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Fetishize This!

Artifacts and Other Agents
at the Edge of Art

In the early nineteenth century, Hegel noted that it had become impossible to kneel down and worship not only in front of sculptures of the Greek deities but also before images of the Christian God, Christ, or Mary.¹ Religious and philosophical thought had moved beyond man-made images of the absolute in anthropomorphic form; however, the “worship” of such images as works of art was a growing industry. The Romantic “cult of art” was setting artworks apart from other artifacts more drastically than before. This was both an enrichment and an impoverishment. The museums of the early nineteenth century, such as the postrevolutionary Musée du Louvre and the Altes Museum in Hegel’s own Berlin, brought out certain qualities in their holdings while suppressing others. An abstraction machine, the museum extracts artifacts from their former social lives and creates new relations among them qua artworks.²

Today’s museum is being reconceptualized as old divisions are increasingly contested—between, for instance, art and design, or Western art and non-Western artifacts. Concurrently, there is a renewed theoretical interest in the agency of things and objects as agents or actants.³ The time is ripe, then, for a reconsideration of the ways in which museified objects functioned, the kinds of lives they led, and the forms of secondary agency that were permitted or withheld from them by different museological conventions and protocols. Do certain arcane modern concepts and practices still hold use value in an age in which you can enter the Louvre not just in Paris but also in Abu Dhabi? I want to reexamine and redeploy in particular the concept of the fetish (and fetishism) against those thing theorists and object-oriented ontologists who throw out the baby of dialectical differentiation with the bathwater of modern binaries.

Theorists from Charles de Brosses to Hegel used the term “fetishism” to denote the worship of seemingly “random” objects, often natural objects found, in African cultures.⁴ In an article from 1842, Karl Marx characterized fetishism, in the de Brosses and Hegelian sense, as “the religion of sensuous desire”—an earthbound religion before the abstractions of later belief systems.⁵ That same year, Marx was planning a critical article on Christian art, which contained excerpts from books such as Carl Friedrich von Rumohr’s *Italienische Forschungen* (1827–32), C. A. Böttiger’s *Ideen zur Kunst-Mythologie* (1826–36), Johann Jakob Grund’s *Die Malerey der Griechen* (1810), and de Brosses’s classic 1760 treatise on African fetishism.⁶ Marx had also encountered the notion of fetishism elsewhere, notably in Hegel. For de Brosses and Hegel, the notion of fetishism denoted a state

of religion and culture before the emergence of art properly speaking; a stage lower than idolatry, before humans formed matter.

For Hegel, consequently, fetishism had no place in the history of art; at best, it featured in the prehistory of religion.⁷ However, the fetish’s place outside the domain of “art proper” points precisely to an aesthetic problem that Hegelian idealism could address only indirectly: the problem of objects that appear to follow an obscure logic, that stand out from the natural world without reducing it to the status of passive receptacle for an ideal imprinted on it. If the artwork for Hegel was a “sinnliches Scheinen der Idee” (sensory appearance of the idea), the fetish falls short of being the spiritualized symbols on which idealist aesthetics focused.

Much later, in the first volume of *Capital* (1867), Marx polemically applied the notion to the commodity and its “theological whims,” addressing an issue that is as aesthetic as it is political: while the value of commodities is determined by the labor invested in them, this labor does not “show up” in the object, whose price appears to be determined from its “social intercourse” with other commodities.⁸ The citizen of bourgeois capitalist society is as beholden to illusions concerning material objects as tribal Africans are. It is this account that has given Marx his reputation as an archetypal modern critic of the fetish. Bruno Latour has argued that such critics variously denounce the naive belief of “fetishists” in the power of things (for the “power” of these things derives from human labor and agency), and critique those who attribute agency and autonomy to humans (for are we not in fact enslaved to things, to the fetishism of *verdinglichten* social relations?).⁹ Rather than being a case of dastardly theorists engaging in a contradictory “double denunciation,” this oscillation embodies the messy dialectic of the thing as frozen subjectivity and liquefied objectivity or as a nonhuman quasi agent. Furthermore, there is a different notion of fetishism in Marx’s work, which cannot be reduced to the denunciation of reification.

In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), Marx famously defined *praxis* as “human sensuous activity,” and he came to think of his own work as a philosophy of praxis, and as philosophy-as-praxis.¹⁰ The phrasing clearly recalls his definition of fetishism three years prior, but with a crucial twist: desire becomes activity. Thus we have two seemingly opposed strands emerging from his early readings on fetishism: on the one hand, the familiar trope of the commodity fetish, based on alienated wage labor that does not “show” in the commodity; hence its seeming autonomy as fetish, whereas its value is in fact determined by labor. On the other hand, praxis can be

thought of as an “activated fetishism,” or *fetishization* as activity rather than fetishism as a state; such fetishization does not merely remain entangled in the world through desire but seeks to actively transform it. This active fetishism goes against and beyond labor.

Here we see that recent attempts by “speculative” thinkers to identify the whole of modern philosophy with Kantian “correlationism” are fundamentally faulty. Armen Avanessian, for instance, critiques Kantian epistemology’s “correlation between subject and object, of pure reason and intuition”; while the *Critique of Pure Reason* “limits the space of our experience to what can be thought, to the conditions of the possibility of our thinking,” aesthetic experience has to step into the breach—without altering the fundamental parameters.¹¹ Avanessian argues that what is needed is not an aesthetics (which is apparently irredeemably Kantian) but a *poetics* that “refers to a making of something in which the boundary from non-being to being is crossed,” and that this “poietic praxis transcends pure thinking and materializes whenever it makes its object, and be it a praxis of pure thinking.”¹² However, Marx and many Marxists (among others) already considered praxis in such terms. Aesthetics was never limited to theorizing a certain kind of rarefied experience; it encompassed aesthetic practice as well as theory. It was *fetishization*: the making, unmaking, and remaking of things.

1. Du culte muséal des objets fétiches

We might say, with Brian Holmes, that the modern museological regime was based on “the notion that an object, by its distinction from all others, can serve as a mirror for an equally singular and independent subject.”¹³ This would be the fundamental formula of modern aesthetic correlationism. The artwork was able to function as such a mirror precisely because it appeared to be uniquely endowed with a subjectivity of its own; it was a mesmerizing subject-object that was tantalizingly close to, yet ultimately distinct from, “primitive” magical fetishes and the fetishism of the commodity.

