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Views of Difference: Different Views of Art

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Introduction

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We want in this introduction to familiarize you with some of the key ideas that have shaped the formal study of cultural difference and thus provide a conceptual and historical backcloth for the body of the book – the case studies that lie ahead. Towards the end of the introduction we give some details about the contents of these case studies.

Exploring difference

This book is about the way in which views of cultural difference that were developed by European colonizers have coloured, and still colour, the evaluation of the arts made by colonized peoples and their descendants. The book explores the different interpretations of these arts, past and present, by artists and historians, some of whom share the perspectives of the colonizers and their heirs and others who do not. It is written with the belief that a productive exploration of difference between artists and cultures must include both asking artists to tell historians how they wish to define their art and seeking to reconstruct the ways in which art was used by different societies in the past.

Within recent theory (originating from sociology and art history) the term 'difference' can have many associations, although it is usually tied to the concepts of social, cultural, or psychic identity, and to the idea that identities are constructed rather than fixed or absolute. Art historians who are interested in psychoanalysis and issues of gender often use the term 'sexual difference' to represent the different sexual identities that individuals may possess or develop. In this book we focus on the nature and construction of cultural differences, and the ways in which cultural identities may be defined or understood in relation to each other. An interest in 'difference' allows us to consider the ways in which peoples and societies have often sought to define themselves in relation to (what they saw as) their opposites. Colonial European powers, for example, often defined themselves as 'civilized' in relation to what they saw as their relatively 'uncivilized' colonial conquests. This perception of difference was tied to imperial political ambitions; it involved relations of power. Perceptions of similarity and difference may be a basic way of categorizing the world. (It is often remarked, for example, that we learn to discriminate between objects by comparing their qualities – their shape, size, colour, etc. We learn, in sum, what a thing is by deciding what it is and is not like.) It is, however, one thing to recognize each other's differences. It is another matter to label others as 'different' and define them as inferior.

The 'one' is secured by the 'other'

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European colonizers treated colonized peoples' cultures and the peoples themselves not simply as different but as different and inferior. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), the cultural theorist Frantz Fanon noted this effect:

> I meet a Russian, or a German, who speaks French badly. With gestures I try to give him the information that he requests, but, at the same time I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case he is foreign to my group, and his standards must be different. When it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilisation, no long historical past.
>
> (1986 translation, p.34)

Fanon suggested that a colonized culture was not treated simply as though it entailed another – presumed equal – set of practices, but as a subordinate system. His title implies that the person with black skin was turned by the power of the person with white skin into a 'white mask'. Persons designated as 'black' were not recognized as being able to announce their changing senses of themselves, and to define the white person and other black persons from their own perspectives, relative to their own identities. They were not valued like people from other European nations, Fanon argued, as being different merely in terms of language and history yet the same in their equal status as human consciousnesses. They were what he termed the silenced 'other'. As we shall see, this concept of 'otherness' has become central to contemporary debates within post-colonial theory (that is, the theory about the legacy of European colonialism).

It was during the late nineteenth century too that scholars developed disciplines that were to institutionalize the study of the art and culture of colonized societies. In particular, what was first called ethnography and later anthropology developed in Europe and North America. It is from this perspective and in this context that we find a formal vocabulary being used that served to entrench western ideas of 'otherness' and its equation with inferiority. For example, the art of colonized and formerly colonized areas was spoken of in terms of 'artefacts' and 'material culture' made by 'craftworkers', and not as 'works of art' made by 'artists'. As emphasized by the artist and critic Gavin Jantjes, writing in the catalogue to the exhibition 'The Other Story' (1989), 'the history of modernism,[1] with its Eurocentric world view, has always demanded that the rest of the world's art be explained by scientific means: anthropology, ethnography, archaeology – rather than aesthetics' (*The Other Story*, p.126). The way the 'one' had 'art' and 'craft' while the 'other' had only 'craft' had the effect of associating the arts of colonized peoples and their descendants with manual, non-intellectual, repetitive, and unimaginative dexterity.[2] In *Art Criticism and Africa* (1997),

[1] On the same page (*The Other Story*, p.126) Jantjes defines modernism: 'modernism claims leadership through its unscientific esoteric responses to the modern age. It is believed to be above and ahead of history, leaving everyone else pondering the past and trapped in traditions.' See also Wood, *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (Book 4 in this series).

