

# Global Capitalism and the Genetic Paradigm of Culture

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Departing from the initial proposal of the conference in Tokyo that says that »different fields of art have different ways of representing the world, so that they require different methods for the analysis of a work of art,« I would like to re-think some methodologies in terms of organizing exhibitions in the context of globality. Documenta 11 from 2002 is the most prominent case, although a variety of other exhibitions in search of this or that (the “Balkan” for example) have recently taken place in Europe.

In the first part of the paper I would like to give some possible answers to the following question: through what operations of exclusion/inclusion in relation to the notion of hegemony does this new European world itself emerge? In the second part I will engage with questions of global capitalism and strategies of visualization and positioning within art today.

## I

These exhibitions are parallel to the phenomenon of global culture and art. What do I want to say? The most important aspect of these exhibitions is that they have brought into focus and made visible the art and cultural productions of other worlds, most notably the Third World (Africa, Central and South Asia, Muslim-Asian countries, Latin America) and the Second World (the former Eastern European countries). All these worlds are currently, with some future projects scheduled, becoming (through a specific selection) visible in (Western) Europe and the North American continent, where for decades they were/and still

are out of focus. It is not only the question of visibility that matters (to see, or even to discover these distant, and not so distant, but still unknown, productions), but also the question of re-contextualisation, that is, making accessible and reachable within the Empire of the capitalist First World what was until now perhaps just imagined, or occasionally, although very rarely, written about.

My question is: through what operations of exclusion/inclusion in relation to the notion of hegemony does this new world itself emerge? What I want to do is to discern, in what appears to be a mere contingency today, the inner necessity of the art/cultural system (as many of these exhibitions present themselves as just a moment of discovery—the exhibitions are entitled “searching for this or that”—or even as an act of pure generosity and sharing between different worlds in this era of globalisation).

Immediately, I could foster the thesis that the model of the way that global art culture imperialism functions must be looked for elsewhere, outside of the pure cultural context. The elements of the exclusion/inclusion machine are to be found in the scientific discourse of cloning, biotechnology and in the notion of the viability of none other than the (recently deceased) sheep Dolly. Two basic texts are to be taken into account: Sarah Franklin’s essay entitled “Dolly’s viability and the genetic capital” (2001) and Donna Haraway’s book *Modest Witness @ Second Millennium: Female Man<sup>®</sup> meets OncoMouse<sup>™</sup>* (1997).

Exhibitions that are prepared as projects realizing the new internationalisation of the Third and Second Worlds demonstrate an incredible viability. It seems that these exhibitions have found a way to involve the “world,” and at the same time (and this is very important) to prolong their proper life. The inclusion of the Third World is also in the balance, with the proliferation of cultural studies in the capitalist First World, as the Second World (former Eastern Europe) is still (!) on the waiting list, and reserved for special purposes. The former Eastern European art and culture is namely forced to wait, just as when you wait to take a charter flight. You are waiting for the call, and you have to be ready.

I can say that there exists a certain cosmo-political context in the modern capitalist world connected with pure commodification, within which works from the Third and Second Worlds seem to be perfectly cloned. In a way the structure of most of these exhibitions is as follows: there is a core of artists that are part (forever, or just freshly affiliated) of the capitalist art market, and other artists quickly commodified to, or made to assist with, these aspects. They are presented in a kind of replica situation, always rotating around the centre.

I can state: What was seen before as an obstacle, a failure (that exhibitions did not deal with the Third and Second Worlds, as they were too complex, not developed and not translatable into understanding), what was in the past therefore perceived as an inherent impossibility, is today externalised as a positive obstacle. This move, from inherent impossibility to external obstacle, is the very definition of fantasy, of the phantasmatic position in which the inherent deadlock acquires positive existence! A-historical exhibitions, ruptures with styles, trends, classifications, etc. are all at work today, with the implication that as soon as the obstacles are removed, the relationship will run smoothly. This global structure is no less hallucinatory and no less a spectralisation of the phantasmatic power of the Art Institution than it was in the past, when this Institution failed to include worlds other than the capitalist First World. Fantasy plays a crucial role in hegemonic formations, a role often at odds with the explicit political/curatorial program of the Institution/Art Exhibition projects. "Fantasy" not only situates the subject in relation to its object cause of desire, but also compensates for the instability of its imaginary and symbolic identifications. This is why it is necessary to articulate not only the equivalence among diverse struggles against oppression, but also to traverse phantasmatic scenarios that might underlie such articulations.

