CONFERENCE REPORT

Are there foreigners in Art? • 14–15 February 2008, Litteraturhuset, Oslo

Are there foreigners in Art?

The conference focused on critical and difficult issues connected with the implementation of an effective cultural diversity programme within contemporary art institutions.

Moderator: Thomas Hylland Eriksen

International key speakers:
• Augustus Casely-Hayford (UK)
• David Elliott (UK/Turkey)
• Koyo Kouoh (Senegal)
• Shaheen Merali (Germany)
• Els van der Plas (Holland)
• Oscar Pripp (Sweden)
• Bisi Silva (Nigeria)

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Photo: Alejandro Perez

Moderator for the conference:
Thomas Hylland Eriksen

Thomas Hylland Eriksen *is a Professor in Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. Leader of the project CulCom, Cultural Complexity in the New Norway. He has for many years worked with the issues identity politics, ethnicity, nationalism and globalisation. His books Small Places – Large Issues, Ethnicity and Nationalism and What is Anthropology are read by students in many countries. In recent years he has published the books Globalisation – Studies in Anthropology (2003), Roots and Feet (2004) Engaging Anthropology (2006), and, together with H.F.Tretvoll, Cosmopolitism (2006). His books are translated into 20 languages. At the moment he is trying to write about rubbish and the quality of life.*

Introduction

The conference was arranged in connection with Norway's Year of Cultural Diversity 2008. We took the opportunity to address some of the critical and difficult issues connected with the implementation of an effective cultural diversity programme within contemporary art institutions.

Norway does not have a long tradition of addressing such issues and, though there are several smaller, voluntary institutions working within this area, the larger institutions and the art media tend to ignore it.

As a follow up to the valuable collaboration between Du store verden!/DSV and the former Riksutstillinger (National Touring Exhibitions) over the last decade, the collaboration of this conference also aimed at strengthening the continued collaboration and the mutual interests in enhancing cultural diversity in the institutions that make up the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design that today includes the National Touring Exhbitions and its important experiences.

We challenged the invited guest speakers with issues including critical questions that arose in the wake of the Arts Council of England's report on their cultural diversity action plan *Towards a greater diversity*. Some of these statements were provocative, others touched a nerve.

The target groups for the conference were first and foremost the leadership of established art institutions, which had been made to focus on cultural diversity by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

We are happy to conclude that the conference was very successful. Our excellent speakers addressed the issues from different viewpoints and were guided by a sensitive and inspiring moderator who guided the speakers and the audience through two rich days of strategic and emotional impulses - and with a highly diverse audience drawn from different art disciplines and communities.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

www.du-store-verden.no

Du store verden!/DSV
works to promote and enhance intercultural artistic and cultural cooperation on a national and international level. The activities include artistic projects within all art disciplines, distribution of artists, information activities, competence building, lobbying and networking.

National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design
The aims of the museum are to "raise the level of knowledge about and commitment to the visual arts, architecture, the decorative arts and design, develop critical faculties, stimulate new perceptions, increase historical consciousness and tolerance of diversity"
www.nasjonalmuseet.no

SUMMARY – by Natalie O'Donnell

Day 1

The auditorium at Litteraturhuset was packed with an array of different people from the art field ranging from students, heads of institutions, journalists and professionals from theatre, dance, music and fine art. The concert by Haddy N'Jie Trio inaugurated the conference starting with soft melodies of lullabies and ending on an energetic high that resonated with the audience. Thomas Hylland Eriksen's enthusiasm as the moderator kept this lively and engaged atmosphere alive throughout the conference – interspersing incisive commentary with endearing humour.

The Minister of Culture, Trond Giske, officially opened the conference by thanking the hosts, the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design and Du store verden!/DSV. He went on to elaborate on the necessity for the year of 2008 being dedicated to cultural diversity since current Norwegian cultural life does not reflect the diversity of the Norwegian population, and the problem of a perceived glass ceiling in the arts. He emphasised how cultural diversity, and the 191 nationalities in Norway, were an asset to the country and its shifting identity, and how education and cultural capital were an investment for the future. He quoted David Lammy, underlining the need to *'invest in people's souls as well as their skills'*. The goal of the government's policy of access and availability was to make the effects of the Year of Cultural Diversity profound and lasting, so as to dispel the need for such a year in the future – where cultural diversity had become a natural part of culture and the activities of national cultural institutions.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen introduced the notion of criteria for excellence with reference to the Arts Council England's operational category of 'highest possible achievement' and how such categories were culturally determined, excluding those who did not fit the mould. He also made reference to the categorisation that non-Western artists and writers were subjected to. While anyone's position may be informed by gender, ethnicity, class background and the like, he argued that making them representatives through the prefix of for example 'Black' artists, was something to be resisted. Hylland Eriksen also spoke of the benevolent exoticism displayed by the majority, which denied the minority the right to be hybrid, and how multiculturalism policies had resulted in ghettoisation. Finally, he remarked how efforts towards cultural diversity should not act as a diversion from discrimination elsewhere in education, economic and employment contexts, resulting in a situation where minorities within a country could participate in culture, but not in, say, finance.

Shaheen Merali

Merali from Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin presented a paper taken from his essay in the catalogue for the exhibition *Re-Imagining Asia* co-curated with Wu Hung, opening in 2008. Merali outlined some of the postcolonial discourses between the 'bookends' of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and Paul Gilroy's the *Black Atlantic* (1993) that had informed current thinking about the world beyond Europe, and challenged what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as 'one way traffic'. Merali showed images of Song Dong's large-scale installation *Waste Not*, where the artist displayed his mother's enormous collection of scraps, leftover fabrics and knickknacks hoarded over the last thirty years in China. The installation became an immense documentary catalogue of one person's individual gathering as well as a record over decades of Chinese material history. Merali argued that new regionalism involves concrete contact rather than secondary examination, and will reveal – not a static culture and geography – but diverse cultural and aesthetic traditions outside Europe.

David Elliott

Before his paper Elliott commented that, when thinking about quality or qualities in art, it was important to remember that aesthetics are not that different cross-culturally. With some dedication and guidance there was no reason why one could not understand diverse cultural productions. Elliot introduced his talk with reference to recent parallels drawn with Attila the Hun and 'now' in the right-wing segments of the British media, and presented movie stills from the recent film *Mongol,* directed by Sergei Bodrov, alongside stills from the 1928 *Storm over Asia,* directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin. The Mongolian Empire of the 13th century became Elliott's point of departure to illustrate that cultural diversity and exchange had always moved vast distances across the world. 18th century Enlightenment thinking, imperialism and colonialism had created an entrapped way of thinking about cultures. Stating that permissiveness and openness would cost nothing but our prejudices, Elliott argued for a more transparent, equal and enjoyable approach to culture and its diverse manifestations.

Koyo Kouoh

Kouoh introduced her talk by highlighting her own hybrid background, being born in Cameroon, growing up in Switzerland and having worked in Senegal for over a decade, where she among other things is in charge of the American Cultural Programme. In her talk, Kouoh outlined the traditional importance of culture for the political leaders of West-African countries after independence. She also underlined the importance of position in terms of perception, and how she saw the non-African viewer in light of colonialism, grand exhibitions, and seaport literature. Citing *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989 as a great shift in the Western approach to African art, Kouoh pointed out how globalisation *'allows us to position ourselves at any side of the table'*.

Oscar Pripp

Pripp outlined the findings following the *Time for Diversity* study carried out in Sweden three years ago. The task was to map and analyze ethnic and cultural diversity within the government culture sector prior to the Swedish Year of Cultural Diversity in 2006. The state of cultural diversity in 63 institutions in Sweden showed very interesting results in terms of the viewpoints of Swedish culture workers, structures in which changes in representation could take place, and the importance of networks.

Question and Answer session

One member of the audience queried why it was common to refer to people in Sweden as 'immigrants' rather than, for example, 'Swedish-Turks' or 'Turks'. Oscar Pripp responded by pointing out that the problem lay not in the label, but in how we thought about 'Swedishness'. It was a concept that was constantly moving away from 'immigrants' because of the threat they posed to such a Swedish identity. David Elliott pointed to the word 'usvensk' ('non-Swedish') to show how people became linguistically embedded outsiders.

Another audience member pointed out the necessity in a globalised world to ask whether the audience is local, regional, national or international. Koyo Kouoh responded with the example of Youssou N'Dour who has an international and a national release for his records that are totally different, as he has to present a diluted version outside Senegal where the audience does not understand him in the way they do in his home country. The point was made that wherever you are, the context you are in influences you.

Shaheen Merali made the point that referenced Cobena Mercer's notion of the 'burden of representation' that young Black artists felt upon entering art schools and professional life. Thomas Hylland Eriksen pointed out that identity making has a built-in 'us / them' boundary. An audience member pointed out that Foucaultian 'regimes of homogenieity' were the problem, and that diversity had existed in the most seemingly homogenous societies, citing the presence of Africans in Nazi-Germany as an example.

The listeners were keen to make their comments and several points were made from various members of the audience, including the problem of hierarchies in education; the way language played a large part in constructing identities; the realities facing Norwegian immigrant families with reference to recent newspaper stories of perceived discrimination; the goals of the year of cultural diversity; and perceived discrimination in funding structures.

One member of the audience queried how minorities could get into positions of power, and whether they would become hostages or role models. Oscar Pripp responded by saying that the most effective way of strengthening diversity was through 'weak networks'. Koyo Kouoh mentioned that she had been impressed by the inclusion of a Black woman (Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen) in the Norwegian cabinet. Another member of the audience made the point that in Zambia they had had White, Indian and Black people in the cabinets for a long time, so that Norway's diversity in this regard was not that special.

Another member of the audience questioned why it was so difficult to get diverse, multicultural audiences for the arts. Shaheen Merali pointed out the distinction between high and low culture, and said the challenge was to make people feel like they belonged in the areas of 'high art', citing the examples of Turkish communities in Berlin. Els van der Plas commented on the parallel worlds that are found in many countries, where one is multicultural and the other homogenous.

Many other people wanted to comment as Thomas Hylland Eriksen drew the Q&A to a close reminding people that there would be a panel discussion the next day. In his closing remarks he

pointed out that in this age of globalisation we could not just speak about the Norwegian context in isolation because Norway was but a node in the world.

Day 2

A performance by Maja Bugge (cello) and Nasra Ali Omar (percussion) specially designed for the conference with samplings from Bugge's composition for Resonance FM in London started off the day. Harmonious and discordant passages in the composition seemed to echo the sentiments of the previous day's themes of diversity, dissent and discussion.

There were slight changes to the programme due to the absence of two of the speakers. Octavio Zaya had sent his apologies following the loss of his passport. Salah Hassan was also unable to attend. Els van der Plas therefore gave her talk on day two, and greater time was dedicated to the panel discussion.

Augustus Casely-Hayford

Casely-Hayford opened his talk with the sombre news that the Stephen Lawrence Centre in London, designed by David Adjaye and with windows by Chris Ofili had been smashed. This reality was juxtaposed with the legal amendment that makes it illegal not to take into account cultural diversity. In the run-up to the 2012 Olympics in London, Britain has seen the instigation of several cultural capital programmes, among them the new wing of Tate Modern, an 11-storey, cast-glass ziggurat designed by Herzog de Meuron. Casely-Hayford went on to describe how cultural institutions in the UK would have to change, and how Tate's new spaces offered exciting opportunities to address a long neglected need to reflect diversity. He sketched some of the changes he had seen in British society as the dominant cultural policy moved from one of multiculturalism and embedded hierarchies to diversity, acceptance of ideas, and a celebration of the plurality of cultural output. While witnessing positive changes in national museums and galleries that would have seemed inconceivable five years ago, Casely-Hayford argued that none of them go nearly far enough. As he reflected in conclusion, perhaps we need new curatorial approaches and maybe new spaces to negotiate those new relationships.

Bisi Silva

Silva sketched the trajectory of the different permutations of cultural diversity in the arts in the UK over the last two to three decades from her own research and experiences. She described the historical shifts in 'naming' from Primitive, Ethnic, and Black Arts to multiculturalism, inter-nationalism and 'cultural diversity'. She gave examples of key exhibitions such as *The Thin Black Line* (1985) curated by Lubaina Himid for the ICA, and *The Other Story* (1989), curated by Rasheed Araeen at the Hayward Gallery. Silva then shifted to cultural diversity from a different perspective, namely the Nigerian context. The lack of a cultural infrastructure in Africa has seen the migration of artists from South to North intensify. However, the connectivity within the African continent has also greatly increased. Silva used the examples of *Overcoming Maps* (2001)*, Exit Tour* (2006), and *Contact Zone* (2007) as projects that had been instrumental in breaking down boundaries, and increased cultural interaction, exchange and dialogue.

Els van der Plas

Els van der Plas began with a description of Dutch society and some of the paradoxes in the contemporary cultural-political debate there. As she elaborated on the work of the Prins Claus Fund, van der Plas introduced the notion of beauty and questioned whether art in some circles has become a means to an end, rather than a means in itself. The Prince Claus Fund have quality and innovation as their main criteria, to maintain culture as a means in itself. One of the reasons for supporting art and culture has to do with aesthetics, the beneficial pleasure of beauty as described by Socrates. With reference to Susan Sontag, van der Plas added that asymmetry, chaos and the attraction of violence and misery were also aspects of the complex concept of beauty. Van der Plas argued that social and aesthetic discourses need to come together, citing Lida Abdul's *Clapping Stones* as a work that addressed the need for a cultural heritage and cultural diversity, while simultaneously being painfully and impressively beautiful.

Panel discussion

Several points were discussed in a ping-pong fashion between the various members of the panel, the moderator, and the audience. Again the audience's participation was lively, and the questions revealed a number of different positions and experiences. The notion of cultural hybridity became a thread running through the various comments. The concepts of beauty and bravery were also raised. The criteria for beauty and excellence, and the potential universality

and neutrality of these were discussed at length. Eurocentric criteria, hierarchies and education foundations of art were also referred to.

Bisi Silva highlighted the importance of knowledge of history, citing the example of Nigerian school children's ignorance of slavery. Els van der Plas pointed out how the potential lay in the museums of modern art which present a greater challenge than 'ethnographic' and anthropological arenas of display. She also emphasised the role of culture in giving people a point of departure – and hope. The importance of the position of the viewer and the contexts that shape people's perceptions were highlighted by several commentators.

One member of the audience raised several points, including how she resented the 'boxing of Africa' in exhibitions like *Africa Remix* and recent biennials, and how she had been disappointed not to see any Norwegian representatives on the panel to discuss cultural diversity in Norway. Koyo Kouoh responded by pointing out that singling Africa out for positive exposure was a good thing, and that the policy of Dak'Art to limit participation to African artists or those of African descent was a necessary positive measure.

As co-organiser of the conference, Marith Hope was invited to respond to the speaker's second point regarding the lack of Norwegian representatives on the panel. She did so by explaining how the organisers had sought international experts for discussing the issues of cultural diversity. She went on to point out that the target audience was, in fact, not the people currently in the auditorium who had demonstrated their commitment to greater inclusion in culture, but the people whose noticeable absences illustrated the greatest obstacle to cultural diversity in Norway, namely the heads of various institutions and senior personnel at the National Museum who were ostensibly hosting the conference.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen called the conference to an end as time was up, and used the example from language debates on Spanglish and Manx as his closing remark. The former is a hybrid, constantly adapting to changing circumstances, while the last natural speaker of this 'pure' Isle of Man language allegedly died in the late 1970s…

Introduction speech

Minister of Culture and Church Affairs mr. Trond Giske

'I do not want my house to be walled in on sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.'

Dear friends,

This famous quote by M. Gandhi captures perhaps the essence of our new cultural diversity. Today, there are 191 nationalities living in Norway. Virtually all nations of the world have paid our small country a visit. Many have come to stay. This gives us more freedom and more choices with regard to shaping our identities and our futures.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to our Norwegian Year of Cultural Diversity and to this conference. With their song, Haddy N'jie's trio sets the perfect tune. More than words, their music demonstrates that diversity is an asset to our society. And many thanks to the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design for hosting this conference together with the DSV Network, as part of their diversity programme in 2008.

Bringing society a step forward can sometimes be a matter of raising the right question at the right time; questions that may provoke or inspire us to new action. Our key question here today – *'Are there Foreigners in Art?'* – is perhaps an adequate question at this moment of time, though I'd like to remind you that last year, one of the Venice Biennale's catch phrases was *'There are no foreigners in art!'*
A foreigner can also be interpreted as someone who is not included, an outsider to the arts community – a conceptual approach consistent with Leonardo da Vinci's statement five hundred years ago that *'there are three classes of people in relation to art: Those who see, those who see when they are shown, and those who do not see.'* We could, perhaps, add one more class: those who, for various reasons, are not seen. Many of our new citizens have been brought up in a tradition of cultural engagement and participation, and there are large numbers of artists of different ethnic origins in Norway. 2008 is the first year where this cultural diversity is seen, thus we are celebrating the year of diversity.

I have a former British colleague, David Lammy, now Minister for Skills, who grew up as a black minority kid in difficult circumstances in the inner city of London. With great credibility he advocates the importance of investing in people's souls, as well as their skills. From his own life and experience he learnt the magnificent power of the arts and music to excite, to lift the spirit, and inspire his dreams for a better future.
Culture is a key component in a young person's development, helping increase self-confidence and creativity, and teaching communication and teamwork. Dynamism in arts and culture creates dynamism in a nation. By ensuring access to arts and cultural activities and encouraging cultural participation, we invest in a future with higher cultural capital and a creative and competent population.

Norway has long democratic traditions. To sustain our democracy, we need all citizens to engage and contribute in society. Sometimes special, targeted measures are needed to ensure social inclusion. We have to break the invisible glass ceiling that shut people out from important arenas. Our cultural diversity policy is closely linked to the issues of access and availability. Our challenge is to bring everybody onboard. Still our cultural life does not mirror our new multicultural reality. My aim is that the stories we are told should represent a wider range of realities. This is a democracy issue. Our new diversity should be reflected in the main cultural activities, in public exhibitions, galleries, art performances, etc. And it should be reflected among art professionals, curators, directors, critics, media and other decision makers within the arts.

Since one generation back, our country has undergone a major transition. Who would have imagined the scope of impact of new information technology or modern migration? Our country now has a greater variety of skin colours, languages, religions and ways of life than ever before in history. Norms are changing. New perceptions and attitudes are emerging. Culturally speaking, and politically, Norway is now tuning in to the wavelength of the world. The transition from conformity to diversity creates a need for reinventing our cultural approach and form new policies.

Minister of Culture and Church Affairs, mr. Trond Giske

Information technology ensures that all cultural expressions can now speak to a larger and more complex audience than it did only few years ago. Also, a new generation of artists is emerging, with impulses of both traditions and our new global reality embedded in their work. Their work is shaping Norway's new cultural identities. In this respect, every artist matters.

There is also a second, important aspect of culture in a globalised world. When people look at the websites of our arts museums from abroad, we are almost inadvertently conducting a form of new diplomacy. The way we present ourselves to the outside world is increasingly becoming more important to our self-image and our relations with other countries. Artists are our best communicators and perhaps the greatest innovators of our time. This makes our cultural institutions more important as promoters of culture and arts, and as arenas for cultural encounters. Museums and art institutions must take a proactive attitude to our new reality as society develops. To make a difference, it is vital that they are developing and renewing in order to attract the public at large. The message is: Look around, think anew, redefine, and innovate.

