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BORDERS AND OBJECTS: REPRESENTING THE
GEOPOLITICAL IN NEW WORLD ART HISTORIES,

1990-2010

by

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Borders and Objects: Representing the Geopolitical in New World Art Histories, 1990-2010

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Abstract

Several contemporary art historians have been interested in exploring how their discipline could respond to the increasing globalisation of knowledge and information by encompassing global perspectives into the methodologies that underpin their approaches to art historiography. This dissertation aims to explore how, in developing their new approaches to world art history, they have drawn on a range of natural and social sciences, thus enabling their work to be placed in a wider social, political and indeed global context. While their individual approaches are many and varied it is important to identify commonalities between them so as to highlight unifying approaches across such diversity.

The dissertation begins with literature review of the key concepts I want to explore. The work of the 19th century historian, Aby Warburg is highlighted to draw attention to his early pioneering attempts to provide an intercultural perspective to art history. Recent attempts to develop new approaches to world art history are then analysed. These include works by David Carrier, Ben-Ami Scharfstein, David Summers, Esther Pasztory and John Onians. The thesis concludes with a discussion on the recent exhibition at the British Museum entitled *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. The dissertation will show that despite the diverse methodologies used by all of these writers and the challenges of the different media employed, all utilise concepts of borders and objects in an explicitly geopolitical context.

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

The research underpinning this thesis and the writing thereof were undertaken solely by the author.

During the past five years the author gave several presentations on aspects of his research to departmental seminars.

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Signed Fang-Lin Hou

Date January 23, 2013

Borders and Objects: Representing the Geopolitical in World Art History, 1990-2010

Introduction

Thesis statement

The last two decades have been a very productive period for scholars and researchers in world art history. From 1990 to 2010 several prominent art historians have published works on art history, and all have claimed to have moved towards a new vision of, or have developed a new approach to, art historiography. It seems as if over this period, these art historians were making a concerted effort to answer the important question of ‘how can we develop strategies of “worlding-art” or “going-global” in art historical research?’ Given the plausible linking of this question to future developments in art historiography (articulated by Elkins)*, I think it is important that there should be a significant place in our current study of world art history to consider the influences of, and problems arising from, geopolitics and how globalisation and anti-globalisation (or localism) influence how the world appears within in a framework of contesting ideas and their interactions.

Defining world art history

In an age of global museums and information exchanges and technologies, world art history is defined by the concept that, as in the best of the humanities studies, it should incorporate an intention for practitioners to travel between different geographical loci and cultural contexts using different methodologies.

Globalisation has been a tendency since the sixteenth century, and the present world accommodates institutions of global museums and their collections of artefacts from all important cultures of the world. According to Mieke Bal, interdisciplinary movements in between various disciplines tends

* (Elkins 2007).

to generate a productive condition which, comparable to a picaresque travel, can be justified by the mere act of transversing alone^{*}. A hybridising elasticity can be perceived in art history that concerns not so much concrete facts about individual art objects but the general critical condition of translation that emphasises deft moves between language and visuality. An appropriate methodology should improvise itself spontaneously as in the situation of each individual's encounter with other cultures, or his or her learning of foreign languages[†]. Like a direct confrontation between theoretical subjects and objects in a critical relationship, the concept of a travelling methodology suggests the ideal of a humanities without boundaries.

To understand the full range of possible parallels or possible explanations for them requires a set of methodologies and discourses that change with changing contexts and environments. For this reason it is not surprising that world art history has not presented itself as a fully defined or described field, with an agreed set of methodologies to be followed by aspiring art historians. With regard to this, it can be argued that, for a growing world art history community, an interdisciplinary methodology has become its traveling concept. World art history has emerged within the framework of contemporary art historiography, which, apart from other humanities, natural and social sciences, also includes women's studies and cultural studies. Thus a writer on world art history today may draw on such diverse disciplines as economics, political theory, ecology, post-colonial and gender studies in approaching their research. Indeed, methodologically, the traveling concept encourages individual ways ahead to be devised because the topic of world art history reveals dimensions that a more specialist or uni-disciplined approach cannot ably encompass when pursued as separate fields[‡].

Methodology

^{*} (Bal 2002: 16)

[†] (Bal 2002: 8)

[‡] (Onians 2011: 128)

To underscore the difference created by humanities with a traveling concept, Mieke Bal suggests that, for example, a performative aspect in cultural studies can help to overcome the destructive divide between apparently incompatible world-views or incommensurate senses of history*. World art history's methodological focus on interdisciplinary dynamics makes a definite move away from any dogmas or fixed hierarchy of values and into a mode of communication or translation between cultural groups or entities. It is my intention in this thesis to capture this characteristic of world art history and to interpret its geopolitical significance: world art history can become an effort to eschew cultural imperialism and to embrace cultural diplomacy as long as it conceptually appears in the form of a communication or a translation. My method is to analyse how the meaning of geopolitics can be perceived in a traveling concept of world art history as it is currently practiced, especially where it uses metaphors of borders and objects to project meanings that can be expressed as administering a cultural diplomacy and practicing a living study of cultural objects.

Interactivity thrives in changes in the current climate of information and image traffic and technology. According to some recent studies in global cultural politics, interactivity also gains a growing currency in a world of networked societies, not only across national borders but also in opposition to dominant ideologies†. Transcultural public diplomacy, if and when demonstrated by world art historians, can generate soft powers that mobilise the power of attraction, and create and disseminate 'mimes' spread among members of intersecting networks‡. A part of cultural geopolitics includes the business of differentiating between propaganda and information, and cultural diplomacy utilises exchange of information to attain the purpose of cultivating mutual understanding. Through the relation of a mediated, two-way act of communication, borders between different sociocultural and geopolitical entities, areas and states may become at once acknowledged and defied in substance.

* (Bal 2002: 15-16)

† (Topic and Sciortino 2012: 16)

‡ (Ibid: 16)

Good cultural analysis endeavours to understand objects through their own terms*. But a living study of cultural objects has the central meaning that objects are studied to throw lights on such issues as cultural relevancy, namely their existence in their culture of origin, and not so much as to draw attention to themselves. Cultural relevancy of cultural objects plays out most clearly through the processes of conserving and restoring the history of their reception, which essentially re-qualify and even recreates the objects by alerting and awakening us to their potentials of agency†. A living study of cultural objects necessarily questions any strict division between subject and object, active and passive, insofar as it describes social practices and material life associated with cultural objects that activate their power of agency. All in all, a living study of cultural objects aims to bring to light the continuous modifications that cultural objects have gathered in their material existence in time.

Objective

This thesis was written as a surveying inquiry to identify recent authors in English who have developed individual approaches, or syntheses of methods, for their own projects of a world art history. I have included authors for this survey whose works were chosen for two specific reasons. Firstly, their works in world art history have clearly shown the innovation of departing from traditional, discipline-specific, methodologies. Secondly, their writings exhibit a sensitivity to the geopolitical meanings or significance of borders and objects, thus facilitating a description and discussion of the extent to which these authors were informed by cultural geopolitics, especially its factors of cultural diplomacy and living object.

Structural Outline

* (Bal 2002: 9-10)

† (Etienne 2012: 5-6)

Structurally, my thesis comprises a theoretical review of the key important concepts which I want to explore in the later chapters, followed by analytical studies on six recent attempts to develop an approach to a world art history, by the art historians referred to above, each governed by their own particular vision of how to explore and ultimately answer the above question. While I have concentrated on the works of these key contemporary art historians I have also included a chapter on the late 19th century art historian, Aby Warburg, as it seems to me that his work, especially *Mnemosyne*, is a significant precursor to the later writers in how he has attempted to explore the concept of inter-culturalness in art history. The thesis is divided into three parts so as to organise the material in a way that best facilitates the discussion and enables me to draw out important comparisons and contrasts.

Part 1 (Chapters 1-2)

The first part, consisting of Chapters 1 and 2, presents and discusses the context for the main topic. After this introduction, the opening chapter engages with the idea of geopolitics as it is revealed in a literature overview. In so doing I have laid out my assumptions on theories that relate most directly to the concepts that I deem as central to my project: geopolitics, competing views on world art and culture, and historiography for a realistic world art history. The geo-political strain in world art history finds its theoretical counterparts in critical discourses on internationalisation of contemporary art scene. Therefore a ‘geography’ of current debates and discussions in world art history would comprise those in the directions of both intercultural exchanges and postcolonial / feminist reflections*. Considered in terms of historical writing, the former stresses a common base of humanity which would operate in support of the validity of an approach of transnational analogies while the latter asserts an essential conceptual alterity or incommensurability in

* (Elkins 2007; Zijlmans and Van Damme 2008)

conceptualising and defining art that would, however, effectively discount and detract from any history or interpretation of art with globalist inclinations.

My study of a historical prototype of world art studies is found in Chapter 2, where I embark on an exploration of Warburg's *Image Atlas*, or known as *Mnemosyne*. With Image Atlas Warburg shows shifting territories for artistic motifs and styles, not as autonomous events but in implication of transformed collective mentalities. Chapter two traces contemporary interpretations of Aby Warburg, a predecessor to today's many scholars of international art history, and his masterful series of image maps, named *Mnemosyne* to bring to mind the symbolic meaning of cultural memory. The geopolitical context in Warburg's work emerges through his iconological interpretations of non-European nations and their culture. Although these are always projected through Warburg's system of metaphoric polarities, there is far less indication of a fixed hierarchy of different races and cultures than of a social Darwinism based on the turnover of technologies. Warburg's image map portrays a geography of interactions between different cultures, each described as a type of collective thinking.

Part II (Chapters 3 and 4)

The second part, Chapters 3 and 4, studies diverse ways towards a personal vision in world art history. The chapters review individually authored histories by David Carrier, Ben-Ami Scharfstein, David Summers, and Esther Pasztory. The differences in their chosen approaches yield different sets of perimeters and criteria with which they define the borders of their concept categories and particularly the objects they study. Each espouses a methodology, or art world view, modelled respectively along the concepts of cultural aesthetics, anthropology of art, phenomenological philosophy and material culture.

Chapter three continues my account of new world art histories as a geopolitical mapping of art forms. Again art in context of a shared human nature forms the central premise in a pair of

books written by philosophers-turned-art-historians, Ben-Ami Scharfstein's *Art without Borders* (2009) and David Carrier's *A World Art History and Its Objects*, but the messages are more spiritual than naturalistic. In their conceptual maps of world art, the prioritised figures are the borders containing multiple national traditions and multi-cultural interactions across them. For them the way of writing a world art history should develop along the lines of practicing mutual regard and communicating through non-imperialist translations, whereby the emphasis of reform is placed on a balance between representing culturological independence and interconnectedness.

Chapter four covers another pair of works by two world art historians who have chosen in their maps of the art world to demarcate heterogenous spaces of art not so much along borders as around individual objects in culture. David Summers's *Real Spaces* (2003) constructs categorical 'regions' based on the situational knowledge of his objects whose formal features aesthetically reflect and recreate their spatial context of origin. Esther Pasztor's *Thinking with Things* (2005) similarly proposes a decentralised and historically informed use of aesthetics as the ideal tool to map forms and their social contexts globally. Both students of late George Kubler, Summers and Pasztor, as seen in the works cited here, share an interest in a universal history of art that manage to unite ethnographical and formal aspects in its discussion of historicity of artificially made objects.

Part III (Chapters 5 and 6)

The third part, Chapters 5 and 6, presents two examples of alternative models conceptualising world art history.

Chapter five analyses John Onians's *Atlas of World Art* (later retitled *Art Atlas*) in which the Earth appears as the common ground for a (structured) materialist and environmental-determinist view of art making throughout human history. Chapter five discusses the use of geographical imageries (landscapes, maps) in representing a new world art history. Onians uses natural and, to a lesser

degree, socio-political borders as frames of space and time which he then makes available for historically projections of artistic production and ownership, including graphics, images and texts. With regard to the above, it can however be said that the apparently abstracted and objectified messages conveyed by the *Atlas* design are informed and fully aligned by current cartographical theories and histories as expounded in geographical and cartographical studies*. John Onians's edited *Atlas of World Art* combines multi-author accounts of art historical events with cultural-historical mapping, to the various merits and shortcomings of the latter format.

Neil MacGregor's narratives written for the exhibition *A World Art History in 100 Objects* are delivered to his readers/audiences in three simultaneously published platforms/ channels: printed book, radio broadcast and online multimedia archive, successfully complementing the globalising theme of his messages. The concluding Chapter six seeks to find and analyse geopolitical mapping in the museological and exhibitionary context. For an updated example that would reflect the current trends in this field, I have chosen to focus on '*A History of the World in 100 Objects*' that took place at British Museum (and beyond through the reach of media) in the year 2010 through 2011. With a layered and medially diversified presentation of 100 selected art and visual objects from throughout the world, Neil MacGregor and his team achieve a versatile expression of many morphological inventions including conceptual and physical mappings mentioned above, and its proposed ideal of museum networking suggests the possibility of dynamically mapping and mirroring the geopolitical ecology in the real world.

* (Wood 1993; Cosgrove 1999; Moretti 2003; Pickles 2004; Cosgrove 2006)

Chapter 1. Geo-history of art as epistemic politics

I. Introduction - world art history in the modern world as a field of geopolitics

What appears to be the mission, or the purpose, of many of today's scholars and researchers in world art history, both in developing and exploring academic theory and in actual historical analysis? Whitney Davis has argued that it is 'worlding the art', that is, making art history into an enterprise which is taught and practised globally (Davis 2010). Given the potentially international and intercultural scope for its expansion, it is important to explore the extent to which geopolitics contributes to recent discussions of world art history.

Traditionally geography has been defined as a 'science that deals with the earth and its life', which also includes descriptions of the 'systematic arrangement of constituent elements' (Kaufmann 2004: 1). As seen from the viewpoint of social sciences, geopolitics is about the relationship between geography (discourses, entities and objects) and the political. More generally understood, geopolitics may be broadly stated to involve sociocultural concepts of identity and differences. Geopolitical culture shows a state making sense of its identity as well as its encounters with other states or political entities in the world. Thinking about a nation's geopolitical culture takes a range of other factors into consideration: its geographical location, historical tradition, institutional situation, and political culture. When conceived as a cultural inscription of space and spatiality, geography is all about power and knowledge, and thus effectively about geopolitics. (ÓTuthail 2005: 71-72).

The term geopolitics has had its history only since 1899, when it was first used by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén. As a concept, it has seen many previous incarnations in history. John Agnew describes the 'three ages of geopolitics' that situate traditional understandings of geopolitics within a much larger history of geopolitical ontology and discourse. Firstly, from the 16th to the 18th century, a form of civilisational geopolitics imagined a world view that

indicated that the world was organised by a hierarchy of civilisations. Later in the age of imperialism and militarism, science including biology, geography and racialist ethnography were used to support causes of domination and territorial expansionism. Finally, in the post Cold War era, the geopolitical world is perceived to be divided into antagonistic blocks of countries, with a ‘Third World‘ acting as a ground of contests and proxy wars between the two (Agnew 2003).

The concept of geopolitics is ingrained into, and part of, world art history today, to the extent that it offers an approach for those with an active interest in the field, to develop an approach for mutual involvement and communication between scholars, perhaps, even leading to a ‘unity of diversity’ that, as suggested in the introduction in this dissertation, remains a valid and valuable idea for today’s historians. Geopolitics, moreover, studies issues about borders and objects. In a world that is full of coexisting sovereign states, geographical views of political issues have important implications considering how they are relevant to people’s awareness and their ways of life.

Modern views suggest that defence, security, justice and finance have formed the major functions of a nation state since medieval and early modern times. This is especially true for states in the democratic tradition where the authority and power of political bodies depend on a government’s ability to implement effective control of available resources and the coordination of actors within its territory, in other words to develop and maintain delivery infrastructures via the logistics of spatial and temporal organisation and management. To the perception of the citizens in a state, the bordered space of its territory can thus appear as a symbol of trust and material stability (Dijkink and Knippenberg 2001: 13-14).

Current concepts of political geography show an aspect of territoriality in which a state’s citizens express a sense of belonging which incorporates the unique identity, culture, and legitimacy which arise from membership of that political body. Nationalistic versions of this conceptual territoriality often take the ideological form of ‘historical territory’. Geopolitics sees the idea of historical territory as a product of social construction, as well as an objectified consolidation

of national identity, which is situated in the natural world (Dijkink and Knippenberg 2001; Hague 2004). Having identified and briefly considered the common grounds that have been suggested, as above, to link history, culture, geography and politics, one is led to consider and discuss how these ideas have intersected in different interesting ways to help customise and critique the genre that is known as world art history.

As a concept, territoriality has had its share in structuring the discourse of world art history. For example, in the contrast between historical localism and globalism, the latter often seeks an alternative to territoriality and linguistic accents which are linked with specific locations and ethnic communities. In a similar way, the discussion and analysis of art and culture are equally susceptible to the same contrast.

Scholars such as Benedict Anderson believe that national identities are the central element of the whole political system and therefore render a whole range of political activities as autonomous, both on the international and on the local levels (Dijkink and Knippenberg 2001: 32-33). Sovereign powers find an agency in creating and differentiating these identities, in information transfers through both national and international communication networks (Ibid: 34).

As a result, the production of a national identity arises as a consequence of a successful state establishing and consolidating its territory along with other developments in the political front, such as the development and establishment of health, welfare and education systems. Thus identity can be defined as the sense that people make of themselves through their subjective feelings based on their everyday experiences and wider social relations. As part of a state's political culture, some of this process of identity building arrives in the form of a body of knowledge, created by geographical science, and other ways of depicting the world, that describes the nation state as the space in which their citizens live. In this sense an individual's need of objectifying knowledge acts as a significant link in the political system. Hence, political scholars such as Hobsbawm have increasingly come to conclusions that validate links between national identity and the political wellbeing and other

developments, as above, in any state. Identity signifies subjectively one's allegiance or sense of belonging to a nation's political body. The changing status of borders and objects in world art history can often be explained through the production of this identity.

II. Territories and geo-history

2.1 Mapping territories in world art history

The renewed interest in the visual presentation of the geo-history of art has resulted in a recurring use of mapping, both as real maps and as metaphors, for communicational and representational purposes. Mapping involves using signs in such ways as to represent iconic, linguistic, and geological features, so much so that they can form the conceptual framework or underpinnings in epistemes and discourses, that is, by giving a new perspective to existing bodies of knowledge as well as facilitating new approaches to scholarly research and discourse (Kaufmann 2004). The idea of local differentiation, that is, geography determining the course of a culture, is traditionally reinforced and its relevance to discourses in general art history was apparent by the end of eighteenth century (Ibid : 3). Crossing between the humanities and the social sciences, a geopolitical history of art inspires new stances and opens up new perspectives into historical accounts of art written around the world. Mapping as an explicatory tool promotes a visual rhetoric which represents art history, among other things, in variably sized units of space that are comparable to domains or territories shown in political histories. Thus embedded in territoriality, the technology of mapping speaks 'a benign language of geographical taxonomies' (Rogoff 2000: 75 ff).

James Elkins's pioneering project examines these 'shapes of art history' (Elkins 2002). Elkins discusses common types of mental maps and their distribution in art history, where it interacts with a practice of automatically arranging unknown artefacts into periods, using the familiar visual rhetorics of constellations, landscapes and diagrams. As far as the history of reception to artefacts is concerned, Elkins concludes that, in these cases, the periodisation always

reflects those found in histories of Western art. The periods that command more historical weight would duly appear proportionately larger in the overall picture. This can be seen, for example, in Panofsky's view of history, which comprises, in equal prominence, the mega-periods of Classical, Medieval, Renaissance and Modern art, in a well familiarised and broadly adopted model (Elkins 2002: 20).

In relation to any topical discussion in this dissertation, an important fact to consider is that models of art historical mapping are in many ways subjective; their sizes and proportions vary considerably as they are adopted and modified by individual historians. However this is especially true with regards to mental maps conceived by scholars of traditionally defined non-Western arts, who are bound to see different emphases and use different frameworks to organise their inquiries. For example, Elkins has suggested that, in a world art map by an African art specialist, Saharan Rock art, Egyptian art, Ife and Benin art may occupy a larger acreage than those of Europe, Asia and Americas put together (Elkins 2002: 22-23).

Mapping art history therefore involves dividing time into territories in addition to those in space, and the resulting periodisation can now mean some sort of assumed identity with an intersection between historical styles and geographical territories in art history (Kaufmann 2010: 3). However, like any border disputes, controversies on the cutoff dates surrounding the onset of any proposed period, or indeed its end, require resolution by historians so as to reach a settlement over the middle ground. Just as there are global superpowers and regional powers in the arena of world geopolitics, Elkins's project reveals how, methodologically, world art history still comprises such groupings as mega periods that are universal history's responses to art (Elkins 2002 16-20). It may be said that world art has been 'discovered' by some kind of historical mapping, a process that automatically arranges unknown artefacts into periods. Elkins' project cites an important example: Panofsky's contribution by designating such periods as 'major periods' and 'Mega periods' which are certainly central and instrumental for understanding his concept of history. The same approach

reappears in Alfred Barr's diagram which by explicating the stylistic lineages leading to cubism and abstract art had become almost definitive in status despite plenty of alternative opinions existing. Examples throughout Elkins's book show how a formalist approach to periodisation has consistently influenced and dominated art historiography (first in the West then the world over) in the modern era, exactly in the way many now conceptualise art history (Ibid : 12-15).

The Renaissance is the mega object in the landscape of western art history (Iversen and Melville 2010: 15). Advancing the analogy of history to bordered territories, Elkins argues that art history may be said to present, simultaneously, two antithetical tendencies: atomism, which has as its scope individual artists or individual works of art, and monism, which insists on seeing the collective behind every art. While atomism often dominates research in art history, monism is required in teaching. To compare an imagined overview of all the traditional academic activities that have since been known in art history, to a landscape, globalisation of the discipline reflects the one extreme of entire history of art collapsing into one single period; the other extreme of art history breaking into atomic bits where no borders can be spoken of (Elkins 2002: 13-15). Generally speaking, these extremes are avoided: in reality, most inquiries perform contextualisation within limits where a joined effort is attempted to bring both disciplinary and interdisciplinary interests together, essentially a convergence mixing and organising of methodological options through negotiation.

2.2 The geo-history of art

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (Kaufmann 2008) analyses how space and time maps are compatible with research in art history, comparable to their use in geography. For him, reflection on the material environment constitutes a much welcomed grounding for positivist thinking or approaches influenced by scientific research. Geo-history of art, or *Kunstgeographie*, can be trusted to reveal the fundamental features of the geography of art like the earth's surface, in an effort to relate

geographic space to artistic tradition. Paul Frankl (1886-1958) expanded his idea of national identity to incorporate various components of *Kunstgeographie*: namely, mapping, anthropological geography, national and racial distinctions. Among post (second world) war publications, Kaufmann counts Otto Pevsner's 'Englishness of English art' as among a later offshoot of the same trend of geographical essentialism in art history (Kaufmann and Pilliod 2005: 4-5).

The term 'space of knowledge' isn't merely metaphorical as it happens in the field of general history. The connection to geography is meaningful, especially as it is explored by French scholars of the Annales School. Fernand Braudel is best known for his work on Mediterranean studies, where his method of *longue durée* (long term evolution) puts into focus both the spatial political and social conditions required to understand the material conditions for the production and consumption of knowledge. Thus the application of Braudel's method to historical studies of world art actually relates to both the *longue durée* of the geographical setting and the shorter period environmental setting for individual historical events (Kaufmann and Pilliod 2005: 8). *Longue durée* deals with such issues as the impact of geographical setting on creation of art as historical happenings in human society (Ibid : 6-8). In George Kubler's well known *Shape of Time*, arguments were made by seeing objects of art very much within the rubric of geographical spaces. Art historical problems and arguments are put into perspective by their locations of metropolises, centres or peripheries in a geographical-historical 'landscape'. Such influences from human geography are detectable in the way they bring out and highlight the point of dynamic interactions at the heart of art history, of the dual emphases of the structural and the causal processes.

2.3 Maps and visual cultures

Spatial representation of chronologies or histories have been popular, both as illustrations and as history maps in their own right (see Onians 2008). Kaufmann's historiography makes it clear that the geographical elements in art history are well documented, as a semantic tradition, since ancient

Greek times at the earliest (Kaufmann 2004: 18-20). Other genres descending from the era included topographies and later variants such as historical guidebooks. As a new development for the discipline, geographical history can also reflect changes in the geographical through time (Ibid : 4-5). Kaufmann has pointed out that, looking from the older disciplines of *Kunstgeographie* and human geography, two separate sets of cartographical meanings emerge for our attention: respectively, those driven by concerns with sources of art materials and those driven by concerns with origins of enunciation for art styles. This development, targeting studies of art production and circulation, concentrates in spatial terms of frontiers and export routes and has possibly inspired a 'post-Nationalistic' geography which is exemplified by borders of networking activities in between shifting and multiple centres of communication (Kaufmann and Pilliod 2005: 13).

Irit Rogoff's book *Terra Infirma* explores the topic of visual cultures inspired by geography, which expands along the concepts of borders, mapping and geographical area studies. There is presumed to be a language of cartography which produces effects semiotically. Rogoff offers several examples in contemporary art that more than enforce the fact that a map can sometimes encode material memories but not so explicitly for its users as to cross the borders divided by political actions and consequences. The reality of conflicting cultures in multi-ethnic or ex-colonial societies does not necessarily endorse strict divisionism but rather a complex situation of cultural overlay that appears as a 'double consciousness' (Rogoff 2000: 75,103-104).

The cartographical experience communicates to the mind meanings that are objectified with positivist facts and details. Where maps are reckoned as consisting of ciphers, the signs incorporate, but are not limited to, physical and political references, such as political boundaries, cities, airports, etc. These 'features' served their function both in or as part of historical narratives. Histories thus became geography. This statement is particularly true where the phenomenon of overlaid histories is captured through the medium of maps. History recounts numerous events of physical surveying and mapping activities before the era of globalisation which more often than not

were an occasion for a 'complex meeting of the world' and which, in turn, yielded complicated and consequential results. These explorations for geographical surveys were frequently colonialist and imperialist in nature insofar as they had effectively transformed non-European terrains into a territory of European knowledge (Rogoff 2000: 91-96).

The scope aspect of maps embodies what Irit Rogoff calls 'strategies of dislocation' because mapping, as in the scientific setting of linear perspective, has much to do with physically and ideologically positioning subjects and objects in a cultural context of image making. As a way of rational control this dislocation shows the action of 'mapping out' that has rhetorical meanings of displacement and exclusion within a constructed system of 'seeing' (Rogoff 2000: 94). From post-colonialism to feminism and post-structuralism, mappings as a metaphor of visibility have been long examined and debated in contemporary discourses of art history. Scholars like Irit Rogoff and Thomas Kaufmann have helped spell out some of geopolitical implications of mapping and other cartographical techniques, that mapping has deep epistemological underpinnings and, as a means of representations, they are as much a science as a cultural construction of visibility.

Featuring cognitive framing and fixing and a systematised image of reality, the mapped view amply suggests an encompassing of the world, although it performs no positioning of the sort that puts an observer in a projected perspective. They can construct relationships, unities and divisions, depending on the ideological context and agenda at hand: an Eurocentric mapping will show the Americas, Asia and Australasia marginalised, flanking on the side (King 1996: 21). 'To be off the map' is equivalent to losing recognition and significance where position or existence is based on such social criteria (Bal 2003: 21). Cognitive moves associated with maps like framing or mapping out deploy rhetorics whose agendas are not immediately recognised, but their geopolitical implications have not escaped criticism for their fundamental and wide-ranging consequences in the fields of natural, social and human sciences.

2.4 Image of the world as a worldview

The human desire to imagine the world in a representational way has been a confirmed feature in most cultures (Blaunt, Stea et al. 2003). Denis Cosgrove, writing on the topic of geographical vision, further notes how, looking back into the prehistory of modern geography, ancient locational knowledge has firmly taken the shape of an ordered classification system. The three parts in the spatial hierarchy in Renaissance cosmological science - cosmography, geography, chorography -- correspond to universal, global and local patterns of nature and are in agreement with the concept that the world is a unitary creation of Divine handiwork (Cosgrove 2008: 15-17). Geographical inscription, in the form of both mapping and describing, can engender both material and imaginative associations: reasoned images of mathematical diagrams, globes, maps and paintings reveal and represent the orders that people have found, organically or constructively, to belong in what they think is the body of the world.

In connecting to the Western tradition of local or landscape views, Cosgrove suggests the same geometric consistency prevails in chorographic visions as well as in those that entrench popular perceptions of cosmography and geography. As he has painstakingly shown with regard to the figurative meaning of perspective in Renaissance art and architecture, the illusion of distance it achieves applies a mathematical logic that presumably matches the way our eyes work and the symmetry in which the human body appears to itself (Cosgrove 2008: 25). Since, much like geography and cosmography, chorography much depends on the technical coordination of geometrical perspective, it has had the same appeal of mimicking a world picture*. As part of a world, embodied and engineered by human presences and appetites, landscapes, as a geographical representation, have become available to use for managing appropriation. Ever since the Renaissance, landscapes, territories and boundaries imagined this way have attracted surveyors' and

* Geometric perspective as a cultural technology is traced in history by Hubert Damisch in his work on the origin perspective (Damisch 1994).

artists' morphological eye turning nature into physiographic understandings (Ibid : 56). Following in a geopolitical sense, the three become related: mapping, epistemology and the cultural construction of visibility. Mapping is thus an activity that has considerable cultural and political significance, insofar as territoriality regularly receives its manifestation in the finding of one's location in one's consciousness. Certainly the long consolidated connection between mapping and conceptual grounding has also found application in the philosophy of epistemological theory.

In an essay called 'The Age of World Picture' Heidegger tries to account for the prominent place that spatial thinking has come to occupy in social and historical sciences. He offers a literal definition of representation (*Vorstellung*) as 'setting in place before', and so characterises the act of representation as inseparable from the meaning of objectification (Heidegger 1977: 120ff). For his theorising of how knowledge is generally presented, Heidegger also includes another important term, *Grundriss* (Ground Plan) which denotes a fundamental design that serves to open up a vista (Ibid : 118). Along with the sense of an expanded outlook, there is also a clear indication of progressing time associated with this term of projection. In spatiotemporal systems, present or progressive time can take the form of representing measurements in internal and external realms. Progressive and continuous time thus introduces both local and global space. The universe is projected as an object system that permits both contextual uniqueness and a 'continuity of type.'

Heidegger defines research culture in natural and historical sciences by how they apply a ground plan and the rigour of its application which are poised to transform world phenomena into a fixed and stable 'object'. In historical and archaeological sciences, for example, an 'objective method' can be carried out where events are measured in spatiotemporal magnitudes of motion. By setting the ground plan forwards and outwards, the knowing process reinforces modern science's claims to the cause of research rigour via a structuring grid of spatiotemporal coordinates which projects and secures an object-sphere in the field of historical sciences (Heidegger 1977: 118-120). The process of particularisation underscores the distinctive character of each specialised field which

organises and circumscribes ongoing surveying activity into an institution of science. In what may be considered as a conquest of the world of unknown phenomena, it is the specialised methodology practised in each field that scans knowledge objects mapped in individual 'object-spheres' and transforms them into the fabric of institutionalised science (Ibid: 123-125).

It comes as no surprise, then, that Heidegger considers the conquest of the world, like an image, to be the definitive event of modern age (Heidegger 1977: 131). When human has become an absolute subject in relation to all and has assumed the subjective position, the world's diversity appears mediated, and in its seemingly objective manner, like a picture. Now Heidegger sees that this *a priori* representation of knowledge has generated a large consequence in the field of anthropology, which he considers as moral-aesthetic humanism with a worldview that is becoming totalised through the vision of scientific investigation. When he writes that 'humanism first arises where the world becomes picture' (Ibid : 133), he expresses his apprehensions about modern technologies of communication. For him the modern man is now in the position of living through the extremes of his experience. However, he is, subsequently, also in ever greater danger that the self-centred, subjective 'power of calculating, planning and moulding of all things' may threaten to obscure some of his ability to see any alternative worldview at all (Ibid : 135). Heidegger implies an outlook of irony here since, at its most extended and detailed, the subject-object worldview would rather bring the perils of losing all meaningful touch with the world's substances.

III. Critical theories and revisions of geopolitics in art history

3.1 Area studies and compartmentalised fields of knowledge

Geography of knowledge is concerned with the reality of how various countries represent or project their presence, both within their national borders and internationally. Successful accomplishment of this requires specialist expertise in firstly, organising and then operationalising knowledge. Before the era of globalisation, the 'intellectual trajectory' in which knowledge was historically produced

and transferred moved geographically from west to east, and this has made and has continued to make the West the 'place of enunciation' for most human and social sciences (Harootunian 2000: 26).

In *History's Disquiet*, Harry Harootunian sees a profound problem with the traditional field of regional studies that has long lost its intellectual efficacy in the era of globalisation. A chapter titled 'Tracking the Dinosaur' focuses on established organisations of Asian Studies, an error and a limitation that he believes affects the industry of world history as a whole. For Harootunian the problem with area studies has arisen partly in relation to its outdated view of geopolitics which it has inherited from its direct predecessor, namely, wartime information services, leading to what he describes as the problem of parochialism. This myopic and narrow scope has led to a flawed format for organising knowledge being formed. The resultant specialisation and divisionism have led to a fragmented base of knowledge and because of this, many of scholars of Asian Studies are still predominantly fixated on, and therefore restricted by, frameworks overlapping those of national borders. He describes the resultant geopolitical subtext of this as that which is found with the 'Englishman's account of his world which still tried to masquerade its particularistic conceits as universal truth' and 'the privileged part standing in for the unenvisioned whole' (Harootunian 2000: 7). Harootunian's analyses show that the latter constantly prefer the older focus on individual nation-states over area or inter-area studies. Since its inception around World War II the academic programme of area studies has become a thoroughly monopolised institution that is, however, devoid of any organic and integrated worldview. Consequently, those responsible for the bulk of world history today are plagued by a 'reluctance to cross the administrative / geopolitical and disciplinary grids that partition knowledge' (Ibid : 26-27). Despite the history and extent of such area studies, the required philosophy and ethics which are needed to respond to globalisation are absent. In his view, then, it is fitting to see to Asian Studies, as an intellectual relic, comparable to dinosaurs from other times and worlds.

Problems persist in crossing these administrative, geopolitical and disciplinary grids that partition knowledge. Such grids imply a dominant tradition in the social sciences and the humanities. The tradition enables the perception of an ‘axiomatic duality’, that is, an essentialist and totalised East and West, except that the West is complete while the East is seen as lacking and not complete (Harootunian 2000: 27). Harootunian rightly sees this as basically a problem with categories both epistemological and organisational. Its persistence has since caused delay and obstacles in assimilating areas into new theories of knowledge and changed views to end their isolation. This results in part of the world and its history remaining essentially incomplete until they have been “conquered” by the West and subsequently absorbed into the West’s view, despite their differentness. Harootunian compares this to a means of expediency which has outlived its original purpose to become a monopoly (Ibid : 28).

In a critique of an earlier, radicalised form of postcolonialism, Harootunian has described its exponents as suffering from a myopia, given that the latter are incapable of looking beyond the borders of their regional history (Harootunian 2000: 48). In part driven by global capital, colonial and de-territorialising experiences are deemed comparable. Postcolonial critics write pithily about how capitalist experience was a totalising one, affecting every aspect of the society, but fail themselves to bring out how the scenario of power and colonialism will play out differently in each historical, geographical and cultural context. In his view, the adherents of postcolonialism have rather made the error of eliding homogeneity with universalism (Ibid : 47-49), investing it with a desire to explain the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised which can be understood with more sensitivity when explained in relation to the geopolitical reality in which the knowledge of regional histories will eventually be created and consumed. Culturally imagining ‘an uncontaminated anti-colonial nationalism’ is a trait shared not only by those with a colonisation in their historical background; it can also arise in the mind of any nation that is negatively affected by the hegemony of capitalist modernism (Ibid: 49).

Ceaseless interaction between modernity and everydayness everywhere produces 'refigurations'. De-emphasising the usual textual based orientation of cultural studies requires one to gain sensitivity to these reconfigurations and materialities such as those given, Harootunian argues, principally in political and economical experiences (Harootunian 2000: 56).

