# Trans—figurations

## Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations

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Victoria Walsh
Paul Goodwin
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# Acknowledgements

This publication marks one of the major research stages before the conclusion of the RCA's contribution to the major four-year EU-funded research project, 'Europeans Museums in an Age of Migrations' (MeLa) and aims to capture some of the texture and diversity of the research process itself for both artist and curator. While the publication exists independently as a body of research material gathered across five collaborative projects, it is also inherently linked to the 'ephemeral exhibition' of the projects presented here which was staged at MACBA (Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona) in June 2014.

Research in any field can be, and more often than not is, messy, open-ended and unpredictable, but the demands and anxieties that it can generate are often equally offset by the emergence of new themes and questions, generating findings and insights well beyond the scope and ambition of initial questions. With this in mind I would like to extend thanks to all of the following individuals who have engaged with the project at various stages of development and realisation:

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Working in collaboration with MACBA for the exhibition particular thanks go to the museum's director, Bartomeu Marí, for responding so positively to the ethos of the project, whose research questions are so confidently being addressed in the museum's own practices of collecting, display and archiving. In addition, thanks go to Marta Vega and Eric Jiménez, and most notably, to Maite Muñoz, for her intellectual and curatorial commitment, her outstanding professionalism, and last but not least her good humour throughout the project.

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Final thanks go to Pamela Sepúlveda and Paul Goodwin for investing their inimitable qualities of intellectual curiosity, curatorial knowledge, academic acumen and generosity of spirit in all aspects of the project to this point. Collaboration lies at the core of the project and without their combined skills and experience, the project would have been considerably diminished.

Victoria Walsh

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## Introduction
Victoria Walsh

This publication marks one of the major research stages before the conclusion of the Royal College of Art's contribution to the four-year European Union funded research project, 'European Museums in an Age of Migrations' (MeLa) which is being undertaken by the RCA's Curating Contemporary Art programme (CCA), along with eight other European partners comprised of universities, museums and research institutes.

As the MeLa website documents, 'the main objective of the MeLa research programme is to define innovative museum practices that reflect the challenges of the contemporary processes of globalisation, mobility and migration' leading to:

¬ rethinking the role of museums in building a democratic inclusive European citizenship
¬ envisioning strategies and exhibition practices to support the new role of museums in an age of migrations
¬ improving knowledge on cultural heritage diversity and identity representation[1]

As part of this project, CCA assumed responsibility for MeLa's Research Field 04, defined as 'Curatorial and Artistic Research', which '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'. As part of its original submission, CCA proposed to work in collaboration with Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and to 'focus on the art exhibition as a discursive tool, with its different ramifications into theoretical, historical (and therefore archival to a great extent), cultural and formal territories.'[2]

As the first document of this publication evidences, an interim report and proposal for the exhibition project and publication was submitted to MeLa in November 2013. This report detailed a refined methodological approach emerging out of the analysis of the preliminary research findings, in an attempt to realign the position of the artist and curator relationship to one of collaboration in a critically self-reflexive research process, rather than that more usually defined by museological structures of production and imperatives of delivery, i.e. an implicitly instrumentalised relationship, focused on the materialisation of display.

This aspiration was inherently made possible through the prevailing experimental ethos and curatorial strategies being developed by MACBA to address the increasing immaterial nature of artists' practices, and the challenges and demands this places on the art museum's historic conventions of collecting, archiving, documenting and display. As Mela Dávilla Freire, the first director of MACBA's Study Center, noted in her essay for the MeLa project, 'Process Versus Product':

[1] See http://www.mela-project.eu/upl/cms/attach/20120622/122519582_7102.pdf

[2] MeLa Agreement of Terms with Royal College of Art, 2012

> The structure taken by the archive and library collections is complex as it derives from a theoretical concept according to which the categories of 'artwork' and 'document', understood in their classical sense, do not apply. In practice the relations of continuity between these collections and the MACBA art collection, and the fact that the archive and the collection are described with entries of one single database, are two factors that help to resolve certain important problems. Amongst other things, this fluid relationship avoids the need for endless, futile discussions aimed at ascertaining whether certain research collections are 'works' or 'documents'. Rather it emphasises their hybrid nature, their combination of two categories ... The process of 'dematerialisation' of the art object ... finally resulted in the disappearance of the end 'product' of creative activity ... In terms of classification and description, one of the main consequences of this process is the fact that the work is stripped of its status as object and consequently the 'product of creation' having disappeared, the 'relations' between the different elements involved in the creative process take on crucial importance. In other words, it becomes an imperious necessity to make clear through classification, the description and visualisation of elements in the archive ...[3]

While more detailed aspects of this approach at MACBA are addressed in the two essays published here by Bartomeu Marí, Maite Muñoz and Pamela Sepúlveda, the original proposition of creating a 'discursive exhibition' put forward in 2012 was very much rooted in a mode of curating focused on bringing to the surface the contingent thought processes and emergent knowledge forms of the artists' practice; processes and forms that the conditions of exhibition-making render difficult, particularly for art museums, in terms of its concern with public display, education and aesthetic pleasure. As theorist Irit Rogoff noted in 2008, in relation to the continuous emergence of 'the turn', however:

> Delving into these questions is made more difficult by the degree of slippage that currently takes place between notions of 'knowledge production', 'research', 'education', 'open-ended production', and 'self-organised pedagogies' when all these approaches seem to have converged into a set of parameters for some renewed facet of production.[4]

Following the preliminary analysis of the CCA research, and thinking towards the committed MeLa 'output' of the 'discursive exhibition' at MACBA, the need to develop a reflexive and collaborative form of practice between artists and curators seemed pre-requisite in order to avoid prioritising one form of knowledge or practice over another and to arrive at a more in-depth discussion of how both curator and artist experience the process of research and exhibition. In addition, the emphasis on a reflexive collaborative method would help generate conversations and encounters that would focus on how practice was understood by each in relation to the other, rather than default into the conventional focus on illuminating the art work or relation to the exhibition concept and form. Technical questions of generally little interest in the public sphere of display or the museological display of collecting and archiving.

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[3] Mela Dávilla Freire, 'Process versus Product: New Paths for Archiving in the Field of Contemporary Artistic Practices', Luca Basso Peressut and Clelia Pozzi, *Museums in an Age of Migrations: Questions, Challenges, Perspectives*, Milan, 2012, pp.199-200

[4] Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', issue 1, November, 2008, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/. Accessed 15 June 2014

While this approach might read as reflexively indulgent, it was, however, fundamentally removed from such a pitfall due to the fact that the collaborations made were not forged simply to investigate curatorial and artistic research in and of itself, but rather in relation to the questions of the project outlined in the MeLa Submission Report, which asserted the methodological approach of ‘problem-solving research’ *through* the practices of curatorial and artistic research and exhibition-making. The proximity of the research process to the exhibition form, is however, essentially a paradoxical relation fraught with problems and questions around ‘research as exhibition’ and ‘exhibition as research’, and one that whatever its objectives and disclaimers poses difficult questions for the artist in relation to the display / market equation of value. These questions have invariably assumed particular currency since the Bologna Process and the increasing take-up of practice-based PhDs in art schools and universities, with the exhibition form being constructed in both guises as research data-gathering and research output.[5] In this context, the original proposal to develop a ‘discursive exhibition’ can, in retrospect, be understood as a strategic move to sidestep what one artist in the project has termed ‘the rush to form’ which the exhibition form can bring to the research process, foreshortening the value of the research itself and producing compromised, if not diminished, art work.

But as Irit Rogoff also noted in relation to the rise of the discursive ‘turn’ in 2008:

> And so the art world became the site of extensive talking – talking emerged as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organizing and articulating some necessary questions. But did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these? ... Increasingly, it seems to me that the ‘turn’ we are talking about must result not only in new formats, but also in another way of recognizing when and why something important is being said.[6]

With this in mind, the project presented in these pages has gained immeasurably in working with artists and curators who were already grappling with these questions and issues in relation to both their work and its display, and who consequently were not only highly adept at articulating their thoughts and positions, but more importantly were open and generous in directly engaging with some of the more complex and problematic questions raised by the project. In reproducing the variety of material we have here of the five collaborative projects of *Transfigurations*, including the raw data of extended interviews alongside working papers, reports, and image sections either generated by the artist or curator, the depth and range of critical enquiry is made apparent; as is the nature of the professional, social, cultural and political spheres in which both artist and curator move and work together to enable a politics of culture to emerge, implicitly and explicitly, both for the artist and audience.

The material presented in the following pages follows the five collaborations of the project:

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[5] For further discussion on this subject see Irit Rogoff, ‘Editorial – Education Actualized’, issue 14, March 2010, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/“education-actualized”-—-editorial/, accessed 17 June 2014

[6] Irit Rogoff, ‘Turning’, issue 1, November 2008, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/, accessed 17 June 2014

- ¬ Bétonsalon in Paris with curator Mélanie Bouteloup and artist Camille Henrot
- ¬ Whitechapel Gallery in London with curator Sofia Victorino and artist Kader Attia
- ¬ Royal College of Art in London with myself and MACBA in Barcelona with curator Bartomeu Marí and artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan
- ¬ Royal College of Art in London with curator Paul Goodwin and artist Leo Asemota
- ¬ Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with curators Jelle Bouwhuis and Kerstin Winking and artist Quinsy Gario

While it is not the function of this publication to present the formal research analysis and findings of the project, not least since the process of the exhibition and the publication itself are part of the data-gathering, the points of connection and disconnection between the projects in relation to the original research questions have highlighted the following:

1 The fluid and undefined practice of the artist has assumed new value and agency in a global context to mediate (and remediate) cultural and political issues that professionalised positions and institutional affiliations often cannot

2 The postcolonial persistence of curatorial engagement with the artist on the level of cultural identity not subjectivity, consistently framed by the western paradigm of the category of 'Fine Art' and implicitly determined by modernist teleological narratives

3 While western traditions of intellectual thought and cultural practice rooted in the Enlightenment tradition continue to underpin the universal museum and the essentialist model of the modernist art museum, recognition of alternative knowledge paradigms, temporalities, and cultural forms of expression and communication beyond the object and its discursive interpretation, should be embraced by the museum (note the recurring reference to Edouard Glissant's 'right to opacity', and recognition of liminality)

4 The need for greater interdisciplinary collaboration and risk-taking between museum curators and artists

5 Desire for greater collaboration by both curators and artists with other disciplines, knowledge spheres and research alliances

6 More flexible and informal spaces within museums for more provisional activity than fully formulated projects and public display

7 New museological thinking in relation to the conceptualisation of public forms of display and engagement (durational issues of liveness, event, hybrid forms of commission / exhibition)

8 The need for increased critical awareness by museums of value systems operating in the administrative management of collections – the opportunity of digitisation to rethink

collection management through reconceptualisation of function and design of database systems

9 The need for more ambitious engagement and understanding of the digital not only as a tool, but as a medium through which to re-imagine cultural relations and cultural heritage in a global context (including 'intangible' cultural heritage)

10 The need for a re-configuration of museums' practices in relation to collection, and exhibition management of artists' practice and collections in relation to immaterial practices, as defined by museological traditions centred on the object

While the formal analysis of the full research project will be published in the Cultural Policy documents produced by each MeLa project partner and published on the MeLa website, the MeLa project will also host a 'Critical Archive' on its website (launch July 2014) which will collectively make publicly accessible each partner's research data. Conceived as a complex interplay of research data, analysis and keywords across all the projects, each project was asked to identify a key 'cluster term' under which their research would fall. In December 2014 Paul Goodwin, curatorial research consultant to the project, and myself proposed the term 'post-contemporary' for the RCA project. In identifying this term, we were building on and responding to a key essay in the previous RCA / MeLa publication, *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis,* written by the theorist Peter Osborne in which he noted:

> Today the fiction of the contemporary is increasingly primarily a global or a planetary fiction ... There is no actual shared subject-position, of or within, from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be *lived* as a whole ... Nonetheless the idea of the contemporary functions *as if* there is.
>
> That is, it functions as if the speculative horizon of the unity of human history had been reached. In this respect the contemporary is a utopian idea. In rendering present the absent time of a unity of times, *all constructions of the contemporary are fictional.*[7]

As Osborne indicates, the binding glue of the 'contemporary' is most at play in creating an atemporality that brings together a plethora of art practices from beyond historically designated areas of western modernism and reframes them as part of a cultural continuum. As we presented in a series of propositions to the MeLa project partners in 2013, and the RCA's project artists and curators in February 2014:

¬ The post-contemporary emerges as a curatorial provocation responding to and anticipating the unstable and problematic conditions of 'contemporary art'

¬ If the modern was 'international' and the contemporary 'global', the post-contemporary questions the nature of this global negotiation of modernity

Throughout the RCA project both artists and curators raised the problematic spatio-temporal conditions of the museum and its collection narratives in relation to their practices, the professionalisation and marketisation of the exhibition form, and most acutely in relation to coloniality, understood as an on-going and current condition of cultural engagement between artists, curators, museums, galleries and the art market in an age of migrations.

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[7] Peter Osborne, 'To Each Present Its Own Prehistory', *Agency, Ambivalence and Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind*, London, RCA, 2012, pp.25-27

In consideration of this problematic of the simplifications of the spatio-temporal in relation to museological and curatorial practice, the leaning towards immaterial practices of making, the methodological formulation of the project, and the conceptual ambition of the research, we settled on the title 'Transfigurations' as much at the descriptive level, as the theoretical. Behind this lay many reference points in our reading including Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sensation,* and Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* in which Gilroy called for a 'politics of transfiguration' which lays 'an emphasis on the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors.' [8]

The Curating Contemporary Art programme at the RCA was set up in 1992 in partnership with the Tate Gallery and the Arts Council of England and was originally intended to train up a new generation of British curators to engage and promote international contemporary art, particularly in advance of the creation of Tate Modern. In recent years, as 'contemporary art' has become ubiquitous with the 'contemporary' it has become more actively engaged with critical curating and the contemporary condition of audience experience. It is noteworthy that at the same time the programme was established, MACBA opened its Study Center with a view to rethinking the museum and its archive and collections. As a programme that has been historically practice-led and is now equally focused on research-led teaching, the research process and findings of this project have generated important new areas of future study, and hopefully a new set of collaborative relations with artists and curators invested in questions that will not just inform European Union cultural policy, but museological and curatorial practice too.

[8] See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, p.37

## Project Team

### Victoria Walsh (Project Director, MeLA, Research Field 04, Curatorial and Artistic Research)

Dr Victoria Walsh is Head of the Curating Contemporary Art Programme at the RCA. Focused on interdisciplinary, practice-based, and research-led teaching she is the co-author of *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Routledge, 2012). From 2005 to 2012 she was Head of Public Programmes at Tate Britain during which time she was Co-investigator of the major three-year research project, 'Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under their strategic programme 'Diasporas, Migration and Identities'. A collaboration between Tate Britain, Chelsea College of Art and Design and London South Bank University, the project addressed the relationship between curatorial practices in the art museum, audience development and engagement, and the impact of cultural diversity policy. The research findings centre around the limits of the politics of representation and identity and aesthetic modernism as a curatorial trope within an analysis of the contemporary cultural condition of hypermodernity, globalisation and digital distribution.

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### Paul Goodwin (Curatorial Research Consultant)

Paul Goodwin is Professor of Black Art and Design at Chelsea College of Art and was previously Curator of Cross Cultural Programmes and Curator of Contemporary Art at Tate Britain. Paul's curatorial and research work currently revolves around African diaspora art in the UK and US since the 1980s; art and sculpture in public spaces; and postcolonialism and globalisation in curatorial and museological practices. At Tate, Paul created platforms for international cultural dialogue by curating a programme of talks. He was Consultant Curator for the international survey exhibition *Afromodern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* at Tate Liverpool in 2010 and co-curator of the Tate Britain exhibition, *Migrations: Journeys Into British Art*, about migration in the history of British art from 1500 to the present day, 2012. He is also Curatorial Research Fellow at King's Cultural Institute, King's College London. In 2012 Paul participated in the RCA's Mela research programme through the symposium on 'Colonaility, Curating and Contemporary Art' organised by CCA, RCA and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla, Spain.

### Pamela Sepúlveda (Research Coordinator)

Pamela's academic background spans the arts, conservation and restoration, and archive / documentation areas. She has a degree in Fine Arts, a postgraduate degree in Conservation and Restoration and a Master in Digital Documentation. Since 2001 she has held various positions at contemporary art institutions such as the Antoni Tàpies Foundation where she was co-responsible for the creation of its innovative and award-winning website as the web manager. More recently, between 2008 and 2012 she participated in the development of the new MACBA Study Center in Barcelona. From 2010, as the Head of Archives at MACBA she had the opportunity to put into practice innovative perspectives in the management and dissemination of a comprehensive documentary collection devoted to contemporary art, aiming to overcome the classical distinction between the document and the work of art. Currently, she is working at the Royal College of Art in London as Research Co-ordinator of the MeLa project and as Archivist at the Whitechapel Gallery.

Curating Contemporary Art
Royal College of Art

# MeLa RF04 – Curatorial and Artistic Research

## Exhibition Project Update and Exhibition Programme
## 28 November 2013

## Submission to MeLa
## European Museums in an Age of Migrations

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## 1 Original Research Aims and Objectives

As was stated in the original research work package of the Curating Contemporary Art programme for MeLa, the CCA project:

- will explore the relationship between art, migration and representation within the contemporary exhibition sector
- prepare the way for thinking about new exhibition environments where the distinctions between the global and the local interact
- will combine philosophical, historical and practice-based approaches
- will encompass contemporary art, design, the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies in order to focus on issues relevant to critical curating and interdisciplinary practices
- work in collaboration with MACBA and its Study Center to focus on exhibition history, exhibition display and exhibition memory

## 2 Overview of Research Activity 2011-13

In 2011 Mark Nash, the first Director of the RCA / MeLa project, oversaw the design of the first stage of the project's fieldwork and curatorial methodology based on the compilation of exhibition histories in collaboration with MACBA, research-led teaching blocks with international speakers on the theme of 'Art and Globalisation' and 'Coloniality' and convened a number of conferences and seminars in the UK and across Europe.

In 2012 Ruth Noack assumed responsibility for the project and initiated a number of seminars, commissioned the artist Ines Doujak to create an installation and performance, and published a collection of essays *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind* (Milan, 2013). In this publication Noack built on the position and questions posed during her joint curatorship of *Documenta XII* (2007) with Roger M. Buergel. In the introduction to the *Documenta XII* catalogue they noted:

> We conceive of the exhibition as a medium. This takes us away from the mere representation of the 'world's best artists' to the production of an experiential space, in which it is possible to explore the terms 'art work' and 'public' in stark juxtaposition. What is contemporary art? What is a contemporary public?

In *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis* these questions were further pursued and developed in the essays contributed by Peter Osborne reflecting on the category of the 'contemporary' and by Victoria Walsh (with Andrew Dewdney) on the nature of the museum encounter for contemporary diasporic audiences.

In September 2013 Victoria Walsh took over as the RCA Project Director and presented a summary update of the key questions and findings that the project was also now drawing into its research enquiry from the Tate Encounters project she had led at Tate Britain from 2007-2010 including the following:

- the key narratives and logic of Modernism are rooted in ideas of expert knowledge (Art History) which no longer speak to the contemporary practices of viewing visual culture
- the impact of the digital on the visual realm is contributing to the dissolution of curatorial authority and expertise in the art museum based on Modernism

- Museum curatorial departments look to Learning, Education and Interpretation programmes to actively engage with the discourse of ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ in order to offset the limits and acquisition history of modern art collections

- Learning programmes often receive funding to directly engage with ‘local diverse / translocal audiences’ leading to high levels of artist commissions which are more experimental as they are not restricted by epistemological basis of a canon or the logic of collection

- the demise of expertise rooted in Art History in relation to cultural authority creates the need to engage with other forms of visual and cultural knowledge that connect the historical and contemporary without recourse to the discourse of racialised heritage and Modern European aesthetics

## 3 Interim Research Findings

Following a matrixial analysis of the research data in relation to the original research questions of the project, Walsh presented the interim research findings at the Paris MeLa meeting in September 2013. These findings can be briefly summarised as:

- **Representation** — Tracking the emergence of the ‘postcolonial constellation’ (Okwui Enwezor) through a critique of colonial modernity, exhibition histories, and the emergence of new artistic subjectivities and regions for the production and dissemination of art (the ‘Global South’) confirms that the politics of representation are now exhausted for both artists and audiences and need readdressing in curatorial practice

- **Globalisation** — the new socio-spatial and geo-political paradigm of transnationalism and its relations to art practice and curating is resulting in a new form of distributed cultural authority and ‘displacement of Eurocentric art histories’

- **Collection and Object** — the stability of the ontological status of the art object in museums of modern art is being brought into question by the immaterial practices and art practices of diasporic and non-western artists leading to disruption of canonical histories and narratives and the emergence of new modernisms

- **Programming** — There has been a significant increase in addressing these issues by museums through a notable increase in ‘programming’ of ‘culturally diverse artists’ and programming of non-object based practices (in museological terms) such as performance, sound installation, film, video which can lead both to conditions of experimentation but also instrumentalisation

- In the wake of New Institutionalism, pedagogical models of curating and institutional critique programming have emerged as a privileged and flexible form of curatorial practice that can respond to new conditions of ‘multiple temporalities versus ephemerality’ in contemporary art

- **Audiences** — The ‘emancipated spectator’ under new conditions of participatory visual culture has transformed the way audiences relate as individual subjectivities to artworks rather than collective publics providing new challenges for curatorial practice

- **Technology** — The expansion of new media and the digitalisation of the visual has resulted in the disruption of the ontological status of art object. This has very particular implications in relation to programming and immaterial practices in terms of use of technology as a performative medium, documentation, social remediation and museolgoical rematerialisation for collection or archiving

¬ **Education / Artistic Knowledge and Research** — The 'educational turn' in arts practice and the search for radical educational strategies in response to post-Bologna Agreement and educational restructuring across European art schools has led to shifting epistemological organisation and basis of visual arts practice and curating

## 4 New Research Questions

¬ What are the challenges to dominant modes of exhibition and display such as the 'white cube' from new forms of practice and programming and what is the determinant relation now between artist and space?

¬ What changes in the spatio-temporal conditions does programming and 'exhibition' of non-object based art practices create in relation to museological narratives of collection display? Is this a disruptive or co-determining relation for artists and audiences?

¬ What conditions of innovation and experimentation do educational programmes in art museums offer to artists and curators as opposed to collection programmes and why is this more prominently focused on diasporic artists and curators?

¬ What are the key issues for both artists and curators in collaborative commissioning in relation to non-object based art practices?

¬ What is the relation between collection and archive in relation to the performance art object and documentation? In relation to diasporic artists and audiences does this help to address / redress the lack of inclusion in collections and displays or manage and restrict the logic of collection and display?

¬ The post-medium, post-object nature of much contemporary art has placed performance at the centre of artistic and curatorial research. Through what conditions and methodology can performance art or immaterial art practices be the subject of research without instrumentalising the practice itself and corrupting the research process and outcomes?

## 5 Methodology

Firstly, the interim research findings have led to the recognition that the RCA / CCA research project now needs to be understood as a form of 'problem-solving, practice-based research' rather than the original form of 'practice-based research.'

Secondly, this refined analysis has led to the need to realign the research methodology with the research design of the project's final 'exhibition' process in order to ensure that the project does not reproduce the very conditions of artistic and curatorial practice which are now identified as the problems and challenges facing curators and artists in an age of migrations.

Thirdly, in order to ensure that the exhibition retains its validity and significance as a form of research practice in and of itself – rather than as an 'exhibition of research' which would offer no innovation in practice-based artistic or curatorial research – the research exhibition itself must be a form of situated, active and collaborative research between artists and curators realised through the process of commissioning and critically-reflexive documentation of this process.

Fourthly, institutional partners whose core practices fall within the key research themes (museum collections, educational programming, curatorial research) will work collaboratively with the RCA / CCA in order to examine further through situated, collaborative practice what the problems and opportunities posed by the contemporary condition of diasporic experience is in relation to curatorial and artistic practice and research.

## 6 'Exhibition' Partners

The confirmed participants which have been secured in relation to key research themes are:

- ¬ Artistic research in relation to Performance outside of the museum — CCA / RCA with the artist Leo Asemota
- ¬ Educational Programming in relation to commissioning and non-collection based spaces — Whitechapel Art Gallery with the artist Kader Attia
- ¬ Performance Programming in relation to Collection — Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam with Quinsy Gario
- ¬ Collaborative Curatorial and Artistic Research in relation to knowledge production and documentation – Bétonsalon, Paris with the artist Camille Henrot and Lawrence Abu-Hamdan with RCA / MACBA

## 7 Exhibition Framework and Phases

The exhibition is defined by three distinct phases:

### Phase One: Establishing the Research Brief for the Collaborative Commission

All of the participating curators, artists and publishers will be invited to the RCA to join the CCA research team for a two-day workshop to collectively re-examine the RCA project's research findings and lines of enquiry and to identify new research questions that will form the basis of the collaborative commission of artist and curator for each participating venue.

### Phase Two: Development and Completion of Research Commission

On the basis of the new questions which will define the 'Research Brief' of the collaborative commission, each of the partners (Whitechapel Gallery, Stedelijk Museum, Bétonsalon, MACBA and including RCA) will be invited to re-contextulise the brief in relation to their own exhibition context and to provide a preliminary outline of their project methodology, form of documentation and to confirm their 'exhibition' dates to ensure public engagement.

### Phase Three: Final Group Research Exhibition,

All of the participating venues and artists will present their research work and documentation at the final project exhibition at MACBA.

## 8 Exhibition Publication

As questions of documentation and archiving are intrinsically related to questions of artistic and curatorial research in the reconfiguration of this project, the function and design of the publication itself will now be brought into the research framework as part of the research methodology, rather than limiting it to the function of an 'output' only.

## 9 Exhibition Timeline

| | |
|---|---|
| **Phase One** | |
| January 2014: | Expert workshop at RCA |
| **Phase Two** | |
| March–April 2014: | Whitechapel Gallery, London |
| April–May 2014: | Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam |
| | Bétonsalon, Paris |
| | MACBA |
| | RCA |
| **Phase Three** | |
| June 2014 | Exhibition / Publication launch / Conference MACBA |

## 10 RCA Exhibition Team

The exhibition team will comprise of Dr Victoria Walsh as Project Director, Professor Paul Goodwin as Curatorial Research Consultant to be supported by Pamela Sepúlveda as Project Coordinator and who in light of her experience and expertise of archives, documentation and publishing and previously working at MACBA will also lead on the final publication.

## 11 Critical Archive

The RCA project's contribution to the Critical Archive will consist of textual accounts of the key theoretical argument and finding of the research project under the cluster term of the concept of the 'Post-contemporary' as presented at the MeLa / Paris meeting in September 2013. In addition to the cluster term and supporting entries which – it is anticipated will relate to performance, education, archive – all documentation of the exhibition project from Phase One to Phase Three will be uploaded to the MeLa Critical Archive to evidence the RCA research findings and conceptualisation of the 'post-contemporary'. This will include drawings, text, video, photography and sound.

| **Key Research Themes** | **Emergent Conceptual Analysis** | **Areas of Combined Curatorial / Artistic Research Questions towards Brief and Commissions** |
|---|---|---|
| Representation | Identity v new subjectivities | Mediation / resistance / post-representation |
| Art and Globalisation | Transculturalism / distributed cultural authority | Knowledge-base / patronage / location |
| Collection (Object) | Canonical dislocation / new modernisms | ¬ performance – documentation form and status (photograph / video / text)<br>¬ performance object – status and documentation<br>¬ audience – status / interaction / documentation<br>¬ post-archive |
| Exhibition / Display | Spatio-temporal conditions of exhibition v narratives of collection display | ¬ White cube – container / agency / medium<br>¬ Spatial location / relation<br>¬ Temporality – relation<br>¬ Post-traditional |
| Programming | Temporality v ephemerality / affect – aesthetic | Discursive – educational turn / activism / co-production |
| Audience | Visual cultures / distribution of visual / spectacle | Relation to audience as ‘public’ / citizen / viewer / visitor / ‘delegated performance’ – distributed ethics and complicity |
| Performance | Post-medium? Post-object? | Agency v collection / archive / capital |
| Technology | Disruption of ontological status of art object | Visual cultures / transmediation / transvisuality / social media |
| Education / Research / Practice | Shifting epistemological organisation and basis of visual arts practice and curating / interdisciplinary | ¬ Conditions of education/ learning / research<br>¬ Nature, conditions and value of research-led practice for artistic and curatorial practice (post-critical) |

# RCA – MeLa Research Field 4
# Paris: 23.09.2013

## Presentation of Proposed Cluster Term
## Dr Victoria Walsh (Project Director) & Paul Goodwin (Curatorial Research Consultant)

## Cluster Term: Post-contemporary

### Proposition 1

¬ Post-contemporary is a critical curatorial response to the current constellation of contemporary art which is understood as a ‘necessary fiction’ glued together by the market and a putative transnationalism best exemplified by the biennial form and international art fairs.

¬ “Today the fiction of the contemporary is increasingly primarily a global or a planetary fiction ... There is no actual shared subject-position, of or within, from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be *lived* as a whole, in however temporally fragmented or dispersed a form.”
Peter Osborne RCA / MeLA publication *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis*

### Proposition 2

¬ The post-contemporary emerges as a curatorial provocation responding to and anticipating the unstable and problematic conditions of ‘contemporary art’.

¬ If the modern was ‘international’ and the contemporary ‘global’, the post-contemporary questions the nature of this global negotiation of modernity.

¬ Post-contemporary as a cluster term gathers together an infrastructure of curatorial and artistic research that critically interrogates the historiography, boundaries and future horizons of ‘contemporary art’ as it operates within the broader context of ‘contemporary’ culture

### Proposition 3

¬ There are resistances to the presentism of globalised contemporary art and the closing of radical horizons for alternative futures beyond the dictates of the market and the congealing of ‘contemporary art’ into an ersatz historical style.

¬ These are forms of art practice and curatorial practice that fall outside or do not fit neatly within the purview of operations of the fiction and market bubble of the ‘contemporary’ as currently constituted and supported by dominant institutions of the market, galleries and museums – e.g. radical performance, artistic collectives, socially engaged work, documentary forms of art production. Post-contemporary attempts to engage with and provide a platform for these tendencies in current art practices and curatorial forms

## Proposition 4

¬ In the post-contemporary imagination the artist-curator divide becomes significantly blurred and the distinction between artist-curator rendered redundant

¬ Curating as presently perceived is inextricably tied into the fiction of the contemporary and the agency of the market. The current basis of global curatorial practice is based on conceptual and avant-garde art practices inherited from Duchamp, conceptualism and institutional critique

¬ The rise of the transnational biennial form is the apogee of this form of conceptual curating that helps to sustain the fiction of the contemporary. Post-contemporary proposes and imagines a blurring of curatorial and artistic research that is realised in a plethora of forms from performance, programming etc to white box exhibitions

## Proposition 5

¬ Post-contemporary is curatorial and artistic work that is critically reflexive and makes visible the interdependence of contemporary art with the market and the fiction of the contemporary i.e. researches and challenges the basis of the conditions of emergence of contemporaneity itself

¬ Post-contemporary is a form of curatorial self-reflexivity in understanding the role of curating and artistic research in the conditions of emergence of the contemporary

MeLa* European Museums in an age of migrations

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
European Research Area
SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME
Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities

## TRANSFIGURATIONS
## Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations
### Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona

**Friday 20 June – Thursday 26 June 2014**
**Opening: Thursday 19 June 2014, 7.30-10pm**
**Public Programme: Friday 20 June 2014, 7-9.30pm**

How are globalisation, digital media and changing patterns of migration affecting our understanding and experience of the contemporary work of art, and how are contemporary artists engaging with curators to think about the condition of the contemporary through their work, its display and collection? How are curators working with new forms of artistic production, particularly 'immaterial' works of art, that fall outside conventional forms of display, collection and archive?

This 'research exhibition' brings together international artists and curators who have been working in collaboration as part of the major European MELA research project 'European Museums in an Age of Migrations' to consider these and other questions of artistic and curatorial urgency as museums begin to think about their future and role in the 21st century. The five collaborations are:

- MACBA in Barcelona with curator Bartomeu Marí and artist Lawrence Abu-Hamdan
- Bétonsalon in Paris with curator Mélanie Bouteloup and artist Camille Henrot
- Whitechapel Gallery in London with curator Sofia Victorino and artist Kader Attia
- Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with curators Jelle Bouwhuis / Kerstin Winking and artist Quinsy Gario
- Royal College of Art in London with Paul Goodwin and artist Leo Asemota

In particular, the research exhibition reflects on the challenges and opportunities of curatorial and artistic research in the 21st century, and the rise of new forms of practice such as performance, sound, and video which are both expanding the range of artists' interests and challenging conventional ideas of the 'art object' in museums and galleries. Following what has been described as 'the curatorial turn' and 'the educational turn' the exhibition considers how complex the interface is between issues of representation, globalisation, collection and object, curating, programming, audiences, and technology.

**Free admission**
**Opening times**: Weekdays: 11 am to 7.30 pm. Tuesday closed. Saturday: 10 am to 9 pm / Sunday 10 am to 3pm
**Location**: MACBA - Capella, Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, Plaça dels Àngels 1, Barcelona 08001, Spain.

**Further press information and images please contact:**
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partners
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MACBA
Royal College of Art
Newcastle University

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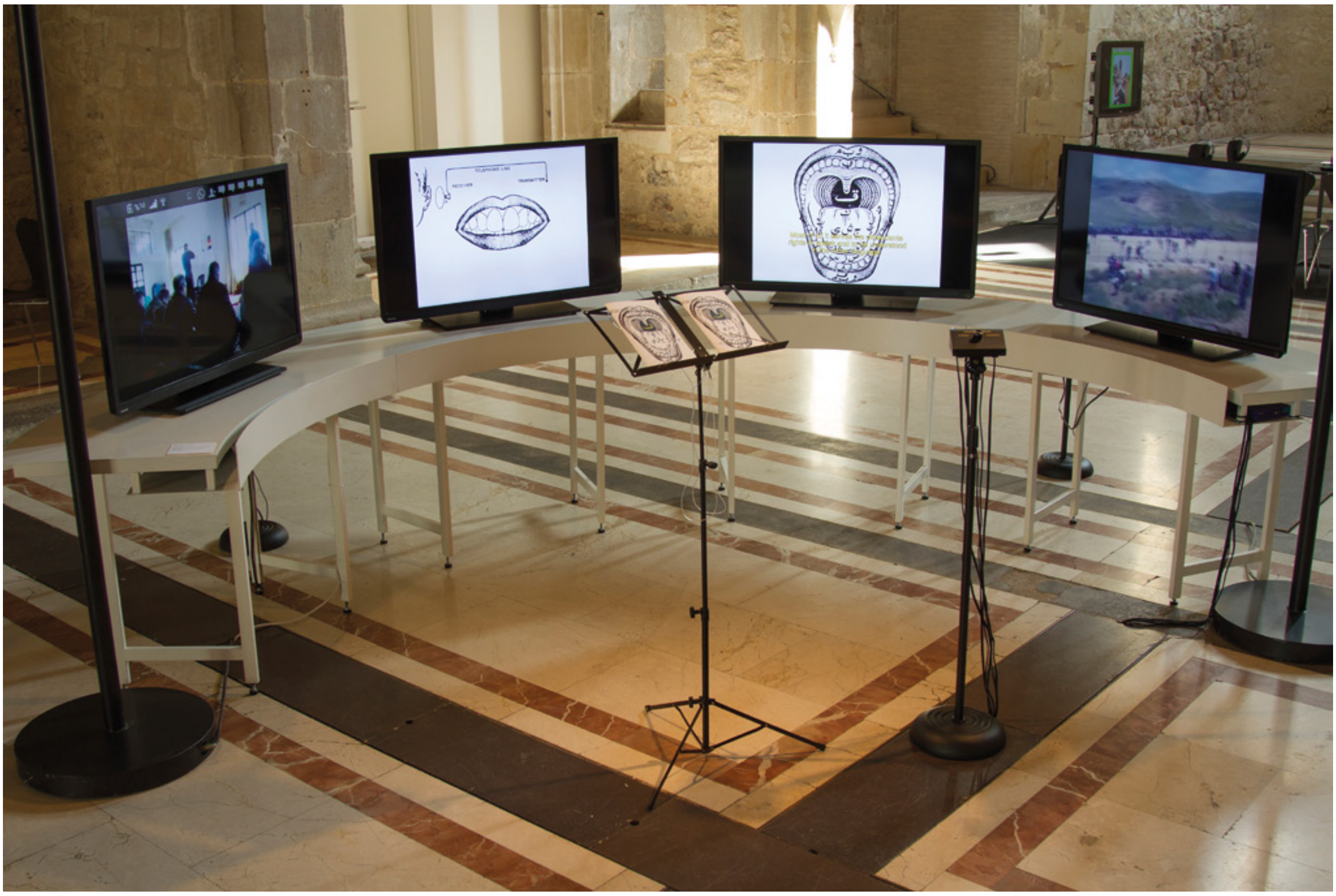
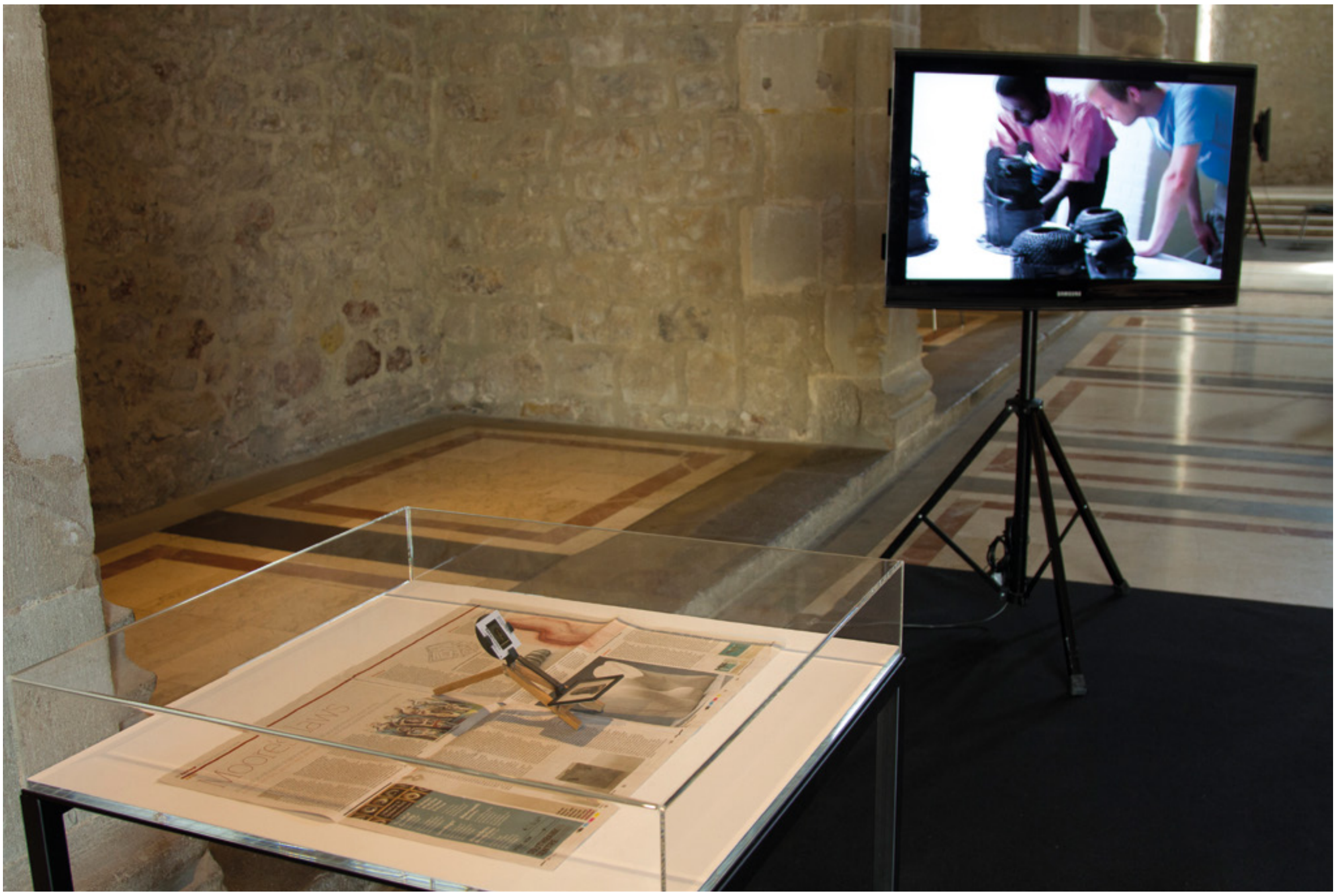
*Transfigurations*, MACBA Capella, installation view, 19th June 2014 © Oriol Molas

TRANSFIGURACIONS
TRANSFIGURACIONES
TRANSFIGURATIONS
MeLa*

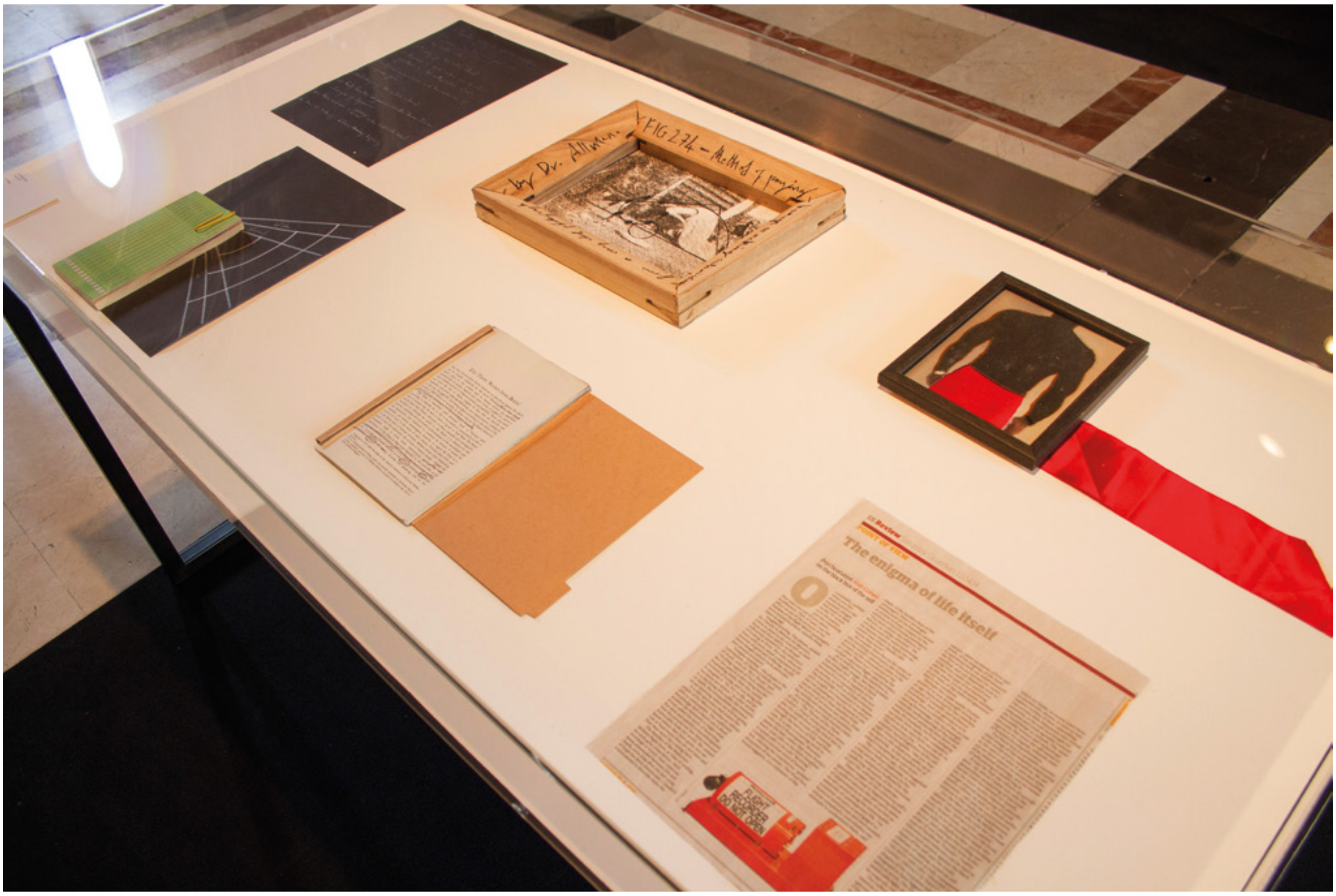
Installation view of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Contra-Diction: speech against itself* © Oriol Molas



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Contra-Diction: speech against itself*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas



Leo Asemota, *Eo ipso*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas

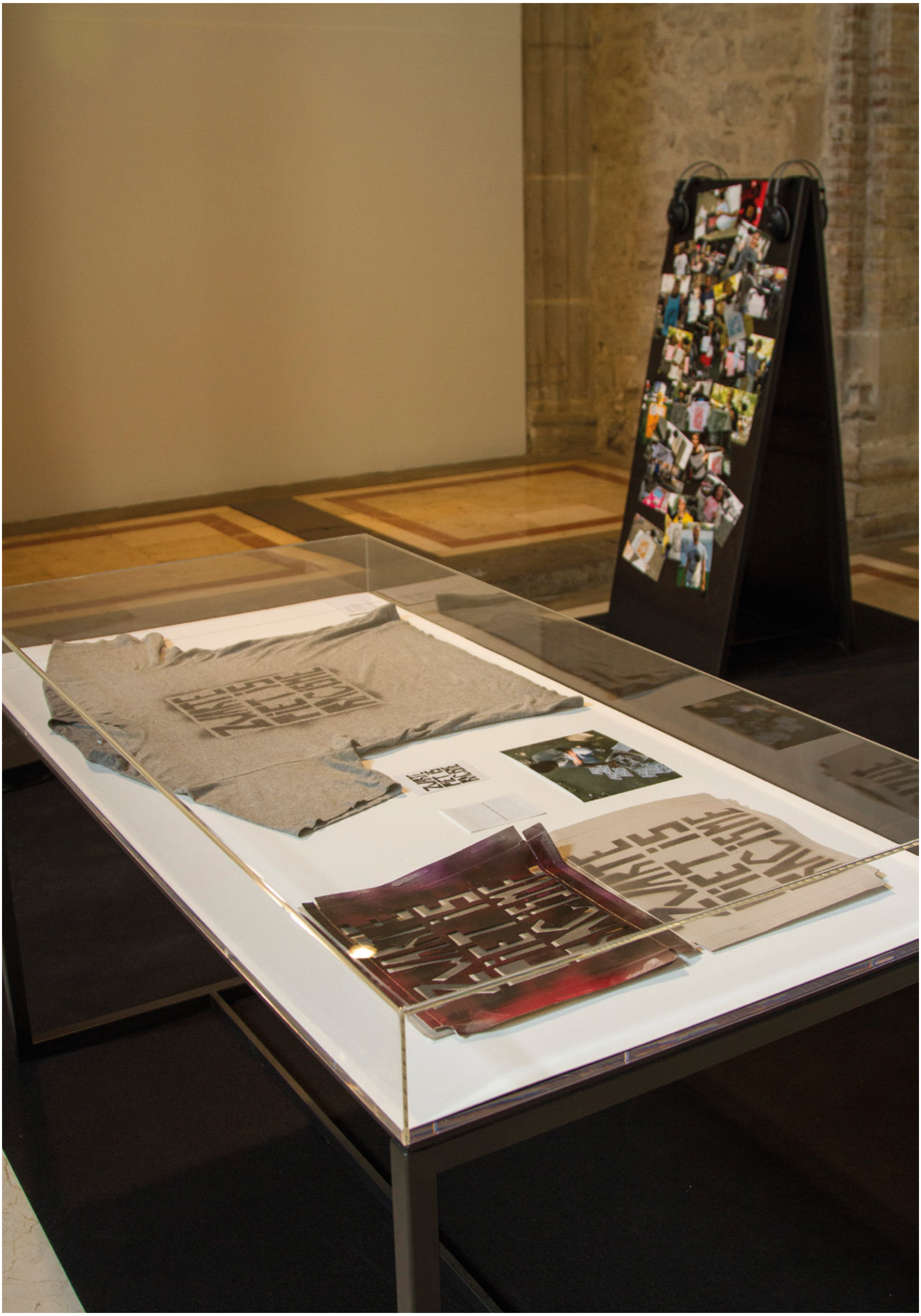

The enigma of life itself

Leo Asemota, *Eo ipso*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas

Through blackface and cross-dressing the Pieten experience a sense of freedom and otherness. These experiences over time become fixed and are buried in the body. The physical disgust often felt and expressed over criticism of Zwarte Piet testifies to this. The majority of Dutchmen simply do not experience the blackface as racist or with racial connotations and are thus prevented from engaging in a dialogue.

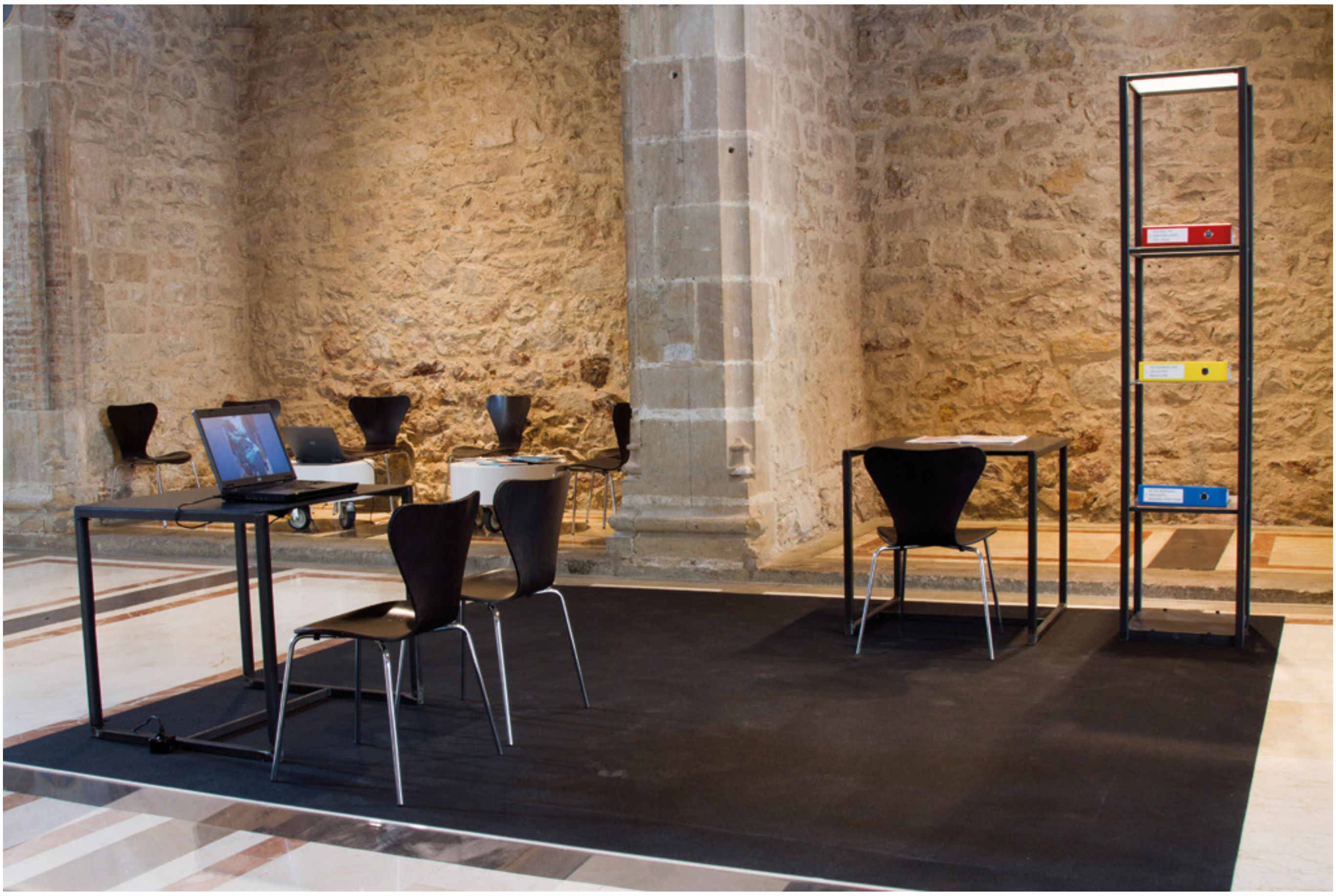
John Helsloot

Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas


ZWARTE PIET IS RACISME

Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas

Kader Attia, *From Material to Abstract*, MACBA Capella © Oriol Molas



Camille Henrot, *The Pale Fox and the Taxidermist: A Foray into Camille Henrot´s Research*, MACBA Capella
© Oriol Molas

# Camille Henrot & Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research

## *The Pale Fox and the Taxidermist*

A Foray into Camille Henrot's Research

> *Ideas are a complete system within us, resembling a natural kingdom, a sort of flora, of which the iconography will one day be outlined by some man who will perhaps be accounted a madman.*
>
> Honoré de Balzac, *Louis Lambert*, 1832

Fascinated by the human need to shape a unified and organised world, Camille Henrot has been focusing her recent work on cultures, practices, and sciences that have historically taken on the extraordinary if not utopian purpose of synthesising all human knowledge into one singular object. Inspired by Balzac's statement, she has been collecting a great number of theories and items attempting to deliver a totalising view of the history of the universe. Through the opportunities granted in 2012 by the Smithsonian's Artist Research Fellowship Program, she started a long-term work investigating diverse fields – from natural sciences, cosmology and anthropology, to theosophy and art – that reflect the human will to explain and classify the world in which we are living.

Conceived both as an artistic and curatorial work, Camille Henrot's project at first consisted of a compulsive accumulation of objects, images, diagrams, texts, rituals and narratives, taken from museums, libraries, and Internet sources. She then created her own classification of things and realities, thus intertwining scholarly and pedestrian sources of knowledge, precious and banal or even waste materials. Giving shape to several stages and formats, this research first resulted in the movie *Grosse Fatigue*, for which the artist was awarded the Silver Lion at the 55th Venice Biennale. It now develops through a series of four exhibitions in Europe, each of which gives the artist the possibility to reshape her work and collaborate with a local cultural institution.

For its step at Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research (September to December 2014), the exhibition *The Pale Fox* – named after an anthropological study of the West African Dogon people published by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen in 1965 – is conceived with the partnership of the Natural History Museum in Paris. Thanks to this opportunity, Camille Henrot is currently continuing her investigations along with museum curators, scientific researchers and taxidermists of the institution. Interested in how museum collections, taxidermy in itself, and other kinds of classification systems embody both a potentially infinite knowledge and some form of authority or even madness, Camille Henrot will reproduce in her exhibition *The Circle* stringing together the collection, classification, systematisation, obsessive appropriation, loss of control and disorder. A shelf unfolding like a frieze around the four walls will gather some drawings, printed or digital images, bronze and ceramic sculptures, found objects and some others purchased on eBay. Exploring varying scales and chronologies, the exhibition will reflect the artist's own

**Preceding image**
The meeting with Christophe Gottini (Head of the taxidermy laboratory) was an opportunity to discuss the evolution of the taxidermy practices, the preservation process, but also the role of the taxidermist's representations in the design of a naturalised specimen. Fabienne Galangau-Quérat mentioned the example of the thylacine of the Muséum-Aquarium in Nancy, that was naturalised in the posture of a kangaroo instead of being represented as a wolf on its four legs. Dealing with the same idea of taxidermists' misreading of animals' natural posture, Jacques Cuisin evoked some naturalised snakes looking like tyres.

history of the universe, while highlighting the fact that the world and mankind exceed representation.

For the project *Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations*, Camille Henrot and Bétonsalon's team wished to present the ongoing process of the artist's collaboration with the Natural History Museum. Gathering different documents and pictures related to her current research, the proposition aims to reveal the 'behind the scenes' aspects of the developing exhibition, with a specific focus on taxidermy as a practice that in itself expresses the human will to explain and classify the world. Putting into question the typically western obsession with the archives and cultural data preservation, this work shapes what Camille Henrot calls a 'retelling of a collection'. Doing so, it observes how each system or practice at stake carries a specific conception of the world, and the way they evolve, exchange with, depend on, or disaffirm each other.

# Interview with Mélanie Bouteloup, Director, Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research
Victoria Walsh and Paul Goodwin

23/05/2014

**VW** From both MeLa's point of view and the kinds of issues that museums in an age of migrations are grappling with, and given how everyone is trying to redress this in a national context as much as a local context… I wonder in terms of Paris at this very moment, what is the kind of discourse around the Pompidou's *Plural Modernities* exhibition, what does the rehanging of the collection mean, and what are your views on it, what issues it's raised, and how important you think this is or isn't?

**MB** So, this exhibition is actually the result of a research programme led by the Centre Pompidou by Catherine Grenier which started in 2010. This programme is called 'Research and globalization' and it's divided into different parts. The first one consists in doing some research on non-western based artists from Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and South America to be able to actually augment the collection of Pompidou to make it 'global'. The second one is to support the research of PhD students. They are offered scholarships and they are invited to work inside the Pompidou to develop their research and connect with the curators, and to also develop some offsite projects. There was also a seminar run by Catherine Grenier and Philippe Dagen, the art critic from *Le Monde*. And this seminar was happening once a month or sometimes even more. There was a symposium organised, parallel to this show, to give visibility to this research that was happening inside Pompidou in connection with the university.

I think this link between the museum and the university is a very positive thing, since relations between these two institutions are still difficult today: the museum stands on the side of the figure of the artist, and the University stands on the side of let's say the academician. In France, you know, universities are quite disconnected from museums, art centres and artistic practice. I guess there are a lot of reasons for that. Maybe it is important to mention that there is also a great divide between art schools and universities. If you want to be an artist, you usually go to an art school, whereas if you want to be an art teacher you go to the university. The university is not so much offering practice-based teaching. There is a big divide between theory and practice. And very often in the conversations you hear from representatives of the museum or the university, you feel it's still a problem. They are like two worlds that don't really know each other… So I see this connection being made between university researchers and curators at the Pompidou as a very good thing to help improve the situation and get away from the sterile opposition between practice and theory.

The other problem I see is that the approach [to the research seminars] was very art historical, in the sense of purely formal and aesthetic. When a researcher was invited to talk about his research, I don't know how but it ended up that even if the researcher was interesting, what he was talking about was not interesting, because they asked the researcher to focus on objects following a very classic art historical approach. So they were mostly talking about artworks without much attention to their context of production, and without engaging with current debates in postcolonial theory. So this was really, really boring and very often also, connections with primitivism were touched on without any reflection around it.

So the Pompidou needs a lot of work to be able to be part of an international conversation. They are now organising a project around *Magiciens de la Terre*. I was asked by Bernard Blistène, the new Director of Pompidou, for some advice on who to invite to open up the field of reflection. Well, I met with the curator who is preparing an exhibition – due to open in June – from the archives of Jean-Hubert Martin. But I haven't heard from him since that meeting. They just organised a symposium to celebrate the 25th anniversary of this historical exhibition directed by curator Jean-Hubert Martin. All the different papers were focusing on describing the exhibition, showing the press reviews that were around at the period of *Magiciens de la Terre*. And many guests were thanking Jean-Hubert Martin for his great work. One presentation was very interesting – the one by Christine Eyene. But she worked on her lecture, writing it in English, and then when she arrived she was asked to tell it in French so she had to translate it while she was talking. Of course, this is very difficult.

**VW** When you identified the problems between art history, the academic theory and practice, do you also think there are other obstacles in this conversation between rewriting art history, or is it just within the factor of a disconnection between academic practice and museum practice? Is there a wider political context or is it just rooted in these two things?

**MB** Of course. It is a problem rooted in French history and its difficulties in dealing with it. Look at what the Musée du Quai Branly and the Cité de l'Immigration are. French institutions are not run by individuals who have a strong critical vision. Let me talk about a recent experience I had with French bureaucracy. Last week, I was on a jury where art schools are invited to answer to an open call run by the Ministry of Culture for research programmes. This is a big issue at the moment in France, 'research in art'. This is in the agenda of the Minister of Culture. She wants to develop what it means to research in art. This goes with the current fusion being led between universities and art schools by the government in accordance with the Bologna agreements.

