

NAKED PUNCH

AN ENGAGED REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND THOUGHT
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ISSUE 16: £2



Zahid Mayo - London

THE FABLE THAT IS MODERNITY

Modernity may be the name for our current historical epoch, allegedly characterised by unfettered progress, liberty, and the conquest of religion and superstition in the name of truth and science. But it is also a story, a fiction. Specifically, it is a fable – a linear morality tale: ultimate redemption in the face of, in spite or even because of, seemingly insurmountable obstacles thrown on our path by external forces or evil others.

The power of such a narrative is evidenced today not only by the manipulation on all sides of images of beheading, fanatics hell-bent on martyrdom or the sacrifice of others, and the uncanny return of religion in latter-day society, but also by its grip on popular culture. Even in the case of the catastrophic, post-apocalyptic scenarios that nowadays dominate cinema, television and young adult literature, the plot inevitably concerns the travails of a hero or heroine who must go through hell, metaphorically but also literally, in order to find ultimate redemption. Crucially, the hero/heroine may have to engage in the commission of evil acts, which would otherwise be totally unacceptable and accidental but seem justifiable and necessary as part of some sort of wider providential plan.

Whether it's the survivors of a zombie-apocalypse in *The Walking Dead* or the heroine of *The Hunger Games*, the general idea, the arc of the story, involves a consideration of the cultural

and epistemological status of eyewitness accounts of strange landscapes and situations whose motives are pious rather than vainglorious: the power of belief or trust to produce redemption, the individual and communal particularity of being chosen for redemption, and the duty of those so redeemed to communicate this "truth" to their fellows.

In that respect at least, the dominant trend in our 21st-century culture (not only in western culture) – represented by *The Walking Dead* or *The Hunger Games*, but also the "return of religion" to the politics of an allegedly secularised world – has more to do with the baroque period of the 16th and 17th centuries than with any other in the history of humankind. In fact, as I will do here, one could draw a strict line between the narrative of Hans Staden's *True History*, published in Europe between 1557 and 1964 (no less than eighty-three editions attest to its enduring popularity) and today's *The Walking Dead*.

For starters, the main focus of both narratives is the same: cannibalism, the eating of human flesh. In Staden's case the reader is invited to share, in imagination, in terror, the memoir of a German mercenary made captive by the Tupinamba indigenous of sixteenth-century Brazil. The latter's representation hinges upon the spectacular and exotic nature of their violent practices centred on ritual sacrifice and anthropophagy. The sensational representation of such violence becomes

the means "by which its internal meanings can be obscured and its external significance manipulated to provide legitimacy to the outrage of the observer"; also to the colonial violence that is simultaneously being enacted.ⁱ

In turn, *The Walking Dead* speaks to a time in which the expansion of global media since Staden's day has convinced many more people around the world of the actuality of terror, and made visible the ways in which the destruction of the bodies of the wretched of the earth, the marginal and the condemned, are integral to the reproduction of colonial/modern/capitalist societies. In the meantime, these internal meanings – the allegorised notion of a tyrant society that eats its own – can be obscured by the image of the foreigner/native terrorist or the "enemy within", the cannibal serial killer of such popular tv dramas as *Homeland*, *Dexter* or *Hannibal*, whose apparent normalcy lures us into the trap of torture and terror "into which we fall once they strike".ⁱⁱ

At this point, such external meanings are manipulated to provide legitimacy to the outrage of the observer and justify the neo-colonial violence that is simultaneously being enacted in order to sustain modern/colonial societies through their moment of most acute crisis. Here again, the 21st century and the 17th century intersect one another, revealing the way in which the modern narrative of subjectivity and moral responsibility cannot

external meanings are manipulated to provide legitimacy to the outrage of the observer and justify the neo-colonial violence that is simultaneously being enacted in order to sustain modern/colonial societies through their moment of most acute crisis'

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Vijay Prashad's latest book is *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books and London: Verso, 2013).

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Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM). He is also considered one of the founding fathers of the Philosophy of Liberation.

Mahvish Ahmad is an independent journalist and lecturer living and working in Islamabad, Pakistan. She is also the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Tanqeed* | a magazine of politics and culture.

Maria Mies is a Marxist feminist scholar who is renowned for her theory of capitalist-patriarchy, one which recognises third world women and difference. She is a professor of sociology at Cologne University of Applied Sciences, but retired from teaching in 1993. Since the late 1960s she has been involved with

feminist activism. In 1979, at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, she founded the Women and Development program. Mies has written books and articles that deal with topics relating to feminism, third world issues and the environment. Some of her published titles include *The Lacemakers of Narsapur* (1982), *Women: The last colony* (1988), *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1999) and *The Subsistence Perspective* (1999). Today Maria Mies lives in Cologne, Germany with her husband Saral Sarkar.

Jeanny Gering is a freelance journalist based in Berlin. She studied Politics and Development Studies at SOAS in London, has worked in Pakistan, India and South Africa and assists the Dart Centre for Trauma and Journalism Europe. Her

do away with the theodicy-like fantasies of redemption through violence and the exclusion of evil, pace its claims to have conquered religion.

In the modern/colonial literature, a connection was made between Tupian sacrifice and religious ideas of Eucharistic sacrifice dividing Protestants from Catholics (and these from Jews and Muslims), through the motif of cannibalism. As Whitehead and others point out, this led to the obfuscation of the political internal meanings of the inclusion of the victim among the Tupi and other indigenous peoples around the world; specifically the inclusionary politics, communal as well as individual, that left no room for big others such as God, Law and the Sovereign. But also, not to a condemnation of violence tout court.

Rather, it led to more nuanced notions of how and when violence could be justified, and by whom. These notions continue to frame the cultural imaginary of modern societies, evoking the image of a violence whose irrationality resides in the obscurity of religious fanaticism. Today's "suicide bomber", like the colonial cannibal, is a Western media formation mobilised as proof of the illegitimacy of the political causes behind certain acts and the legitimacy of others (i.e. military intervention).

Staden's account was also an au-

tobiography, a reflection on how violent trauma affects the construction of one's self-identity through the purging of doubt in favour of belief. Such capacity for belief would be presented as the ultimate basis of knowledge and individual utter responsibility, proportional to one's subjection to divine grace within the bounds of reason. The domain of modern reason – including objective knowledge and moral responsibility (or "privatised" religion) – emerges thus against a background of terror, anxiety and psychosis.

We're told that such phantoms have been exorcised from the body politic of modernity, or confined to the dustbin of history (together with the cannibal people "without" history of post-Hege- lian imagination). However, as the cases of Staden's narrative, contemporary pop culture and the "War on Terror" reveal, it is more the case that such phantoms not only still haunt modernity but trust modern subjects into committing vengeful acts of its own. These are then disguised as justifiable or necessary evil acts on the way to redemption. The fable of modernity and its others isn't so much a delusion or a lie, as the mirror in which modernity can look at itself. It's also in this mirror "where its others look back".iii

i - Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil. Edited and Translated by Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier. Introduction. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, LVIII.

ii - Ibid. LXI.

iii - Eduardo Mendieta, "Imperial Somatics and Genealogies of Religion: How We Never Became Secular", in Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion, edited by P. Bilimoria & A. B. Irvine, Springer, 2009, 231-246.

stories always take a people's perspective of political and social change, whether she publishes them in written form, for radio, online or on film. The conversation with Maria Mies was recorded in 2013 in Cologne, Germany. To find out more about Jeanny's work go to www.jeannygering.com

Seher Shah's practice examines various architectural, historical and personal iconographies through their formal and visceral qualities. Her recent solo exhibitions include 30 | 60 | 90 at Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2013); Constructed Landscapes at AMOA- Art House, The Jones Center, Austin TX (2013), Radiant Lines, Nature Morte, Berlin (2012); and Brute Ornament, two-persons exhibition with Kamrooz Aram at Green Art Galler, Dubai (2012).

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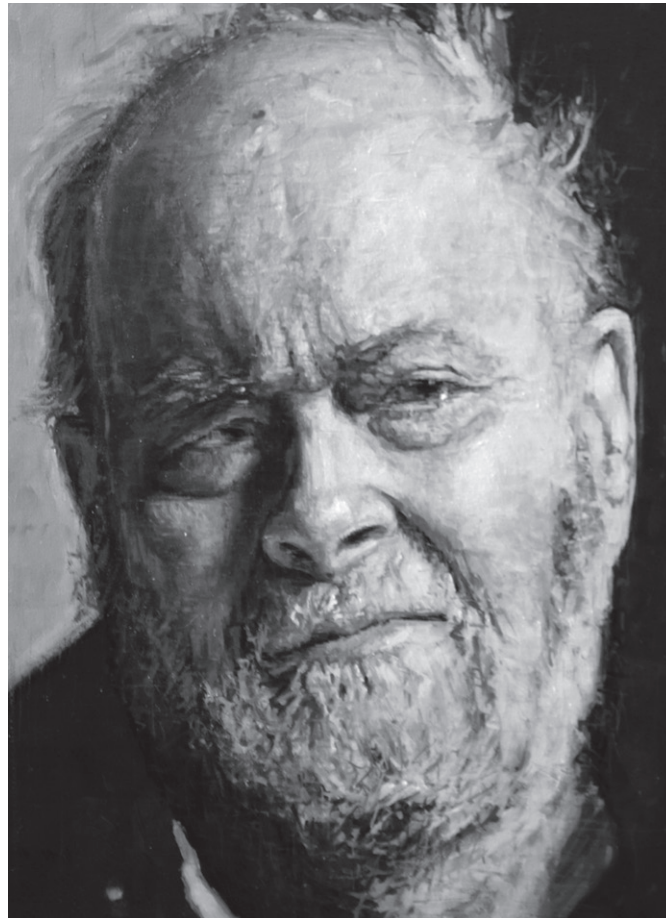
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Arthur C. Danto - by Luca Del Baldo
oil on Belgian linen,
30x40 cm ,
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We dedicate this issue to our consulting editor, comrade Arthur Danto. With his love in our hearts and in the memory of his many virtues we continue:

**January 1, 1924 –
October 25, 2013**

SHU ARAB SPRING?

