

**THE POSTCOLONIAL CONSTELLATION:
CONTEMPORARY ART IN A STATE OF
PERMANENT TRANSITION**
OKWUI ENWEZOR

The proper task of a history of thought is: to define the conditions in which human beings "problematize" what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live.

—Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

This flood of convergences, publishing itself in the guise of the commonplace. No longer is the latter an accepted generality, suitable and dull—no longer is it deceptively obvious, exploiting common sense—it is, rather, all that is relentlessly and endlessly reiterated by these encounters.

—Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

1.

It is a commonplace of current historical thinking about globalization to say there are no vantage points from which to observe any particular culture because the very processes of globalization have effectively abolished the temporal and spatial distances that previously separated cultures.¹ Similarly, globalization is viewed as the most developed mode, the ultimate structure of the singularization, standardization, and homogenization of culture in the service of instruments of advanced capitalism and neoliberalism. In the face of such totalization, what remains of the critical forces of production which, through-

out the modern era, placed strong checks on the submergence of all subjective protocols to the orders of a singular organizing ideology, be it the state or the market? If globalization has established, categorically, the proximity of cultures, can the same be said about globalization and art? When we ask such questions, we must remember that the critical division between culture and art has, for centuries, been marked by art's waging of a fierce battle for independence from all cultural, social, economic, and political influences.

At the same time, the modern Western imagination has used the apotropaic devices of containment and desublimation to perceive other cultures, in order to feed off their strange aura and hence displace their power. Today, the nearness of those cultures calls for new critical appraisals of our contemporary present and its relationship to artistic production.

I start with these observations in order to place in proper context the current conditions of production, dissemination, and reception of contemporary art. Contemporary art today is refracted, not just from the specific site of culture and history but also—and in a more critical sense—from the standpoint of a complex geopolitical configuration that defines all systems of production and relations of exchange as a consequence of globalization after imperialism. It is this geopolitical configuration, its postimperial transformations, that situates what I call here "the postcolonial constellation." Changes wrought by transitions to new forms of governmentality and institutionality, new domains of living and belonging as people and citizens, cultures and communities—these define the postcolonial matrix that shapes the ethics of subjectivity and creativity today. Whereas classical European thought formulated the realm of subjectivity and creativity as two domains of activity, each informed by its own internal cohesion—without an outside, as it were—such thought today is consistently questioned by the constant tessellation of the outside and inside, each folding into the other, each opening out to complex communicative tremors and upheavals. Perhaps, then, to bring contemporary art into the context of the geopolitical framework that defines global relations—between the so-called local and the global, center and margin, nation-state and the individual, transnational and diasporic communities, audiences and institutions—would offer a perspicacious view of the postcolonial constellation. The constellation is not, however, made up solely of the dichotomies named above. Overall, it is a set of arrangements of deeply entangled relations and forces that are founded by discourses of power. These are geopolitical in nature and, by extension, can be civilizational in their reliance on binary oppositions between cultures. In this sense, they are inimical to any transcultural understanding of the present context of cultural production. Geopolitical power arrangements appear in the

artistic context along much the same Maginot line. The terrible tear at the core of these arrangements lends contact between different artistic cultures an air of civilizational distinctions predicated on tensions between the developed and the underdeveloped, the reactionary and the progressive, the regressive and the advanced, shading into the avant-garde and the outmoded. This type of discourse is a heritage of classical modernity, which, through these distinctions, furnishes the dialectical and ideological agenda for competition and hegemony often found in the spaces of art and culture.

The current artistic context is constellated around the norms of the postcolonial, those based on discontinuous, aleatory forms, on creolization, hybridization, and so forth, all of these tendencies operating with a specific cosmopolitan accent. These norms are not relativistic, despite their best efforts to displace certain stubborn values that have structured the discourse of Western Modernism and determined its power over Modernisms elsewhere in the world. Édouard Glissant, whose classic work *Caribbean Discourse* made us aware of the tremor at the roots of the postcolonial order, interprets the current understanding of global modernity as essentially a phenomenon of the creolization of cultures. He shows us that in global processes of movement, resettlement, recalibration, certain changes and shifts in modalities of cultural transformations occur, changes that by necessity are neither wholly universal nor essentially particular. Contemporary culture, for Glissant, is cross-cultural, reconstituting itself as a "flood of convergences publishing itself in the guise of the commonplace."² In the modern world, he intimates, all subjectivities emerge directly from the convergences and proximities wrought by imperialism. Today, they direct us to the postcolonial. The current history of Modern art, therefore, sits at the intersection between imperial and postcolonial discourses. Any critical interest in the exhibition systems of Modern or contemporary art requires us to refer to the foundational base of modern art history: its roots in imperial discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, the pressures that postcolonial discourse exerts on its narratives today.

From its inception, the history of Modern art has been inextricably bound to the history of its exhibitions, both in its commodity function through collectors in the economic sphere and in its iconoclasm evidenced by the assaults on formalism by the historical avant-garde. It could, in fact, be said that no significant change in the direction of Modern art occurred outside the framework of the public controversies generated by its exhibitions.³ Fundamental to the historical understanding of Modern art is the important role played through the forum and medium of exhibitions in explicating the trajectory taken by artists, their supporters, critics, and the public in identifying the great shifts that have marked all encounters with Modern art and advanced its claim for enlightened

singularity amongst other cultural avatars. For contemporary art, this history is no less true, and the recent phenomenon of the curator in shaping this history has been remarkable. Nevertheless, a number of remarkable mutations in the growing discourse of exhibitions have occurred. At the same time, art has been persistently presented as something wholly autonomous and separate from the sphere of other cultural activities. Exhibitions have evolved from being primarily the presentation of singular perspectives on certain types of artistic development to become the frightening *Gesamtkunstwerk* evident in the global megaexhibitions that seem to have overtaken the entire field of contemporary artistic production. If we are to judge correctly the proper role of the curator in this state of affairs, the exhibition as form, genre, or medium, as a communicative, dialogical forum of conversation between heterogeneous actors, publics, objects, and so on, needs careful examination.

2.

Today, most exhibitions and curatorial projects of contemporary art are falling under increasing scrutiny and attack. More specifically, they have been called into question by two types of commentary. The first is generalist and speculative in nature. Fascinated by contemporary art as novelty, consumed by affects of reification as a pure image and object of exhibitionism, with spectacle culture, such commentary is itself sensationalist, and lacks critical purpose. It tends to equate the task of an exhibition with entertainment, fashion, and the new thrills and discoveries that seasonally top up the depleted inventory of the "new." It haunts the response to so-called megaexhibitions such as documenta, bicinales, triennales, and festivals, as well as commercial gallery exhibitions of the omnibus type. It easily grows bored with any exhibition that lacks the usual dosage of concocted outrage and scandal. Impatient with historical exegesis, it contents itself with the phantasmagoric transition between moments of staged disenchantment and the incessant populist renewal of art.