Well, I could see in the debates we were having that some experts who are part of the Ministry were really not helping to get away from a too bipolar distinction between academic research and artistic research. I really do think that these two ways of doing research should not be opposed. This attitude only serves to perpetrate a very basic dichotomy between fields of study where connections exist beyond the institution. I tried to explain to them how, for instance, the document, the text can be material also for an artist, but they tend to see it like as a kind of trend. I think the problem comes also from a lack of theory published in French around this way of working.

Well, what I would like to say is that for me, this is a big problem: that French institutions are run by homogenous individuals. Also, we are bombarded by so many meetings run in all sorts of administrations… We hardly find the space to experiment and break conventional work-formats. Funding is also dependent on how you fulfil the administration's agendas.

To come back to the Centre Pompidou which is the key. Very recently, they organised a big symposium on the history of exhibitions which is a new programme developed out of one person who had a fellowship at Centre Pompidou and did his PhD on the history of exhibitions through photography. And I could see that this research project could be a way to go out of the purely art historical approach, you know, de-contextualised. Because the history of art exhibitions is also a way to analyse how an exhibition has been received and discussed. So you start to talk about the debates also on an international level.

**VW** Talking about exhibitions and thinking about whether exhibitions have impact, I wonder if you could say something about the legacy or the impact of Okwui [Enwezor] and how his curatorship or leadership with Paris Triennale came about, and what your involvement was?

**MB** So the Triennale was the third edition of La Force de l'art, which was a manifestation organised by the Ministry of Culture in the Grand Palais that was supposed to show only French artists in order to demonstrate the supposed specificity and excellence of French art. And, of course, the two first editions were very criticised because they were for us, more like shows that were just translating a political agenda, rather than contents. Also, the second edition was curated by three men from the same generation and was strangely mainly showing the work of male artists … In 2010, Nicolas Bourriaud started working in the Ministry of Culture and I think after his experience in London and the Tate Triennial he tried to disorient La Force de l'art and he invited several curators, Okwui was among them, to submit a project for a third edition, which would be called the Triennale. He succeeded in convincing the Ministry to find a new name. But the ambition was to show the excellence of French artists and Okwui submitted a project in which the ambiguity about only French or not was not clear. And I think he perfectly understood the context and he submitted what was a perfect project for everybody.

And then Okwui decided to work with some associate curators, so I started to work with him with other ones. We had a lot of problems, of course, because during the year of research many people in the Ministry realised that we wouldn't be showing a majority of French artists. Up until the opening, it was a problem. And also, the other problem was that the Palais de Tokyo was under renovation, a new director arrived after François Kaeppelin was, kind of, fired… And then Jean de Loisy was appointed and actually wanted to have his own project for opening the Palais de Tokyo. But after a year of intensive struggle, the Triennale opened. The idea of Okwui was to have a lot of artists, and I think this was a good thing because he felt that there was a need, an urgency to show a lot of artists which were totally invisible in France. The impact of the Triennale was not visible until now: it's starting to be visible. I recently had a talk with someone who is writing a paper on the Triennale, so two years after.

**VW** Did the Triennale engage with different communities of interest? Did it raise a debate at all?

**MB** Not really I have to say. The initial idea we had with Okwui was really to work with a lot of collective groups, individuals, small institutions, in the region of Paris, not only Paris. But actually, we had so many administrative, organisational and logistical problems that we could not really relate with all these different places. And while luckily, we had Le Crédac, Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, les Instants Chavirés and Bétonsalon part of it, collaboration was really loose and it didn't really work. And we really wanted to have also an exhibition that was in permanent movement with a lot of circulation of ideas and contents. We wanted to have talks every day but at one point we just realised that it would be just impossible because the Palais de Tokyo was not ready to welcome such an intensive project. The team was more or less the same as the Palais de Tokyo before but they had, like, 20,000 square metres, and before they had only, I think, five or so. So we were running…

**PG** Part of the idea of the Triennale, as I understood it, was to engage with French colonial history and colonial knowledges, for example, and that kind of legacy of ethnographic research obviously has a very strong tradition in France, going back many years. And I know that Okwui was trying, and yourself, to engage with that. Was that successfully engaged? And how was that received? Because that obviously had the potential to open up a conversation about the past and about colonialism, which, as we know in France, in terms of art, has not really been engaged in the same way.

**MB** Yes, the idea of Okwui was to actually trace the history of the gaze towards the other, through ethnographic documents because, of course, Marcel Griaule and Claude Levi-Strauss are important figures, but there is also Georges Balandier who wrote La Situation Coloniale in 1951. Our ambition was to actually look at the materials that were produced by ethnographers, to actually reassess the role played by photography in the construction of alterity. I think we succeeded more to translate this project in the catalogue, in the anthology, but not so much in the exhibition. Because in the exhibition, at the end we just had, kind of, a corner at the entrance with pictures, photographs and drawings. And, let's say, the narrative we wanted to construct was not visible.

We had the film of Jean Rouch which was inside a programme of different themes in a little room, but lost in the Palais de Tokyo. We also had work by Timothy Ash. But I had a conversation with Maria Thereza Alves who was really, like, shocked about this project because she said: 'how you can actually show only ethnographic films made by American or French? Why are you not showing the production of Brazilians, you know, on their own culture?' This is true, I think it was missing. Maybe if we would have had the time, the space, to consider a programme of talks, I think we would have been able to construct what we wanted to discuss. And the anthology I think is a nice tool because it responds to a lack of translations of fundamental texts. Maybe the ambition of the project was too vast, and the mediation means too little. Visitors could not digest all the information. Also, it lasted for only three / four months, after the Triennale, everything stopped in a way, very brutally also.

**VW** This kind of ecology that you're describing, a big institution like the Pompidou and smaller and big events, project-based, is that also to do with funding? How is funding given? Is it from the Ministry directly, or are there other funding sources that give more independence to projects? Does the Ministry evaluate or how do people decide whether something's successful or not successful?

**MB** I don't really know actually how the Ministry evaluates what's successful or not. I wonder if they know themselves. For sure, funding is very important, but it's not only the main problem. I mean, in the '60s, '70s, there were a lot of groups who were trying to construct alternatives to society and they were doing it without any funds. And so why are we not in the same energetic construction? Universities were radical centres. These were the places where actually the debates were happening; they started from there. And today it's not the case anymore.

**VW** So maybe that's a good moment to slightly change our order to think about your relationship with Bétonsalon as we sit in the university complex. You seem to have a lot of people coming through the door, which most galleries in London would be quite happy to welcome into a university gallery. But maybe you could say something about the history of Bétonsalon, how you think your work connects to these discussions?

**MB** Bétonsalon was, in a way, born out of a reflection that actually there were no spaces for testing ideas, failing ideas, reflecting, experimenting with artists. I mean it's true that in Paris we have very few alternative spaces, artist spaces. When one opens, the next year it's closed because there is no funding for it. When we started our project with some artists from the Beaux-Arts de Paris, we had this in mind because some artists had already run some spaces before. And we really wanted to create an institution from the very beginning, because we believed that the public body should also support spaces run by artists and curators. And we worked on building our own kind of institution, but without compromise. This space is the property of the City of Paris and we are a non-profit organisation. We don't have any relation with the University Paris 7 which surrounds us, that's important to mention. And this is actually one of the few cases of an independent arts centre based in a French campus. There are a few other art galleries in French university campuses, but most of them are run by the university.

So when we arrived here, we were seen as foreigners by the university. Paris 7 is a multidisciplinary university but there is no visual art, no art history. And the cinema and literature departments are important. So we had to face some kind of disciplinary competition… Today, it's working really well actually. My strategy to be able to develop this project was to connect with other institutions, to add other partners in the configuration. So we worked with different museums, like the Museum of Natural History, Museum Albert-Khan, the Garden of Tropical Agronomy, the Centre Pompidou but also with art schools. Working with these established institutions helped us to get recognition inside the university. Now, we have gained our own reputation and I can feel that we can actually influence a little bit the contents on what is being taught at the university. There is a project to create a Chair run by Bétonsalon and financed by the university.

And we are also working a lot on research. So we are having different programmes that run on a two-year basis involving researchers and artists. For instance, we'll be having a symposium in July on the question of new digital databases and how they can be used and interpreted, and maybe re-thought. So we focus on intercultural approach towards museums' databases. We are now included in discussions with university researchers who don't know at all the current debates happening in the visual arts. I see they are actually really curious; I feel the horizon of interesting possible developments longer term.

This is very pragmatic what I say but I think it's also very useful to enter into contents in a very simple way. And then, you know, it takes time, it really takes time. I think you can't make things change or evolve without a lot of conversations and meetings, and time. We are a very young institution and I think, with time, we can develop projects more in a horizontal way. For instance, at the moment, we are working towards the creation of another space. The City of Paris has encouraged us to develop a kind of residency space in another area of Paris. And I like this way of working to infiltrate different kind of spaces instead of making one only space bigger and bigger to the point that it cannot be flexible. And I like the way that it's more like a lot of conversations happening in different places and bit by bit, you know, it makes things change. And I find this methodology quite interesting.

**PG** I'm quite interested in how you situate this space, and in particular because it's called Bétonsalon Centre for art and research. How do you see this developing, and what is the trajectory of this centre?

**MB** Actually, you know, it's only been one year that I've been working at an international level. I've spent nine years setting up the place having the contracts for the space to be stable, and focusing on fieldwork here. And now, I'm starting to develop projects with other organisations outside of France, and there are different strategies, let's say. I mean, one is actually to work with other art centres which are, kind of, similar to our space, like Chisenhale Gallery in London or Bergen Kunsthall in Norway, to co-produce works and exhibitions. This is the easiest way, it helps Bétonsalon to develop its network and reputation within the art milieu.

But the other way is to connect with other types of organisation. So they could be universities or museums of different kinds. But the difficulty I'm having now is there are a lot of small projects with all sorts of organisations abroad and I need to find a way to have a bigger team to deal with all these small projects. And I hope that, with the extension with the other space, we will be able to have more people and work in an efficient way… I don't want to enclose myself in frameworks, that would be too rigid and not so flexible.

**VW** Can I go back to this word 'research' – what does it mean for you in relation to Bétonsalon and what you want to do? Because when you talk about doing exhibitions, is that a different form of exhibition for you, or is it still about making exhibitions but just different exhibitions that don't exist already?

**MB** I've been curating exhibitions

which very often depart from special encounters (like for instance Joëlle Girard, who has constituted an alternative archive of thousands of radio recordings), or conversations I have with researchers on issues of society we feel are not enough discussed in France. Then we try to set up a situation, a physical situation where we can show some materials, but also discuss them. And I like this idea that everybody can bring something to the conversation. This aspect is very important. I feel that research, and research in art centres should actually be developed through showing the process. And the best way for me to show the process is actually to include the discussion, the reality of discussing inside the physical exhibition space. And very often, you see research exhibitions with a lot of documents being displayed on the walls. And very often, it ends up quite dry and fixed.

**VW** This idea of ‘problem-solving research’ – and a different form of emergent exhibition in a way, rather than a descriptive exhibition – how do you see that connect, or how do you see that developing and having an impact on a wider practice of curating? Do you want to have an impact on curating or on artists’ practice? Does the art school need to change, does this theory of practice that you were talking about need to change…?

**MB** I don’t see myself as a curator, first. What I’m interested in is fieldwork. And so to maybe start from a place, you choose a point and you look at what’s around and what crosses it or not. And then from this, you start to activate the things in a more smooth way, let’s say. So around Bétonsalon, there is a university, there are art schools, there are research institutions, industries. And then from this I start to see how in my projects I can involve all these people. So this is I know very ambitious. This is what drives me actually to go to work.

And so I was very happy, for instance, last week, to be in this jury for reflecting on what is research in art schools, because I feel that art schools are not connected enough to other institutions like art centres or universities. Teachers are there for years and there is very little turnover. I am now in contact with a few directors like Stéphane Sauzedde from Annecy or Muriel Lepage from Clermont-Ferrand who are trying to develop connections with universities and art centres. At the moment there are very few research projects in art schools that are interesting for me. Most of them are focused on one teacher with a small group inside his class. There are not so many long-term collaborations with researchers from social sciences or between art schools and art centres.

**VW** But you’ve also, I think, changed the relationship of how a curator works with an artist. I mean, you’ve worked a very long time with some artists and present your work quite collaboratively. I wonder if you could say something about how you started working with Camille Henrot?

**MB** I met Camille through our studio visits for the Triennale and soon after, I invited her to participate in an exhibition at Bétonsalon. Since I was already in contact with her, we developed a more specific relation during her work for the Triennale. And at one point, when she introduced me to her research project for the Smithsonian, I think we naturally said, okay, let’s work on this more together. And we decided that we would find some partners around this research project entitled ‘History of the universe’. So when she was invited to produce a work for the Venice Biennale, she told me she was a bit lost because the invitation was coming a bit too early in her research process. I really enjoyed our talks, and had great pleasure listening to her ideas and giving her feedback on them. She ended up doing this film Grosse Fatigue. For her, this is just a kind of sketch where she wanted to express this feeling of not being able to digest the sum of information and data she was at the time accumulating at the Smithsonian. She was insisting on her desire to pursue her research through an exhibition and a book.

So we actually started to see how this project could be an evolving project, you know, like each space would be a different incarnation and not just the same show. And we got a scholarship from the Ministry for Camille to spend some time at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. I introduced her to Fabienne Galangau, a curator I met there after having heard of the MeLa project. We spent a lot of time there in the corridors and in talking with different curators we could meet. I mean, Camille is very curious like me, and she also has very crazy ideas to connect things that are not normally connected. And I think this is where we actually get on well. And she arrives in the museum where everything is supposed to be ordered, let’s say, and she asks questions in all different directions, with no methodology. But I think this is actually a very productive process because the curators are finding these types of questions so fresh in a way that they get on with conversations easily. And I don’t know actually where we’re going to go with this project. We were having a Skype yesterday night and she was telling me that she was a bit lost. And me too, I have to say. But we are very happy to be able to render our conversations and encounters visible through the MeLa project.

**VW** And in terms of how the conversation came about in relation to the MeLa context of thinking about collaborative research and how a curator and an artist, in a way, sort of, start to occupy the same issues. How is that conversation for you? How has Camille changed you, or you Camille?

**MB** I did a project on the issue of intangible cultural heritage. And this started from a report published by UNESCO in 2003 which wrote a convention to describe what it is. And it's a very important document which actually explains that heritage is not only based on the monuments and texts, but it's also something which is alive in material and based on gestures and the bodies, and rituals. And so all types of intangible cultural practices are now being registered by UNESCO. There is a list which has been made and this actually raises a lot of issues, because how can you register something which is actually in permanent movement, and not based solely on objects? Also, every time you actually enact a ritual, it's a different one.

And Camille, on her side, is actually now reflecting a lot on how museums are registering and representing their collections through these databases that are online, because she's working a lot with the Internet. And how actually this picture of an object is, kind of, absurd to represent all the stories that are behind, like the 'Mano Poderosa' or 'The All-Powerful Hand' in Mexico, for instance, which is supposed to be a representation of the world, and it's just one object with five fingers with Christ, his parents and his grandparents. But, of course, all the stories behind are not in this picture and she's trying to connect this picture with other kind of pictures, to be able to get a sense of the complexity around it.

**PG** Can I just pick up on that, because I think one of the key questions that we're asking in MeLa is about this relationship between the artist and the curator, and how it works. So I wondered whether you could just say a bit more? You explained how you both came to the realisation that your interests are actually very much in common. So I guess, how reflective of that relationship or how self-reflective of that relationship is the relationship? In other words, how aware are you of the division between responsibilities in developing this research? Do you see your role as the curator to support her research on this, or is this something that you're doing together as a kind of collaborative process? And how does that then manifest itself in terms of the end protect?

**MB** Well, it's not so clear for me, so I can only try to describe it for the moment. I haven't theorised it. For instance, when we were visiting the museum, Camille was taking a lot of pictures. I understood what she's interested in by looking at these pictures. So for her next visit, I asked Camille Paties, our curatorial assistant who is a student at the Museum, to find interlocutors there who might be the people that she would be interested to meet. I mean, she told me she was interested in also the disorder that we can find in the offices of the museum. And so we literally tried to meet with some researchers who had a very chaotic office, for instance, so that we could work on these different accidents that we see in there.

We also started to work together on the book project. She wrote a text called 'Atlas of the Atlas – Unified theory of all encompassing objects, language, and strategies' which is like a 20-page text full of references and connections of different sorts, and she asked me to give her feedback on that because she felt like she was at the end of the first step of research. She read a lot of texts and mixed them into an essay in three parts. The first one is about the beginning of the world, when things are being born and pulled apart. The second one is focused on ordering and the classification. It's entitled 'On Paranoia: collecting and all encompassing strategies'. The third part is about destruction and the feeling of being overwhelmed by the universe. It was very hard for me to work on this document. I could not understand all the references. Sometimes, I thought they were too superficial or Eurocentric, western-based. Camille is eager to hear my thoughts and recommendations on who she should look at etc. This is a normal conversation between a curator and an artist, I think.

**PG** One of the reasons why I was picking it up is because people like Irit Rogoff and Maria Lind talk about the difference between the 'curatorial', which is a form of intelligence in a way. It's a way of ordering relationships in the world in the way that you described, about connecting people that only really curators are in a very good position to do to connect artwork, to connect that with discourse with people in various situations. And you really clearly described that what you were trying to do with Bétonsalon versus the idea of curating, which is about putting objects, organising exhibitions, in other words.

**MB** I think you produce content when actually you disturb each other. And so for me, it's through the encounter of heterogeneity that actually something interesting can appear. So I try to apply this thing to the way I'm working, but it's true that I am more interested in the work being made or being apprehended than the work in itself and its position in the space. But it's also important to actually integrate the stage of how you build a discourse also inside the physical space. And the main difficulty I have is how to build a narrative between documents that are produced by researchers and are not artworks, and artworks which actually need the space to breathe and be exhibited well, and clear with the space. This is a difficult thing actually. Because one pitfall I am trying to avoid is to de-contextualise the research or to reduce it to a series of small documents, or even worse, to make it look an installation of art.

**VW** That brings us right to the heart of the challenge of the MACBA show and the MeLa project because there are so many pitfalls and paradoxes here. Because you're funded to do research, which is a provisional process, and yet the funding expectation also demands an object culture to evidence, to demonstrate the research process. And I suppose what you've developed here is a fabulous model of still occupying space but also generating discussion and discussing installations when you have them. But I wondered if you could just say a little bit, however unresolved and open-ended it is, about Camille's proposal for the MACBA display. I wonder if you could just describe it and how it's come about, and how you think it intersects with everything we've been talking about, the French context and your research here. Because when we first approached you, it's because your work and approach touches on all these things. I mean, you are, out of all our collaborators, the one who really understands the questions. Whether we can achieve anything is something different, but I wonder if you could just say something about that.

**MB** So where to start? We tried to find a way to develop a project for MACBA that could be a starting point for a series of conversations. And I asked Camille if she would agree that I play an important role in selecting the materials of research we have gathered around her project. She told me she was happy about this idea not to produce an artwork per se but rather showing some notes, pictures and texts we have gathered in our common dropbox. So we made a selection of materials related to our initial visit at the Museum [Natural History] when we took photographs in the corridor and in the taxidermist department. I think these documents reflect very well the issues that were raised at that moment. We thought to contribute to the publication with these materials as well, because we like the idea of distributing and sharing our research, so it can actually be spread in different parts.

**VW** I think the challenge is to try to prevent anything taking up the space of the art object or an artwork. One of the arguments about the white cube space is that it stages everything as the artwork. And yet the chapel space that we now have at MACBA equally adds a whole level of theatrical staging to the work so it is quite interesting how you have to negotiate and mediate the expectations of both the visitor, but also documentation. Because if one starts photographing this, which we decided to do for the publication, even the photograph could restage it to look as if it looks substantial. So it's how you retain that contingency and that notion of research, rather than artwork. Because we now live in a culture where we visually trap everything, it turns it into something, the image already makes it into something before, and the discourse moves away.

What's interesting and challenging for us is just the questions it raises, even in the process of having to deliver real things like the exhibition for what I described, but also the nature of the images. Because what's coming up again and again is that this is EU funding into research, and for good reasons, the emphasis is on the disclaimers from the EU. So every single thing we do has to have the disclaimer that this does not represent the opinions of the EU etc. And yet every project about migrations is problematic because it's inherently raising questions. So there's an anxiety. When I looked at the images that Camille has chosen, I wonder if there are any politics of the image about what is being represented there. I just wondered if you could reflect on… do you think there is an issue of ethics of the image?

**MB** What do you mean with this issue of ethics?

**VW** Well, in the research process, you have to ask difficult questions because, in a way, ethics is already the social ordering of what's right and what's wrong. So, to actually research something you have to unpick that established order in order to ask new questions otherwise you're just reconfirming what's already in place. So, I wondered whether there is a kind of provocation that one can raise in the research process, but which you can't in display. So, research exhibitions should give you more licence to ask more difficult questions or show more difficult things. I mean, I'm grappling with this as the curator of this project.

**MB** I think every exhibition or every project should be able to actually ask difficult questions. I don't make a separation between a research exhibition and a normal exhibition.

**VW** So then my final question is do you think it is the role of national museums to be able to embrace such questions?

**MB** Yes, of course. Yes, definitely.

**VW** But why, because the nation has to be a coherent thing in order to be national, does it not? The nation means a coherent collective body so to represent the nation at the level of the national, should it be able to ask questions? Is its role to ask questions or is its role to put something there for others to ask questions?

**MB** No, I think it has this responsibility to be a place where questions are raised and discussed. So this means actually to have a collection, let's say, that actually represents a series of questions that are raised on the issue that is supposed to be explored, and also to find ways that these materials are being mediated and discussed with visitors and other users of the museum. But the museum should be … national or not, it should be a public sphere, let's say, a place where different individuals are able to discuss ideas through materials which have to be more heterogeneous than they are. It can actually translate to one point of view, but this point of view, it's important that it can be discussed, otherwise it's not interesting.

## Camille Henrot & Mélanie Bouteloup, Bétonsalon – Centre d’art et de recherche (Paris)

### *The Pale Fox and the Taxidermist: A Foray into Camille Henrot’s Research*

Camille Henrot is fascinated by the human need to shape a unified and organised world and her recent work focuses on cultures, practices and sciences that have historically tried to create an idealistic and utopian account of human knowledge. Conceived as both an artistic and curatorial work her project is based on the compulsive accumulation of items, images, and narratives that tend to deliver a totalising view of the history of the universe. *The Pale Fox*, named after an anthropological study of the West African Dogon people published by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen in 1965, presents part of the on-going research process and long-term collaboration with Bétonsalon (Centre for Art and Research) and the Natural History Museum in Paris, putting into question the western obsession with archives and cultural data preservation.

Camille Henrot (b. 1978) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include the New Museum, New York (2014); New Orleans Museum of Art (2013); Slought Foundation, Philadelphia (2013); Kamel Mennour, Paris (2012); and Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, Paris (2010). Group exhibitions include Companionable Silences, Nouvelle Vague, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2013) and A Disagreeable Object, Sculpture Center, New York (2012). Henrot received the Silver Lion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

Mélanie Bouteloup is co-founder and director of Bétonsalon in Paris, Centre for art and research. Bétonsalon strives to develop a space of reflection and confrontation at the confluence of art and university research by giving form to discourses from the realms of the aesthetic, cultural, political, social and economic. Integrated into the site of the University Paris 7 at the heart of a neighbourhood undergoing reconstruction, the ZAC Paris Rive Gauche in the 13th district of Paris, Bétonsalon aims to ally theory and practice, with the objective of rearticulating the position of research and artistic creation in society.

The following documents are related to Camille Henrot´s research index 'Atlas of the Atlas':

A **Pulling the Universe Apart: The Circle**

1-7 Extracts from Fabienne Galangau-Quérat's research on phylogeny
8-9 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The logic of totemic classifications', *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966)
10-20 Research pictures and screenshots from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 2013 © Camille Henrot
21-22 Julius Neubronner's camera-equipped carrier pigeons. Anonymous photograph. c. 1908

B **On Paranoia and Collecting – Noah's Ark**

1-9 Research pictures from the Zoothèque and the taxidermy laboratory of the Natural History Museum, Paris, 2014 © Camille Henrot

10-16 Research pictures and screenshots from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 2013 © Camille Henrot

C **In the Beginning There Was Death: Building Your Home**

1 Sketch for the exhibition *The Pale Fox*, 2013 © Camille Henrot
2-3 Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dietrelen, 'Amma', in *Le Renard pâle*, tome 1: *Le mythe cosmogoniqu*e, fascicule 1: *La création du monde* (Paris: Institut d'ethnologie, Musée de l'Homme, 1991)

4-9 Research pictures and screenshots from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 2013 © Camille Henrot

10 Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013, video (colour, sound), 13' © Camille Henrot
Courtesy the artist, Silex Films and kamel mennour, Paris

11-16 Camille Henrot, *The Pale Fox*, 2014, installation view at Chisenhale Gallery. An exhibition commissionned and produced by Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research, Paris; Chisenhale Gallery, London; Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; and Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster. Courtesy kamel mennour, Paris and Johann König, Berlin. © ADAGP. Photo: Andy Keate

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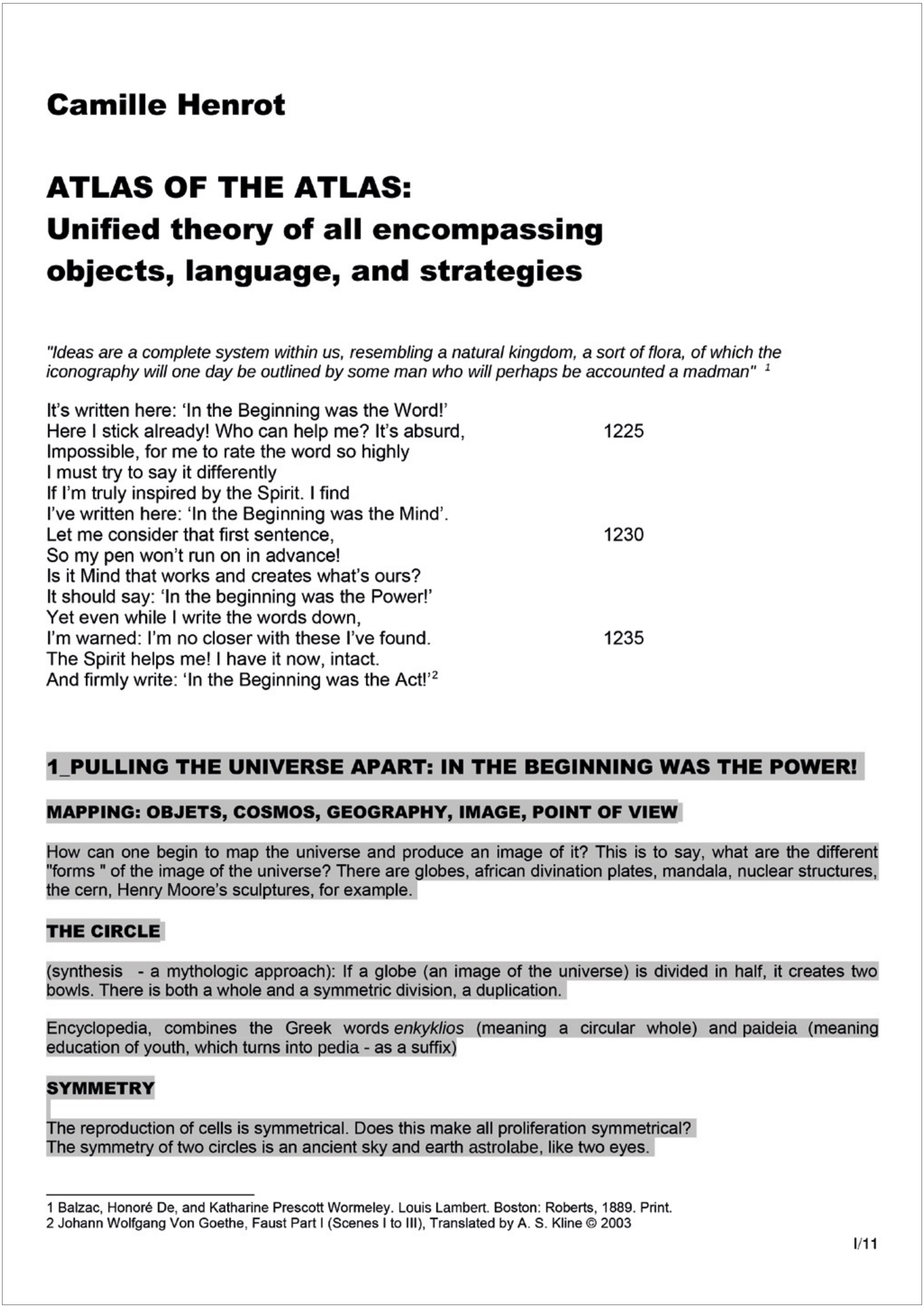

# Camille Henrot

## ATLAS OF THE ATLAS: Unified theory of all encompassing objects, language, and strategies

*"Ideas are a complete system within us, resembling a natural kingdom, a sort of flora, of which the iconography will one day be outlined by some man who will perhaps be accounted a madman"* [1]

It's written here: 'In the Beginning was the Word!'
Here I stick already! Who can help me? It's absurd,
Impossible, for me to rate the word so highly
I must try to say it differently
If I'm truly inspired by the Spirit. I find
I've written here: 'In the Beginning was the Mind'.
Let me consider that first sentence,
So my pen won't run on in advance!
Is it Mind that works and creates what's ours?
It should say: 'In the beginning was the Power!'
Yet even while I write the words down,
I'm warned: I'm no closer with these I've found.
The Spirit helps me! I have it now, intact.
And firmly write: 'In the Beginning was the Act!'[2]

### 1_PULLING THE UNIVERSE APART: IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE POWER!

#### MAPPING: OBJETS, COSMOS, GEOGRAPHY, IMAGE, POINT OF VIEW

How can one begin to map the universe and produce an image of it? This is to say, what are the different "forms " of the image of the universe? There are globes, african divination plates, mandala, nuclear structures, the cern, Henry Moore's sculptures, for example.

#### THE CIRCLE

(synthesis - a mythologic approach): If a globe (an image of the universe) is divided in half, it creates two bowls. There is both a whole and a symmetric division, a duplication.

Encyclopedia, combines the Greek words *enkyklios* (meaning a circular whole) and paideia (meaning education of youth, which turns into pedia - as a suffix)

#### SYMMETRY

The reproduction of cells is symmetrical. Does this make all proliferation symmetrical?
The symmetry of two circles is an ancient sky and earth astrolabe, like two eyes.

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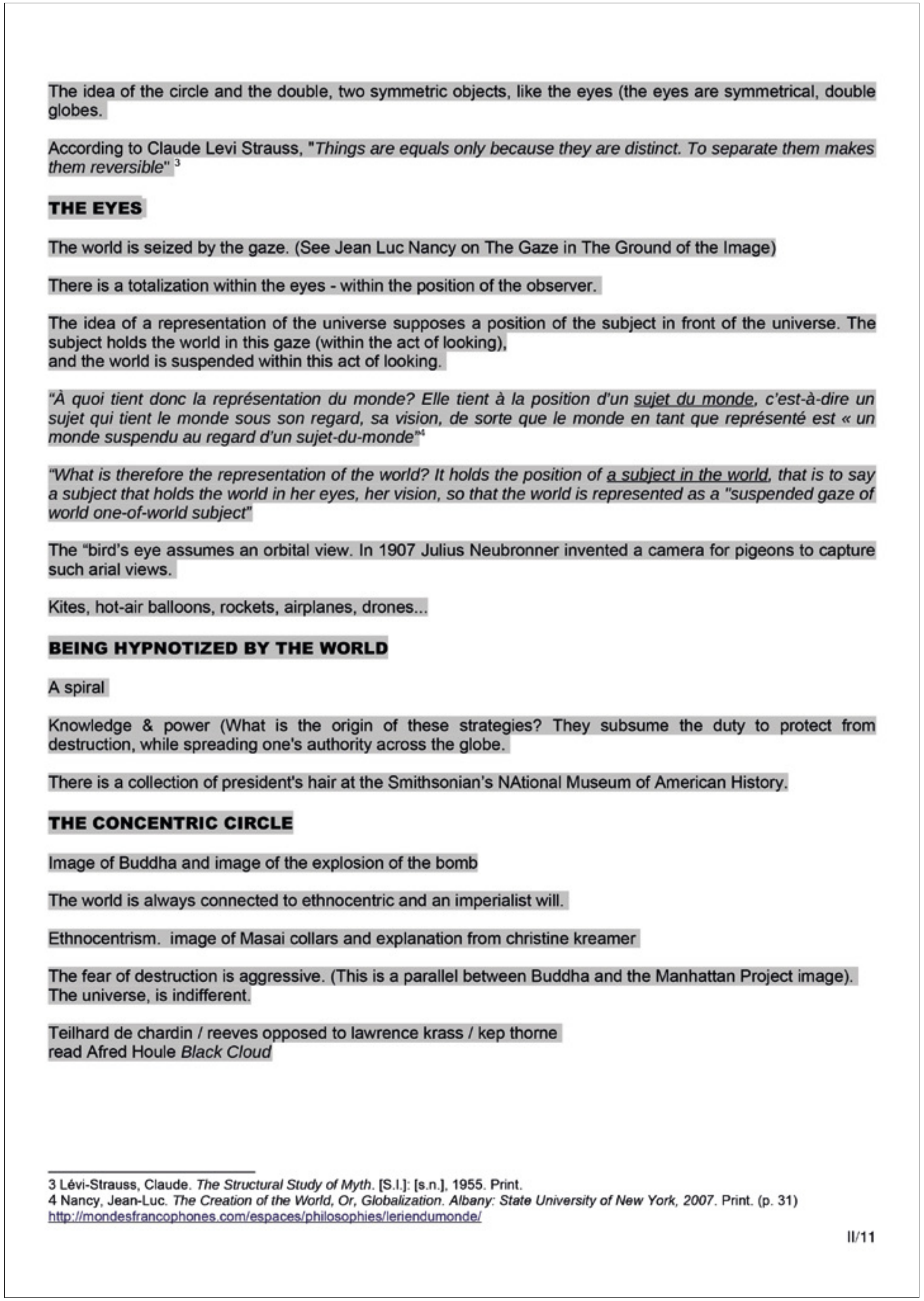
[1] Balzac, Honoré De, and Katharine Prescott Wormeley. Louis Lambert. Boston: Roberts, 1889. Print.
[2] Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, Faust Part I (Scenes I to III), Translated by A. S. Kline © 2003



The idea of the circle and the double, two symmetric objects, like the eyes (the eyes are symmetrical, double globes.

According to Claude Levi Strauss, "*Things are equals only because they are distinct. To separate them makes them reversible*" [3]

**THE EYES**

The world is seized by the gaze. (See Jean Luc Nancy on The Gaze in The Ground of the Image)

There is a totalization within the eyes - within the position of the observer.

The idea of a representation of the universe supposes a position of the subject in front of the universe. The subject holds the world in this gaze (within the act of looking),
and the world is suspended within this act of looking.

*"À quoi tient donc la représentation du monde? Elle tient à la position d'un sujet du monde, c'est-à-dire un sujet qui tient le monde sous son regard, sa vision, de sorte que le monde en tant que représenté est « un monde suspendu au regard d'un sujet-du-monde"*[4]

*"What is therefore the representation of the world? It holds the position of a subject in the world, that is to say a subject that holds the world in her eyes, her vision, so that the world is represented as a "suspended gaze of world one-of-world subject"*

The "bird's eye assumes an orbital view. In 1907 Julius Neubronner invented a camera for pigeons to capture such arial views.

Kites, hot-air balloons, rockets, airplanes, drones...

**BEING HYPNOTIZED BY THE WORLD**

A spiral

Knowledge & power (What is the origin of these strategies? They subsume the duty to protect from destruction, while spreading one's authority across the globe.

There is a collection of president's hair at the Smithsonian's NAtional Museum of American History.

**THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLE**

Image of Buddha and image of the explosion of the bomb

The world is always connected to ethnocentric and an imperialist will.

Ethnocentrism. image of Masai collars and explanation from christine kreamer

The fear of destruction is aggressive. (This is a parallel between Buddha and the Manhattan Project image).
The universe, is indifferent.

Teilhard de chardin / reeves opposed to lawrence krass / kep thorne
read Afred Houle *Black Cloud*

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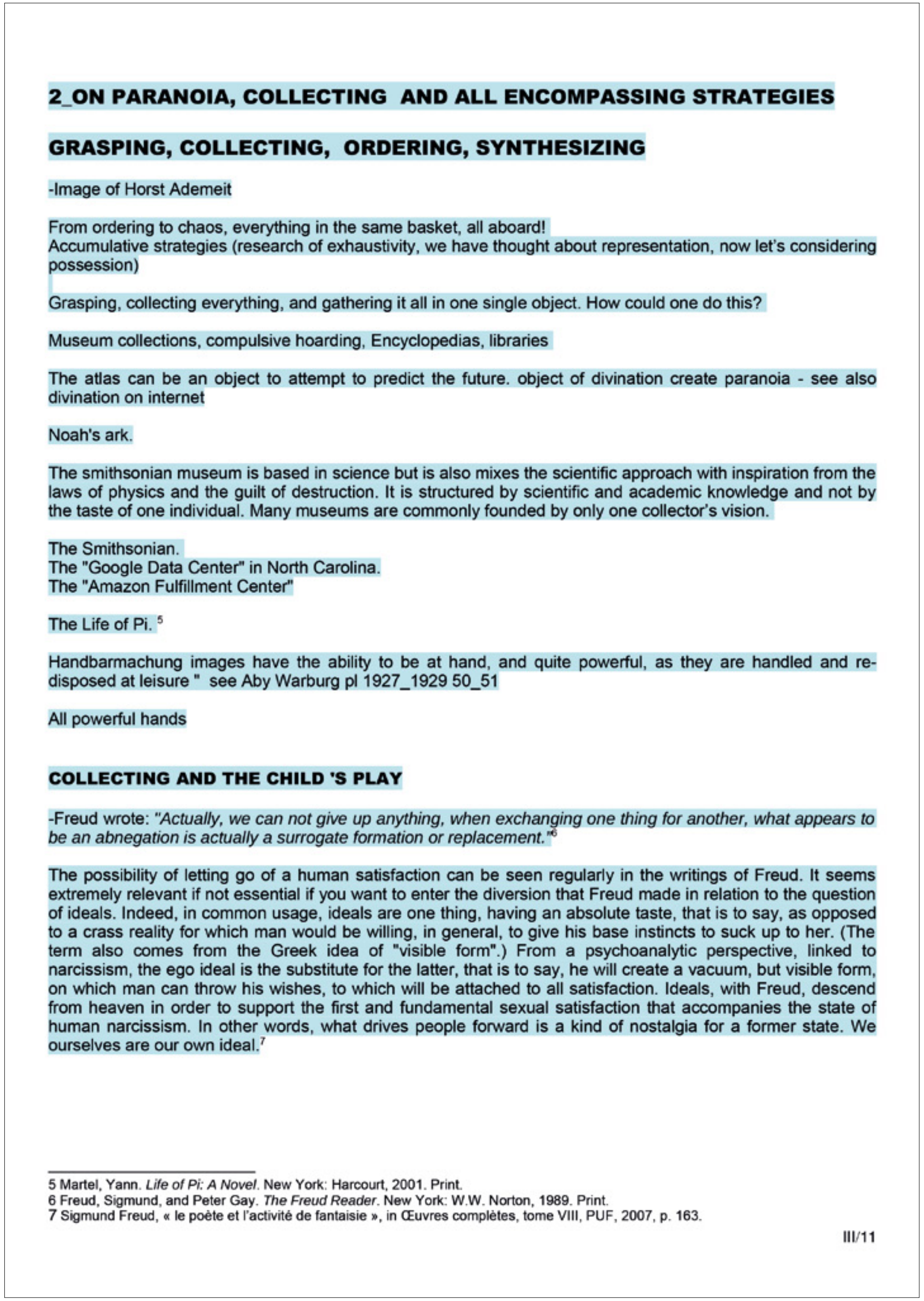
[3] Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Structural Study of Myth*. [S.l.]: [s.n.], 1955. Print.
[4] Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Creation of the World, Or, Globalization. Albany: State University of New York, 2007*. Print. (p. 31)
http://mondesfrancophones.com/espaces/philosophies/leriendumonde/



## 2_ON PARANOIA, COLLECTING AND ALL ENCOMPASSING STRATEGIES

## GRASPING, COLLECTING, ORDERING, SYNTHESIZING

-Image of Horst Ademeit

From ordering to chaos, everything in the same basket, all aboard!
Accumulative strategies (research of exhaustivity, we have thought about representation, now let's considering possession)

Grasping, collecting everything, and gathering it all in one single object. How could one do this?

Museum collections, compulsive hoarding, Encyclopedias, libraries

The atlas can be an object to attempt to predict the future. object of divination create paranoia - see also divination on internet

Noah's ark.

The smithsonian museum is based in science but is also mixes the scientific approach with inspiration from the laws of physics and the guilt of destruction. It is structured by scientific and academic knowledge and not by the taste of one individual. Many museums are commonly founded by only one collector's vision.

The Smithsonian.
The "Google Data Center" in North Carolina.
The "Amazon Fulfillment Center"

The Life of Pi. [5]

Handbarmachung images have the ability to be at hand, and quite powerful, as they are handled and re-disposed at leisure " see Aby Warburg pl 1927_1929 50_51

All powerful hands

**COLLECTING AND THE CHILD 'S PLAY**

-Freud wrote: *"Actually, we can not give up anything, when exchanging one thing for another, what appears to be an abnegation is actually a surrogate formation or replacement."*[6]

The possibility of letting go of a human satisfaction can be seen regularly in the writings of Freud. It seems extremely relevant if not essential if you want to enter the diversion that Freud made in relation to the question of ideals. Indeed, in common usage, ideals are one thing, having an absolute taste, that is to say, as opposed to a crass reality for which man would be willing, in general, to give his base instincts to suck up to her. (The term also comes from the Greek idea of "visible form".) From a psychoanalytic perspective, linked to narcissism, the ego ideal is the substitute for the latter, that is to say, he will create a vacuum, but visible form, on which man can throw his wishes, to which will be attached to all satisfaction. Ideals, with Freud, descend from heaven in order to support the first and fundamental sexual satisfaction that accompanies the state of human narcissism. In other words, what drives people forward is a kind of nostalgia for a former state. We ourselves are our own ideal.[7]

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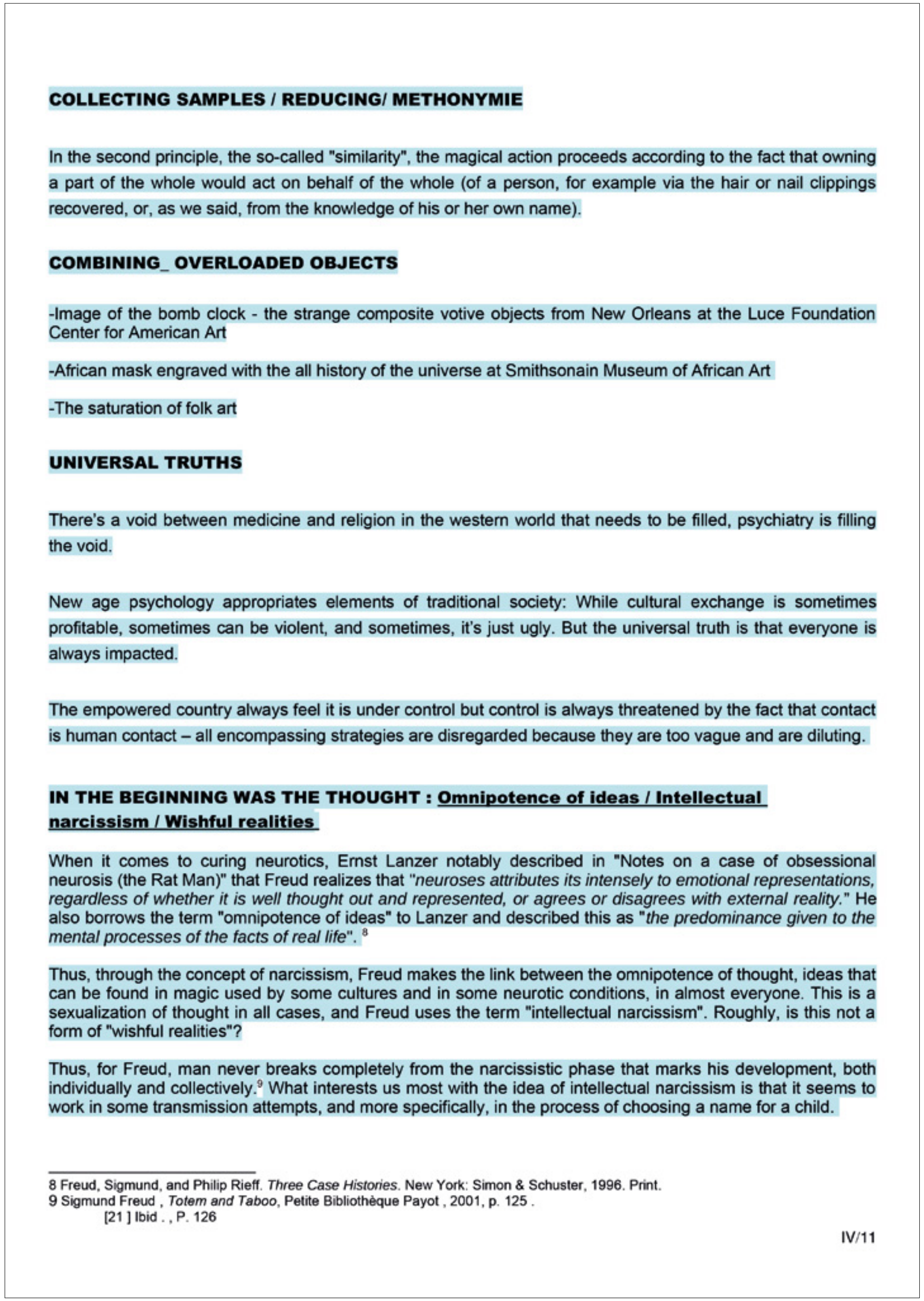
[5] Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi: A Novel*. New York: Harcourt, 2001. Print.
[6] Freud, Sigmund, and Peter Gay. *The Freud Reader*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. Print.
[7] Sigmund Freud, « le poète et l'activité de fantaisie », in Œuvres complètes, tome VIII, PUF, 2007, p. 163.



## COLLECTING SAMPLES / REDUCING/ METHONYMIE

In the second principle, the so-called "similarity", the magical action proceeds according to the fact that owning a part of the whole would act on behalf of the whole (of a person, for example via the hair or nail clippings recovered, or, as we said, from the knowledge of his or her own name).

## COMBINING_ OVERLOADED OBJECTS

-Image of the bomb clock - the strange composite votive objects from New Orleans at the Luce Foundation Center for American Art

-African mask engraved with the all history of the universe at Smithsonain Museum of African Art

-The saturation of folk art

## UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

There's a void between medicine and religion in the western world that needs to be filled, psychiatry is filling the void.

New age psychology appropriates elements of traditional society: While cultural exchange is sometimes profitable, sometimes can be violent, and sometimes, it's just ugly. But the universal truth is that everyone is always impacted.

The empowered country always feel it is under control but control is always threatened by the fact that contact is human contact – all encompassing strategies are disregarded because they are too vague and are diluting.

## IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE THOUGHT : Omnipotence of ideas / Intellectual narcissism / Wishful realities

When it comes to curing neurotics, Ernst Lanzer notably described in "Notes on a case of obsessional neurosis (the Rat Man)" that Freud realizes that "*neuroses attributes its intensely to emotional representations, regardless of whether it is well thought out and represented, or agrees or disagrees with external reality.*" He also borrows the term "omnipotence of ideas" to Lanzer and described this as "*the predominance given to the mental processes of the facts of real life*". [8]

Thus, through the concept of narcissism, Freud makes the link between the omnipotence of thought, ideas that can be found in magic used by some cultures and in some neurotic conditions, in almost everyone. This is a sexualization of thought in all cases, and Freud uses the term "intellectual narcissism". Roughly, is this not a form of "wishful realities"?

Thus, for Freud, man never breaks completely from the narcissistic phase that marks his development, both individually and collectively.[9] What interests us most with the idea of intellectual narcissism is that it seems to work in some transmission attempts, and more specifically, in the process of choosing a name for a child.

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8 Freud, Sigmund, and Philip Rieff. *Three Case Histories*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Print.
9 Sigmund Freud , *Totem and Taboo*, Petite Bibliothèque Payot , 2001, p. 125 .
[21 ] Ibid . , P. 126

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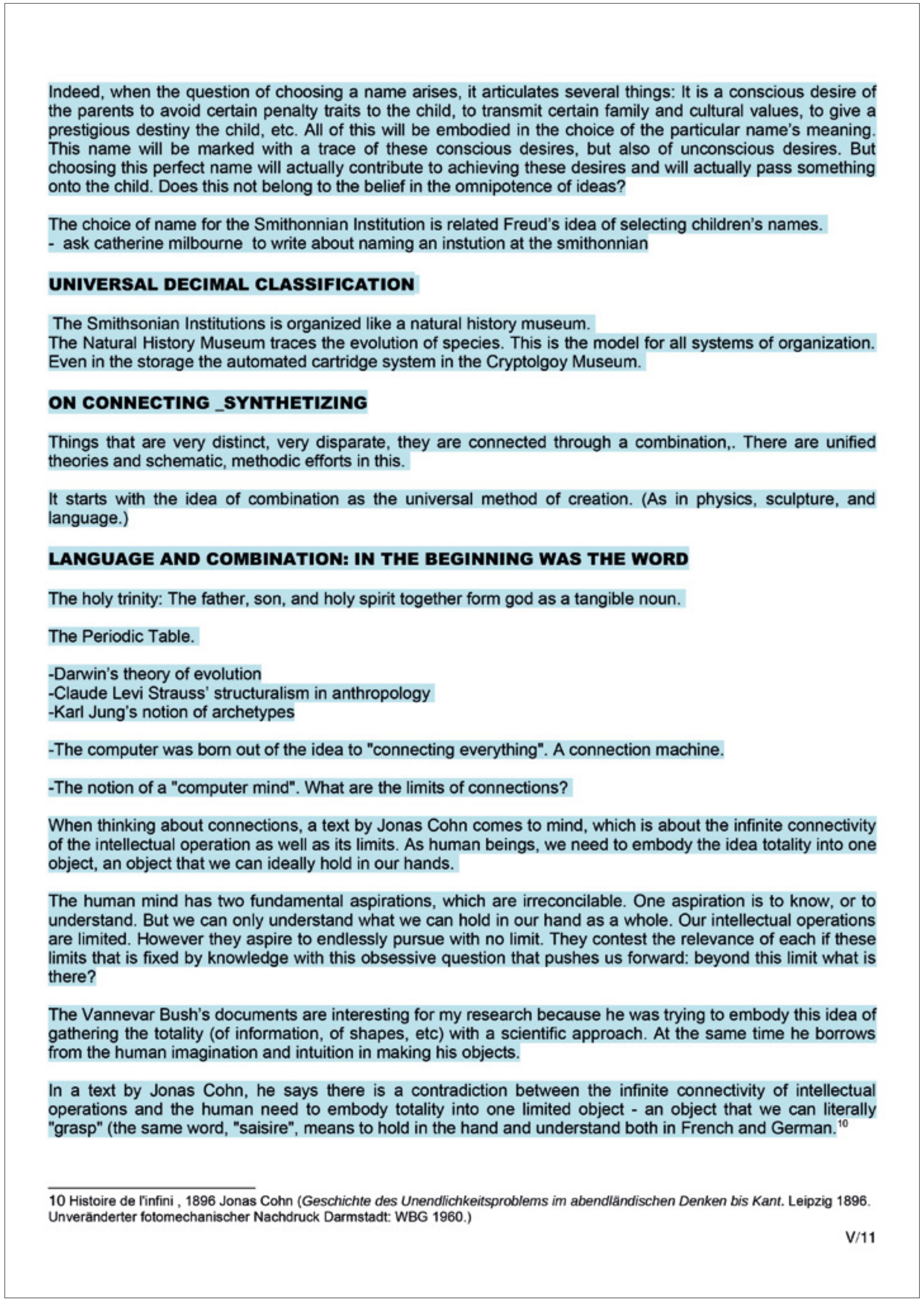

Indeed, when the question of choosing a name arises, it articulates several things: It is a conscious desire of the parents to avoid certain penalty traits to the child, to transmit certain family and cultural values, to give a prestigious destiny the child, etc. All of this will be embodied in the choice of the particular name's meaning. This name will be marked with a trace of these conscious desires, but also of unconscious desires. But choosing this perfect name will actually contribute to achieving these desires and will actually pass something onto the child. Does this not belong to the belief in the omnipotence of ideas?

The choice of name for the Smithonnian Institution is related Freud's idea of selecting children's names.
- ask catherine milbourne to write about naming an instution at the smithonnian

## UNIVERSAL DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION

The Smithsonian Institutions is organized like a natural history museum.
The Natural History Museum traces the evolution of species. This is the model for all systems of organization.
Even in the storage the automated cartridge system in the Cryptolgoy Museum.

## ON CONNECTING _SYNTHETIZING

Things that are very distinct, very disparate, they are connected through a combination,. There are unified theories and schematic, methodic efforts in this.

It starts with the idea of combination as the universal method of creation. (As in physics, sculpture, and language.)

## LANGUAGE AND COMBINATION: IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

The holy trinity: The father, son, and holy spirit together form god as a tangible noun.

The Periodic Table.

-Darwin's theory of evolution
-Claude Levi Strauss' structuralism in anthropology
-Karl Jung's notion of archetypes

-The computer was born out of the idea to "connecting everything". A connection machine.

-The notion of a "computer mind". What are the limits of connections?

When thinking about connections, a text by Jonas Cohn comes to mind, which is about the infinite connectivity of the intellectual operation as well as its limits. As human beings, we need to embody the idea totality into one object, an object that we can ideally hold in our hands.

The human mind has two fundamental aspirations, which are irreconcilable. One aspiration is to know, or to understand. But we can only understand what we can hold in our hand as a whole. Our intellectual operations are limited. However they aspire to endlessly pursue with no limit. They contest the relevance of each if these limits that is fixed by knowledge with this obsessive question that pushes us forward: beyond this limit what is there?

The Vannevar Bush's documents are interesting for my research because he was trying to embody this idea of gathering the totality (of information, of shapes, etc) with a scientific approach. At the same time he borrows from the human imagination and intuition in making his objects.

In a text by Jonas Cohn, he says there is a contradiction between the infinite connectivity of intellectual operations and the human need to embody totality into one limited object - an object that we can literally "grasp" (the same word, "saisire", means to hold in the hand and understand both in French and German.[10]

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10 Histoire de l'infini , 1896 Jonas Cohn (*Geschichte des Unendlichkeitsproblems im abendländischen Denken bis Kant*. Leipzig 1896. Unveränderter fotomechanischer Nachdruck Darmstadt: WBG 1960.)

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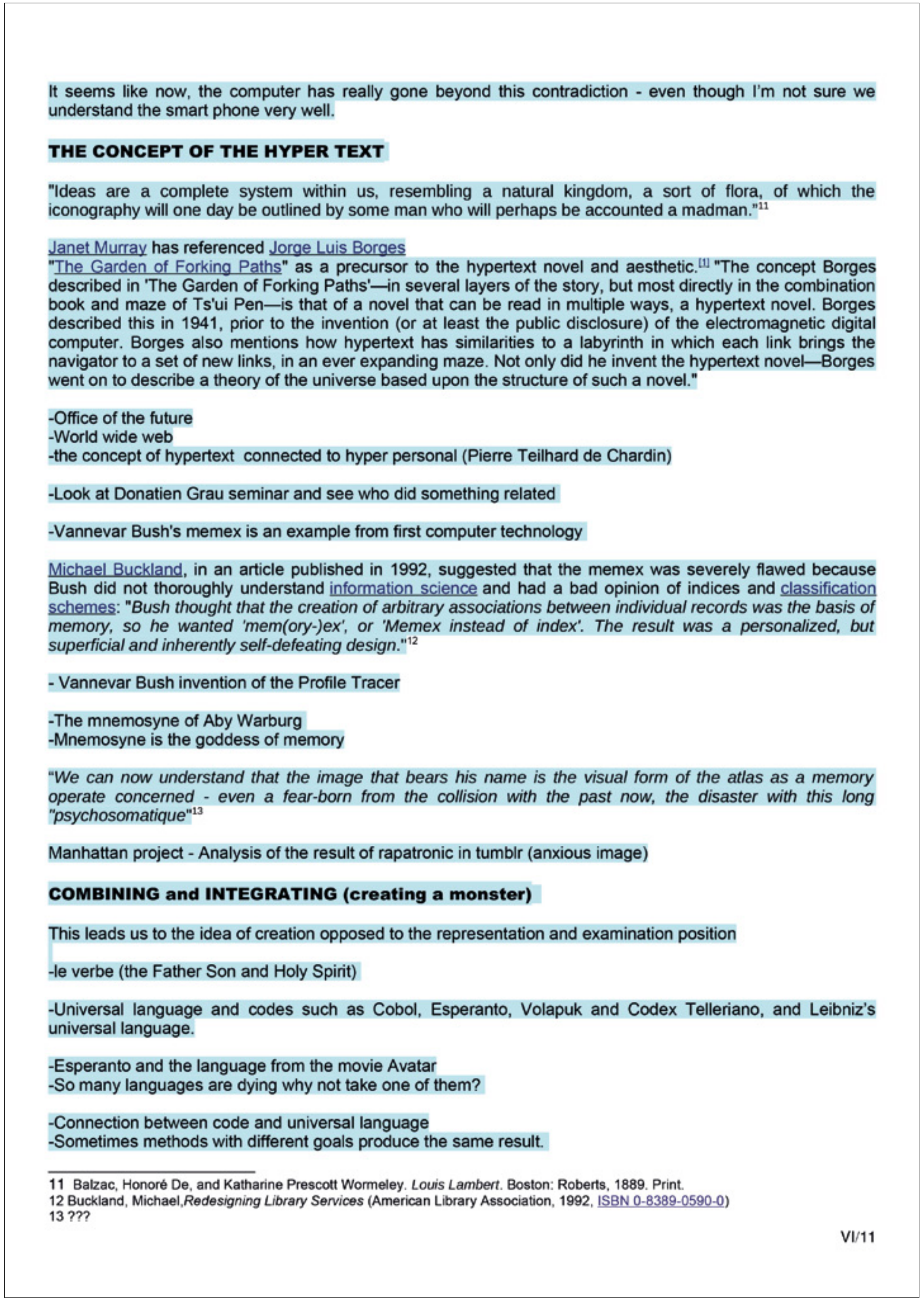

It seems like now, the computer has really gone beyond this contradiction - even though I'm not sure we understand the smart phone very well.

**THE CONCEPT OF THE HYPER TEXT**

"Ideas are a complete system within us, resembling a natural kingdom, a sort of flora, of which the iconography will one day be outlined by some man who will perhaps be accounted a madman."[11]

Janet Murray has referenced Jorge Luis Borges
"The Garden of Forking Paths" as a precursor to the hypertext novel and aesthetic.[1] "The concept Borges described in 'The Garden of Forking Paths'—in several layers of the story, but most directly in the combination book and maze of Ts'ui Pen—is that of a novel that can be read in multiple ways, a hypertext novel. Borges described this in 1941, prior to the invention (or at least the public disclosure) of the electromagnetic digital computer. Borges also mentions how hypertext has similarities to a labyrinth in which each link brings the navigator to a set of new links, in an ever expanding maze. Not only did he invent the hypertext novel—Borges went on to describe a theory of the universe based upon the structure of such a novel."

