Colonialism and Culture

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It is... too simple and reductive to argue that everything in European or American culture therefore prepares for or consolidates the grand idea of empire. It is also, however, historically inaccurate to ignore those tendencies - whether in narrative, political theory, or pictorial technique - that enabled, encouraged, and otherwise assured the West's readiness to assume and enjoy the experience of empire. (Said, 1994: pp. 95–96)

As colonialism has come to be seen as something other than just a question of economics and politics, its 'cultural' dimensions have come to the fore. These include not only the obvious and central issue of the cultural dimensions of colonialism as a practice, but the fact that different colonialisms have had their own cultures, the manner in which colonialism has come to inform the metropolitan cultures of Europe, and the ways in which the colonial experience has itself helped constitute the very notion of culture.

Colonialism's variables are complex. We might consider the differences between trade, conquest and settlement. The list of European aspirants to empire is long: Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy - even Sweden and Denmark. Some succeeded and others desired, but failed, to control large parts of the world. These different projects were driven at different times by radically different motives: the Lockean natural law justification for the British expropriation of American land, the 'civilizing mission', and 'whites bring death from afar'. These are some of the modalities, some of the European progenitors, some of the ideologies that are so deceptively concealed by the word 'colonialism'. And to this we must add the stages on which all this complex drama was played out: the Americas, Asia, Australasia, Africa. To add further complexity, colonialism refuses historiographic compartmentalization: it rapidly unfolds into the history of the modern world: modernity and globalization are intimately entangled with colonialism. Beyond this we can consider, as a coda, non-European empires. It is perhaps one of the ironies of colonialism's tenacity that Euro-American scholars are reluctant to concede visibility to the colonies created by non-Europeans.

In a moment, then, culture. But first, blood and destruction. Any consideration of the cultural technologies of colonial rule needs first to inscribe the more brutal technologies on which certain colonial projects were built.
Sven Lindquist provides an unforgettable powerful meditation on the technologies of extermination perfected in colonial Africa, prior to their use in twentieth-century Europe. He recalls reading Conrad in the 1940s, the ‘black shadows of disease and starvation’ appearing as prophecy of twentieth-century death camps, and a refutation of the claim for the ‘phenomenological uniqueness’ of the Holocaust. His point resonates with the passionate declaration by the poet of Négritude Aimé Césaire:

What the very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against humanity, not the humiliation of humanity itself, but the crime against the white man . . . ; it is the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions as were borne till now by the Arabs, the coolies of India, and the negroes of Africa. (cited by Ferro, 1997: p. x)

Adam Hochschild asks how it is that the museums of Nazi Germany have been destroyed, Moscow’s Museum of the Revolution been utterly transformed and yet the Royal Museum of Africa at Tervuren in Belgium remains packed with colonial forgetting and lies. The museum celebrates campaigns against ‘Arab’ slavers, shows black and white films of Pende masked dances, preserves spears and fish traps in glass cases. But in this whole museum, swarming with numerous visitors, there is not the ‘slightest hint that millions of Congolese met unnatural deaths’ (Hochschild, 1999: p. 293). When Leopold II was forced to officially cede his private killing fields in the Congo basin – the Congo Free State – to Belgium in 1908, the furnaces burnt for eight days incinerating the records of his holocaust. Leopold, through his private army in the Congo, the Force Publique, was responsible for the death of, at a conservative estimate, ten million Congolese.

The new historiography of colonialism has rightly reacted against what is sometimes referred to as the ‘fatal impact’ thesis (the reference here is to Moorhead’s popular 1966 book of the same name), and has sought to stress the ambivalence and incompleteness of colonial projects, and the resilience of those who were colonized. However, it is important not to repeat the forgetting which has characterized Leopold’s legacy, when we consider the cultural dimensions of colonialism: Lindqvist and Hochschild’s accounts must remain as moral spectres over the rest of this discussion.

The new prominence given in various accounts to colonialism’s cultural dimensions has also been attendant on the formal decay of colonialism as a world historical force: the more distant it has become the more ‘cultural’ it is seen to have been. Colonialism conceived of as brute economic and political oppression has ceded much ground to a vision of colonialism as a concatenation of ideas, categories, texts, images and exhibitions: instead of colonialism as the epiphenomenon of greed and the desire for conquest, different colonizing projects are increasingly approached through their complex cultural entanglements.

The plausibility of a singular Colonialism is now a thing of mere shreds and tatters, although its afterlife in notions of ‘colonial worldview’, and ‘colonial discourse’ displays a huge tenacity. Perhaps this should not surprise us for, as Nicholas Thomas observes, we need to theorize colonialism ‘but discussion may be obstructed if we assume that the word relates to any meaningful category or totality’ (Thomas, 1994: p. ix). The binary of Master and Slave has been displaced by the complexities of the different European cultural matrices that informed national empires and a growing awareness of the manner in which the transactions and ‘translations’ in the encounters between colonizers and colonized can hardly be reduced to a pure domain of power or economics.

Although this enormous empirical diversity makes it difficult to generalize about colonialism itself, it remains possible to sketch certain trajectories of thinking about colonialism. In the next section I will consider different approaches to the cultural technologies associated with colonialism which vary in the degree of efficacy that they grant to cultural practices in creating and sustaining asymmetrical relations in colonial situations. Following this, the rest of this chapter will
focus on vision, incarnated in a Foucauldian fusion of visibility and power. This will be explored as a theme in academic analysis, and then in the concluding part of the Chapter as an ongoing concern in visual arts practices predominantly by ‘fourth world’ artists.

CULTURAL TECHNOLOGIES OF COLONIALISM

We might start by considering what we might think of as ‘strong’ theories of the cultural technologies of colonial rule (Dirks, 1996: p. ix). These are predicated on the efficacy of colonial ideology and practice. Initially articulated as an alternative to ‘punishment’ paradigms of colonialism, which stressed military and economic dimensions, some of these ‘disciplinary’ approaches have paradoxically come to mirror an earlier Imperial History in the power they grant to the colonizer.

The Nietzschean power/knowledge formulation quickly passed via Foucault into the ‘cultural’ study of colonialism. The Saidean variant of this (that is, following the insights of Edward W. Said) is undoubtedly the most celebrated and derided, but other important versions of this paradigm have also had a great impact. Many years before Said published Orientalism, the anthropologist-turned-historian of India Bernard Cohn was producing powerfully detailed studies of the cultural technologies of rule in South Asia. His remarkable studies on the impact of the census on Indian social organization, the hierarchical modalities of imperial assemblages (darbars), the role that indigenous texts played in colonial understandings of Indian society and the socio-linguistic aspects of ‘command’ would effectively inaugurate a ‘Cohnian’ school. Among his former students are Ronald Inden, Nicholas Dirks and Arjun Appadurai, who have all elaborated and extended Cohn’s interest in the cultural dimensions of colonial relations.

Cohn had suggested that the Census, with its hierarchized and objectified categorizations, formalized identity in new ways, and ‘became an object to be used in the political, cultural and religious battles at the heart of [Indian] politics’ (Cohn, 1990: p. 250). Most importantly, Cohn demonstrated the precise mechanics through which objectifications passed from ‘hand to hand’ and transformed worldviews. Hierarchy also appeared in the British appropriation of the ritual idioms of darbars, which they turned into spectacles of submission and obedience. Following the Government of India Act of 1858 (which ‘de-sacralized’ the Mughal Empire), British rule faced the problem of ‘internalizing’ itself within the Indian polity. Seeking to anchor their authority in the security of the past, Mughal court rituals of display and incorporation became the model for a British neo-traditional idiom of power. Complex and contradictory though this neo-feudal idiom was, it established a trope, to be affirmed or negated in the future: early Indian National Congress meetings replicated its basic form; Gandhi’s later political semiology directly repudiated it.