The study of everydayness that produces the 'unevenness' everywhere alerts us to the presence of 'immanently based, different forms of historical temporalisations' as they happen across the world. For Harootunian it is a mystery how everydayness provides a figure of uneven development as a result of capitalist globalisation interacting with each geographical locality. Central to everydayness is the uneven development which arises when capitalism has been introduced into different countries, at different moments in their historical development, and with different forms and rates of intensity (Ibid: 57). As a result of the phenomenon of globalisation, cultures outside Euro-America have now gained a more visible presence. According to Harootunian, this indirectly challenges any concept of history as a fixity (Ibid: 17). His meta-historical inquiry into recent Western texts on the history of foreign cultures reveal the surprising fact just how much of past historical writing has still largely failed the obligation for historians to reflect on the power conditions that necessarily accompany the production of any history. Back to Elkins's earlier suggestion (see section 2.1 in this chapter), it is arguable that the shape of art history is predominantly geopolitical, since in a world shaped by the forces of Western imperialism, any global history cannot but show that this is all the non-Western countries have shared in experience (Ibid : 47-48).

3.2 Postcolonial interventions

3.2.1 Geopolitics and imaginations of global power

Geographer John Agnew has identified what he thinks as four essential features of geopolitical imaginations in today's world. First, the world has come to be seen as a unitary whole, where a

developing global vision has replaced theological cosmologies with institutionalised ways of seeing and imagining the world political space which often look unabashedly ethnocentric. Second, much of the world has become divided between 'modern' and 'backward' regions and countries, largely because of the accepted tendency to convert time into space. Third, a state-centric ontology bolsters the assumption that the world is made up of states exercising power over blocks of space, which in turn drives people into what he calls the 'territorial trap' of thinking things increasingly in the divisive 'domestic' and 'foreign' terms. Fourth, the reality of interstate politics is increasingly being represented and accepted as a 'condition of anarchy' where dominant states accumulate power at their own pace and compete in a struggle for primacy (Agnew 1998). Agnew's characterisation of geopolitics paints a picture of politics in which hierarchies and their rivals in power are constantly engaged in a clash of absolute identities and bordered spaces.

A similar dynamics of geopolitical contests and struggles has played out on the international scene of intellectual histories, as some of the significant examples in this section will show. These have been founded on the premise that colonial power and its epistemological counterpart of modernism constitute themselves in various forms and through a system of hierarchical differences in between civilisations and territories. In order to fight back against the hegemony of capitalists and modernists, a strategy must be devised not least in terms of a geopolitics of knowledge that recognises and rebels against the Western model of (universal) Man and of Knowledge which is found to be intrinsically hegemonic. In confronting any globalising set of views and values, local traditions have faced the needs both to offer consolidated models of self-identification and to seek conceptual independence and alterity from such spaces as inhabited and formulated by colonialist schemes in science, technology and history.

The idea of double cultural transcends cultural borders and has found theorised expressions such as Homi Bhabha's notion of spaces of hybridity (Papoulias 2004). Take Homi Bhabha's mainly spatial concept of ambiguity that characterises post-colonial cultures in

general. His application of the term describes the hybrid cultural practices of British Muslims and other ethnic groups which he has found equally 'displaced' in between fragments of different cultural traditions (Bhabha 1991: 315). This 'Third Space' as Bhabha calls it, projects the ambiguous identity in many postmodern hybrid societies, through its liminal placement where an intercultural process plays out various forms of subaltern engagement with dominant discourses (Papoulias 2004: 55-57). Coincident with the topic of racist geography are problems of natives' psyche as the colonised and mimicry mentality which Bhabha contributes to colonising cultural process.

Likewise concerned with the margins of dominant cultural space as well as with the formation of conflated and confused identities of its diasporic inhabitants, sociologist Stuart Hall suggests that the logic of capital translates everything in the world into a simulacrum of itself. Through an accelerated opening of both commodity and financial markets worldwide, global capitalists have created the scenario of multinational production in which dependent local economies were created in the material sense through the erosion of nation-states, national economies and national cultural identities, and this dependence of the local on the global has come to its signification via shifting cultural identities and suitable methods of interpretation (Hall 1991: 23-25).

3.2.2 Border thinking, colonial difference and liberation historiography

Social historian Walter D. Mignolo's theories on border thinking and colonial difference are primarily a reaction to the multinational capital's moves to violate the rights and identities of native people from Latin America to inherit their local traditions in culture, language and history (Mignolo 2009: 72). As he conceives it, the idea of border thinking is about taking different positions from which one can define a survey of encounters between emerging cultures and imperialists' global designs. On the other hand, border thinking is also about the epistemic potential of varying such perspectives in the context of geographies of racial ideologies (as defined in deferring to other postcolonial

critics such as Bhabha and Hall, above).(Delgado and Romero 2000: 10). And in the case of those nation-states that were also empires, grammar worked in two directions; to unify the nation, and for the symbolic control of the colonial possessions, like the Spanish in America or the English in India (Ibid : 16).

In the history of coloniality of knowledge, first the empires, and now the nation states, have control of grammar, language and epistemology, which have been colonial instruments of control and possessions. Intersections between different research languages and the logic behind each language is the site of border thinking, where acting on the problem of interconnections can initiate reforms in the field of the institutional production of knowledge. Mignolo's idea of border mentality encourages the definition that decolonisation of knowledge means learning to think 'with, against, beyond' the legacy of Western epistemology (Delgado and Romero 2000: 30). As he points out, 'things could work in different directions even when the hegemonic power points toward only one direction' (Ibid : 26).

In the field of intellectual history, Mignolo has expanded his historiography in the direction of problematising imperialist expansions and other inequalities symptomatic of the hegemonic union of modernity and coloniality. For him, the historical fact of coloniality has at its centre the issue of power, itself a matrix framed by such representational devices as binaries and measurement, and by constructing a hierarchy that is based on the idea of Citizen/Man both descended from the Renaissance and from the age of Enlightenment (Mignolo 2009). In illustrating what he means by colonial difference, he points out how any cogent discussion of colonial history lends itself to the idea of power in modernisms, and the discourses as Eurocentrism and globalisation therefore become relevant. 'As most everywhere in the globe, the production of knowledge in Latin America has long been subject to colonial and imperial designs, to a geopolitics that universalises European thought as scientific truths' (Walsh 2007: 224). To counter this, with a view respectful to the cultural 'other' and 'foreign', and to cultivate postcolonial reason, a non-Eurocentric tradition of

thought becomes an all-important starting point, where its political-epistemic project of ‘de-coloniality’ may help to make headway towards possible future shifts in producing knowledge, guided by a geopolitics of critical thought (Ibid : 235). Recognition that ‘the West’ is as much a geopolitical as it is a geo-historical entity paves way for understanding the enormous implications of plurality of non-Western histories, subjects and cultures elsewhere in the world. In comparison, the traditional scholarship of area studies often falls into the methodological conundrum of scientific positivism portraying only an apparently unchanged reality, combined with an incapability of seeing the ongoing process of hybridisation.

Mignolo formulates his philosophy of liberation as a response and an alternative option to World System Theory (or Dependency Theory) which sees foremost advocacy in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1991). One key aspect that he sees from the indigenous point of view is that the World System Theory, although advocating the opening of social sciences to the world, continues to connect the activities of distributing and producing knowledge with the power base that is western civilisation (Mignolo 2002: 60). Essentially western civilisation stands for the Euroamerican/North/Capitalist tradition or caucus of traditions, known to cultural outsiders as something akin to a ‘colonial power matrix’ (Grosfoguel 2007). Since a symmetry between culture and political economy is critical in creating the globalist colonial worldview (Ibid : 219), shifting away the balance of power from it will require a combination of changing conditions and expanding institutional developments to achieve, substantially, for indigenous subjects in most non-European locations. Moreover, Mignolo’s project of decolonisation involves a double movement that is expected on the part of geopolitically aware intellectuals: both radical criticism, such as those we have seen from South Asian subaltern philosophy and African thinkers, and appropriation, the latter being largely contributions from the Latin American school of subaltern studies. Geopolitics figures prominently in the epistemological theory of decolonisation: the universal opening claimed by the rival World System Theory can only be countered with a planetary scope for the Ethic of

Liberation from all ideological conditions resulting from colonial differences (Mignolo 2002: 61, 69; Grosfoguel 2007: 213)

3.2.3 Feminist geographies

As with postcolonial discourses, feminist studies also represents an uncompromising critical approach to the objective of politics of knowledge. According to pioneer feminist art historian Griselda Pollock, feminism aspires to keep certain general issues, such as history, body and power, in view, while its theorising tends to focus in the humanities and cultural practices (Pollock 1996: 5). By proposing to present a ‘perpetual provocation’ to both female and male scholars and theorists, feminists position themselves to become radical interlocutors of existing institutions and ideologies: traditional political categories are replaced and reshaped to invigorate polemics on cultural practice, identity and custom. It is typical that feminist projects regularly employ an interventionist strategy: roots in activism and suffrage social movements have given rise to broad concerns and interests in fields of the cultural, the ideological and the subjective. Feminists have successfully merged these internally related problematics into an inclusive politics of the body (Ibid: 6).

Thus, in her preface to the anthology *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*’ (1996), Pollock has referred to feminism, not as an essence, but as a group of positions (Pollock 1996: 5). For a feminist model of art history, she lists influences of Marxist theories of social history, Althusser’s formulations about ideology and Foucault’s definitions about discourses and discursive formations (Ibid : 15). Given the widespread women’s experience addressed by its growing analysis, which covers such material as practice, race and gender differences, it is only natural that feminist art history in the form of critical activities has seen an expansion into both institutional and theoretical spaces, even reflecting a diversity divided by

linguistic as well as social and cultural differences *. Within art history's own disciplinary space, she stresses feminists' continuing contest against dominant discourses of Art History and Art, whose traditions or canons still produce Eurocentric, homophobic and patriarchal stories of art. In so insisting, the convention of feminist art history commits itself to 'undertaking historically located and positioned readings of equally historically positioned texts and their producers' (Ibid : 18-19), effectively outlining a geography for its positioning in history. On the other hand, Donna Haraway approaches the issue of politics of knowing by retrieving the obscured relation between vision and body. Her groundbreaking essay on situated knowledges represents a feminist stance on science and its structuring of facts and artefacts (Haraway 1988). It is a call for women to found their own doctrine of objective vision, in order to deconstruct 'truth claims' by objective science and technology; it argues that these should be replaced by more socio-political skills like historical contingency, semiotic technology, and account for the world (Ibid : 576-578). As far as feminists are concerned, the false vision promoted by capitalists global hegemony ('god tricks') promises transcendental vision but in fact only makes one lose touch with the physical world and become blind to changes in one's immediate environment.

Haraway's theory of situated knowledge thus demands us to look away from the unified perspective that is implied in technical images. Resisting a distant, probe-perceived techno-vision and its static, feminist geography engages with the idea of a 'successor science' that would partial perspectives, particularly those of the subaltern class. Therefore, she suggests that, in engaging with feminist criticism, positioning of knowing subjects should be relative (Haraway 1988: 583-84). Haraway has criticised that geography, as it is generally practiced in institutional contexts, has become overtly objective: a 'direct, devouring, generative and unrestricted vision' successor science (Ibid : 585). Its acquisition of knowledge nevertheless relies heavily on

* Pollock distinguishes in between two generations of feminist critics extending across the north Atlantic, with the first American generation being conservative in comparison to the second, largely British one on the radical side (Pollock 1996: 13-14).

prosthetic devices enabled by techno-scientific means. Distance mobility and interchangeability define the era's seeing mode through infinite and innumerable possibilities of visualisation. For Haraway, a dissolution of centred human subjectivity would be inductive for material-semiotic connectivity that promotes a situated moral understanding and connects heterogeneous entities into ethical communities (Holloway 2004: 171). Similar to postcolonial critics, feminists have engaged in a geopolitical warfare against the global establishment of Western media culture.

IV. Global conditions and visual studies

4.1 Visual turn and cultural turn

For a while in the new millennium now, some art historians interested in exploring the epistemological boundaries of academic art history have seriously looked into the 'visual turn' in art history, developments that have brought existing art historical practices closer in relation to the trans-disciplinary studies of visuality and visual culture. Hans Belting, who along with Arthur Danto claims traditional art history has reached a certain end or breaking point*, points to the fact that a new paradigm of global art has placed pressure on Western art history in the crisis of the latter becoming outmoded. In addition there is the impact that has arisen from the process of decolonialisation which requires the world at large to become more open (Belting 2009: 7). Combined, these motivations for changing have the effect of gradually turning art history away from influences of western modernism and towards a future solution of interacting with Visual Studies which boasts of a distinguishing set of interdisciplinary characteristics. It can be said that visual studies is pervaded with a spirit of democracy where all objects exhibiting 'complex figural artefacts or the stimulants to visual experiences', not just those created as art, are getting attention from scholarly inquiries (Jay 2002a: 88). The newly found democracy with images can potentially spread a critical study of art (as an updated art history) on a global scale (Buck-Morss 2004).

* (Belting 1987; Danto 1997)

What may be of geopolitical relevance in an argument for visual cultural studies, vis-à-vis a spatially bordered, culturally defined version of art history, as still broadly conceived? Martin Jay thinks the importance of visibility in the consideration of images lies in it speaking, as a shared part of human nature, against some more radical claims of cultural relativism. He argues that even feminist or colonialist assertions for heterotopic views of visibility (see the previous section in this chapter) involve the common element of vision. By focusing not just on the discursive aspects, but also on the figural ones, in each visual artefact, it may help to understand the condition and full import of the act of attentive looking, both for and despite the particularities of each viewer (Jay 2002a: 88). As explained advocates of visual studies, the field is above all characterised by a 'democratic impulse' as well as a 'democratic political potential' in its aim to describe visual practices from all social levels and positions (Jay 2002a: 87; Buck-Morss 2004: 17). Combined channels of technological virtualisation and sociocultural mediation have long since changed the state of our visual experience (Jay 2002b: 269-70). Although visual studies can, and does, examine visibility on a localised, spatially distinct basis, there is no denying that the current 'visual turn' refers to a global transformation of culture that affects people's way of looking at images, both modern and historical, on a current basis. International art biennials and exhibitions exemplify changes in perspectives, where images, now collectively perceived and exchanged building blocks of culture (Buck-Morss 2004: 20), seem to shift in ontological status from capitalist commodity to socialist ethic.

4.2 Visual studies: new locations for art history

Buck-Morss, in an essay titled 'Visual Studies and Global Imagination' (2004), observes proof that a new imagist aesthetic has arrived with the age of visual studies, which she calls an alternative to elitist concepts of art history. The new global art history deals not with objects in their full significance but only virtually with regard to the systems of their distributions, and the corporate

image and globalised art market do lead to inclusion of works by non-Western artists that threatens to overturn any traditional art history that insists on being a Western-only narrative (Buck-Morss 2004: 5). Art history in the twenty-first century has moved a long way since Europe's early modern era. Appreciation of art does not require journeys to sites, and visits to national or urban museums and institutionalised galleries are optional for access to art works. In private contexts, images of past masterworks can be consumed when reproduced in coffee table books. Technologies of slide projection and digital photography are now indispensable for art history courses in higher education. It is Buck-Morss's point that, geopolitics apart, art history, even in its Euro-American models, has been a prototype of visual studies all along (Ibid: 6-7): the studies are now as much about images as about (if not more than) art originals and objects.

Buck-Morss argues that images are the 'medium for transmission of material reality' (Buck-Morss 2004: 9). In her analysis of the global modern aesthetics (called 'Aesthetics III' and an alternative to two others in orientation), the image is not grounded in social reality and does not reflect practical concerns. In her vision of a democracy of global image consumption, Buck-Morss evokes archives of surreal 'unconscious optics' that were first envisioned by Walter Benjamin*, expecting viewers to 'connect' to world-as-images via a traffic of perception that travels across networks in the cyberspace (Ibid : 18). For visual studies the virtual images work perfectly as they are thought-provoking, although they may still be irrelevant for the connoisseur's art history which exists primarily for the identification of actual objects. If this makes it out to be the case that image cultures in the postmodern context consist not of natural but hybrid signs, it applies just as well to incommensurable views of the world. This is the case because there is simply no account of what all see and think if they live in territories that have no real borders (Jay 2002b: 273).

4.3 A general theory of visuality

* For an anaesthetic history of aesthetic, see (Buck-Morss 1992) and also (Pollock 2011).

Human nature is the measure by which art making in every culture may be gauged and related, and such gauging and relating may mean to interpret cultures by their causes both in natural history and in social life. In relation to the former, there are methods of art history that begin investigating the nature of vision via anthropology, psychology, and biology. To the latter, there are also attempts to explain experiences of art as something universally shared by applying culturally and spatially based concepts such as ‘artworld’ and ‘worlding the art’.

Whitney Davis’s general theory of visual culture considers its history as being composed of a series of successions: vision succeeds to visibility (Davis 2011). First he argues that vision has an art history, in the sense that visual culture records evolutionary changes in human visual perception. Davis illustrates this hypothesis with the actual example of aspects and ‘aspectivity’. Visual objects possess an aspectivity when one can sum up their aesthetic effects to a certain ‘look’ (aspect), and accounts of artefacts with regard to their aesthetic aspectivity may be created with an assessment of their configuration, style and depiction of themes. This is true given the fact that aspectivities are constituted by perceptual awareness (Ibid : 4-5). Data on criteria such as formality, stylisticality and pictoriality, obtained by comparing forms of life versus features found in their representations, are useful. Davis argues that a general pattern of visual culture plays out in the real world not as independent lines of linear development but successively, in fact like feedback loops of vision and visibility, themselves being a mutually evolving process (Ibid : 9-10).

Second, it is evident that a mutual determination between sensuous matters of form, style and pictorial representation is operative when considering the reality of exchanges between a viewer’s vision (in terms of shape recognition) and visual experience, respectively psychological and cultural. Davis argues that a history of seeing needs to be anchored in relation to the historical stability of a particular ‘enduring depictive function’ (Davis 2011: 19). This is because a picture is a deliberate rendering of the thing, and an art world, whose definition depends on the acts of art making and viewing, would prove to be both a cultural convention and social institution. Reasons

on the workability (or lack thereof) of such notions are not limited to cultured ones, such as a national or cultural tradition of visuality. Recursions are necessary to occur for the distinction between object and its discernible image to become ‘descried’ or pronounced culturally (Ibid : 19-22). References to neuropsychology or neuroaesthetics provide support equally to seemingly contradictory hypotheses by Arthur Danto and Wartofsky on the issue of how much of human visual perception may be trans-historical and cross-cultural (Ibid : 26). Arguments on the natural versus the cultural determinacy of visuality become more dismissible based on the fact that not all artistic traditions harbour the same ideals about mimetic intentions, in the sense that artists only copy what he or she sees, ‘pre-pictorially and non-stylistically’ (Ibid : 28). The phrase ‘historically situated’ fittingly describes this case of cross-cultural influence; the examples of Cozens and Chiang Yee whose similar display of style in geographically different spaces demonstrates a conscious recognition of the cultural aspect in visual practices: Chiang could be said to have found a stylistic resonance in Cozens’s art, samples of which he had personally collected in his stay in Britain from 1933-1955 (Ibid : 33)(Figures 1, 2)*.

Third, visuality is variably ascribed to have been both natural and social in origin and in formation e.g. Gombrich (Davis 2011: 191). Following his reasoning, it is sensible to think that visual perception would have to have both a natural basis and a cultural history. However, even Gombrich acknowledges a lack of explanation as to how nature has interacted with culture. This is particularly in the case of a history of pictoriality, where figurative patterns are observed to have recurred or replaced each other in art, instances of ambiguity or viewer’s miscognition regardless. An iconographic succession, involving the pictorial sign and its conventional meaning, requires what Davis calls a ‘transreflexive relay of recognitions’, recognition in between reflexive encounters, to be complete (Ibid : 195). Art historians back at the beginning of twentieth century tried to develop a kind of art history that would also work as a history of visuality. Some examples

* Alexander Cozens (1717-1786) Chiang Yee (蔣彝, 1903-1977).

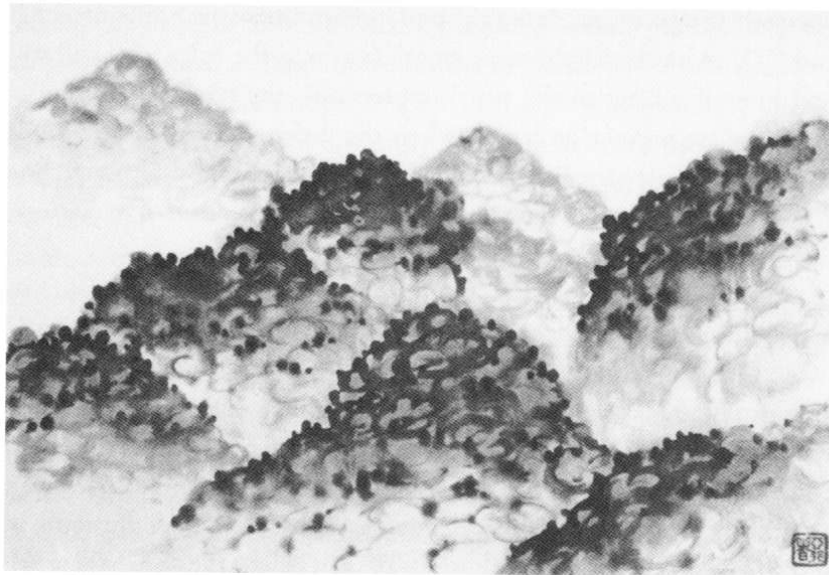


Figure 1 Upper: Chiang Yee, *Mountains in Rain Looking Through the Windows of a Bus From Kenwick*, c. 1935

Figure 2 Lower: Alexander Cozens, blot painting c. 1785 (*British Museum*)

Reproduced from Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visuality* (2011), p. 30.

of this way of thinking are Panofsky's science of iconographical meanings as well as Warburg's exploration of such seemingly mysterious concepts as the *Nachleben* (afterlife) of what meanings pictures have (Ibid : 196). Pictorial meaning takes the form of iconographical conventions, which are transmitted across borders and in between cultural sites. Although meaning assumes a different and distinct form in each, the conventional motif indicates to these historians a constancy and continuity of their recognition. Culturality is at the centre of pictorial successions because it is intimately associated with the origin of 'aspectivity' which is a result of, and inherent in, all culturally conditioned pictorial depictions.

Historically the notion of visuality comprises such diverse bodies of practice including representational economics and successions of paradigms and hegemonic revolutions and shifts. Relays of vision are discussed in terms of a chain of events in which vision and visible features of any form in a visual culture have come to generate each other. In reflecting on the social realities forming the background of such activities, Davis's studies of visual culture covers themes of formality, visibility, visuality and culturality. He highlights the roles played by human acts of perception and valuation which, according to him, derive from an autonomic drive and from a 'categorical imperative to see the world as a whole' (Davis 2011: 338). By way of establishing a general theory of visuality, Davis explains why art historians may seriously look at the possibilities of transcending cultural barriers (with necessary investigations and recursions), while not being deluded into thinking falsely about cultural universals (Danto 1998; Elkins 2007: 74).

4.4 An anthropology for visual studies

More than traditional art history, the new art historical paradigm shows the importance of medium to visual studies. Although not exclusively found in intercultural situations but just as certainly in some ways universal, inter-medial signification occurs in the event of image representation, whether of internal or external, endogenous or exogenous, varieties (Belting and Dunlap 2011: 30). It

proposes that images persist in a mode of inter-medial transmissions, where they comprise an interactive ontology of reflecting and recalling each other (Ibid : 31). This shapes up into a new trend in art history in which specificity of material media and contexts is recognised to the extent that the meaning will be conveyed through its being embodied and transmitted by them.

An Anthropology of Images by Hans Belting discusses how images are produced and transmitted by some sort of media. A history of images of necessity wants to consider the evolution of pictorial media, if only because it takes media's carriage of images to transcend the physical separation of generational and cultural boundaries. Also, the cultural history of art images can be read in conjunction with the history of the concept of the human body, to the extent that it is so often the visualisation of human bodies that takes the centre stage in representations. Whatever art's attitudes towards the actual body, like the mirror, the material frame that carries images has perhaps the most profound physio-psychological relevance to one's thoughts about self-image and related behaviours (Belting and Dunlap 2011: 15-17) Belting's 'anthropology of images' sees the most significant locus of images exactly in the living body itself, a future locus of the image (Ibid : 59).

Our living body, judging from the current state of virtual reality, empowers the viewer in his private space with her personal imagination. This has the condition of images being invented, (re)produced and distributed via the media of photography and film (also see Buck-Morss). For Belting, an anthropology of images seems a most natural kind of historical approach to the vast diversities of art from the past. In regarding the material body as a site of pictures, it appears to the social body via processes of migration and transformation. The truth of this is borne out in the instances of tribal art form of masks, where it is claimed that ornaments function as a worded language by transmitting social codes and a means of transforming the naked face. For Belting, the ritual-social purpose of animation certainly provides key to the interpretation of aesthetic practices such as body painting and funerary masks. (Belting and Dunlap 2011: 21-24).

Belting's anthropology of images imagines (or dreams up) a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview produced and reproduced in our body, that is not rigid and does not follow fixed rules in its operation. Visual space can be created via an artificial image projection that substitutes for the observer's perception, and Belting argues that the most rewarding way to understand image technologies is to correlate its simulated viewer perception with the image media. Modern interaction of the image with media technology has the prehistory of image archives from long ago and / or other cultures, and it can be categorised with other inter-medial strategies. (Belting and Dunlap 2011: 30, 39)

V. Conclusion

Literature on geopolitics and art history today paints a world picture of cross influences and changes both within and across cultural-political borders. In that picture, interpreters are faced with such factors as theoretical complexities and movements, created both in between and around the rival rhetorics of global universalism and cultural essentialism. However, as Susan Buck-Morss asserts, as far as multicultural history (or histories) of art goes, 'reorientation rather than rejection is the best strategy.' (Buck-Morss 2004:5) This points to a possible solution that history will be written in ways that identify and interpret the local reactions to the globalised image of the world. At the centre of this reaction would be the expressive objects created by artists themselves. This definition assures that the new histories will be written to represent comprehensively a decentred and evolving character that underlies much of the current era of globalisation.

Chapter 2 The 'Atlas' Elements in Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne*

I. Introduction

The latter half of Aby Warburg's career as an art historian seems to have seen him increasingly occupied with the question of researching images through a study of historical mentalités. The task of bridging historical distances is achieved using surveys based on criteria derived from such conditions as related to what Warburg believed to be essential to human existence, including that of empathy. The individuality of local cultures is preserved, and indeed highlighted, when these systematic studies of images reveal a network of objects as well as their embodied affects.

Innovations associated with *Mnemosyne* show Warburg to be a forerunner in the development of the historiography of art by building a prototype for an open system of world art history, with a methodological toolkit that combines cultural psychology, anthropology and sociology of art.

In a lecture note, titled 'Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance' (1914)*, Warburg wrote, (under discussion are the arch of the Triumph of Constantine the Great from ancient Rome and the Renaissance painting by Raphael), that they 'serve as the basis of our excursion through unexplored territory, the only points of orientation being tracks that veer off in all directions.' Warburg used the geographical, or more precisely, cartographical metaphors of territory and boundary so as to outline the objective of his iconological inquiries at hand, which may well have been intended to be some sort of a guide for the viewer's thought and judgement as they encountered these images.

Not surprisingly, there has been a substratum of geographical meanings for these terms as they were applied by Warburg. Territories always refer to already formed identities that require to

* Aby Warburg, 'The Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance' in *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*. edited by Richard Woodfield (2001), Warburg's essay translated by Matthew Rampley.

be maintained by political and economic forces, while boundaries are, moreover, about regulating and relating the actions of subjects within one or other territories.

II. Warburg and his concept of mapping art in history

2.1 Science of Mapping History

Life episodes such as his short travels to the lands of Hopi Indians in America in 1895-96 have enhanced the impression of Warburg as an art historian with a remarkable range of interests in the history of cross-cultural movements of visual symbolisms. There is evidence of this in his methods of studying images, which seem to have always been developed through connections within a cross-cultural context. In addition, Warburg's wide range of interests tends to combine his view of art history, still very much a developing discipline then, with sciences that study universals in human conditions, such as anthropology, psychology and sociology (Iversen 1993; Didi-Huberman 2001; Szónyi 2001). It is conceivable that exchanges from these various 'hard' social sciences would benefit art history, not only in the process of developing and testing more precise methods in observation and description, but also in establishing a more systematic and rational basis for the classification and interpretation of its objects.

The culture of mapping or cartography traditionally carries with it the same connotations of rigour and procedure as may be found with epistemological enterprises in general: including the usual impressions of rationality and naturalism associated with the scientific activities of observation and inquiry. Maps are a valid comparison here, in terms of how they put forward a fixed ground plan of how things are positioned in space and time, which, in turn, is a projection of the ontological state of things (Cosgrove 1999: 6). As a part of the technology of cartography, the pairing of surveys and objectivism helps to prevent inexactitudes regarding one's acquisition of knowledge of nature (Heidegger 1977: 117). The history of disciplinary practice reveals that art history in Warburg's time laid claim to efficacy in developing a materialistic basis of knowledge by

means of a strictly 'scientific' approach (Pfisterer 2008: 71)*. As a method, mapping would arguably have found a good fit in Warburg's construction of his own approach to iconology.

2.2 Towards a Cultured Visuality

Ernst Gombrich, art historian and an important biographer of Warburg, has stressed Warburg's personal wish and experiment to rectify 'inadequate evolutionary categories' in art historical scholarship at his time. The question of art in history shouldn't be charted only in political periodisation, or only by figures of artistic genius in 'Old Masters' studies. Rather 'an extension of the methodological borders' is required for art historians who are ready to engage in the study of history of art in a rigorous manner, which ideally should deal with the 'historical psychology of human expression' which he believes is yet to be realised. It appears to him that Warburg's view of the history of art has neither a materialistic nor a mystical orientation, rejecting both the traditional framework of political periodisation, and the blind faith in the individuality of artistic genius. Instead this approach seeks to found a 'historical psychology of human expression' on the operating assumption that the creation of a sign, or the change of a style, works in any society in dependence on complex, organic links with the collective awareness of those living in that society, whether on the spiritual or material level (Gombrich 1999: 270-1, 275; Woodfield 2001).

Warburg has attached to images an archival or documentary meaning that assumes that they not only embed our primal reasoning or thoughts by the internal way of remembrance, but also act as a pointer to the external reality of world views across some historical distance. Indeed his iconological method reads each image's contents mainly in relation to previous instances of the same type (Ostrow in Woodfield 2001: 4). Thus, as some sort of an analytical record in the historical continuations of images, Warburg's particular kind of psychology has the task of mapping

* These 'scientific' methods fell, in Warburg's time, largely into three categories: *Kunstwissenschaft* (sciences of art), anthropology, psychology of art (Pfisterer 2008: 71). Of course some of these were never well known outside of Germany.

adequate 'general evolutionary categories' in art history*. The proposed mapping method, which would represent 'great and universal evolutionary processes' as they happen in all cultural contexts, always renders what Warburg himself has described as a 'panoramic view of history' (Gombrich 1999: 270) which records movements of cultural forces, such as transmissions and transformations of motifs, across the borders of different times, geographical areas and cultures.

In the field of human sciences, theories of physical anthropology such as promoted by Darwin and others in nineteenth century, had meanwhile seen a real expansion into general studies of culture, in an early form of cultural anthropology: the 'scientific programmes' by Semper, Herder and Vischer, among others, applied the same reasoning and logic to investigating the relationships between both individual and social mindsets and staged processes of cultural development or deviation (Pfisterer 2008: 72). Empirical psychology had apparently arisen around this time among human scientists who were keen to explain subjective matters (such as may concern mind and culture) by way of objective principles (laws of science). A functional materialism inspired by quantifiable models, the new methodology of historical psychology deploys a variety of relevant extracted data such as local geographical and socioeconomic conditions in order to classify or to compare the psychological traits of different traditions and peoples worldwide. In the field of art history, this phenomenon has especially contributed to the academic interest, which Warburg seemed to share, in how one may trace the origin of artistic imagination and creation to the operation of psychic mechanisms.

Classical authors in art history, such as Riegl, Wölfflin and Warburg, pioneered studies of aesthetic practices that received relatively less appreciation, such as ivory carving, numismatics and prints. Their endeavours actually helped to change the popular view of the visual environment as a whole. Thanks to the interest in cultural technologies gained from them, art criticism had been transformed into a criticism of visuality based on the issues of perception and visions. The

* This refers to a map in which the borders are open, in the sense that they are meant to be crossed over with correct interpretations.

comprehensive intellectual approach that was practised by these early art historians sought to combine philosophical, psychological and anthropological interests. Significantly it was able to expand the range of historical iconography extensively, into secular or popular culture, to stand beside the ‘established’ classical and Christian repertoires (Bruhn and Dünkel 2008: 173-174).

2.3 Evolutionary dialectic

Warburg’s evolutionary dialectic, as has been pointed out by Warburg scholars, appears to have been under the influence of a slew of evolutionist discourses that had already become popular at the time, including those by Charles Darwin and by Warburg’s teacher Karl Lamprecht, that took matters of nature, culture and society and applied them to science. (Gombrich 1999; Didi-Huberman 2001; Woodfield 2001). It proposed the view that evolution emerges as a process between polarised tendencies that linked themselves into new syntheses. As described by Ulrich Pfisterer, Warburg’s intellectual milieu saw an active interest in evolutionism in both social and human sciences which found inspirations in psychology and anthropology (Pfisterer 2008). Evolutionism definitely was an influence for Warburg in methodological considerations, although he was not by far its most explicit supporter, or ‘evolutionist’, in art history (Ibid : 77). Judging by his research on non-European cultures, Warburg’s interest in world art by way of a science of images is not easily dismissed. His declared ambition of becoming a psychohistorian of cultures indicates no less scope and approach.

Warburg’s vision to accommodate art objects from all cultures in the world through their shared empathetic capacity has found a viable metaphor of conceptual space. The theme that has occupied much of his career and output, the survival of antiquity, repeatedly sees the same allegorical treatment of an encounter between an ‘Olympian’ aspect and its counterpart of an ‘entrenched, traditional, demonic’ aspect (Iversen 1993; Iversen and Melville 2010: 41) As Warburg studies now stand, most modern interpreters agree that the art historian’s favourite

primordial conflict would have a significantly ambiguous meaning (Iversen 1993; Woodfield 2001; Ventrella 2011)*. Deep inside every object that he has chosen to interpret, there lies the aesthetic value of a Janus-faced Herm: a creative tension symbolised in one inseparable embodiment. Indeed Warburg's own words suggest the same: 'Logic sets a mental space between men and object by applying a conceptual label; magic destroys that space by creating a superstitious (...) association between man and object' (quoted in Iversen and Melville 2010: 42). The creative tension that Warburg seeks to project in his projects is not supposed to be a stable one. He assigns to what happens between man and object in such a concept-space: 'liberating experience and boundless communicability'[†], in fact more of a concept than a concrete space. Iversen and Melville state that Warburg's writing, his library, and his Image Atlas were all designed to create and preserve a 'Denkraum' (Ibid : 46). Warburg's preferred historical method appears to have the functions of a mnemonic theatre, performing mental mapping with the means of projection and other resources of visual historiography.

III. *Mnemosyne* and meanings in visual culture

3.1 Modes of time and space

Warburg was well known in his time as a collector of images, both photographic and otherwise. Walter Benjamin was impressed by the breadth and depth of his collection, so much so that he called Warburg's library a 'hallmark of the new spirit of research' (Buck-Morss 2004: 21). One cannot be sure if Benjamin said this with an image of 'unconscious optics' in his mind, but Warburg's image collection is certainly comparable to an 'archive of collective memory' (Ibid : 23). In any case, images drawn from the massive collection would have formed the bulk of his final, unfinished project *Mnemosyne*, to which he gave the subtitle of Image Atlas. To help create a sense

* Especially in Iversen's account, Panofsky, Gombrich and Fritz Saxl have apparently all missed Warburg's built-in ambivalence in his texts.