-Office of the future
-World wide web
-the concept of hypertext connected to hyper personal (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

-Look at Donatien Grau seminar and see who did something related

-Vannevar Bush's memex is an example from first computer technology

Michael Buckland, in an article published in 1992, suggested that the memex was severely flawed because Bush did not thoroughly understand information science and had a bad opinion of indices and classification schemes: "*Bush thought that the creation of arbitrary associations between individual records was the basis of memory, so he wanted 'mem(ory-)ex', or 'Memex instead of index'. The result was a personalized, but superficial and inherently self-defeating design.*"[12]

- Vannevar Bush invention of the Profile Tracer

-The mnemosyne of Aby Warburg
-Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory

"*We can now understand that the image that bears his name is the visual form of the atlas as a memory operate concerned - even a fear-born from the collision with the past now, the disaster with this long "psychosomatique"*"[13]

Manhattan project - Analysis of the result of rapatronic in tumblr (anxious image)

**COMBINING and INTEGRATING (creating a monster)**

This leads us to the idea of creation opposed to the representation and examination position

-le verbe (the Father Son and Holy Spirit)

-Universal language and codes such as Cobol, Esperanto, Volapuk and Codex Telleriano, and Leibniz's universal language.

-Esperanto and the language from the movie Avatar
-So many languages are dying why not take one of them?

-Connection between code and universal language
-Sometimes methods with different goals produce the same result.

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11 Balzac, Honoré De, and Katharine Prescott Wormeley. *Louis Lambert*. Boston: Roberts, 1889. Print.
12 Buckland, Michael,*Redesigning Library Services* (American Library Association, 1992, ISBN 0-8389-0590-0)
13 ???

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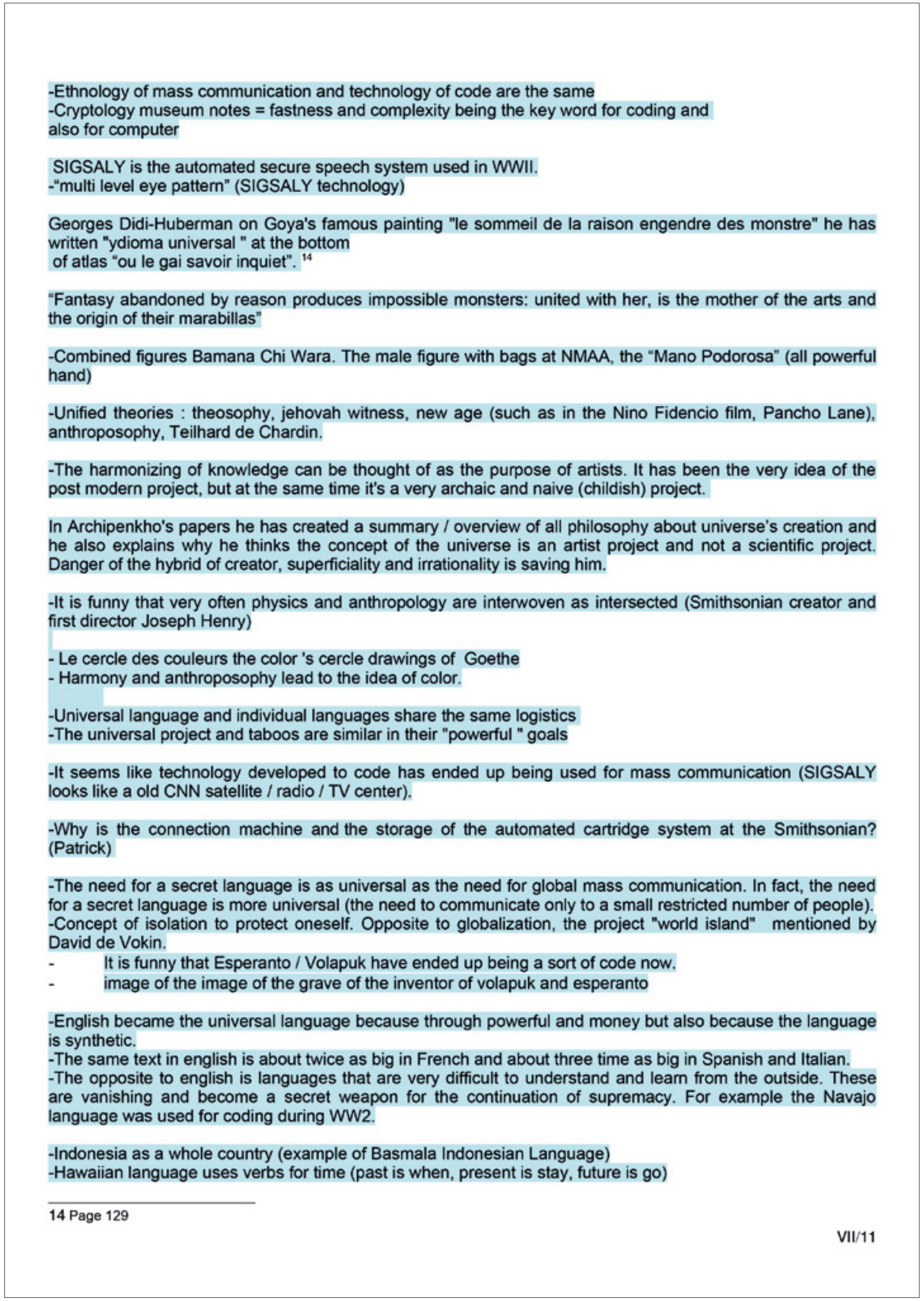

-Ethnology of mass communication and technology of code are the same
-Cryptology museum notes = fastness and complexity being the key word for coding and also for computer

SIGSALY is the automated secure speech system used in WWII.
-"multi level eye pattern" (SIGSALY technology)

Georges Didi-Huberman on Goya's famous painting "le sommeil de la raison engendre des monstre" he has written "ydioma universal " at the bottom
of atlas "ou le gai savoir inquiet". [14]

"Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marabillas"

-Combined figures Bamana Chi Wara. The male figure with bags at NMAA, the "Mano Podorosa" (all powerful hand)

-Unified theories : theosophy, jehovah witness, new age (such as in the Nino Fidencio film, Pancho Lane), anthroposophy, Teilhard de Chardin.

-The harmonizing of knowledge can be thought of as the purpose of artists. It has been the very idea of the post modern project, but at the same time it's a very archaic and naive (childish) project.

In Archipenkho's papers he has created a summary / overview of all philosophy about universe's creation and he also explains why he thinks the concept of the universe is an artist project and not a scientific project. Danger of the hybrid of creator, superficiality and irrationality is saving him.

-It is funny that very often physics and anthropology are interwoven as intersected (Smithsonian creator and first director Joseph Henry)

- Le cercle des couleurs the color 's cercle drawings of Goethe
- Harmony and anthroposophy lead to the idea of color.

-Universal language and individual languages share the same logistics
-The universal project and taboos are similar in their "powerful " goals

-It seems like technology developed to code has ended up being used for mass communication (SIGSALY looks like a old CNN satellite / radio / TV center).

-Why is the connection machine and the storage of the automated cartridge system at the Smithsonian? (Patrick)

-The need for a secret language is as universal as the need for global mass communication. In fact, the need for a secret language is more universal (the need to communicate only to a small restricted number of people).
-Concept of isolation to protect oneself. Opposite to globalization, the project "world island" mentioned by David de Vokin.
- It is funny that Esperanto / Volapuk have ended up being a sort of code now.
- image of the image of the grave of the inventor of volapuk and esperanto

-English became the universal language because through powerful and money but also because the language is synthetic.
-The same text in english is about twice as big in French and about three time as big in Spanish and Italian.
-The opposite to english is languages that are very difficult to understand and learn from the outside. These are vanishing and become a secret weapon for the continuation of supremacy. For example the Navajo language was used for coding during WW2.

-Indonesia as a whole country (example of Basmala Indonesian Language)
-Hawaiian language uses verbs for time (past is when, present is stay, future is go)

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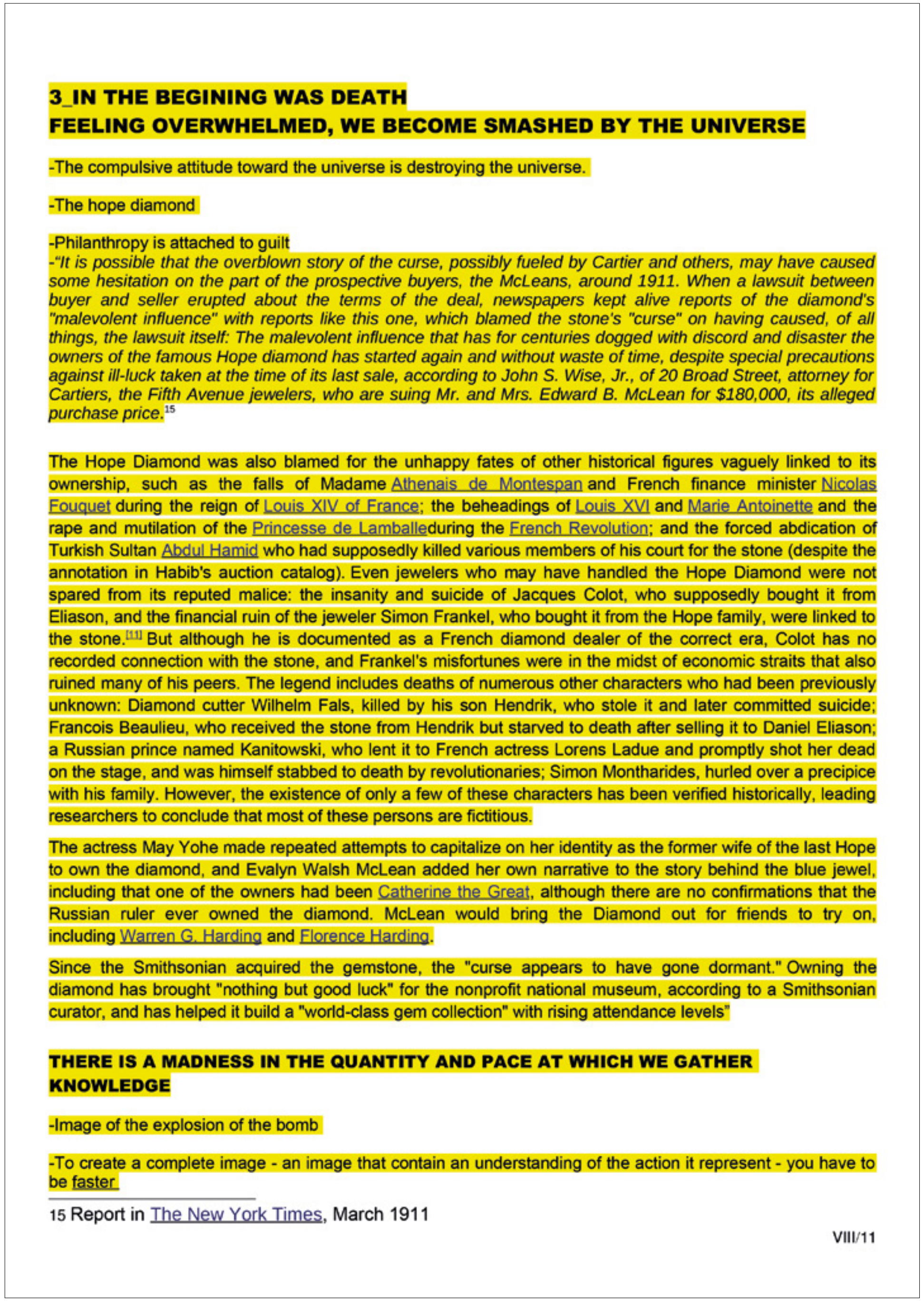

**3_IN THE BEGINING WAS DEATH**
**FEELING OVERWHELMED, WE BECOME SMASHED BY THE UNIVERSE**

-The compulsive attitude toward the universe is destroying the universe.

-The hope diamond

-Philanthropy is attached to guilt
-*"It is possible that the overblown story of the curse, possibly fueled by Cartier and others, may have caused some hesitation on the part of the prospective buyers, the McLeans, around 1911. When a lawsuit between buyer and seller erupted about the terms of the deal, newspapers kept alive reports of the diamond's "malevolent influence" with reports like this one, which blamed the stone's "curse" on having caused, of all things, the lawsuit itself: The malevolent influence that has for centuries dogged with discord and disaster the owners of the famous Hope diamond has started again and without waste of time, despite special precautions against ill-luck taken at the time of its last sale, according to John S. Wise, Jr., of 20 Broad Street, attorney for Cartiers, the Fifth Avenue jewelers, who are suing Mr. and Mrs. Edward B. McLean for $180,000, its alleged purchase price.*[15]

The Hope Diamond was also blamed for the unhappy fates of other historical figures vaguely linked to its ownership, such as the falls of Madame Athenais de Montespan and French finance minister Nicolas Fouquet during the reign of Louis XIV of France; the beheadings of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and the rape and mutilation of the Princesse de Lamballeduring the French Revolution; and the forced abdication of Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid who had supposedly killed various members of his court for the stone (despite the annotation in Habib's auction catalog). Even jewelers who may have handled the Hope Diamond were not spared from its reputed malice: the insanity and suicide of Jacques Colot, who supposedly bought it from Eliason, and the financial ruin of the jeweler Simon Frankel, who bought it from the Hope family, were linked to the stone.[11] But although he is documented as a French diamond dealer of the correct era, Colot has no recorded connection with the stone, and Frankel's misfortunes were in the midst of economic straits that also ruined many of his peers. The legend includes deaths of numerous other characters who had been previously unknown: Diamond cutter Wilhelm Fals, killed by his son Hendrik, who stole it and later committed suicide; Francois Beaulieu, who received the stone from Hendrik but starved to death after selling it to Daniel Eliason; a Russian prince named Kanitowski, who lent it to French actress Lorens Ladue and promptly shot her dead on the stage, and was himself stabbed to death by revolutionaries; Simon Montharides, hurled over a precipice with his family. However, the existence of only a few of these characters has been verified historically, leading researchers to conclude that most of these persons are fictitious.

The actress May Yohe made repeated attempts to capitalize on her identity as the former wife of the last Hope to own the diamond, and Evalyn Walsh McLean added her own narrative to the story behind the blue jewel, including that one of the owners had been Catherine the Great, although there are no confirmations that the Russian ruler ever owned the diamond. McLean would bring the Diamond out for friends to try on, including Warren G. Harding and Florence Harding.

Since the Smithsonian acquired the gemstone, the "curse appears to have gone dormant." Owning the diamond has brought "nothing but good luck" for the nonprofit national museum, according to a Smithsonian curator, and has helped it build a "world-class gem collection" with rising attendance levels"

**THERE IS A MADNESS IN THE QUANTITY AND PACE AT WHICH WE GATHER KNOWLEDGE**

-Image of the explosion of the bomb

-To create a complete image - an image that contain an understanding of the action it represent - you have to be faster

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15 Report in The New York Times, March 1911

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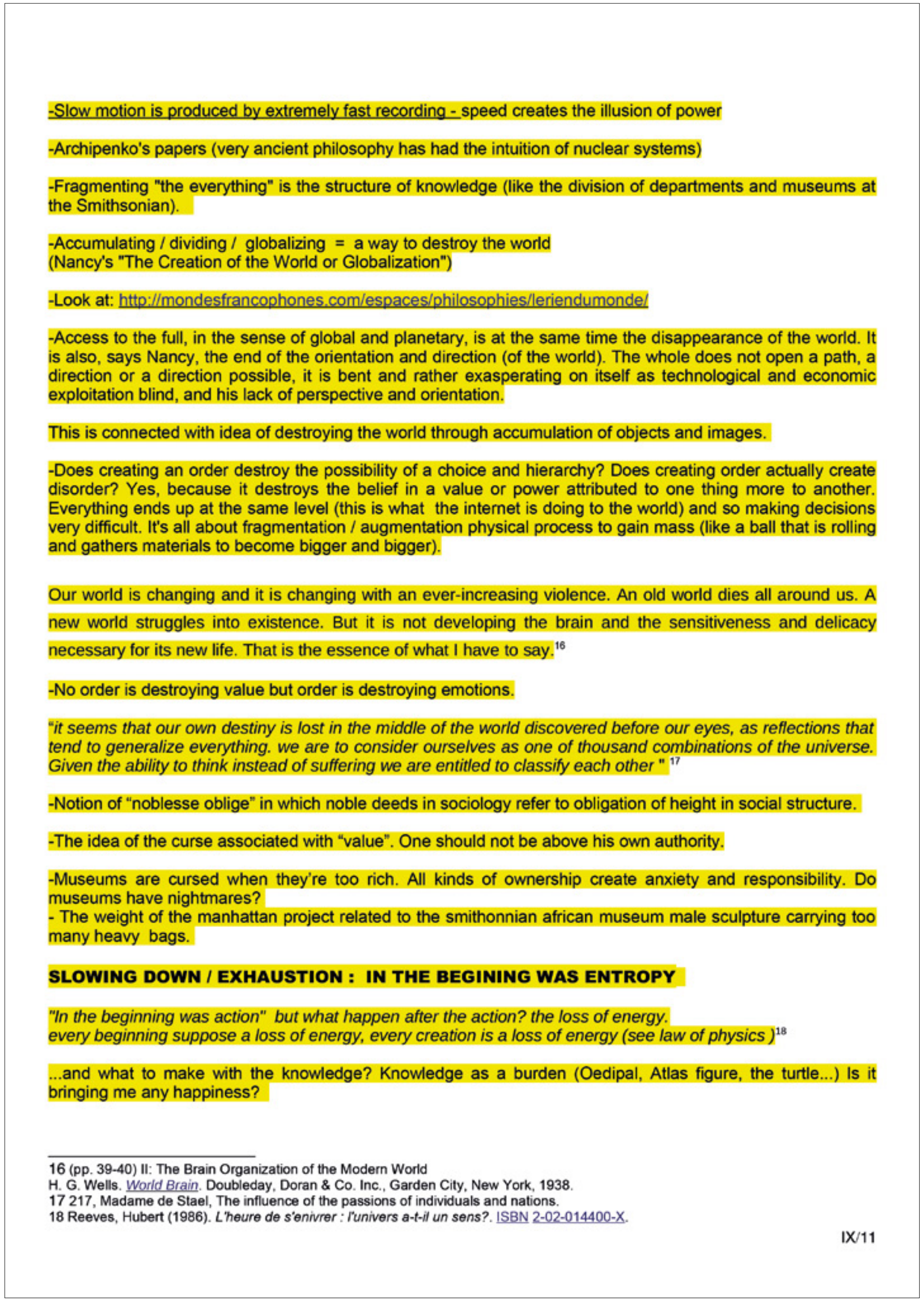

-Slow motion is produced by extremely fast recording - speed creates the illusion of power

-Archipenko's papers (very ancient philosophy has had the intuition of nuclear systems)

-Fragmenting "the everything" is the structure of knowledge (like the division of departments and museums at the Smithsonian).

-Accumulating / dividing / globalizing = a way to destroy the world
(Nancy's "The Creation of the World or Globalization")

-Look at: http://mondesfrancophones.com/espaces/philosophies/leriendumonde/

-Access to the full, in the sense of global and planetary, is at the same time the disappearance of the world. It is also, says Nancy, the end of the orientation and direction (of the world). The whole does not open a path, a direction or a direction possible, it is bent and rather exasperating on itself as technological and economic exploitation blind, and his lack of perspective and orientation.

This is connected with idea of destroying the world through accumulation of objects and images.

-Does creating an order destroy the possibility of a choice and hierarchy? Does creating order actually create disorder? Yes, because it destroys the belief in a value or power attributed to one thing more to another. Everything ends up at the same level (this is what the internet is doing to the world) and so making decisions very difficult. It's all about fragmentation / augmentation physical process to gain mass (like a ball that is rolling and gathers materials to become bigger and bigger).

Our world is changing and it is changing with an ever-increasing violence. An old world dies all around us. A new world struggles into existence. But it is not developing the brain and the sensitiveness and delicacy necessary for its new life. That is the essence of what I have to say.[16]

-No order is destroying value but order is destroying emotions.

*"it seems that our own destiny is lost in the middle of the world discovered before our eyes, as reflections that tend to generalize everything. we are to consider ourselves as one of thousand combinations of the universe. Given the ability to think instead of suffering we are entitled to classify each other "* [17]

-Notion of "noblesse oblige" in which noble deeds in sociology refer to obligation of height in social structure.

-The idea of the curse associated with "value". One should not be above his own authority.

-Museums are cursed when they're too rich. All kinds of ownership create anxiety and responsibility. Do museums have nightmares?
- The weight of the manhattan project related to the smithonnian african museum male sculpture carrying too many heavy bags.

**SLOWING DOWN / EXHAUSTION : IN THE BEGINING WAS ENTROPY**

*"In the beginning was action" but what happen after the action? the loss of energy.*
*every beginning suppose a loss of energy, every creation is a loss of energy (see law of physics )*[18]

...and what to make with the knowledge? Knowledge as a burden (Oedipal, Atlas figure, the turtle...) Is it bringing me any happiness?

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16 (pp. 39-40) II: The Brain Organization of the Modern World
H. G. Wells. *World Brain*. Doubleday, Doran & Co. Inc., Garden City, New York, 1938.
17 217, Madame de Stael, The influence of the passions of individuals and nations.
18 Reeves, Hubert (1986). *L'heure de s'enivrer : l'univers a-t-il un sens?*. ISBN 2-02-014400-X.

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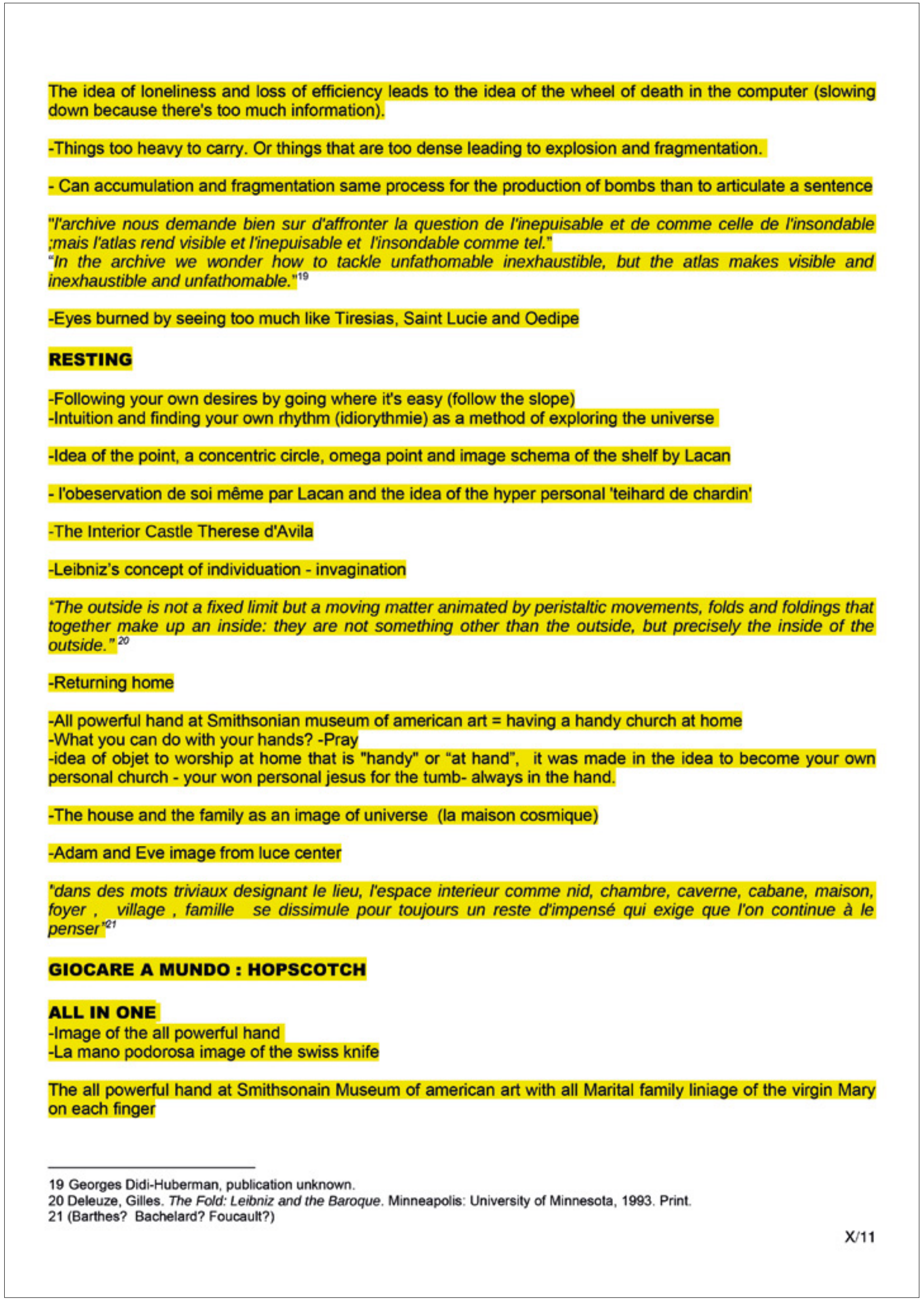

The idea of loneliness and loss of efficiency leads to the idea of the wheel of death in the computer (slowing down because there's too much information).

-Things too heavy to carry. Or things that are too dense leading to explosion and fragmentation.

- Can accumulation and fragmentation same process for the production of bombs than to articulate a sentence

*"l'archive nous demande bien sur d'affronter la question de l'inepuisable et de comme celle de l'insondable ;mais l'atlas rend visible et l'inepuisable et l'insondable comme tel."*
*"In the archive we wonder how to tackle unfathomable inexhaustible, but the atlas makes visible and inexhaustible and unfathomable."*[19]

-Eyes burned by seeing too much like Tiresias, Saint Lucie and Oedipe

**RESTING**

-Following your own desires by going where it's easy (follow the slope)
-Intuition and finding your own rhythm (idiorythmie) as a method of exploring the universe

-Idea of the point, a concentric circle, omega point and image schema of the shelf by Lacan

- l'obeservation de soi même par Lacan and the idea of the hyper personal 'teihard de chardin'

-The Interior Castle Therese d'Avila

-Leibniz's concept of individuation - invagination

*"The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside."*[20]

-Returning home

-All powerful hand at Smithsonian museum of american art = having a handy church at home
-What you can do with your hands? -Pray
-idea of objet to worship at home that is "handy" or "at hand", it was made in the idea to become your own personal church - your won personal jesus for the tumb- always in the hand.

-The house and the family as an image of universe (la maison cosmique)

-Adam and Eve image from luce center

*"dans des mots triviaux designant le lieu, l'espace interieur comme nid, chambre, caverne, cabane, maison, foyer , village , famille se dissimule pour toujours un reste d'impensé qui exige que l'on continue à le penser"*[21]

**GIOCARE A MUNDO : HOPSCOTCH**

**ALL IN ONE**
-Image of the all powerful hand
-La mano podorosa image of the swiss knife

The all powerful hand at Smithsonain Museum of american art with all Marital family liniage of the virgin Mary on each finger

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[19] Georges Didi-Huberman, publication unknown.
[20] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993. Print.
[21] (Barthes? Bachelard? Foucault?)

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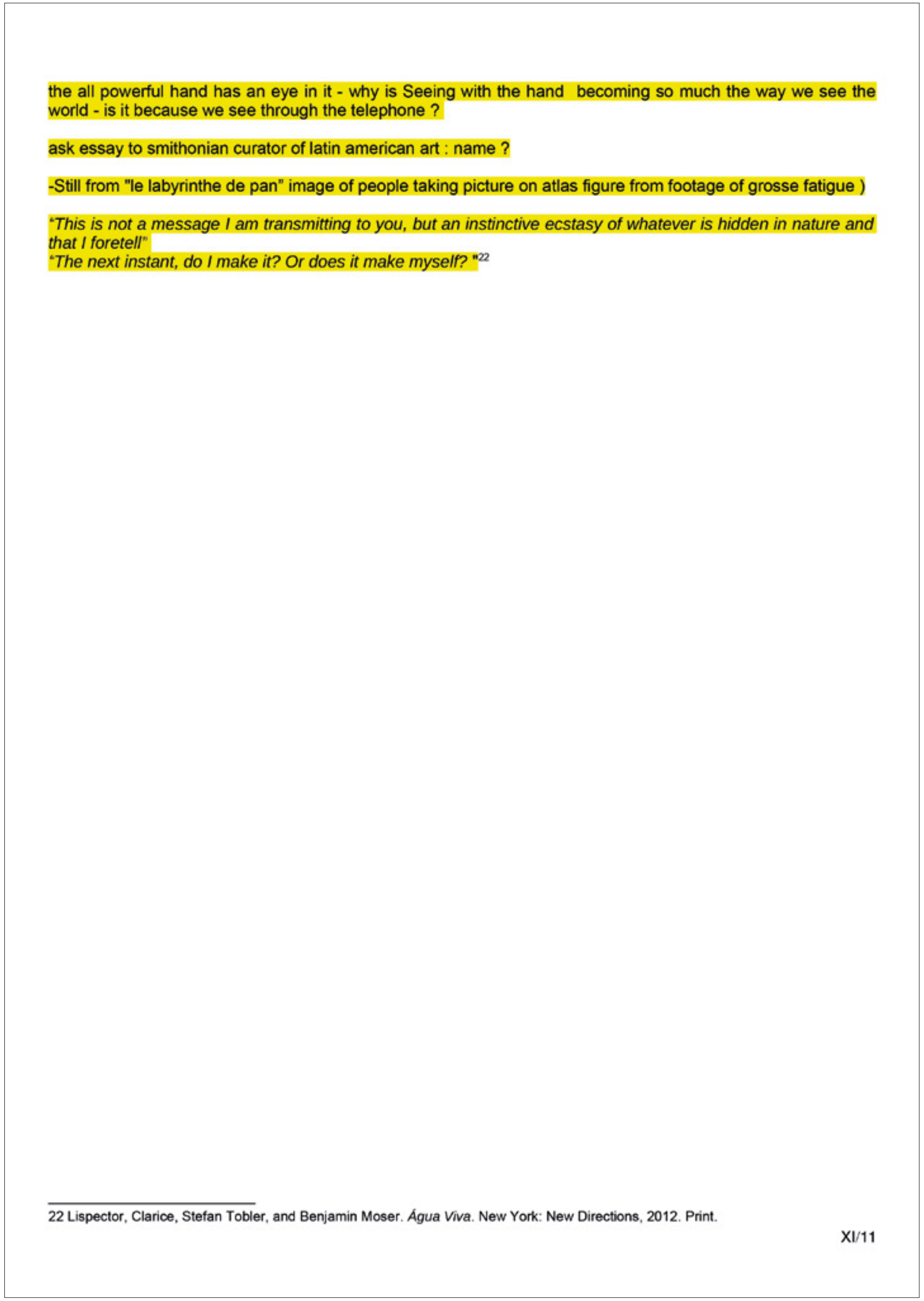

the all powerful hand has an eye in it - why is Seeing with the hand becoming so much the way we see the world - is it because we see through the telephone ?

ask essay to smithonian curator of latin american art : name ?

-Still from "le labyrinthe de pan" image of people taking picture on atlas figure from footage of grosse fatigue )

*"This is not a message I am transmitting to you, but an instinctive ecstasy of whatever is hidden in nature and that I foretell"*
*"The next instant, do I make it? Or does it make myself?* "[22]

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[22] Lispector, Clarice, Stefan Tobler, and Benjamin Moser. *Água Viva*. New York: New Directions, 2012. Print.

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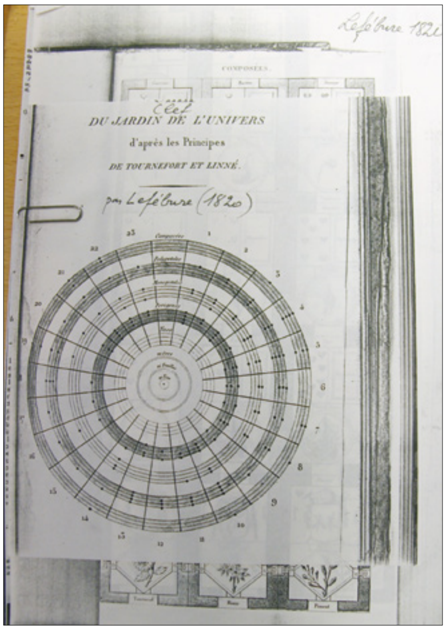
# A Pulling the Universe Apart: The Circle



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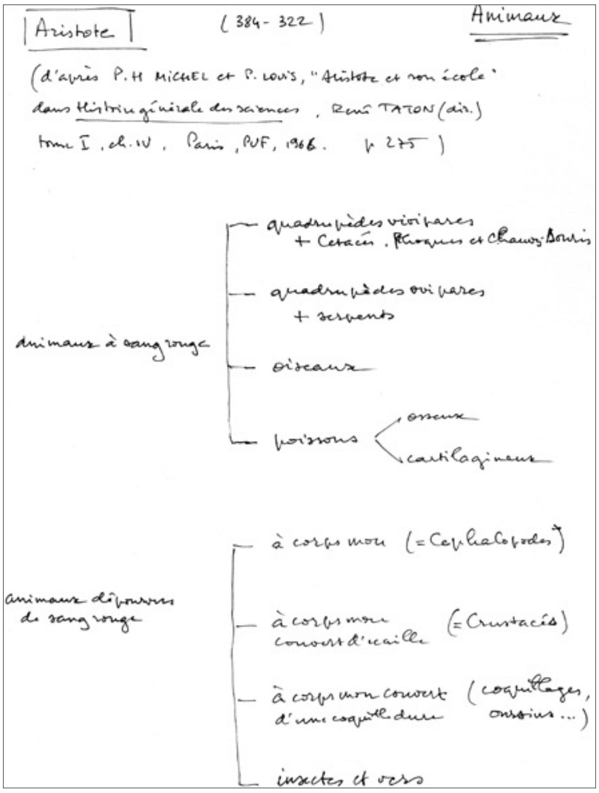
Our main collaborator at the Natural History Museum in Paris is Fabienne Galangau-Quérat (Associate Professor of Museology). When she was project leader in exhibitions for the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution (1994) she gathered many representations related to the classification of species: phylogenies and trees of life, from Jules Verne and Aristote to cladistics.



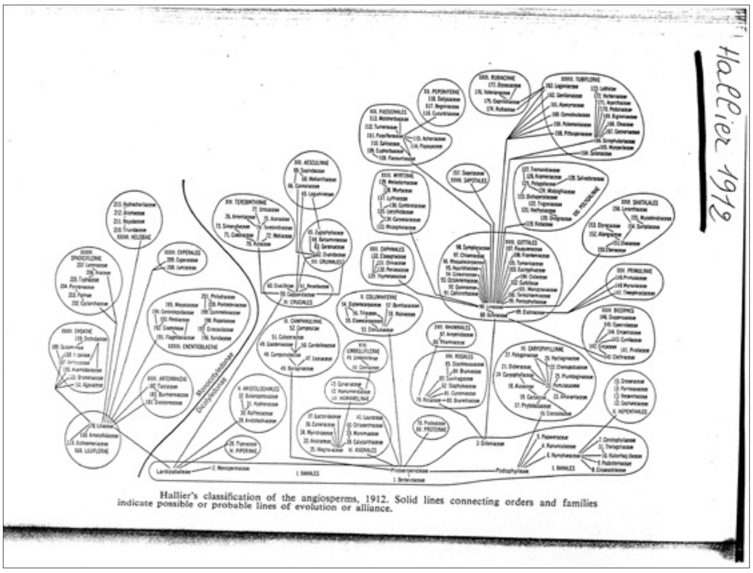
Aristote (384 - 322) Animaux

(d'après P.H MICHEL et P. LOUIS, "Aristote et son école" dans Histoire générale des sciences, René TATON (dir.) tome I, ch. IV, Paris, PUF, 1966. p 275)

animaux à sang rouge
- quadrupèdes vivipares + Cetacés, Phoques et Chauves-Souris
- quadrupèdes ovipares + serpents
- oiseaux
- poissons
  - osseux
  - cartilagineux

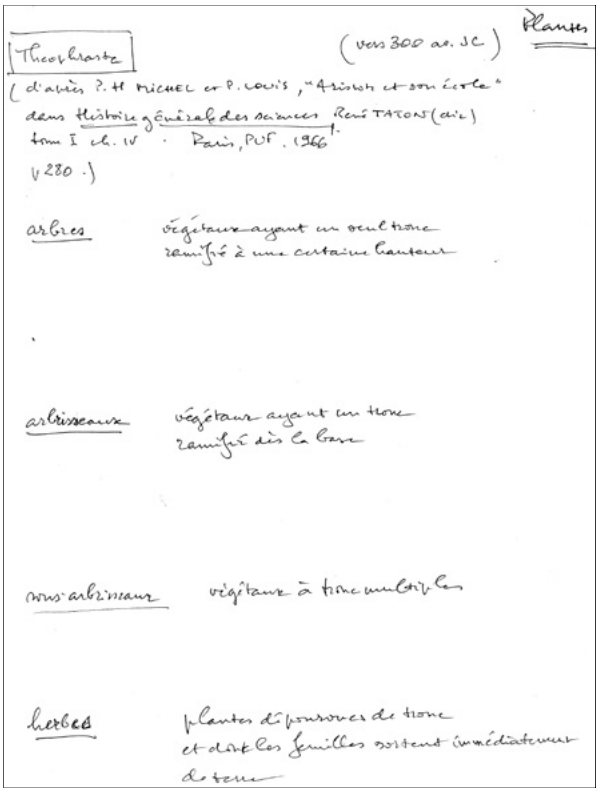
animaux dépourvus de sang rouge
- à corps mou (= Cephalopodes)
- à corps mou couvert d'écaille (= Crustacés)
- à corps mou couvert d'une coquille dure (coquillages, oursins ...)
- insectes et vers

2



Hallier's classification of the angiosperms, 1912. Solid lines connecting orders and families indicate possible or probable lines of evolution or alliance.

3

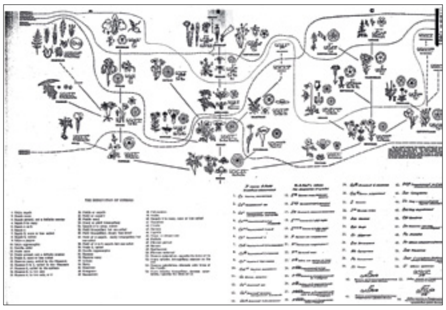


Theophraste (vers 300 av. JC) Plantes

(d'après P.H MICHEL et P. LOUIS, "Aristote et son école" dans Histoire générale des sciences René TATON (dir.) tome I ch. IV . Paris, PUF . 1966 p 280 .)

| | |
|---|---|
| arbres | végétaux ayant un seul tronc ramifié à une certaine hauteur |
| arbrisseaux | végétaux ayant un tronc ramifié dès la base |
| sous-arbrisseaux | végétaux à troncs multiples |
| herbes | plantes dépourvues de tronc et dont les feuilles sortent immédiatement de terre |

4



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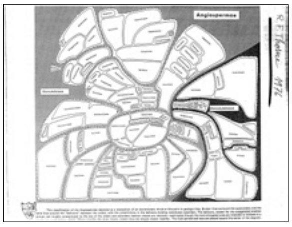

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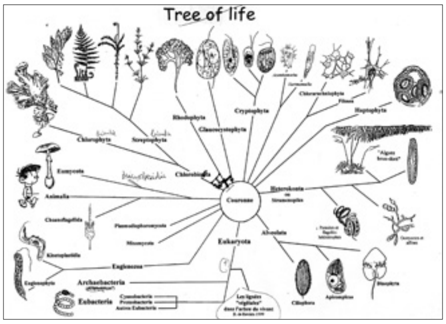

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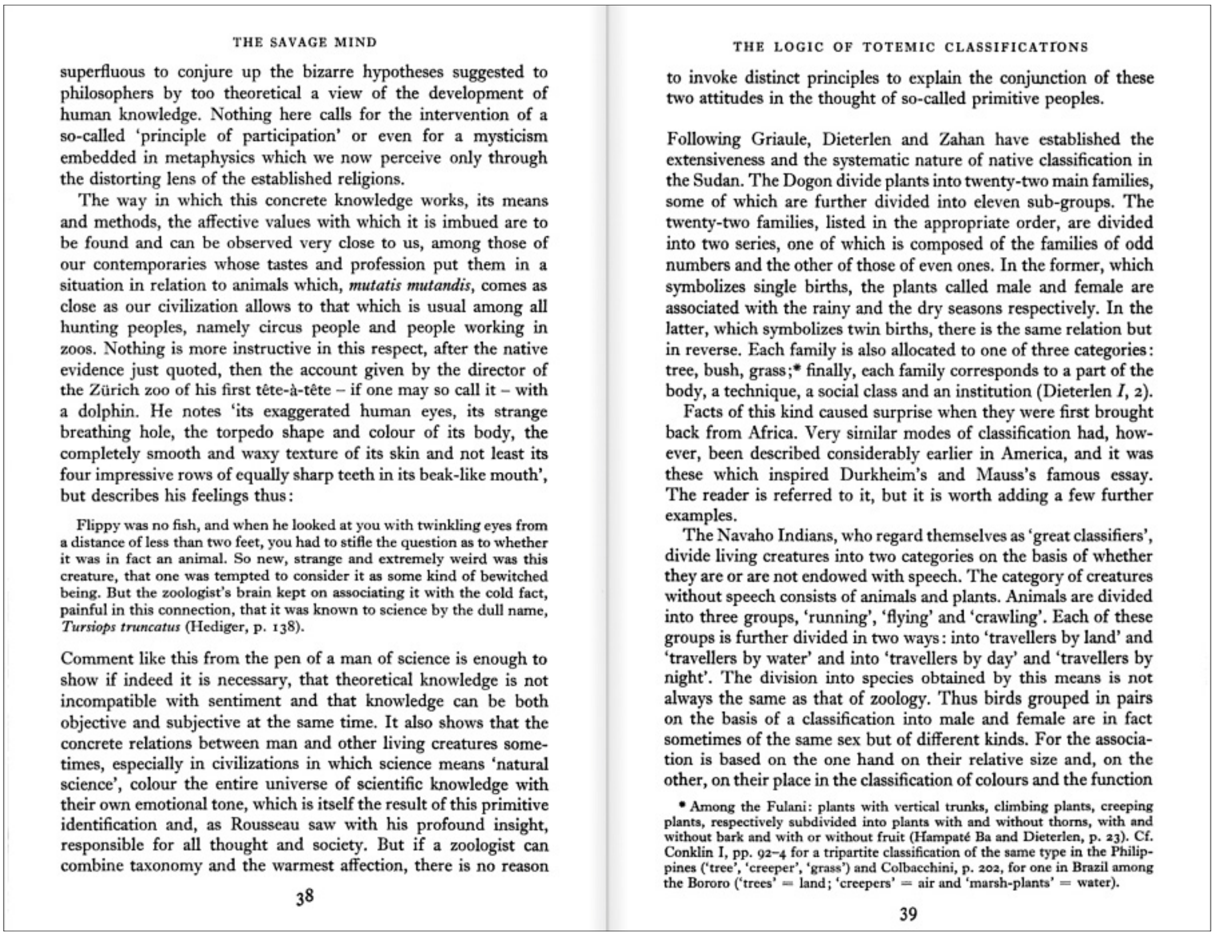

THE SAVAGE MIND

superfluous to conjure up the bizarre hypotheses suggested to philosophers by too theoretical a view of the development of human knowledge. Nothing here calls for the intervention of a so-called 'principle of participation' or even for a mysticism embedded in metaphysics which we now perceive only through the distorting lens of the established religions.

The way in which this concrete knowledge works, its means and methods, the affective values with which it is imbued are to be found and can be observed very close to us, among those of our contemporaries whose tastes and profession put them in a situation in relation to animals which, *mutatis mutandis*, comes as close as our civilization allows to that which is usual among all hunting peoples, namely circus people and people working in zoos. Nothing is more instructive in this respect, after the native evidence just quoted, then the account given by the director of the Zürich zoo of his first tête-à-tête – if one may so call it – with a dolphin. He notes 'its exaggerated human eyes, its strange breathing hole, the torpedo shape and colour of its body, the completely smooth and waxy texture of its skin and not least its four impressive rows of equally sharp teeth in its beak-like mouth', but describes his feelings thus:

> Flippy was no fish, and when he looked at you with twinkling eyes from a distance of less than two feet, you had to stifle the question as to whether it was in fact an animal. So new, strange and extremely weird was this creature, that one was tempted to consider it as some kind of bewitched being. But the zoologist's brain kept on associating it with the cold fact, painful in this connection, that it was known to science by the dull name, *Tursiops truncatus* (Hediger, p. 138).

Comment like this from the pen of a man of science is enough to show if indeed it is necessary, that theoretical knowledge is not incompatible with sentiment and that knowledge can be both objective and subjective at the same time. It also shows that the concrete relations between man and other living creatures sometimes, especially in civilizations in which science means 'natural science', colour the entire universe of scientific knowledge with their own emotional tone, which is itself the result of this primitive identification and, as Rousseau saw with his profound insight, responsible for all thought and society. But if a zoologist can combine taxonomy and the warmest affection, there is no reason

38

THE LOGIC OF TOTEMIC CLASSIFICATIONS

to invoke distinct principles to explain the conjunction of these two attitudes in the thought of so-called primitive peoples.

Following Griaule, Dieterlen and Zahan have established the extensiveness and the systematic nature of native classification in the Sudan. The Dogon divide plants into twenty-two main families, some of which are further divided into eleven sub-groups. The twenty-two families, listed in the appropriate order, are divided into two series, one of which is composed of the families of odd numbers and the other of those of even ones. In the former, which symbolizes single births, the plants called male and female are associated with the rainy and the dry seasons respectively. In the latter, which symbolizes twin births, there is the same relation but in reverse. Each family is also allocated to one of three categories: tree, bush, grass;* finally, each family corresponds to a part of the body, a technique, a social class and an institution (Dieterlen *I*, 2).

Facts of this kind caused surprise when they were first brought back from Africa. Very similar modes of classification had, however, been described considerably earlier in America, and it was these which inspired Durkheim's and Mauss's famous essay. The reader is referred to it, but it is worth adding a few further examples.

The Navaho Indians, who regard themselves as 'great classifiers', divide living creatures into two categories on the basis of whether they are or are not endowed with speech. The category of creatures without speech consists of animals and plants. Animals are divided into three groups, 'running', 'flying' and 'crawling'. Each of these groups is further divided in two ways: into 'travellers by land' and 'travellers by water' and into 'travellers by day' and 'travellers by night'. The division into species obtained by this means is not always the same as that of zoology. Thus birds grouped in pairs on the basis of a classification into male and female are in fact sometimes of the same sex but of different kinds. For the association is based on the one hand on their relative size and, on the other, on their place in the classification of colours and the function

* Among the Fulani: plants with vertical trunks, climbing plants, creeping plants, respectively subdivided into plants with and without thorns, with and without bark and with or without fruit (Hampaté Ba and Dieterlen, p. 23). Cf. Conklin I, pp. 92–4 for a tripartite classification of the same type in the Philippines ('tree', 'creeper', 'grass') and Colbacchini, p. 202, for one in Brazil among the Bororo ('trees' = land; 'creepers' = air and 'marsh-plants' = water).

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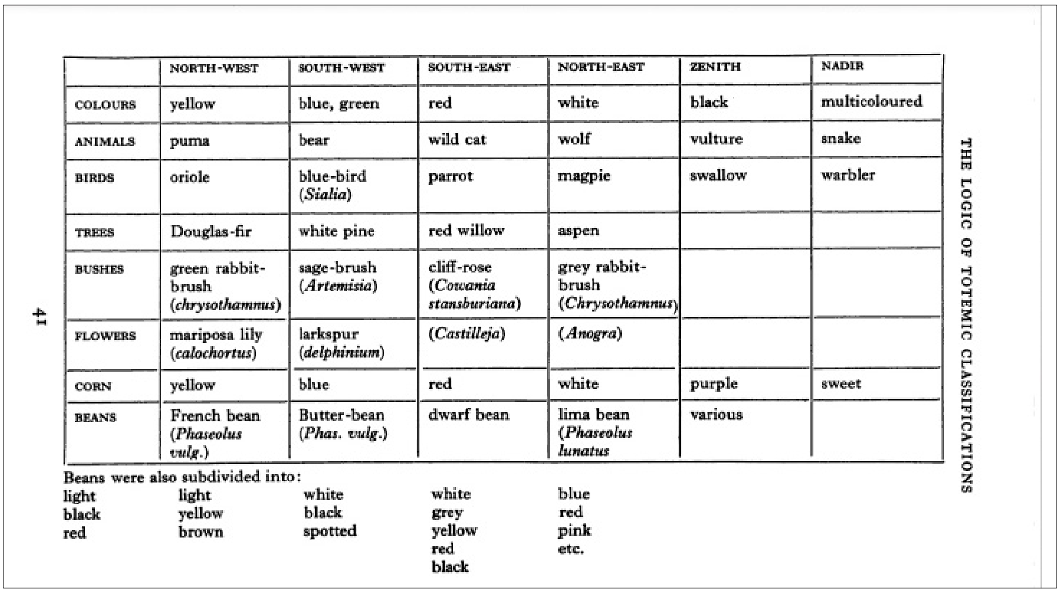

41

THE LOGIC OF TOTEMIC CLASSIFICATIONS

| | NORTH-WEST | SOUTH-WEST | SOUTH-EAST | NORTH-EAST | ZENITH | NADIR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| COLOURS | yellow | blue, green | red | white | black | multicoloured |
| ANIMALS | puma | bear | wild cat | wolf | vulture | snake |
| BIRDS | oriole | blue-bird (*Sialia*) | parrot | magpie | swallow | warbler |
| TREES | Douglas-fir | white pine | red willow | aspen | | |
| BUSHES | green rabbit-brush (*chrysothamnus*) | sage-brush (*Artemisia*) | cliff-rose (*Cowania stansburiana*) | grey rabbit-brush (*Chrysothamnus*) | | |
| FLOWERS | mariposa lily (*calochortus*) | larkspur (*delphinium*) | (*Castilleja*) | (*Anogra*) | | |
| CORN | yellow | blue | red | white | purple | sweet |
| BEANS | French bean (*Phaseolus vulg.*) | Butter-bean (*Phas. vulg.*) | dwarf bean | lima bean (*Phaseolus lunatus* | various | |

Beans were also subdivided into:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| light | light | white | white | blue |
| black | yellow | black | grey | red |
| red | brown | spotted | yellow | pink |
| | | | red | etc. |
| | | | black | |

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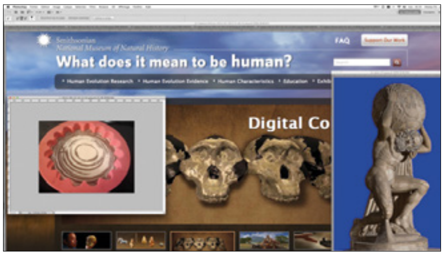
Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History
What does it mean to be human?
FAQ
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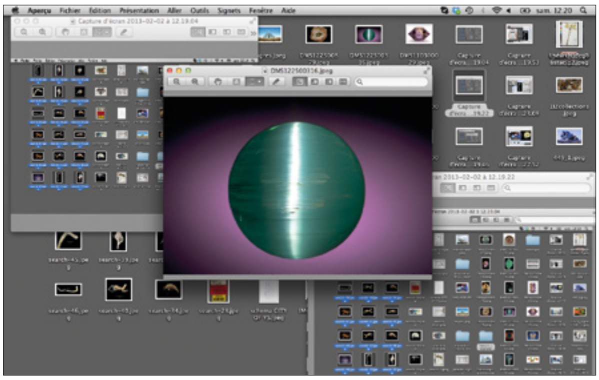

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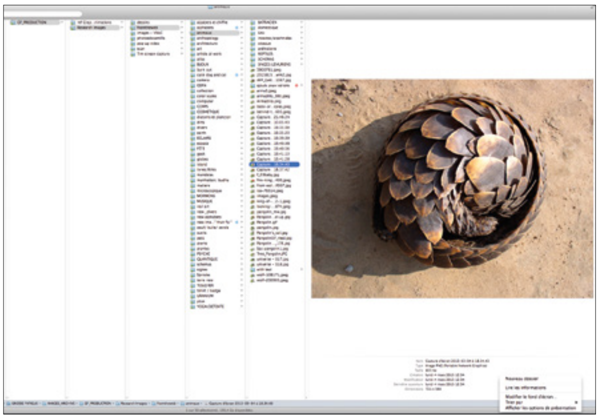

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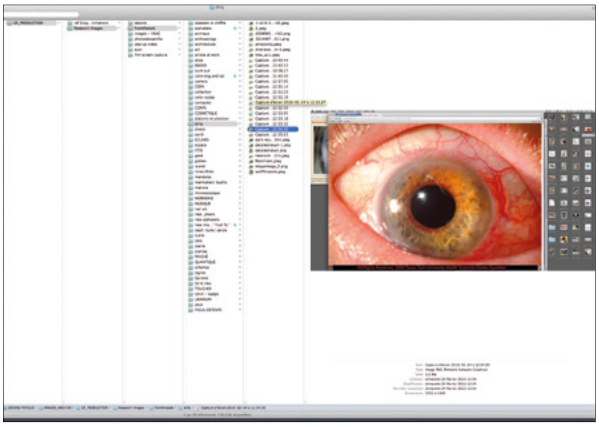

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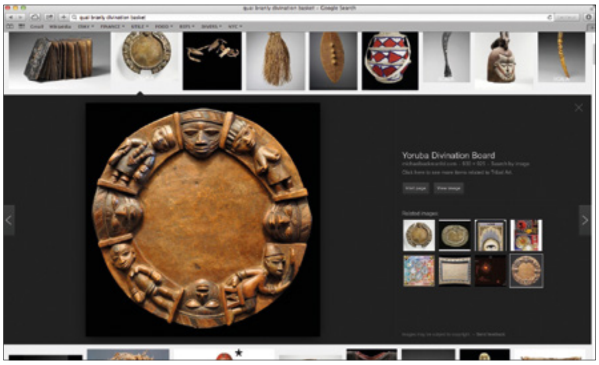
Yoruba Divination Board

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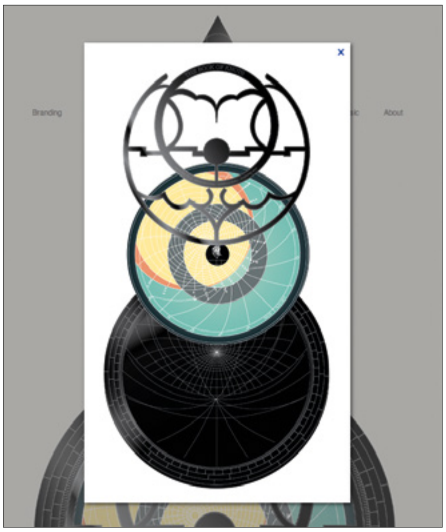

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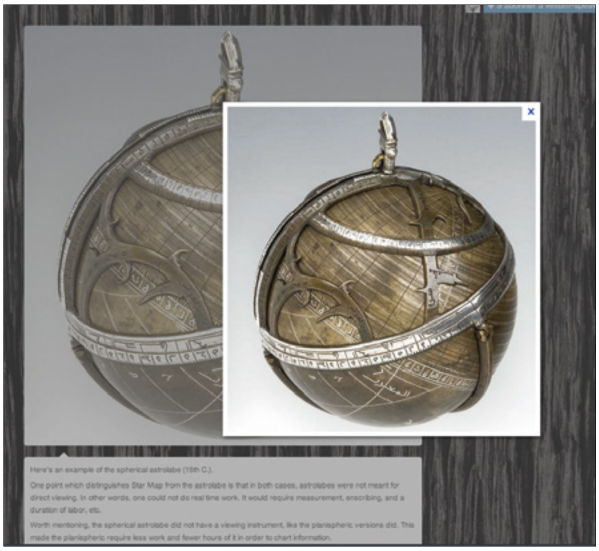


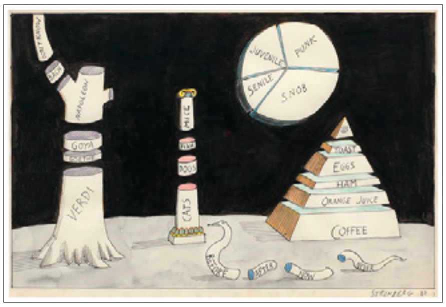
Here's an example of the spherical astrolabe (15th C.).

One point which distinguishes Star Map from the astrolabe is that in both cases, astrolabes were not meant for direct viewing. In other words, one could not do real time work. It would require measurement, enscribing, and a duration of labor, etc.

Worth mentioning, the spherical astrolabe did not have a viewing instrument, like the planispheric versions did. This made the planispheric require less work and fewer hours of it in order to chart information.

17

18



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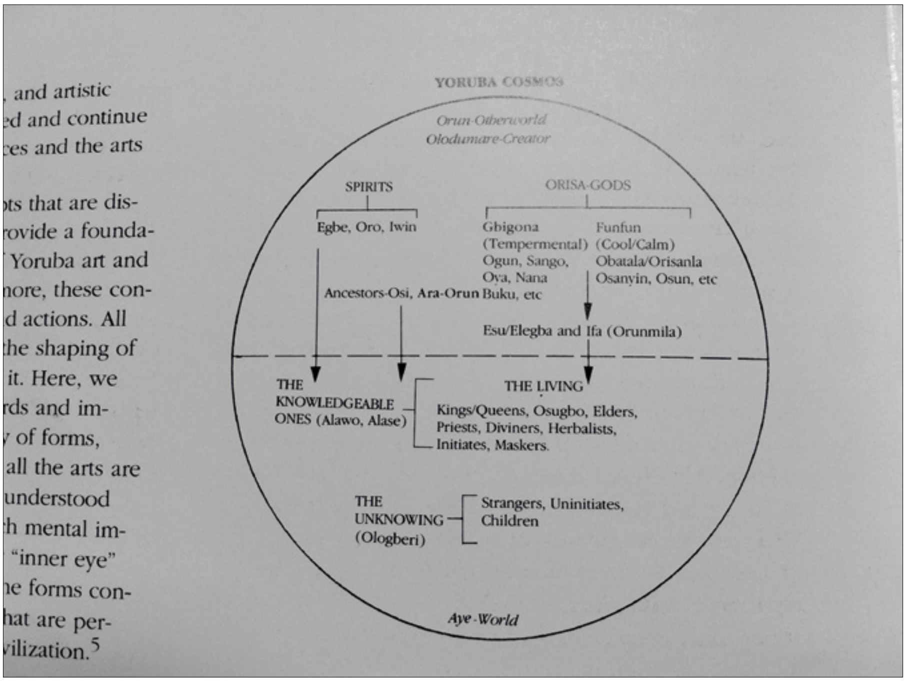

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Yoruba art and
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it. Here, we
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of forms,
all the arts are
understood
h mental im-
"inner eye"
he forms con-
hat are per-
ilization.[5]

YORUBA COSMOS

*Orun-Otherworld*
*Olodumare-Creator*

SPIRITS
Egbe, Oro, Iwin

ORISA-GODS
Gbigona (Tempermental) Ogun, Sango, Oya, Nana Buku, etc
Funfun (Cool/Calm) Obatala/Orisanla Osanyin, Osun, etc

Ancestors-Osi, Ara-Orun

Esu/Elegba and Ifa (Orunmila)

THE KNOWLEDGEABLE ONES (Alawo, Alase)

THE LIVING
Kings/Queens, Osugbo, Elders, Priests, Diviners, Herbalists, Initiates, Maskers.

THE UNKNOWING (Ologberi)
Strangers, Uninitiates, Children

*Aye-World*

20

In 1903, Dr. Julius Neubronner patented a miniature pigeon camera activated by a timing mechanism. Equipped with the cameras, pigeons photographed a castle in Kronberg, Germany, around 1908. The castle, built for a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, still stands today, and serves as a hotel and a site for high-level international conferences and summit meetings.