Cohn’s concerns with the impact of British ‘systematizations’ of Indian cultural practice is taken up by Dirks, in his detailed ethno-history of a small south Indian polity and his subsequent study of colonial understandings of caste. Cohn, and subsequently Inden (1990) and Bandyopadhyay (1990), had shown the Orientalizing effect of British valorizations of caste as ‘religious’ rather than aspects of a political and economic aspiration. Dirks consolidates this, exploring in detail how the ‘spectre’ of caste emerged out of a colonial modernity, how the manner in which ‘caste has been constituted as the principal modality of Indian society draws as much from the role of British Orientalists, administrators and missionaries as it does from Indian reformers, social thinkers and political actors’ (Dirks, 2001: p. 8). Similar arguments are advanced by Fox (1985) in his study of British conceptions of ‘martial races’ on Punjabi Sikhs, and Mahmood Mamdani’s (1996, 2001) study of the legacy in Africa of colonial constructions of political identity. Here we see colonizers’ categories partially constituting the social formations they purported to describe.
The strong account of colonialism’s cultural technologies that Said mapped in *Orientalism* (1978) was considerably complexified in his later work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The earlier work had an impact which is hard to overestimate, and famously established what has almost become an academic sub-discipline – the study of colonially generated cultural knowledge and its relation to power. In *Orientalism*’s original formulation this centred on the inscription of two phantasmatic identities – Occident and Orient generated and sustained by an ‘enormously systematic’ European knowledge practice. Although Said gestures to the complex desires that underlay this practice (‘a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections’ [Said, 1985: p. 8]) the bulk of his analysis advances a confident systematicity – a world of ‘racial, ideological and imperialist stereotypes’ (Said, 1985: p. 328) – apparently devoid of self-doubt and contradiction.

*Culture and Imperialism* shares *Orientalism*’s curious mixture of declamation and qualification and ultimate ontological indeterminacy. EuroAmerican cultural production is charged with a blanket assumption that ‘outlying regions of the world have no life, history of culture to speak of, no independence or integrity worth representing without the West’ (Said, 1994: p. xxi) and some of the most reductive formulations of the relationship between literature and ideology are praised. In one see-saw movement we are offered a vulgar reprimand. But the see-saw swings back when Said wisely observes that ‘A novel is neither a frigate nor a bank draft. A novel exists first as a novelist’s effort and second as object read by an audience’ (Said, 1994: p. 87). Just as in *Orientalism* the Orient’s ontological status is never really made clear (‘almost a European invention’, it was ‘manage[d] – and even produce[d]’), so in *Culture and Imperialism* the reader is offered a menu of incompatible options strangely juxtaposed like rocks on a scree bed.

Said has acquired a deserved iconicity, in part because of his political courage and an attractively archaic humanism. However, the term ‘Saidean’, so often invoked, sketches a volatile position in a broader debate where other analysts have brought more penetration, subtlety and consistency. More negatively, some scholars, deterred from investigating the intellectual life of ‘outlying regions of the world’ because of eagerness to avoid repeating Orientalism’s tenacious ideology, conjure a mirror-image phantom of the discourse they wish to attack. Anxious about the possibility of ever engaging a world that has not already been ‘Orientalized’ they perversely echo Imperial History’s own delusions of grandeur. Said, it is true, did state in *Culture and Imperialism*, that ‘No vision . . . has total hegemony over its domain’ (Said, 1994: p. 225) but Saidean analyses rarely stress an incomplete hegemony.9

More recent work on empire and literature has many more points of contact with Said’s much more nuanced assessment of Raymond Schwab’s encyclopaedic *Oriental Renaissance*, a work first published in 1950 and which provides a sympathetic portrait of European literary tropes of alterity. For Schwab, the East was Europe’s ‘invisible interlocutor’, providing a ‘disruptive invigoration’ (before succumbing to ‘condescending veneration’) and the complex, fluid, cultural alignments and realignments he presents force the conclusion (which Said here affirms) that ‘the library, the museum and the laboratory underwent internal modifications of paramount importance’ (Said, 1984: p. xvii). This is a position very different from the suggestion in *Orientalism* that from Homer to Cromer10 European paradigms changed very little.

Ros Ballaster, in her recent discussion of the role of fictions and fables of the East from the late seventeenth to eighteenth century, affirms the Saidean supposition that ‘these tales are part of a wider cultural project which creates the object it feigns identifying’ (Ballaster, 2005: p. 2), but rejects the idea that they are in any sense ‘cultural technologies of rule’. Fables of the East are more than simple ideological reflections of colonial interests: they are, Ballaster argues, ‘a form of subaltern discourse, a means of seizing verbal authority’
with power over a phantasmatic Orient, but are almost exclusively debates internal to Europe which happen to take the ‘Orient’ as their ‘alibi’. In this respect there is a certain resonance with John MacKenzie’s ongoing critique of Said on the grounds that Orientalism is expressive of desires that predate and exceed the instrumental knowledge/power dynamic on which Said focuses.

The second point concerns the inadequacy of any analysis which differentiates simply between different forms or national practices of colonialism and ignores the complex historicity and variability of those individual lineaments. This is to take the process of analytical fragmentation much further than simply Spanish versus British and British versus French. It insists that we attend to the radical historical transformations and understand that colonial projects were not the epiphenomenal reflection of unchanging European national interests, but highly conflicted and contested endeavours that incarnated themselves in radically different ways often within the space of one or two decades.

These cautions may appear the perfect justification for the abandonment of any attempt to theorize continuities and resonances in colonial practices. The retreat to empirical particularism can be very comforting. However, it is possible to respect the singularity of colonialism’s multiple and diverse iterations, and at the same time draw out certain themes and idioms which appear as recurrent *leitmotifs* cutting across this bewildering terrain. One such *motif* concerns the relationship between visibility, knowledge and power.

**COLONIALISM AND VISIBILITIES**

In both Cohn’s and Said’s work there is a key visual trope: the certainty of knowledge is predicated on visibility. Cohn writes of an imperial gaze (‘The British appear . . . to have felt most comfortable surveying India from above and at a distance’ [Cohn, 1996: p. 10]), while Said repeatedly presents the colonial
archive as a material and visual structure (‘there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration . . . in theses about mankind and the universe’ ([Said, 1985: p. 7]). Tony Bennett’s (1995) theorization of a metropolitan ‘exhibitionary complex’ as a mode of moral education and control was exported to Indian contexts by Gyan Prakash (1999), discussed in the broader context of the British Empire as a whole by Peter Hoffenberg (2001) and has been reformulated as a ‘colonial exhibitionary complex’ by Daniel Rycroft (2006). Colonial content was central to many of the exhibitions and museums that Bennett describes: Rycroft describes how new illustrated popular journals such as the Illustrated London News extended the exhibitionary complex through an infinite prosthesis. Through the wood engravings that made possible new forms of illustrated history, an endless stream of images of the British Empire became available in ways that they had previously not.

In Timothy Mitchell’s (1988) justly influential Colonizing Egypt the ‘world as exhibition’ is fused with a Heideggerean sense of the world as picture. The general disposition that has been termed ‘Cartesian perspectivalism’ (Jay, 1988) is given an especially intense colonial incarnation: ‘the age of the exhibition was necessarily the colonial age’ remarks Mitchell in one of his most Heideggerean moments. The exploitative framing of the world (which movements such as Arne Naess’s ‘deep ecology’ attempt to undo16) achieves its fullest and most destructive form in colonialism – a structured regime of spectatorial distanitation. Indeed one could almost substitute the word ‘technology’ with ‘colonialism’ in Heidegger’s writing and produce a text very close to Mitchell’s. Echoing Cohn’s (1996: p. 10) comments about the fear of Britons in India of ‘the narrow confines of a city street’ (as opposed to the certainty of distance and elevation), Mitchell cites Gustave Flaubert’s 1850 letter from Cairo. ‘As yet I am scarcely over the initial bedazzlement . . . each detail reaches out to grip you; it pinches you; and the more you concentrate on it the less you grasp the whole. Then gradually all this becomes harmonious and the pieces fall into place of themselves, in accordance with the laws of perspective’ (cited by Mitchell, 1988: p. 21).

Colonial perspectivalism becomes the quest for a privileged ‘point of view’, abstracted from the dangers of nearness and physical contact, and seeking surety in distance and framing. As with the panopticon it was ‘a position from which . . . one could see and not be seen. The photographer, invisible beneath his black cloak as he eyed the world through his camera’s gaze, in this respect typified the kind of presence desired by the European in the Middle East’ (Mitchell, 1988: p. 24; see also Alloula [1986] and Pratt on the ‘seeing man’ [Pratt, 1992: p. 7]). And yet Europeans also sought immersion within the object-world of the colony, a contradiction resolved for some writers such as Edward Lane and Richard Burton through the use of disguise. These are positions very different from earlier ‘dialogical’ impersonations of the sort addressed by Ballaster in the literary field and popularized among a wide public by William Dalrymple.17

Monitorial schooling, urban planning and new modes of writing and communication were all aspects of a strategy, Mitchell argues, of making Egypt colonizable through visibility: ‘the colonial process would try and re-order Egypt to appear as a world enframed. Egypt was to be ordered up as something object-like . . . it was to be made picture-like and legible, rendered available to political and economic calculation’ (Mitchell, 1988: p. 33). Mitchell’s work exemplifies an approach – derived from Heidegger and Foucault – in which a colonizing modernity is incarnated through the disembodied modality of vision. This was a theme theorized with remarkable explicitness by Léopold Senghor in his essay De La Négritude (1962), which opposes a European deadly objectification with a desirable African immersion in the materiality of thought. Whereas ‘the European’ ‘freezes’ an object ‘out of time . . . fixes it, kills it’ and ‘makes a means of it’, ‘the African turns it
over and over in his supple hands, he fingers it, he feels it’ (Senghor, 1965: pp. 29–30).