One of the important objectives of our Year of Cultural Diversity is to integrate multicultural aspects of arts and culture in institutions and activities that receive public funding. Our aim is to put in place a new state of mind, a curious, innovative, open-minded new attitude in a population who welcomes the challenges of an open world. Our "grand project" is to bring people together - especially people who have never shared experiences before - and to build lasting and trusting relationships for the future. Hopefully the Year of Diversity will bring people of our country to discover new exciting elements of our cultural diversity and to look at our culture from a different perspective.

Social and cultural policies are closely allied. Arts and culture could constitute the incident room that we need for dealing with social challenges. John F. Kennedy said that: *'If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity'*. Today more than ever, we need arts as a means of communicating, as a basis for dialogue. Not necessarily to agree, but to understand. Arts can provide a common basis for understanding across social and cultural divides.

Our present actions are forming the society for the next decades, thus shaping the future for the next generation. Assuming we can strike a balance between individual freedom and personal responsibility, diversity may generate and nurture spiritual as well as material values for our society.

A vision of the good society means that we should invest in people's souls as well as their skills. And never has there been a better opportunity to make this a reality. Together, we shall break the invisible glass ceiling that stops groups or individuals from taking part in ordinary cultural life. I am confident that quality and aesthetics will prevail. We need good quality art: to provoke and reconcile, to create contrasts and bring clarity, to challenge and to confront - and to create bonds between people. We have an excellent starting position. We have a platform to build on.

I hope that, by the end of this year, we will be able to congratulate our institutions on their remarkable achievements in making the multicultural aspects of our society a more visible and more integrated part of their activities. Norwegians will not become any less Norwegian if, in Mahatma Gandhi's metaphor, we open the doors and windows and let foreign winds blow through our house. The strength of our culture lies in its ability to absorb foreign influences and to transform them into something that enriches our cultural legacy for the future.

Dear friends, for the purpose of future challenges, allow me to rephrase the initial key question: Are there outsiders to arts – and if so, how can they be included? Answering the questions ensuing from this will take us a big leap forward towards achieving our aims.

I wish you good luck in your deliberations!
Thank you!

A great deal more but nothing much….

Shaheen Merali

Art history is not art[1]

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Cultures (HKW) in
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worked since 2003. At
the HKW he has
curated *Dreams and
Trauma*, (2005), a film
festival and moving
images installations,
an exhibition by
twelve artists of
Palestinian and Israeli
origin and the seminal
exhibition, *The Black
Atlantic*, with new
commissions by Isaac
Julien, Keith Piper and
Lisl Ponger /Tim Sharp.
He co-curated `*The
First Chapter-Trace
Root: Unfolding Asian
Stories*` for the 6th
Gwangju Biennial,
Korea (2006). More
recently, he has curat-
ed the international
group exhibition *All
our Tomorrows: the
culture of camouflage*
for the Kunstraum,
the University of
Lueneburg and *New
York States of Mind*,
an exhibition and film
programme of artists
and film makers living
and working in New
York for the HKW and
the Queens Museum
(New York). In 2008
the seminal exhibition
Re-Imagining Asia,
co-curated with Wu
Hung will open in
Berlin followed by an
international tour of
the show.

On Readership:

The work of many of the great thinkers who have tried to deconstruct the European grand narratives has been recognized as 'full of rage' and as originating from an anti-Western stance.

Suffice it to say, their efforts have always been belittled and, if acknowledged at all, then only ever as over-determined and as working within a biased framework. Such characterizations have embedded these positions into a series of measures, which guarantee that their contribution will be marginalized. The general perception – that supporters of plurality are found within liberal camps, and include members of the intelligentsia who act as societies' messengers about multicultural conviviality – has become an inherent myth. The current, further institutionaliza-tion of right wing thinking and political control within Europe and North America, from the initial late twentieth-century spectrum of a broadly secularist view to a more sectarian perspec-tive, has recently lead to an ironic reversal of direction.[2]

One is, of course, historically indebted to and dependent upon European thought, as it is indispensable in helping to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and, yet, it remains inadequate as a model for systems completely outside of its reach. Instead of taking historical time as integral, the social historian Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests plural, normative horizons specific to the existence of postcolonial nations:

'It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history – that is, 'history' as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university – is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'.'[3]

The one-way traffic Chakrabarty describes is also visible in the current experiments of extending constituents and communities, as well as other experiments within the European Union.

Where there were once welcoming arms, albeit for the purpose of economic expansion and audits, there now remains an intact hostility when it comes to revisions of history(s). The suggestions of an open-ended archive – which could upload layers of meaning away from the binary that has so often created a cultural ambience rather than an international construct of culture – remain unwelcome and face ideological opposition within the post-global discordance of the new millennium. The eulogies are evident in bounded economic and immigration policies that affect porosity and the wording of the delivery of the postcolonial within the European frame.

In the late twentieth-century cultural studies sector, which often reflects upon issues heralded as culturally important, and which acts upon cultural or historical violence, these often entangled and oppositional constitutes were regarded as the 'Said phenomenon'. This tagging emerged out of reactions to scholarly critique by the Palestinian/American Edward W. Said, and particularly his noble work *Orientalism* (1979)[4] . The 'Said phenomenon' reveals an embroiled and bitter series of much-published correspondence that often leads to heated debates over the study of literary or cultural history through textual, and often schizophrenic, references.

Similarly, the publication of the *Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*[5], by the sociologist Paul Gilroy in 1993, opened up a new dimension in a shared global history by fostering a desire to uncover and unravel previously redundant texts, conference papers and lyrics, which had provided the author with the basis for liberating a set of opinionated and often fossilized positions. Perhaps the *Black Atlantic* and, to some degree, *Orientalism*, now provide the bookends for what we call 'postcolonial studies', and have helped to formulate many of the theoretical standpoints of the latter. Burgeoning in their wake has been a series of interpreta-tions, methodologies and even academic departments, which are dedicated to these fields of study and which allow us to question the authority of centuries of unsettled questions.

Importantly, it has been argued that these duelling treatises have made the memory of the 'Orient' and the Atlantic a central and appropriately humanized issue, by allowing the reader to rethink ideas and to address the issue of representation within a critical framework. These initial introductions helped to link memory to aspects of geography and culture. As such, the impact

of these publications, alongside key works by authors, poets, performers, film makers and visual artists, has helped the process of historicizing regions and localities, and of making global notions of identity and cultural heritage an internationally important issue.

As such we remain indebted to the phenomenal rise of postcolonial thinking processes, which started in the seventies within cultural studies and have since broadened the outlook of the field for us, allowing us to comprehend more fully both globalization and post-globalization.

If one returns to the research premise and methodology of the *Black Atlantic* example then, one has to ask the relevant question: How does our coming to terms with contemporary culture, which includes visual theses as well as performative and literary miscellany, provide insights into that historical lineage which we still draw on for many of the premises and practices that underpin our ongoing activity? What is the contemporary role and function of art as a producer of knowledge and as a cultural entity, and does culture enable current cartographical mapping?

The obligatory response from within the contemporary fold is highlighted by the art historian Geeta Kapur, who makes the following nuanced observations:

'The Contemporary world art presents itself as a volatile phenomenon that can nevertheless be comprehended. It poses itself in many different ways: as a mass of fragments, as new universals, as barely differentiated images and objects in the gargantuan consumption mechanism of global capital. How do we make sense of these developments: as anti-hegemonic politics, as an expository ground for resurgent identities, as an index of democratization, as a spectral triumph, as a fresh franchise on creativity?'[6]

Our ability to produce meaning through the formal invention of the arts has often been described in terms of a literary or artistic invention, transforming the power of lived experience into symbolic form. We have of course been transfixed by artistic invention and meaning since time immemorial, as advertently highlighted by the work of the Surrealists in post-war Europe.[7] But, as art historian Stanley Abe warns us, the distinct twists and practices of reading the symbolic can lead to the construction of meanings and the framing of propositions that we have learned to call history. Stanley Abe talks about the European invention of Buddhism, a concept that came into being to make sense of religious practices in Asia. He helps to chart the changing attitudes towards Buddhist art, which was initially looked upon as mere ethnographic evidence. He helps to uncover the fallacies of Western-style aestheticism, which claims to be non-imperialistic, but in fact just 'brackets' colonial practices instead of leaving them behind.

'Buddhism was one of many non-modern belief systems that would need to be rationalized to our modern episteme. Modern ways of knowing frame this project, based on the assumption that the European possesses the scientific techniques necessary to explain the beliefs of distant lands and people. The making of a rational understanding of something called Buddhism stretched from the earliest encounters with superstitious and idolatrous practices (Kircher) to the identification of the worship of *Fo* in China, to that of *Buddhou* in India, to the invention of 'Buddhism' (first usage according to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1801) and its eventual adoption as a World Religion.'[8]

Art historian Irit Rogoff suggests that, by closely examining the emerging configurations of postmodernity, we are at a place which we call 'what it is, that we do'. Locating ourselves within 'what it is, that we do' provides us with the crucial means to call attention to the apparently seamless and 'natural' condition of our existence. This awareness of our condition provides much-needed insight and a powerfully critical reflexive self-consciousness, which together allow for the uncommodified criticism of history and belief, which can, in turn, work towards resistance. The struggle continues on a day-to-day basis, outside the official discourses of the nationalist and institutional frames, in what Fanon has called the conscious knowledge and the practice of action.

The artist Song Dong, in collaboration with his mother Zhao Xiang Yuan, created *Waste Not,* a large-scale installation that helps us to further understand the process and the inherent possibilities of representation and resistance.

'I remember, during my childhood, my mother always bought scraps of fabric to make clothes, because they didn't need to be purchased with the government-distributed clothing coupons. Later, fearing a shortage of goods, she continued to collect them. They are still there, neatly folded in the wardrobe. This fear of shortage invariably led to the kind of lifestyle in which anything that could be kept, wouldn't be thrown away. 'Waste not' became the basis for the 'collection' of these materials. In that period of insufficiency, this way of thinking and living was

a kind of a *fabao*, literally translated as a 'magic weapon', but in times when goods were plenty, the habit of 'waste not' became a burden. With the improvement in living conditions, it also became the basis of a generation gap: my mother not only refused to throw away her own things, but wouldn't allow us to throw anything away either. Our living space became occupied by these objects waiting to be used. For us, the fear of shortage became an anxiety about accumulating piles of useless things. But 'waste not' isn't the life philosophy of a singular person; a whole generation of people was raised in this collective spirit.'[9]

The *Waste Not* installation forms a large sprawling archive of the most mundane and pedestrian objects, which not only form the visible memories of an individual and a family, but also create an immense library cataloguing the material history of three decades of Cultural Revolution in China. The artist thus enables the audience, beset by their present anxieties about China, to enter a series of consciously founded and designed spaces in which to contemplate their cultural memory in the form of re-usable symbolic objects. The carefully considered categories of the goods, the aged reality of the designs of packages and materials, and the localized references for an international audience, not only bring national meaning to an aspect of Chinese identity, but also begin the process of revealing the hidden spectres of life within the Cultural Revolution, towards an eventual transnationalization of collective memory. Here the discourses of space – Third Spaces, heterotopias, demarcation lines – become constructs that give birth to transgeography, transnationality and translinguality. *Waste not* acts as an accumulative microcosm that posits difficult 'local views', rather than presenting these difficulties of translation as mere beguiling theoretical constructs that are taken for granted and further reduced to academic propositions.

Writing, and sometimes talking, about art in this way feels for many artists and cultural historians like a foray into our recent histories, where we negotiate the artist as a biographical figure, the artwork as an expanded premise, and the organizing of events we call exhibition-making as functions within an economic network. In all the differing locations provided for Art, whether it be exhibition (as display), performance (as an event), education (as pedagogy) or publication (as dissemination), we become the interrogating audience searching in vain, and the experience often solicits us to displace tightly-held assumptions about our own culture and about monoculturalism. The encouragement is to embrace change and accommodate flexibility. This sense of interconnectedness is an important aspect of *Re-Imagining Asia*, as it informs interpretations outside of the strictures of nationalisms; as it subsumes interpretations that are unframed and can remain deterritorialized; and as it aims, not to provide clarity, but rather to indicate a set of compelling entry points. This allows for a fresh interest in inherent complexities and ever-evolving rapports. Binaries are dispelled and outlawed rather than becoming the constant in-laws of conservative syndromes. Oblique notations, leading to altercations, are welcomed.

Doubling Democracy Through Culture

Re-Imagining Asia tackles these issues from the artists' points of view, proposing to position works and theses that articulate 'what it is, that we do'. Contesting purely theoretical formulas, the intention is to present a group of selected visual, filmic and textual works that reveal complex cultural identities, artistic heritages, and political orientations in contemporary art, all of which help us to evaluate and extend our knowledge and framing of Asia. As such, its goals lie in 'de-flattening' the presentation and interpretation of international art by developing a new regional approach: one that is governed by emphasizing the individuality both of historical fact in relation to the imagination, and of regional negotiations based on concrete contact rather than secondary examination, so as to reflect reality rather than anthropology.

The artworks and the artists assist us in grappling with the complexities of the present through lived knowledge and partially interpreted traces of geography within the frame of historicity. Instead of defining Asia in terms of static political geography or cultural/ethnic identity, the circuit of positions allows us to approach it from an artist's point of view – as a place both real and imaginary, and as a collection of diverse cultural and aesthetic traditions.

Thus, the diversity of experiences – dependent on an infinite array of historical alignments within the spectrum of the contemporary, perambulatory conditions that are making Asia contemporary – provide infinite spaces for re-evaluating the prototypes that have emerged in politics and the economy. The processes of post-war Asian modernization arguably originated within the difficult passages of neo-colonialism and state-capitalism, where political traces of post-war heterogeneity have left a radical space for multiple remodellings.

In the following dialogue between San Francisco based art curator Hou Hanru and Beijing based architect Chang Yung Ho, a series of subtle but pertinent points about adaptation, dependency and multiple identities are made:

HH: Are you saying that the pursuit of a Chinese identity is motivated by the presence of Western culture in China?

CYH: Yes, to a certain extent. Foreign culture is like a mirror, which makes you realize that you are, or should be, different from the aliens. Then starts the complex process of rejecting, learning, and absorbing, etc. And you ask: What is Chinese? What is not? What are the cultural definitions? Is this contemporary Chinese or ancient Chinese? Though you never get clear answers. With more contact with the outside, we have certain pressures that other Chinese architects don't have. Most Chinese architects are free of any moral burden about taking in an idea which has been done before. That is impossible for us. We are constantly working under some kind of Foucault-esque gaze. The gaze is also looking for Chinese identity. I think Chinese or Asian identity is more than a formal issue; it is far more complex. In our work, something is uniquely Asian – that is density. Beijing may not be the best example of a high density city. Southern cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, are denser. Density can be seen as the outcome of an engaging urban life style… However, Americans' attitude towards density has been always negative. Density means for them lower living standards. A quintessential Modernist idea. Le Corbusier's *Radiant City* is based on fresh air and sunlight. And air and light is the antithesis to density.[10]

Here it is argued that Asia becomes a terrain where density and external presence can allow a set of productive tensions – a collision enabled by infinite mobility that allows multiple positions to be assessed as a set of concrete possibilities. As the world's largest and most populous continent, Asia covers just under nine percent of the Earth's total surface area (just over twenty-nine percent of its land area) and, with almost four billion people, it contains more than sixty percent of the world's current human population. Its field of activities, and therefore their depiction, are multifaceted and multi-habitual. Even if one is inside the continent, ever-evolving forces collude to promote a sense of estrangement that makes one feel like an outsider. The sounds of migration, internal displacement, the disruption of communal space, and spiritual revolutions become part of the configurations of schizophrenic belonging.

Film programmer Philip Cheah construes the problem of estrangement and evaluates it as an inferiority complex on the one hand, and on the other a symptom of economic structure:

'We are locally Asian when it benefits us to be and we are global citizens when the benefits swing the other way. I have pretty much concluded that there is no Asian pride because there isn't a consciousness for it. The culture of inferiority is quite ingrained. Try figuring this out. Why is it that in this day and age, there are still many new Asian film festivals that are run by the West? We are talking of significant festivals both in South-East Asia and the Middle East. To rub salt in the wound, Asian filmmakers still dream of being recognized and awarded in Western festivals first instead of taking pride in the many festivals in Asia today […]. And if Asians lack an Asian consciousness, it's really because we haven't figured out where Asia is in our heads. Asians can hardly recognize Asians […]. A large part of Asia is still inside the periphery even within Asia.'[11]

Sobriety: The image, the imagined, the imaginary

'If there were no photographs, there would be no Abu Ghraib', commented a guard stationed at the infamous detention facility.

In his seminal book, Arjun Appudarai wrote:

'The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice […]. The imagination has become an organized field of social practices […]. [It] is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.'[12]

Imagination[13] has become a leading part of not only Asian culture but of every modern society. It is a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity. Now a part of everyday life, imagination has become the property of collectives. The current frenzied push to evaluate the effects of modernization in an urban Japanese context has evolved a series of fascinating contributions. One such unpicking is by the young Tokyo based artist Chiho Aoshima, whose works amplify, on a grand scale, the fantasy worlds that place the 'innocent' girl in peril. The history of youth and

of female subjectivity is imaginatively represented in the excited, male, fantastical world of control, rape and ever more degenerative paedophilic tendencies. These provocative confrontations question the place of such phallocentric materialization on the naïve female form, so replete in contemporary Japanese culture, and question its translatability and increasing popularity in the West. Here the imaginative is employed to interrogate a collective fantasy, questioning conventional definitions of power, and using neglect in societal attitudes which are further embedded into the realm of the imaginary to highlight the psychopathic values and sedimentations.

In contrast, Korean-American artist Kimsooja portrays the monk-like figure of a woman wandering into the midst of harsh urban centres around the world, where the mendicant stops and stares at others who are engaged in constant movement. The *Needle Woman* series is antediluvian in design and makes an arresting set of images. The reality of the performative creates a hallucinatory picture of resistance by building an aggregate image of urbanity: a condition set up in opposition to internal, meditative mindscapes. In reducing and postponing assimilation into the hub of the city sprawl, the artist draws on polarized intervention. A modification of reality takes place: a failed translation that questions public behaviour, public space and public responsibility. The value comes from stopping and standing still, and choosing not to be a pedestrian like those around her. The repetition of this act in different cities further emphasises held expectations of the pedestrian and, like many other artists, Kimsooja is interested in exposing homogeneous behaviour: what it is, what it can do, and what it allows others to be. The onlookers laugh at her sedentary posture, and even prompt a corrective measure persuading her to move on. Their intense expectations are met with neither recognition nor change by the artist, but they help to further expose the globe as a summative environment in which progress is measured by group behaviour rather than by the unknown territory of the individual's flight.

The selected texts and works in *Re-Imagining Asia* demonstrate that contemporary art and thought, both from and about Asia, are neither confined to a single geographical sphere nor defined by the artists' ethnicity or gender. Not only do many 'Asian artists' now live and work in all parts of the world but non-Asian artists, including prominent figures, have also derived ideas and visual vocabulary from an interest in art, religion, lifestyle and philosophy that has its intellectual base in Asia. This new confidence – which hosts a thickened global archive within the contemporary – radically departs from the occupation of a single Eurocentric space and gets to grips with the partial knowledge of numerous histories.

Although it has to be acknowledged that not all histories are represented or even partially present, poet and art critic Ranjit Hoskote states that 'The House of Islam' has always been an absence in Asian curatorial decision-making, with Islam being marked as a *metoikos*: a stranger. Instead of constructing Islam as the perennial Other, Hoskote suggests looking for examples in which peaceful and fruitful co-existence has actually taken place. His example is 'the Far West', i.e. al-Andalus, where from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries a real *ecumene* existed, which included minorities, in an unfolding efflorescence.

