Journal *Hybrid*, no. 4

« The question(s) of representation »

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Introduction

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Translated by Nicolas Cognard and Ana Wolf

Published: February 19, 2018

Full text (PDF file)

By adopting a perspective that is resolutely non-ethnocentric, this fourth issue *Hybrid* aims to question the emergence of a major and perhaps unprecedented crisis in the field of representation, by which we mean a way of comprehending the world, as a model of imaged figuration, and as a means of conceptualising the way humans interact with their environment. Taking the risk of rehabilitating a term as hackneyed as it is since the attempt to theorise it in the École des Annales, the objective of this collective publication, by inviting contributors from different disciplines to map out the ideological and aesthetic issues at stake in order to highlight the political, social and cultural impact for today's world. This project attempts to re-contextualise, but also to de-territorialise the relationship to figuration, and to outline the bases of an ecology, or an "ecosophy" of representation, that cares to question the conditions of production and reception, of realisation and effectuation, when its precise function is to bring about, through credence, adhesion and mobilisation, the reality that it claims to describe, stylise or schematise.

It would appear that the endemic, even systemic crisis that has become the uncontested matrix underlying our artistic, media and political dreamworlds is, in turn causing a crisis in representation, which is expected to account for both the solicitation of historical references and the figuration of rapport (class, generational, gender and ethnic). The weakening of delegated, democratic representation (the rise in voter abstention and defiance relative to the vote and conventional or institutional forms of public and political life), and the development of participative, cooperative or collaborative alternatives, are sources of new citizen involvement. This upsurge in the desire for self-representation comes from the dominated or those who have been relegated to the margins of the public space, with an interest in denying the legitimacy of the dominant representations. We are dedicating this publication to the

archaeology of our "regime of media visibility"[1] and its impact on the "politics of representation."[2]

Some context

For a number of decades now, on the wave of the aesthetic of waste, aka *junk* or *funk*, art has been rummaging in dustbins and recycling junk. The wrecked, the worn out, the dirty, the filthy survive their usual fate and live on in art (*Pictures of junk*, by Vik Muniz). The trivial (plastic, tyres, pipes), soil, brackish water, blood (Beuys), rotten things, vomit, excrement (Manzoni, Serrano, Warhol's *Piss Paintings*) and, on a more general level, any intrusion of foreign bodies serve a legitimate artistic purpose. We have seen the abandonment of the illusionism of representation with the disappearance of the subject (Rauschenberg's *White paintings*; *Carré blanc sur fond blanc* by Malevich). The excessive presence of the object (*Le Plein* by Arman) is counterpointed by its absence (*Le Vide* by Klein; *Silence,* the museographic exhibition by Michael Fehr – of which John Cage's *4'33* could be the musical equivalent) and the performance of its destruction (*Übermalungen* by Arnulf Rainer) or its self-destruction (*Hommage à New York* by Tinguely). With the relegation of pictorial material, the artist's body (Orlan and his substances; *Self* by Marc Quinn; *Mur des défécations* by Jacques Lizène) has, in certain cases become the material, when it is not the piece itself, including even representing the invisible (Liu Bolin).

Gone are the days when in *La Représentation émancipée* (1988), Bernard Dort could celebrate "a happy utopia: the theatre as a place where diverse artistic approaches and diverse conceptions of the world could co-exist, of course with a restrictive conception of the notion." Today, belittling and accusing representation in all its forms is common, to the extent that a new "iconoclast" phase could be in our near future. The increase in lawsuits against works of fiction for, either their allusion to events or people "who really existed" and who are perfectly recognisable, or their incidence on copycat behaviours that attempt to make imaginary narrative episodes happen in real life. We are also seeing a return of pressure from civil society as well as from the powers-that-be and the media to have pieces of art – and not just the political caricatures of Mohammed so present in the public debate – banned, censured, modified or amended for their supposed insult to a belief system (*Golgota Picnic* by Roberto Garcia), or to human dignity (*Our Body* by Gunther Von Hagens)…

Is it possible that we have now entered an era that the sociologist Bruno Latour has termed "Iconoclash"? By abolishing the line between the objectivity of facts and crazy fabrication, the composite notion of "faitiche" (a contraction in French of "fait" (fact) and fétiche (fetish) – factish?) allows us to take a certain distance from the two main processes that modern western thinking established to distinguish itself from other socio-cultural configurations: the critique of belief and its corollary, the tenacious dogma of belief in critique.[3]

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1 Nathalie Heinich, *De la visibilité. Excellence et singularité en régime médiatique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2012.

2 Martial Poirson, *Politique de la représentation*, Paris, Champion, 2014.

3 Bruno Latour, *Petite Réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches* suivi de *Iconoclash*, Paris, La Découverte/Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2009.