Mitchell’s approach has been subject to measured and useful critique by Charles Hirschkind. He has suggested that Mitchell entangles two quite different modalities of power – what Foucault would term ‘micro-physical techniques’ and those that depend on what Hirschkind terms a ‘theological effect’. This criss-crossing between quite different forms has the consequence that ‘power seems to reside outside of the realm of material forces, and hence to lay claim to a certain suprahuman authority’ (Hirschkind, 1991: p. 284).

This critique alerts us to an aporia at the heart of many assertions about culture and colonialism: the difficulty of demonstrating the mechanisms of consumption and iteration that link ideological artefacts to the material arenas of colonial policy. Arguments, such as that advanced by Linda Nochlin (1983), who reads Orientalist paintings much in the same way that Said reads texts, frequently depend on a generalized colonial zeitgeist in order to convince us of an epistemic colonialism which produces colonially inclined artists who produce images which appear self-evidently to propagate the same colonial episteme. MacKenzie draws attention to the volatile identifications of signs which Said and Nochlin gloss negatively: images of boys studying in Koranic schools, which for Saideans may signify languor, can also be read as ‘showing respect for learning and literacy’, craft production may signify ‘backwardness’ but might also be understood as positive valorizations of pre-industrial production by artists who were in some cases closely allied with William Morris’s arts and crafts movement. ‘The east’ MacKenzie argues ‘offered inspiration for a radical movement to refresh itself anew at the deep wells of colour and light, pattern and design’ (Mackenzie, 1995: p. 67). Subsequent work by Roger Benjamin (1997, 2003) nuanced this considerably, allowing us to understand the changing historical moments in which particular configurations of artists, images, exhibitions and ideological iteration occurred.

The desire to use the visual as an emblem of other historical forces always encounters the wider issue which Carlo Ginzburg, following E.H. Gombrich, termed the ‘physiognomic problem’. Here the issue is whether images or texts (or other aspect of cultural production) genuinely inform analyses as originary evidence, or whether they must always be relegated to the role of illustration of a thesis which has already been determined. Ginzburg (1989) put it this way:

The mishaps that can result from such a ‘physiognomic’ reading of artistic documents are clear enough. The historian reads into them what he has already learned by other means, or what he believes he knows, and wants to ‘demonstrate’. (Ginzburg, 1989: pp. 34–35)

Ginzburg is concerned with this as a fundamental methodological issue for all visual-historical enquiry. However, much of the debate around ‘Orientalism’ has engaged the image in such a cavalier fashion that this has become a peculiarly acute issue.

**DIVERGENCES AND CONVERGENCES**

It is a curious, and generally overlooked, fact that scholars who dwell on the polarization of their viewpoints increasingly agree on the fundamental modalities of colonialism. Superficially one could easily present an account of the historiography of colonialism that pitted ‘postcolonial’ scholars against those who exhibit a tolerance of, and nostalgia for, empire. So the work of Edward W. Said is in certain obvious respects wholly opposed to the widely disseminated ‘notorious’ (Porter, 2006: p. xvii) views of Niall Ferguson. For Said, a Christian Palestinian product of the *nakba*, (British) colonialism ‘required an abiding . . . subordination of the native and colony to the English, individually and collectively’ (Said, 2003: p. 5). For Ferguson – Oxford historian turned Bush-regime confidant – British colonialism was rendered as a beneficent and foresighted ‘Anglobalization’. Underlying this apparent incommensurability are a shared set of
assumptions that colonialism was something far more subtle, complex and tenacious than gunboats and the Maxim gun. Beneath differences in political evaluations of colonialism’s legacy—frequently expressed with an extreme combativeness—there is a growing agreement about the cultural dimensions of its modality.

To illustrate this, consider Homi Bhabha’s exemplary reading of the material dimensions of colonialism as translational slippage in his essay ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’, C.A. Bayly’s Empire and Information, and David Cannadine’s Ornamentalism. Whereas Bhabha is frequently cited as an empathetic critic of Said the latter two authors are commonly taken to exemplify (respectively) the dying embers of the ‘Cambridge School’ of South Asian historiography, and of ‘High Toryism’. Said has described Bayly’s work (here filtered via Dirk’s characterizations) as ‘assigning a good deal of blame to Indian “agents and accomplices”’ and Cannadine’s approach as turning ‘the whole business into a peripheral episode in the history of the eccentricities of the British upper classes’ (Said, 2003: p. 3).

What alignments and resonances can we detect beneath this surface animosity? Where Said conjures a world of binaries, the one holding sway over the other, Bhabha imagines an asymmetric world characterized by ambivalence, anxiety and dialogue. ‘There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power is possessed entirely by the colonizer, which is a historical and theoretical simplification’ (Bhabha cited in Young, 1990: p. 142). In ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’, Bhabha scrutinizes a colonial logic as the ‘partialization’ of the ‘English book’. Diagnosing colonial power’s own claims as rhetorical anxiety, Bhabha focuses, almost ‘ethnographically’, on a precise moment of encounter, transaction and translation.18 Colonial power may appear incarnated in its own terms at the beginning of this account but is quickly revealed in its fragility once it becomes subject to negotiation in a particular location at a particular time. It is here that Bhabha’s subtitle – Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817 – assumes such importance, for he intends us to understand that all relations are subject to empirical articulation.19 It is in the enunciation of power – its iteration – that we see slippage as the condition of manifestation: ‘the presence of the book’ triggers a ‘process of displacement’ in which it is ‘repeated, translated, misread . . .’ (Bhabha, 1994: p. 102).

Bhabha’s text describes the perplexity of a native catechist who had encountered a small crowd of Indians under the eponymous tree. The catechist is initially delighted by what appears to be a group of bible-clutching Christians, Indians who have assimilated themselves in a utopian conversion to ‘the religion of the European sahibs’. But all is not as it seems. The Indians’ books cannot be the same as the Europeans’ because Europeans eat flesh, and besides the Indians were given it directly by God. Here ‘through an act of repetition . . . the colonial text emerges uncertainly’ (Bhabha, 1994: p. 107). The catechist attempts to merge this ‘re-iterated’ book in the possession of the group of Indians with the ur-text of the bible as the codification of the ‘religion of the European sahibs’ but fails. This incident exemplifies a more general proposition for Bhabha, that ‘colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference’ (Bhabha, 1994: p. 107). It also conjures a tangible and material space of transaction, encounter and iteration.20 It is material both in terms of its specificity and in the appearance of the ‘English book’ not as a disembodied text or ideology, but as incarnations that have complex histories, surfaces and appearances: ‘it is its appearance that regulates the ambivalence between origin and displacement, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition’ (Bhabha, 1994: p. 110).

A close reading of Bhabha’s ‘case studies’ helps dispel the oft-cited claim that he is only interested in a placeless, de-historicized and de-materialized phantasmatic ‘colonial discourse’. From the placedness of the shade of a tree outside Delhi, we find Bhabha inhabiting a space which is epistemologically
(if not politically) curiously resonant with the spaces conjured by Bayly and Cannadine. When Cannadine repeatedly asks what colonialism ‘really looked like’ (Cannadine, 2002: p. xvii), he is – unexpectedly – engaging the same issue as Bhabha in his preoccupation with ‘surfaces’ and ‘appearances’. Similarly, Bayly’s project – to explore the ways in which colonial knowledge depended on ‘native’ mediation of that knowledge – produces a space very similar to that described by Bhabha’s catechist. In a parallel manner in his remarkable book *Empire and Information*, Bayly is keen to document the emergence of what he terms ‘an Indian ecumene’ – a terrain of shared knowledge negotiated between Indians and colonizing Britons – which is also characterized by contestation and failure.