*Pigeon photographs courtesy of Deutsches Museum, Munich*

21

22

B

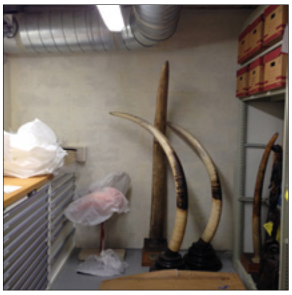
## On Paranoia and Collecting – Noah's Ark

Aquila nævioides,

1

Image 1, 2 and 3: A selection of pictures shot by Camille Henrot at the Zoothèque (the place of storage for most of the vertebrates in the Museum), where we organised a visit with Jacques Cuisin (Head of restoration at the Natural History Museum in Paris).

2



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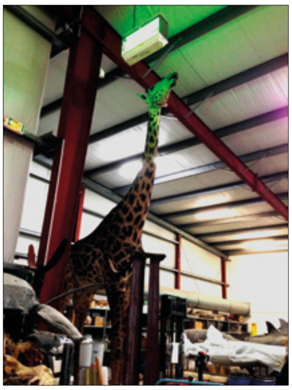

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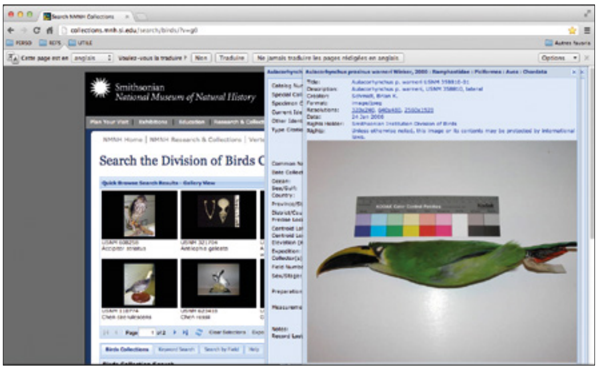
Smithsonian
National Museum of Natural History
Search the Division of Birds C

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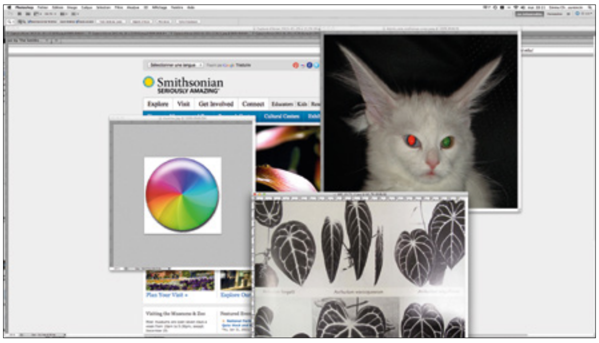
Smithsonian

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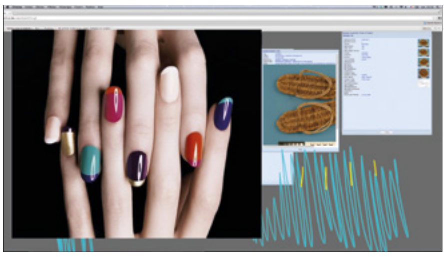

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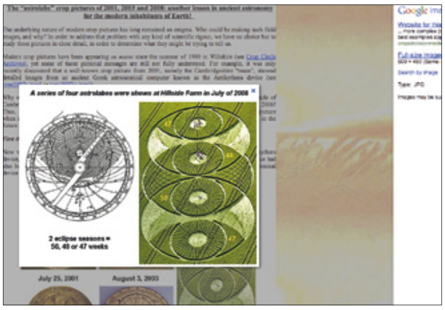
The "astrolabe" crop pictures of 2001, 2003 and 2008: another lesson in ancient astronomy for the modern inhabitants of Earth!
A series of four astrolabes were shown at Hillside Farm in July of 2008
2 eclipse seasons = 50, 48 or 47 weeks
July 25, 2001
August 3, 2003
Google
Website for this
Full-size image
Search by image
Type: JPG

14

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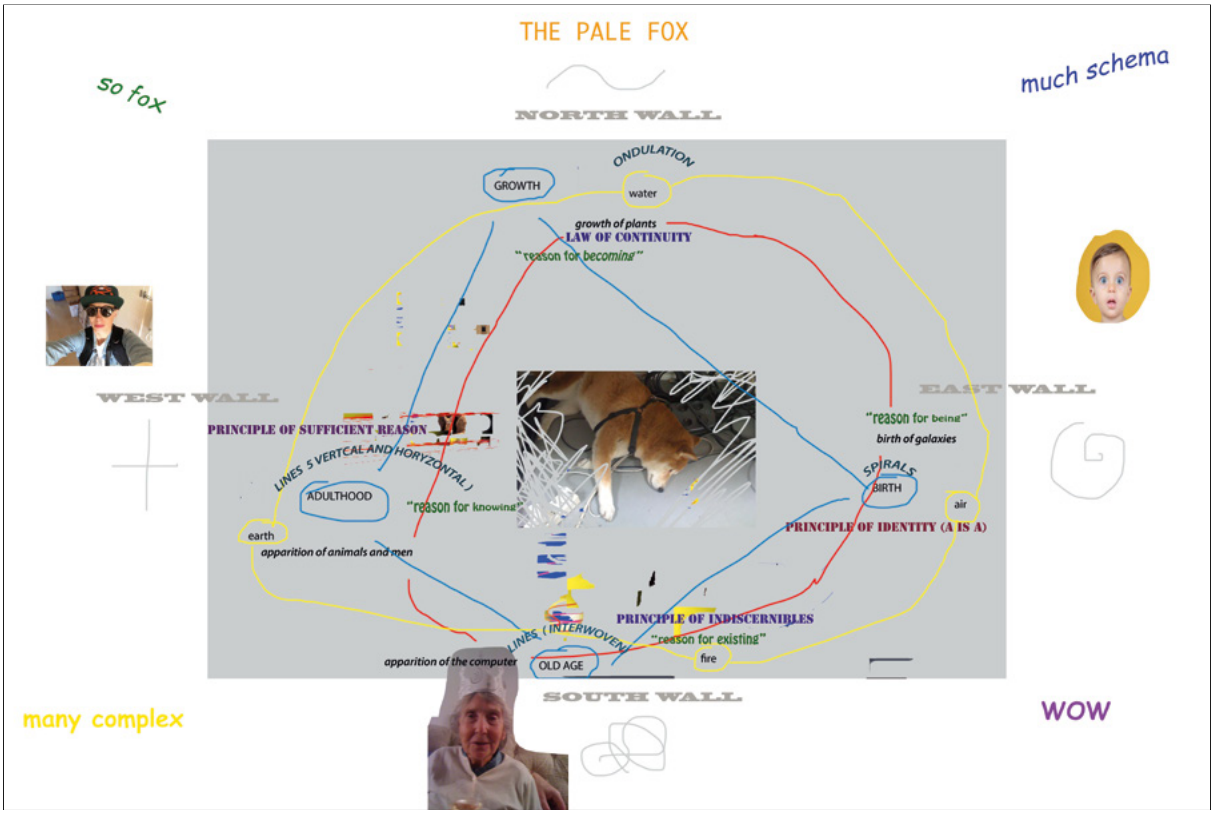
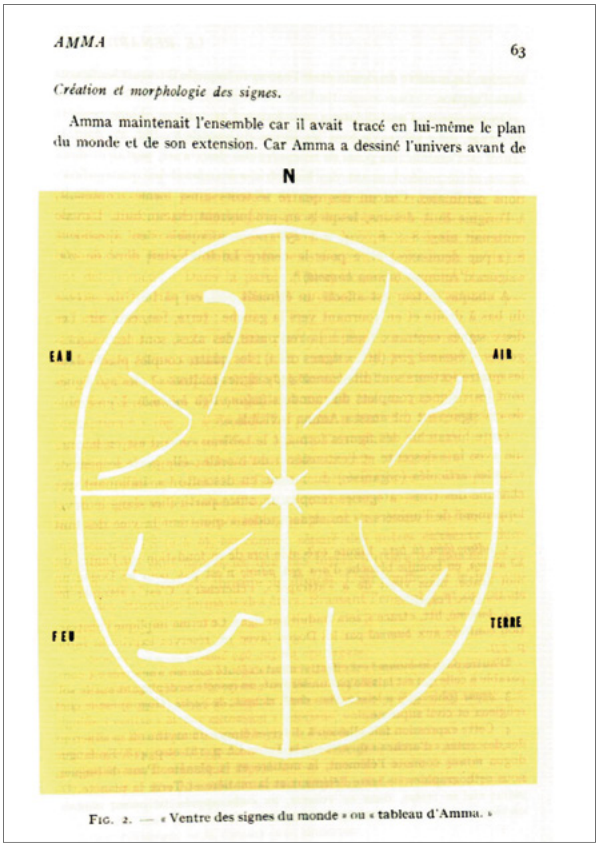
COLLECTION MANAGEMENT
NEWS & HIGHLIGHTS
UPCOMING EVENTS/MEETINGS
STAFF

16

## C In the Beginning there was Death: Building Your Home


THE PALE FOX
so fox
much schema
NORTH WALL
ONDULATION
GROWTH
water
growth of plants
LAW OF CONTINUITY
"reason for becoming"
WEST WALL
EAST WALL
PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON
LINES 5 VERTCAL AND HORYZONTAL
ADULTHOOD
"reason for knowing"
earth
apparition of animals and men
"reason for being"
birth of galaxies
SPIRALS
BIRTH
air
PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY (A IS A)
PRINCIPLE OF INDISCERNIBLES
"reason for existing"
fire
LINES (INTERWOVEN)
OLD AGE
apparition of the computer
SOUTH WALL
many complex
wow

1 Sketch for the exhibition *The Pale Fox*, 2013 © Camille Henrot



*AMMA* 63

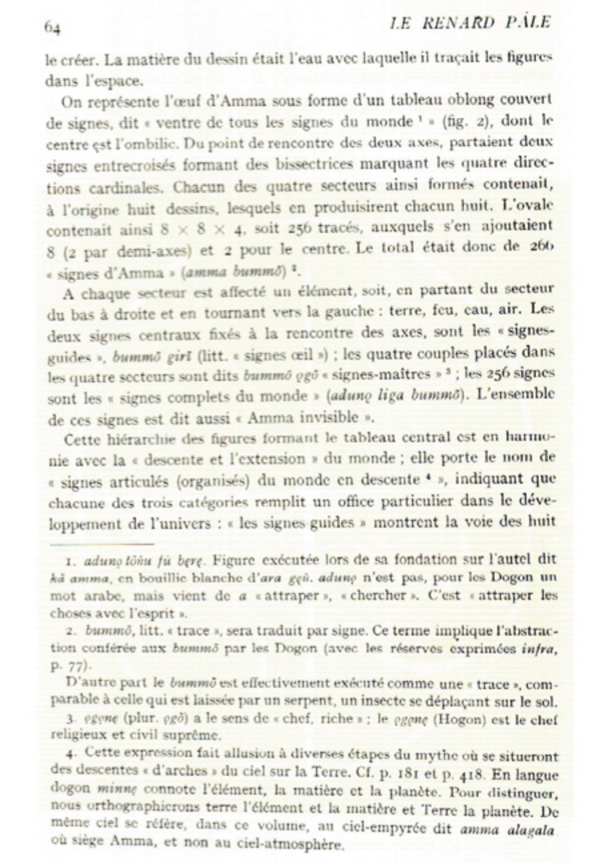
*Création et morphologie des signes.*

Amma maintenait l'ensemble car il avait tracé en lui-même le plan du monde et de son extension. Car Amma a dessiné l'univers avant de

N
EAU
AIR
FEU
TERRE

FIG. 2. — « Ventre des signes du monde » ou « tableau d'Amma. »

2



64 *LE RENARD PÂLE*

le créer. La matière du dessin était l'eau avec laquelle il traçait les figures dans l'espace.

On représente l'œuf d'Amma sous forme d'un tableau oblong couvert de signes, dit « ventre de tous les signes du monde [1] » (fig. 2), dont le centre est l'ombilic. Du point de rencontre des deux axes, partaient deux signes entrecroisés formant des bissectrices marquant les quatre directions cardinales. Chacun des quatre secteurs ainsi formés contenait, à l'origine huit dessins, lesquels en produisirent chacun huit. L'ovale contenait ainsi 8 × 8 × 4, soit 256 tracés, auxquels s'en ajoutaient 8 (2 par demi-axes) et 2 pour le centre. Le total était donc de 266 « signes d'Amma » (*amma bummõ*) [2].

A chaque secteur est affecté un élément, soit, en partant du secteur du bas à droite et en tournant vers la gauche : terre, feu, eau, air. Les deux signes centraux fixés à la rencontre des axes, sont les « signes-guides », *bummõ girī* (litt. « signes œil ») ; les quatre couples placés dans les quatre secteurs sont dits *bummõ ǫgõ* « signes-maîtres » [3] ; les 256 signes sont les « signes complets du monde » (*adunǫ liga bummõ*). L'ensemble de ces signes est dit aussi « Amma invisible ».

Cette hiérarchie des figures formant le tableau central est en harmonie avec la « descente et l'extension » du monde ; elle porte le nom de « signes articulés (organisés) du monde en descente [4] », indiquant que chacune des trois catégories remplit un office particulier dans le développement de l'univers : « les signes-guides » montrent la voie des huit

---

[1] *adunǫ tõnu fù bęrę*. Figure exécutée lors de sa fondation sur l'autel dit *kà amma*, en bouillie blanche d'*ara gęù*. *adunǫ* n'est pas, pour les Dogon un mot arabe, mais vient de *a* « attraper », « chercher ». C'est « attraper les choses avec l'esprit ».

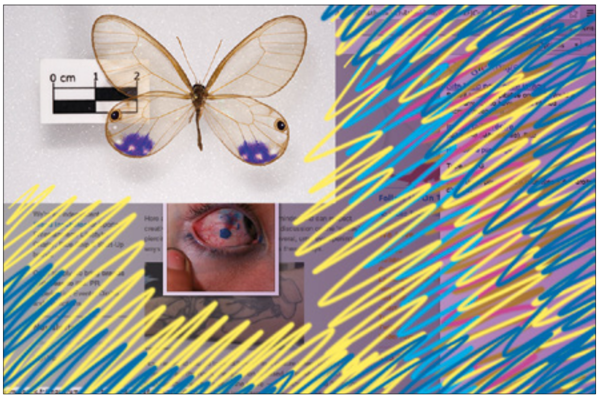
[2] *bummõ*, litt. « trace », sera traduit par signe. Ce terme implique l'abstraction conférée aux *bummõ* par les Dogon (avec les réserves exprimées *infra*, p. 77).

D'autre part le *bummõ* est effectivement exécuté comme une « trace », comparable à celle qui est laissée par un serpent, un insecte se déplaçant sur le sol.

[3] *ǫgęnę* (plur. *ǫgõ*) a le sens de « chef, riche » ; le *ǫgęnę* (Hogon) est le chef religieux et civil suprême.

[4] Cette expression fait allusion à diverses étapes du mythe où se situeront des descentes « d'arches » du ciel sur la Terre. Cf. p. 181 et p. 418. En langue dogon *minnę* connote l'élément, la matière et la planète. Pour distinguer, nous orthographierons terre l'élément et la matière et Terre la planète. De même ciel se réfère, dans ce volume, au ciel-empyrée dit *amma alagala* où siège Amma, et non au ciel-atmosphère.

3



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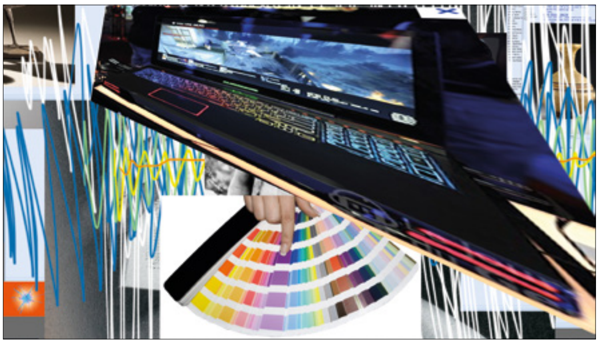

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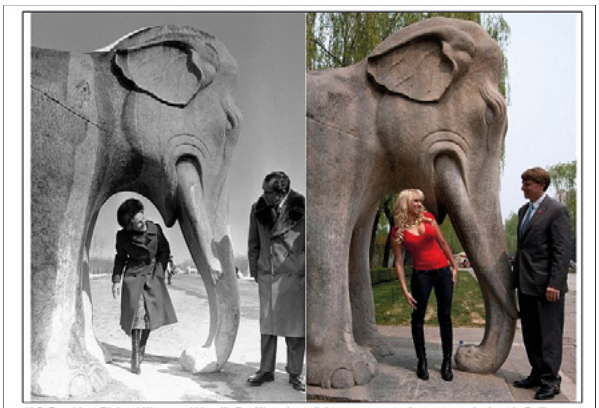

U.S. President Richard Nixon and his wife Pat Nixon have light moments at a huge stone elephant in Beijing. Last week, Nixon's grandson Christopher Cox and his wife Andrea Catsimatidisat visited the same location

6

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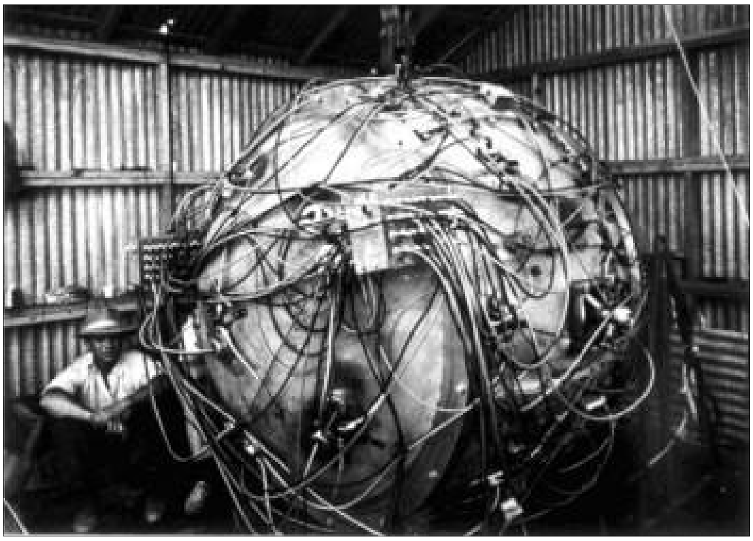

9

National Security Agency
Corporate Communications
One message. Many voices.
Corporate Communications
Strategy Group

10

11 Camille Henrot, The Pale Fox, 2014, installation view at Chisenhale Gallery

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15

16

# Kader Attia & Whitechapel Gallery

from material to abstract

## Kader Attia

### Paul Goodwin

The rise since the 1990s of the so-called 'educational turn' in contemporary art has stimulated the exponential growth in discursive and pedagogical events and formats by artists as part of their practice and by global biennial exhibitions (such as *Documenta X* (1997) and *Documenta 11* (2002)) and art institutions. Theorist Irit Rogoff has noted that this educational 'turn' has been characterised 'by a slippage between notions of 'knowledge production', 'research', 'education', 'open-ended production', and 'self-organised pedagogies' that have permeated both artistic and institutional strategies both as a consequence of – and a critical response to – the EU state reforms of education in the Bologna Accords'.[1] In particular, there has been a significant increase in addressing these issues by museums through a notable increase in 'programming' of 'culturally diverse artists' and non-object based practices (in museological terms) such as performance, sound installation, film, video. Education and learning departments in museums and galleries have played an active part in this process. It has been argued that in the wake of new institutionalism, pedagogical models of curating and institutional critique programming have emerged as a privileged and flexible form of curatorial practice that can respond to new conditions of 'multiple temporalities versus ephemerality' in contemporary art.[2]

The location of the Whitechapel Gallery in the heart of the East End of London with its long history of migrant settlement contributed to its selection as a key partner for the MeLa project commission. In the 17th century, French Huguenots migrated to the area for housing and helped to create a thriving weaving industry. In the 19th century, Irish and Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to the area, with Jewish immigration continuing into the early 20th century. In the later 20th century, Bangladeshis settled in the area in large numbers and have substantially shaped the current identity of the neighbourhood adjacent to the gallery known as Brick Lane. Since its foundation in the early 20th Century, but particularly since the 1950s, the Whitechapel Gallery has always struggled to reconcile its exhibition programme of cutting-edge contemporary art with an educational remit directed towards local communities. This conflict is highlighted by researcher Carmen Moersch in her study of the Whitechapel Gallery's education programmes since the 1970s:

> On one hand, the gallery sought to connect to the international art world by showing widely discussed and partly established contemporary artists. The programme shifted more and more from issue-based and locally contextualised exhibitions to a long list of single artists' names. On the other hand, the gallery was maintained by a board of trustees, who emphasised the initial mission of the gallery which was to serve the people of the East End of London, to provide them with art and cultural education.[3]

This tension between the outward-facing projection of the gallery as a hub of modern and contemporary art focused on traditional

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[1] Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *e-flux journal* , Issue 0., 11/2008

[2] Victoria Walsh, RCA MeLa Exhibition Project Update and Exhibition Programme Report, 28 November 2013).

[3] Carmen Moersch, 'Oppositions to Interstices: Some notes on the effects of Martin Rewcastle, the first education officer of the Whitechapel Gallery, 1977-1983', Engage, Issue 15, Summer 2004, p.1

'white cube' exhibitions by international, mostly Euro-American artists while at the same time having to respond to an ever-changing local context within one of Britain's most culturally diverse locales with long history of migration, perfectly exemplifies the problematics at the heart of the MeLa project. In other words, how can a museum respond to a dynamic socio-cultural context of rapid migration across its exhibition and learning programmes? The year-long commission of Kader Attia's *Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder* by Whitechapel Gallery provided a perfect opportunity to examine the question of how educational programming at the gallery responds to the work of an artist whose personal biography – French-born living between France, Algeria and Berlin – and artistic practice is deeply engaged in questions around migration, postcolonialism and the construction of power/knowledge across geographical locations and historical epochs.

This work was curated by the Whitechapel Gallery's Chief Curator, Magnus af Petersens, in the context of the gallery's annual sculpture commission. The artist was invited to explore the space of the gallery itself, the site of the reading room of the old Whitechapel library. The artist responded by constructing a complex, multilayered installation consisting of a cabinet of curiosities filled with books, rare artifacts and scientific measuring instruments. At the top of the installation a beam of light shines upwards into a mirrored infinity evoking the biblical story of the prophet Jacob's vision of angels ascending from earth to heaven. Surrounding the cabinet is a vast array of wall to ceiling stacked books on subjects ranging across history, art, architecture, science, physics and astronomy within both western and non-western contexts. The project develops the artist's long-standing interest in the continuity and evolution of processes of 'repair' across colonial and postcolonial contexts – here formulated as a problem of the construction and acquisition of knowledge.

Alongside the exhibition a number of educational events were programmed by the education team headed by Sofia Victorino, the Daskalopoulos Head of Education & Public Programmes at the Whitechapel Gallery. These included the standard formats of an artist talk in conversation with the exhibition's curator, a gallery tour with an assistant curator and a lecture by an academic philosopher, Jacinto Lageira, who has written on Kader Attia's presentation on the notion of repair at *Documenta 13*. Following the research method identified for the MeLa project by Victoria Walsh of 'problem-solving, practice based research', I worked with Sofia Victorino to co-commission an event based on the artist's research interests and process in order to interrogate the MeLa problematic of artistic and curatorial research within the context of educational programming and its relation to questions of representation, globalisation, the art object and museological processes.

An important part of the research process was to get an understanding of Sofia's role as an education curator in relation to Kader Attia's commission, but also to get a sense of her practice in the wider context of curatorial research and educational programming. In my interview, Sofia framed public programming as a site of research and production of knowledge arguing that a public programme is 'a test-bed and research platform to rehearse, discuss and delve deeper into questions posed by artists' practices'.[4] This

[4] Paul Goodwin interview with Sofia Victorino, 25 April 2014

research-based methodology has been particularly useful in researching the super-diverse local context of Whitechapel and Tower Hamlets that constantly presents challenging questions about how the gallery addresses issues of migration, identity and representation. Following a major exhibition of photography from the Indian subcontinent in 2010 organised by the curatorial department *(Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh,* curated by Sunil Gupta) Victorino participated in a British Council research visit to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, which resulted in a collaborative commission by artist and filmmaker Matt Stokes in 2012 with local community workers and artists from Whitechapel's Bangladeshi community. Stokes is well known for his participative practice of immersing himself in the life worlds of communities in an immersive research process that results in the production of films, events and archives. 'The Street' a year-long programme resulting from the commission consisted of artist projects, workshops, and research culminating in a film presented as a gallery display. For Victorino, the artist's research process mediating between the 'global' concerns of the gallery and the 'localism' of community is as important as the gallery exhibition:

> What's important is that the artists' process of working with communities is as relevant as the final presentation. There is no hierarchy there. There is equal value placed on the artists' research and conversations.

Further, Victorino's working notion of 'programming' is fully engaged in the kinds of multidisciplinary and experimental formats that have come to the fore in the 'educational turn' and in global exhibitions such as Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *Documenta 13* where discursive events and publications were given equal status to the artworks in the exhibition:

> I see programming as not tied exclusively to discursive events but as something in a much more expanded landscape that might encompass residencies, performative projects, publications etc. Programming is as much about people as it is about research, because in a programme what is at stake is what kind of encounter and discussion you want to be making or sharing.

Despite this embracing of an expanded notion of education as a form of research and collaborative process, in the case of the Matt Stokes, project there is little evidence that this process has informed the relationship between the curatorial and education departments in the gallery. A cursory glance at the website and archive shows a rather traditional separation between the curatorial programme of exhibitions and the standard formats of education 'events'. An important exception to this however was the acclaimed exhibition *The Spirit of Utopia* (4 July-5 September 2013) curated by a cross-gallery selection of curators from the curatorial, education and archive departments. The exhibition featured a variety of performative, collaborative and relational art works from ten international artists many of whom had participated in *Documenta 13* such as Theaster Gates, Pedro Reyes and Claire Pentecost. The project had emerged from a number of conversations between the curators around investigating how contemporary artists are researching alternative futures for the economy, society, and environment through the medium of socially engaged and globally minded artistic research projects. In a discussion with her curatorial colleagues about the exhibition Victorino clearly articulates a notion of curatorial research as encompassing a form of cultural translation between global and local nodes of artistic practice and audience participation:

> Another thing I want to bring to the discussion with colleagues is the role of the curator and our role as curators: how these projects are rehearsed in a wider global scope but with a very specific local embeddedness. And how the curator becomes in one way or another the mediator or the translator to a very specific local context. That is how I see our role within this show and within each project. How do we turn this into something meaningful in this specific context and in this moment in time?[5]

One of the key RCA / CCA questions the research process addressed was to what extent the rise of immaterial practices and performance in the 21st century, particularly in the context of the increase in transnational and diasporic artistic practices, challenges the stability of the ontological status of the art object and disrupts canonical histories and narratives based on modernism. This question formed the central part of discussions around the question of music and cultural appropriation as a form of repair in Kader Attia's practice in the research workshop following his public 'lecture-performance' at the gallery (1 May 2014). Drawing on an extensive playlist of a range of music from post-independence *cha cha* in the Belgian Congo to Bhuddist chanting, Attia argues that music can act as a form of political repair as it moves from processes of materiality to abstraction.

Drawing on the work of cultural theorist Eduoard Glissant, Attia claims a 'right of opacity' as a legitimate artistic strategy in relation to museums for artists working with immaterial modes of artistic production such as sound and music. Alongside this right to be opaque and resist the meanings that art institutions and curators may seek to impose on the work, Attia also claims a 'right to form' i.e. to speculate on the form of an artwork and how it is presented even to the extent of disappearance. Thus artistic research on appropriate forms is a kind of speculative practice that is a model of resistance by the artist from within the system of power relations in the art world, as Attia notes in his interview for the project, 'I think if you want to resist a system, you have to be within the system. This is very fundamental as well. This is the "guerrilla". And an artist has to struggle from inside, he has to disappear.'[6]

Reflecting on the form of the lecture-performance at the gallery where the audience participated in a collective listening experience with the artist in relation to his research on the appropriation of musical forms between colonial and postcolonial societies, Attia argues forcefully that this experience is an essential part of the artwork:

> This public context, is something that I would call the experience of the artwork. It will remain because of recordings like

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[5] Transcript of 'Discussion: The Spirit of Utopia, A Curatorial Panel Discussion between the curators of The Spirit of Utopia, and Richard Noble, Head of the Department of Art at Goldsmiths, University of London', http://thespiritofutopia.org/concept

[6] Kader Attia interview, 2 May 2014

this. It will remain because of the audience who were there. They will remember all this going from material to the abstraction. They will also unveil discussions, I think, and as far as I'm concerned, it's a part of the experience of the artwork that I call 'the repair'.

# Kader Attia
Sofia Victorino

## Context

Whilst visiting the Prado Museum in Madrid I stumble upon José de Ribera's 'Jacob's Dream' (1639). The painting depicts a man asleep, leaning on a tree in the countryside, with his head resting on a rock. The sky is grey (though with some shades of blue), and an intense light points towards the man's head. In that beam of light, angels descend and ascend from heaven to earth, bridging these two worlds. The near-absence of the angels in the painting is enigmatic, as one can barely discern their forms. However, they are the main subject of the composition and the key to its symbolic meaning.

Kader Attia's commission for the Whitechapel Gallery titled 'Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder'[1] revisits the biblical story of Jacob's dream, and is part of his ongoing research into the concept of 'repair'. Attia defines 'repair' as a principle of development in both culture and nature: repair as infinite possibility, and repair as a lens from which to address the complexities of Europe's colonial past and the 'ghosts of modernity': from material histories and social experience to physical healing and cultural transformation. This work is the latest iteration of a project first presented at *Documenta 13* (Kassel, 2012), then at KunstWerke (Berlin, 2013) and later at the Beirut Art Center (2014).

The Whitechapel Commission also engages with the history of the place, recalling the reading room that once existed in the former Passmore Edwards Library. Framed by the architecture of the room, with its white pillars and old brick walls, Attia's installation includes a floor-to-ceiling set of bookshelves where visitors can look through different source materials. Inside this structure, a cabinet with objects ranging from scientific instruments to engravings and rare books echoes the protocols of the museum and its taxonomical impulse. The structure leads us to a ladder and when reaching the top, we are immersed in a mirror-image of infinite totality.

What happens when we try to gather 'all the knowledge in the world'? Attia's work traces the evolution of knowledge through western and non-western art and architecture, science, anthropology, politics, physics and astronomy. This is mirrored in the constellation of books and artefacts placed side by side in the display, evocative of different temporalities, geographies, histories and disciplines.

In a recent article in *Artforum*[2] Manthia Diawara discusses Attia's art as a poetics and as a praxis, acknowledging its performativity: 'Attia does not merely represent or document commonalities, he activates them in the service of what he calls reappropriation. To reapropriate is to reverse the "powerful system of appropriation" that is western universalism, not through simple negation but through creative reengagement.' The repair enables a space of freedom, a space 'to see with your own eyes', and a space of resistance that subverts the logic of global capital.

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[1] See Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder, exhibition catalogue, Whitechapel Gallery, London 2014, 26 November 2013 – 23 November 2014.

[2] Manthia Diawara, 'All the Difference in the World', Artforum vol. 52, no 6, February 2014, pp.160-7.

## Process

How is artistic and curatorial research framed within a public programme? How can a research process be shared? How are immaterial and performative practices engaging audiences in new ways? What is the difference between curating an exhibition and curating an event? How is the rhetoric of 'the global' infiltrating institutional discourse? In the initial discussions with Victoria Walsh and Paul Goodwin these emerged as key questions to be asked within a reflective working process. The Whitechapel Gallery's collaboration with the MeLa project would include a series of workshops and an event developed in close dialogue with Kader Attia and Paul Goodwin.

In the context of Attia's year-long commission, the idea was to take his research and work as a point of departure for a public programme that looked into narratives of power and identity. Over the course of a year, and signalling thematic threads across exhibitions and events – such as for example overlapping concerns and shared interests with the Chris Marker exhibition – the aim would be to investigate memory and archives, and anthropological approaches in contemporary art practice.

The questions raised also acknowledge the attempt from different art institutions to create new and more complex narratives that impact on the way artistic and curatorial practice develops. Recent examples across a wide range of institutions have been addressing modernism's alternative histories: the Pompidou's rehang of their permanent collections under the title *Plural Modernities* (2013) and the events programme revisiting the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (2014); the conference 'Reimagining Modernism, Mapping the Contemporary: Critical Perspectives on Transnationality in Art' organised by Cambridge University (2013); the symposium 'Collecting Geographies: Global Programming and Museums of Modern Art' at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2014), as well as numerous exhibitions, curatorial exchange projects or international platforms such as the Triangle Network or Tate's 'Across the Board'.

On a visit to Kader Attia's studio in Berlin with my colleagues Magnus af Petersens (chief curator), and Emily Butler (assistant curator), during his solo exhibition at the Kunstwerke (2013), Kader was receptive to the engagement with programming for the duration of the Commission – though at that point still immersed in the making of it. We briefly talked about architecture, Jean Prouvé and Maison Tropicale, accumulation, naming, control, and 'the need to develop different relations with otherness'.

## Event

**'From Reappropriation to Repair':** This first lecture by Kader Attia coincided with the opening of the new commission at the Whitechapel Gallery (November 2013). Attia started by recalling the myth of origin of cultural anthropophagy: 'Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question', as stated in the Manifesto Antropofagico by the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade. The culture of the coloniser should be absorbed, devoured, appropriated and controlled – and the right to hybrid identities should be claimed, against the progressive linearity of the western hegemonic canon.

Attia also showed a group of teenagers playing football on the ruins of a Roman temple in Algeria. This architectural structure was being used as a backdrop (and goal) for their game. The image not only related to personal memories of growing up between Algeria and the suburbs of Paris, but also pointed to a wider thread of material, social and political histories.

In *Documenta 13*'s piece, 'The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures' (2012) Attia juxtaposed African masks that had been repaired (and where the mend was made visible), with images of World War I soldiers with disfigured faces – alongside wooden sculptures made in Dakar, Senegal, and marble sculptures from Carrara, Italy.

In the exhibition *Repair: 5 Acts* at Kunstwerke (2013), one of the displays featured a projection of LP covers of African musicians – in the colonial period and beyond – accompanied by a soundtrack that traced back different roots and genealogies. Kader's interest in objects and sound, in the material and the spiritual, in the spatial and the performative led us to the discussions for the second event co-organised with Paul Goodwin and Victoria Walsh within the research framework of the MeLa project.

During a skype meeting in January 2014 Kader talked about his research into a collection of music instruments and sound recordings at the Berlin's Ethnological Museum. At this point, he had also been working on a new piece for the 5th Marrakech Biennial where he used two helmets from the Rif War (that belonged to the French army) and had them transformed by a local craftsman into a small Arab guitar. Again, this evoked the continuity of the item and of the history.

There were some key points worth highlighting that could connect the two events:

1 reappropriation as exchange (e.g. repairing a broken item, like a cloth from Congo with a piece of Vichy fabric)
2 mimetism as resistance (e.g. the Australian lyrebird mimicking the sounds of its surroundings
3 migration and translation (the Blues 'before' Louisiana, in Mali).

I was also interested in the discussion on the way traditional artefacts of non-western cultures are displayed by western museums – or hidden in storage because they include western symbols – which is something I found fascinating in the images Kader had previously shown. However, for the second event we proposed Kader to focus on 'music and improvisation' as tools through which to expand the understanding of 'repair'.

**'From Material to Abstract'**: The title of Kader's lecture (May 2014) drew upon his interest in music as a political statement, music as an 'epistemology' as he put it – and the role it played out in the struggle against colonial order. In terms of format, the event gradually moved from the discursive to the performative, with Kader selecting different materials from his playlist in what became a session of collective listening – from the Nigerian Fela Kuti to the sounds of a Pygmy community.

The talk also coincided with new work being added to the display: 'Repair Culture Agency, 1-4' (2014) consists of a series of marble busts of wounded soldiers (WWI) based on medical photographs, placed alongside wooden learning boards (Ketab) with Arabic inscriptions. These boards were used by children to learn religious scriptures, and suggest a parallel to the library as a tool.

## Time

How can history be performed and reactivated in the here and now? How to think through the notion of the 'event', its relation to different audiences and to the 'object-based' installation on display? These were some of the lines of enquiry we attempted to address. The research methodology was based on conversation and fieldwork – seeking to test hypotheses along the way, to cope with the workload, to discuss and share ideas about what a public programme should be 'doing'.

The public events programme at the Whitechapel is articulated in thematic strands across four seasons, working alongside local and international partners. Our approach relies on three main ideas: to be experimental and porous; to integrate research and practice; to allow space for speculation and collaboration. Lectures, discussions, symposia, off-site projects, performative events, film screenings are devised to expand the depth of engagement with exhibitions, displays and commissions; and to put the Gallery's programmes into the wider context of other cultural practices, geographies, and critical discourses. The involvement in the MeLa project enabled us to test and rethink working models and forms of research, and to reflect upon what it means to work with artists in the shaping of a programme.

Across seasons, different threads emerged in the programme, at times explicitly related to the Commission – from east to west, from the cosmic to the magical, from quantum physics to African music – but also proposing more tangential associations – Hannah Hoch's ground breaking series 'From an ethnographic museum', Chris Marker and Alain Resnais' film *Statues Also Die*, Clementine Deliss's discussion on *Seven Stories of Modern Art in Africa*, Judith Barry's talk on peripheral voices, Jacinto Lageira's research on whether art can 'repair' history, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's turn from the archival to the 'composting mode', and Griselda Pollock's remarks on trauma, affect and transformation. All these moments provided ground for intellectual and critical engagement. Maybe the productive forces within the making of a programme rely on context and relationships, on questions and uncertainties, on the intended and the unintended. On spaces in between.

# Interview with Kader Attia
Paul Goodwin, Victoria Walsh, Sofia Victorino and Magnus af Petersens

Whitechapel Gallery, 2.05.2014

**VW** So, first and foremost, thank you to the Whitechapel and thank you to Kader for agreeing to contribute to the project. The MeLa project that the Royal College of Art [RCA] is involved in is called Research Field 4 which is about curatorial and artistic research, and, put very briefly, from our point of view at the RCA's Curating programme, we wanted to not just think about curatorial and artistic research as two different practices but to bring them together about what it means as a form of collaboration, because the notion of research is that if it's separated, we seem to not suggest new ways forward or a closer dialogue between the practice and theory of each.

Over the last six months we've been working towards an exhibition that has been both a series of commissions towards actual exhibition works, but also programming. Because the questions we've been looking at are really questions about, as we move towards the 21st century, what kind of character does the rise of programming and performance of non-western artists reveal in relation to the rise of immaterial practices, the turn to sound, the interest in music and the rise of performance-lectures, of a different kind of discourse; and is this embrace of new types of performance and immaterial practices by both museums and artists, is that a response to the new global conditions and global opportunities of curating and commissioning or is it a quick fix from museums to supplement and substitute what's missing in collections and the practices of artists?

And behind this lies questions about the kind of stranglehold of modernism on the display and commissioning of works, that there normally has to be an object at the end of the day, and performance raises challenges to that. There are questions about whether, in particular, music and sound is problematic for the modern art museum and whether that means there are more opportunities in non-collection based galleries than museums. Or is that also to do with the increase in programming and the kind of biennial, the liveness, the event, the new engagement of audiences? Has that allowed new practices to appear?

So those are the kinds of questions we're grappling with and we're working with other artists in the project too. That's the context behind particularly this conversation with you Kader, particularly after your first talk here when you presented in relation to Jacob's Ladder here at the Whitechapel your interest in music and where you put those questions forward, and again obviously last night in such a compelling production.

And somewhere in this conversation I think we also have, which came up last night, the whole issue of technology and how the digital is transforming the archive and bringing in new histories that are a problem for modernism and the modern art museum. I mean, the playlist itself, your playlist last night, that ability to pick and choose and put new reference points together in the context of art, which wasn't so easy once before and which of course the programme and performance lecture allow, so perhaps some of those things will come up in conversation.

**PG** So Kader, I'd like to start by taking the title of your project yesterday, From the Material to the Abstract, or rather, I'd like to flip that, from the abstract, in a way, the space and time of music in your practice, moving to, as the conversation develops towards the material, towards the museum and towards the practices and the practice of museum and curatorship, its relationship to objects and to the materiality of the museum with its modernist object-orientated ontologies.

Maybe Kader, you could start off by reminding us about the trajectory or the genealogy or your interest in music and how it related to your research on repair?

**KA** Well, I've always been interested… I never had that kind of exclusive taste of music, you know? I've always been interested by any kind of music. I grew up and my mother was listening to Arabic, but also to European music all the time, then my sisters, so between my mother listening to this or my sister listening to Elvis Presley… There's one moment in my life, I have to say, which I never spoke about but which really stayed and made me… the more I'm getting older, this moment is very important. When I was, I think eight or nine years old we were living in this French suburb of Paris and I was following my brothers all the time. I grew up in a family of two girls and five boys and my two elder brothers were very close in age, and my two younger brothers, so I was always alone but always following my elder brothers. So something was happening and I followed them one day.

It was a Sunday, I think, a very sunny Sunday, and they were walking, taking the bus and I was following them. I knew they were going to a party. Then we arrived. I don't remember how long it was. For me, it was an eternity, but my brother discovered that I was following them, and they said, 'what are you doing here?'. You stay with me now. And then we arrived in an area and there was a gigantic crowd, so all the boys were climbing on fences and then you can't believe what I see. We watched this crowd and my brother said to me 'this is James Brown'. The thing is that James Brown came to France in Paris at the Communist Fête de l'Humanité which was the very big Communist event in 1981 or something like this, and for me I didn't know… I was watching this small guy and this crowd… dancing with him.

For me this moment really left me something that music can be not only enervating but something hypnotic. Because I have this vision of the crowd, it was huge moving with the same movement. This was the beginning of the '80s this kind of soul music had an incredibly strong impact on the immigrant population of France and here and all of Europe. We were talking a lot about this yesterday, especially James Brown. I mean, for me it was the beginning of something because after James Brown was all the funk of the '80s and then the hip-hop culture. What I still have strongly in my mind is that music was always related to the body. We were not listening to James Brown, we were dancing, and the guy was dancing as well. I remember small tiny stuff like jumping and all of this crowd around and all these people who could not afford to pay the ticket, that's why they climbed the fence. They were like moving on top of the fence. It was like a spiritual communion.

**PG** And how did you make that connection with music in terms of the development of the repair project? So for example at the KW Museum in Berlin, you incorporated that into the display as one of the kind of chapters or the dramaturgy that evolved through looking at the record covers, so was that the first kind of entry point into that project?

**KA** At some point yesterday I linked the fact that music has a wave, basically, sound as a wave is also similar to light, so to image. I mean, they both work the same process. Sound can exist because of the oxygen, because of the air. Without this there is a wave that is produced. The elementary particle of light photon is a wave. What is important for me is that I've been wondering if we could have recorded music of the prehistoric people, for instance, probably some melodies would have been similar to some of them we're listening to today, like at some point we do believe that we advance something but we do not advance music. Music is here, waves are everywhere, and you just discover it.

It came to my mind that music, as a political statement, claimed to repair something, Independence Cha Cha… it's a statement which says I don't have anything to struggle against you, I have only my music, I have only my Joseph Kabaselleh, as it was. He wrote these songs in a café in Brussels when the Congo was struggling for its independence. He wrote these songs in a café where Kasavubu and Lumumba used to go because he was close to Kasavubu and Lumumba. So Independence Cha Cha is a very funny and nice song. You really can enjoy to dance to it, but it's very political. There is another one which is called Table Ronde, round tables, and it's also, independence… so it's interesting to see that, first of all, the music which is supposed to be invented far from Congo in the Caribbean area or Latin America came to Congo at the end of the colonisation with cha cha, salsa, rumba, and was transformed by these local artists as a tool for getting back their freedom.

So this is what I call one form of 'reappropriation'. And this is maybe what, as far as I'm concerned as an artist, I really like because we do have this liberty of acting contrary to anthropologies, technologies and scientific; we can speculate on something. I think art is an incredible area for speculation. I'm totally fine with this. You know, Edouard Glissant used to say, 'I claim the right for opacity. I don't want to explain to you. I claim the right to opacity.' It is an interview by Manthia Diawara, fantastic, in which Glissant is saying we should make the UN state this right of opacity. I don't want to talk. So an artist has this incredible right for opacity to make a relation between this microphone and this glass of water, or this microphone and this cloud, this surrealistic comparison.

So, let's say, before this cultural time of independence, colonisations, politics, I'm fascinated by the fact that if music has been invented by the human mind, it is a process which repairs something or aims at repairing something, otherwise it would not have existed. That's why I'm always relating this notion of repairing with the theory of evolution of Darwin and Wallace, what they actually define as natural selection, because it's a very interesting controversy between Wallace and Darwin, why natural selection? That is the question. Natural selection is a process of repair. If you remove in any living systems these processes of selection of the best member, the whole chain collapses.

**VW** Can I just pick up on what you were saying about opacity and speculation and the opportunity of the artist? Is repair for you… from what you've just said then, could that be seen as a response to the politics and limits of representation, of the fixing of colonial histories of the organisation, of knowledge and societies?

**KA** Yes, at some point the limit… it is this right for opacity. I think when an artist who is at some point working with researchers' material is struggling against this researchers' material, and because the rational aspect, I would even say the delusional aspect, the delusional rational aspect of archive limits your mind and limits the minds of the audience because of these so-called precisely visual and texts and documents, what Foucault called archive is an authority. You have to be aware about this, that the archive showed you what it wants to show, and by the way, at the same time hides what it doesn't show. So the way I use the reference to this right for opacity of Glissant is much more, I think, fundamental artistic process.

I don't know if you remember yesterday someone asked a question about politics in art and whether art can be politic. I think it's a trap question because there is no political art, and there is political art. Art is politic by definition and it is not by definition. It's an oxymoron so that's why, for me, this notion of opacity, to be able to develop your own laboratory as you want following your ideas, even if sometimes people can say this is too much speculation, I don't mind. I absolutely don't mind.

**PG** Okay, so moving from the abstract to the material and to the museum in particular, what happens to that right to opacity that artists claim when you actually move into the space of the museum, with its own sets of meaning systems, its own collections, not in the case of Whitechapel though; Whitechapel doesn't have a collection, but it has particular curatorial practices, particular ways in which it has to relate to the audience through programmes, through interpretation, so how do you manage that kind of struggle that Glissant talks about in terms of the right to opacity?

**KA** I mean, first of all you have to think that any project and proposal you make that you work on in a museum can be shown elsewhere. I mean, this library commission in a real library, the people can take the books, open the books, leave with them. The second thing which I think is important is these unexpected analogies that I'm free to create. For us, it looks obvious now because they're here but before this, there is one year of work, papers, texts, project, and I did it, I proposed this to the anthropologist museum, and they said, I don't understand. It's too close, it's too blah-blah, it's not my business. This is what I heard many times in the Ethnological Museum. It's not our business, these analogies, this relation, but then the same anthropologist saw the piece and said this is interesting.

That's the difference between an artist and a scientist. I think the artist pushes forward and concretely realises something and then when the piece is here, it's here. I can die now. It will stay. This is the artwork. And that's why society needs artworks. Within the Museum of Contemporary Art or Ethnological Museum, I think it's exactly like the question of politics of art. I think the museum is an oxymoron. The museum is relevant because it's also in an autocratic process. If you do not develop this autocratic statement within a Museum of Contemporary Art, for instance, it is just decoration. And I think we are very much into this kind of very tight space to work when you are dealing with archives, because also I would say the perception of the audience of artworks which gather and use archives. That's why most of the time, when I'm using archived documents I'm always re-using them, transforming them, involving them in installation, creating windows, ladders, I would say, with this mural, I mean, a way to escape. I'm not a fan of just vitrine and books and that's it. I like them because I like books. When I see exhibitions like this, I spend time, but I miss something. I miss the immaterial.

**PG** I'm just thinking about that sense that Kader's mentioning about putting that kind of work into the museum. I'm just thinking about from the museum's point of view and the curatorial point of view. How much are you aware of that kind of struggle about opacity, about not being contained by the structures or the meaning systems of the museum as a curator working with the artist as you've done in the process of that commission? How much negotiation is there around that and how much are these agendas on the table?

**MP** I was hoping that he would respond to the space of course because a commission has the opportunity to respond to a context, a neighbourhood, an audience and a history then you can relate to it if you would choose to, otherwise you can pick finished work and try to tell a story. The second thing I think is interesting, we're talking about the formats of museums and curating to shape content, to try to challenge those formats now and then and this was not a completely new format, but rather unusual still to have a one-year exhibition. I think the duration of the project raises really interesting possibilities and challenges and I thought in inviting Kader, one of the ideas was of course that the works of his that I've seen before are so multi-layered and so rich to sort of work with and let it develop over a time of a longer period.

So then your interest in the space and the history, the neighbourhood, was a great start for that. I also think that working with Sofia and the whole idea of this one year is that we can go deeper into the process and work with programme and interpretation and events, like we had yesterday, that are part of the artwork or showing different angles of it. So this was kind of a little bit of the invitation that we had one year.

**KA** I think what is interesting in this explanation by Magnus is, at the same time Glissant said I claim the right for opacity, I also say I claim the right for form. I think it's extremely important as well that we do not remove the notion of form in art. We do not only, I mean, speculate in the bad terms and meanings only on concept. I think the form is extremely important and I have to say that this room in the Whitechapel Gallery is definitely a space which inspired this project because of this ghost presence of the library. I'm not even talking of books, but this atmosphere and ideology. I mean, these four niches now in which I put inside analogies between broken traditional items and marble busts which could have been in any Victorian library or French Louvre library is what I call form. It's extremely important this notion of form.

So here again we're back in this idea of the difficulties that an artist has to deal with the institution, museum. Because you have to be able to express through forms, your own statement, your own vision that you want to share with the rest of the world who want to come, and it's not easy. I have to admit, it's not easy. I mean, the institution is symbolically and formerly extremely heavy.

I think if you want to resist a system, you have to be within the system. This is very fundamental as well. This is the guerrilla. And an artist has to struggle from inside, He has to disappear. I also did this sentence which I wrote sometimes with the same colour on the wall which says, 'to resist is to remain invisible'. To resist is to be invisible, that's the sentence. On a white wall, it's white. On a grey wall, it's grey. It's this metaphor of how to exist within a context.

**VW** Can I ask a question back to all, which is the kind of account that you were giving last night, do you think of it as research or background knowledge or information that should be of interest to the curator as a kind of archive or as a form of interpretation? Could that music list go into the exhibition corridor or could it become part of the installation? How would you feel about that? Or is that just part of an essay for a catalogue? What is it to us and what do you want it to be?

**KA** I mean obviously my opinion will be different from anyone else at this table and anyone yesterday, but as far as I'm concerned it is an artwork and it is not an artwork. It is part of, not of my researches, my researches were before, but I have more than 40,000 sounds, I decided this is the research style but the tracklist I did was, I think, 10 or 11 musics. The context of yesterday, this public context, is something that I would call the experience of the artwork. It will remain because of recordings like this. It will remain because of the audience who were there. They will remember all of this going from material to the abstraction. They will also unveil discussions, I think, and as far as I'm concerned, it's a part of the experience of the artwork that I call the repair…

**MP** It's a question of documentation and performance, I suppose, and in this case I think playlists can be, of course interesting but I think the moment also of meeting an audience and being there, I don't want to romanticise that all performances you have to be present all the time. I mean, it can survive in other forms, but I think definitely we should not lose the meeting that's in the room and think that we can translate it into other forms, all of the questions afterwards, or the responses and the laughter and the kind of revelations that you inspired with us, so I think that was a finished goods situation that doesn't have to grow into the installation.

**PG** I'm quite interested in the way that ephemeral events or moments that can be captured by documentation but we're not there to experience it. I mean, part of your [Kader's] discourse around western rationalism and which curatorial discourse and museums comes out of is a tradition of always wanting to capture something and to freeze it in a kind of perfect state. I'm quite interested in the way that these kinds of more ephemeral practices can somehow resist that and also I'm thinking about your idea of abstraction and, of course, in modernist genealogies, abstraction comes out of the avant-garde tradition whereas actually we know and you've mentioned that African art forms, African sculpture was abstract many centuries before and that was kind of appropriated by western forms of abstraction. So I'm quite interested in the way which abstraction itself can be seen as a form of resistance. I just wonder whether that's what the radicality of performance is at this particular moment now when hypercapitalism or neoliberalism is very much about erasing certain histories.

**KA** I don't know if I get you but what I like in this statement is that it's actually tackling, I would say, this market hegemony and capitalism hegemony of cultures; the fact that anything you do in contemporary art and cinema, in dance, in anything, needs money to get to work, and I mean, as soon as something is found it gets trapped into the systems, and I have to say that from this you have different problems from which you have to escape. The problem of this capitalistic control of cultures is that the danger of it is when it's producing a sort of dogmatic mind. This is nice, this is not nice.

I think that if you asked an artist very much interested in epistemology and trying to understand how much the western modern project, the western modern agenda, was actually a mix, and is still, I think, of colonialism on to the others, I mean two of the othernesses, you really discover that, for instance, the ethnological museums are really problematic. Ethnological museums, they claim to be the accumulation of knowledge of the rest of the world, of culture that has absolutely nothing to do with the continent where we are, and it's very weird, it's something I've never understood.

Remember that the notion of tribal art, or l'art negre, or any kind of terminology they've found for traditional art came within colonialism time, not now. That's the problem of this terminology of A-R-T, because as far as I'm concerned when I go to Congo, when I go to Cameroon, when I go to Mali, in Algeria, anywhere I'm talking with people about traditional art, they say this is not art, what are you talking about? And here you have I would say the beginning of this recuperation of these, I would say, hegemonic systems. I would say this things of naming something that is not part of your culture is a form of colonialism. So to resist, Paul, and I agree with you, is first to forget the idea of art. Getting, I would say, not abstract, but I would use immaterial… immaterial, we say in English?

**PG** Immaterial, yes.

**KA** I would say immaterial because I have something interesting on my cellphone which is just a mask that I found in a gallery in Brussels. It's a Dan mask from the Ivory Coast. If you put your finger on it, and my son really is fascinated by this… he takes the phone and he puts his finger on this mask, and this is what I call this immaterial fascination, the fact that what we do believe we see of such cultures, it is not what it's supposed to be, and we actually read it through the prism of knowledge that is totally part of a system that we try to escape or criticise.

**PG** I made some notes at your talk last night and you were talking about the idea of moving to abstraction, and at the time you were playing the Nairobi sound about the reappropriation of glass bottles, and you said that in the music you hear kinds of liberation from the instrument, from the object, which you said was getting deeper into what we are made of, getting closer to the continuum, so the way in which it resists… I think part of speculative realism is that movement, which is obviously very attractive to many researchers now, particularly younger researchers in contemporary art, is about trying to rethink our relationship to the object and to objects, and to actually respect the opacity of objects. That's something that exists independently, that's not co-related.

So, I just think there's something around this moment that we're in now which I think your project relates to and I think it is a question for curatorial and museum practices around rethinking in a radical way our relationship to objects, our relationship to immaterial practices in a way that I think can lead to new forms of artistic and curatorial collaboration in some way.

**SV** Maybe to go back to Vicky's question about the nature of the event and the place it occupies within practice, I guess for us it was very much related to the aspect Magnus mentioned as well in terms of duration, in how do you engage with this work that is on display for a year. And I guess as far as I see it, it's very much about creating a platform or a moment where some of the ideas that you have tested out through the work and through your research, how we can create a shared moment where you're exposing yourself, as you say, in front of an audience and you're sharing those source materials and ideas that have informed the research. So I think the event is in itself a moment of, again, testing the boundaries and potentially of experimenting or trialling new parts for other research to come, or previous research that has occurred, but that is not necessarily made manifest through to objects on display in this place.

**KA** The temporality of artworks is very specific. Talking about the other disciplines' way of creation we were talking about yesterday, I think between cinema, for instance, and art installation, you really have difference of narration. Exhibiting an artwork for one year in the same place, I think is a very exciting challenge, not only because the world we are living in today in this hysteria of consuming and fast consuming and amnesia and so on, people want to see something, it's okay, I got it, next, and then you think that you guys have to create a dialogue for a year.

**SV** But I think it also relates in an interesting way to the idea of archive and something that we've discussed about as well, the category of the contemporary and how you talked about how history can be performed in the here and now and how history can be activated, so I also see the moment of the event as this moment where we're drawing upon your kind of research, archiving interest. How do you reactivate this? How do you translate it in to other possible meanings and maybe open up to other interests?

**KA** Lectures like yesterday was a way to continue this because it's not a lecture talking about the piece. I'm saying that a year exhibition is a fantastic opportunity to really go deeper into the artworks. The lecture yesterday is one of them. The re-enactment, rehanging, repair, as I thought it at the beginning, is a second step. But I have to say that, within the context of the museum, the notion of history, it works to develop peripheral… I don't want to use the word performance because I don't like it, but I mean discussions and dialogue.

**SV** And how do you feel about showing at the same time as Chris Marker? There are two key films that relate in a very explicit way to your own work, the Statues Also Die and Souvenir d'un avenir, it's not in the exhibition but also show the images of wounded.

**KA** I know very well Les Statues Meurent Aussi and it's not only a Marker movie, it's Alain Resnais as well. This is important to mention. But what is extremely interesting is this beginning. I think the whole movie is fascinating but I got this first sentence where he said when the human dies they go into history and when the statues die they go into a museum. I mean, this is maybe the best answer regarding the whole question of what is the museum. The museum is a paradox, and I was saying this at the beginning of this, the museum is a total paradox, and it's difficult to deal with paradox.

**PG** Is it a productive paradox?

**KA** It's a productive paradox. A paradox is productive but it's a paradox. The presence of Marker here is this. This installation, the Jacob's Ladder, is also this massive presence of the history, of this reference to history. It's also a reference to the architecture of Whitechapel to the history of the building, and it is because of this that it opens the mind to not only a self-critique of the museum, but also self-critique of the audience, a self-critique of what we are, of how we think. Do we think, really, by ourselves? No, absolutely not.

**SV** I would just like to ask you one more thing about paradoxes and about programming an event. We know that you are working on and preparing the opening of a space in Paris, which is called The Colony…

**KA** I was about to tell you that, I mean, all these questions of museum, these are questions for you guys.

**SV** So how do you deal with that kind of place which you've said aims at dealing with Europe's colonial histories, and how you as an artist see your role in that, and what will it be?

**KA** I think as an artist, to concretise the idea of a space where you're going to show art, you have to curate. I did curate two shows in my life in the past, one in Neuchatel, in the Centre of Contemporary Art, and one in a gallery in Paris. It was enough to understand that, because obviously I didn't put my work, I was just focusing on the project as a curator and it was two nice experiences, especially regarding the distance, the distance that you have to keep all the time, to have a sort of large view on everything. There were 11 artists in Neuchatel. So I felt at this time that I crossed the river to the other side. It was very, very demanding, extremely demanding.

What I found interesting, going back to the question of Paul's, is that also these people's work is based mostly not openly or clearly speaking on reappropriation but they were in touch with these topics, by recycling, by revisiting, by reinventing history and so on. The thing is that within an institution you became an institution, so as long as you want to be radical, it’s extremely difficult. I think exactly for the project in Paris what I did in Neuchatel as much as I could is I camouflage myself. Paris, now, is so far a city which became the less interesting in Europe, so far. Each time I come to Paris it’s absolutely blown my mind how much colonialism is in front of you in the street, when you go out of Gare du Nord, but when you talk about colonialism in France, most of the reaction are, ‘oh my God, no, colonialism is over. Again, Algerian war, no, it’s over, everyone is free now.’

The space used to be a Congolese club, a nightclub, so the owner was leaving the lease and we said we want to make a deal. This is the place, because we will also make parties of Congo music. Then I started to develop and to write the project which is based on this. The problematic of colonialism, especially in contemporary art, is that it’s based on working and using all the time ghosts. You know what I mean. Aesthetics of black and white pictures, archived documents; colonialism is now, and I said yesterday we have to put it in colours. We have to colourise colonialism. We have to talk about what’s going on now in Central Africa, in Mali, everywhere, and I think that exactly as the microbe. It’s not only, there will be some, but the sort of very vindictive, radical exhibition, educational ones. Most of the presence, the platform, will be dedicated to non-western, young artist cultures, but there will also be European artists who are focusing, interested by this part of the story. I don’t also believe in this ghetto close to the other. We want to create a platform of reflection not a ghetto.