[2] See Barker, Webb, and Woods, *The Changing Status of the Artist* (Book 2 in this series), in particular the historical introduction and Case Study 1.

the artist and critic Chika Okeke underlines the way in which these constructs 'operate as an intellectual device for trivialising, or denying the profundity of all artistic endeavours of the voiceless. The Yoruba[3] master, Adugbologe, was a "carver" – therefore a craftsman – while the Italian master, Bernini, was a "sculptor" and an artist' ('Beyond either/or: towards an art criticism of accommodation', p.91).

A related point worth registering at this stage is the different overtones to the word 'primitive' in much western art historiography (Plate 1). The idea of the 'primitive' is fundamental to the concept of an inferiorized cultural

Plate 1 Gavin Jantjes, detail of *Untitled* (Plate 4).

[3] A people of Nigeria.

'other'. It is often used, for example, to represent the views of European artists, such as the painters Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso, who were looking to supposedly 'primitive' cultures of Africa and the Pacific as sources of artistic inspiration around the end of the nineteenth century. Although many western artists saw these cultures as a rich source of aesthetic ideas, they were considered in terms of the opposition they represented to the apparently sophisticated, industrializing West. For example, the subject-matter of Gauguin's art in the 1890s was inextricably bound up with the colonial culture of Tahiti and French Polynesia. Gauguin's images were made to be sold in Paris, and showed sensual, dark-skinned women luxuriating in a fertile, tropical environment, contributing to the various myths and fantasies through which the colonizer (France) represented the colonized society (Tahiti).

To define a society as 'primitive' denoted a belief that a culture was fossilized at a stage of evolution through which western societies had passed. It did not include an understanding of the way in which societies develop sophisticated sets of beliefs and regulations independent of their repertoire of technical skills.

Western art historians were also fond of denying that other cultures had made any art at all before the twentieth century. In *Art Criticism and Africa*, the art historian John Picton explains:

> Sometimes even in the most reputable quarters it is said that, before the twentieth century, there was no art in Africa, no 'Art', that is, as 'we' have it in the 'West'. Of course, if there were no art, there would be no art criticism either. This will not do. First, there are all the problems of an account determined by 'us' versus 'them' (not least the impossibilities of determining who is in what category, etc.), or the 'West' versus what. Secondly, it is also the case that it was not long before the twentieth century, that there was no art (i.e. 'Art') in Europe either. Words such as art, craft and technology after all derive from words for skill (Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Greek respectively) and their separation into seemingly distinct frameworks of activity is very much a part of the development of ideas and practices in eighteenth-century Europe.
>
> ('Yesterday's cold mashed potatoes', p.21)

The tendency to associate higher forms of art with a written tradition of theory and history ignores the importance of oral discussion about art. It seems likely, according to Picton, that 'art criticism as a discourse that enables, directs, understands, encourages, imagines and discourages, but which does not determine, must have evolved even as art itself evolved' ('Yesterday's cold mashed potatoes', p.22).

Even though large areas of the globe did not fall under western imperial domination, colonial observers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries treated all non-European cultures in similar ways. To explore this imperialist 'shadow' effect, we may consider the treatment of art in China. Here was a field that could hardly be treated as backward, since it pre-empted norms of western high art practice: it had a written theory and history before any such texts were produced in Europe. The solution – for western art historians – was to classify Chinese art as different from the progressive art of the West by interpreting it as unchanging. We should be clear that the word 'unchanging' (were this description of Chinese art even true) was intended to imply a lack, as we can see from its opposition to 'progression'.

There is no suggestion here of something more positive – such as perhaps that Chinese art had achieved some sublime height from which it would be pointless, and indeed impossible, to move on.

In other cases, western art historians saw the culture of the 'one' as making art that constantly progressed and developed, while they thought of the 'other' as making art that was decaying. In his book *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (1977), the historian Partha Mitter shows that this was the way in which Indian art was interpreted.