 'What lies beyond the horizon of our normality can excite curiosity, even wonderment, or anxiety, even terror. The strange, the alien, the Other comes therefore to be imaged either as unattainable beauty or as undesirable monster […]. Where, for instance, might these boundary conditions lie, in the context of the cosmopolitan-seeming conceptions of Asia, that have dominated critical and curatorial discourse in the centres of Asian exhibition-making activity during the last decade? These centres lie, almost without exception, in East Asia: in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China; with Singapore as an international hub whose policy-makers regard their South-East Asian location as incidental rather than constitutive. Given this, I would suggest that the conceptions of Asia that prevail in this system are embedded in a civilizational vision that privileges the cultural lineages of India, China and Japan.'[14]

This regional remapping advocates the porosity of political, linguistic and religious boundaries; a porosity that distinctively undermines the prefectures built as Western nationalism that serviced modernity's quest for complete paternal knowledge and control. Still, the privileged centres have shifted from the Euro-American praxis to the economic giants of the contemporary dragon (China) and elephant (India) economies. This helps to clarify postmodernism's materialization within economic context and arraign, rather than within the postcolonial articulations of order, translation and interpretation.

Touching, sliding discussions

Sociologist Ashish Nandy has often talked of the potential for the closer scrutiny of societal arrangements which reveal, not only hostilities but also paradoxical pragmatisms measurable in human terms rather than sociologically or politically. In a discussion recently, he highlighted one such arrangement that had been used as an insurance mechanism to allay anxieties, recalling the practice of visiting more than one Indian sacred space (temple, mosque and church) to ask for supernatural guidance and assurance. This observation invites us to question the tightly-held premise that identity is constructed out of a singular affiliation. The formation of identities in specific cases – including the State of Punjab and Kashmir, which owe their existence to the colonial divisions of lands – leads to supranational identities in the creation and enforcement of nation state identities (India and Pakistan).

A second example provided by art critic Zhu Qi highlights the complementary arrangements that contributed to the history of contemporary China and the independent history of Korea, which are looked upon together as a contemporary political text by many artists.

'Asian contemporary history began with the deconstruction of the colonial spaces. At that period, the contemporary history was the prototype. But after the deconstruction, there are many differences of the choice on politics, economy and the self-remodelling on culture in different Asian areas including modernization, origination, neo-colonialism, state-capitalism and political traces of post-war […].'

Zhu argues two further interesting points that hold meaning for post-war Asia's younger generation: that there is no 'struggle with the traditional', and the notion that 'colonial spaces make Asian cities a heterogeneous, multilevel, covered space'.[15]

The production of the contemporary within Asia is an oft-disputed viewpoint. The conjectures of the arguments are dependent on the multiple and overlapping chronologies of culture itself. In Western thought, the contemporary is often predestined as part of modernization, whilst in the context of Asia it evolves in specific, designated arenas, be they spatial, temporal or political. This disparity can be partly explained by the differing levels of antagonistic political turbulence associated with neo-colonial and post-colonial transformations, in which culture is presented as a war of moral and intellectual postulations within public spheres, often treated as a place to panic rather than a domain of enquiry and interpretation. The imaginative probabilities associated with cultural signifiers create a floating constituency that can generate images, which have been ignored and which recognize a history built on questioning and reflexive debates. There is no pretension that a level playing field exists for all parts of Asia. Interestingly, a set of dynamics are generated between gaps and borders, which, for a very long time, have been policed and exorcized by ideological constraints – originating in their colonial past as well as in other dynastic and feudal systems – that have made some countries in Asia non-negotiable terrain.

Due to these factors and other, often incommensurable circumstances, culture remains a constantly negotiated reality within and outside an audience's grasp, outlook or consensus. One of the many areas of contention is found in the way contemporary films in numerous Asian contexts are only available within a very specific Film Festival niche. Important works often remain isolated, controlled, locked and unprogrammed – even becoming imaginary projects for the students and audiences they were intended for. This remains the case for key early works by directors from Iran to China. The following account by the exiled Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf helps to reveal how individuals can be faced with encroaching circumstances:

'This was the time when I had finished my film *A Moment of Innocence* and the Government demanded lots of cuts in the film if we wanted to show the film in theatres. Unfortunately my producer was willing to accept those cuts because he had invested lots of money in the film. But I was not willing to accept. I told him that I would give him the money and buy the film from him. So I called my wife Marziyeh, [and children] Samira, Mysam and Hana and told them – we have two ways before us. One – keep the film and sell the house. Second – keep the house and give up the film for censorship. Every one voted for keeping the film so we sold our house and used that money to get the film back.'[16]

The understanding reached by many cultural producers, as they facilitate an increment in dialogue, has helped to formulate a theory that comes out of understanding the nature of

conflict and even its management. At other times the resistance of assimilation has helped to evolve a realistic philosophical stance that has helped even when culture is viewed as a secondary substratum to be negotiated: that is, the view that the production of culture is amateurish, a luxury or a drain on limited societal resources. In some extreme cases, culture is viewed by the authorities as both a criminal and a dangerous entity, to be curtailed and controlled by institutional legitimation.

To manage production and circumvent official worries, Asian cultural entrepreneurs have learned routes to manage culture and cultural producers:

'[Making a] comparison between, for example, European and Asian publications, is not encouraging: art publications in Southeast Asia suffer from a lack of resources and oftentimes from government control. Many publish online or infrequently to bypass the problematic expense of printing. While alternative modes of exhibition may take place in Japan for financial reasons, they take place in Myanmar, for example, for other reasons. As Jacquelyn Suter notes, 'a performance piece is an intangible; there is no evidence once its completed. A painting holds more threat; it can be confiscated and the artists prosecuted.' Similarly, internet publications and projects, while being cost effective, often allow the expression of views that would not be permitted in print.'[17]

The production of the image and the use of the imaginary within the Asian context is highly uneven and is dependent partly on the current strength of a specific terrain's cultural condition. One important motivating factor, which starts the process of explaining the plethora of image production, is the key question 'What is it to be who we are?' 'Being' has meant a production of images that has superseded the oral and the literary. The additional surplus within the continent of technological image resolution software, from scanners to printers, has further increased and made more permanent design and image culture.

From Ground Zero to the Petronas Towers – forming a global canon

The Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur are the world's tallest twin buildings, and were the world's tallest buildings from 1998 to 2004. A challenging set of world events has made them the only existing twin towers now that the famous World Trade Centre in New York has been destroyed, but they have subsequently been surpassed as the tallest buildings in the world due to other, more adventurous innovations such as Taipei 101 in Taiwan, which stands at five hundred and nine metres. As such, histories and records are superseded in a competitive and destructive environment that moves at great speed and velocity. These subtle structural changes, as exemplified above, introduce the need to comprehend turns that affect the translatability of cultures on the move.

The term used in cultural studies to refer to this process – the 'Translational Turn'[18] – refers to the necessity of translating cultural processes due to the decomposition of the old dichotomies (identity-alterity, inside-outside, colonizer-colonized, East-West). The encounter of cultures, inter-religious relationships and conflicts within (or strategies for) the integration of diversified cultural systems nowadays ask for a new approach towards negotiating cultural systems and processes.

In a way, this turn helps to negotiate the manner in which the figures conducting the translation – the translator, the curator, the philosopher or the collector – have become central to the process of organizing for the public, within the 'programme attitude' so prevalent in contemporary cultural economies.

'Today, the movement of peoples around the globe can be seen to mirror the very process of translation itself, for translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator.'[19]

In a similar fashion, the artist as translator is a prevalent figure within the public domain, presented as a communicator of difference, of the global and the intricate. Artist Takako Saito has a remarkable capacity to draw upon art history's references, employing a plethora of materials including the found object, the Fluxus methodologies of printed materials, and installations referencing sculptural modalities, so as to commit audiences to engaging in a playful, performative encounter.

Curator Wu Hung quoted Beijing based artist Zhang Dali, who says that people will naturally fix what they consider ugly and what touches those objects that are visible to them. This is the premise behind his photo pairings: one hundred and twenty-three examples of paired doctor-ings that make up the work *A Second History* which shows how photography was used as a tool to manipulate the perceived needs of the masses during the era of Cultural Revolution (1966–76). These photos represent a critical part of Chinese history; as Zhang Dali says 'they have guided our lives, studies, work, and family values'[20]. *A Second History* consists of vibrant exam-ples of artistic censorship, used explicitly for political motives, as well as commonplace examples of photo enhancement made during the same era. As Wu Hung says, 'the doctored images not only help reconstruct historical events and images of state heroes, but also lay a foundation for comprehending the world and the idea of the people.'[21] It is a challenging act to make a work of art from this 'before' and 'after' of source material and doctored material.

It is in the fact of potential translation that every act of liberation opens up new relations of power, which in turn bear the inherent danger of domination. Liberation has to be maintained; that is, the reinstated mobility of power relations has to be controlled by what Foucault calls 'practices of liberty'.[22]

The need to translate and to understand the probabilities of context and history can be a tricky endeavour, and it takes some nuancing to unravel it. Chinese art historian Carol Yinghua Lu highlights, in her essay, the general overuse of the term 'people', which holds a particular resonance within the public sphere of China. The term's pedestrian usage in the Western context has few specific definitions, but it has rather different consequences in China, where due to decisions made in the political system, it is used to dictate and therefore to make the vernacular understood as a conditioned entity – in 'people' it defines both a lived space and a sense of belonging within a culturally produced urbanity:

"People' is a term that is extremely loaded with political connotation and revolutionary logic. In Chinese legal papers, official documents and political theories, 'people' is no doubt the most frequently used term. To prove their claim that 'the people are the master of the country' under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, as opposed to 'being governed' in the previous regimes, the word 'people' was introduced into public speeches, entered public attention and came to prefix the names of many public amenities under the Communist rule: 'People's Square', 'People's Road', 'People's Park', 'People's Commune', 'People's Publishing House', 'People's Theatre', 'People's Congress', 'People's Government', 'the People's Republic of China', and the list goes on.'[23]

Re-Imagining Asia permits the viewer and the reader to access converging points, which are seemingly unconnected but which allow for an understanding of historiographical debates from perspectives rooted in geographies to cultural memories. As a theoretical construct and as an approach, the project can create a further understanding of one's own space and place, and a means by which one is able to articulate the drive towards a liberating reality as part of an international history. This is vitally important for survival in the receding environment of post-colonial subjectivity and geography, as pointed out in the initial paragraphs of this essay. The liberation from centred perspectives, be they the battered concepts of Euro-centrism or the shifts in gendered power relations, can also help us to think tangentially in terms of Modernism as an interdependent international experience. On the basis of a case study of Gutai, a Japanese avant-garde art movement founded in the 1950s, Canadian academic Ming Tiampo proposes that Modernism is an international event that traversed different Asian itineraries. Adapting Harold Bloom's model of interpoetic relation, Ming Tiampo calls for a rethinking of Modernism in terms of cultural translation. She seeks:

'to historicize Modernism to acknowledge both the transnationality of Modernism in Europe and North America, as well as the rich history of cultural translation and transmission – not derivation or importation – that characterizes Modernism in Asia and other non-Western regions. What I seek to do through this examination of Modernism's transnationality is thus, not just to stake out an Other Modernism in Asia, but to dismantle the notion that Western Modernism is universal, and the idea that it existed without reference to its colonies, trading partners, and imagined territories. By considering the underacknowledged transnationality of Modernism, we can then begin to speak of cultural translation in the context of geopolitics instead of Primitivism, Orientalism, and always-already late Other Modernisms.'[24]

Tiampo adds two interesting propositions that allows for this inter-poetic translation to be comprehended more fully and through the registers of transnational and intertextual convergences leading to a hypertextual and inter-artistic history of Modernism:

'Firstly, that we evaluate Modernism as an international event that is necessarily tied to its history of colonialism, imperialism, war, and the concomitant outcomes of travel, commerce, media, immigration, and imagination. This allows us to do two things – it politicizes our reading of what has, up until now, been a relatively pure history of forms as well as a history of pure form. It also allows us to construct a transnational history of Modernism that regards the movement of culture within this geopolitical context […] My second proposition is that we investigate this transnationalism historically, grounding our understanding of cultural flows in diachronic and synchronic histories. In the case of Asia, this operation reveals a complex history of transnational Modernism refracted, not through the West directly, but through other Asian itineraries. We all know about the importance of Japan to Chinese and Indian Modernism through figures such as Okakura, the Tagores and the Gao brothers, but less understood is the importance of a figure such as the Chinese writer Lu Xun to the development of Japanese literary historian Takeuchi Yoshimi's theories of Modernism in Japan immediately after the war. My last proposition is that we rethink the notions of influence (what Bloom calls influenza!) and art historical change through a new set of models that can cope with the challenges of trans-national Modernism. Expanding and rethinking Harold Bloom's model of inter-poetic relation, I propose two additional categories or revisionary ratios for now, and hope that we can think of a few more: cultural translation and media translation.'[25]

Much of the radical questioning of history from a multitude of social groups, including Asian groups and individuals in the Western hemisphere, has allowed a re-classification of and re-entry into existing hierarchies within the realm of aesthetics and also, encouragingly, within culture, where that which was so readily dismissed as secondary and contrived in the late twentieth century has been successfully decoded, helping to displace Western ideological drives and to unlock the canon. This breakdown of ideological structures, which had substantiated so much of what we call cultural heritage, has meant that these structures have started to become entropic agencies. Their demise through historical and continuing work within feminism, postcolonialism, and other such mediating discourses has helped advance the current values of plurality and inclusion. As we manage history, we are also fortunate to be able to look and understand that which had been erased and folded into the closets and into uncertainty. This jolted version of culture – where values can be returned to a measurable and commensurable form, and within which study is constructed through time – is highlighted in the texts by Carol Yinghua Lu and Ming Tiampo. Their diachronic mode of working is further substantiated by a synchronic approach to internationalism, where measured approaches to events and henomena are considered without historical antecedents. As strategic globalizationists, their readings are therefore based on disrupting rather than merely accessing the archive.

In this early phase of twenty-first century observation, with the strongest formulation of gender-balanced cultural production in the history of art, Asia is undergoing a much-needed cultural levelling that has started the redistribution of value and the beginnings of contiguity. It is offering grounds for co-existence and neighbourliness, creating opportunities for further resistance to the oppressions of the past, and providing a necessary direction of tolerance and comprehension which works towards a larger structure of narration.

Austrian art historian Christian Kravagna's insight into the work of black American philosopher and visual artist Adrian Piper, throws light on how these contextual shifts have occurred. He cites Piper's argument that:

'the concept of aesthetic experience remains a constant factor.' Piper insists that art has the potential to set in motion an experiential process of learning and change; and her firmness on this point is all the more noteworthy since a constant theme of her work is a substantive critique of art (the art world) and its denial of political issues in the name of aesthetics. Piper rescues the aesthetic, as a form of insight with a transformative potential, from the clutches of a conserva-tive value system; and this is why her position is such a fruitful one, for any discussion of the relationship between social criticism and aesthetic/artistic praxis.'[26]

It is within these prolonged studious investigations that postmodernity strives towards the reassessment and re-appropriation of orthodox histories into symbolic allegories, as an apt means of responding to imperial representation and dominance.

La Grande Bouffe

In *Re-Imagining Asia*, the premise of reassessing representation through a critical understanding of the narrative paradigm is posed by understanding the fragmentation rather than the configuration that is there to be consumed. *Re-Imagining Asia* re-interrogates identities through the deployment of the postcolonial where truth and modalities can be articulated; where internationalism and cosmopolitanism should not be subsumed by globalization. It is here that intercultural can lead to inter-Asian. In re-defining cultural knowledge, we enlarge the circles of antagonisms, fallacies, differences and the dispossessed. *Re-imagining Asia* allows for an intra-cultural context, in which Asia becomes a regional zone where competing imageries provide symbolic values of defensive secularity, the desegregation of order and culture, and the politicization of religion.

Here we are able to trace four categories that are pertinent to the remit of this project. These four areas could be seen as outlines by which to organize the vast and diverse collection of material, but more importantly they provide a non-prescriptive metaphor through which the reader can consider the work.

i) Love and Fantasy
As adoration for another person or thing as well as a relational state, love is above all a constellation of emotions and experiences. Constantly in a state of cultural flux, the diversity and complications of the global context allow for differing contextualizations. Within this complex set of emotions there remains the possibility of intersection with the realm or notion of fantasy. The significance of the fantastical moment both opens and confines love, and allows for religious, philosophical, cultural and scientific entanglements and ramifications of love in all its constellations. Here love and fantasy become a space for both the imaginary and the image.[27]

ii) Architecture and Mobility
The transnational flows and linkages of the contemporary condition take place on a grandiose scale, sometimes reaching beyond the imaginary. The challenge for this prevailing development still remains how to understand the relationships between not only the local and the global, but also between persons and cities; the particular and the universal; exchangeability and singularity. The impact of such transnational flows and linkages can be felt and observed particularly in the case of an urbanism that is testimony to a new and fluid architecture, which negotiates not only with the socio-economic structure of its city, but also with its ethnicities and cultures. The changed optics of the urban has also created an immensely different sensibility to the image and to the state of being. The image becomes infected with the current state of architectural power, and constant mobility is the magnetic object of our desires.

iii) Pleasure and Suffering
Friedrich Nietzsche once said: '[o]ne must have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star', hereby referring to the binary structure of pleasure and suffering. Instead of defining them as oppositional, his concept of lust and pain draws on the distinct inclusion of both affections simultaneously. Just as deep pleasure is always tinted by pain, excessive suffering encapsulates the potential for joy and lust. The longitudes and latitudes of pleasure and suffering become the navigational nuance of political accountability in contemporary Asia – where the desire for revolution constructs and informs political and aesthetic knowledge. The cosmopolitan informs and shapes our imagination, but does it reside within the repressed, or within the fully-fledged urbanization of Asia as it becomes the meta-urban space of promises?[28]

iv) Doubts within the System
Be it cultural, economic or international, the system – as a set of real or abstract entities comprising a predominantly instable whole – is dangerously close to imploding in the course of the world's globalization. Such implosion of any system gives rise to substrata including mental manipulation, dystopian niches, devastated nothingness and technological failure. Since the system is always an anthropological one – in terms of its originators, beneficiaries and victims – its devastation will also include its inherent anthropological structure. An example of this is anthropological nurturing, in the way Western institutions are complicit with Iranian cinema, or in the more recent rise of Chinese avant-garde art in the auction houses of the metropolitan centres of North America. What are the doubts, and who are the recipients?

Within a commodified art world that embodies racial and national values partly derived from the European notion of modernity and narrative, the Asian counterpart has of course been part of the unfolding enquiry, working towards a plurality in the site of production and meaning.

Asian artists alongside other disenfranchised communities in the art world are fighting the chronic laziness of institutions and curators in a bid to move these guarded histories and spaces away from repressed dialogues into a transformed and, possibly, activist multi-cultural practice. But we do have to be careful here, that this 'oppositional' rhetoric of radicalism in fine art and criticism does not become formulaic and academic, i.e. institutionalized in the worst sense.

The remuneration for exchange:

Much of the radical questioning of norms, as stated in the above, has allowed us to cross the marked boundaries of modernity, in which form was the ultimate goal. Today we face a much more diverse community, which has emerged from this rhetoric of opposition and countered histories where the analysis of context, material and moral conviction – backed by a substantial reworking of a complicated set of interconnected 'others' – has created the contemporary context of sometimes 'rather unwelcome observations', described as a moment of epiphany or a new globality.