The museology of the Romantic era built on older developments. Works by the Old Masters had been prized possessions of royal and noble collections since the Renaissance. However, as Quatremère de Quincy noted with some concern in 1796, works were being torn from their traditional networks of social relations and cultural habits at an unprecedented rate, due to the Napoleonic conquests and the emergence of the public art museum. Quatremère’s intervention was aimed directly against the French state requi-

sitioning artworks in occupied countries and transporting them to France, where the Louvre was to house masterpieces from the Ghent Altarpiece to the Laocoön.¹⁴

The Romantic cult of art put the artwork in a category of its own, as a thing touched and shaped by genius. Hegel—though not himself a Romantic—articulated this fundamental division from a historical point of view when addressing the decline of the Catholic Church and the emancipation of art in the early sixteenth century. From a Catholic point of view, some kind of kitschy ex-voto is as good as or better than a Raphael, whose work has qualities that went beyond—and sometimes against—its religious functions.¹⁵ For Hegel, who was the product of Prussian Protestantism, much of Catholic culture was not too dissimilar from the fetishism of African tribes that worshipped seemingly random objects.¹⁶ Hegel thus exploited the potential of de Brosses’s Enlightenment critique of the base origins of religion to pinpoint contemporary survivals of such practices.

The Portuguese term *feitiço* means “made by human hand.” Referring to objects of witchcraft, it morphed into the pidgin term *fetisso* in the context of the colonial encounter with Africa in the late fifteenth century.¹⁷ In this respect, fetish and artifact are virtually synonyms. Artifact, from the Italian *artefatto*, combines the Latin stem *arte* with *factum*, for made or produced: something “made with skill” by human ingenuity. Curiously, de Brosses etymologically related *fétiche* to *chose fée* (fairy object or magical object) so as to stress that the African fetishes were *chosen*, like readymades or objects trouvés, rather than *made*.¹⁸ In a distorted way, this may reflect that many African religious practices revolved around magical, sacred substances that could be kept either in sculptures or in other objects, such as gourds.¹⁹ There is thus always an element of cultural, semiotic labor—but not necessarily of object-making in a sculptural sense. The human mind may be a greater artificer than the human hand.

The relationship between (Western) artworks and (non-Western) fetishes continued to haunt modern discourse and practice. In the early twentieth century, artists, critics, dealers, and collectors revalued certain types of objects from Africa (and later from Oceania and elsewhere) as genuine works of art—a process that spans from the early appropriation work by Cubists and Expressionists, via Marius de Zayas’s pioneering exhibition “African Negro Art” at the Photo-Secession in New York in 1914 and Carl Einstein’s 1915 book *Negerplastik* (Negro Sculpture), to the Surrealists’ profound appreciation for ethnographica and the Museum of Modern Art’s 1935 exhibi-



Fig. 1: "African snail fetish," Tristan Tzara's collection, Paris.

After World War II, artists such as Barnett Newman continued the modernist tendency of privileging the "primitive fetish" as more aesthetically productive than most Western art: "The artist today has more feeling and consequently more understanding for a Marquesas islands fetish than for the Greek figure."²² Newman asserted a hierarchy between art and nonart within the realm of non-Western artifacts: the works of (male) American Indian visual artists had to be separated from the craft of "women basket weavers," and it was important to make it clear that "the God image, not pottery, was the first manual act."²³ This division should be seen in conjunction with the dividing line that Newman sought to draw between art and everyday (design) objects.

Newman was fiercely critical of Marcel Duchamp's work, as well as the Bauhaus ideology, which held sway at museums—for instance, MoMA organized the exhibitions "Useful Objects of American Design under \$10" (1940) and "Good Design" (1951). Equating the readymade with the exhibition of design objects, Newman bemoaned the fact that "we now have museums that show screwdrivers and automobiles and paintings. [...] I feel

tion also titled "African Negro Art." The term "fetish" continued to be used, but the concept of "random objects worshipped by Africans" was now adapted and identified with specific types of objects—in particular "nail fetishes" (wooden sculptures riddled with nails).²⁰ This had an added attraction for the Dadaists and Surrealists since it suggested that what had been newly reconceptualized as African art could be used to challenge the conventions of Western academic art. Closely associated with Charles Ratton's Paris gallery of African and tribal art, and subscribing to the Communist Party's anti-imperialist stance, the Surrealists exhibited kitschy relics of colonial Catholicism as "European fetishes."²¹



Fig. 2: "European fetishes" from *La vérité sur les colonies* (1931).

that it's time for the Museum of Modern Art, for instance, to put on an exhibition of machine guns."²⁴ For Newman, showcasing the work of "Bauhaus screwdriver designers" at MoMA was a category mistake—just as it was a category mistake to consider as art the work of (female) basket weavers.²⁵ Here it would be beside the point to pillory Newman for his unquestioned binaries and macho posturing. What matters in the present context is that his writings give a good sense of the structural instability of the whole categorical apparatus of art and of objects suitable for "museification."

Together, the readymade, the Bauhaus screwdriver, and the handwoven basket come to negatively define the modernist artwork, which transcends

their mundaneness. The modern work of art is more akin to the “Marquesas islands fetish” in refusing use value and asserting its sensuous plenitude. For Adorno, the artwork is a strange and somewhat dysfunctional—or excessively functional—commodity, precisely insofar as it still has traits of the religious fetish and thus goes beyond mere commodity fetishism.²⁶ This suggests, philosopher Stewart Martin stresses, that art is “a residual survival of magical fetishism within a modern culture of commodity fetishism,” and that “the fetishism of art is distinct from the fetishism of magic as well as from the fetishism of commodities.”²⁷ But what if we were to go back to the root meaning of the term fetish? As Jean Baudrillard noted, the term “has undergone a curious semantic distortion. Today it refers to a force, a supernatural property of the object and hence to a similar magical potential in the subject, through schemas of projection and capture, alienation and reappropriation. But originally it signified exactly the opposite: a *fabrication*, an artifact, a labour of appearances and signs.”²⁸

