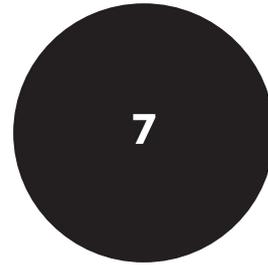




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Postcolonial Image Archives

When writing about problems stemming from colonial legacies, and about everything connected to that which we categorize under the loosely (sometimes much too loosely) defined term “post-colonial,” and especially when writing about the world of images and visual practices – we often fall into a trap. We find ourselves facing an unresolvable aporia – how can we preserve the images while retaining crucial ethical and political perspectives within our field of vision? How do we engage (affectively and politically) while maintaining a distance essential to understanding the particularly complex universe of these images and the histories they contain; their entangled and difficult fates, their multiple meanings and often ambivalent status? Can these perspectives be reconciled? What are we able to discern in “those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of the moonshine,” to quote Joseph Conrad? If we strive to understand the hypnotic force of particularly striking photographs, do we not lose the context in which they were created and forget the complex issues of responsibility? At the same time, aren’t strict moral and political assessments often equivalent to taking a side, robbing us of the ability to perceive complexity, heterogeneity, ambivalence?

There may not be one single answer to these questions. The essence of what we might call “postcolonial images” or “images in postcolonial situations” is – as it seems – contradiction, paradox, a certain heterogeneity and multiplicity of meaning. Questions that suspend meaning. We are in a space so fittingly described through the metaphor of crossroads; in a place where various paths, history, “layers of images” meet and intersect. “Between,” as Jacques Derrida wrote, “real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being,” in a space occupied by ghosts...

Working with postcolonial images and archives demands a particular sensitivity. It is also an experience that benefits from an unorthodox approach (and gaze) and a certain ease in traversing between different disciplines and discourses. This can be seen clearly in the section **Perspectives**, where we present two conversations that demonstrate the tenuousness of strict divisions between theory and practice

in the context of working in and on postcolonial image archives – in both cases we encounter people who consciously seek out a position “between.” Clémentine Deliss, the director of the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, discusses her experiences of working with museum archives, and about her project of transforming a traditionally ethnographic museum into one more open to art and unorthodox laboratory methodologies, “a living school,” in which the glass cases of museums are replaced by laboratory tables, and collecting and acquiring exhibits and artifacts is replaced by creating them, and critically reflecting on the potentialities of the archive. In the second conversation, writer, journalist, and curator Max Cegielski describes the Migrating University of Mickiewicz in Istanbul, and more broadly, his work of seeking out traces of “Polishness” in the Near (and further) East, following in the tracks of the aforementioned national bard Adam Mickiewicz (who died in Istanbul) and other, less well-known figures, such as the traveler and ethnographer Bronisław Grąbczewski. Their travels are not only a testament to a cosmopolitan identity, but also a certain vision of “Polishness” – open to heterogeneity, to the Orient, understanding its own limited, hybrid position.

An example of the search for a more capacious form for writing about postcolonial archives of images is certainly the essay of the German writer and curator Tobias Hering presented in the **Close-up** section. The text accompanied Filipa César’s project on the film archives of Guinea-Bissau. It is simultaneously a description of the history of this remarkable cinema, co-created, shortly after independence was attained (among others by Chris Marker). It is also an attempt at a meditation on the subject of postcolonial amnesia (and its images). Finally, it is an effort to contemplate its own position – that of a European writing about the cinema of a small African country. The pretext for this meditation was the call for papers for this issue of *View*, more specifically a small, seemingly meaningless grammatical error in a quote from Hering’s essay that changed, however, its meaning, recalling once again the necessity for sensitivity and responsibility (for words as well) in contexts of research on/in postcolonial images and archives. In another essay published in this section, the writer and reporter Olga Stanisławska – similarly to Deliss, Hering, and Cegielski, writing about postcolonial images from outside of the academia – recalls and elaborates on discussions surrounding Brett Bailey’s controversial installation, *Exhibit B*. The elliptical structure of the article invites the