In contemporary aesthetic values, the outcome has been images that are nuanced and complex; images engaged with history, especially post-war twentieth century history; images flirting with autonomy and the substantive criticism of biased narratives. A model of postmodernity that might even be described as toxic, as re-imagined through translation.

In conclusion, it seems that modernity's ultimate goal, which was form-orientated in its production and aesthetic investigation of art, has violently shifted towards a more politically and socially engaged postmodernity. As the poet Ranjit Hoskote has argued:

'True, cosmopolitanism is an experimental, adventurous attitude to culture; an ability to embrace a diversity of Others. True, also, that the sophisticated appetites of the cosmopolitan self carry it beyond the confines of the parochial – so that it recognizes few, if any boundaries to the range of experiences it can savour. And yet, there may be limits to the seemingly infinite elasticity of the cosmopolitan. It is not improbable that there are *some* boundary conditions of strangeness or alienation that even the most cosmopolitan self may be unable to negotiate, for temperamental or more grandly historical reasons.'[29]

Here, it is important to also realize that the condition of cosmopolitanism existing in many mono-ethnic Asian cities is based on cultural mediation of the 'Other'. This is profoundly present in the way that many small and relatively unknown Asian cities hold large-scale Biennales and Triennales as well as large-scale cultural events including film festivals, art fairs and conventions.

The re-emergent artistic/aesthetic praxis, and its transformative potential for re-assessing and re-appropriating histories, allows for a complicity that suggests mutual gain. Here the artist is not a complete outsider, but, even as an Other, is partially included within society and working within its various components including its values, systems and operations. The artist is thus helping to create a 'shared cultural knowledge base' of transnational imagination. The incessant repetition of acts and images made by artists has furthermore created a refusal to be removed from sight, making up an archive more approximate to transnational and hypertextual realities.

These recent, cumulative and shared experiences have formed a contiguous artworld which we, as audiences, are now able to comprehend more clearly in a market-driven working relationship. The question remains as to how long the current interest generated will last and whether it provides a more level field of cultural production. The plethora and velocity of twentyfirst century visual culture, and its increased capacity to accommodate previously othered explorations of visual practices, is now broader-based in comparison to the rather reserved communities and notions of high modernity, which was so male, white and European in its outlook and formation. With the experiences of major Asian events – including the Biennales of Gwangju, Sydney, Beijing, Singapore, Shanghai, Istanbul and Jakarta, and Triennales including Yokohama and India – the frame of aesthetic concerns and values has widened to beneficial effect, accommodating and shifting the hegemony of European modernity and postmodernity. These forces of change and shifts in agency have helped institutional frameworks to start the process of accommodating and accepting trajectories that could have remained outside of their remit. The quotidian life of Asia has provided new subjectivities, and artists, curators and organizers are beginning to mediate the social conscience of culture which, through political and aesthetic endeavours, is instrumental in creating space for diverse dialogues within the broadened, globalized whole. With Asian narratives, as exemplified within Biennale structures as well as in other major interventions in the eighties and nineties (such as *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery in London, and *Documenta 11* in Kassel), we are more aware of the power structures of

theory and curating that had kept art within a historical European arena. Fate demands now that we proceed from the influence of historical re-writing from once marginal positions, from the monolith of formalism, into contingent and interconnected practices. Fate remains now firmly in our own hands, encouraging us to define the ground of forms, legacies, lineages, and models of aesthetics in re-imagining Asia.

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1   Marcel Duchamp, *The Creative Act*, recorded at: *Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts*, Houston, Texas, April 1957

2   In his publication *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996), Roger Brubaker refers to this reversal of direction by means of reflecting on the developments of Europe as the birthplace of the nation-state and modern nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century. Assumed to be the graveyard for those notions at the end of the twentieth century, fin-de-siècle Europe has been moving back to the nation-state, most spectacularly with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia into a score of nationally defined successor states. Brubaker draws on Pierre Bourdieu and the 'new institutionalist' sociology, and by comparing contemporary nationalisms with those of interwar Europe, he tackles one of the most interesting aspects and important problems that the 'New Europe' is facing: the massive reorganization of political space along national lines.

3   Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford 2000, p. 27.

4   Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York. 1979.

5   Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993.

6   Geeta Kapur, unpublished text for the Conference on the Delhi Biennale, 2007.

7   Franklin Rosemont describes the experimentation with sleep, sleeplessness and dreams by the Surrealists as follows: 'Surrealism aims to reduce, and ultimately to resolve, the contradictions between sleeping and waking, dream and action, reason and madness, the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and the society, the subjective and the objective. It aims for free imagination from the mechanisms of psychic and social repression, so that the inspiration and exaltation heretofore regarded as the exclusive domain of poets and artists will be acknowledged as the common property of all.' See *Andre Breton and the First Principles of Surrealism*, Pluto Press, London 1978, p. 1.

8   Stanley Abe, 'China, The Buddha, and Modern Aestheticism'

9   Unpublished artist's statement by Song Dong, in collaboration with Wu Hung.

10 Dialogue between the Paris based art curator Hou Hanru and Chinese architect Chang Yung Ho, Huaqiao Hotel, Beijing, February 20, 1999 (www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9908/msg00095.html, standing of 8.11.07).

11 Philipp Cheah, 'Bringing It All Back Home: Asian Cinema, that is…'

12 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1996, p. 31.

13 'The imaginary' as a term was introduced 1936 by Jacques Lacan and denotes one of the three orders in his psychoanalytic theory. In this sense, it entails connotations of illusion, seduction and fascination but is by no means unnecessary or inconsequential (as something that is illusory). The Lacanian term defines the dual relationship between the ego and the specular image. The use of the term outside Lacanian psychoanalysis refers to a set of values, institutions, laws, and symbols common to a particular social group and their corresponding society. The social imaginary is an institution in as much as it represents the system of meanings that govern a given social structure. Defined by the interactions of subjects in soci-

ety, such imaginaries are to be understood as historical constructs. The imaginary therefore is an imagined concept, contingent on the imagination of a particular social subject.

For more details, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Jonathan Webber (Trans.), Routledge, London and New York 2004; Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Bruce Fink (Trans.), W.W. Norton & Co., New York 2006; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Verso, London 1993 (1983); D. P. Gaonkar *Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction*, Public Culture 14 (1/2002), pp. 1-20; C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham 2004.

[14] Ranjit Hoskote, 'Retrieving the Far West: Towards a Curatorial Representation of the House of Islam', in this book,

[15] Zhu Qi, 'Millennium Reincarnation: The Possibility of Asian Contemporary Visual Art' (www.chinaartnetworks.com/feature/wen_zhu.shtml, standing of: 08.11.07),

[16] www.makhmalbaf.com/articles.php?a=480 standing of: 08.11.2007.

[17] Susan Acret, 'It's a bull market! Investing in the future of contemporary Asian art' (www.aaa.org.hk/newsletter_diaaalogue.html#diaaa51 standing of: 08.11.2007).

[18] This shift in paradigms points towards the idea of culture as translation, overcoming the notion of culture as text. Drawing away from the concept of translation as mere linguistic transformation of one meaning articulated in several languages, the translational turn is regarded as a transformative process that neglects the existence of original and reproduction. For further information see Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften,* Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt 2006.

[19] Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, Routledge, London/New York 2002, p. 5.

[20] Wu Hung, Zhang Dali, He Hao, *Zhang Dali: A Second History*, China 2006, p.5. (Exhibition Catalogue on the occasion of Zhang Dali's solo exhibition: *Zhang Dali: A Second History*, at Walsh Gallery, Chicago, June 2006).

[21] Wu Hung, Zhang Dali, He Hao, *Zhang Dali: A Second History*, China (2006), p.5. (Exhibition Catalogue on the occasion of Zhang Dali's solo exhibition: *Zhang Dali: A Second History*, at Walsh Gallery, Chicago, June 2006).

[22] Amidst the forces that affect us, we can exert a transformative power. Foucault returns to Greco-Roman antiquity to discover the self understood as individual agency characterized by autarchy and auto-affection. The 'disempowering' forces that we resist, be they material, historical, economic or socio-political, are simultaneously the forces that power our ability to create ourselves differently. This is what Foucault meant when he proposed that we should each summon the power to create our life as a work of art – to give it a different form from the one imposed upon us by external forces. What Foucault called an 'aesthetics of existence' should therefore be understood as a practice of freedom.

[23] Carol Yinghua Lu, 'People's Park'

[24] Ming Tiampo, 'Cultural translation as Interpoetic Relation'

[25] Ibid.

[26] Christian Kravagna, 'Political arts, aesthetic politics, and a little story about the Nachträglichkeit of experience' in: Roger M. Buergel, Ruth Nowack (Eds.), *Things We Don't Understand*, Generali Foundation, Vienna/Dresden 2000, p. 96.

[27] Bruno Latour's ideas of cosmopolitics can also be seen to play within this category of a constructive and imaginative cosmopolitan. In the context of love and fantasy a shift occurs within cosmopolitan centres that can be described as a fluctuating set of agreed relations that Latour refers to as cosmopolitics, where cosmopolitanism is constructed or even imagined. Here love and fantasy intermingle to form what has been referred to as imagined communities or neighbourhoods.

[28] Cf. Peter J.M. Nas, 'Ecumenopolis in Asia': 'The concept of the extended metropolitan region or *desakota* zones (Bahasa Indonesia for village-town zones) has been coined for this amoebae-like spatial form of regional-based urbanization, which seems diametrically opposed to the city-based urbanization to which we are accustomed. According to McGee, these urban regions have several components such as the city-core, the metropolitan area, and the extended metropolitan area, the latter constituting a patched area with mixed agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Pertinently, mega-urban regions may follow divergent patterns of spatial growth. The growth triangle of Singapore is an example of the 'expanding state model', also involving part of Malaysian Johor and Indonesian Riau. Surabaya is a case in point following the 'extended metropolitan region model', whereas Jakarta and Manila are examples of 'high-density extended metropolitan regions'. Asian mega-urbanization as a component of the world informational society entails completely new morphological contexts for living, and fundamental changes in lifestyle, consumption behaviour and production conditions. These developments in urbanization are often exclusively described in terms of overwhelming and almost insoluble problems, pointing at excessive population density, deficient infrastructure, traffic congestion, poor housing and living conditions, and so on. These distorted images of immensity, unsustainability, parasitism, extreme poverty, and poor quality of life do not generate adequate and realistic perspectives. Without negating or under-rating mega-urban problems the full-fledged urbanization of Asia and the world are quite near and will offer tremendous opportunities for the development of humankind.' (See: www.leidenuniv.nl/fsw/nas/pdf/01Nas-Mega-UrbanizationinAsia-20-05-03ms.pdf, standing of: 19.11.07).

[29] Ranjit Hoskote, 'Retrieving the Far West: Towards a Curatorial Representation of the House of Islam'

Why Multiculturalism should not be necessary

David Elliott

David Elliott
Curator, writer, broad-caster and museum director. During 2007, David Elliott worked as the first director of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art [Istanbul Modern]. Previously he was the founding director of the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (2001-2006); Director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden (1996-2001) and Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, England (1976-96). From 1998 until 2004 he was President of CIMAM (the International Committee of ICOM for Museums of Modern Art).

Elliott is a cultural historian whose main interests concern contemporary art, the Russian avant-garde, and the visual cultures of central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the non-western world during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the early 1980s he conceived a series of pioneering exhibitions that integrated non-western with contemporary art.

Ever since the 18th century Enlightenment we, in the West, have been painting ourselves into a corner. The fact that this corner is now getting extremely tight, accounts for our dependence on such tired ciphers as 'multiculturalism' or 'cultural diversity' to try to give form to, or communicate with, those sticky, painted wastes beyond. It is as if these mantra-like words give us permission to look at a world further than ourselves, to painlessly relinquish a little of what we think is our hard-won power, to somehow come down from the heights of our fantastic civilization. Frankly, all this would be funny if it was not so sad.

People, images and things have always moved vast distances across the world. Just think of our genetic, let alone our cultural, histories. They are festivals of impurity. If I trace back my own paternal YDNA, I find it matched in the contemporary populations of Northern Portugal, parts of China, Japan, Africa and Tibet as well as in the UK and the Americas.

In *The Mongolian Gene,* one of my future dream projects, I would like to make an exhibition that would celebrate all this and the innate impurity of art. The model is the Mongolian Empire of the 13th century, one of the largest in the world, that stretched from the East coast of China, across the steppes of Siberia to Western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Disciplined soldiers and good administrators they believed they had a mission to conquer rather than civilize and, beyond technical and technological innovations in the arts of war, had relatively little to offer in material culture. As a result they were quickly absorbed by the local populations occupied and left little behind them but their genes. These can still be clearly traced. In a sense we are all Mongolians, Armenians, Africans, Tibetans…..

The later empires of the great European nations were built on a completely different premise and for this we can probably blame the Bible. We thought that we had the God-given gift of civilization and the duty to civilize others. In the 18th Century we *were* the masters of the universe – no not the Norwegians (you were still under the Swedish yoke) – but at least the great Empires: Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, declining Sweden, with little Prussia snapping at our heels and the revolutionary British former colony starting to flex its muscles across the Atlantic. And many believe that things have not changed so much, even under the golden dawn of the European Community. It seems to be human nature to be reluctant to relinquish power.

Yet, what the Enlightenment gave with one hand - Human Rights, modern democracy, the right to self determination, artistic autonomy – it took away with the other in the form of grasping colonialism, exploitation of the poor, nationalism, despoliation of the environment. In fact they were two sides of the same coin – intimately interlinked – you couldn't have the one without the other. Where otherwise would the materials and labour have come from to create our wealth?

The Atlantic Rim, including our liberated, but equally exploitative North American brothers, became a site of economic enterprise, industry and technological innovation – all according to rational principals and a firm belief in the magical doctrine of Manifest Destiny in which 'advanced' civilizations had the moral right and power to dominate the rest of the world and its peoples. The North American First Peoples were not the only ones who suffered cruelly from this march of progress.

This is how the West was won – and the East, and the South, in fact, how we got most of those parts that had material or strategic value and had not been grabbed by some other power. And in spite of our own many internal conflicts and wars, our vanguard of civilization felt it had the Christian, God-given duty to decide for others. The human rights that we enjoyed were not transferable. Tragically, this mind set continues to the present and can be clearly seen in our self-justifying, post-Cold War 'policeman of the world' mentality that, hardly surprisingly, we see so hotly contested in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

It was almost as if the Divine Right of Kings had perished at the guillotine only to make way for the birth of an equally insufferable Divine Right of Development. To misappropriate the words of Henry Ford 'history was bunk' and became little more than a justification of the inalienable right of white – in some cases Anglo-Saxon – races to lord it over the rest. From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's short poem *Xanadu* (1797) to Edward Gibbon's major work *The History of the*

Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-89), the culture of the newly developed, industrializing world disdained the civilizations of the past for their decadence and moral backwardness. Of course, great monuments of culture had survived, but these did little more than stimulate a sublime frisson in the backbones of the Western intelligentsia as they fantasised that, one day, Western civilization would also become decadent and die. This was a vital part of the equation because decadence, political, racial, moral, was the flip side of modernity – a pretext for huge suffering (not to mention genocide) - and a necessary engine for moral rectitude. The rest of the world learnt quickly from its masters, unless they were teetering on the edge like the decadent Chinese and Ottoman Empires that were easy meat for the Western powers.

But there was a problem. Once set loose, ideas about human rights and self-determination were impossible to contain and, while originally devised for a few white, privileged Western males, leeched out into the rest of the world with unpredictable effects.

The equation between individual liberty on the one hand, and national self-determination on the other has never been fully worked through, and I am sure that it has no single correct answer. Yet, the West still behaves as though there is a solution – and that is, simply, the world the way they want it.

On the decadence front, Oswald Spengler's long predicted *Decline of the West* (1919) has been brought back into focus by the economic growth of the Pacific Rim and the unleashing of the economies of India and China. It seems that for the world to make any sense, we either have to be masters or slaves. Yet, although this kind of radical essentialism has many precedents in manifestations of political power, if one concentrates on cultural terms, this seems to me peculiar and very dangerous.

I am much more interested by the idea of a cultural power that transcends all kinds of political boundaries. Autocratic politicians have always been very wary of this. Why, for instance, would Hitler, Stalin and Mao have wanted to suppress the very best art that was made around them and replace it with a poodle variety that would lick rather than disregard the hand that fed it? If any of you have an inclination towards theories of racial or national purity or essence, I would advise you to leave now. I have bad news. Ever since the beginning of time, cultural influence has always been on the move, occasionally imposed, more often willingly adopted, and it has travelled in every possible direction.

Culture is in its very nature impure and thrives on this. Throughout the Enlightenment, Europe was willingly bombarded by styles of art and design from India and China, in the 19th Century Japan became all the rage, and by the beginning of the 20th Century, it was Africa. It did not matter whether anyone understood or respected the cultural influences they were using, the fact is that they provided novel ideas and starting points that enriched the local cultural gene pool and led to new and different possibilities. And just think what in India, China, Japan and Africa artists did using European influences! But long before this, there was a constant exchange and mixing of cultures. The trade routes of the Silk Road, from Chang'an [Xian] to the Black sea and beyond and back were traced in an exhibition I made in Tokyo in 2005 called *China: crossroads of culture* that showed the many different influences from the Western Han (207 BCE to 25 CE) to the mid-Tang periods that contributed to the Tang Dynasty cultural renaissance (618-907 CE). Many of the works shown here had been excavated in China but not made there. This was shown at the same time as *Follow Me! Chinese art at the threshold of the new millennium,* an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art that focused on the current cultural impact of globalization by showing the work of the youngest generation of artists. Looking at Africa, Basil Davison has highlighted the impact of similar flows between North and South that followed the oases across the Saharan dessert during the 14th and 15th centuries and were a high-point in African civilization. Such routes as these have always been the conduits of art, culture, ideas, religion and technology as well as goods.

Our new age of globalization, in fact, is hardly new although its speed may be faster. In the snowy wastes of the early Viking settlement of Helgö on Lake Mälaren, with a population of barely a thousand souls, a 6th Century North West Indian Buddha was found that had obviously been carried there across the Asian steppe and through the rivers of Russia. Two centuries later, Tang Dynasty silk reached the nearby Viking capital of Birka. Going back even further, the horned figure on the famous silver *Gundestrup Cauldron* in the National Museum in Copenhagen was originally thought to represent a Viking when it was excavated from a Danish peat bog at the end of the 19th Century. We now understand that this masterpiece of 2nd Century

BCE metalwork was probably made in what is now Romania by itinerant metalworking Aryans (Thracians) who had originated from the Indus Valley and that the cross-legged, horned figure represents, not a man wearing a Viking helmet, but Pashupati, Lord of the Animals, an early form of Shiva, one of whose physical attributes was antlers.

The idea of multiculturalism as a natural rather than artificial state, present whether we like it or not started to become clear to me at the close of the 1970s when, as a much younger Museum Director in Oxford, it was obvious that the Western avant-garde had dematerialised itself out of existence, and that some other ways of looking at contemporary art had to be found. The market, as always, preferred what it already knew and we saw a return to painting and historicist imagery as the next hot number.

Die Neuen Wilde, the Young Italian *Transavantguardia* and the Americans David Salle, Peter Halley and Julian Schnabel became the order of the day. Yet, for me it was difficult to be too enthusiastic about this radical wind change because it implied a serious lack of professionalism on my own part. The examples of Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz were particularly significant in that they were 'discovered' by the international art world at the beginning of the 1980s, although some of their best work had been made throughout the 1960s and 70s.