The real object of Baudrillard’s critique is Marx and his notion of commodity fetishism. In contrast to what Baudrillard suggests, Marx and his followers always emphasized that the commodity fetish is the product of (hidden) labor, which has to be uncovered through analysis and action. Furthermore, as suggested in the above, Marx’s notion of praxis can be interpreted in terms of active fetishization (as opposed to fetishism as a state). Baudrillard’s own version of such fetishistic activity reflects the semiotic turn in the humanities and the rise of immaterial labor: he interprets *fainctise* as trickery, as the “cultural sign labor” that produces the fetish.²⁹ We are dealing with semiotic labor—the work of signification. However, in the 1970s and after, Baudrillard would give ever more totalizing accounts of “the code,” whose semiotic oppositions seemed to be programmed a priori, without any room for human agency. Baudrillard came to fetishize the fetishism of the code.³⁰

Like the notion of the artifact, that of the fetish can thus be used in an encompassing and general sense. Yet in the history of Western art, artworks are seen as a category that is somewhat distinct from other objects, since the various arts, while being based in specific materials and skills, were seen as vehicles of spiritual achievement or genius.³¹ Art as a general concept distinguished those operating within its conceptual and institutional parameters from mere craftsmen. There is a chasm between Hegel’s host or kitsch relics and a Raphael painting. In the twentieth century, this distinction was *reincorporated into art itself* with Duchamp’s readymades. The readymade is an

industrial artifact chosen by the artist, who comes up with “a new thought for that object.”³² As John Roberts has argued, this also means that two forms of labor overlay one another—traditionally identified as “productive” labor and artistic labor.³³ Duchamp’s artistic work is indeed a semiotic operation; the commodity object becomes its own sign, and over time its sign value—to use a Baudrillardian term—vastly outperforms its original price.

If Marx’s account of commodity fetishism condenses two illusions, that of the *sensuousness of commodities* and that of the *autonomy of the value form* from living labor, and if Adorno’s aesthetic theory privileges the first illusion and deploys it against the second, in art after Duchamp there is a Baudrillardian triumph of the fetishism of the code.³⁴ This raises serious questions about the value of human labour (fetishistic practice) and even of human life.

2. Entrist Strategies and Exit Strategies

Arjun Appadurai has argued for a “methodological fetishism” that would consist in following “the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories.”³⁵ Here, I will briefly discuss some trajectories that cross the line between contemporary art and nonart in one direction or the other. Duchamp asked himself whether there could be works that would not be works *of art*.³⁶ In the case of museums, clearly many are not museums *of art*. During the last ten to twenty years, it has become common for artists to do projects in slightly dusty ethnographic, natural history, or community museums.

In the late 1960s, Lothar Baumgarten started investigating display strategies in ethnographic museums—resulting, for instance, in a slide piece based on the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (*Unsettled Objects*, 1968–69). These forays were not the result of invitations from the institutions.³⁷ In recent decades, however, it has become quite common for artists to receive invitations from curators of “nonart” museums such as Clémentine Deliss during her tenure at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt am Main, or sometimes from third parties, such as freelance curators. Biennials and other major exhibitions may also annex nonart museums wholesale, such as the 8th Berlin Biennale in 2014 and its mostly feeble attempts to create an aura of criticality by infiltrating the ethnographic museum in the Dahlem neighborhood of former West Berlin before its contents are moved to the rebuilt Stadtschloss in the center of the city. Strategies, display and viewing habits,

and conceptual frameworks from the sphere of contemporary art are then imported into the nonart museum.

What is the aim of such an exercise? In a context where curators feel the need to address the obsolete and often colonial and imperialist nature of institutions as well as their collections and modes of ordering the world, the “task” of the artist is often implicitly, or explicitly, to provide a “fresh” and “critical” perspective, to rearrange the collection, to provide other ways of looking and structuring. It is no surprise that when the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (outside Brussels) first started to seriously consider its role as a colonial relic, the exhibition project “ExitCongoMuseum” (2000) drafted contemporary artistic practices to provide critical perspectives.³⁸ In the sphere of solo projects, at the Manchester Museum, Mark Dion’s *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacy* (2005) brought together many disparate collections and objects, from botanical models to ethnographica.³⁹ The latter project, in particular, raised troubling questions about collecting, colonialism, and appropriation. Dion’s installation and accompanying publication reframe the seeming eclecticism and obsolescence of many of these artifacts—and of the institution containing these objects—in neo-Surrealist terms, questioning them while at the same time providing them with a kind of secondary aura.

In “making it” into Dion’s installation, some of the objects demonstrated real agency; they stood out or at least fit into the overall constellation through which Dion modulates their meaning and adds or subtracts qualities. The agency of objects is, of course, secondary; it is the agency of the artifact, of the fetish, as something that is the product of human activity.⁴⁰ Even in natural history museums, a rock sample, by being selected, is thereby transformed into a geological readymade. It is further subjected to all kinds of framing devices. Around 1800, for instance, the rocks in the Teylers Museum in Haarlem—an institution of the Enlightenment—were put in display cases. Previously, the museum privileged active handling and participation by the visitors, but now the relation with the items in the collection became primarily visual or scopic.⁴¹

The modernist museum exacerbated this privileging of the visual, and Willem de Rooij’s installation *Intolerance* (2010–11) at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin exacerbated it to the point where it becomes self-reflexive. The installation combined Hawaiian feathered artifacts from the ethnographic museum in Dahlem with the work of seventeenth-century Dutch “bird painter” Melchior d’Hondecoeter.⁴² Both types of objects were status



Fig. 3: Willem de Rooij, *Intolerance*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 2010.

symbols in their respective societies, and they were both implicated in early forms of global trade. D’Hondecoeter’s paintings, for example, show exotic birds that had been imported to the Dutch Republic from other continents. While such parallels did not make the montage of these two specific groups of objects less stark or striking, they were subjected to similar museological procedures. The code that De Rooij employed for this exhibition was that of the perfect white cube, of the museum as decontextualization tool or abstraction machine. Displayed without much additional information in well-lit display cases set into the same wall that displayed De Hondecoeter’s paintings, the Hawaiian artifacts were shown as objects that are as aesthetically rich and valid as the Dutch painter’s work. This re-performing of modernist museological conventions creates an experience hovering between half-forgotten familiarity and irritating estrangement. However, it does not engage with the actual processes of accumulation and de-territorialization related to the works.

