
“Per un museo postcoloniale”
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* For table of contents, abstracts and bios of the authors see http://www.esteticastudiericerche.com/?option=com_content&view=article&id=93%3A12012&Itemid=2&lang=it, 19 Novembre 2013.

The issue 1/2012 of *estetica. studi e ricerche* takes on the new and urgent challenge of outlining the ‘postcolonial museum’. What is this new museum, what are the guidelines that it should follow, what are the urgencies, the concerns, the questions to which it is necessary to find an answer? What will be the discussion provoked by this museum *to come*? Most of all, how, and to what extent, is the museum changing, turning from national into *transnational*, and into a space where the exiled artist might finally be able to build his/her home?

Each of the essays collected in this issue, arranged into three sections, suggests different and possible pathways and guidelines, all of them stemming from the need to rework what has been historically removed – from the museum – by Occidental colonizing cultures. As Iain Chambers points out in his introductory essay, the issue is primarily concerned with the problematic *inclusion* of ‘others’, whose presence has been removed or consciously swept away by traditional criteria of representation and categorization. ‘Including’, however, should only be an initial step, a transitional stage leading to the destruction of these criteria that need to be rethought in order to avoid abiding by a Eurocentric logic. In the transformation of the museum from a “cemetery” and a “crypt” into a migrant network, Chambers effectively proposes the use of postcolonial criticism as a key to deconstruct the narrative apparatus and the logic of the museum itself (9).

As a matter of fact, postcolonial issues can cast light on a criticism that has so far been strictly confined to the field of museum studies. That is exactly what Beatrice Ferrara suggests, in the first section of the issue (*The postcolonial challenge*). In her essay, Ferrara references the London-based artistic duo Otolith Group, and embraces a wider field of research, including the relationship between museum issues and immaterial labour. In their video-essay *Hydra Decapita*, the duo brings to light the confusion resulting from the global crisis of capitalism, and ties up postcolonial and postmodern issues with the spread of immaterial labour, whose growth is to be connected to the relationship between capitalism and migration. In the present moment, art becomes a way of giving expression to this confusion and, at the same time, of dispelling it. The waves generated by images on the screen – those of the sea, the nomadic archive *par excellence* – are reflected in the vibrations of the afrofuturistic electronic music duo Drexciya, whose sound opens up to a new sensorial and affective relationship among images, sounds and viewers.

Vibrations recur also in the essay by Parati, Postiglione and Pozzi who, presenting the [MeLA project](#) (European Museums in an Age of Migration), draw attention to *vibrations* and to the *multiplicity/complex order* couple. The new

museum will have to embrace the vibrations generated in the encounter between objects and viewers. It will introduce a new artistic-architectonic practice by the theoretical-methodological principle of *multiplicity*. This will violate the narrative unity and replace it with neither a linear nor a chronological *complex order*, which, in turn, will raise many questions rather than provide ultimate answers.

By establishing a co-productive relationship between subject and object, vibrations open up the possibility for a collaborative relationship. It is on this relationship that community museums, such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, are grounded. Alessandra De Angelis connects this museum with memorial museums (exemplified, in her article, by the Jewish Museum in Berlin), as both are able to suggest counter-narratives of traumatic events. However, although both museums deeply engage with the senses of their viewers, the Berlin museum, even more than the South African one, tends increasingly to replace the dialogue with an internal monologue within the represented community. The result, as with many other memorial and community museums, is the exclusion of those who do not belong to that community.

Issues of inclusion/exclusion are also debated in the article by Mariangela Orabona, which focuses on the marginality/centrality of the black body within the museum space. The black artists take possession of this space, which has always been racially characterized, often by adopting strategies of resistance that ‘mine’ the museum from the inside. This is the case for artists such as Fred Wilson, and especially Kara Walker, whose oversexed African silhouettes disrupt and explode the monolithic environment of the museum. Similarly the original installation *Museo della Normalità Europea* (*The Museum of European Normality*), which was presented during Manifesta 7 (2008) and which Giulia Grechi analyzes in detail in her article, can be presented as another example of deconstructing the traditional order of things in museums. By means of irony and provocation, this installation succeeds in presenting a reversed ethnography, where the very ‘normality’ of European peoples is questioned and looked at, rather than the traditional framing of the ‘strangeness’ of colonized peoples. It is an absolute reversal that involves not only forms but also contents, and goes so far as to engage with the archive itself, which turns into a place where absences, rather than presences, are stored.