And last but not least, what for me really became important is that this situation that is happening now in France needs that kind of space, because it’s even worse now to speak about colonialism in France. It became even worse. Exactly like this, I don’t know if you remember one of the pieces I did last year, which is a mask covered with mirrors. I did this project because in 2009 there was in Paris at the Grand Palais, the biggest exhibition on Picasso and his masters. It was entitled like this, Picasso and his Masters; supposedly all the master painters that have been influencing Picasso from Caravaggio to El Greco to Goya to Cezanne, it was an incredible show. I saw the show two times. The first time I saw it I was like very impressed, and then I spent almost three and a half hours in the Grand Palais, went to have a coffee, and I thought, there is not one single African mask in this exhibition. This is not possible.

So I went back to the exhibition, and then I was looking for everything. So I wrote a text about this, because I think that the biggest problem here is not only the amnesia, it’s this rising amnesia. Everyone is talking of the rising conservatism, but no one spoke about this. Everyone says, oh my God, in Ukraine it’s like this and in Italy it’s like that and in France … but this is an example of the contemporary way of anti-colonialism statements.

Now it is 2009, while if I’m not wrong, in 1936, the whole of MOMA in New York was filled with traditional art from Africa. When the MOMA opened they were struggling already against European museums like the one in London and in Paris. They wanted to make a strong statement. They did this 1936 exhibition in which the whole MOMA was filled with tribal art to say modern art museum, this is where we come from. So if you guys don’t think that a missing mask, a missing fundamental history of modern art, of modern artists such as Picasso, who invented Cubism by following this art of so many people, is not present in 2009.

**VW** Going back to perhaps a sort of paradox as well that you articulated which is the artist as a figure can speculate, has opacity, but there is a problem with the category art itself as well. What kind of knowledges do you think, or what kind of practices do you think the curator should have in the 21st century? I mean, many curators come from an art historical background or perhaps sometimes Cultural Studies or Museum Studies, but the kind of knowledges of non-western art are limited, however much this new category of the global or contemporary art emerges. Do you see a shift or would you like to see a change in the kind of histories being offered or what constitutes the curatorial now that the curatorial is taking over so much?

**KA** Yes, and also I would say the last 20 years, because curators in the ’70s and ’80s, I mean, did exist obviously, but they were not like travelling in business class.

**VW** I mean, there’s almost less culture in curators now than there was 20 years ago, because they came from other places, they came from other practices, other disciplines.

**KA** I agree. The world definitely has changed so fast as well since 9/11 and the position of even the curator and the artist has changed a lot. I mean, the director of the museum. I mean this world of the art world is constantly changing. I have to say that it's difficult for me to imagine the future. What I'm sure is that if you create again with a small piece of paper and each one would represent an actor of this so called art world, the director of institution, the art critic, the curator or the artist, the artwork, the auction house, the gallery, definitely the artist is important, not only the person of the artist but the artworks.

The only thing that I believe in is that the artist is nothing but the shadow of his work. The work is the expression of something else which is before and beyond the artist. Here again we are in this continuum. Mozart was listing the music, some people say, from a divine origin and others say from the universe. I think in the future all of these actors might change completely, not the artwork. I think the notion, not only physical, I'm not talking about an entity, it can be immaterial as well, but this notion of created things, of artworks, so it's this terminology, it sounds very weak, but you know what I mean, creation, this is what I call the repair. It's needed.

When Marcel Duchamp was writing to his brother this letter in 1907, the letter exists, I read it, 'I am about to make an important discovery. It is called the readymade.' When Duchamp is writing this letter to his brother, he already knows that after this readymade he will have to find something even stronger and higher and further, because he's a brilliant mind. What really strikes me is this incredible obsession, or I would say instinct, that the human mind has to constantly reinvent and improve and go forward to. Duchamp, by creating the readymade, has just reoriented all art history. He just repaired something. He reoriented art history, and from this point, for me, he repaired something, and after him other artists are continuing this job. This will stay.

However the market will recycle everything and anything. I mean, we were talking about dance yesterday. There are some immaterial creations that also you can catch, you can control. Maybe they will be in a way recuperated, but what fascinates me is this constant process of improving, at some point of natural selection of the better, of the further, of the sharpest, but much beyond this concept of modernism, much further than this idea of progress, because it existed before. This is a very complex issue, you know, to understand the difference between creation and progress.

**VW** And I've got one last question that just builds on that. I mean, already in this conversation, you've picked up the phone, we've seen the mask on your cellphone, the playlist on your laptop screen, what do you feel technology is offering? I mean, this moment which is also, whether it's progress or modernism, but the reproduction and acceleration of culture through the digital and that kind of collage for everyone and the kind of appropriation and the circulation of imagery, but also the fragmentation of histories, does that enter into your thinking at all?

**KA** I think the era of the digital, I would prefer to use the word virtual, illustrates perfectly what I was saying when I said from the material to the abstract and then the material and then the abstract and then the material, so you have within the universe this loop of going from concrete to abstract, concrete to abstract, material to the immaterial. With this huge infinite virtual world that is opening up now, we are back again on to immaterialism. We are maybe too young to know this but in the future, you will see the evolution of technology. I mean, I've been in touch with many people in Dakar, who are into avatars. They have avatars, from Dakar, Senegal, they are making love with a vampire in LA, I mean, this is this parallel world. I think talking about this immateriality, the digitalisation, the technology, will bring us back, mankind, to this immateriality, the next step.

**PG** I think, just to round up, I think, the discussion, and so many really interesting issues have been raised by this, and I think one of the things for me, personally, that I get from your work, Kader, is, as you mentioned, it's not just about dealing with the ghosts of colonialism, it's about the reality today of coloniality. Coloniality is something which inhabits our world today, and I think a project such as yours helps to really bring that to the centre of what we're thinking about in terms of western modernity, about colonialism and coloniality, and how that is still really part of what we're doing today.

## Kader Attia & Sofia Victorino,
## Whitechapel Gallery (London)

*From Material to Abstract*

Kader Attia's lecture *From Material to Abstract* took place at the Whitechapel Gallery in London as part of a public programme for his commission *Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder* (2013-2014). Attia's work is rooted in history and archival research, exploring hybrid objects and identities in an age of globalisation. The lecture developed with the RCA / MeLa project draws on his research on African music in the context of colonial and postcolonial relations of 'repair' and cultural exchange and appropriation. Attia's public performance highlights his interest in how ideas of 'form' and the history of the object have defined the understanding of what constitutes culture and memory in the postcolonial era, and raises important questions such as, how can history be performed in the here and now?

Kader Attia (b. 1970) lives and works in Berlin. He has exhibited widely since his first solo show in 1996 in Kinshasa-Congo. Recent projects include solo exhibitions at the Beirut Art Centre (2014) and Kunstwerke, Berlin (2013). Attia's work has also been shown at *Documenta 13*, Kassel, Tate Liverpool and Tate Modern; Centre Pompidou and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. His work also featured at the Biennale of Contemporary African Art in Dakar (2014) and in the 5th Marrakech Biennial (2014).

Sofia Victorino is Daskalopoulos Head of Education and Public Programmes at the Whitechapel Gallery where she is responsible for leading a programme of artists residencies, commissions, schools and community projects, talks and events. Founded in 1901 to 'bring great art to the people of the East End of London', the programme has ranged from showcasing art from Africa, India and Latin America to premiering solo emerging figures such as Picasso, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Through exhibitions such as the Whitechapel Open, the gallery has promoted artists who live and work in the East End of London.

1 Kader Attia, Lecture, 1 May 2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery, London.

2 Kader Attia, ‘Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob’s Ladder’, 2013, metal shelves, wooden vitrine, books, metallic stands, archival documents, lithographs, telescope, strip light, mirrors. Installation view at Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2013, Irene Panagopoulos Collection, courtesy Roupen Kalfayan, Athens and Galerie Krinzinger. Photo: Stephen White.

3 Kader Attia in conversation with Paul Goodwin, Victoria Walsh (Royal College of Art), Sofia Victorino and Magnus af Petersens (Whitechapel Gallery), 2 May 2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery, London.

4 Screen shot of Kader Attia’s interview at Whitechapel Gallery, 2 May 2014

5 Kader Attia, ‘Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob’s Ladder’, 2013, metal shelves, wooden vitrine, books, metallic stands, archival documents, lithographs, telescope, strip light, mirrors. Installation view at Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2013, Irene Panagopoulos Collection, courtesy Roupen Kalfayan, Athens and Galerie Krinzinger. Photo: Stephen White.

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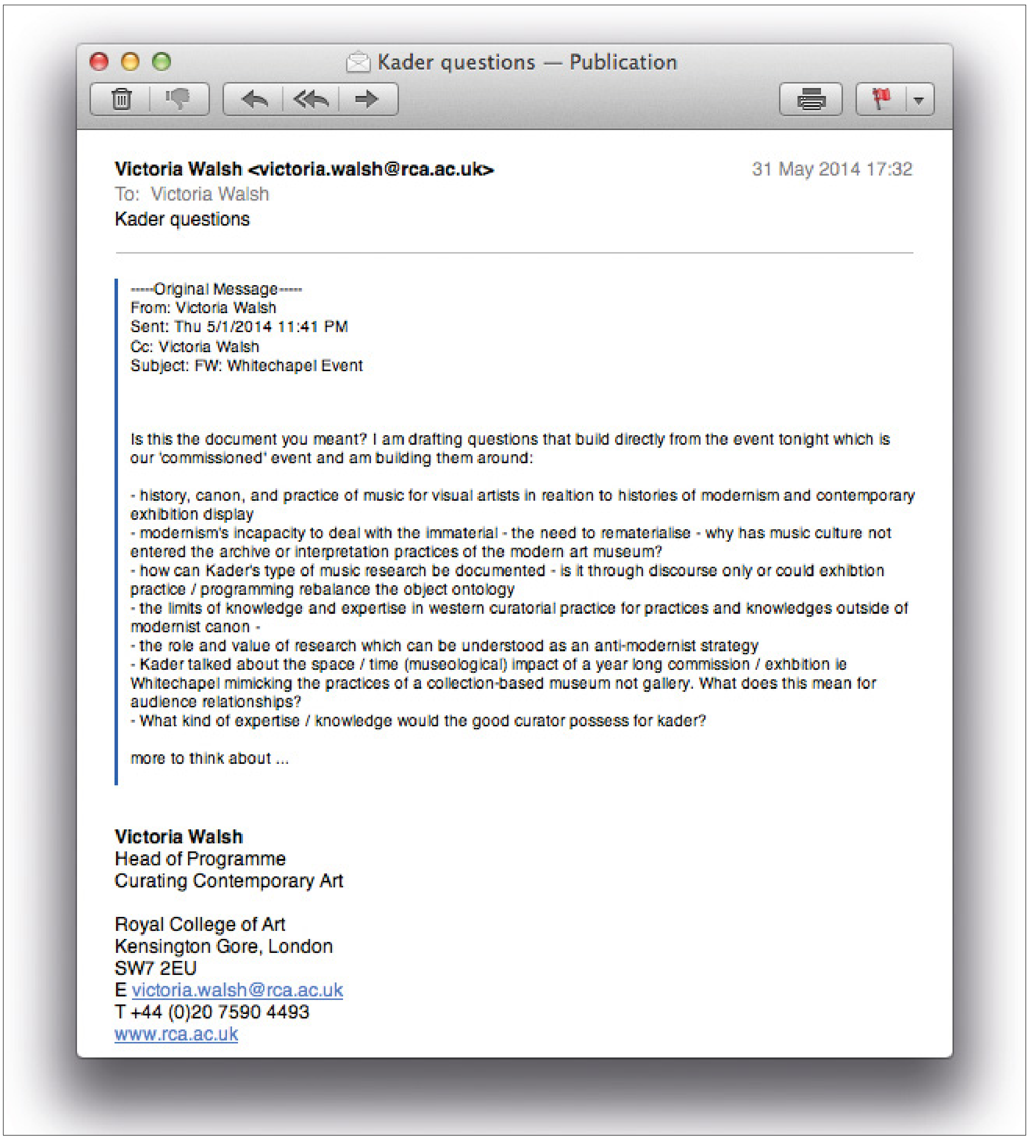

**Victoria Walsh <victoria.walsh@rca.ac.uk>** 31 May 2014 17:32
To: Victoria Walsh
Kader questions

> -----Original Message-----
> From: Victoria Walsh
> Sent: Thu 5/1/2014 11:41 PM
> Cc: Victoria Walsh
> Subject: FW: Whitechapel Event
>
> Is this the document you meant? I am drafting questions that build directly from the event tonight which is our 'commissioned' event and am building them around:
>
> - history, canon, and practice of music for visual artists in realtion to histories of modernism and contemporary exhibition display
> - modernism's incapacity to deal with the immaterial - the need to rematerialise - why has music culture not entered the archive or interpretation practices of the modern art museum?
> - how can Kader's type of music research be documented - is it through discourse only or could exhibtion practice / programming rebalance the object ontology
> - the limits of knowledge and expertise in western curatorial practice for practices and knowledges outside of modernist canon -
> - the role and value of research which can be understood as an anti-modernist strategy
> - Kader talked about the space / time (museological) impact of a year long commission / exhbition ie Whitechapel mimicking the practices of a collection-based museum not gallery. What does this mean for audience relationships?
> - What kind of expertise / knowledge would the good curator possess for kader?
>
> more to think about ...

**Victoria Walsh**
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# Leo Asemota & Royal College of Art

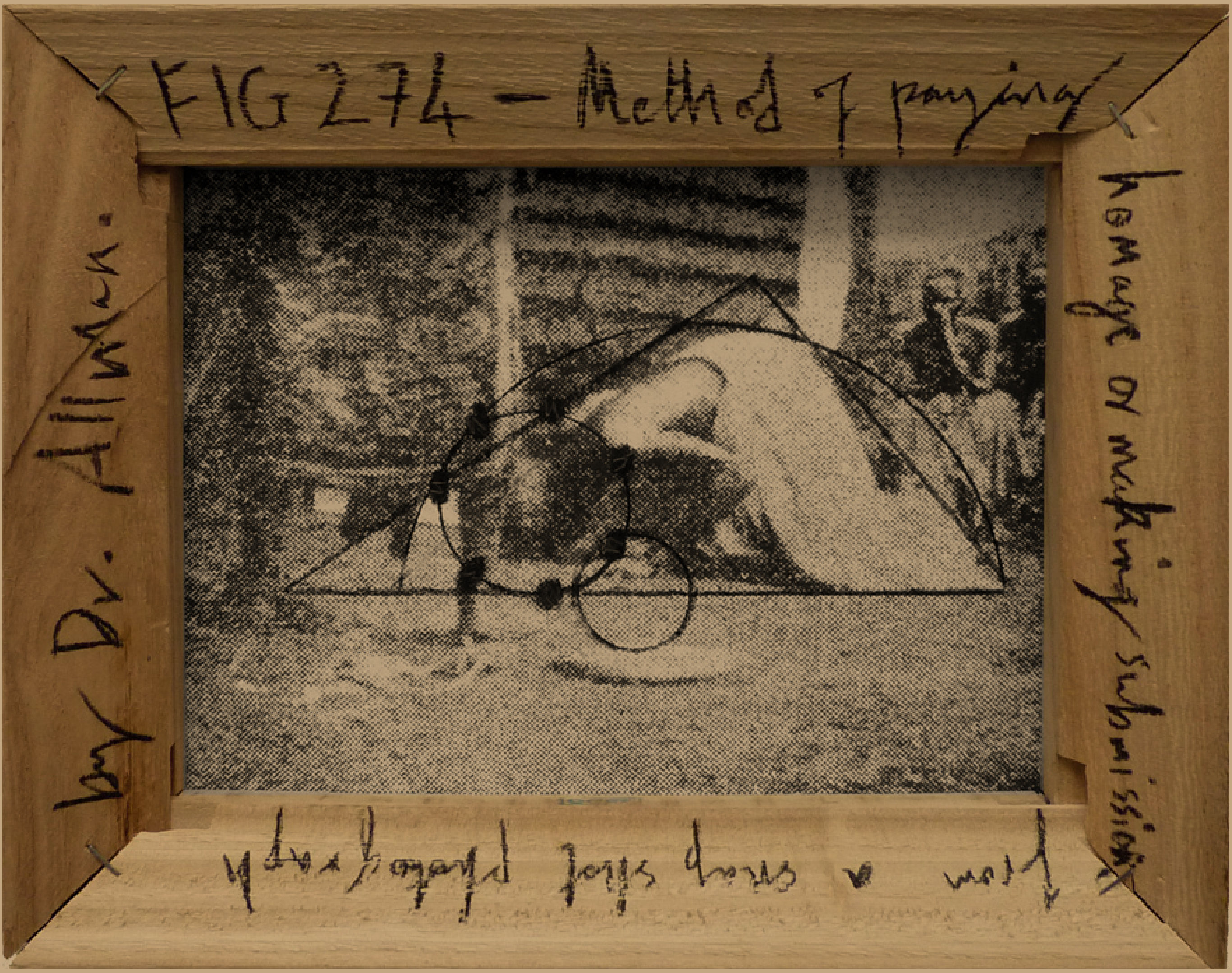
FIG 274 – Method of paying
homage or making submission
from a snap shot photography
by Dr. Allman.

## Leo Asemota

Paul Goodwin

### Context

Leo Asemota's performance, 'Count Off for Eo ipso' (23 August 2012) which was part of the Tate Tanks 15-week programme of performance, film, video and installation marked a significant moment in the often fraught relationship between ephemeral and immaterial art practices and one of the high temples of western modernism. The Tate Tanks programme is considered to be a watershed moment in the history of that institution. In the words of Tate Modern director Chris Dercon, the Tanks 'challenge many aspects of what historically has been important to museums – their collections and modes of display and archive – and ask vital questions of what it is to be a museum in the twenty-first century.'[1]

To many people who observed Leo Asemota's performance that evening – some of whom including myself had been following the evolution of his masterwork 'The Ens Project' for a number of years – what we witnessed fully endorsed the acuity of Chris Dercon's remarks. It was clear that we were participating in an artistic experience that museums like Tate Modern were not originally set up to accommodate, both in terms of the scale of the project and in terms of the essential subject-matter of the performance. 'The Ens Project' is an ongoing multipartite artwork involving a fluid assemblage of objects (sculptures, photographs, drawings, etchings) that are connected in complex and ever-changing ways with performances and ritualised ceremonies. The project revolves around the artist's investigations into three key elements: the Igue ceremony of the Head practiced by the Edo people of Benin City, Nigeria; the Victorian age of invention, exploration and conquest (part of which was the 1897 sacking of Benin City by the British and the theft and dispersal to western museums of the famous 'Benin Bronzes'); and Walter Benjamin's seminal treatise on art in the technological age.

A key starting point for Asemota's research is his exploration of the plastic, symbolic and performative qualities of a range of materials: orhue (kaolin chalk), coal, brass/bronze, palm oil, calfskin vellum, fleece, iron, gossamer and fur, that populate his installations and performances and refer to histories of trade, conquest, and industry across global territories. Indeed, performance and ceremony and their relationship to technology are at the heart of 'The Ens Project'. The genesis of the project emerged as a response to a chance suggestion on a computer search programme (the Latin words *eo ipso*) that opened up questions for the artist about his relationship to technology. The project finale, a large-scale outdoor performance event, called 'Eo ipso', is the culmination, raison d'être, and expressive motor of the entire project. The Tate Tanks event, 'Count Off for Eo ipso', was effectively a site-specific rehearsal for this final stage of the project which was preceded by two other stages: 'first principles' and 'the handmaiden'.

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[1] Chris Dercon, Tate website blog: http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/tate-modern-director-chris-dercon-on-tanks).

The performance was devised in collaboration with Tate Collective, a young people's group, and staged a sophisticated re-narrating of the project's history using multiple screens combined with live and playback technologies while simultaneously exploring the conversion of the Tate Tanks site itself from Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's design of Bankside Power Station into the temple of modern art that it is today. For many of us who witnessed this event, Asemota's performance and the project from which it derived posed numerous questions about the intertwined genealogies and entangled histories of our post-migration and postcolonial condition and how traditional institutions engage with this kind of hybrid, performance-based artwork; a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk*. Questions about migration, globalisation, technology and ritual framed in this immaterial format arguably challenge the thinking and procedures of western museums in relation to their collections and object-based ontologies.

Another key question that arose from this performance concerns the fact that it took place as part of Tate's Learning Department's 'Undercurrent' series of events which set out to explore the counter-cultural 'underground', and 'under-represented' artists and art forms, as opposed to the more canonical collection-focused Tanks programme organised by the Curatorial department (including the work of Anthony McCall, Suzanne Lacy and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker). Indeed many of Asemota's 'Ens Project' performances have been organised within the framework of museum and gallery education and public programming: 'The Long March of Displacement', Victoria Embankment and St Paul's Cathedral, London, (September 2008); 'Ens Memoralis', National Portrait Gallery, London (June 2008); and 'Sash of Fulfillment', British Museum (November 2013). The fact that these performances have been largely curated by education programmes raises the question as to whether this form of 'programming' is more flexible and able to respond in a more timely manner to the challenging nature of ephemeral and hybrid artworks that often defy the standard forms of categorisation that many curators work with.

## Artistic Research

Following 'Count Off for Eo ipso', Leo Asemota was commissioned by the Royal College of Art's Curating Contemporary Art programme (CCA) to engage in a research process of working with a curator (myself) to reflect on the process of his artistic research for the MeLa research exhibition at MACBA Barcelona. The aim of the research process was to interrogate the process of producing this commission in relation to the trajectory of 'The Ens Project' in which it forms a part, and in relation to Asemota's wider practice as an artist. One of the key issues that emerged in the artist's research practice is his studio – 'Eotla', or Estate of Leo Asemota – which is also a public display space that incorporates a project space called *The Contemporary Rooms*. Asemota has used these rooms as a site to preview and reflect on specific elements of 'The Ens Project' at various points in its development. *The Contemporary Rooms* was thus an excellent starting point to begin the process of interrogating Asemota's research methodologies and the importance of the studio to his practice, both as a private space for contemplation and making, but also as a public site of display.

When I visited Asemota in his space with Victoria Walsh to interview him, he had recently de-installed *Sash of Fulfillment*, an exhibition comprising two suites of works: photographs, drawings, sculptures and videos drawn from 'The Long March of Displacement' (2008) and 'Count Off for Eo ipso' (2012), live art works from two distinct phases in 'The Ens Project' as described above. For Asemota, this display space is a method to situate and assess the progress of his work within the ongoing flow of production and process: '*The Contemporary Rooms* are a way to monitor my own development: how I like for my work to be presented. To more or less begin to develop a vocabulary on process; of creating and presenting. For me it's a vocabulary that connects to the work I have created.'[2]

One of the features of the space that stood out for both Victoria and I was the 'white cube' nature of the space: elegant, clean white walls that evoke a sense of a white cube gallery space so central to ideologies of modernism. As Victoria noted, entering the space feels like 'entering another world, a hermetically sealed, self-contained, autonomous environment populated by structures or images and objects that have no correlation to any other context the visitor will know other than The Ens Project!'. However, the artist resisted this framing of his space or his work with modernism, arguing that his work has a dialogue with many aspects of art history rather than a specific relationship to modernism. Asemota forcefully holds on to the absolute ephemerality and contemporaneity of the way his space is conceived, noting in the interview: 'The space (*The Contemporary Rooms*) is always changing. It's here, it's now, it's done. Everything I put on here is always the here and now for me.'

This resistance to curatorial or external framing is consistent throughout Asemota's practice and demands that his work be engaged with in non-deterministic, open ways, that suggest a collaborative relationship of *working with* the artist and *being part* of the process of the work, rather than situating oneself as an external onlooker attempting to force the work into pre-existing categories.

## Curatorial Research

I have worked with Leo Asemota on several projects since 2009 when I commissioned him to present his work on 'The Ens Project' as part of the *Conversations Pieces* artist talks/performance series I curated at Tate Britain in the Public Programmes department. Since then, Asemota's work has been a key part of my curatorial project of identifying and supporting artistic practices and strategies that extend and stretch beyond simplistic notions of 'black art' or 'culturally diverse art' and place black and diasporic artistic practices within the space of broader discourses around what 'contemporary art' means today beyond the restrictive and hegemonic frames of the 'market' on the one hand, and 'diversity / multiculturalism' on the other. Both paradigms have severely constricted, complex understandings of the nature of contemporary practices in an age of migrations. Works such as Asemota's 'The Ens Project', which do not sit easily into one particular frame, open up new possibilities for the development of progressive and innovative curatorial practices in this area: a hybrid practice that cuts across object-based / art historical and programme based / cultural theory forms of curating.

[2] Paul Goodwin and Victoria Walsh, Interview with Leo Asemota, 7 March 2014

This aspect of Asemota's practice – the challenge to traditional curatorial methodology – was a central part of discussions I convened with two other curators who have worked on 'The Ens Project': Mark Miller, Convenor of Tate Young People's Programmes, who curated 'Count Off for Eo ipso', and Chris Spring, Chief Curator of the African Galleries at the British Museum who curated *Sash of Fulfillment* among other projects with Asemota. In attempting to capture the essence of a durational and multi-platform project such as 'The Ens Project', both curators registered a sense of 'failure', albeit a 'productive failure'. For example, in relation to the 'Count Off for Eo ipso' performance Mark Miller noted the difficulty in trying to capture the fullness of the work in various forms of documentation and then being faced with the problematic of thinking through how to usefully deploy this material after the event:

> ... there's something about the way in which even though we want that unknown quantity, and that's the exciting bit about the work, that actually there is something about, when I say 'failure', it's kind of trying to think how can I possess it? But it's almost like trying to accept that actually you can't possess it. It's an organic and extremely nuanced moving form. But it's just how you try to understand that. It's almost like you want to move it on to the next space, but it's non-fixed in a sense. You're not quite sure where it's going to go. So it's quite confusing. It's a positive failure, if you want.[3]

Similarly, in the same interview, Chris Spring notes the durational character of the work as eliciting a total commitment to it on the part of the curator:

> I suppose one of the things it's taught me is with Leo in particular, you've got to be in it for the long haul, and you've got to be prepared for some frightening moments. You've got to be prepared to go with the flow. It's immensely rewarding, and if by doing that you can one way or another make his work more available to a wider number of people then that's an important kind of element of your contribution, whether you feel that you failed a little. I think you endlessly will.

For my part this research process has effectively entailed the need to evolve a more co-operative model of curatorial engagement. Leo's artistic research and practice demands an intense, durational engagement with his work. In co-operation with the artist we have evolved a working methodology based on conversations about and around the work in both formal (on stage at events) and informal settings (in the studio, exhibitions, cafes) where 'The Ens Project' has acted like a laboratory to explore various aspects of my curatorial interests around migration, globalisation and coloniality through the prism of Asemota's triad of artistic concerns: history, reason and technology.

The meanings and symbolism replete in the work are never fixed. They are always in constant motion and thus demand and enable a constant work of interpretation and questioning. The curatorial model of just 'supporting' the artist and passively working with the artist to enable the 'product' to be presented is impossible in working with an artist like Leo Asemota. Much more work is required. A certain leap of faith in the process is required. One is

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[3] Paul Goodwin, Discussion with Mark Miller and Chris Spring, 25 April 2014

not sure where the project will head next. The co-operation is a fraught one: the fear of failure is never far from the surface because one is constantly being presented an ever-evolving set of ‘unknowns’ that unsettle stable assumptions.

# On Leo Asemota
Paul Goodwin in conversation with
Christopher Spring (British Museum)
and Mark Miller (Tate)

25.04.2014

**PG** One of the reasons why we've asked you both to come is really because you've both been doing some work in various capacities with Leo and with the 'The Ens Project'. So can I ask you first to just say your names and what you do, as a starting point?

**CS** I'm Chris Spring, I'm Chief Curator of the African Galleries at the British Museum. I'm curatorially responsible for contemporary art from Africa, or people of African heritage, and I have a geographical area of expertise which is northern, eastern and southern Africa, particularly textiles, though Arms and Armour was my first book.

**MM** Mark Miller, Convenor, Young People's Programmes at Tate Britain and Tate Modern. I also lead a national programme called Circuit, specifically working with young people, 15 to 25 yrs, across both sites and nationally to really engage them in the displays, exhibitions, wider cultural conversations and engagement through culture and looking at art as a catalyst for informal learning as well as really thinking about this as related to programming and cultural production by young people and for young people.

**PG** I think we'll start off by just talking about how we started to initially engage with Leo's work curatorially and in terms of what we do. I think for myself it was when I was at Tate Britain as Curator of Cross-cultural Programmes and I devised a series of artists' talks and interventions that would engage the collection, by inviting a number of artists to come in and talk about their work in relation to the collection. I invited Leo to come and do a talk about some of his head portraits and how it related to portraiture. Also of course I think possibly one of the first times I met you, Chris, was in the performance, the 'Long March of Displacement'.

**CS** Did you go to the National Portrait Gallery performance as well?

**PG** I did. Because I think I might have met Leo through a curator for the National Portrait Gallery who mentioned to me about his work and I came across it and I went to see that performance.

**CS** But I have a sort of feeling that all of us can never quite pinpoint when Leo became quite a big part certainly of our professional lives but also personal in some ways, too. Whenever I talk about Leo or try to engage with his work, I try to sort of become a sponge! I sort of absorb things, because he's got a firm grasp on what he's doing but I'm never quite sure that I have that same. He invites you to have your own kind of response in your own way and so on, and it's grown. I remember, I think there was a showing of one of his early films at the British Museum. I didn't go to that, but I think somebody said you should have gone to that. I think Leo shortly after that got in touch and it's grown from there, I think, particularly attending the various performances.

And I got a real sense of a kind of structure that was going on, that I could begin to understand. But also whenever I was at one of those performances I did get a real sense of a changed perspective on even the immediate surroundings, whether you're walking along the Embankment, contemplating the chewing gum on the pavement or fag ends or the significance of the monuments that you pass and so on, and the fact that it started at the Houses of Parliament, ended at St Paul's and then it really began to really, really make sense and it went from St Paul's across to Tate Modern. Because I could see politics and religion and industry and art being joined in a really interesting way. So that was a big picture.

Then there always seems to me a huge, almost global, universal element to Leo's work. And then there's the minute, and that's what I really like about it too, the objects, they can be quite small but highly significant: a piece of brass or like a snowball of coal. How those connect, I can see how he's talking about how they connect Benin, the empire of Benin and the British Empire, sort of driven on this collision course. And that's re-enacted by us in a very interesting way now today.

I'm always very interested in how works of art, particularly in the context of my work at the BM [British Museum], can connect objects that we have in our collections with today, and with the past, and sometimes there's a very, quite distant past as well. So I got a kind of growing feeling of how those things were connecting in my mind and professionally through how it related to institutions like the BM, like Tate Modern, like the

National Portrait Gallery and the collections that were there, the history of those collections and so on.

**PG** I definitely relate to a lot of what you've said about Leo's work and its radical openness in some ways which can be quite slippery initially. I still don't really know, I still can't say that I've grasped the entire project, maybe even a small part of it, and it seemed to be changing and evolving every time I meet him, something else comes in, so it's like a system.

But I guess for me, in terms of my curatorial perspective at Tate, I definitely had inherited a remit which was to talk about culture diversity in Britain, in British art, and to really open up that perspective. I was less interested in the kind of way that cultural diversity has been traditionally talked about. One, I was struck by the fact that a lot of cultural diversity initiatives didn't even engage art, it was just about really closed discourse about diversity, which I didn't find interesting. So by doing this series called 'Conversation Pieces', it was definitely about engaging with art practice. It wasn't just discussions about diversity, but part of its programme, its approach to the job was to talk about cultural diversity and I thought, I actually want to change it a little bit and talk about art practice and how artists engage with cultural diversity.

I was very open about the fact that I was doing a critical perspective. I wanted something that is actually going to critique and challenge the kind of coloniality of Tate and the collection and the British art world. So I did have a slightly preconceived notion in thinking about Leo's work, you know, Benin, bronzes, postcolonial, but quite quickly getting involved in his work, I saw there was so much more to it than that. And in fact, that was not the way to think about his work, actually. So quite quickly I abandoned that sense of trying to fit him into a postcolonial paradigm and actually just thinking, okay, well, what is he about?

Because it's quite interesting, because we were talking about Benjamin and it's about ritual, and I think it's that, this ethnographic aspect to it, but it's not really ethnographic, and I was really struck by the kind of language that he uses, not only the very precise language that he but the almost quite bombastic titles that he gives to projects such as 'The Condition of Consequence', these wonderful titles! And this sense of order, and diagrams and the language of science.

Then I realised why I was attracted by it. I'd never really come across a work by, say, an African artist in that way, expressing itself in that kind of multifaceted way and I could see a language of modernism; I can see traditional so-called traditional cultural practices, I can see a kind of global perspective.

**MM** That's why I was attracted to it. I think in consideration for the Tate Tanks which were opening and considering what the future of museums might be and this idea that it was the first space in a museum like the Tate, or a gallery like Tate, which was purely dedicated to live art, ephemeral art practices. But again I think like both of you, I think I met Leo at a talk at Delfina. And it was about the work that he'd done where he had gone across London and taken photographs of all these spots where accidents or murders had happened, and it was quite interesting, but I wasn't immediately drawn to that at that time. And then I think the thing with Leo's work is that actually, I think Eva [Eva Langret] who was working at Wapping Bankside at the time suggested I should meet him and talk to him, because I'd seen him around, but I hadn't actually spoken to him.

So we met and I think, as Chris says, it's kind of this thing about the conversation about art, about life, about his work, the precision, but then within that precision there's this kind of ambiguity. It's kind of this evolving thing, it's like a work response to itself. So I thought that was a really interesting space to be, in terms of the considerations of what I was trying to do with this idea of the 'Undercurrent' programme for the Tate Tanks; the idea of representation that was the art represented, thinking about the future of museums.

Initially I wasn't sure whether Leo would be great with young people, because he had to collaborate with six, seven young people, but he was fantastic, just unbelievable, just perfect, really. Because one, he's extremely serious about his practice. His practice is very thorough, I think, in terms of background research, etc. And I think for young people to come to that and understand that and get that from him, get that knowledge, share knowledge, etc, is a great opportunity to Tate Collective, but then also I think the way the project evolved in The Tanks was part of that. I think it was a great moment for us, because of the real, true collaboration with Leo and Tate Collective.

But then also how the work manifested itself in true, almost project style. Just in the unknown, but then the known as well; he always had that throughout, the kind of, if you want, the research period of putting the project together was that there was this form, this structure. But within that, it was a very loose, a responsive area for participants to be part of as well as himself. But some of the specific things, Chris said, was that move, the relationship to The Tanks and his previous work, Liverpool, the 'Long March', then coming to Tate, there's these kind of weird connections that happened through his work. It was amazing.

**PG** The architect.

**MM** Giles Gilbert Scott.

**PG** Giles Gilbert Scott, yes.

**MM** And that connection between the Long March, St Paul's, the height of St Paul's and the Turbine Hall, etc. All of that. Yes.

**PG** Could we talk a bit about the performance itself? Because we were all there at that performance.

**CS** Which one are you talking about?

**PG** The one at the Tate Tanks, that Mark organically curated. Because in a way, that was the performance that definitely Vicky Walsh, the Director of the Project, saw, and that's the first time she really engaged with his work, and really felt as though that opened up questions that resonated with the MeLa Project and the MeLa theme about the challenge to the museum, on a number of levels. One, what do you do with this performance work? How do you document it? How does it relate to a collection? And two, the fact that this has come into the museum through a young people's programme. And what does that mean in terms of curating and programming?

**MM** I think for me it's really about trying to create or think about a new space or a connection with an audience. It's very much core to that in the sense of how do people respond to something, what do they get from it, what do they learn from it, how can they contribute to it, that's really what I'm, really interested in. And that includes the audience, the young people who might be involved, the artist, myself, and how does that… if you want, navigation of an art space, manifest itself and I think that's the interesting thing.

I think what's really important as well for me is communication with a diverse audience as well, so it's not about the traditions of galleries, museums, etc, and I think it's about how we expose the knowledge that's held in these museums, whether it's artefacts, visual culture, whatever it is, because actually let's see how we can get that to make a communication with new and diverse audiences, and looking at it in a very loose way, so it's not necessarily thinking about the didactic transmission of that knowledge, it's how can that knowledge become new knowledge with the intersection of the audience. Yes, so it is kind of about a moment, really, or moments, or duration, or point.

**PG** Kind of a temporal process, you're saying?

**MM** Yes, definitely. And I almost think, almost while saying that I almost feel like I've failed in a way, because in some ways…

**CS** How so?

**MM** There's something about trying to create that moment and then you don't record it properly or there's something about how that moment becomes a new moment, or how do you move or shift on what has happened. So for instance, what we did with Leo, for instance, what's the next step to that? And we don't know until an opportunity presents itself and we don't know what that opportunity will present.

**PG** That leads us on to that question I raised earlier, which is documentation. So how did you document that event?

**MM** We've got film, photographs. We were also playing with technology as well at the time, because Leo's quite interested in technology, about what we assume technology is framed as now, but actually we were talking about technology from Benin, from centuries back and how that technology, industrialisation, etc, how that's changed. So there was this thing of doing a live transmission into the space and then the physical march, the physical objects changing, people taking photographs, tweeting them, Tumblring. But I also feel that, maybe 'failed' is the wrong word, maybe it's the progression hasn't been, or the route to the progression, hasn't been captured, do you know what I mean? You seem to understand when I say this?

**CS** Absolutely, yes. Because in the Africa galleries, which opened in 2001, we made a conscious decision to introduce people to the arts of Africa through the work of contemporary artists and then to have their work throughout the galleries, although that was a slowly evolving process. Way back in 1995 we'd worked with Sokari Douglas Camp, and Magdalene Odundo, and that had just briefly shown me the potential of how artists can in a sense mediate an exhibition or a display in a way that curators used to, or at least the curatorial voice can fade into the background. That doesn't mean to say you need a panel explaining why this work of art, what it's doing to you etc. In fact, we try to avoid that in the African galleries.

But Sokari and Magalene, they produce pieces of sculpture, ceramics. In a sense why I've felt a failure with Leo was because I really liked his work and we even got to the point of thinking of acquiring and getting some prices and so on, and getting these pieces into the gallery. For one reason and another we didn't, and he was the only artist up to that point who I'd targeted, who I failed to acquire the works. I think we will still at some point, but I can see the potential for doing what a lot of artists do, but with Leo in particular, of kind of addressing that contentious history of those collections.

And also the fact that he works, he puts particular weight and importance on materials, which is the way in which we decided to arrange the galleries, let people look at simple materials. We were criticised for that. There was a sort of element of people saying, oh, this is going back to the old kind of typological arrangement of things. But in the forged metal section, for example, not everything by any means is made of forged metal. It was more an idea of what these materials can signify. I could see that strongly in Leo's work.

I went to the two performances and marched with him. I think this kind of physical involvement is very good too. You get the real feeling of what he's doing. Then a couple of years ago the education department didn't back it. It was something that we did totally off the cuff and financed ourselves and we had this symposium called 'Benjamin, Benin and Britain'. Amazingly, the young people came, I think from Tate Collectives then, and it was a good mixture of people. I wasn't sure how it was going to work, but Leo, he wasn't sure when he told me later, he has this air of confidence. He rings you up and there's a sort of quiet voice, 'hello, this is Leo here'. Your mind goes into a sort of panic… Again, the filming people, we managed to lasso two or three people from the library to carry things along. It worked fine. And I think rather than the physical objects being in the gallery, this performance, it's there, it's out there now, it's in this e-book which is a powerful thing, I think, and it's almost superseded the need simply to have a physical object.

PG Does that also accord with what Leo is doing with the 'The Ens Project', which is that the objects are very much, it seems to me, secondary… not secondary, but part of this process which led to this event, which is the final, the expressive weight of the project, it's the main thing that's going to happen. And then when it happens, it's over. So in a way, from both of you, what I find quite interesting, quite exciting actually, is that you both mention this idea of failure. But it's a very productive failure.

CS Yes.

MM Oh yes. Definitely.

PG What is the challenge of this kind of work for the museum? And it sounds as though there are challenges to what you're doing.

MM Yes. But I think also perhaps it is about where we're all coming from in terms of our knowledge and experience of art and the traditions of art, the canon, whatever, the structures in which we've experienced them. So there's something about the way in which even though we want that unknown quantity and that's the exciting bit about the work, that actually there is something about, when I say failure it's kind of trying to think how can I possess it? But it's almost like trying to accept that actually you can't possess it. It's an organic and extremely nuanced moving form. But it's just how you try to understand that.

It's almost like you want to move it on to the next space, but it's non-fixed in a sense. You're not quite sure where it's going to go. So it's quite confusing. It's a positive failure, if you want. Like Chris says, there's lots of things that I would love to have done or to progress on with the work or to try something new, but actually until the opportunity arises, you just have to work it out. You have to have more conversations and see what the next opportunity is. But there's something about the impact, if you want, of that work, how do you possess that to enable it to manifest itself somewhere else? And I think that's perhaps what I mean by failure, because I haven't been able to get that impact to manifest itself somewhere else. But that's not necessarily a bad thing, because I was going to say when Chris mentioned 'Benin, Benjamin and Britain', that structure was amazing, for me that whole kind of deconstructed, suppose you like, you said it was like a performance…

CS It was.

MM …which inspired us to work with Leo at the 'Power Myth and Technology' around Meshac Gaba. We were looking at that kind of format, which was another really good way in which I think Leo engaged with our programme and with some of the young people he'd worked with in a deeper way as well.

**PG** Because there's also a kind of sense in which this sense of the slipperiness relates to, I guess, debates about performance generally, and how do you capture performance art?

**MM** But for me, I don't even know if it's that. Because I know that some of the acquisitions of Tate, whether it's ephemeral in our practices, it really is about how the artist begins to think, right, I want this to be captured. And Leo isn't really considering that, I don't think, at this point, when it comes to performances or whatever work he's going through. Because he can recreate something. It won't be exactly the same, but you could actually… as you know, installation works require it, there's a whole list of what you need to do, where you place it, what you do, the words that you use, etc. So I think that's more about what Leo wants as an artist, whether he wants it to be nailed down and captured in that way. And I think he's interested in that, but not in the way that we might want it, or not we, but the 'institutions' might want it to happen.

**PG** Because he does document his own work – quite fastidiously as well. It's very well documented. Categorised.

**MM** Yes. But I also think his work is the total of everything. It's the research, it's the conversations, it's the objects and then it's the performance, it's the whole thing.

**PG** Can you think of other kinds of artists or art works that are those kinds of?

**CS** Not in that way. I would have said someone like Jeremy Deller. I don't know much about his work, but I think the differences with that is that the specificity of some of Leo's research that he goes back to and he moves and manipulates and changes and shifts his artistic and aesthetic, if you want, and symbolic relationship to objects, materials, images as well. I think that's a big difference.

**MM** All the way through there are these little and sometimes big catalysts that set you off, and they may be quite personal things as well as general, historical and so on, that might be to do with the materials that he uses or the persona that he adopts. I remember in The Tanks… who is this guy? And it wasn't until a lot later on that I realised he was the architect, I think, wasn't he? I'm not a great West Africanist but I know about this thing called Odù Ifá, which is what the Yoruba people have, nothing's written down, and lots is written down with Leo's work.

But it's like a kind of thing to which lots of people contribute knowledge and history and ideas and architecture and art and poetry and so on, and all those things are featured, and religion, of course, in Leo's work. It's also a way of looking at history that isn't linear; it's a kind of cyclical thing. So you can get on to this roundabout of Leo's work and you can see as you go round all sorts of things that relate to many people in different parts of the world, Benin and the Ens, they're central, and the idea of this kind of aura, I think seems to be the head and the heart and so on, for powerful things.

But that's the great kind of delight of it in a way. And as a curator, or participator, whatever, member of the audience, it's just a pleasure to get on and I don't know whether I do ever get off. Probably once you're on you get a sense of maybe getting off sometimes, but there is no other work of art that I know of that is really comparable to this. You do have to go back to the beginning each time in a sense, and that's really important, you do have to be responsive and respond and not have certain expectations that you might have working with other artists, perhaps.

**PG** It's interesting, I had a bit of a Leo moment at the weekend, I went to see the Joseph Beuys display at Tate Modern and I went past the Beuys room and I forgot the name of the work ['Lightning with stag in its glare'], you know, the girder that's hanging across and it's kind of connected to the material that's hanging. I don't know, why, I just thought of Leo's work. I hadn't made a connection between Beuys and Leo before, but I just thought, again, because of the way the materials and the way that the materials have a kind of symbolic weight in Beuys' work, there's a performative element, it's an element of myth, and Beuys' interest also in technology, so I texted Leo and said, 'oh, Beuys, you know!' It implied, it relates to something you just said, his reply was, 'I always considered that "The Ens Project" preceded Beuys!'

Yes, and I spoke to him afterwards, and I think it relates to what you were just saying about his drawing on traditions that precede European modernism and Beuys' engagement with shamanism, which comes out of studying these kinds of cultures. I think Beuys doesn't have a total artwork but he doesn't separate art and life. His idea of social sculpture, it's for his art he's engaging the world and changing the world. I'm not sure that Leo's interested in changing the world, but his artwork is definitely more than the sum of its parts, its individual parts, which is so fascinating. I guess to round up, what have you learnt from working with Leo's work? What do you think are the implications for your institutions? And how has it challenged your institutions in any way?

**CS** I don't know if it's challenged but it's sort of impacted our institution since that. I think with Leo it blurred the edges between what's curatorial and what's programme. What I would say I've learnt from Leo's work is that thorough, rigorous research and the idea of an evolving artwork. I think working with Leo you actually experience it truly, and I think that I've definitely learnt a lot.

**PG** But there's also an element of chance in it as well.

**CS** Yes. There is. There's also a fear, I think. I get a sense that there's a fear that Leo doesn't want to explain his work too much. I think that's fine. But sometimes I think there are so many nuggets of goodness, if you want, that it can be missed sometimes. And I think, because we're all in this room, because we're all interested in his work and we know a fair bit about it and we look at it and we explore it, we have conversations with him, and I think that's the real kind of value, I think, of Leo's work as well. But then it's how is that communicated across to those who do not know the depth of his work?

**PG** Yes. And that came across actually for me in seeing his show at the New Art Exchange [Nottingham], which I think is the largest presentation of his work, of his objects anyway, to date. I spoke to a number of people on the opening, and many people just don't understand it at all, they don't get it, but they liked it. Because it's very beautiful show, the objects are very beautiful. But not many people at all thought that they really understood what he was doing. I spoke to the Director of the New Art Exchange who said, we definitely took a risk with Leo because our gallery is a kind of community-based gallery and Leo's work is quite challenging and Leo himself doesn't really, as you say, make a huge effort to communicate or give out a simple idea about what his work is. But he said he doesn't regret it at all because there's so many different entry points, you can take things from it.

**CS** With Leo, I think probably with most of the artists I work with, and as an artist myself, I'm responding on a very personal level as well as professional curatorial level. I suppose one of the things it's taught me is you really are with Leo in particular, you've got to be in it for the long haul, and you've got to be prepared for some frightening moments. You've got to be prepared to go with the flow. It's immensely rewarding, and if by doing that you can one way or another make his work more available to a wider number of people then that's being an important kind of element of your contribution, whether you feel that you failed a little. I think you endlessly will.

I think his biggest critic is his young 9-year-old cousin? And that's great. So he listens to what his young cousin is saying just as much as any professor or whatever. And when you think of the reams and reams and reams that have been written about the Benin bronzes and the history of Benin and so on, deservedly so, fantastic. I don't think there's anybody that's got anywhere near the kind of appreciation of the full depth and range of those objects and everything that surrounds them that Leo does. I suppose as somebody who's worked at the BM, a lifer, and one of the really most important and also most contentious collections that we have, actually working with an artist who can bring to life in a really dynamic right now kind of way what some of those issues are, and to think about the history that surrounds that whole tradition and in a way to make you and everybody else who has a little window into what Leo is doing feel really part of that too. It's an amazing kind of global, unifying kind of feeling, I think, that cuts across all ethnicities and age in an extraordinary kind of way.

**PG** There's a universalism about it.

**MM** Yes, definitely.

**PG** Last question: I think you'd probably all agree that we're talking about an extraordinary work of art which hasn't yet really been collected – but can it be collected?

**MM** I think it can, not in its totality, I don't think, but parts of it can. And I'm sure, Chris, that's probably what you want to do. Once you collect it then it's what happens around it. Like you said, the programme or the performance or the information, the research, how does that sit around the physicality of the work as well? It's just thinking of what you want or what are collectors looking for in real terms, in practical terms? You know, thinking about storage, even, how do you get as close to capturing it as you can, rather than thinking you can capture the completeness of it.

**CS** I suppose like any good curating of any work of art, it's got to be just an element that gives you a little toehold into the artist's vision, and that could be a film or it could be an object, it could be a number of things. And I've used one photograph of Leo and his two helpers standing in front of the Houses of Parliament and I've published that in about five different contexts including Fashion Africa. I ask Leo each time. So, in each of those instances that one image, and it's an interesting image too, is crossing time and place and politics and religion and all sorts of things.

People often ask why isn't this at Tate Modern? Pieces that we have in the British Museum, any work of art in any situation that's doing a different kind of… maybe the same work of art in that photograph has a different kind of resonancy each time it's used. So yes, it's collectable in that sense. But as curators, you've got to make sure that you don't try to confine it, because you've got to try to, however you use it, whatever piece of this great project you might have in your collections, you've got to make sure that that is a catalyst for thinking about the wider project. And how that relates to everybody who experiences it. And actually everybody who doesn't experience it as well, sooner or later, a lot of people are going to I think experience it. It's pretty remarkable work and it's expanding.

**PG** And proliferating.

**Leo Asemota,**
**Royal College of Art**
*Eo ipso*

London-based Nigerian artist Leo Asemota has been working on *The Ens Project* since spring 2005. The multipartite artwork continues to be evolved in response to three key elements: the Igue ceremony of the Head practiced by the Edo people of Benin City, Nigeria; the Victorian age of invention, exploration and conquest (part of which was the 1897 sacking of Benin City by the British and the theft and dispersal to western museums of the famous 'Benin Bronzes'); and Walter Benjamin's seminal treatise on art in the technological age. Central to the (Project's) artist's ideas are a range of materials such as coal, orhue (kaolin chalk), palm oil, iron and brass/bronze that relate and mediate complex histories and geographies of trade, conquest and technological transformation. The works in this exhibition are part an expansive body of work of Asemota's discoveries and experiences in the course of *The Ens Project*. The photographs, documents and video in this installation convey ideas and the conceptual framework for the staging *of Eo ipso* the live art work Asemota considers to be the last component in *The Ens Project*.

www.theensproject.net

Leo Asemota 'eon to eons'

A *Eo ipso* (spelling and grammar check), screen shot

B *10.08.2005*. Colour photograph. Photo by Coral Thomas

C 1 *Human Head*, 10th millennium B.C. Eynan/Ain Mallaha
Limestone; 3 ⅛ × 2 ½ in (8 × 6.3 cm)
Excavations of the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique
Collection of the Israel Antiquities Authority, IDAM 57-895
Copyright © 2000–2008 The Metropolitan Museum of Art. All rights reserved.
Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the OASC initiative

2 Antoine Thomas, *Leo's head*. Ink on paper

3 Antoine Thomas *Leo's head*. Ink on paper

4 *Head of an Oba*, 16th century (ca. 1550). Nigeria; Edo peoples, court of Benin
Brass; H. 9 ¼ × W. 8 ⅝ × D. 9 in. (23.5 × 21.9 × 22.9 cm)
The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979
Accession Number: 1979.206.86
Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the OASC initiative http://www.metmuseum.org/research/image-resources#scholarly

5 Leo Asemota at the British Museum viewing Benin commemorative heads. Video still
Courtesy of Leo Asemota / Eo*T*LA

6 Slide (Henry Moore *Helmet Head No.1*). ©Tate Gallery 4/1095 / ©The Henry Moore Foundation

D 1 Page spread, H. Ling Roth, *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors*

2 Centre for Anthropology AOA British Museum, Book/Journal Request

3 Leo Asemota, *Geometry of Obeisance,* charcoal on archival pigment print in artists' frame

4 Centre for Anthropology AOA British Museum, Book/Journal Request

5 Cult of the Moon, photocopy of J. Wyndham, *The Curse of Obo: A tragedy of Benin*

6 *Fig. 1 Total Lunar Eclipse of 14 April 2014*
Courtesy NASA

E 1 Page spread*, Coal: British Mining in Art 1680-1980,* exhibition catalogue

2 *African finch.* Brass

3 Newspaper cover, *Hurriyet*, 15 May 2014

4 Newspaper clipping, Isabel Hunter, 'Turkey's pit of despair ', *The Independent,* Thursday 15 May 2014.

F 1 Leo Asemota, *Observation of material (After Grunewald's Dead Christ).* Graphite, palm oil, coral and brass pins on paper

2 *The Palm Vegetable Oils and Fats, A Progress Book*, Unilever Limited, 1955

3 Leo Asemota, *Observing The Handmaiden*. Coniunctio*, orhue (kaolin), coal, palm oil, satin and archival pigment print in artist's frame. Coniunctio*: orhue (kaolin) and coal combined

4 Leo Asemota, *Untitled,* Plaster impregnated bandage

5 Newspaper cover, 'Grey Matters', *The Guardian,* G2
Wednesday 16 April 2014

G 1 Cover, Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Translator J. A. Underwood), Penguin Great Ideas, 2008

2 Spread, Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Translator J. A. Underwood), Penguin Great Ideas, 2008

3-6 Leo Asemota, *Observations on a system of recording the live art work Eo ipso.* Ink on paper

7 Leo Asemota and Michael Lindsay in conversation at 16OZ studios, London on a system of recording the live art work *Eo ipso*. Photos by Serkan Nihat

H 1 Centre for Anthropology AOA British Museum, Book/Journal Request

2 Ehi: Three Stories from Benin, *Benin Studies R. E. Bradbury*, artist's bound photocopy

3 Ebiware Dotimi Okiy, *Igue 2009*, colour photograph
© 2009 Ebiware Okiy Photoshop

4 Leo Asemota, *Observation of material (Ellipse in a ring*), Orhue (kaolin), coal and outside calliper

I 1 Newspaper cover, *The New York Times*, Sunday 4 July 2010. Articles selected on association with *The Observer*

2 Newspaper clipping, Sarah Sands, 'We must bring a human scale to technology', *Evening Standard*, Tuesday 29 April 2014

3 Newspaper clipping, Natasha Singer, 'Meet Intel's digital anthropologist', *The New York Times,* 15 & 16 February 2014

J 1 Basement studio

2 Assemblages in the Contemporary Rooms at Eo*T*LA in preparation for the *Transfigurations* exhibition at MACBA

3 Installation view of *The Prime Mover's will on the Architect* in the Contemporary Rooms at Eo*T*LA (Autumn/Winter 2010). Photos by Sally Fischer.
Courtesy of Leo Asemota / Eo*T*LA

### eon

ORIGIN: mid 17th cent. via ecclesiastical Latin from Greek *aiōn ‘age.’*

an indefinite and very long period of time

- *Astronomy & Geology* a unit of time equal to a billion years.
- *Geology* a major division of geological time, subdivided into eras.
- *Philosophy* (in Neoplatonism, Platonism, and Gnosticism) a power existing from eternity; an emanation or phase of the supreme deity.
- An age of the universe; immeasurable period; eternity

### Edo

ORIGIN: the name of Benin City in Edo.

- a member of a people inhabiting the district of Benin in present day Nigeria. The peoples of Benin were ruled since the 14th century by a longstanding dynasty of Obas (kings). Its tradition of art and ceremony is one of the most sophisticated in the history of art, renowned for its refinement and majestic beauty. The British sacked Benin in 1897, its art looted and sold to defray the cost of the expedition. Benin sculpture can be found in museums and personal collections across the world.
- of or relating to this people or their language.

### ego

ORIGIN: early 19th cent. from Latin, literally ‘I.’

a person’s sense of self-esteem or self-importance

- *Philosophy (in metaphysics)* the self; a conscious thinking subject as opposed to non-ego or object)
- *Psychoanalysis* the part of the mind which is organized and has a sense of individuality (thus used by Sigmund Freud to distinguish it from the primitive, impersonal, and wholly unconscious part which he called the id (the part of the mind in which innate instinctive impulses and primary processes are manifest) and is itself modified by the superego (the part of a person’s mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reflecting learned social standards)

### Leo

ORIGIN Latin.

