The Postcolonial Museum

The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History

Edited by Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona and Michaela Quadraro, Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', Italy

This book examines how we can conceive of a 'postcolonial museum' in the contemporary epoch of mass migrations, the internet and digital technologies. The authors consider the museum space, practices and institutions in the light of repressed histories, sounds, voices, images, memories, bodies, expression and cultures. Focusing on the transformation of museums as cultural spaces, rather than physical places, is to propose a living archive formed through creation, participation, production and innovation. The aim is to propose a critical assessment of the museum in the light of those transcultural and global migratory movements that challenge the historical and traditional frames of Occidental thought. This involves a search for new strategies and critical approaches in the fields of museum and heritage studies which will renew and extend understandings of European citizenship and result in an inevitable re-evaluation of the concept of 'modernity' in a so-called globalised and multicultural world.

Long overdue, here is a volume that updates and reconfigures the intersection of postcolonial critique with multiple interpretations of the museum and social praxis in globalisation. The Postcolonial Museum *charts gaps, achievements and prospects in 20 chapters that re-interpret the connection of past and current imperialisms. Introducing a wealth of new voices, this is essential reading for anyone interested in curatorial practice and theory, modern and contemporary art, ethnography, museology and the interventionist potential of research in the humanities overall.*
Angela Dimitrakaki, University of Edinburgh, UK

Cover image: *The Tomb of Qara Köz* by Ronni Ahmmed and Ebadur Rahman, Venice Biennale, Lido, 2011. Image courtesy of the artist and the curator, Ebadur Rahman.

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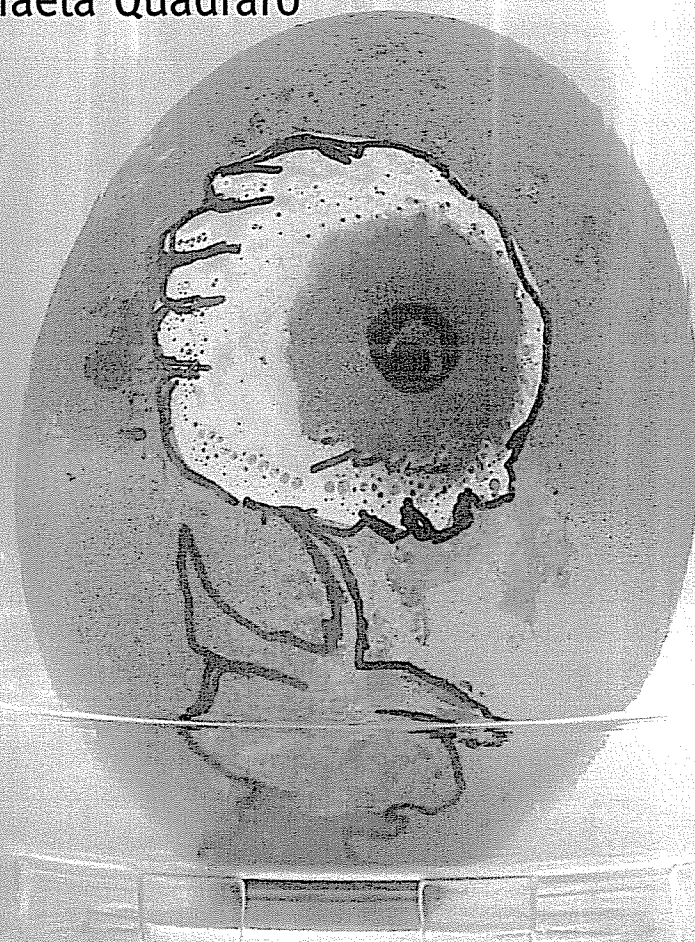
ASHGATE

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Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona
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Postcolonial art is intimately linked to globalisation – that is, to a critical reflection on the planetary conditions of artistic production, circulation and reception. This implies focusing on the interweaving of the geographical, cultural, historical and economic contexts in which art takes place. The relationship between globalisation and art, as Okwi Enwezor observes, conceived and institutionalised by the European history of modern art in terms of separation or simply negation, here acquires fundamental importance (Enwezor 2003). It represents both the premise through which the relationship between art and the postcolonial can be conceptualised, and the matrix that helps to convey the cultural and political value of this relationship, together with its significance as a *disruptive encounter*. Far from being lost in the sterile and abstract, yet provincial, mirror of self-referentiality masked as universalism – with the implicit claim of the autonomy and independence of art from other cultural forms and activities – postcolonial art is deeply and consciously embedded in historicity, globalisation and social discourse. On one hand, it reminds us of how power is organic to the constitution of the diverse relations and asymmetries that shape our postcolonial world, and hence of how 'bringing contemporary art into the geopolitical framework that defines global relations offers a perspicacious view of the postcolonial constellation' (Enwezor 2003, 58). On the other hand, postcolonial art also shows how aesthetics today presents itself as an incisive critical instance. Postcolonial art proposes new paradigms of both signification and subjectivation, offering alternative interpretative tools that promote a reconfiguration of a planetary reality.

Analysing the link between modernity and this global reality, we can say that globalisation can be understood as the planetary 'expansion of trade and its grip on the totality of natural resources, of human production, in a word of living in its entirety' (Mbembe 2003). It was inaugurated by the Occident through a violent process of expropriation, appropriation and an exasperated defence of property, spread globally through capitalism and its imperialist extension. This is a political economy that is deeply rooted in, and sustained by, the humanist, rationalist, colonialist and nationalist culture of the West. The central phenomenon of modernity, born in a historical exercise of power, was fed by the religion of 'progress' and the racist ideology of 'white supremacy' imposing itself for centuries as a universal ontological category through the institutions of laws,

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governance and the brutal instrumentalisation of lives and bodies (Spivak 1999). As Homi Bhabha insists, it is impossible to separate this past from the present. They are not disconnected: the former is not a mere predecessor of the latter. On the contrary, the past presents itself as a contingent, interstitial and 'intermediate' space that intervenes in the present, bringing newness with it. Remembering cannot be a quiet and introspective recollection: 'It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present' (Bhabha 1986, xxiii). Memory here becomes a search for the traces left behind by old and new imperialist strategies.