By contrast, the exhibition “The Potosí Principle” (2010–11), curated by Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer, and Andreas Siekmann, was a sprawling assemblage of artifacts and artworks that primarily came from South



Fig. 4: "The Potosí Principle," Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2010–11

America.⁴³ The core was constituted by Baroque paintings from Potosí, the silver mining town in Bolivia that was key to the Spanish colonial economy; the curators linked this site of "primitive accumulation" to its contemporary equivalents in Latin America, China, and the global art world.⁴⁴ "The Potosí Principle" foregrounded the relation of the extraction of value from the soil and from people with the production of visual artifacts, such as the Baroque paintings that function both as propaganda and yet another form of accumulation. Hung from scaffolding and accompanied by a seemingly nonhierarchical mix of texts and diagrams, the paintings were fetishized not as masterpieces worthy of high-art status (they are usually seen as "derivative" colonial works) but as indices of larger political, economic, and cultural processes.

"The Potosí Principle" used the art space as a site that can show, com-

bine, and reflect on a wide variety of objects and images. This engagement with objects is as aesthetic as it is political—"aesthetic" not in the sense of an aestheticist fixation on a few choice qualities of a few choice artifacts, but in the more fundamental sense of a sounding out of the potential as well as limits of sensuous presence and visibility.

Is this still art as we thought we knew it, and is the context still an *art museum*? The Museum of American Art, Berlin, a project by a Serbian artist who uses the name "Walter Benjamin" among other aliases, tries to undermine the art space from within. The Berlin museum and its "franchises" in different cities and host institutions present reproductions and re-presentations of classic modern artworks and museum displays. If Willem de Rooij is interested in the potential of the modern museum and gallery to abstract the works displayed in it, the Museum of American Art's meta-installations are presented within the narrative that the age of the modern museum and art is over. As "Walter Benjamin" puts it:

Art museums didn't always exist—they are basically a recent invention, and it seems they have now exhausted their purpose, become obsolete, alongside the very notion of art. A few of them might be preserved and conserved as examples of what once was art and the art museum, thus closing the other end at some point. But most of the existing museums would have to transform into another kind of institution of memory. [...] Those places could use any kind of exhibits/artifacts: 'original works of art,' replicas, copies, facsimiles, documents, objects, moving images. Regardless of what their previous meanings were, the character of these artifacts would now be closer to the notion of 'specimen' than to the notion of 'work of art.'⁴⁵

The Museum of American Art appropriates or copies many modern "masterpieces," and creates full-scale or reduced copies of classic modern museum spaces, from MoMA exhibitions, to El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in Hannover, to the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale from 1962. Going back further in history, the museum has also (re)presented depictions of the Belvedere gallery at the Vatican, where, during the Renaissance, the popes began to display rediscovered antique statues such as the Laocoön and the Apollo Belvedere. "In today's terms, we would consider these statues to be the first readymades and, in fact, the first objects of art."⁴⁶ But if such artifacts were the first readymades, then what would contemporary



Fig. 5: Museum of American Art, Berlin, *Sites of Modernity* (collection of the Museum of Antiquities) (1502–2010), 2010, Installation, dimensions variable. Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

artworks be for future post-art institutions? A kind of neo-ethnographica? Or, in fact, *liberated readymades* that are no longer all about the art/nonart distinction and auratization and hyper-reification, but about bringing out a wider set of qualities and conditions, as in “The Potosí Principle”?

Like the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Museum of American Art has exhibited installations dealing with both modernist museum displays and the Vatican’s Belvedere gallery; “Walter Benjamin’s” historical narrative seems to provide a script for the Van Abbemuseum, which has often given copies pride of place, and is intent on using the museum for other purposes than aesthetic self-celebration.

Rather than a space of calm and critical reflection, as in De Rooij’s practice, the museum becomes an agent for action. One example of this was Tania Bruguera’s transformation of the Van Abbemuseum into the Museum of Arte Útil (2013–14), which documented an array of activist practices and attempts to reintegrate art into society as something other than an excessively expensive commodity fetish.⁴⁷

Bruguera’s Museum of Arte Útil rhetorically transformed the institution by putting wooden partitions in front of its white walls, suggesting

a future in which art has been transformed into a useful tool and in which the museum has been transformed into “another kind of institution of memory.” Within this architecture, Bruguera presented documentation of important aesthetico-political practices from the 1960s to the present, but the whole conceptual framework and visual manifestation of her “museum” represented an unfortunate relapse into crude binaries: decadent aestheticism versus useful art; contemplation versus action; white walls versus rough wooden fences; the urinal as useless readymade versus the urinal as useable urinal. In fact, Bruguera has quite literally put the Duchampian urinal back in the bathroom, both at the Queens Museum and at the Van Abbemuseum. But instead of reversing the readymade in this nondialectical manner, wouldn’t the more productive approach be to potentialize and liberate it, even more than De Rooij’s *Intolerance?* This would mean allowing the artifact to engage with its contradictions and the different forms of labor and practice that are embedded within it.

The Arte Útil project is marked by theoretical and practical impoverishment rather than by any transformative aesthetic or sociopolitical potential. Regardless, Bruguera’s insistence on more traffic between the context of art and other social frameworks and fields is to the point. The museum becomes a node in an indexical network that no longer revolves exclusively, or even primarily, around the preservation and presentation of an exclusive group of rare and precious objects.