reader to orbit successive “rings” of the text along with the author, opening out onto new potential contexts for interpreting *Exhibit B*, culminating in the question: when importing images of hegemonic oppression into critical discourse, is it possible to avoid the risk of repeating their oppressive effects? Stanisławska’s deliberations elegantly illuminate certain aporias in European reflections on the problematics of postcolonialism and its images, aporias, which become a part of that critical discourse. Another form of controversy is analyzed by the anthropologist Sławomir Sikora in a text about Jørgen Leth’s film *Haiti. Untitled*. It refers to a disconcerting expression, lurking within an effective form of film, in which Sikora discerns a modern-day incarnation of “ethnographic surrealism.” The intended subversiveness shifts, unobserved, into colonial nostalgia, as if in accordance with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s assertion that even a radically postmodernist subject remains a colonial subject... The thread of ambivalence and colonial nostalgia returns in the next piece in this section, authored by Małgorzata Grąbczewska. It is devoted in large part to Kazimierz Zagourski – a Polish photographer working in the Belgian Congo after the First World War. Again we are confronted with a contradiction: the cosmo-Pole who is open to foreignness is also the one who inadvertently confirms, through his photographs, colonial domination. Simultaneously, Grąbczewska finds an astonishing context for the typologies in his photographic ethnography: contemporary works of J. D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere and Lorna Simpson, where the colonial burden becomes an expression of freedom and newly created identities. The thread of post/colonial contradictions also appears in Tomasz Szerszeń’s piece, which analyzes Pier Paolo Pasolini’s African film essay, *Appunti per una Orestiada Africana* (1975), a piece suspended between political cinema and classical auto portraiture, between mythology and postcolonial critique, documentary and fiction, between giving a voice to the “dispossessed” and their objectification. The point of departure (and arrival) is the opening shot of the film, of the director’s reflection in the window of an African store. This image can be read both as a metaphor for a complicated, hybrid, postcolonial reality (and its representation), and as a kind of intellectual machine for the suspension of meaning, producing questions without clear answers.

The Close-up section opens with a text by T. J. Demos, a chapter of his excellent book *Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art*, where

he sketches out the idea of “colonial hauntology,” an extremely useful perspective in the study of postcolonial image archives, describing the necessity of reconciling oneself to the fact that the (colonial) past remains ever open, stubbornly haunting the present. In the essay published in *View*, Demos focuses on the work of Vincent Meessen pertaining to the particular “colonial amnesia” of Roland Barthes (Barthes’ maternal grandfather was Louis Gustave Binger, a French adventurer and colonial officer, who participated in France’s annexation of Cote d’Ivoire in 1880). This “French” theme emerges more fully in **Panorama**, where Tomasz Swoboda writes about the colonial universe reflected in the fantastical world of Raymond Rousset’s *Impressions d’Afrique* (and his posters for theatrical performances). Swoboda’s exhaustive analysis illuminates the context of the images, serving as a form of archaeology of the images of French colonialism. In this sense it elegantly supplements, not only the concepts of Demos (and Meessen), but also another essay in the Panorama section, a chapter of Hannah Feldman’s *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962*, which discusses French art and cultural politics in the context of decolonization processes and the war in Algeria. In this chapter, Feldman focuses on André Malraux and his Museum of Imagination, illuminating not only the context of decolonization, but also – what is particularly interesting – its colonial echoes. As Feldman notes: “We can situate Malraux’s model as both a *product of* as well, perhaps, as *constructive force behind* the colonial violence that permeated the decades during which he was writing and revising his study and putting its conclusions to work.”

In **Viewpoint**, we return to Congo, the “point zero” of all postcolonial narrations, to discuss the work of the Congolese artist Sammy Baloji. His project, *The Album*, is an excellent example of archival work with post/colonial images that is fueled by the strange temporality and ambivalences so characteristic of “colonial hauntology.” Whereas Baloji is an artist “from there,” surveying history and creating his own identity out of its ruins, Jan Simon, one of the participants of the aforementioned Migrating University of Mickiewicz, is a Polish artist, who has long been testing out “Polishness” in “postcolonial situations,” traveling to the East and the South. His project, *Along Transfer*, emerges from a recent trip to India and discusses a collection of signs and information tablets from various ships (or rather, their ruins), gathered at a junkyard of old ships in Alang.

In the final section, **Snapshots**, the theme of postcolonial images (and their archives) returns once more, in relation to the last Berlin Biennale discussed by Daniel Muzyczuk. Deconstructing the premises of the exhibits, he points out how the over usage of subversive contexts leads to the loss of their subversive potential. In the remaining reviews, Katarzyna Bojarska analyses two exhibitions, Anda Rottenberg's "Progress and Hygiene" and Georg Schneider's "Unsubscribe" (Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw); Luiza Kempieńska discusses the exhibition of Slovak sculptor Maria Bartuszova's work (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw), and Tatiana Pavlova, a Ukrainian historian of photography, presents the work of the photographic collective Shilo (the students of Borys Michailov).

Editorial Team

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