This is particularly evident if we consider the experience of colonialism not as a concluded chapter in global history, but as an intrinsic and indelible part of the contemporary world. Although the great empires of the past have officially ended, Europe can be observed through a postcolonial lens that unveils tensions and uneasy answers. Migratory movements and transcultural differences continually interrogate issues such as cultural heritage and national identity. People who have come from one-time colonies in search of a better life perform a perpetual and concrete re-membering of the deep interconnection between the former metropolitan centres of power and its disseminated peripheries.

The challenge of the postcolonial approach to contemporary society is to question the historiographical narrative as told from within the parameters of a univocal point of view. In this sense, Stuart Hall, in his 1996 essay 'When Was "the Post-colonial?" Thinking at the Limit', points out that postcolonial time is still configured as a *postcolonial constellation*, a time of 'difference'. This condition is configured as a *postcolonial constellation*, and gives voice to multiple and heterogenous contexts that differ from each other. Nevertheless, the term 'postcolonial' has been particularly convincing in demonstrating that there are no neat distinctions between 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there'. Colonisation is read as 'part of an essentially transnational and transcultural global process' that produces de-centred and diasporic re-elaborations of the grand narratives (Hall 1996, 247). The global intertwines with the local, and marks the proliferation of multiple connections and migratory forms and forces.

From dislocated and disseminated spatialities, alternative narrations propose creative imaginaries, ideas and artworks that can belong to this or that place. Referring to Achille Mbembe's intuitions, our world could best be understood in terms of 'the interlacing of histories and the concatenation of distinct worlds' (Mbembe 2011, 86). Colonial experience is thus described as a complex and open-ended process that plays a crucial role for the circulation of goods, collective imaginations and human beings. This is to register the formation of a transnational and transcultural world characterised by contact zones, passages and interstices.

It is in this re-consideration of universal history that the postcolonial challenge takes place. However, rather than referring to what comes after, the prefix 'post' implies a critical analysis that deconstructs Western hegemony and reveals the consequences that are at the very heart of modernity. As Edward W. Said understood, the Western archive has to be analysed 'contrapuntally', taking into account simultaneously both the dominant historiography and the other histories

that are negated and repressed (Said 1994). Cultural forms need to be taken out of traditional enclosures and considered in a global process. This is to acknowledge an ever-changing world, crossed by 'overlapping territories' with less rigid barriers and 'intertwined histories' of productive relations. This implies a critical and radical distance from what Mbembe has defined as Western necropolitics – that is, the exercise of appropriation through dis-humanisation, based on a force 'which takes life for death and death for life', and is seemingly incapable of transformation.

Postcolonial art, which emerges from experiences of migration and hybridisation, displays how this deadly imposition of the 'proper' and the 'Same' (to put it in feminist terms) is necessarily confronted with its limits and failures. Aesthetics opens up the unexpected possibility for a different encounter with and conception of the world. Opposed to necropolitics, the experience of art itself is inscribed in an experience of transformation. Significantly, postcolonial art often manifests itself in forms of desiring and untameable forces, in expressions of interconnections, border-crossing, becoming. Art erupts into history and interrupts the totalising and exclusionary – in a word, colonial – understanding of the world, transposing us into the *living archive* of postcoloniality.

Therefore, if the history of modern art, like the history of modernity, is rooted in and ordered by imperial discourse, its narrative, which is historically linear, culturally homogeneous, geographically centralising and politically universal, is mined and exploded by the pressures of postcolonial narratives, discourses and expressions. What is at stake here is not a pacific integration of the missing chapters of the forgotten, excluded and subaltern voices into inherited accounts, but rather a deconstruction and rewriting of those very histories through the irrepressible presence of these other narrations. This helps us to disengage the relationship between contemporary art, cultural difference and global reality from the exclusive politics of museology. It also disseminates a dissonance with what Kobena Mercer defines as 'the politics of expedience', which often seems to dominate the 'multicultural' and racial-friendly approach of international art exhibitions (Mercer 2002). Avoiding the risk of reducing art to an expedience for inclusive and moribund accounts of the transcultural present, postcolonial aesthetics invites us to consider art as the possibility through which our connection with otherness, with present and past, belonging and memory – even with science and nature – is problematised and activated, in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

For example, at *Documenta 13*, the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir created a kind of personal museum from some Palestinian literary remains, where history, memory and belonging are intimately interconnected and interrogated. In her photographic installation *ex libris* (2012), the artist showed images drawn from more than 30,000 books coming from Palestinian homes, institutions and libraries looted by Israel in 1948, and then kept and catalogued as AP ('Abandoned Property') in the Jewish National Library, West Jerusalem. Jacir took pictures with her cell phone over the course of many visits. She showed the internal pages of those books, where the

Arabic is both in handwriting and typescript, sometimes clear in bold characters, but elsewhere has almost disappeared or is superimposed with other writing and hardly legible. Sometimes English words mingle with Arabic ones. In Kassel, where *Documenta* was hosted, the artist created a register of the traces and fragments she found, and translated some handwritten inscriptions of the former owners into German and English, exhibiting them on billboards, in public spaces, weaving a dialogue with history and place. *Ex libris*, in fact, takes place in the Zwehrenturm, the area of the Fridericiarum Museum where manuscripts were stored and that survived the 1941 American bombing that destroyed other volumes kept in the museum library. Jacir also concentrated on the postwar period when the region of Hessel-Kassel was occupied by American forces. Here, the Offenbach Archival Depot, which hosted the books and manuscripts looted by the Nazis, instituted a process of restitution, the largest in a US zone up until then. Interlacing past and present experiences of siege and destruction (perpetuated by the United States and Israel), and superseding the borders of different histories and geographies (North America, Central Europe, the Middle East), the artist appears to re-actualise the process of restitution, giving it a disruptive meaning that questions the very idea of ownership. The Palestinian books that were once brutally appropriated are now registered in a public vision and space, through a creative gesture that renders them unappropriable and uncontainable. What the artwork produces is not simply a recuperation of what was lost, but the transformation of the loss into a possibility of a potency that goes beyond colonial power towards a different re-collection that activates memory as difference.

