LEARNING TO SQUANDER

MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS IN THE INFINITE TEXT OF WORLD CULTURE

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Abstract

In this article on South African visual art I fix my sight on a global interhuman and aesthetic sphere in which region/nation/transnation merge to produce a cultural economy that overlaps and cannot be satisfactorily grasped according to a centre-periphery model. This eschewal of existing binary models also means a reconceptualisation of the liminal as an in-between space in a fixed divide. Currently it is not only the margin that is indeterminate, but the infinite text of the global cultural economy within which visual art plays its part. This part, as Nicolas Bourriaud (2009a) notes, has become intensively immediate, pragmatic, or politicised – the visual arts replacing cinema, which succumbs to the seductive lure of the advertorial image. Following Bourriaud (2009a), the key question I pose is: "why it is that globalisation has so often been discussed from sociological, political, and economic points of view, but almost never from an aesthetic perspective?". In this article, I provide an answer by shifting the focus to the aesthetic. My challenging of the solidity of a global cultural economy in this article institutes a logic of flux; a world in which migration meets creolisation; deindividuation meets the post-identitarian; the rhizome meets the radicant. The upshot of these shifts is a move away from the sterility of multiculturalism – the relative autonomy of reified cultures – towards a global (local-and-generalised) culture in perpetual translation. Key to this shift is the move away from origins and a move towards unforeseen destinations. It is this drift, transmigration, or translation that comes to shape and define contemporary aesthetics and the formation of a mobile population of artists and thinkers, comprising the immigrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer. It is these figures, or tropes, which are the focus in my reading of contemporary South African visual art and its affect and impact in this molten global cultural economy.

> men shall know commonwealth again /
> from bitter searching of the heart
> (Leonard Cohen, *Dear Heather*, 2004).

Watookal

As logic or trope of the in-between, border, littoral, or threshold, the liminal supposes not only a point of mediation but an *a priori* division or contradiction; some definable difference which, whether fudged or discrete, nevertheless contains within itself some singularity, so that, for instance, a racial category such as

"coloured" supposes the integrality and undivided wholeness or "essence" of blackness or whiteness. However, for the purposes of this argument, I suggest that the very notion of an undivided wholeness is disputable, and that, after Waddy Jones, lead singer of South Africa's current global music sensation, *Die Antwoord*, the race card does not quite work except as pastiche, as a certain workable, if deficient, obscenity that flies in the face of the complexity of the human.

In the track titled *Whatever Man* [*skit*] on the CD-ROM *0*, Waddy Jones rhapsodises: '[c]heck it. I represent South African culture. In this place you get a lot of different things: blacks, whites, coloureds, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, *watookal*. I'm like all of these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person'. Multiplicity is integral to the notion of oneness. Moreover, the one is inconceivable without a prior understanding of heterogeneity: Jones champions bastardisation as the prime mover. The *non*-position he assumes, in the post-post apartheid or post-transitional moment, is a fitting one, given that cultural practice in South Africa and globally veered increasingly towards the hybrid and indeterminate. As Leora Farber (2010:303) confirms, 'it is clearly no longer possible, desirable or productive to frame debates around representation in terms of self and other as clear-cut, distinguishable categories'.

Coterminous with the critique of solid racial and cultural categorisations, there is the deterritorialisation or detournement of the object. In other words, while objects in the realm of visual culture or the objectification of race or culture persists, each is placed under erasure, rendered visible yet cancelled, forcing apprehension of the essential as nothing more than a differential – an affect of citation, a material recycled, an object or event estranged or defamiliarised. Here Jones's catch-all summation, *watookal*, finds kinship with Woody Allen's film titled *Whatever Works* (2009) which, similarly, foregrounds a makeshift and pragmatic worldview and ethics, the assumption behind which being that the absence of certainty, the belatedness of a finite system, whether of ideas or things, means that all humankind is left with are fleeting contingencies, momentary solutions. For some, this perception appears bleak, but when adopted playfully or with a wry and ironic turn, it need not be. *Watookal* emerges as the figure for productive fusions, quick-fix escape plans, or, after JM Coetzee (2009:233), 'Brazilian futures'.

In Coetzee's novel, *Summertime* (2009:233), the writer's double, who is also named Coetzee, anticipates the,

> longed for day when everyone in South Africa would call themselves nothing, neither African nor European nor white nor black nor anything else, when family histories would have become so tangled and intermixed that people would be ethnically indistinguishable, that is to say – I utter the tainted word … – Coloured. He called that the Brazilian future.