All this led me to start thinking about quality. If their work was any 'good' in the 1960s and 1970s, and to me it obviously was, why, as a professional who claimed to be up to date with contemporary art, did I not understand this before? And, by extension, if this had been over-looked on my own doorstep, of how many other works of great quality made in more remote parts of the world was I completely ignorant? It seemed as if the history books and the market re-enforced each other in their lack of knowledge or care about what had been going on in the wider world although, of course, certain insertions and revisions were permitted – but the keyword here is 'permission' because the system of appreciating, writing about, showing and selling art was, and to a significant part still remains, essentially closed. This was because the West was convinced that it had 'invented' modern (and post-modern) art and any uncalled for incursions from outside were regarded as, at best, derivative, at worst, not even worthy of consideration.

It was at this time I started to include exhibitions of non-western art into the Oxford programme because I was convinced that there was so much good work outside our experience that we did not know about. Among these were *India Myth and Reality* (1983), a history of the development of Indian modern art from the 1940s (Bombay Progressives) to the early 1980s; *Reconstructions: avant-garde art in Japan 1945-1965* (1985) an eye opening exhibition that showed that during the late 1950s/early '60s Tokyo and Osaka were among the most visually avant-garde cities in the world; *Art from South Africa* (1990), a survey of the visual culture of the 'new' South Africa before it actually existed, or *Silent Energy: new art from China* (1993), a view of the new generation of artists that had emerged after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). These shows were accommodated in the same spaces where exhibitions of the work of Jackson Pollock, Wassily Kandinsky, the Soviet Avant-Garde or the best artists being in Britain during the 1980s were also shown. The point was that these exhibitions were all shown on a completely equal basis and there were no compromises of quality either in the works chosen or in the ways they were presented.

While I appreciated his courage as well the political and cultural resistance Jean-Hubert Martin must have faced when organizing the seminal multicultural exhibition *Les Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris in 1989, I could not sympathise with him in combining Western with non-Western art under the rubric of them both being 'magic'. I felt that this was not treating the work in an equal way because under any other circumstance works by Richard Long, Marina Abramovic or Jannis Kounellis would never have been seriously described in this way. Furthermore, the obviously high quality non-Western work that was shown needed to be considered and appreciated first and foremost as contemporary art rather than as an exotic manifestation of ethnology or anthropology. Nevertheless this exhibition was a step forward in that unknown work by non-Western artists were shown in a powerful 'international' space, although compromised by the romantic exoticism of its pretext.

Not surprisingly, in Great Britain, as elsewhere, there was a strong critique of the dominant system by artists. Raschid Araeen, first with *Black Phoenix* and then with *Third Text* was particularly important. And then there was the work of Eddie Chambers in Bristol, of InIVA and Autograph in London and many others; in the USA there were the art offshoots of the Black Power movement, Chicano art, Border Art and the work of countless individuals like Kerry James

Marshall, Jimmy Durham and Ellen Gallagher. Yet, the problem has been that the dominant system has accommodated them without essentially changing its mind set. Although originating in a sense of radical protest, such individuals and organizations have, with few exceptions, been co-opted by the permissiveness of a closed multiculturalism in which all are equal, yet some are obviously very much more equal than others. And there's very little one can do about it because, as Michel Foucault pointed out, we are all prisoners of our own systems and institutions. Is it better to be shunned or permitted? Both equally reinforce feelings of isolation and separation rather than a sense of openness or equality. My suggestion is that we try to think in a way that contradicts the authoritarian ideology of political correctness so institutionally prevalent in the US and UK because this re-enforces ideas of compartmentalization and prevents different cultures from being seen together, on the same plane, as in a continuum. Paradoxically, the art world seems to be one of the most innately rigid - even racist - of these institutions, although the individuals of which it is composed may not be.

This is the legacy of Western development – shared even by countries that did not have empires. Cultural authority is assumed, some others are allowed to participate while yet others are relegated to the tender mercies of ethnology or anthropology. This assumes that art – as we know it – is a 'possession' of the West, that aesthetics is a Western 'invention' and that others live on a radically different if not lower plane.

This is obviously nonsense. Why not think of similarities rather than differences that are usually superficial and all too apparent? Is not a large part of the making and appreciation of art based on feelings and emotions that we all share? The ideas of artistic autonomy articulated by Kant that are the basis of modern Western aesthetics, have a relationship to fundamental human rights, but was not a similar aesthetic autonomy also exercised by the *literati* painters of Sung and Ming dynasty China – themselves a small male minority? Many other parallels can be made between cultures and there is a desperate need for us to study and think about culture comparatively. I suspect that the real reason for such narrow-mindedness is fear because, collectively, we have so much invested in the past. It seems as if we really believe that we *invented* morality and if Western culture, with all its power and technology, is not superior to others where does this leave us now? Being the doorman at the gate of the Panopticon is one of the few means of control we have left. It is no surprise that the rest of the world begs to differ from this opinion and the rapidly shrinking space around us is becoming like a prison.

As I said at the beginning, we are entrapped by a dilemma of our own making as well as by events that are beyond our control. Perhaps the world we have dreamt of was far more noble than our institutions could permit and, as the wheel of history continues to turn, the true nature of our situation is uncovered and the security of the herd seems far more attractive than the beauty, exhilaration and terror of the open sea.

Yet, we have to live with both. We have no choice. But in continuing to think more openly and equally about cultures, what really is at stake? The right to make a cartoon of the Prophet, or the possibility of discovering art now, and in the past, that is familiar yet different, intelligible yet, like all good art, not completely so? We do not live in a vacuum, why not entertain both possibilities and perhaps, in the process, discover completely different perspectives on freedom, human rights and cultural life? Of course there are risks in being open, yet the paradigmatic role that art plays within culture and society means these are small compared with those in the actual world, and the shift in our mental set from 'permissive' to 'open' that may be triggered as a result, will surely cost nothing other than our prejudices. To me this seems a small price to pay for a more transparent, open, enjoyable, equal and beautiful world.

(Back)Grounds of connections in international art practices and exhibition circuits

Koyo Kouoh

Koyo Kouoh
Koyo Kouoh was born in Cameroon and has a reputation as an art administrator and curator. She was the Coordinator of Cultural Programs at the Gorée Institute before setting up the African Association for Contemporary Culture to promote African intellectual and artistic creativity. A well known and highly respected cultural producer, Kouoh has collaborated with the Dakar Biennale of Art from 2000-2004, co-curated the Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine and facilit-ated La Caravane de la Poésie, a literature tour from Gorée to Timbuctu. Specializing in photography and public interventions, she has curated exhi-bitions in Brazil, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and the United States and written on contempo-rary African art. She recently served as advisor to the artistic director for docu-menta 12. She is based in Dakar.

First of all I would like to thank the Government of Norway for adhering to the idea to fund platforms of presentations and exchanges related to contemporary African art practices and reflection on art production. Second, I want to thank Gavin Jantjes for inviting me to be part of this program, and Marith Hope and Stina Högkvist for their professional assistance and collab-oration since November 2007.

The conference title poses a tricky question. *Are there foreigners in art?* As it often happens when categorization, segmentation or grouping are at play, one is more often than not tempted to take sides and advocate for it.

People working in the arts are not an exception to this pattern. The most optimistic one would argue that art is a big family of people thinking alike and working for the same goal: the goal of lifting spirits to higher perceptions.

Meanwhile reality shows that this is not true. Because if art was that nihilistic, self-sufficient, entity of beauty, reflection and criticism, then one would not have the polarizations that we all know: West/South, profit/non-profit, modern/contemporary, traditional/modern, local/global, male/female and so on.

History shows that the perception of the non-African viewer was imbedded in a discourse that escorted and justified the colonial fact. Taxpayers of imperial countries wanted to know how and why so much public funding was flowing into what was then considered institutionalized adventures.

And this form of communication around the myth of the *tabula rasa* has not yet departed from Western minds. Moreover, the development of culture also contributed to the establishment of imaginary mega structures about the myth of the 'other'. This 'other' deserved to be seen in his nakedness and in his most primitive character.

Based on this light the Hottentot Venus, widely exhibited in London and Paris during the first half of the 19th century was the first great attempt at showcasing cultural diversity in Europe.

We all know about the Venus's fate. A long story that spans almost two centuries, from 1810 to 2002 when President Mandela finally succeeded in forcing France to return her remains to South Africa.

The grand colonial exhibition staged in Paris in 1931 did not correct that general and popular perception of the 'other' either. During that exhibition, Senegal presented a large repertoire of performing arts, which made the foreigner even more foreign. These shows were very popular. Many people attended the performances, but very few understood the cultural values and artistic heritage embedded in them.

Colonial literature, also known as seaport literature, because many authors of such writings made stopovers on African coasts, hardly ventured inland, often stayed very briefly, yet claimed ethnological expertise. These writings also transmitted myths about the African: Pierre Loti, René Caillé just to name two whose works, up to now, are still referenced as the crème of eth-nological writing. All these images and references unfortunately have not yet disappeared from the imaginary iconography of Europe when Africa lights up in the mind.

The advent of paid holidays and mass tourism after the Second World War paved the way for new discoveries of the 'other'. Many aspects of the Black phenomenon were displayed on the walls and in the theaters in Europe, most specifically in France and Great Britain.

We have had the abolition of slavery, structural decolonization has been enforced, civil rights and liberation movements shook the establishment, the Harlem renaissance, the black arts movement and the advent of contemporary African art in the early nineties.

All these efforts of inclusion would not have any meaning if there was not, on one side, a profound sentiment of neglect, and on the other an equally profound feeling of sheer ignorance.

Recent cultural globalization provides us now with the opportunity of positioning ourselves at any corner of the table. That means that the art mix becomes more and more diverse. The increased mobility of people, ideas and practices creates a virtual sense of access; a sense of possibility; a sense of reality. The amount of identity exhibitions that were shown in the last fifteen years for instance, clearly contributes to a sort of cultural decentralization.

However, in French speaking Africa, the idea of cultural diversity, as it is understood in the West, really started taking roots after the independence era. The principal idea was to protect the French language, which had already developed an independent dynamic on the continent.

The 'other' now became an ally, an accomplice. In the light of this, a movement such as the Francophonie, which by the way was founded by late Presidents Senghor of Senegal and Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia among others, could not be limited to the sole defense of the French language.

The new strategic allys also became an economic partner; thus the necessity of support for artistic expressions arose clearly. In Senegal for instance, this need for visibility resonated in the cultural vision of Senghor. It is in this context that national ballet groups and international group exhibitions traveled the world. The same process took place in many other African countries such as Guinea, Mali, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire to name a few.

These international exhibitions and performances facilitated the presentation of a new African face and provided people outside the African continent exposure to African creativity. However, the quality of these works remained very folkloric.

The advent of contemporary African art on the international art scene in the late eighties and early nineties opened up new avenues for critical analysis of artistic practices in Africa. Magazines such as *Revue Noire* in France and later *NKA* in the United States contributed to expand the horizons and broaden the knowledge on the creative processes of African artists and intellectuals.

In the wake of the 'Primitivism' show at MoMA in New York, Jean Hubert Martin, then Director of Centre Pompidou in Paris put together *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989: an exhibition of contemporary art that aimed at counteracting ethnocentric practices in the art world.

As Benjamin H.D. Buchloh says, Martin also sought to correct the problem of '100% of exhibitions ignoring 80% of the earth'. *Magiciens de la Terre* stirred much debate and controversy that still continue today.

People critiqued its aims and the selection process. Rasheed Areen for instance wrote in *Third Text* that the apparent equality with which artists from all over the world are presented in the exhibition masks biases in the way in which the organizers of the exhibition went about selecting the artists; searching for the 'authentic' and bypassing anything truly modern in Third World cultures.

Other writers questioned the curator's premises about 'center' and 'margin' and about determining cultural identity.

Regardless of what position artists, art professionals and critics had about that exhibition, today, the *'Magiciens'* exhibition can be considered the momentum that inspired many on multiple levels and from various perspectives and for different motives. The exhibition marked a sensible fault line in Western curatorial practice.

Ever since, the consideration of art production by non-Western artists increased steadily. Agencies, institutions, art spaces were created specifically to fill that gap.

No serious curator of internationalism nor institution engaged in showing the world could any longer afford the *faux-pas* of not having African representatives in their shows and accompanying panel discussions.

How to resist cultural diversity

Oscar Pripp

Introduction

Oscar Pripp
Researcher at Uppsala University in Sweden in the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology. He also worked for several years at the Centre for Cultural Diversity. He has published several books, among them: Mångfold i Kulturlivet (Diversity Within Culture), Fittja, världen og vardagen (Fittja, the world and everyday life), Tid for mångfold (A time for diversity) together with Emil Plisch and Saara Printz-Werner.

Maybe you are asking yourselves 'Why the title How to resist cultural diversity?' 'Shouldn't a conference of this kind be about concept development and increased diversity'? My aim today is to point out a couple of problematic contexts where diversity is counteracted in the Swedish culture sector. I regard these contexts as necessary for work on increasing diversity to accelerate and, above all, obtain lasting effects. It is true that one must produce good examples to inspire cultural institutions. But in my experience there are many who just keep asking for good examples without being prepared themselves to get to the bottom of how inequality is created within organizations. Good examples in combination with a deeper insight into obstacles and problems are, in my opinion, the most efficient road towards long-term and lasting change.

The study I use as a basis, *Tid för mångfald –'Time for diversity'*, was carried out three years ago by the Multicultural Centre on commission from the Swedish government and the Ministry of Culture (Pripp, Plisch & Printz-Werner 2005). The task was to map and analyze the ethnic and cultural diversity within the government culture sector prior to The Year of Cultural Diversity 2006. We were two ethnologists and three political scientists who took on the task of examining 63 cultural authorities and institutions. These included, for example, the Royal Dramatic Theatre and the Nordic Museum and authorities like the Swedish Arts Council and the National Heritage Board. We interviewed leaders, conducted a comprehensive questionnaire survey and went through annual reports. We concentrated on the three areas of organization, production and users.

People from a foreign background, especially from outside the Western world, are hardly represented at all among the leading tiers in the government culture sector in Sweden. Consequently, one starting-point for the study was to analyze and pinpoint questions of representation. As a result of this strategy this theme was subject to intensive discussions in many institutions during The Year of Cultural Diversity. In the media, however, the representation issues were not at all given the same attention. Investigative reports were notably absent. Culture critics and columnists concentrated instead on discussing whether The Year of Cultural Diversity was a good or bad initiative. Many, but not all, were critical because the initiative came 'from above', from the government and the ministry. It was said that the professional culture sector and art could not base their existence on some kind of social philanthropy, in other words, on the integration of immigrants. Even though we stated in the study that it concerned the existence of professional cultural practitioners and their position in the culture sector. I will come back to that issue later on. Others claimed that a year of cultural diversity might also entail risks, since that would mean 'freezing' people in their ethnic identity, and making the situation worse by pointing out people with a foreign background. This is another point I will return to.

Criteria

In order to systematize the handling of ethnic and cultural diversity in the 63 institutions we set up a series of simple criteria: *about, for, with, by, how* and *where*.

The first criterion, *about,* focuses on to what extent the activities of the culture institutions are about ethnic and cultural diversity. What we then looked at was the contents of theatre productions, exhibitions, theme days and other events. *About* was the most frequent way of working with diversity in the institutions.

The second criterion, *for*, observes whether the production is meant *for* a diverse audience. *For* was the second most common way of working with ethnic and cultural diversity. In order to reach a wider audience the institutions visited multi-ethnic suburbs, cooperated with immigrant associations, schools, and classes in Swedish for immigrants.

It was less common for productions to be made together *with* people representing a broad diversity, like influential reference groups, partners and called-in experts.

Least common of all was having activities and productions led and carried out *by* people with a foreign background. Nor did this issue have any special priority in the organizations. *By* was viewed by us as a particularly important aspect, since it indicated where to find the central power relations.

A fifth criterion is *how* cultural diversity is expressed. In what forms and by what expressions is diversity represented? As a mosaic of the different cultural traditions of different groups? As mixed forms of various traditions and influences?

The last criterion is *where* there is room for diversity. As part of the institutions' mainstream production? Or as separate projects beside the regular activities?

These were the criteria we used when mapping the institutions so as to be able to compare them with one another in some way. In our final report we also launched the six criteria as a way for organizations to make their own identifications of how they work with diversity. This may seem a blunt tool, but it has proved efficient for systematizing and improving work on diversity.

Some results

It was shown in our study that there were few heads of institutions who had a foreign background and less than one per cent who originated from outside the Western world. Ethnic diversity was almost exclusively to be found at the bottom of the organizations, among those who clean, run cafeterias and restaurants, and to some extent among janitors and technicians.

When we discussed the reasons behind the unequal distribution with the representatives themselves, circumstances came to light such as organizations *under pressure:* it was hard to find the time for all tasks and commitments. When we arrived to interview a management group, those in charge might look at us with hollow-eyed tiredness, shaking their heads unhappily and saying: 'First we worked with gender issues for one and a half years, then with work environment issues, and now you are here asking about ethnic and cultural diversity. We have also heard that we are supposed to lump together various discrimination bases such as sex, class, ethnicity and sexuality and work with intersectionality.' Often it was the same person who was responsible for several of these issues and who was hardly found the time even before we arrived with our investigation.

Another reason they gave was low *personnel turnover*. One authority said: 'Well, those of us working here started at the time the new culture policy was introduced in 1974. We are still the same people here today, how are we supposed to create diversity?' Other institutions told us of *shrinking resources* and *mounting costs*, and that they might have to lay off employees rather than hire new ones. Others talked about *vague directives and low feedback requirements* from the Ministry of Culture. In other words, we found a number of everyday circumstances which were brought up by the authority and institution representatives themselves as reasons for the current situation.

Structural connections

We also found so-called structural connections between the institutions' attitudes to ethnic and cultural diversity on one hand and the underrepresentation of people with a foreign background on the other. Let me illustrate this by a quotation:

> *I wasn't just an ordinary actor but a foreign actor who was employed as an immigrant actor… Nothing has changed in all these years. When I phone to ask for a job, I always have to start by explaining that I am not applying for an mmigrant role but for a role that suits me.* (Mina Azarian, in: Stockholm County Music, 2004)

The words are those of Mina Azarian, an actor, and they well reflect the way in which I wish to approach the topic of structural exclusion effects in this lecture. By structures I mean simply the aggregate effects of the actions and attitudes of many individual actors (Giddens 1993, Runfors 2003). The joint *effect* that is created need not entirely correspond with the personal convictions and intentions of the people involved. What Mina Azarian's words express are repeated every-day actions emanating from key individuals in the culture institutions. Normally it was not their intention to exclude – in this case – an actor with a foreign background. But the effect of their way of interpreting and 'arranging' – or 'placing' – people coming from outside the Western world turned into a joint structural exclusion effect, which was very obvious to Mina, since she was the recurrent object of the treatment, but it was unclear to the cultural representatives themselves (cf Stonequist 1937, Warnke 1993).

In the following I want to focus on four such structural connections: (1) *a lack of commitment and knowledge,* (2) *excluding networks*, (3) *ambiguity* and (4) *ambivalence*. The two latter

aspects are close to one another, but differ in that *ambiguity* represents how concepts like cultural diversity are infused with so many alternative and competing meanings that they lose their strength. *Ambivalence* refers to the feelings among the representatives of cultural institutions when facing the ability and competence of 'the Other', when he or she tries to find a permanent position in the culture sector (Bhabha 1994, Tilly 2000).