The second type of commentary is largely institutional, divided between academic and muscological production. It is one part nostalgic and one part critical. Adopting the tone of a buttoned-up, mock severity, it is actually based on a pseudocritical disaffection with what it sees as the consummation achieved between art and spectacle, between the auguries of pop-cultural banality and an atomized avant-garde legacy. For this kind of commentary, art has meaning and cultural value only when it is seen wholly as art, as autonomous. On this view, every encounter with art must be a scientific, not a cultural, one, the priority being to understand the objective conditions of the work in question. In mo-

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ernity, the inner logic of the work of art is marked by art's removal from the realm of the social-life world that positions it as an object of high culture. Yet there is a price to be paid when it wins its autonomy from any accreted social or ideological baggage. For critics with this viewpoint, the task of the curator is to pay the greatest possible fidelity to a restrained formal diligence in artworks, one derived from values inculcated and transmitted by tradition, a flow that can only be interrupted through a necessary disjuncture, one marked by innovation. The paradox of a disjunctive innovation that simultaneously announces its allegiance and affinity to the very tradition it seeks to displace is a commonplace in the entire history of Modernism, especially in the discourse of the avant-garde.

For curators and art historians the central problematic between art and the avant-garde occurs when there is a breach in the supposed eternality of values that flow from antiquity to the present, when the autonomy of art suddenly has to contend with the reality of the secular, democratic public sphere—itsself the result of a concatenation of many traditions.⁴ Even more problematic are breaches in the very conditions of artistic production. One example is what has been called elsewhere the “Duchamp effect”; another is highlighted in Walter Benjamin’s much-referenced essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which famously traced the changes in the dissemination of art that transform and question traditional notions of originality and aura.⁵ Yet another is the encounter between modern European artists and the African and Oceanic sculptures at the turn of the twentieth century, one that resulted in the birth of cubism and much else.

Of these, the Duchamp effect was the most traditional view, because what it purports to do is delineate the supremacy of the artist: the artist as not only a form giver but also a name giver. It is the artist who decides what an object of art is or what it can be, rather than the decision being a result of progressive, formal transformation of the medium of art. For Duchamp, it is not tradition, but the artist who not only decides what the work of art is but also controls its narrative of interpretation. This idea found its final culmination in the tautological exercises of conceptual art, whereby the physical fabrication of art could, ostensibly, be replaced with linguistic description. From this perspective, artistic genius emerges from a subjective critique of tradition by the artist, against all other available data, not from an objective analysis of the fallacy of tradition.

The confrontation with African and Oceanic sculptures by European artists was a striking example from the “contact zone” of cultures.⁶ This encounter transformed the pictorial and plastic language of modern European painting

and sculpture, hence deeply affecting its tradition. What is astonishing is the degree to which the artistic challenges posed by so-called primitive art to twentieth-century European Modernism have subsequently been assimilated and subordinated to modernist totalization. Therein lies the fault line between imperial and postcolonial discourse, for to admit to the paradigmatic breach produced by the encounter between African sculptures and European artists would also be to question the narrative of modern art history. Nor should we forget that the non-Western objects in question were required to shed their utilitarian function and undergo a conversion from ritual objects of magic into reified objects of art. The remarkable import of this conversion is that the historical repercussion of the encounter has remained mostly confined to formal effects and thus formalist aesthetic analysis.

I cite these examples because they are material to our reading and judgment of contemporary art. The entrance into art of historically determined questions of form, content, strategy, cultural difference, and so on establishes a ground from which to view art and the artists' relationship to the institutions of art today. This breach is now visible, because it no longer refers to the eternal past of pure objects, nor to the aloofness from society necessary for autonomy to have any meaning. In his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* Peter Bürger makes this point clear: "If the autonomy of art is defined as art's independence from society, there are several ways of understanding that definition. Conceiving of art's apartness from society as its 'nature' means involuntarily adopting the *l'art pour l'art* concept of art and simultaneously making it impossible to explain this apartness as the product of a historical and social development."⁷

The concept of *l'art pour l'art* as part of the avant-garde formulation of artistic autonomy was described by Benjamin as a *theology of art*, which "gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure' art, which . . . denied any social function of art."⁸ Based on this denial, Bürger's analysis advances a claim for a socially determined theory that stands at the root of two opposing traditions of art historical thought found amongst certain key practitioners today. Not surprisingly, the two opposing traditions match the rivalry discernible in the second type of commentary on curatorial procedures mentioned earlier. This is the domain most struggled over by conservative (traditionalist) and liberal (progressive) groups, both of whom have increasingly come to abjure any social function of art, except when it fits certain theories.

Two recent examples will demonstrate my point here. A roundtable discussion on the state of art criticism in 2000, published in the one-hundredth issue of the influential art journal *October*, was typically reductive.⁹ Although the

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panelists' attack against certain populist types of criticism was indeed cogent and necessary, one could not help but detect a tone of condescension in their irritation. The composition of the speakers of the roundtable was illustrative of the way in which the modes of elision and discrimination that are recurrent in most mainstream institutions and conservative academies pervade even this self-styled progressive intellectual organ. It is, of course, universally known, that this journal, despite its revolutionary claims, remains staunchly and ideologically committed to a defense of Modernism as it has been historically elaborated within the European context and updated in postwar American art. There is nothing inherently wrong with such commitment, were it not elevated to the height of being the universal paradigm for the in fact uneven, diachronic experience of modernity. There is very little acknowledgment of the radical political strategies and social and cultural transformations developed since the decolonization projects of the postwar period outside the West. These have shaped the reception of Modernism in the work of artists outside of Europe and North America, as well as that of many within these spheres. To ignore or downplay this, after one hundred issues of continuous publication, is a grave error.

The second example highlights the conservatism of traditional museums of Modern art in their treatment of Modernism. For its opening in 2000, the Tate Modern museum presented an overarching curatorial viewpoint, one that straddles a large expanse of historical developments in Modern art. The relationships between Modern art and the European artistic tradition, and between contemporary art and its modernist heritage, were central. To demonstrate these relationships and at the same time transform the methodology for rendering them in a public display, the museum moved actively between a synchronic and diachronic ordering of its message. The press was filled with speculation about the effectiveness of the museum's "radical" attempt to break with the outmoded chronological emphasis of modernist art history, its effort to inaugurate a far more dialectical exchange and adopt a discursive approach, above all in the display of the permanent collection, which was arranged according to genre, subject matter, and formal affinities. The goal was to present the history of Modern art and the transformations within it in a way that would be readily read by the general public, especially if, for example, a Monet landscape were demonstrated to be an immediate ancestor to the stone circle sculptures and mud wall paintings of Richard Long. What are we to make of this juxtaposition? It shows us, certainly, that both Monet and Long are deeply interested in nature as a source for their art. It could also evoke for the viewer aspects of spirituality and the metaphysical often connected to nature, as well as the conception of landscape as a genre of art from which artists have often

drawn. Despite being a curatorial gimmick, these are interesting enough propositions for the average, unschooled museum visitor.