For Coetzee, the provocation lies in a will toward nothing or no thing, a desire to erase divisions and celebrate a hybridity that would defy the return of discrete racial and cultural categories. Particularly pertinent to this debate is the notion of a society stripped of the obsessive reversion to relative racial and cultural differences, an obsession which can be said to have compulsively defined and profoundly marred the nation's imaginary. Thinking, feeling, breathing outside this gulag of fixations is not possible. There cannot be comprehension of a day when everyone in 'South Africa would call themselves nothing'.

To conceive of racial and cultural difference as "fucked into one person" is certainly a beginning, but, as Breyten Breytenbach (1999) observes, this miscegenated consciousness is the result of an *a priori* heterogeneity

that humankind has had a vested interest in never countenancing. In Breytenbach's *Dog heart* (1999) there is this return of an age-old repression: '[w]hat I want to write about is the penetration, expansion, skirmishing, coupling, mixing, separation, regrouping of peoples and cultures – the glorious bastardization of men and women mutually shaped by sky and rain and wind and soil … And everywhere is exile' (Jamal 2005:146). From the outset of this nation's collective history, therefore, one finds the seed of a hybrid consciousness which, while repressed, nevertheless proved symptomatic of an alternative culture. It is this alter-culture that Jones invokes – and with it this will to become nothing – which attests to an emergent inter-human and radically cross-cultural future.

Freed from an identitarian hysteria, perhaps there could begin to be a reconfiguration of a more harlequinesque or syncretic subjectivity, founded not on a utopian embrace of otherness, or a mutinous relation to a preconceived or preordained selfhood, but, rather, upon a keenly wakeful grasp of the absurdity of both positions. In short: there is no *a priori* selfhood from which one diverges and no aspirational alterity which can be wholly absorbed. The trick, then, is to recognise the ruse of self and other, a dialectic which, while highly efficacious, is nonetheless a chimera or nonsensical illusion.

Without this dialectic or system of opposites it appears that there would be no liminal zone; no intermediate position. Holding fast to the construct of racial difference or any other system of polarisation, one begins to realise just how irresistible this system has proven to be, all the more so when that binary system is an unequal, privative, and punitive one. Dialectical at its core, this system would, in the South African context, breed nothing but misery. One need not be a South African to recognise the obscenity of such a system. That the practitioners of apartheid *and* their detractors both invested in the punitive nature of a polarised and dialectical system, reveals the degree to which it was firmly believed that the system could be acted upon, or reacted against, but never negated. Hence Coetzee's utopian vision of a world purged of the toxicity of preconceived difference, and hence the wish for a world no longer over-determined by things – be they objects, or people as objects.

The logic of apartheid was, of course, built upon this notion of discrete, divisible, and unequal essences; a logic whose absurdity was compounded all the more by that intractable variable: coloured. It is, as Coetzee (2009) points out, this very unnameable category, coloured – a category that, in my view, is no less impenetrable or less obscure than the categories white or black – and which forcefully emerges as the locus for the deterritorialisation of dialectics and the furtherance of a post-dialectical cultural vision.

Here, effectively, is where I think the debate, from my perspective, starts, for the liminal not only exacerbates the binary but, at best, confounds it. The undecidable residual within the logic of the dialectic cannot be synthesised. Rather, the liminal aggravates, deterritorialises, or sets adrift a dialectically composed logic. The liminal is a supplementary logic: that added to and that which substitutes or overcomes a given system.

All this, from a progressive or radical perspective, is for the good, as currently, tidy oppositions are perceived as bad, and the synthesis of these oppositions equally so. Indeed, the neoliberal notion of sameness – perceived here as the false aura of democratisation and standardisation or as the treacherous coda of globalisation – emerges as a harbinger of indifference; as a coolly detached agenda which overrides any perceivable glitch in a synoptic or autocratic global system.

Given, therefore, that sameness and standardisation become benchmarks of tyranny, or generic indenturement of a global populace – under the signs of unity-in-difference and multiculturalism, no less – where, then, does that leave the liminal? Nowhere, if one assumes the globalisation of culture as a given, sameness as a norm.

