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"The Global Now": Apotheosis and Decline

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- 1 Are we in the process of already freeing ourselves from the grip of the "global"? In the Anthropocene age, when human beings are casting themselves, in real time, in the triple role of agents, witnesses and historians of the interactions of climate, living world and geology, the epistemological "too human" category of the "global" is experiencing both its apotheosis and the beginning of its decline, in favour of the "planetary". To be sure, the two categories are far from being incompatible, and what Anna Tsing has mischievously called "the charisma of the global"¹ is brandishing its effectiveness more than ever in the human sciences, as is illustrated by the recognition this notion is enjoying in western institutions and in one or two extremely interesting publications reported in this issue of *Critique d'art*.² But this "charisma" is qualified, not to say flawed, by new questions which are currently exercising knowledge, discourse and art praxis and, needless to add, the political word. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a pioneering figure of post-colonial feminist thinking, makes a distinction between the "globe", which is situated "in our computers" and cannot, as such, be "experienced", and the "planet", a living and inhabitable radical otherness, but only *on credit*, capable of encompassing "an inexhaustible taxonomy of names of forms of human otherness".³ "The global reveals to humans the sphere of the planetary", explains, in his turn, Dipesh Chakrabarty, who, after making the case for a reversal of focus leading us to "provincialize" Europe, adapts his method to the planetary scale to make the globe itself a very specific province of our solar system.⁴ If, for Spivak, the globe is an abstract form, which can be essentially reduced to liberal technoscience, Chakrabarty, for his part, is interested in the at once transcendent and immanent otherness of the globe—an actual threat and an actual hope.
- 2 It was after 1945 that consciousness of "globality" was imposed wholesale: not because it was new, needless to say, the globe having started to be criss-crossed from one end to the other and obsessively represented from the 16th century on, but because it has since

then been produced on every level of human action, by several types of collective subjects in the world and through a plethora of symbolic, communicational and institutional mediations. The atomic, nuclear age, triggered on 16 July 1945 at 5.29 a.m. in the desert of New Mexico, involves the forced universalization of the globe by western technoscience. The division between the First World and the Second World appeared illusory both for certain bitter people nostalgic for fascism and for one or two firebrand revolutionaries: technicization, combined with the normalization produced willy-nilly by formal democracy or by communism, would introduce the human species into the grey and wrinkle-free post-history which has since then haunted the anxious imagination of the West. Before long, the blue sphere suspended in the cosmos, photographed by Apollo 8, would rule in favour of Martin Heidegger who, in 1938, warned that "the image of the world", or *Weltbild*, is not simply *an* image of the world, but "the world conceived and grasped as an image".⁵ It was this humanist singularity which, according to him, hallmarked defective modernity. So have things come full circle? All for the good, according to those historians who, like William H. McNeill (1963), reckon that the transcendent position of universal history is finally both legitimate and possible.⁶ In the sphere of art, André Malraux offered a striking image of the domestication of the world and the totalization of history inherent to it, by considering from on high, scattered over the floor of his living-room, the reproductions of sculptural works from every place and every period.⁷ But it was also at the same moment—apotheosis and decline, here again—that this humanist and hegemonic universalism started to crack, with the Third World being posited as a fully-fledged historical subject. Aimé Césaire and Maurice Merleau-Ponty thus conceived a "latent universalism" which did not exclude "conflict" between specific universals. The consensual global thinking about history is increasingly being broken up by the work of "difference": by way of post-colonial studies and a history which, in refusing to be invariably written by the victors, seeks to give the "vanquished" their voice;⁸ through the asserted shift from a mechanical and externalizing comparativism to the more reflexive, more local and micro-historical thinking about cross-breeding, connection and symmetry;⁹ lastly, through material history, focusing on studying the functional and semantic transformations of objects in their tortuous trajectories and their different biotopes.