There is a further dimension to the idea of the 'other' that has come under scrutiny – generally speaking, from the 1960s onwards. This has led to a focus on examining relations of power and on uncovering how the powerful remain 'on top'. As part of this, certain dominant forms of art history, such as biographies of individual artists being written in Europe and North America, have been increasingly challenged from various 'outsider' positions, including those relating to issues of class, gender, and ethnicity. (The term 'ethnicity' was often used to designate groups differentiated by such factors as supposed racial categories or religious beliefs. Increasingly, the preferred usage indicates cultural diversity that is applicable to everyone.)

For our purposes, of particular interest is the line of argument that proposes that art history has been monopolized by writers whose western-centred views have resulted in the marginalization of the art of the colonial subjects of European powers, and that of other societies loosely (and often pejoratively) labelled 'non-western'. This label – which is often used as a grouping for almost any art (such as African, Asian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, indigenous Australian) that is produced outside North America and Europe – implies controlling status. As already noted, this is to define these other art forms in negative terms as not belonging to the West. However, a further point to register here is the significance of *who* is doing the defining for the whole process of the production, consumption, and exchange of art. The system cannot be operating on equal terms. Artists labelled as 'non-western' who want to make a living from what they produce are forced into a relationship that makes them victims of western-controlled commerce, or tourism.

As we have seen, the challenges to a eurocentric art history come initially from groups asserting that non-Europeans faced discrimination *en masse* because they were defined as different and inferior by those thereby designated as 'western'. As the debate has developed, however, there has been increasing attention to the ways in which difference can be treated pejoratively *within* groups designated as 'non-western'. This may be according to differences of, for instance, class, gender, or religion, such that sub-groups can be seen as themselves operating the psycho-social mechanisms of the 'other' towards those they in turn designate as different and inferior.

In addition, there has been recognition of cultural diversity and difference within European and North American societies, and the forms of artistic expression that they have generated. Within Europe, the post-war immigration of peoples from colonized areas has contributed to the emergence of urban cultures characterized by ethnic diversity, hybridity (see below) and complex social sub-groups.

Equal borrowing rights

Theories of racial and cultural purity pervaded colonialist discourses.[4] Such thinking entailed the disparagement of people and art forms said to be 'hybrids'. The related idea that the culture of one society is entirely different and separate from another was also prevalent. Both views connect with the convenient belief of colonists that European people were distinct from subject peoples, who did not need the same rights to political representation. Such ideas underpinned, for example, political theories of the separate development of races. They were linked to myths about different racial characteristics, which were supposed to determine the cultural proclivities of different groups and were considered to be innate or 'natural'. Such essentializing theories[5] were also taken up – this time positively to assert pride in inborn qualities – during the struggles for political independence from imperial controls. These ideas were discussed in the journal *Présence Africaine* during the 1940s and 1950s by writers and artists living in Paris, such as Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana. After the achievement of independence in Senegal in 1960, theories of *négritude* (the essential[6] quality of the Negro genius) were championed by Léopold Senghor, the President of Senegal. They were also held by political movements comprising those fighting racist discrimination inside European or European-dominated societies. Essentializing beliefs remain attractive to some, but have come to be questioned, perhaps most engagingly by the twentieth-century writer Wole Soyinka: 'In a brilliant and most original one-sentence statement, Soyinka put forward his own unmistakable position thus: "The tiger does not need to proclaim its tigritude"!!' (Adelugba, *Before Our Very Eyes: A Tribute to Wole Soyinka*, p.21). Essentializing theories tend to sit comfortably with theories of nationhood, and have been invoked where artists sought to create national artistic identities. However, they may need to be regarded with some caution, in so far as they seem to set limits to how far change is possible.

Writers have criticized the idea that art develops in separable cultural capsules. It has been argued that there is always movement in both directions across any cultural boundaries (Plate 2). The scholar Paul Gilroy suggested in 1993, for example, that 'the consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the "Indians" they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from one another' (*The Black Atlantic*, p.2). Such analyses value the 'hybrid', that is to say, the creation of a new form from the amalgamation of two different forms. They expect the 'syncretic' (the gathering together from different sources of similar elements or concepts to create new systems or concepts) and the 'eclectic' (the juxtaposition of diverse elements to create a heterogeneous pattern). In 1995, the scholar Signe Howell suggested: 'Not only is it unlikely that traditions have single origins, it is equally unlikely that their manifestations develop along a single path devoid of outside influences' ('Whose knowledge', p.178).