I thus ask whether the liminal still has any conceptual or political purchase, and without any further delay, I say – yes. The question, however, is, how can and does the liminal work? In brief, the liminal functions as a supplement, rupture, outlier, cracked actor, demystifier. All importantly, its role runs counter to the global lore of standardisation and sameness. In blasting apart the false idols of race and cultural particularity, the dogma of selfhood and nationhood, the cool conceit of the transnational, and the equally cool and effete notion of the cosmopolitan, the liminal is a ceaseless reminder of the skulduggery that is spin-doctoring. Sophistic at its core, the liminal as an anthropomorphised condition, necessarily plays fast and loose with culturally dominant values. Its role is not, however, merely reactive. Rather, the liminal is a state of engagement that either by-passes or escapes received codes, or then again, defrosts them, makes them leak, seep, suppurate, go off, rot. Messy, unfinished, provisional, or contingent, the liminal proves the core of contemporary thought. Furthermore, because it functions as a fissure or fracture, a glitch or parasite, the liminal prompts the realisation that all solid forms melt into air, or, in keeping with my image of a fridge short-circuited, its contents rapidly assuming their expiry date, perforce rotting and ending up contaminating the cool containment that once protected them. The liminal, as a state, forces an acknowledgment of the precariousness of any machinic, electrical, or ideological system of containment.

If systems work, this does not mean that they are sustainable, although of course, it is also remarkable how systems exceed their sell-by date. Binary logic, as a system, is a crucial case in point. However, if binarity persists, indeed, its resilience enforces people's preparedness to accept the fixities that make a divide workable. The enormous appeal of binarity is connected to an obsession with things, solids, or discrete, containable, or objectifiable categories. Humankind persists in believing that it cannot function, let alone create, without this resilient, if obsolescent system, which is surely why the arts have thrived. I refer here to the persistence of racial categories which, at the same time, are redundant. However, shifting to a more prosaic system of things – consumable products – one encounters a vivid drama of obsolescence. For example, Deyan Sudjic (2009:17) considers one particular object, the laptop:

> [t]he very first time it came out of its foamed plastic wrapping, my fingerprints would start to burn indelible marks into its infinitely vulnerable finishes. The trackpad would start to fill up with a film of grease that, as time went on, would take on the quality of a miniature duck pond. Electrostatic build-up would coat the screen with hair and dandruff … laptops are not the only consumer objects to be betrayed by their owners. Simply by using them, we can destroy almost all the things that we persuaded ourselves to love.

My point is that it is not only consumer products that are vulnerable to time, but also ideological notions such as race and culture, for it is phenomena such as these which humankind destroys. This destruction is not only the result of love, however; there is also the matter of simplification, disregard, or hate. By affixing an essence or purity to things, be they human or technological – and here the difference has become increasingly difficult to maintain – they are given a lasting

quality that they have never possessed. As Sudjic (2009:17, 18) remarks,

> [w]hen it was new, the metal-coated plastic body of my mobile phone from Nokia served to suggest that it was the last word in technology … Within a few months, under the constant pressure of my restless fingers, it turned into an unsightly lump of dumb polycarbonate, apparently scarred by the most scabrous of skin diseases as the metallic finish flaked away to reveal grey plastic under the polished surface.

These experiences may be familiar to many. Their relevance lies in the fact that contamination or wear-and-tear is inevitable. This leads to the question: what is the effect of this contamination on ideas-as-things? How do ideas alter? What makes ideas arrive at their expiry date? Moreover, given that ideas – even the most resilient ones – are vulnerable to change, how can this change be perceived as invigorating or affirming? My point is not to confirm the inevitable, but to foreground just how, in the intercession of things and the human, ideas and people, productive changes can occur – changes that can further human understanding and connection. It is in this regard that the liminal proves to be an active solvent, and, in the case of contemporary art practice, a crucial factor in altering the way people live within and make changes to the world.

Postproductive

In numerous curatorial enterprises and three pithy books, Nicolas Bourriaud (2002a, 2002b, 2009a) has championed art practices that assume the liminal as crucial to the reconfiguration not only of things, but also cultural perception, which, when no longer wholly vested in things but rather in their contexts, force an alternative relation to both the perceptual and object worlds. Crucially, here, the liminal is not the peripheral but the interstitial, for as Bourriaud (2002a:31) notes, grand social and historical narratives, be they utopian or revolutionary, 'have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies, any stance that is "directly" critical of society is futile, if based on the illusion of marginality that is nowadays impossible'. Confronted, rather, by a world grown increasingly entropic and schizophrenic, Bourriaud stresses the partial or contingent nature of cultural intervention. There is, therefore, the need to operate 'at the hub of "social infra-thinness" … that minute space of daily gestures determined by the superstructure made up of "big" exchanges", though not entirely defined by it' (Bourriaud 2002a:17). It is this critical rub, abutment, displacement, or qualification which, for Bourriaud (2002a:26), defines the best in contemporary art practice as a mode and means of encounter: 'a relational object, like the geometric place of a negotiation with countless correspondents and recipients'.