I. Tornado.

A tornado seems to have swept through the narrow Gaza Strip. Every few years (2014, 2012, 2009, 2006...) this tornado makes its appearance. It lashes the day, lasts weeks and creates devastation that takes months and years to repair. Names are given this tornado (Cast Lead, Protective Edge), but these are only a façade. The real name of this tornado is Israel.

II. Toyota.

Hot winds scorch the old cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. Men with all the arrogance of religious sanction and youthful exuberance stand beside white Toyota trucks. They are ready for their jihadi furlough. Off they go into the desert to the northern Syrian cities that bend their knees to them. US war-planes, effectively the Iraqi air force, bomb them away from Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad. Syria is at the feet of the Islamic State. The plume of dust that follows them is nothing compared to the smoke that their guns will generate. Nor the fear. The Islamic State and its cousin, Jabhat al-Nusra, threaten Damascus more than the defected troops of the Syrian Army and the self-styled rebels ever did. Nusra fighters stand guard near the Golan Heights, gateway to Israel. But they have their backs to Israel. Their real target is Damascus, where honeyed eyes watch in terror as the smoke comes closer and closer. The UN says that the death toll in the Syrian Civil War is now over 191,000.

III. Rabaa.

Brave protests take place near Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo to remember the massacre of August 14, 2013. That day saw gruesome violence: 638 dead, largely civilians, mainly supporters of deposed President Morsi. On the anniversary this year, at least four more are killed. A pall hangs over Egypt. Politics raised on a pedestal at Tahrir Square has crashed down. As if he could take it no longer, Egypt's renowned human rights lawyer, Ahmed Seif al-Islam decided to depart from the world. Two of his children, Alaa Abd el-Fattah and Sanaa Seif, are currently in prison. They are part of the sixteen thousand political prisoners in Egypt. A wall of Saudi and US money surrounds Heliopolis Palace.

IV. Salah Badi.

Smell of the NATO bombs remains fresh in the unending conflict across what is rapidly becoming "Somalia on the Medi-

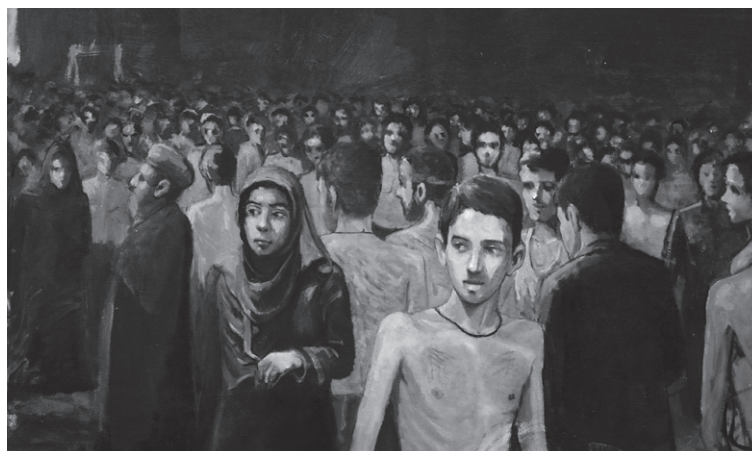
terranean." A dangerous conflict in Benghazi between General Khalifa Hifter, who fashions himself as a Libyan nationalist, and Ansar al-Sharia drew airstrikes on the General's behalf from his Gulf Arab friends. Tripoli's airport is gutted by the ongoing war between the militias of the towns of Zintan and Misrata. These are not feuds between towns, but political clashes between groups with different views of post-Qaddafi Libya, egged on by their own geo-political backers – Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Misrata's leader, Salah Badi, a man with terrible post-traumatic stress disorder, is in the saddle. His is banditry of self-aggrandizement. Fuel to the fire comes from Libyan jihadis, returning from the rat-line that took them to Syria.

V. Manama.

A young woman disembarks from her flight into Bahrain, small pearl in the Persian Gulf. She walks to passport control. She is arrested.

Her passport is taken from her. She is not surprised. Her father, Abdul Hadi al-Khwaja, sits in a Bahraini jail. He has been there off and on since February 2011. He is on hunger strike. She has come to see him. The King throws her into jail. Her name is Maryam al-Khwaja. She is the acting president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. The title "acting" sits there only because the actual president, Nabeel Rajab had been in prison for two years. He was released in May, just in time to oversee the publication of the Centre's annual report, in which one finds this:

"A clear example of the culture of impunity evident in Bahrain is the case of human rights defender and journalist Nazeeha Saeed, Bahrain correspondent for France 24 and Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya. According to Saeed, she was tortured at Riffa police station in 2011. She was 'blindfolded, kicked, punched, and slapped. Her hair was pulled, she was whipped with plastic tubing, had a shoe forced into her mouth and her head dunked into a toilet.' Saeed obtained three independent medical reports which confirmed that she was subjected to torture, two of which were issued by doctors working for the Ministry of the Interior. Despite the clear evidence of torture and the fact that she identified five of her alleged torturers, only one of them, policewoman Sarah Al-Moosa, was taken to court by the Public Prosecution Office. Al-Moosa was acquitted of all



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charges on 22 October 2012 and her acquittal upheld on 23 June 2013. No one has thus been held accountable for the torture of Nazeeha Saeed.”

VI. Constitutions.

Not far from where the street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself and became the spark of the Arab Spring in Sidi Bouzid, is a polling booth. It is the kind of booth that welcomed Tunisians to vote into place a process that wrote them a constitution. It is the first constitution written by an Arab citizenry – where the citizens sent their representatives to an assembly, where they fought over values and produced reasonable compromises.

An hour west, in Kasserine, Mohammed Ali Nasri jumps from his home as gunmen – eager to kill him – chase him down. He survives. The gunmen, he says, are likely al-Qaeda fighters who drove down from Mount Salloom, along the Algerian border. Mohammed Ali Nasri is from the secular Nida Tounes party, whose leader Beji Caid Essebsi has been under armed guard since the assassination of Mohammed Brahmi (Nida member of the assembly), who was killed on July 25 of last year. Leftist leader Hama Hammami is also under protection after his comrade, Chokri Belaid, was assassinated on February 6, 2013. Gunfire seeks to silence the voice of reason.

VIII. Mission Accomplished.

Neither the West nor the Gulf

‘Neither the West nor the Gulf Arabs, and nor indeed Israel, wanted the Arab Spring to succeed. It was too dangerous.’

Arabs, and nor indeed Israel, wanted the Arab Spring to succeed. It was too dangerous. The interim government in Egypt allowed an Iranian gunship to go through the Suez Canal for the first time since the Iranian revolution of 1979. That brought palpitations in Riyadh, Tel Aviv and Washington – the axis of “order” in the region.

Their coalition went to work in Libya, whose smoke covered over the Saudi entrance into Bahrain. In the name of democracy in Libya, democratic movements in Bahrain were sent to prison. Money and personnel hastily went off to Syria to suffocate the civil resistance and turn it into a terrible civil war. Cynical moves to beat back the dynamic of Tahrir had become essential. Saudi money and intelligence played a key role, with the Obama administration in the background. Too much of the Arab Spring seemed to sit in the lap of the Muslim Brotherhood, proxy of Qatar and Turkey. When the people had been scared off in Egypt, Saudi Arabia hastily disciplined its small neighbour. The emir had to retire, and his son had to pledge more modesty. Turkey was caught in a web of its own making. Neo-Ottomanism with a Muslim Brother face had not been as appealing as it seemed to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the current Prime Minister of Turkey. The Muslim Brothers

went off to prison. It was not to be their Spring.

IX. Bread and Freedom.

Liberals, congenitally without a mass base, went back to their think tanks and consultancies, to posts as advisors to the militaries and the emirs.

Leftists, beleaguered, sniff the earth for signs of new beginnings.

X. Arab Futurism.

2005 is a good year to imagine the Arab near-future. The Damascus Spring erupted as Baghdad fell into the throes of one more season of explosions. Imagine if you will a man named Hadi al-Attag, who lives in al-Bataween (Baghdad), and who spends his days collecting the body parts of those killed in these explosions. He stitches a body together, Citizen X or the-one-who-does-not-have-a-name, the new crime fighter who seeks revenge against those who killed the parts of his body. Ahmed Saadawi, who wrote this story – the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, sees his Citizen X as the composite of Iraq’s diversity, the savior of a country in distress, and the “epitome of mass destruction.” It is all these things. This Frankenstein, said Saadawi, “is the fictional representation of the process of everyone killing everyone. This character is the visual representation of the larger crisis, rather than the solution.”

Arab futures are not myths of salvation. They are rather dystopias

external meanings are manipulated to provide legitimacy to the outrage of the observer and justify the neo-colonial violence that is simultaneously being enacted in order to sustain modern/colonial societies through their moment of most acute crisis’

of survival as violence engulfs Arab societies. Hope has been smothered. It has come to mean its opposite. A young Syrian activist tells me that he wants “politics to end.” Another in Egypt says, “When will it become quiet again.” The yearning for order has its dangers. It suggests that futures are not possible, and that the unequal and brutal stability of the past has merit.