In Bayly’s account, the power/knowledge relationship, which for Foucauldians such as Cohn and Said entails intimacy and potency, has a Bhabha-esque anxiety and ambivalence. In the first place it is not colonial *sui generis*; rather it is the co-option by colonizers of ‘sophisticated systems of internal espionage and political reporting which had long been deployed by the kingdoms of the Indian sub-continent’ (Bayly, 1999: p. 365). In the second place, we should not understand this to have been a ruthlessly efficient system for it ‘rested on shaky foundations’ (Bayly, 1999: p. 365). Colonial knowledge was ‘never absolute’ and was the result of a ‘dialogic process’ in the manner that Irschick uses this Bakhtinian idiom (Bayly, 1999: p. 370). If one wishes one can roll up these ‘anxious’ characterizations as part of a paradigm which desires to portray ‘colonizer[s] as victim[s]’ (as Said claims Linda Colley – wife of Cannadine – does in her book *Captives* [2002]). Alternatively, and I think more productively, one can search beneath the superficial political oppositions (whose reality I do not deny) and explore resonances between very different approaches which attempt to apprehend different forms of colonialism in their complexity.

So as a further example, David Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism* exemplifies a High Toryism which, by the device of never bothering to read the works of those authors to whom they imagine themselves to be opposed, ends up unwittingly mirroring certain elements of them. It is striking that the central point made by many of his critics is that what he says is not ‘new’: postcolonial historiography of the kind he professes to disparage has been exploring these issues for several decades. Thus do phantoms battle phantoms. Another idiom through which we can trace a curious symmetry between ‘postcolonial’ and High Tory approaches can be found in the area of biographical reflexivity. What Said (1985: p. 25) described as the necessity of a Gramscian ‘inventory’ has become *de rigueur* for historians of different hues: Bayly (1998: pp. 307–322), Hall (2002 *passim*), Cannadine (2002: pp. 181–199) and Porter (2006: pp. x–xi) have all recently offered their own reflexive inventories.

Different approaches have also reflected different audiences. A postcolonial scholarship, engaged with the tenacity of colonial ideologies, has consolidated a position within the academy through its recondite professionalized language. A contrasting populism – largely based in the academy but looking to broader publics – has advanced politically conservative positions in an everyday language. Part of a wider public desire for the return to neo-Macaulay-an history as narrative, works by authors such as Colley, Cannadine, Fergusson and Dalrymple (some tied also to a television series) have fed into a public desire for absolution from the burdens of the postcolonial.

**PROVINCIALIZING EUROPE**

I have suggested that the starkness of Said’s vision has been fruitfully complicated by Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that ‘Orientalism’ was never as straightforwardly successful as Said imagined it to be for it was itself internally flawed – ‘forked’ or ‘split’ – by the entanglement of horror and desire that constituted it. Bhabha’s re-elaboration of the complex urges driving colonialism has also
illuminated the ways in which those who had been ‘orientalized’ might work within the contradictions of ‘orientalism’ as a practice to partially overthrow it. Whereas Said’s model is suggestive of a mimesis in which colonialism is granted the power of the master copy, Bhabha’s is more suggestive of Pandora’s Box – the act of colonial enunciation immediately sets free a surplus of possible enactments ensuring unpredictable outcomes.

The potential of Bhabha’s insight is demonstrated by Stephen Eisenman’s study of the painter Paul Gauguin’s residence in Tahiti. Previous approaches to Gauguin had stressed his complicity in various systems of domination: he was variously condemned for colonial racism and misogyny (Eisenman, 2000: p. 120). In a world of colonial binaries he seemed to be unequivocally placed on the side of the French colonizers. Eisenman, however, presupposes a world of more fluid identities and hypothesizes a congruence between Gauguin’s bohemian refusal of European sexual dimorphism and Tahitian categorizations of the Tata-vahine, or Mahu – terms that are sometimes translated as the ‘third-sex’. Remaining alert to Gauguin’s colonial investments and the complexity of his position, Eisenman nevertheless opens up the possibility of seeing how Gauguin’s liminality permitted him an almost ethnographic intimacy with Tahitians, and provided the base for aesthetic projects which cannot be reduced to a ‘colonial gaze’. This privileged liminality is compressed in his illuminating title: Gauguin’s Skirt. Echoing Bhabha, Eisenman concludes that ‘Rather than buttressing repressive regimes, colonial arts and literatures may actually undermine their ideological legitimacy, or at least offer potential paths for future cultural and political resistance’ (Eisenman, 2000: p. 19).

Gauguin’s Tahitian and Marquesan experiences fed back into metropolitan European art, just as Picasso’s ‘epiphany’ in the Trocadero opened European Modernism to African and Oceanic aesthetics. ‘Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts within Europe itself’ as Cooper and Stoler note (1997: p. 1) This is a trajectory that could be given a vast temporal dimension. Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued – in a wonderful provocation – that early modern Europe’s class system emerged through the control of spices, prestige substances from the east that brought with them the ‘taste of paradise’. Spices were ‘emissaries from a fabled world’ (Schivelbusch, 1992: p. 6) and would give an undifferentiated European palate its first ‘decisive refinement’. Schivelbusch draws a parallel between today’s Age of Oil and an earlier Age of Spices in which the Occident borrowed its vestments from the east: ‘More and more people desired sumptuous, exotic clothes and sharply seasoned dishes, and this change in taste signalled the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern age’ (Schivelbusch, 1992: p. 10). Sidney W. Mintz (1985) makes a parallel argument about the manner in which the European love of sugar (initially an elite sumptuary classed as a ‘spice’) was transformed through the economics of slave labour into a mass-produced source of calories that reduced the cost of reproducing an industrial workforce. From spice to sweetener, sugar became a necessity demanded by the masses.

Bernard Porter asks ‘in what ways [was Britain] an imperial society, as well as an imperial nation?’ (2006: p. vii). His answer is that most of the time it wasn’t, at least in any obvious self-conscious way. Attempting to systematically survey British cultural life for colonial/imperial ‘content’ (as opposed to opportunistically ‘poking about for the occasional imperial shard’ [2006: p. 224]) he finds surprisingly little. Surveying public statuary erected in London he finds that a mere five out of eighty erected before 1880 (and still standing) were of ‘imperialists’. Glasgow’s statuary, however, betrays a far greater material residue of empire (Porter, 2006: p. 147). Porter concludes that empire played a small role in the constitution of domestic British society, at least until the late nineteenth century, when there were more concerted attempts to generate imperial patriotism and affect. Their lack of success explains, he suggests, the lack of popular
political angst in Britain during the disintegration of empire.

Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* (2002) argued that empire had fundamentally constituted a Britain which had been able to imagine itself civilized through continual counterpoint with colonized others. Focusing in the latter part of her study on mid-Victorian Birmingham she traces the slippage from paternalistic Abolitionist discourse into a harsher vocabulary increasingly configured by notions of race as biological difference. Porter in response complains that in support of a Birmingham structured by empire she ‘can come up with nothing apart from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’ and a popular entertainment about Australia. The former does not count as ‘imperial’ in Porter’s scheme and the latter ‘should probably not count as serious theatre’. The silence, Porter concludes ‘is deafening’ (Porter, 2006: p. 140).

In his staging of doughty panoramic historical empiricism against a flighty and unreliable postcolonial scholarship, Porter privileges only the visible and the countable as evidence. The subliminal, the repressed, the allusive (and even the sweet) have no place in his enumeration. The Saidean conclusion – on a reading of *Mansfield Park* and *Great Expectations* – that English literature demonstrates the ‘hegemony of . . . imperial ideology’ is, Porter argues, possible only if one is prepared to ‘put more weight on very incidental aspects of their plots than they can bear’ (Porter, 2006: p. 141). Here we encounter an impasse between different methodologies: Porter’s vulgar enumeration (illuminating in many ways) finds itself passing a sophisticated ‘new imperial history’ (proposing that British history simply cannot be understood without an understanding of empire) which looks to a radically different order of signs as evidence.

We can think about different kinds of signs in a different idiom. Stephen Eisenman’s argument, briefly touched on above, proceeds from a material moment, rather like Bhabha’s scene under a tree, outside Delhi: the moment when a long-haired Gauguin alights at Papete in 1891. This concern with an embodied world is also taken up by Cannadine and E.M. Collingham. Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism* was essentially concerned to inscribe imperialism as a question of class, of rank and status, rather than race, an echo of Joseph Schumpeter’s argument. In exploring the question of ‘imperialism as ornamentalism’ (Cannadine, 2002: p. 122), Cannadine dwelt on a material dimension of colonialism – which he summarized *inter alia* as ‘processions and ceremony, plumed hats and ermine robes’ (Cannadine, 2002: p. 126). This was part, he argues of imperialism’s anti-capitalist nostalgia for an idealized hierarchy evident in ‘Gothic cathedrals in the Dominions; ruling princes and Indo-Saracenic architecture in South Asia; native chiefs and traditional tribes in Africa and the Middle east; imperial chivalry, royal images and icons…’ (Cannadine, 2002: p. 128). Imperialism permitted a magnification of a fantasy no longer plausible within Britain: ‘blooming with brighter colours, greater radiance and stronger perfume’ (Cannadine, 2002: p. 128). Collingham examines the body as a locus for the construction and contestation of authority in colonial India. The manner in which Gandhi would use his body as a somatic signifier, a visible sign of bio-moral substance, has been extensively analysed (Alter, 2000; Bean, 1989). Collingham focuses on colonial somatics, showing how dialogical ‘nabobism’ is displaced by an anxious ‘sahibism’. Transformations in British power were complexly mirrored and prefigured in transformations in bodily norms. Collingham’s book cloaks a celebratory account of the British in India in a thin carapace of Foucault and Elias; however, she draws our attention to the need to study the material articulations of colonizers’ cultural practice.