- 3 Since the 2000s, people championing the "global turning-point" in art history have unanimously regretted the delay registered by the discipline. Some strive to demonstrate that it would suffice to re-connect with a heritage forgotten since the 1930s: since the end of 19th century, the shift from event-based and individualized *Kunstgeschichte* to objective and anonymous *Kunstwissenschaft* has involved the quest for "universals" and transcendent psycho-physical categories, with the help of ethnology, folklore, the psychology of people and peoples, biology, and prehistory.¹⁰ A century later, it is up to the neurosciences, cognitivism, big data and more classical transcendent categories, deriving from formalism, to gather up, in a perforce reactionary way, the shattering and variegation of the forms and images of human history.¹¹ The "iconic" turning-point, in synergy with "visual studies", wrenches the western artwork out of its aesthete's sovereignty and its bourgeois autonomy, making it comparable to the figures and objects of other historical realities and of all the media. Some art historians disturb the epistemological "neutrality" of the discipline, by proposing racist postulates.¹² Others more wisely limit themselves to the critique of modernist primitivism and well-pitched exoticism, enabling them to distinguish the

Weltkunst [arts of the world] of the first half of the 20th century from the real "global art" of today.¹³ The most intransigent among them are not content with studying the artistic production of particular cultures in their specific contexts, but, in addition, do not permit themselves to think about them with the critical tools forged by western thinking against itself.¹⁴ Close to the "ontological turning-point" in anthropology (muddling the arrangements of the representation of the world with its "being"), this approach, despite itself, confines itself within a mirror-like relation to adversarial universalism.¹⁵ The fact is that, here as elsewhere, it is probably more interesting to focus on the *contradictory* epistemological and political premises of the discipline, whose resolutions do not have to be won in advance. The historian is neither a go-between nor a judge, the conflicts of thought and action being, above all, problems to be thought out in their complexity. From now on, how can we conjugate the quest for universals with the ethnic and even racial postulates of the discipline and the identitarian mission assigned to art by western society? The ideological double bind between universal vocation and ethnic identity of works is regarded by certain thinkers of the "global" as one of the most significant aspects of contemporary art, because, for better or for worse (it depends on the historical reflexivity involved, as is shown by David Joselit), it guarantees its visibility in the "supermarket of images".¹⁶

- 4 These are the two paradoxes of the "global": the more an art is culturally "different", the more it legitimizes the advent of the "global"; conversely, never, since European Romanticism, has this thing called "Art" enjoyed such an effective universality, since people started to criticize the hegemonic ideology of the West. This epistemological and political tension overlaps to a certain degree with the tension examined by Etienne Balibar in his works on universalist dialectics, working through exclusion and through inclusion, through the extension peculiar to the Universalism of the "One" and the intensity peculiar to that of the "many".¹⁷ Like Spivak, many are the historians (including art historians) who, in the linearity of a phenomenological tradition, push away the disembodied substantive of the "globe" in favour of the "world" and, more precisely, of the "worldling", because this involves this particular multiple, seething with individuals, relations and histories. But there is nothing to stop this tension between the "One" and the "many" from also taking on the lethal forms of racialization and/or commercialization. Fetishism is never very far away when we talk of art, and the real problems start when metaphors merrily free themselves from what they signify: "archipelagos", "navigations", "flows", "viral contaminations" and "forms of cannibalism" can fully wield their cognitive power, provided they do not restrict themselves to idly exercising their own evocative power, but face the ordeal of the concrete.¹⁸
- 5 The "global" is partly linked with modernity and, since the end of the Cold War, with what we call the "contemporary". On the scale of the globe, the former is sometimes criticized for its hegemonic project and sometimes claimed in the name of places that have long remained on the hidden side of history. When we evoke the "contemporary", it is the "global now" (Arjun Appadurai) that is being evoked, no longer believing in the progress of the Enlightenment and living in liberal euphoria, or, on the contrary, in presentist melancholy. But the idea would be to disrupt these narratives a little. Because history never ends and never ceases to be re-written, because the binary division of the world must, precisely, not be "binary", it is legitimate to think of cognitive circumnavigations not only as the transformation of the "world" into a "globe", but also as so many attempted curious encounters, undermined by self-doubt

and laden with ambivalence. Without claiming that the *tour* has been made and that it is time to "go home", and even less that it is a matter of forgetting about modern barbarism, let us suppose this primitive Cartesian passion: "stupor". A disconcerted passion, capable of everything, best and worst alike, a passion that may, through that "introspection" of the other praised by Claude Lévi-Strauss in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, allow us to discover the ignored "parts" of a lengthy modernity, which could potentialize our present.¹⁹