[4] When used in this way, 'discourse' means a systematic group of apparently logical statements and practices that limit the ways knowledge about a topic may be represented (i.e. centre/periphery; mainstream/backwater; original/copy; pure/mixed; rational/irrational: used to indicate relations of power in imperial societies) (see Gieben and Hall, *Formations of Modernity*, pp.291–2).

[5] Theories supporting the idea that human traits are innate and inalterable.

[6] Determined by innate racial attributes.

Plate 2 Gavin Jantjes, detail of *Untitled* (Plate 4).

Colonizers may have brought western innovations to colonized societies but they themselves underwent rich and complex transformations through imperial inter-relationships. Colonizers might think of such things as china, chintz, polished mahogany, aspidistras, pyjamas, or tea as characteristics of pure Englishness, but they were the results of cultural cross-breeding. The theories of separate cultural development were circulated by people who were borrowing from every culture in the globe.

Where artists from the community of the colonizers took from the art of a colonized society, they were often said to be powerfully inspired by a motif or idea they had borrowed from another culture. In contrast, where artists who were colonial subjects took from the colonizer's culture they were widely seen as copying weakly. The relations of cultural exchange were thus

represented as unequal. Colonized societies could be accused of impure mixing. But colonizers saw themselves as taking elements from another society to enrich a product, and openly boasted their appropriation or glossed over the fact that what had been taken had entailed the making of something hybrid. Cultures, then, are not to be thought of as absolutely distinct, but as able to translate and transform new ideas so that they are usable in different systems.

If we acknowledge fully the role of transactions in cultural development, individuals or practices placed in the cross-over positions between two or more cultures can be seen as particularly privileged – as located at a vantage point: a viewer standing at the boundaries of several cultures could, it may be argued, see things in a new light. Furthermore, imitation of western forms and styles by colonial subjects is not necessarily understood as an obsequious or submissive act. Some have noted its subversive potential. The cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, for example, suggested in 1990 that, where imitation mimicked or created a parody of western forms and styles, the imitator was, on occasion, being revealed as a shrewd viewer of the conventions of the colonizing power rather than a passive reflector – the mode expected of the 'other' (*Nation and Narration*, pp.318–19).

In his self-portrait (Plate 3), Yinka Shonibare seems to be exploring the subversive powers of mimicking the mannerisms of the master. He can be seen wearing the dress of, and in the conventional setting chosen by, a European of slave-owning rank in the eighteenth century. Shonibare explained that he thinks of this image in some sense as a satire in the manner of the eighteenth-century London painter William Hogarth:

> On the one hand the picture is one of me actually dressing up, having a good time, and on another level I'm actually making a strong political statement about my relationship as an African to the powerbase in the West, the thing that actually created the developed world, the roots of all that, and my own relationship to that, as an African. So there is both that element of comedy, and satire in the piece, because it is absolutely absurd and outrageous. Also there is the level of enjoyment because I actually did enjoy putting on the costume, but the curious part of that was that it was incredibly difficult for me to keep a straight face while the picture was being taken.
>
> (Interview with Catherine King for the OU/BBC television programme, *West Africa: Art and Identities*, October 1997, A216 TV 6)

Imitating another powerful art form could be seen as demonstrating that one has understood 'how the trick works' to create particular effects, and is no longer fooled by the impressive display.

