The Postcolonial Museum

The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History

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This book examines how we can conceive of a 'postcolonial museum' in
the contemporary epoch of mass migrations, the internet and digital
technologies. The authors consider the museum space, practices and
institutions in the light of repressed histories, sounds, voices, images,
memories, bodies, expression and cultures. Focusing on the
transformation of museums as cultural spaces, rather than physical places,
is to propose a living archive formed through creation, participation,
production and innovation. The aim is to propose a critical assessment
of the museum in the light of those transcultural and global migratory
movements that challenge the historical and traditional frames of
Occidental thought. This involves a search for new strategies and critical
approaches in the fields of museum and heritage studies which will renew
and extend understandings of European citizenship and result in an
inevitable re-evaluation of the concept of 'modernity' in a so-called
globalised and multicultural world.

*Long overdue, here is a volume that updates and reconfigures the
intersection of postcolonial critique with multiple interpretations of the
museum and social praxis in globalisation.* The Postcolonial Museum *charts
gaps, achievements and prospects in 20 chapters that re-interpret the
connection of past and current imperialisms. Introducing a wealth of new
voices, this is essential reading for anyone interested in curatorial practice
and theory, modern and contemporary art, ethnography, museology and
the interventionist potential of research in the humanities overall.*
Angela Dimitrakaki, University of Edinburgh, UK

Cover image: *The Tomb of Qara Köz* by Ronni Ahmmed and Ebadur Rahman,
Venice Biennale, Lido, 2011. Image courtesy of the artist and the curator,
Ebadur Rahman.

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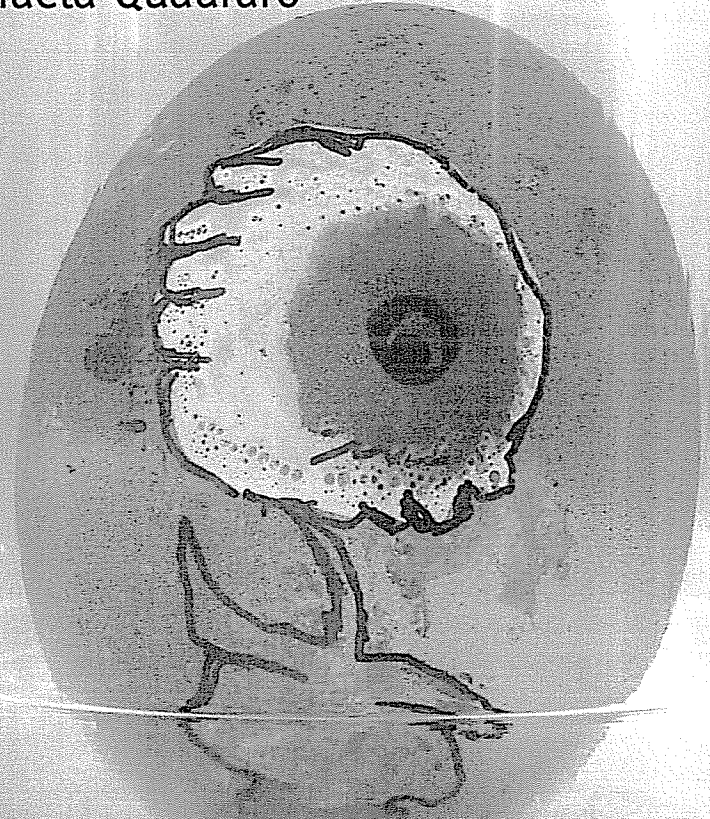SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

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ASHGATE

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Introduction: Disruptive Encounters – Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality

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and Michaela Quadraro

Postcolonial art is intimately linked to globalisation – that is, to a critical reflection on the planetary conditions of artistic production, circulation and reception. This implies focusing on the interweaving of the geographical, cultural, historical and economic contexts in which art takes place. The relationship between globalisation and art, as Okwi Enwezor observes, conceived and institutionalised by the European history of modern art in terms of separation or simply negation, here acquires fundamental importance (Enwezor 2003). It represents both the premise through which the relationship between art and the postcolonial can be conceptualised, and the matrix that helps to convey the cultural and political value of this relationship, together with its significance as a *disruptive encounter*. Far from being lost in the sterile and abstract, yet provincial, mirror of self-referentiality masked as universalism – with the implicit claim of the autonomy and independence of art from other cultural forms and activities – postcolonial art is deeply and consciously embedded in historicity, globalisation and social discourse. On one hand, it reminds us of how power is organic to the constitution of the diverse relations and asymmetries that shape our postcolonial world, and hence of how 'bringing contemporary art into the geopolitical framework that defines global relations offers a perspicacious view of the postcolonial constellation' (Enwezor 2003, 58). On the other hand, postcolonial art also shows how aesthetics today presents itself as an incisive critical instance. Postcolonial art proposes new paradigms of both signification and subjectivation, offering alternative interpretative tools that promote a reconfiguration of a planetary reality.