† Quoted in (Ventrella 2011: 326)

of objective reality, panels in the Atlas often include contextual information in the form of images of both actual and virtual spaces, which are a mix of location shots and object shots of artworks themselves (panels 8 and 56, for example). Warburg made his *Mnemosyne*, as an image atlas, to display meanings that lie outside previous categories of associations. As revealed in the beginning of the series, Warburg considers it important enough to create spatiotemporal staging for his Image Atlas:

1. Plates A, B and C illustrate the orientation (cosmology, geography and genealogy) in the construction of both local and global spaces. The plates suggest the systematic conquest of these spaces by human knowledge and their consequent colonisation by the political powers of classical antiquity.

2. Plates 20-23a show illustrations of cosmology from oriental cultures of antiquity.* These, as part of a collection of spatiotemporal atlases, such as those of Tycho Brahe and others, are to be read with the Palazzo Schifanoia in mind (Warnke, Brink et al. c. 2003: 46-47).

3. Plates 28 and 29 display various panels of cassone decoration with scenes from contemporary social life. The focus is distributed among scenes from the marketplace and of warfare, which are some of the earliest visual representations depicting human movements in the reality of cultural spaces (cf. Ibid).

The above excerpts from *Mnemosyne* provide a good look into the framework of geo-history that Warburg set up for historical psychology. There are correspondences to the celestial and earthly domains of space and time which are portrayed as inter-dependent in human conceptions. (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2003: 560) As several commentators have pointed out, Warburg's intention is to overcome the borders of art history (Agamben 1999: 90). The inclusion of a spatiotemporal dimension in *Mnemosyne*, symbolised by maps and genealogical charts, may have been intended by Warburg to illustrate the interplay between cultural forces to be presented, mostly

* Contents on plate/panel 23 are mainly comparative and cross-referential, which contain artworks that are drawn from both ancient traditions in both east and west showing the shared themes of destiny and fortune.

in a non-linear fashion, in his formulated worldview. There is certainly an emphasis on the inseparable relation between culture, earth and life, and it can be also taken as a hint to one of his thematic points, namely, that people's production and use of art have always come about as the result of their interaction with the material forces of their environment. Outside of the criteria of materialities and historicities that are locally based, there can never be convincing analyses or contextualised research that is based on a pure history of style, or a history of cultural forms as these are inauthentic categories.

3.2 A psychology of images

As a scientific study of (historical) images and their influence in original settings, Warburg's *Bildenwissenschaft* (science of images) showed interest particularly in their functions of transforming and carrying psychic energies (Ventrella 2011: 324). One can find references to similar driving forces, like a liberating influence and revolutionary mindset, in Warburg's time (Schoell-Glass 2001). Warburg's travels to the land of the Hopis predated most of his development of the theory of evolutionary psychology, with the hope to find a key to the mystery of analysing and ordering experiences of visual images. Like an anthropologist, Warburg would have had to use visual analysis of gestural language to classify human figures in artworks from a wide range of periods and locations. It reminds one of Panofsky's statement which defines iconology as the 'history of cultural symptoms or "symbols" in general'; 'in general' here covers 'varying historical conditions, essential tendencies of the human mind' (quoted in Woodfield 2001: 263). The iconological approach to visual symbols, as revised by Panofsky, has been widely accepted and influential (at least until the current trend of Warburg's revival). For Panofsky, usefulness of scientific methods in creating historical interpretation has its measure by how a synthetic balance of subjectivity and objectivity is achieved. On the other hand, Warburg's understanding of iconology

does not focus iconographically as much as it aims for a ‘historical psychology of human expression’ (Ibid : 263).

Warburg’s vision of art history thus describes to later historians and critics an ‘international process of dialectical engagements’, with a vivid sense of ‘individuals being involved in the dramatic conflicts of historical experience’ (Woodfield 2001: 269). However interpretation of this dramatic psychology remains inconclusive. Gombrich, in his well-known anniversary lecture devoted to the topic of Warburg’s aims and method (1999), decided that Warburg’s method contained a message of rationality’s final victory over superstition and magic’s dark power, thus implying a symbolic struggle in which the sides are either positive or negative. On the other hand, there is certain room for more ethically ambiguous interpretations that, in the spirit of Nietzsche, cast them as fundamental, inseparable, and mutually dependent counterparts in an allegorical setting. For example, witness Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville’s readings of reason versus unreason, logic versus magic, and so on (Iversen and Melville 2010: 40-41). Depending on one’s angle, Warburg’s interest in seeing intercultural interactions as a struggle between cultural identities may still have the same values of resonance and controversy for the current studies of visual culture, especially where diverse geopolitical factors of images, including reproductive technology, politics of fascism and racialism, are considered (Buck-Morss 1992; Agamben 1999).

As in the case of Walter Benjamin, Warburg’s take on *Bildwissenschaft* emphasises the image’s potentiality as medium (Buck-Morss 2004). His own research on the Native American Pueblo society led him to similar findings as what he would later have applied to Roman Antiquity, Florentine Renaissance or German Reformation (Didi-Huberman 2001: 622). Warburg’s extraordinary use of psychology in creating his science of culture has attracted interests and commentaries from cultural theorists and art historians alike. Francesco Ventrella argues that Walpi and Oraibi rituals are tools that operate between the cultural zones of magic and logos, of nature and culture. As in Thomas Carlyle’s analogy of clothes in *Sartor Resartus*, they are a potent agent

for phenomenological meanings and personal attachment of a sort to help stimulate individuals with their cultural imagination (Ventrella 2011: 326). In current discourses on the sociology of symbolic images, all societies, whether thought to be primitive or ‘civilised’, produce objects that can serve the powerful functions of mediating experiences and transmitting messages between man and his environment (Ibid : 326). Panofsky’s iconology has been under criticism for all its ahistoric tendencies including archival panopticism and cultural patrimony (Ibid : 314-315). In comparison, Warburg’s seems to be intellectually more dramatic and disruptive in the fact that his polarised terms of comparison and analysis seem more like an allegorical than a factual kind of historicism. In his analysis of Warburg’s scientific method, Grigorio Agamben describes Mnemosyne and its mapping of experiences and other psychological movements as a ‘dynamogram’, for the forces that are implied by such events (Agamben 1999: 90). Griselda Pollock sums up Warburg’s concept of image-symbols as ‘reservoirs of energy and affects’ that release their charged-up energies only at the right historical moments when stagnant cultural tendencies seem to be in need of revitalisation (Pollock 2011: 79).

So the scientific concept of *Auseinandersenergie* (‘conscious dialectical energy’) apparently dominates Warburg’s thoughts on iconology (Gombrich 1999: 270, 276). If anything, it demonstrates the speculated logic of universal transformations but also the rules of unpredictability regarding their outcomes. Although the oriental represents ‘dark powers’ against the rational potency of Renaissance enlightenment in his analysis, it is arguable that Warburg was more interested in the dark powers’s contribution to the process of cultural resolution than their ethical significance per se. What really matters is the encounter, the confrontation. Warburg’s science of images thus has its predominant site in a *Denkraum*, which is more like a mnemotechnical theatre than a laboratory. Its dialectic representing clashes between cultures and nations makes the progressive and the conservative halves in the schizophrenic character of Western cultural tradition all the more visible (Agamben 1999: 93-94).

3.3 Cultural history and memory

Warburg's *Mnemosyne* is an atlas of *Zwischenraum*, an interval space, as well as where different cultures collide and image symbols migrate. An important part of his work indicating this specific intent considers the survival of antiquity in subsequent periods of history. Agamben describes Warburg's main query on this topic in this paraphrase: 'To what extent are we to view the onset of a stylistic shift in the representation of the human figure in Italian art as an internationally conditioned process of disengagement from the surviving pictorial conceptions of the pagan culture of the eastern Mediterranean peoples?' (Agamben 1999: 92). By adopting Agamben's point of view, it seems correct that Warburg takes 'disengagement' to be the main iconographical interest of his object, a phenomenon which happened as a process wholly in reaction to an international condition between the regions of Italy and Near East. To consider that, to a real degree, *Mnemosyne* contains mind maps which Warburg used for lectures in his last years (Rumberg 2011: 246-248), what aspects he has extracted from the images' deepest meanings are arguably geopolitical, in the sense that they conflate into such a thing as social memory that is formed halfway between private thought and cultural identification. The basic formula and principle appear to be universal, yet the actual constituency and forces at work would be identifiably different from one part to another in the world. Hermeneutically rising from the level of art history, then to cultural history, Warburg sees the symbolic significance of images now appear as either reconstruction of a personality or as a vision of the world (Agamben 1999: 98-99).

Combining ethnology, philology and history, Warburg intends that his approach of iconology sufficiently awakes a 'good European' like himself* to the crisis of cultural schizophrenia and to the forces of nature that are revealed by tracking cultural memory in history (Ventrella 2011: 324). Indeed, Agamben calls it an urgently needed, future 'anthropology of Western culture' (Agamben

* Warburg's personal favourite epithet is taken from Friedrich Nietzsche's 1886 essay 'Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future' (Agamben 1999: 96)

1999: 100). *Mnemosyne* shows that both Western and Eastern art contains images whose contents correspond to the themes of astrological magic (panel 20 through 27) and fortunes (‘self-freed men and their mutually transformed symbol’). The way in which the meanings of images are organised suggests the distinction between scientific technologies and superstitious magic are more blurred than clarified. In Warburg’s prelapsarian psychology, the unconscious mind is inscribed and impressed by these sometimes enigmatic messages, that potential energies are contained and preserved in the device of symbolic objects which may be released upon reception of what Benjamin calls traces of ‘divine wisdom’ (Iversen and Melville 2010: 51)*. It is the same as ‘heed the fairy tale’s wisdom or consequences may be disastrous’ situation (Buck-Morss 1992: 8).

As the title of *Mnemosyne* suggests, Warburg’s diagnosis of humanity and his remedy are encrypted and revealed in close relation to memory: the collection of linked remnants of international history is meant to (re)animate the collective memory of Europe (Agamben 1999: 95). Warburg’s most celebrated analyses, such as those for the fresco cycle at Palazzo Schifanoia or for Dürer’s print of Melancholia attest, mythic constructs like these in fact had practical values attached to them, since they were aide-mémoires that had roots in mnemonic skills of their times. Per Rumberg’s archival research on Mnemosyne suggests that Warburg has extensively incorporated *Bilderreihen* (sketched notes for serially arranging pictures) both in concept and in the process of its actual creation (Figures 3, 4)(Rumberg 2011: 248). Halfway between an image map and a shooting script for a film project, it is a genuine mnemonic device for spacing and placing the image objects and for orchestrating a visual display. Warburg’s device thus makes invisible lines of movement (‘evolution’) between ‘sites’ of images appear, seemingly composed almost like a painting itself (Ibid : 249). Referred by Warburg as a ‘ghost story for adults’, *Mnemosyne* certainly has its own life history, in stages which outline Warburg’s own travelling thoughts on tracing the strands of symbolism.

* As for storage and discharge of mental energies Pollock suggests the influence from Richard Semon’s concept of *engram*. (Pollock 2011: 80)

IV. Passions in the Body

4.1 '*Pathoformeln*'

As it is with later authors who have written histories of art from various cultures, Warburg's psychology of culture shows its colours of anthropology, most clearly by focusing on what is thought to be universal. It appears that the same train of thought that seems to move the images across space and time makes its appearance in Warburg's iconographic universe mostly in the guise of 'pathos'. Pathos can refer to the fluttering drapery lines or to the violent convulsions of human bodies and limbs under extreme duress. Behind all incarnations of pathos is the concept of animist energies, or vital force, that Warburg imparts into most of his archival researches and projects, particularly those concerning the survival of antiquity in quattrocento Italian art. As referred to earlier in this chapter, when interpreting Warburg's historical philosophy, Gombrich constantly evokes its possible connections with Darwin's theory of evolution*, and concludes that survival of human expressions and gestures likely means a weakened 'residue' of former human psychology and behaviours serving the purpose of survival (Gombrich 2001: 39). Hence the 'flourishes' of drapery and movement in Botticelli and Ghirlandaio (panels 39 and 43) are identifiable with the mythological figure of nymphs, while gestures of Verrocchio's figures borrowed from ancient sarcophagus reliefs fit into another formula of *conclamatio*; these Renaissance examples of pagan survival are seen by Gombrich as representative of 'clusters of primitive impulses' (Gombrich 2001: 59).

Warburg himself was naturally enthusiastic about the mission of historically identifying and defining this 'new gestural language' in the field of historical Western art. To give an example in 'the Entry of Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance', Warburg argues that Gozzoli and Burgundian tapestry cartoon artists were its opponents because these artists fail to

* As well as 'evolutionist schemes' by other contemporary historians of art, such as Tito Vignoli and Konrad Fiedler.

give a strong impression of 'the tragic situation' at all when the topic (the Rape of Helen) requires it. The deliberate incorporation of contemporary dress codes has the advantage of 'mimetic intensification' for the reception of their works, but this delight in ornamentation, known as the French style ('*alla frazese*') at the time, was clearly in conflict with the dynamic 'antique style' movement ('*all' antica*') before conversion to classical forms took place (Warburg 2001: 15-17). Warburg notes that the liberation of figure styles in quattrocento Florentine art gained popularity with commissions involving passionate scenes of Rapes and Battles, among other kinds of 'animal violation' (Ibid: 18). Warburg found empathetic expressions in art of this period suddenly opened up to an 'invaluable gain in gestural vocabulary' (Warburg 2001: 20). Scenes of excess of movements and passions, specialised by the likes of Pollaiuolo, are by far the largest group of fifteenth-century art in *Mnemosyne*.

The reception of Warburg's interpretations has not ceased being controversial. In particular, critics claim that, as a historiographer, Warburg has not maintained his rational detachment from the 'powers of darkness' which can be seen, for example, in his wild demonisations of foreign art styles or physiognomic fallacies (Gombrich 1999; Woodfield 2001: 287). Richard Woodfield reminds us that, to understand the mentality of quattrocento Florentine citizens, one is more justified to consider such factors as role playing in reference to modern social psychology*. When looking back on Warburg's heuristics, then, a real issue lies in how one chooses to situate his use of the term 'primitive' in the context of a general history of international cultural communication. Much as it appears that Warburg may have placed 'primitive cultures' in a generally negative light, as a consequence of outdated methodology in history and psychology†, the indication does not

* This in turn invites the psychological question of why role playing became a vogue in Florentine society and what significance it imparted to the social members. Whether Warburg's theories seem to modern readers to be borderline fantastic or logically clouded by his own fears, the actual relations between quattrocento folk sciences and aesthetic fashions are perhaps more complex to determine so as to reject any one-sided explanation of art as phenomena.

† According to Gombrich, Darwin's study of evolutionary psychology requires observation of strongest expressions of human passions. may have given Warburg the idea of *Pathoformeln*. In this case, it would show the factor of over-determination in Warburg's methodology.

really cohere with some of the positive meanings for ‘primitivism’ found in 1920s modernist Europe. Also, suspicions of racialism in Warburg's discourse are better supported when the concept of survival is understood in context of Darwin's evolution theory, with the latter suggestions of competition and eugenics. It would have produced a very different meaning indeed, if an explanation based on alternative anthropological theories is available (see the following section in this chapter).

Margaret Iversen's interpretation of the serpents as a symbol in relation to the ‘primitive’ cultures of both Mediterranean antiquity and American Pueblos visited by Warburg, for example, highlights the existence of cultish and performative values in common to both. The constellation of Great Serpent, or Asclepius, emblazons meanings of a source of influences on mathematicians and physicians; suffering and death in the legend of Laocöon; and through parallel meanings, the crucifixion (Iversen 1993: 198-201). To the Hopis, the arrow-tongued serpent is associated both to terrifying lightning and to the benevolent rain which was their own source of water (Ibid: 202-203). In looking for the evolution of such symbolisms, one invariably witnesses a metamorphosis from ‘instinctual magic interaction (with pagan deities) to a ‘spiritualised taking of distance’ (Ibid: 205). As one living in the twentieth century, it only stands to reason to see mythological representations of natural powers replaced by an explanation by modern science. However, the unexpected return of the repressed has the effect of disrupting the linearity of historicist discourse (Iversen and Melville 2010: 56).

4.2 A unique meaning of survival in cultural history

Georges Didi-Huberman calls for a rethinking of the term ‘survival’ in the Warburgian context. First of all Didi-Huberman points out that Warburg is the most anthropological of all art historians in his time, and that Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft* owes its profound understanding of the past uniquely to certain influences from anthropology, especially those formulated by Edward B. Tylor

in his 'science of culture' (Didi-Huberman 2002). In his 1861 book *Primitive Culture*, Tylor suggests that the permanence of cultural forms in the Western history of art tends to have become invisible unless studied from the viewpoint of *longue durée*. Didi-Huberman describes the Tylorian view of the ethnologist's task as one that recommends a vertical investigation of any culture, so as to uncover the extraordinary reality of time in any society, in which the present time is constituted not in a single progression from the past, but in multiple strands of the past that all show marks of intertwined development (Ibid : 63). The complex state of temporality described here is perhaps best comprehended as a 'time knot' connecting the linear historicity of academic history to the usually ahistorical fields of anthropology. As for observation of this multi-past experience, its media are none other than a cumulative, 'vertical' mapping of historical facts from the past.

As Didi-Huberman has shown, Tylor, a leading ethnographer of his time, urged his fellow anthropologists to look for a culture's 'imprints of time' which contain the history of its development and which suggest themselves in signs of 'progression, degradation, survival, revival, modification' (2002: 63). 'Looking round the room we live in, (...) Here is the honeysuckle of Assyria, there the fleur-de-lis of Anjou, a cornice with a Greek border runs round the ceiling, the style of Louis XIV and its parent the Renaissance share the looking glass between them.' (Quoted in ibid: 63) The imprints of time, although constantly transformed and shifted in appearance, keep their 'stamp' of history on the forms of the present like roots in a ground. Tylor's 'science of culture' emphasises the 'anachronic' aspect in any culture that will, with proper investigations, reveal a richness of cultural facts and a tenacity to anyone observing with a historian's sensitivity to details in daily life. It draws the picture of a horizontal variety of cultural textures, including language, sayings, proverbs and other aspects of popular traditions that stem from the vertical complexity of the present time intersecting with multiple pasts. Not surprisingly, Tylor's *Primitive Culture* contains a chapter on the importance of vernacular sciences like magic and astrology, presumably leaving an influence on Warburg's work (Ibid : 94).

Tylor's belief in historical tenacity and permanence of cultural expressions has led to his theory analysing their survival in new cultures. Didi-Huberman also reports on his interest in cultural survivals as a 'symptom', which often appears in more trivial or exceptional contexts, such as joking, sayings, games, or superstitions (Didi-Huberman 2002: 64). Tylor's survivals are specifically about symptoms that carry various past modalities of time into the present, and so are Warburg's. Both are meant to suggest a more complicated concept of history than commonly conceived, and both are about reappearances (even phantomic ones) of historically already 'dead' cultural habits. On the one hand, Warburg remained a nineteenth century character by placing cultural history even in the context of evolutionary theories, biological or not, thereby inviting critiques or doubts by art historians of upcoming generations. On the other hand, as Didi-Huberman points out, Warburg definitely was one who broke away from the canonic model of art history, by making a theory about memories of forms that move both backwards and forwards, in discontinuous time.

4.3 Symptomatic signs and irrationality

In his discussion of the survival of the pagan classical style in early Renaissance painting, Warburg gave a special place to expressions of 'pathos with both body and soul', significantly embodied in the figures of maenad and Mary Magdelene. For example, he referred to works by Bertoldo di Giovanni (c. 1420-1491), a student of Donatello, as an outstanding example, where the inspiration and imitation of ancient formulae of signifying passionate feelings emerge unambiguously (Warburg 2001: 25). It is noteworthy that Warburg deliberately approached this material from an angle quite unlike iconology as we know it. Crossing from maenads to warriors seems an oblique link, but shared by both is a representation of an excess of orgiastic gestures, along with their undeniable impact on the spectator's senses.

Walter Benjamin's theory on allegorical signs maintains that the artistic symbol is plastic and its reception is instantaneous, that is, the visual expressiveness of the image itself is most direct and least discursive. Iversen and Melville suggest that allegories work in the most extreme and inherently encrypted ways (Iversen and Melville 2010: 51). Learning human expressions systematically is comparable to compiling a lexicon in which expressive values of human gestures can be confirmed and committed to memory. Citing ecological theory, perhaps one can speculate that a vocabulary of allegorical expressions may be mapped in their 'living' environment of culture.

As the most anthropological of all art historians at his time, Warburg attempts to reach an understanding of each culture that came into his research, since his pathological approach stresses the element of individuality and unique buildup of its historical past. In Mnemosyne, for example, he has collected and compiled such a set of observations and image data that cumulatively demonstrates the persistence of paganism. Warburg's *Kunstwissenschaft* discovers the pathos formula that see gestures and charged emotions in images as a sort of hyperlink to unconscious memories evoked by their thematic context, often dance and rituals (Pollock 2007: 12). Unlimited by time or space and aiming to investigate trans-individual (and transcultural) psyche, the collection is 'anthropologically central to what has been somewhat impoverished by classical aesthetics under the concept of imitation.' (Didi-Huberman 2001: 621-622) Didi-Huberman actually goes so far as to call Warburg's invention a new paradigm on the basis of the symptom method. Comparison between his method of pathos formula and those suggested in contemporary literature of psychophysiology offers similar elements such as dynamogramme (dynamic engrammes, which have been proposed by neuropsychologists as mental loci where memory traces are stored) and psychodramas of polarities that create the properties of symptoms, 'visual intensity' and 'contradictory simultaneity' (Ibid : 634). It is important to know that, since Warburg conceives his images as formations that are capable of revealing the unconsciousness, they operate as a floating signifier with values that are therefore relative, rather than absolute, in each culture.

This part of Warburg's inquiry could be said to have created a new theory of signs governing the semiotics of allegory and interpretation. The concept of pathos formula, for example, is a corporeal crystallisation of the monstrous dialectic, itself a formal line of tensions forged in the crux between sensitivities and anaesthesia which form the substance of one's psychic activities (Didi-Huberman 2001: 627). Experience provides hints to historical writing that bases itself on the realities of day-to-day life. Warburg and Freud are similar in the tendency of their interpretations, one that is undertaken with skills of observations through disguised reversals or contradictions (Ibid: 637).

Images combine both ethnological and etiological intentions, for example, Warburg's understanding of pathological 'pathos' corresponds to the Synoptic table which arose from contemporary innovations in clinical psychology by the Frenchmen, Charcot and Richer (Ibid : 628). Warburg's approach of interpretation thus comprises both categories of typology and messages. Warburg uses dynamogramme and psychodramas as part of his approach to understanding the expressive values of human gestures. This can be confirmed by comparing for similarities between his pathos formula and contemporary theories of psychophysiology (Didi-Huberman 2001: 634). It is in these forms, full of visual intensities and permanently unresolved conflicts, that Warburg recognises such plastic images as dynamic formations (same as dynamogrammes) that are capable of indicating the entangled state of unconsciousness through signs of incomprehensibility and antithetical 'double consciousness' -- hysterics and melancholy contained in the same body, for example .

Symptoms can never seem fixed in their meanings, so they are equally capable of leading to interpretations of displacement and of movements. Migrations are envisioned 'moving geographies, as well as surviving histories' which Warburg attempted to account for through *Mnemosyne* (Didi-Huberman 2001: 640), Like Warburg's *Ninfa*, *Mnemosyne* contains floating symbols that are impossible to pin down or decipher due to their regressive character but subject to

no apparent limitation (Ibid : 631). To the extent of it being an embedded part of the collective memory, the symbolic character of symptoms appears less than formally and more unconsciously, so much so, as to lend itself more eloquently to mnemonic readings. Inspired by the clinic of hysterics, including spectacles of clinic analysis and style, Warburg's dialectic of monstrosities offers to describe expressions in irrational and unconscious memory in typologies under the general influences of the Dionysian state. Didi-Huberman aligns the dialectic with a heritage of psychological knowledge that assimilates the Freudian structure of seeing 'physical effect together with its psychological cause'. a picture of human psyche via realisation of what Warburg called an 'enigmatic organism' which Warburg evoked in all his Renaissance studies (Ibid : 638).

V. In the flesh: tracing the (m)other figure

5.1 Warburg's cultural analysis and cross-cultural image history

Margaret Iversen and Griselda Pollock have written about the broad common ground that exists between conceptions of cultural history in Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project and the general feminist concept of art history's social-psychic object, indicated respectively by the bywords of 'nameless science' or knowledge of 'the feminine other' (Iversen 1993: 218; Pollock 2003: 176). Along with Kristeva's concept of 'Women's Time' these allusions have been to the 'unconscious' 'feminine' or 'other' epistemology that has been repressed or hidden so to become entirely outside the purview of positivist history. Transposing Kristeva, Iversen suggests that traditional science founded by Bacon and Descartes actually uses a 'sexually transgressive' language and is perfectly represented in the monstrous figure of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (Iversen 1993: 218). In the feminist psychic discourse on the split speaking subject, this masculine half of the subject is operating on a transcendental ego and thus set apart from its body, its unconscious, and its history, while the feminine half embodies a 'decentred, situated, divided, overdetermined' subject (Ibid: 219). For Iversen, then, the argument to be made is that the two split subjects are linked to two

methodological approaches to the interpretation of cultural images, and that Warburg represents the former feminine ideal (while Panofsky the latter). She finds Warburg's art history to be deeper and more sympathetic because it represents a subject whose cognitive instinct is much in touch with the maternal body, with notes to indicate how much Warburg himself understood that the mind's detachment from it is the direct cause of a schizophrenic subject (Ibid : 219-20).

Warburg's *Kunstwissenschaft*, when represented by the large collection of images that he featured serially in *Mnemosyne*, has done no less than exploring extensively into the cosmological, ritual, and indeed sacred, aspects of human cultural imagination. We know through Griselda Pollock's research, that Warburg has used the work of the British classical scholar Jane Harrison in exploring the profound mythic meanings in the serpent symbol as it was used in native cultures worldwide. That is the suggestion to native peoples of the magical power of technological mastery over such natural resources as fire or water that man have constantly needed for survival (Pollock 2007: 15). So, to Warburg as well as to Harrison, symbolic and mythic imagination of the sacred was alive in the mythic universe before modern technologies took its place and replaced fear and awe with energy and communication (Ibid: 18). In Pollock's account, Harrison's reading of the ritual origins of art in Classical and Pre-classical cultures which have been successfully passed down to later feminists like Virginia Woolf, whose text effectively kept the feminist legacy alive, of trying to instil mytho-poetic thinking into alternative interpretations of cultural history that combine semiotics and psychoanalysis (Ibid : 21).

For the purpose of this dissertation, Pollock's feminist account of Warburg's contribution with *Mnemosyne* to art history again shows why an interdisciplinary approach leading to alternate modes of interpretation is needed to materialise a true cross-cultural studies of visibility, making it possible, especially when the term 'art history' for some may have accumulated too much Eurocentric baggage already. The lesson from this calls for a more diverse intellectual landscape from the present as well as the discovery of a richer cultural geography buried under strata of

spiritual history from the past. What Pollock calls a ‘phallic lack’ of revolution in knowledge systems since the era of modernity, industrialisation and colonialism may be rectified through the ‘female legacy’ of innovation an imaginary archaeology (Pollock 2007: 21). Others pursuing a similar feminist tradition include Luce Irigaray and Gillian Rose who draw on the visual metaphor of mirrors for egos. A dialogue between the two discusses how the male imagination duplicates and reflects itself to ensure the projected self-images of coherence and legitimacy: the mirror images in this case are comparable to rigid and inflexible walls, as they ‘produce the absolute power of form’ and ‘the solidity of concepts, boundaries and order (Irigaray 1985: 76; quoted in Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2003: 558). These words above give a hint about one possible meaning of Mnemosyne as related to a feminist non-representational geography of cultures.

5.2 Relating to femininity in photographic images

It is typical of Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* that female historical figures and mythological personifications appear prominently in various *Tafeln* or screens that comprise the series *Bilder Atlas*: the Muses, Diana, Luna, Cybele, Niobe’s daughter, Psyche, Medea, Polyxena, Isis, Fortuna, Daphne, Juno and Helen, among others. Starting with *Mnemosyne* the personification (memory, reminiscence, and mother to the Muses) to whom Warburg’s project is eponymous, these and other female figures are often the ones who carry the allegorical or expressive values in *Mnemosyne* the project. For example, Warburg’s theory of memory (adapted from Richard Semon) suggests that mnemonic energy is one of man’s vital qualities that impresses and inscribes the unconscious and so provides an animating pulse, or a life force, to all conscious operations (Pollock 2011: 89-90). Recognising the ancient links between maternity and psychological value of the sacred in the history of human culture, Griselda Pollock argues that the female reading in cultural history is capable of our self analysis and cultural investigation (Pollock 2007: 12, 15). An archaeology of sign, charged emotion and the psyche, for example, is capable of disclosing the dynamics of ‘transfer, polarisation

and inversion or even disenchantment' of socio-psychoanalytical motifs, terms that are radically different both from historical canons, or from such mainstream historical frameworks as progressive time and linear thinking (Pollock 2011: 89). To trace images on the level of symbols and through the female sensibility, then, is to think about human society, culture, religion and subjectivity, in terms of sex differences. For example, women's life-giving significance, which was ancient but seems to have been eclipsed compared to men's, which is meaning-giving and which has been prominent into the modern age (Pollock 2007: 11).

Pollock's project 'Time, Space and the Archive: Towards the Virtual Feminist Museum' in which she rediscovers the spectatorial paradox in photographs of timeless female bodies, such as those of *Graces* by Antonio Canova, that represent the linear temporality that we have become used to in the contexts of museum display or catalogue photographs. As a preface to the project, she has maintained that the classical female nude has persisted in making the perfect body of woman as the object that enables privileged men to speak with each other only of themselves. The belief of a singular meaning that has frequently been given to art works through the iconographical method usually finds its physical counterpart with the implementation of a precisely determined viewing position, as well as the formalist concern for the 'right' way of photographing a freestanding piece of sculpture (well known practices, such as Wölfflin's). For Pollock though, she believes that multiple and alternative clues or registers of meaning are 'contingent on variable factors in the actual moment and situation' at the action of viewing itself (Pollock 2003).

Regarding the last point, Pollock definitely sees an abstracting tendency, to which Warburg's concept of 'pathos formula', of mnemonic power of an once-powerful image for its affective traces, provides a potent antidote. 'Warburg began to see in the petrified stasis of classical sculpture's gestural repertoire a repository of once-animated performances and dancing rituals, that carried in mnemonic form the legacy of once-enacted rituals and sacrifices, themselves the register in social

and collective action of materially determined if psychically experienced – emotions about life, death, desire and want.’ (Pollock 2003: 190)

The choice of applying the Warburg method to interpretations can bring about ruptures in the patriarchal discourse of history, in the form of ‘creative interventions’ which re-orient our understanding of an image ‘both in and outside of [its] time’. In Pollock’s case, she managed to trace the Graces’ identity which then went on a series of transformations from *kharis* in Greek, *gratia* in Latin to *chesed* in Hebrew. In their diverse meanings, though, these can all, in the shifting contexts of different ethical and social practices, bring to the fore the feminine and female association with life, desire, death and the gift to contribute to the general livelihood of humans (Pollock 2003: 191).

5.3 Interpreting images in practice

As Agamben points out in his study of Warburgian iconology, Warburg's concept of symbols is consistently auxiliary in the way of a medium -- called ‘intervals’ by the art historian himself -- which significantly resides ‘between consciousness and primitive reactions’ and oscillates ‘between the positing of causes as images and as signs (Agamben 1999: 94-95; Pollock 2011: 74). For Griselda Pollock, photographic images are a form of ‘technologically-assisted and reproductive memory’. Pollock takes Vilem Flusser's point that there is a magical nature in photographs' messages that should not be overlooked when an effort is made to decode them; the images are in all realities a surface to gazers through which a space opens up where they can roam freely and search for recognised and new relations to their past experiences (Pollock 2011: 92). Along with Walter Benjamin's discovery of 'optical unconscious', Flusser's philosophy also enables her to see how Warburg is equally a philosopher by exploring symbolic potentials of the photographic medium.

Photography was intimately connected with art history, both in inception and practice, about which Warburg was known as being highly enthusiastic, having claimed an eventual goal of moving ‘across the work-of-art-history towards a science of pictorial shape’ (Bredekamp 2003: 423). Certainly by ‘pictorial shape’ Warburg was not indicating anything like connoisseurship but rather vital/immediate distanced/mediated (Pollock 74). The fact that Warburg has chosen for his Image Atlas to present these symbols in the form of photographs of photographic assemblages confirms Pollock’s assertion that the set is not only photo-optimised but even photo-dependent in its intended way of presentation. Some of the point here can be made by comparing Warburg’s *Bildatlas* (Image Atlas) to André Malraux’s *Musée Imaginaire* that was created later. The pages or planes of Warburg’s atlas of cultural memory, with its metaphorical association with the mind both conscious and unconscious, seems an appropriate alternative to the linear plan of the museum and layout of the art history book or lecture. Warburg's instinct for the socio-psychological methodology thus hints at a feminist geo-history of art. The essential psychological dimension of any physical sign is for Warburg an important clue to interpretation of images.

Flusser’s theory shows some intimate reading compatible with Iversen’s feminist critique, when the latter is applied to support a fair reading of Warburg’s image theory where typology is equally definitional and operative: apart from the ideal of detachment, the photographic image encourages a heterogeneous, actively associative interpretations when not pinned down by some commentary or even captions (Iversen 1993: 216-17, 222). Warburg’s unique *Bilderreihe* has a powerful example for Benjamin’s argument that images are proprietarily both visual and metaphorical, Considering that metaphors are originally a philosophical and literary theoretical concept, images, photographic or otherwise, makes perfect sense for the interdisciplinary task of collaborating between art history and philosophy. According to Mieke Bal, the move of bridging gaps between different historical locations and times in the topography of one’s historical imagination (Bal 2002: 60).

VI. Conclusion

Mnemosyne as Warburg's incomplete final work is fascinating because its creative, bold use of image objects indicates the great potential of the photographic archive as a source of interdisciplinary research in art history. Feminist models of art history can be accommodating to the need of a cross-cultural history without becoming progressivist at all. An evolutionist model lacks precision because of the highly debatable meaning of the terms themselves. But symbols, by contrast, constitute a good shared basis for intercultural work, where Warburg's non-linear, transnational mode seems to provide an innovative approach to border thinking in art history. Recognising the symbolic multivalence of images (and their reproductions) confirms Buck Morss's vision of history as shattered in an era of postmodern global spectacles.

Chapter 3. Borders in world history of art: Carrier and Scharfstein

I. Introduction

Cultural anthropologist Jonathan Friedman has stated that ‘making history is a way of producing identity’ (Friedman 1994: 118). This is because the process of constructing a history places an individual or collective subject in the position of imprinting her or their present onto the past. Thus, constructing history, in the subjective sense of producing a relation between what was presumed to have happened in the past and later or current affairs, can be seen to be similar to myth-making. In addition, in different cultures with different world views, this process of historicising the past will certainly play out in a whole variety of ways, each developing, for the collective group or people themselves, a differing cultural identity from all others. As available forms of historiography and cultural identities are far from being unitary or homogenous, there is basically an unlimited scope for transcultural historians when they study and make comparisons between histories from a number of cultural traditions.

This chapter is a critical review of two recent implementations in the field of world history of art, David Carrier’s *A World Art History and Its Objects* and Ben-Ami Scharfstein’s *Art without Borders*. Here I will attempt to discuss how the notions of culture and identity may have influenced their approach, as indicated in the titles of their books, to the tasks at hand, that is, to write a history of art that successfully captures the worldwide scope as intended. If we recall the distinction that James Elkins has made in the first chapter, between ‘monist’ and ‘universalist’ stances that represent the extreme ends of a spectrum of views, which are possible, for the purpose of historical research of art and artistic culture, it is clear that neither author has chosen to become too particular or too generalised in engaging with their potentially vast topics. Instead, as far as I can see, both Carrier and Scharfstein have chosen to explicate the significance of individual art objects by presenting them in relation to a shared context.