To rethink the museum of the future means first and foremost to uncover and subvert the established principles of cataloguing and archiving, which are Western, patriarchal principles; these will fragment and crumble in the presence of the emerging principles of others. This is the idea that the three articles in the second section of the issue, *Future Archives*, share. Here the *female other* emerges, strongly but lightly at the same time. Here, the *feminine* phases in speech finally become a speaking and acting subject. In the performances of the artists Zineb Sedira, Lalla Essaydi and Zoulikha Bouabdellah, which Silvana Carotenuto presents in her article, the doors of the archive open wide to house memory of the past – the colonial past, the diaspora, the exile – and, at the same time, portend a drive towards the future. In recovering their roots, their *mother* tongue, their maternal

dimension (Sedira), these women take back the word, which also means writing, and writing on their bodies (Essaydi) – those same bodies whose eroticism is, in Islamic culture, to be totally reinvented (Bouabdellah).

To finally welcome the woman – the *patriarchive* turns into a *matriarchive* – means also to imagine and build a flexible archive that might implicate the fluidity that distinguishes both women's nature and their diasporic writing, as Manuela Esposito suggests in her article. Such an archive merges with the ground (the desert) and the water. Sedira's videos and Roni Horn's photographs, with their liquid fabrics, show the deep relationship between the human and the natural worlds, whereas the ground becomes the ultimate archive in the works by Vietnamese critic and director Trinh T. Minh-ha, who replaces the alleged emptiness of the desert with a counterpointal, full sonority.

The relationship between women and nature, the centrality of sound, and the 'suspended' dimension of the desert space, also recur in the essay by Annalisa Piccirillo, which concludes this second section. The focus here is on dance, the most difficult art to archive, being as it is so closely linked to the performative moment. Dance, however, turns the human body into a living archive, constantly on the move, and inscribes in the body of the dancer the memory of the movement. By escaping materiality and gravity, the dancing bodies choreographed by the artist Isabel Rocamora refuse rationality and the burden imposed by the rules of the *patriarchive*; dance becomes light, aerial, intangible: in a word, *antigravitational*.

Zineb Sedira's works display women's will to express, to occupy a space of their own and to subvert the pre-established order. These issues are also present in the article by Celeste Ianniciello, in the third part of the volume (*Excavating museum spaces*). Both Sedira and the artist Mona Hatoum aim at recovering lost and removed memories, whereas Lara Baladi's artistic collages allude to the act of collecting in order to recompose the rifts of the past. Baladi's works especially show the clear intent of transcending the museum's space, of tearing down its white walls, and, in the end, of setting up what Ianniciello calls *the museum of the world* (in contrast to the traditional, obsolete, *museum of the nation*). In a similar fashion, Viviana Gravano firmly criticizes traditional museum logic in her article, taking as a starting point the ethno-anthropological dynamics enacted at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. According to Gravano, the French museum takes on a neocolonial attitude in removing, without mincing words, the presence of the 'other', which it frames, over again, within Western categorizations. The result is a form of neo-orientalism that erects impenetrable barriers among different cultures.

Acting as a counterpart to this closed, fixed, monolithic museum, there are the two counter-examples proposed by Gianluca Gatta and Giusy Muzzopappa: although different from one another, a museum in Bristol and the one in Lampedusa both share the theme of 'the passage' – in the first case the Atlantic passage, and in the second one the passage across the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the pressures exerted by the Caribbean community, which perceives itself as directly involved in

the narration of the British slave trade, the attempts made by the Bristol museum to give voice to this historical inheritance have so far not been very effective. On the contrary, the small museum of migration in Lampedusa is specifically aimed at bringing to light the counter-narrative of the landings that have affected the island for the last twenty years, and allowing a critical and emotional reflection about the phenomenon to emerge. However, it is still to be seen whether the museum will succeed in effectively involving the protagonists in the stories that it seeks to assemble and relay.

Lidia Curti concludes this issue of *estetica*. After summarizing the previous pieces, stressing their common intents and itineraries, Curti opens up a possible new space through reflecting on contemporary Indian art. The works of the artists Abhishek Hazra, Tejal Shah, Sarnath Banjeree and Pushpamala N., that were exhibited at the MAXXI museum in Rome (October 2011 – January 2012), gives the author the opportunity to reflect not only upon the artistic and political importance of the work of art, but also on the creative process that produces it. The exhibition in Rome seeks to do justice to this aspect, not only by emphasizing the matter and the material of which the work of art is made, but also through the reshaping of the museal spaces, which literally *bend* to the needs of the exhibited works. Moreover, the active participation of the artists in the exhibition's organization opens one last, crucial question: is it possible to highlight, inside the museum, the *production* of the work of art, beyond its reproduction and representation, and, therefore, to think of a museum that might ultimately be able to balance the official narrative with counter-tales?

These are the questions that the museum of the future – the *postcolonial* museum, the *postmuseum* – will have to answer.