The rooms housing the permanent collection were divided into four themes: Still Life/Object/Real Life, Nude/Action/Body, History/Memory/Society, Landscape/Matter/Environment. The decisive idea was to break with a conception of modernist historiography entrenched at the Museum of Modern Art in New York since its founding more than seventy years before. Never mind that many professional visitors, namely curators and historians, whispered that this apparent boldness owed more to the lack of depth in its collection of Modern art than any radical attempt to redefine how the history of Modern art was to be adjudicated and read publicly. The rooms were divided, like stage sets, into the four themes, such that they read much like chapters in a textbook. The resultant sense of Modern art's undisturbed progression—absent the contradictions, frictions, resistance, and changes that confound and challenge conventional ideas of Modernism—is in itself a historical conceit. Anything that might challenge this most undialectical of approaches was sublated and absorbed into the yawning maws of the Tate Modern's self-authorizing account.

One example, and by far the most troubling, of the curatorial reasoning behind this account will suffice. The Nude/Action/Body theme suggests a series of transformations in the manner in which the body has been used in Modern and contemporary art. The series of passages from *nude* to *action* to *body* suggest an image of contingency, internal shifts in the development and understanding of the human form and subjectivity as it moves from Modern to contemporary art. The image that presides over this shift is corporeal and mechanical, symbolic and functional, artistic and political, from the *nude* as an ideal to the *body* as a desiring machine.

The first gallery opens out to an eclectic selection of paintings by Stanley Spencer, John Currin, Picasso, and others. This is not an auspicious introduction. The selection and arrangement of the works in the gallery is striking, but more for its formal sensibility than in authoritatively setting out any radical thesis of the nude and the body. In the second gallery two large-scale, genuinely imposing, black-and-white photographic works, one by Craigie Horsfield and the other by John Coplans, face each other. Horsfield's picture *E. Horsfield* (1987) (1995) is in the tradition of classical modernist reclining nudes reminiscent of Cézanne's bathers and Matisse's odalisques. It is an outstanding, ponderous picture, heavy like fruit, with the graded tones of gray lending the mass of flesh a stately presence. Coplans's *Self-Portrait (Frieze No. 2, Four Panels)* (1995) is typical of his performative and fragmentary, multipaneled, serial self-portraiture, often representing his flabby, aging body. The seriality of the depicted

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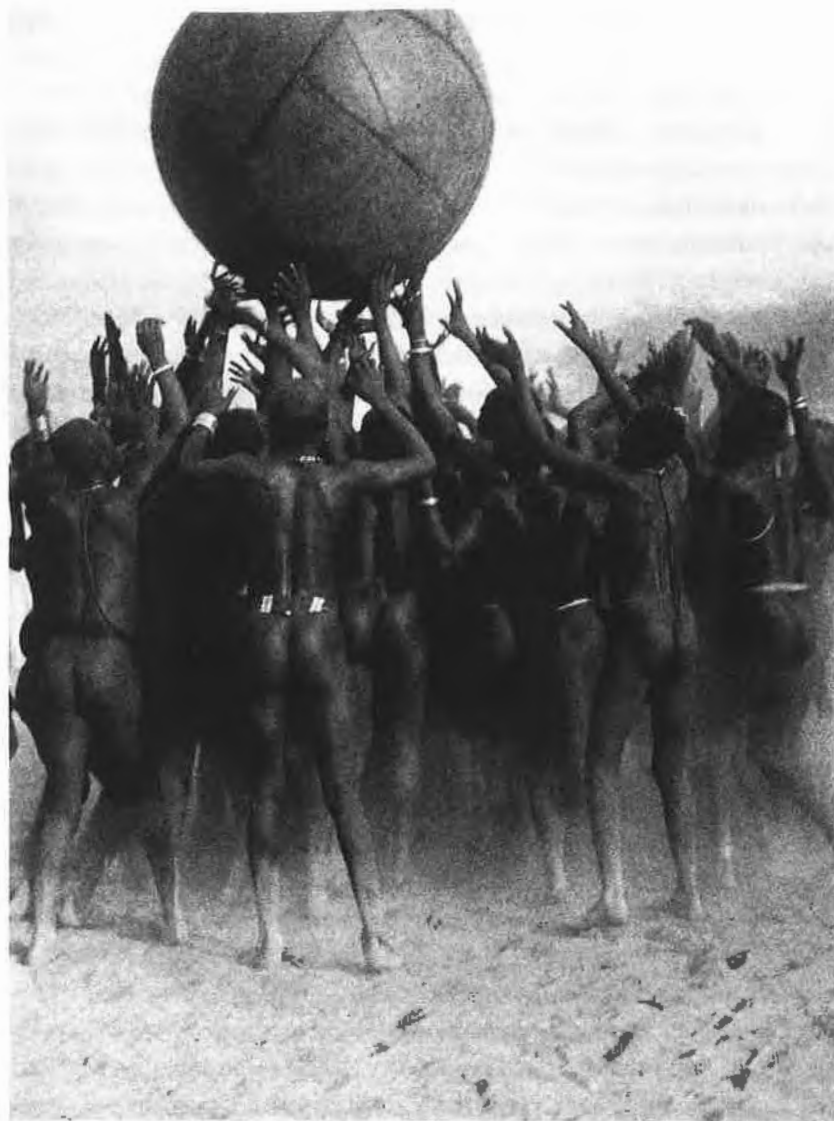
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parts reveals a body seemingly laying claim to its own sentient properties. Formal echoes of the nude from its early modernist treatments of the nude are to be found in contemporary photography, but the difference between the two lies in the idealization of the former and the self-conscious subjectivity of the latter. Modernist photography of the nude focused on forces of nature trapped in classical culture, whereas the contemporary nude is closer in spirit to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the desiring machine consumed in the process of expressing itself.¹⁰

When we enter the next gallery, we find a small ethnographic vitrine embedded into one of the walls of the room. To the left is a discreetly placed LCD monitor playing extracts from two films; one by Michel Allégret and André Gide, *Voyage to the Congo*, 1928, the other an anonymous archival film, *Manners and Customs of Senegal*, 1910. The two extracts evince a theme common to travel documentary. Although temporally and spatially separated, we can place these two films within a well-known genre, in the system of knowledge that belongs to the discourse of colonial, ethnographic film studies of "primitive" peoples. (We already know much about the Western modernist fascination with "primitive" peoples' bodies, along with their Orientalist correlatives. We know that the concept of alterity was not only important for Western Modernism; it was also a focus of allegorical differentiation.) Allégret and Gide's film, and the more structurally open archival footage, provide us with much to think about in regard to Modernism, spectacle, otherness, and degeneracy. In each of the two films, we see the setting of the African village and its social life: villagers self-consciously working on their everyday chores such as grinding grain, tending fires, minding children, or participating in a village festival of dance and song. Most striking about Allégret and Gide's film, however, is that it highlights nakedness; the nakedness of black African bodies under imperial observation. Here, nakedness as opposed to nudity yields a structure of critical differentiation between the primitive and the Modern, between the savage and the civilized, between ideas of nature and culture.