Both Carrier and Scharfstein, being humanists, seem to favour the idea of exploring the meanings of art objects through their environment, of the people or places that created them, including the mental settings of people's subjectivity and identity (Preziosi 2009: 151). Also, in both Carrier's and Scharfstein's books, national identities and traditions are made distinct and signified by the constantly implied mark of national borders. But it is arguable that the authors have made geopolitical use of the signifier of borders to organise the geopolitical aspect of their narrative. I want to use this chapter to consider how each author uses the border signs to project different world orders.

II. David Carrier: A world art history and its objects

2.1 Objects of art history

In a 1993 essay titled 'Why Art History Has a History', Carrier wonders how art history, as a form of writing, can learn from regular history in its query of 'truthful original ways of narrating stories about artworks' (Carrier 1993: 310). His conclusion is for art historians to give comparable weight to verbal documentation which is often thought of as mere background information. Upon reflection, one can definitely understand how knowing the larger context is positively helpful to the formulation of various interpretative hypotheses that can be equally adduced from visual evidence alone. Even Gombrich shows that psychological evidence is useful in reconstructing artist's intentions, which accords with his reading of art philosophers, such as Arthur Danto, who reject connoisseurship as a valid ground for similar tasks. Good interpretation needs to correspond to one's visual experience and also to any useful information about the artist's intention, or it would be difficult to choose from multiple interpretations that emerge following the viewing of the same sample of visual art. Carrier thinks even philosophy of art history is inalienably historical in its concerns (Ibid : 308). 'Until we know the history of interpretation of a picture, we cannot recognise how we might see it differently.' Carrier imagines a tripartite system that involves observer, picture

and text. His preference clearly lies with the conventionalist theory for discovering truth in art historical interpretation, that is, truth in art history 'is relative to the conventions of the period' (Carrier 1993: 308).

Inclined to incorporate a self-consciousness into his art historical writing, Carrier no doubt would want to instil a fair sample of authentic 'period' feel for the art of whichever historical period he happens to be writing about. Also his clear interest in (historical) conventionalism would have determined what art history's 'objects' are in his book. As Terry Smith writes in his review of *A world art history and its objects*, his main object is no mere material thing but art writing itself, regarded as an artful practice (Smith 2009). Theory-wise he has Hans-Georg Gadamer as one of his allies, who argues that the 'true' historical object is not 'an object' at all, but a relationship which comprises both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. Gadamer calls this the 'principle of effective-history' that makes understanding possible (Gadamer, Barden et al. 1975: 267). Understanding as 'placing oneself within a process of tradition' is integral to any reconstruction of artistic intentions as part of the history of an object of art, a mentality that Carrier seems to be seeking in his call for making art history more like history and less like objective science. Subjective possession of an effective knowledge of historical period as intended by Gadamer makes a required condition for self-conscious art historical writing as intended by Carrier. That is why aesthetic attitude conflicts with the notion of artworks as unique objects, and what Carrier has based his arguments on in his proposal for a world art history.

2.2 Cultural traditions and monocultural art historical narratives

As suggested by the analysis of Carrier's philosophy of art history, art historical narratives are primarily about art traditions. According to Carrier, they describe tradition's origins and developments, the latter in terms of influences that expand the tradition's network both in time and in space (Carrier 2008: 22). He also finds that, in order for these attached life meanings to cultural

traditions to be translated, monocultural traditions, especially, can be conveniently presented as time lines carrying indicators to supporting documents or objects of reference (Ibid : 23). Cultural traditions defined by bodies of textual evidence can also, in turn, gain symbolic autonomy and identity as traditions by embodying authenticity and such*. The concept of cultural tradition, in Carrier's narrative, seems so much like a narrative whose qualities it virtually inhabits, such as continuities and coherence etc. To make the above point, Carrier stresses the rule that traditions must be considered as wholes, or else the historian risks missing 'causal connections between earlier and later artists' (Ibid : 27). Carrier's tendency, of stringing together celebrated but far apart figures in history to shape whole traditions, does not exactly help the result of his manoeuvres to seem less forced. Carrier names canonic writers Vasari, Hegel, Gombrich and Greenberg to stand for a continuous European tradition of art historiography, despite of the fact that, for most of art's history or for humanity as a whole, contributions by individuals and canonic works of art are bound to be quite partial in comparison to the whole.

The second part of Carrier's exposition on art historical monoculturalism (Chapter 3) begins with negotiations that are necessary to maintain a clarity in reasoning for his narrative in the style of a 'prolegomena' (Carrier 2008: xxv). In this part he would make reference to one-on-one comparisons between cultures to establish parallels of the 'one timeline per tradition, one tradition per culture' system that he uses for presenting monocultural art histories. In most cases Carrier limits these comparisons to scenarios between Europe and one other (Indian, Chinese or Islamic) culture, perhaps because between the latter three cultures there really has been more exchanges than

* Carrier has the following quote from fellow art historian David Scott, which seems to illustrate my point rather well: 'Tradition is not a passive, absorptive relation between the past and the present. Rather tradition presupposes an active relation in which the present *calls up* the past'. In this context, tradition is rather seen at the receiving end of historical constructs from future times.

between what is usually called ‘East’ and ‘West’.* What Carrier hopes to establish, as non-controversial facts, are broad generalisations such as the following: ‘Before there was sustained contact between these distant cultures, Chinese, European, Indian, and Islamic art were on independent time lines’ (Ibid : 39). One’s response to truth claims indicated by Carrier’s multiple-timeline formation may have to depend on how much one is willing to accept his terms which, having been developed in the context of European art history, inevitably feel reductive or compromising in all other contexts in which it is supposed to function comparably (Gaskell 2010: 66-67).

2.3 Multicultural art historical narratives

In *A World Art History and Its Objects*, David Carrier has a polemic book. In its first half, he discusses the idea of combining multiple monocultural art historical narratives. As far he is concerned, there can be no universal monocultural history of art, because one single point of view, or one continuous story cannot account for art developments in diverse traditions such as Europe, Islam, India and China all at once (Carrier 2008: 44). Doing world art history, however, requires understanding of other traditions and their exotic aesthetics, without the pretence that art historians can forget about their own tradition. This is why translation is important to art historians, without which they cannot deal with multiculturalism and its main problem of incommensurability between different cultures and languages. For the proper way of cultural translation, Carrier believes that he has found a key idea in ‘mutual recognition’ as it is developed by Jürgen Habermas in ‘Discourse Ethics’ and other works on communicative rationality (Ibid : 96). In his opinion, mutual

* Particularly Islamic art has been in exchange with Indian and Chinese cultures with varying degrees of closeness. Carrier has not formed this observation in part because he has limited the data of his survey to painting of few particular genres. One suspects that more frequently contacts between cultures occur in hybrid or non-parallel contexts. An example of the latter can be found in *When Asia Was the World* (2008) by Stuart Gordon, who basically argues that the Eurasian landmass, Mediterranean and east Africa functioned as one cultural entity between 500 and 1500, with a broad basis of shared conventions (Gaskell 2010: 66).

recognition, or reciprocal acknowledgement between different cultures and aesthetic traditions, contributes positively towards a real cross-cultural history of art.

Carrier claims that, for the purpose served by a world art history, mutual respect promotes a perspectivism that bases itself on the primacy of contemporary information and interpretation (seeing the past as seen from the present), although the same perspectivism would also assert that there are multiple ways of mapping the structure of our world (Ibid : 98). Practicing art historians have faith in cultural translation enough to use it as part of their method. For Carrier, the translations may be difficult, but Oleg Grabar seeks to situate Persian painting in the context of Persian-speaking culture and in the Iranian society, yet he is quoted as saying that ‘there are universal modes and values in the perception and appreciation of the visual arts, even though nearly infinite variations occur in different places and at different times’ (Ibid : 109). To round out his proposal, Carrier recommends open-minded strategies regarding multi-cultural art histories (Smith 2009). This includes, in a move that is like going global through local, a respectful but also liberal approach to translation of foreign aesthetics for world art historians. Like Carrier’s general idea of writing art history, however, this one clearly relies on assumptions developed in Enlightenment philosophy and may come with its own burdens in ideology.*

In response to the question of a globalised art history, Carrier has written speculatively elsewhere with another question of what happens when art history travels. For him, the answer will inevitably depend on its ‘translatability’, or its ability to communicate with local systems. Carrier holds the view that moving art history (in authentic Euroamerican styles) is too expensive to be possible, while his biggest concern remains that no-one has ever managed to write a world art history and do justice to native traditions in both Europe and Asia (in Elkins 2007: 288). A way ahead is suggested by Cuban critic Gerard Mosquera in his critique of the ‘Marco Polo Syndrome’ (Mosquera 2005). He proposed that the West should also take an initiative by adopting

* See section (3.1) for more discussion.

a pluralistic view towards their own tradition by opening it to the diverse critical evaluations from outside. Given their shared interest in making art studies more contingent to local or regional traditions, Carrier and Mosquera would have agreed, at least on the point of forming a multicultural method by first rejecting the impossible option of a reductionist, transcultural perspective. This dissertation argues that both authors would have preferred the 'pan-human' approach instead, in certain sociological or anthropological views of art (Zijlmans 2008; Smith 2009), where an insistence on a perspective of connectivity, that uses cybernetics for culture's new frontiers, establishes it in more universal terms of a social (sub)system (Luhmann 2000).

2.4 Intercultural art historical narratives and national identities

To make an argument in his book, Carrier envisions a scenario of a 'specific meeting of visual cultures' that can be summarised as follows: along with European, Indian and Islamic art, a Chinese tradition has developed along its own trajectory. In his view, a fair world history of art would represent that each flourished quite independently until occasional contacts became frequent and eventually dense in today's world of globalisation. However, Carrier's reiterated point of view in this interpretation remains that, despite subsequent interactions, these four traditions are basically distinct, 'each possessing its own essence' (Carrier 2008: 41). He follows the nationalist practice by making a cultural tradition synonymous to its bounded territory, a move that attaches to a geographical location the additional significance of its history and all activities that have taken place over the entirety of its cultural memory. To keep his tradition-bound analysis on track, Carrier relies on an outmoded notion of artistic hierarchy that privileges painting over other art forms, and so neglects to give enough weight to a broad range of visual cultural exchange (Gaskell 2010: 67). In contrast to various globalisms, this is a symbolic localism that has the effect of transfiguring and empowering a community.

As Michael Featherstone suggests, when applied to nation-states, localism usefully provides a repository for all its 'myths, heroes, events, landscapes and memories' (Featherstone 1995: 109). Carrier's basic metaphor of piling up single timelines depends on the cohesive meaning of tradition, all the while helping to bridge over historical distances in nationalist narratives. Cultural bordering by historians is a geopolitical action that has the effect of rendering permeable boundaries as fixed even in the context of a world art history. Carrier's idea of monocultural narratives has much in common with those based on the ideal of 'nationalist art' that has its historical roots in the political system of nation states in the modern era. A nation state, still plays a powerful role in our life with its funding of the nation's art infrastructures, but its historical connections with cultural imperialism may be unsympathetic to others supporting a more democratic ideal of world art (McLean 2011: 163).

III. The question of intercultural comparison

3.1 Intercultural comparisons: ethics for aesthetics

In *A World Art History and Its Objects*, David Carrier concerns himself primarily with one question: just how general his historically inclined, general philosophy of art history can be, especially when applied to the topic of a world art history, which has global, if not universal relevance? The answer he provides seems to be 'as general as aesthetics is to being human'. Between knowledge of internal dynamics of art history and that of external sociological accounts of art, Carrier chooses a shared aesthetic as the universal foundation for a world history of art. This is true no matter how abstract or obscure the links between philosophical concept and actual objects of art may be*, or how difficult it may be in practice to verify a historical interpretation on the basis of an unverifiable continuity of a past tradition. Carrier postulates, '(t)o relate the successive works of art on our

* Throughout his book, Carrier does not seem to have engaged with the important task of examining inner changes within individual cultural traditions, except, not surprisingly, that of Europe. But lack of knowledge in foreign cultural traditions does not seem to have prevented Carrier from questioning native historians about their adherence to own traditions. See Atreyee Gupta and Sugata Ray's comment in (Elkins 2007: 350, 399).

various time lines, we need an aesthetic, an account of how successive artists understood what they were doing' (Carrier 2008: 77). His theory for a world art history itself, constructed from the possibility of multiple monocultural narratives (which has not yet been realised), does not actually provide a real answer for the real question of geopolitics in a cultural world.

But in the final section of his book, Carrier does offer a solution that may, in theory, work for the cultural-political situations of an increasingly globalised world. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas's communicative ethics for actions in the public sphere suggest, for Carrier, a believable mode of border-crossing between communities of 'traditional ways of writing art's histories' (Carrier 2008: 145). To the extent these conscious efforts at intercultural respect are for promoting mutual interests and recognition and for fighting provincialism and racism, they are well within the range of ethics. Carrier thinks that, by respecting all cultures, one manages to understand everybody else on their own terms and without imposing own ways of thinking (Ibid: 136). A translation that brings nations together is an ideal act of geopolitics.

Carrier's solution of communication between international partners has a precedent in history, of the study of 'world literature' (*Weltliteratur*) originally invented by Goethe but since applied mostly in the sense of an open, fair platform for academic exchanges. Homi Bhabha is famously quoted as saying that 'the study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognise themselves through their projection of *otherness*'. (quoted in Lüdeke 2009: 44). As has been noted (Ibid), although originally conceived in the context of Enlightenment philosophy, where the intention of Goethe's original coinage of the term 'world literature' was to set up a new paradigm and new coordinates of international comparison, the concept is now updated to call for new forms of intercultural knowledge to be produced, as a result of the 'intensification and international and interdisciplinary exchange of contents, norms and values' (Ibid : 45). In light of Homi Bhabha's transformation of Goethe's original cited above, the concept of 'world literature'

would have the meaning of broadening up the disciplinary field towards more variety of cultural and intercultural discourses and artefacts (Ibid : 46).

3.2 An exotic history for an exotic art

James Elkins's book *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History* (2010) engages the curious topic of evaluating art historical works on the topic of Chinese landscape paintings. As he has limited himself to works in the English language only, it is almost predictable that those presented in the book show exactly as his chosen title suggests, namely, that histories of Chinese landscape painting by art historians in the West appear to be a product of the Western art historical tradition rather than the Chinese one. Elkins notes that they seem to have followed the unsaid rule of making no serious departure from the Occidental set of protocols and mindsets as far as theories, rhetorics and logics go. Carrier's text proposes the opposite, advancing an exclusivist theory that rejects evidence not directly sourced from texts from the era.

Stating his second argument for the book, Elkins discovers that all historical scholarship on Chinese painting involves parallel studies between Chinese and Western art (Elkins 2010: 11). For an example, when Pepe Karmel compares Wen Zhengming with Franz Klein, a question immediately arises regarding how knowledge of Klein's work helps with our understanding of Wen's. Indeed, does it make sense to view Chinese art via Western art, or should we strive to understand it on its own terms, without reference to familiar models? (Elkins 2010: 37-38). In reaction to Fong Wen's coinage of 'Yuan Renaissance' to illustrate a certain historical scenario,* a similar question can be asked: what does Renaissance mean in the pure Chinese context? When pursued to the extreme, the question definitely feels paradoxical (Elkins 2010: 67-68).

Perhaps for the very reason of the geopolitical dominance of Western scholarship, even in an interpretative community committed to Chinese art, so far the practice of translating cultures seems

*'Understanding the Yuan masters is as crucial to the understanding of later Chinese painting as is understanding the Renaissance to the study of European painting'. (James Cahill)

to have generated few pioneers. There is a definite possibility that an unfamiliar tradition will look 'flat and self-similar' to a scholar working on such comparisons. While David Carrier's argument is that one must interpret or understand unfamiliar cultures by way of examples that are familiar (Carrier 2012), his theory can work out far less successfully in practice when the extrapolation becomes simplifying and reductive exploring in a unfamiliar territory. When a Western author makes a comparison of historical perspective his or her motivation can always be regarded as Western because of the way they are positioned, i.e. their location of enunciation. Elkins found any effort to persuade his East-European audience over an evaluation of their native artist was stymied because he discovered that on the occasion the artist's national identity supersedes aesthetic consideration of any kind. 'The long, ongoing, painful history of nationalisms is more than enough to demonstrate the danger of overly strong distinctions between national cultures' (Elkins 2010: 59).

Is there a solution? The solution is to make the category of 'transnational' art history available and perhaps favourable (Eisenman 2011). On the whole, Elkins's polemic take on 'Chinese' art history highlights the geopolitical nature of most intercultural exchanges of knowledge. His conclusion is that art historical narratives, periods, and senses of interpretation are more 'obdurately Western' than on the surface. This may also apply to Carrier's approach to art in 'exotic' traditions as well, despite his apparent awareness of the issue. Carrier's account lacks specificity when it comes to historical details, especially those belonging to different times and spaces which seem conflated and encompassed under the same bracket of an aesthetic or philosophical tradition*. Description of another culture's art can seem an 'impure affair', but only to the eyes of those who find that 'a translator is a traitor' (Clifford and Marcus 1986). In the context of world art history, translation embraces parallels, cross cultural studies, colonialism, among other

*Comparable to being 'locked inside a nation's borders' in a sense of one's cultural identity falling into the mentality of a 'border trap', in which situation the state acts as the geographical 'container' of the modern society. See reference in next (3.3) section.

specific concerns and considerations, but the core difficulty may exist in the matter of representation itself, of the geopolitical positioning of its voice.

3.3 Cultural theories and national artworlds

In establishing his view of world art history, Carrier prioritises art cultures from China, India and Islamic people above others. The diagram that Carrier uses for his main argument in *A World Art History and Its Objects* consists of four parallel lines indicating the evolution of art in each of the four 'national artworlds' in his cultural narratives (Danto 1964; McLean 2011: 44). The structure of a 'pile-up of parallels' apparently shows a civilisational model of history, which allows him to portray each as if it generated its own history and was able to tell the story about its own art. However, as Terry Smith astutely notes, Carrier's approach takes him 'perilously close to the essentialist generalities' such as those in the 'clash of civilisation' thesis championed recently by Samuel Huntington (Smith 2009). Carrier's book itself offers not so much a history of art per se, but a look at what it sees as cultural institutions and their ideologies about the nature of art and how to evaluate it (Girshick 2008: 225). While Carrier claims himself committed to explaining 'the relationship of successive works of art on the various timelines' (Carrier 2008: 109), he has, in fact, focused on the timelines instead most of the time. With regard to Carrier's obviously swayed priorities, Ivan Gaskell suggests that, since philosophers place on themselves the constraint of the written word, so do most art historians, including Carrier (Gaskell 2010: 67). As a result, Carrier shows himself to have concentrated only on societies with *written* commentaries on visual art: whether they are by Giorgio Vasari in sixteenth-century Tuscany, or Tsung Ping in fifth-century China. In doing so, by 'world art history' Carrier does not mean the world in its human entirety, but only parts of it: Europe, China, India, and the Islamic world alone. Gaskell reveals Carrier's essentialist bias and apparent adherence to the outmoded view of 'civilisations' (Ibid : 67).

Carrier's vision is that mutual translation and recognition may eventually bring communication as a much needed answer to aesthetic exoticisms. This change would also address the problems caused by language used for the production of knowledge and boundaries of humanities (Mignolo 1998; Mignolo 2002). Insisted reliance on text-based analysis establishes an order of access but also erects language barriers. Carrier fails to consider the 'power discrepancies' between various art making societies and communities (Gaskell 2010: 67). As such he endorses an aesthetics of national artworlds (McLean 2011): an internal discourse shows a focus of interest on what art critics and patrons do, and does so by a relative neglect of the production of art objects, and too much oriented in consumption alone and from the perspective of art critics and patrons. Cultures described in his setting are thus more national artworlds employing autonomy and authenticity as their default identity and value.

What are the effects of globalisation on world art history? The generalised view of art tradition sported by Carrier entails a half-hearted embrace of localism and consequently rejection of anthropology as his methodology. With respect to geography and artistic traditions, identifying cultures within their locale has been part of the practice for artists and art historians (Cherry and Cullen 2006). The concept of place signifies an imposition of culture onto an actual geographical site. Places are images of cultures of the past that are archived and no longer alive. They form a significant part of our contemporary experience. Contemplated from afar as a distant landscape and a painting, these 'places of the imagination' are those with which an entire culture is identified. In this process of cultural landscaping, cultural names put natural mountains and rivers on territories of memory; the process is culturally determined. When closely linked with memories, places become images of past time. (Belting and Dunlap 2011: 46-47) (Paasi 2003)

IV. Breaking borders in geo-history of art: Significance of ethnography in Scharfstein's *Art without borders*

Hailed ‘the world’s comprehensive intercultural comparative analysis of art and artists to date’ (Van Damme 2008: 300), Ben-Ami Scharfstein’s *Art without Borders* (2008) claims to explore art’s diversities via philosophical discourses, and does this on a true world scale. As with all other ways of researching art worldwide, Scharfstein’s effort clearly shows dedication to specific aims and purposes, such as concepts in relation to all humanity, as well as some unspecified and puzzling omissions and exclusions, such as those connected to postcolonial and feminist concerns. In comparison to Carrier's book discussed earlier in this chapter, Scharfstein has largely avoided adopting dated and often controversial views in world history, such as evolution of culture and civilisation*. Instead, it seems preferable for him to consider the universal significance of art to humanity via an account of a naturally or socially based approach. In short, he uses terms that would identify different social entities for comparison, while carefully downplaying borders and other geopolitical devices that would, under normal circumstances, link to power, or other concepts, with hierarchic or hegemonic connotations.

4.1 Humanity as basis of art worlds

Scharfstein impressively starts his declaration of the importance of art by making an appeal to general humanity. He conceives his stance of art thinking as being on ‘an open aesthetics’, namely one that takes account of and absorbs all differences. Cultural anthropologists have agreed on the ‘universal existence of aesthetic taste and aesthetic impulse’ which have received recognition since the very start of anthropology (Coote and Shelton 1992: 7). The only noticeable controversy in his book on the ideological front, then, concerns the labelling of aesthetic ‘primitives’ or primitivism. Later the book would show, on numerous occasions, that its author makes a passionate argument on the correct or incorrect uses of the term ‘primitivism’ when matching art with peoples or moments in art history (Scharfstein 2009: 26-27).

* Such as in well known works by Spengler and Samuel Huntington.

More important for Scharfstein, however, is to recall the often forgotten fact that connections between art and human nature had originated from the universal fundamentals of evolution (Scharfstein 2009: 1-3). Scharfstein's theory suggests that becoming aware of the natural foundation of art helps us to live better as humans, above all in ways that aesthetically and socially connect each of us to our common humanity such as creation, parenthood, making signs, in other words to the fact that art implicates life through its aesthetic aspect or dimension of life (Ibid : 7-15, 17). This corresponds to the belief of many anthropologists of art, and its broad meaning of an adaptive reason for art certainly echoes the thesis of theorists such as Ellen Dissanayake (Anderson 2008: 205; Dissanayake 2008: 252).

4.2 Traditions as social institutions

Scharfstein defines a tradition as an active psychological factor in social bonding because local communities reinforce themselves with its maintenance (Scharfstein 2009: 82). Traditions form an utopian space for local memory (Ibid : 94). He also stresses the point that is repeatedly witnessed, that traditions are what it takes to authenticate cultural production (and to separate products from mere copies or forgeries, as arguments over which at some point in history distinguished aesthetic issues among literati in Ming China, for instance)(Ibid : 103-105). Indian sculpture turned socially into art thanks to Havell and Coomaraswamy, an effort that seems to have transcended the barriers between the colonisers and the colonised (Ibid : 110-111)*. Scharfstein has also identified a tendency of ephemerism in several cultures' traditions (ancient Roman, Egyptian, Indian and Chinese), comparing it to a wish to visualise and idealise life at its prime (Ibid : 112).

As Scharfstein goes on to suggest in this extended first chapter, the concept of tradition can be mobilised to interpret cultural phenomena as diverse as often reenacted iconographical symbolisms,

*Art historian Ernest Havell, in his *Indian Sculpture and Painting* and *The Ideals of Indian Painting*, published, respectively in 1908 and 1911, argues that Indian art should be appreciated in terms of its own standards. Those standards go back, he claims to the Vedic period, even though this period left little if any evidence of nonverbal art.

apprentice-master systems, rules in image making or building, subcultures of classicism, archaism or antiquarianism (Scharfstein 2009: 102-159). Using the separate examples of Winckelmann's 1764 *History of the Art of Antiquity* and Chinese and European writers at court, he attempts to describe a historical phenomenon of reified traditions ('creative copying'; 'traditional desire to depend on past models') in such formations of social relations and practicalities as academies and institutions (Ibid: 163, 167). To conclude his chapter on tradition and traditionalism in art, Scharfstein has given conspicuous examples of intellectual attitudes towards them in the early twentieth century, in the form of art movements that were based, respectively, on the ideals of anonymous craftsmen (Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, and Soetsu Yanagi), and metaphysics (Coomaraswamy). He argues that both Yanagi's *mingei* (folk arts) movement and Coomaraswamy's Indology had ended less than successfully because both attempted to solve collective problems about their tradition with solutions conceived and promoted by individuals (Ibid: 171-179). Scharfstein's analysis of tradition in art thus presents a picture of social memory that is infinitely accessible to individuals but ungraspable by the vision of any of them. It proposes an analogy in which an art tradition may act like a collective subject. Tradition resembles a collective subject from whom individuals constantly receive determination or influences, but over whose essential nature one has no easy way of comprehending due to its multiple manifestations.

4.3 Artists as a social catalyst

Much as Scharfstein is keen to portray art as a natural product of human beings as they develop themselves cognitively along with an organised society, he concludes that, since there is no such thing as a perfectly traditional society, any tradition is also always facing challenges from heroic individuals, in an antithetical pairing between tradition and egocentricity (Scharfstein 2009: 182). Unconventional individuals were often associated with qualities such as 'crazy' 'wild' as opposed to 'timid' or 'merely conventional' in the native Chinese contexts. There, instead of just being

uncontrollable, inspired spontaneity, according to Scharfstein, is what sells bold unconventional artists whose work is admired for their ‘heroic, powerful spirit’, a required condition for an unsuppressed individualism (Ibid : 184).

In historical parallels to Scharfstein’s narrative about the Chinese artistic genius’s ‘egocentric’ traits is the Greek terms of *phantasia* and what it signals in an artist that names him a visionary and which has evolved to be close to ‘(creative) imagination’ and ‘intuition’ in the current terminology of Western art theories (Scharfstein 2009: 192). The Islamic world is represented in this chapter by the Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) of Mughal India who, for his love of art, had become one of the few violators of the Islamic prohibition on images that depict animate beings: Scharfstein credits Akbar and his son, Jahangir, with royal patronage that created the new Mughal style of illumination painting (Ibid : 200). (Figure 5)

Scharfstein spends a significant portion of his third chapter in *Art without Borders* on the heroic artists (Alberti, Leonardo and Michelangelo) in Renaissance Florence, mainly through Vasari’s eulogies, before shifting the attention of his focus onto philosophers in Enlightenment era England and Germany who invented the philosophical concept of natural genius. Schiller, for example, argues that full humanity is attainable through a unity of religious and hedonistic aestheticisms, in the art form of ‘playing’. Scharfstein sees Schiller’s idea of relating ‘play’ to aesthetic experience as proof for the principle of disinterestedness or art for art’s sake (Scharfstein 2009: 214). In his history of the idea of ‘genius’ and its development in history, Scharfstein points out that the romantic idea ‘genius’, in particular, took the form of undergoing difficulties such as torture and madness, as if there must be links between creativity, melancholy and mental illness (Ibid : 223). Scharfstein’s digressions on the favourable effects of dementia and possibly brain damage adds to his characterisation with unusual causes of visual creativity that are statistically supported to a small degree (Ibid : 225).



Figure 5 Manohar, Emperor Jahangir receiving his two sons,
Album-painting in gouache on paper. (c. 1506-07)
British Museum

Still, the stereotype of an eventful, heroic life fits Scharfstein's characterisation of art genius as romantic and egocentric well. In the era of Western modernity, cultural specialists like scientists, artists and academics have become heroes in their own right, who seek to and have the relative power to encourage the transformation, fix or repair of whatever that comes short in everyday life (Featherstone 1995: 57). Non-Western cultures do not always reject changes as they are assumed to do sometimes. Rather a common pattern is for the indigenous people to incorporate changes on a selective basis (Coote and Shelton 1992: 7).

4.4 Intersecting cultural influences and multicultural comparisons

Scharfstein devotes the last two chapters in his book not just to the theme of multicultural art history, but properly to the theme of cross-cultural art history. For chapter four, his focus is on documenting mutual influences between Western art and non-Western art (Scharfstein 2009: 264). Understandably, most of the cases by which Scharfstein has perceived these cross-cultural developments belong in the era of contemporary or twentieth-century art; many of them seem trivial or random at first, but they are all the more exciting for the art historian as he or she discovers that events in the history of recent art have for the most part unfolded in expected ways, forming a sort of chaos which he believes to be productive (Ibid : 265). For this last observation he gives the examples of photography, whose effect on artists has been described as 'liberating' and whose instrumental and mechanical effects as 'subversive' to art's prior uses and conventions (as in the case of 'plagiarism' in Sherrie Levine's radical re-conceptualisations of art (Ibid: 269, 302). This particular strand in Scharfstein's narrative seems to imply that photography, as a momentous modern invention in media technology, had successfully reset the course of the broader tradition of Western (graphical, literary) art to a primitivist position that it has to date never experienced.

Quoting European borrowings from the art of Japanese woodcut print (Monet, Gauguin), Japanese borrowings from European prints (Kokan, Hokusai)*, European borrowings from the art of African sculpture (Vlaminck, Kirchner) and Chinese borrowings from European art tradition (Zhao Wou-ki, Chen Tsing-fang)†, Scharfstein shows the intense exchanges between cultures characterise modern art as a whole (Scharfstein 2009: 271, 280, 286). To the extent Scharfstein has decided to make ethnic art the preoccupation of his book, he presents it above all as in relation to ‘modern primitives’, under which terms he perceives and understands native artists in Papuan, Inuit, (Australian) Aboriginal and African cultures (Ibid : 304). What cultural identities mean for ethnic artists is to adapt to life facing an artworld that is created and controlled by institutions of largely European origins and constitution. They are, therefore, perceived by Scharfstein to be at the forefront of a revolution by fulfilling (not always voluntarily) the function of an agent of change, both in their native environments and in diaspora (Ibid : 357). Scharfstein’s writing in this section has managed to portray a trajectory of European art as it moves to engage the aesthetic influences from exotic art traditions, regarded under the general nomenclature of ‘primitive art’ (Ibid : 273).

In place of a conclusion, the final chapter in Scharfstein’s book pledges to understand the nature and potentialities of non-Western art via what he believes to be a fair study of outwardly distinct but intrinsically interconnected aesthetic traditions, because arguably aesthetics considers such elements from both nature and culture that humans perceive, respond to and make use of universally (Scharfstein 2009: 386). As he writes at the beginning of first chapter, he wants to ‘find common ground among the most characteristic aesthetic conceptions of many of the art cultures (he) deals with’ (Ibid: 8). To describe his findings, Scharfstein singles out the following human traits as essential for aesthetic experiences and found them a common possession among cultures he has investigated: sensations, perceptions, basic aesthetic preferences, basic human emotions, and

* Shiba Kōkan (司馬 江漢, 1747-1818); Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾 北齋, 1760-1849)

† Zhao Wou-ki (趙無極, 1921-) Chen Tsing-fang (陳錦芳, 1936-)

basic cultural responses to commonly shared purposes (Ibid : 381). It is based on these transcultural overlaps in perceptual, emotional and social functions that Scharfstein devises his synoptic list of aesthetic doctrines, in addition to the following ideas for aesthetic qualities: fusion, oscillation, realism and beauty (Scharfstein 2008: 346; Scharfstein 2009: 390).

V. Aesthetics, subjects and identity politics:

5.1 An anthropological approach to aesthetics

In *Art without Borders*, Scharfstein tries to adapt traditional aesthetics for an updated anthropology of art, tapping into the theoretical and historical sources of intercultural comparison studies and exploring the possibility of retuning the Western aesthetic system for non-Western applications. A story of anthropological approaches to art, as told by Richard Anderson, began with Franz Boas's *Primitive Art* the appearance of which in 1927 provided the first extensive example of examining the significance of art in human culture and thought (Anderson 2008: 204). Parallel developments in academic anthropology by Bronislaw Malinowski, of a sociocultural functionalism that later became paradigmatic for a long time among anthropologists, had little impact on art criticism and history until decades later (Ibid : 205). Anderson attributes the resurfacing of anthropology of art to a renewed interest in the psychological dimension of human culture, which contributes to a focus on cognitive, symbolic and philosophical dimensions of Non-Western art, and make the occurrence of such discourses as a dialogue between aesthetics and anthropology possible (Ibid: 206). From the evidence of interdisciplinary history, it is convincing to think that sustained interactions in the twentieth century between anthropology and art criticism and history sets the basis for Scharfstein's inquiry about universalities in aesthetics.

The much used and abused label of primitivism, associated with this evolutionist controversy, has been a negative contribution to the enterprise of comparative studies of art. Wilfried van Damme associates this tradition of comparative studies to anthropologists from mid-nineteenth

century to early twentieth century (Van Damme 2008: 296). Comparative studies in art history have seen development in the direction of cultural anthropology which is a Western invention. Its ethnocentric and speculative methodology also caused concerns over neutrality. The controversy surrounding the academic use of the term 'primitivism' has indeed seen Franz Boas, the preeminent cultural anthropologist of his time, indulging in a form of cultural relativism. His belief in the particularities observed from fieldwork indicates that all cultures are fundamentally unique and comparisons based purely on race and other political distinctions can be difficult to justify (Ibid : 297-298). On the other hand, there is also controversy in relation to the alternative structures of diffusionism and evolutionism that were there to inform anthropologists of hidden rules, laws or logic of cultural change, although assertions like these for master narratives must seem suspicious to late twentieth century critics (Schneider 2003: 220). James Clifford's pair of essays 'On Ethnographic Authority' 'On Ethnographic Allegory' manage to provide an analysis of ethnography epistemologically, that it relies on the power of observation, as well as theoretical observation, for effective conversion of experience into a coherent narrative. 'Nevertheless one should resist the temptation to translate all meaningful experience into interpretation. If the two are reciprocally related, they are not identical. It makes sense here to hold them apart, if only because appeals to experience often act as validations for ethnographic authority.' 'The most serious argument for the role of experience in the historical and cultural sciences is contained in the general notion of understanding others (*Verstehen*) which arises initially from the sheer fact of coexistence in a shared world' (Clifford 1983: 126, 128).

Anthropology of the aesthetic is a new emerging discipline of academic inquiry, with inherent problems of consensus from the critical point of view (Coote and Shelton 1992: 8). Alfred Gell thinks an anthropology of aesthetics must reproduce the technological (non-semiotic) aspect for cultural objects. Using the example of a Trobriand canoe-board, Gell suggests a universal standard for art is a technically achieved level of excellence (Coote and Shelton 1992: 8; Scharfstein 2009:

178n). Gell asserts the value of an aesthetic approach is to 'illuminate the specific objective characteristics of the art object'; however, as with art universally, content (identification with mythological symbolism) combine to attract the luxury good which was the aim of expeditions. Meanings such as manifestation of ancestral power, in another example, can be reduced and abstracted into the same as a Western aesthetic value. Another problem concerns if the same critical frameworks such as realistic/ideological art in Marxist aesthetic can be applied to the class-less or pre-class societies where most anthropologists do their work (Firth 1992: 36). Aesthetics does not always relate to standards of beauty. A more accurate term for understanding aesthetics in a broader context is 'principles' (Coote and Shelton 1992: 7).