Analysing the link between modernity and this global reality, we can say that globalisation can be understood as the planetary 'expansion of trade and its grip on the totality of natural resources, of human production, in a word of living in its entirety' (Mbembe 2003). It was inaugurated by the Occident through a violent process of expropriation, appropriation and an exasperated defence of property, spread globally through capitalism and its imperialist extension. This is a political economy that is deeply rooted in, and sustained by, the humanist, rationalist, colonialist and nationalist culture of the West. The central phenomenon of modernity, born in a historical exercise of power, was fed by the religion of 'progress' and the racist ideology of 'white supremacy' imposing itself for centuries as a universal ontological category through the institutions of laws,

Chapter 12

The Incurable Image: Curation and Repetition on a Tri-continental Scene

Tarek Elhaik

Curation is the state of exception that has become the rule. Like ethnography, curation has become the air we now all breathe. The routinisation of both ethnography and professional curatorial practice seems to be a symptom of a collective malaise in contemporary culture. Professional curatorial practice, specifically, as the dominant form of curation and modality of relation, threatens to drain the real of its future anterior, of its capacity to generate change through complex repetitions. This chapter is an attempt to grapple with and resist the normalisation of dominant forms of curation in contemporary life.

This re-evaluation of curation stems primarily from my research location at the border between cinema studies, visual culture studies and media anthropology. During the course of my fieldwork, I have learned many lessons from collaborative dialogues with colleagues and interlocutors whose vocation is to reflect on the ontological and epistemological status of contemporary curatorial practices. I have benefited, in particular, from curators, anthropologists, film and art historians, psychoanalysts, cultural theorists, pedagogues and philosophers who have generously guided me while I was conducting a long-term ethnography of intellectual and curatorial life in Mexico City.[1] Like many scholars, artists and other creative researchers, I too was attracted to the contemporary art-alternative-to-academia thesis. Like many, I too have quickly been disappointed by initially promising curatorial efforts that ended up squandering the very potentialities that ignited those hopes in the first place. More and more we witness institutional critiques and collective curatorial efforts gone awry. Often, these culminate in blatant displays of power reminiscent of academic posturing that convert the potentially horizontal into the powers of the vertical, and the difficult 'public use of reason' into a surrender to normative institutional models, the star system and the congregation of usual suspects (often 'representatives' of and cultural elite from the post-colony). Indeed, one should be perplexed by the increasing 'dominant' role played by certain curators in their shaping the terms under which public life ought to be lived and cared for.

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1   I have learned much about the ethnographic and curatorial turn from discussions with the late Olivier Debroise, Maria Ines Canal, Fiamma Montezemolo, Jose Luis Barrios, Jesse Lerner, Cuauhtemoc Medina, Rogelio Villareal, Osvaldo Sanchez, Tayana Pimentel, Lucia Sanroman and Roger Bartra.

As new figures of the public intellectual, curators have managed to create status for their practice by capturing the desires of academics too often trapped in their lonely ivory towers. The latter, eager to breathe a bit of fresh air and to achieve visibility through art institutions, unhesitatingly consent to supply concepts to these omnivorous curators and cultural mediators too busy programming 'one damn thing after another'. Within this ideological framework, deals and alliances are made through a clever use of the vague, emblematic figure of research (in particular ethnography) that often culminates in ostentatious displays. More often than not, 'the art world's penchant for the frivolous and its coziness with an ascendant oligarchy can only confound – or even offend' (Lee 2012).