3. Post-Readymades and Neo-Readymades

The Duchampian readymade redefined the artwork by engaging with preexisting commodity fetishes instead of making new works, and this led to a higher fetishism in some of its offspring, such as commodity art à la Koons. However, precisely by problematizing the nature of artistic creation in relation to industrial or manual labor, it also initiated a shift from the artwork as object to *art work*—art as work involving the production, reproduction, maintenance, and circulation of a wide variety of fetishes. Who is



Fig. 6: Tania Bruguera, *Arte Útil*, 2009/2016. Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

more Duchampian: Jeff Koons, with his perfect stainless steel bunnies, or Barbara Bloom who, on the cover of the catalogue for the 1986 exhibition “Damaged Goods” (which helped launch Koons’s career) showed a cleaning woman in a car salesroom, thus foregrounding the feminine maintenance work that goes into keeping fetish objects *shiny*?⁴⁸

In his anthropological theory of art, Alfred Gell notes that artifacts are indexes in the Peircean sense: “artefacts have the capacity to index their ‘origins’ in an act of *manufacture*.”⁴⁹ Precisely insofar as they are *feitiço*, made by human hand, artworks and other artifacts “motivate abductions” about their meaning and function—about actual past meanings and functions and possible present and future meanings and functions.⁵⁰ The index is the social sign par excellence.⁵¹ It cannot be relegated to a world of “pure” semiosis.⁵² Insofar as they index their origins, artifacts or fetishes are also *temporal and historical signs*. Ethnography and anthropology have often viewed other cultures and their artifacts as ahistorical, trapped in a perpetual present, but this is an ideologically motivated failure to engage with *other* histories. For Marx, the commodity fetish was a *broken index* insofar as it failed to reveal the real reasons for its “behavior” on the market. Many forms of critical aesthetic practice try to counteract this form of fetishism through active fetishization. “The Potosí Principle,” for instance, treats artifacts as indexes that don’t just point toward repressed origins but are also open to being re-performed, accruing new layers of labor and meaning—fetishes with a future.

A practice that embodies this open-ended re-performance is that of Agency, a Brussels-based platform formed by Kobe Matthys in 1992, which examines the modern intellectual-property regime. Agency collects “things” that have been subject to copyright litigation, and “calls [these] *things* forth from its list via varying assemblies inside exhibitions, performances, publications, etc.”⁵³ These things aren’t necessarily single physical objects—they range from computer-generated bingo cards and genetically engineered bacteria to cases pertaining to folklore, tradition, and tribal culture.⁵⁴ For instance, *Thing 001635 (Australian Coat of Arms)* “concerns the conflict between indigenous elders and the Commonwealth about the use of totems in the Australian Coat of Arms.” This case was discussed in Betonsalon in Paris with a number of “concerned guests,” which included anthropologists. A related case, *Thing 001390 (Ten dollar bank note)*, revolves around legal action by the sculptor Terry Yumbulul against the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Aboriginal Artists Agency Limited for violating his copyright. The



thing 001635 (Australian Coat of Arms)

Fig. 7: Agency, *Thing 001635 (Australian Coat of Arms)*

agency had sold one of his ceremonial morning-star poles to the Australian Museum in Sydney and sub-licensed the copyright to the bank to use the image on a ten-dollar banknote that commemorated the first European settlement in Australia.⁵⁵

While Agency participates in exhibitions, its displays are only one aspect (or manifestation) of the *assemblies* that it convenes around these things. These assemblies bring together a disparate array of objects and subjects (or things and people). A “specimen” of one or more “things” on wooden tables is usually part of the assembly, as well as a live event during which experts and concerned parties debate the ins and outs of a particular case. Agency’s artifacts and their uses having triggered legal actions that eventually generate Agency’s assemblies, in which lawyers, artists, theorists, and other concerned parties discuss the thing in question—or become part of it. The Heideggerian-Latourian meaning of “thing” as something that is a “matter of concern” is of course part of Agency’s theoretical framework.⁵⁶ Its assemblies are parliaments of things.

“Thing” here is not a synonym of “object,” it is rather something that does not fit into the “ordered ranks of objecthood.”⁵⁷ While such things have surprising agency, it is a secondary agency, dependent on human action and interpretation. In Agency’s assemblies, the things trigger responses and become coproducers of discourse by eliciting statements from a variety of participants (via the invitations sent out by Kobe Matthys). This is of course a post-Duchampian practice. Agency is not interested in incorporating these things into art as readymades; the point is not to “turn them into artworks,” nor to reverse the procedure and “put the urinal back in the bathroom,” but to examine semiotic artifacts through re-performing them, and to problematize semiotic labor while engaging in it. In Agency’s practice, it is a small step from a totem pole to a copyrighted algorithm or genetically engineered organism. These are all part of the same regime. Nothing “purely analog” remains in a “post-digital” culture where the

distinction between online and offline has become extremely fuzzy.

As writer and theorist Florian Cramer has argued, the post-digital artifact is indexical to the core. “The ‘maker movement’—as manifested in fab labs, but also at zine fairs—represents a shift from the symbolic, as the preferred semiotic mode of digital systems (and of which the login is the perfect example), toward the indexical: from code to traces, and from text to context.”⁵⁸ Using digital technology or not, the most relevant contemporary practices conceive of the fetish as a thing that is subject to continuous re-making or re-performance. While this “circulationist” logic has deep roots in the analog culture industry, it was exacerbated and liberated by digitization. In the process, the artwork has been reconceptualized as art *work* that engages with the indexical trajectories of fetishes and with the conflicts embedded in them—tracing, showing, and discussing them in art spaces. Methodological fetishism engages with such post-digital trajectories, including the geographical and cultural distances traversed by digital fetishes.

Occasionally, the operations and transformations that are involved raise more questions than they care to answer. A case in point is Renzo Martens’s Institute for Human Activities (IHA), which aims to turn a palm-oil plantation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) into an art center using the rhetoric and logic of gentrification as well as the creative industries and Richard Florida’s “creative class.” To fund this development, Martens presents sculptures made by former plantation workers in Western gallery and museum shows—not the original clay sculptures, but 3-D prints in chocolate. These cacao neo-fetishes are combined with sparse, suggestive, and mystifying information about the entire “chain” of the production process, particularly the situation at the IHA’s site in the DRC. Some of this may be tactical, as the IHA was chased from its first location by a local company with ties to the palm-oil giant Unilever, but that does not prevent the project as a whole from collapsing under the weight of its contradictions.