Border-crossings

In the frame of a postcolonial constellation that is simultaneously theoretical and practical, we could think of a different configuration of space, based on the centrality of transits and transcultural movements. Zygmunt Bauman's ideas about a 'liquid modernity' emphasise the centrality of fluidity as a fitting metaphor to grasp the complexity of contemporary society (Bauman 2000). Modernity, according to him, has always been liquid. The absence of finishing lines attests to a permanent state of change with no clear destinations. His ideas do not merely celebrate this condition, but also envision a frightening scenario. Indeed, the melting of solid bonds into more precarious and individually conducted lives can generate the proliferation of private interests and feelings of anxiety over security. In this way, every incoming body can be a source of fear. This emotion registers the proximity of others and creates rigid boundaries in daily life: 'Fear works to align bodily and social space: it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained' (Ahmed 2004, 70).

Past histories of slavery and civilising missions survive in the present and activate a proliferation of stereotypes. In the context of migration, these ideas find a

striking example. If liquidity encourages the mobility of human beings and capital, it also involves many human beings experiencing a restriction on their right to move. This is particularly evident for migrants, asylum seekers and those seeking a 'better life', as the artist Isaac Julien puts it. In his audio-visual installation *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* (2007), contorted black bodies gasp in the foam or lie lifeless on the shores of the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. In this artwork memory becomes a strategy of aesthetic engagement. In order to dislocate the linearity of the narration and the authorial voice, the formal construction of Julien's installation, elaborated on multiple screens in museum spaces, shows the impossibility of presenting the fullness of memory. Floating histories of diasporic and subaltern bodies exceed any logic of framing.

The propagation of bodies in the critical space of the Mediterranean Sea is a source of fear in the racialised regime of global information. Such proximities are seen as a threat to the safety of the nation-states. Cultural differences are intensified and charged with danger, while those lives submerged beneath the waves of modernity are rarely registered. As Iain Chambers has suggested, the adoption of a 'critical mourning' is necessary – that is, a tracing of the continuous resonance between the past and the present (Chambers 2001). His 'maritime criticism' exposes existing knowledge to unsuspected questions and unauthorised interruptions, 'by folding it into other times, other textures, other ways of being in a multiple modernity' (Chambers 2008, 33). This means that we should take a heterogeneous modernity into account and adopt a postcolonial cartography that rethinks cultural places such as the Mediterranean as sites of stratification. The emphasis on human and cultural connections through and across the sea refines the ways in which global history is framed. A 'new thalassology' emerges, a cultural-historical framework based on the centrality of the sea in the making of global history (Horden and Purcell 2006). The Mediterranean is here rethought in terms of complexity and variability within an emerging critical connectivity. At the same time, Europe is unmade as a fixed space of exclusion and privilege, and remade as a fluid space of multiple contaminations and transcultural differences. So, European territories become a privileged terrain for the discussion of global flows and forces, and an exemplary site for investigating the question of migration in its material, historical, symbolic and creative developments.

A possibility or even necessity unfolds here: rethinking and overcoming the existing notions of heritage, patrimony, property, their embodiment in memory, history, place, belonging, and the multiple means and modes in which they are sustained. In this sense, the Mediterranean region, with its migrant histories, serves as a paradigm of border-crossings through artistic production, as in Julien's video installation cited above. Besides visual production, other artistic works express a contamination of sounds, languages and memories. For instance, a new musical genre has recently developed in the Mediterranean area, Harraga rap, a product of the current processes of migration that conducts us directly into the different currents of time. This music is created by North African migrant artists and takes its name from an Arabic word meaning literally 'burning': metaphorically, it

indicates travelling without documents. What these lyrics declare is a desire for life that translates into the challenge to burn the frontier. This rap music circulates in the suburbs of Tunis, Algiers and Tangiers, as well as in the Italian island of Lampedusa, which represents the first landing for many of the southern migrants in their passage to Europe. Emblematically, it is also known as 'Lampedusa rap'.

Border-crossing is the constitutive trait of Harraga music. It emerges from experiences of migration and the engendering processes of hybridisation through the mixture and conflation of various Mediterranean sounds and languages (Arabic, French, English and Italian). In a way, Harraga music reconnects to the tales of transit and cultural interlacing that have historically characterised the Mediterranean region, and even to the construction of modernity traced back to the Atlantic migrations. But it also reminds us of how in today's 'Fortress Europe', as with the Western imperialism of the past, the desire for border-crossing succumbs to the violence of security policies, thus often becoming an experience of refusal, exclusion, and even death. The bodies, the voices, the languages and the histories of the migrants immediately transpose us into an unexpected recognition of shared spaces and times, in the common, frequently silenced, history of migration.

If this music – that ultimately breaks up the discomforting continuity between the violence of past and present colonialisms – can contribute to rewrite (the aesthetics and ethics of) the frontier, in the form of chants of desire, it also functions as a cultural reminder not only of past, but also of present and future narratives of border-crossings and transmissions. It contributes to the reconceptualisation of institutionalised notions of heritage, memory, belonging and the archive. A memory of the future is announced. This undermines the conservative paradigms and apparatuses that sustain 'our' heritage, soliciting the question 'Whose heritage?' and undermining inherited pretensions of legitimate authorship and ownership (Hall 2002).