Modernism and postmodernism

Both the idea of a universal modern art and the concept 'postmodernism' raise significant issues for debates about difference. Being a European colonizer or former colonizer meant being powerful enough to maintain the fiction of speaking objectively for all humanity and possessing knowledge that was not bound by one's cultural and geographical location. Hence the development of the idea of a contemporary art that was not British modern art, French modern art, or North American modern art but just modern art. Although such views purported to aim for the possibility of a set of modern

Plate 3
Yinka Shonibare, *Untitled*, 1997, colour photograph, 178 x 132 cm, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

artistic practices that was genuinely open to all, this set was originally defined and authorized by westerners. In the catalogue for the exhibition 'The Other Story' (1989), the artist Rasheed Araeen noted that the art historians Hugh Honour and John Fleming, in their *World History of Art* (1982), had claimed to represent for the first time all the cultures in the world. Of this account Araeen wrote that such pluralism only lasted in their narrative until the nineteenth century:

> As we enter the twentieth century, African / Oceanic sculpture is taken up again but only in connection with modernism, the development of various movements and styles – in particular, Cubism. After that, everything non-European, both cultures and peoples, disappears. The West then shines alone this century, the whole world reflected in its image.
>
> (*The Other Story*, p.10)

Contemporary artists in the West merely needed to operate within, or gain approval from, their own cultural systems to 'count' as modern practitioners. In contrast, colonized cultures have been widely seen as producing contemporary art that was dependent on leadership and approval from European or North American centres, and in need of a qualifying adjective to place them geographically – as in 'Indian' modern art or 'African' modern art. Such attitudes could also entail treating artists from colonized peoples, or who worked in countries that had formerly been governed as colonies, as secondary or eccentric practitioners of contemporary art forms. Araeen drew attention to the way in which such artists had been ignored or treated differently by critics and historians, in explaining that the exhibition he curated in 1989 told 'The story of those men and women who defied their "otherness" and entered the modern space that was forbidden to them, not only to declare their historic claim on it but also to challenge the framework which defined and protected its boundaries' (*The Other Story*, p.9).

The governmental structures of empire underpin the metaphor of centre (European seats of government) and periphery (the colonial provinces where civil servants and police effected the laws of the centre). According to this model, artistic influence was thought to flow from the centre out to the margins, rather as laws and edicts had done. Artists seen as coming from the periphery could not be regarded as taking a leading role at the centre.

Turning now to postmodernism, it is often argued that the contemporary concern with 'difference' is itself a characteristic of postmodernism. The latter term, which originated within a western intellectual context, is broadly used across different academic disciplines to describe a contemporary culture and era which differs significantly from the so-called 'modern' period of the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. There are numerous, contradictory definitions of postmodernism. Some definitions focus on the effects of post-industrial, technologically developed societies on western culture in general, arguing that the explosion of information technology, global communication, and the mass media have helped to fracture some of the belief systems and artistic values of the earlier modern period. Other definitions see postmodernism as signalling the collapse of the certainties of a western-controlled modernism in the face of the criticism of eurocentricity by artists who were excluded by modernism from the canon.

Although in its broadest sense the term is used to describe a culture or cultural outlook, it also has more specific meanings when applied to individual disciplines. Postmodern approaches have tended to move away from the single historical narratives of (western) art history that are often associated with modernism. For example, the modernist idea of a linear historical progression away from naturalism, through various 'isms' such as Fauvism and Cubism towards abstract art, has been challenged as a constraining and oversimplified narrative, which marginalizes many other diverse forms of modern artistic practice. What we are describing as 'postmodern' here is a theory of art. This should not be confused with postmodern *practices* of art, although there is often a close relationship between theory and practice. In keeping with the idea of multiple narratives, it is often argued that postmodern

practices are characterized by difference – by the co-existence of varied techniques and different cultural positions. For example, many artists working in Europe and North America since the 1970s have begun to use realist styles and techniques (styles regarded as outside the domain of modernism), have borrowed and pastiched photographic images from the media, or have used their art to explore cultural diversity.

However, we are always on dangerous ground when we make sweeping generalizations about art, and we should be cautious about representing too crude a division between modernist and postmodernist art. In the process we may oversimplify the nature of both. Some writers have suggested that many of the artistic forms that we now identify with postmodernism, which include the use of parody or discontinuity, were already in evidence within art of the early twentieth century.[7] Similarly, it would be unwise to assume that postmodernism means the same thing everywhere. In West Africa, for example, as pointed out in 1991 by the scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah, artworks 'are not understood by their producers and consumers in terms of a postmodern*ism*: there is no antecedent practice whose claim to exclusivity of vision is rejected through these art works' (Is the post- in postmodernism the same as the post- in postcolonial?', p.348).