The method of the camera work in both films appears to be objective, aiming to show "primitive peoples" as they are, in their natural space. Nevertheless, one can detect that part of its conscious structure was to show the degree to which primitive man is not to be confused with the modern man. This differentiation lends what we are viewing a quality not of empathy exactly, but, as James Clifford puts it, "a more disquieting quality of Modernism: its taste for appropriating or redeeming otherness, for constituting non-Western arts in its own image, for discovering universal, ahistorical 'human' capacities."¹¹ This observation, taken *in toto* with Modernism's relationship to other-



Michel Allégret and André Gide, *Voyage to the Congo*, 1928. Film still. Public domain.



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Michel Allégret and André Gide, *Voyage to the Congo*, 1928. Film still.
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ness, the primitive and the savage, bears on the distinction between the nude's formal, aesthetic status within Western modernist art and the picturing of simple nakedness with no redeeming aesthetic value commonly found in ethnographic discourse.

If the Tate Modern were an institution working beyond the smug reflex of Western museological authority it would have found right in its own context artists such as Rotimi Fani-Kayode, the Nigerian-British photographer whose work—formally and conceptually—involves a long, rigorous excursus into the distinction between the nude and nakedness as it concerns the African body. The analytic content, not to say the formal and aesthetic contradictions that Fani-Kayode's photographic work introduces us to about the black body in contrast to the modernist nude is quite telling. More substantial is its awareness of the conflicted relationship the black body has to Western representation and its museum discourse.¹² This makes the absence of works like his in the Nude/



Rotimi Fani-Kayode, *Untitled*, 1987–88. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

Action/Body section of the Tate Modern the more glaring. Many other practitioners deal with these issues, but Fani-Kayode is important for my analysis for the more specific reason of his Africanness, his conceptual usage of that Africanness in his imagery, and his subversion of the fraught distinction between nakedness and the nude in his photographic representation. Fani-Kayode's pictures also conceive of the black body (in his case the black male body with its homoerotic inferences) as a vessel for idealization, as a desiring and desirable subject, and as self-conscious in the face of the reduction of the black body as pure object of ethnographic spectacle. All these critical turns in his work make the Tate Modern's inattention to strong, critical work on the nude and the body by artists such as he all the more troubling, because it is precisely works like his that have brought to crisis those naturalized conventions of otherness that throughout the history of modern art have been the stock-in-trade of Modernism.

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tion, there are none for Tate Modern's monologue on the matter of the ethnographic films. Alongside the screen, the wall label expounds on the matter of the films' presence in the gallery, uttering its explanation in a characteristic double-speak: "European audiences in the early 20th century gained experience of Africa through documentary films. Generally these conformed to stereotyped notions about African cultures. An ethnographic film of 1910, for instance, concentrates on the skills and customs of the Senegalese, while *Voyage to the Congo*, by filmmaker Marc Allégret and writer André Gide perpetuates preconceptions about life in the 'bush.' However, the self-awareness displayed by those under scrutiny, glimpsed observing the filmmakers subverts the supposed objectivity of the film."

These words impute both the manufacture and consumption of the stereotype to some previous era of European documentary films and audiences, which is to imply that the business of such stereotypes lies in the past, even if it has now been exhumed before a contemporary European audience for the purposes of explaining Modernism's penchant for deracinating the African subject. But if the discourse of the stereotype is now behind us, is its resuscitation an act of mimicry, or is it, as Homi Bhabha has written elsewhere, an act of anxious repetition of the stereotype that folds back into the logic for excluding African artists in the gallery arrangement as a whole?¹³ Does the repetition of the stereotype—caught, if you will, in a discursive double-maneuver—posit an awareness of the problem of the stereotype for contemporary transnational audiences? Or does the museum's label present us with a more profound question in which the wall text causally explains and masks what is absent in the historical reorganization of the museum's memory cum history? One conclusion can be drawn from this unconvincing explanatory maneuver: more than anything it entrenches European modernist appropriation and instrumentalization of Africa into the primitivist discourse of which the Tate Modern in the twenty-first century is a logical heir.

As we go deeper into the matter, our investigation has much to yield as we look further into the ethnographic desublimation (an uneasy conjunction, no doubt, between colonialism and Modernism) taking place in the museum. Beside the film screen, inside the vitrines, we find, casually scattered, postcards with the general title "Postcards from West Africa," and a small, dark, figurative sculpture, untitled, undated, identified simply as *Standing Figure*. The label tells us of the sculpture's provenance: it is from the collection of Jacob Epstein, thus conveying to us the sculpture's aesthetic aura through the synecdoche of ownership. The implication is obvious: the ownership of such a sculpture by one of Britain's important modernist artists means that he must have appreciated the

sculpture first and foremost as a work of art, for the important aesthetic qualities that recommend it to the modern European sculptor. But if this is so, why then is the sculpture not more properly displayed along with other sculptures installed in the gallery? Or does its namelessness and authorlessness disable it from entering into the domain of aesthetic judgment necessary for its inclusion as an authoritative work of art?

It is no use speaking about the lyrical beauty and artistic integrity of this powerful sculpture, now so pointlessly compromised by the rest of the detritus of colonial knowledge system crammed in the vitrine. The sculpture's presence is not only remote from us, it seems to connote, not art, above all not autonomous art, but merely the idea of artifact or, worse still, evidence. Nearly a hundred years after the initial venture by Western modernists (and I do not care which artist "discovered" what qualities in African or Oceanic art first), it should have been clear enough to the curators at Tate Modern that in terms of sheer variety of styles, forms, genres, plastic distinctiveness, stylistic inventiveness, and complexity of sculptural language, no region in the world approaches the depth and breadth of African sculptural traditions. In the Congo, from where Gide and Allégret gave us deleterious impressions of their *voyage*, we find distinct traditions of sculpture such as Yombe, Luba, Mangbetu, Kuba, 'Teké, Lega, Songye, and Dengese. These traditions of sculpture—like many others—are as distinctly unique as they are historically different in their morphological conception of sculpture. The expressive and conceptual possibilities in the language of artists working within each group have produced sculptural forms of extraordinary anthropomorphic variety and complexity. Whether of the mask or figure, the statue or relief, a simple comparative study between them yields the active field of artistic experimentation and invention that many a modernist recognized, understood, and appreciated. But this is not communicated at all in the lugubrious gathering at the museum. What this installation communicates is neither a history nor even a proper anthropology of Modernism. Rather, the task of this "historical" instruction is more the repetition of what has become a convention in a variety of museums of Modern art. This type of instruction more obfuscates than enlightens. In fact, along with museum collections, most Western modernist museology is predicated on the repetition and circulation of disparate apocrypha and objects connected to this obfuscation.¹⁴

The very idea that there might be an African conception of modernity does not even come up. Nor does the possibility that between Western modernist artists in correspondence with their African contemporaries there existed and now exists an affiliative spirit of mutual influence and recognition. Instead, the

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vitrines as a whole posit a mode of instruction as to what is modern and what is not. On display are Carl Einstein's well-known book *NegerPlastik* and Marcel Griaule's accounts of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition published in the journal *Minotaure*, contemporary to Michel Lieris's famous book *L'Afrique Fantôme*. This is a pantomime of "the Modern" opposed to "the primitive," which the Tate Modern has now upgraded to the most astonishing form of ethnographic ventriloquism. Having emptied and hollowed out the space of African aesthetic traditions, the rest of the gallery was filled in—with customary care and reverence—with carefully installed, "autonomous" sculptures by Brancusi and Giacometti, and paintings by the German expressionists Karl Rotluff and Ludwig Ernst Kirschner. A Kirschner painting of a cluster of nude figures with pale elongated limbs and quasi-cubist, conical, distended midsections is noteworthy and striking in its anthropomorphic resemblance and formal correspondence to both the sculpture in the vitrine and what we had been looking at in the film of the naked Congolese women and children in Gide and Allégret's film.