Bourriaud's (2002b:8) aim is to 'present an analysis of today's art in relation to social changes, whether technological, economic, or sociological'. Moreover, what matters to him is 'the interhuman sphere: relationships between people, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, interactivity, and so on' (Bourriaud 2002b:7). Across these spectra, his focus is 'a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing' (Bourriaud 2002b:9). For the purposes of my argument, I foreground the interactive and interhuman dimension of cultural practice; the deployment of forms or things in the service of a reconceptualisation of society. Unmoved by the reification of things, races or cultures, Bourriaud (2002b:13) elects, rather, to reveal how art as a social practice is informed by,

> the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The

> material [manipulated] is no longer primary. It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already informed by other objects.

The key figures for this redeployment or redaction of the existing world are, for Bourriaud, the DJ and the programmer – figures who embody the liminal zones in which citation, recycling, and detournement are highly active. Liminality, as it is understood here, emerges as a mode of postproduction; a production with a built-in alterity or derangement of perceptible norms and forms. This, of course, is not a novel practice; rather, what matters is its intensification over the last decade, for today, Bourriaud (2002b:17) notes, 'artists … program forms more than they compose them: rather than transfigure a raw element (blank canvas, clay, etc.), they remix available forms and make use of data'. This, as I understand it, is Jones's point, just as it is the basis of Breytenbach's vision of a 'glorious bastardisation': '[i]n generating behaviours and potential reuses, art challenges passive culture, composed of merchandise and consumers' (Bourriaud 2002b:20). Furthermore, and importantly for my argument, this rerouting, defamiliarisation, or syncretism, allows for a crucial rethinking of the very system of binarity which has not only sustained the alienated relation of merchandising and consumption, but the objectification and essentialising of racial and cultural categories.

A melding of difference, this rapidly intensifying conflation and blurring forces one to reconsider humankind's perceptual stupor. 'To use an object is necessarily to interpret it. To use a product is to betray its concept' (Bourriaud 2002b:24), and it is this vital betrayal that I stress. What this betrayal presupposes is the shattering of 'the logic of the spectacle' (Bourriaud 2002b:32), or rather, a shattering of the spectacularisation of received and immutable differences which, as Njabulo Ndebele (1994) notes, has kept South African arts in thrall to the sensational. 'The spectacular document … is demonstrative', comments Ndebele (1994:49), continuing that,

> [p]referring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is a literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. Nothing beyond this can be expected of it.

Bourriaud (2002b:74) echoes this view when he states that, 'one can denounce nothing from the outside; one must first inhabit the form of what one wants to criticise. Imitation is subversive, much more so than discourses of frontal opposition that only make formal gestures of subversion'.

Published in 1994, Ndebele's diagnosis of the reactive nature of resistance literature unfortunately remains pertinent today, for, as stated earlier, there is a vested interest in indenturement; in reconstructing the abhorred spectacle that humankind cannot quite free itself from. That said, the emphasis of this article is to the contrary. My view is that Bourriaud's (2002b:32) thesis on art, in willing the shattering of spectacle, 'restores the world to us as an experience to be lived'. It is not a matter of merely recognising inequity but acting upon it and changing it. To do so, as Ndebele notes, requires an intimate knowledge. It follows that the attainment of this intimacy supposes an ability to crack open the surface truth, confound the lie upon which that truth subsists, and, given the resilience of that lie, to estrange it all the more. This estrangement

requires the contamination of a preconceived frame, for as Bourriaud (2002b:41) notes, 'the frame is at once a marker – an index that points to what should be looked at – and a boundary that prevents the framed object from lapsing into instability and abstraction, i.e., the vertigo of that which is not referenced, wild, "untamed" culture'. This is once again a reminder of the vitality of the liminal, for in deterritorialising the frame, by forcing it to disclose it's policing of evidence, the more the liminal reveals the ruse of hegemonic meanings. These hegemonic meanings are not only those putatively at work in a given objective frame, but also those resident in the perceiver who is framed in turn, and here, one can interpret these frames as ethnicities, national cultures, or even personalities which, as Bourriaud (2002b:49) notes, are by no means 'indissoluble or permanent … [but] … just baggage that we carry around'.

Dave Hickey (1997) forcefully reworks this view in *Air guitar: essays on art & democracy*. What matters for Hickey is the non-parallel nature of interpretation and experience. Moreover, deeply sceptical of the authority and aura of the art object, Hickey, like Bourriaud, seeks an alternative mode of engagement which, in the context of this article, can be conceived of as liminal. For Hickey (1997:164), this liminality is the 'gauzy filigree of decentered awareness' which, all importantly, serves as 'the body's last defense against … codified self-knowledge'. Suspicious of using critique as the means to self-aggrandisement, Hickey (1997:165) eschews the 'God-like mantle of auteur' while holding fast to 'one's sotto voce [*sic*] as a private citizen'. This crucial doubt regarding self-possession in the instant of critique or the experience of an artwork is founded in the notion that, 'we always confront works of art as part of that selfless, otherless, unwritable instant of ordinary experience' (Hickey 1997:166). I cannot stress the significance of Hickey's view enough, for, in conceptualising the body and its relation to perception, his view affirms the importance of de-individuation and one's sotto voce as a private yet selfless and otherless being. 'The essence of humankind is purely trans-individual', Bourriaud (2002a:18) concurs; the sum of 'bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical'.