Syrian novelist Rosa Yassin Hassan’s *Guardians of the Air* (2009) describes how a man comes to the Canadian embassy to seek refugee status. When he sits he spots an electric heater. He snaps and rushes out. It turns out he had been tortured by such a heater in Syrian dungeons. The narrator says, “The room became narrower than a tomb, pressing down on my chest. The worlds had turned into a torture chamber...I was surrounded by degradation and death when all I yearned for was beauty.”

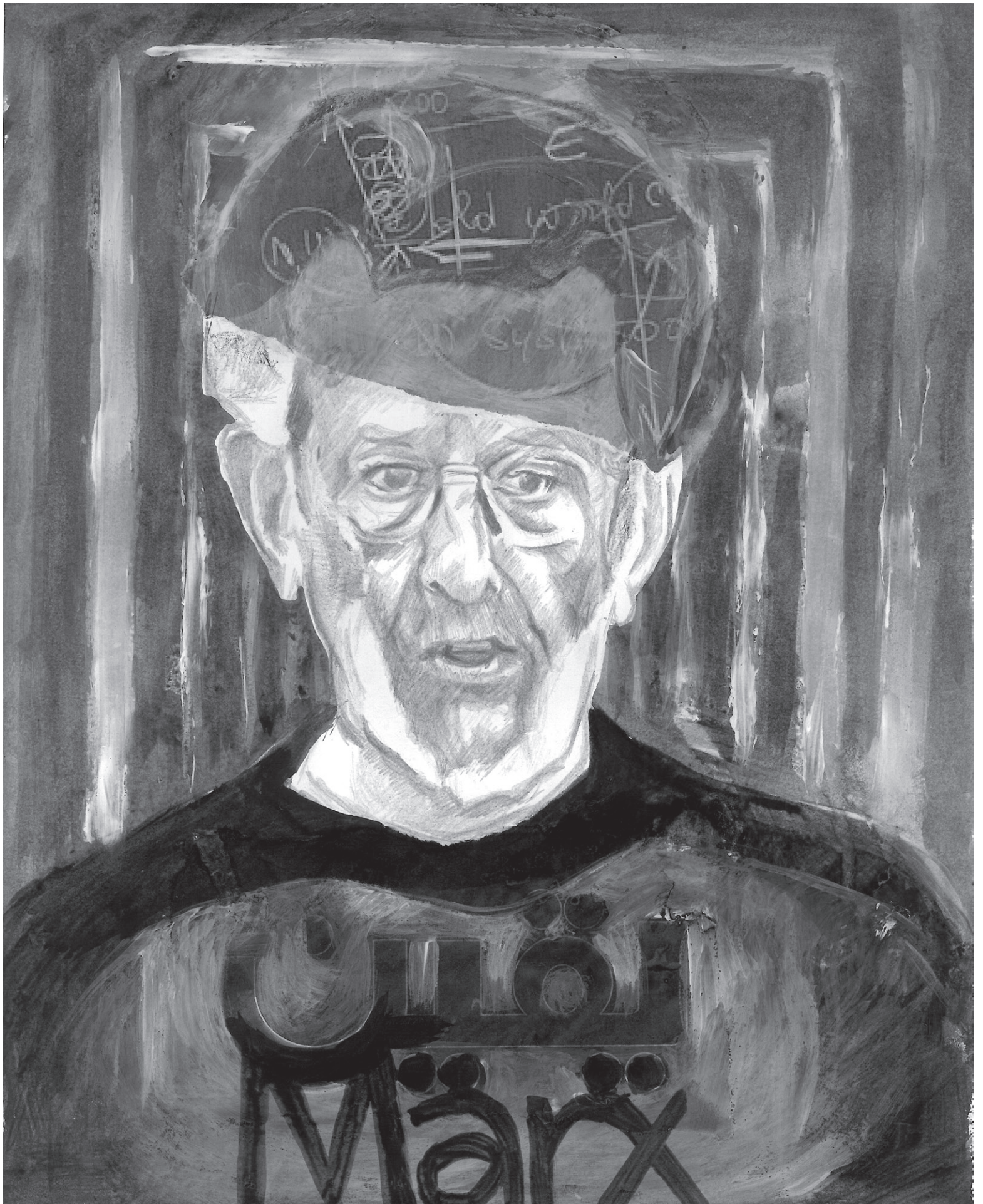


Illustration of Enrique Dussel by Ahmad Ali Manganhar

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH ENRIQUE DUSSEL

Enrique Dussel invites me in through the black gates that lead to his office at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. I am 45 minutes late but he wants to put time aside for me despite my delay. “You have come all the way from Pakistan after all,” he says. “It would be a shame if we did not speak.”

His office has a library that looks like his mind: Eclectic and disciplined. He is a voracious reader of philosophy from across the world, almost as if his person does not recognize boundaries of thought. The books that he has written cover an entire wall, all bound in identical black leather with titles engraved in gold. “My compiled writings,” Dussel explains. He has channeled his engagements into his thinking and his pen, and produced a collection of work that has inspired generations of philosophy students, activists, and political groups, in Mexico and beyond.

Dussel is one of the most grounded and innovative political philosophers alive today. He is the author of more than 50 books,

and written extensively about everything from political philosophy and ethics, to theology, aesthetics, and ontology. As one of the founders of the Philosophy of Liberation, he approaches his areas of thought from his position as a thinker in the Global South. His experience as a young boy in Mendoza, Argentina, the son of a country doctor, played a defining role in his life. His interaction with poor rural families, voluntary work with disabled children, and political activism as a teenager constituted his intellectual discourse, paving the way—along with so many other experiences—towards the man that he is today. Perhaps that is why his background is precisely the place that he starts, as I sit down to speak to him, to ask him about his person, and his philosophy.

Mahvish Ahmad (MA): You describe yourself first and foremost as a philosopher. Could you explain the role of the philosopher and of philosophy?

Enrique Dussel (ED): For me, philosophy was first and foremost the discovery of what it

means to be a philosopher in Latin America.

As an 18 year old, I chose to study at the Faculty of Philosophy. During my time, a Bachelor was 10 semesters, or five years, long. I first studied in Argentina, but left for Mexico where I was in exile through the Argentinian military dictatorship of 1975. At this point, the study of philosophy in Argentina was Eurocentric. We studied Greek philosophy, Latin, the middle ages, etc. So studying philosophy in Argentina was the same as studying in Madrid, Paris or Berlin.

At the age of 23, I received a stipend to pursue a post-graduate doctorate in philosophy in Spain. It was at this point that I discovered that I was not a European, but a Latin American. And, then, I didn't know what happened. I spent a total of 10 years in Europe. After Madrid, I went to Sorbonne in Paris, and Germany for two years. I went to Israel, the Mediterranean, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Greece, and so on.

[Dussel picks up “The Politics of Liberation: A Critical Global His-

tory”, the first of his mammoth 3-volume work laying out the foundations of a decolonized political philosophy]

This book is the first of its kind, mapping out Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Philosophy from the 13th Century until the year 2000. It is 1100 pages long, and each page has two columns. I inspired the book, but more than 60 colleagues have collaborated in its production. This is the first history of philosophy in Latin America. It was published in 2010, and nothing of its kind has ever existed.

Thinking as a Latin American philosopher has been a very difficult struggle. The academia, and its university professors, have mostly been Eurocentric.

I started when I came back from Europe and discovered popular struggles. We started thinking of the history of Latin American philosophy, from the point of view of the oppressed. An approach that is so characteristic of Liberation Philosophy, the only new school of thought born in Latin America.

Modern philosophy is bourgeois. Consciously or unconsciously, this philosophy justifies imperialism, bourgeoisie, capitalism, eurocentrism. Domination has a last philosophical moment. We build a critique against this foundational moment so the oppressed people can become free. That, for me, is the function of philosophy. It is a critique of the status quo.

Understanding their philosophy, European philosophy, as provincial, which it is, is not easy for us. We are of the conviction that Hegel and Marx are for all worlds, and not philosophers of the central moment of world history.

It is necessary to discover and develop the new subject, i.e. our subject. It is necessary to rethink our problems, and not only European problems. Develop new categories. Ask new questions, and develop new answers, that Europe cannot develop, because their problems are different. After this exercise, we can perhaps look at the categories of European philosophy, and see if they are relevant.

But let me also bring in something else that is interesting.

Let me bring in the beginning of the Philosophy of Liberation. They are a group of philosophers in Argentina in the 1960s who arose during military dictatorship and oppression. There were very

interesting popular movements in Argentina in the '60s. The '68 of Argentina or Mexico is not the '68 or Paris or Berkeley. Ours was very different. Here in Mexico, '68 was Tlatelolco. During a repressed student and workers movement the government massacred more than 400 in the Tlatelolco section of Mexico City. In Paris and Berkeley, not one person was killed. Here, more than 400 died. In Argentina, students and workers took control of a city, Cordoba. We call it "The Cordobazo", or "The Big Cordoba", and it sought to challenge the dictator, Onganía's, power.

Political engagement is very strong in our countries, and we have a very strong and popular political sensibility. The "popular" is a very difficult subject in Europe or the United States. There people think Hitler, folk and folkgeist, they think rightist groups. But in Latin America, the people signify dignity, and the poor. They're all Indians, Afro-Americans, and workers, the marginalized. The "people" have another meaning for us.

The same goes for the state. Antonio Negri in *Empire* said the state is not important. The question is empire, and empire has no relation with the state. But for us, in post-colonial countries, the state is very important. Because the state can defend us from the presence of world capitalism. So, we have many different visions not just on the political, but also of the ethical.