Are we, on the contrary, suffering from a "visibility"[4] deficit, and as such, from the phenomenon of misrepresentation? The increasing poverty of the "great national narrative," conjugated with the eclipse of narrative practices such as "life stories" from literature and sociology, the result of the crisis in democratic representation, motivates then, not a defiance with regard to representation, but, on the contrary, a new scenario aimed at the constitution, through alternative democratic delegations, of a "parliament of the invisible"[5] aimed at making up for the shortfall in the usual forms of media visibility ("Nuit debout," the Indignés movement…).

The conditions of production and above all, reception of representation are seriously being called into question, they configure the dividing lines that only very partially intersect the usual political and ideological splits. They are turning art, culture and creation into a field of unprecedented, or at the very least, renewed, battle, at times weakening freedom of expression, opinion and invention, limiting the margins of creativity and thus calling into question the sovereignty of the artist or intellectual as the base of the modern democratic space and of the distribution of the sensible (partage du sensible).

Elements on which to reflect

In a paradoxical situation that is only apparent, the unprecedented sophistication of the techno-scientific means of representation in tandem with a culture of innovation (3D or multisensory cinema, augmented reality, avatars), the expansion of new information and communication technologies within an attention economy that has reached saturation point, or the unprecedented crisis of the traditional democratic system of representation, are combining to weaken the shared construction of the symbolic field and to shift representation to the very centre of a *malaise* in civilisation, or even a real anthropological rupture: today, it is turning from a system of perception and comprehension of the world around us, the generator of attempts to create a narrative, into an increasingly opaque filter, at times incidentally, at times deliberate, of systems of identification, classification or prioritization, but also of forms of recognition, legitimacy and identity.

If we start from the hypothesis according to which representation, far from merely being a simple imitation of the real (*mimesis*), allows a fantasy-based projection either into the past, in the form of a re-enactment, or into a possible future with agency in the contemporary world, often passed down by powerful individual or collective mythologies or storytelling, through utopia or exploratory fiction, we can then ask ourselves a number of questions about our era.

Can representation be accused of being an accomplice to the systems of domination, oppression or alienation that it is supposed to deconstruct, denounce or even battle? Does representing boil down to the reiteration of a redundant relationship to reality to the point where it participates in the phenomenon that it pretends to denounce or call into question? Does representing involve, on the contrary, proposing a form of sublimation of the

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4 Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research*, Basingstoke, Palgrave McMillan, 2010.

5 Pierre Rosenvallon, *Le Parlement des invisibles. Raconter la vie*, Paris, Seuil, 2014. The sociologist takes on the huge editorial project of the 19th century, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, encyclopédie morale du XIXᵉ siècle* by Léon Curmer.

real that can introduce a dissonant, critical and distanced relation to this phenomenon, and be a source of empowerment? Does exposing or exhibiting the humiliated of history, contribute to giving them back their full and entire legitimacy within the symbolic order which they were excluded from for so long? Or, on the contrary, does it bring the very conditions of their subordination back to life, thus reactivating them; in other words, actualises the symbolic violence that is at its basis and essentialises the vision that we have of them, including when we are trying to present a valorizing image of them? On the other hand, projecting oneself into a fantasy and fictive vision of reality allows us to conjure the demons of the past, to invent other possible worlds, to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible or perhaps to exacerbate tensions by playing with the tolerance levels, to the point of exasperation?

Elements of perspective

We open up a number of avenues of reflection here from the basis of a reflection about the social, cultural and political construction of representation, but also on its reception effects and self-fulfilling effects.

Manufacturing representation

The aim is to examine the production of representation, a function of the modalities of figuration which are identifiable in time and space, or on a broader scale, to question, through the "manufacture of images" (Philippe Descola), the big, fundamental taxonomies that spread different world visions, as well as the axiological systems they are linked to. Consequently, the question of knowing what we have the right to show, say or imply within the republican order is thrown into sharp relief.

In recent years, a number of affairs have highlighted the extent to which fiction has been tackled. There was the case in which the novelist Pierre Jourde came up against the inhabitants of his native town of Lussaud (Cantal) in 2005, when his autobiographical book *Pays perdu* (2003) was published; that of Mazarine Pingeot whose novel *Le Cimetière des poupées* (2007) was loosely based on the trial of the Courjault family for the double murder of their infant children, and the affair that brought Dr. Villiers (played by Philippe Torreton) against the television station Arte when it broadcasted the TV film *Intime conviction*, which was banned in 2014… On another level altogether, since his show *Le Mur* was banned in Nantes in January 2014 by order from the Ministry of internal affairs, the provocative comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala has chosen to continue to repeat revisionist comments about "historical facts such as those against the Jewish community," uninhibitedly inciting intolerance and rendering what Judith Butler refers to as "hate speech," thus putting pressure on freedom of speech and thought within the consensual and placatory order of the République. However, while the scars of history and collective traumas raise the question of the "un-representable"[6] with new strength, shows such as *Rwanda 94* from the Belgian collective Groupov (in 2000) try to "attempt a symbolic reparation for the dead, to be used by the living."