Such artistic experiences illustrate how postcolonial art emerges through an intertwining of art and life, articulating what Jacques Rancière ([2004] 2006) defines as the 'politics of the collage' between politics and aesthetics and, in the words of Edouard Glissant (1997), a 'poetics of relation', where points of connection are inseparable from interruptions, intervals and lines of flights. The postcolonial artwork, in other words, elaborates an ethical-aesthetic cut 'across and within an inherited Occidental art discourse that leads simultaneously to recovery and renewal … the autonomy of art and aesthetic suddenly becomes a pressing ethical and political issue' (Chambers 2012, 22–3).

Within the complex and contested cartography of global modernity, the encounter with postcolonial art reveals life emerging from processes of connection and disconnection, conjunctions and differences, territorialisation and deterritorialisation. We are critically confronted with a disorienting proximity between local and global, inside and outside, past and present, here and there, the self and the other, life and death. Art transposes us into an opaque zone where distinctions between spaces of tension and 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992), frictions and connections are blurred. In this sense, border-crossing is not simply the

methodology of a postcolonial aesthetics, but also and simultaneously an ethics, a politics, an epistemology.

The artworks described above can be considered as diffused traces of a shared migrant heritage. This is invariably repressed in the linearity of Occidental accounts of history and memory. Migrant aesthetics transposes us into an alternative cartography, where the injunction to 'burn the frontier', coming from subaltern voices, translates into a rejection of the Western legacy of limits and the confines of a specific cultural legacy. This is a map that stretches the cultural and geographical horizons drawn by both official historiography and museology. It goes beyond the 'white walls' of the museum (Curti 2012), to exceed its space and time. The postcolonial aesthetics dislocates and reinvents museum spaces and memorial practices, and disseminates alternative ways of elaborating and sharing memories. The conceptual limits and the physical boundaries of the archive are overcome, as art transforms the museum, recognising in public space, the streets and the sea a liquid and fluid archive of migrant memories.

The Museum of 'Cold and Old'

As Michel Foucault observed, museums function as 'heterotopias' – like other cultural institutions, they are places in the immediate 'beyond' of time and space. Here existing forms of social, political and biological rules, such as physical pleasure, corruption or decay, seem to fall into abeyance. The mirror is the material and symbolic icon of all heterotopias, in so far as it does not exist separately from the external world that it reflects and inverts. It manifests reality in a tiny synchronic space where the relations with the external world are visible but nevertheless turned upside down, protected and exposed at the same time, in each case non-modifiable. You can observe the codification of reality in a mirror, its appearing and disappearing, but you cannot intervene in the process of its reversed functioning (Foucault 1986).

An archive functions in much the same way: by storing 'real' objects (or ideas), it preserves them from the corruptions of reality. The discourse of the archive reflects the rules of the external world, yet maintains its own internal dynamics, its own language. The archive, as Foucault suggests, is 'the first *law of what can be said*, the system that governs the appearance [and disappearance] of statements as unique events' (Foucault 1972, 129). *Conditio sine qua non* for all the discourses that intersect the world at certain periods, crossed by interruptions, fissures and frictions, the archive functions precisely through this non-homogeneous texture. Outside its non-linear rules, nothing can manifest itself as a 'unique event', worthy of being remembered and celebrated. Therefore, the archive as a mirror of reality is also the set of rules that determines the memorial and aesthetic processes that are to be remembered and registered.

As Jacques Derrida points out, the archive is haunted by the risk of falling into the abyss of its own premises and ruins. There exists an 'archiviolithic drive'

towards suffocation (Derrida 1995), a sort of centripetal force that is always prone to destroying the living quality of memory. The compulsion to store and preserve memory kills every attempt at re-qualifying the present and taking responsibility for the future.

In Leila Aboulela's 1999 short story 'The Museum', published in her collection *Coloured Lights* (Aboulela 2001), such premises appear in all their force.[1] Shadia, a clever yet confused Sudanese student in Scotland studying for a Master's, finds herself ill at ease, stuck in a country imbued with both racist prejudices and orientalistic images of Africa. The difficulties of the migrant condition and of the courses, as well as the pervasive pessimism that circulates among the non-European students, undermine their self-esteem and their capacities:

> The course required a certain background, a background she didn't have. So she floundered, she and the other African students ....

> Us and them, she thought. The ones who would do well, the ones who would crawl and sweat and barely pass. Two predetermined groups. ... 'These people think they own the world.' (Aboulela 2001, 100)

Thanks to the initially difficult, yet enriching, friendship with Bryan, a Scottish course-mate who helps her survive the classes, Shadia manages to experience this difficult situation diversely. She finds moments of real communication, or at least of intercultural dialogue and translation, we might argue, even in the close-minded Aberdeen college: a heterotopia, yet one of the saddest types. Towards the end of the story, though, she is overwhelmed by the same negative feelings of surrender that are drastically debilitating the African students. One day, invited by Bryan, who is eager to demonstrate his willingness to learn about her country, to an African museum in Aberdeen, she experiences the disappointment and the almost physical sensation of collapse and being 'scotomised', as a living African, under the aseptically false descriptions of her country that she discovers in the museum. This is a prototype of the 'exhibitionary complex' described by Tony Bennett (1988), where the young woman is disturbed by her own interiorisation of the gaze of the powerful others, and yet opposes it:

> During the 18th and 19th centuries, north-east Scotland made a disproportionate impact on the world at large by contributing so many skilled and committed individuals .... In serving an empire they gave and received, changed others and were themselves changed and often returned home with tangible reminders of their experiences.