Given the large literature on the subject, one should take Tate Modern to task by asking whether it could not have found African artists from whatever period to fit into their dialectical scheme? The evidence emphatically suggests a larger number of candidates. The reality is that they did not do so. Not because they could not, but most likely because they felt no obligation to stray from the modern museum's traditional curatorial exclusions. So much for the claim to be mounting a dialectical display, as indicated by the titles of the rooms. In fact, what was concretely conveyed was an untroubled attitude, a singular point of view, a sense of sovereign judgment.

We should, nonetheless, concede the fact that Tate Modern was merely operating on well-trodden ground. When, for example, Werner Spies reinstalled the galleries of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 1999, he applied a curatorial flourish to the museum's cache of modernist paintings and sculptures, mixing them with postwar and contemporary art while assigning classical African sculpture and masks to a garishly lit vitrine wedged into a hallway-like room. A more serious example of this sort was the curatorially important, widely influential, and superbly scholarly exhibition "Primitivism and Modern Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern" of 1984–1985 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which treated the African and Oceanic works as it did the most highly refined modernist objects. But even this valuing of them as autonomous sculptures was achieved through a sense of reification that all but destroyed the important symbolic power of the objects and the role they played in their social contexts.

In 1989, Jean-Hubert Martin curated "Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre

Pompidou, an exhibition that remains controversial. It set a different course in its response to the question that has vexed the modernist museum from its earliest inception, namely the status and place of non-Western art within the history of Modern and contemporary art. To evade this conundrum Martin elected to eliminate the word "artist" from his exhibition—mindful of the fact that such a designation may be unduly burdened by a Western bias—choosing instead the term *magicien* as the proper name for the object and image makers invited to present their art. If the MOMA and Centre Pompidou exhibitions—in New York and Paris respectively, two bastions of the history of Modern art in the world—responded critically to the controversial and unresolved aesthetic and historical debates within modernist accounts concerning art and artists from other cultures, Tate Modern, in its own attempt to further the rewriting of the modernist reception of the Other and of non-Western art, proved both unevolved and unreflexive. The entire installation was ahistorical, with no semblance of the critical content of what Habermas calls the "the philosophical discourse of modernity."¹⁵ In fact, it was marked by a subjugation of historical memory, a savage act of epistemological and hermeneutic violence.

3.

If I have dwelt on elucidating this particular view it is only to frame what is at stake for artists and curators who step into the historical breach that has opened up today within the context of contemporary art. As regards modernist historiography, that is another matter. But we do know that Modernism has many streams that do not all empty into the same basin. Equally evident is the fact that the rising tide of institutional interest in other accounts of artistic production will never lift all the boats into the dialectical position of tradition and continuity so beloved by museums such as the Tate Modern. This is the nub of the current skepticism toward a globalized reception of contemporary artistic practices from far-flung places with little historical proximity to the ideas transmitted from within the legacy of the Western historical avant-garde. In today's complex conditions, the legacy of the Western historical avant-garde seems inadequate to the job of producing a unified theory of contemporary art. Because of its restless, unfixed boundaries, its multiplicities, and the state of "permanent transition" within which it is practiced and communicated, contemporary art tends to be much more resistant to global totalization. Yet the last two decades have witnessed an exponential rise in the fortunes of curators, who, with their portmanteau of theories neatly arranged—befitting of their

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status as the enlightened bureaucrats of modernist totalization—travel the world scouring it for new signs of art to fill the historical breach.

Deftly packaged multicultural exhibitions seem, today, to be mere responses of convenience and strategy aimed at keeping at bay certain social forces that demand greater inclusion of art that reflects the complexity of societies in which museums exist. To be sure, the responses by museums and academies to the troubling questions of inclusion/exclusion have a historical basis, most obviously imperialism and colonialism. The rupture in continuity to which imperialism and colonialism subjected many cultures continues to have contemporary repercussions on matters such as taste and judgment. It provides many artists with an important point of disputation, and hones their capacities for figuring new values of truth within the field of contemporary art. Modern and contemporary art has demonstrated the utter impossibility of the one true judgment of art, however authoritative such judgment may seem to be.

It has long been recognized that postcolonial processes have increasingly highlighted the problematics of Western judgment over vast cultural fields in the non-Western world. Many curatorial practices today are direct responses to postcolonial critiques of Western authority. The conditions of production and reception of contemporary art evince a dramatic multiplication of its systems of articulation. This has occurred to such a degree that no singular judgment could contain all its peculiarities.

The curatorial responses to the contestations initiated both by postcolonialism and expanded definitions of art seem directed at assimilating certain historical effects that became clear only in the last three decades, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, and have accelerated since the late 1990s. I will delineate the five effects that, to me, are the most salient. They are outcomes not so much of the value system of the old world of Modernism but the postcolonial conditions of the contemporary world as such. Because modernist formalism has tended to respond to contemporary culture with hostility, the effects I am speaking of are marked, therefore, not so much by the speed of their transposition into networks and teleologies of organized totality (that is, they do not share the theology of universal history common to all modernist effects), rather, they are founded on the impermanent and aleatory. Impermanence here does not mean endless drift, or the evacuation of specificity. Rather, the structure of contemporary art's relationship to history is more transversal, asynchronous, and asystematic in nature, thereby revealing a multiplicity of cultural procedures. Contemporary art today cannot be defined by simple, singular models.

The first effect of contemporary complexity is the proliferation of exhibition

forms—such as blockbusters, large-scale group or thematic exhibitions, cultural festivals, biennales, and so on—and their constant mutation. All of these have significantly enlarged the knowledge base of contemporary thinking about art and its commonplaces in museums and culture at large. This enlargement is crucial, because it has created new networks between hitherto separated spheres of contemporary artistic production, in both the everyday engagement with the world and its images, texts, and narratives, and in what I have called Modernism's dead certainties. Even though this phase is still in a developmental stage, it has already oriented the transmission of contemporary art discourses toward a deeper confrontation with what Carlos Basualdo has called the "new geographies of culture."¹⁶ Curatorial and exhibition systems are confronted with the fact that all discourses are located, that is, they are formed and begin somewhere, they have a temporal and spatial basis, and they operate synchronically and diachronically. The located nature of cultural discourses, along with their history of discontinuities and transitions, confronts curatorial practices with the fragility of universalized conceptions of history, culture, and artistic procedures.