The ethical liberation I developed is not a consensual ethics like Habermas. I needed a material ethics of the affirmation of life, the corporality of life. Because, for the poor, poverty is a problem, whether you are in Pakistan, India, or Latin America. For us, poverty is a problem.

But what does it mean to be poor?

I discovered Marx not as a Marxist. I discovered Marx as a means to understand what it means to be poor. Being poor not on the individual, moral, or abstract level, but in the economical, the geopolitical, and the historical sense. To discover the poor as "other", in the sense of Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher, is different than the "other" in Levinas himself. When I spoke with Levinas, he didn't understand why we found his thought so interesting. Because, for us, the first problem wasn't exteriority, but poverty.

The trouble is that our problems are not very well represented in North American or European philosophy. We have other questions. For example, the alienation of the colonial culture of the old colonies. We have a tradition, and this tradition was the annihilated, oppressed because of the exploitation by European culture. We have a dichotomy here, that the European does not understand. The European does not understand what it means to confront these questions. He has no idea what all our questions mean, because our situation is very different: To be colonial.

All other schools, Marxist, phenomenology, American pragmatism, etc., are all commentaries of Europe or the United States.

So to answer your question, for me philosophy is to think, to critique in a radical manner, against the foundational moment of domination. The oppressed constitute the majority in the periphery, the South and the old colonies. Modern philosophy is bourgeois. Consciously or unconsciously, this philosophy justifies imperialism, bourgeoisie, capitalism, eurocentrism. Domination has a last philosophical moment. We build a critique against this foundational moment so the oppressed people can become free. That, for me, is the function of philosophy. It is a critique of the status quo.

MA: How does the philosopher, the intellectual, play a role within this critique?

ED: First, through the deconstruction of the history of philosophy. Europeans believe and lay claim to being the universal philosophy. Descartes is the beginning of modern philosophy. And modern philosophy is a world philosophy.

We say "No, hold on a moment!" Modern European philosophy is a European philosophy. It is true that European countries like France or England become, especially after the industrial revolution, empires of their time. And that all other cultures were more or less dominated as colonies.

For example, I read Parmenides, who said the being is what the non-being is not. For a European it is almost an abstract tautology. But, when I read the Greek philosopher, I understood that the being is Greek, and the non-Greek is the non-being. The barbarian, the asiatic, the other people outside the city walls. Heraklitus said the logos is until the wall of the city, after the wall is the multitude. But, this multitude is an asiatic multitude, the non-being, the non-human. So, I understand this from the point of view of the coloniality of being. I understand it in the other way. All Greek, feudal and even Islamic philosophy—because even in Islamic philosophy there is a sense of who is Islamic (Dar-ul-Islam) and who is not Islamic (Dar-ul-Harb) – advocates the negativity of the other. The problem is that I am that other.

In the first lecture I gave in the United States, I said, “For you Latin America is not civilized, developed, human. It is not. When I speak of my country, I speak of the non-being, of a barbarian philosophy.” I begin with a text of Athenagoras in the 2nd century. He was not a Roman, and spoke on the barbarian philosophy of the Roman people. I can reread the Roman and understand what it means to be the barbarian of the European. I introduce a new, and actual, subject into European philosophy.

For North Americans, to be a Mexican is to be illegal in the United States. And to be illegal is

to be a second human being. It is a racist category, indicating that Parmenides is still at work today. The being is Anglo-Saxon, the non-being, the non-human, is non-Anglo-Saxon, whom we can kill, no problem. Take Iraq, one Iraqi is not a problem. We can kill hundreds and thousands of persons, but the 25 boys are a problem. The American is paramount.

A sensitivity to this, an attempt to critique this, is developed in a Philosophy of Liberation.

MA: How does one go about de-centering such a dominant discourse?

ED: Many things come to mind.

This is a small book, “The Philosophy of Liberation.” It is like a meta-discourse.

There are abstract categories. All categories in the social science e.g. in anthropology, sociology, history, politics, etc. have abstract categories.

We can speak on the totality; a system. But what does totality mean? A system? What does it mean when somebody in the exteriority of the system is subsumed and alienated in the system? And how can somebody recoup the dignity of the system, and organize a new system? And put the system into question? All these are abstract categories. I call them meta-categories. It is logic.

The Philosophy of Liberation begins to be a logic. But afterwards, on the basis of this logic, I construct a politics, an ethics and an aesthetics, many things. At this point, I operate on a more empirical level. For example, the question of gender at an erotic level, woman/man. I can develop a treatise on the liberation of woman based on the categories I develop in the philosophy of liberation. And confront issues like psychoanalysis.

But on these levels, the question of modernity always plays a role. And in modernity, central and peripheral countries now begin to be in question. Because, now, at this moment, the centrality of Europe and the United States begins to change. The presence of China and India begins to be more developed. Russia discovers a new possibility. And the new poles of presence, where the center is not Europe, United States, and Japan, like some years ago, begin to be a pluripolarity—if I can call it that.

Now, it’s more difficult to see many relations on this geopolitical level. But this moment is still interesting. China, for example, begins to be more present at all levels. They also begin a discovery through their own philosophy. Because, Marxism said the old culture was a bourgeois, monarchic mix—nothing. But now, the Chinese begin to discover that there is an old Chinese culture. They begin to discover tradition, to understand what

China means. China is not a miracle. It has developed over 2000 years of civilization. Each of these big cultures have begun to discover their traditions, and have begun a dialogue with modernity. They have philosophical questions that we must put into the discussion. That, generally speaking, Europeans don’t put into the question, or into the discussion.

MA: You speak of de- and restructuring philosophy. Could you give another example of when you take existing canonical political philosophy and de-structure it? Could you give me a specific example of a thinker where you think this is necessary?

ED: For example, for me, within political philosophy, ethics is the abstract foundation of all practical fields. Economics is a practical field, as is family, culture, and, of course, politics. That is why I needed to develop an ethics of liberation. I began to study political philosophy to clarify this foundational moment for myself, the foundational moment of all practical fields.

For me, the question lay in our practice. And in the last 12 years, Latin America has had very interesting political experiences, or practices. We have a long history of politics, and in books, I clarify this history. To understand where I am in Latin America. But, it was not like this in the past. So in 1999, for example, the revolution was not so strong. This was when Hugo Chavez began the Bolivarian

ian Revolution in Venezuela.

I focused on the left, or rather, center-left, not the far left. There was a small left... Nevertheless, it was a novelty, because all our governments were right-wing military dictatorships, or populist like the Congress Party in India. Now, they have moved more to the left.

I began to study the experience in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and other countries. And for me, it was revolutionary. The manner in which the Zapatista movement began to speak on politics. For me, it was very original. They think politics like Indian groups, and they express themselves through a man who writes very well, Subcommandante Marcos. He is a philosopher. He studied at the same university where I am a professor. He was a professor there too, and he was 4 semesters junior to me! Afterwards, he went to Chiapas. He is a philosopher, but he engages with the Indians. And he has a very beautiful, very clear, manner of writing.

He has produced an expression which is very interesting. It is in Spanish, and it is untranslatable (intraductible) from Spanish. "*Los que mandan mandan mandando.*" Beautiful poetry. Mandan means commanding. The dominant groups, the rulers, command commanding. Mandan mandando. Commanding is understood as domination. But, said Subcommandante Marcos, for us, for the Indians, the person

that is commanding is obedient to the people. So, Marcos said : "*Los que mandan mandan obediendo.*"

For me that was... [Dussel flicks his hand, and says] Pphm! A theoretical bomb! Because in modernity, from Hobbes until now, power is a type of domination. In political science, from Weber to Marx to Lenin in "State and Revolution", the left in general has thought that political power is domination. Because of that understanding, Marx said that the state is not the solution after the revolution, but the finishing or the end of politics is. Why? Because politics is domination. That is the position of anarchism. If political power is domination, then the people can never take power. Because they do not want to dominate the other.

We need a positive definition of political power.

This hypothesis, the Zapatista hypothesis, changes the definition of power, and changes the definition of all politics. You see, power can be fetishized, it can be self-referential. But I need to think at which level: At the level of the institution!

I then begin to make a distinction between potentia and potestas. I take this from Spinoza, from Negri. But I changed the definition, because I need to arrive at a positive vision of politics. And not to be an idealist or moralist, because my position is a critical

realism. I am not a moralist who thinks politics is very beautiful. No, I say in the majority of cases politics becomes dominating, and fetishized. But it is a negative possibility, you know—the nature of the power.

And with this hypothesis, I can begin to understand what power is. I began to speak of it in the "*Twenty Theses on Politics*". But that was after 10 years of struggle. Because I needed to look at all my books on history. The first volume of my 3-volume world philosophy book was a rereading of the history of politics. And in this rereading, I began to reread the text and see the mistakes within this history. This history was not a history. No, I understood the meaning of power in history, and I needed a new vision of a question, of power—a positive vision.

And this vision is... *Die Welt ist Wille*. A beautiful expression by Schopenhauer, but not with the same meaning that Schopenhauer had. The expression is "a will to live." It is very positive. That is the force of power. It is the will to live of the people. And this concept is in the Indian civilization. In all civilizations. Life is the central moment of all cultures. The most mythical and primitive gift, that the Gods give us, is life.

And life is the only absolute moment in all ethical and political description. I have a universal principal: The affirmation of life. I am not postmodern with a fragmentary rationality. No. I think

the affirmation of life is necessary for all humanity. Without the affirmation of life we are finished, no? But it is not only affirmation. Where the will is, is the consensus of practical reason. I am not irrational, I think reason is very important. And, it can be universal too. That means it the community is in agreement about this question: How do we affirm life?