> The tangible reminders were there to see, preserved in spite of the years. Her eyes skimmed over the disconnected objects out of place and time. ... Nothing

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1   'The Museum' received the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000.

was of her, nothing belonged to her life at home, what she missed. Here was Europe's vision, the clichés about Africa: cold and old. (Aboulela 2001, 115)

The museum seems to have accomplished its task, at least according to Shadia's fears: it proves to be a mausoleum that consolidates not only the distance between the hosting/hostile milieu and her mother country, but also her own cultural prejudices, her gaze on herself and her situation. Nothing is expected to change. No space is left to allow the cultural institution to fill the gap – or try to take notice of it – between the migrant's expectations of integrating and improving her life and the delusive experience of cultural dominance or the erasing of difference. In much the same way, the college fails to help the African students fill their gaps in mathematics: lacunas due to the educational system that Britain's supremacy had exported to Africa. 'Museums change, I can change,' Bryan pleads with her when noticing the discouragement clouding her beautiful face (Aboulela 2001, 119), but nothing seems to change at all. Social, political, educational circumstances overwhelm an already worn-out girl, lost in between the mirage of home – where she was unhappy and unsatisfied – and the nightmare (at least, so it seems) of an inhospitable, racist country.

Although published eight years after the hopeful, vibrant book *Imaginary Homelands* in which Salman Rushdie surely changed the discourse and perceptions on migrations, Aboulela's story is paradigmatic of an experience of delusion and immutableness. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes: 'to migrate is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul, but the migrant is not simply transformed by his act, he also transforms the new world. Migrants might well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridisation that newness can emerge' (Rushdie 1991, 210).[2] Compared to this visionary theory, Bryan's words of change seem ingenuous and superficial: from the very beginning of this short story we are confronted with his orientalistic perceptions.[3] Shadia's reactions to the spectacle of Africa as a place both 'cold and old' are comprehensible: the offensive simplifications of a massive memorial archive of conquest and national self-celebration threaten her living memories, reducing them to mere opposition and sterile nostalgia that proves unable to change the situation. The display of savagery and passivity she is compelled to stare at is symptomatic of a whole discourse: an archive of prejudices, we might say, based on ignorance, indifference and carelessness: full of *holes*; an archive constructed on voids, oblivion, erasures, on worlds that are rendered non-existent, both in the past

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2   This idea of 'newness' emerging out of the migrant condition is reworked by Homi Bhabha (1994), who brings out Rushdie's words further, theorising on a radical position of 'in-betweenness' of the postcolonial and the migrant subject, capable of inventing new positions and strategies for survival.

3   His 'positive' orientalism sees Shadia as a princess, and Sudan as nothing more than a remote country that he is unable to locate in Africa. As for La Mecca, it is a place he says he is fond of, but then he naively confesses to have only seen it in a book.

and the present, as the Bangladeshi artist and curator Ebadur Rahman seems to remind us in 'There is Not Yet a World' (Chapter 5 of this volume).

Foucault suggests that it is precisely around these holes – fissured, interrupted networks of discourse and reality – that the archive can both validate itself and, conversely, be seriously threatened by the difference(s) it can neither control nor store. The present is likely to change, if accepted for what it is. The present as a *present* is a gift, but also a responsibility we are invited to respond to in order to preserve life from the ghosts, the remnants and the discursive limits inherited from the past.

Change inscribes itself in the very nature of the archive: a *dispositif*, a technology of power that we are always able to subvert. According to Foucault, power is a 'strategic game', a relationship that, unlike sheer violence and domination, is always subjected to change:[4]

> [It] can only be articulated on the basis ... that 'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognised and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, effects and possible inventions may open up. (Foucault 1982, 789)

Therefore, as Maurizio Lazzarato underlines in analysing Foucault, 'the analysis of power dispositifs should then begin ... with the dynamic of forces and the "freedom" of subjects' (Lazzarato 2002, 107). What postcolonial subjects often experience in the ethnographic museum is still the political dominance of the cultural institution, the silent violence of hermeneutics and display that they may feel unable not only to bear, but also to confront, owing to personal and political frailty. As subjects, though, they always have the potential to subvert this relationship and free themselves through creation, *unpredictability* and even *chaos*, rather than continue the charade of an imposed identity. Nevertheless, as in this short story, intense social, economic and cultural yokes may overwhelm them. In this asphyxiating and tiny *margin* of space and action, are inventions and creations likely to happen? Is it possible to change one's political position from the 'exotic other' to the subject of change and political creativity, to change museums from within?

As bell hooks puts it, margins are precisely the locations in which change happens, where those people 'who are unwilling to play the role of "exotic Other"' have to 'invent spaces of radical openness' (hooks 1990, 148). And this is both an ethical and an aesthetical praxis, as she further explains:

> Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

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4   See also Antonio Gramsci's distinctions between 'cultural hegemony' (power, in a Foucauldian sense) and coercive dominance.

> For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance. (hooks 1990, 149)

In the margins of culture, where the totalising and homogenising project of the archive fails and reveals itself as a discourse in the making, resistance is always possible. For hooks, as for Hall, with whom she discusses his notion of the 'politics of articulation', creative resistance is also a question of language: for her, speaking with one's own words, while for Hall, it involves inventing new forms of expression out of encounters and conflict.[5] Even museums will have to reinvent their language to face the challenge of the contemporary, an epoch massively informed by migrations, planetary interdependence and networks of fluxes and information, and yet still deeply scarred by old and new colonialisms, marginalisation, economic and political inequality, racisms and sexisms.

How do museums 'de-colonialise' themselves, not so much to ingenuously get rid of the burden of the past and the stereotypes of 'First-Worldism', but rather to undo and radically interrogate the more subtle and widespread mono-cultural perspectives of culture and the encompassing *épistémè* which imbues their language, self-perception and discourses? How will European museums succeed in 'marginalising' themselves, not merely to offer space to the 'periphery', or to tacitly 'host' and acculturate the others that come from the 'margins', but rather to recover creativity and new energy? How can museums cease being a 'curated' place, a space rendered anaesthetised, immune and impermeable to the story of traumas and wounds, a place that, as the Moroccan curator and anthropologist Tarek Elhaik suggests in Chapter 12 of this volume, is incapable of hosting the problematic instance of 'incurable images' coming from elsewhere? In the light of these questions, museums become unstable, marginal, exceed their white walls, and open themselves to the possibility of a postcolonial museum yet to come.