Lack of knowledge and commitment as an excluding mechanism

In our study we were able to establish how common weak commitment and a lack of knowledge of diversity issues were among people in leading positions. It was not unusual that these people, who had not made themselves familiar with these issues, were the most vociferous and critical towards efforts of enhancing ethnic and cultural diversity. This lack of commitment and knowledge, we felt, was a central problem, since top-management commitment is crucial to the ability of an organization to include ethnic and cultural diversity (Mlekov & Widell 2003). Changes will start from above.

One result of the lack of knowledge in the culture sector was that the diversity questions – in a number of institutions and authorities – were dropped in competition with other issues. When weak commitment turned out to be a widespread phenomenon in many institutions the result was a structural effect common to a large part of the government culture sector.

Excluding networks

The interviewed heads described how the leading levels of culture institutions and authorities surrounded themselves by strong, comprehensive networks. Leading persons told us how common it was to recruit already well known or recommended exhibition producers, theatre directors, actors, project coordinators etc. It was not thought necessary to advertise jobs since it was known who might be considered for these jobs. There were occasional attempts to increase diversity by expressing such wishes in advertisements, that is via formal recruitment channels. At the same time parallel recruiting took place via informal channels, which meant that the diversity aspect was often sacrificed.

About 65 percent of all recruitment in Sweden takes place via informal networks and channels (Bethoui 2004). According to our informants the figure for certain parts of the culture sector was considerably higher. Sweden is characterized by ethnically segregated labour and housing markets. If a considerable amount of hiring is done by informal routes, this is likely to entail that these contacts will not cross the demarcation lines of working life and the housing market.

Weak social bonds and widespread networks, or "weak ties", give people more alternatives to act and more contact paths as well as providing an important potential for labour market recruitment (Borevi 2002:43f, Granovetter 1973). The weak and more widespread networks are essential, especially when it comes to spreading information beyond strong communities. These weak networks demonstrate how our social contacts on the micro level, that is in the everyday life of an organization, are linked to structural effects on a macro level (Granovetter 1973).

The excluding effect created by the networking of many actors was, as far we understood it, not always intentional or surveyable on the part of the individuals. It was often a product of everyday routines and working methods within organizations in order to keep down costs and make them function as smoothly as possible (cf Tilly 2000).

Two examples of widespread networks and weak ties

Two successful examples illustrating how effectively new networks can be set up are the theatre project 'New plays – new worlds' (Nya pjäser – nya världar) and the Swedish Arts Council's 'Portfolio show' (Portfoliovisning) (Pripp 2007, SOU 2007:57).

Dritëro Kasapi is artistic leader of Gottsunda Dance and Theatre, in an Uppsala suburb. He was in Norway recently lecturing on his project 'New plays – new worlds', which is a cooperation project between Gottsunda and a number of established theatres in various places in Sweden. Kasapi wanted to do away with deeply-rooted ideas of the theatre in the suburbs by making productions ambulate between the various theatres and using co-production to move the periphery into the focus of art and the focus to the periphery. To get hold of newly written drama by authors with a foreign background a call went out for new ideas for plays via a great many different information channels and committed individuals who had their own large networks among groups of people not normally represented in the field of drama. The result was

that 280 plays were submitted and by a long selection process a number of playwrights were engaged. As of today at least two plays have been set up. It should be mentioned that no specified demands have been made on form and contents, but every individual author has been left to decide on his or her artistry.

The Swedish Arts Council's 'Portfolio show' (Portfoliovisning) followed a similar pattern when it offered artists the opportunity to show their art in various places in Sweden. In the southernmost part of Sweden alone the call for art works led to selecting 84 artists for a portfolio show, who in this way established a contact with the Arts Council. The method has proved successful and is still used for new regional shows. On the whole, very few artists have managed to be commissioned to produce public art. Today six artists have been given sketch commissions and four will probably obtain public ones. Not only has the project involved new contacts with a number of artists. The internal routines of the Arts Council have also been affected as regards the way new contacts are received and treated and the council has been forced to increase its competence in assessing quality. As in the case of New Plays – New Worlds it is made clear that it is up to the artists themselves to decide on form, meaning and content.

None of those who conduct these two projects admit that they have had any problems in pointing out and categorizing 'immigrants' or that their initiatives have confined people to their ethnic identity. Nor have they experienced that they have been forced to lower their standards of artistic judgments. They have encountered such assertions and expectations from others, both inside and outside the culture institutions, but they have also received valuable support from many people.

The ambiguity of the culture concept

Culture is a hypercomplex concept, which means that it covers many different meanings, which may be activated at the same time in the same discussion (Fink 1988, Öhlander 2005). Hypercomplex concepts still contain layers of earlier historical meanings and contexts. Typically enough, they are constantly being questioned and subjected to controversies about valid interpretations and definitions. In other words, these are central power concepts (Brylla 2003).

The leading actors in the culture sector defined culture in a variety of ways, which is of course a prerequisite for a vital and dynamic cultural life. However, as regards ethnic and cultural diversity, different attitudes tended to be played off against one another. In this way, initiatives towards change might lose their force and peter out.

Most of our informers naturally referred to the aesthetic meaning of culture, linking cultural diversity primarily to a classical liberal definition: a diversity of ideas, styles, experiences and expressions, etc. But when the same people discussed "cultural diversity" and immigrants they still tended to drift into stories about immigrants in accordance with a classical anthropological definition, as a group's specific norms, values, beliefs and art forms. And when it came to immigrant representation in the culture sector it turned into a question of the cultural expressions of ethnical groups and ever so often associations were made to the way society supports weak marginal groups. In other words, they often failed to separate concepts from associations. To talk about inclusion means that the horizons vary among those who together create the normative culture and not necessarily that there are different "cultures" represented (Stonequist 1937, Warnke 1993, Young 1990).

We did not find it easy to suggest how the institutions could relate to concepts like ethnic and cultural diversity. Our study had, however, taught us that work on increasing diversity in the institutions were counteracted by a number of strong forces with an ability to sink projects by consistently throwing in alternative definitions or reminding others of all the aspects they were in danger of missing if they unilaterally went in for increasing the representation of people with a foreign background.

We suggested that each institution should develop *one* model of its own containing *several* distinct, parallel and equivalent attitudes towards how cultural diversity can be linked to ethnic diversity. This was done to evade collision between different dogmatic definitions, locked-in positions and, above all, the tendency to 'forget' sensitive representation issues.

As an example institutional work on cultural diversity could in this respect contain the following five equivalent positions:
  1. Cultural diversity is a broad liberal concept representing different styles, genres, art forms, individual attitudes, social identities, experiences, etc.

2. A practising artist (or the equivalent) should not have to be associated with his or her background, or any other social identity, if he or she does not wish to.
3. A practising artist (or the equivalent) can represent/be associated with one or more ethnic groups and cultural traditions, if she or he wishes. Old traditions are also influenced by the contexts where they are enacted, forms change and the meaning they convey varies depending on the present-day context.
4. A group/region/state or similar unit should be able to be represented by several parallel and even contradictory expressions.
5. Artistic (and similar) expressions are amalgamations and mixed forms, that is expressions of the *creolization* and hybridization of various ideas, traditions, styles, genres and living conditions.

These five points were our way of demonstrating how important it is that it is the individual artists that make their own choice of subject and of how they themselves are to be labelled – all on condition that the representation issue is on the organization's agenda. Vagueness and ambiguity, after all, provided the institutions with the chance of skipping the challenging representation issues.

Ambivalence

We also found in our study a widespread ambivalence among the institution heads towards the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity. This equivocal approach formed a pattern in that more or less the same problematizing reasoning recurred with many of our interviewees. The view I want to convey about ambivalence is that of an overarching concept for the pattern of hesitation and problematization that became apparent among the interviewees when they were faced with the question of increasing diversity in their own organization. While the discussions of the positive aspects of diversity were often brief, the accounts of the problematic aspects were much more expansive.

Our informants declared themselves as being basically positive to ethnic and cultural diversity. A common argument was that their own authority or institution had a mission to mirror the surrounding community. At the same time they regretted that the organization did not live up to this demand for mirroring society. Another argument was that the organizations would become more dynamic and open to development if the staff were more heterogeneous representing a variety of ideas and experiences. A third point of view was that art and other cultural expressions were in need of new influences to be able to develop. A fourth argument, from a few spokesmen, was that the culture institutions and authorities would have to take greater responsibility in the work of changing the meaning of the Swedish heritage. The argumentation built on the need to adapt the heritage to those living in Sweden today, so that it included the stories, experiences and history usage of further population categories.

More than anything else, diversity was portrayed as something problematic. Usually the organizations and their interviewed heads took a *cautious wait-and-see attitude* to working more actively with diversity. Most notably, they were uncertain about *how* to become part of the 'New Sweden'. 'New Sweden' referred to an imaginary ethnically diversified country in a comparison with 'Old Sweden', that is two imagined contrasting communities. By underlining that they were talking of a new country it also seemed reasonable to them that their own adaptation had to be a slow long-term process. To ensure that everything was done right it was necessary that the question was first brought up in seminars, in internal investigations of the reasons behind the skewed recruitment and, above all, by attempts to reach consensus within the staff of the organization.   It seemed as though there was a wish to solve all kinds of imaginable problems before the genuine encounter with 'New Sweden' could take place.

Ambivalent reflections like these often emerged in the form of what I would call *ethnic stories*. These identity stories contained descriptions of 'immigrant' characters and problems (cf Martin 1995). Our narrative analysis brought out the ethnicity of the stories insofar as they implicitly chiselled out an ethnic Swedishness – and its position in the world – by describing shortcomings among the 'immigrant category', that is people originating from the non-Western world and from Eastern Europe. What kept coming up in these ethnic stories were accounts of how immigrants did not contribute culturaly because they had chiefly come to Sweden to make money, a possibility that did not exist in that sector. It was asserted that culture was not looked upon as something valuable among the 'immigrant groups' – or 'the new Swedes', as they were also called. Further accounts went into how unused the newcomers were to large cultural institutions and buildings, something that was not so common in the countries and provinces they were associated with. There were also stories of how immigrants and refugees were afraid

of anything that could be associated with government and authorities, since many of them had suffered persecution in their former countries. Another recurrent description was of how 'young immigrants', girls in particular, were prevented by their parents from getting an education and entering into art and culture and its places.

Another common point was that diversity aroused ambivalent fears that competence and quality would be lowered. Not the least, the concept was also associated with amateurism and ideas of 'the suburb'. We asked ourselves: why should diversity necessarily mean working with amateurs? Why not with professionals?'

The ethnic stories, in other words, conveyed a colonial picture of looking at things, where immigrants appeared as too culture- and tradition-bound and needing to learn about democracy, gender roles, modernity and to realize the importance of communicating in Swedish. It was an enumeration of desirable qualities amounting to the stage props of an imagined ethnic Swedishness. The way immigrants, as practitioners of culture, were perceived supported the ambivalent attitudes that were activated as soon as the topic came up. The assumed advantages of diversity were literally eaten up by its assumed problems. The overall effect of many leaders' ambivalence towards the ability and qualities of 'the Other' built up an excluding wall, a demarcation line which was both visible and measurable.

I think it is important to emphasize at this point that this effect need not be identified with the intentions of those involved. On the contrary, people's intentions may be good, they may be convicted humanists in favour of people's equal value, but among themselves they simultaneously create excluding structural effects through their everyday talk, their priority right of interpretation and their shared understanding of themselves and the world.

Final words

The picture of ethnic and cultural diversity emerging under the theme of ambivalence has turned out to be shared by many more people than the representatives of the government culture sector. There is a strong structure facing those who want to work with cultural diversity in multi-ethnic environments, for instance, and who want to increase the representation of groups that are today greatly underrepresented. Dritëro Kasapi, stage director at Gottsunda Dance and Theatre, works in a multi-ethnic suburb of Uppsala. He is working hard to increase this representation, but he refuses to lower the artistic values that are fundamental to him. Every day he is faced with expectations and ideas from the world around him of what cultural diversity should be like, that the task of culture should be to provide a social miracle cure for integration, for example. Such a tradition has already existed in Sweden for a long time. I will now give the last word to Dritëro:

> It seems as if people only look upon theatre and art as a means to achieve goals that have a clear educational and social purpose. But that has nothing to do with reflections from the life of an individual. Politicians and civil servants ask: 'We want to know what you are talking about. Are you talking about integration? Excellent! We will give you extra money for that'. It must not be too complex, as if they thought: 'poor immigrant children, are they coming to see this? It will only confuse them. It's no good if it's too multi-dimensional.'

> The artistic aim that theatre and art must contain is of no interest those around me. Putting integration aspects first will in the long run have the opposite effect. None of the young boys who come to our theatre want to end up in a slot, like that suburban guy, when they are about to take their first steps as artists. People around him say: 'but he's from Gottsunda, we'll make sure that he will be integrated.' 'No', I say, 'make sure he gets a chance to perform his art'.
> (Pripp 2007)

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The road to interculturalism

Dr Augustus Casely-Hayford

Over the summer of 2012, more than the Olympics is going to launch in London. A number of major cultural capital programmes are designed to simultaneously come to fruition; buildings that will change the face of the British arts infrastructure fairly fundamentally. But there is one space that has already gained special financial and political support from the British Government and which has created a buzz of anticipation beyond the arts sector. 2012 is when a spectacular new wing of London's Tate Modern will open - an eleven storey, £200 million cast-glass ziggurat designed by Herzog de Meuron; it will expand the gallery's spaces by 60% and help with what is predicted to be a doubling of the five million visitors over the next four years. And during the years between now and its opening, the Tate will have to think carefully about who those visitors might be. By 2012 London will be one of many British cities that will have to consider what an 'ethnic-majority' native population really means; especially in a city of Europe's largest transient demography of foreign migrant workers and tourists.

We have been saying it forever: British publicly supported culture will have to change. But perhaps this time we must mean it. And the Tate's new spaces offer an exciting set of options to address a long neglected need. The new building will allow the Tate team the space to rethink the way that it tells the story of modern and contemporary art, and to build a better audience experience and a more comprehensive sense of international practise for 2012. In silhouette the plans for the new wing might resemble the ziggurat at Babel, and it could be said that there are 21st century echoes of that ancient ambition to build a space where broken and diverse narratives can find a home, to create meaningful Tate curatorial resolutions to the issues of identity and difference, diversity and interculturalism of curatorial coherence and broad accessibility. Whatever that curatorial solution might be, I doubt it will be the discovery of a grand, all-encompassing 21st century narrative; if nascent thinking is anything to go by, it may well be that it becomes a space that accommodates the acceptance of the contingent nature of the curators voice, and that asks us all to participate in and to share an organically developed, interactive thesis. But in letting go the Tate will have to build a new basis for commonality so that we, (the audiences, participants and artists) are not *Babel*-ised, polarised and torn apart by difference.

I was thinking about what that might mean when I recently visited Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* at Tate Modern; a 167 metre long crack that extends the length of the Turbine Hall. Salcedo has said that it is a work that intended to shift perceptions of the world we live in, to remind us that the scale and significance of the gallery's architecture is undermined by a past of discrimination and tension between peoples that sits beneath the surface of modernity; 'Shibboleth represents borders, the experience of segregation, … so this piece is a negative space.'

Whilst wandering around it, I thought how strange that even as Britain slips into recession, after fifteen years of growth, as a nation Britain is wealthier and healthier than ever before. And perhaps the British have a lot to feel proud and optimistic about; our language is the international language of the arts and commerce, and, like our history, it ties us into an international narrative more profoundly than any other nation on earth. Yet, we seem to be manifesting the sociological dysfunction of a country under siege and in depression; a rise in our perception of anti-social behaviour, an actual rise in reported racist attacks and a growth in our distrust of foreigners. The last time that the far-right were able to double their vote in a local election was in1931 at the height of a huge global downturn. This has happened whilst the Government has found it necessary to propose 'British values' classes for children, British culture tests for naturalising immigrants and it is looking increasingly likely that we will soon all be carrying identity cards encoded with bio-metrics to prove our Britishness whenever we are asked. Almost without public debate, we have begun to change the relationship between culture and nationhood, between patriotism and citizenship. If we do not actively subscribe to the new Britishness, some legislation, some policy or ambient pressure will seek us out and ask us why. If the early 21st century politics is characterised as the left having won the argument on social politics and the right for economic, the participation and integration debate is one of the areas in which the old ideological tensions still has the potential to polarise and inspire deep passion. The current British Government has tried to forge policy on participation and integration to build social cohesion, to create terms for an acceptable level of integration that are mediated by the state with sanctions for those who resist.

The flip-side of forcing young people to consider the value of Britishness in an atmosphere of

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ambient hostility to certain kinds of diversity, is that our national cultural institutions have been forced to open out and reconsider their programmes and staff in the context of the new sociology. As a Minority Ethnic curator, I have witnessed positive changes in our national museum and gallery sector, in the area of inclusion, during the last few years that I thought would have been inconceivable five years ago – but none of them go nearly far enough. We still structurally exclude particular people and yet we expect them to willingly sign up to our national narrative.

I still remember my first visit to a national museum. During the summer of '76, I took myself along to the British Museum to see what my art teacher said was the history of the word's material culture. It was a short visit; I was told at the information desk that work from Africa, Asia and other art of the non-Western colonies was in the Museum of Mankind, where there was more space to explore their particular complexity. Even at twelve I was not convinced – why was Egypt part of the Western canon?

I began to think about what the, then new, concept of multiculturalism might mean to the arts, how a celebration of difference could reinforce, underline, or justify prejudice and leave problematic categorisations unquestioned. And these were some of the things that motivated me to visit my first Notting Hill carnival in the summer of '76. I wanted to see what it would be like to not be different, to be a central part of the narrative – the core of the script.

It was just getting dark when the rioting began. I stood on a porch and watched pink paraffin Molotov cocktails tumble out of the air and decant burning streams of kerosene down the road toward the police lines. Every time a bottle burst on the road, a cheer would go up. It was in a strange way very beautiful. I watched for what felt like a long time. I was just about to become a teenager and I was mesmerised with both fear and excitement. At the time it all made a kind of sense. The riot may have been spontaneous, but the anger was borne out of years of building resentment. The local population were simply tired of being scared and marginalised.

During one of the lulls a lone policeman ran up the hill by me. He stopped for a moment, looked back, and then ran on. I recognised the look on his face. I knew it well. It was fear. For me, that subtle but memorable exchange made sense of that momentous summer; the silo walls of multicultural London were smouldering. It would not be contained. The following week in the final cricket test match of one of the greatest West Indian cricket tours, Michael Holding, the Caribbean pace-man, single-handedly destroyed England with a devastating display of imperious bowling. I didn't know how it would change, but I knew this bit of the world could never be quite the same.

Twenty years later, I was called by the British Museum to consult on the move of the Africa collections from the old Museum of Mankind back into the main Russell Street collections – all around us multiculturalism was being declared dead.

Yasmin Alibai Brown, one of the most respected British East-African-Asian commentators, in her book *After Multiculturalism* had written about forging a new language for talking about race and culture and Trevor Philips, the director of the commission for racial equality, had concurred in a number of speeches. They like the rest us, travelled on London tubes and knew that the demography of London and the confidence of minorities had changed radically. They did not talk about multiculturalism anymore, they wrote about diversity; the acceptance of an underpinning foundation of ideas, within which we all celebrated the plurality of cultural output. This was about accommodation, assimilation and cooperation – not just tolerance. This was about breaking down barriers, not supporting them.