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6 Jacques Rancière, "S'il y a de l'irreprésentable," in Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Art et la mémoire des camps. Représenter, exterminer*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 81-102.

Can we thus say that representation constitutes a congruence, a redundancy, a dissonance or a dissemblance relative to the facts it evokes or convokes? Mobilising the impact of reception and the sensibilities of those at whom the representation is aimed appears to be essential in order to answer such a question and understand the interaction on which it is based.

Taking back representation

We need to attempt to identify the phenomena of reception through a number of writings or issues that can lead to a symbolic confrontation or a conflict of interpretation within the field of representation, thus weakening the "interpretive communities" that have been constituted (Stanley Fish). The expansion of the field of possibilities of representation due to the digital revolution, but also the increase in the number of immersive or emersive apparatuses of direct audience, listener, observer or reader involvement sharply call into question the reception of increasingly complex systems of representation. They are at times termed "perverted systems," in as much as certain processes "put the audience in the position where it is participating in what it is supposed to be condemning."[7]

The pressure that works of art have come under in recent years calls for an examination of the impact of representation on the receiving audience, within the politics of affect and a rereading of the relations between ethics and aesthetics.Political and societal pressure can be official, like the institutional censorship of the commissioned play *11 septembre* by Michel Vinaver in the United States in 2003, or official legal investigations such as the ten-year enquiry into Henry-Claude Cousseau, director of the musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, after the *Présumés innocents* show by Larry Clark in 2000. It can also be seen in cases when curators remove objects from showcases in their museums as they are "at risk," or interfere with their database for the same reasons as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has admitted to doing.[8] It can also be expressed spontaneously and accusatorily (Paul McCarthy's Christmas tree/anal plug in place Vendôme in Paris); in the destruction of pieces on public show (*Piss Christ* by Andres Serrano; *Dirty Corner* by Anish Kapoor, renamed "Le vagin de la reine" an covered in anti-Semitic graffiti in the gardens at Versailles); in protests such as the fundamentalist Christians who fight to have so-called blasphemous pieces banned (*Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio (2010)* by the Italian playwright Romeo Castellucci – intended as a mystical and metaphysical parable of a reflection on physical decline and death), or that of small so-called anti-racist groups exposing the racism of a piece which itself meant to denounce racism (during the installation-performance *Exhibit B* by Brett Bailey, the artist's intention was to bear witness to the horror of human zoos and freak shows). Pressure can also manifest through self-censorship, like when the novelist Michel Houellebecq felt obliged to suspend his promotional tour for *Soumission* due to the terrorist attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo on January 7th 2015. Indeed, the novel he had only just published depicted a parallel universewhere the Islamic State established itself in France...

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7 Nathalie Heinich, *Libération*, 27-28 December 2014, p. 27.

8 For more on these questions, see Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudy-Ballini, "Les musées aux prises avec le sacré des autres," *Raison présente*, no. 195, 2015, p. 83-90

The performative effectiveness of representation

In light of the evidence of the self-fulfilling dimension of systems of credence, as examined by the sociologist Robert Merton, we are free to examine the performative dimension of representation, in other words, its incidence on the sensible world. Can we then evoke the therapeutic effect of representation when it acts as an outlet, like Aristotelian catharsis? Must we, on the contrary, conclude that it has an effect that exhorts to action? This is the question dealt with in a report coordinated by the philosopher Blandine Kriegel on audiovisual production in 2002 that concluded clearly that exposure to television violence had a definite inciting effect and was responsible for exposed young people "acting out." This echoes the recurring scandal that erupts every time the public space is grieving after an act of madness or barbarism, especially in the United States, and the horror film industry is put on the stand. On a more general level, we should also question the impact representation has within the social and political space, even the extent to which it affects the capacity for mobilisation or exhortation to action. To what extent are statistics and mathematical predictions – the benchmark for credit rating agencies and public policy makers –, responsible for the economic crisis they are meant to predict, and that for the most part they tend to precipitate through the mimic-contamination effect of the loss of trust in the financial and banking system? What are the potentially and paradoxically de-motivating effects of catastrophe predictions that in the political and media discourses, announce an upcoming ecological disaster thus leading at times to an uptick in predatory behaviours within the Anthropocene, boosted by the notion of a "merry apocalypse" ?[9]

The ambiguity of the social, cultural and political uses of representation[10] is only equalled by the constitutive ambivalence of the notion, which is a source of renewed questioning on the way the symbolic field articulates with the pragmatic space, motivating at times an experimentation with democratic alternatives,[11] and at times a discourse of "hatred of democracy" that reveals the main aesthetic issues in politics,[12] but also the political implications of aesthetics.