Unexpected Visions

Museum narratives build national and cultural identity through framing. As Ursula Biemann suggests in Chapter 16 of this volume, the museum does not

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5   This importance of community and encounters, translated into the museal space, recalls recent studies based on community museums, in particular *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Karp et al. 2006) and *Museums and Their Communities* (Watson 2007). Recognising the power relationships and the frictions that inform museum and representation, seen as arenas of conflictive perspectives and battles, these studies call for forms of co-operative, participating, more equal relationships, based on respect and trust between curators and source communities, as well as consultation, co-curatorship, listening. In particular, the essays in *Museum Frictions* insist on the margins as places of change.

merely store artefacts and exhibit facts, it is the very apparatus of difference – in other words, a 'boundary-drawing device'. Many of the frames of thought that form the essential foundation of the museum represent the legacy of nineteenth-century ideas and have to be re-imagined. The neutrality of museums needs to be deconstructed in order to advocate a new museum theory, or critical museum theory, that is about decolonising and cross-cultural exchange (Marstine 2010). The very idea of 'authenticity', as Aboulela's short story reminds us, is an illusion, an idea conceived in the late eighteenth century, when the museum was born in Europe and then developed as an exhibitionary *dispositif* of the civilising mission. The strategies of archiving and classifying lie at the very heart of Western modernity; in this context, museums were means of power and knowledge exhibiting cultural forms and the regulation of bodies and discourses (Bal 1996). The modern museum is part of an institutional 'exhibitionary complex' that has allowed the development and circulation of disciplines such as biology, history, and anthropology (Bennett 1988). This complex of institutions with their practice of 'showing and telling' – that is, the exhibition of objects and the construction of cultural meanings and values – is a pedagogy. The organisation of space and of the relation between the viewing subject and the viewed object were central to this complex for establishing norms of public conduct and strategies of surveillance.

In the formation of the museum, vision has a central role. Here, we can use the theoretical tools of visual culture to reveal the frictions and tensions that constitute that formation. Considered as a field of study, visual culture is concerned with the cultural practices of looking and seeing; it considers the image as a sign or text that produces meaning (Hall and Evans 1999). However, since these meanings cannot be completed within the text, they require the subjective capacities of the viewer to make the images signify. This leads to a theory of visuality that investigates and indeed questions the relation between subject and object. Visuality focuses on questions of visibility, knowledge and power. We know that the gaze produces the subject through complex processes which are both social and psychic. If we think of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1986), this dynamics becomes very clear. It is through the power of the gaze that Fanon understands himself as a black subaltern subject.

Nicholas Mirzoeff elaborates the visual as an interdisciplinary and 'challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialized identities' (Mirzoeff 1999, 4). Visuality is developed as a problematic space, where it is possible to re-think the consolidation of power in a visualised model and with the logic of belongingness and location. Subjects, as Mirzoeff reminds us, are defined both as agents of sight and as objects of a visual discourse. In the context of museum studies, the interpretive frame of visual culture makes it possible to investigate vision in its social and cultural dimension and to declare a critical approach to the objects, collections, and so on. Considered in its cultural politics, the museum raises important questions of interpretation. In particular, attention is devoted to the construction of

meanings and values that take place in its space. As Hooper-Greenhill suggests, museums are deeply related to questions of representation and power, especially 'the power to name, to represent common sense, to create official versions, to represent the social world, and to represent the past' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 19). So questions need to be asked about meanings: since they are always plural, there cannot be a single way of framing objects.

The museum vision, far from referring only to the mere capacity of the eyes, works as a technology of power and becomes controversial given the strategies of inclusion and exclusion that are drawn upon. It is also in this deep interrelation between visuality and power within the museum that the postcolonial challenge occurs. This development in critical theory suggests an enhanced significance of spatiality. As Irit Rogoff suggests, the critical process of spatiality insists on 'the multi-inhabitation of spaces through bodies, social relations and psychic dynamics' (Rogoff 2000, 23). This is in contrast with nation-states which insist on a singular inhabitation under one dominant rule. Since space is always differentiated and characterised by boundary lines, visual culture aims to repopulate space with all the unknown images removed by the illusion of a transparent locality.

In this sense, the visual arts suggest ways to experiment and reconfigure theories because they register the differentiation of space and the coexistence of multiple belongings. For example, Isaac Julien's *The Attendant* (1993) is a provocative short film that is set in a museum. In this artwork, after the ambiguous and sensual encounter between the middle-aged black attendant of the museum and a younger white man, a nineteenth-century painting that depicts a slave's capture comes to life. The attendant expresses a homosexual desire, materialised in his fantasies about the young visitor and his imagination of real bodies that replace the paintings exhibited in a cold and institutionalised museum. The logic of the viewing subject and the viewed object is subverted as the characters of the paintings look at the attendant and populate the space with hidden histories of race and gay male sexuality. Therefore, this short film allows not only the return of a repressed unconscious, but also interrupts the monumental sacrality of the museum. In *The Attendant*, as in Julien's subsequent installations *Vagabondia* (2000) and *Baltimore* (2003), the museum is the key theme and location of an artistic strategy that contributes to a theoretical reflection on the transformation of this institution. Contemporary exhibitionary complexes are set in motion by the circulation of hidden and border-crossing realities. At the same time, the museum becomes a space of intervention that engenders productive and experimental encounters. Art confirms itself as a possibility of change. Far from being the place of the already known, ready to be transmitted, or the place where the spectacle of 'the contemporary' is consumed (Debord 1990), it becomes the space of imagination and desire, where the unexpected comes into being, but is also the space of questioning, and even silences. The museum becomes a disrupting, 'incurable' space of both hospitality and hostility.