A further point to bear in mind refers us back to the politics of cultural theory mentioned earlier. We need to be wary about the extent to which some forms of postmodernism disguise cultural retrenchment: they may be merely a shift in 'brand-name' adopted by those formerly in control of modernism in order to re-establish their power bases on different ground. For example, ostensible admiration of the differences in other cultures by western viewers may be seen as a rejection of the proposition that western culture could itself be a 'various' and 'different' 'other' rather than the 'one':

> In the beginning it was Modernism, modernism for everybody. Now there is 'western' culture and 'other' cultures, located within the same contemporary space. The continuing monopolisation of modernism by western culture (particularly in the visual arts) denies the global influences of modernism. If other peoples are now, in their turn, aspiring to its material achievements, and want to claim their own share, why are they constantly reminded of its harmful effects on their own traditional arts?
>
> (Araeen, 'Our Bauhaus, others' mudhouse', p.6)

What is clear, however, is that the art history of the last few decades of the twentieth century has been influenced by many other disciplines and theories – among them literary theory, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and post-colonial theory – all of which have contributed to what we now broadly label 'postmodern theory'. The influence of post-colonial theory in particular has encouraged us to look closely at the cultural origins of art-historical language and concepts, acknowledging the exclusions and value judgements that may be involved. Art history itself is now characterized by a diversity of approach and (as is argued in Case Study 1) by an increasing openness to exploring different artistic cultures in which 'we are all to each other different'.

[7] See Wood, *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (Book 4 in this series).

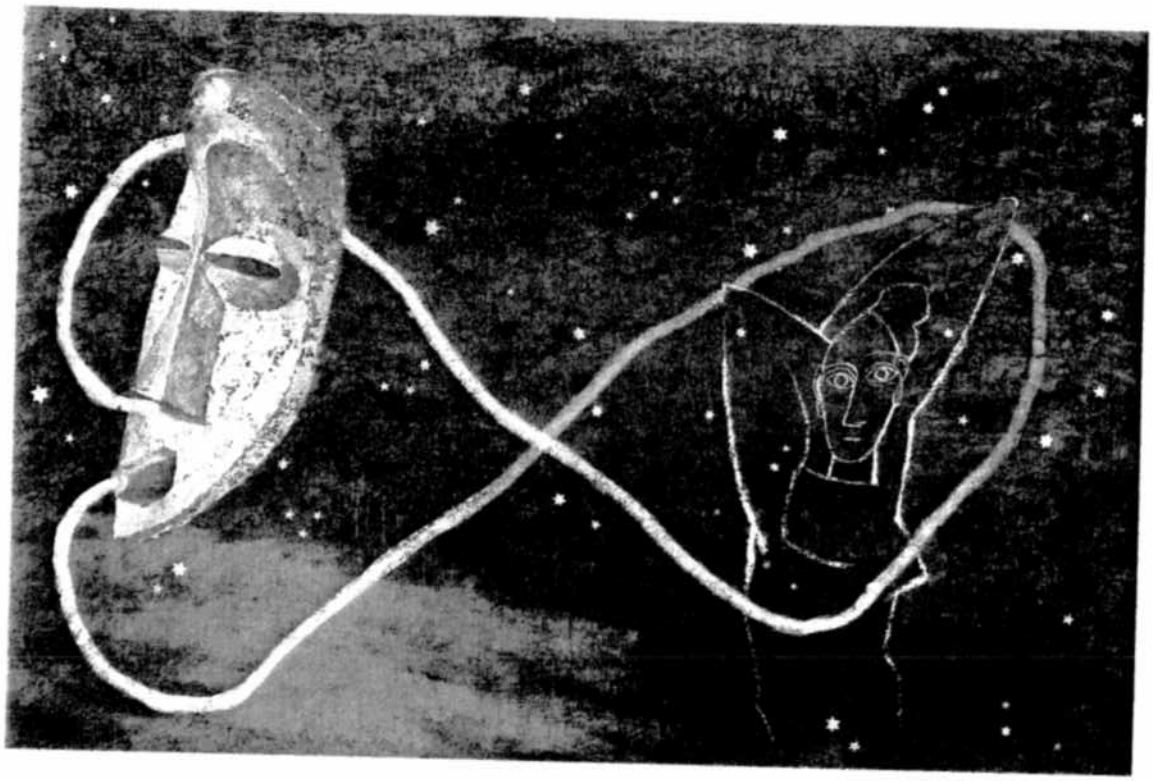

Plate 4 Gavin Jantjes, *Untitled*, 1989, sand, acrylic, and tissue paper on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, Hayward Gallery, London, The Arts Council of England Collection.