Contents

The first part of this issue of *Hybrid* is given over to the examination of the possible obsolescence of the very concept of representation, when considered in the light of certain phenomena that are un-representable, ineffable or not in keeping with the real and its figuration. It insists on the process of production of representation, envisaged according to regimes of facticity that may lead toward forms of alienation.

To begin, does one represent the self? Romain Gary excelled at it, dreaming his lives and living his dreams, "as if fiction had to precede history, dreams

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9 Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *L'Apocalypse joyeuse. Une histoire du risque technologique*, Paris, Seuil, 2012.

10 Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple introuvable. Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998.

11 Pierre Ronsanvallon, *La Contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006.

12 Jacques Rancière, *La Haine de la démocratie*, Paris, La fabrique, 2005.

anticipate experience, narration outrun identity."[13] In art, as we know, some creations are greater than their creator. William Faulkner could testify, imprisoned in a form of racism that his books wanted to denounce, he was "one of those writers that their own work didn't manage to convince." [14] Nevertheless, in writing a biography, how does a writer renounce the great split between what amounts to two types of realities: life and work? How, instead of getting bogged down in what the former did to the latter, do we grasp how they can be intertwined? Nicolas Adell, in his exploration of the mechanisms of intellectual activity of scientists, writes that scientific works "walk before the life" of their author. Managing to account biographically for this sort of duality is to show the specific way in which the work acts on a life, attaches itself to it, allowing us to reinterpret life, maybe even give it a specific meaning. He highlights the aporias of self-representation through an attentive and distanced observation of the "savant life," as gleaned from journals and research notes. He thus sketches the contours of the anthropology of contemporary subjectivities, points out the tension that is inherent to any attempt to split life and work, and underscores the performative effects of fictional projections of the self.

Alexandre Surrallés covers another modality of the un-representable, meaning a way of understanding the world or a modality for the conceptualisation of elements of the environment. This translates as an unprecedented interest in that which cannot be conceptualised and, as a result, for the unutterable. The difficulty, or even the impossibility of explaining in words, experiences for which concepts are non-existent or not very obvious, has recently become a stand-alone area of study in anthropology. The existence of semantic chasms in particular with relation to the denomination of its precepts is, in addition, one of the most important issues for an anthropology of meaning. In everyday life, Alexandre Surrallés notes, the Candoshi Indians never resort to using terms of colour to describe colours. Colour does not refer to only the visual, neither does it constitute a property that is dissociable from the others. On the contrary, it refers to a shared poly-sensorial experience, and calls on a perception that plays on the similarities or contrasts between multiple elements of the environment.

In another article of this *Hybrid* issue, Joël Candau defines the un-representable relative to the inadequacy of our communication systems. He examines the saturation levels of information in the attention economy of today's society, an overload that literally screens us from any clear perception of the world. If, as he states, "the very point of representation is to be other than represented thing," it seems as if what is represented is of less importance than the way in which it is represented. Klee felt art should not reproduce the visible but make it visible. Not only render visible but legible, added Georges Didi-Huberman.[15] What, precisely, is supposed to be rendered legible? How and for whom? With what effects? At what cost? Artists thus wonder if they must always opt for legibility.

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13 François Laplantine et Alexis Nouss, *Métissages, de Arcimboldo à Zombi*, Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 2001, p. 22.

14 Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 962 (quoted by Jean Jamin, "Une société cousue de fil noir," *L'Homme*, vol. 38, no. 145, 1998, p. 215.

15 Georges Didi-Huberman, "Ouvrir les camps, fermer les yeux," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, no. 5, 2006, p. 1011-1049.

Nicolas Bourriaud observes an "unprecedented event in the history of humanity, the sum of existing cultural products now goes beyond both the individual's capacity to assimilate and the average lifespan."[16] The increase that has occurred due to digital technologies and the current overabundance of visual information and the level of hyper-solicitation it causes, tends to affect our aptitude for attention and representation. Whatever the right-thinking, corporatist relativism in anthropology seems to think, any "cultural matrix," according to Joël Candau, is not beneficial to cognitive development. The contemporary image overload[17] that has bogged us down in a permanent present, de-realises the events and representations that are transmitted through these images. In media terms, it places war reporting from the Middle East, vox pop interviews in the street and reality TV episodes on the same level. The fact that social media allows anyone to become a source of information unbound by fact-checking, makes approximation and distortion everyday occurrences to the extent that the notion of "a post-truth" or "post-factual"[18] era has emerged with the obligation to point out – *cf.* #paslegorafi (#nottheonion) – that the real is indeed real.[19]