Living the Place, Archiving the Space

At this point, the question of spatiality needs to be explored. Michel de Certeau talks about the difference between place and space defining the first as 'the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence'. He adds: 'space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of directions, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements …. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it' (de Certeau 1984, 117). As a place for the collection of objects, the museum is now experiencing new possibilities of co-existence, mainly via the production of social conditions rather than through the disposition of artworks. It becomes a space composed of mobile elements and new intersections. Here the 'place', where objects are pre-ordered, is experienced as a new *medium* meeting the needs of different public subjects.

An alternative way to inhabit the space of the museum, through encounter and live experiences, questions the traditional understandings of museum collections and the laws of the 'place'. New artistic practices inhabit the museum as a space of political and social encounters aiming at producing the conditions of a heterogeneous new audience. They engage in a process of co-individuation (Simondon 1989; Stiegler 1998) where both the 'I' (the artist) and the 'we' (the audiences) are socially and politically transformed by real-world issues such as the impact of financial crises and the subsequent social and labour conditions of life and work.

Many of these practices are experiencing a shared process of *becoming collectivity* as 'a coexistence of being singular plural' (Nancy 2000, 3). Jean-Luc Nancy talks of the impossibility of existing singularly without the plural: 'Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence' (Nancy 2000, 3). Taking Nancy's formulation of coexistence in its literal meaning as an existing together interval, a *being in common* moment – at the same time and in the same place – the production of collectivity is experienced as a relational approach and as a different modality for inhabiting space, disrupting the dominant uses of the museum.

Focusing on the transformative potentialities of the spatiality of the museum, the concept of coexistence allows a re-articulation of the traditional role of the museum as a display machine. It produces an altogether more powerful 'social technology', imagining possible connections between producers and receivers that are not mediated by the traditional form of the artwork (Karp et al. 2006). Taking into account a critical reflection on global capitalism and neo-liberalism in order to explore the complexity of the dynamics involved in the relation between the artist, the institution and the audience, it is worth underlining that the concept of collectivity occupies an important role in many contemporary theoretical works: from Paolo Virno to Giorgio Agamben, Nancy, Hannah Arendt, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri. Understanding how this concept enters the museum space in order to change its *exhibitionary function* means tracing the way in which these critical

approaches have dealt with such a concept in the light of the social transformations of neo-liberal society.

Virno, for example, speaks of the necessity of a new articulation of the relations between the collective and the individual. In order to understand our singularity, we have to look at the collective as a field of radical individualisation. His approach focuses on a *set of relationships* that define us as collectivity, from the social to the individual:

> Instead of connecting given singularities, this 'set of relationships' constitutes these single individuals as such. Human nature is located in such a thing that – not belonging to any individual mind – only exists in the relation between the many. To speak of human means to develop a philosophy of the preposition 'between'. (Virno 2002)

In the recent past, a search for unity as a *coexistence of different singularities* has been actualised by collaborative actions, co-working activities, newly formed communities informed by the idea that a collective 'set of relationships' between different people, a social engagement of *being in common*, follows all the economical and political shifts of capitalist society. Within this overall frame, the museum experiences new conditions of artistic production. These lead to stressing the importance of the transformative centrality of social production as a sharper separation between the artist as a producer, the institution as a hegemonic model of social organisation, the consumption and circulation of the artworks, comes into play. New economic practices involve different collectivities in the museum space, defining what elsewhere has been called *immaterial labour* (Lazzarato 1996).

Among the different public and private cultural institutions where immaterial labour takes place, the museum has a prominent position. It involves irregular forms of working experiences, intermittent and without a guarantee of a future income, often without an income at all, or else forms of attachment to work as a 'mode of contemporary self-disciplining' (McRobbie 2007). In other words, work increasingly replaces life itself. It defines contemporary life as a precarious social condition, essential to new neo-liberal strategies for dealing with immaterial labour. As it becomes the capitalist norm, 'precariousness', as a new contemporary concept, is experienced in multiple forms of immaterial and affective labour, especially in contemporary art practices. In order to understand how precariousness has changed the rules of the game in cultural institutions, it is necessary to consider the generational transformations of the social condition of work.

Precariousness presents itself as a generational social condition that obliges a deeper understanding of the relations between capital and the new creative forms of labour. Rather than a biological phenomenon, the concept of generations is identified as a technological one with its limits and possibilities (Berardi 2009). Those limits and possibilities are the basis for a new process of social recomposition of social subjectivities, of alternative ways to experience work not in opposition to capital, but as an independent form of precariousness (Lazzarato

1997).[6] New subjectivities are in transition along the razor-thin border between the spheres of work and life. The limits and possibilities of labour, framed in the wider understanding of creative labour inside and outside the museum, leads to rethinking the production of subjectivity as the 'raw material' of immaterial labour (Lazzarato 1990).[7]

In 2012, the Unilever Turbine Hall at Tate Modern was crowded every day with the same bunch of 70 people.[8] This swarm participated in a collective performance by the British-German artist Tino Sehgal, whose work deals with questions of attention and encounter beyond cultural belongings in public spaces such as the museum. For his new artwork, Sehgal held some collective workshops that explored, with participants of all ages, cultural background and experience, the relational encounters between people inside the 'social technology' of the museum. The artist is well known for his objectless art practice. He does not allow documentation of his work at any stage. This strategy has been developed in order to avoid adding more objects to the world of consumer society. Through gestures, actions and speeches, he creates *tableaux vivants* that he calls 'constructed situations'. These are subject to the radical temporality of their duration and intensity. Museum visitors, as well as people dressed as museum attendants, chant, scream, walk towards other visitors or just interact with each other in a play in which there should be no rules and interpreters.