In an earlier video, *Episode Three: Enjoy Poverty* (2008), Martens played himself as a neocolonial figure with a messiah complex who tries to get Africans to profit from their own poverty by taking their own pictures and selling them to Western agencies and media; in the film, we watch the predictable failure of this scheme. Now, we are invited to believe that the IHA is qualitatively different; that it is a serious attempt to effect change. Martens, however, still uses tired strategies of over-identification that sabotage this possibility, such as accepting chocolate by Barry Callebaut (a company that isn’t exactly known for its ethics) and including in the shows large



Fig. 8: Installation by Renzo Martens/IHA as part of the exhibition “Confessions of the Imperfect: 1948–1989–today,” Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2014–15. Archives Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

wall texts that read “Made possible by barry callebaut”—asking us to accept this as cheeky critique that is itself beyond critical questioning. And while Martens rightly stresses that the art world and its role in gentrified Western metropolises depend on the disavowal of its connections to sites of colonial and neocolonial extraction and accumulation—the disavowal of the export of violence from the centers to the margins—how can a “good” form of gentrification be brought about?

Gentrification is not a cure for underdevelopment; it is a machine for the reproduction of inequality and displacement through wealth redistribution and the production of new class distinctions.⁵⁹ Even if Martens were to succeed in bringing gentrification to this site in the DRC, it changes nothing about the mechanism. If he really were successful, the site would become as unaffordable for artists and intellectuals, or workers, as Manhattan or much of London. But gentrification is not even given a proper chance (shades of *Enjoy Poverty*). Rather than collaborating with existing art initiatives, Martens decided to create his own, designating former plantation workers as his living readymades. Using their sculptures he produces chocolate techno-fetishes that garner high visibility for himself and the IHA

even though they barely sell, thus failing to generate funding for the art center at the plantation.

Some of Martens's designated artists have produced striking pieces. Thomas Leba's work in particular stands out when exhibited—but it stands out in a context devised by Martens as an artist operating with a degree of symbolic capital and discursive presence that is unobtainable to his neo-plantation workers. In contrast to the Showroom and the Otolith Collective's collaboration with the Chimurenga group from Cape Town, or the activities of the Arts Collaboratory network, this is no meeting of equals.⁶⁰ The sculptors have no control over the means of production and the appearance of the final pieces. With these techno-fetishes Martens seems to indulge in the contemporary take on the fetish while ultimately reverting to a much more conventional and conservative fetishism. Sculptures are extracted from the DRC, but now via digitization. In the process, they are modulated and re-performed, but primarily by a Dutch artist in the context of his own project.

4. Group Affinity⁶¹

When Martens had an IHA show at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin in 2015, he created a showroom of sculptures and a generic office space that supposedly functioned “as a contact point and an open platform, which creates a market for the exhibited works, generates visibility and credibility, raises funds, convinces volunteers, and assembles knowledge—all in the interest of the plantation's long-term gentrification.”⁶² But this was clearly an instrumentalist “open platform,” attempting to generate visibility for artistic commodity fetishes that generate income. It put a discursive and collaborative spin on a showroom—labeling it a showroom is another instance of Martens flaunting his critical self-awareness, as though this would preempt any critique of the stratagems in questions. The contrast with the discursive space created by Chimurenga at the Showroom in London on the invitation of the Otolith Collective, is again instructive: in the *Chimurenga Library*, the group, which edits a “pan-African gazette,” was able to articulate and problematize its own practice, including discussing the creative industries and gentrification.⁶³

In some of its more relevant incarnations, the contemporary exhibition is no longer a display of (supposedly precious) artifacts. One German curator has put it in rather drastic terms: “These days, the only valid exhibitions are

workshops or seminars or self-constituting reading groups.”⁶⁴ In an age when everything appears to be subject to curation, museums and related institutions are no longer primarily in the business of collecting and curating artifacts. Following artifacts' indexical traces into a contested past and divergent futures, they collect and curate social relations. These social relations obviously include artifacts as well as the humans that made them or whose ancestors made them, or whose ancestors stole or bought them, or those who have some other interest in the matter. Institutions that house the spoils of colonial plunder, such as the British Museum in London, have to engage with the living cultures that once produced their possessions.⁶⁵

In other cases, the index in question is not a *work* but a *worker*, not a thing but a person. Following the appropriated “ethnographic” objects, migrants from all over the world come to metropolitan centers in the West to find legal or illegal employment—often as cleaners, domestic workers, or builders. In a first step, the *artwork* as fetish object (*fainctise*) was redefined by focusing on the art *work* (the actual *faire*, the labor) that produced the object in the first place, and that keeps re-performing and circulating it. Now the focus shifts from the work to the worker—and not just the “art worker” in a narrow sense, but all kinds of laborers that are essential for maintaining the entire infrastructure (even if *as individuals* they are disposable).

Migrant workers obviously don't just go to “the West.” They also head, for instance, to the Persian Gulf States—where they may encounter Western institutions and corporations in search of capital. For a number of years now, the Gulf Labor group has examined and criticized the working conditions of migrant construction workers on the site of the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.⁶⁶ Objectified by the legal and security apparatus, and given a residency permit or citizenship or relegated to the shadow economy, these people are living indexes. We are *all* living indexes, but this indexicality stands out more when the distance between point of departure and current position (in historical, cultural-geographic, or economic terms) is greater. In Berlin, refugees organize museum tours for their peers under the name Mul-



Fig. 9: Chimurenga, *The Chimurenga Library*, The Showroom, London, 2015



Fig. 10: Yoonis Osman Nuur of the refugee collective We Are Here, in Jonas Staal's "New World Academy #2: Lost. In Between. Together," BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, 2013

taka, at the Museum für Islamische Kunst, for instance. Here, the people encounter artifacts that were once taken from the country they themselves were forced to leave: a meeting of indices.

Various groups and projects have tried to create visibility for "illegal" as well as "legal" immigrants and refugees, acknowledging that at-world denizens such as artists and curators are frequently dependent

on their labor (as domestic workers and nannies). From Tania Bruguera's long-term Immigrant Movement International project in New York to the work of Dutch artists and intellectuals with cleaners, domestic workers, and the "rejected" asylum seekers of the We Are Here group, activist assemblages and assemblies proliferate.

It can be a serious challenge to forge a "group subject" when its participants are so diverse. However, from different perspectives and different positions, the participants all experience the "de-quantification" of value. With Marx's illusion of fetishism having become a reality, we can no longer claim (à la Marx) that the value of a commodity is really due to the labor power invested in it.