But the third element, that is fundamental, is feasibility. Because the Frankfurt School criticizes instrumental reason. But I need instrumental reason, because people, without technology, wealth, a good economy, have no power. So I am a realist, critical, positive. But afterwards, when this community organizes with force and power, and produces the institutions they have, they begin to do this...

For the left, institutions, like power, are thought as oppressive. I say the institution is ambiguous. It can be oppressive, but it can also be an affirmation of life. Agriculture is one institution. I need agriculture to grow, to eat different plants, it is good for life. Agriculture is an institution. Agriculture opens up the possibility that the owner exploits the worker. But it also opens up the possibility for the affirmation of life. Thus, it is ambiguous. It is not intrinsically bad or evil. In my second volume of "*The Politics of Liberation*", in more than a 100 pages, I speak on this ambiguity of institutions.

I say, the institution can become oppressive when it is fetishized, but at the moment of creation—new institutions—the institution is liberating. At the beginning, a system gives people the possibility to live. Afterwards it becomes oppressive, when it becomes a bureaucracy, when it becomes fetishized and self-referential, persisting for the sake of persisting.

So with this vision of institutions, I can describe different types of institutions. I have a description of all possible political institutions. So about life in the economy, education, culture, etc., and the manner in which it is reproduced. And also the institution that is meant to legitimize the system, i.e. the question of democracy.

After the question of the institution, there is the question of the feasibility of the system: Of technology, economics, etc.

And then, there is a third level. That is, the subjective, principal, normative level, that obliges me to affirm life. Taking a consensus not through violence but through reason, and doing the possible, not the impossible. This is based on subjective, normative principals... It is normative because the ethics in politics is transformed into something political. So, in general, political science of the political faculty speaks on the history of institutions. But it never speaks on subjective, normative principals. Because that is a philosophical question, not a political science question. Democracy is

only a procedure of institutions. But at a cultural, subjective level, the agreement of a person with the institution is based on the belief that the masses always make a decision after a consensus based on the semiotic participation of the affected.

That is a subjective culture.

I think democracy is objective, and the latter is subjective. I do a description of almost all ideal systems of politics. It is not ideal in the sense of Plato. It is the actual system in their best aspects. And that is the second volume [of Dussel's three-part "Politics of Liberation", which lays out a decolonized political philosophy]. And in the third volume, that is in thesis 11-20 [in Dussel's "Twenty Theses on Politics"], I begin a new time period, and I say that the old system cannot be perfect. Because of the human condition, the old system always produces negative effects. The persons that suffer the negative effects—I will use Walter Benjamin and call them the victims—see the system as unjust. From the point of view of the victims, the system is unjust.

Now, let's take a situation where all the participants have a justice claim... I can have a justice claim, but commit an unjust act, because I do not know the negative effect. But the others, who suffer from my action that I committed with my justice claim, suffers from my act. He says to me, "Yes, you have a justice claim, but I suffered

Like in Islam, I can say: "You know that Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt?" All people know this as a part of their culture. So I can say, by God, there was the Pharaoh, because he believed he was God. It was idolatry, and God called on the slaves to leave Egypt. But for that, the people had to struggle. They had to give their blood. And the blood of the people arrived at the Nile as a social movement. And then the Pharaoh said, "Go out!" And the people went and founded a new society.

from your act." So I see it as unjust. I see the injustice of my act, in the negative effect of the other. So, it is from this point of view of the other, that I have deconstructed the entire system. Because, now the political action must begin with a liberation praxis to change the system. That is, the revolution of the transformation. It is liberation praxis. I need to change all types of institutions.

I have new principals, subjective ones, that are not systems that allow the reproduction of the existing system, but new subjective normative principals that oblige me to change the system. To do a new better. And these are critical

normative principals. That is the second part.

With this type of description of politics, I gave courses to, for example, the Indians in Bolivia. I said that is the reality, and they said, "Very interesting!"

They understood it very well. They said, "Help us in our action."

And I can explain that in that group, the people understood what politics means. It comes from our experience. And I see in contact with the people how effective this comprehension is. Because the people understand that they are the only siege around power. All institutions, the president, the deputy, the governor, the military. All these people exercise power as delegation, as my delegation. But they are not power. I am the only subject.

When the people understand that, it changes everything.

And that comes from practice. I do not think there is any philosopher in Europe or the United States who expresses all that in such a manner: It is my practice with the people.

I am in exile because the military of Argentina exiled me. But in Venezuela, I gave lectures in the military school. Hundreds and thousands of students in the military spoke with me about strategy and politics, and they were all very enthusiastic. It was effective. And, I cannot take up the ques-

tions of any philosopher in the United States or Europe. Though, it is true I am in dialogue with almost all the actual political philosophers in Europe and United States.

MA: You just mentioned a moment ago that a lot of your work is based on a dialogue with the people. Could you speak a little bit about the origins of the ethics and politics of liberation, and of course liberation theology? Could you say a little about the origins of both in Latin America and in relation to your own activism?

ED: It is interesting I have here one book by Ali Akbar Engineer. He is an Islamic thinker in Bombay, and he has an Islamic theology of liberation.

It is exactly like in Latin America. It was Latin American. The theology of liberation was born more or less at the same time as the philosophy of liberation. In 1968. The reading of Marcuse, the Frankfurt School, but more than that, the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara, Camillo Torres, who was a priest who later died in Colombia, were important. The Christian Youth People in the university. Many of them became guerrillas in the 1960s and they gave their life, and many of them were killed. So in these groups, as Christians, and I could say as Islamists, they began to rethink their own tradition. The interesting thing in the theology of liberation was that it was related with Marxism. There

are not many Islamic groups that have gone this way. They have gone towards a more fundamentalist, and traditional thinking. In Latin America, the theology of liberation was democratic. First, Christian democrats means capitalists. But these young people read Marx, so there was first a reconciliation between Christianity and Marxism. But it is also interesting that Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher in aesthetics, Jewish, who spoke of a solution as a materialistmessianism. He combined Marxism with Judaism, exactly the same intuition that underpins the theology of liberation.

It was interesting because the theology of liberation was not a product of the academy. It did not come because the theological faculty was persecuted. It was a product of a popular movement. A struggle against the military and a left consciousness. It was not fundamentalist, it was democratic. It was Marxist in its interpretation and very articulate with the popular imaginary, i.e. a religious imaginary. In Latin America and in the Islamic World too, the popular imaginary is religious. In all the world, and especially the periphery. The interesting thing in the theology of liberation was that within the church it was a critique. It was not that it was from the church, but that it was a cri-

tique of the church. Especially a critique against the Eurocentric vision of the Vatican in Italy. That too was critical in relation to the bourgeoisie. It was very easy to understand for the people. The theology of liberation in Latin America was a novelty in world history, because it was the first religious movement that was democratic, left, and against capitalism.

The philosophy of liberation arose in the same moment, with the same experience, but was discovered within the philosophical faculty. I was a professor in philosophy. I am a doctor in philosophy. At that moment I started to, not as a priest but as a philosopher, to study theology, in Paris and in Germany. I did a semester of theology. I know theology academically. I studied in Hebrew because I was in Israel so I speak Hebrew. I can read the Bible in Hebrew. So I have a theological formation, but not as a priest, or as a member of the bureaucracy in the Church, but as a professor in philosophy.

So I developed a philosophy of liberation that was not a theology. Though, I also knew the theology of liberation.

It is easier when I speak to poor people, Indian, Afro, or other

popular groups, on the theology of liberation rather than the philosophy of liberation. Because the people know, recognize, this language.

I say, "You know Moses?"

"Yes."

"He was in Egypt?"

"Yes."

"In Egypt there were slaves."

They say this, they recognize this, because they know and recognize Christian thought.

Like in Islam, I can say: "You know that Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt?" All people know this as a part of their culture. So I can say, by God, there was the Pharaoh, because he believed he was God. It was idolatry, and God called on the slaves to leave Egypt. But for that, the people had to struggle. They had to give their blood. And the blood of the people arrived at the Nile as a social movement. And then the Pharaoh said, "Go out!" And the people went and

founded a new society. And the people know that. We can say, good it is safe for you now like it was then. Mexico is like Egypt and you are a slave here. We must make a new Mexico. Read the text, it is holy for them. And they say, "Yes, it's true. That is what the text says." It is easier, that way to begin to analyze the system of oppression.

MA: So it's an imaginary that they share?

ED: Exactly! It is the symbolic language of the imaginary of the people. Theology is easier for the people.

But the philosophy of liberation goes deeper. Because we must think of the foundational moment. We must confront European philosophy and destroy its false arguments. But I do not have any problems in my text. There is nothing on theology, it is pure philosophy. I do not need any faith to understand what is said. But if a person has a faith, Christian or Islamic they can understand it too because my

thought is Semitic.

Take my first book, that I wrote many years ago: "Semitic Humanism". For me, Semitic is Babylon, Phoenician, Palestinian, Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic. I have a chapter on Islam. But I say I will speak on the Semitic vision of the human as a philosopher. Not as a believer. I speak on, for example, anthropological unity and ethics. Also in Islam, they think of the unity of the flesh: Head, soul and body. Unity.

I speak of intersubjectivity in the community and in Islam—in the *Ummah*. There is no individualism, there is community. After that, temporality is not a circular temporality, but a linear temporality, because I don't just study Babylonia, Christianity, but Islam. And I say, in the beginning, that I studied that because this tradition is part of the Latin American imaginary. So I write thus as a Latin American philosopher, not as a theologian.

At this time I was at the European Institute in Mainz, and I wrote this in Germany while I was there.

Let me quote from the book. "This work expresses the different moments of the constitution of one philosophical anthropology, the human being and the world."