Although the widespread interconnection that now exists and could be taken for a opportunity for ideological diversity, and despite the apparent increase in the level of choice available from new media, this image overload reduces our experience of the world to what the filter bubble lets through, relative to previously confirmed preferences, emotions or opinions, giving rise to what the sociologist Gérald Bronner refers to as a "democracy of the gullible."[20] Outside of the digital realm, and one's inner circle, the existence of difference, potentially lumped together with the idea of a threat, ends up justifying the normalisation of bans or avoidance strategies. For example, in American universities, the "right not to be offended" has led to the creation of "intellectually safe spaces" aimed at protecting students from being confronted with dissonant ideas that might shock them or compromise their psychological well-being. "Trigger warnings" thus warn non-feminists to avoid a feminist space or forum, dissuade trans-phobic feminists from frequenting spaces that are open to transsexuals, or even dissuade white feminists from mixing with black feminists. In current thought, the "ethical turning point" finds a (probable) transcription in "collaborative," "participative" art. An art founded on the "culture of interactivity"[21] that aims for a consensus and avoids anything

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16 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël 2009, p. 185.

17 See Joël Candau, *Anthropologie de la mémoire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 1996; Id., "Du mythe de Theuth à l'iconorrhée contemporaine: la mémoire, la trace et la perte," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, t. 36, no. 111, 1998, p. 47-60.

18 See [online]: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-truth_politics [Consulted June 15th 2017].

19 On this, see the question Daniel Schneiderman asked in his article in *Libération* on February 19th 2017: "After all is Marine Le Pen's gorafique wall less gorafique than Trump's promised non-gorafique wall with Mexico (that the Mexicans will obviously pay for)?"

20 Gérald Bronner, *La Démocratie des crédules*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 2013. For more on the market finality of a tracing set-up in the capitalism economy, read Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention*, Paris, Seuil, 2014.

21 An art "to the delight of curators who acquire here, in the best possible way, a social function of 'proximity' testifying to the postmodern democracy of an art that managed to break away from the avant-garde and 'revolutionary' danger of the

disturbing, thus assuring the public that it will not be upset by what it sees or hears.

The representation of the un-representable, for which monotheistic religions have tended to reserve opposite treatments, is an issue that is common to most other religions. Studies on ceremonies with supernatural practices among the Aboriginal Australians show that crucial roles are given to objects that seem to lack expressiveness, those that "gain in effectiveness what they lose in expressiveness." As such, "the more banal their appearance, the more exceptional the representational role they are called on to play" […] the ritual performance complies with a major constraint: preserving the deeply un-representable character of the entities involved.[22] However, the relation to the un-representable goes beyond the question of its visual depiction. On this subject, the manner in which certain cultures have their own way of depicting a real "thing" that cannot be depicted, and that is literally unutterable, can provide us with some edifying comparative data to think on. In the American Indian context, Andrea-Luz Guttierez-Choquevilca shows us in his article that the shaman's chant resolves the problem of the lack of visibility of the spirits on the ritual stage by another deficit: the ordinary conditions of perception and communication. The invisibility of the spirits is reflected in this unintelligibility of the Shaman's words. The lack of clarity in the words that prevent any kind of univocal meaning guarantees the power and multiplicity of the images. It adds an un-decidable and volatile meaning to them that opens them up to many interpretations. While language is used, it is non-descriptive and provokes uncategorised thoughts and feelings. In addition, in this region of the world, it is not specific just to beliefs. The confusion in representation no longer appears, as such, as a problematic or pathological form, but on the contrary, as the usual working of all representation. The lack of terms for colours among the Candoshi that we mentioned above is also an illustration.

Another modality of the un-representable – or of a representation that only represents itself – is the simulacra, the decoy function which contributes to creating and maintaining of confusion between what's real and fictional. In Japan, we could say that the *otaku* "culture" constitutes a sort of *safe space* in and of itself. Agnès Giard shows us that in the spirit of its partisans, de-realising the world in order to make it bearable means attempting to un-realise the self by fleeing normality through absence in this world. It means trying to stay outside the mould and to stand out from the social order of one's parents, adults in general and the workplace not to mention sex and the distractions of the flesh. Real life is elsewhere: in fiction, vacuity, abstraction, virtuality, incompleteness; in the non-being seen as the condition for all potential possibilities. By giving up on the rules of ordinary existence, by choosing representation over the real, the *otakus* choose to live in the moment, avoiding the conformity of ageing. At least they attempt to save time... From synthetic dolls to video game screens, what is real in *otaku* culture is only meaningful as a fantasy of the real, as it is only as an illusion that it generates interest and

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transformation of forms *in situ* into intensive *in socius* forces" (Éric Alliez, "Post-scriptum sur l'esthétique relationnelle: capitalisme, schizophrénie et consensus," *Multitudes*, no. 34.3, 2008, p. 124).