Repetition and Curation

It is often argued that the hegemonic ascent of the curator in contemporary culture belongs to the historical process of formation of the bourgeois public sphere, the autonomisation of art, the intensification of the rule of experts responsible for diagnosing and caring for our lives, and the emergence of guardians of the social link from the figure of the Human Rights Activist to that of the Cultural Mediator. Moreover, the rise of these figures of care and mediation runs parallel to the subsequent de-politicisation of the social link. There seems to be a compulsive attempt in secular, liberal, democratic public cultures to draw the contours of freedom and emancipation through carefully staged processes of mediations and monitored productions of stable subject positions anchored in territorialised forms: nation, region, city, continent and so on. In fact, this historical background continues to be productive today and very much informs the field of contemporary curatorial practice. As a form of use of public reason deeply moulded by the ascent of both the rule of expertise and the nationalist-cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, the curator's form of curation is none the less constantly threatened by unpredictable visceral outbursts that do not lend themselves to immunisation. The status of their form of curation is in fact beginning to morph and 'cool down' into something close to what Jean-Paul Sartre once called the 'practico-inert':

> The Practico-inert has an intimate relation to the notion of seriality. In order to define a series, Sartre takes the famous example of the queue that forms every morning at a bus stop. The bus queue is an expression of seriality, of a 'plurality of isolations'. The queue is a crowd in the sense that individuals who share the same objective – to get on the bus – come together in the same physical space. But every individual in that queue tends to see every other with hostility, as a potential competitor for a limited resource – a seat on the bus. Each is an obstacle to the aims of the others. Each person is indifferentiated, the only unity being the practico-inert everyone is waiting for, the bus. (Malik 2010)

The current proliferation of biennales and triennales, for instance, is a symptom of the automatisms in the curatorial economy and apparatus of contemporary art. It is a perfect example of both masterful deployments of the Kantian notion of the use of public reason and Sartrian seriality and repetition. Therefore, one ought to ask whether this specific use of public reason can continue to constitute a beginning. My point of departure; my bus stop, so to speak, is 'ethnographic' in both the strict and expanded sense of the term. In the strict sense, I am both a media anthropologist and a moving-image curator sceptical of the procedures at work under the regime of the so-called ethnographic turn in contemporary art. In an expanded sense, because it is the deployment of the emblematic figure of ethnography that has, to a certain extent, prompted many a professional curator to perform spectacular tightrope walking acts that too often ended up stunting the potential of ethnography to make something creative, ethical, and political by adopting a 'radically different epistemology founded on the luminal' (Crapanzano 2004, 8).

Contemporary curatorial work, under the regime of ethnography, has paradoxically shifted towards power and away from potentiality, to put it in Deleuzian terms, towards the monarch and away from those promising practices of freedom. Ethnography has become the alibi that has created new figures of curatorial sovereignty. It is now not only the King but also the Curator who cares for our lives. And the Curator (dispatching and summoning more and more cultural mediators in the so-called postcolonial periphery) cares for us through the powers of the sovereign. It is the professional curator who condenses, with a productivity that should alarm us, three models of power: sovereignty, discipline and control. In light of this, I ask: how do we resist this three-pronged actualisation of power in the context of our societies of control where curation has become the state of exception in which we all live? Can we imagine amidst these regimes a 'real' curatorial state of exception, as Benjamin once put it? Should we perhaps align these resistant forms of curation with the increasing concern among those psychoanalysts actively engaged in the polis to answer the following vital question: 'should we not prevent the discourse of the analyst from being re-inscribed into one of the three other discourses: master, university, hysteric?' (Chiesa 2005).

I join the many who try painstakingly to keep both distance and proximity from the binary economy and historical compromise between academic and contemporary art worlds. Fellow dwellers in those adjacent, ethico-aesthetic and existential territories resisting incorporation and annexation into increasingly neo-liberal academic and contemporary art worlds have begun to take issue with two paradoxical features characteristic of majoritarian curatorial culture.[2] First, we interpret the gluttonous inclusion of geographic regions and provinces under the cosmopolitan rule of curatorial empire and its attendant logic of representation as

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2   I borrow the concept of adjacency from Paul Rabinow. The goal of anthropological inquiry is 'identifying, understanding, and formulating something actual neither by directly identifying with it nor by making it exotic. Rather, it seeks to articulate a mode of adjacency' (Rabinow 2007, 49).

a paradoxical effect of the postcolonial and the pluralisation of cultural practices. Second, we see the widening chasm between art, ethnography and life as a paradoxical effect of the age of so-called 'documentary turns' with its attendant participatory events, social art practices, and artists and curators-as-ethnographers.[3] Even more troubling is the gradual expansion of curatorial practice into all regions of life (curating dinners, lectures, conferences, the rituals of relational aesthetics, and so on), on the one hand, and, on the other, the increasing indifference towards the basic clinical, ethical and practical etymological register evoked by the word 'curation'.[4] Curate: from Middle English *curate*, 'member of the clergy'; from Latin *curates* (same meaning) and *cura*, 'spiritual charge of souls'; from earlier *cura*, 'care, healing'.