It is not theology. I speak of the symbols of a culture, of hermeneutics. In the second part you can read about Hellenistic humanism, because I ask: What happened with the vision of Greek philosophy?

The third book looks at the presence of Hellenism in Semitic vision. And it was a question of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th century until the 14th century. The development of that, until the discovery of America. And after that, I be-

gin the history of Latin America, because I have a vision of a world history that is philosophical, not theological. But, I can do theology, which means I can go into a community or in a church of Christians and say, "We are believers and in our text I can speak as a believer." And in this moment, I do theology.

But in the faculty of philosophy, I never do that. One of my students said to me, "Why are you speaking on theology?" But I've never spoken on theology! And they do not know my faith or non-faith. I said it has nothing to do with that. I can play tennis, and I can have a Christian or Jewish faith, but that has nothing to do with philosophy.



Portrait of Maria Mies by Zahid Mayo

AWAKENING TO PATRIARCHY: A CONVERSATION WITH MARIA MIES

Jeanny Gering: You have argued that women have played an active role in left and national liberation struggles and yet they have been subjugated to patriarchy after national liberation or political victories of movements by the very movements they had supported. Can you elaborate on this on how you came to this conclusion?

Maria Mies: I first realised this pattern, for the role of women in liberation struggles, when I was teaching at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. I had started a program for women and development there. It was the first one in the world, where women from third world countries could come and do an 'MA in Women and Development'. In 1979 this was quite new. These women came from various countries, from Somalia, Sudan, South Africa, from the Caribbean, India and Bangladesh. We talked about the situation of women in these countries and I learned that most of them had undergone a liberation struggle like India, Bangladesh, South Africa and Somalia. Then I gave them

a course on Socialism and the Social Democratic Party and the women's movement in that party in Germany. I had studied what had happened to that movement in the 19th Century and later on. The German example showed that women were active in the socialist struggles. Clara Zetkin had even started a separate women's organisation within the SPD. But Rosa Luxemburg did not join her. She did not want to join that women's organisation. She wanted to do "real politics", and "real politics was a men's affair. When the SPD was banned by the state, the men were forbidden to agitate openly. But the women's organization could continue their work. The state did not consider their work as political and left the women's organization alone. Later on when the Socialist Party was legalised again the Socialists wanted to integrate the women into the SPD as individuals. They said: "We don't need an extra women's organisation". That meant women had no longer an organisation of their own, could not organize their "Only Women's Conferences" and continue their journal: "Die Gleichheit". When

I studied other Liberation Movements I found similar tactics. When I shared this observation with my students they came and told me the same, for instance a woman from Somalia told me: "We were active in the liberation movement in our country, and for some time now the Marxists have won victory in Somalia, but when it comes to the question of how we as women should continue, what role would we have in the new government. What kind of government would we want to have, what kind of economics would be good for women, we found that women's problems were not considered important." The same happened in South Africa. Even today I get news from one of those students. She had joined the ANC and did her PhD on Women in South Africa. Today she is so disappointed with what the ANC has been doing. So, when it comes to the question of political and economic power – women's issues are forgotten. Their separate women's organizations are dissolved. Women have to do the same jobs they did before and have to go back to housework. That was the gen-

eral understanding I had gotten from the German experience.

Actually, the erstwhile revolutionaries often aim for women to have the same position as the bourgeois women. "Equality" was and is their solution for the "Women Question" as it was called in Germany in those years. Even Engels wrote much earlier, "What is good for the bourgeoisie, should be good for everybody". I have always criticized this idea, because if we only want to get to where the bourgeoisie is, it's not worth a revolution. I think today "Equality" is still more or less the aim of most revolutionaries and even of many feminists. Most feminists in today's women's movement, whatever there is left of it, only want equality. This has not been the aim in the early days of the feminist movement; it was about women's liberation. Our demand was: "We want liberation" and that means liberation from male violence, patriarchy and capitalism. We were much further in our thinking than women are today. My students in the Hague and I came to this understanding already around 1980.

Our demand was: “We want liberation” and that means liberation from male violence, patriarchy and capitalism. We were much further in our thinking than women are today. My students in the Hague and I came to this understanding already around 1980.

JG: What were the core aspects of the women’s movement to you when you were teaching in the Hague?

MM: The issues which practically all feminists in the world were studying at that time were the issue of violence against women and of housework. Why is there still so much violence against women, even in our so-called civilized societies? Why is housework not considered as work in this society by capitalists? Our critique of capitalism as well as of Marxism started with that question. Why is housework not understood as work? Why is it not paid? The issue of unpaid housework was and still is a crucial problem in all our societies. In those years there was a worldwide campaign on housework. It was discussed by feminists all over the world. To solve that problem some feminists demanded wages for housework. Their argument: If housewives would get a wage for their work as any male worker gets a wage, then the problem would be solved. The campaign “Wages for Housework” was started by three women who are still my friends today. Two Italians: Sylvia Federici and Maria Rossa da la Costa and Selma James from Jamaica. I did not agree with them, because I do not believe that the solution of the problem of housework lies in turning all unpaid housework in wage-work. Because wage-labour has not liberated men from the exploitation by capitalism. Hence, apart from

male violence against women my first theoretical critique of capitalism began with the question: What role does housework play in capitalism? That is still one of the most important questions today. Even today women who have only done unpaid housework are not entitled to get a rent in their old age.

Women have not always been housewives. When I think of my mother, a peasant woman, she had to do housework of course, but she was a peasant woman who also had to work in the fields, take care of twelve kids, feed the chicken and the pigs, milk the cows and do all the necessary work that has to be done in a subsistence farm all over the world. Under capitalism the concept of women’s work changed dramatically. The new concept of women’s work was housework. This concept means that a woman does unpaid work at home and depends on a wage-earning husband, the so-called “breadwinner”. Of course, the women of workers had to combine their wage-work in a factory with their unpaid housework at home. This situation is still the same for most working women

today. Men however go to a factory or an office and sell their labour power for a wage. But he has not created that labour. Without the woman he would not be able to sell any labour power anywhere. This insight in the role of housework under capitalism led me to Marx and his concept of labour. He sees a fundamental difference between “productive labour” and “reproductive labour”. Productive labour means that men produce a commodity that can be sold with profit on the market. Re-productive labour is non-waged labour that is not sold on the market, for instance housework. Marx calls this non-wage work “re-productive labour”, because he understood that this labour is necessary to “reproduce” the labour power from day to day but also from generation to generation. He also knew that the intergenerational re-production of labour power could not be technically planned. But he was of the opinion that this re-production of new human labourers could be left to our natural instincts.

His opinion on “productive and “re-productive” labour brought me and other feminists to the conclusion, that making a car is productive but giving birth to a child is non-productive. This Marxian definition of labour under capitalism made clear to me that women have nothing to expect from socialism. Because the socialist concept of labour and the sexual division of labour is

basically not different from the capitalist one.

I discovered the concept of patriarchy in a similar way as I had discovered capitalism: not by reading books but by personal experience. I had been in India for five years, from 1963 to 1968. In 1972, I wrote my PhD on Indian women and patriarchy. It was the first book written ever on modern Indian women and patriarchy. When I studied the Indian patriarchy I discovered that German society is also ruled by patriarchy. And so are most societies in the world.

JG: Why did you decide to do your PhD on that topic?

MM: That has to do with a whole part of my biography, (Mies 2010). I was a lecturer at the Goethe Institute in India in Pune. I taught German to Indian women and men. Men were the majority but there were also some women students. I asked myself: “Why do these women want to learn German, what can they do with German?” For the men it was clear, they wanted to find a job in Germany or to study sciences. But when I asked the women about their motivation I found out that they wanted to postpone the so-called marriage talk. Because Indian women had to get married -at least in those years. These were not love marriages. Marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and the bridegroom. The two partners hardly knew

Experience and practice come first. Theory comes later. This method I consider the only one in which the “research objects” can participate as subject

each other. What was important was that caste, class and family status matched. Girls had to get married before they were too old. Otherwise they had no status and no economic security in India. In those years there were hardly any middle class women who had a regular job and an income of their own. A woman was dependent throughout her life. As a child she was dependent on her father. After marriage she depended on her husband. In her old age she depended on her son. An unmarried daughter was therefore a burden to her family.

Moreover, the parents of a girl had to pay a dowry to the bridegroom's family as a kind of tribute. There is absolutely no economic rationality behind this custom. Dowry is the opposite of a bride-price. A bride-price still acknowledges that the woman has a value. She costs for instance as much as a cow. The Indian dowry system however de-values the woman totally. It is the most patriarchal marriage system I know. The “bride-giving” has not only to give a daughter for nothing to the “bride-receiving” family, but on top of that has also to pay “for the honour” that their daughter is accepted by that other family. If a family has several daughters they can go bankrupt to get them all married. And they have to get married. But even after marriage the woman has to work for free for the husband and his family. She has no right to work outside the house. She has to obey her

husband and the mother in law. Even modern people legitimize the custom of dowry by the argument that a bride has to be fed by her husband's family. The giving and receiving of dowry is forbidden by law. But many progressive and educated families still practise this custom. I understood why our women students tried to postpone that marriage talk by studying German. Because in the Indian middle class education of girls has a high status. A BA of the girl is an asset in the marriage negotiations. All this I learned from my women students in Pune. Here I got my first experience of what patriarchy is.

After my return to Germany in 1968 I wanted to study the position of Indian women more thoroughly. I went to the University of Cologne and told Professor Koenig, a famous sociologist, about my experiences in India and that I wanted to know more about the status of Indian women. He suggested “Why don't you do a PhD on this subject?” I went back to India and did an empirical study on the role conflicts of educated Indian women. There I learned thoroughly what patriarchy means in reality for women. This study was for me also the beginning of my commitment in the new women's movement.