**SOMATICIZING EMPIRE**

The corporeal anxiety that Collingham describes and Gandhi’s ‘implosion’ of colonially constituted somatics alert us to the volatility of difference in colonial contexts. Cooper and Stoler note that ‘the otherness
of colonized persons was neither inherent nor stable’ (Cooper and Stoler, 1997: p. 7). In India, the Dutch East Indies, French Indo-China and diverse parts of Africa, colonizers invested much energy in managing race as a crucial idiom of colonial logic. The colonial ‘construction’ of caste has already been alluded to in the discussion of Cohn and Dirks, but we might note here that the dominant colonial anthropological theorization of caste at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century constituted it as ‘race’ on the basis of the ‘nasal index’ (Risley, 1891: p. xxxiv).

Associated with Herbert Hope Risley, Census Commissioner in 1901 and President of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1911 (see Pinney, 1990, 1992), this conceptualization of caste as race was very explicitly mobilized as part of a divide-and-rule anti-nationalist ideology. Since caste ‘perpetuates such differences between classes of men as we readily recognize between different breeds of horses or cattle’ (Anderson, 1913: p. 5), Indian nationalism could never succeed, it was claimed. Risley characterized European nations as built on ‘national types’ made possible by genetic interchange. In India by contrast ‘the process of fusion was long ago arrested . . . There is consequently no national type, and no nation in the ordinary sense of the word’ (Risley, 1909: p. 288). Gyanendra Pandey (1990) has traced a parallel process in the sphere of ‘communalized’ constructions of Hindu and Muslim identities in colonial northern India.

But race was more commonly configured as the difference between colonizer and colonized. The differential role it played in diverse colonialisms with diverse histories makes it impossible to produce a generalized history of its trajectory. Eighteenth-century Mexican casta paintings were profoundly typologizing minute fractions of mestizo difference (see Katzew, 2004) at the very moment that in some parts of Europe Enlightenment anti-imperialism was rejecting naturalized difference in favour of a quasi-relativistic form of ‘culture’ (Muthu, 2003: p. 184), albeit one which was heavily influenced by ‘climatalogical’ factors. Herder, for instance, is interested in ‘nation’ as ‘a state of mind or a sense of distinctiveness’ (Muthu, 2003: p. 246): race has almost no role to play in this. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, partly under the weight of misreadings of Darwin, and in the face of increasing anti-colonial resistance, a biologicist race assumed a new tenacity in many official colonial projects and in the popular European imagination (Rich, 1986).

Here, as Stoler (1995; see also Young, 1995) has argued, a ‘racially erotic counterpoint’ of black and white bodies was a key vector through which colony and metropole interacted. The strength of these identifications was most powerfully expressed in the anxiety that surrounded métissage, which Stoler reads as a ‘metonym for the biopolitics of empire at large’ (Stoler, 1997: p. 199).

I will shortly turn to the ways in which contemporary visual artists have explored what Sarat Maharaj terms a ‘xeno-epistemology’, which may help us understand some of the questions which have so far, in this essay, only been addressed through the idiom of academic dispute. Prior to that we must consider two central conceptual paradigms – négritude and neo-Gandhism – which have articulated influential paradigms of post-coloniality.

Négritude can be seen (like Ubuntu and Thabo Mbeki’s ‘African Renaissance’) as a tactical inversion of ideologies implicated in colonialism. Originating in 1930s Paris under the influence of the Harlem Renaissance (a further exemplification of what Paul Gilroy terms the Black Atlantic), figures such as Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire invoked a striking set of essentializations about Black Africa. Senghor’s 1962 text De La Négritude starts with a starkly drawn characterization of a colonial ‘Cartesian Perspectivalism’ which kills its object in order better to understand it. Black Africans, by contrast, are presented as immersed affectively in a world from which they are not yet divorced.

Senghor’s disparagement of colonial objectification finds echoes in an Indian tradition of anti-colonial opposition. Rabindranath Tagore – a major influence on Ashis Nandy
and Partha Chatterjee (India’s two leading public intellectuals) – produced powerful poetic descriptions of what Partha Chatterjee has termed the ‘prisonhouse of colonial reason’ (Chatterjee, 1995: p. 55). In 1893 in a letter written at Shelidah, Tagore wrote that ‘Curiously enough, my greatest fear is that I should be reborn in Europe! For there one cannot recline like this with one’s whole being laid open to the infinite above . . . . Like the roads there, one’s mind has to be stone-metalled for heavy traffic – geometrically laid out, and kept clear and regulated’ (Tagore, 1921: p. 106). A year later he would write of his repugnance with Calcutta, which ‘is as ponderously proper as a Government Office. Each of its days comes forth like a coin from a mint, clear cut and glittering, Ah! Those dreary, deadly days, so preciously equal in weight’ (Tagore, 1921: p. 121).

Ashis Nandy draws on Tagore and Mohandas K. Gandhi as resources for recovering possibilities generated by Indian epistemologies which have survived colonialism, albeit in fragmentary forms. His early work *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), informed by Fanon and Césaire, engaged the deep insertion of colonial alienation in the Indian psyche (‘that is why the cry of the victims of colonization was ultimately the cry to be heard in another language . . . ’[Nandy, 1983: p. 73]). Later work has looked to Tagore for insights on alternative modalities for national self-imagination, and popular commercial film as a bearer of ‘vestigial elements in a dialect which everyone had half-forgotten’ (Nandy, 1995: p. 21). In a memorable account of a series of 1980s hijackings of Air India aircraft by Sikh extremists he records the emergence of a repressed sense of community – triggered in extremis – and articulated by a common language of the songs and sentiments of Hindi film. Nandy writes of the ‘deep but increasingly cornered elements of Indian culture’ – by which he means non-modern and pre-colonial which still find a place in mass-cultural forms such as Hindi film. Ably championed by Lal (2000) and subsequently Young (2001), Nandy’s position has been subject to searching attack for what might be seen as its own essentialization of the ‘non-modern’ and pre-colonial.

In all these textual arguments, the material and visual have figured prominently. The appearance and non-appearance of imperial themes in public statuary, imperial plumes, styles of architecture and complexly somatized bodies have all served as currency within linguistic discourses. Working within the humanities and social sciences it is difficult to escape a self-reflexive language as the primary mode of investigative analysis. However, the experience of colonialism has also preoccupied numerous visual artists, and this concluding section considers the nature of the particular insights they offer.

**ART-ETHICAL PROCESSING AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM**

The legacy of the colonial within the post-colonial has been of central concern to a number of important visual artists and critical commentators on visual cultural production. Okwui Enwezor, perhaps the most consistently exciting international curator, made this a central issue in the conceptualization of *Documenta 11* in 2002, noting that today’s avant-garde is ‘so thoroughly disciplined and domesticated within the scheme of Empire that a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found to counterbalance Empire’s attempt at totalization’. Sarat Maharaj (2002) wrote very thoughtfully at the time of that show about ‘xeno-epistemics’ and the potential of visual art for knowledge production that might provide such a counterbalance. Noting the different modalities of the visual arts and ‘high-speed’ knowledge systems such as science and social theory, Maharaj conceptualized art as ‘“xeno-equipment” rigged out for attracting, conducting, taking on difference . . . ’ and harbouring the possibility of ‘art-ethical processing plants churning out options and potentials . . . for action and involvement in the world’ (Maharaj, 2002).

Art’s potential to theorize options and potentials has a long history. A new history
of art as xeno-epistemology would have to include such substantial and extraordinary bodies of work as Mexican subversions of colonial codices commissioned in the wake of the Spanish conquest of 1519 (Gruzinski, 1992) and the extensive commentary and critique of the colonial settlement of Australia provided by nineteenth-century Aboriginal artists such as Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla (Sayers, 1997). There are ample and sufficient survivor’s of non-Western visualizations of the history of colonial trade and conquest on which to construct indigenous visual histories of colonialism.