The painting *Untitled* (Plate 4) by Jantjes could be seen as a meditation on this theme, on the relationship between art in Africa, in the mask on the left, and the art of Europe, in the drawing after Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* on the right.

With reference to Plates 7 and 8 in Case Study 1, illustrating an African mask and Picasso's painting, consider possible readings of the image shown in Plate 4.

Discussion

This image is intriguing because it suggests but does not define the relationship between the representation of a mask and a drawing after a painting. The mask is shown as solid, and from its mouth and nose a stream traverses the sky. In comparison, the drawn woman is an insubstantial creature. Yet, while she is represented as if further away and held in the orbit of the mask's influence, the gaze of the mask is averted, whereas the woman looks out at the viewer. The powers of African and European art are represented, perhaps, to show the dependence of European abstraction on the traditions of Africa.

This painting is open to a variety of interpretations, as shown by different reactions to it by reviewers who saw it at the exhibition 'The Other Story'. For the art critic Sadeq Khan in *New Link* (15 December 1989), the painting is 'a metaphor for cross-fertilization and interpenetration', in its depiction of 'a respiration tube' passing from the mask's nostril to its mouth. The art critic Jane Bryce, in *Arts Review* (16 January 1990), interpreted it as pointing to 'modernist borrowings of such artists as Klee, Ernst and Picasso', and consequently emphasizing the fundamental instability of modernist claims to originality. For Bhabha, *Untitled* showed that cultures could be different and of equal worth:

> The line drawing of the translucent *demoiselle* gazes wide-eyed at the viewer in the familiar figurative pose; the mask at the other end of the canvas, turns away from the priority of the figurative and the visual to suggest other senses of identity. The two images are linked through umbilical cords that suggest not an unmasking of the Picasso figure, but a challenging tension across the terrain of cultural difference between the visual locus of the aesthetic, and the *sensoria* of other cultural systems. In one sense, the two figures are incommensurable; in another, it is this difference that makes possible the negotiation of cultures on equal terms.
>
> ('The wrong story', p.41)

The contents of this book

This book is introduced and concluded by two artists – Gavin Jantjes and Rasheed Araeen – who have played key roles in analysing, in order to demolish, the mechanisms of marginalization of non-western art. This they have done using art works, curating exhibitions, and charting the contemporary history of art. What are the writings of artists doing in a book that is otherwise written by art historians? It seems to us important to seek views about issues of difference from those who are actually negotiating a path for themselves as artists in the face of categorizations that derive from colonizers' perspectives. At key points of change in the status of art, artists writing about art have played crucial parts. Some of the first European art histories written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were produced by artists, and included autobiographies: Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentaries* (*c*.1450) and Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1568). These artists literally wrote themselves, and other artists, into history, since art had not previously been the subject of history in Europe (except in ancient Rome and Greece a millennium before). Jantjes and Araeen belong to a generation of artists who, as heirs of colonized peoples, and working in the metropolis of former colonizers, have helped to shift eurocentric perspectives on art history by, in their turn, recording themselves and their fellows in history and introducing theoretical issues related to their works as well as criticism (see Case Studies 1 and 9). Both artists take as their central metaphor the idea of the traveller striving against the odds in often hostile terrain to reach some goal. That both have done so to describe their trek through the darkest depths of the imperial metropolis suggests how crucial it is for them to turn the tables on the myth of western exploration and discovery.