For cultural institutions that posed a very stark set of questions; the British state collection of art is divided between a number collections, some material culture, some visual art. The great contemporary visual art collections are housed in the Tate gallery and it saw the Modernist project that underpinned its remit as being an almost exclusively Western phenomenon. This impacted on its understanding of how it could accommodate diversity, and how it might broaden its collecting ambition to incorporate new Britons, some of whom drew inspiration and contextualisation from non-Western sources, and others who were genetically Black or minority ethnic, but did not convey that in their work. And although the British Museum was about to begin to reabsorb its ethnographic material into its broader collection, there was no strategy for building a link with the contemporary world or artists of African descent living in Britain.
The British Museum Africa team pursued what was then a radical perspective, arguing for the

introduction of contemporary work into the British Museum collection as a way of creating an aesthetic interface between this problematic collection and the public. This was wonderful in the sense that it represented the building of the first structured collection of African and Black British artists work by a National Museum or Gallery, but it was problematic because the work was being collected by what was then a department of ethnography.

It could be argued that the Sainsbury African Galleries' success was that they, in some way, straddled the gap between art gallery and ethnographic museum gallery, adopting the strengths of both problematic curatorial traditions, opening up the curation process to as many diverse voices as was seen to be possible. The curators realised that through the introduction of contemporary work, they could represent diverse perspectives or at least acknowledge the contingent nature of interpretations offered; accepting the idea of a gallery as an unfinished project, an open forum, a project that will continue to change and evolve over time. In that space the contingent, almost diffident nature of the curatorial approach, is always obvious. The exhibition narrative might be overt, even at times provocatively so, but it is posited as an authored perspective, within a framework of conscious dialogue, which made the visitors feel informed and involved in debate, not intellectually regimented by a one-way stream of factual absolutes.

The year that the British Museum collection moved, I also spent some time making a documentary on a different sort of ethnographer, Chris Ofili, in his Kings Cross studio. The Kings Cross of the nineties was not the Eurostar 'gateway to Europe' as it is now nor did it feel like the imminent 'Home of Arsenal Football Club'. It was a rundown inter-section, where small-time drug-dealers and end-of-the-road prostitutes worked the station platforms and the network of grimy streets to the south. After leaving art college Chris Ofili found a studio in a large, ramshackle Victorian block behind the station. Ofili smelled in Kings Cross the whiff of Gotham City and the Harlem of film and fiction. Through Chris' eyes it had an urban romance and authenticity that may have been ugly, but was also somehow magical. From that ambient vulnerability and latent threat, Ofili excavated a number of broken but beautiful narratives that he layered into his work to create the complex enigmatic canvasses for which he won the Turner Prize. Ofili found ways of trapping the energy of the streets under layers of resin and glitter; turning the sleaze and grime into beautiful icons of complexity.

But Chris also foresaw the limits of the diversity project – why should certain people be made to feel that their cultural output is somehow a subset of a broader underpinning Western culture – or that they would be forever framed as part of the culture of their ethnicity. There are no discrete separate self-contained, unchanging cultures – culture simply reflects and creates change, it is not defined by change, it is change.

He said that in creating a hybrid gallery museum space at the British Museum, in which the material culture and visual art could sit together, it also raised the bar on what museums might do, who their audiences are and how contemporary art can re-frame material culture and ask questions about the space and the job of the curator.

It made me think. I felt that much of this, though incredibly successfully articulated by artists, was not being practically addressed and delivered by the academics, curators, anthropologists and ethnographers of the museum world. I thought, what if we were to create a programme that brought to Britain many of the most articulate and gifted African artists alive, simply to talk about their work – to build an ambient art historical tractatus that could reframe Africa? What if we used that as a platform to bring new audiences into spaces, to find funding to create fellowships and professional development opportunities for artists that would build the capacity to change the way that we in the British Art sector perceive Africa art once and for all?

That idea became a year long festival of African culture that seemed to get under the skin of mainstream Britain. The Africa 05 team spent more than three years building support, developing programming and raising money for a vast programme, including the eight fellowship projects. The BBC was a huge help in creating awareness and generating programming. Arts Council England, invested £200k to fund salaries and coordination costs. The Africa 05 team were able to use that to generate about £7million in in-kind sponsorship from a number of large commercial and non-commercial organisations. Both the BBC and the Arts Council became involved in the legacy and most of the contributors have fulfilled commitments to future programming. By the time of its launch, Africa 05 was a 150 organisation partnership that expanded beyond the visual arts to incorporate, film, craft and design and literature – to include partners from the conventional mainstream institutions like the British Museum, the South Bank

Centre, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Whitechapel Gallery, and even the Royal Agricultural Show, (The Establishments' annual agricultural show in Stonleigh), but we also had as partners hundreds of community groups and institutions. Tens of millions watched the BBC programming, millions visited the website, hundreds of thousands visited the exhibitions, events and shows, 35% of whom were new audiences.

Africa 05 changed me. I began to realise and accept that perhaps a particular kind of campaign, the intellectual guerrilla war of the last century was being replaced by a different kind of engagement. Many of the young people involved were not satisfied with defining cultural practise within the margins, or under a broader umbrella as a subset, nor diffused into others as part of soup of cultures. It had for them become untenable to see the culture of minorities as the constantly shifting beach-line and the traditional mainstream as Britain's bedrock and hinterland. The idea of a stable mainstream founded upon a fixed core set of ideals and beliefs against which everything else is measured and accommodated, must be seen as an old fashioned comforting delusion.

The day that I visited Tate Modern to see the Salcedo, I was actually also there to see the old oil tanks that once stored the fuel for the great turbines that powered central London for a generation. These football pitch-sized spaces will become the basement of the new ziggurat shaped, cast glass gallery, being built at Tate by Herzog de Meuron that according to the initial plans will give greater space for international work, for diverse practise, but also for working with digital technology in new and interesting ways.

I have come to think that, if we need spaces, this is a new space for a new time. Even in its plans, I think that a constellation of ambitions for the building suggests something; it acknowledges that we need not be defined by where we live, or who we might choose to support in the World Cup. This is a space, extended in scope and possibility by interactive and digital possibilities, a space that accepts, that today a new sociology is developing. How we choose to share information, and not geography increasingly sets out the parameters of our world. In our digital age our means of communication can pull us into communities beyond our geographic neighbourhood into broader networks that might reflect specificity of interest and affiliation in ways that were previously unimaginable. These groups might well reflect global economic trends or socio-religious affiliations that could sit in tension with the politics of our immediate localities. This has created an interesting tension between rigid old-fashioned sociologies, their concomitant marketing categories and our individual identities that may well be under constant parallel renegotiation.

I am delighted that this new space will meaningfully extend what happens in the Tate's galleries beyond the physical space to create new spaces where those who do not traditionally frequent galleries will be comfortable. Digital technology can facilitate the expression of massive individuality and also, can make us each a publisher. In the West, many of the generation that grew up with these digital possibilities feel that they can proactively define or redefine their cultural affiliations, if they choose. Their 'culture,' as it might conventionally be conceived, does not define or contain them in the way that it did their parents. This is fluidity beyond the realms of the multicultural or diversity project, testing even the notion of the intercultural; this kind of interaction is highly complex and fluid because it allows us to choose to subscribe to it at personal levels of negotiation.

For traditional galleries this world might appear as hard to penetrate when looked at through a frame of geo-politics or macro-sociology because under the skin of the digital ecology, there are not hoards of homogenous football supporters, rooted to one locality and happy to be defined in that way, we know this space is driven by a conglomeration of individual and distinct human beings. And the technology allows us to unravel the demographic and marketing data and drill down to tease out the taste of each and every digital user. Whilst this might be challenging for traditional politicians who work at a macro-level within geographic boundaries it is emancipating for their constituents; fundamentalists and the non-conformists, liberals and conservatives, can each broker their own relationships of enfranchisement and build communities that by-pass parochial pressures and geographically localised politics. Or if they choose they can absorb and drive those agenda in ways that were never previously possible.

The current British obsession with identity and nationality is a strange and quaint attempt to counter the scarier aspects of this. But culture does not reside within physical or even sociological structures, it lies within individuals who make and consume it; it is fluid and we choose to subscribe to it at personal levels of negotiation. It might well be that multi–culturalism, diversity

and inter-culturalism should not be seen as absolute models, they may well coincide with each other in time, in place, and within individuals.

Where is physical geography left? As modern Western nation states, we must give people the spaces to negotiate new senses of themselves within our borders or we will be overwhelmed by the rising tide of change in the way that we negotiate identity. The power of the individuality can be conglomerated in ways that do not involve government, bureaucrats or multi-nationals. We now, almost individually, have the power to create our own cultural platforms (and as Al Qaeda have shown, to destroy and defy the most powerful); there is no longer a single narrative, one interface, belief system, with which we must comply, or participate; no single frame through which we read the world, no space in which we all feel a need to participate. No absolute dualism of good an evil, East and West, left and right, but instead a complex sea of changing and intersecting sociologies that collide and collapse into each other. Individuals may choose to participate at their own level of negotiation; permission to engage, or rules of engagement cannot be mediated by the state or a narrow channel of organisations. There is a larger and more complex framework of engagement that we cannot control. We cannot demand or legislate participation, as nations once did. Today in open-border democracies we have to earn our citizens' aspiration for cultural enfranchisement. And perhaps we need new curatorial approaches and maybe new spaces to negotiate those new relationships. And perhaps the embracing of a broad evolving narrative, a democratising of decision-making, an opening-up and diversifying of practice will broker that common yet elusive space that the mainstream seeks.

Mind the Gap: Cultural Mobility in an Age of Globalisation

Bisi Silva

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For those of us of who have lived for a substantial period in the UK, cultural diversity is about filling gaps. The gaps in the system, gaps in knowledge, gaps in programming, gaps in representation and gaps in interaction. And history shows that we need to be mindful about how we fill these gaps. Whilst the struggles of the past demonstrate that a considerable level of visibility many have been attained, it has also resulted in many adverse effects which invalidate many of the gains. I would like to give an insight into the colour and trajectory of the different permutations of cultural diversity over the last 2-3 decades from my research and experience in the UK.

The 1970s was an important period in the arts in Britain. It was a time in which artists who were being rejected by the art establishment had also begun to demand for a more visible position for their arts within the wider landscape of British arts activity. These demands finally resulted in the commissioning and the presentation in 1976 of the seminal publication **The Art Britain Ignores** by Naseem Khan[1]. It was a controversial publication that provoked mixed reactions from different communities but it also heralded the beginning of a dialogue between ethnic minority groups and funding bodies beginning what Gavin Jantjes termed as 'The long march from Ethnic Arts to Internationalism.' [2]

My area of interest is in the way and the context in which Black (which replaced the more exotic Ethnic Arts label of the 70s) visual artists were presented in mainstream institutions in the UK in the 80s and 90s. I would like to point out that Black in the UK at the time was less about a particular race but more about a group of people who were historically marginalized within mainstream British society. It concerned predominantly African, Asian and African Caribbean artists although it eventually extended to other groups such as the Chinese, Turkish and Cypriots. My focus is on the African, Caribbean and Asian communities who had more historical connections through similar colonial and postcolonial history.

In 1985, artist Lubaina Himid curated an exhibition at the prestigious ICA, London. Taking her cue from the space allocated she titled the exhibition *The Thin Black Line*. The work of 11 Black women artists was exhibited in the corridor space and stairway of this mainstream institution whilst a solo exhibition of an emerging white male artist was given the spacious main exhibition space. This juxtaposition is of consequence, while the ICA purported to give black women a space, as a curatorial presentation their efforts were simultaneously muted by placing them in a marginal space. In this position the exhibition was secondary to the function of the space – a corridor which people walk through to get somewhere else. It was not a neutral space where you can stop, contemplate and mediate. This exhibition illustrates the way in which black artists are made invisible part of the mainstream, yet marginal to it.

The early 80s saw the rise of the Black Art Movement with an emphasis on the political that transformed in the mid to late 80s into multiculturalism. This was a period of considerable optimism, which should have made the subject of invisibility, if not completely redundant at least it should have reduced the issue of tokenism and marginalisation. It was also a period that coincided with increased funding especially from the defunct GLC the now Greater London Council. Artist and writer, Kwesi Owusu observes 'within a mere four years, it (GLC) succeeded in doing what other funding agencies, including those with specific responsibility for the arts, had failed to do in more than two decades.'[3]

During this multicultural period there was a flurry of mainly group exhibitions of which the key ones included 'The Essential Black Art' in 1987 curated by Rasheed Araeen and 'Black Art Plotting the Course' in 1988 by Eddie Chambers. These exhibitions endeavoured – to varying degrees – to offer a chronological, historical and ideological context for the work of artists of African and Asian descent. Their subsequent tours provided the opportunity for a wide audience to engage with and debate the different perspectives on Black art.

These activities culminated in a landmark exhibition in 1989 'The Other Story' at the Hayward Gallery, London. Artist and curator, Rasheed Araeen spoke extensively about his struggle to bring the exhibition to a mainstream gallery in London. The exhibition took 11 years to come to light due to institutional racism. The press reaction ranged from the supportive to the

analytical to the virulent. Two comments from the 'infamous' Evening Standard critic Brian Sewell epitomises the extreme reaction to the exhibition. In the first instance he recognised that 'in the visual arts, racial prejudice is unchallenged, and even apartheid would be a welcome improvement on the present invisibility of black artists.'[4] However this seeming attempt to engage in the important issues the exhibition raised was foreclosed by a torrent by which he concluded that 'the black artist… must not require praise, nor demand a prime place in the history of art. For the moment, the work of Afro-Asian artists in the West is no more than a curiosity, not even worth a footnote in any history of 20th century Western art.'[5]

The developments of the 80s came at a time when there were very few Black curators, historians or writers within the cultural sector to build a framework around the work being created. However, despite some amount of visibility, the dearth of mainstream exhibitions that included the work of Black artists, the lack of solo exhibitions, the absence of Black curators in national museums or public galleries, the Euro-centric art history curriculum and the lack of and - where available negative - media criticism made and continued to make Black invisibility a subject of continual debate. Artist and curator David A Bailey states that 'When Black artists were emerging from colleges and the community sectors, they found that the arenas in which they were to be nurtured, supported and exposed were culturally bankrupt in trying to understand this new generation of practitioners who were different.[6] On its part, 'The Other Story' seemed to signal the end of a decade of radical activity within Black arts movement in England. After the intense debate had subsided, academic and cultural critic Lola Young, titled her article *Where do we go from here*[7]. The labelling of artists from the 50s 'Migrant,' to 'Ethnic Minority' to 'Black,' to the current 'Culturally Diverse' artist seems to have undermined the individual needs of these artists. The process which American writer and critic Lucy Lippard has called 'naming' has made artists ambivalent about new policies on cultural diversity. The problems and restrictions of 'Black arts' politically, ideologically and artistically, has proved adverse for some artists making them retreat to their studios whilst others such as Mona Hatoum, Yinka Shonibare, Keith Piper, Sutapa Bizwas, Zarina Bhimji and curators such as Gavin Jantjes have gone to national or international careers.

In the 1990s a new era was ushered in under the rubic of Internationalism. In 1991, InIVA (The New Institute of International Visual Art) in London launched the discourse with a conference on 'New Internationalism'. But what is meant by Internationalism? Is it more of the same, a different name for Black arts or multiculturalism or cultural diversity? As writer Jean Fisher observed. 'We are constantly at the risk of becoming hostage to received ideas whose truth cannot be subjectively evaluated. Like cultural production, concepts rapidly become commodified, reduced to their most trivial meaning or more sinisterly, hijacked by the interest of whatever agency has control over the means of dissemination.'[8] At the beginning of the new millennium Cultural Diversity and Globalisation constitute the new buzzwords.

II

I would like to shift location from Europe to highlight the way in which I experience cultural diversity from a different perspective. I relocated to Nigeria over five years ago. In my new location in West Africa race is in the background against a context in which the diversity of different cultures and peoples is foregrounded. This provides an opportunity to explore the way in which artists in Africa position themselves in relation to the concept of globalisation? Like their counterparts in the West, they have gone from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' to 'postcolonial' from 'primitive', to 'ethnic' to 'Black' to 'multicultural' to 'cultural diversity' and now accepted as 'global' artists. These trajectories have opened the gate slightly wider each time for 'natives' but as Olu Oguibe states in *The Culture Game* 'Unbeknown to the natives, they are constantly lodged in a hidden battle against one another for the few, predetermined places and opportunities designated for them on the contemporary art stage.' Nonetheless art professionals such Nigerian Okwui Enwezor are bursting the gate wide open with his historic appointment as the first non-white, non-European, non-Western African artistic director of Documenta 11. The metaphor for the gate is also acted out at mega exhibitions and international biennales such as those proliferating around the world especially in historically peripheral centres such as Cape Town, Sharjah, Cairo, Luanda, Bamako, Dakar, Busan, Gwanju and Dominica Republic. Mobility within and across countries seems to be the impetus for cultural diversity in Africa, with artists and cultural workers on the continent making a concerted efforts to dialogue, interact and collaborate. Mobility predominantly in the form of political and economic migration has been the subject of several exhibitions and projects from and within Africa but few opportunities have been presented that investigate the inward movement from a cultural perspective. Below are three recent examples.

On a curatorial research trip in West Africa, I met a visual artist with a rising international profile. Within the first ten minutes of our conversation, he repeatedly mentioned how busy he was and how he had made an incredulous fifty trips within the year. Impressed by his level of mobility which few artists or curators on the continent are privileged to experience, I was surprised when my question 'which African cities were part of your travels' was met by a moment of silence followed by an unconvincing 'one, maybe two cities'. Another moment of silence and our uncomfortable body movements seemed to confirm that contemporary African artists are not only interested but more inclined to make art for non-African audiences. In spite of almost half a century of independence Africa still has the propensity to look outwards rather than within itself. The consequence of the last two decades of the deteriorating political, economic and social conditions on the continent coupled with the paucity and inadequacy of cultural infrastructure has seen artistic migration from South to North intensify.

However, with or without support artists are packing their bags and hitting the road. Despite the lack of cultural infrastructure and institutional support African artists continue to find creative ways for professional development and inter-continental and inter-regional networking. The past five years has witnessed an unprecedented array of connectivity within the continent with South African and Nigeria companies leading African expansion. Places and people that seemed so distant and disconnected are now accessible through unprecedented means of connectivity by air, the Internet, mobile technology, but also not so good interregional road networks. Continental exchange between artists has continued to increase and is becoming widespread. The North-South journey has shifted direction towards a South-South one. Within this context artists have moved from individual endeavours to a more collaborative model. Cultural interaction, exchange and dialogue within Africa have renewed debates on history, culture and mobility. The personal and collective experiences of these artistic journeys and projects provides an important starting point to raise and explore urgent questions and issues about the construction of identity in Africa

In 2001 a group of Nigerian artists began a project called *Overcoming Maps*[9] which took them by road from Enugu to Abidjan. In their project they went out to challenge maps, borders and boundaries – physical, ideological, linguistic and cultural - created by colonial powers to contain their territories and the free movement of people and of ideas. (maps as boundaries and frontier of creativity) Since 2001 and five trips later they have visited over ten countries in East and West Africa and met and interacted with over 400 artists and cultural workers. Whilst the artistic strategies have created a new body of knowledge hitherto unavailable or unaccessed and with a new aura of confidence the *Overcoming Maps* project group, nevertheless, observed in their evaluation report, 'it has also revealed problems within the region of failed promises, decaying infrastructure and a substantial level of (under) development.'

Another interesting project is *Exit ~~Art~~ Tour*[10] 2006 involving seven artists visiting seven countries to take part in seven workshops or cultural contacts. They started in Douala, and finished in Dakar, with workshops and exchanges in Calabar, Lagos, Cotonou, Lomé, Accra, Ouagadougou and Bamako. As stated on their website some of the questions for which they search answers include 'Who are the leading protagonists of contemporary art in the countries that we will cross? What is the official cultural policy? What kind of strategy do artists develop? What are the prospects for collaboration and exchange? With individuals and with institutions?'