FOURTH-WORLD XENO-EPISTEMICS

Among key contemporary contributors to a project of ‘xeno-epistemology’ we might include Jimmy Durham, an artist of Cherokee descent. His earliest works were a series of Indian ‘artefacts from the future’. One of them, Bedia’s Muffler (1985), is a car exhaust decorated with cowries and shamanic designs and suspended from a leather strap. This post-industrial artefact simultaneously mocked the expectations of an ‘authentic’ timeless Native American art and conjured a future in which a skilled relationship to the land again becomes necessary for survival (illustrated in Durham, n.d.: p. 18). Pocahantas’ Underwear (1985), a pair of red feathered knickers in which frayed elastic coexists with archaic pendula of beads, conjures a similar collapse of Empires.

But Durham’s works constitute a more ambitious and conceptually complex critique of what we have previously considered under the rubric of ‘colonial/Cartesian perspectivalism’. In a superb reading of Durham’s 1994 ICA (London) show Original Re-Runs, Laura Mulvey situates Durham’s concerns within the literary theorist and historian Tzvetan Todorov’s conjoining of the introduction of linear perspective and the discovery and conquest of America (Mulvey, n.d.: p. 45) This technology of representation serves not simply as metaphor, but rather (as we have seen in Timothy Mitchell’s argument about the colonization of Egypt) a specific tool in the picturing and control of territories and peoples. Mulvey has suggested that Durham’s ICA show might be understood as a prolonged destabilization of such a visual/political regime founded on a process of binary confrontation between a valued self and disavowed other. If a system of perspective provides the stable point from which one’s own culture can (following Said) oppositionally view nature, civilization view savagery, and so on, Durham tried to corrupt the alignments that make such identifications possible. Ropes hung from the ceiling bisected the space of the gallery and set up a rival spatial regime that conflicted with a series of opposed signifiers (presented in the style of road signs) that invoke colonial binaries.

The critique of colonialism as – literally and figuratively – a way of seeing forms a central part of the Brisbane-based Aboriginal artist Gordon Bennett’s work. Bennett, more than any other living practitioner, has taken as his object of analysis the visual regimes that made colonialism possible and subjected these to complex transformations and reordering. ‘By recontextualizing images subtracted from this grid of Euro-Australian “self” representation [he attempts] to show the constructed nature of history and of identification as arbitrary’ (cited in Bennett, 2000: p. 16). Bennett’s Aboriginal mother was raised on a reserve and prohibited knowledge of her own people’s belief and customs. Bennett’s own upbringing, which he has written about with searing insight and poignancy, involved a complete invisibility of his Aboriginality.

Bennett’s triptych of 1989, Requiem, Of Grandeur, Empire, demonstrates his concern with cultural technologies of rule and colonial technologies of representation. Aboriginal figures (based on early photographic images by Charles Woolley and J.W. Lindt from the 1860s and 1870s) are positioned at the vanishing point of perspectively depicted cubes. Labelled A, B and C, these confute colonial literacy and the abbreviated racist calumnies (which Bennett references explicitly in many other works) as dual technologies of domination. Linear perspective and European
technologies of writing, together with civilizational rhetorics (two of the triptychs reference European classical archways), are diagnosed as central devices in the construction of Aboriginal identities by a colonial ‘world picture’.

But, as Bennett himself has said, his is not a nihilistic investigation, despite the enormity of the genocidal history he of necessity engages with. Rather, he is interested in the arbitrary nature of identifications and the ways in which technologies which claim a natural status might be overturned by radically different world views. Empire endows Emperor Augustus at the summit of the archway with an Aboriginal ‘halo’ referenced through the ‘dot’ style which became such a characteristic feature of Western Desert acrylic paintings from the 1970s onwards. Empires disrupt Empires.

The manner in which representational technologies ‘made’ a colonial history is more explicitly developed in a series of paintings in which Bennett reworks familiar images of Captain Cook. Possession Island, for instance, reconstructs an eighteenth-century history painting, overlayering and interweaving both Aboriginal dot style with a Jackson Pollock-style dribble that references his Blue Poles, famously purchased by the Whitlam Government in 1972 for a then record sum and which for many symbolized the Australian state’s desire to find an authenticating history and narrative outside itself. Abstract Expressionism as cultural imperialism is a connection made explicitly by Bennett: ‘The overpainted Modernist trace of a Pollock skein [is] a metaphor for the scar as trace and memory of the colonial lash’ (cited by Smith, 2000: p. 16). Bennett’s concern with the ways in which ‘style’ embodies culture and history resonates with Yinka Shonibare’s deployment of kitenge printed cotton as a trace of history and identity. For Shonibare, a London-born artist of Yoruba heritage, these trans-national textiles (originating in a Dutch East Indies batiks factory, printed in Manchester for the colonial African market) articulate the contingent, but enormously powerful, conditioning of style and permit the re-cloaking of the everyday with a provocative postcolonial surface that makes history ‘strange’ (Kasfir, 1999: pp. 211–212).

Bennett’s exceptional work might be seen as an actualization of Homi Bhabha’s demand that in the reading of colonial discourse ‘the point of intervention should shift from the identification of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through [...] stereotypic discourse’ (Bhabha, 1994: p. x). Bennett’s diagnosis of the intimate efficacy of this discourse provides us not simply with a moral/political position but an enormously sophisticated and precise analysis of its mechanics, demonstrated especially well in his 1988 series titled Notes on Perception (Bennett, 1999). His wider oeuvre constitutes a penetrating intellectual disquisition on the ways in which we perceive other histories through the experience of colonization and the grain of visualization.

Bennett’s work is also powerfully concerned with the relationship between centre and periphery, and their mutual dependency and fictionality. Ian McLean has observed ‘Perspective does not expel the periphery to the ends of the world, as it might seem, but brings these ends into the centre of both the picture’s space and the subjectivity of the viewer’ (McLean, 1998: p. 138). Through this manoeuvre, Bennett (like Durham) sought to place under erasure the relationship between centre and periphery, and subject and object, which discourses like that of linear perspective propose. But there is a broader concern here with cartography – the making of maps, territories and borders which Paul Carter (1987) has diagnosed as ‘spatial history’. The illegitimacy of colonially imposed borders has also been the object of a direct, explicit and literal attack in the Namibian artist John Ndeva Muafangejo’s linocuts. In Angola and South West Africa (1976), for instance, he traces the legacy of King Mandume (a figure of great political resonance for Kwanyama people) and the artist’s own experience of trans-national migration. The pictorial space occupied by Angola and (apartheid South African-occupied) South West Africa,
or Namibia, is bisected by a line marked ‘artificial boundary’ (Timm, 1998).

CONTESTING THE COLONIAL WORLD PICTURE

The work of all these artists suggests what has already been hinted at: that beneath all its infinite variety, what we understand as colonialism is the climax of a man-besotted view of reality, the fruition of a way of regarding the world as expendable, as something simply there for human exploitation. European world conquest was precipitated by the desire to extract resources (spices, gold, slaves . . .) and colonialism and imperialism emerged as technologies of control and quantification. In the terms delineated by Heidegger, the world became increasingly viewed as a ‘picture’ – as something set apart from man, rather than that thing that encloses and moulds man (Heidegger, 1977). The modern concept of man indeed emerges as a product of the ability to set oneself apart from the world. Many colonial projects intensified this concern with the world as a field of mathematically quantifiable, spatial and temporal, certainty, drawing out the differences between European subjects and non-European objects. Colonial pseudo-sciences and representational practices can be interpreted in this light as anxious attempts to guard against the collapse of this separation.

The world as something set apart, and as something ripe for colonization, constitutes one of the central concerns of Leah King-Smith’s elegiac Patterns of Connection series. These photo-compositions emerged from King-Smith’s work in the archives of the State Library of Victoria (Australia) in 1989 and 1990. The works overprint archival images of Aboriginal people with King-Smith’s original fish-eye landscapes in large Cibachrome prints. The smallness and disposability of the original archival prints has been banished by these imposing prints, whose glossy surface confronts the viewer with their own mirrored presence. If the archive prints were one sign of the ‘world as picture’ – of a realm over which ‘man’ had power (structured through alien taxonomies and endlessly substitutable), perhaps King-Smith’s photocompositions should be seen as a reassertion of the power of that world over a colonizing eye. The power relations are reversed: it is no longer the viewer who structures the world in his/her own image, but the world which ‘impresses’ the viewer (Williamson, 1996: p. 46; King-Smith, 1992).