The second effect initially appeared as an allegory of transformation and transfiguration, then subsequently as a mode of resistance and repetition. It is easy to underestimate today the force of the dissolution of colonialism on art and culture until we realize that, not so long ago—barely half a century—the majority of the globe (covering almost two-thirds of the earth's surface and numbering more than a billion people) were places and peoples without proper political rights. Now, with the decay of colonial state structures, it is again easy enough to mock the utopian aspirations of self-determination, liberation from colonialism, and political independence that began to see off the imperial discourse that had characterized global modernity in its early phase. Indeed, global modernity powerfully sustained the plethora of fictions on which the idea of a national tradition in art and culture was founded. In the guise of the modern nation-state, it furnished the political identity of the modern artist, and continues, by and large, to do so. Decolonization and national identity, therefore, represent the bookends of two concomitant projects of late global modernity. On the one hand, decolonization portends to restore sundered traditions to their "proper" pasts, whilst national identity through the state works assiduously to reinvent and maintain them in the present and for the future. This is what has been called the roadmap to nation building and modernization. Decolonization, qua the postcolonial, transforms the subject of cultural discourse, while the nation-state reinvents the identity of the artist and transfigures the order of tradition for posterity. If the mode of the postcolonial is resistance and insubordination through transformation, that of the nation is consolidation

and repetition that becomes the emblem of continuity. The unseen. Contemporary usefulness inheres

Nowhere is this cultural identity. practice, but, quite the field of representation is as much as territories, to rationalization, and new practice multiple dwelling national and cultural community become essential cultures, despite postcolonial artists able in the ideals of stellation, therefore

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Putting aside it has been eviscerated, its oppositionality Modernism? Further based discourses,

and repetition through transfiguration. Out of each, the figure of the new becomes the emulsifier for either tradition and restoration, or tradition and continuity. The antinomies of the Modern and contemporary can be plainly seen. Contemporary curatorial practice is keenly aware of the uses, abuses, and usefulness inherent in this situation.

Nowhere is this discourse more palpable than in the fiery debates concerning cultural identity. Representation becomes not merely the name for a manner of practice, but, quite literally, the name for a political awareness of identity within the field of representation. In the context of decolonized representation, innovation is as much about the coming to being of new relations to cultures and histories, to rationalization and transformation, to transculturation and assimilation, and new practices and processes, new kinds of exchange and moments of multiple dwelling as it is about the ways artists are seen to be bound to their national and cultural traditions. Here, political community and cultural community become essentially coterminous. As well, beyond nationalism and national cultures, decolonization is more than just the forlorn daydream of the postcolonial artist or intellectual, for it has, attached to it, something recognizable in the ideals of modernity: the notion of progress. In the postcolonial constellation, therefore, the new in art has different kinds of self-affirmative content.

How does this square with the postmodern critique of what is derogatively referred to as "identity-based" or "multicultural" art? Notice the conflation of the terms: identity and multiculturalism. The weakness of all identity-based discourse, we were told, lay in its self-contradiction, in its attempt to conflate the universal and the particular, self and other, into the social site of artistic production. Another critique saw identity-based practices as presuming cultural and political grounds that were too reductive and simplistic, specific and limited; and, because of their incapacity to deal with abstraction, incapable of transcending that specificity and aspiring to universal culture. Commenting on the fragmentation of modernist totalization introduced by Postmodernism, art historian Hal Foster posed the following questions: "Is this fragmentation an illusion, an ideology of its own (of political 'crisis,' say, versus historical 'contradiction')? Is it a symptom of a cultural 'schizophrenia' to be deplored? Or is it, finally, the sign of a society in which difference and discontinuity rightly challenge ideas of totality and continuity?"¹⁷

Putting aside for the moment the fact that identity-based discourses have been eviscerated, are we to take it that identity discourse—understood in all of its oppositionality, contingency, and discontinuity—is the specter that haunts Modernism? Further, was there a false consciousness in the belief that identity-based discourses, along with their multicultural correlatives, working in al-

liance with postmodernism's critique of grand narratives and universal history (including those elaborations on paradigms of asymmetrical power relations unleashed by postcolonial studies), could bring about the possibility of a decentered global cultural order? Certainly, global culture is thoroughly decentered, but its power can hardly be said to be contained. Through an unsentimental reading of Marxism and cultural ideology, Poster offers a view that permits us to pursue this question. He writes of how:

new social forces—women, blacks, other “minorities,” gay movements, ecological groups, students—have made clear the unique importance of gender and sexual difference, race and the third world, the “revolt of nature” and the relation of power and knowledge, in such a way that the concept of class, if it is to be retained as such, must be articulated in relation to these terms. In response, theoretical focus has shifted from class as a subject of history to the cultural constitution of subjectivity, from economic identity to social difference. In short, political struggle is now seen largely as a process of “differential articulation.”¹⁸

No museum or exhibition project, even if it might wish to avoid addressing the consequences of this “differential articulation,” can remain critically blind to the importance of multicultural and identity-based practices, however wrong-headed and regressive they may appear. One guiding reason for this vigilance amongst cultural institutions has to do with both the politics of enlightened self-interest and the changing of the cultural and social demographics of many contemporary societies due to large-scale immigrations of the twentieth century. In the case of the United States and Europe, the civil rights movement, antiracist movements, and the struggle for the protection of minority rights have increased the level of this vigilance. There is also the recognition of the role of the market in the institutionalization of national identity in recent curatorial projects, especially in exhibitions designed to position certain national or geographic contexts of artistic production. What is often elided in the excitement of these new national or geopolitical spaces, however, is the politics of national representation that recommends them through various national funding and promotional boards, cultural foundations, and institutions.¹⁹ Increasingly, curators have become highly dependent on the patronage of such institutions. The neoexpressionist market juggernaut of the late 1970s and 1980s led Benjamin Buchloh to identify a similar curatorial symptom, one that trades on the morbid cliché of national identity: “When art emphasizing national identity attempts to enter the international distribution system, the most worn-out historical and geopolitical clichés have to be employed. And thus we now see the

resurrection of such notions as the Nordic versus the Mediterranean, the Teutonic versus the Latin."²⁰

The third effect is the explosion of and the heterogeneous nature of artistic procedures immediately at variance with the historically conditioned, thereby conventional understanding of art within the logic of the museum. Such procedures have been theorized, quite correctly, as neoavant-garde, rather than as true ruptures from their academic obverse. However, it can be said that institutional canniness has often found inventive ways to absorb the energies of even the most insurrectional positions in art. The emergence of new critical forces has all too often become cashiered as another instance in the positivist ideology of advanced art's claim of *engagement* set forth by the institution.