What Hickey and Bourriaud compellingly lay out, is the realisation that history can only have relevance today if it is defounded, wrested from the aura of nostalgia or pastness. Suspicious of authoritative 'police mentalities [which] will always strive to impose correct readings, to align intentions with outcomes, and couple imaginary causes with putative effects', what Hickey (1997:170) importantly provides a reminder of, is that 'we always have a choice':

> [i]n a poorly regulated, cosmopolitan society like our own, the discourse surrounding cultural objects is at once freely contingent and counter-entropic. It neither hardens into dogma nor decays into chaos as it disperses. It creates new images and makes new images out of old ones, with new continuances around them. It is a discourse of experiential consequences, not disembodied causes.

Given the rabidly negative criticism and suspicion which affixes itself to diffuse logics, it is heartening to recognise the writings of thinkers like Hickey who remain undeterred. In recognising the difficulty of words to express or explain experience – the 'shown, seen, touched, felt, smelled, heard, spoken, or sung' (Hickey 1997:163) – he forges ahead, accepting the partiality of critique – its simulacral relation to things and experience, its hallucinatory role as a species of karaoke or air guitar. Hickey (2002a:13) echoes the position taken up by Bourriaud (2002a), which is the drive to learn,

> to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived

> idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks [and the analysis thereof] is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real.

Here the liminal, as the interstitial and momentary, emerges as the very will to life; a life deadened at every turn by the pre-emptive forces of total recall, preordained histories, received values and tastes.

Radicant

Bourriaud (2009:20) notes the increasingly commonplace view that the world has become hybridised or creolised, that this change is the result of exchange and the interpenetration of cultures, and that while this exchange has often proven to be the result of violence, it has also, all importantly, resulted in the emergence of a more productive and healthy moral conscience.

With this view in mind, how then can one speak of ethnicity or national culture without the full knowledge that both imperatives are intrinsically altered by transculturation and transnationalism? In other words, how can one speak of a South African culture that is not only haemorrhaging from within but also by virtue of the inescapable interpenetration of the outside? If South African culture harbours any meaning then perhaps, following Mike Kelley (cited by Bourriaud 2009:41), it is 'meaning [as] confused spatiality, framed'.

My concern here is not to dispute the vague geographic nomination of "South Africa", but to ask, given the creolisation of the world, how this bastardisation as a productive contamination has played itself out in South African visual art. Has this cultural contamination produced breakthroughs of moral conscience and hope, or has it merely produced an echo chamber in which imported notions remain supreme? In answering this question, I remain with Bourriaud (2009a), who explores the epistemic and cultural implications of a global hybridisation. But first let me supply Bourriaud's understanding of the term. 'To be radicant', Bourriaud (2009a:22) says,

> means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviours, exchanging rather than imposing.

Bourriaud (2009a:37) conceives of "radicantity" as a "post-identitarian regime". In other words, the new and evolving subject that Bourriaud envisages is one (who is always multiple) that at no point allows its meanings to coalesce into a form of self-knowledge. Indeed, because of its multiplicity, Bourriaud's non-identitarian figure comes to resemble Coetzee's vision of a being and a culture that can call itself nothing. Here it is not the absence of meanings that matters but its strategic or unconscious elision: meaning works, but it works in passing and as a process of ceaseless translation.

Figures for this non-identitarian regime are, for Bourriaud, the immigrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer, which, ironically, are figures or figurations of identity nonetheless. As Bourriaud (2009a) notes, each serves as a marker for a culture of translation, a point of interface, a liminal zone. What each achieves, by virtue of being subjects of globalisation, is a shattering of the notion of space, for each recognises that it is as possible 'to reside in a circuit as in a stable space, just as possible to construct an identity in motion as through fertilization, and that geography

is always also psychogeography'. Thus, Bourriaud (2009a:57) continues,

> it is possible to dwell in a movement of round trips between various spaces. Airports, cars, and railroad stations become the new metaphors for the house, just as walking and airplane travel become new modes of drawing. The radicant is the quintessential inhabitant of this imaginary universe of special precariousness, a practitioner of the unsticking of affiliations. He [sic] thus responds – without confusing himself with them – to the living conditions directly or indirectly brought about by globalisation.