The result is often unpredictable. A dynamic interplay of 'constructed' chaos emerges from the affective presence of the collectivity. Sehgal's way of conceiving a *becoming collectivity* again recalls Nancy in the sense of being exposed to others. The constructed situation seems to be precisely the 'set of relationships' in a swarm of people literally occupying the cultural, social and economic spatiality of Tate Modern, one of the sanctuaries of contemporary art. We could possibly criticise this aim to create 'experimental encounters' in terms of conservative strategies, for they conceive of artistic production as a compensatory activity, an activity where individuals communicate their personal emotions, experiences, memories and desires without linking them critically to the matrix of social and cultural forces from which they emerge. Still, there is an unpredictable force that emerges from this chaos.

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6   In particular on the possibility to envisage a process of collective subjectivation and social solidarity and imagine a movement in the sense of a collective process of intellectual and political transformation of reality (Berardi 2009).

7   The production of subjectivity recalls the Foucauldian technology of the self: modes of 'subjectivation' and of 'subjectification' explore how selves are forged and how they live in ways which are both heteronomously and autonomously determined. They pose questions about the limits and possibilities of human activities (Foucault 2007).

8   Sehgal's artwork is conceived as part of Tate Modern's wider project called *The Tanks*, a lived space hosting performative experiments such as *Art in Action Festival*, which inaugurated *The Tanks* last July. A new 'model' of experiencing the museum as a 'mass medium', 'emphasizing the visitor's own physical presence', has been stated in the *Open Manifesto* of the programme (Grant and Danby 2012, 2).

The intangible rather than compensatory activity of Sehgal's storytellers produces a new space of disturbance, an experiential memory where different singularities interact through an event that cannot be planned in advance. You never know what is going to happen. In a 'regime of total immateriality', as Claire Bishop (2004) has defined Sehgal's approach, the artist aims to provoke a critique both of the way in which we collectively inhabit the spatiality of the museum, what Hannah Arendt (1998) calls the 'space of appearance', and its blurred material boundaries. This is linked to the assumption that where a consistent swarm of singularities converges, with access to different types of stories and actions, a situation is created whose complexity is impossible for single individuals to attain. Arendt argued: 'Only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others' (Arendt 1998, 22–3). Human action is both contingent and unpredictable, as is the case in Tino Sehgal's intangible performative act.

The open-ended result is a collective production of desires, a transformation of actions, rather than a transformation of material, sustained through the audience's experiential memories. The boundaries of the exhibition space are blurred even though the scene is inconceivable without its museum stage. The 'exhibition' of an un-restricted space, as a territory of political, cultural and social encounter, becomes a living archive where the 'experimental community', the artwork itself, is created. There is, as Rogoff would term it, the emergence of other possibilities for the exchange of shared perspectives or subjectivities. These are forms of emergent and performative collectivity 'beyond all the roles that are allotted to us in culture-roles such as those of being viewers, listeners or audience members' (Rogoff 2004). Sehgal's creative practice can also be perceived as a critique of the pastoral modality of power that refers to the Foucauldian metaphor of the shepherd guiding his flock of sheep (Foucault 1982). This is to explore how selves are forged and how they live in ways which are both heteronomously and autonomously determined. It poses questions about the nature of contemporary social order, the conceptualisation of power, human freedom and the limits, possibilities and sources of human action.

Sehgal is an example of experimental collective art, an artistic attempt that goes beyond the temptation that characterised many earlier community projects: the desire for a 'lost belonging'. He uses the space and the institutions of art as channels for producing his work. The *space of appearance* created from the coexistence of the participants is loaded with the power conceptualised by Arendt as the 'fleeting coming together' in a moment of action and mutuality by a group of people, an experimental community. The encounters between people are mental displacements that allow the audience to establish an imaginary and physical journey inside a 'boundless space'. This is to engage with the memories of others, investigating, at the same time, your own memory. The whole performance seems to ask the audiences to experience the memories of others in order to develop their own comprehension of the experimental encounter.

Conclusion

It is possible to register a passage here: from the museum as the place where objects (artworks, books, archaeological remains) are stored and exposed as sacred historical signifiers that embody Memory to the museum as a space that generates narratives, events, experiences, new memories. This is the postcolonial museum such as the 'Museum Without Objects' proposed by Françoise Vergès on Réunion Island in Chapter 1 of this volume, or the *museo diffuso*, a museum that spreads through the public space of the city evoked by Viviana Gravano in Chapter 8 of this volume. History can be remembered differently. As Vergès suggests, it is possible to overcome the accumulative palimpsests of colonial culture, opposed by the power of a migrant poetics made up of voices, sounds and gestures. The museum *dispositif* is now faced with the challenge of re-proposing its discourses and practices of representation. The difficulty lies in establishing what is 'representable' and how this can be proposed when, as postcolonial aesthetics underlines, images and sounds do not simply *stand for* life, but rather can themselves be considered *as* life. They emerge as a force that exceeds the status of representation and visuality itself.

The very existence of post-representative languages can be interpreted as an invitation to consider the possibility of alternative archives, able to account for a different humanism, a different political economy. The archives of the future should be able to register, as Ursula Biemann's video-essay *Egyptian Chemistry* (2012) suggests, the elements of an untameable and unrepresentable ecology that reconnect to life as difference, unfolding from the encounter between nature and culture, *bios* and *zoe*, matter and technology, chemistry and magic. Perhaps a move from the limits of an anthropocentric vision to the possibilities of a post-humanist narrative, based on the recognition of an ecology of multiple belonging, is the path through which we can approach the dream of postcolonial thought. Strongly advocated by Mbembe, this is the dream of a radical humanism, emerging from a responsibility toward our historical inheritance, and founded, above all, on the distinctions that differentiate us.

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