But let us go step by step. Let's see what logic is developed and brought to the final stage by the so-called global exhibition projects in the capitalist First World. Let's explore these fundamental shifts in its very logic.

We have to distinguish between different forms of functioning of the art "Institution" within different capitalist periods, decades and logics. The forming of the capitalist art market, in order to sell a single work of art, was based on the development of a careful pedigree—an exact genealogy of this single work of art. What it was necessary to accomplish was a shift in the definition of cultural capital: a shift from culture as a whole to the reproductive power of a single work of art, in order to say that this work of art is ready to be capitalized and invested in. In short, this shift involved the formation of an exact genealogy of the single work of art that was enabled therefore to stand for a larger whole. The creation of such a genealogy was accomplished through careful critical and intellectual/theoretical work as well as art marketing-cultural-institutional devices. Such an artwork then started to function as a template for the continued production of artworks of special types. For example the Young British Art (YBA) scene today can be seen as precisely the result of such a manner of development. To be even more precise, the shift is synechdochic (the word is used by Sarah Franklin when discussing the process of the formation of a breed), in the sense that the "substance" from which the artwork is made becomes a template for an entire national contemporary type of production. The same can be seen within the phenomena of what was in the past decade named the new Switzerland Art Scene.

These conceptual processes in the art world are kept alive for decades, enabling the careful selection and proliferation of artists, production, investment and art stock exchanges. In turn, such differentiation(s) have enabled a redefinition of what is cultural context, along with the development of new definitions of what is a historical and an art lineage.

What it is important to notice in this process is how much conceptual apparatus had to be put into motion in the capitalist First World in relation to artwork(s) in order for their value to emerge as "natural." Therefore, strictly speaking, and based on important statements made by Franklin, the Young

British Art scene can be considered to be not only a new cultural-technological-aesthetical assemblage, but also almost a breed. Its constitution is, using Franklin's vocabulary, a discursive formation, and its style a manifestation of the market-investment-art institution-theory capacity. Making a reference to a "breed" in such a context is not a cynical or pejorative remark at all, as the "breed" is in fact a British invention! On the other hand, it is important to introduce into the vocabulary of art and culture notions from the realm of biotechnology, such as template, breed, genealogy, pedigree. If we keep in mind the idea of this effective capital investment (theory/money/art market) in the single work of art, we have to acknowledge the importance of the art/critic/theory "machine" in its background, which obsessively works on providing genealogical and historical power to a unique artwork style and aesthetics.

The final result is a special linkage of money, institutions and critical/theoretical writings that today present themselves even more than ever as a "civilizational kinship." This kinship (that again comes from the vocabulary of biotechnology) presents itself in the "world" as the most natural and internal process of art and culture in the capitalist First World, and moreover this "civilizational kinship" is today overcoming the cultural borders in order to become the password of the day in political affairs (us against them; the war to preserve civilization, etc.).

Which exact form of exclusion/inclusion will prevail in a certain configuration is the result of struggle. My intention is not to play with the endless impossibility of substitution within the same fundamental field of impossibility, but to make thematic the different structural principles of this very possibility.

Let us see what is going on with the so-called new global exhibition projects that include selected Third and Second World artists and their works, or which are organized just for them. These projects make evident some important new directions, which can be seen not only as a conceptual, but also primarily as a technological shift. With these projects, firstly, the traditional template of genealogy is disrupted, and secondly, a new kind of assemblage, effectively "repro-

grammed" in time and space, is put into action. What is important is not the work of art, but the technique of transfer that provides the means of reproduction. The inclusion of the work of art from the Third and Second Worlds in the territory of the Empire has therefore in most of the cases a role to just testify to a successful application of the technique of transfer. In the case of an artwork originating from outside the Empire, neither its own authenticity, nor its own auto-generative capacity is valuable. It is solely here to prove the transfer of the work of art to another context and also, if it persists through time, of the work of art's viability to survive in the new context. The work of art coming from the Third and Second Worlds thus functions as a "living proof," that the transfer is successful, as it was in the case of Dolly. The transfer is the source of the new global cultural capital, or, as can be stated via Franklin's thoughts: "the transfer is a device for seeding a corporate plan for the production of cultural wealth in the form of cultural-reactors." These works of art are seen as cultural-reactors.