Furthermore, the postcolonial museum cannot be thought of outside of its current contract with the university and its attendant form of care and pedagogy. The point is not to worry about whether the curator's form of curation and research is 'being subsumed by the academy and its associated discourses and economy', or that we should unify 'the divergent epistemologies that underpin the creative arts, humanities, social and physical sciences' into a universal science of curation (Biggs 2013). Indeed, the curator and the academic will continue to be intimately linked, even taking pleasure in switching roles and trading places from time to time. Yet the current form of alliance between art institutions and the university is a historical form of contract and exchange that remains, in the final instance, contingent. Because of this, it cannot be exonerated from the logic of capitalist exchange on humanist, universal or transcendental grounds, or by the increasingly dubious claim that the university and the museum foster, more than any other institutional context, (neo-)avant-garde forms of care and pedagogy. How can they, given their anomic and hierarchical structures that seldom enable a shared work of mourning? The news is not so gloomy, as some academics and institutional curators have already begun to seize on the potentiality immanent to the field of curation in the most open sense of the term (Cohen 2010; Lee 2012; Montezemolo and Sanroman 2005; Preziosi 2003; Sanchez 2006).

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3 If we put aside Hal Foster's narrow use of examples and understanding of anthropology as 'the science of alterity', his astute critique of the artist-as-ethnographer can be extended to the problematic re-appropriation of the figure of the ethnographer by the team of curators-as-ethnographers at the recent triennale *Intense Proximité* at Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

4 This etymological register is explored, for instance, in the curatorial work and publications of the Mexico City-based collective and journal *Curare*. From a different set of geopolitical concerns Boris Groys's (2009) work is among the finest theoretical elaborations of curation as a figure of health and illness in contemporary culture. I do share his view of the artwork as ontologically ill and in need of curation, applaud his spatial deployment of the cinematic moving-image as a disturbance to traditional forms of display, but am sceptical of his commitment to the museum as the paradigmatic institution where cures are dispensed.

More importantly, other forms of curation are yet to be imagined that will be unrecognisable to both academics and professional curators. These other forms of curation will encourage and foster other relational assemblages, transference, counter-transference, and unruly modes of access to and production of unconscious material. Since this unconscious material cannot be accessed or produced in a cultural institution like the museum, either it may partially re-direct and divert the museum or the biennale from their institutional *telòs* and social finality (an unlikely outcome), or it will be able to come up with other forms of instalments beyond both contemporary art and academic institutional settings. It is my gnawing intuition that the forms of curation to come will return to their ethical and clinical vocation by re-investing social spaces where the rapport between care and the incurable is the point of departure.

The public and private use of reason ought, perhaps, to be counteracted by something intractable (incurable and untreatable). Indeed, some of us feel that we have to re-take the task of curation and its vocation to short-circuit and resist these dominant routes and maps, resist the professionalisation of everyday life and the 'assimilation' of entire geographies under the rule of the Curator.[5] These other forms of curation would enable us to circumvent the politics of the social link and the 'political economy of belonging' (Massumi 2002, 68) at work in majoritarian art curatorial practice. It would enable us to think with media arts, with the lives of others, with alterity, with difference in itself and iterative assemblages that produce unexpected repetitions, the intractability of our personal and collective pathologies, and so on. My aim here is to rethink the term 'work' in curatorial work, reinsert curation within a larger intellectual history of practical deployment of concepts at once clinical and critical, re-engage the tradition of the *anthropologie du lien*, and reclaim the clinical genealogy of curation by inserting it within a history of postcolonial disorders. This re-insertion of curation within a history of disorders is not metaphorical: it has affinities with the central question of what is curative in the psychoanalytic process. In order to answer this question, we first ought to take into account the crucial distinction between the professional curator's form of curation (one hinged primarily on a medical-interventionist model of care; the curator's operation is not unlike the surgeon's) and the form of curation that would be more treatment-oriented and psychoanalytically inflected by an ethics of the incurable.