22 Marika Moisseeff, "Les objets cultuels aborigènes ou comment représenter l'irreprésentable," *Genèses*, no. 17, 1994, p. 8-32.

affects. In order to grab attention, motivation, desire or feelings, this real must remain a simulacra.

On the stage, the depiction of historical reality can also be somewhat a simulacra as is the case in *Ça ira (1) : Fin de Louis*, directed by Joël Pommerat and staged by the Compagnie Louis Brouillard in 2014.[23] However, this simulacra, when it refers to cruelty or genocidal disaster, aims first and foremost to provoke the critical conscience of the audience. Nevertheless, in her article, Sophie Wahnich tells us that merely showing does not render conscious. The exact reproduction of a trauma, indeed if a play even manages to do so, runs the risk that the audience will defend itself by hardening its emotions – insensitivity, impassibility, passivity – inhibiting any reflexive thought and, as a result, any urge to act. Maintaining emotional aptitude is fundamentally a condition of thinking and acting; a condition, in this case, for vigilance and insubordination. So there is a fundamentally political and social responsibility to place the audience in the best conditions to represent what they see to themselves. The question, bitterly contested as we know, as to what photography, cinema and art in general should depict of the crimes of the Nazi regime,[24] is still very much discussed.[25] While nothing obviously can compare to the "impossible that is beyond frightening," in Samuel Fuller's terms,[26] the fact remains that contemporary artists have made it their specialty to "stage the unstageable" as was said of Sarah Kane's terrifying plays, preferring, as the playwright herself put it, to "risk an overdose on stage rather than in real life."[27] So they raise the realism of the representation and the show of suffering – in this case self-inflicted – as a supposed means, both political and social, to denounce human alienation (Gina Pane's self-mutilation) or to bear witness to disillusioned youth tempted by nihilism (Chris Burden, and the Vietnam War). The novelty is in the "transition from represented suffering to actual suffering in the representation."[28]

The second part of this publication deals with the new potentialities of representation, with regard to new forms of mediation between the real and its

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23 On this subject, we recommend you read the article in the online magazine *Thaêtre* entitled, "La Révolution selon Joël Pommerat," in particular "Usages de l'histoire, fétiches de la Révolution," with Patrick Boucheron, Guillaume Mazeau and Sophie Wahnich. [Online] http://www.thaetre.com/2017/04/21/usages-de-lhistoire-fetiches-de-revolution/ [accessed 11 June 2017].

24 We refer you to the Claude Lanzmann/Jean-Luc Godard polemic and, among the many articles written about this event, the writings of Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, Paris, Minuit, 2003 and Jacques Rancière, *Chroniques des temps consensuels*, Paris, Seuil, 2005.

25 See, for example the polemic about the photographs taken by Emin Ozmen showing decapitations by jihadis in Syria, that most outlets turned down but were awarded the prix du public de Bayeux in 2014.

26 Quoted in Gorges Didi-Huberman, "Ouvrir les camps, fermer les yeux," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, no. 5, 2006, p. 1029.

27 "Sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality," said Sarah Kane (Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, "Sarah Kane," translated by Christel Gassie and Laure Hémain, in *Rage and Reason. Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, Methuen Drama, London 1997).

28 "Representations of crime and cruelty seen by the contemporary stage," Les Subsistances, laboratoire international de création artistique. [Online] http://www.les-subs.com/UserFiles/0405_dossier_pedagogique_crimeetcruaute.pdf [accessed 15 February 2017].

figuration and the processes of intelligibility it leads to or inspires. It allows the exploration of blending, redefinition and hybridisation of the notion of representation, while examining its semiotic and performative effectiveness and shifting the analysis to the potentially emancipatory effects. Barbara Roland proposes the re-categorisation of the notion of representation, no longer seen as antagonistic but complementary to that of performance, as part of an analysis of the event-based apparatuses generated by post-dramatic or performative theatre. By engaging the action carried out and the very act of its presentation in the same process, this perspective dissolves the boundaries between the stage and the theatre, performer and audience, real and illusion, life and art... In doing so, it reveals the inherent polysemy of the performativity of events, abolishing the dichotomies in use and re-deploys the field of possibilities.

Reconsidering the artificial gap perpetuated by Western thought between the subject and its representation, the sign and the real, the word and the thing, Viviana Lipuma denounces the alteration of the thought processes of people who have suffered colonial oppression. She sees it as a vector of the Westernisation of the world and, from a more materialist and post-colonial perspective, exhorts them to "re-indigenise," by returning to the effectiveness of signs that can fight submission by (re)inventing other modes of semantic and performative existence. The aim is to rethink all of the political and aesthetic functions of images, making space for the multiplicity of affects that they engender and enabling oppressed, marginalised and often invisible minorities to own a new way of representing themselves.