What these conditions entail is transience, speed, and fragility; conditions generally perceived as precarious which, nevertheless, seem inescapable in contemporary art practice and lived relations. The question then, given these seemingly entropic conditions, is how to conceive of them as generating a breakthrough in a productive and ethical interhuman connectivity. For as Homi K Bhabha (2003:162) notes: '[a] time-worn, singular figure … bears contrary witness to the whirligig of our global age fraught, as it is, with the fever of frantic speeds, appetites for expanding size, and the vanity of vast numbers. It is the human being tethered to the spirit of writing/literature'. Here, I place the emphasis on contemporary art practice and its potential to enrich lived relations.

Given one's perceptual frame, this question is up for grabs, for one can either celebrate the following or gasp in horror: '[i]n a world that records as quickly as it produces, art no longer immortalizes but tinkers and arranges, throwing the products it consumes on the table pell-mell' (Bourriaud 2009a:88). For Bourriaud (2009a:122), the transitory is exactly that – transitory – a condition which makes it difficult to conceive of history on the move:

> [w]e now live in times in which nothing disappears anymore but everything accumulates under the effect of a frenetic archiving, times in which fashions have ceased to follow one another and instead coexist as short-lived trends, in which styles are no longer temporal markers but ephemeral displacements that take place indiscriminately in time or space.

Here, the syncretic meets the schizophrenic; origins and ends are cancelled out by the glare of an unceasing present.

Arthur C Danto (1997:12) defines this vertiginous state as 'a period of information disorder, a condition of perfect aesthetic entropy. But it is equally a period of quite perfect freedom. Today there is no longer any pale of history. Everything is permitted'. In this definition, there are strong echoes of a Nietzschean extra-morality. Where Danto concurs with Bourriaud is that entropy can be perceived as a health; that hope does not necessarily suppose a guiding ego or master narrative, and that, on the contrary, what matters and what best informs change is this more liminal, fractal, or interstitial mash-up. The productivity of this approach, for Bourriaud (2009a:125), consists in,

> the activation of space by time and time by space, in the symbolic reconstruction of fault lines, divisions, fences, and paths in the very place where the fluidified space of merchandise is established. In short, in working on alternative maps of the contemporary world and processes of filtration.

Here translation becomes all the more operative; indeed, for Bourriaud (2009a:131), translation lies 'at the centre of an important ethical and aesthetic issue: it is a question of fighting for the indeterminacy of the code, of rejecting any source code that would seek to assign a single origin to works and texts'.

Translation, as it is understood here, functions as a disarticulation and miscarriage of the so-called primary text, or, after Bourriaud's logic of postproduction, as a kind of sampling, subtitling, re-routing – in short: an information disorder. However, there remains a need to further examine the emergent ethical landscape which this information disorder generates. Here I note Pico Iyer's (2000) study, *The global soul: jet lag, shopping malls, and the search for home*. The latter is indebted to the work of American Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, from which the words, 'global soul' are derived. Iyer's (2000:17e) view is not merely to blithely celebrate a cultural and psychic anomy, but rather, as he notes, 'we must take the feeling of being at home into exile. We must be rooted in the absence of a place'. He nevertheless recognises that, 'the key to this global soul … lay entirely in perception: it was not so much that man had been exiled from the Garden as that he had ceased to notice that it was all around him' (Iyer 2000:17e).

Displacement and estrangement become enabling here; one's acute sense of superfluity is the key to a re-envisioning of self as a mutating alterity – hence Iyer's (2000:23) point that 'the Global Soul is best characterised by the fact of falling between all categories'. This indeterminacy or flux is not surprising, given the speed and fragility which defines global change. And here follows the crux: what this entropic state demands is an ethical responsibility, for 'in a world in which everyone's problems are everyone else's, a new sense of community must be formed on the basis of something deeper than soil and higher than interest rate, if our "One World" dreams are not to devolve into One Nation parties' (Iyer 2000:34). This resonates with Leonard Cohen's (2004) vision of a commonwealth wrought from the bitter searching of the heart.