John Roberts has argued that Marx's theory of value was never meant to be applied to unique, unreproducible works of art (in contrast to reproducible ones, such as novels) because they transcend "their own status as commodity fetishes by becoming, in a sense, bloated and *absolute* kinds of fetish, absolute commodities."⁶⁷ Now, however, the unreproducible artwork—that particular fetish—has become the model for an economy in which the commodity's "theological whims" are everywhere. Branded products and luxury goods (sometimes in quasi-unique "limited editions") behave like autonomous Baudrillardian sign fetishes, deriving their price from their manufactured aura rather than from labor power. If one wanted to argue that price does not equal value, then one would still have to acknowledge that calculating the "real" value is de facto impossible.

Some of Agency's things are not made by human hand (*feitiços*), such as circus tricks learned by an elephant or computer-generated bingo numbers. While there is obviously human labor and agency at some point down the

line—at the very latest when they become the subject-object of a lawsuit—it is no less true that production is now more than ever an aggregate in which what Marx characterized as the "dead labor" stored in machines and equipment seems uncannily alive. New products are now often an inextricable tangle of old and new patents and trademarks that enforce each other—knowledge extracted from traditional cultures and state-of-the-art laboratories (some privately funded, some state funded), computing power and marketing strategies, and invisible sweatshops and automated high-tech plants. Meanwhile, tech companies that have never turned a profit are successfully launched at the stock market, and workers may produce value less through their "official" job and more through the debt that they amass—their mortgages can be repackaged and resold. The extraction of value has become intensified and dispersed to such an extent that nobody can keep count.

In the cultural sphere, the *qualification* of labor—that is to say, the emphasis on specific and unique qualities rather than on abstract quantity—is such that nobody knows the real value and "just price," even though this is exactly what groups such as W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) try to establish (while the Wages for Facebook web project polemically asserts the need to put a number on the value that users produce for Facebook). Campaigns for wages and rights for domestic workers, and for the need of undocumented immigrants to live and work, are part of the same struggle.

It hardly needs saying that a *sans-papiers* who does not know where he or she will spend the night is in a dramatically different position from a curator or unpaid intern. The point is not to minimize such crucial differences (which in extreme cases can be the difference between life and death), but to assert that we are all denizens of the global Potosí. The extreme subjectivation of cultural and intellectual workers is as problematic as the objectification of "disposable" immigrants, of whom there is always fresh supply (but is the same not true of artists, curators, and critics?) There is a pressing need to assert the agency of human cooperation and the reality of the human subject as a living fetish who, in being or risking becoming human surplus, is both less and much more than a worker.

- 1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 142.
- 2 I used the term *abstraheringsma-chine* in relation to an article by Wouter Davids on the Centre Pompidou and Tate Modern. See the editorial, "Totale participatie," *De Witte Raaf*, no. 101 (January–February 2003): 1.
- 3 Bruno Latour uses "actant" as a more "neutral" alternative for the irredeemably human-sounding "agent" or "actor."
- 4 Charles de Brosses's *Du culte des dieux fétiches* clearly informs Hegel's later discussions.
- 5 See William Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 133–34.
- 6 Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62.
- 7 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 284–85; and
- 8 G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 282–84, 295.
- 9 Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," ch. 1, sec. 4 of Capital, vol. 1, *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-cl/ch01.htm#54>.
- 10 In the original 1867 German edition of *Capital*, a short version of Marx's account of commodity fetishism could be found in the appendix on the value form; this was later included (in an expanded form) in the main body of the text. Rosalind C. Morris makes much of the fact that the original German version of the heading "The Fetishism of Commodities" reads "Der Fetischcharakter der Ware," which one can translate as "the fetishistic nature of commodities," and asserts that "Marx rarely used the term 'fetishism' (*Fetischismus*), except in explicit reference to religion." (Rosalind C. Morris, "After de Brosses," in Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard, *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea* [Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2017], 188.) This
- trans. Chris Miller and David Gilks (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012). Quatremère's analysis could of course be extended, with even more justification, to the violent appropriation of artifacts from regions occupied by the European colonial powers—which accompanied the violence directly inflicted on these regions' inhabitants.
- 15 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 488–89. Hegel here calls the host a "blosses Ding" (mere thing), in contrast to artworks.
- 16 See the similarities between Hegel's discussion of the Catholic cult in the aforementioned passage and his account of African fetishism in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 295.
- 17 Ethnologist Karl-Heinz Kohl argues that what Europeans interpreted as fetishism was in fact not dissimilar from the Catholic cult of relics in *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichten und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 15–98. Kohl also emphasizes the long process of hybridization during which African cultures appropriated elements from the colonizers' Catholic religion.

- 18 Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie* (1760) (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 15.
- 19 See, for instance, Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 191–94.
- 20 Karl-Heinz Kohl argues that these nail fetishes are the product of the encounter between African tribal cultures and the Catholicism of the European colonizers. Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge*, 19–20, 194.
- 21 The Surrealist installation of "fétiches européens" was part of La Vérité sur les Colonies, the 1931 exhibition organized in Paris by the Communist Party to counter the Colonial Exhibition.
- 22 Barnett Newman, "The New Sense of Fate" (1948), in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 165.
- 23 Barnett Newman, "The Ideographic Picture" (1947), in *ibid.*, 108; and "The First Man Was an Artist" (1947), in *ibid.*, 159.
- 24 Barnett Newman, "The Plasmic Image" (1945), in *ibid.*, 245.
- 25 Barnett Newman, "Open Letter to William A. M. Burden, President of the Museum of Modern Art" (1953), in *ibid.*, 39.
- 26 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 338.
- 27 Stewart Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007): 22.
- 28 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 91.
- 29 *Ibid.* The term *fainctise* in Baudrillard's original French is rendered by Levin as "faking."
- 30 The decisive work is *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), which established a rigid opposition between precapitalist "symbolic exchange" and the equivalence of signs in the age
- of simulation.
- 31 See Susan Vogel's seminal exhibition catalogue *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (New York: Center for African Art, 1988).
- 32 Anonymous, "The Richard Muft Case," *The Blind Man*, no. 2 (May 1917): unpaginated.
- 33 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in London* (London: Verso Books, 2007), 21–43.
- 34 On the two illusions contained in Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, see Martin, "Absolute Artwork Meets Absolute Commodity," 22–23.
- 35 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.
- 36 Marcel Duchamp, "À l'infinifit!" "Boite blanche," in *Duchamp du signe*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 105.
- 37 On Baumgarten and ethnography, specifically his 2011 exhibition at Museum Folkwang, see Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, "Who's Present in Presentation? On Lothar Baumgarten's 'Evening of Time – Señores Naturales. Yanomami,'" in *Naturalis: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarek et al., *Cultures of the Curatorial*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 258–80.
- 38 The overall curatorial concept of "ExitCongoMuseum: A Century of Art with/without Papers" was by Boris Wastiau, who invited the artist Toma Muteba Luntumbue to curate the contemporary art section, in which he also participated himself. Among the other participants were Meschac Gaba, David Hammons, and Luc Tuymans. The museum was in a period of transition at the time, and not all factions within it supported the project.
- 39 Dion's project was an initiative of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacies, in collaboration with the Manchester Museum.
- 40 On the secondary agency of artifacts, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univer-