NOTES

1. Tsing, Anna. "The Global Situation", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 3, August 2000, p. 327-360
2. Joselit, David. *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization*, Cambridge : MIT Press, 2020, (October Books)
- Le Supermarché des images*, Paris : Ed. du Jeu de Paume : Gallimard, 2020, (edited by Emmanuel Alloa, Marta Ponsa, Peter Szendy. Preface by Quentin Bajac)
- Art, Global, Maoism And The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020 (edited by Jacopo Galimberti, Noemi De Haro-Garcia, and Victoria H.F. Scott)
3. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Planetarity", *Death of a Discipline*, New York : Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 71-102
4. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category", *Critical Inquiry*, no. 46, autumn 2019, p. 1-31
5. Heidegger, Martin. "L'Epoque des conceptions du monde », *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, Paris : Gallimard, 1962
6. McNeill, William H. *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1963
7. See: Grasskamp, Walter. *The Book on the Floor: André Malraux and the Imaginary*, Los Angeles : The Getty Research Institute, 2016
8. Wachtel, Nathan. *La Vision des vaincus : les Indiens du Pérou devant la Conquête espagnole (1530-1570)*, Paris : Gallimard, 1971
9. "Connected History", "crossed history", "history into equal parts" and reflections on the conjugation of the scales of the global and of micro-history, which these approaches are part of.
10. *Global Artistic Circulations and the History of Art*, Farnham : Ashgate, 2015 (edited by Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel). And for a genealogy of the exterior see: Pfisterer, Ulrich. "Origins and Principles of World Art History - 1900 (and 2000)", *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Amsterdam : Valiz, 2008, p. 69-89 (edited by K. Zijlmans, W. van Damme)
11. Onians, John. *Atlas of World Art*, London : Laurence King Publishing, 2004 ; Summers, David. *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, London : Phaidon Press, 2003 ; <https://artlas.huma-num.fr/fr/>
12. Michaud, Eric. *Les Invasions barbares : une généalogie de l'histoire de l'art*, Paris : Gallimard, 2015; Leeb, Susanne. *Die Kunst der Anderen : 'Weltkunst' und die anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne*, Berlin : PoLYpeN, 2016 ; Id., "Primitivism and Humanist Teleology in Art History around 1900", *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 12, 2015, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/leeb.pdf>

13. Belting, Hans. "From World Art to Global Art. A View on a New Panorama" (2013), <http://whatsnext.net/011>.
 14. Elkins, James. *Is Art History Global?*, London : Routledge, 2007
 15. As has been brilliantly demonstrated by David Graeber, "Radical alterity is just another way of saying 'reality': a reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro", *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 1-41
 16. See: Juneja, Monica. "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'", <http://archive.summeracademy.at/media/pdf/pdf789.pdf>
 17. For example: Balibar, Etienne. *Des Universels : essais et conférences*, Paris : Galilée, 2016
 18. On the emancipation and migration of the metaphor from one text to another, see Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern" in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, London, Tate, 2009, and its use by Okwui Enwezor in his response to the questionnaire of the magazine *October* about the "Contemporary", no. 130, Fall 2009, p. 33-40. And about a good critique of the dematerialisation of "flows", as they operate, for example, in the thinking of Arjun Appadurai (*Modernity at Large : Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 1996); see the above-mentioned article by Anna Tsing, "The Global Situation".
 19. In his famous lecture, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, fondateur des sciences de l'homme" (1962).
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Maria Stavriniaki is an HDR lecturer at the Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, where she teaches contemporary art history. She is working on the intersection of art, human sciences, and political thought, with a very special interest in the issues of time and history. Her most recent book is *Saisis par la préhistoire: enquête sur l'art et le temps des modernes* (Presses du réel, 2019; in the process of being translated into English, Zone Books). She co-curated the exhibition *Préhistoire: une énigme moderne* (Centre Pompidou, 2019). At the present time, she is interested in the historicity of the 1950s, as well as modernity as an "atomic age".