Is this, furthermore, another dimension of Coetzee's 'Brazilian future' – this world of hyper-interconnectivity, complicity? Is this the world which humankind, in this post-post apartheid or post-transitional moment finds itself in? Certainly networking is on the increase in the arts; post-identitarian aesthetics is beginning to hold sway. Joseph Gaylard and The Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA)'s initiative – *Two thousand and ten reasons to live in a small town* – in developing community art projects in provincial centres such as Richmond, Sutherland, and Laingsburg, is a case in point. Yet, there remains the overwhelming fetishisation of the auteur; a hangover which like the diocese, state, or church, persists as a framing narrative through which to read South African cultural exchange nationally and abroad. Certainly an exilic aura clings to South Africa's more terrestrially mobile artists, such as Kendell Geers, Moshekwa Langa, Robin Rhode, and Candice Breitz; however, exile as it is understood here, is not a matter of mere geographic displacement, it is psychogeographic and, crucially, defined by an acute sense of the productivity of the liminal within any given zone of activity. The following words by the twelfth-century Saxon monk, Hugo of St. Victor (cited by Iyer 2000:31), that are key to Iyer's thinking, can assist in understanding this more wide ranging conception of the exilic: '[t]he man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land'. Exile begins with the deterritorialisation of the familiar, the estranging of consensus, the bridging of divides, the cancellation of hatred, and the birthing of an ethical and inter-human love. One enters this transformation in the liminal moment, a moment when one becomes nothing. This is not a state merely of self-abnegation; rather, it is the state of radical immanence, a state in which, as Jones so aptly puts it, everything is fucked into one person. In this zone, as Bourriaud notes (2009:165), there can

be 'no pure cultural habitats'. Hence the rapid-fire increase in 'cultural collectivism' and 'a pooling of resources' (Bourriaud 2009:173). In this interzone of hyper-networked activity 'the star products of our time are no longer objects … No, this transitory unstable character is represented in contemporary works by the status they claim in the cultural chain: the status of event, or the response to past events' (Bourriaud 2009: 175). Here I am reminded of Kathryn Smith's recent project in association with VANSA – *noli procrastinare or Kooperasie Stories* (2010), which through the interface with the community of Laingsburg, reworked the tragedy of the 1981 flood, thereby altering its impact in the present. What these event-based initiatives do – and here Brett Bailey's Cape Town based *Infecting the City* (2008-), or Marcus Neustetter and David Andrew's *C30* intervention (2007-2009), are cases in point – is deterritorialise divides, open up communities, reconfigure psychic-geographies, be they urban or rural. Furthermore, they help to wrest history from petrifaction. Neustetter and Andrew pose the key question, "what if the classroom operated like an artwork?". Given that life increasingly imitates art, this aesthetic and event-based intervention acts as a reminder of a critical shift in the arts world-wide.

After Bourriaud (2009a:183), this celebration and radical theorisation of the event leaves one situated 'within the space of an eternal afterward of things'; in 'a kind of suburb of history' which 'immediately implies a mode of thought in the form of footnotes'. On the downside, this conception has generated a host of melancholic or nihilistic visions of the current age under the sign of the postmodern, a term which, because it describes a fallout that always defers to a nostalgia for a golden age – a nostalgia, say, for certainty, fixity, or some absolute or resolvable contradiction. However, as Bourriaud (2009a) notes, nostalgia today is nothing more than pastiche. This is a ceaselessly translatable, precarious, and heterochronic age, an age no longer defined by synoptic or continental building blocks but by the archipelagic.

Archipelagic

One of the most vivid figures of liminality, given its fractal densification, is the archipelago, and Southeast Asia is the most fractured existing archipelagic landmass. It is not surprising, therefore, that for his *Alter-Modern* project at the Tate Gallery in 2009, Bourriaud chooses a map of an East Indian archipelago formation, made by Nicholas Cumberford and published in 1665 (see Catalogue: 2011). As Bourriaud (2009b:11) notes,

> the archipelago (and its kindred forms, the constellation and the cluster) functions … as a model representing the multiplicity of global cultures. An archipelago is an example of the relationship between the one and the many. It is an abstract entity; its unity proceeds from a decision without which nothing would be signified save a scattering of islands united by no common name. Our civilization, which bears the imprints of a multicultural explosion and the proliferation of cultural strata, resembles a structureless constellation, awaiting transformation into an archipelago.

Furthermore, Bourriaud (2009a:185) notes that the archipelago emerges as 'the dominant figure of contemporary culture'. A geographical correlative for highly energised networked systems, the archipelago, because it is a fractal and not a continental geography, becomes the figure for an 'altermondialisation' or 'alterglobalisation' (Bourriaud 2009a:185, 186), 'an archipelago of local insurrections against the official representations of the world'. For Bourriaud (2009a), this geopolitical vision finds its cultural counterpart in the term 'altermodern' – a term freed from nostalgia

and critical reflexivity, allowing for an immanent, mutable, and mobile vision of culture(s). 'Viatorization' is the term that Bourriaud uses to signal an age defined by speed, immanence, and heightened transportability. Within such a nexus, engagements are fast and loose, connections instantaneous, knowledge systems fragile, and all eternalities corruptible.