Michel Foucault once characterized an emergent form of European knowledge as ‘the absolute eye that cadaverizes’ (Foucault, 1976: p. 166). He was concerned here with the paradoxical manner in which certain forms of encompassing knowledge demand the death of their subject in a way that Senghor had prefigured. The black British photographer Dave Lewis has confronted this continuing cadaverization in a series of works which introduced fluid, live bodies into the regimented and ordered spaces of nineteenth-century anthropological archives (Charity et al., 1995). The desire to analyse the ‘absolute eye’ and its tendency to ‘cadaverize’ has also been a central concern in work by the white South African artist Penny Siopsis. In a powerful series of photographs she engaged with the legacy of Sartje Bartmann, the so-called Hottentot Venus, who was exported to Europe as an object of curiosity in the early nineteenth century.

South Africa has also been the setting for a significant recent debate about the rights to use certain images. Okwui Enwezor, director of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale, launched a fierce critique of white South African artists’s use of ‘black bodies’ in their attempts to negotiate the new ‘rainbow nation’. He focused particularly on Candice Breitz’s Rainbow Series, which morphed pornographic and National Geographic images of white and black bodies in a manner that referenced Dada and Surrealist notions of the ‘exquisite corpse’. Practitioners such as Breitz, Enwezor implied, appeal to a universal space of Modernist creativity and right to speak: they fail to recognize the ways in which political histories in which they are complexly
implicated have deprived them of that right to speak (Enwezor, 1999).

Enwezor’s intervention problematically entangles itself with essentializations of (in Foucault’s term) enunciative modality, which has been wittily critiqued by Rasheed Araeen under the rubric of ‘Our Bauhaus, Others’ Mudhouse’ (Araeen, 1989). Araeen, the Pakistani-born London-based editor of *Third Text*, has recounted how after his arrival in London as a sculptor working in a post-Caro tradition, he came increasingly ‘to feel that the context or history of Modernism was not available to me’ (Araeen, 1987: p. 10). Instead, he was continually reminded of the relationship of his work to that of ‘his own Islamic tradition’. While Araeen dreamt of a universal ‘Bauhaus’, he was offered only a ‘mudhouse’.

Araeen sees this artworld vision of the modernity of the self and the archaicism of the other as part of a structural dependency, for one cannot have the modern without its obverse, the archaic. Araeen’s diagnosis of the artworld’s Orientalism provides a useful frame through which to view the important recent work of the Russian artist Haralampi G. Oraschakoff. Like Bennett, Oraschakoff attempts to implode the basis of centre/periphery distinctions, proposing instead something rather like the Möbius loop in which the inside and outside transmute. His exhibition on the theme of Itinerants and Orientalists – which juxtaposed his own images of cartographic marginalization with painted ‘copies’ of canonical Orientalist works by artists such as Delacroix and Gerome – explores the mutability of different positions, noting that ‘For the British artists, Russia represented eastern exoticism, but the Russians identified themselves as Europeans, condemning Ivan the Terrible’s bloody excesses …’ (Borovsky, 1999: p. 14). Echoing Dipesh Chakrabarty, Oroschakoff takes as his central problem the belief that ‘time on the boundaries flows differently’.

This struggle between centres and peripheries, metropoles and interstices, gives rise to one of the major framing tropes of postcolonial art practice: the margin as centre. This involves a repudiation of a temporalized cartography which positions much of the world in a relationship of ‘belated-ness’ to colonial centres. Recall Said’s argument (much elaborated by Inden [1990], and independently theorized by Fabian [1983: p. 25ff.]) that a key Orientalizing strategy involved (in Fabian’s term) the denial of ‘co-evality’ (the denial of a singular temporality uniting both centre and periphery: the Occident had History and Agency; the Orient did not). As Dipesh Chakrabarty has discussed, it became the fate of the belated zones to replicate a history that had already happened elsewhere: Europe and America had histories of art (see Nelson, 1997), the belated zones had traditional art practices which might one day cease to be traditional, but never with the possibility of becoming ‘original’. Nineteenth-century evolutionist propositions which posited colonial metropoles in historical advance of their peripheries are easy to dismiss now, but they have a tenacious shadow in the assumption that aesthetic history is made in New York or Paris by practitioners who, like Nietzsche’s madman in the market proclaiming that ‘God is Dead’, discover that they have arrived ‘too soon’ and that the ignorant public are not ready for them. If Nietzsche’s madman’s burden was to arrive ‘too soon’, the belated-zones’s burden was to arrive too late.

Dipesh Chakrabarty – who has perhaps theorized this question more perceptively than anyone – observed with regard to the writing and thinking of history that ‘“Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian”, “Chinese”, “Kenyan” and so on …’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: p. 27) The same could be said – perhaps with even more justification – about much art history, which so fully presumes the ‘sovereignty’ of the primary European model that all other contending histories are merely footnoted, or even deleted. Some commentators would claim that a similar ‘denial of co-evality’ lay at the heart of two exhibitions in the 1980s which generated a huge critical industry.
The Museum of Modern Art’s 1984 ‘Primitivism’ in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern exhibition was a milestone in the creation of a new consciousness of the politics of representation and exclusion. Committed to exploring the ‘affinity of the tribal and the modern’, the ostensible aim of the show was to demonstrate the influence of ‘Primitive’ non-Western art (primarily African and Oceanic) upon European ‘Primitivists’. Building upon earlier studies (von Sydow, 1921; Goldwater, 1938), William Rubin, the curator of the MOMA exhibition, was honestly explicit about his interest in the ‘modern’ half of the equation, being concerned to ‘understand the Primitive sculptures in terms of the Western context in which modern artists “discovered” them’ (Rubin, 1984: p. 1). It was this privileging of EuroAmerican artist’s actions and the almost complete silencing of the voices of the creators of the ‘Primitive’ objects which caused such outrage among a plethora of critics who ranged against what came to be seen as Rubin’s ‘colonial’ strategy.

The dominant narrative in the exhibition sustained a beneficent and self-possessed EuroAmerican modernism granting African and Oceanic art mere walk-on parts as proofs of its generosity and openness to diverse influences. This entailed an inventory of (in the sense that Homi Bhabha characterizes it) cultural ‘diversity’, as opposed to a confrontation with cultural ‘difference’ as a conflictual and historically constituted struggle (Bhabha, 1994: p. 34). Thomas McEvilley turned up the heat further in a denunciatory exchange in Artforum. For McEvilley, the MOMA show strove for a ‘Western-imposed “commonality”’, but for all its pretensions had only served to further inscribe the ‘Hegel-based conviction that one’s own culture is riding the crucial timeline of history’s self-realization’. Ultimately the Primitivism exhibition’s desire to believe in the ‘wholeness, integrity and independence’ of the Western tradition reinscribed the Hegelian assumption that Western art history alone embodied the self-realization of Universal Spirit (1984).

A similar critique was developed by Rasheed Araeen with respect to Magiciens de la Terre, which, like Primitivism, was ostensibly concerned with a universal creativity. Curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989 in Paris, Magiciens deployed a ‘super-empiricism’ aimed at destroying the ‘false distinction between Western and other cultures’ but, for many critics, its refusal to address the institutional and cultural frameworks through which different art practices were mediated vitiated this laudable project. The exhibition mixed works produced by EuroAmerican named individual artists with those produced by ‘anonymous’ collective ‘tribal’ practitioners, reproducing for many a further neo-Hegelian sense of the West as the sole occupant of historical space (Araeen, 1989). In this sense the history of non-Western aesthetics’ colonial entanglement (e.g. Mitter, 1977) is merely repeated, not superseded and resolved.

Approaching colonialism’s cultural dimension through the prism of contemporary visual xeno-epistemology presents a clear sense of a recurrent concern with colonial perspectivalism – a coercive rationalizing mode of hierarchical knowledge. However, it provides little sense of the heterogeneity of colonialisms which I was keen to stress at the beginning of this discussion. Perhaps this reflects the way in which a hypostasized colonialism is presented in the art schools in which most of the artists I have discussed have been trained. The art I have discussed demonstrates in a powerful way that, as Stoler notes, ‘“to colonize” is an evocative and active verb accounting for a range of inequalities and exclusions – that may have little to do with colonialism at all. As a morality tale of the present the metaphor of colonialism has enormous force but it can also eclipse how varied the subjects are created by different colonialisms’ (Stoler, 1995: p. 199). Arts xeno-epistemology appears exceptionally good at ‘Heideggerian’ evocation, not as successful in nuanced delineation. An analysis of subaltern visual xeno-epistemology grounded in the study of Indian popular responses to colonialism (Pinney, 2004), Zairean popular ‘history painting’
(Fabian, 1996) and other localized practices would almost certainly generate a vastly more disparate set of perspectives, positions that might be congruent with Stoler’s.