As for Florian Grandena and Pascal Gagné, they call for the tactical re-appropriation of representations put out by a certain cinema genre on the subject of homosexuality. Such an approach may prove to be fertile for escaping a system of control or self-control and above all the essentialist calming and reification of the gay body through overly civilised, even frankly formulaic eroticisation. The writers champion conspicuous hypervisibility as means, not of normalisation, but of re-appropriation of gender stereotypes captured in all of their structural equivocity. Shifting away from the logic of assigning an injured or mutilated identity, this approach that owns differentiation casts a new eye on these "abject tactics."

The condition of women is also ripe for freedom from the gender stereotypes so prevalent in the dominant culture, here seen through the eyes of women on other women. This study of a radio programme by Christine Bouissou allows her to highlight the skewed perception of educational and integration journeys of women from the South, as seen through a universalist feminist filter that is prompt to deny all socio-cultural specificities and quash the complexity of contrasting representations. It is, according to the writer, the surest way to work towards a renewed form of humanism with potentially emancipatory effects, all the more necessary as it occurs in a post-feminist period marked by the reflux and re-motivation of gender stereotypes and by flagging feminist mobilisation.

Taking a broader perspective, Maxime Boidy approaches the system of democratic representation as the product, less a form of delegation of popular sovereignty to its designated representatives and more as a "battle for representation," the function of positions of visibility that are shared overall in an unequal way. This battle emerges thanks to a boost from the "crisis-

concept." The public sphere appears thus, not as the consensual space that is structured by bourgeois representation as defined by Jürgen Habermas, but as the space for dissensus and symbolic clashes, in other words, the "public oppositional space," a field of expansion of "rebel subjectivities," in the words of Oskar Negt.[29] Taking an analysis of the dissenting currents such as *tute bianche* or *black bloc* as a starting point, he asks us to distinguish political iconology from political iconography and to re-examine the attempts of subordinates to emancipate. He then covers the "battle for visibility" through the crisis of representation, that which the *Comité invisible* perfectly summed up in 2007 with the following political maxim: "To be visible is to be out in the open, which means above all, to be vulnerable."[30] In other words, the battle for recognition may prove to be perfectly aporetic, attempting to reinforce the very systems of control and marginalisation that it claims to fight. Such a perspective is very much of the moment, at a time when the various forms of political participation are in an unprecedented crisis, threatening the republican consensus on democratic representation.

Vanishing lines

In a space that is now globalised and split between different belief systems in terms of representation, images circulate, hybridise, and recompose themselves. Tensions are emerging between art, representation and the world at large that illustrate, for example, the growing polemic around the question of Western response to non-Western art. Under the auspices of well-meaning promotion of cultural diversity,[31] researchers from diverse disciplines (history, art history, anthropology, comparative literature), under the influence of post-modernism and post-colonialism in the 1980s in the United States, are rejecting the possibility of objective knowledge of the past or of other societies. In their opinion, the blurred lines between "real facts" and fiction that leads to the interpretation or evocation of these facts by those who did not experience them, means that anthropology should "give up its ambitions to being a science and become a form of poetic or literary writing."[32] They denounce Western Imperialism and point the finger at the legitimacy of any form of "cultural appropriation" – be it material, imaginary, interpretive, symbolic or aesthetic[33] –, by defending the idea that the only acceptable form of reception of non-Western art forms is that which stays as close as possible to the original meaning.

By following the guiding principle that the only legitimate use and interpretation of these art forms is that initially intended by the artist, there has been an upsurge in support for indigenous people who refuse to be represented by foreigners – whether it be in fiction or in scientific work (notably ethnographic) –, or to use references, motifs, styles or elements of language that come from the "immaterial heritage" of these people. Those who campaigned for a boycott of *Exhibit B*, for example, took umbrage with South

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29 Oskar Negt, *L'Espace public oppositionnel*, Paris, Payot, 2007.

30 Comité invisible, *L'Insurrection qui vient*, Paris, La fabrique, 2007, p. 102.

31 Martial Poirson and Sylvie Martin-Lahmani (eds.), "Quelle diversité culturelle sur les scènes européennes ?," *Alternatives théâtrales*, no. 133, October 2017.

32 Claire Fagnart, "Art et ethnographie," *Marges*, no. 6, 2007, p. 8-16.c

33 Read, in particular James Clifford, *Malaise dans la culture* [1988], Paris, École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1996.

African Brett Bailey's skin colour claiming it denied him the right to evoke the painful past of the black communities. "The source of the transmission cannot be dissociated from the message," according to Po Lomami who casts doubt on the capacity of a piece to denounce racism "when everyone refuses to take the colour of an artist into account." She came out against "a white artist appropriating black bodies to feed his art, adding that 'we are faced with yet another case of our history, representation and struggles being appropriated.'"[34] The installation was cancelled in England and cut short in France. The historian Pascal Blanchard lamented "The conclusion was that only a black person can understand racism."