JG: What did this realization-what patriarchy is - mean to you? And how do you explain patriarchy to someone today? Many people today in a place like Ger-

many would say that there is no patriarchal system any more.

MM: To me personally it meant that I went on studying patriarchy further and used the same method I had used before. That means: Experience and practice come first. Theory comes later. This method I consider the only one in which the “research objects” can participate as subjects.

I came back in 1968. This was a fantastic moment of history. In Germany the Students' Movement had just begun. These years were also the beginning of the Women's Movement. I participated in both of these movements. While I wrote my PhD thesis I tried to tell my feminist friends about my experiences in India and about patriarchy. But all this was too exotic for them, and too far away. They struggled against male oppression and inequality between men and women in our society.

Immediately after my doctorate I got a job at the School of Applied Social Sciences in Cologne. My specialization was Family Sociology and Sociology of Social Minorities. This was an ideal combination. I could integrate all I had learned before into my teaching. I talked about my discovery of the patriarchal family system in India and elsewhere, on the status of women as a social minority, on alternatives to these systems, on the various utopian movements to build up a new society. For the

students all this was new and they were fascinated. They all had to read Engels', “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, When we discussed whether patriarchy has disappeared under capitalism, as Marx and Engels had predicted, it became clear that it had not. Some of the women were already feminists and asked “What about our job chances, what about studies, what are our prospects for our future? Why don't women in Germany have the same job opportunities as men? Why is there so much violence against women in our society? Why are so many women raped or beaten by their husbands? Isn't that patriarchy or how do you explain this?”

About ten of these women students started a campaign to establish a “House for Battered Women” in Cologne. I supported them and together we founded the association: “Women Help Women”. Our struggle began in 1976 and by the end of the year we had our “Autonomous Women's House”. It was the first one of such “Women's Houses” in Germany.

The experience of this struggle against violence against women taught all of us that violence is the secret of patriarchy. You can't understand patriarchy unless you understand the role of violence to uphold this system. And capitalism would not have emerged if it had not been built upon patriarchal ground.

Maria Mies: The Village and the world, Spinifex, Melbourne, 2010

ARSENAL

Yesterday was beautiful; today is thick & stagnant:
hurricanes threaten communities from Kitty Hawk to Nantucket
–
all low-lying areas are evacuated.

I seek alternatives (routes & pathways previously discredited)
& I understand the efficacy of Harriet Tubman's oft-brandished
pearl-handled pistol: *you go on or you die*, she promised,

every wavering runaway slave committed to her care.
Were it left to me, I'd lie down in any available ditch, forever.
(I'm unequal parts postures & approximation – an attractive,

illegible sign.) But it isn't, I'm not exclusively my own.



MY POEMS BEAR THE WEIGHT AND

Qalandar Bux Memon: Your poems often evoke death and also aging - which we might say is a movement towards death - it seems the scent of death lingers in your poems. Why. And, then, can i ask, is, for you, live a means of preparing for death.

Rangî McNeil: My poems bear the weight (& suffer the limitations) of my experiences. My relatives tend to die suddenly, prematurely & often, including my mother who died from lupus exactly two weeks before my fourteenth birthday at 33. (Almost) everything I've done since – no matter how magnificent or mundane – is a response to that loss.

QBM: There are also references to illness and healthcare - or lack of. In America this is a very political issue. It could be argued that the

lack of healthcare makes dying a painful but also an everyday experience - in particular, for historically marginalized communities in the Americas (African-America and original Americans) and all those who are outside the provision of healthcare. Would i be correct to read these experiences into your poems.

RM: Though I can't recall a direct or oblique reference to healthcare (or the lack thereof) as a socio-political phenomenon in my poems, I'm interested in the body's decline. Or rather, the ways in which the body betrays itself & the process by which remedies are or aren't afforded & to whom. I wager that my interest

stems not from being black but from the fact that at twenty-five I was diagnosed with chronic auto-immune system disease that until the advent of Obamacare rendered me ineligible for health insurance.

QBM: I also sense that your method in these poems is one of asides. Poets often note and compose from the wayside of everyday life. It seems you curate together that which, to quote you from one of your poems but out of context, that which 'lurks along our margins'. You bring it to the centre.

A FEILD GUIDE TO THE UNEXPECTED

How could I mistake the scent of anxious-approaching-angry skunk for that of cheap marihuana? A scent I called skunk weed, but Vida says that term is reserved for the good shit.

And rules are rules (like *carpe diem* or *don't write checks with your mouth that your ass can't cash.*)

The future differs from all predictions. Where to go in my hairshirt, bespoke & precious? What lamentation does winter-quitting-spring warrant? Of course,

wildlife lurks along our margins – a phenomenon with which we're markedly less unfamiliar than we were led to believe.

BIRDS ARE NOT THE ONLY MUSIC

A name, if not heavy, still of a certain heft, but less jagged than affection: a suitable anchor for this good earth. Its freight & pestilence

(with promise's promises intermixed).
Josephine, Blondena, Ola-Bell, Herbert, Rufus.
Borne in indefinite directions, all.

AN IRREGULAR ODE

Thirty days shy of forty,
on a rush-hour-crowded Coney-Island-bound F train,
I questioned the exact circumference of the sandy circle
in which the Children of Israel wandered for forty years.

Forty years.

Were desert environs so sundry as to provide a passable facsimile of farther & farther? Of progress rather than round & round? How can we help but forgive them their myopia? (Though I know that isn't the right term for what ailed them.)

SUFFER THE LIMITATIONS OF MY EXPERIENCES.

RM: I'm a notorious eavesdropper, a long-walker, a voracious reader & a lover of the subway. As much as I understand them, my poems are attempted articulations composed from recalled & recycled materials; from something I try to make something else: not unfamiliar, but extraordinary & true. Even if fabricated.

QBM: You live in NYC, where late modern capitalism operates to elapse and eradicate the idea

of 'death', 'of aging' and replace them with images and ideas of 'youth' and 'rigor' and 'work'. How, then, does your environment evoke your work and how then is your poetry received. surely, the hipster youth don't want to hear about 'dying' and 'ageing'.

RM: I live in New York because it is the place in which I feel the most like myself. In this city I am

anonymous. But New York (like life) often feels like a fight to the death with rusty knives. My poems can't help but reflect this peril & the corresponding jubilation. I don't give much thought to how the poems are received, reception being irrelevant to composition



Seher Shah - RADIANT LINES-X BLOCK

OBJECT ANXIETY: SEHER SHAH INTERVIEWED BY ASIF AKHTAR

An encounter with Seher Shah's work bears an invocation to possibilities of re-enchantment in a disaffected world. Through the minutest detail of mark-making to the construction of expansive urbanscapes, Shah's work, in drawings, photographs, prints, and sculptural objects challenges preconceived notions of the spatial-visible and the temporal-historical facets of modern life. Lines burst into fractals, familiar motifs, repeated endlessly, morphing through continuous manipulations; patterned multiplicities become visibly obstructed by the overbearing presence of powerful monolithic shapes. Between the infinite tonalities of gray – from delicate graphite strokes to the immense black gouache – Shah is able to render monochromatic realms of intricacy with masterful strokes. From the micro-signification of individual markings and inscriptions, to the colossal presence of national monuments and high-modernist infrastructure, Shah weaves together lines and symbols, maps and iconographies, structures and landscapes, to create eerie locales of ambiguity where viewers are struck by the uncanniness

of our multiple origins and countless possibilities.

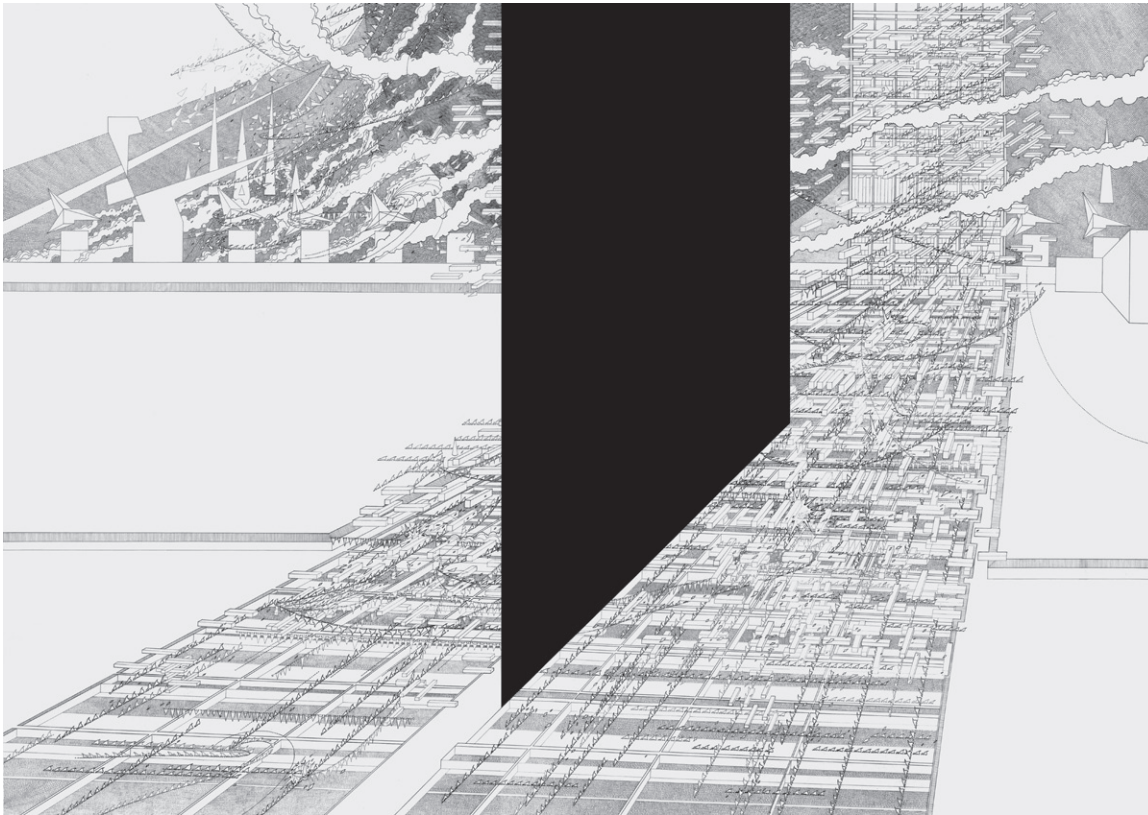
Shah's architectural fascination with the ways in which building blocks of symbolism come together to form unique histories and distinct ideologies is already apparent in her earlier work. I was introduced to Shah's work while covering the Victoria and Albert Museum's Jameel Prize in 2009, for which she was among the ten shortlisted artists. Shah's drawings and prints from that period, articulate the malleability of iconographic symbols and shapes in flux, while reverberating echoes of high-modernist urban dream-imagery from imagined imperial peripheries. Her *Black Cube Drawings* (2007) experiment with the prospects of metamorphosis in a monolithic shape: a seemingly solid black cube is molded and contorted into distinct forms, emitting fantastical swirls of endless vegetal patterns, as it unfolds into a cross. In *Cluster* (2008), she fuses structural monuments and icons to present cultural amalgamations – capturing historical subjects, colonial regiments amidst skylines of possible post-colonial empires overlooking col-