The fourth effect results from the mediatization of culture, especially in the transformation of the museum form into the realm of the culture industry of mass entertainment, theatricality, and tourism. The most exact expression of the passage of museums into the concept of mass culture has been achieved through the fusion of architectural design and the museum's collection whereby the collection and architecture become one fully realized *Gesamtkunstwerk* and understood as such.²¹ The fusion of the art collection with the architecture of the museum is as much a value-supplying feature as any other purpose. Out of town visitors can visit the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Guggenheim Museum in New York or Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao, treating each as a unique work of art in its own right, or they may travel to see the buildings and visit the collections at the same time. Despite their universalist aspirations, most contemporary museums exist with the dark clouds of nationalism or ideologies of civic virtue hovering over them. Even if the aspiration of the museum is not specifically nationalist, in order to attract funding and state support, its discourse in today's competition between global cities must be decidedly nationalist in spirit.

The fifth effect, which I believe ultimately subtends the previous four, is the globalization of economic production and culture, and the technological and digital revolution that has fused them. Two factors about globalization make it fascinating in relation to this discussion: its limit and reach. While the compression of time and space is understood as one of the definitive aspects of the globalization of art and culture, the access of artists to its benefits is massively uneven. Having abandoned the values of "internationalism," there is now the idea in art discourse that the globalization of art opens the doors to greater understanding of the motivations that shape contemporary art across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, South America, across the world at large. Paradoxically, it is globalization that has exposed the idea of a consolidated art world as

a myth. Rather than a centered structure, what is much in evidence today are networks and cross-hatched systems of production, distribution, transmission, reception, and institutionalization. The development of new multilateral networks of knowledge production—activities that place themselves strategically at the intersection of disciplines and transnational audiences—has obviated the traditional circuits of institutionalized production and reception. These emergent networks are what I believe Basualdo means by “new geographies of culture.” By emphasizing emergence, I wish, especially, to foreground not so much the newness of these territories (many of which, in fact, have extraterritorial characteristics) but their systematic integration into mobile sites of discourse, which only became more visible because of the advances in information technology as a means of distributing, transmitting, circulating, receiving, and telegraphing ideas and images.

4.

How does the curator of contemporary art express her intellectual agency within the state of “permanent transition” in which contemporary art exists today? How does the curator work both within canonical thinking and against the grain of that thinking in order to take cognizance of artistic thought that slowly makes itself felt, first in the field of culture, before it appears to be sanctioned by critics and institutions? I do not have specific answers to these questions. But I do have a notion or two about how we may approach them.

From the moment exhibitions of art assumed a critical place in the public domain of social and cultural discourse amongst the political classes—within the bourgeois public sphere that first emerged actively in Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution—exhibitions have been constituted within the history of thought.²² This field, as Foucault showed, is shaped above all by institutionalized power and systems of legitimation. Despite the evident fact that the institutions of art moved, inexorably, from the private, courtly domain of the feudal state to the increasingly public salons of the democratic secular state, fundamental instruments of power were still disproportionately held through patronage by the bourgeois elite in alliance with the aristocracy. Today, this process of social differentiation has entered another sphere, one dominated by capital, and contested by the forces of the so-called avant-garde. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, “The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favorable to those who dominated the field economically and politically (e.g. ‘bourgeois art’) and the autonomous principle (e.g. ‘art for art’s sake’), which

5.

All curatorial procedures that are grounded in the discursive mechanisms of "the history of art" have an optics, that is to say a lens, a way of looking, seeing, and judging art and its objects, images, texts, events, activities, histories, and the intermedia strategies that define the artwork's public existence through institutions, museums, galleries, exhibitions, criticism, and so on. Yet the power, if not necessarily the import, of curatorial judgments are limited by the almost Orwellian dispensation on the part of certain art academics toward constructing a viewpoint that is overarching in terms of its conclusions about certain artistic skills and competencies, concepts, and meanings. As a specific discipline of the Western academy, the "history of art," having taken as its charter the oversight of all artistic matters, tends to surreptitiously adopt and incorporate into its discursive field a bird's-eye, panoptic view of artistic practice. This, in turn, appropriates and subverts subjective judgment into a sovereign assessment of all artistic production within a general framework. The curator, therefore, is not quite the sovereign we earlier made her out to be. Nonetheless, she operates (with the unambiguous sanction of historical and imperial precedent) like a viceroy, with the role of bringing the nonbelievers under the sovereign regard of the great Western tradition. It is the sovereign judgment of art history, with its unremitting dimension of universality and totality, that leads us to question whether it is possible to maintain a singular conception of artistic modernity. It also raises the question of whether it is permissible to still retain the idea that the unique, wise, and discriminating exercise of curatorial taste—or what some would call, ambiguously, "criticality"—ought to remain the reality of how we evaluate contemporary art today. Foucault's call for the problematization of the concept of thought in relation to critical praxis remains pertinent. The fields of practice in which relations of production, acculturation, assimilation, translation, and interpretation take place confront us immediately with the contingency of the contemporary norm of curatorial procedures that spring from the sovereign world of established categories of art inherited from "the history of art."

The museum of Modern art as an object of historical thought has a social life, as well as a political dimension, and its function cannot be dissociated from the complex arena of society and culture within which its discourse is imbricated. To that end, then, it is of significant interest to see in the curator a figure who has assumed a position as a producer of certain kinds of thought about art, artists, exhibitions, and ideas and their place amongst a field of other possible forms of thought that govern the transmission and reception of artistic production—someone, that is, who thinks reflexively about museums. Interestingly, in

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recent decades, it is artists more than curators who have interrogated the institution of the museum with considerable rigor. Even if "institutional critique," which inaugurated this critical intervention into the discursive spaces of the museum, has made itself redundant in light of the parasitic relationship it developed within the institution, it nonetheless opened up a space of critical address that few curators rarely attempt.

The challenge here is for the curator to grasp her work as a mode of practice that leads to particular ways of aligning thought and vision through the separation and juxtaposition of a number of models within the domains of artistic production and public reception. This method shows how the curator reflexively produces an exhibition, while allowing the viewer to think, see, appreciate, understand, transform, and translate the visual order of contemporary art into the broader order of knowledge about the history of art.

6.

If we were to attempt a definition of the status of the artwork in the current climate of restlessness and epistemological challenges, it would not be a restrictive one, but an understanding of the artwork as being produced and mobilized in a field of relations.²⁴ A field of relations places contemporary art and its problematics within the context of historical discourses on modernity, and elucidates the challenges to, and potentialities of, curatorial work today. The incandescence of Foucault's splendid definition of the idea of "work" provides a true insight into the problem. This is how he defines work: "that which is susceptible of introducing a meaningful difference in the field of knowledge, albeit with a certain demand placed on the author and the reader, but with the eventual recompense of a certain pleasure, that is to say, of an access to another figure of truth."²⁵

Situated, as curators and art academics are, on the other side of the line from which the public faces institutions of legitimation, how might we achieve this other figure of truth, especially in an exhibition context? With what aesthetic and artistic language does one utter such truth? In what kind of environment? For which public? How does one define the public of art, particularly given the proliferation of audiences? Finally, in the circumstances of the contemporary upheaval of thought, ideas, identities, politics, cultures, histories, what truth are we talking about? The upheaval that today defines contemporary events is a historical one, shaped by disaffection with two paradigms of totalization: capitalism and imperialism, and socialism and totalitarianism. If the disaffection with these paradigms did not shift significantly the axis and forces of totalization, it did shape the emergence of new subjectivities and identities. But the

dominant description of this emergence has crystallized into a figure of thought that is radically enacted in oppositional distinctions made on civilizational and moralistic terms, such as "the clash of civilizations," "the axis of evil," and the "evil empire."²⁶ During the late 1980s and early 1990s the culture wars in the United States were waged on similarly reductive terms, which in time cooled the ardor of those institutions tempted to step beyond their scope.²⁷