The act of protesting, which has an eminently political meaning, is becoming a litigious matter. Nowadays, "multiculturalism, having become critical methodology, is like a system that distributes meaning that allots social claims to individuals, reducing their being to their identity and shifting all meaning towards an origin that is considered to be politically revealing."[35] In doing so, multi-cultural theories merely serve to "reinforce the powers-that-be, as they fall into the trap that was set for them: fighting oppression and alienation through symbolic house arrest – that of essentialist theme parks […] how can we ignore that political struggle is today, more than ever, a struggle of representations?"[36]

In France, the question of image property rights that makes the digitisation of pieces in the public domain even more pressing, stretches this to "intra-cultural" relations as can be seen in the claim by the Dordogne department to obtain proprietary rights on reproductions of the prehistoric paintings in the Lascaux caves.[37] The limits it places that these image rights place on the expansion of knowledge and freedom of artistic expression would lead us to fear, along with François Soulages, that soon "a photographer will no longer be able to photograph anything except what he or she already owns."[38]

Under the effects of a push toward a "cultural and social decolonisation," (Michel Côté), a museum's representation of otherness is no longer just the curator's affair. Where museum history remains silent, or is powerless to restore, art proposes to reveal, heightening awareness and provoke reactions by convoking a connection to memory. Denouncing Western imperialist ideology that falsifies or anesthetises the connection to the past has become a

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34 "*Exhibit B* is a show of white privilege, that confirms and reinforces that privilege," *Libération*, December 1st 2014. [Online] http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2014/12/01/exhibit-b-est-une-exhibition-du-privilege-blanc-qui-le-confirme-le-renforce_1154673 ; [Online] http://lmsi.net/BoycottHumanZoo [accessed 3 February 2015]. We refer you to the recent polemic surrounding the *Nyansapo Fest*, an Afro-Feminist festival planned for Paris, that had planned to reserve certain spaces for women of colour only. [Online] http://www.lemonde.fr/m-moyen-format/article/2017/06/06/du-mlf-a-nyansapo-ces-festivals-sans-mixite_5139199_4497271.html*…* [accessed 28 May 2017].

35 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël 2009, p. 213.

36 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radicant. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël 2009, p. 38.

37 [Online] http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/09/10/favorisons-la-libre-diffusion-de-la-culture-et-des-savoirs_4751847_3232.html [accessed 28 May 2017].

38 François Soulages, "Monstrations et expositions photographiques des violences," in Annette Becker and Octave Debary (eds.), *Montrer les violences extrêmes*, Paris, Créaphis, 2012, p. 51.

fundamental issue leading artists to contest the way museums treat history and cultural alterity. For example Fred Wilson, took over the museum space (*Mining the museum*, 1992), exhibiting artefacts that are normally kept in store rooms, and proposing scenographies that depicted the objects as "museum hostages" (*Colonial collection*, 1990).[39] Books stitched shut symbolise untold history in Kader Attia's work (*The Repair from Occident to Extra-occidental Cultures*, 2012 and *Repair. 5 Acts*, 2013) another denunciation of historical censorship. But beyond the "decolonisation" of artefacts or exhibition spaces, other artists are questioning both the valorisation of seeing, and the possibility to delegate the status of memorial support to material, long-lasting representations. As such, "a part of contemporary art is built by cultivating a sort of anger against the pretention of objects, museums and memorials to act as places of memory for men and their loss. Art prefers recovery, compression, re-composition or disappearance. […] the idea is for artists go against the idea that an object alone can contain memory."[40] In other words, memory goes beyond what the eye sees, and the struggle to remember relies on art's refusal to stick to only material, long-lasting representativeness. A piece is no longer reduced to what it shows and what physically lasts of it. It resides also what, inside, is hidden from view and self-destructs or fades away, as part of a "memorial strategy," making people feel "absences, like the presence of disappearance" according to Annette Becker and Octave Debary on the subject of Jochen Gerz's anti-monuments.[41] Art thus conceived can re-introduce a sense of temporality that the eternal presence of digital life is masking.

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39 Fred Wilson, "Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums," in Christian Kravagna (ed.), *The Museum as Arena. Artists on Institutional Critique*, Cologne, Walther König, 2001, p. 98.

40 Annette Becker and Octave Debary, "Jochen Gerz et la parole maudite," in Annette Becker and Octave Debary (eds.), *Montrer les violences extrêmes,* Paris, Créaphis, 2012, p. 123-130.

41 Annette Becker and Octave Debary, "Jochen Gerz et la parole maudite," in Annette Becker and Octave Debary (eds.), *Montrer les violences extrêmes,* Paris, Créaphis, 2012, p. 123-130.

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