What is the result of the technology of transfer: works of art coming from the Third and Second Worlds are removed from the source of their primary conceptual/inner contextual value. The result is a different genealogy, an "enterprised-up genealogy," (as is the case with Dolly) which as a consequence has to take apart all the genealogical descent systems. Within the Third-and-Second-World newly developed expressions or "enterprised-up genealogy" so to speak, within this new FAST (FOOD) GENEALOGY (as a reference to a McWorld), the power of the art work to generate new ideas and concepts is not important at all, what is important is solely the transfer. With enterprised-up genealogy, via Franklin, newly flexible subjects and their works of art are redesigned and freed from specific cultural contexts, "ready to become newly promiscuous recombined art works." What is also important is the process of abstraction from the root. In such a way, with the technique of abstract transfer, when the artwork is cloned within a new paradigm, it testifies that it is also removed from the "noise" of the root. If it were also to transfer the entire poverty and social relations and the possible intellectual implication(s) that the work of art produces in its original context, it would be very politically demanding, as well as costly. Actually

nobody can predict what kind of match would result if we allowed the “noise” and the “waste” of the Third and Second World real space to come truly closer to, to enter, the Empire. An abstract and evacuated transfer eliminates the risk, producing instead a replica of the desired traits. So it is not so strange that all these works from the Third and Second Worlds are today presented in so-called evacuated and sterile White Modernist Exhibition Cubes. Just think again about Documenta 11. Was not this the main flaw of Documenta 11? At the very least, did not the critics complain that the exhibition would have been perfect if the works had not been put into such an abstract (Modernist Cubes) context? But my point is, that this was the precise externalisation of the inner logic of all these global art projects.

In terms of genealogy, the technique of transfer effects a 90-degree turn, whereby the “descent” is no longer the equivalent of genealogical gravity. With these exhibitions (Documenta 11, “In Searching for Balkania,” etc.) that include new world(s), it is possible to talk about the new cultural capital in the form of a new genetic paradigm of culture. At the heart of such new Internationalism there is, therefore, what Sarah Franklin primarily stated for the sheep Dolly, and I am adapting it for our global, cultural-genetic condition,—“the technique that bypasses the conceptual and artistic capacity of the work of art in its specificity.” The global, for exhibition purposes, “enterprised-up genealogy” functions exactly like cloning in the realm of new biotechnology. Within these new epistemological coordinates of global art, it is less important to know what, again, rephrasing Franklin’s statements about Dolly, art work coming from the Third or Second worlds “is, than what it does.”

For these global exhibitions what is important in re-using art works from the Third or Second Worlds is the process of the compression of genealogical time, offering in such a way an evacuated, sanitized pure context that will thus be constantly perpetuated. Or to put this even more precisely, we see a process of the cannibalisation or rapid assimilation of history and specific art practices. These exhibitions instantiated a new form of genealogy, one that eliminates “conven-

tional genealogical time, order, and verticality.” An over-rapid historicization is what we have here, and the totality set on effaces the traces of its own (im-)possibility.

Dolly is the vanishing mediator, as are works of art from the Third and Second Worlds. Dolly became even more an iconic sign of its vanishing mediation when she passed away in the year 2003.

What I am trying to develop here is an intensification of the politics of reproduction (as in the case of Dollyesque procreation) within a global cultural context that results in an enterprising-up of genealogy and processes similar to cloning. This specific type of cloning, which is firmly tied to technology, enables capital to remove the substance from the artwork. This has implications for the whole idea of enterprise. A process of expropriation is going on that bases difference on a very different bondage, influence, and constellations; the Third and Second Worlds’ difference(s) are seen solely through relations of enterprise and propriety. The exhibitions are owned and the works are branded! Donna Haraway in *Modest Witness @ Second Millennium: Female Man<sup>®</sup> meets OncoMouse<sup>™</sup>* describes the effect of cloning precisely as the construction of a new kinship. She describes kinship as “a question of taxonomy, category and the natural status of artificial entities.” What else are art works from the Third and Second Worlds than artificial entities, half cloned and in the process of forced naturalization within the only “natural and civilized” capitalist First World? What is important to understand is the logic of the process. If we use Hegelian terminology, then the radically contingent struggle for hegemony can be operative only in so far as it represses its radically contingent nature, in so far as it undergoes a minimum of naturalization.