As I have already noted, my reflections on the clinical dimension of curation owe a great deal to interlocutors with whom I have had the chance to discuss these matters while I was conducting an ethnography of curatorial laboratories in Mexico City. Consider, for instance, the interventionist clinical-conceptual framework of the multi-disciplinary group Teratoma, where art historians and critics, curators, artists and anthropologists explore contemporary shifts in cultural, intellectual and aesthetic productions from a wide range of practices, engaging the effects of economic globalisation and the mutation of cultural geopolitics, aiming at creating

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5 Psychoanalysis invites us to evaluate the notion of resistance 'as both a defence and an authentic category of being'.

intercultural networks and circuits. In the words of Cuauhtémoc Medina, co-founder of the Teratoma group and Chief Curator at MUAC (Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City):

> Teratoma is a site of encounters, debates, exhibitions, residencies, pedagogy, dialogues, archiving of textual, visual, physical and virtual information in order to allow production, debate and reception of the various cultures to come in our continent. ... For now, we have decided to adopt TERATOMA as a provisional name for our group. As some of you may already know, the name comes to us from pathology: it is a denomination that refers to a type of tumor that has the nasty particularity to generate all kind of cell types, but without organization. As a result of a failure in the cellular reproductive mechanism, often due to the latency of embryonic cells or to genetic disorder, Teratoma has the tendency to grow in the body by combining, in a quasi-monstrous way, neuronal tissue with pelvic bones, semen with mammal glands, and so on Teratoma appears like a double of the affected body, perfectly identical to it, yet acting as its twin, without top or bottom, left or right, or distinction between function and localization. Teratoma is a metaphor that stands for the rejection of at once the ideal architecture of culture and the evolutionist imaginary. It is the illness of a regression to chaos by a colony of cells that acts parasitically towards the symbolic apparatus.[6]

The image of Mexico City as a metastasised urban sprawl has earned the monster the name of 'the Tumor City' (Serra 2005).[7] Teratoma was deployed by its founders as an oncological metaphor, both site-specific and practical to a framing of a curatorial intervention in the body politic of a post-revolutionary political culture ailing from what anthropologist Roger Bartra has diagnosed as a 'melancholic post-Mexican condition'. In contrast, but in continuity with the dialogues initiated with the anthropologists, art historians, artists and curators who were then members of Teratoma, I began to understand the work of curation as an ethnography-based evaluation of this Mexico City-centred clinical landscape, and eventually as a search for an exit from what might be called an onto-oncological form of intervention and conceptualisation.[8] The very word 'teratoma' recruits a

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6   Conversations with several members of Teratoma took place in the context of my ethnography of curatorial laboratories in Mexico City during 2004–2007. I am particularly grateful to Cuauhtémoc Medina for sharing with me, in private conversation, the founding document that I quote here, in which he delineates with remarkable rigour the conceptual contours, geopolitical concerns and curatorial objectives of this interdisciplinary group.

7   Sierra is also known for his installation work that performs corporeal inscriptions on the bodies of marginal forms of life, undocumented migrants, sex workers, street children: that is, forms of life reduced to bare life or diagnosed with incurable illnesses.

8   'Cancerous tissue: each instant, each second, a cell becomes cancerous, mad, proliferates, and loses its configuration, takes over everything, the organism must submit

Nietzschean ethics of dosages and maps it on the vitalistic ontology of so-called peripheral national cultures such as Mexico's. Moreover, it evokes and suggests a revision of the national body politic through a symptomatology hinting at an emerging cartography of intrusion. Teratoma, as illness, diagnosis and form of curation, may even help us locate an 'originary susceptibility of the post-colonial [or peripheral] nation-state to intrusion' (Pheng 1999, 239). It enables us to conceptually explore questions of 'immunisations' and curation of the body politic. Yet, in the end, it dangerously extends the aggressive model of the curator as surgeon (at worst) and benevolent caregiver (at best).

Teratoma's curatorial onto-oncology is certainly a rigorous curatorial model that intensifies the relationship between the critical and the clinical. It does indeed point to other forms of curation. Yet I feel inclined to go only so far with it: we need to underscore Teratoma's limits, the model of aggression and intrusion it relies on and celebrates as the only mode of achieving the dissolution of a certain postcolonial nationalist horizon. It enters the de-territorialised regions of the incurable: a complex, psychoanalytical concept. Indeed, the notion of therapeutic action in psychoanalysis that informs the form of curation I'm driving at is in productive tension with the cures of the onco-curator. But the very nature of Teratoma's curation runs the risk of subsuming the psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable within the perspective of a medical epistemology that ultimately cannot be reconciled with it:

> Indeed, care is not treatment. When we speak of treatment within psychoanalysis, we are in an entirely other register than that of care. Psychoanalysis delimits a domain of application in which the concepts and practices of care are hardly applicable. One will thus say that a psychiatrist cares and that a psychoanalyst treats. An interesting French idiom allows us to underscore this difference. When one says of someone that he is intraitable, this means that he is intractable, that he refuses to compromise his principles. In more Lacanian terms, one could say that he refuses to give up on his desire. The notion of psychoanalytic treatment is of this same order. Contrary to care, which centers on the action of the caregiver or the team of caregivers, the notion of treatment is centered on the relation between the subject and something without which his very existence would no longer matter to him/her – that which, in psychoanalysis, we call his desire. (Apollon 2006, 26)

Teratoma's onco-curation and conceptual strategy extends a certain Avant-Gardist and interventionist tendency in Mexican experimental media arts and moving-image culture. This continuity suggests a reliance on the philosophical tradition of vitalist organicism. A parallel can be established with yet another Mexican model

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to its rules or re-stratifies it, not only for its own survival, but also to make an escape from the organism, the fabrication of the "other" BwO on the place of consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 163).

of infusion into the diseased body politic, found in Rubén Gámez's powerful experimental film *La Fórmula Secreta* (1965). The film opens with an image of dimly lit drains and tubes plunged in darkness and connected to an invisible, unidentifiable body. As the camera slowly tilts downward reaching the lower part of the frame, a fast-paced moving image of a shadow of a vulture (the mythological carcass-eating *zopilote*) spectrally hovering over the Zócalo is released, the nationalist public square *par excellence*. Who is being inoculated, who is being immunised, what are the limits of diagnosis and therapeutics – Curatorial Work as symptomatology? – dosed as virulent responses to a self-triggered immunological crisis? What phantoms are these, where are they descending from? What are the disorders plaguing the post-Mexican condition? Who are these non-authored curators? And is the Vulture of *La Fórmula Secreta* searching for the Serpent? The Serpent of Aztec Mythology, as a figure of migrations and mestizo modernity? The Serpent of Asclepius, as a semiological figure of medicine (*semiotiki* in ancient Greece referred to symptoms)?

Can these images be the point of departure for a 'de-medicalised curatorial ethics', as Cuban curator Osvaldo Sanchez once remarked?[9] Whether we are willing or not to think through them, both Gamez's and Teratoma's images intensify in productive ways the relation between organic and inorganic life that constitutes the postcolonial and post-revolutionary national cultures. The intensification of the relation between the organic and inorganic at 'work' in these images is a harbinger of a new figure of freedom, resistance and working-through in collective formations and subjects that we none the less have outgrown. It therefore proceeds from the observation that:

> the metaphor that has replaced the living organism as the most apposite metaphor for freedom today is that of the ghost. It is epitomized by the post-colonial nation, whose haunted life or susceptibility to a kind of death that cannot be unequivocally delimited and transcended suggests the need to reconceptualize freedom's relation to finitude. (Pheng 2003, 383)

I will venture that the mode in which we have outgrown the living organism, as ghosts with anthropofagic desires and appetites, ought not to be 'curated' in medical terms. A combination of both a Deleuzian clinic and a psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable might be appropriate to carry out our works of curation amidst frankly depressed and depressing affective, aesthetic and political landscapes. Indeed, it could be lived, experienced and conceptualised in joyful terms that escape the affective dual economy of melancholia and enthusiasm characteristic of post-Enlightenment political modernity. I am proposing a form of mourning generated by the predicament that haunts the postcolonial museum we are collectively fabulating on and imagining in this symposium and collection of essays. This form of mourning might help us understand the ethico-political and therapeutic

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9   Personal conversation with Osvaldo Sanchez at In/Site meetings in Tijuana.

implications of the replacement of the living organism by the ghost. This secession of the ghost from the living organism is the form of curation of our postcolonial national cultures and societies of control. Shedding the living organism as the main metaphor of the disciplined postcolonial nation will be accompanied (cheerfully, I might add) with the disappearance of both postcolonial cosmopolitanism and nationalism, to make room for another form of inhabiting the postcolonial nation under the sign of the ghost. The ghost is anything but a cosmopolitan national. The ghost is only an intensification of the zone of mediation between the organic and the inorganic. It is the task of curation that is often neglected by artists, academics, curators, cultural producers and so on.