The result of their artistic excursion was an important learning experience, and the establishment of a cultural network to overcome the isolation and distance normally experienced in Africa. The journey also raised urgent questions and issues about the validity of an African identity, African integration and all the other 'toothless' enabling and empowering policies such as NEPAD, Commission for Africa and ECOWAS. But from their utopian perspective, as far the Douala 7 are concerned 'Art shouldn't need a visa'.

Contact Zone[11] takes as its underpinning theme the historical movements within Africa along the trans-Saharan trade route. It brings to Mali, a central country within the caravan route, the work of 12 contemporary artists from North and West Africa in a landmark exhibition that explores how artists are responding to internal mobility and cultural exchange and how they are interacting in the 21st century. The erroneous history that Africa south of the Sahara had little contact with the outside world before the arrival of Europeans belies the successful commercial and cultural encounter with Northern Africa during the Trans-Saharan trade in salt and gold. One in which there are lasting influences especially the widespread adoption of Islam in most of West Africa. Cultural mobility has formed an important research and development aspect for many artists in West Africa. Togolese artist Sokey Edorh travelled over an extended period

researching the ancient pictograms which inspire his *Alphabet* series, whilst Beninese Dominique Zinkpe has spent shorter periods realising his *Taxi* project in several African cities including Bamako. Senegalese photographer Boubacar Touré Mandémory crosses several borders capturing the remnants of what life may have been as presented in *The gold diggers* series whilst Tunisian Dalel Tangour's photographic series focuses on migration and exile within and outside of Africa.

In the absence of a fixed definition, in the process of continual shift, in an attempt to move forward the long march from ethnic arts to internationalism, to cultural diversity to globalisation, is a metaphor for the possible, the possibility to create a locus where many people many voices and many discourses can interact, interrogate and communicate.

Revised - Lagos, March 2008

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[1] Naseem Khan, 'The Art Britain Ignores', 1976, Arts Council, England.

[2] Gavin Jantjes, The Long March from Ethnic Arts to New Internationalism', *Cultural Diversity in the Arts*, KIT Publication, Netherlands, 1993, p59.

[3] Kwesi Owusu, 'The Greater London Council', *The Struggle for Black Arts:What can we consider better than Freedom*, Comedia, London 1986 chap 5, p104.

[4] Brian Sewell, 'Pride and Prejudice', *London Magazine*, December 1989.

[5] Brian Sewell, 'Black Pride and Prejudice', *Evening Standard*, Thursday 4 January, 1990.

[6] David. A. Bailey, 'Some thoughts on a portrait of an artists', *A Ship called Jesus:Keith Piper*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1993.

[7] Lola Young, 'Where do we go from here? Musing on the Other Story', *Oxford Art Journal*, February 1990, p54.

[8] Jean Fisher, Editor's Note, *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed.Jean Fisher, Kala Press/inIVA, London 1994, pX

[9] Overcoming Maps is a project of the Pan-African Circle of Artists.(PACA) They have an extensive website www.panafricanartists.org/overcomingmaps where texts about the project can be downloaded. The 2007 Overcoming Maps project is to Zambia.

[10] A journal of the *Exit Tour* 2006 project is available at www.exitour.netfirms.com

[11] *Contact Zone* was initiated by the director of the National Museum of Mali director Samuel Sidible The exhibition took place from October – November 2007. The curators were N'Gone Fall (Senegal), Bisi Silva (Nigeria) and Rachida Triki (Tunisia) A fully illustrated bilingual French/English catalogue accompanied the exhibition

On Beauty and Other Unfinished Things[1]

Els van der Plas

Els van der Plas
Director of the Prince Claus Fund, Holland, and an art historian. In 1987 she founded the Gate Foundation in Amsterdam, an international organisation that promotes intercultural exchange in contemporary art. In 1997 she became the first Director of the newly established Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development. She has organised major cultural events as part of the Fund's activities, the most recent being the Sahel Opera, an international musical collaboration involving artists and musicians from a number of countries in central West Africa. She also edits and writes for various publications, lectures, curates exhibitions, serves on several boards, and continues to direct the many operations of the Fund.

Organisers' statement:
The focus on aesthetics that should be at the heart of any arts policy has been largely submerged by concerns - however important they may be - about ethnicity and inclusion.

As the Director of the Prince Claus Fund, you encounter some strange ideas and notions about art and artists. Examples include development aid workers, who involve the importance of the fight against AIDS when judging a contemporary art exhibition, and Western museum curators, who continue to seek a disguised form of *l'art pour l'art* - but with an exotic flavour - when dealing with Non-Western art.

Others stretch the definition of culture to an extreme. Once, after the Prince Claus Fund had turned down a Nigerian applicant, he blithely responded with a request as to whether we would like to finance his birthday party. Another example is the self-elected king of a small village in Ghana, who wanted to set up a zoo consisting of males and females of every species: elephants, leopards, ostriches and lions. The fact that these animals were already living around him did not deter him from pursuing his plans for the zoo; he simply argued that it would be a tremendous asset for the country's cultural heritage. Then there was the film festival for the blind and drumming courses for the deaf: no matter how crazy the idea, it's ended up on the desks of our staff members. Clearly, opinions about what art and culture entail are extremely diverse.

Conversely, in the West, people are increasingly attempting to incorporate subjects such as cultural diversity, participation and integration into the discourse of art and art production. Engaged art is gaining ground while the aesthetic debate has been neglected for many years. In fact, aesthetic debates in the Western art world seem taboo, whereas in the rest of the world - which is five times as big - beauty is foremost in the thoughts of the entire cultural elite.

Sometimes I feel split between many cultural extremes.

Signs of the times

Globalisation has coloured, changed and unsettled societies. Here, I would like to begin with a description of the situation in the Netherlands (where I come from). In 2001, an environmental extremist assassinated a right-wing, gay politician. In 2004, a filmmaker had his throat cut by a fundamentalist, third-generation Moroccan, who believed that the filmmaker had made an unIslamic film. Furthermore, the woman who had come up with the idea for the film, the Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, began her political career as a left-wing intellectual before switching to the extreme right. She has subsequently become involved with the ultra right-wing American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a think-tank that advises George W. Bush. Hirsi Ali, now supported by France's intellectual left, is expected to be awarded French nationality in the near future. So much for cultural diversity! This also shows us how a small country can have big ramifications, and how the world - including my native land - has undergone a complete, multicultural metamorphosis over the last 20 years.

Yet, what I find so disturbing is the fact that I no longer feel at home in my own country. I can no longer identify with its media; the TV program *Big Brother* has spawned the much reviled, yet extremely popular, *De Gouden Kooi* (*The Golden Cage*): a live program where real people bully other real people until they are forced to flee. The person who is the biggest bully, wins the prize. Is this a mirror of Dutch society?

At this point, the winner would seem to be Geert Wilders, the politician behind the Party for Freedom, which currently has nine seats in the Dutch parliament. He would like to forbid the Koran and argues for the deportation of the country's Muslims. Unfortunately, he seems not to realise that most of them are now Dutch. Conversely, third-generation Turkish girls wear headscarves as a political statement despite the fact that headscarves are still banned and the subject of fierce debate in Turkey. Young Antilleans and Moroccans go off the straight and narrow, while ironically Holland's most successful film has a Dutch-Moroccan subject and the extremely Germanic title of the *Schnitzel Paradise*. How much more diverse confusion can this society take?

To make this even more complicated, Charles Esche, the Director of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, recently invited me to talk about *Art as A Tool*, a subject I had not expected to be

brought up by a Dutch museum of contemporary art. That afternoon, you could have heard a pin drop as I described beauty as being an important characteristic of the arts. This was not because the audience was impressed by my speech or by what I was saying; rather it was due to an instant and collective sense of shame. The prevailing attitude was that beauty does not constitute a criterion or a point of departure for the contemporary arts. My question to my fellow panelists and the audience as to whether they would like to discuss the subject of beauty was greeted by a deafening silence. Is beauty a taboo in certain echelons of Western high art? Is debating aesthetics 'simply not done'?

This seems odd considering that Plato and Socrates were the founders of the Western aesthetic discourse, a debate that continued unabated until the second half of the 20th century. Have we lost our way aesthetically? Or was it simply high time that art broached other discourses than simply that of beauty?

Cultural Policy

Of course, if you want to create a policy concerning art - whether it's for the country as a whole or for the Prince Claus Fund - it's vital to understand what art is all about. Moreover, any art policy will also reflect the feelings of society at large. And societies, as I mentioned previously, are rapidly changing. Art cannot solve problems; it can only represent them, reflect them and comment on them. However, in some circles, art does indeed seem to have become a *means to an end* rather than *a means in itself.*

Our first question is, of course: Why should we support and promote art and culture?

The first reason is one of aesthetics. Socrates described how all beauty brings us beneficial pleasure. What did he mean here? Beauty is defined in many different ways throughout the world. Each culture defines aesthetics in a different way, yet it always represents the same positive emotions and life values. This is why everybody has the capacity to perceive beauty. We may not see it in the same way, but we can all empathise with the feelings it evokes. When people behold beauty, they feel alive; they feel that life has meaning. In addition to food, health and a roof over your head, these aspects are so essential that it is always astonishing to realise just how few policy-makers actually care about culture and beauty. In his essay *Beauty in Context*[2], the Indian theatre critic Rustom Bharucha wrote: '(….) I would include the concept of beauty that needs to be retrieved not just for our aesthetics, but for our sanity. By disregarding beauty, we are also disregarding ourselves and the discovery of meaning in life.'

So why don't policy-makers use aesthetics as an argument for substantiating the support and funding of art and culture? As a concept, aesthetics is apparently too abstract for hardcore politics, even though culture frequently features in the world's headlines. Take the demolition of Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 or the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad in 2003. A significant detail about the first example - the Buddhas' destruction - is the fact that it was the result of a mono-cultural government policy where the Taliban wanted to do something that would demonstrate what Islamic society should stand for. This cultural policy generated an enormous amount of media attention. The images were transmitted across the world, and everyone was dismayed but could do little about it because it had been the government's decision.

The second example concerns Baghdad's National Museum and shows just how important we consider culture to be. The looting of the National Museum horrified people in not only Iraq, but also the rest of the world. In fact, the looters were not the only guilty party; the international art market was also denounced along with the military forces that had failed to safeguard these art treasures. This general and extremely international indignation indicated that people attach great importance to all cultures. Indeed, culture is essential - as the artists and archaeologists of Iraq and Afghanistan will confirm - for the creation and preservation of a country's cultural heritage and, therefore, for the development of cultural history. This cultural history imbues each individual and society with a sense of respect and identity.

That beauty and the significance of cultural heritage are not formulated more clearly in cultural policy is also due to the fact that the aesthetic discourse has been placed on the art world's back burner. As I said before, there is effectively a taboo against saying that art is beautiful. Certainly in terms of contemporary art, an artwork's beauty is no recommendation for its inclusion in a Biennale or exhibition. But beauty is more than Plato's perfect proportions and measurements. Certainly, it is also more than a photo by the Nigerian photographer J.D. Okhai Ojeikere, or the

artefacts of the well guarded collection of Bactrian gold from Afghanistan. For beauty can also embrace asymmetry, chaos and the attraction of violence and misery, aspects that Susan Sontag clearly understood. Like our society, aesthetics has also become much more complex and, in this sense, the arts constitute a reflection of the current social situation.

Cultural policy and its points of departure

The fact that criteria such as cultural diversity, inclusion and gender have been incorporated into cultural policy is due to the issues that society is currently dealing with. Uncertainty, a feeling of insecurity and the waves of migration throughout the world have also influenced the politics of art. The argument: 'It's the quality that matters' is no longer enough. The lack of cohesion between the various population groups, the Parisian suburbs' resistance to the mainstream Élysée, the Kikuyus' bloodlust for the Luos in Kenya, and President Erdogan's statements in Cologne on 9 and 10 February that the assimilation of the Turks in Germany constitutes a crime against humanity: all these events indicate that we have lost our way on the path to tolerance and fellowship. We need all our strength to understand and give meaning to this point in time. And that's where we also need art.

Until 15 years ago, Western artists had distanced themselves from the complexities of society. Ivory towers were overpopulated, and artists were not prepared to descend into the mud of life. Their conceptual works ignored every form of political and social debate. Art was no longer a part of the discussion; abstraction had taken the place of interaction.

And then there were the unfortunate facts of culture. Museums failed to attract migrant visitors, and they certainly did not show the work of artists with a different or a dual cultural background. International culture remained white, and in many countries culture was never mentioned in government policy.

With the advent of social unrest - from the destruction of the Twin Towers to the Twin Buddhas - policy-makers slowly began to realise that culture must also relate to a changing society. In fact, society may well be in desperate need of art, where it is not kept at a suitable distance but is embraced as a participant and discussion partner. This is because culture is also at the heart of these issues.

Beauty's complexity

The idea that aesthetics and art have nothing to do with society is an *idée fixe*. Since time immemorial, aesthetics has had close links with morality and ethics. Plato described beauty as follows: 'The musician imitates divine harmony, the good man imitates virtues and the wise legislator imitates the Form of the Good in constructing his state.' Morality, ethics and law are all associated with aesthetics, and are therefore also the representation of goodness and rightness in society. The English poet John Keats connected beauty with truth. In the final lines of his *Ode to a Grecian Urn* (1819) he wrote: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' It is easy for us to understand the close association between beauty, truth and goodness. Beauty's complexity consists of its relationship with might and power. The attraction of a powerful man, of fighting, of war and suffering all relate to the aesthetics of misery. Both terrible beauty and the beauty of the terrible are of great importance in relation to this discussion. As Susan Sontag so succinctly described it: 'If it bleeds, it leads'[3]. Here, she was also referring to the importance of the media in this discussion.
This complexity of aesthetics became particularly evident in the 20th century, although its accompanying debate was effectively silenced. Perhaps it is important to continue it, because this may also enable us to answer the policy-makers' questions. The fact that cultural policy relates to society and makes demands on both the artist and the producer would seem obvious. But aren't policy-makers going a little too far when they impose politically correct starting points on cultural institutions and artists?

The Fund's cultural policy

Let me briefly introduce the cultural policy of the Prince Claus Fund. As the Fund's Director, I'm dealing on a daily basis with artists and cultural entrepreneurs, who have to ask themselves why what they do is so important. In the complex, multicultural countries that they come from - such as Rwanda, Iraq or Afghanistan - opting for the cultural field is not an obvious choice and can even be a dangerous one.

The points of departure for everything that the Fund does are quality and innovation. For the Fund, these criteria are very useful, even though there is an ongoing debate about different

criteria in different environments. However, I believe that you can experience the Good everywhere and at all times. Through good advice, research and an open mind, one will be able to judge and enjoy an artwork, wherever it comes from. So why did the Fund choose these criteria?

Firstly the Fund's money comes from the Development Aid Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry deploys other criteria than those of the Fund, and these consist of poverty reduction, cultural diversity, gender issues, sustainable development, AIDS prevention and other major world issues. It is important that these people are made to realise that art and culture are also basic needs, so that we do not lose ourselves in a discourse about the usefulness of aesthetics in the struggle against poverty. Hence, culture is a means in itself.

Some arguments about why the Fund supports culture in areas of economic and political complexity - and especially those plagued by war and misery - concern the fact that culture provides hope and comfort. It brings happiness and hope for a better future.
So how does modern art fit in with all this? Isn't it something of a disruptive element? Doesn't modern art problematise society? This is frequently a function that has added value in complex communities. Enabling the discussion of taboos and traumatic events is a role that culture can play. Here, I'm not suggesting that, for instance, a play should thrust these subjects on an audience, rather that the consideration of complexities and confusing experiences, and the act of imbuing them with symbolic meaning, already contributes to their processing.

Moreover, frequently it is the artists who analyse a society critically and provide it with commentary. Indeed, from the Romans to the present day, it has been the artists who have depicted society in a subtly critical way. Francesco Goya portrayed his indictment of war with colour and passion. Picasso painted his famous *Guernica* as a condemnation of his country's dictatorship and the painting remained an indictment in Spain until democracy was restored. In the 1920s and '30s, the German artist Max Beckman eloquently disparaged the Nazis in their bars and pubs, a condemnation that rings in our ears to this day.

But we can also analyse the contemporary works of the Afghan artist Lida Abdul. The first work I saw was *White House* at the 2004 Venice Biennale. It impressed me greatly. It consists of an arid landscape in which we see the ruins of a village that has been either bombed or demolished. It is a desolate sight. We follow a woman with a pot of paint and a brush (the artist herself), who whitewashes everything that is still standing. This is the artist's *J'accuse*, the creation of a guilty landscape where the pearly white ruins shriek their indictment so eloquently: Stop the senseless destruction and obliteration of people and their culture! Stop destroying a country with a celebrated cultural history that spans many thousands of years!

Another video, *Clapping Stones*, criticises the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas. We see a group of young men in front of the gaping holes in the rocks. They are performing a ritual, using stones from the Buddhas. The viewer is confronted with the voids in the rocks and the tapping of the pebbles, which are all that is left of the Buddhas. This is the same indictment as the white ruins, the same *J'accuse* or guilty landscape.
In this work, the artist is silently addressing the need for not only cultural heritage, but also cultural diversity. The work is painfully and impressively beautiful.

Other artists, who engage with complex subjects such as cultural conflicts, include Gonçalu Mabundo, who re-uses Kalashnikovs dating from the Mozambican civil war, and Benin's Romuald Hazoumé, who criticises a.o. the oil industry with his masks and installations made of jerry cans.
The subject matter can also be highly personal - such as a lover's letter ending a relationship by the French artist Sophie Calle – or extremely worldly, as is illustrated by the video by the Amsterdam-based, black British artist Steve McQueen, about the unfair relationship between a Congolese coltan miner and the Western coltan industry.

It now seems that policy is seeking participation, and artists feel called upon to relate to society. So the social and aesthetic discourse needs to come together at this point in time. For how can the world scream and art remain silent?

All we need to do is to think of the overwhelming nothingness that became so tangible when the Taliban blew up the Bamiyan Buddhas. The emptiness of the niches shouts at the people. Lida Abdul used the remaining pebbles lying there to produce her musical film essay. You cannot destroy a cultural past, although there have been many serious attempts: the Taliban in

Afghanistan, the Nazis in Germany and the Serbs in former Yugoslavia. There is no such thing as total destruction. Ruins, survivors and tiny pebbles are still there to tell the tale. People flee, they put the broken pieces back together again, they tell their stories and they reveal the destruction. Here, says Abdul, are the ruins of my country, of my history and my culture. I do not accept it, so I will shout it out with a beauty that hurts. And this is something that can never be taken from either her or us. For this reason alone, we need art, and also an art policy.

For Plato, beauty and representation (*mimesis*) were closely related. But he also used another word for representation: *methexis*, which means participation. Perhaps art and the idea of social participation are more deeply rooted in society and less profoundly divided than we once thought.

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[1] The title of this speech was inspired by Goenawan Mohammed's publication *On God and Other Unfinished Things*.
[2] Bharucha, Rustom, *Beauty in Context*, the Prince Claus Fund Journal #2, 1998
[3] Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Hamish Hamilton, Penguin Group, London, UK, 2003.

Hadde N'jie Trio:
Haddy N'jie with Becaye Aw (guitar) and Øystein
Bergsvik (percussion)
Photo: Alejandro Perez

Nasra Ali Omar (percussion) and Maja Bugge (chello)
Photo: Alejandro Perez

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