The brand becomes, for Haraway, a kind of hyper-mark. “The parent company,” which is in our case the well-administered global exhibition project, then connects brands and trademarks. As Haraway (through Franklin) points out: these commodity descent lines (and I will add—the Third and Second Worlds’



art works) present different kinds of substantial connection(s), kinship and genealogy which are established solely through trademark(s) or brand(s) as its mark(s). Such exhibitions can be seen therefore as projects that mark a different set of relations, which today are generated and procreated within the deadly influence of corporate techno-science, which radically overdetermines, forms and articulates what is considered global culture.

I can posit the following conclusions:

1. We can say that all these exhibitions have several fathers (and not one single mother, just as with Dolly) or owners who establish the brands. A specific marking now occurs through branding, which establishes a new proprietary relation. And this relation can be seen as the protection of capitalist property rights, which leads to the increasingly privatised ownership of different public projects, exhibitions and etc. All these ownerships—new paternal figures—are obscured by quasi impersonal rules and neutral principles in public, and heavy criticism in private, that make visible how these new fathers are behaving as dictators, imposing the absolute right of decisions. Most exhibitions are named after the father-curator!

2. What is missing in these exhibitions is “a patiently documentary genealogical critique,” as Ewa Płonowska Ziarek in her book *An Ethics of Dissensus. Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* suggests; instead we get flat documentaries. The difference is crucial. In a flat documentary style of presentation it seems that “freedom” can be seen as an easily transferable possession or simply an attribute of the subject. Instead what is needed is a different viewpoint; we have to think here about “freedom” as a situated political praxis (situated knowledge, as Haraway argued) that can possibly create modes of being that are still improbable.

3. The process of cannibalisation and over-rapid historization is also happening within the capitalist First World (nothing is left out of the work of the capitalist machine) in order to give fresh blood to different histories and practices and even more to re-connect different sciences and theoretical works.

We get exhibitions that connect technological inventions and theoretical work and all is shown in an obsessive natural way; it all seems as if it had already been working for centuries. Some exhibitions present such an artificially speeded up lineage of the first capitalist innovations and inventions that it is as if everything had already been here for at least five hundred years. What a powerful civilization and what a splendid science (be sure that here the Third and Second Worlds have nothing to look for!) that was always on the right path—right from the very beginning. In producing this enterprised up continuity, the civilization can therefore survive happily in its neutrality and as well with its democratic invention(s). And beware, if necessary, everything will be defended to the last man! An excellent example is the New Tate Modern institution of art and its ways of dealing with art works; the way the works are presented there is also part of the new system of branding and marketing. Here we see the matrix of old and new, where rooms with titles announce wholly new dimensions or epochs. The social and political dimension is presented as just an event in the course of the new logic of the newly established order, where the social and political “room” is, so to speak, only a stage in a new a-historical art and cultural history.

Da capo senza fine (sounds familiar!): back to civilizational kinship.

In all these articulations theory has a special function and provides a methodology for hegemonic procedures. In the book *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, the authors deal with the notion “oppositional determination.” The notion traces a trajectory from Hegel and Marx to Žižek in searching for a path to look into the location of theory and identities. The intention is to look at the process of theoretical writing and its complicity with power. We can detect a dialectical process between the technology of writing and the politics of publishing. Theory and the industry of theoretical writing are precise pyramidal constructions, carefully safeguarded. Who can publish, when they can and, moreover, who will give the first line of interpretation, all of this is extremely important for the capital machine. Huge symposia, seminars and panels organized to support world exhibitions and

global cultural projects provide for the circulation of always the same theoretical personalities and public opinion makers and represent the reproduction of the capitalist machine in theoretical terms. In relation to capital, theory displays itself as an auto-regenerative hypertext. Just as with cloning, we witness the reproduction of capital in genetic terms. After the procedure of original accumulation, capital in its flexible stadium can circulate "naturally." In such a way theory is not just innocent intellectual work, but is today part of the capitalist machine, enlarging its spiritual as well as its territorial aspirations. Well administered, with the facility of continuously publishing books within American university publishing houses (having remote departments in Western Europe, or vice versa), those who teach and produce knowledge in the capitalist First World have structured access to the printing tools and technical instruments of publishing.