In the main part of this book, we draw attention to the relationships between the cultural and political locations of art historians and the kinds of interpretation they presented or present. We start in Part 1 with a critical look at the way in which pre-colonial art (meaning art produced before the coming of European colonialists to the majority of the globe) has been interpreted. Colin Cunningham examines the interpretation of pre-colonial Indian architecture by the Scots merchant and architectural historian James Fergusson in the mid-nineteenth century at the height of British imperial power (Case Study 2). Catherine King compares Fergusson's standpoint with that of the art historian, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, publishing half a century later and reviewing pre-colonial Indian art from the perspective of Indian nationalism (Case Study 3). One of Coomaraswamy's concerns was to take a Hindu perspective on Indian art and thereby rebut European disparagement of it. He pursued closely focused studies to this end on, for example, the pre-colonial art of Sri Lanka and Rajput[8] painting before 1800. When we turn to look at a text on Indian art by Partha Mitter, who has developed his ideas during the period after the achievement of independence for India, we find a speaker able to take a position arguably even stronger than that of Coomaraswamy to offer an explanation as to why European historians stated that Indian art was decadent (Case Study 4). Mitter turns the spotlight off Indian art and back onto the European interpreters of Indian art and *their* cultural locations and interests. Part 1 ends by considering the interpretations by European historians of art made in China, an area beyond colonial territory but with which Europeans traded (Case Study 5). European views of art in China, with its vast period of production long predating but also paralleling the time of European imperial domination, can be compared with the views of the historians of Indian art considered in Case Studies 2, 3, and 4.

In Part 2 we consider how art made by those subject to European domination in colonies and their descendants has been interpreted over time and place. We start with two case studies concerning artists working during the period of direct colonial rule, within colonized areas (Case Studies 6 and 7), and then move to consider two case studies focusing on artists working after direct European colonial rule had ended (Case Studies 8 and 9). What seems to characterize modes of interpretation of colonial subjects' art made during the colonial period (Case Studies 6 and 7)? How do they compare with the tenor of art-historical accounts attached to the work of artists practising after independence from colonial domination, whether working in a newly independent nation free from immediate subjugation or in what was the centre of the former European colonial power (Case Studies 8 and 9)? In Case Study 6, Tim Benton examines the evidence about the original reception of the architecture of António Francisco Lisboa, an artist of Portuguese and African ancestry working in Brazil in the 1790s, and charts the interests of later historians writing in Brazil, Europe, and North America, which revived or questioned Lisboa's reputation a century later. Could he be regarded as an innovative architect on the world stage or was his importance limited to a place in Brazilian colonial vernacular architecture? The tension between international and national importance can also be found in accounts from the 1930s onwards of the work of the twentieth-century Indian artist and

[8] This is the nama given to a group of warrior clans who ruled north-west India in princedoms from the eighth century onwards.

philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, examined by Catherine King in Case Study 7. Was he a key player in the development of modern art in India? Was he innovating or imitating? In Case Study 8, Catherine King surveys the new aspirations and new narratives created in post-independence Nigeria as artists gathered to debate their approaches to making modern art. How could artists assert independence? Did this mean making works that did or did not obviously draw on African subject-matter, styles, or media? We end by considering the autobiography of an artist – Rasheed Araeen – who is descended from former colonial subjects and has practised art in London, the metropolis of a former European colonial power, after independence (Case Study 9). Was it easier or more difficult for such an artist to refuse to be interpreted as geographically and racially located according to the ideology of the imperialist maps of centre and periphery, superior and inferior, those who innovate progressively and those who cannot develop alone? Artists working in Nigeria could be seen to have the space to debate their own group approach and to begin to write their own histories – albeit with an eye to critics and gallery demand outside their community. Children of former colonial subjects working in a European metropolis (such as Araeen) could, in contrast, be individually isolated, unless they organized with other artists who saw themselves in similar positions.

This sequence of case studies allows us to take snapshots of the historiography of pre-colonial, extra-colonial (in China), colonial, and post-colonial art to obtain some sense of the power of imperialist ideologies and the cultural spaces in which other viewpoints may be offered. Each different colonial relationship presented different structures of cultural government. It is important to stress that the case study approach seeks to avoid the temptation to treat 'pre-colonial', 'colonial', or 'post-colonial' conditions in recklessly generalizing terms. Rather, the aim is to infer, in guarded terms, what may be understood from specific instances of the effects of European imperialism and its aftermath.

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