- *Astronomy* a large constellation (the Lion) in the Northern hemisphere, lying between Cancer and Virgo, said to represent the lion slain by Hercules. It contains the bright stars Regulus and Denebola and numerous galaxies.
- *Astrology* the fifth sign of the zodiac, which the sun enters about July 23.
- (**a Leo**) ( pl. **Leos**) a person born when the sun is in this sign between about July 23 and August 22.
- *Christendom* the name of 13 popes, notably Leo X (1475–1521), pope from 1513; born *Giovanni de’ Medici* was a noted patron of learning and of the arts. He excommunicated Martin Luther and bestowed the title of **Fidei Defensor** (Defender of the Faith) on Henry VIII of England. This phrase is abbreviated as **F D** or **FID DEF** on all British coins.
- **Art** the name of artist Leo Asemota (b. 10 August 1967 in Benin City, Nigeria)

### do

verb

- perform, effect, execute (an action, the precise nature of which is often unspecified)
- work on (something) to bring it to completion or to a required state
- produce or give a performance of (a particular play, opera, etc.)
- result in: to serve the needs of
- be suitable or acceptable
- to translate or adapt form or language of

### so

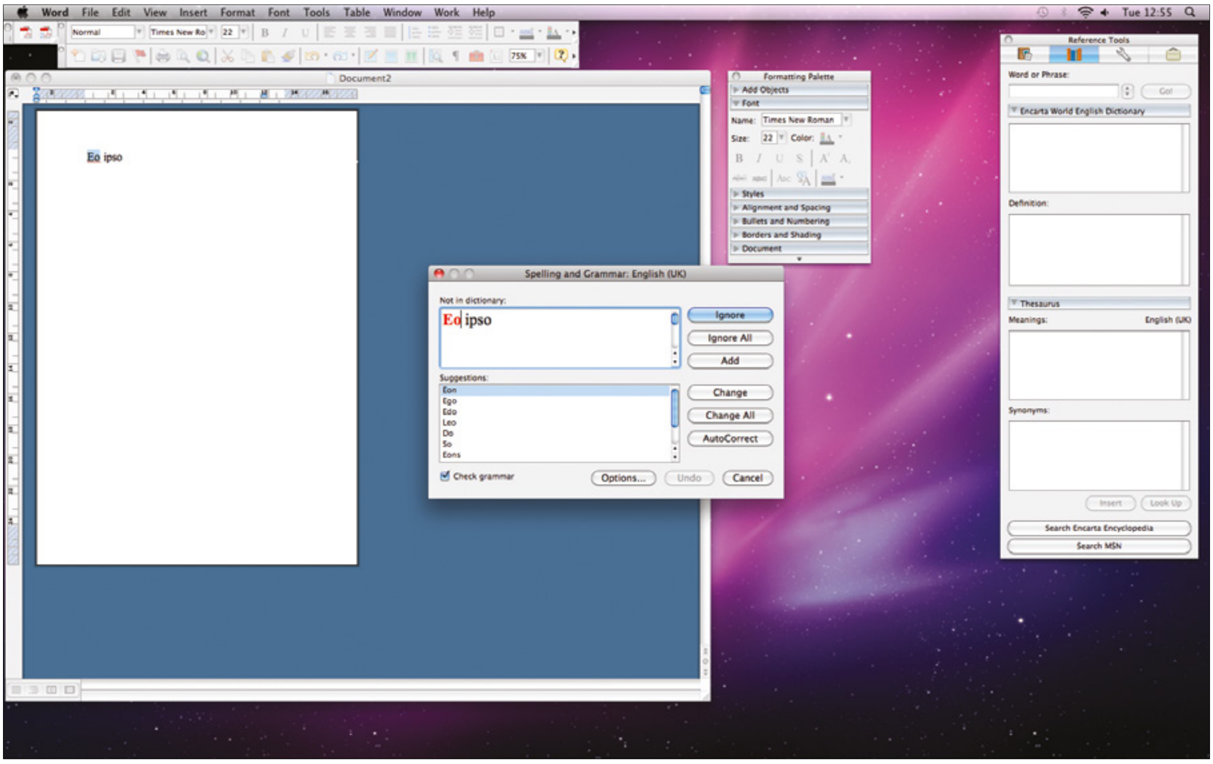
adverb

- in the manner, with result, described or indicated
- and for this reason; therefore
- (**so that**) with the aim that; in order that:
- and then; as the next step
- introducing a concluding statement
- [as submodifier] to such a great extent
- extremely; very much (used for emphasis)
- referring back to something previously mentioned
- similarly; and also
- in the same way; correspondingly

### eons

(see eon)

A



Eo ipso

Spelling and Grammar: English (UK)

Not in dictionary:

Eo ipso

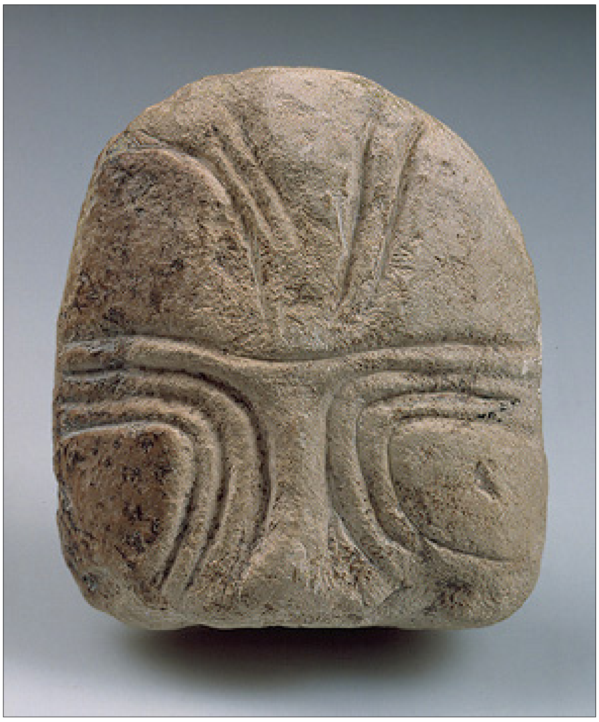
Suggestions:

Eon
Ego
Edo
Leo
Do
So
Eons

☑ Check grammar

B

C



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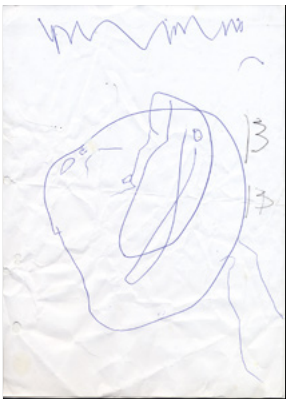

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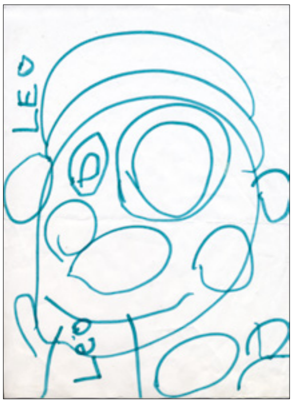
LEO
Leo

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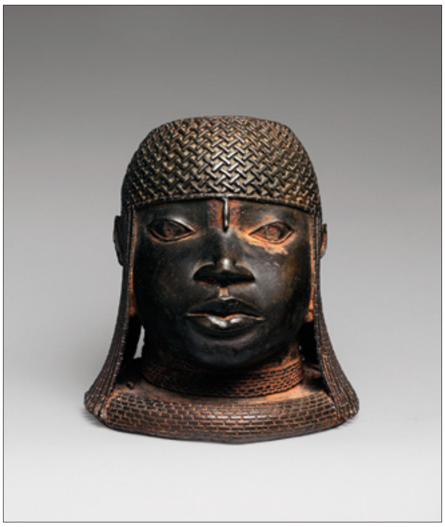


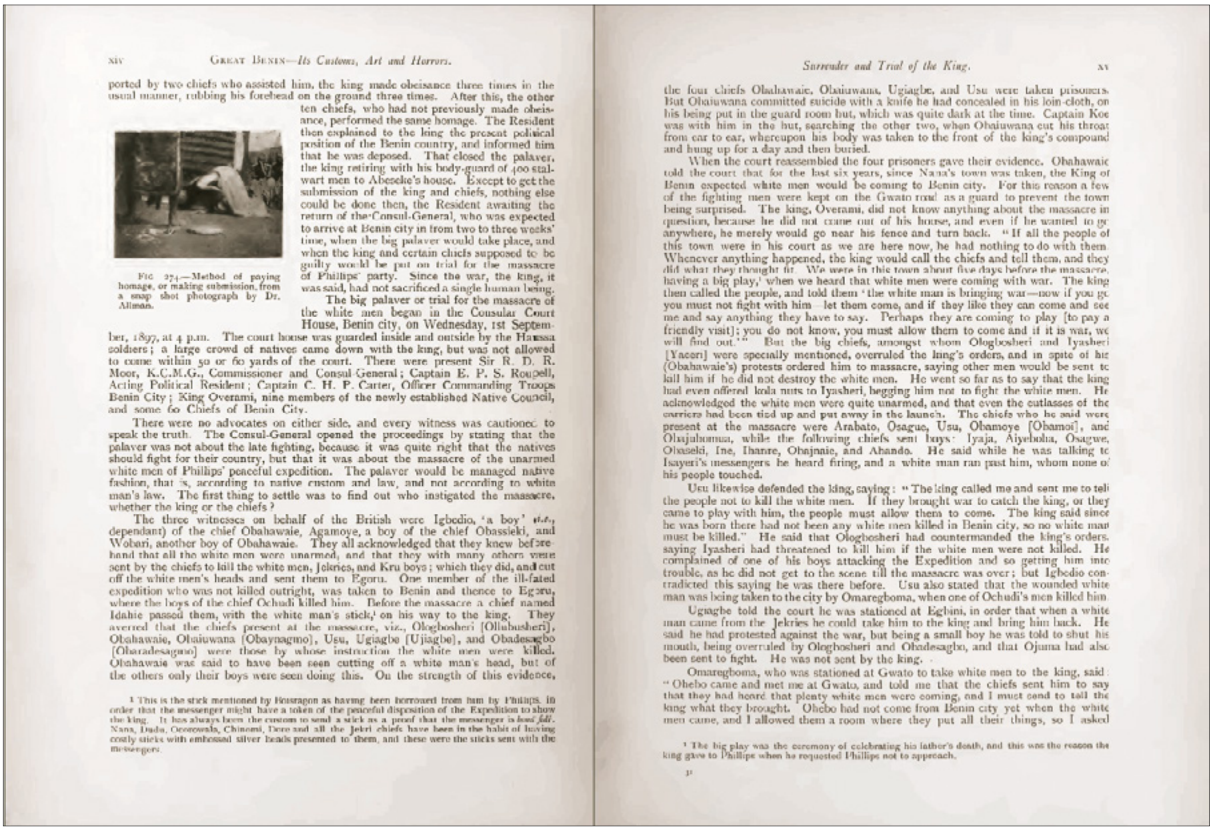
4

5

Henry MOORE, OM, CH
Helmet Head No. 1 (1950)
(33.0 x 26.0 x 25.4)
TG T00388
TateGallery
© Copyright 4/1095
© The Henry Moore Foundation

6

D



xiv GREAT BENIN—*Its Customs, Art and Horrors.*

ported by two chiefs who assisted him, the king made obeisance three times in the usual manner, rubbing his forehead on the ground three times. After this, the other ten chiefs, who had not previously made obeisance, performed the same homage. The Resident then explained to the king the present political position of the Benin country, and informed him that he was deposed. That closed the palaver, the king retiring with his body-guard of 400 stalwart men to Abeseke's house. Except to get the submission of the king and chiefs, nothing else could be done then, the Resident awaiting the return of the Consul-General, who was expected to arrive at Benin city in from two to three weeks' time, when the big palaver would take place, and when the king and certain chiefs supposed to be guilty would be put on trial for the massacre of Phillips' party. Since the war, the king, it was said, had not sacrificed a single human being.

FIG. 274.—Method of paying homage, or making submission, from a snap shot photograph by Dr. Allman.

The big palaver or trial for the massacre of the white men began in the Consular Court House, Benin city, on Wednesday, 1st September, 1897, at 4 p.m. The court house was guarded inside and outside by the Haussa soldiers; a large crowd of natives came down with the king, but was not allowed to come within 50 or 60 yards of the court. There were present Sir R. D. R. Moor, K.C.M.G., Commissioner and Consul-General; Captain E. P. S. Roupell, Acting Political Resident; Captain C. H. P. Carter, Officer Commanding Troops Benin City; King Overami, nine members of the newly established Native Council, and some 60 Chiefs of Benin City.

There were no advocates on either side, and every witness was cautioned to speak the truth. The Consul-General opened the proceedings by stating that the palaver was not about the late fighting, because it was quite right that the natives should fight for their country, but that it was about the massacre of the unarmed white men of Phillips' peaceful expedition. The palaver would be managed native fashion, that is, according to native custom and law, and not according to white man's law. The first thing to settle was to find out who instigated the massacre, whether the king or the chiefs?

The three witnesses on behalf of the British were Igbedio, 'a boy' i.e., dependant) of the chief Obahawaie, Agamoye, a boy of the chief Obassieki, and Wobari, another boy of Obahawaie. They all acknowledged that they knew beforehand that all the white men were unarmed, and that they with many others were sent by the chiefs to kill the white men, Jekries, and Kru boys; which they did, and cut off the white men's heads and sent them to Egoru. One member of the ill-fated expedition who was not killed outright, was taken to Benin and thence to Egoru, where the boys of the chief Ochudi killed him. Before the massacre a chief named Idahie passed them, with the white man's stick,[1] on his way to the king. They averred that the chiefs present at the massacre, viz., Ologbosheri [Ollubusheri], Obahawaie, Obaiuwana [Obaynagmo], Usu, Ugiagbe [Ujiagbe], and Obadesagbo [Obaradesagmo] were those by whose instruction the white men were killed. Obahawaie was said to have been seen cutting off a white man's head, but of the others only their boys were seen doing this. On the strength of this evidence,

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[1] This is the stick mentioned by Boisragon as having been borrowed from him by Phillips, in order that the messenger might have a token of the peaceful disposition of the Expedition to show the king. It has always been the custom to send a stick as a proof that the messenger is *bonâ fide*. Nana, Dudu, Ocorowala, Chinomi, Dore and all the Jekri chiefs have been in the habit of having costly sticks with embossed silver heads presented to them, and these were the sticks sent with the messengers.

*Surrender and Trial of the King.* xv

the four chiefs Obahawaie, Obaiuwana, Ugiagbe, and Usu were taken prisoners. But Obaiuwana committed suicide with a knife he had concealed in his loin-cloth, on his being put in the guard room hut, which was quite dark at the time. Captain Koe was with him in the hut, searching the other two, when Obaiuwana cut his throat from ear to ear, whereupon his body was taken to the front of the king's compound and hung up for a day and then buried.

When the court reassembled the four prisoners gave their evidence. Obahawaie told the court that for the last six years, since Nana's town was taken, the King of Benin expected white men would be coming to Benin city. For this reason a few of the fighting men were kept on the Gwato road as a guard to prevent the town being surprised. The king, Overami, did not know anything about the massacre in question, because he did not come out of his house, and even if he wanted to go anywhere, he merely would go near his fence and turn back. "If all the people of this town were in his court as we are here now, he had nothing to do with them. Whenever anything happened, the king would call the chiefs and tell them, and they did what they thought fit. We were in this town about five days before the massacre, having a big play,[1] when we heard that white men were coming with war. The king then called the people, and told them 'the white man is bringing war—now if you go you must not fight with him—let them come, and if they like they can come and see me and say anything they have to say. Perhaps they are coming to play [to pay a friendly visit]; you do not know, you must allow them to come and if it is war, we will find out.'" But the big chiefs, amongst whom Ologbosheri and Iyasheri [Yaceri] were specially mentioned, overruled the king's orders, and in spite of his (Obahawaie's) protests ordered him to massacre, saying other men would be sent to kill him if he did not destroy the white men. He went so far as to say that the king had even offered kola nuts to Iyasheri, begging him not to fight the white men. He acknowledged the white men were quite unarmed, and that even the cutlasses of the carriers had been tied up and put away in the launch. The chiefs who he said were present at the massacre were Arabato, Osague, Usu, Obamoye [Obamoi], and Olajubomua, while the following chiefs sent boys: Iyaja, Aiyebolia, Osagwe, Obaseki, Ine, Ihanre, Obajnnie, and Ahando. He said while he was talking to Isayeri's messengers he heard firing, and a white man ran past him, whom none of his people touched.

Usu likewise defended the king, saying: "The king called me and sent me to tell the people not to kill the white men. If they brought war to catch the king, or they came to play with him, the people must allow them to come. The king said since he was born there had not been any white men killed in Benin city, so no white man must be killed." He said that Ologbosheri had countermanded the king's orders, saying Iyasheri had threatened to kill him if the white men were not killed. He complained of one of his boys attacking the Expedition and so getting him into trouble, as he did not get to the scene till the massacre was over; but Igbedio contradicted this saying he was there before. Usu also stated that the wounded white man was being taken to the city by Omaregboma, when one of Ochudi's men killed him.

Ugiagbe told the court he was stationed at Egbini, in order that when a white man came from the Jekries he could take him to the king and bring him back. He said he had protested against the war, but being a small boy he was told to shut his mouth, being overruled by Ologbosheri and Obadesagbo, and that Ojuma had also been sent to fight. He was not sent by the king.

Omaregboma, who was stationed at Gwato to take white men to the king, said: "Ohebo came and met me at Gwato, and told me that the chiefs sent him to say that they had heard that plenty white men were coming, and I must send to tell the king what they brought. Ohebo had not come from Benin city yet when the white men came, and I allowed them a room where they put all their things, so I asked

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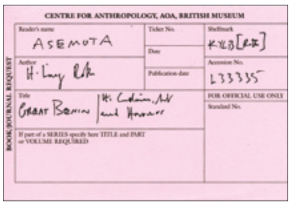
[1] The big play was the ceremony of celebrating his father's death, and this was the reason the king gave to Phillips when he requested Phillips not to approach.

31

1



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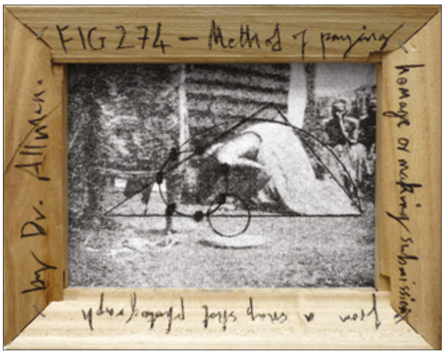
FIG 274 – Method of paying
homage or making submission
from a snap shot photograph
by Dr. Allman

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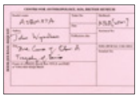

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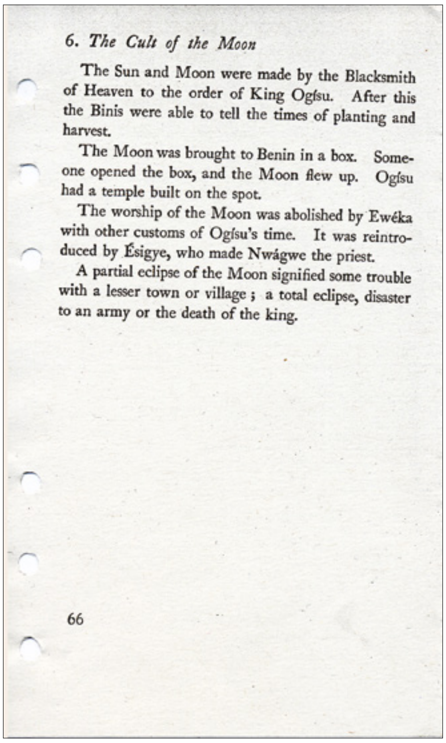

### 6. *The Cult of the Moon*

The Sun and Moon were made by the Blacksmith of Heaven to the order of King Ogísu. After this the Binis were able to tell the times of planting and harvest.

The Moon was brought to Benin in a box. Someone opened the box, and the Moon flew up. Ogísu had a temple built on the spot.

The worship of the Moon was abolished by Ewéka with other customs of Ogísu's time. It was reintroduced by Ésigye, who made Nwágwe the priest.

A partial eclipse of the Moon signified some trouble with a lesser town or village; a total eclipse, disaster to an army or the death of the king.

66

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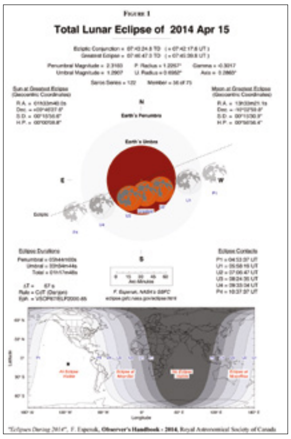
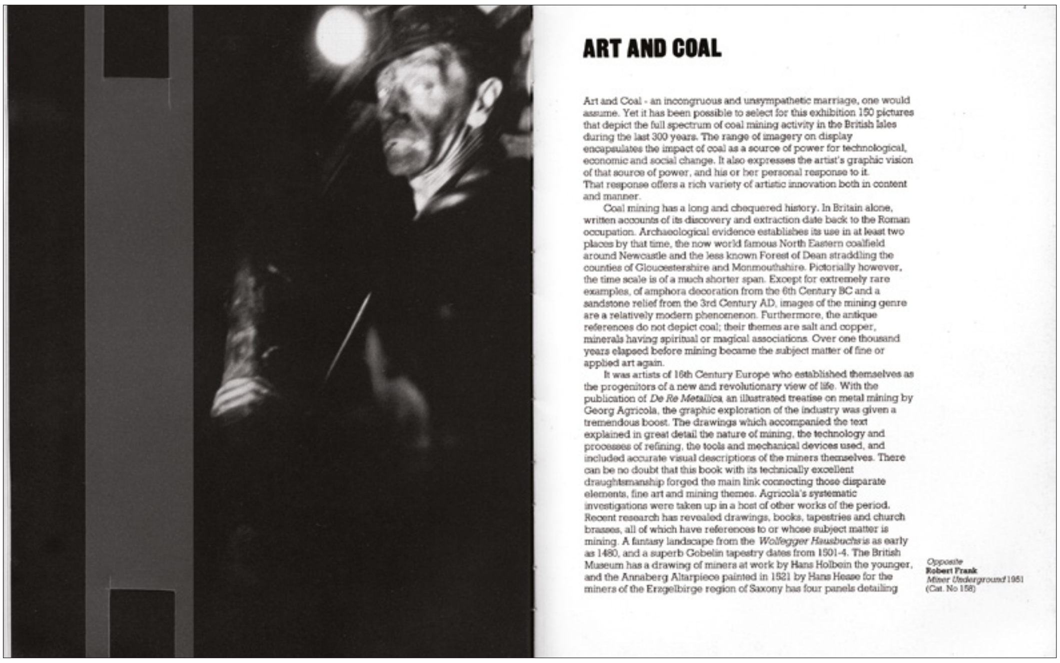


FIGURE 1
Total Lunar Eclipse of 2014 Apr 15
Sun at Greatest Eclipse (Geocentric Coordinates)
Moon at Greatest Eclipse (Geocentric Coordinates)
N
Earth's Penumbra
Earth's Umbra
E
W
S
Ecliptic
Eclipse Durations
Eclipse Contacts
Arc-Minutes
Longitude
Latitude

"*Eclipses During 2014*", F. Espenak, **Observer's Handbook - 2014**, Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

6

E



# ART AND COAL

Art and Coal - an incongruous and unsympathetic marriage, one would assume. Yet it has been possible to select for this exhibition 150 pictures that depict the full spectrum of coal mining activity in the British Isles during the last 300 years. The range of imagery on display encapsulates the impact of coal as a source of power for technological, economic and social change. It also expresses the artist's graphic vision of that source of power, and his or her personal response to it. That response offers a rich variety of artistic innovation both in content and manner.

Coal mining has a long and chequered history. In Britain alone, written accounts of its discovery and extraction date back to the Roman occupation. Archaeological evidence establishes its use in at least two places by that time, the now world famous North Eastern coalfield around Newcastle and the less known Forest of Dean straddling the counties of Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire. Pictorially however, the time scale is of a much shorter span. Except for extremely rare examples, of amphora decoration from the 6th Century BC and a sandstone relief from the 3rd Century AD, images of the mining genre are a relatively modern phenomenon. Furthermore, the antique references do not depict coal; their themes are salt and copper, minerals having spiritual or magical associations. Over one thousand years elapsed before mining became the subject matter of fine or applied art again.

It was artists of 16th Century Europe who established themselves as the progenitors of a new and revolutionary view of life. With the publication of *De Re Metallica*, an illustrated treatise on metal mining by Georg Agricola, the graphic exploration of the industry was given a tremendous boost. The drawings which accompanied the text explained in great detail the nature of mining, the technology and processes of refining, the tools and mechanical devices used, and included accurate visual descriptions of the miners themselves. There can be no doubt that this book with its technically excellent draughtsmanship forged the main link connecting those disparate elements, fine art and mining themes. Agricola's systematic investigations were taken up in a host of other works of the period. Recent research has revealed drawings, books, tapestries and church brasses, all of which have references to or whose subject matter is mining. A fantasy landscape from the *Wolfegger Hausbuchs* is as early as 1480, and a superb Gobelin tapestry dates from 1501-4. The British Museum has a drawing of miners at work by Hans Holbein the younger, and the Annaberg Altarpiece painted in 1521 by Hans Hesse for the miners of the Erzgelbirge region of Saxony has four panels detailing

*Opposite*
**Robert Frank**
*Miner Underground* 1951
(Cat. No 158)

1

2

Hürriyet ORADAYDI

HER NEFES ÖLÜM

BAŞIMIZ SAĞ OLSUN

245 ölü

3 GÜN MİLLİ YAS

Hürriyet

VARDİYADA RUS RULETİ

Enkaz altında kalan mutluluk

TÜRKİYE'NİN başı sağ olsun

Arda'yı böyle teselli ettiler

Onlar da ağlıyor

Kaçış odası neden zorunlu değil

KAZA BU IŞIN FITRATINDA VAR

Duygu dolu anlar yaşadı

O RESİM NİHAL'İN

ALMANYA: YANINIZDAYIZ

3

World

Turkey's pit of despair

4

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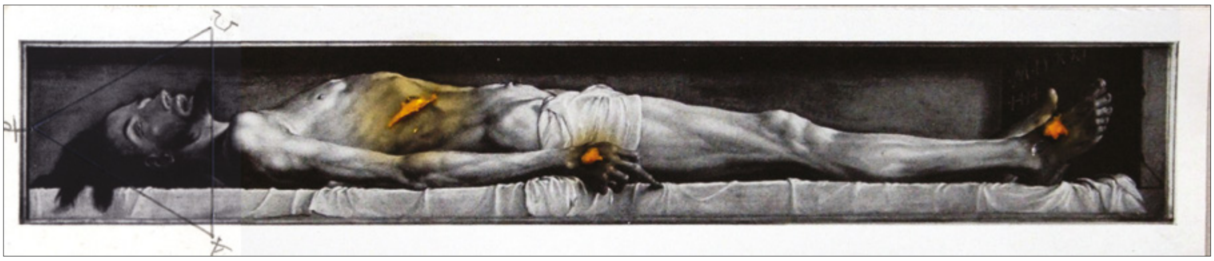

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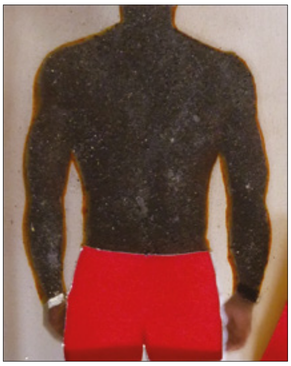
THE PALM

SHELL
KERNEL
PERICARP

2



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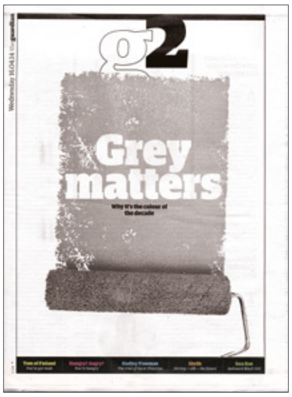

Wednesday 16.04.14 the guardian

g2

Grey matters

Why it's the colour of the decade

5

G

Walter Benjamin The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction GREAT IDEAS

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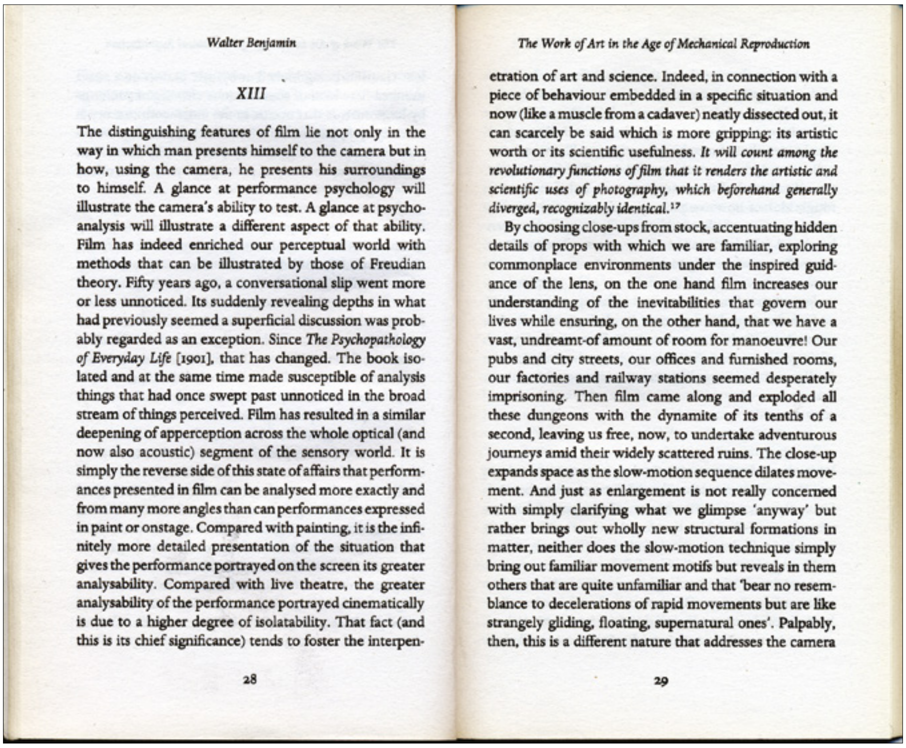

Walter Benjamin

XIII

The distinguishing features of film lie not only in the way in which man presents himself to the camera but in how, using the camera, he presents his surroundings to himself. A glance at performance psychology will illustrate the camera's ability to test. A glance at psychoanalysis will illustrate a different aspect of that ability. Film has indeed enriched our perceptual world with methods that can be illustrated by those of Freudian theory. Fifty years ago, a conversational slip went more or less unnoticed. Its suddenly revealing depths in what had previously seemed a superficial discussion was probably regarded as an exception. Since *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* [1901], that has changed. The book isolated and at the same time made susceptible of analysis things that had once swept past unnoticed in the broad stream of things perceived. Film has resulted in a similar deepening of apperception across the whole optical (and now also acoustic) segment of the sensory world. It is simply the reverse side of this state of affairs that performances presented in film can be analysed more exactly and from many more angles than can performances expressed in paint or onstage. Compared with painting, it is the infinitely more detailed presentation of the situation that gives the performance portrayed on the screen its greater analysability. Compared with live theatre, the greater analysability of the performance portrayed cinematically is due to a higher degree of isolatability. That fact (and this is its chief significance) tends to foster the interpen-

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The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

etration of art and science. Indeed, in connection with a piece of behaviour embedded in a specific situation and now (like a muscle from a cadaver) neatly dissected out, it can scarcely be said which is more gripping: its artistic worth or its scientific usefulness. *It will count among the revolutionary functions of film that it renders the artistic and scientific uses of photography, which beforehand generally diverged, recognizably identical.*[17]

By choosing close-ups from stock, accentuating hidden details of props with which we are familiar, exploring commonplace environments under the inspired guidance of the lens, on the one hand film increases our understanding of the inevitabilities that govern our lives while ensuring, on the other hand, that we have a vast, undreamt-of amount of room for manoeuvre! Our pubs and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our factories and railway stations seemed desperately imprisoning. Then film came along and exploded all these dungeons with the dynamite of its tenths of a second, leaving us free, now, to undertake adventurous journeys amid their widely scattered ruins. The close-up expands space as the slow-motion sequence dilates movement. And just as enlargement is not really concerned with simply clarifying what we glimpse 'anyway' but rather brings out wholly new structural formations in matter, neither does the slow-motion technique simply bring out familiar movement motifs but reveals in them others that are quite unfamiliar and that 'bear no resemblance to decelerations of rapid movements but are like strangely gliding, floating, supernatural ones'. Palpably, then, this is a different nature that addresses the camera

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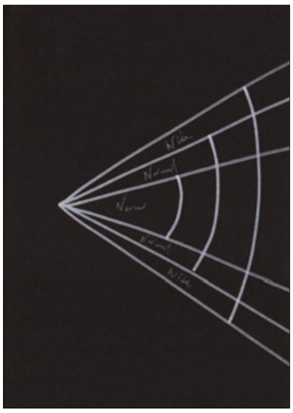

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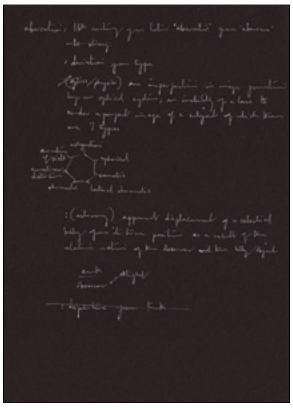

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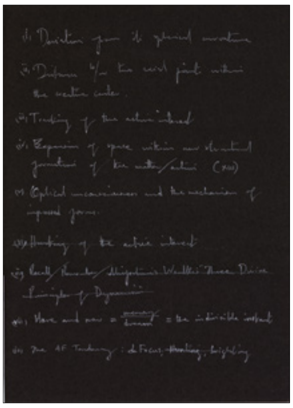

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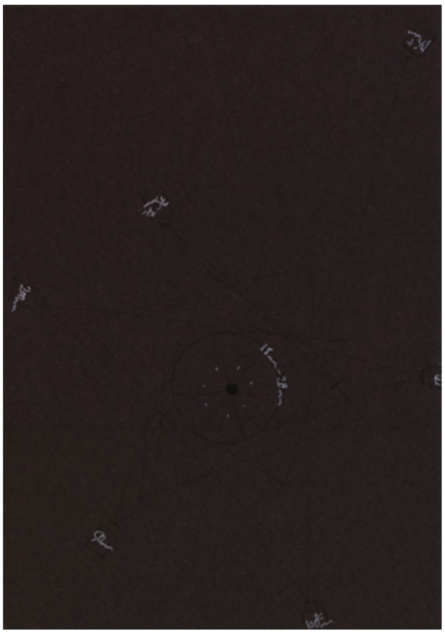

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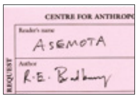
CENTRE FOR ANTHROPO

REQUEST

Reader's name: ASEMOTA

Author: R.E. Bradbury

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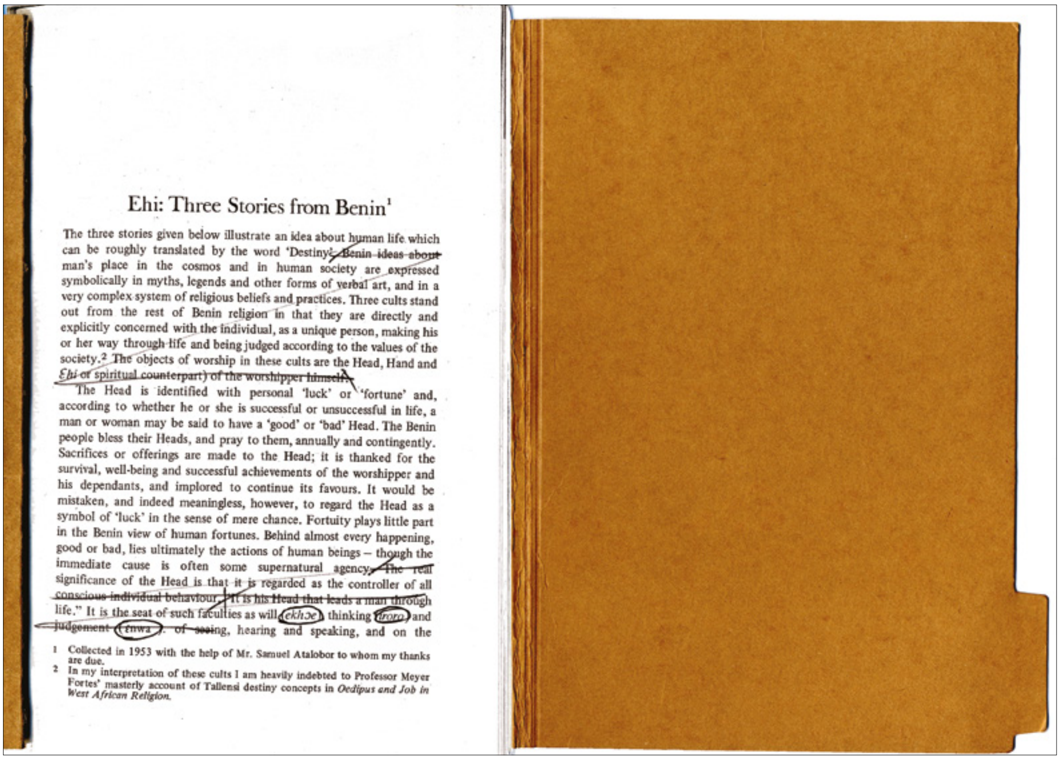
### Ehi: Three Stories from Benin[1]

The three stories given below illustrate an idea about human life which can be roughly translated by the word 'Destiny'. ~~Benin ideas about~~ man's place in the cosmos and in human society are expressed symbolically in myths, legends and other forms of verbal art, and in a very complex system of religious beliefs and practices. Three cults stand out from the rest of Benin religion in that they are directly and explicitly concerned with the individual, as a unique person, making his or her way through life and being judged according to the values of the society.[2] The objects of worship in these cults are the Head, Hand and ~~Ehi or spiritual counterpart) of the worshipper himself.~~

The Head is identified with personal 'luck' or 'fortune' and, according to whether he or she is successful or unsuccessful in life, a man or woman may be said to have a 'good' or 'bad' Head. The Benin people bless their Heads, and pray to them, annually and contingently. Sacrifices or offerings are made to the Head; it is thanked for the survival, well-being and successful achievements of the worshipper and his dependants, and implored to continue its favours. It would be mistaken, and indeed meaningless, however, to regard the Head as a symbol of 'luck' in the sense of mere chance. Fortuity plays little part in the Benin view of human fortunes. Behind almost every happening, good or bad, lies ultimately the actions of human beings – though the immediate cause is often some supernatural agency. ~~The real~~ significance of the Head is that it is regarded as the controller of all ~~conscious individual behaviour. 'It is his Head that leads a man through~~ life." It is the seat of such faculties as will (ekhɔe), thinking (iroro) and ~~judgement~~ (enwa), of ~~seeing~~, hearing and speaking, and on the

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[1] Collected in 1953 with the help of Mr. Samuel Atalobor to whom my thanks are due.

[2] In my interpretation of these cults I am heavily indebted to Professor Meyer Fortes' masterly account of Tallensi destiny concepts in *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion.*

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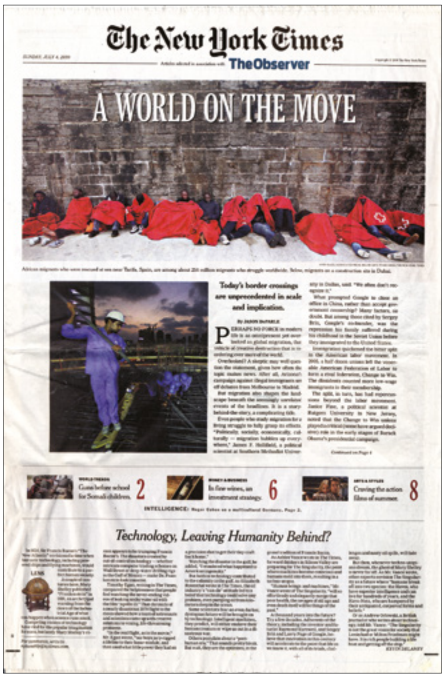
## I


The New York Times

TheObserver

A WORLD ON THE MOVE

Today's border crossings are unprecedented in scale and implication.

Guns before school for Somali children. 2

In fine wines, an investment strategy. 6

Craving the action films of summer. 8

Technology, Leaving Humanity Behind?

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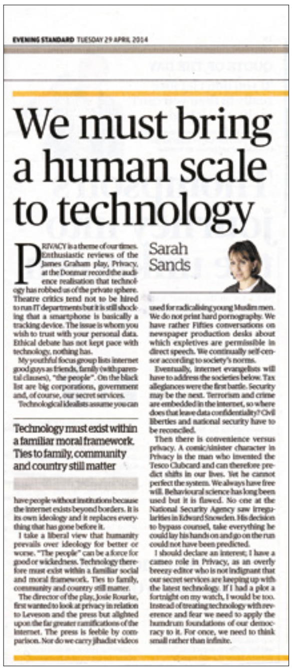
EVENING STANDARD TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2014

# We must bring a human scale to technology

Sarah Sands

PRIVACY is a theme of our times. Enthusiastic reviews of the James Graham play, Privacy, at the Donmar record the audience realisation that technology has robbed us of the private sphere. Theatre critics tend not to be hired to run IT departments but it is still shocking that a smartphone is basically a tracking device. The issue is whom you wish to trust with your personal data. Ethical debate has not kept pace with technology, nothing has.

My youthful focus group lists internet good guys as friends, family (with parental clauses), "the people". On the black list are big corporations, government and, of course, our secret services.

Technological idealists assume you can have people without institutions because the internet exists beyond borders. It is its own ideology and it replaces everything that has gone before it.

> Technology must exist within a familiar moral framework. Ties to family, community and country still matter

I take a liberal view that humanity prevails over ideology for better or worse. "The people" can be a force for good or wickedness. Technology therefore must exist within a familiar social and moral framework. Ties to family, community and country still matter.

The director of the play, Josie Rourke, first wanted to look at privacy in relation to Leveson and the press but alighted upon the far greater ramifications of the internet. The press is feeble by comparison. Nor do we carry jihadist videos used for radicalising young Muslim men. We do not print hard pornography. We have rather Fifties conversations on newspaper production desks about which expletives are permissible in direct speech. We continually self-censor according to society's norms.

Eventually, internet evangelists will have to address the societies below. Tax allegiances were the first battle. Security may be the next. Terrorism and crime are embedded in the internet, so where does that leave data confidentiality? Civil liberties and national security have to be reconciled.

Then there is convenience versus privacy. A comic/sinister character in Privacy is the man who invented the Tesco Clubcard and can therefore predict shifts in our lives. Yet he cannot perfect the system. We always have free will. Behavioural science has long been used but it is flawed. No one at the National Security Agency saw irregularities in Edward Snowden. His decision to bypass counsel, take everything he could lay his hands on and go on the run could not have been predicted.

I should declare an interest; I have a cameo role in Privacy, as an overly breezy editor who is not indignant that our secret services are keeping up with the latest technology. If I had a plot a fortnight on my watch, I would be too. Instead of treating technology with reverence and fear we need to apply the humdrum foundations of our democracy to it. For once, we need to think small rather than infinite.

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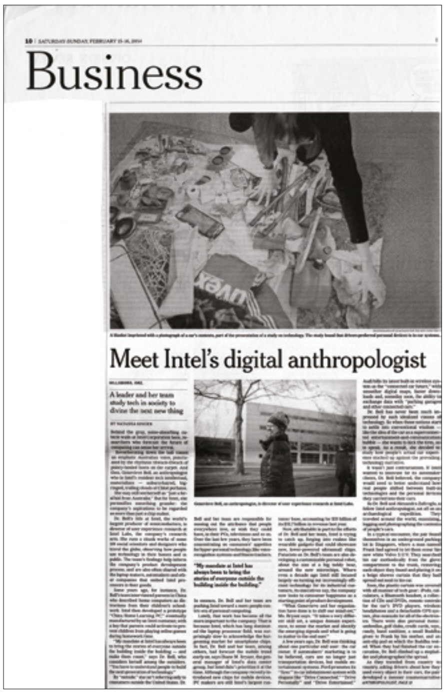
Business

Meet Intel's digital anthropologist

A leader and her team study tech in society to divine the next new thing

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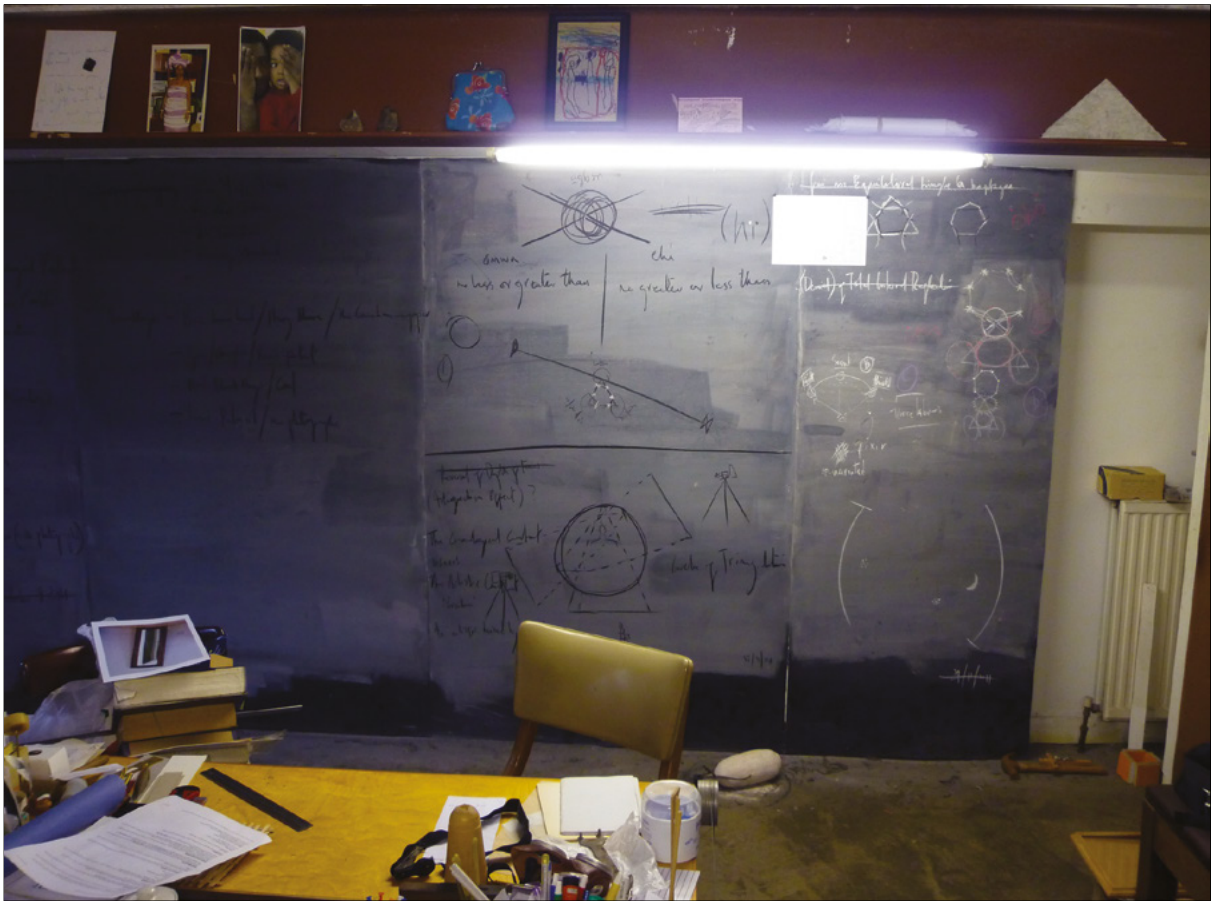
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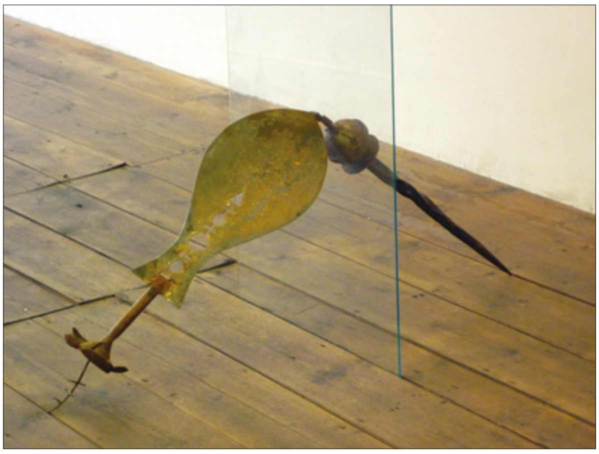

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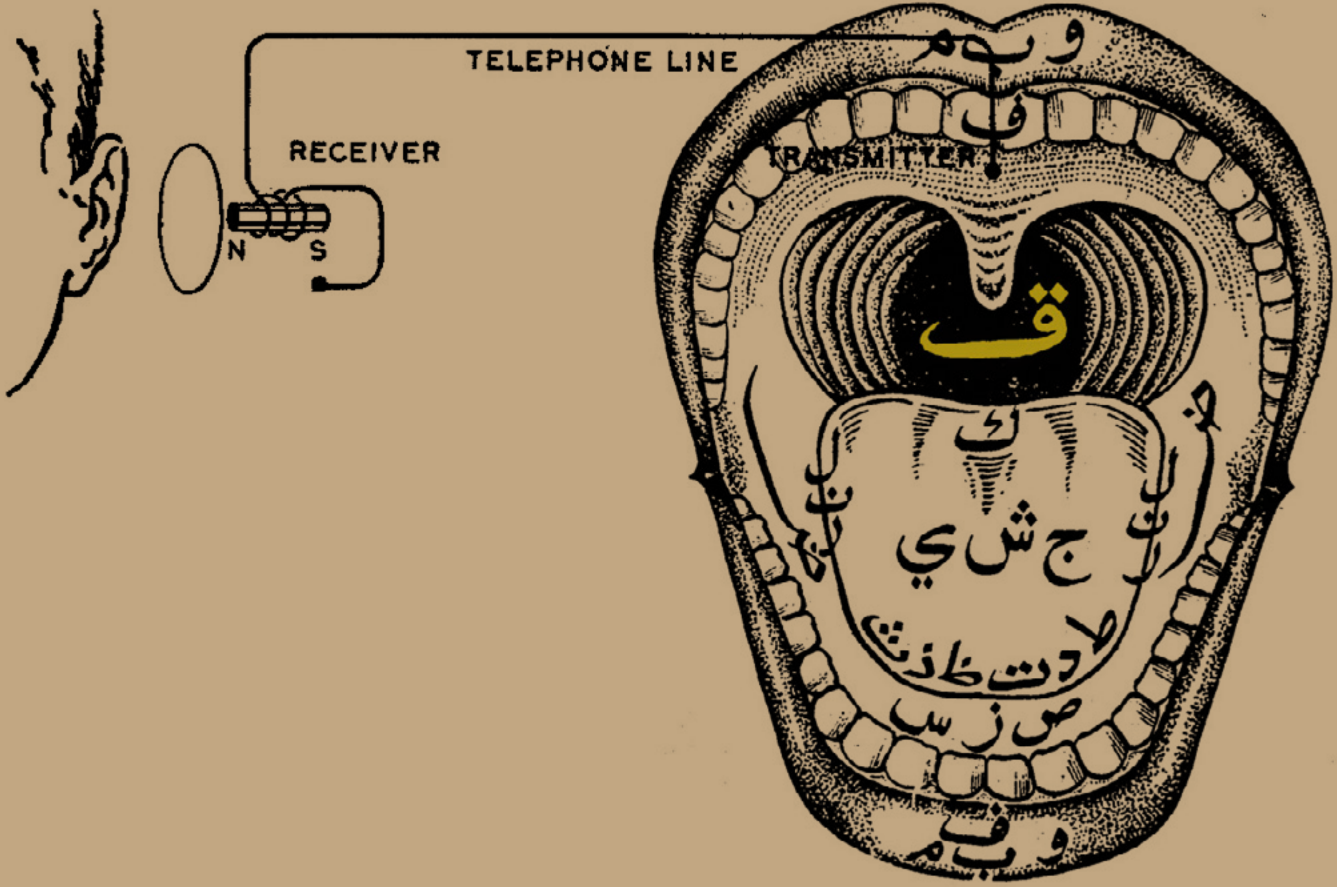
# Lawrence Abu Hamdan & Royal College of Art / MACBA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## Contra-diction[1]

### Lawrence Abu Hamdan

In late December 2013 reports began emerging from Idlib province in northern Syria that the entire population of 18 villages belonging to the esoteric Islamic minority the Druze had been subject to mass conversions, from the Druze doctrine to Wahhabi Islam. Taking responsibility for these conversions was the Islamic-militia Jubhat al Nusra under the command of Sheikh Saad Said Al-Ghamidi who had travelled specifically from Saudi Arabia for the 'mission'. On social media websites the conversions were repeatedly described by those responsible as 'the biggest success of the Syrian Revolution'. Al-Ghamidi's crusade from Saudi Arabia to Idlib province's Jabal al Summaq to convert the Druze was extensively documented and uploaded. In the images we can see Al-Ghamidi and his cohorts simultaneously armed with machine guns and humanitarian supplies as they entered the remote villages.

The Druze doctrine typically does not have communal prayer and is against any type of religious activity that could be seen as coercive of others yet amongst these uploaded events we see a video of Al-Ghamidi preaching at a Druze majlis (council) where he teaches them the fundaments of his Islam and instructs the Druze present on how to pray properly. As part of Al-Ghamidi instructions he teaches one member of the audience to become a Muezzin (the person who sings the call to prayer) here, while he simultaneously trains this mans voice and instills the sound of the Azan (the call to prayer) onto the ears of the community: retraining their audio cognition for sonic interpolation to Islam. By teaching one of the Druze to become a Muezzin he constructs the loud audio infrastructure of Islam into villages which have only heard the hushed and private voice of religious belief before. As a remnant of his visit Al-Ghamidi intends the Azan to be billowed from the top of these mountains as a form of sonic territoriality; a sound used to mark his new conquered terrain not just to be heard over the land, but also from the mountain into the heavens from where he has now assured his place in the afterlife, a place I hope will be granted to him very soon.

Aided by Jubhat al Nusra, Al-Ghamidi occupied abandoned buildings and used them as sites to host his mass conversions. In these

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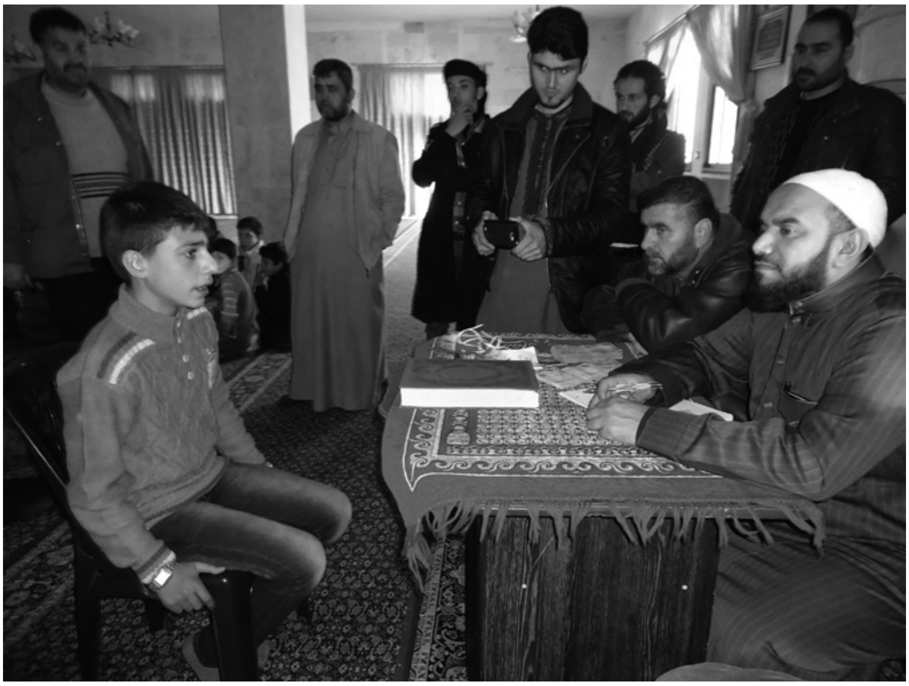
[1] This text was written to accompany the work in progress installation of 'Contra-diction' for display at MACBA (20-27 June 2014)

sites we see Al-Ghamidi sitting behind a desk and as his cohorts document he receives people one by one and asks them to speak out loud the words that once uttered will officially initiate them into Islam:

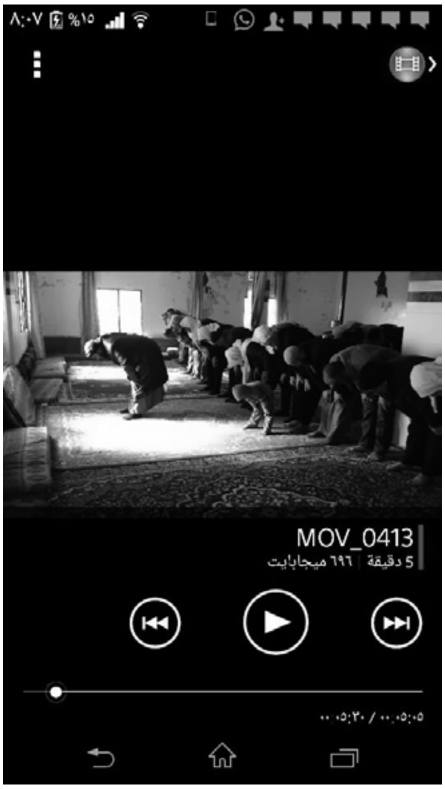
> 'Ash-hadu an la ilaha ill Allah.' ('I bear witness that there is no god but god.') 'Wa ash-hadu ann Muhammad an-rasullulallah.' ('And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.')

The table that acts as the stage for this speech-act is furnished only with the holy book of the Quran and to its left is a neat but sizeable pile of cash. This money we can only presume is present to lure people to the table and of which a portion is given after one's utterance is complete.

We only see still photographs of Druze going through the conversion process; their mouths are caught open by the camera lens, but their voices are never heard. In all images relating to these events we do not see an image referring to any possible resistance to Al-Ghamidi conversions and nor do we hear any direct statement from the now converted community. The evidence of the conversion used by Al-Ghamidi that he and Jabhat al Nusra circulated widely is a hand written four-page Druze authored declaration which states that the undersigned 18 villages have converted to Islam and that they denounce the so called Druze doctrine.



Accusations of forcing people to convert against their Will start to emerge from multiple media sources and condemnation is directed at Jubhat al Nusra. Quickly the story becomes popular in the so-called free international press where we hear the classic narrative of an individual's Free Will and identity under threat. This narrative is mobilised to serve the all too common and dangerously negligent discussion on Syria; of the unmanageable and hopeless 'complexities' of the conflict accompanied by a tone of increasing hatred and fear of Islam. A similar narrative that also serves the Bashar al Assad controlled state media who quickly promote the news of forced conversions of Syrian minorities as a legitimising agent in a bloodthirsty tirade of barrel bombs, torture and murder committed against thousands of innocent lives.



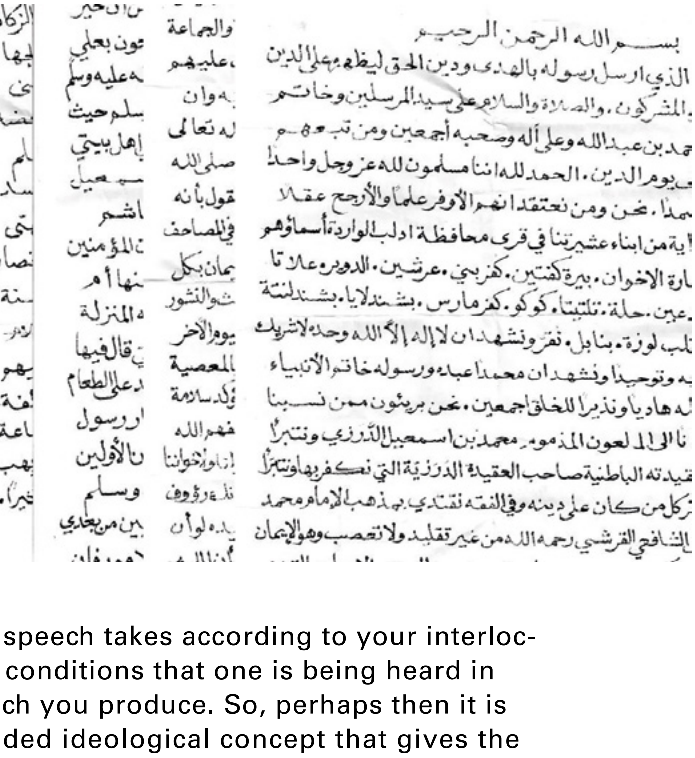
Yet for those who read more carefully, the written declaration issued by the Druze, another more unexpected and hushed claim starts to be made audible. In this third statement the victim narrative is not mobilised as a form of pushing a political agenda, be it autocratic or liberal. Rather, it is a claim that this was neither a forced conversion nor a success for the single-minded and violent ignorance of Al-Ghamidi. In fact, the claim is that it is not a conversion at all, but the Druze practising their right to something called *Taqiyya:* a piece of originally Shia jurisprudence that is most inadequately described as dissimulation or a legal dispensation whereby a believing individual can lie or commit otherwise illegal acts while they are at risk of persecution or in a condition of statelessness. This is a right they have practiced since the Druze doctrine was established 1000 years ago. *Taqiyya* is the right that has arguably allowed the Druze to survive those 1000 years and is therefore why it is so fundamental to their ideological and theological practice.

The Druze are a distinct branch of Ismailism because of their belief in reincarnation and their incorporation of platonic and other philosophies. *Taqiyya* is the concept through which the non-coercive religious activity of the Druze is maintained. For the Druze prayer is typically private and there are no Mosques found in Druze communities. Here, the belief that making one's religious thoughts public is a form of sacrilege against the private dialogue you have with your maker. *Taqiyya* is the concept through which such a religious practice is maintained and facilitated and though it is originally present in many forms of Islamic doctrine, *Taqiyya* is now often attributed to the Druze community. Paradoxically, the privacy that *Taqiyya* allows is what defines the community from the outside perspective. So what is designed as a way to keep one's ego and identity private becomes a way to define and stereotype the Druze as the people who practice lying and secrecy, who fluidly shift political allegiances, who adopt contradictory political positions and who are living between the borders of often hostile nations (the split territory of the Golan heights being the most striking example), inhabiting the more undefinable border spaces, both geographically and culturally.