What counts as political and as technical is at stake here. The line of demarcation between the technical and the political places knowledge inside the field of re-territorialized theory. I want to be very precise here: I want to emphasize the location of theory, because it is crucial not to forget one's own complicity in apparatuses of exclusion and inclusion that are constitutive of what may count as the theory/technology of writing and the politics of publishing. Lineage is very important, as is kinship. As Haraway argued, only some "writers" have the semiotic status of authors for any text, since only some actors and "actants" have the status of owners and inventors.

So, the question is not only how to be compatible with theory, or just in synch with a theoretical position, but also how to rethink theory as the struggle for an impossible-possible emancipation.

## II

What is that is not-quite/not-right in the space of the visually dominated

global Art World? Tanja Ostojic (Serbia/Germany)'s video work with the title *Be my guest* (15.58min), 2001, is such an example.

The video-film is based on reedited documentary materials taken from Tanja Ostojic's performance, presented in Rome in 2001. Invited by the curator Bartolomeo Pietromarchi to have a performance at Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, Ostojic decided to arrange an unusual setting for it. First she sent an invitation card in the form of a letter in which she announced her performance as an easy gathering with food, drinks and light talks about art. All to be seen as a very civilized, term used by Ostojic, chat about art; after, in the letter, she announced, she would take a bath in the Jacuzzi bath, installed in the gallery space for this occasion. In the invitation letter she proposed to us to be her guests, "Be my guest" is therefore the title of the performance. Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, as it is possible to hear from the video, amplified the civilized dinner; the opera aria *Viene la sera* (interpreted by Maria Callas) is in the video played throughout the evening. In which way are we to establish the interpretation about this performance/video work?

Relying on philosophy and psychoanalyses, I argued that Tanja Ostojic developed two important approaches toward art, media and performance. The first one is the authentic act of traversing the fantasy, through overidentification, the other is incarnation. Both come from the psychoanalytic heritage. Ostojic developed in her video work the, so-called, Zizekian overidentification with the contemporary art power edifice. If in contemporary art most things are about sex and corruption, and about libidinal/sexual fantasies and empowerment relationships, then Ostojic acted precisely in a way to overtly stage this phantasmatic scenario that is discussed, incited, implied, but not made overtly public. Ostojic in her performance/video took on the role of a "society bitch." "Be my guest" means exactly to invite the curators, and all protagonists from near and afar, involved in the Art Institution, to perform the obscene games, conducted in the background of the Art Edifice, in an overtly visible, public, way. Ostojic staged "the questioning of the phantasmatic scenarios of the contemporary art world"

publicly in the gallery space. Acting in such a way she performed, according to the Lacanian vocabulary, the authentic act of traversing the fantasy. In short, if the art power edifice is relying on obscenity and promiscuity, and, if this is what the story about art and its power is, then the proposed process of overidentification (being a public "society bitch") exactly over-displayed these processes in the public realm.

And what about incarnation? This overidentification is performed in front of our eyes in "flesh (in-carne) and 'hot' blood:" Ostojic and the curator discussed about art and life and lay in the Jacuzzi bath naked, while drinking champagne, coming almost to a situation of public coitus interruptus. With the previously mentioned curator and with the critic Ludovico Pratesi (who joined them, after understanding literally Ostojic's invitation: be my guest), Tanja Ostojic in the Jacuzzi bath performed a radicalized version of Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita!* What was only incited in the golden past of the art nouvelle vague is today put totally visible in the public gallery space.

The questions about the work stays open, although it forces us to think not only "what is art," but what we, as artists, and critical intellectual activists, are compelled to do, in order to change the state of things? Especially, as it is today definitely obvious that, the effective, but simple critical avant-garde assertion, used in the past, about the Art Institution being too much empowered and obscene, is not enough!

#### References

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