Cultural theorists have contended that politics of knowledge, including colonial power, has operated in anthropological approaches to culture. Postcolonial critic Walter D. Mignolo argues that the historical consequences of colonisation and imperialism have crystallised into the conceptual frameworks of civilisation and modern world system. The very fact that the discipline of anthropology studies mostly the third world verifies the fact that it follows the logic of globalisation into sustaining the capitalist imperialist creation of hegemonic division of central/peripheral identities. Thus from his view, scientific and scholarly knowledge in its universalist stance helps to sustain a locus of disciplinary and scholarly enterprise. An epistemology (or gnoseology in a coined term by Mignolo) that reveals this inequality between epistemological colonisers and colonised is mandatory as a critique of the anthropological subject (Mignolo 1998: 46).

Mignolo argues that interculturalisation in the age of globalisation plays out to two different strategies using spatial and temporal distances: 1. By creating the primitive/exotic identities for art in the past (Rhodes 385), and 2. by creating 'other' identities and values of modernity (Ibid). Mignolo considers that the problem with 'frontiers' in the era of the geography of globalisation coincides with boundaries of humanities. In looking at how spatial borders have been transformed

into chronological ones, he thinks that civilisation theory and the intercultural comparison model built around it depend too much on Enlightenment ideas (section II in this chapter), and remains oblivious of the colonial history that took place two centuries before that, thus forming a blind spot in local histories in which ‘global designs are enacted or where they have to be adapted, adopted, transformed, and re-articulated’ (Mignolo 2000: 278).

Considering the factor of politics of knowledge in Scharfstein’s philosophy as it is on display in *Art without Borders*, a critique of his being epistemologically naive seems difficult to avoid. This is perhaps understandable when one considers the fact that Scharfstein’s programme comprises philosophy only and no sensitivities to geopolitical realities and that Scharfstein has worked with an outdated model of world art studies. The exception is Scharfstein’s sufficient supply of reflections and consideration on ethnological issues, especially those arising from the issue of contact between anthropology and cultural studies.

5.2 Intercultural identity and subjectivity in world art history

On the other hand, Scharfstein apparently thinks the European investigations of other cultures have, on balance, contributed positively to helping to remove barriers to importing concepts and values from other cultures without prejudice. Upon examining the history of interactions between modern Western artists and those from other cultures, he writes optimistically about a new ideology of world art taking shape, ‘We in the West are exceptionally receptive because we have, for the purposes of creation, demoted our tradition and been attracted to other, alternative traditions. Once the old borders have been erased and so much of so many places and times has acquired legitimacy, the field of choices becomes a borderless, indefinable miscellany’ (Scharfstein 2009: 282).

Scharfstein’s optimism finds its epistemological expression in the trope of ‘world history artworld’*. An update on Arthur Danto’s discourse of Artworld arrives for the field of world art

* Danto coined the term “artworld”, by which he meant cultural context or “an atmosphere of art theory. For world art artworld, see (McLean 2011)

history in the form of its identification as a *meta-narrative* and its development to suit the historical reality of globalisation (McLean 2011). To the extent that Danto's definition of Artworld contains not only the physical aspect of objects, institutions and persons, but a spiritual one, too, in that an artworld meets the predicate of having relevant epistemic descriptions of its art (Danto 1964: 582). Ian McLean thus suggests that the world as we experience it particularly merits a pluralist approach to its diverse phenomena of artworlds, notionally consisting of systems on local, national and world art levels: the world art artworld 'tolerates' local art worlds by virtue of treating itself as a 'zone of translation' that mediates between them (McLean 2011: 163-164).

Given that world art artworld is assumed to have emerged in response to globalisation in the socio-cultural world, world art identifies with the condition of future possibilities of globalisation (McLean 2011: 164). Globalisation scholars such as John Tomlinson also describe emerging signs of a global interdependence that, if anything, will be optimal for cultural de-territorialisation (Tomlinson 1996). The phenomenon of world integration, globalisation signifies complex interconnections among societies, cultures, institutions and individuals. Also included in Tomlinson's thesis is the rise of a post-national order, the dislocation of cultural identities and the emergence of 'hybrid' cultural identities in multicultural nation-states and in transnational cultural forms (Tomlinson 2003: 275).

On the level of geopolitics, Scharfstein's stance in *Art without Borders* certainly seems more attuned with a world art artworld, with its more fluid definition of aesthetics than the one applied by the latter. To the extent Scharfstein derives his understanding of aesthetics from both anthropological and historical sources, thus avoiding in his discourse any fixation on the national artworld and its implication of cultural autonomy and civilised achievements. Carrier's view of a future world art history, judged from this angle, seems somewhat outmoded with its implied hierarchy of cultures, and thus becomes vulnerable to criticisms of multiplying the same narrative

of cultural ordering used by European nationalism and its imperialism, albeit shared among other regional super powers as well.

VI. Conclusion

True to a shared anthropocentric attitude, neither Carrier nor Scharfstein is so much interested in studying actual artistic objects themselves as in comparing aesthetic preferences through textual accounts from those cultures. However, Carrier's writing explores aesthetic traditions internationally, which obliges him to base his observations exclusively on sources consisting in written texts. In comparison, Scharfstein's approach seems more eclectic, with additions from the ethnography of art whenever possible. The discussion in this chapter shows that this difference is considerable and consequential when one attempts to estimate what their work means to our conception of world art history today which still faces controversies and is far from stable. This is important as proof of their attempts to establish a transnational approach to world art history (Piotrowski 2009: 84).

Chapter 4. Placing Objects: David Summers's *Real Spaces* and Esther Pasztory's *Thinking with Things*

I. Introduction

As generally understood, 'cultural turn' signifies a movement in the social sciences and humanities to build research initiatives on aspects of cultural processes that reveal themselves through spatial and material expressions. In this chapter I will be focusing on reviewing influences of 'cultural turn' in world art history scholarship, particularly in two recent works that to me seem perfectly to represent the tendency: David Summers's *Real Spaces* (2003) and Esther Pasztory's *Thinking with Things* (2005). For me what makes it interesting for them to be discussed together in the same context is a shared methodology with an interest in material culture and directed to a spatial turn. In recent decades, under the auspices of cultural turn, there has been a renewed interest among humanities scholars and art historians in examining and understanding spatial relationships and material culture.

Under the broader category of trends that have influenced the cultural turn in history studies, one can enumerate such entries as material culture and spatial turn that have significant links to the geography of culture. The idea of a thing 'means less an object than a particular subject-object relation' (Brown 2001: 4). Summers has traversed the many pages of *Real Spaces* to prove to us that knowing a thing's identity does not necessarily inform us on that relation, but knowing the way they are arranged, assembled, configured or simply formed or shaped, does (Summers 2003: 17). Similarly Pasztory devotes the first part of her *Thinking with Things* to sandboxing a theory of art on the combined basis of anthropology, philosophy, and art history (Pasztory 2005: ix). Her interest in interpreting objects of art with some intellectual assistance from post-structuralist theory and anthropology has inspired her to speculate on the origin of anthropomorphism in art and non-art via the material history behind such concepts as cultural 'insistence' (locally distributed and similar to

traditions) (Ibid: 41). Like Summers, Pasztory has conceived *Thinking with Things* with the intention to transcend the cognitive framework surrounding the Western notion of 'art'. This is particularly true with regard to the book's first half, where her concerns, while not always related to art or aesthetics, may still be relevant. As Pasztory informs us, she is more interested in what she perceives to be common (global) traits among human beings, even when the sameness mainly transpires through regional varieties (Ibid: 4).

Between Summers and Pasztory, I will argue that the authors share an object-centred, objective approach to art: whether images or things, they relate the persons and society around them to specific experiences or messages in ways that can be loosely defined as geopolitical, where power relationships are explained via deployment of sociocultural metaphors such as the articulated creation of space and place. But beyond that, the chapter will also describe what divides them methodologically which is mostly a matter of different emphases. Summers's expansive volume seems led by diverse ideas, including those in semiotics, psychology and cultural geography, whereas Pasztory's discussions often embrace the frameworks of material and media culture, and her analyses of conceptual art are guided by notions and principles of cultural anthropology.

II. David Summers's *Real Spaces*

2.1 Art historical description for the 'visual' arts

Looking at David Summers's past work before *Real Spaces*, one notes that he has already articulated some of the central issues discussed in *Real Spaces* in an early paper called "'Visual Arts' and the Problem of Art Historical Description" (Summers 1982). In it, he points out that certain biases have existed in the Western discourse of art history which misinterpret what the discipline set out to do in the first place. Several of these, according to Summers in this early essay, concern the assumed neutrality of its concepts and methodologies to the conditions of human perception. There is the established method of iconographical analysis which is supposed for visual

contents to 'reflect influence of theological, philosophical and political ideas' but which uses a language that is already 'implicitly interpretative' with its definition of artistic meanings as intrinsic (Ibid : 302). Using the example of iconography Summers expresses his mystification over the fact that the Western discourse of art history largely treats 'visual' arts as cues for events of cognitive perception while overlooking other visual qualities that may be encoded in every specific pictorial structure.

Inspired by his encounters with ideas from both Ernst Gombrich and Meyer Shapiro that regard picture signs as an object of 'geometric-optic' transcoding or a continuous field of optical elements, Summers comes up with the idea of each planar pictorial structure being a semantically unambiguous amalgam of optical elements (Summers 1982: 303). In considering any pictorial plane using the geometric-optic description as above, Summers suggests that two distinctive types of syntactic relationship between optical elements can be identified: one, a 'context' that is a kind of mutual sustenance between elements, and, two, an 'order' that constitutes an amalgam of signs that are articulated enough among themselves to co-determine a semantic value (Ibid: 304). Summers's alternative definition of the 'image-field' depends on differentiating configurations as much as it does on an optical base for stating an image sign. Summers argues that there is a history of real relations between the planar order and conceptual images that are imaginative devices that are found on the plane, to which he attributes the significance of being the deepest sign of human order, and a form of civilised life that has spread 'from city plans, roads to written language' (Ibid : 305).

In the remainder of his paper, Summers uses his devised theory to examine the development of planar order, as well as its real cognitive (as opposed to epistemologically projected) qualities, using objects from both Western and other cultures. From the viewpoint proposed by Summers, images such as *Tlalocan (Paradise of the Rain God)* from Teotihuacan, or *Ashurnasirpal II Anointing the Sacred Palm* a relief from Assyrian Nimrud, even Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*, represent their subject matter of cosmic importance well within character with what he deems to be

a realisation of planar pictoriality throughout the history of human art. In these cases, Summers believes that the pictorial plane has by now come already with the presuppositions of orders like axis, division, elevation, ornamentation, rotation, symmetry, subordination, translation and so on, that would fit in superbly with the ritual significance as intended for by all the examples of art incorporating the viewer's own space that he has selected for analysis (Summers 1982: 306). He has chosen those examples and set them up as historical parallels, with the hope for one to see the obvious conventionality, and therefore dominance and longevity, of planar structure, at least among what Western art history calls 'conceptual art' (as opposed to 'art of naturalism'). He also notes that the predominance of planar compositions exist always with use in certain, such as political, or public, or both, cultures (Ibid: 307). Before moving onto his much larger project of *Real Spaces*, Summers expresses his intention to seek the 'purposes and animating historical principles' for the time-preserved format.

2.2 Against the 'Rise of Western Modernism'

David Summers published *Real Spaces* in 2003 to offer a full-length treatment on the topic of world art history. However, it is particular to Summers's book that it attempts to contain and explain the world's art and its knowledge in terms that are exclusively conceptual and art historiographical. In his own words, *Real Spaces* is a project informed and inspired by concerns with 'theory, history and criticism' (Summers 2003: 12). Thus, unlike most others in the same category that have methodologically remained within the formalist and iconographic traditions, *Real Spaces* aims to replace their rearguard stances with the more embodied approach of 'post-formalist art history' (Ibid: 15). As such the book proposes a conception of artefacts and images which, when considered as one category, are not so much 'visual' as they are habitual and thus cause expected responses in their makers and users. Take, for example, Summers's claim about the grounding of 'real spaces' in such universal conditions as our concrete, 'given nature' and lived, 'second

nature' (Ibid: 53). At the least, his evocation of the 'real spaces' spells out the need for a new worldview in art history; to him, modern western academic discourse touting formal or visual analysis is simply too internalised and reductive to be authentically universal, particularly in the face of the reality of world cultures and their diverse expressions (Summers 1991).

As a result, he insists that all real developments in, and modernisation of, art history have to be achieved 'in accommodation of more or less local traditions' (Summers 2006: 216). Fully convinced of the value of a contextualised history of art, Summers proceeds to categorise art in its broadest sense as (part of) a material condition, which (in relation to man's physical presence) shows degrees of similarity and difference, as if on a spectrum, depending, in each case, on the purpose for which it is used and the manner in which it is used (Summers 2003: 38-39; Summers 2006: 22-23). His focus on interpreting art's physical contexts is also clearly borne out by a claimed rejection of post-structuralism as a useful tactic, because the latter's linguistically-inspired approach to expansion of 'texts' still provides no useful answers to the analysis of categories of artistic experiences lying beyond those of language, such as in historical societies which have never developed written documentation (Summers 2006: 219). Summers's critically aware 'post-formalism' in *Real Spaces* thus concerns itself with a cross-cultural translation, of what he calls 'the terms of our embodiment and community, (...) in one or another cultural historical form' (Ibid : 221).

2.3 World art history as a system of 'real metaphors'

The notion of 'real spatiality' has itself been evolved from an earlier concept which Summers has called 'real metaphor' (Summers 1991). Summers defines a real metaphor as one that 'takes its value from our embodied experience of the world in which we find ourselves, and at its etymological base it belongs with such other metaphors (...) that refer to limits and boundaries, words, that is, that refer to qualitative differences between inside and outside.' (Summers 1991:

247). Thinking of art in (linguistic) terms of conceptual replacements, he imagined the creation of subjunctive spaces in cultural contexts where objects are made for the effect of substituting ‘things that arise and vanish in the experience of an individual’, especially those that are absent, distant, past in time or out of sight. Under the condition of real metaphors, images and objects are therefore ‘culturally specific constructions of human spatiality’ made to assist an ‘intrinsically coded act’ to take place, as may be required in various cultural processes. To illustrate his proposition, that significant, contextualised use determines the status of real metaphors, Summers made reference to the simple example of a hobby horse: so a stick may become a real metaphor when it is made into a horse in children’s play, a significant use may be put to any object with ‘one or another potential spatial value in one or another circumstance’ (Summers 1991: 246-50).

Values attached to the criteria of real spatiality are presented as a system of one principle and six constituent categories, based on the objects’ relations of similarity and difference to each other: 1 - Facture (the basic notion and principle); 2 - Places; 3 - The appropriation of the centre; 4 - Image; 5 - Planarity; 6 - Virtuality; and 7 - The conditions of modernism (Summers 2003: 5-9). While the vast amount and variety of information which Summers has managed to communicate through this system defies efforts of quick compression or extraction, it is nevertheless appropriate to note how in the headings for the chapters, an even mixture of use and spatial terms keeps to the theme of art denoting a ‘space of use’ which also recalls his earlier conceptions of art as spatiotemporal substitutes or ‘real metaphors’ (Summers 1991: 227).

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is also important to recognise the transmissive and communicative undertone implied by Summers’s use of such keywords as ‘real metaphor’, ‘subjunctive space’ or ‘substitutive image’ when envisioning his system of a cross-cultural history of art. As he himself has suggested, the very notion of ‘real spatiality’ presumes a transposition of objects in the subjunctive space, shared by the maker and the user alike, through which a link of spatiotemporal correlation is established, and information is channelled via the affective activity of

entering the context (Summers 1991: 249, 255; Summers 2006: 20-21). By entering the context, I want to point to Summers's interpretation of the Sacred Rock at Machu Picchu: (Summers 2003: 261). Communication and control via real spatiality are thus said to go beyond vision, because they are pre-linguistic and participatory. In contrast with the psychophysical space asserted by philologically-inclined art historians, Summers insists that his 'real space' involves modes of presentation that are more embodied, phenomenological and simply, more 'local', due to its intimate interdependence with the meta-optical environment of 'real space' (Ibid : 21).

III. *Real Spaces* and multiculturalism

3.1 Is there cultural primacy in real spatiality?

Critics have questioned certain assumptions on Summers's part as they are implied by his formulation of 'real spatial values', in both the earlier (1991) and later (2006) versions. Some raised issues are apparently concerned with the primacy value claimed by his post-formalist approach, and others are with the related problem of a master-narrative attempting to present, with its categorising system, objects of world art produced in what appears to be an infinite diversity of cultural contexts. Disputing Summers for claiming primacy in his approach, David Radcliffe, has argued that social reality reflected by the categories in the former's system of world art history, while apparently more radical than other approaches or methodologies, does not warrant a freedom from blind spots where a continuity actually exists between works in visual art and works in other media (Radcliffe 1991: 261-262). It is also fair to think that approaches based on essentialist, pre-linguistic experiences do not replace others based on traditional nominalist thoughts, if only for the reason that art works usually communicate in more ways than with their physical presentation. As Radcliffe has pointed out, Summers's 'taking origins for essences' runs the risk of creating incommensurable categories (Ibid : 262). In James Elkins's 2004 review of *Real Spaces* (and consequently in his 2007 book *Is Art History Global?*), Summers's categories of 'real spatial values' are still being criticised for their

penchant for essentialism. Elkins detects in them a most palpable influence from Heidegger's philosophy which is shown to be limiting, as he thinks that it may have contributed to a lack of specificity in Summers's descriptions of embodied experiences, which his 'real spatiality' is apparently based on. With examples such as experiencing the green stone assemblies at the Olmec site of La Venta, he shows that Summers's descriptions of historical objects were often more abstract ('ascent, planarity, centrality, axiality, and facture') rather than embodied (compared to Elkins's own description of the hued sand supporting the stone: 'dozens of distinct tones of pink, red, yellow, white') (p. 138). Elkins's review suggests that this is a consequence of *Real Spaces* aiming to replace the traditional Eurocentric art history with his single post-formalist master narrative ('single intellectual edifice') with an explicit motif of universal applicability (Elkins 2007: 52-56). Of course Elkins's comment would also beg the question that, if Summers's descriptions seem too much influenced by the European geometrics to be universal, his own use of colours may invite similar criticisms, since we know that colours are far from universal in their observation, categorisation and nomenclature.

3.2 Space as a cultural modality

Inspired by his interest in world art history, Elkins's evaluation of *Real Spaces* places Summers's devised categories of 'real spatiality' against a measure of five different methodological positions in the field. His reading shows that Summers's position, compared to that of refining and adjusting working concepts in traditional Western art history, is a better fit to non-Western art. It is noted that Summers's concepts used to complement his spatial categories had their background in a variety of European languages, but it is also pointed out that there is a complete lack of attention to non-Western languages in Summers's approach (Elkins 2007: 57-58). As an alternative approach to Summers's, Elkins quoted Nancy Munn's work on Australian Aboriginal sense of space, in which the world art historian methodically seeks out and applies indigenous critical concepts where no

clear equivalents in Western languages exist (Ibid: 60). Munn uses the Warpiri term *wam-ngirntiri* to refer to the detour practised in the Aboriginal societies as a means of marking boundaries that require spatial prohibitions (Munn 1996: 450-451). She pointed out that the detours around an ancient locale must be distant enough to avoid excluded persons seeing it, and so, in effect, the actors in the detouring mark out a negative space with their bodily movements (Ibid: 452).

The spatial categories used by Summers and by Munn bear some comparison: specific Aboriginal experience and local knowledge have been brought to bear by Munn on her studies of non-Western art while neither seems necessary in Summers's system of spatial production. In the case of the latter, this shortcoming has prevented potentially useful consideration of historical variants of his premises (Elkins 2007: 59). However, for all their evident differences, Summers's and Munn's categorising definitions are motivated, philosophically, by the same linguistic relativity hypothesis with which most scholars in the field of cross-cultural art studies are familiar, and who study multiple languages in order to better understand the respective cultural views that these languages reflect* (Ibid: 58). Subscription to the linguistic relativity model renders the ideas of cultural translation possible, although not without some consequences.

Friedrich Teja Bach, in his discussion on 'the modality of spatial categories', argues that incorporating the language of conceptual and technical terms from non-Western cultures alone, does not help to globalise history of art, and that it is just as important to incorporate on the cognitive level, i.e. the 'languages' of images and forms (Bach 2007: 73). Therefore, the use of spatial categories as an essential determinant in intercultural discussion of art seems historically problematic but also practically hard to replace because of the structural meaning it has received at the previous stages in the discipline's institutionalising history (Said 1982; Bach 2007: 78-79).

*Thought difference in the context of linguistic relativity hypothesis: 'Thought: Language might influence many different aspects of thought. Most empirical work has focused, appropriately enough, on those aspects that are easiest to assess without relying on language. This is important, since we otherwise risk finding influences of one aspect of language on some related aspect of language, rather than on some aspect of thought. Commonly studied cognitive variables include perceptual discrimination, availability in memory, and classification.' (Swoyer 2010)

Thus, debates over the primacy of 'space' in the structure of art historical analysis do and always will involve a conflict between universalisation and particularisation.

3.3 World art history or visual culture studies

As stated at the start of this chapter, Summers has proposed to combine given nature and second nature with his notion of 'real space' (Summers 2003: 53). Taking issues with *Real Spaces*, Keith Moxey correctly points out that, by avoiding this distinction, Summers seems too prepared to neutralise his assumptions about the primacy of real spaces by glossing over the consequences of a conflict in cultural meanings (or non-meanings) as being inevitable (in Elkins 1995: 209). Given his somewhat unqualified assumptions about nature and also an inconsistent classification system for world art, it is not difficult to read Summers's concept of 'real spaces' as being somewhat biased and limiting. Apart from inviting undesirable criticism of an unconscious Eurocentrism (Rampley 2005: 528; Bach 2007: 56, 148), any universalism recalls the complex relationships that art history has with its own tradition of master narratives on the one hand, and with colonial and post-colonial experience on the other. A globalised art history does not even seem like a practical expectancy, so long as there are very contrary opinions on the issue (Elkins 2008: 109). On the one hand, there are places where art criticism is only historical practice that lacks the institutional support needed for any recognisable form of art history. On the other hand, speaking for all non-Western audiences, African art historian Olu Oguibe, feels it is inevitable that Africa (or any non-Western culture) must continue to exist as the Other for occidental concerns and obsessions, until there is a complete exclusion of what he calls cultural-historical 'categories, delineations and constructs', or when a proper history is to be written for art of any non-Western culture (Oguibe 2009 (1993): 231). Given all the concurrent agreements and disagreements for a coherent global paradigm to be established for art history, it is not surprising that Deborah Cherry has found a reason to prefer

visual culture studies to art history, and it has to do with the former's greater readiness and abilities to answer to the demand of cross-cultural methodologies (Cherry 2005: 480).

IV. Space and place

4.1 Spatial order and objects

In *Real Spaces*, Summers clearly devotes himself to embedded elements of spatial thinking, place-defining and other topological elements in artworks. Our knowledge of the author's biographical background suggests the same. According to Christopher Woods, a pair of 'maverick teachers' gave definite influences on Summers's decision to embark on 'Real Spaces', architectural historians Vincent Scully and Mesoamericanist George Kubler (Wood 2005). Summers has intended his Real Metaphors as specific forms, in which limits and boundaries are encountered, respected, and negotiated, and always represent cultural choices (Summers 2007).

Summers's narrative, in many ways resembling an art history of space and place, reveals debts to the achievements in philosophy and geography that deal in phenomenal manifestations of these notions. In this section, I suggest that the lasting influences from Yi-Fu Tuan, renowned American geographer and an exponent of humanistic geography since 1970s, may have informed and perhaps inspired the formation of Summers's approach, especially on the issue of human cultural values in intimate interactions with the environmental context. Best known for *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), his work has focused on the relationships between human beings (including cultures) and their environment, materially and also emotionally and spiritually, as 'being-in-the-world' (Rodaway 2004: 307). That Tuan's geography stresses both spatial relations and an experiential aspect, that interprets personal encounters and reflections (Ibid: 306), seems to make that attribution unmistakable although Summers lists no credit for him in *Real Spaces*.

4.2 Space: borders of conceptual constructions

'The human being, by his mere presence, imposes a schema on space.' (Tuan 1977: 36). According to Tuan, one ahistorical aspect in anthropological studies regards its embedded conception of space and spatiality: although geometries may seem devoid of any elements directly associable to human instincts, but, on the level of conceptions and values, space is grounded in common traits of human biology and is, therefore, a trans-culturally valid metaphor (Tuan 1979: 393). First, cosmic imagination in many cultures consists of cyclical rounds of nature, with coordinates forming a salient 'frame' for expressions of anthropocentrism. Vertical and horizontal lines recall bilateral organisation of human bodies -- these are both orientations and ecological cues -- erectness and prone position, high and low polarities, and so on. These spatial expressions articulate our every behaviour and their every product, from biology (animate body in space) to building (environment provides stable cues for orientation). Best representing the former are body parts that serve as a model for spatial organisation: face (front), back (behind), head (above), mouth/stomach (within), limbs (prepositional items for indicating positions)(Tuan 1977: 20). Tuan's humanistic geography has asserted the apparent universality of the practice of partitioning space according to the same principle of centre, cardinal directions and the four quarters, a worldview that seems to be shared by numerous mutually unconnected native tribes in New World and peoples in the Orient (Tuan 1979: 404-405).*

Summers builds his several chapters in *Real Spaces* by claiming similar relations 'between the arrangement of social space, social order and the modelling of the larger world' (Summers 2003: 124). The extended narration on the Navajo hogan, for example, describes how the design that characterises the people's art form of sand painting also applies to the organisation of their social relations via the architectural form itself, not least in the ritual context, where an image suggesting the harmony among spiritual forces which forms a shamanic intervention must be made following

*Particularly, social anthropologists such as Emil Durkheim and Marcel Mauss have locative adverbs, spatial demonstratives, personal pronouns: half-mimetic, half linguistic acts of indication cardinal directions.

the centre outwards and following the sun-like movement, 'east to south to west to south' (Ibid : 125-127). The significance of centres in many schemes of things on a surface, such as axes and boundaries, is an example of what Summers calls the 'real spatial basis' for primary social relations or notional limits thereof (Ibid: 20-21). With regard to geometrical terms like centres, alignment, axis and circumference, that have been applied in his analysis of objects with a nearly mythical frequency and versatility, although the connections may well have originated in modern anthropological practice, Summers is ultimately convinced that they represent the real condition of 'basic social spatial values' (Ibid: 131). For Tuan and other believers in the human instinct to simplify, this is also true: geometric abstraction is as much a way for the mind to comprehend the mystic as it is a way to understand the notion of space through biological and pragmatic experiences (Tuan 1977: 17; Katan 1999: 173). This may be conceived as irrational elements in an apparently rational operation making the abstract, the mythic and the pragmatic into three aspects of the same organic human nature.

4.3 Places: objects of experience

Spatial 'values' that Summers seems to extract effortlessly out of the material environment of images or objects are much discussed in the context of cultural geography, both in the form of hypotheses and as anthropological examples. A place is a kind of object. Humanistic geographers like Yi-fu Tuan contend that places are like those objects that can organise spaces into centres of meaning, but this is only possible with human beings because only they have a sense of place as if it had an identifiable spirit or personality. A geometric personality is thus rendered onto a space following a period of learning or identification, leading to the creation of significant localities, buildings or manmade objects in the specificity of well-known places or landmarks (Tuan 1977: 17-18; Tuan 1979: 415-416).

The factor of easy recognition to our senses alone may explain the birth of well-known places, but so do other 'objective' qualities that most commonly include a visual aesthetic sense of place and sensory memories apart from the visual types. An object or place is said to have achieved a 'concrete' reality when one's experience of it has a full or total measure (Tuan 1977: 18). It is safe to assume that the majority of non-image examples in Summers's *Real Spaces* are equipped with what Tuan calls qualities of a 'concrete' place. A visit to places such as the Pyramids at Giza or Borobudur in Java is certain to command such a tremendous impression that the visitor's experience of the spaciousness or environmental monumentality of their location can never be less than total or concrete (Chapters 2, 3)(Summers 2003: 176, 216-217).

But even anthropomorphic images or virtual objects - another major type featured in Summers's book - are equally explainable in the context of places. According to Tuan, places can be defined in a variety of ways; even visually inconspicuous places can be lent intimate experience with literary art (Tuan 1977: 162). But *Real Spaces* is mainly concerned with images or objects that identify their location as a field of care. Tuan describes how care can make a place out of space: 'if a piece of sculpture is an image of feeling, then a successful building is an entire functional realm made visible and tangible.' (Ibid : 164). People have memories and experiences, and when these are accumulated, care is also built up over time. Purposive movement and perception, both visual and haptic, give human beings their familiar world of disparate objects in space (Ibid: 12). It is true that anchorage and expressions of human emotions can be places and objects that have no identity, particularly if these places are ephemeral as an index to private, intimate experiences (Tuan 1979: 419). But sensible forms are created to signify collective selfhood in public environments such as temples, town halls or civic centres. There they provide a visible pattern to the rhythms of personal and social life.

Depending on people's different experiences everywhere, a place can visually dominate a native population's shared behavioural and perceptual field, again with different configurations for

local variety of purposes (Tuan 1977: 163; Summers 2003: 62)(Figures 6, 7). Summers's analysis suggests a classification of prototypes for this cultural phenomenon. As opposed to his verdict on Western 'social space', which he finds 'disenchanted', the examples in *Real Spaces* are space markers to impart a sense of primacy or wonder to viewers. Following principles that are presumably defined by human nature more than anything else, Summers describes a series of spaces and places that are either figural, planar or virtual, composed or manipulated with artifice to become affective or memorable.

V. Pasztory's *Thinking with Things*

5.1 Spatial order and objects

For some art historians it is well recognised that a comprehensive history of world art can be written based on how its objects and their use reflect the diverse functions they fulfil in the purpose of social integration. The significant use of 'differences amongst artefacts with its focus on the historical characteristics claimed to be manifested in works' thus becomes characteristic in what is recognised as the anthropological approach of art history. At the height of formalist art history (generations around Wölfflin and Focillon), this evolutionary view of progression in artefact forms itself evolved into a rhetorical art of instilling secure belief in pre-given realities— those taken as underlying the character or soul of a nation, place, period, or time (Preziosi 2009: 151).

According to her own words, Esther Pasztory's *Thinking with Things* was written towards 'a natural history of art', by which she means that where, structurally, world art history and anthropology are closely related to each other (Pasztory 2005: 3). That first premise was later reformed and transformed into 'the structural evolution of things in social contexts of increasing complexity' (Ibid : 4). The historical contexts favoured by Pasztory to illuminate the process of social integration of cultural objects are early ones, including band societies, tribes, chiefdoms and



Monumental outdoor statues of Amida Buddha in two East Asian cities
Figure 6 (Upper) Great Buddha (Daibutsu 大仏) in Kamakura, Japan. 1252.
Figure 7 (Lower) Great Buddha in Changhua, Taiwan. 1956.

ancient states but the author has chosen to represent later centuries with two non-political, catch-all categories, textual and technological eras (Ibid : 4). Pasztory's book is divided into two parts of approximately same proportions. Part One consists of eleven chapters that discuss universal themes in her proposed theory of a world art history while Part Two contains a collection of essays that see universal theories from Part One applied to analyse cultural objects mostly from ancient and medieval cultures in Mesoamerica. With her project's two heterogeneous halves balanced against each other but built from similar assumptions, Pasztory has arguably played the roles of a cultural anthropologist and a regional art historian in practice side by side, allowing her ideas to be presented in ahistorical and historical styles (it is not always clear which corresponds to which) of sequencing cultural objects in time and space.

5.2 An evolutionary succession of things

Billed as 'Towards a new vision of art', Pasztory seems to have achieved that, at least in terms of innovation. The eleven chapters included in part one of her book seem to aim at heterogeneous topics. Continuity between different chapters can also seem a bit elusive. But these are very much in the spirit of post-structuralism as it avoids at all costs the impression of projecting the presumed pseudo-objectivity of a master-narrative. Starting from the Chapter 1, Pasztory seeks to reset the expectation with an alternative definition of things by dividing them into the categories of 'art thing' and 'not art thing'. Pasztory also redefines art as a form of communication technology that finds functionality and aesthetics working together, except the functional part of art has been lost in later eras when art's visual aspect won out over its textual one. Her discussion in Chapter 2 of primitive reason and primitivism argues that they can be appreciated on a multivalent and non-verbal level in images and objects (Pasztory 2005: 4, 18).

Pasztory's takes on cultural objects, inspired by communication technology, subsequently become the thread to link the ten chapters that follow. Her preferred model of an anthropological

and processual system is described in Chapter 3. Pasztory states that art develops on a neoevolutionist trajectory, where a typology of artefact forms depends on the levels of social-political integration in which they are produced. From hunter-gatherer bands, tribal villages, chiefdoms to states, each type in the list comes with its set of new features and issues that are specific to that stage of historical development in the social life of cultural objects; levels that appeared still later than these are labelled with Pasztory's own terms: old world textual era and technological era. Long stretches of cultural 'insistences' mark individual traditions in Pasztory's Chapter 4 (Ibid : 42), but the concepts of superimposition, impersonation, enhancement and apotheosis strike her as being at home with artefacts from the milieu that may be described in the order of hunting and gathering bands, villages, chiefdoms and apotheosis (Chapters 5-8, Pasztory 2005: 32, 42, 61, 67).

Chapters 9 and 10 in *Thinking with Things* relate to such developments as aestheticisms, world religions, idolatry and media. Competitions between different communication technologies, among which Pasztory counts art, ultimately lead to the creations of cultural objects after modernism or primitivism in a world with centrally positioned media and marginalised conventional art. Pasztory recapitulates the concept of art as a great succession of objects in Chapter 11, that undergo formal transitions as newer types of society replace old ones (Pasztory 2005: 69, 87).

5.3 Forming a network

Part two in her study consists of monographs on Pre-Columbian art with occasional comparison with works from elsewhere. Pasztory attaches great significance to traditions in the Americas in her work on world art history, for the very reason that no text based civilisation existed in the New World. She senses that forms of art become message-carrying codes through the structuring of socio-political strata in early states, and through her researches associated with shamanism and

North American Indian ritual images, she is able to confirm the hypothesis that formal elaboration is usually not the result of requirement by religion, but that of social competition. The concept of space applies in 'inventiveness' placement, hierarchy and a 'compositional multivalent' message, for which Pasztory gives the example of 'net jaguars', an imaginary style mixing realities and symbols (Pasztory 2005: 34-35, 117, 147, 150-151).

The naturalism of particular examples of Pre-Columbian portraits, such as Moche head vessels and Olmec colossal heads, seems mystifying as it is more an exception than a rule, even among other art objects in these cultures. Pasztory's analysis of these unexpected outbursts of naturalism sociopolitically places both in the highly stratified system of complex chiefdoms or states, which customarily built monuments for the rulers and their hierarchic peers (Pasztory 2005: 182-183). Gombrich's binary method of regarding naturalist art the polar opposite of conceptual art seems problematic. Pasztory fits Nasca geoglyphs into the Andean system of aesthetics, citing a 'collective think' that favoured spatial relations, but displayed almost no interest in visibility, among its properties (Ibid: 130-131, 199). In the last instance, the ancient Inca art form recalls the architectural spaces referred to by David Summers and Yi-Fu Tuan, in that both are, for the most part, based similarly not primarily on conditions of visibility, but on the construction of mental schemas or diagrams.

VI. The anthropological and semiological perspectives

As discussed in the previous part of the chapter, Pasztory tries to import into her vision of world art history new methods that are striking for explicitly not being limited by Enlightenment ideas of primitivism and rationality or language-based reasoning, and for a self-confessed interest in the formal study of art and cultural (including utilitarian) objects based on experience and consciousness. In next section I make an attempt to discuss these ideas of Pasztory further with relevance to the topic of world art history.

6.1 'Thing theory'

Apart from museum professionals, collections of cultural objects are most administered and curated by art historians and ethnographers, and despite protests to the contrary for accessibility reasons, museum studies and material culture seem perfectly accommodating for an intersection between art history and things in the form of material history (Cheetham, Holly et al. 1998: 289ff; Brown 2001; Eisenman 2011: 289). Thus, in their function as signs, things can be taken to mean an encounter, or mark an occasion where objective meaning of art as objects may be restored. Things can transform into a placeholder, and, when contemplated, can seem to have a force of materialisation all by themselves. Considering the utilisation of things this represents a real possibility of obtaining realistic accounts of everyday life and material *habitus* (Brown 2001: 2). In his 'Thing Theory', Bill Brown is quick to point out that things, in their guise as objects, stand for what mobilises a discourse of objectivity. There is the force of symbolic transformation by which the objects becomes 'values, fetishes, idols and totems' (Ibid: 5).