Perhaps Bourriaud is correct, and humankind no longer lives in an eternal afterward of things. Perhaps it is past the reactive cult of mourning. Then again, as noted at the outset of this article, productive connections in South Africa remain in abeyance; the hapless other – such as in the case of the *mkwerekwere* or African immigrant – is easily scapegoated and slaughtered. Things remain neurotically in place, spectacularised and worshipped at the bulimic altar of consumerism, while people, as things, remain subjected to toxic prejudice and dogma. Normative perception resembles a kind of injection moulding, the person-as-thing fixed according to a prescribed and automated design. In each of these moments, the liminal is never encountered; rather, the liminal, bizarrely, is blithely by-passed and to all intents and purposes presumed not to exist: perceived as marginal, it perforce becomes invisible. Despite this grim prognosis, however, there have and always will be, healthy and innovative intercultural transactions, but, the crossings and re-crossings critical in order to sustain a durable world still waits. This is Coetzee's utopian vision of a 'Brazilian future', as it is Jones's and *Die Antwoord's* explosive hybrid present in the instant of its obsolescence. It is Bourriaud's archipelagic cluster fuck or Cohen's 'commonwealth'.

In South Africa, people do not live in a geographic archipelago but in a psycho-geographical one. Historically, they have been reduced to Bantustans or gulags that bred petrifaction. While that psychic deformation persists, people have, nevertheless, become answerable to Breytenbach's call for a 'glorious bastardisation' – a bastardisation which has compelled their world visions and art practices to be all the more syncretic. The liminal, after all, lies in the rub of difference. And it is in this rub, which, in spoiling the cool finishes of an imagined divide, a discrete and separate thing, returns one to the dirt that no-one wants to talk about – the dirt, rot, rawness, and imperfection of the human body – a bare forked animal and a liminal thing indeed.

I conclude with another map, made by Henricus Marcellus Germanus in 1489 and commissioned by the Columbus brothers. It shows the entirety of the world as framed except for Southern Africa. I present this map as a striking figure for a peculiarly South African liminality. The map was commissioned to ensure that Europe perceived the Cape of Good Hope as insurmountable – all the better to secure Christopher Columbus's westward bid. The curious irony, for me at least, is that it succinctly summarises the superfluity of a sector of humankind, namely the Southern African, and its acute sense of its peripheral existence. This consciousness, while real, is of course, also hopelessly anachronistic. Dependant largely on the vested interest in the supremacy of the west, this consciousness, proverbially dubbed the "colonial cringe", is inhibiting. However, when re-evaluated, this consciousness can generate another world vision. This requires a reorientation of the perception of the globe, the adoption of multiple and shifting perspectives, and, in the case of the map, a perception that reads people's extraneousness and seeming superfluousness – that wedge of napkin that abuts nothing – as something empowering, something to DJ, remix, transmogrify.

As Zhigniew Bialas (cited by Jamal 2010:155) notes:

> [t]he world map of Henricus Marcellus Germanus presents the Southern tip of Africa extending beyond the frame of the map, literally introducing, from the very start [1489], a discourse of marginality only partly justified by geographical

distance. The frame of the map is broken to accommodate the much distorted Cape, which suggests that South Africa was added as a cartographical "last minute afterthought" and/or that it was already construed as an obstacle, an overflowing monstrosity, the frame-breaking irregularity of form.

Here is an edgy post-productive figure for the liminal in South African culture; a supplementary zone which cannot be wholly contained. I address the existential fallout of this summary excision elsewhere (see Jamal 2010:155-169), and argue that while this gnawing sense of exile and superfluity persists, that it is precisely this condition of the outlier or pariah which, paradoxically, in this emergent disjunctive and overlapping global cultural economy, makes art practice that emerges from this zone all the more timely and prescient. For in today's world – one which thrives outside of tidy polarities and distinctive zones of expertise and provenance – it is precisely cultures informed by an a priori heterogeneity or mash-up that speak most effectively. Notwithstanding the persistent recourse to the imaginary and nostalgic primal scenes of pure origins and clear divides still operative in South Africa and elsewhere, the productive challenges posed by Coetzee, Jones and others remain, and matter more. A new postproductive episteme is required, one which gives up synoptic totalisation, challenges reactive consciousness, which enjoys the pleasures of connection and learns to share, or, as Bourriaud (2009a:56, 39) notes, to 'squander' one's heritage … scatter and invest its contents', and make 'meaningful connections in the infinite text of world culture'.

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