This paradox of understanding *Taqiyya* as a condition of being publicly-private is one of many contradictions that one encounters in trying to understand the term; the more one understands of it the more it evades another form of understanding. Dissimulation is not a translation of the term, but inherent to its form as a concept. Yet there are those who seek to define it, one such definition is given below by Druze Scholar Wissam Abu Daghram:

In our part of the world, mothers talk to their newborn babies in a language called INGHH APOO. It is a two-syllable word composed of INGHH and APOO. It means nothing; it has no meaning. It is just two sounds – INGHH and APOO – used to communicate with the newborn child. The newborn baby perhaps does not understand, it doesn't have any way of processing this information in its brain to really understand any meaning other than just an abstract sound of the mother's voice. So what does the INGHH APOO communicate? What is flowing through these two syllables? It is love and care. So the child receives these two sounds that don't make any linguistic sense but transmit the mother's love. The language will grow with the child as the mother will raise the communication skill to a higher level. When the child has grown older, the mother will say "let's go for breakfast". Then when the child grows older again and goes to school, the mother will instruct "take your sandwich with you". When the child becomes a student in the college, there is no way the mother will say to her child INGHH APOO. So *Taqiyya* is the means of communication that you adapt to any person, based on the amount of knowledge that s/he is capable of understanding. You speak to people on the level of the other's readiness to listen.[2]

'You speak to people on the level of the other's readiness to listen.'



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الذي ارسل رسوله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين
المشركون. والصلاة والسلام على سيد المرسلين وخاتم
مد بن عبد الله وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين ومن تبعهم
يوم الدين. الحمد لله اننا مسلمون لله عز وجل واحدا
حمدا. نحن ومن نعتقد انهم الأوفر علما والأرجح عقلا
ية من ابناء عشيرتنا في قرى محافظة ادلب الواردة أسماؤهم
ارة الاخوان. بيرة كفتين. كفربني. عرشين. الدوير. علاتا
عين. حلة. تلتيتا. كوكو. كفرمارس. بشندلايا. بشندلنتة
لب لوزة. بنابل. نقر ونشهد ان لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك
ه وتوحيدا ونشهد ان محمدا عبده ورسوله خاتم الأنبياء
له هاديا ونذيرا للخلق اجمعين. نحن بريئون ممن نسبنا
نا الى الملعون المذموم محمد بن اسمعيل الدرزي ونتبرأ
قيدته الباطنية صاحب العقيدة الدرزية التي نكفر بها ونتبرأ
ز كل من كان على دينه وفي الفقه نقتدي بمذهب الامام محمد
الشافعي القرشي رحمه الله من غير تقليد ولا تعصب وهو الإيمان

So *Taqiyya* is the form that speech takes according to your interlocutor. An assessment of the conditions that one is being heard in order to construct the speech you produce. So, perhaps then it is *Taqiyya* as a deeply embedded ideological concept that gives the Druze the specific and recognisable form to their own speech. As Lebanese Anthropologist Fouad Khouri explains, 'From a very early age, Druze learn how to pronounce correctly all the Arabic phonemes, which is not done to my knowledge in any other Arab group from the Gulf to the Atlantic.'[3] This correct pronunciation is made audible by the articulation of the Arabic letter ق (qaf), a letter most closely aligned with the English letter 'Q', but here the sound is produced at the very base of the glottis, at the point of the so-called 'Adams apple'. Throughout the Levant one rarely hears this letter articulated (as it appears in the alphabet), but rather

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[2] Audio recorded Interview with Wissam Abu Daghram by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 2013

[3] Fouad Khoury, *Being a Druze*, 2004, p.188.

hears it dropped, and pronounced as “ء” ‘af’, replacing the ‘ق’ *q*af sound with a glottal stop; similar to the British ‘t’ which in the word ‘butter’, as it is often pronounced ‘bu’er’.

> Butter or ‘bu’er’
> Ta*q*iya or Ta’iya

Wissam Abu Daghram offers the theological context for the Druze elocutionary idiosyncrasies:

> Because Sidq al lisan (trueness of the tongue) means ‘speaking the truth’. Truth means that you have to respect the words. When you respect the truth of the language, you have to pronounce it as it is. To elaborate your pronunciation properly as the language intends also carries a meaning within it on the level of truthfulness. We pronounce all the Arabic phonemes correctly in order to stick to the basic rules of the language itself. Because if I pronounce the Arabic letter qaf as “ء” ‘af’ I’m not saying it correctly, so I am also not ‘speaking the truth’.
>
> ‘I’m not saying it correctly, so I am also not speaking the truth.’

Daghram’s explanation here opens up a fundamental shift in the way one literally articulates the Truth. For here the truth is enmeshed in the phonetic pronouncement of the word, just as much in the meaning of the word itself. Speaking the truth is to enunciate the word as it is originally intended in the Arabic language and the theological context for this is that the Arabic language is the divine word of God. Unlike English, which is not the original language of the Bible, the Quran was originally written in Arabic. And because the Arabic language is the language of God it is the language of He who created all *things*. Which has been interpreted by Ibn Arabi, and many other religious scholars throughout history, as meaning that the creation of the thing and its word are one and the same. That the Arabic language is not a representation of things in the world, but actually language is another mode for that thing to exist. This is the same theological context through which non-figurative Islamic art like calligraphy is also practised, in the sense that the visual form of the language and the presence of the word is a divine manifestation and not a form of representation. Here there is no subject-object divide in language, no meaning separated from the thing to which it refers, it is collapsed by the idea that he who created the thing created the word for that thing as well. Therefore, the combination of sounds that produce any word in the Arabic language are intended to capture the essence of the thing to which they match. The sound of the spoken word in Arabic is therefore inherently onomatopoeic, whereby the form of the thing and its sound are one and the same. Just like the calligrapher’s sculpting of the word-form, the sound of words are inherently object, objective, and a product of divine truth. Words sound as they are originally intended by the creator and deviating from this sound is a deviation from the true pronunciation of the language and of the true form of the thing to which that word matches.

For the Druze, therefore, there is no coincidence that both words of the Arabic language referring to truth (haqiqa) and trueness (sidq) and both contain letter ق qaf. To literally speak the truth (the word/

sound and its meaning), to maintain the trueness of the tongue ‘sidq al lissan’ one must pronounce the ق qaf. Yet, *Taqiyya*, a word whose meaning is in direct contrast to truth and trueness, is also a word that contains the necessity to articulate the ق qaf. *Taqiyya*.

However, it cannot be said that *Taqiyya* is in total opposition to the truth; it is more a queering of the truth through a deeply entangled relationship with the language that shifts what you say and how you say it to an equal plane of semantic existence. *Taqiyya* is a reinterpretation of ‘sidq al lissan’ (the trueness of the tongue); it is the theological context that permits one to always be telling a divine / sublime / metaphysical truth whilst a material and earthly relation to the truth may not be so faithful. These contradictory forms of sacred articulation *Taqiyya* on the one hand and sidq al lissan on the other work together to make sure one is always speaking a truth even if they are lying. Thus the claims that the Druze converting to Wahhabi Islam in Idlib province did not actually convert despite all appearances, for *Taqiyya* enables a speech act like that which one utters in order to convert to Islam, to misfire as here the formal qualities of speech, its elocutionary force, can eclipse the meaning of the words that are uttered. Much like the ways in which the calligraphic form can often render the holy word that it depicts illegible.

Yet, this contradictory combination of forms of speaking the truth are not always so politically convenient, and again here it is the letter ق (qaf) which amplifies the issue. As though one hears the ق (qaf) from time to time spoken by certain villages of other sects throughout the Levant the Druze are the only sect to pronounce this letter whether you find them in Lebanon Jordan, Israel / Palestine or Syria. The pronouncing of this letter is not a question of accent as in each place you find the Druze they will have the corresponding accent of that region. Rather, the pronouncing of the ق (qaf) is a conscious and collective decision amongst a geographically dispersed community. Hence, in the absence of a racial or ethnic form of visualising the difference between the Druze and other Arabs, the ق qaf can be used as a sonic form of identification. The Druze can often be identified by the articulation of the ق (qaf) leading to moments throughout history where in which a slip of the glottis has revealed Druze identity to fatal consequences. This all too easy form of vocalising difference does not serve well the practice of *Taqiyya* as it is a practice in place to protect and conceal a community from being identified by its potential persecutors. To have such an identifiable feature of a minority’s speech exists in ‘contra-diction’ to a deeply embodied practice to conceal one’s identity, but also to not impose one’s identity on others. So, here the two features of the Druze doctrine that work to condition the speech of its members come into direct contradiction: *Taqiyya* is designed to conceal or not emphasise one’s ego / identity, and yet *sidq al lissan* (trueness of the tongue) means that one should pronounce truthfully and correctly all the letters of the Arabic alphabet, yet in pronouncing the ق qaf ones identity is exposed. Wissam Abu Daghram responds to these contradicting yet entangled forms of articulation:

> ... according to Taqiyya: if I am a Druze living in Beirut [surrounded by non-Druze], I should pronounce “ق” qaf as “ء” ‘af. If I’m living in the mountains [in a Druze stronghold], I should not pronounce it “ء” ‘af, unless the “ء” ‘af would be

> accepted there, I should vocalise it “ق” qaf. But in general, if I speak “ء” ‘af or “ق” qaf in any community in order to get the attention to my ego, under Taqiyya [as a religious practice], I’m doing something wrong. So it’s a very fine line, because speech is really interconnected and entangled with the ego.

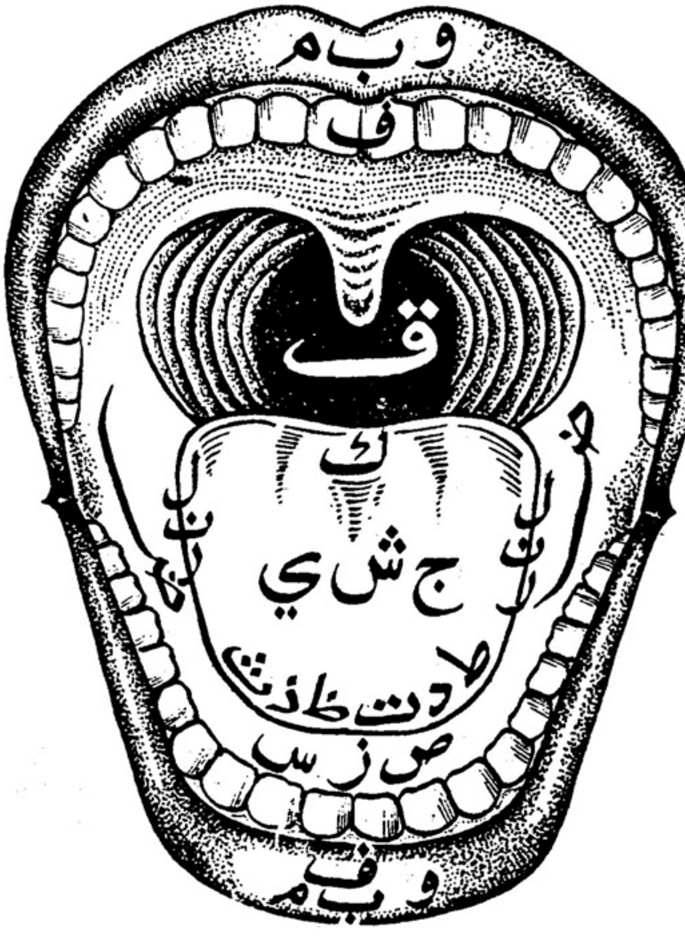
What is emphasised by Abu Daghram in the above quote is that more careful listeners, and more attentive ears, will notice that the Druze community are not only identifiable for speaking with the ق (qaf), but also for their often incredible agility in switching between ‘ق’ / ‘qaf’ and ‘ء’ ‘af ‘. *Taqiyya*, as a deeply embodied practice, therefore gives a kind of agility and a fluidity moving between different ways of using speech and of being heard, depending of course on who is listening. Those who listen carefully to the voices of the Druze will often hear the moment when a family member calls them on the phone and the deep glottis, lying otherwise dormant in the throat, suddenly springs into activity for the duration of the call alone. In linguistics this widespread social phenomena of changing the way you speak according to who you are speaking to is called ‘code-switching’ or ‘Accommodation Theory’; the latter title almost serves as a condensed description of *Taqiyya* more generally. In the linguistic literature on Accommodation Theory they mark two different categories of speakers, the ‘convergers’ and the ‘divergers’. The ‘divergers’ are those stubborn individuals who maintain a form of speech different to those they are speaking to as a mark of their linguistic territoriality or other vocal origin to which they strongly identify. The ‘convergers’ are those who assimilate through a constant process of dissimulation; constantly adapting, always able or willing to inflect their speech to be in greater proximity and conformity to those they are in dialogue with. The ‘convergers’ are those who try to bring less attention to the presence of their own speech in order, as Abu Daghram’s puts it, ‘not to create a disturbance to the ear of the listener’. The ‘convergers’ are those who constantly deviate from their ‘true’ linguistic origins, or perhaps are simply not bound to any linguistic origin at all. Rather than a territorially aggressive form of speech the ‘convergers’ occupy many accents that represent one’s many selfs.

Dexterous tongues that can interpret one event in multiple voices is another possible definition of *Taqiyya* as it is the permission one can take with one’s voice to mutate and mimic accordingly, and it is this emancipated form of speech that has always assured its unholy proximity to dishonesty and lying to many of those who hear it. Yet, it is also this liberated speech, unshackled from truth, identity and origin that has allowed the concept proximity to another deeply established and embodied practice of representation ‘the Freedom of Speech’. Dr Sami Makarem claims *Taqiyya,* in its right context, would become totally in line with the core of human freedom; the freedom of speech’.[4] The Freedom of Speech is to speak words free from persecution and censorship. Yet *Taqiyya* has been previously defined as ‘speaking at the readiness of the other to listen’. *Taqiyya* can be seen in relation to the Freedom of Speech, but what is of more concern to *Taqiyya* than the ability to say whatever you want is to the ability to be constantly aware of how what you say is being listened to. *Taqiyya* is a practice that allows you to pay close attention to all the minute details of human utterance as a way of embodying into your speech not only your self, your ego, but also the ears of those who are listening to you.

[4] Sami Nassib Makarem, Remarks on Anis Obeid’s: The Druze and Their Faith in Tawhid, http://samimakarem.com/pdf_files/Remarks_on_Dr_Obeid’s_book25082008.pdf. Accessed 11 February 2014.

Speech that is freely adaptable to the ears of your interlocutors. *Taqiyya* then is not about speaking freely, not about the possibility to speak words unhindered by censorship or persecution, but it is about reclaiming control over the very conditions under which one is being heard. Abu Dahgram elaborates on this point below:

In the freedom of speech you are given the security that, when you speak out whatever you think, you are guaranteeing to me that you will not take this legally against me. This is the fundament of the freedom of speech; I'm legally allowed to say anything, to say whatever I want. When we think about this in relation to *Taqiyya*, it is more like the freedom of speech is the freedom to remain silent; if I want to express my freedom by being silent, this is my speech. So *Taqiyya* means that I'm allowed not to speak. And when I speak, I am guaranteed that whatever I say will not be taken legally against me. If silence is not part of the freedom of speech, then speech will not be free. If you force me to talk, you abuse me. This is what is happening with Jubhat al Nusra in Syria ... Because by being silent, I'm respecting the community.[5]



Rather than aligning *Taqiyya* to the Freedom of Speech, for Abu Daghram, the concept is much more closely related with another fundamental legal condition of democratic speech, the Right to Silence. The legal right against self-incrimination, or pleading the 5th Amendment as it is often referred to in the USA, more closely matches the religious jurisprudence of *Taqiyya* as a legal dispensation to not speak the whole truth. *Taqiyya* as a piece of Islamic jurisprudence could be seen then as the legal precedent for the 5th

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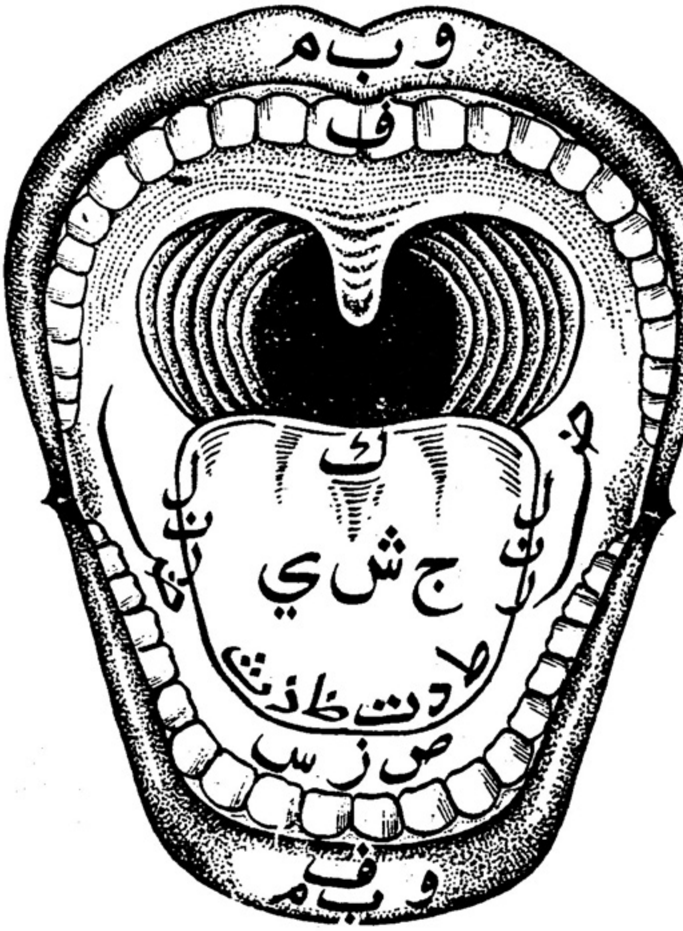
[5] Audio recorded Interview with Wissam Abu Daghram, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 2013

Amendment and the so called Miranda Rights, as it emerges a century prior to what is by now a well-established and interpolated form of legal diction and means to advocate and negotiate one's rights. *Taqiyya*, however, still remains; it is not yet eclipsed by these newer legal concepts because it is more robust than its conceptual contemporaries. Only if you live within a country or juris-diction that offers you the right to silence are you assured that your speech will not be extracted from your body through torture. *Taqiyya*'s strength is that it can exist as silence in the guise of speech. *Taqiyya* is silence camouflaged by phonetic articulation and not simply the loud presence of silence as a form of resistance. *Taqiyya* can function as 'the right to silence whereby silence is a luxury one is not afforded. As it functions when you are forced to talk, *Taqiyya* becomes especially important in a Stateless or precarious legal framework. The persistence of *Taqiyya* is that it can withstand the absence or presence of any type of earthly jurisdiction. And perhaps this is why we find it often used in those border zones, disputed territories, at lawless altitudes and on ceasefire lines.



*Taqiyya* is the infra-politics adapted by individuals who inhabit such in-between spaces; as *Taqiyya* is a deeply embodied and interpolated border practice. A simultaneously subservient and subversive form of political agency. A contra-dictionary concoction of at once being a freedom to speak and a right to remain silent. By listening closely to *Taqiyya* in one voice we can simultaneously hear the collaborator and the convert, the converger and the diverger, the translator and transgressor. *Taqiyya* is not the loud call for a minority's rights, nor the territorial claim to a State, rather it is another means through which one can adapt to the constantly changing conditions of civil conflict. *Taqiyya* is not the claim to a State of one's own, but rather a claim to Statelessness; it is not the right to rule the land, but a command over the border itself.

An image of the Shouting Valley: a sonic vantage point where divided Druze Families communicated across the Israeli / Syrian border in the Golan Heights since 1967, shouting across the physically impenetrable jurisdictions. The valley has been empty since close to the begining of the Syrian uprising.

Interview with Lawrence Abu Hamdan
Victoria Walsh and Paul Goodwin

28.02.2014

**VW** So I suppose I'm just curious since we're now here at MACBA, you've been before and seen the spaces. But we saw the new spaces in the chapel this morning, and I just wondered generally what your feelings were about the space itself, of the chapel and its location in the square next to MACBA and just whether you've read it as a very independent type of space or in association with your connotations of MACBA? And what might that mean in relation to thinking about how you would approach the space and install it? Were you thinking about a museum of modern arts audience or just a space?

**LAH** Well, I did understand this relation to when Bartomeu said it's a turbine hall, I understood when I went inside. I could see its function in that sense, in the sense that it's a single large room that would house something. The space is dominant. It's a space very close to the street so people can come in and out and experience things. So I understood it in that sense.

Of course my work is very different to what would normally be in the Turbine Hall [Tate Modern], it's a bit more, well, it's not really designed to take up that much space. I think it's more about producing spaces for listening, so in that sense somewhere like the Turbine Hall wouldn't be very easy for me to work with in the way that I think about things. But that space seemed to make a lot of sense because of course it's this liturgical space which is designed for a certain type of listening.

And that was very clear the minute we set foot in the space because of course the acoustics were great and they weren't actually like normal church acoustics; they were much more controlled and modest. I don't know anything about the history of the building but perhaps it's quite late Christian architecture in the sense that it seemed that speech intelligibility as a part of liturgical experience was already thought about when it was built.

Because of course the biggest contradiction in a lot of church spaces is that the awe-inspiring reverb of God often came into contradiction when they needed to understand more and more what was actually being said, taught, etc. So the spaces were never designed to host lectures or sermons but eventually it needed to do that. And this is a long diversion, but the way they did that was a lot of technology was put in place. So in that sense it's an exciting space to think about producing something, or it's very exciting actually seeing it.

**VW** I don't know what preconceptions you might have had of what kind of space, but I suppose it's thinking of course technically how you'll engage with the space. It's not a white cube; it's a long way from it. Will it become a useful dynamic or do you might worry, thinking about its presentation might frame its… or help form its…

**LAH** Yeah, I think that's something. I mean initially I thought well, this is actually quite perfect for the issues that I'm dealing with for several reasons. One of them being that it's a space of religious listening and it's exactly the kind of thing I'm dealing with in the sense that it's not really the theological side of it or the liturgical side of listening, but I'm more interested in this community and minority listening within the religious doctrine, or how religious doctrine has conditioned listening. So that's one of the essences of what I'm dealing with.

So in that sense I think it was interesting. I thought oh, this would be great. But at the same time… so before I go into the but part, the other thing I thought was interesting is when we started talking about its secularisation, its conversion from a religious space to a secular contemporary art museum, museological space. Which is interesting because of course again, the work I'm dealing with, the work I'm presenting is about the very processes of conversion and what remains, what is retained through the processes; how are these things embodied? How are they also rejected? What of the self is retained and what is effaced in a way. That's what the work is dealing with through these Druze conversions in Syria. So I think those two things were very interesting for me.

But at the same time I don't want of anything that literalises a lot of the issues. Of course, often the first things you think as an artist when you see a space are not always the thing that make it good later on when you actually begin working on it. So I'm aware that that could be a possibility. Yes, I think it's definitely something of an experiment in that sense. And if it does literalise it too much then I think it runs the risk of making a very benign comment about general ethical or religious experience practice voicing, which I think would be a shame.

But it could also add to it in an interesting way. And I think actually the subject I'm talking about is strange enough. Let's say the more monumental liturgical space that it offers is exactly the opposite of the voicing that I'm talking about in the work, which is a very secretive whispering of specific phonemes that happen in certain places between certain people. And in fact it's exactly the opposite of a coercive religious dominant practice of community. And it's really about the subtleties language can maintain for a community and religious identity across these more major spaces, more major coercive nationalist, or major identity sites.

But these will probably make more sense once the project has been developed. So I think there's something also in that contrast to play with, which was also exciting. So I'm not so worried about this literalisation, I'm more excited actually about playing with those contradictions. So yeah, this placing some more minor whispering, very subtle uses of language and voice in a space which is really designed to be where you sit and be lectured to, etc, I think could be interesting.

**VW** I was going to ask you, was there any other comparison with where you've shown your work?

**LAH** I used to do projects where I was doing these marching performances in an acoustic space. I was dealing a lot with acoustic space. This is very early in my art practice. It's not something I do anymore. But there I was always looking a lot at the ways in which spaces could be activated by their acoustics in a quite conventional way. But then since I've been dealing more with these questions of voice and its legislation and its relationships to ideology, etc, it's been almost totally gallery or radio space. And those are two very different spaces anyway, radio you've no idea where you are being placed, which is interesting. This is the first time I think there's a very dominant space like this, a space that is intended to be dominant in its very design rather than something like a gallery which just happens to have an annoying and idiosyncratic layout, if you see what I mean.

**VW** But in terms of the fact that people will walk in off the street, although it feels hermetically sealed, the kind of space for producing for listening is very different to a white cube space. They won't be attuned; they won't have walked into the museum and gone into that slightly quieter state. So they will be in a different moment.

**VW** How do you think you might navigate or think about the balance between sounds and visuals in this work in this space? How do you ever think about the balance between listening and visual? Do you think that as a prioritising of material or as a dialogue of material?

**LAH** Yeah, a dialogue more. So in the past I've played with light and the way the opacity of a video can be linked to ways of speaking and rhythms of voice and this kind of thing. So I think there is a lot of opportunity to produce something quite visual out of the voice. And also I think people need a focus point in order to listen. I think if you just place people in a sound space they either go into themselves, close their eyes, which is not really what I'm interested in doing, because I don't think isolation works with what we're talking about, which is that essentially I don't want to isolate the sounds I'm talking about from the social space. I don't want to make sound an extra or exotic phenomena which doesn't belong in the messy, political history of the social space.

So I like that people can either see each other or they're focusing on something that basically opens up the room for listening. I mean the most conventional space I can think of for really good listening is the cinema, because people are all looking in one direction. But I don't want to make films. I don't really feel adept at doing it.

So to cut a long story short, basically I think it's good to have a focal point for a main audio peice. And the way I think about it is that maybe the space would be divided into these little stories where different works could be placed and the complexity of the project could reveal itself as one moves around the space. So at the beginning maybe you just see it very classically as a question of a forced conversion, and then as you come all the way around through the other bits that are introduced, the other information, the other bits of sound, and maybe by that time you start to understand it's less about a victimhood, it's much more about the role of being liminal as a people and being minor and what that means and how one negotiates outside of the limited offerings of nationalism.

And I think that even though it might offer that at first it could be interesting to slowly dissolve that when you're not… by the end you're not really sure where to place yourself. And I think we were talking with Paul a bit about; how you could see the role of the collaborator as actually a progressive role, of the role of the traitor or such things. Because as people like Snowden show us, this is really where the politics is happening, and these very dodgy characters who one imagines that they've converted from the dark side, the NSA, to the light. But in fact they were always right-wing libertarian shifty characters who were one way or another collaborating with whoever they're in dialogue with. And I think that there's something interesting about those characters that emerges again in this story. It's the in-betweenness.

**VW** Well, I was going to say, I mean having just walked around the collections as we have, and in the absence of any information that helps the visitor understand what they're looking at and particularly just going up to even the top floor, there were very complex installations of William Kentridge, Eric Baudelaire, architecture and urbanism, and obviously displays that are trying to talk to the politics of urbanism and communities, but with no accounts given. That's a very sophisticated visual language. And I'm just wondering what your relationship to interpretation in this kind of context might be? Would you hope that the installation itself will provide enough? How would you contextualise this if one takes into account your point about the sounds of the street or the ideology of not disconnecting?

**LAH** I always try and provide context because the works I like do that. And maybe I'm a bit conservative and I've certainly been accused of this in some senses, is that I like things to reveal themselves in a narrative way. I'm not after this moment of reveal where all of a sudden the thing you thought was happening is turned on its head. It's not about these epiphanies but it's about a kind of montage using the space as a montage or having a voiceover of the space.

But that's somehow probably a bit of a control freak thing where you want people to really get it, which I do. I mean I do want people to get it very classically speaking. I want them to understand the points. And that's maybe why I spent so much time doing these lecture events, listening events where I'm present and it's a more clear platform than certainly the installation of my audio archive. But I think, yeah, you would want some kind of initial sort blurb that just allows them to enter the way in, and then once they're in there, there would be bits of information embedded in voices in the actual work itself somehow. But I always find a way to integrate the voiceover, which is my voice in the work. And play with that as well.

**VW** I suppose I'm also asking these questions because we're all in this slightly strange contradictory moment which is we're looking at the space before the process, so the space will start to determine the presentation and the form. But then again, almost even if they've been a two year project, you might know the space. And so I'm not sure if it is an anomaly or a problem or whether it's just… when you were talking about you're not really interested in what form research takes, I mean the form would most probably be defined by something at some point.

**LAH** Oh, no I don't know that I'm not interested in what form research would take, I think that's important for me. But I think what I'm saying is I'm not interested in presenting research as such, without a form. Or presenting unfinished-ness.

**VW** What's the problem with unfinished-ness?

**LAH** It's not a problem but I would like it to be as engaging as it can be for an audience. I don't want them to feel like, 'oh well, it's something that will eventually develop'. I mean it could be unfinished in the sense of my work with it, but at that point when an audience encounters that they should feel that they are seeing something which they can read, it can be legible as a project. It's not so clear because also when I start to say these things it sounds like it's too much of a statement. But I think there should be a thesis, or at least that's what I'm interested in working with. Even if it's not taken to its end point but there should be something in which an audience could follow from start to finish in a way.

**VW** But have you ever made a work or do you ever think about a specific audience, or is the audience always an abstract or an abstraction of the display experience?

**LAH** When I did this lecture event/listening seminar in the Tate there was an amazing moment where this stenographer was actually in the room. So I was talking about a lot of practice of stenography. I wasn't thinking that anyone was a stenographer, stupidly actually. And someone just piped up and actually made a point much more beautifully and in a much more concise way and said something which I'm still shocked by and amazed by. And it was great moment and I thought that couldn't really happen in any other context but the Tate in the UK context. But the Tate has much more of a draw among non-arts professionals and people interested directly in art I'd say.

**VW** And do you think audiences in relation to listening might find it or do you think they do find it easier than the incredibly coded visual language of much contemporary art? Or do you think it doesn't play out like that?

**LAH** I think people don't have much patience for listening. I think often they think okay, if I don't need to use my eyes I can put some headphones on and check my emails, etc. But I think it's difficult. So that's something I like. I mean I like thinking about the way people listen essentially, so I like trying to play with that and induce forms of listening among its audience. So I think a lot about the audience and the way people listen. I think that's central to the practice.

It's a general person; I don't have anyone in mind when I'm thinking about the way they listen. And that's why I found it so engaging working with the radio producers because they really know how to make a very broad type of audio in which anyone can consume and can be comfortable doing it.

**PG** Is there a difference between an audience and a public? I mean just thinking about there may be a semantic difference but it may be something more substantial in terms of the way that you think about who you're engaging with. In a sense an audience tends to feel specific to a particular art environment or show or something. But a public sounds a bit more democratic. I don't know, is that something… does that distinction mean anything to you? I was thinking about the project in Utrecht.

**LAH** That was exactly specifically for the public, and again, because it was a press conference I mean the whole idea was in fact to use the exhibition as a site of press conference, as a site for some form of advocacy among a broader public. I think it did work and I mean I wouldn't call the Somali asylum seekers I worked with a public; they were definitely an audience or definitely participants, definitely collaborators in the sense that they were targeted. I really wanted to make work for them actually. Whereas probably the gallery thought of them as more of a public in a sense that they're bringing people from outside of the art space, art world right into the gallery. But at the same time I think in your distinction you made between public and audience, they were definitely more audience / collaborators. They were really in the work.

The other public, probably the most public in a way, presentation, that I have done is giving expert testimony in a deportation hearing at the UK asylum and immigration tribunal… It's very interesting because of course that should be a public space. But I mean there's nothing more segregated than that performance where essentially you have apartheid under the British law. Literally you go into these immigration asylum tribunals, you see everybody of colour from every race except white sitting in rooms awaiting to be tried, and then a totally white layer of judges, lawyers, coming in and processing them.

It's absolutely disgraceful and it's shocking and you can see that from all the way down, the way that interpreters are used. Basically 10% of what's said is translated. People have no idea what's going on. And it's a total sham. So I mean that idea they're also performing a public role which couldn't be anything but public if you know what I mean. It's totally a mode of segregation. But still everything's recorded. It's the total public institution, but in its performance, but not in its outward look, but not in actually what it's doing.

I mean there is another kind of public / private thing, I guess what we decided with that Conflicted Phonemes project is that those images should be used by those people and should be disseminated and should be used in many different spaces. And then the issue is interesting when it comes to having a gallery when someone asks how much it costs. At the same time if that's a big museum, that means that the piece is going to disseminate far wider than I could disseminate it.

**PG** Does it make a difference, for example, to put it into an archive. Is there something that an archive has that would make it objective, well, not objective, but something that is a record, and part of a networked distribution?

**LAH** I didn't think about that. I think it's nice that you slip these things into archives now, because then people might just come across it in a different way. Because browsing a library, it's really how I've found some more of the foundational texts, when I was looking for a different text and actually I found the one that then became the thing that I used more. And I think that's the same with a lot of people.

**VW** I suppose that prompts me to ask in terms of how the social or political or cultural agency of the work can be maintained, now that people are beginning to buy your work, are you selling it with installation instructions or directions? Are you concerned with its display or might they be able to interpret that for themselves… to incorporate it into their own display strategies?

**LAH** I mean the thing is they were never designed to be sold. So that's why, Conflicted Phonemes for example is a huge vinyl wall sticker actually, and so when people ask me about how they install it, it just basically means well, when you put it up you better rip it off again, and you've got to print it again. So these ideas creep into your mind when you're faced with another reality, another set of logistics about what it means to sell something. I've never sold anything still yet in my life.

But I'm having to make those decisions let's say. I mean I think things will change now that I know a bit more about how editions are made and how works circulate among the art fairs etc. I think it will just simply because also there's a limited amount of survival you can get out of doing group shows where you're paid €150 to €300 and that are pretty exhausting.

**VW** I mean are there any contexts or conditions under which you could imagine refusing to show or are there any countries or are there any environments. Do you see yourself or your work as politically positioned in the sense that there are some places you wouldn't want it to show, or if you have a gallery and a dealer and it's placed somewhere where it's simply taken as an artwork. Do you have feelings about that at this point about how it might be represented or misrepresented.

**LAH** The only problem I see is with Conflicted Phonemes in a way because it's the one that most expediently speaks about an issue. I mean it speaks about an issue and addresses it and it's a visual thing. So a lot of people pay attention to it.

The documentaries that I've made can exist as documentaries; they're not really messed with if they're sold because they can be screened. And they are still in this more investigative mode… they have an investigative moment, they have a politics. But if I think about the tiny example that Conflicted Phonemes offers, this question, it's that it can exist as an artwork and other things. I mean I'll always make sure I have as much right to distribute the image in whatever way and that they have a certain flexibility. But let's say there's a certain dimension, and a certain structure that is installed and is considered art, and that people… I don't have a problem with people considering it that as such, an object. Because I still think that if you put it in a gallery it works.

But I like people to spend time with those images. In that sense I like it as this big thing in a gallery where people actually would just sit and try and work it out and, initially, be overwhelmed by the information and then slowly enter it and try and figure it out. So I think that's the idea of giving an issue time. So I feel that that's fine, I don't mind it being taken as such. But as long as it can always exist in some other form.

**VW** And just finally that relationship between that and your website. Because I mean that is a different kind of listening, so one can really enjoy your work at leisure but with comfort informally, at home. Is that a different audience? Is that a different type of listening? Could you imagine using that more in terms of open source / creative commons, so that kind of logic?

**LAH** This is going to sound very boring, but when I did my literature review for my PhD I wanted to figure a form out that would allow the archive to be understood as a discography let's say of the research. So almost the archive as the literature review that I was using, this collection of tracks and interviews and things like that. So what I did was I took a system where I used the sound cloud files, uploaded everything to sound cloud, and then you know on sound cloud there's a comments bar – where people normally write 'phat beats' or something like that. But actually what I noticed is that it doesn't have a word limit.

So at the moment I wanted to talk about a piece of… say there's a track of someone saying OYEZ OYEZ OYEZ, the moment in the recording you want to talk about you can pinpoint it and from there you can expand off into a mini essay, let's say. And I really liked that and I liked this way of reading and listening and I thought that worked and it was very simple. And in fact the whole system was already there for me to use on the soundcloud interface. But I hadn't really seen anyone do that before. And I think that that made a new type of listening, reading experience that I think was really interesting. So I'm interested in doing that kind of thing, and there's a couple of invitations to do e-books and stuff where the sound can be embedded within text. So I really liked that. I think that has a lot of potential.

Whether I just put everything up as a public archive, I'm not sure it really makes sense because it's not really an archive in that way as I keep saying. I don't think it's posing an authority on a subject, I think it's just really about a set of questions that I'm asking. So I'm not sure how much sense that would make from it. I think people could engage with it like they do in an exhibition. And I think if I found a way of doing a voice activated website I would think that would be amazing.

**VW** But this technology exists?

**LAH** Yeah, because I used the same technology in the installation, but the problem is that then it's a software that I have installed on a computer. I don't know how you do a more automatic system where the browser itself…

**VW** Yeah, but MIT, somebody must have designed this.

**LAH** Somebody will be designing it.

**VW** Because if you can have voice recognition for writing this must not be that far away.

**LAH** I mean exactly, it's just about having an online widget version of the same thing that you can have as software. I think it's definitely possible, I just need some genius to work with me on it, and some finances.

**PG** I guess in terms of one of things that came up in the research workshop, about the relationship between curator and the artist. Just a general question in terms of how you felt that worked today because you met a number of curators, you met the director, and there's myself and Victoria. Is there any reflection that you have about that in terms of the different voices that speak to you from an institution?

**LAH** I think this project is unique actually in the approach of the role that I am positioned in, the curatorial project as a whole. And I'm enjoying that a lot. So I think generally speaking you would never have this experience. If I'm asked to do a group show I don't have any understanding of the inner workings of the research that the curators are doing. So I think this is a meta project in the sense that it's self-reflexive and that's great, that's really interesting. It's a real privilege in some ways. So I think it's very different.

**Lawrence Abu Hamdan**

**Victoria Walsh, Royal College of Art & Bartomeu Marí, MACBA**

*Contra-Diction: speech against itself*

*Contra-Diction: speech against itself* is an installation in-progress looking at the minor speech acts of the Druze religious community spread across Syria, Lebanon, Israel / Palestine and Jordan. Across the region the Druze name is synonymous with secrecy and they are stereotyped for their cross-border liminality as well as the changeability of their political positions. Following stories emerging from Syria that 18 Druze villages suddenly converted to Wahabi Islam this project looks at the ways in which the doctrine of the religious Druze minority has a specific interest in the voice and in speech through an ethico-religious practice called *Taqiyya*. By looking at the Druze theology and philosophy through the secret life of phonemes, this work attempts to show how minority-thinking can allow us to re-read fundamental issues in regards to silence, free speech and the territoriality of language.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan's (b.1985 Amman) work often deals with the relationship between listening and borders, human rights, testimony, truth and law, through the production of audio-visual installations, graphic design, sculpture, photography, workshops and performance. His solo exhibitions include *The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012) at Showroom; Group exhibitions include Tate Modern, London; M HKA Antwerp, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; the Beirut Art Center; and the 2012 Taipei Biennial.

1 Tamer Eldemerdash, 2014

2 Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 2013

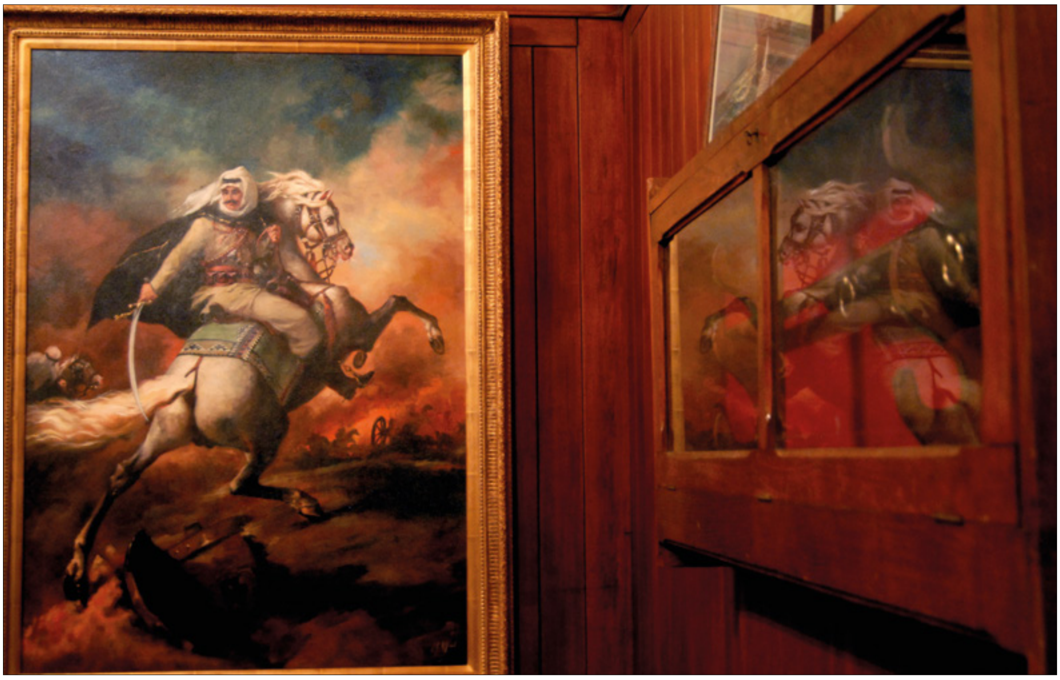
3 Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 2014

4 Rachel Anderson, 2008

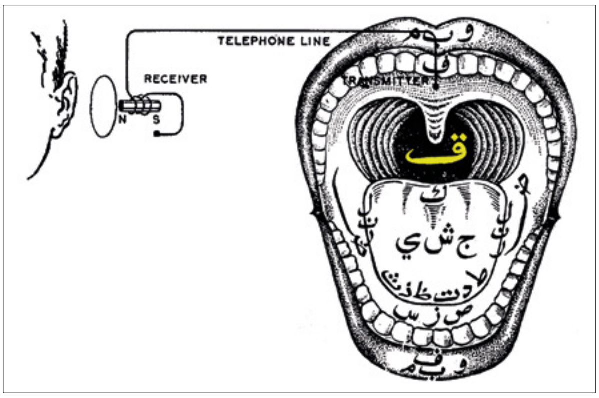
5, 6, 7 Emilio Moreno, 2012

Do not pollute others' hearing with shameful sounds.

1 A central component of Abu Hamdan's *Tape Echo* 2014 project is a new video work of two Cairene sheikhs delivering a sermon on the effects of the city's amplified and over-populated audio environment on its inhabitants. This sermon, as all sermons, was broadcast on loudspeakers into the streets, as is customary in the city, and took place in the context of recent changes to the laws and regulations in the name of noise pollution that seeks to monotonise sermon content and unify the call to prayer.

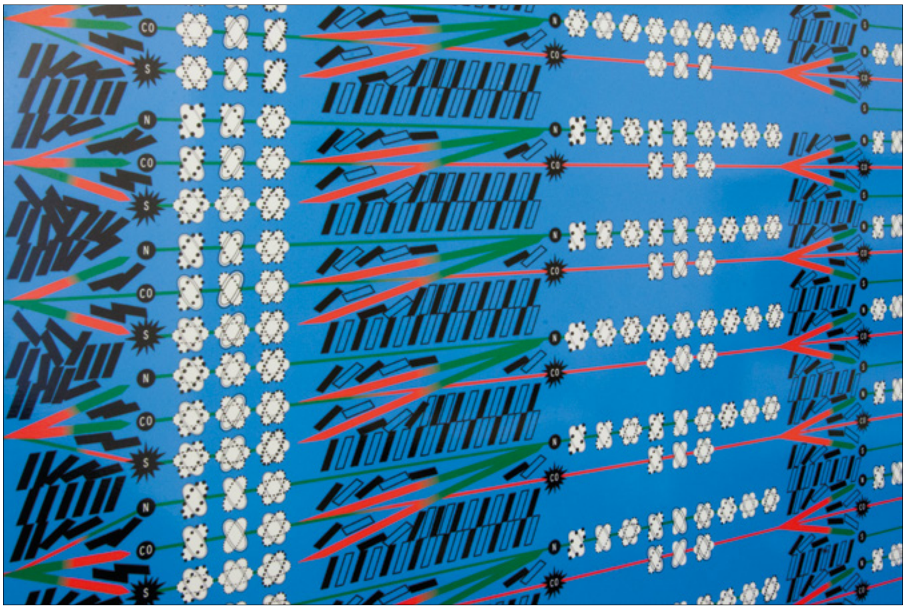


2 *Double-Take: ~~Officer~~ Leader of the ~~Chasseurs~~ Syrian Revolution Commanding a Charge* (2014) is a work that tells the story of how a contemporary version of Théodore Géricault's painting *Officer of the Chasseurs Commanding a Charge* (1812, in the Louvre) in which the artist replaced the French imperial officer with Sultan Basha Al-Atrash (1891–1982) the leader of the Syrian uprising against the French in 1925–1927. The painting was commissioned by a wealthy businessman from Syria for his British country house and anglophilia is the unusual reason for this paradoxical sight of an anti-colonial image that uses the aesthetics of its coloniser. Abu Hamdan uses the doubleness of the story told by the paintings (the beginning and end of French imperialism) to understand the ways in which people build a complex and contradictory relationships to their colonial past. The two hundred years separating Géricault's painting from its perversion are condensed in one moment of double-take, into which a whole history of the colonial project can be read.



3 *Convergence 2014* is one of the four new video works Abu Hamdan is presenting for *Transfigurations* at MACBA. In linguistics this widespread social phenomena of changing the way you speak according to who you are speaking to is called 'code-switching' or 'Accommodation Theory'. In the linguistic literature on Accommodation Theory they mark two different categories of speakers, the 'convergers' and the 'divergers'. The divergers are those stubborn individuals who maintain a form of speech different to those they are speaking to as a mark of their linguistic territoriality or other vocal origin to which they strongly identify. The convergers are those who assimilate through a constant process of dissimulation; constantly adapting, always able or willing to inflect their speech to be in greater proximity and conformity to those they are in dialogue with. The convergers are those who constantly deviate from their true linguistic origins or perhaps are simply not bound to any linguistic origin at all.

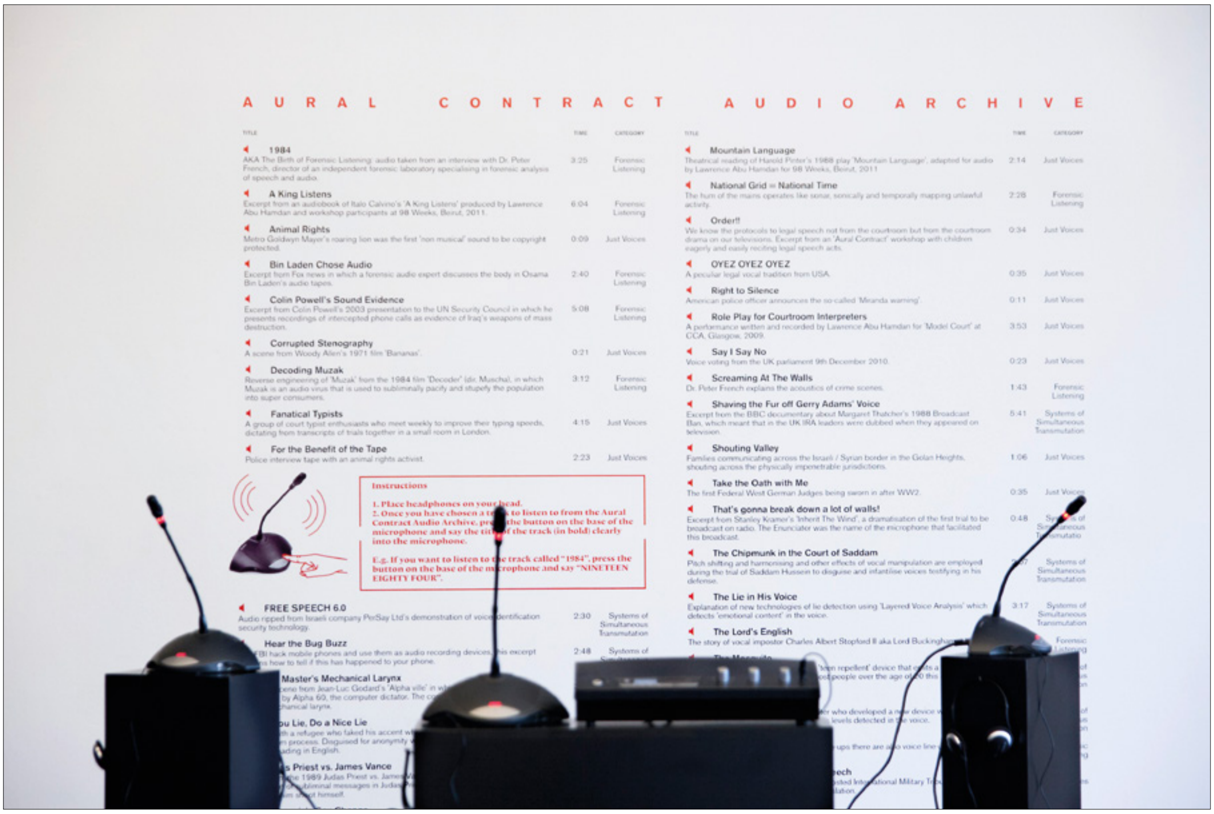
4 *Marches*, 2008, Lawrence Abu Hamdan



5 *Conflicted Phonemes, 2012*

In September 2012 in Utrecht, Abu Hamdan gathered together a group consisting of linguists, a graphic designer and a core group of Somali asylum seekers, who all face deportation because of the results of an accent test conducted upon them by the Dutch immigration authorities. Together they created a series of maps that seek to expose and disseminate the realities of voice analysis used to determine the origin of asylum seekers. These maps intend to demonstrate how the history of Somalia, its 40 years of continual migration and crisis, have made an impact on both peoples' way of life as well as their way of speaking. Hence, the maps explore the hybrid nature of accent, complicating its relation to one's place of birth by also considering the social conditions and cultural exchange of those living itinerant lives. The complexity of these maps is a testimony to the irreducibility of reading the voice like a passport and its inapplicability to fix people in space.

6 *Conflicted Phonemes* press conference 2012 at Casco Utrecht



7 Installation shot *Aural Contract Audio Archive* 2012 at Casco Utrecht. Since 2010 Lawrence Abu Hamdan has been building a discography of sounds that examine the contemporary politics of listening and focuses on the role of the voice in law. This *Aural Contract Audio Archive* contains extracts of his works together with specific moments of juridical listening and speaking gathered from a range of sources such as the trials of Saddam Hussein and Judas Priest, UK police evidence tapes, films such as *Decoder* and readings from texts including Italo Calvino's *A King Listens*. The *Aural Contract Audio Archive* is then installed as a voice-activated sound installation. Just as the law requires you to testify, so does the *Aural Contract Audio Archive*: here the audience must speak to the archive and voice their desire to listen to its content as speech recognition software becomes used as a compositional tool. The microphone and headphones that constitute this are developed by Bosch Security™; the world's leading amplifier and transmitter of testimony.

# Quinsy Gario & Stedelijk Museum

## Performing Translocality in Art & Exhibitions

Jelle Bouwhuis and Kerstin Winking

Apart from opening up our curatorial practice to an active engagement with the notion of translocality, one of the central aims of the *Global Collaborations* project, this recollection of our curatorial research also addresses the shift away from more traditional art practices towards artistic contributions to broader cultural and political discourses. The curatorial research took place as part of the preparations for the exhibitions *Transfigurations – Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations* (MACBA, June 2014) and *How Far, How Near: The World in the Stedelijk* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, September 2014) during which we will work with, amongst others, the Amsterdam-based performance artist Quinsy Gario. The concept of translocality was also a topic in the 'Translocality Workshop' held in the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (May 2014), as part of the thought process that precedes the set-up of the exhibitions in MACBA and the Stedelijk. Below is a curatorial introduction to the concept of translocality in relation to Gario's work, a report of the workshop, followed by an interview with the artist.

Quinsy Gario's work caught our attention because of our shared interest in the ways in which the 'colonial other' is today perceived in the cultural and political arena of the Netherlands. Generally speaking, the prevailing body of politics and cultural institutions, inspired by the proliferation of right-wing nationalist sentiment over more than a decade, tends to over-emphasise the Dutch economic and cultural achievements of the Golden Age. Even worse, it perpetuates a narrow-minded view of these achievements while also diminishing their value through a cultural-essentialist lens. In this context it is challenging to achieve a more critical involvement with the darker side of that era, because it appears to be too difficult to address issues such as slavery without offending national pride. Stating that racist stereotypes dating back to the colonial period are still present in Dutch society is almost taboo, especially when it comes to enormously popular traditional figures like Zwarte Piet (Black Pete).

The figure of Zwarte Piet visits the Netherlands every year in November, and has done since time immemorial—at least in the public imagination. Here is how the art historian Sven Lütticken describes Zwarte Piet's traditional role:

> In Holland, the feast of Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas) is celebrated in the evening of 5 December, but this celebration is preceded by a week-long residence of Sinterklaas and his black servants in the country. After the official arrival of Sinterklaas and his Zwarte Pieten ("Black Petes") by boat from Spain in mid-November, the country is swamped with Zwarte Piet iconography. This imagery is a version of the visual cliché of the Moor that had developed during the long history of European colonialism, and turned into a mainstay of nineteenth/twentieth century visual culture. There is, in

> fact, a mass of near-identical "Black Petes" who accompany Sinterklaas, played by white people in blackface. With curly hair, red lips and golden earrings, and wearing colourful costumes, the "Black Petes" are stereotypes that by and large would no longer be acceptable in the public space of other European countries. It clearly is necessary to re-imagine this figure, but in the age of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders "Black Pete" has been turned into an essential element of Dutch identity.[1]

In summer 2011, Gario became fed up with the fact that the majority of the Dutch population simply reiterates the tradition, without consideration of its racist implications, so he initiated the *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* (Black Pete is Racism) performance. Gario deliberately calls this a performance project instead of an action or a protest for two reasons. First of all, he insists on his status as an artist, and not as an activist; secondly, he wants to be taken seriously and not be considered just another troublemaker. Gario and his companions hung out at markets and other crowded public places dressed in white T-shirts with the text 'Zwarte Piet is Racisme' printed on it in black letters. His performance found many critics, but also supporters, some of whom joined the artists in wearing the T-shirts during the festive arrival of Saint Nicholas at a parade in Dordrecht in November 2011. Even though Gario and the other people were performing peacefully, the Dordrecht police arrested the artist and some of his supporters for disturbance of the public order. In August 2013, Gario submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights, pressing charges against the Dutch state on the grounds of police violence. The case is ongoing ...

Apart from *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, Gario created a comprehensive body of work including two poetry collections, theatre plays, music videos, performances and exhibition displays over the last few years. Through this variety of artistic means, he spreads his ideas regarding the complex ways in which colonial stereotypes are uncritically included and excluded in the Netherlands, as well as in Europe at large. Through his art, he scrutinises the claim that today, European states are having to deal with the fact that they are no longer the main players in world economics and politics, and explores why people tend to hold on to sentiments fuelled by nationalistic nostalgia, of which one manifestation is racism.

*A Village Called Gario* is less directly related to the artist's personal experience or family history than the title may suggest; instead it focuses on patterns of migration, both general and specific, which are relevant to his family history in different ways. Taking an existing village called Gario in the Central Republic of Africa as a point of departure, the artist tells about a partly fictional, partly factual global journey. The inspiration for his one-man performance comes from the travelogues of colonial explorers. Like them, Gario combines locally collected knowledge with imagined stories.
The performed journey takes us from Gario in Central Africa, to Constantinople, Brazil and New York, but also to places that are actually connected to the artist's family history. Gario is convinced that if people only look at the personal side of a story and ignore the structural one, they lose the sense of how such structures are communal constructions or collaborations. Like *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, *A Village Called Gario* questions white people's production of knowledge about the places and people central to the performance.

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[1] Sven Lütticken, "Piet Zwart & Zwarte Piet" in: Jelle Bouwhuis and Kerstin Winking (eds.) *Project 1975: Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Unconscious*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014.

In *A Village Called Gario*, the artist traces and invents possible explanations for how his family ended up in the Caribbean, and with that particular family name. With this in mind, the performance can be seen as a new narrative about forms of global human movement. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's theory of translocality and its relation to the nation-state. From this perspective, nation-states consist of 'situated communities' or 'neighbourhoods' made up of 'localities', which Appadurai defines as figures, not grounds. Neighbourhoods can be, as Appadurai puts it, 'ideally stages for their own self-reproduction, a process that is fundamentally opposed to the imaginary of the nation-state, where neighbourhoods are designed to be instances and examples of a generalisable mode of belonging to a wider territorial imaginary'.[2] Today, such neighbourhoods consist of 'circulating populations with kinds of locals to create neighbourhoods that belong in one sense to particular nation-states, but that are from another point of view what we might call *translocalities*'. In both *A Village Called Gario* and *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* Gario performs translocalities. The police violence that overcame the artist sadly illustrates what Appadurai describes here:

> The nation-state conducts through its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous, and homogeneous space of nationness and simultaneously a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching grounds, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and mobilisation.

Obviously, Dutch nationalist sentiment does not allow criticism of the racist element of its most popular national holidays, even if the critique is performed under the banner of art.

Exhibition projects such as the Stedelijk's *Global Collaborations* project engage with the notion of translocality because it is considered indispensable to a curatorial practice that promotes the complexity, heterogeneity and plurality of contemporary art. The term globalisation is abundantly used, often without attention to figures of translocality, especially within the institutionalised art world and modern art museums such as the Stedelijk. The notion of global art seems instead to perpetuate a Eurocentric viewpoint, which ignores more or less hidden formations of ethnocentricism which in fact become misplaced in global exchanges. Putting notions of translocality on the agenda is a way of discussing such limitations of the institutionalised art world.

Even though the title of the Stedelijk's *Global Collaborations* project might suggest it is about global art, it is actually a continuation of the curatorial practice that we developed during *Project 1975* (2010-2012). This project involved exhibitions and commissions for new artworks, which engaged with the cultural implications of global trade and migration. Questions we asked ourselves included: why do age-old colonial structures and stereotypes survive in contemporary culture and society? To what ends are they used today? Can they be critically addressed through art? In what ways does modern and contemporary art reinforce cultural-essentialist tropes? Can contemporary art and exhibition practices break with

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[2] All quotes are taken from: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

the uncritical reiteration of colonial stereotypes, and promote more nuanced and less racist cultural involvement with the colonial past and present?

Since its inception in Aarhus, Denmark, Gario has further developed the idea for his performance of *A Village Called Gario*. The presentation in MACBA is the third staging of this piece, which was first presented in November 2013 during the Afrovibes Festival in Amsterdam and then in May 2014 at the Nikolaj Kunsthal in Copenhagen, Denmark. It will also be performed at the opening of the exhibition *How Far, How Near: The World in the Stedelijk*. This exhibition reviews the collection and history of the Stedelijk Museum after World War II, and how this prominent museum of modern art became geographically exclusive in its scope, thereby also sidestepping the intriguing and challenging figures of translocality.

## Report on Stedelijk Museum Workshop – 'Translocality'

6 May 2014

Judith Couvee, Michelle Sachtler and Kari-Anne Stienstra

In light of the growing interest in the discourse of globalisation within art institutions, the 'Translocality Workshop' was held at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam. Sara Blokland (artist and curator), Jelle Bouwhuis (curator), Godfried Donkor (artist), Quinsy Gario (poet and performance artist), Paul Goodwin (curator), Lidwien van de Ven (artist), Babak Afrassiabi (artist), Kerstin Winking (curator), Katarina Zdjelar (artist), and ourselves (interns at the Stedelijk Museum), attended the workshop. All artists and curators presented their individual projects in relation to the theme of translocality and discussed their views on the concept.

Kerstin Winking and Paul Goodwin set the backdrop for the workshop by explaining the concept of translocality, which deals with social and spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries – including those of nation-states. Translocality usually describes phenomena involved with mobility, migration, circulation and spatial interconnectedness, but not necessarily limited to national boundaries. This workshop functioned as a platform for exchanging ideas about artistic and curatorial practices related to this theme.