My conception of the postcolonial constellation is an outcome of the upheaval that has resulted from deep political and cultural restructuring since World War II, manifest in the liberation, civil rights, feminist, gay/lesbian, and antiracist movements.²⁸ The postcolonial constellation is the site for the expansion of the definition of what constitutes contemporary culture and its affiliations in other domains of practice; it is the intersection of historical forces aligned against the hegemonic imperatives of imperial discourse. In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the importance of postcolonial history and theory for accurate understanding of the social and cultural temporality of late modernity. If I recommend the postcolonial paradigm for illuminating our reading of the fraught historical context from which the discourses of Modernism and contemporary art emerged, it is only to aim toward a maturity of the understanding of what art history and its supplementary practices can contribute today toward our knowledge of art. The postcolonial constellation seeks to interpret a particular historical order, to show the relationships between political, social, and cultural realities, artistic spaces and epistemological histories, highlighting not only their contestation but also their continuous redefinition.

NOTES

An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Research in African Literature* 34, no. 4 (2003), 57–82.

- 1 See Fernand Braudel's discussion of the structural transformation of the flow of capital and culture by distinct temporal manifestations, the paradigmatic and diagnostic attribute of historical events in relation to their duration, in his *Civilization and Capitalism*, esp. 3:17–18 and 3: chap. 1.
- 2 Much like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their use of the idea of the rhizome, Glissant employs the metaphor of the prodigious spread of the mangrove forest to describe the processes of multiplications and mutations that for him describe the tremor of creolization as a force of historical changes and ruptures brought about by changes in the imperial order.
- 3 Admittedly, the advent of mass culture has muted the ability of exhibitions to be truly seminal in the wider cultural sense manifest in the controversies around the French salons of the nineteenth century, or the Armory Show of 1917 in New York. Dada was defined as a new artistic movement primarily through its many exhibitions and

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happenings. Recent art world miniscandals—such as the lawsuit brought against the Contemporary Art Center of Cincinnati upon its exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's homoerotic photographs in 1990, or the controversy surrounding Chris Ofili's painting of a Madonna, which used elephant dung for one of her breasts, in the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition "Sensation" in 1999—indicate the degree to which exhibitions of art remain culturally significant.

- 4 The Nobel economist Amartya Sen has recently given many examples of the cross-pollination of ideas between cultures—particularly in language, mathematics, and the sciences—which has continued unabated for two millennia. See his "Civilizational Imprisonments."
- 5 See Bnskirk and Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*; and Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
- 6 See Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone."
- 7 Dürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 35.
- 8 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224.
- 9 See *October*, "A Special Issue on Obsolescence," particularly the roundtable on art criticism, 200–28.
- 10 See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.
- 11 Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 193.
- 12 For a thorough account and brilliant analysis of this issue, see Thelma Golden's groundbreaking exhibition catalogue *Black Male*.
- 13 Bhabha, "The Other Question."
- 14 The same holds true for most museums of contemporary art in Europe and the United States. I have often found it curious how contemporary collections seem exactly identical, irrespective of the city in which the museum is located. The unconscious repetition of the same artists, objects, and chronology in both museums and private collections should make curators less sanguine about the independence of their judgment in connection with art and artists who may not fit easily into the logocentric logic of seriality.
- 15 See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, for an extensive treatment of the discourse of modernity and modernization, and of Modernism as their artistic and aesthetic corollary. In the chapter "Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance" he draws attention to Max Weber's contention that the concept of modernity arose out of a peculiarly "Occidental rationalism."
- 16 Carlos Basualdo, "New Geographies of Culture," statement on a flyer accompanying a series of public seminars organized by Basualdo at the Jorge Luis Borges National Library, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2002.
- 17 Foster, *Recordings*, 139.
- 18 Foster, *Recordings*, 139.
- 19 Some of the most active institutions are foreign policy instruments of the given countries. These include the British Council (United Kingdom), Association Française d'Action Artistique (France), Danish Contemporary Art (Denmark), Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Germany), Mondriaan Foundation (The Netherlands), and the Japan Foundation. They employ the export of artists and exhibitions as an active tool of cultural diplomacy, often organize curatorial tours in their respective

- countries, fund artists for overseas projects, support exhibitions in highly visible international cities, and tour exhibitions of art from their national collections to other parts of the world.
- 20 Bnchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," 123.
 - 21 The Centre Pompidou, Paris, designed by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano; the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry; and the Milwaukee Art Museum by Santiago Calatrava are examples of this conjunction. Yet no other museum achieves this fusion most thoroughly and with such audacious rhetorical panache as Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. Libeskind's architectural narrative is so forceful and complete that any visit through the museum is nothing less than an architectural guided tour, one in which the experience of the displays is always mediated by the stronger narrative of the building.
 - 22 See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.
 - 23 Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 40.
 - 24 My idea of field of relations recapitulates Bourdieu's own assessment (in *The Field of Cultural Production*) of the artistic sphere as one enmeshed in a field of activities in which various agents and position takers collaborate in an ever expansive set of relations that define, conceive, conceptualize, and reformulate norms and methods within the field of cultural production.
 - 25 Foucault, "Des Travaux," in *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1994), 4:367, quoted by Paul Rabinow in "Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought," in Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault*, 1:xxi.
 - 26 Respectively, Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*; George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002, in which he outlined a stark distinction between states that belong to the moral universe of the civilized [*sic*] world, and those others, especially Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, who, he stated, exist in the pool of darkness and are motivated by evil intentions against the peaceful, civilized world; and then U.S. president Ronald Reagan characterizing the Soviet Union in a speech to the British House of Commons, June 8, 1982.
 - 27 Conservative critics such as Hilton Kramer, Allan Bloom, and others made fodder of any cultural form or concept seen to want to relativize the obvious categorical and empirical truth of the great Western tradition with a cultural insight that deviates from the superiority of the Western canon. Postmodernism, and latterly postcolonial theory, became the easy route to show that the emperor of multiculturalism has no clothes and must be exposed as such with the most strident ideological attacks. Political subjectivity or social awareness of the dimension of multiplicity in any creative work was not only seen as fraudulent but also anti-Western. The culture wars destroyed any vestige of dissent within the intellectual field and exposed the weaknesses of the liberal academy. Part of the terrible legacy of this civilizational discourse is a return to consensual opposition between the Left and the Right, each pitched in its own historical bivouac. Today, to speak a measure of truth about art that contradicts the retreat back into rampant academicism is indeed a dangerous, yet occupational hazard.
 - 28 Elaborated in Enwezor, "The Black Box."

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