In the case of Thing 000773 (Pseudomonas), the patented organism has a strong link with traditional knowledge—its detoxifying properties had been used in India for centuries.

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can be indexical, symbolic, and iconic.

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ibid., 28.

51 — Referencing the title of Eliseo Verón's study *La semiosis social* (1993), So-hyun Ahn calls the form of semiosis proper to the index "social semiosis." So-hyun Ahn, "Le sens de l'espace muséal: Analyse sémiotique de l'espace muséal" (PhD diss., Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, 2010), 81. The most ambitious recent attempt to accord the category of the index a central role for cultural analysis is Diederich Diederichsen, *Körperreferier: Zur Ästhetik der nachpopulären Künste* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017).

52 — Unlike the autonomous semiotic system posited by Baudrillard in his desire to define fetishism in systemic terms, as the fetishism of the code—forgetting his own remarks about the "made" quality of the *Jeitico*.

53 — See "Agency," *Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/artiste/agency/>; assemblee-les-laboratoires-d-aubervilliers.

45 — "Walter Benjamin," "The Way beyond 'Art'" (2010), in *Recent Writings* (Vancouver: New Documents, 2013), 67–68. This text was originally published in the first issue of *The Copyist*, a publication accompanying the Van Abbemuseum's project "Play Van Abbe" (2009–11).

46 — "Walter Benjamin," "The Unmaking of Art" (2011), in *ibid.*, 132. See also Steven Ten Thije, "The Joys of Meta: On the Museum of American Art," *Afterall*, no. 37 (Autumn/Winter 2014), http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.37/the-joy-of-meta_on-the-museum-of-american-art.

47 — The Museum of Arte Útil was on view at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven from December 2013 to March 2014. See "Museum of Arte Útil," *Van Abbemuseum*, accessed July 26, 2017, <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programma/museum-of-arte-util/>.

48 — See my essay "Shine and Schein," *e-flux journal*, no. 61 (January 2015), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/shine-and-schein/>.

49 — Gell, *Art and Agency*, 23. Indexicality is, of course, not an exclusive property of artifacts; they

online).

63 — See "The Chimurenga Library," *The Showroom*, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.theshowroom.org/exhibitions/the-chimurenga-library>. The gazette, the *Chimurenga Chronic*, was available at the exhibition.

64 — "Man kann eigentlich nur noch Ausstellungen machen, die Workshops sind oder Seminare oder selbstermächtigende Bildungsgruppen." Tim Caspar Boehme, "Gekommen, um im Betonberg zu bleiben," *die tagesszeitung*, September 15, 2012, <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/digitaz/artikel/?ressort=ku&dig=2012/09/15/a0054>.

65 — On the British Museum and Australian Aboriginal culture, see Paul Daley, "Preservation or Plunder? The Battle over the British Museum's Indigenous Australian Show," *Guardian*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/apr/09/indigenous-australians-enduring-civilisation-british-museum-repatriation>.

66 — See *Gulf Labor Artist Coalition*, <http://gulflabor.org>.

67 — Roberts, *Intangibilities of Form*, 31.

sity Press, 1998), 36–38.

41 — Julia Noordgraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2012), 9. On Teylers Museum, see also Mark Dion, "Füllung des Naturhistorischen Museums," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 20 (November 1995): 75–86.

42 — *Intolerance* was accompanied by a boxed three-part catalogue, with each volume dedicated respectively to Melchior d'Hondecoeter, Hawaiian featherwork, and De Rooij and his exhibition.

43 — "The Potosi Principle: How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land?" was shown at Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, and the Museo Nacional de Arte and Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore in La Paz, Bolivia.

44 — See various essays in Alice Creischer, Max Jorde Hinderer, and Andreas Siekmann, eds., *The Potosi Principle: How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land?* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010).

56 — See, for instance, Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media, 2005).

57 — W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 112.

58 — Florian Cramer, "What Is Post-Digital?," *APR/À* 3, no. 1 (2014), <http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318>.

59 — See Stefano Harney and Tomika Sealy, "Creative Industries as Underdevelopment," *The Chimurenga Chronic* (2015), 48. These projects acknowledge that the participants are not economic, social, and political equals; thus, democratic and egalitarian forms of collaboration become all the more important.

61 — Group Affinity was the title of a summer school and subsequent exhibition organized by Casco in Utrecht and the Kunstverein Munich in 2011.

62 — Press release for the exhibition, http://www.kw-berlin.de/media/files/00_renzo-martens_press-kit_en.pdf (webpage no longer

While the artist consented to the museum sale, he contested the use of his sculpture on the banknote, which was highly controversial in his community. During the court case, "Roy Marika, the senior male member of the Kirraijungu clan [...] understood that Mr Yumbulul had the right to make the Morning Star Pole for ceremonial purposes and also for sale to places such as museums in order to educate people. [...] Mr Marika said that the subject of mass reproduction of paintings and important objects is very sensitive because it takes the ability and right to produce and supervise the production of these objects out of the hands of the Aboriginal people."⁵⁵ (Quoted from Agency's file on *Thing 001390*.) However, the judge ruled that because Yumbulul had signed an agreement with the agency that provided for this kind of transaction he could not claim to have been misled, and his case was dismissed.

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