On the other hand, things outside of their status as objects can become an agent of inverted mind projections, where active meanings and thoughts emerge. Arjun Appadurai's definition of 'methodological fetishism', for example, sets a condition with which it is possible to read circulation of things as a concrete historical fact in illumination of collective psyches in any particular culture (quoted in Brown 2001: 6). One can speak of a phenomenology of materialism at work which puts an indexical use of the discrepancy of precepts between what things are and what things are for a society (Ibid : 8) Brown reminds us how, back in the modernist discourse of 1920s, Walter Benjamin already realised that things were 'part and parcel' of society's institution through his interpretation of 'Dream Kitsch' in surrealist art (Ibid : 12). Connecting legacies from Georg Simmel through Benjamin to Bruno Latour and Michel Serres makes Brown understand the history of object culture as the repressed 'other' of subjective history (Ibid : 15). Especially this latter line

of changing thought about things has led to a reformation of objective categories, destabilising the ontological meaning of such terms as human subjects and inanimate objects (Ibid: 12).

With thought experiments like an imaginary resizing of a regular household utensil to the scale of a Claes Oldenberg sculpture, it would be easier for a cultural outsider to appreciate points such as those raised by David Summers and by Esther Pasztory about the kind of power to have come out of an encounter with a colossal Olmec head. The fascinating naturalism of this portrait head, when combined with the gigantic scale of its presentation, conceptually and perceptually transcends limitations that are often associated with the ontological status of objects (Summers 2003: 94; Pasztory 2005: 180). Against the background concept of a 'primitive rationality' Pasztory's explanation of supernatural enchantment in the making of certain cultural objects certainly feels more persuasive (Ibid: 18). By rethinking about objects in one's own mind, and by thinking with things (just like Pasztory has) might prove to be a more objective way to write a world history of things.

6.2 Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*

Given its closer and more systematic scrutiny of the tangible, material basis of human existence, anthropology seems to compare favourably to art history in addressing the issue of cultural difference in the age of multiculturalism. In an essay that reviews the anthropological theory of art in Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (1998), Matthew Rampley suggests that a great value may be its supply of an objective reference in the long debate over cross-cultural aesthetics, which, for example, remained relatively unresolved in Summers's *Real Spaces* (Summers 2003: 528). He observed that the methods of cross-cultural analysis deployed by art historians are often so generalised in their theoretical basis as to be nearly useless when tested against the reality of empirical data. Gell's devising of art's 'agency', on the other hand, struck him as being more systematic and robust than most other alternatives, including those from the field of anthropology of

art itself. The reason cited by Rampley for this, which he called Gell's 'methodological philistinism', is that he found most anthropological theories of art to have been plagued by the fallacy of aestheticisation -- analysing it using a matrix consisting of 'authentic' aesthetic values, not those of religion, ritual or other social relations or functions -- despite the fact that most (Western or non-Western) human cultures lack such a thing as pure aesthetic art (Rampley 2005: 530).

Influenced by an anti-aesthetic turn in art criticism, Gell effectively 'reframes' his definition of art using a set of criteria that represented a new anthropology of art and that saw it instead as a 'technique of enchantment' (Rampley 2005: 531). An artist is thus, in a way, considered as an occult technician who encodes objects with 'magical' indexical meanings. On the condition of this 'impossibility of using aesthetics as a universal parameter of cultural description and comparison' (Gell 1998: 3), he has devised a new scheme that was called the 'art nexus', to explain the social function of art (p. 29). Around the art nexus, Gell would arrange all applicable ties, including those of social and economic behaviours and interactions in relation to what one would call 'objects of art'. He states its purpose as showing social relations in which objects were related to social agents 'in an art-like way' which would presume intentions or social objectives in all of the agents' actions or events (Gell 1998: 13-17). These ties would include the processes of habituation, adaptation and conditioning for which man's life in the material environment inevitably prepares him or her. Gell's formulation of the art nexus defines four basic roles for actors in the relational network: artist, index (object of art), prototype (meaning or referent) and recipient, of which permutations are used to describe and analyse the art situations found in all social processes (Gell 1998: 28ff).

As Rampley points out, Gell's theory of art consists of a productive interplay between art work, enchantment and art nexus (Rampley 2005: 542). His anti-essentialist stance is so radically different from the traditional aesthetic evaluations or even most other models in the anthropology of

art, that his theory can well replace them as an alternative framework for cross-cultural analysis. Gell's insistent intertwining of social and aesthetic values in any system of communal living posits parallel notions about the history of art as a social institution, and goes some way in aligning itself with modern art theory and criticism (Ibid: 542). To the extent that his theory proposes to define art by its function in the socio-technical matrix, it considerably enlarges the range of possible objects for art studies, albeit always in a translated (transformed) sense. Thus it can be argued that Gell's work is of enormous relevance to the interdisciplinary development of art history, especially at the moment of the latter seeking to broaden the ground of its application and to gain greater cross-cultural currency. Although the art nexus was developed to rework the issues and phenomena within the traditional domain of the anthropology of art, it has the potential of providing a meta-discourse for world art historians to assist them with the task of translation or developing their own intercultural discourses on the issues of art practice and theory.

Gell's anthropology of art not so much equates than distinguishes between art and agency which explains why he could write about an anthropological theory of art. However his agentive theory certainly warrants a general efficacy in aesthetic matters. Elsewhere in human sociocultural life the ambiguity represented by Gell's theory of abduction of agency does not have the same significance as it would in art history or theory. Whitney Davis makes the point that art is enigmatically special in its recursive relay of inferences that can potentially go astray -- self-bifurcated and deviated in the actual practice of reception. ('Abduction' is a term devised and re-defined by Gell in this context to mean an inferential scheme*.) Using the concept of agentive abduction, then, stipulates the understanding of alternate or proliferated agencies of the work of art, in a manner that is potentially open-ended and recursive (Burke, Herron et al. 2007: 214).

* According to Robert Layton, Gell devised abduction of agency in order to avoid turning art into a medium of communication (Layton 2003: 454). Note that this is close to what Pasztor has done in *Thinking with Things* to depart from aestheticised approaches that, as we can see in the case of Carrier and Scharfstein (Chapter 3), are still favourable.

6.3 Objectivity and another object-oriented approach to world art history

The question of a rigorously objective approach to a world art history continues to intrigue art historians and to inspire new proposals. Stephen F. Eisenman (Eisenman 2011) argues that previous efforts to create a world art history have been questionable, or at least flawed, for the reason of becoming excessive in their attempt to include a diversity and multiplicity of values or priorities, as to become egregious in their methodological scope. He describes ‘a portmanteau of terms derived from divergent (though exclusively Western) philosophic, literary and social science traditions’ that is being staged for current discussion but suspects that an absence of ‘artistic, visual and material commonality’ will not help reach a needed consensus to advance the collective goal via concerted theorising and dialogues (Ibid : 282)*.

Simply put, Eisenman’s diagnosis of the quandary facing the world art history consortium mainly consists of the issue of having to choose between cultural evolutionism and cultural relativism, two of the more significant developments in anthropology in previous decades. He considers the close links between anthropology and world art history to be a dubious relationship, and labels the latter’s embrace of the former its ‘original sin’ (Eisenman 2011: 283). For Eisenman, the cultural concept was first devised by Edward Burnett Tylor (in his *Primitive Culture*, 1871), after Darwinian influences. Cultural anthropology in the Tylor-Darwin style has no currency value, mainly because of its need to maintain a lineage and an integrity of morphology is excessively reductive in its description and clearly suggests the possibility of a species being superseded and replaced by a fitter and better equipped race for a given environment (Ibid). Some debates surrounding the use of anthropology arise from the identification of culture with the organic metaphor of biology and other life sciences tends to cause a distortion of its basic character.

Meanwhile the typological imperative in any science of sorting can still render it liable to biases

* Eisenman’s list of key terms currently used by world art historians: ‘transnational, spectacle, other, subjects, rhizomatic, flows, simultaneity, space, place, geography, virtual, sovereignty, hybridity, multivocality, subaltern, mass, multitude, network’ that are then applied to a globally diverse range of objects and practices. (Eisenman 2011: 281) Note that ‘object’, that is his own choice, is not included in the list but certainly has been used before.

and other subjective fallacies in observation. To continue with his questioning, Eisenman suggests that the other fatal flaw that lies in the anthropological approach to world art history is its frequent insistence on cultural relativism which has been a foundation to modern ethnographic practice ever since Franz Boas became the theory's best known advocate in early twentieth century. A moderate view of cultural relativism is necessary against the negative influences of ethnocentrism, but he warns that an ethic of 'no interference' can suspend evaluations of not only an other's culture, but of one's own culture as well, effectively undoing the entire critical dimension of world art history (Ibid : 285).

VII. Conclusion

Works by Summers and Pasztory explore the possibilities of writing a new world art history using alternative formal criteria or agentive concepts. In *Real Spaces*, Summers builds up an expanded typology of art works with his own set of criteria that not so much defers to conventional aesthetics as it espouses a phenomenology of reception. Echoing Tuan Yi-fu's humanistic geography, Summers's revised programme for interpretation of art largely prioritises space and place as they happen in life. Pasztory's *Thinking with Things* invests in an equally personalised approach to anthropology of art, locating art works and cultural objects in a system that corresponds to all parts of human social history. By entirely dispensing or abolishing references to an ideological framework that is mostly a product of European modernism, and by replacing it with a cross-cultural theory, an ideal 'horizontal art history' (Piotrowski 2009) may seem more of a possibility without the artificial internal divisions caused by geopolitical hierarchies.

I. Introduction

Previous chapters in this thesis present art historians who had created an expression of their own unique vision of a world art history, meaning to take on a field that can seem challenging to an extreme, given its enormous scope in time and space and virtually unlimited materials of complexity and diversity. These authors undertook their projects apparently with one strong motivation in mind, and that is to renew the study of art worldwide, a goal that seems to go hand in hand with the realisation that art history is turning into a global enterprise. Indeed art history can only go global if the trend of globalisation continues at its current rate (Davis 2010). That means that art history as an integrated field of study will have to deepen into the headways it has already started decades ago but has which sped up in recent years, a valid observation if the frequent CIHA (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art) events which undertake a thematisation of world art are to be reckoned (Lavin 1989; Anderson 2009). In any case, with art history conferences and publications of regional, international, and global importance becoming a recurrent event in locations worldwide, resources such as a comprehensive survey of the field's materials cannot be anything but useful and indispensable when world art history is as new as other, more established departments of art history. Onians regards his *Atlas of World Art* (hereafter *Atlas*) as 'the first attempt to present a comprehensive survey of the field's material' (Onians 2011: 126). At least in view of the particular kind of market and need that it is designed for, Onians claims that his book, first published in 2007, has done well to support and respond to these.

In this chapter, I am interested in looking into Onians's unique contribution to a first comprehensive survey of world art history in the atlas format*, and I intend to discuss the question

*For others, Onians may have just done a perfunctory, ersatz example of world art history and nowhere near an accomplishment (Eisenman 2011: 281). But it is clear that Onians intends a certain type of use, for which interest, it may be argued, the *Atlas* serves adequately. See the paragraph above and the following (II) section.

of how his publication is meant to negotiate the important task of ensuring the availability and recollection of the past. My narrative in the following pages proposes to answer the question with a sequence of Onians's representation in four sections covering separate, but interrelated, issues that may be related to this particular publication. First, there is *the Atlas* itself which represents both the Earth and the people who historically have inhabited it, as well as the interest of Onians himself and of his collaborators in world art history as they see it. Secondly, there is Onians's intellectual investment in the natural/ecological discourse of art and how it is expressed in the media culture of maps and map making, which converts facts into codes of spaces and spatial distributions for our imaginative consumption. Thirdly, political or natural borders stand, both formally and metaphorically, for the geopolitical aspect that is embedded in every discourse in world art history, whatever its scope of inspection and interpretation. Fourthly, objects in the *Atlas* present themselves not only as bits of the real world to be surveyed and mapped, but also as material agents in the *ecumene* or human world to conduct people's feelings and actions towards art. I find it convincing to think that these four aspects together create a distinctive blend of that which makes Onians's *Atlas* suitable for a range of interpretations from public identity to material culture.

II. The *Atlas*: media and messages

2.1 Onians and World Art History

John Onians calls his own edited book, *Atlas of World Art*, the 'first attempt to systematically document the art of all regions of the globe from prehistory to the present'. Attesting to the worldwide appeal of its content is the fact that, since its first publication in 2004, there has appeared full translations in languages from German to Spanish, and from Chinese to Japanese. Diversity is very much at the heart of the project, as it created an extensive collaboration among no less than sixty-eight art historians who contributed. Onians himself also stresses the importance for

the study of a history of world art to observe some of its ‘compelling necessities’, namely to expand its relations to fields or frameworks that have not been its strong points (Onians 2004: xi).

Although Onians has apparently decided to have analytical depths take a second place to breadth or diversity in the contents, it could have been argued that it serves the purpose of rendering a ‘horizontal’ (lacking built-in hierarchies) view of world art across the scope of human history.

As the principal editor and presumably the originator of the project, Onians must take credit for the overall conception and design of the book. He decides that a sweeping overview of art, ‘the oldest, most widespread and most important of human activities’, is necessary but difficult to integrate without requiring all participating regional specialists to rethink their topics and approaches (Ibid: 10). The format itself also reflects a process of rethinking, in which the common elements include geographical maps of various sizes and descriptive purposes, textual narratives and photographic reproductions, all specially prepared for the project (Figure 8). The presentation involves a planned mixing of different modes of representation in the same flat space of a page. This format clearly brings in more flexibility and resources, but it also imposes new inner conflicts and constraints regarding how concepts and ideas may be formed and framed in the context of a history of world arts. Whether seen as a world art history with maps or a world map for the history of art, Onians’s edited tome is an interesting experiment from an informational point of view, the workings of which I propose to examine in greater detail with the balance of this chapter.

Onians makes it clear that he intends his *Atlas* to provide a new overview in which the tale of human creation of art can be told in its entirety (Onians 2004: 10). Doing so has, in the first place, entailed a careful correlation of symbols upon which a new variety of signifying patterns are modelled. Information techniques are used to present knowledge about art and to aid its understanding. As a constructed discourse, the *Atlas* nevertheless manages to remain a source of heterogeneity where different authorial voices can come through while also coexisting as a community. Certainly this arrangement of controlled flexibility reinforces the concept of historical

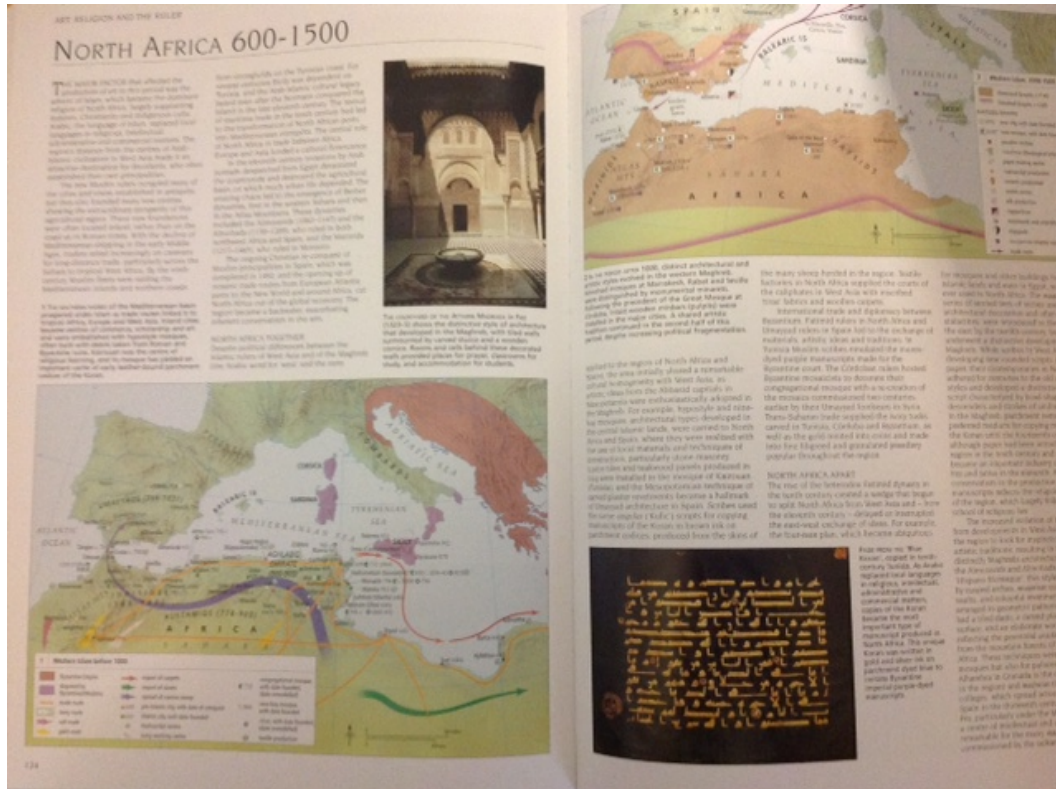


Figure 8 Typical view of a 'spread' of information in John Onians's *Atlas of World Art*. Adapted from (Onians 2004: 188-189)

texts as a compilation or a multi-author collaboration, as it has been done in institutionalised traditions of history writing. On the innovative side, the medial environment in the *Atlas* certainly suggests that a mixture of maps, photographs and texts does bring its readers into a more active contact with its themes. This is consistent with Onians's claim that his edited project combines a broad coverage with a shifting focus, to facilitate 'an integrated understanding of art as a worldwide phenomenon' (Ibid: 10). His adopted approach thus resembles that of an anthropology of material culture, of which the starting point, to embrace the object world through describing, imaging and mapping, conveys an important epistemological message. As with a project that openly endorses a globalised view, individual researchers' cultural biases (which is an unfortunate but unavoidable fact) do not cut across space and time, but rather form a collective collage of multiple pieces of a mosaic. This I believe fits right into Onians's formal ideal of a world art history, an ensemble piece in which unity is projected through diversity.

2.2 A map of environmental forces

In order to show art at its most universal and also its most diverse, Onians sets up a new conceptual arrangement based on embodied nature, or nature 'as a set of resources and constraints' that come into effect between the relationships of earth, time and man (Onians 2004: 10). Onians's perspective makes him see these not so much as entities than as interactants in an evolving process: availability of materials for art is mapped onto the surface of the earth, while time is segmented by the appearance or rise to dominance of human behaviours related to art (Ibid : 11). Hence, in the *Atlas*, the continents are made the major units in space because there is, in the same continent, an apparent continuity in terms of environmental elements and constraints which contains and also regulates human activities.

Onians considers passive exposure to the environment as the most important source of differences which set apart art from one place to next. In consistency with his other works, the art

historian prioritises the view that humans are natural beings who share most of their genetic materials with other animals but whose brains are uniquely adaptive insofar as to be able to use inborn inclinations and inherited surviving skills for making art. Each local environment offers its special variety of landscape, fauna and flora. Speaking of their respective influences as an ambience, Onians gives the examples of ‘soft’ Nile Valleys in contrast with the bare rocky mountains in Greece. He reaches the conclusion that comparing the soft lotus bud capitals in Egypt and the angular Doric and Ionian ones in Greece provides enough evidence to show people’s inclination to represent in art what they see most in their local environment.*

In contrast to passive exposures in Onians’s system of artistic evolutions is the category of diffusions and disruptions by active forces (Onians 2004: 12). By ‘active forces’ he means the impacts from complex behaviours of human beings themselves that take the forms of military, religious, ideological and commercial expansions. These are shown to have created, over time, new environments for artists and consumers of art alike, which produce historical changes or transformations in art styles by setting a stage for their activities both within geographical regions themselves and also across borders. As an example, Onians explains how modernist art in the twentieth century was prepared, formally and neurologically, by the influx and influences of Asian, African, American and Oceanian art which the British commercial expansions overseas brought in, first at the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Ibid: 13). In form of human life activities that range from hunting and gathering to industry and science, these forces are the predominant themes consistently featured in the seven sections that constitute the temporal dimensions in the *Atlas*. Onians suggests that this arrangement of ‘active forces’ helps anyone attempting to see art as ‘visually interesting modifications of planet earth’s material resources’ (Ibid: 13).

2.3 Visualisations and contextualisations

* (Onians 2004: 12) and also see Chapter 3 in this thesis.

To compile a universal history for people living worldwide to learn about the story of art in their own region poses a rather difficult challenge for Onians and his group of academic colleagues. Based on a concept of a meaning of nature that is understood by people of all cultures, his *Atlas*, however, seeks to locate human beings as actors within the natural networks of space and time, in order to explain what unites all art and yet what makes it different or why it changes from one place to another and between different cultures (Onians 2004: 10-11). Onians therefore considers the success of his presentation to depend not so much on the depth, as on the spread, of its treatment or data coverage. According to his ideas, each spread should contain a set of select visual information on the topics of topography, art materials, art production, use, display, art institutions, related social groups, ethnic communities as well as geopolitical nation states (Ibid: 13). In addition to selecting the data to be visualised or the objects to be imaged, individual authors were also asked to provide verbal commentaries on their own interpretation of the context. Onians proposes that, although the *Atlas* as a whole contains a broad diversity of authors and arguments, it has aimed to be at one and the same time individual and yet comparable, compressed and yet accessible in its mode of information.

The map-dominant construction of Onians's collection also shows that he well understands that maps are a stylisation of spatiality which can nevertheless be an inspiration for prospective world art historians. This is specially true in the sense that maps may be intellectually inspiring to them, in helping to raise new questions or to see new connections between facts documented in this way. In fact, one can argue by the evidence of Onians's *Atlas*, that it has already provided an experience of the cartographical model to the participating art historians, who have experimented for this project treating and retreating a variety of themes and scopes within their own field of specialisation. As one considers Onians's alternative idea of 'writing' world art history in a style mixing genres of communication, it becomes clear that significant differences do happen between working in textual form and working with maps.

According to Franco Moretti, who had authored a series of geographical analyses and atlases for literary history, maps are a transformation of quantitative information that can or cannot otherwise be suitably accounted for in its textual form (Moretti 2003: 76). He suggests that cartography has great heuristic potentials as an interdisciplinary form of data modelling that is much used in natural and social sciences. Maps, says Moretti, are like nets or filters that we apply to round up data or knowledge, and one values maps exactly for the 'empirical data they allow us to process and understand' (Moretti 2004: 63). Following the logic made clear by his argument, one also learns to appreciate one advantage with Onians's cartographical way of presenting art history. Maps are transformative as far as their factual presentation goes, so they tend to reveal some aspects of things better than others. Moretti points specifically to how maps, as well as graphs and tree diagrams, are an excellent means of analysing, abstracting and applying massed quantitative data for information (Moretti 2003: 67). One suspects that this last finding by Moretti may have, in some way, informed Onians's statement about making *Atlas* a first comprehensive survey of the field's massive cumulation of materials.

Further to Onians's comment in the last section of his introductory essay, it shows how a number of conditions, which he once again describes as counterparts of 'resources and limitations', have become attached to his choice of format. The historian defends his devised solution to the problem of writing a world art history, claiming that the *Atlas* achieves an egalitarianism in knowledge sharing. Yet he also feels obliged to point out that a prominent use of the atlas format is likely to cause in some minds suspicions about the *Atlas* being 'a vestige of an imperialist project' (Onians 2004: 13). It seems to me that these are thoughts on the topic of communication (covering its content, means of dissemination, and use) that have entered into the process of editorial decisions and determined the modes in which information is encoded and distributed. It is in this aspect that I want to argue that they have a particular importance to those who are attempting to engage with the subject of world art with an ecological awareness. Onians and his collaborators

have extensively used human geography (see next section) as an embedding concept in the *Atlas*. In their view its discourses are eminently compatible with their purpose of translating and transmitting art historical knowledge for global consumption, even if it also produces a unique set of issues due to its past status as a general means of representation.

2.4 Human geography in the *Atlas*

To each of the seven chronological sections in the *Atlas* Onians contributes a brief summary and background text which makes its point by painting a picture of human behaviours in relation to art. For example, while there were interactions between art, science and industry prior to 1800, in his chapter covering the century between 1800 and 1900, Onians focuses primarily on the importance of these interactions as they happened in various regional settings. Onians has stressed the fact that art of this era was the first ever to see its external impact take place on a global scale. All departments of the art industry were transformed by the force of accelerated communication, including the transportation of manufactured objects and transmission of manufacturing technologies, which took place on all inhabited continents. Consequently, the transformed conditions played a decisive role in shaping national styles and perfecting local production techniques to become part of an international network of exchanges. London's Great Exhibition of 1851 and contemporary publications by Owen Jones and William Morris were Britain's best-known examples showing influences from imports of works of art, both from antiquity as well as more modern eras. In the rest of the world, cultures in America, Asia and elsewhere took impacts from European exports, notably in the spheres of science and industry, but also in art and other manufactured objects (Onians 2004: 210-211).

Like all others written by Onians for inclusion in the *Atlas*, this account of nineteenth century art reiterates his credence that writing a global history of art also means seeing the events and resultant objects through the spatial framework of geography. Historical geography frequently

demands regional specialisation, for the historical reason that regional geography has traditionally been historical geography (Kaufmann 2008: 13). Kaufmann suggests that the localised historical perspective can pertinently apply to geography by virtue of ‘local illustration’ or ‘local instantiation’ (Ibid: 12). Hence the cognitive structure of human geography is ready to find a ‘landscape’ meaningful to correlate, the physical nature of land and other environmental features, to human culture*. This resonates with the concept of cultural geography, which studies human culture by the measure of its diffusion across the globe as well as its origins and development within individual regions (Kaufmann 2004). Certainly it is possible to see that Onians’s *Atlas* belongs to this category insofar as it makes a clear effort to study human cultures in consideration of place, relating human artistic response to objects and environments within its sensory experience of space†. Another issue that can be considered in the analogy between geography and landscape is that of identity and essence where related to place (Tuan 1979). As the focus of inquiry moves into the interrelationship between human subjects and their environment of a naturalised culture (or, depending on the perspective used, a culturalised nature), an interdisciplinary approach that involves anthropology, psychology and sociology often intervenes, and borders of discourses are crossed over (Ibid: 12).

III. Borders

3.1 National histories of art

In the recent history of human and social sciences, the term ‘spatial turn’ has come to mean a cultivation of scholarly interest on the relations between ideas and spaces (Perkins 2003: 346).

Symptomatic of this is a visible revival of interest in space and place in time on the art historical

* Such cultural landscapes belie the belief that the life of thinkers, scientists and artists is intimately connected to the social circumstances in the countries they live in. (Kaufmann 2008: 168)

† It is a discourse "of positions, stances, moves. . . close and distant gazes. . . of spatial orientation and separation." (David Parkin) quoted in (Munn 1996: 447)

scene. Historiographer Robert S. Nelson argues that, for anyone trying to understand the various sites or performances that constitute art history, there is a geographical dimension in its 'disciplinary gaze' (Nelson 1997). For him an overview of the field resembles both a surface space that is filled with particular points and a totalising plane divided by a grid of marked as well as implied borders (Ibid: 28). Expanded discussions of art's ontological role in the social life in every human society have come to include all conceivable aspects of material culture as it is defined in human geography (Kaufmann 2004: 342).

The alignment between human geography, cultural geography and art history expresses itself clearly where connections are drawn between material and natural resources and traditions of cultural or artistic activities. Questions of artistic origins in time and space as well as outward transmissions across frontiers are constantly evoked to make an attribution, to build an art collection, or to name a newly identified style in art. As Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann suggests, it is difficult to imagine what art history would have been like if it couldn't name a painting ('French impressionist'), a piece of furniture ('eighteenth-century English'), or a sculpture ('Italian Renaissance') in this manner. This creates a sense of identity (as in a dichotomy between self versus other) that is legible in all geographical configurations, including the historical *Kunstgeographie* ('geography of art') whose legacy in regional and determinist ideologies Onians's *Atlas* must both relate to and resist in order to make its intention clear about intercultural or global orientations. An example of this attitude is the emergence of diaspora as a locus of contact zones of nations, cultures, and regions which allows the cartographic representation of directional and processive terms such as border, travel, creolisation, transculturation, hybridity, and diaspora (as well as diasporic)(Clifford 1994: 303; Pratt 1996: 364).

As a near methodological parallel to Onians's *Atlas*, Franco Moretti's ongoing research on mapping the history of nineteenth-century European novels, provides an excellent comparison for us to try to understand how Onians's *Atlas* can, even with its apparently abstract coding of historical

material, provide for our geopolitical readings of world art history (Moretti 1998: 36). Given the comparable time frames (mid-eighteenth to nineteenth century) in which both cultural phenomena of European romantic novels and world art history (also of a European origin) emerged, the way in which he uses the figure of borders to inform his cartographic explanation is fascinating. For Moretti, external borders are the container-sign that most indelibly defines the territory of a nation state, which sets the geographical foundation for all collective discourses at the time (Ibid: 29). Part of what borders do is to dialectically set up a 'hostile Other', which then serves as a source of collective identity (Ibid: 29). In addition, a paradigm in the form of a space-trope (thematic tropes inhabit their own space) theory dictates a nationalist influence in art history: thus consolidations or aggressions, or in Moretti's terms, intensions and extensions, over borders are indicators of a meeting between geography and humanities (Moretti 1998: 43; Moretti 2004: 96).

3.2 *Kunstgeographie*

Geography of art as a proper historical method has been, at least since the late nineteenth century, a predecessor to today's geo-critical practice (Tally 2011), when the concept itself contributed to a distinctive tradition of scholarship. Primarily in German-speaking countries, art historians in this tradition took to the articulation of their methodology as a *Kunstgeographie* that placed objects of art in a setting of space-time (Kaufmann 2008: 170). A 'chronotope' as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, their historiography had as its forebear the classical genre of topography*, for there was not only an emphasis on the physical circumstances in which works of art were created, but also, more problematically, on the ethnic backgrounds to which the works' makers belonged. The topic of artistic identities, as determined by their location within borders, appeared to dominate the enquiries of *Kunstgeographie* as a whole. 'Periodisation relies on the historicist assumption that not everything is possible in all times, but it is also true that not everything is possible in all

* As has been noted in (Silver 2004), this was popularised by Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of narrations,

places' (Kaufmann 2010: 3). In dominant academic practices, provenances have become indispensable in the organisation of art historical knowledge.

As argued by Kaufmann, Stefan Muthesius and others who have investigated the history of this tradition as an academic trend, *Kunstgeographie*, at least as it was advocated by contemporary historians and historiographers such as Kurt Gesternberg (1922) and Paul Pieper (1936/37), was immediately about methods for establishing regional identities and borderlines in art studies. Their scientific arguments were based on such concepts as *Stämme* (tribe), *Völkerpsychologie* (ethnic psychology) and later *Raumstil* (style in a space, in contrast to the humanistic formulation of *Zeitstil*)*. Especially in the years immediately before the Second World War, *Kunstgeographie* appeared to have reached a height in its activity of explicitly searching for constants in the art of a city, region, state or nation. However it is recognised by modern critics that the supposedly scientific description of the *Kunstgeographie* programme had its prescriptive aspects, too. Some of the terms that its analysis depended on, i.e. comparisons in the categories of cultural constants and differences, easily became biased and loaded with assumptions and values that cannot be easily confirmed and justified (De Bièvre 2008: 187). Ideological and methodological problems were the main reasons besetting *Kunstgeographie*, which largely went out of fashion among art historians in the last century's postwar world.

3.3 Geopolitics, social history and the geography of art

In contrast to the dated discourse of prewar *Kunstgeographie* which often resorted to Wölfflinian art-specific analysis, Onians's editorial policies are actively interested in reflecting the more recent trend in interdisciplinary links to social science†. Essentialist distinctions such as borders and ethnic identities are superseded by a diachronism that sees geopolitics largely in the dynamic terms

* Gesternberg authored *Ideen zu einer Kunstgeographie Europas* and Pieper published a book in 1936 that was simply titled *Kunstgeographie*. (Muthesius 2000; Kaufmann 2008-172)

† Here I am in full agreement with Stefan Muthesius' observation, that interest in *Kunstgeographie* has since seen a revival, but not without the necessary moves towards its being revamped. (Muthesius 2000: 20)

of social processes. Centres, metropolis, diffusion, circulation, forms of exchange or mixture are the new foci instead. Jan Bialostocki, a pioneer in this advocating the ‘processes’ model, suggests areas to which such discussions relate: religion, artistic materials, trade, shared artistic resources, climate and location (Silver 2004: 786). To the extent that these indicate the links and causal relationships between political power and geographic space, Onians’s *Atlas* clearly represents the new postwar school of art geography by substituting the older antitheses of *Zeit- and Raumstil* with more integration of history and geography based on criteria of spatial politics and patterns at various scales*. There are many distinct cases of geopolitics informing ‘spatial turn’ to be found in the pages of the *Atlas*, especially in the context of intercultural or multi-ethnic encounters in the annuals of imperial expansions and the resulting colonisation (Pratt 1996: 364-365). A sensitive use of historiography therefore becomes important for the world art historian to balance, when approaching interpretation and strategies for setting the narrative discourse into motion.

Take, for example, the analytical text in the segment ‘North America 1500-1800’ by Norman Bancroft-Hunt (pp. 148-49) which illustrates how the element of geopolitics has discreetly entered into the balance of recent art historical discourse. The first half of Bancroft-Hunt’s essay begins with the identification of Native American cultures with the ‘cultural areas’ that were autonomous territories of ‘largely stable’ cultures and beliefs (in Onians 2008: 148). The premise finds consolidation in the next paragraphs matching the distribution of tribes in the area with materials and techniques used in their socio-economic organisations. The details are much more comprehensive and more complete in the accompanying map of tribal America, sorted not only by the variety of their clothing materials but, more significantly, by the relative positions of their original place of habitation (p. 148)(Figure 9). Denis Cosgrove has shown that maps and surveys were used by colonisers to strengthen the intertwining of the ideologies of ‘the Wild’ and ‘the West’

* The terms in general show influences from geopolitics, inspired by the latter’s specific strategic prescriptions based on the relative importance of land power and sea power in world history. For this ‘political turn’ of art geography, also see (Muthesius 2000: 22) and (Kaufmann 2008: 175)

in popular American culture, clearly for propaganda and geopolitical reasons (Cosgrove 1996: 117). In comparison, then, the appeal of the current 'Tribal North America' map can be said cartographically and graphically to construct the image of North America as the pre-invasion homeland (or 'environmental niche' of Native Americans) before the penetrations by European forces began*.

The second half of Bancroft-Hunt's exposition shifts its attention to the history of European expansions in North America. It offers a region-by-region picture of the transformation of native cultures through the process of interactions between native tribes and European invaders and traders. For example, in the Woodlands, tribes such as the Algonquians were heavily decimated by invading armed forces but the Creek turned into villagers by adopting English farming and livestock-raising techniques, among other English dress codes and customs. In the Southwest, the Pueblos were forcibly converted by the Spanish colonisers but retained traditional culture and beliefs. Bancroft-Hunt's geopolitical account of this history, then, also suggests that regional differences play a role in diversifying, transforming or even undermining the craft practices of local people that is too prominent to ignore. Indeed, thanks to the introduction of new media technologies (tools, materials, dyes), it is possible to form the observation of a 'florescence of Native American arts', even though this also means that the relations between native tribes and their European exploiters increasingly became one of conquest and dependence (Onians 2004: 149). Indeed, by identifying European trade items as the major factor in enriching the material cultures in early 1700's North America, the author is forwarding the interpretation that the Great Plains was the central space where influences came from all parts of the previous tribal geography and formed a complex mosaic of heterogeneous culture traits which 'most typifies the general perception of Native American culture and art'. Ironically, the brilliant spectacle of cultural collisions and fusions was the consequence of a diaspora of an unprecedented scale and time frame among Native North

* A similar message of 'paradise (and cultural memories) lost' can be seen embodied in the map of 'Aboriginal Australia' by David R. Horton (1996). See (Anderson 2009: 5).