The Incurable Image

My task as a media anthropologist and moving image curator, in this context, is neither to be hopeful nor pessimistic about this secession, only to 'invent new weapons' (Deleuze 1995, 182) to resist in new forms, as the former generation – that is, the decolonisation generation – did through the then apposite metaphor of the living organism. Militant cinemas and 'militant images' of the 1960s, such as Gamez's *La Formula Secreta*, operate as a figure of the living organism 'in anguish', to cite one of Glauber Rocha's film titles. The oncological metaphors and images I've been engaging in this chapter are such weapons, nothing more and nothing less. They are images that index a form of curation that has affinities not to medical care, but to psychoanalytic treatment and therapeutic action:

> This notion of treatment requires a radical experience on the part of the subject that calls into question his relation to something that is as important to him as the apple of his eye [la prunelle de ses yeux]. It thus calls for a rethinking of the very foundations of a being's existence and his relations to others. In order for it to be considered a treatment, its particularity must reside in the analyst's desire to constrain the subject to assume an ethical position with respect to the knowledge derived from the experience. The problematic of treatment implies that the objective is to assume the consequences of such a knowledge and thus to take ethical responsibility toward oneself and toward others. This ethical constraint upon the position of the subject with respect to the knowledge derived from the experience and its consequences is the very object of psychoanalytic treatment. This position led Freud to recommend to Tausk that he terminate the analysis of a patient whose ethics seemed to him clearly insufficient. Treatment consists therefore in undertaking a radical experience that gives access to a knowledge; and the analyst expects that the first consequence of this knowledge will be a mutation of the ethical position of the patient. (Apollon 2006, 26)

I call incurable images those images that host this uncanny 'mutation of the ethical position of the patient'. I would like to also suggest that incurable images are

fundamentally modes of inheritance. I am interested in incurable images that point to complex modes of inheriting decolonisation. These moving images enable the mode of curation I have been hinting at here, somewhere between a Deleuzian symptomatology and the psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable. Incurable images are sites of complex repetitions and zones of endurance for the spectator-patient who manages to bypass the enclosure of traumatic wounds by official narratives from both left and right sides of the politico-ideological spectrum. They are tormented by the impersonal forces of history, as noted by some psychoanalysts and psychoanalytical anthropologists (Benslama 2009; Crapanzano 2011; Pandolfo 1998; Pandolfo 2013). Not unlike 'the larger historical dimension in which both patients and analysts are situated' (Davoine and Gaudillère 2006, 15), a dimension of spectatorship seems to haunt the rapport between history and trauma (in the psychoanalytical sense) or between history and becoming (in the Deleuzian sense). Profoundly ethical, this dimension can be inserted in the context of a form of curation-as-clinical-practice, the aim of which is to bring creative relief when faced with the incurable.

I would like to conclude with a dialogue I have been having with the Columbian artist Carlos Castro, and a recent piece of his in particular. It is an allegorical image of politico-symbolic decay in Bogota's Plaza Central, an image that assigns allegorical status to a symbol of postcoloniality. It has affinities with the photogram from Ruben Gamez's *La Formula Secreta*, in that it too is an image of a ghost that hovers around another post-revolutionary nationalist public square *par excellence*. Carlos Castro describes his public installation *That Which Does Not Suffer Does Not Live* (Figure 12.1) in the following terms:

> an installation in Bogotá's main plaza in which I made a replica of a Simón Bolívar statue out of pigeon food and placed it in the same location. Pedestrians were able to contemplate the *transformation* of a statue of Colombia's founding father as it was eaten by pigeons for 12 hours.[10]

In this public, time-based installation, anthropofagic desire is actualised as a relation between the symbolic figure of both pan-Latin Americanism and Third World liberation movements (Bolivar Plazas and statues can be found in cities from Cairo to San Francisco), a nationalist use of public space with potential cosmopolitan implications (including shedding doubts on the future of cosmopolitanism as a useful concept and ethico-political horizon) and an (undesired and abjected) urban non-human species.

Not unlike Walter Benjamin's image of the Angel of History, Castro's public installation can be read allegorically in so far that it sets in motion an assemblage that wrestles with and mediates a schizophrenic historical sense. This provisional assemblage disrupts the public status of Bogota's Plaza Central and opens up a passage between a historiographic matrix and a constellation of affect out which

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10   Carlos Castro, private email conversation with the author.