CONCLUSION: WHOSE COLONIALISM?

Such an approach would also highlight the multiple non-European colonialisms which although having very low visibility in mainstream academic discourses have nevertheless structured the experience of significant numbers of people. Haralampi Oraschakoff’s work directs our attention to Russia’s incorporation of neighbouring lands into its empire, a process which has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars, as has Japan’s regional expansion, where attention has been directed to culture as a tool of imperialism, ‘a tool often so malleable, transportable, and imperceptible that it masked its own profound instrumentality’ (Weisenfeld, 2000: p. 595; see also Low, 2003). We might also note that one of the most significant, and earliest, documents of ‘visual resistance’ to European colonialism, Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* of 1615, is also marked by local struggles over empire. Guaman Poma sent his remarkable illustrated text to King Philip III of Spain as a primer in ‘good government’, a moral guide as to how the Spanish should act if they were good Catholics (see Adorno, 2000, 2001). His own position was complex for though he was matrilinearly descended from Inca nobility he articulated a pro-Andean but anti-Incan stance on the basis of his paternal Yarovicha Allauca Huanco lineage. From this perspective the Incas were ‘usurpers’: thus did two empires entwine Guaman Poma.

The list of empires which the discussion of colonialism generally has no space for might be extended: we could add the Ching, Mughal, Ottoman, the Sultanate of Sokoto (Ferro, 1997). A focus on an exclusively European presence can produce curious results: Brian Larkin notes that Northern Nigeria was colonized by the British between 1903 and 1960 and ‘a history of over a thousand years is divided into a period pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial which centres less than 60 years of British rule at the heart of Hausa experience’ (1997: p. 408). The acknowledgement of non-European expansive forms would perhaps contribute a further stage in what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the ‘provincialization’ of Europe. The move towards culturalized accounts of world history has been accompanied by an increased scepticism about the centre-periphery models which seemed to replicate colonialism’s own self-delusion. Emmanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory has been increasingly displaced by a ‘provincializing’ trajectory. In this new historiography colonies emerge not simply as a ‘belated’ periphery but as motors of innovation. In Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra’s account of Spanish histories of Mexico, it is indigenous historiography which plays a key role: early Spanish historians ‘did not hesitate to consider the historical information stored in quipus and codices as trustworthy’ (Cañizares Esguerra, 2001: p. 68). In Bernard Smith’s (1960) account of European artists in the South Pacific in the late eighteenth century it is the effect of Tahitian light on the landscape painter William Hodges which facilitates his aesthetic breakthrough 25 years before William Turner’s belated metropolitan achievements. For Susan Buck-Morss (2000), Hegel’s writing on the master-slave dialectic can only be understood through the impact of the Haitian Revolution, and for Carlo Ginzburg, a key element in the surveillance of colonial metropolitan populations – fingerprinting – has its origins in rural colonial Bengal of the 1860s (1989). The belated acknowledgement that the ‘periphery’ was also capable of generating its own vast empires now needs to be added to the inventory of this process of ‘provincializing Europe’.

NOTES

1 At various times Sweden had a colonial presence in Delaware, Guadeloupe, parts of the Gold Coast
and India. Denmark also had a presence in the Gold Coast, various Caribbean islands and Serampore in India.

2 These are ideological permutations described, respectively, by Anthony Pagden (1995, 1998), Fisher-Tine and Mann (2004) and Lindqvist (1997). Locke’s sanction against American natives attempting to regain their lands (that they ‘be destroyed as a lion or tiger, one of those savage wild beasts’ [Pagden, 1995: p. 77]) was in practice similar to the modality Lindqvist describes.

3 See also Davis (2002).

4 Nicholas Thomas observes that the extent to which fatal impact theories ‘require variable’ (Thomas, 1994: p. 15).

5 ‘Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established power on foreign shores’ (Dirks, 2001: p. 9).

6 ‘Punishment’, following Foucault (1979), denoting a modality of naked power, and ‘discipline’ denoting an internalized self-policing.

7 Cohn taught for the whole of his career in the Department of Anthropology in the University of Chicago. See Guha’s foreword to Cohn (1987) and Vinay Lal’s helpful assessment at: http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Culture/Intellectuals/cohn.html.


9 In this light, the repudiation of the sense in Orientalism that colonial ideologies were all-powerful, by the claim in Culture and Imperialism that ‘there was always some form of active resistance’ (Said, 1994: p. xii) appears equally absurd. One would like to think there was ‘always’ resistance, but this is surely a historical phenomenon to be documented in particular situations rather than humanistically posited as a general reflex.

10 Lord Cromer, Agent and Consul-General in Egypt, 1883–1907.

11 Almost certainly the work of the Italian writer Giovanni Paolo Marana (Ballaster, 2005: p. 207f.).

12 ‘Common understandings of “Enlightenment universalism” fail to come to terms with the … manner in which Diderot, Kant and Herder intertwave commitments to moral universalism and moral incomensurability, to humanity and cultural difference’ (Muthu, 2003: p. 10).

13 ‘Europeans no longer appear as representations of a a single univocal tradition, but as figures who were improvising sinuous paths through fiercely competing claims’ (Greenblatt, 1991: p. xx).

14 The portrayal of Spanish colonialism as motivated by gold and blood, and stressing greed and cruelty.

15 For instance MacKenzie suggests that Orientalist pre-occupations with the desert are expressive of industrialized nations’ citizens’ desire for cleanliness: ‘the central point about the desert was that it was perceived as morally and physically clean … the desert represented a great purifying force’ (MacKenzie, 1995: p. 59).

16 See Zimmerman (1993). Naess’s philosophy can be read as generically anti-colonial, as much as it can be read ‘ecologically’.

17 Dalrymple’s White Mughals (2003), celebrates the eighteenth-century British Resident at Hyderabad, James Kirkpatrick’s cross-cultural entanglements.

18 In this respect Thomas’s critique of Bhabha (1994) is curious insasmuch as Thomas’s earlier work (1991) could be viewed as precisely concerned with those questions of translational slippage which are so central to Bhabha himself.

19 Conversely Bhabha in other writings does invoke a disembodied ‘colonialism’ and ‘colonial’ discourse for a critique of which see Parry (2004), Perloff (n.d.) and Thomas (1994).

20 Important works which engage this problematic (though without recourse to Bhabha) include Greg Denning (1992, 1996) and Jonathan Lamb (2001). Lamb paraphrasing Pagden notes ‘the damage caused to the self by its own mobility’ (2001: p. 114) and cites John Trenchard’s 1725 warning against the ‘self-extrusion’ provoked by voyaging: ‘People are like Wire: the more they are extended, the weaker they become’ (Lamb, 2001: p. 115).

21 Inschick describes how the ‘colonial’ understanding of the vellala caste in South India was not the ‘product of the British alone but formed a project resulting from many voices, high and low, past and present’ (Inschick, 1994: p. 201).

22 See an illuminating review by Edward Said (2003). Hall’s argument could be fitted to Stepan’s suggestion that racism – almost indiscernible through the middle ages – is a product of the slave trade (Thomas, 1994: p. 78). Hall can then be seen to describe an Abolitionist modulation, after which earlier attitudes are reconsolidated.

23 Although this is a distinction he seeks to undercut in the preface to the paperback edition of 2006.

24 See Geoff Ely’s critique: ‘Ornamentalism’s approach seems bizarrely disconnected: durbars and plumed hats may have made empire into a spectacle, but its mechanisms of rule depended far more on the local contexts of legitimacy and contestation’ (2002).

25 See also Arnold (1994) and Cummings (2003).

26 For a contrary position see Young (1995: p. 40).

27 And sub-regional strategies that have sometimes been termed ‘internal colonialism’ (Hechter, 1975). Beyond this we might also consider diverse ‘counterflows’ such as non-Europeans’ travel accounts of their experiences of Europe (Mukhopadhyay, 2002; Fisher, 2004).

28 See also Cooper and Stoler (eds.): ‘We question the “colonial” as well as the “-ity”, the former because it homogenizes a power relationship whose
limitations and contingencies need to be examined, the latter because it suggests an essential quality to the fact of having been colonized, implying that colonialism was the only thing of importance to people who live in what were once colonies (Cooper and Stoler, 1997: p. 33).

29 She shows in convincing detail that, contra most Hegelian scholarship, this was not the result of an internal debate within European philosophy but a reflection of Hegel’s awareness of German press coverage of Haitian slaves’ revolt against their colonial masters.

REFERENCES