The concept of translocality is at the core of the SMBA projects *Project 1975* and *Global Collaborations*, both of which engage with the relationship between contemporary art and globalisation. Winking developed *Project 1975* in collaboration with Bouwhuis; the project ran from 2010 to 2012 and explored the relationship between contemporary art and (post-)colonialism. The exhibitions *Time, Trade, Travel* and *Hollandaise* were developed during Project 1975. *Time, Trade, Travel* was the result of a collaboration between SMBA and the Nubuke Foundation in Accra, Ghana, and explored the shared histories of both countries. The starting point of *Hollandaise* was the textile known as 'wax hollandais', which is produced in the Netherlands and is very popular in West Africa. The *Global Collaborations* project stems from *Project 1975* and continues the collaborative partnerships and project-based curatorial approach developed during *Project 1975*, with multifaceted and locally engaged art institutions in Indonesia, Lebanon, Israel and India. *Global Collaborations* aims to connect themes in the work of artists working in these countries. These artists have strong local connections, but also deal with and think about the rest of the world.

Paul Goodwin spoke about MeLa, a four-year research project that explores new strategies for modern and contemporary art museums in Europe. The project has a focus on the ways in which the migration of ideas and people affects such museums. Of specific interest is the role of the digital in modern museums, as well as curatorial discourse and collection practices. Goodwin brought to light the questions that fuel this research: how are artistic practices changing, and what is the curatorial response to this? Does it make sense to continue displaying artworks in the modernist, white cube space? Although the white cube seems like a neutral background upon which art can 'speak for itself', it is a way of displaying artworks that emerged from a specifically western, modernist perspective.

Performance-based artworks are an important point of the discourse of contemporary art and the institutional collection thereof; Goodwin asked how museums can acquire and incorporate performances into their collections, especially since an intangible experience is what is at the core of these artworks. He believes there needs to be greater collaboration between the curator and artist to come up with solutions to these problems. In his research, Goodwin asks which 'global' we are looking at and states that it seems like the global is always somewhere out there, not present in its own culture. He wants to move beyond the primary questions of identity: who defines the terms we use to describe our identity? Once we begin to question where the terminology comes from, it becomes clear that what we are faced with is a discussion of power relations.

After Goodwin's introduction to the MeLa research project and Winking's presentation of the curatorial points of departure of *Global Collaborations*, Jelle Bouwhuis talked about his current project *How Far, How Near: The World in the Stedelijk*, a large-scale project exhibition involving works from the Stedelijk Museum's collection. Bouwhuis explained that the exhibition *How Far, How Near* is focused on exploring the presence of, or rather the lack of, non-western art in the Stedelijk Museum's permanent collection. Bouwhuis is interested in digging into the archaeology of the museum in order to find out more about how the Stedelijk has viewed, collected and presented what Bouwhuis calls the non-west. It turns out that the non-west can be found in the Stedelijk's collection of modernist painting and sculpture of the early 20th century, as well as in their graphic design and photography collections. There are numerous posters dealing with the themes of apartheid, African solidarity, Indonesia's ties to the Netherlands, as well as photographs documenting poverty or civil rights movements outside of Europe. The exhibition he is curating is based on an exhibition held in the Stedelijk in 1955 called *Modern Art: Old and New*, which juxtaposed modern abstract art with ethnographic artefacts such as Papuan tapa cloth or African masks. The exhibition is intended to juxtapose works from the collection with newly commissioned contemporary pieces.

Artist Quinsy Gario gave a presentation on his evolution as an artist and a storyteller. He expresses his ideas through poetry, theatre and film, as well as via a public radio show and a forthcoming television series. Gario's first project was with the Netherlands-based performance poetry group Poetry Circle NOWHERE, a group that focuses on public interventions. One of Gario's most famous interventions is the project *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* (Black Pete is Racism), which explores the role of the figure of Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands. Through his performance art, Gario strives to share the importance of controlling the representation of your own story. The question here, as it is in art and art history, is whose history is being told?

'Translocality is a way to be engaged with the context of a location and, at the same time, being open and interested in its relation to others, Winking stated. Translocality also resonates in the work of artists such as Sara Blokland and Lidwien van de Ven. Blokland creates installations and video works centred around the personal history of her family by confronting issues of identity construction related to migration in space and time. Van de Ven's photographic works focus on local events that find larger meaning by examining them in relation to world religions and politics. The mass media play an important role in her artistic practice: she follows how certain stories come to be picked up, lost, covered or not covered. Katarina Zdjelar introduced and showed her videos *Shoum* (2009) and *My Lifetime (Malaika)* (2011). Babak Afrassiabi introduced and screened *Satellite, as long as it is aiming at the sky* (2010), a video he made with Nasrin Tabatabai.

One of the conclusions of the workshop was that in order to do justice to art and its makers, museums for modern and contemporary art should overcome cultural essentialism and allow the histories related to art and their collections, where appropriate, to be told from a translocal perspective. As Goodwin remarked, it is often thought that the global is just 'somewhere out there'. Thinking art and art collections in terms of translocality, however, is not so much about giving in to a fashion that glorifies the global, as it is about relating localities to significant geopolitical developments.

# Interview with Quinsy Gario

Jelle Bouwhuis and Kerstin Winking

3.06.2014

**JB&KW** In 1993, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA) opened as the project space of the Stedelijk Museum. Our programming and curatorial research looks at the interest of artists and other art professionals like writers, curators, theoreticians, and so on, and offers them a platform for the presentation of their ideas. SMBA does not have the same obligation as the Stedelijk Museum to uphold and connect to the modernist tradition that is still so prevalent in the contemporary, institutionalised art world. Do you think that SMBA's more playful, but critical involvement with the format of the white cube allows for more diversity in terms of ideas and people?

**QG** I think that's a given because of the nature of the space and the mandate given to the space. SMBA is supposed to do something different to the Stedelijk. As such it will produce events that treat the idea of art differently than the mother ship. This also means including people and ideas that would otherwise fall by the wayside.

If we see the Stedelijk as the earth and SMBA as the moon, it should be able to affect the tides and structurally influence the goings-on. However, I'm not so sure that it does. Placing the inclusion of diverse ideas and people off somewhere else makes it easier for the Stedelijk to remain the same.

It doesn't have to question the white cube and the modernist tradition that it holds dear because the SMBA already does that for it. In Dutch we have the saying 'uit het oog, uit het hart' (out of sight, out of mind). In other words, once something is out of your line of sight you don't care for it anymore. The SMBA is a safer arena in which to deal with structural diversity because the results don't seem to structurally affect the Stedelijk, yet.

**JB&KW** How Far, How Near – The World in the Stedelijk, the exhibition we are currently preparing for the Stedelijk Museum, looks at the ways in which the geo-political past and present affected the collecting history of the museum. Among other things, we are interested in the representation of the former Dutch colonies and the colonial other. Even though we've worked on several projects together in the framework of different SMBA initiatives, you seemed to be quite surprised when we asked you if you'd be interested in contributing to this exhibition.

**QG** Not coming from an art school background and basically bluffing my way into the art scene turns every invitation into a big deal. A lot of people dream of having their art shown in the Stedelijk and you guys not only invited me to be part of How Far, How Near, but also to perform in Barcelona at the MACBA. I mean, you are throwing me into the deep end of the art-world pool. The visibility, the exposure and the canonisation are in equal parts amazing and humbling.

In that regard I'm fully aware of the context of my contribution to this exhibition with works from the Stedelijk's canonical collection. It's not like 20 years ago when Surinamese art was stereotypically seen as a regressive, stuck-in-the-mud version of Dutch art. This view was criticised, but its almost off-the-cuff-nature exposed how colonial ignorance and white supremacist thought had been normalised within the Dutch modern art context. The How Far, How Near exhibition exposes how that normalisation leads to collecting practices that obscure and stigmatise.

It's a step in the right direction towards paying more attention to modern art and artists from the islands, Surinam, Indonesia and New Guinea. However, our presence in the Stedelijk needs to be normalised beyond exhibitions that specifically deal with colonialism and ethnicity. There needs to be a more self-reflexive understanding of why we weren't included before, but we shouldn't become the next fetish object. In other words, we shouldn't only be important in relation to the former coloniser, but also worthwhile in our own right.

A lot of artists want to be included but don't want to be placed in a box where their ethnicity becomes more important than their artistic practice. No artist wants their work to be overshadowed by their person. Even when their person, their presence or their embodied experiences becomes their work, they're using that to make a statement beyond themselves alone. In this regard it's necessary to be aware of these mental blind spots and expose them.

**JB&KW** Talking in terms of 'we', you suggest that there is a kind of collectiveness among people from the former colonies. Yet, we wonder whether such a collectiveness actually exists and if so, aren't works from the Stedelijk's collection by artists with biographical ties to the former colonies such as Michael Tedja, Remy Jungerman, Stanley Brouwn, Fiona Tan or Iris Kensmil, part of that 'we'? Could it be that the connections between these artists' works in the collection are in the narrative threads, which here and there connect them to each other?

**QG** I think it's important to remember how people from the former colonies have been kept in the dark about each other. In the Dutch national psyche we see the East as the lost crown jewel and the West as a perpetual financial drain. The material, physical and psychological realities and legacies of our colonisation are actually exactly the same in a lot of respects.

The delayed acknowledgment of this has a lot to do with the fact that the Netherlands was at the centre of the communication between the colonies. As such it controlled the flow of information. A lot of people from the West, for instance, don't know about the history of the enslaved African in the East. And people from the East don't know that the West provided the Allied forces with petrol. The Dutch state was able to shape the manner in which people from the former colonies talked about each other and also among ourselves.

We might be falling into the same trap by placing the Stedelijk's role as collector as a factor of a burgeoning collectiveness among artists with ties to the former Dutch colonies. Stanley Brouwn's inclusion in this list of artists is, for instance, emblematic. Going so far as to scrub his image from the Internet and making sure people don't photograph him next to his work, Brouwn actively avoids being pigeonholed in the 'ethnic artist' corner. That you place him and his work next to Remy Jungerman's, because the Stedelijk happened to have bought works from both of them, is exactly why artists like him run from the ethnicity box that treats their work as a secondary feature.

The collectiveness I'm talking about is something that goes beyond the curatorial idiosyncrasies of the Stedelijk. By focusing on the authority of the Stedelijk, on who gets to be seen as an artist from the former colonies, we're missing out on projects like Wakaman, Uni Arte, State of L3, Black Europe Body Politics, Instituto Buena Bista or Tembe Art Studio. Their inner workings steadfastly decentre the selection criteria of art institutions in the West and focus on their own views on art and art production.

**JB&KW** Could you tell us about your sources of inspiration for the narrative of A Village Called Gario?

**QG** My performance A Village Called Gario also decentres the selection criteria of art institutions. It removes the West as the authoritative voice in recalling world history. By placing the start of my family history, in other words civilisation, literally in the centre of Africa, I try to up-end history that keeps telling us that civilisation started in Greece and then manages to completely whitewash that beginning. The performance presents a different beginning as another option to think about how we became aware of ourselves and the world. When travel writing first appeared as a western literary tradition it was part of colonial expansion. As such it was an expression of conquest. By tracing my family history I present travelling as something other than conquest and decentre the traditional concept of the traveller. It's performative decolonial thinking in theatre form.

**JB&KW** Your work has been presented in art centres, theatres, on the radio, on TV and in print. Apart from that, you also make extensive use of digital technology and channels like Facebook, Tumblr and YouTube. In this respect, do you think that the way people experience art has changed because of the development of these digital platforms? Why is the presentation of your work in a museum still relevant for you when actually, you can much more easily spread your ideas through other digital and analogue technologies?

**QG** We can pretend that the digital is more important, but that's simply not the case. The digital is always rooted in the material world and the ability to be physically presented. The reason why Facebook, Yahoo (Tumblr) and Google (YouTube) are able to be ubiquitously present is because they can afford the millions of servers needed to open up those spaces. A little website won't be able to compete with that unless they're also able to create that same kind of physical presence. Just on a basic level.

I think the same is true for the art world. When looking at an artist like Constant Dullaart for instance, who mainly works with the Internet, it's his participation in group shows, festivals, gallery shows and biennales in physical locations that ensure that his work finds an audience within the art world. The cultural capital of those locations and the financial capital that comes with it ensures that his work has an audience, and that his audience grows. If he were not part of this material world, his work would not find an audience that would pay him the amount of money that he has been receiving for making digital works.

A lot of my work has not been recognised as art because it was specifically made through those digital media outside of the confines of the art institution context.

Zwarte Piet is Racisme did not start as part of a solo or group show. Even its proposed final show was a bit of a wash out. The project wasn't included because the curators that I asked to help set it up found that the project had become 'controversial' and 'tarnished' as an activist movement. It would detract from the other works in the show, according to them. A bit disappointed, but thinking it was for the best, I agreed to not give it its intended bow.

As an artist, this inclusion is about approaching mighty art institutions on my own terms and personally, this inclusion is kind of like flipping the bird to those curators [laughs].

**JB&KW** Could you tell us why the curators you worked with found the Zwarte Piet is Racisme too controversial or tarnished? Did it have to do with the fact that the project received lots of attention from the Dutch mass media, or with the fact that you took the Dutch police to court?

**QG** Well, leading up to the exhibition I got arrested during one of the performances of the piece. Basically the performance consists of me standing at public outdoor locations with a T-shirt on that says 'Zwarte Piet is Racisme/Black Pete is Racism'. The T-shirt is from the bargain store Zeeman (Sailor) and the words are sprayed on using a cut-out made from a Dr Oetker Ristorante pizza box with spray paint from HEMA. Using the T-shirt from Zeeman is a nod to the nautical history of the Netherlands and the spray paint is an acknowledgment of HEMA having introduced white Petes for their pop-up store in London in 2010. Usually, standing in public would lead to one-to-one discussions, but when I wore it the last time, I was present at the national Sinterklaas parade where hundreds of people dress up as Zwarte Piet. The police found my presence with the shirt as a sign that I was about to disturb the peace. As I was arrested, I started shouting that I hadn't done anything to deserve the police beating, and the footage of that was later used to argue that we were shouting the whole time we were present, which of course was a complete fabrication. Afterwards a Commission concluded that although arrest hadn't been resisted, the force used wasn't excessive. Yet, I still have daily neck, shoulder and back pain, so we have now taken it to the European Court of Human Rights.

**Quinsy Gario**
**Jelle Bowhuis & Kerstin Winking, Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam)**
*Zwarte Piet is Racisme (Black Pete is Racism) /*
*A Village Called Gario*

*Zwarte Piet is Racisme* (Black Pete is Racism) and *A Village Called Gario* are two performance projects by Quinsy Gario. For both projects, Gario took specific locations as points of departure. The *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* problematises the figure of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) that returns to the Netherlands every year in November, during the Saint Nicholas feast. Aspects of this performance project are shown in photographs, while for *A Village Called Gario*, which will actually be staged at MACBA, the artist takes a village called Gario in the Central Republic of Africa as the starting point for an imaginary trip. During this trip he traces possible ways of how his family ended up in the Caribbean with that last name while touching upon the ways in which those places now negate their colonial and postcolonial heritage.

Quinsy Gario was born in Curaçao and raised in St. Maarten and the Netherlands. Under the pseudonym T. Martinus, Gario he has self-published two poetry collections. He won the Hollandse Nieuwe 12 Theatermakers Prize 2011 and in 2012 he started his own radio show called ROET IN HET ETEN (Spanner in the works). His video work produced under the banner of NON EMPLOYEES has been shown on MTV Netherlands, and he is a member of the pan-African artist collective State of L3. Group exhibitions include Galleri Image (Denmark); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerpen (Belgium) and SMART Project Space and Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (Netherlands). He has performed in MC Theater (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Contact Theater (Manchester, United Kingdom) and Ballhaus Naunynstraße (Berlin, Germany).

Jelle Bouwhuis is Curator of the SMBA and Kerstin Winking is Global Collaborations Project Curator for the Stedelijk Museum & Stedelijk Museum Bureau. Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA) is a project space of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, located in the city centre. The objective of SMBA is to present contemporary art from an Amsterdam context and therefore to create an international platform by organising exhibitions, lectures, debates, publications and a residency programme that brings international curators together with cultural producers based in Amsterdam.

1 Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, 2011-2012
© Quinsy Gario

2 Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, 2011-2012
© Quinsy Gario

3 Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, 2011-2012
© Quinsy Gario

4 Quinsy Gario, *A Village Called Gario*, 2014 © Quinsy Gario

5 Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, 2011-2012
© Quinsy Gario

ZWARTE PIET IS RACISME

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ZWARTE PIET IS RACISME

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ZWARTE PIET IS RACISME

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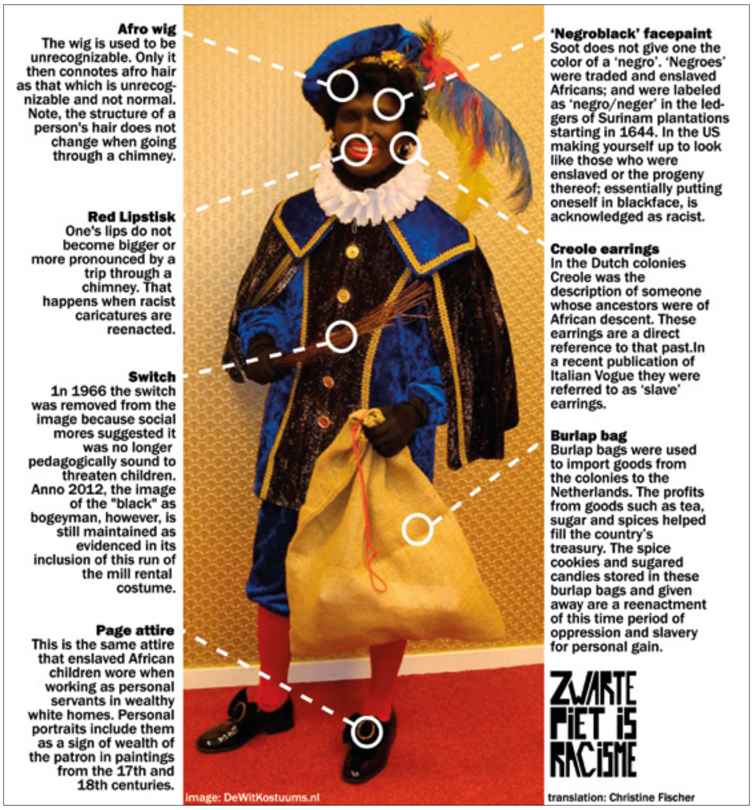

**Afro wig**
The wig is used to be unrecognizable. Only it then connotes afro hair as that which is unrecognizable and not normal. Note, the structure of a person's hair does not change when going through a chimney.

**Red Lipstisk**
One's lips do not become bigger or more pronounced by a trip through a chimney. That happens when racist caricatures are reenacted.

**Switch**
1n 1966 the switch was removed from the image because social mores suggested it was no longer pedagogically sound to threaten children. Anno 2012, the image of the "black" as bogeyman, however, is still maintained as evidenced in its inclusion of this run of the mill rental costume.

**Page attire**
This is the same attire that enslaved African children wore when working as personal servants in wealthy white homes. Personal portraits include them as a sign of wealth of the patron in paintings from the 17th and 18th centuries.

**'Negroblack' facepaint**
Soot does not give one the color of a 'negro'. 'Negroes' were traded and enslaved Africans; and were labeled as 'negro/neger' in the ledgers of Surinam plantations starting in 1644. In the US making yourself up to look like those who were enslaved or the progeny thereof; essentially putting oneself in blackface, is acknowledged as racist.

**Creole earrings**
In the Dutch colonies Creole was the description of someone whose ancestors were of African descent. These earrings are a direct reference to that past.In a recent publication of Italian Vogue they were referred to as 'slave' earrings.

**Burlap bag**
Burlap bags were used to import goods from the colonies to the Netherlands. The profits from goods such as tea, sugar and spices helped fill the country's treasury. The spice cookies and sugared candies stored in these burlap bags and given away are a reenactment of this time period of oppression and slavery for personal gain.

ZWARTE PIET IS RACISME

image: DeWitKostuums.nl

translation: Christine Fischer

5

# The View from MACBA

MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

## Oral Museum Of The Revolution

Bartomeu Marí

Around 1918, in the Berlin metropolis, in the midst of great rebellious exuberance against the moral and aesthetic values of the bourgeoisie, a group of belligerent artists emerged and started using a whole new set of techniques, forms and artistic practices, breaking away from the status quo of the art at the time. In the Prussian capital, the Dada movement, along with their Parisian and Zurich counterparts shared a deep rejection of the figures of authority of any type. However, it was also considered as the most politicised and multifaceted activities. Artists such as Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters were central players and made important contributions that broadened the world of what we now call art. Over time, these contributions have proven to be an essential part of understanding the development of artistic practice today. The invention of photomontage, an evolution of the collage carried out with photographic materials and procedures that Raoul Hausmann disputed with John Heartfield is one of the most drastic creations with the strongest impact in the history of iconography. Applied graphic arts in advertisement that has surrounded us for over a century adopts the technical and communicative scope from techniques originated by such artists. Parallel to this, a second and equally drastic invention took place, but which would take longer to prove its capacities in the production of beauty. Phonetic poetry arose like an echo of a new visual experience. The body is summoned by art through unprecedented factors; our senses are induced to profoundly different behaviour, eyes and ears are suddenly subjected to ideas that will for evermore change the way we perceive the world. Art changes the world through the alteration of human awareness.

Phonetic poetry, whose invention is claimed by different artists, introduced not only sound into the artistic environment that had been dominated for centuries as only being for the eye: Dadaist's experimentation with sound transported the human voice towards the centre of the formal and material avant-garde of art. Their experiments and inventions, that we would call performances today, were fuelled by the language of theatre and dance, by typographical experiments of futuristic poetry, Velimir Khlebnikov's and Aleksei Kruchenykh's 'words in freedom', the humanist spirit of the anarchism of the time and by pure romanticism, total enthusiasm.

Today we also know that there were two avant-gardes: one rational, cleansed, abstract, idealist, pure and based on the separation that exists between art and life, and the other temperamental, irrational, hybrid, empiricist and determined to bring together art and life. During the years 1960 to 1970 those 'dirty' elements of historic avant-gardes move towards the present and project the crisis of the bourgeois museum in today's culture. At the beginning of the 1970s, artist and critic Brian O'Doherty theorised the apotheosis of the pure avant-garde principle, or 'clean modernity', that the white cube represented the ideology of the gallery space. In his famous essay, O'Doherty stated:

> Who is this Spectator, also called the Viewer, sometimes called the Observer, occasionally, the Perceiver? It has no face, is mostly a back. It stoops and peers, is slightly clumsy. Its attitude is inquiring, its puzzlement discreet. He – I am sure it is more male than female – arrived with modernism, with the disappearance of perspective. He seems born out of the picture and, like some perceptual Adam, is drawn back repeatedly to contemplate it. (...) There are two kinds of time here: the Eye apprehended the object at once, like painting, then the body bore the Eye around it. This prompted a feed-back between expectation confirmed (checking) and hitherto subliminal bodily sensations. Eye and Spectator were not fused but cooperated for the occasion. The finely tuned Eye was impressed with some residual data from its abandoned body (the kinesthesis of gravity, tracking, etc). The Spectator's other senses, always there in the raw, were infused with some of the Eye's fine discriminations. The Eye urges the body around to provide it with information – the body becomes a data gatherer. There is heavy traffic in both directions of this sensory highway – between sensation conceptualised and concept actualised. In this unstable rapprochement lie the origins of perceptual scenarios, performance and Body Art.[1]

The first and last enemy of the white cube as an essential instrument of aesthetic modernism, O'Doherty tells us, is the collage and the forms and techniques that derive from it, as soon as they enter the sacred space of our vision, (the eye floating free from a body, having destroyed the other senses) real life, the outside, the dirty and chaotic truth which the clean avant-garde wants to take us away from. The modern museum is based on a sweeping change, in the perfect opposition between inside and outside, between museum and city, between art and no art. One conception of the avant-garde has never substituted the other. They have in fact, co-existed rather well, with the changing trends of biennales or art fairs that today have become the real thermometers to gauge contemporary art.

Since 2008, the Museu d'Art Contemporani of Barcelona has begun a specific line of expansion in its collection that has precisely to do with the extension of our senses with which we as spectators, interpreters and audience, are faced with in the facts of today's art. Because a large segment of contemporary art does not manifest itself through definable objects or recognisable works of art, many artistic objects – and as I argued before, since the beginning of the 20th century – should be characterised as 'occurrences', events, situations or environments. They seem to have no beginning and no end, no weight; they seem not to belong to a known genre. Can art exist without objects? An exhaustive definition of the notion of an object will say no, but the alteration in sound waves perceived by our eardrums is an object, at least an object of material existence, an alteration in material in one sense or another. Why is MACBA interested in an art that situates the voice, the human body and its possible ways in and out, at the centre of the phenomenon of perception? Because it is one of the unsurpassable extremes that creates value, experience, knowledge and pleasure that art has cultivated for over 100 years but that does not have a fixed place – not even a precarious one – in the social recognition of culture. It is like dealing with 'illegal art' of an ontological material, 'something other', that critics have not identified until very

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[1] O'Doherty, B., *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University of California Press, 1976-1999, pp.42 and 52

recently. MACBA as an institution has acquired a nervous system, with skin and bones, allowing it to fully interact with its public.

Since then MACBA not only promotes the research, exhibition and promotion of such artistic forms, but it also collects and integrates them as part of the DNA of the museum's identity. There are two examples that I would like to highlight here. Apart from exhibitions such as those that have been dedicated since 2004 to the vocal works of Vito Acconci, or to the work of Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller, MACBA conscientiously turned its attention to art that uses sound and human voice as its epicentre. We do that through the collecting and commissioning of new works, which are produced or co-produced by the museum; and above all, through the creative use of the objects and values contained in the Archive of MACBA's Study Center – the link between the conceptual space of the library and that of the actual collection. The Archive, with the materials that document these artistic practices, participates in this change in concept of the museum that is perceived as a producer of knowledge and not just as a space containing valuable, rare items. Projects such as the Ràdio Web MACBA help us relate with other entities that work with sound and consider such works as sculptures or installations, which do not depend on a physical space. This field of activity does not only cover the promotion of, but also the production and collection of sound-based works. Life suddenly infiltrates the museum through numerous entrances and exits, through multiple openings where new areas of sensibility, thought and action come together.

'In the beginning was the word'. In Christian culture the supremacy of the word in time, the spoken word is before anything. God created the world with his commands through words. For many other faiths, words, diction and voice play different but always pre-eminent roles in the structure of representation and beliefs. Words, voice, identity (language), belonging, community, as well as conflict and exclusion, form part of beings that communicate within the physical surrounding of voice. The verb and voice, lead us to the sense of hearing and to the disruptive experience of time, with its finite character. Theatre, poetry, music, through their modern transmission systems, cinema, radio and television, have also conquered the spaces of sound. Whether or not they are accompanied by unique visual experiences, creative artisans and the technologies of transmission and reception have transformed into large communication industries. Since the 1990s, innovation and development in audiovisual technologies have brought sound to the museum, while also driving the light out from its galleries, converting the white cube into a black box. The black box, the moving image, the spirit and mechanisms of cinema introduce voice and sound into the kingdom once governed by silence. The experience of time is also incorporated as a fundamental part of the work and no longer as a condition of our perception. The audio space that is now integrated in the museum probably constitutes the intermediate space between darkness and light, total continuity and temporary contingency that distinguish the types of imagination that are proposed by art today.

Between the presentations of the exhibitions *Time as Matter* (2009) and *Volume* (2013), two lines of investigation of our collections were introduced. These two presentations of the collection analysed the components of the physical and intellectual perceptive and material framework around which MACBA has been developing an important part of its exhibition programme and acquisitions policy. The activities of the museum itself give rise to a documental archive that represents memory and awareness. Within the activities and Public Programmes, the *Oral Museum of the Revolution*, a recent project by Beatriz Preciado, represents precisely the central position of orality within contemporary art. The *Oral Museum of the Revolution* is a performance and sound exhibition-archive that intends to give an audio and spatial presence within the context of the contemporary city and museum, the historic languages of social change invented by minorities of race, gender, sexual, bodily and functional and cognitive diversity, from the first revolution of slaves in Haiti and the uprisings of the *citoyennes,* to today's queer, autistic, intersexual, transgender, anti-speciesist movements that fight to broaden and redefine the limits of the democratic horizon. In 1791, the slave Tussaint-Louverture declared the abolition of slavery in the island of Haiti. In the same year, in a context in which women and bastard children have no rights to the political word, Olympe de Gouges publicly read *Les droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*. In 1849, when women did not have the right to vote, Jean Deroin was declared candidate to the French legislative elections. In 1867, Karl Ulrich stated before an assembly of German jurists that criminalised homosexuality that 'homosexuals' are not sick but are full subjects of law. In 1987, Larry Kramer publicly identified himself as an AIDS victim in order to oppose political management of the pandemic in the United States. 'How is it possible', asks Jacques Rancière, 'that those who do not have the right to talk in public nor to govern, claim access to politics through words? How is it possible that a despicable body declares himself as subject of politics through force? How can a scene of declaration be invented?'. 'Which is the contemporary voice', asks Judith Butler, 'that burst into the language of the law to interrupt its univocal function?'

The *Oral Museum of the Revolution* investigates the production of oral knowledge, the function of theatricality in activism, the relationships between language and actions, the semiotic and pragmatic specificity of political statements of the uprising, as well as the relationships between the literary genre of the 'manifest' with avant-garde and conceptual artistic practices. Produced in collaboration with students from MACBA's Independent Studies Programme, the *Oral Museum of the Revolution* brings together artists, activists and critics to collectively create a laboratory to broaden the museum's space through speech and listening. Moving away from the hegemonic model of the visual two-legged spectator, silent and wandering, that prevails in modern museums, the *Oral Museum of the Revolution* is aimed at a multiplicity of political subjects, of bodies and languages, of ways of gaining knowledge and experimenting that go beyond vision and that are built on conversation and feeling. The idea is to imagine the museum as a place to activate the processes that Félix Guattari defined as 'molecular revolutions': producing another desire, mobilising other ways to feel and learn.

Beyond its performance dimension, the *Oral Museum of the Revolution* enters the museum through a research project intended to create a double archive: on the one hand it takes on the construction of an 'archive of biopower' that explores languages, subjectivation techniques, and technologies of hegemonic control; and on the other, a cartography of resistance to create maps and chronologies of feminine opposition strategies, anti-colonial, queer, etc., as well as the relation with artistic practices.

Different ways of presentation, exchange and interaction between participants are put on the stage, in which the museum has already become. Hybrid forms of theatre, dance, music (or non-theatre, non-dance and non-music) now play a central role in live presentations and different forms of transmission. Although it is true that more and more museums incorporate live acts into their programming, such as performance, concerts, dance, ephemeral sessions, we should be conscious of the risk of the entertainment industry seeking legitimisation in the art world. In the same way that auction houses usurp the attributes that prevailed in public art institutions, the conditions of presentation, formats and instruments also tend to create confusion. It is in these areas of exchange and intermingling where the critical spirit and curatorial requirements should be upheld. It is not about preserving a 'pure' space, protected and certified by the museum, in which life and art are separated by the white cube, but rather spaces that offer aesthetic, experiential and intellectual values, and not the nearly omni-present market-driven forms encountered everywhere.

## Bartomeu Marí
## Director of MACBA – Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Bartomeu Marí was born in Ibiza (Spain) in 1966 and was appointed Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA) in 2008. He was the Curator of Exhibitions at the Fondation pour l’Architecture in Brussels (Belgium) between 1989 and 1993, and was also the Curator at IVAM-Centre Julio González in Valencia (1994-1996). He has been director of Witte de With, Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (The Netherlands) during 1996-2002. Between 2002 and 2004, Marí was the coordinator of the Centro Internacional de Cultura Contemporánea in Donostia-San Sebastián (Basque Country). In 2002 he co-curated with Chia-chi Jason Wang the Taipei Biennial and in 2004 he co-curated with James Lingwood the exhibition *Juan Muñoz. La Voz Sola. Esculturas, dibujos y obras para la radio*, shown at La Casa Encendida, Madrid. In 2005, he was the Curator of the Spanish Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennial, where Antonio Muntadas was the invited artist. Since August 2013 he is the President of CIMAM.

1 Screen shot of the Ràdio Web MACBA website, 2014
MACBA. Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

2 Screen shot of the Oral Museum of Revolution website, 2014
© 2014 MOR

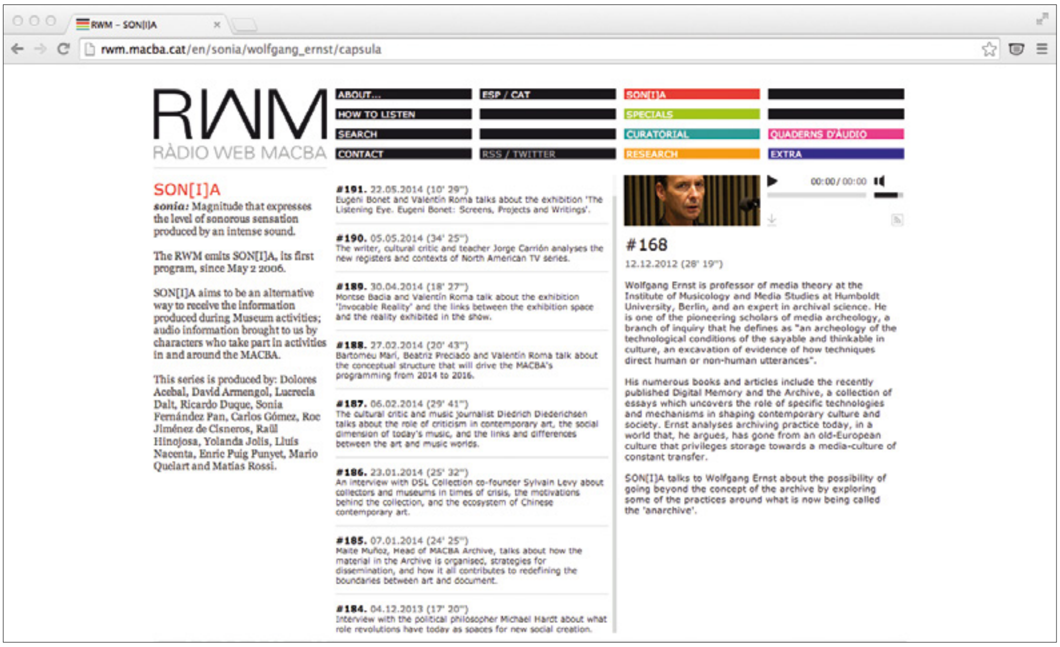
3 Gediminas Urbonas and Nomeda Urbonas,
*Ruta Remake*, 2002-2005
General view of the exhibition 'Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas. Devices for action', 14 March – 15 June 2008.
MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation. Gift of Havas Media
© Gediminias Urbonas, VEGAP, 2014;
© Nomeda Urbonas, 2014
Photographer: Tony Coll

4 General view of the exhibition 'ASPEN. The Multimedia Magazine in a Box', 7 January-28 April 2014. MACBA. Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
Photographer: Rafael Vargas

5 Miralda's studio, Barcelona
© Miralda for Food Cultura, 2014

6 General view of the exhibition 'Possibility of Action. The Life of the Score', 17 June-5 October 2008. MACBA Study Center
Photographer: Juanchi Pegoraro

Page 159: MACBA Study Center and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) seen from Plaça dels Àngels
Photographer: Rafael Vargas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HOW TO LISTEN
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SON[I]A

***sonia:*** Magnitude that expresses the level of sonorous sensation produced by an intense sound.

The RWM emits SON[I]A, its first program, since May 2 2006.

SON[I]A aims to be an alternative way to receive the information produced during Museum activities; audio information brought to us by characters who take part in activities in and around the MACBA.

This series is produced by: Dolores Acebal, David Armengol, Lucrecia Dalt, Ricardo Duque, Sonia Fernández Pan, Carlos Gómez, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, Raúl Hinojosa, Yolanda Jolis, Lluís Nacenta, Enric Puig Punyet, Mario Quelart and Matías Rossi.

**#191.** 22.05.2014 (10' 29")
Eugeni Bonet and Valentín Roma talks about the exhibition 'The Listening Eye. Eugeni Bonet: Screens, Projects and Writings'.

**#190.** 05.05.2014 (34' 25")
The writer, cultural critic and teacher Jorge Carrión analyses the new registers and contexts of North American TV series.

**#189.** 30.04.2014 (18' 27")
Montse Badia and Valentín Roma talk about the exhibition 'Invocable Reality' and the links between the exhibition space and the reality exhibited in the show.

**#188.** 27.02.2014 (20' 43")
Bartomeu Marí, Beatriz Preciado and Valentín Roma talk about the conceptual structure that will drive the MACBA's programming from 2014 to 2016.

**#187.** 06.02.2014 (29' 41")
The cultural critic and music journalist Diedrich Diederichsen talks about the role of criticism in contemporary art, the social dimension of today's music, and the links and differences between the art and music worlds.

**#186.** 23.01.2014 (25' 32")
An interview with DSL Collection co-founder Sylvain Levy about collectors and museums in times of crisis, the motivations behind the collection, and the ecosystem of Chinese contemporary art.

**#185.** 07.01.2014 (24' 25")
Maite Muñoz, Head of MACBA Archive, talks about how the material in the Archive is organised, strategies for dissemination, and how it all contributes to redefining the boundaries between art and document.

**#184.** 04.12.2013 (17' 20")
Interview with the political philosopher Michael Hardt about what role revolutions have today as spaces for new social creation.

#168

12.12.2012 (28' 19")

Wolfgang Ernst is professor of media theory at the Institute of Musicology and Media Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin, and an expert in archival science. He is one of the pioneering scholars of media archeology, a branch of inquiry that he defines as "an archeology of the technological conditions of the sayable and thinkable in culture, an excavation of evidence of how techniques direct human or non-human utterances".

His numerous books and articles include the recently published Digital Memory and the Archive, a collection of essays which uncovers the role of specific technologies and mechanisms in shaping contemporary culture and society. Ernst analyses archiving practice today, in a world that, he argues, has gone from an old-European culture that privileges storage towards a media-culture of constant transfer.

SON[I]A talks to Wolfgang Ernst about the possibility of going beyond the concept of the archive by exploring some of the practices around what is now being called the 'anarchive'.

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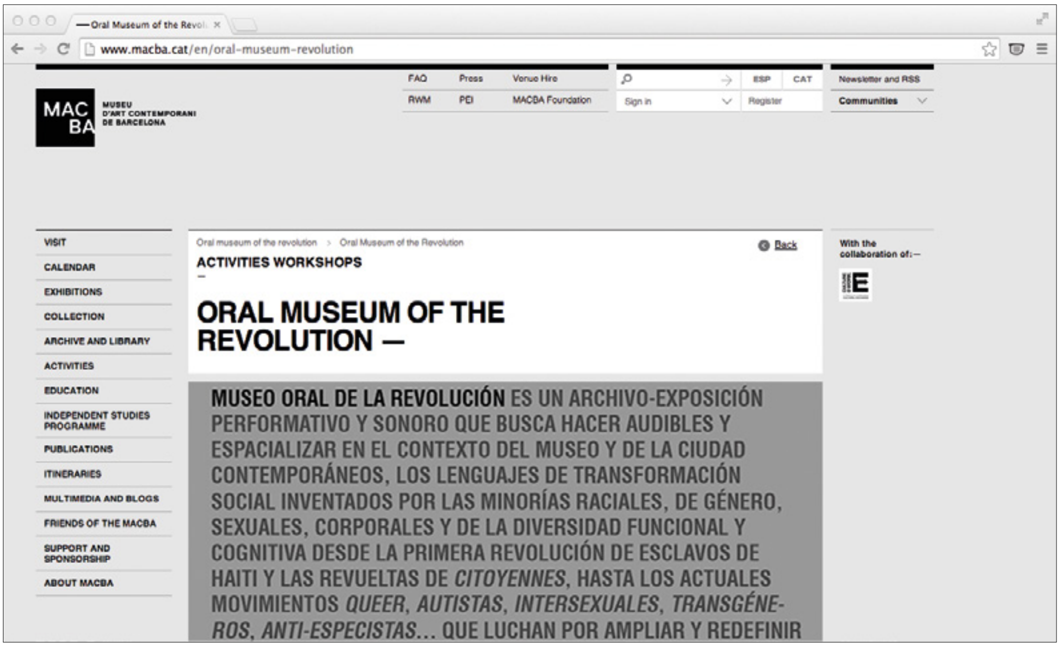
—Oral Museum of the Revol
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Oral museum of the revolution > Oral Museum of the Revolution
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ACTIVITIES WORKSHOPS

—

ORAL MUSEUM OF THE REVOLUTION —

**MUSEO ORAL DE LA REVOLUCIÓN** ES UN ARCHIVO-EXPOSICIÓN PERFORMATIVO Y SONORO QUE BUSCA HACER AUDIBLES Y ESPACIALIZAR EN EL CONTEXTO DEL MUSEO Y DE LA CIUDAD CONTEMPORÁNEOS, LOS LENGUAJES DE TRANSFORMACIÓN SOCIAL INVENTADOS POR LAS MINORÍAS RACIALES, DE GÉNERO, SEXUALES, CORPORALES Y DE LA DIVERSIDAD FUNCIONAL Y COGNITIVA DESDE LA PRIMERA REVOLUCIÓN DE ESCLAVOS DE HAITI Y LAS REVUELTAS DE *CITOYENNES*, HASTA LOS ACTUALES MOVIMIENTOS *QUEER*, *AUTISTAS*, *INTERSEXUALES*, *TRANSGÉNEROS*, *ANTI-ESPECISTAS*... QUE LUCHAN POR AMPLIAR Y REDEFINIR

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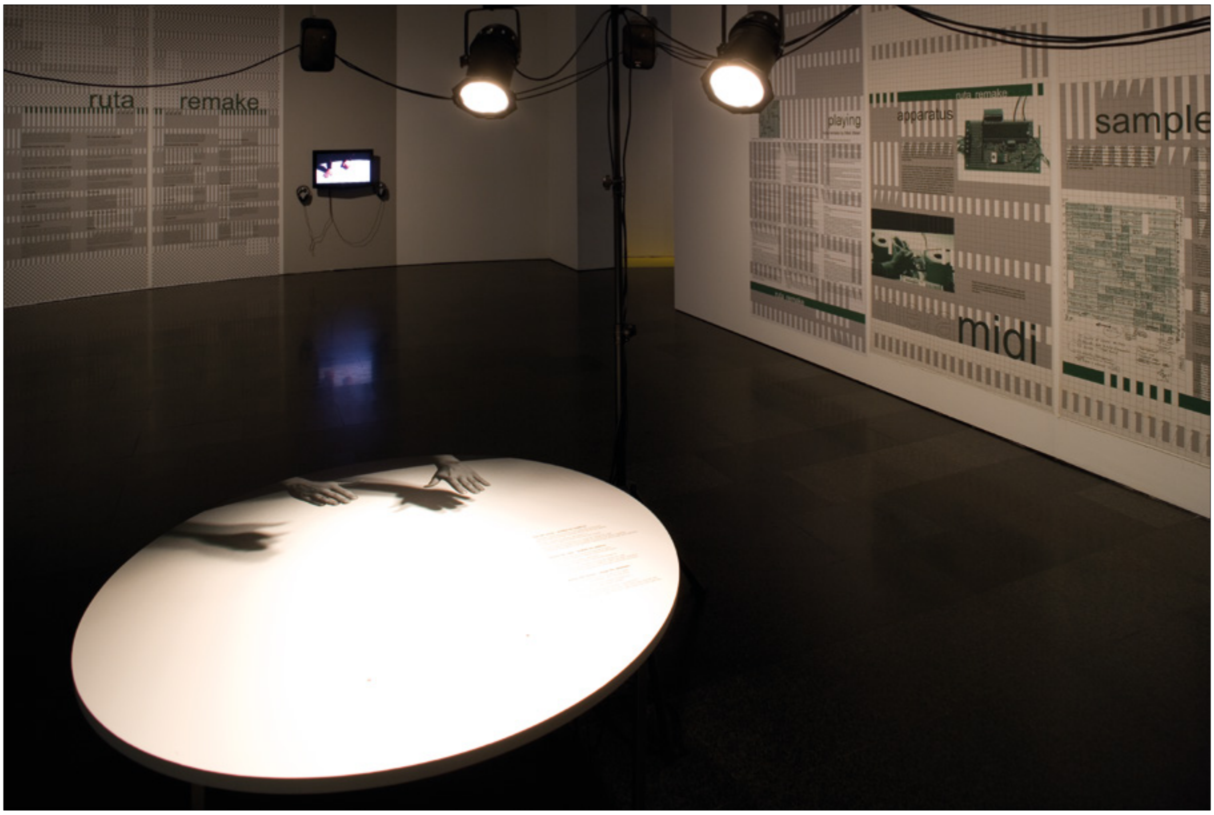
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# Archiving The Immaterial: Old Problems, New Challenges

Maite Muñoz and Pamela Sepúlveda

For a long time, art museums seemed to have been born with a secure identity, safeguarded by their designation to exhibit art and even to provide it with the necessary ritual of visibility. Yet now, as we embark upon the global age, they face a new challenge'.[1] Social transformations, globalisation, mobility and migrations are imposing changes on the roles and uses of museums, art objects and contemporary artistic practices. We are living in a time when a significant part of artistic production is moving towards practices ever more hybrid and immaterial. In a globalised context, new practices and strategies are questioning artistic activity oriented towards the production of physical objects and the primacy of formal aspects; rather, they are focusing on the artistic process itself. In that process, the artist as researcher gathers pre-existing archive materials at the same time as creating new documents. Similarly, the actions and activities that the artist performs within their research process are captured and documented by the institutions that house them. We find ourselves confronted by a new constellation of documentary typologies, traces of a complex process that undoubtedly has its historic roots in the conceptual art of the end of the Sixties.

The concept of de-materialisation as applied to art was coined by John Chandler and Lucy Lippard in their seminal paper 'The Dematerialization of Art', published in 1968 in *Art International*. Their thesis maintained that a defining step in artistic production had occurred during the Sixties, from art prioritising the object and the physical and visual, to art motivated essentially by the 'idea' and the thought process. A new art form emerged in two directions: art as idea, and art as action. The former negated matter; the latter put it in movement. From the end of the Sixties, artists have de-materialised and de-objectualised their artistic practices and have transformed them into processes recordable through text, photography, video or directly in data information and documents, which naturally find their place in archives rather than collections.

As a conscious or spontaneous reaction to the dominant cultural logic, processes of auto-archiving developed, as well as artistic practices that used archival formats and procedures as medium, and which reflected upon the latter. An art of attitudes, concept and de-materialisation, that has continued to evolve and grow; particularly if we think of the more active artistic media currently such as video, expanded cinema, sound experiences, and net art. In addition, as the curator Harold Szeemann observed, a significant proportion of contemporary artists are characterised by their nomadic condition.[2] They can frequently be seen in international exhibitions, and particularly in biennials. Their artistic production has adjusted to this migratory rhythm. Formats adapting best to this purpose are principally photography and video due to their ease of transport and the options of reproduction. It is therefore not random that these formats have thrived in such exhibitions.

[1] Lecture given by Hans Belting at the conference 'L'Idea del Museo: Identità, Ruoli, Prospettive', 13-15 December 2006, which was organised by the Musei Vaticani in the context of the festivities of 500 years of the Vatican Museums 'Quinto Centenario dei Musei Vaticani, 1506-2006'.

[2] Interview to Harald Szeemann for *Art Press* before the inauguration of Biennale of Venice of 1999. 'A Well-Documented Biennale', *Art Press*, 247, 1999.

We are thus confronted by a much more complex and intangible art than that of the conceptual art of the Sixties, whose traces used to be well-defined documentary objects, results of a meta-artistic thought process. Today, artistic processes, frequently with no defined beginning or end, are generating traces, approaches, and ideas, consisting of a diverse variety of documents from different sources. This information replaces to some extent the traditional, exclusively formal concerns and physical nature of the object of art. Currently, the artist as a researcher, allows himself to speculate in the artistic context which offers him a flexibility that the traditional academic context denies. S/he can speculate without the need to achieve conclusions, in a trial and error attitude that focuses on the process. The artistic act is a work in progress.

This is the case with the artists involved in this project. With Leo Asemota's 'The Ens Project' we encounter an ongoing multipartite artwork interconnecting ideas on the changing self in a dynamic globalised culture. His work encompasses an open range of expressions that include films, photography, sculptures, drawings and performance. A further example is Lawrence Abu Hamdan's work which frequently deals with the relationship between listening and borders, human rights, testimony, truth and law, through the production of audio-visual installations, graphic design, sculpture, photography, workshops and performance.

These transformations are inevitably imposing changes in the use and role of museums which are destined to develop a social role beyond being warrants of the past. Museums are thus changing from homogeneous bodies containing patrimonial objects – historicising machines – to heterogeneous and fluid bodies, generating knowledge. They become a model of effective spaces of mediation and transfer of ideas where it is possible to transcend frontiers between disciplines. The Canadian museologist Duncan Cameron refers to the concept of 'the museum as a forum'.[3]

Since the middle of the 20th century the consideration of the art object, based on hermetic categories, has become obsolete, together with the traditional organisation and subdivision of contemporary art collections in departments such as photography, sculpture, painting, etc. Collections are transitioning to hybrid spaces bordering archives and libraries. As Mela Dávila noted in her description of the scope, methods and objectives of the MACBA Study Center, the limit between the former and the latter are becoming blurred and almost disappearing.[4] The dividing line traditionally separating the categories of document and work of art has been overcome by the understanding that both conform to the continuum of a single patrimonial collection.

The museum is clearly confronted by a mutation in the meaning of its collections. The document now assumes a prominence previously reserved for the art object; a symptom of the contamination of the archival dialectic by the museal one. Due to the absence of a single and unidirectional narrative configuring the collected objects, the collection turns into an archive through which to transit. Spectators acquire an active role and the ability of constructing multiple narratives. This circumstance equally affects the collecting practices of museums in which documents, testimonies and fragments are fundamental elements. They do not merely represent a

[3] Duncan F. Cameron, 'The Museum, a Temple or The Forum', *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2014

[4] Mela Dávila, 'Es una obra, o es un documento? El Centro de Estudios y Documentación del MACBA', Glòria Picazo (ed.), *Impasse 10: Libros de artista, ediciones especiales, revistas objetuales, proyectos editoriales, ediciones independientes, publicaciones especiales, ediciones limitadas, autoediciones, ediciones de artista, publicaciones digitales ...* Lleida: Ajuntament de Lleida, Centre d'Art La Panera, 2011, pp.301-308. For this book, she described the scope, methods and objectives of MACBA Study Center by elaborating on the various theoretical parameters that MACBA is using to guide the expansion of its holdings.

contextualisation of the object of art, but rather belong in their own right to the collection, which is also becoming ever more an archive.

The particularity of archival material stemming from these artistic practices, as well as the process of reactivating it through exhibitions and other systems of visualisation, requires flexible art professionals with multidisciplinary skills. Roles for archive curators or archivists with a curatorial interest are becoming more frequent. The logic systems of both disciplines work together, combining a balance of the apparent objectivity of archival method with the creation of narrative typical of curatorial practice.

The role of the archivist with curatorial interest does not only apply to disseminating and reactivating material once it has been archived in the institution. The research process of artists travels through gathering, classifying and, at times even, describing documents. In this regard, they can rely on the collaboration and perspective of the archivist to reflect the complexity of their creative process. Artists compile pre-existing archival material and generate new material. They incorporate archival practices in their work process. In this regard, we should quote the research developed by MACBA, within the MeLa project, on classification methods and archiving protocols of documents produced by exhibitions, with the aim of identifying good practices and producing recommendations to launch exhibition archives.

The publication *Folding The Exhibition* is a product of this research, and is aimed at museums, galleries, researchers and artists.[5] In addition, there is a report of the experience of the close collaboration between the staff of the MACBA archive and the artist Miralda. His ongoing project, 'Food Cultura', which focuses on the study of food has myriad artistic, social, economic and political implications across all cultures and comprises a vast body of actions, collections, publications, exhibitions, projects and restaurants that question common museum protocols. An analysis of this material was produced and compiled by Miralda about his projects and exhibitions that identified the pertinence of establishing standards to classify and describe the materials. The necessity to use an informatic tool designed to reflect the particularities of the creative process became evident and, after this first phase, a database was conceived, designed, and developed to respond to the need of managing the documentary materials of the artist. Currently, the artist is using this system to document the projects, events, exhibitions, objects and documents that surround his artistic practice.

Works such as those of Miralda, Leo Asemota, and Lawrence Abu Hamdan, more abstract, blurred and complex than those of the conceptual art of the Sixties as they enter collections and archives, risk falling into artificial categories built by museums. Limits may be set that the artist has not created, corrupting the processes associated with the work. Such new artistic practices, and resulting materials, require a different procedural management of description, visibility and access which is much more fluid and less compartmentalised. Notions of archive and collection need to be revised and this inevitably generates a debate on subjects and aspects that are not easy to address. With the disappearance of the formal aspect, such considerations and thoughts challenge the grounds of current institutional dynamics of acquisition,

[5] *Folding The Exhibition*. Barcelona, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Milano, MeLa Project, 2014.

documentation, cataloguing, exhibition, conservation and restoration. What challenges does the conservation of intangible works such as sound art entail? How to preserve works in formats that become outdated due to the ongoing development of information technology? What are the issues related to acquisition and documentation of Internet art?

The analysis of this situation yields a clear conclusion: the difficulties incurred in the classification, description and visualisation of these works require different resources to those available to the classical systems. They need to reflect the complex network of links that give meaning to elements of status and characteristics so diverse as those present in contemporary art collections and archives. The approach and management of a markedly multidisciplinary artistic production must not be conceived as a static element, but rather as a set of actions that allow the integrity, function and access to the works to be maintained. Creating strategies, protocols, tools and standardised metadata enhancing the conservation and future access of that information should be a priority. This task should be performed together with the use of equally multidisciplinary tools that could overcome the previous focus on the materiality of the work. The artistic project has to be broken into its different aspects, which may be physical, conceptual, logical, contextual or related to interaction with the users, and we should keep in mind that we are not dealing with final outcomes, but with processes.

These difficulties imply a background work of analysis and understanding to eventually and ideally enable the documentary databases containing these materials to integrate relationship diagrams between its elements, and to reflect the ambivalence and complexity of its materials. Processes becoming works and works becoming processes, are difficult to completely comprehend by institutions. In spite of this, we continue to witness attempts by museums to embrace and acquire these artistic processes at certain stages, through snapshots, merely representing frozen moments of those processes. Information technology systems for description and cataloguing in museums and archives shall evolve from data and information management systems to more complex systems of knowledge management. Their role should be to plan, implement and control all activities related to knowledge and to offer systems of queries based on creative visualisation methods.

It is becoming evermore necessary for the institution to be in charge of preserving and transferring knowledge. There is therefore an urgency to address the new artistic practices with new methods, tools and approaches, able to provide adequate answers to an evolving challenge.

This new challenge transforms the museum in the custodian, not of the object, but of the live meaning of the work, of its wisdom.

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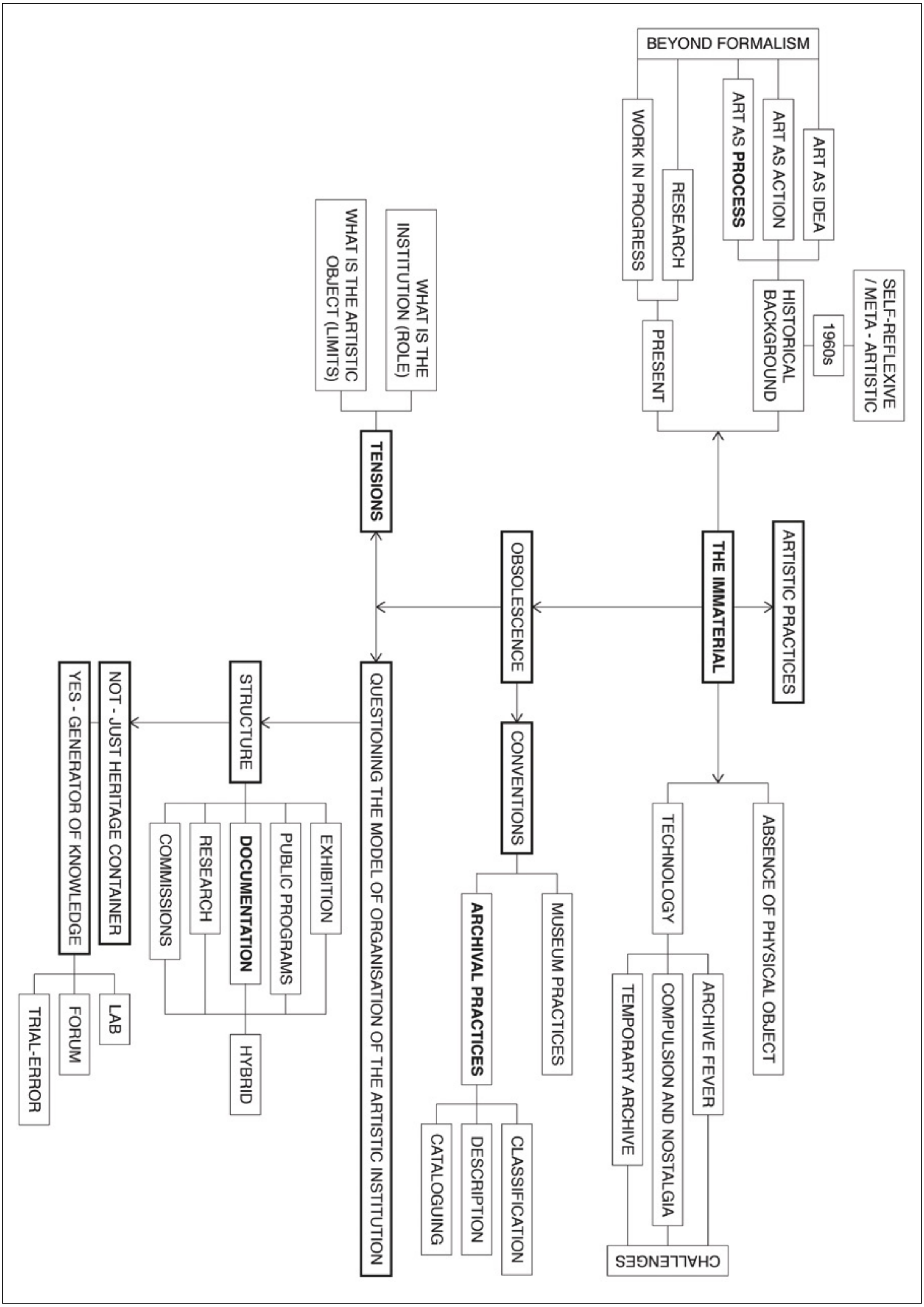
BEYOND FORMALISM
ART AS IDEA
ART AS ACTION
ART AS PROCESS
RESEARCH
WORK IN PROGRESS
SELF-REFLEXIVE / META - ARTISTIC
1960s
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
PRESENT
WHAT IS THE INSTITUTION (ROLE)
WHAT IS THE ARTISTIC OBJECT (LIMITS)
TENSIONS
ARTISTIC PRACTICES
THE IMMATERIAL
OBSOLESCENCE
QUESTIONING THE MODEL OF ORGANISATION OF THE ARTISTIC INSTITUTION
ABSENCE OF PHYSICAL OBJECT
TECHNOLOGY
ARCHIVE FEVER
COMPULSION AND NOSTALGIA
TEMPORARY ARCHIVE
CHALLENGES
CONVENTIONS
MUSEUM PRACTICES
ARCHIVAL PRACTICES
CLASSIFICATION
DESCRIPTION
CATALOGUING
STRUCTURE
EXHIBITION
PUBLIC PROGRAMS
DOCUMENTATION
RESEARCH
COMMISSIONS
HYBRID
NOT - JUST HERITAGE CONTAINER
YES - GENERATOR OF KNOWLEDGE
LAB
FORUM
TRIAL-ERROR

A graphic representation of the concepts and relationships outlined in the text in order to structure ideas and provide a visual summary. Based on the idea of immaterial artistic practices, attending to their historical background and the present context, the diagram indicates the obsolescence of certain museum practices. In particular, it shows the archival challenges and the need for questioning and rethinking the understanding that the art institution is a generator of knowledge rather than a mere receptacle for history

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