Figure 12.1   Carlos Castro, *That Which Does Not Suffer Does Not Live*, Bogota, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of the artist

unstable subject positions are produced. While everything is set up for a symbolic reading of the scene, I want to suggest that Castro's installation has produced a form of image that also can be called an 'incurable image': one that not only eschews a diagnosis that privileges disruptions brought to the symbolic order of the Nation (which it does, needless to say), but that disorients us by forcing us to return to chaotic affects that cannot be curated in the professional sense of the term. It does so, I will argue, by providing us with a way out from the cosmopolitan-national fantasies that agitate the postcolonial imaginary, on the one hand, and provides us with another mode of curation for our societies of control. The becoming-imperceptible of Bolivar displaces the body politic and visual culture of the Nation onto another scene. I call this 'the Tricontinental scene': a volatile zone of mediation populated with incurable images such as Castro's where we are asked to emancipate ourselves from figures of sovereignty (the monarch, the militant, the curator), on the one hand, and the moral landscapes and affective geographies of cosmopolitan nationalism and Third Worldism, on the other. It might even require us to think of other forms of collectivity through a different deployment of images. What ethical and affective implication can be drawn from incurable images? What politics of the unconscious is to be found in the becoming-imperceptible of Bolivar? Is this something reminiscent of a Warburgian dynamogram? Does the effacement of Bolivar's effigy actualise what Alberto Moreiras (2001) has called

'the exhaustion of difference and the emergence of a second Latin Americanism' that would inaugurate a post-nationalist and post-cosmopolitan work of mourning? What form of repetition does the work of mourning carried out by incurable images point to?

As a moving image curator and media anthropologist, I try to pay careful attention to the ethico-affective operation underlying the clinical concept of 'curation'. It is an outline of curation from the pathic point of view of images. This shift in attention would require us to both engage the production of images as a radically de-authored process and to displace our subjectivities towards a commitment to the pathos of images that have a life and death of their own. This ought to be achieved not by simply displacing the dyadic relation between analysand and analyst onto that of moving image and curator and onto that of spectator and screen, as in classic psychoanalytic visual and media theory. It would have to put us in the role of analysand, and the moving image in that of the analyst. We are images' clinical pictures, they repeat us as symptoms, and we repeat them as diagnosis. The task of curation would then be one committed to participating in collective processes and to forging therapeutic communities through intractable and incurable desires encountered in images. We are the hinterlands of images, nothing more and nothing less: we are images' expressions, bas-relief from the chaotic and infinite world of images, and not the other way around, in which images are formulated as mere representations of our collective and personal ordeals, subjectivities, lives, realities and so on. The task of curation that emerges from this is both *anonymous* and *therapeutic*, tending to and caring for iterative assemblages in contemporary visual culture.

In light of this, I take the 'work' in curatorial work as a composite form of working-through that wavers between two ethical traditions: a psychoanalytical ethics of mourning that laments and re-elaborates the loss and failures that affect us, and a Deleuzian symptomatology, full of belief in the future, that also laments the material returned by the Real, but does so by joyfully seeking to re-assemble and re-actualise those imperceptible potentialities crushed by dominant and indifferent agencies of symbolisation.[11] The work of curation, like the Deleuzian and psychoanalytical ethical operations, begins with a form of attention and care for signs of imperceptible potentialities that lay dormant in sites of complex repetition. This imperceptible, this pathic dimension of curation, is found in what I have called 'the incurable image'. It is incurable in a double sense. In the professional and institutional sense of the term: literally escaping the reach of curatorial practice and its attendant disciplinary institutions (museums, university, nation-state). In the psychoanalytical sense: by pointing to troubles and disorders

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11   The juxtaposition of Deleuze's symptomatology with the key Freudian concept of 'working-through' is a symptom less of an impasse or impossibility than of hope: to find help from two of the most powerful theoretical and practical attempts to handle and care for the volatile materials of repetitions. It also goes without saying that the title of this chapter is indebted to Deleuze's own wrestling with the ontology of repetition (see Deleuze 1994).

that cannot be treated and cared for in the bio-medical sense of the term. Incurable images can only be the source of a lament at the threshold of a mourning process hinged on a singular ontology of images and pedagogy of healing. Incurable images are both clinical and non-clinical forms of life. I have evaluated here some of the uses and disadvantages of these incurable images for life. The rest escapes us indefinitely.

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