Americans in history, which involved the forced migrations of generations of local populations, turning some into a nomadic lifestyle.

The survey map (p. 149)(Figure 10) attached to this part of Bancroft-Hunt's narrative visualises little of the rich outcome of this combustion of uprooted elements from various native art traditions, as it does to illustrate the colonial violence of invasions and incoming trades that caused this tribal dispersal and displacement. The map has to illustrate the gradual process of replacement in geopolitical dominance over a timeframe of three centuries with no more signs than dots for trading ports and points of exchange, and coloured arrows for the routes taken by colonial profiteers and armies. Nevertheless, the very generalised scope of the cartographic view of the history of North American encounters and conflicts does succeed in making apparent the multi-local space in which the whole process was staged that caused, from what might be a Native American point of view, a post-national or even an anti-national development in which national borders were exceeded and cultures and identities were thoroughly dispersed and obliterated (Fortier 2005: 182).

IV. Objects

4.1 Methodological meanings

Onians's design of the *Atlas* assumes that maps can provide an endlessly varied and useful way of communication in developing a model for the world history of art. The fact that maps often dominate in the book's page views suggests the author's /editor's trust in their ability to format messages within individual enclosures of a semantic field and, at the same time, to realise the potential of simultaneous, layered expressions. Regarding the systemic meaning of cognitive orders in the book, one critic comments thus: 'The *Atlas of World Art*, edited by John Onians, breaks the story into a sequence of smaller regional stories in chronological division, attempting to give equal space to every culture. The scheme presents no apparent intersections' (Carrier 2008: 57). Onians's maps in *Atlas* are actually of varying proportions, but indeed they communicate individually as well



Figure 10 Map of European Exploration and Contacts in North America 1500-1800 adapted from John Onians *Atlas of World Art* page 149

as in ensemble. In human and social sciences, the ‘spatial turn’ has also much to do with the issues of studies and interpretation of maps (Pickles 2004: 10, 29). Cartography, as pointed out by map scholar John Pickles, has long been used for visualising and representing ‘earthy’ reality in an assembly of spaces (Ibid: 8). What it does well is to construct image objects that generate meaning both as diagrams and as a way of visualisation. When interpreted as diagrams, maps imply an organisation of ideas: while as visualisations, they are primarily about spaces (McCarty 2005: 32). However different things are in reality, they can always be shown in the spatial terms of locations on a map. Being both schematic and spatial, maps are therefore capable of proposing complex ideas through projections in a visually ordered space. Cartographic representations, especially those produced by professional cartographers, presuppose the powers of precision and transparency in their depiction, and they can give the impression of showing information objectively and with a ‘dispassionate neutrality’ (Ibid: 61-62). But, in reality, maps are messages with their particular set of codes, and they always reflect the social practice of space-making, which has its own history and serves specific interests.

4.2 A cartography of material cultures

In the previous section, I have endeavoured to show that mapping is actively used as a visual technology: it scans the world as a panorama of human cultures while also inscribing an ideology of science. Geographer John Pickles rightly calls cartography a process of Cartesian reductivism that is deployed for ‘an economy of display and demarcation’ (Pickles 2004: 8). Seeing the activity of cartography itself as some sort of map-writing also provides insight into instances where codification through maps takes on the function of subject formation (including construction and dissemination). In short, cartography serves as a social tool whereby an understanding of the world is made possible (Ibid: 4-5). ‘Maps present entire world views, with all that phrase implies in terms

of philosophical or scientific outlook, theological import, political influence, aesthetic perspective, and artistic choice.’ (Silvia Tomasch, quoted in *ibid*: 92).

Maps are often created with abstraction (which Adorno called a ‘peephole’ metaphysics) in mind, privileging vision as the source of ‘direct’ knowledge about the world (quoted in Pickles 2004: 80). Defending the inherently abstracted quality of cartographical signs, Moretti argues that its figural style of representation is actually related to some of its most productive qualities. Maps reveal the location-bound, circumscribed nature of any effort to represent historical events, and they also suggest a geometry of spatial patterns where a domain of social relationship may be sketched using a synthesis of analysed data (Moretti 2000: 64-65). The geometry of social history that Moretti has in mind shows cultural objects in reciprocal positions and distance in this relational domain (Moretti 2004: 95). Distinct from usual narrative histories that tend to focus on extraordinary events, abstract history maps direct the viewer’s attention to things that look ‘banal, everyday, normal’ (Moretti 2003: 67). A more rational approach than most, Moretti’s quantitative method presents material culture as a substratum in the cultural history of every nation on the map.

In his review of *Atlas*, Larry Silver criticised its very broad treatments of themes for lacking in specificity or fine details, especially where entire continents were under the same coverage: ‘But the wider the time span or the geographic stretch, the harder it is to make many fine distinctions’ (Silver 2004: 783-784). Silver cannot quite grasp the fact that the maps in Onians’s *Atlas* are designed not to compete with specialised readings in regional studies, but rather to create a generalised and abstracted overviews of territories, boundaries and categories, to track borders between nation states and, most importantly, to articulate the borderless interactions between them. Onians’s maps place virtual enclosures on those societies in various parts of the world to show how they operate as neighbouring cultural systems and also as separate constitutive parts of the same global continuum of human existence. However, in smaller maps Onians’s cartographers are also allowed to carry out studies of local uses of urban spaces. In a supplementary map titled ‘London c.

1600' historical information is offered not only for various continental artists who were established in the city from Hans Holbein to Anthony van Dyck (Onians 2004: 162), but all the theatres, roads, palaces, urban (built-up) areas both in and outside of the London Wall, the Wren churches and indeed damages from the 1666 fire that led to the building of the churches. This type of 'vignette' map helps to recreate what can be called a postmodern man's exploration into the past and distant. (Imagine this for viewers as far removed as in twenty-first-century Taiwan!). A sense of local specificity is remarkably apparent in these portrayals, thanks to their suggestion of contemporary networks of social life, all in the figure of spatial relations of its various sites.

4.3 A transnational cartography and intercultural consciousness

Martin Heidegger envisages a 'world picture', a 'mathematical manifold' in which one can visualise nature and society through a pictorial projection of their spatial relationships (Heidegger 1977: 146; Pickles 2004: 84). In truth the *Atlas* cartographies are nothing but abstract spaces printed on paper and inscribed with geo-codes like places and place names, legend symbols, layered lines, and other coordinate objects, but these were made in accordance with what the art of cartography has achieved in its history, an advanced capacity to represent the earth and its geographies with a semantic certainty. The presence of geo-codes in these maps thus partakes in the meaning of a universal science, that embraced a 'planetary consciousness' (Marie Louise Pratt) with its 'lines of power' (Gunnar Olson) (Ibid: 4). However, it has been argued that this mode of knowledge making has had an interior history and a European genealogy, and, as a result, its expression of the world as a natural environment to all human systems of culture would have to be as much a prescription as it is a description (Pratt 2008: 15-37).

All modern maps are by nature over-coded and over-determined in their communication (Pickles 2004: 14). But in fairness to projects like the *Atlas*, it would also have to be argued that they have come a long way from the days of Alexander von Humboldt, when maps served as solid

proofs of authentication for scientific imperialism (Pickles 2004; 71-74; Pratt 2008: 15ff). Taken as an ensemble, cartographies in Onians's *Atlas* are an attempt to highlight, by their inclusion, a wide variety of contemporary cultural or trade practices. The selections made in each episode of its cultural history vary according to the regions and periods represented. For example, reading map legends informs us that Melanesia in 500 BC - AD 600 had pottery, megalith carving, dolomite and stone figure carving, paddle-and-anvil pottery carving and shell ring production (p.93), while France in AD 1500-1650 had château and public house building, tapestry, inlaid enamel making, publishing, book selling, and printmaking as industries featured in the maps (p. 174).

Looking at the map illustrating 'Japan and Korea, 1800-1900' in the *Atlas* (p. 252)(Figure 11), it soon becomes apparent that it has carefully de-emphasised the static, territorial aspect of geographical codes, in favour of those emphasising trends and transformations. The system is not territorially or nationalistically centred, insofar as it spatially includes both Japan and Korea. While legend symbols display spatially referred data of artistic production in urban centres (Kyoto, Edo, Nara, Osaka and Seoul in the map), movements indicating traffic or transportation in multi-coloured and ribbon-like arrows and routes no less suggest that art was also active at portal cities (Pushan, Nagasaki, Yokohama), in the sense that related their exports to China, India, Europe and elsewhere overseas constituted an intra- and intercultural context for the system. Images of 'nodes, links and networks are rendered cartographically in exciting and innovative ways, as colourful curtains, chains, branches, streams, bits and bytes, connections and interactions, all mapped to render visible the unseen world-in-the-wires' (Cosgrove 1996: 157; Pickles 2004: 162). The regional map focusing on Edo (Tokyo) in 1800-1900 (Figure 12) seems to take on Onians's interpretative approach to art history in metropolitan spaces, resolving legible details that indicate conditions of materiality: art as movements is embedded in a network of canals, railways, bridges, silk or cotton textile firms amidst woodblock studios/shops, ceramic kilns, the royal palace, pleasure districts, theatres, shopping areas and sumo tournament grounds (Cosgrove 2008: 163). A visitor's

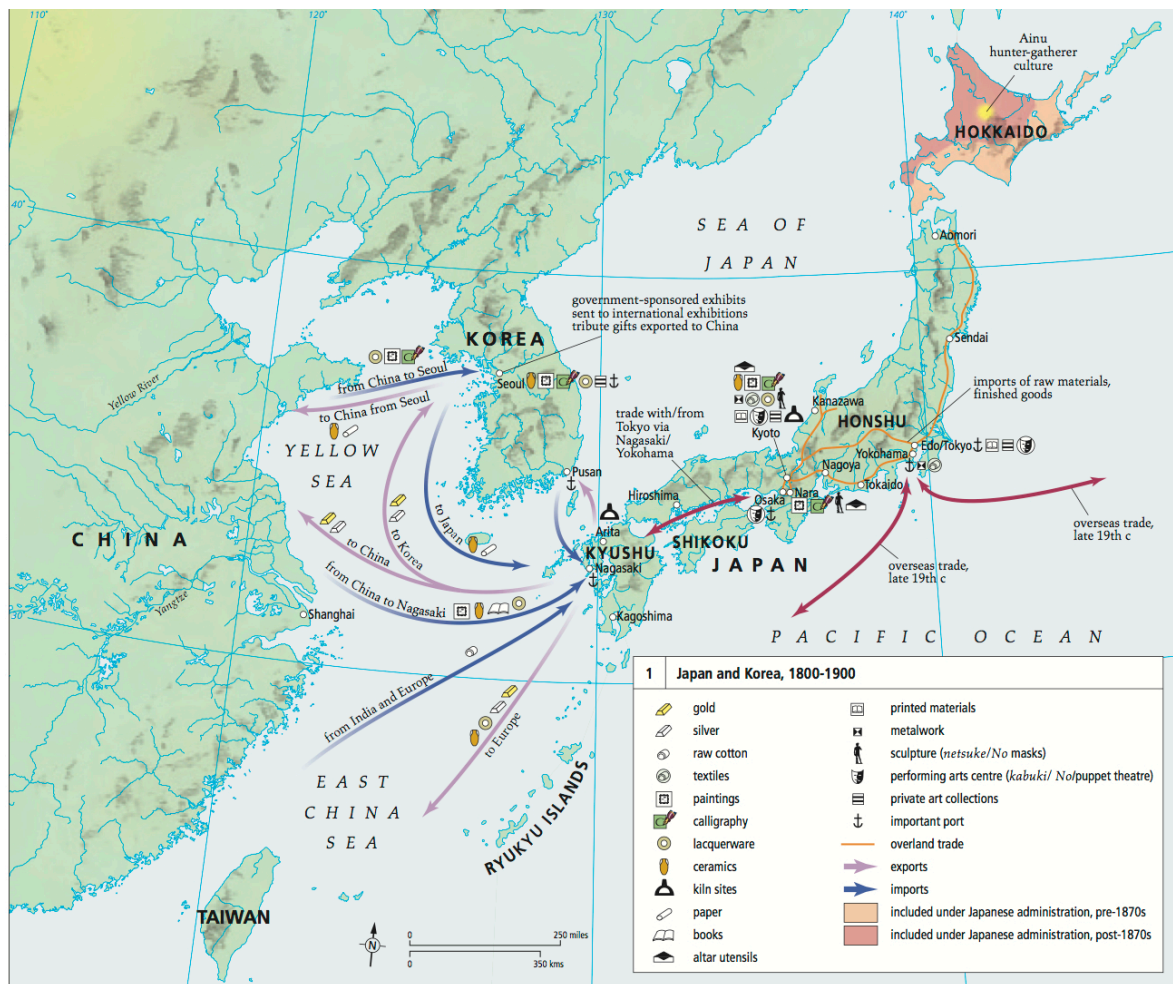


Figure 11 Japan and Korea, 1800-1900 adapted from John Onians *Atlas of World Art* page 252

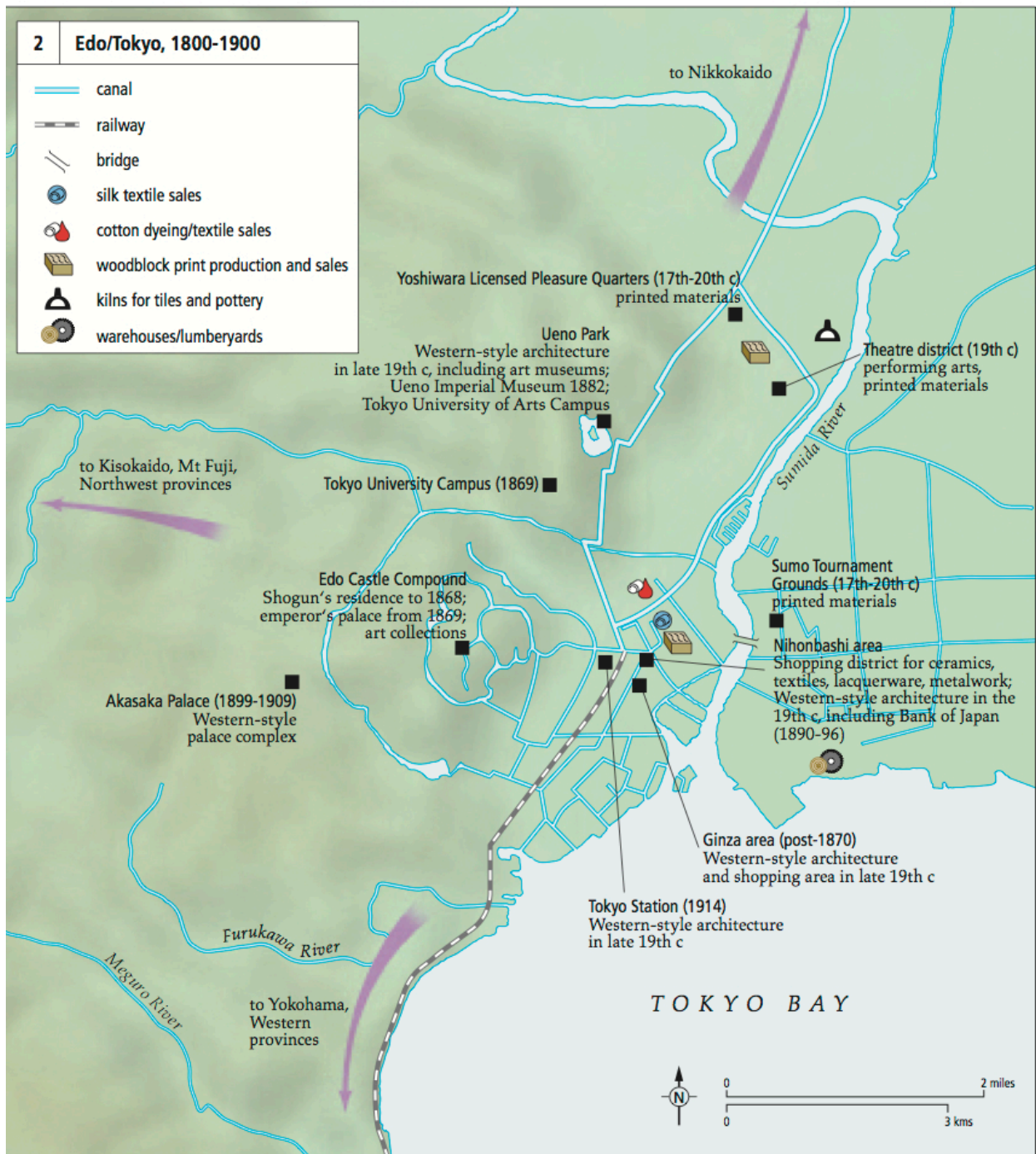


Figure 12 Edo/Tokyo 1800-1900 adapted from John Onians Atlas of World Art, page 253

discomfort facing up to an unfamiliar city is usually mediated by the map (Ibid: 181). Visualising the states of traffic and trade in Edo, especially in association with its foreign imports, may be helpful in forming and understanding the explanation that the city's growth as an art system was inseparable from early Japanese history of globalisation, both in terms of an environment for access and control of communication.

4.4 Case of a materialist history: Interpreting modernism in postwar period Japan

Everyday ordinary life, while consisting of routine, habit and custom, can represent deep social conflicts and contradictions to a historian's alert mind. A productive model of telling the story of modern history has been suggested by Harry Harootunian who advises looking not at the usual major event list, but into the everydayness in people's physical existence instead, for an alternative source of insight. His portrayal of civic life in the 1920's Tokyo makes an excellent example of interpreting the state of industrialisation and concomitant conditions such as what was called an urban sickness (都市病, toshibyō) caused by the 'ceaseless flow from countryside to the cities'. Sensitive observations led to the discovery that the everyday aspect of modern life has been a source of symptomatic expressions which originate from the impact of the drastic conditions of social transformations and of which diagnosis can be made following social theories by Freud, Simmel, Weber and Kracauer. Harootunian agrees with the Japanese philosopher of the period, Tosaka Jun*, that it's the 'routinisation of everyday life' that created modernity, along with its fleeting, commodity-like, and de-historicised temporality. The split from concrete, lived experience and the reality of an accelerating everydayness in a capitalist society, the two together contributed to an increasing inner conflict and crisis in the individual subject who meanwhile had mostly modern and objective values. An exception was socialist writers and artists such as Murayama

* Tosaka Jun (戸坂 潤, 1900-45), Japanese Marxist philosopher, member of the Kyoto School.

Tomoyoshi* who, with works like 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing' (1925), tried to create a concept of everyday life without the barriers between artists and workers (Harootunian 2000: 68-79).

By Harootunian's account, the socioeconomic and psychological conditions that can be called 'everydayness' in Japanese modernisation have provided a convincing description of the background stimuli needed to call on a counterpart in art and cultural productions, of which leftist or avant-garde movements in Tokyo, spearheaded by someone like Tosaka Jun or Murayama Tomoyoshi, no doubt played an important role. The main text to accompany the map of Edo/Tokyo 1800-1900 (p. 252) (Figure) makes no mention of avant-garde art and literature but Western-style architecture instead. Captions below the map, however, clearly point to Edo's innovation in response to foreign imports, and the production of material goods to supply to a growing middle class (Onians 2008: 252).

4.5 Transnationality in the *Atlas* and Green Art Studies

Maps in Onians's *Atlas* provide insight into art production as systems and so they lend themselves well to interpretations based on transnational ideas and principles. Basically an art history without names, these maps construct narratives that are not so much about human subjects as they are about performing social behaviours. They evoke thoughts or observations about an environment of relations, in which human actors dwell, access, flow, consume, own, borrow or become neighbours to each other. Recognising physical contingencies via cartographical imagination may even inspire scholars to reconnect to some older concepts in the literature of art geography. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, for example, recognises in Onians's *Atlas* a possibility to add to what has been said about the circulation, assimilation and diffusion of styles, as well as about centres and peripherals in

* Murayama Tomoyoshi (村山山 知義, 1901-1977) Japanese Marxist playwright and artist who pioneered the style of 'conscious constructivism'.

so-called 'art worlds' (Ibid: 176). Indeed he thinks that the de-centred and distributed structure of the *Atlas* provides excellent ideas as to how topics based on the issues of cultural changes or contacts between regions may potentially be used to build into a disciplinary geography of art (Ibid: 179).

Green Studies of Art (championed by the art historian Elizebeth de Bièvre) qualifies as another important example in the category, where an application of geographical thinking to art history has shared with Onians, methods and principles that may be explained by geopolitics. As de Bièvre has written, Green Art Studies restores to its deserved prominence the basic question of why a geographical distribution of stylistic variety happens at all. She supports her claim by making a clear distinction between geography's 'short' and 'long' histories when they are used in conjunction with studies of art*. The 'long' historical geography of a place refers necessarily to its geology, climate, hydrology as well as distributions of flora and fauna. The 'short' geography, on the other hand, shows short-term and local changes in the long geography by either natural interferences or by human interventions: such as earthquakes, flood, draughts, dam or bridge building, canals, irrigation systems, agriculture, deforestation, war or internal legislature. Related to the short and long geographies of a place (within a radius of fifty miles in her formulation), and vital in de Bièvre's views, are the differences between its geographical 'situation' and 'position': the former is the initial natural circumstances with which a local community interacts - river, coast, jungle, etc - while the latter refers to local relations with other parts of the world that may facilitate or prevent ecological interactions between a community and its environment (De Bièvre 2008: 184).

*They reflect influence from the prototypes as set by the Annales School of Historical Studies by Braudel, Chaunu, Duby, Le Goff, etc. De Bièvre also defines art as consistent with the following comprehensive terms: for her art is 'anything material, still or in movement, made or chosen intentionally or unintentionally anywhere in the world at any time by an individual or a group, to be of interest for its autonomous visual properties and the beliefs and values these may carry, whether aesthetic, religious or spiritual, secular or sociopolitical, private, public or otherwise.'(De Bièvre 2008: 184)

It is argued by de Bièvre that Green Art Studies acts as a useful framework for art historians who wish to construct their accounts of shared experiences of art makers and users in essentially the same physical and mental environments. An important inference to be made on this premise is that these shared experiences would have generated meanings on the subconscious level that exist apart from what historians usually get from gleaning through evidence in the kinds of verbal accounts, texts or material objects that are available. The total of physical environment is, for de Bièvre, a sum of both natural and man-made events that a community has experienced as a collective subject. By adopting the approach of Green Art Studies, historians would become more sensitive to the fact that the affective part in any art is the result of its shaping by the long-term impact of a set of subconscious assumptions on the local population of art users. In effect, de Bièvre is convinced of the psychic link between subconscious expectations and the natural situation of a community's collective existence (De Bièvre 2008: 184-185).

Seen from a geopolitical point of view, de Bièvre's Green Art Studies has shared with Onians's geography of art (as it is revealed in the *Atlas*) the idea that art, as a social system, connects with the other systems of political, religious and economic life shared by the community of its makers and users. But ultimately, so historians must reckon, the integrated ecological system provides the material context for all the residents' conscious activities on a level that may be subconscious. As cases of inspired use of Green Art Studies in the field of popular art history have shown*, to use long-term ecological changes as a common denominator to explain historical differences in visual experience can be in itself an epistemologically challenging feat to perform. But the environmental theories about social systems and their coupling with both natural- and ecosystems are nevertheless instructive to those who want to consider the significance of artistic expressions, in terms of what their meanings might be in deeper structure, for example, the studies

* An excellent example can be found in the documentary film 'Hollands Licht' ('Dutch Light') by Pieter-Rim and Maarten de Kroon (2003), which expands on Joseph Beuys's speculations on the possible influences on Dutch art by historical changes of its ambient light condition.

on the universals in human culture by Donald E. Brown (Brown 2004). Universals in each culture are thought of in his formulation as the synthesis of human nature adapting itself in feedback from contacts with the living environment.

V. Conclusion

As the first comprehensive survey of world art history, John Onians's *Atlas of World Art* attempts to interpret the geopolitical meaning of a history of world art with a medial hybrid of cartographical, textual and photographic communications. Onians's invention, essentially an inter-medial experiment to integrate the genres of chronotope and cartography, tends to highlight certain issues in the field of the geo-history of art. These range from the geopolitical disputes between national schools in the field, to ecological inquiries on interactions between human culture and physical nature. Whether the focus is on ideology and politics (borders) or on ecological history and material culture (objects), the outcomes from discussion on these issues are highly relevant to, and will have an impact on, the important question regarding the future directions of world art history as a humanistic discipline.

‘(F)or history, heritage, museum studies and related disciplines, the new capacity to display and organise material digitally has clear parallels with the great exhibitions, whose power to attract the wider public, capture the imagination and inspire wonder came not only from the exotic nature of their content, but also from their use of new technologies of preservation, simulation and representation.’ (Arthur 2009:1)

I. Introduction

Museums and public galleries are high-profile institutions, particularly in the event of blockbuster exhibitions. In the thesis’s final chapter, I want to write about an important moment in museology which witnessed *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, opening in the year 2010 at the British Museum. The exhibition has an ambitious title that matches its intriguing concept. Comprising a selection of only 100 objects, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* hardly ranks as one of the largest exhibitions in the history of British Museum at all. However, the promise to represent a world history in only 100 objects was slightly exaggerated, and there was no telling how this concept would be interpreted in its actual execution until the day the exhibition opened its doors to the public. Perhaps more so than the other of the exhibitions held at the British Museum around that time, the *100 Objects* exhibition was a huge success with the public, arguably on more than one aspect.

By all available evidence, including overall very enthusiastic visitor attendance figures and public participation, I will argue that it has been significantly due to the fact that *A History of the World in 100 Objects* has successfully interpreted and implemented a new post-museum concept. In comparison to the modernist museum, post-museum means more than just physical exhibits for communication to their visitors, and this makes their message more forceful. I find that *A History of the World in 100 Objects* made a real breakthrough in that regard, and I will structure my discussions as follows. The opening section provides a background for the exhibition’s mission, with regard to its intent, purpose and formation. The second section focuses on the exhibition’s

message of representing universal historicity itself. The third section considers the exhibition's physical, virtual and cyber-presentations, which combine to amplify and optimise the exhibition's appeal as an international art show. The final part contains a critical evaluation of the exhibition.

II. Background

2.1 A 'world museum'

Along with several other (also touring) exhibitions given in the preceding years, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*' celebrated the 250th anniversary of the British Museum opening to the public. Equally celebrated was the Enlightenment ideal of 'the world in a box'*, to which the British Museum claims to have always committed itself, by bringing into its collection a most 'exotic' array of objects from around the world. The event of the 250th birthday, nevertheless, sees the Museum adding a new gloss to its old ideal, insomuch as it now wants to go from a 'world museum' into a journey of sharing its fabulous collection with the world.† In this sense *A History of the World in 100 Objects* represents a resolve, on the part of the Museum and its current director Neil MacGregor, to take the objects out from their boxes and open them to the world over. There are clearly moments when some issues raised in previous chapters are relevant to this chapter and I will cite such observations and conclusions as appropriate.

In an essay titled 'Global Collections for Global Cities', MacGregor expressly argues that one major obstacle to the exhilarating feeling of being as one with the rest of the world is the human desire for people to want to be divided into communities and, as a result, to be different and hostile to the communities of each other (MacGregor 2009: 66). In reaction to this unwittingly aroused animosity in the present context of global culture, MacGregor's suggested solution is for anyone to consult a global collection of cultural objects. As long as one is willing to listen, he is convinced

* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/world-in-a-box.shtml> 'The world in a box' (June 06) retrieved on 20/08/2011

† http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/events_calendar/recorded_events/250_lecture.aspx '250 years on: What does it mean to be a world museum?' (January 2009) retrieved on 20/08/2011

that many objects in every world-class museum have a story to tell to the whole global world. Not all stories told by objects are preferred by him, because, like he said, ‘Nations construct for themselves the stories they want at particular moments they will sell to their public.’ (Ibid: 69). As the Director of the world’s first public museum, he believes that a museum can contribute to the world’s public with a salient point, that is, if many objects can tell the story that their respective nations and cultures are actually connected at the level of cultural history, why shouldn’t the authenticity of their stories convince more? A world museum, in MacGregor’s opinion, is the world home to everyone’s art and everyone’s historical memory (Ibid : 70).

In order to make this ideal of a ‘world museum’ start up and come to its materialisation, the British Museum and its Director have clearly rethought the planning of their exhibitions and the philosophical initiatives and concepts behind them. The concept of a post-museum appears to be highly relevant where *A World History in 100 Objects* is concerned. According to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, the paradigm of modernist (or else known as disciplinary) museums is on its way out, along with its pattern of most important activities, centred around displays, collection and acquisition (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). The incoming model of the post-museum, on the other hand, considers physical displays as being only one among many, both tangible and intangible, ways to reach out to the target audiences. Such outreaching programmes can include community establishments, organisational partnerships, and even educational programmes, that are able to transform the exhibition into ‘the museum of many voice and many perspectives’ (Ibid: 152). It appears that, for the British Museum, the cultural responsibility for a world museum lies in producing a world history that would involve the world as the measure of its contribution.

2.2 A message to the world

What makes the exhibition itself a bit more extraordinary than most others, however, is its design to use media power to maximise its outreach as far into the world as possible. As it stands, the title

refers not only to the physical exhibition at the Museum. It is also used to represent a BBC Radio 4 series which consists of a leader programme on BBC TV in addition to 100 15-minute broadcast programmes presented by Neil MacGregor over 20 weeks in 2010, a podcast with the option of downloading, a book based on the same radio series, as well as an indefinitely implemented website dedicated to the exhibition. The composed and edited contents of the exhibition itself were thus designed to appear in multiple versions that spread across audio, electronic, print media and on both analogue and digital platforms. Although the Museum's director Neil MacGregor has made it clear that the exhibition itself should be regarded simply as 'the latest iteration of what the Museum has been doing' since its foundation in 1753, which is to tell history through things (MacGregor 2010: xiii), for this project, history has been told through a joint collaboration between the Museum and the BBC, and so the extension through the media coverage will have set the main tone in which the exhibition became known outside of its home institution.

Material objects are like language and manipulation of the natural world to us, because they, too, constitute one fundamental way through which we construct ourselves (Pearce 1995: 14). Given the history of the British Museum, which acquired its huge collection from an even bigger variety of sources, it is not surprising that many of the 100 objects that form part of physical display in this exhibition were sourced at different times in history and from older collections that were amassed from even further abroad but are no longer existent. Considering the making of this exhibition, then, makes us realise that this 100-piece exhibition represents a hub of messages that came from all parts of the world awaiting interpretation.

The prototype of the modern museum is the Renaissance *Wunderkammer* collections which were usually assembled for private individuals with an erudite message attached to teach as well as to delight. Later on, it has been part of a modern convention that museums, as a component in the disciplinary society, erect new regimes of truth through construction of an objective space (space that holds and posits objects) and through the operation of time, space, body and object control.

The Western history of museum collections since their early days has consistently suggested a built-in purpose of *convenientia* (connecting disparate things in harmony), essentially a well-tuned system of assembled rare and unique material objects. (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63)

Although likewise consisting of a multitude of curiosities, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* is not put together just for the personal enjoyment of princely patrons, nor does it seek to educate citizens of a modern nation state. Rather the exhibition has claimed for itself a humble but most egalitarian aim, to tell and share a story with each object that is deemed significant in a global history. Hence the exhibition organisers are explicitly not interested in another exercise in democracy, but rather, their fervent wish is that their exhibition (and its medial counterpart) will be a cultural gift for all people in the world, and it needs to be this in a concrete sense, that it is accessible to all.

2.3 Shaping the project

MacGregor's preface to the printed catalogue, a lively apologia under the title 'Mission Impossible', shows that the project itself had nevertheless become feasible, despite all self-imposed challenges and constraints. A collaboration with BBC Radio 4, the exhibition was expected to observe certain 'rules of the game' set by the Radio 4 Controller Mark Damazer, that, in its strictness, depart from the curatorial requirements: First of all, the project is sized at 100 selected objects from the more than seven million in the Museum's collection. Secondly, the selections would have to cover the entire history of man-made objects, from two millions years ago to the present day. Thirdly, the objects's origins would have to cover the entire world, too, as evenly as possible. Lastly, the 100 objects would have to encompass as many aspects of humanity 'as proven practical', that is, not limited to those of the socially privileged and powerful (MacGregor 2010: xiii).

The results of this deliberately rigorous process of filtering are certainly diverse, often controversial, and yet still in keeping with the general character of the Museum's massive collection. One unusual condition laid down to constrain the exhibitors' thinking was to present each of the objects with a narrative of its own on radio and not on TV. It posits an approach to visual objects that is about as oral as possible, and to present each object in this way is, as discovered by the Museum Director himself, to appropriate it by way of communication. In the preface he discusses the process that took place between the administrators in order to reach a final consensus on which objects would be selected for the exhibition: '[W]e would group the objects in clusters of five, spinning the globe at various points in time and looking at five snapshots of objects at that particular date' and 'we would invite experts and commentators from all over the world to join in' (MacGregor 2010: xiii-xiv). Details like this illustrate the exhibition organisers's ambitious goal of creating a meeting point for various information, messages and voices and a depository of not just objects for contemplation but also engaging ideas about history as well.

III. A world history through objects

3.1 Telling a history

Regarding the narrative qualities of art exhibitions, it has been argued that collecting is a human feature that is closely connected to one's need to tell stories (Bal 2004: 89). This hypothesis is more than verified by the exhibitors of *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, who assert that it is not just a mission of the British Museum, but of all museums, to tell history through things (MacGregor 2010: xiii). The point of historicising is moved further when, in the formal introduction to the exhibition, and under the title of 'Signals of the Past', the Museum's Director proceeds to explain why and how a history can be told through an act of decoding which acknowledges a source of information in the objects themselves. He claims that histories told through objects are distinguished by the unique nature of the information they divulge: comprehensively diachronic in

the sense that these accounts rarely cover isolated phenomena alone but can often be related to a series of historical events and social processes (Ibid: xv). The exhibition shows the intention of initiating a process of subject formation through interplay with the cultural mode of understanding (Bal 2004: 85).

Indeed, in the above narration and objectification, MacGregor is apparently quoting an anthropological explanation for collecting objects, that collecting is basically ‘collecting ourselves’, an essential human feature (Clifford 1988: 216). In his ‘On Collecting Art and Culture’, James Clifford has elaborated on this connection, describing both an ‘art-culture’ system which, since its emergence in early nineteenth century, has been applied in a pedagogical, edifying and later institutionalised manner, to organise collections of both local and foreign cultural objects in the West (Ibid). The system itself is responsible for the invention of such hierarchies as distinguishing between art and artefacts, authentic and inauthentic, categories in what Clifford calls ‘a structure of desires’ (Ibid : 224). For organisers of a world art exhibition at a world museum, to reinstate the ‘art-culture’ system with its hierarchy of sociopolitical, geopolitical and aesthetic values would be unthinkable. MacGregor’s strategy of prioritising and privatising the subjective process of narrativity, then, recommends itself in a way of accessing and possessing the collection that all viewers can do and enjoy.

3.2 Object lessons

The curating staff for *A History of the World in 100 Objects* conceived and constructed an ‘object-hood’ whose elements, they claim, are invested with intrinsic and yet ineffable qualities. In the preface to the main text (which is also roughly identical to the broadcast transcript), MacGregor explains how some properties of the objects on display can inspire near-ideal storytelling or history writing:

1. 'The necessary poetry of things' - some histories are not learned from study of texts but through the more abstract and obscure processes of cultural translation, poetic imagination and contextual interpretation (Ibid: xviii)
2. 'The survivals of things' - objects embody the survival of cultural memories, to the extent that cultures without textual devices rely on objects to register and retrieve their histories. A conspicuous example is that of Kilwa pottery sherds (p. 385) which stood testimony to an ancient history of intercultural trade and communications which was unknown to Europeans and which has only been slowly revealed to us through discoveries in archaeology (Ibid: xx).
3. 'The biographies of things' - meanings of objects undergo changes due to the vicissitudes of their circumstances or to new discoveries about their past history. MacGregor gave the example of the 5th-to-8th century Chinese painting, 'Admonitions Scroll' (pp. 248-255), which made a strong case of its 'social biography' in forming and shaping a 'community of shared enjoyment' that had lasted centuries (Ibid: xxii).
4. 'Things across time and space' - objects can be materially connected between different settings of temporality and spatiality and so can generate global movements of historical knowledge and provide access to a myriad of alternative sets of cultural memories and local views. For visitors to the British Museum collection, it is both an enlightening and a refreshing experience to hear the Nigerian author Wole Soyinka comment on a Benin Bronze (p. 502)(Ibid: xxiv).
5. 'The limits of things' - museum objects are such that their access serves both as an interface and an incentive for trying to understand past or remote cultures. They motivate cultural historians for possible meanings behind the heritage contained therein by crossing these limits through imagined constructions, often a patchwork of other sources (Ibid: xxv-xxvi).

Not covered in the above list of points made by MacGregor about the interpretation of cultural objects, it is, however, difficult not to note that he always embeds a paragraph in the commentary that he wrote for each object in the exhibition that enacts its own encounter scene with the object through such devices as a sensitive description. For example, his note on a Maya maize god statue (Figure 13), begins with these words:

In the heart of the British Museum, we have a god of maize. He's a bust, carved of limestone using a stone chisel and a basalt hammer, and the features are large, symmetrical, the eyes closed, the lips parted - as though this god is in communion with a different world, quietly meditating. The arms are bent, the palms of the hands face outwards - one raised, one lower - giving an impression of serene power. The head of the god is covered with an enormous headdress in the shape of a stylised corn cob, and his hair is like the silky strands that line the inside of a cob of corn, inside the wrapping leaves. (p. 49)

Upon first reading, it is patently clear that the sample paragraph stylistically takes advantage of the fact that we usually have our encounter with an object initially through our bodily senses (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 116). Indeed, MacGregor's loving reading of the statue's materiality is apparent in the specificity of such details as limestone, basalt, silk threads and silver-lined leaves, not to mention his interest with the crafting itself which expresses itself through refined renditions of abstract and mimetic forms (symmetry, closed eyes, bent arms, turned palms and enormous headdress). Of course the global reception of MacGregor's ekphrastic prose, as an inalienable part of the construction of the meaning in his commentary, must remain uncertain, where language or translation becomes an unsurpassable barrier to comprehension. Regardless of this, we must assume that MacGregor wrote and produced his graceful remarks to accompany the images with an utmost (Kantian) conviction in the basic human capability to be affected and persuaded where his meanings can be perceived.

Maya maize god statue Contributed by British Museum

Statue of the Maya maize god from Copán in Honduras. © Trustees of the British Museum

Image 1 of 4 Hide image caption

The statue is of the Mayan maize god. He was found in a

No.9

A HISTORY OF THE WORLD
IN 100 OBJECTS

[Listen to this programme](#)

[Download \(right click & "save target as"\)](#)

[Read the transcript](#)

Part of After the Ice Age: Food and Sex (9000 - 3500 BC)

About this object ▶ View in timeline

Click a button to explore other objects in the timeline

Location Central and South America ▶
Copan, Honduras

Culture Aztec, Maya and Central America ▶

Period 600 - 800 ▶
AD 715

Theme Food ▶ Religion ▶

Size Medium ▶
H: 90cm W: 54cm

Colour [Color swatch]

Figure 13 Maya maize god statue, AD 715. From *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, accessed at http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/Hvi54RDiQym6Pgd3_IsRKA 18/01/2013.

3.3 Analysis: narration as re-presentation

Claims by *A History of the World in 100 Objects* re-acquaint us with the idea that it is a part of humanity to link historic objects with the behaviours of creating historical narratives. As archaeological and cultural evidence has suggested, antiquarianisms of some form exist in history and in many cultures around the world that make self-aware or even institutionalised efforts to conserve and exalt memories through historic objects, ruins or vestiges (Schnapp 2003). Within the universal context of affective interest in the past, it is easy to see why *A History of the World in 100 Objects* appeals as a travel back in time and across the globe. Particularly in its book form, the exhibition presents itself as messages from the objects themselves, with distinctive information ‘about people and places, environments and interactions, about different moments in history and about our own time as we reflect upon it’ (MacGregor 2010: xv). In addition to the 5 points raised in a previous page a further three provide interpretations about what this exhibition communicates when one considers its approaches to the 100 objects selected:

6. MacGregor’s discourse on the necessary poetry of objects also suggests a philosophy of history similar to one upheld by New Historicism. Like the latter, he insists that not only researchers or erudite scholars, but rather inspired poets are needed to tell the stories properly, since any objective or scientific description of historical facts is necessarily an illusion of value neutrality (White 2004).
7. MacGregor’s concept of ‘signals from the past’ shows a concern with performing cultural semiotics which takes the form of an observation of a subject’s engagement with cultural objects through a historical narrative. There is an aspect of cyber-semiotics that places the historical narrative in the context of its subject’s self-description.
8. Seen from the psychoanalytical perspective, any exhibited collection of visual objects awakes a fetishism or desire in domination which must be satisfied via such gestures as a

subjective assignment of meanings to the objects (Bal 2004). Hence the modern museum emerges as a site of time transformation where historiography performs a feat of moving cognitions of the past into consciousness for the present, across preset divisions in one's space of memory (Certeau 2004: 36-37).

Therefore a discursive component, with the voice of a narrative subject, is inserted when the collection of 100 objects comprising the exhibition is there to attract and to inspire those with 'a will to objectivity' (Certeau 2004: 36) to tell historical stories of their own. The idea of historical narration as a transport of the past to the present underscores the museum's interpolative function as a context to inform visitors of their inner selves. The Museum Director set an example by calling for everyone to construct their own history in engagement with the historical objects. It is a reminder of an individual's responses when engaged in an experience with the objects. Speaking as a world art historian, the carefully chosen objects as media culture perform agency for a kind of system self-description which we call shaping the identity in the environment of educational institutions.

IV. Post-producing the exhibition: communication and representation

4.1 The physical presentation

The British Museum and the BBC actually produced *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, rare for its type of shows, to be a three-way presentation: on air, online and onsite (Cock 2011). As a physical exhibit, the exhibition took place *in situ*, amidst the British Museum's permanent collection on display. The objects themselves were therefore not removed from their usual location(s). As has been deliberately decided, the 100 objects were not to be gathered as one 'exhibit' in the same physical room: rather the term 'onsite' was used to mean 'presenting complete with their cultural context'. The organisers have also pointed out that the visitors to the exhibition can use the 100 selected objects as 'jumping-off points' to explore the broader collection with

which they are conceptually spatially integrated (Cock 2011). (see onsite photograph of object No. 16: Flood Tablet, Figure 14).

The exhibition's official metaphor of historical journeys through global spaces is rigorously explored in order to mobilise the otherwise static physical display. Designs include establishment of a 'trail' for each period-specific subgroup linking the ten objects whose origins are distributed across all the continents. Once on a trail, in order to facilitate locating any of the 100 objects in the museum's many galleries, visitors need to consult annotations on both the museum floor plans and the world maps on each page in the free guide booklet (Figure 15). Because the British Museum is the oldest public museum in the world and also the nation's most significant depository of important archaeological and other social science finds since the Enlightenment, it has enough authority and power to represent the world art-culture system by opening up a framework that reveals the museum's seemingly infinite holdings.

The analogy between the museum floor plans and maps of the many histories to which *A History of the World in 100 Objects* has referred is both instructive and interesting. It brings to mind Foucault's classification of heterotopia* which counts museums (and libraries) among places of 'infinitely accumulating time' (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 26). Kevin Hetherington has argued that modern museum practices have largely deprived object collections of their heterogeneity with their strict ordering of sensory impressions. (Hetherington 1999: 67). *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, by placing an all-important priority on diverse and dissimilar choices of objects, has gone some distance in restoring a heterogeneity to the museum space. Some of the most controversial objects included in the exhibition, for example a credit card issued in the United Arab Emirates (No. 99, p. 647 in the catalogue) and a solar-powered lamp and charger manufactured in Guandong, China (No 100, p.653), have the same shocking and thought-provoking

* In Foucauldian definition, the term 'heterotopia' has the meaning of 'places of otherness' outside of a hegemony.

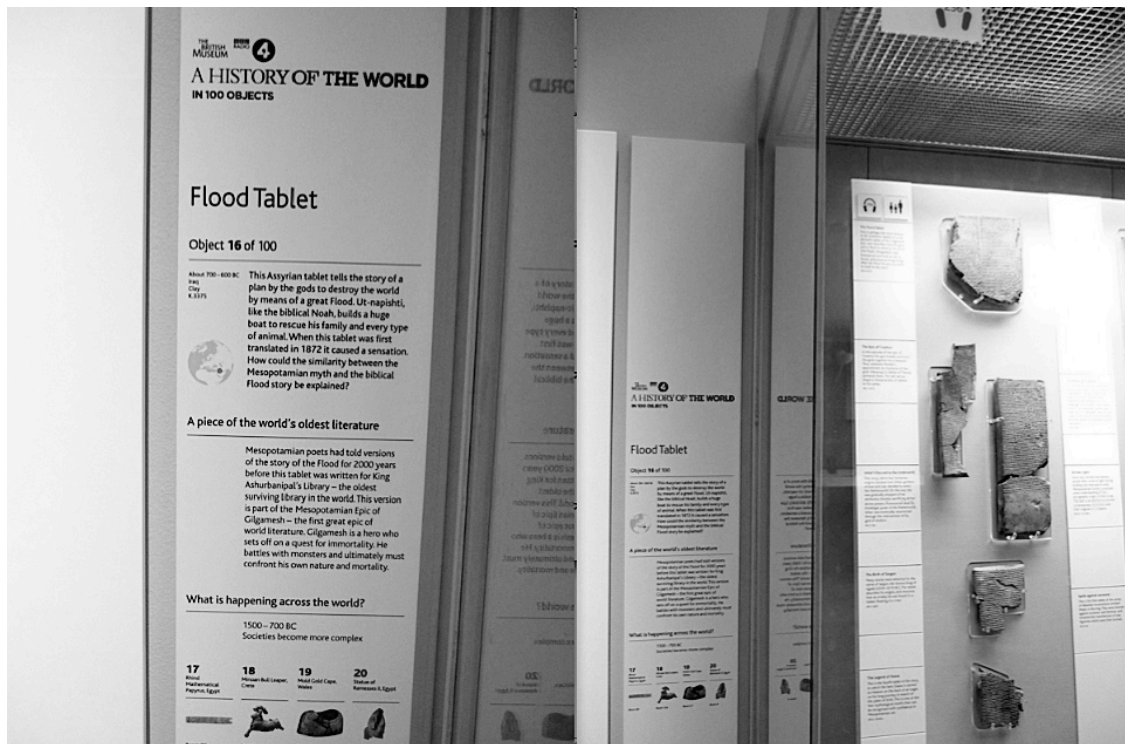


Figure 14

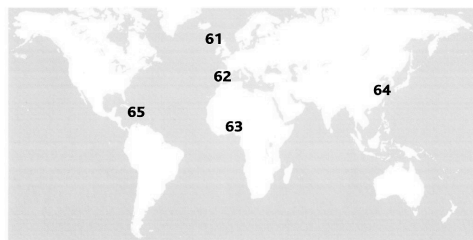
Photo collage showing the on-site display of the 'Flood Tablet' (No. 16) in *A History of the World in 100 Objects* at the British Museum in 2010

Week 13
Status symbols
 AD 1100–1500

Despite the Black Death and the chaos caused by the Mongol invasions of Asia and Europe, this was also a period of learning and scientific achievement. Technological advances led to the creation of magnificent objects used by the wealthy to reflect their status. In Mongol-ruled China iconic 'Blue and White' porcelain was first developed and went on to be desired across the globe.

In Ife, one of the first city-states to arise in West Africa, artists created life-like sculptures using sophisticated metal-working techniques. Within the Islamic world arts and sciences flourished and European scholars soon benefited from Islamic advances in astronomy, maths and even chess. A ruler's status in the Caribbean was closely tied to their relationship with their ritual throne.

61 Lewis Chessmen, Probably made in Norway AD 1150–1200	62 Hebrew astrolabe, Spain AD 1345–1355	63 Ife head, Nigeria AD 1400–1500	64 The David Vases, China, AD 1351	65 Taino ritual seat, Santa Domingo, Caribbean AD 1200–1500
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Week 14
Meeting the gods
 AD 1200–1500

Throughout the world during this period objects were used to bring the faithful closer to their gods. In the Western Church, pilgrims flocked to shrines to see holy relics, including the body parts of saints. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, images of Jesus and the saints were venerated in the form of icons. Hindu worshippers in India used statues to develop a personal

relationship with individual Hindu gods. In Huastec Mexico penitents visited statues of the mother goddess asking for forgiveness. The religion of Easter Islanders in the Pacific changed to reflect their deteriorating environment. Polynesians ceased worshipping statues of their ancestors and instead created a cult associated with the island's diminishing bird population.

66 Holy Thorn Reliquary, France AD 1350–1400	67 Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, Turkey AD 1350–1400	68 Shiva and Parvati sculpture, India AD 1100–1300	69 Sculpture of Huastec goddess, Mexico AD 900–1521	70 Hoa Hakananai'a Easter Island statue, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) AD 1000–1200
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Figure 15. Page scan 'week 13-14' from the British Museum *A History of the World in 100 Objects* guide booklet.

effects as did Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades when they were included in a museum exhibition along with all other cultural objects.

4.2 On-air and in-print editions

As previously stated, one feature which most significantly (and also somewhat controversially) set *A History of the World in 100 Objects* apart from most previous exhibitions of world art held at the British Museum was a closely cooperated partnership with BBC's media networks and, above all, its use of the broadcast medium for the diffusion of its effects. Though an unusual choice of medium for an exhibition of so-called 'visual' artefacts, storytelling via radio broadcast was said to have given a larger prominence to the other parts of the objects' existence than would have otherwise been possible (Cock 2011). As the exhibition's curators and producers have pointed out, removing the visual part from the specific episode for each object was considered counterintuitive but only superficially so -- radio as an electronic medium reaching out to the public actually provides the benefits of more background information and more detailed description in the space of each fifteen-minute episode than would television in any case (Ibid). In the end, there is the factor of viability to reckon with: a series of radio programmes for *A History of the World in 100 Objects* ran for one hundred episodes through the year of 2010, while an equivalent on television would have been unthinkably expensive from a budgetary point of view.

Any issue about representing the exhibition but without corresponding visual stimuli was apparently addressed when its catalogue/collected programme transcripts was published jointly by the trustees of the British Museum and BBC in 2010. For each of the 100 selected objects in *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, the printed publication includes at least one but sometimes many illustrations to reproduce the object in photographic views. Modern art critic Douglas Crimp famously called reproductive photography of art used in museum publications 'the museum's ruins' (Crimp and Lawler 1993). For him, photographic reproduction (as deployed for *A History*

of the World in 100 Objects in its book form) manifests how collected objects relate to a museum collection, to the extent that all photographable objects and their photographable details can find a part in the latter as a super-archive (Ibid : 51). Therefore, in comparison to verbal descriptions which tend to bring to the foreground differences in origins for different objects, photographic reproductions thus run the risk of being the museum's big homogeniser (Crimp and Lawler 1993: 54). In response to André Malraux's ideal of 'museums without walls', it has been argued that photographed objects lose their properties as real objects but gain a 'specious unity' of visible surfaces. A sequential arrangement of photographic reproductions only enhances illusions of continuities of stylistic evolution and transformations (also see Foster 1996; Potts 2003). Crimp, writing in early 1990s, had perhaps foreseen the even more rigorous use of photographic images (particularly in the adapted form) as icons in today's computerised cybernetics of virtual environments of database aesthetics.

4.3 An online trans-media database

Michael Portillo's comment on the project's use of digital media as a factor contributing to *History of the World in 100 Objects* winning the 'Art Fund Prize 2011' included words to the effect that the project's outstanding use of digital media has surpassed that intimated by 'museums without walls' in providing social meanings of the objects of its message: departing from the usual museum practices and developing new innovative way of interacting with their audience* (Prudames 2011). More so than the physical implementation of the exhibition itself, both the virtual form of the radio broadcast and the picture book demand exclusive attention from the audience during the programme playback time. The exhibition's own customised podcast archive

* 'The truly global scope of the British Museum's project, which combined intellectual rigour and open heartedness, and went far beyond the boundaries of the museum's walls.' as stated by Portillo. 'Above all, we felt that this project, which showed a truly pioneering use of digital media, has led the way for museums to interact with their audiences in new and different ways. Without changing the core of the British Museum's purpose, people have and are continuing to engage with objects in an innovative way as a consequence of this project.' (quoted in Prudames 2011)

and digital platform*, on the other hand, make it possible for visitors to listen, download or subscribe to any of the programmes long after the live transmission was completed and ease such restrictions as placed on the user's time schedules or browsing preferences. As argued by its designers, it makes it possible for computer networked users to access the programme, scripts, photographic reproductions, and even 3D object views freely without restriction (Cock 2011). As such the website acts as both the online storage as well as rendering facility for *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, where all multimedia materials associated with the exhibition and with its documentation have been transferred and transformed into information that is interactively organised and dynamically retrievable through the architecture of an integrated database or database complex.

Comparing a new media database complex to a physical exhibitionary complex (for the latter, see Bennett 1996) reveals their common assertion of a rhetoric of spectacle via a structured feast of senses. As true to most sites of the world wide web, the digital platform for *A History of the World* relies on a hypermedia structure to distribute a mixed variety of media, i.e. via the path of hypertext links (Manovich 2001: 37-38). Hypertext and hypermedia provide non-linear, or random, access to information and also a more language-like interfacing environment for visitor-consumers (Fahy 1995: 93). In this context, non-linearity is synonymous with randomness, with regard to the possible directions which the user's intentions may take. For example, if one opens the 'explore' page at the exhibition website, she would see numerous minuscule photographs shown 'swarming' the space, of which each represents a hyperlink to a data and media file set associated specifically with the object itself, including the audio files of the radio programme, zoomable photographs, videos in the round, annotations and figures to highlight details when seen in closeup (Figures 16, 17). Here the word 'explore' caters to such site visitors that may have increasingly become aware of and accustomed to their role as savvy consumers of media and are able to have control over their

* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/> (last accessed 30/09/2011)



Figure 16

'Explore' page at the BBC-British Museum project 'A History of the World in One Hundred Objects' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/explorerflash/>)

BBC Sign in News Sport Weather iPlayer TV Radio More Search the BBC

THE BRITISH MUSEUM BBC A HISTORY OF THE WORLD TODAY'S OBJECT Ceremonial ballgame ball

Home Explore Programmes Topics Blog Learning Get Involved About My Profile

Olduvai handaxe

Contributed by British Museum



Image 1 of 4 [Show image caption](#)

This handaxe made of green volcanic lava represents a tradition of tool-making which began about 1.6 million years ago. Smaller [This handaxe is made in](#)

No. 3
A HISTORY OF THE WORLD
IN 100 OBJECTS

[Listen to this programme](#)

[Download \(right click & "save target as"\)](#)

[Read the transcript](#)

Part of Making Us Human (2,000,000 - 9000 BC)

About this object [View in timeline](#)

Click a button to explore other objects in the timeline

Location [Africa](#)
Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania

Culture [Early People](#)

Period [Two million BC - 10000 BC](#)
1.2 - 1.4 million years-old

Theme [Food](#)
[Science & Technology](#)

Size [Small](#)

It: 23.8cm **W:** 10cm **H:** 5cm

Colour

Figure 17

Page for 'Olduvai handaxe' from *A History of the World in 100 Objects* website
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/l3l8quLCR8exvdZeQPONrw>

consumption. Given their purpose, builders of the exhibition website have aimed to match popular expectations with their design of the 'Flash explorer' interface. Here we have an instance of communication being shaped by the post-industrial logic of 'production on demand' and 'just in time' (Manovich 2001: 38). The interplay among media that has been characteristic of the project is nowhere more manifested than in its online format.

V. Globalising the exhibition: assessment and critiques

5.1 Witnessing a common humanity

The project of *A History of World History* celebrates human cultural diversity against a backdrop of common humanity. Previous discussions in this chapter have referred to museum exhibitions, in Michel de Certeau's terms, as strategies of time in managing collective memory. Organisation of the exhibition shows regard for both synchronic and diachronic relations in a networked manner (an interpretative decision that manifests itself more subtly in the radio programme, as well as in the book version, for their apparent stronger focus on individual treatments of the objects themselves). A return glance into the exhibition guide map provides some collateral evidence for this observation. The 'information reveal' tactic adopted by the exhibition production team introduces five new items per weekly cycle covering the same period and covered by the same theme for an invited comparison, although the objects were drawn evenly from all continents in the world (Figure). Through devising broadly encompassing themes such as 'status symbols' or 'meeting the gods', the museum collection ably uses its property as an archive of diversities to incline the audience's mind towards recognition of a common humanity.

The theme of common humanity has developed in intercultural art history by scholars like John Onians, Ellen Dissanayake, Donald E. Brown and Ben-Ami Scharfstein who have preferred to see art interculturally as an adaptation of human nature to the environmental nature (Dissanayake 1999; Brown 2004; Scharfstein 2008). Dissanayake, for example, has stressed the adaptive

functions of art, and her hypotheses of art providing for cognitive, political, reproductive and other general social functions clearly overlaps with those that informed the conception of *A History of the World in 100 Objects* exhibition (Dissanayake 2008). Scharfstein has also argued for relevance of his observations, that humans share basic perceptual and emotional sensitivities and that different cultures invent similar ways of response for the most essential social purposes, to view art as a social and cultural practice (Scharfstein 2008: 343). By and large their ideas refer to the communication framework whereby cultural variations are inevitably a manifestation of self-organising individuals in continuous interactions with outside conditions. Whether art is recognised as deriving from the sensitivities and responses that belong as a part to our common humanity, it arguably contains them on an implicit, subconscious level (Ibid: 346). Seen from the global viewpoint, the ‘common humanity’ argument has made a most significant contribution to the *A History of the World in 100 Objects* exhibition programme.

‘To consider objects from the perspective of visual culture is to focus on the relationship between the object and the subject’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 108). Fundamental for *A History of the World in 100 Objects* is the idea that this configured subject-object relationship is intended as a response to globality, or indeed the global situation. Assuming that the most essential terms in a subject-object relationship (general humanity) remain unchanged*, MacGregor’s subscription to an inclusive, planetary universalism is comparable to a cosmopolitanism with local roots. It is perhaps preferable to describe this cosmopolitanism as a relativisation of the modernist universalism or natural universalism (Jay 2002b: 275; Washbourne 2005: 169). What follows is that actual interaction between subject and object will depend on the viewer’s experience and position when resources originating in the exhibition and in the British Museum reach multitudes of viewers and users domestically and abroad. Speaking anthropologically, one’s inability to negate MacGregor’s ideal of ‘world history in objects’ completely comes from the general inability for one to understand

* MacGregor’s basic belief in the universality of human nature is reaffirmed in (MacGregor 2009).

images or objects to be relative to a specific culture, ‘understood as a bounded and coherent way of life’ (Jay 2002b: 275).

5.2 Incommensurability and local knowledge

On the topic of international or global art-shows, one of the most widely read contemporary works of criticism is Homi Bhabha’s ‘Double Visions’ (1992, Bhabha 2004). In this Bhabha targeted the exhibition ‘*Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*’ held from October 12, 1991 to January 12, 1992 at the National Gallery, Washington, DC. For Bhabha, the exhibition’s most important message was not the ‘creation of a global culture circa 1492’ but a double vision whose parallelism ‘to present every civilisation on its own terms’ ultimately failed to achieve its preset and promoted goal. He realised this when his viewing of the exhibited great Renaissance paintings by Leonardo and Dürer detected no ‘Mean and Measure of All Things’ but distracted and downcast gazes, while Hans Holbein’s *Ambassadors* shows a real parallel between navigational maps of Discovery and the transformed, anamorphic skull of death. So in its stead, he argued that the Western museum, when exhibiting objects from colonised cultures and the postcolonial world, should adopt a perspective of *parallax* which recognises the difference or displacement of an object’s appearance when the observer’s position also changes (Ibid: 236-40).

We can learn some salient points from Bhabha’s postcolonial critique, including what, in today’s exhibitionary climate, translates into a reminder of potential dangers in association with an overarching colonial subjectivity in the matters of intercultural exchanges if the issue of incommensurability between different cultural pasts fails to be recognised and reconciled. Regarding *A History of the World in 100 Objects* exhibition, it is argued that MacGregor and other organisers, given their role as acting curators of the collection, clearly recognise their own influence and intervention in the way in which the objects would appear to the public and spectators. To resist contemporary corporatist influences, local knowledge is recognised as important when

retelling the history of a collection. Depending on the object in question, the exhibition's broadcast programme frequently holds interviews with specialists from the field or in the cultural tradition from which a historical object has originated. Hardly a 'native informant'* from cultural pasts, the scholarly inputs are argued to represent a practical reference point for native experiences as part of the stories told about the objects. As a strategy for museum curators and historians to articulate a native position but avoid othering and appropriation, Fred Myers has suggested to work against the domination of the visual by restoring the privileges of other senses: smell, hearing and touch in representations of material culture (Myers 2004: 206). Considering the interplay of media and narrative in *A History of the World in 100 Objects* project, it seems to be well appointed in capturing some of the more transient elements of the objectifying process and in multiplying its impact on visitors and audience alike.

In a more recent account, Homi Bhabha has written about the updated concept of global memory, in relation to a revised idea of cultural transmission, previously divided between societies, minorities and museums (Bhabha 2009). He argues that transmission of cultural heritage solely through the agency of cultural identities or ethnic lineages no longer seems the only conceivable or creditable way, in this time and age of globality, transnational communities and diasporic movements. The new subject in the ethnic project of global cultural memory is an emergent international civil society, who stake their claims to rights and also obligations over objects and representations of social and cultural authority. In meditation of the process of cultural transmission, Bhabha came to the understanding that the notion of cultural continuity is at all possible when human subjects and cultural heritage (sites and other cultural objects) engage in what may be called cultural continuity through memory. There is an urgency in preserving both tangible and intangible legacies as a means to salvage cultural memories, which extend beyond the historical

* Furthermore, a 'native informant', according to Gayatri Spivak, is a colonising projection from the Western visitor put upon a person in a foreign culture, and is connected to the experience of a radical Otherness. (Spivak 1999: 66-67)

event only by efforts from ethical witnesses who ‘keep alive the traces of images and words’ (Ibid: 49-50).

5.3 Contacts and processes

A History of the World in 100 Objects has sought to globalise its messages, in ways that recall what anthropologist James Clifford called ‘museums as contact zones’, an idea he borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt (Clifford 1997). By recognising the different roles increasingly played by contemporary museums, Clifford suggested that they are no longer static collections; rather, they feel much like places of encounter and passage. When the metaphor of travelling is extended to artefacts themselves, all the traffics between major collections would be significant both on the national and on the international levels. With the meaning of interculturalisation, in which museums ‘increasingly work the borderlands between different worlds, histories, and cosmologies’, one can imagine museum visits changing people’s concept about the public and about its cultural heritage. Clifford’s ‘contact zone’ views of museums compares them to spaces of transits but also to those of communication and distribution. Their resources would include partnerships with powers of media, as well as available funding from both public and private parties (Ibid: 210-13).

In comparison to the old diffusionist model, Clifford’s unconventional view of museums as a contact zone paints a vastly more complicated picture of what they do and how they communicate. For example, there is now much room for discussion of museum control and management based on the application of informational technologies alone. ‘Beyond museum documentation systems, computers are increasingly used to monitor and control environmental conditions, for commercial activities such as points of sale, for general administrative purposes, building management, desktop publishing, exhibition design and for project management’ (Fahy 1995: 88). Clearly this added technical sophistication presents a museum with the option of going beyond simply making objects accessible to the general public (Witcomb 2003: 121). It is argued by this dissertation that *A History*

of the World in 100 Objects has made definite contributions by incorporating into its agenda two processes that apparently work on separate levels but are ultimately convergent in their purposes. First, there is the process of engaging the broader community via the technological link of social media, and second, there is also the process of shaping an intersubjective discourse of museum exhibitions by exploring the possibilities of digital history.

From the start, the production team for the project on *A History of the World in 100 Objects* were keen on engaging public participation. Concurrently with the main exhibition at the British Museum, there were also exhibitions at participating regional museums. By December 2010, around 1,500 objects had been contributed by 551 museums/historic sites. At the website, private visitors were encouraged to contribute their choice of objects: around 4,000 objects were uploaded by the public during the project duration (Cock 2011).

Statistics suggest that *A History of the World in 100 Objects* has been very successful in enlisting public input into both its design and content, even as a project with few precedents in the field to lend the experience. To a great extent this is due to an inventive and fertile partnership with BBC on publicity, a first of the kind for the British Museum*, but also contributing towards the goal is the relatively new museum policy of using social media to create participatory communication. Scholars of modern museums have drawn on the significant influence of social media, broadly definable as a combination of online communication, networking, and/or collaboration which serve as a basis for user interaction† (Russo, Watkins et al. 2008). Examples of such collaboration are visible on every page of *A History of the World in 100 Objects* website. Online details for each object (Figure, example) are invariably accompanied by comment threads consisting of contributions from both curatorial and user communities on the subject of the exhibited object,

*For starters, suspense was used to pique the public's curiosity. 'Throughout the series, the 100th object had been kept secret, and a campaign leading up to the reveal was launched, to encourage appreciation of the contemporary nature of the themes woven through the programmes from the start, spark debate, and gain wider exposure for the project.' (Cock 2011)

†Social software, social networking and Web 2.0 are other terms used to describe tools and platforms that enable similar user interaction' (Russo, Watkins et al. 2008: 22).

while also providing links to blogs by curators, art historians and other museum professionals on the website. Initial education or encouragement needed for an individual or a community to create, upload, and share digital cultural content using social media can be considerable. It has been estimated that visitors to *A History of the World in 100 Objects* website who also uploaded an object constituted only 0.1% of the total number (Cock 2011). Given its difference from the pattern of one-to-many communication in traditional museums, the application of social media enables a transformation of communication into a participatory, interactive dialogue, bringing a synergy to the acts of connecting and coupling such heterogeneous systems as online communities and institutions of cultural information.

The exhibitory orders represented by traditional museum collections are used to embody a hierarchic power of auratic authenticity and other narratives of cultural materialism (Witcomb 1997: 106-107). The pressures on contemporary museums to go ‘beyond the mausoleum (of times past)’ and to become proactive include those on the grounds of politics, economy and social responsibilities (Ibid: 102). Increasingly, as part of the process of opening up to social media, there are demands for leading cultural institutions to highlight the values of cultural diversity, local knowledge, and popular memory. As proven by the British Museum’s experience with *A History of the World in 100 Objects* project, the effects of electronic technologies have arguably not entirely displaced objects, but they have rather brought into question any absolute claims about their possible meanings as historical information (Ibid : 104).

It has been claimed that the same approaches that have affirmed the role of audiences in social learning have also enabled the deconstruction of grand narratives (Russo, Watkins et al. 2008: 22), The fact is that the rise of ‘digital history’* and postmodern discursive paradigms have driven changes in the way historical information is generally presented in the context of new museum

*Digital history’ is a term used to delineate all aspects of the study and appreciation of history, heritage and material culture that involve digital rather than other conventional media in its presentation, storage and access.’ (Arthur 2009: 2).

practice. The *A History of the World in 100 Objects* website already made much use of active user initiating processes that, via wide-ranging applications of relational database and intermedia textuality, rearrange data and show new patterns in that information. The first thing it has affected would be the old hierarchies in which historical knowledge has been constructed till this point in history. The distinction ‘between what were once called primary and secondary sources in the study of history’ would have been eliminated. The fact that a museum collection of cultural objects is systematically well aligned with the idea of a place of ‘visual technology’ seems hopeful as to how intercultural exhibitions may evolve in response to the increasingly visual, dynamic and multi-textual character of history in the digital history environment. (Arthur 2009)

VI. Conclusion

A partnership between the British Museum and BBC transformed the special exhibition *A History of the World in 100 Objects* into a prototype of ‘intelligent museums’ which extended physical displays of cultural objects seamlessly into the online expansions of electronic and digital media. Inclusion of non-objects such as broadcast diffusions and intermedia footages as part of the exhibition content has indeed suggested a real departure from the museum’s traditional self-identity of ‘the world in a box’ as well as an opening up of new perspectives into the outside world as enabled by connections. As far as museum philosophy is concerned, the exhibition itself definitely signalled a tendency in which the main attractor of visitor interests gradually shifted from the physical values of the objects themselves to those of related information and activities. The changing dynamics towards the interactive and the plural would also have profound implications for the curatorial business of representing art history in the space of museum exhibitions. As I have suggested earlier on in this chapter, the Museum’s decentred position on ‘possible’ histories of the world was in fact aided by new patterns of selecting and distributing exhibition contents. *A History of the World in 100 Objects* has, in more than one way, realised Clifford’s ideal of ‘Museums as

Contact Zones', not in the least by proposing multiple possibilities in which a new history of the world may be written, and by imagining a new scenario, in which the governmental and the dialogic aspects may be perfectly brought together. At this time, 176 museums have become a provider of both physical and virtual access to art history. It is interesting to see in the long run, whether this pattern may give a most complete expression yet to the communicational ideal of Global Village.

Conclusion

A final brief conclusion highlights three key points from the works of the various authors studied which I feel support my original statement that a renewed appreciation of the geopolitics of borders and objects is important for contemporary art historians attempting to develop and articulate new approaches to world art history.

As stated in the Introduction this thesis was written as a surveying inquiry to identify recent authors in English who have developed individual approaches, or syntheses of methods, for their own projects of a world art history. The thesis has clearly identified several such authors ranging from Aby Warburg in the early twentieth century to writers in the 1990's and later.

There is much to say about the ideal these works stand for, and about the methods that their authors have decided to use to bring this ideal forth into an intelligent expression. They show these authors are decidedly varied in their views of the world, and this is borne out by the diversity which characterises their work as a whole. Indeed there is such variety in project scale, nature and method, and given the broad range of human art which they have tried to explore, which is that of the entire world, perhaps there is no surprise that some of the titles analysed are more expansive than others, and that the critical responses to the works have been varied. But in general the idea of the world is more sufficiently suggested by variety than by sheer size. Each work can be seen to have different strengths and weaknesses in how the authors have attempted to answer the key question of how to develop strategies for 'worlding-art' as discussed in the Introduction. Yet overall this diversity is encouraging in demonstrating that it is probably not likely that any single attempt to create a world art history is likely to succeed, however one defines success. However, as I have shown in my analyses of the authors' works, all implicitly or explicitly have shown a sensitivity to the geopolitical meanings or significance of borders and objects, which have in the broadest sense,

helped to shape their conceptual thinking and subsequent analysis, synthesis, and presentation of data.

The second main point I would like to raise relates to the sheer breadth of multidisciplinary expertise that the authors have had to draw on in developing and realising their separate approaches. This points to the essential need for all art historians to recognise that the discipline must reach out to and join up with other natural and social sciences, as appropriate, to provide new perspectives on our understanding of how art has shaped human experience and how human experience has shaped art. In the process of writing the six chapters of this thesis, I have experienced intellectual encounters with a range of scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, including art historians, philosophers, geographers and museum directors. The experience is comparable to having a virtual tour through the world, not only in terms of the variety of landscapes observed and the various borders that have been crossed, but also in the multiplicity of cross cultural encounters.

The third and final point relates to the ethical potential for cultural diplomacy and living objects from the work of world art historians as mentioned in the Introduction. Geopolitics is essentially about nations and peoples in the world, and about defining oneself and others. In a world of increasing globalisation with all of its advantages and disadvantages, including the migration of people and conflicts between nations and people, any attempt to highlight and reinforce the common human experience of all peoples must be welcome. Each of the authors discussed have demonstrated an empathy with a wide range of cultures and their separate unifying approaches to developing a world art history have highlighted the relevance of how an understanding of the different kinds of borders that exist within and between peoples and nations, and a sensitivity to the concept of living objects, can be used to promote cultural dialogue and understanding. Such approaches as seen in the authors and works I have studied for this thesis show the contribution that we, as art historians, can make towards this even larger ideal.

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