lective aspirations of nationhood caught in an almost alienating state of ambiguity. Taking these symbolic artifacts and monumental fantasies as a point of departure, over the past few years Shah has expanded her library of images to inform her more recent work in which previously encountered icons are re-rendered in altogether different contexts.

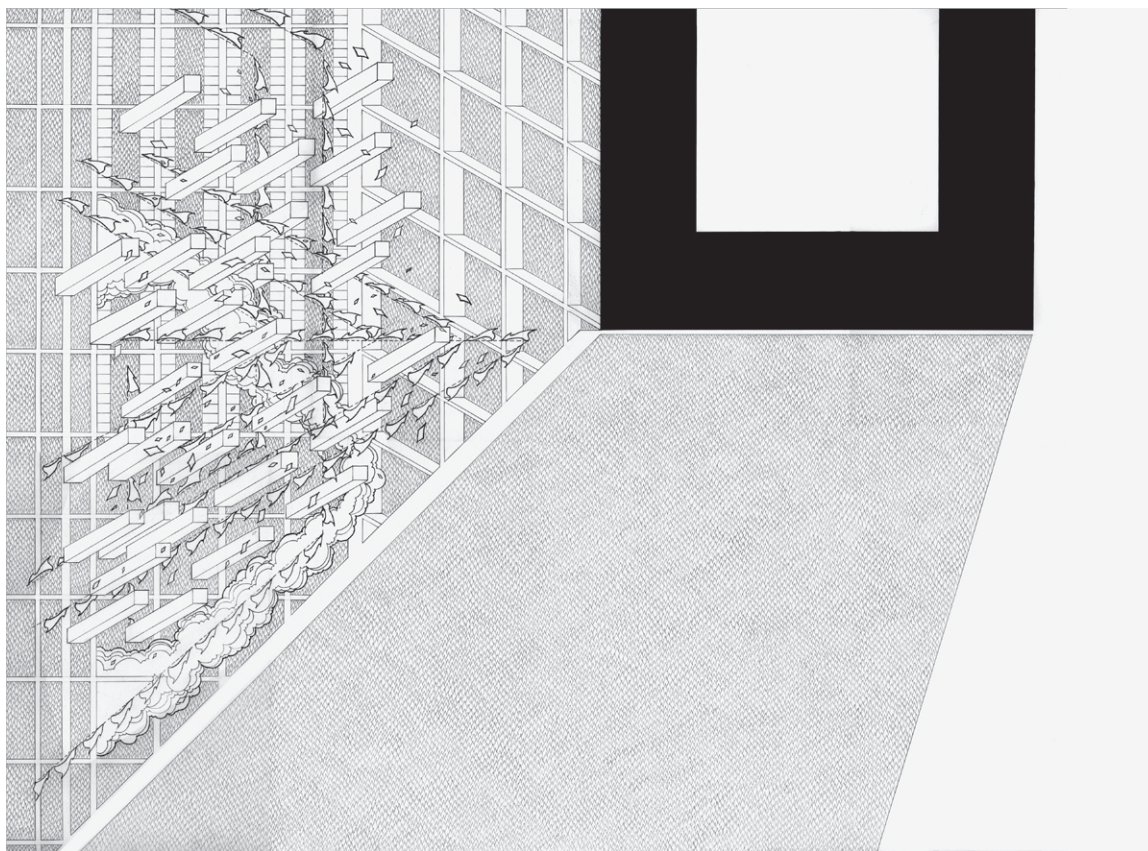
While creating patterned intricacies through gestures of mark-making, Shah sometimes blackens out large parts of her work through monolithic shapes in black gouache. In *Object Relic (Unite d'Habitation)* (2011), a black polygon cuts through the work, in sharp contrast to the detailed drawing it destroys. Shah's usage of black gouache take on more overt forms in her collaboration with Randhir Singh's photographs in *Mammoth: Aerial landscape proposals* (2012), where vacant opaque polygons are superimposed onto sprawling urban landscape as parts of the infrastructure are concealed through this practice of erasure.

I had the opportunity to visit Shah at her studio in Brooklyn, New

York in 2011, where she showed me the works she was preparing for her *Object Anxiety* (2011) series. A year later I was able to revisit her work through a follow-up interview (included below). More recently, she appears to have gravitated towards detailing structural aspects of high-modernism and mid-twentieth century Brutalist architecture, while examining the relation of built spaces with surrounding landscape. Shah has located an exemplary specimen of the modernist mentality in Le Corbusier's collectivized living structures and administrative infrastructure, such as, *Unite d'Habitation* in Marseilles, France and the *Capitol Complex* in Chandigarh, India. In *Unit Object* (2012), one finds that the black cube has been replaced by a concrete Cartesian grid as the foreground for Shah's fantastical graphite swirls. In *Capitol Complex* (2012), Shah skillfully manipulates Corbusier's compartmentalized repetitions of the concrete facade of the assembly and secretariat buildings in Chandigarh to create a sense of spatial abstraction. Deconstruction of architectural fragments opens up hypothetical spaces, creating unending patterns;



Seher Shah - OBJECT RELIC (UNITE D'HABITATION)



Seher Shah - UNIT OBJECTS

echoing regulated repetitions of modern urban life. Minimalistic use of colors, a rarity in Shah's work, emboldens the haunting texture of the bare concrete slabs. This series brings into question how these unsettling forms of urbanism, already imprinted onto our modern soul, produce utopian visions of life through their resounding expansiveness, overshadowing the insignificance of individual experience. Through endless partitioning and sequestering of spaces, such infrastructure defines the contours of routine activity and everyday life. Cutting and folding these repetitive structures at unique angles, Shah is able to make these monuments of modernism collapse onto themselves—while gesturing their forms towards new possibilities.

Shah's treatment of buildings and built spaces shows a truly refined eye for structural forms. She is able to conceive of buildings, at once, as places of habitation, as objects, as relics, as artifacts, as totems, and as structural abstractions. Visually mediating between the scale of individual experience and the larger scale of the landscape, Shah is able to continually change the viewer's perspective on buildings. In *Hinterland Structures* (2011), Shah displays photographs from the American west in a series of light-boxes. These images explore the relation of built structures to their surrounding landscape, how these may be conceived of as objects or relics immediately decipherable from the envi-

ronment that envelops them. A picture of a church shows a corrugated metallic box with a cross at one end as the only signifying marking designating the object's function as a place of worship; the vast desert landscape in the backdrop re-enforces the presence of this lone object.

Different aspects of Shah's work negotiate between valences spanning from the slightest gesture of the individual mark, to the monumental iconographies that furnish our collective memories. Trained as an architect, Shah is all too familiar with processes of how marks on paper, such as, urban maps and building plans, can go on to become materialized as actual objects in the form of buildings and structures that manifest our everyday experience of urban life. Approaching these processes from different angles, Shah is able to fold this distance onto itself through utterly simplistic means. In *Object Repetition (Line to distance)* (2011), Shah experiments with three-dimensional forms, using hydrocal to cast hundreds of white crystalline objects. These nearly identical structures when placed in the gallery, create sharp contrast with Shah's drawings (similar to the way black monolithic shapes often cut through patterned intricacies of her graphite renderings). Through the reductive practice of inscribing repetitive marks – dashed lines – onto these white objects which resemble folded sheets of paper, Shah is able to physically inhabit drawing within the built space of the

gallery's interior in an intriguing fashion. The mass-produced objects bring to the forefront, aspects of repetition and recycling which have been central in Shah's work. The practice of marking an impression directly onto the surface of the physical object also performs the work of collapsing the procedural distance separating the two contingent forms.

Through continuous fluctuations of our gaze, between the gesture and the monument; inscription and collective memory; and individual scale to the scale of landscape, Shah's work allows us to glimpse at spaces of ambiguity that lie somewhere beyond history. Fragments of imagery, symbols found in archives, nationalistic images, architectural facades, icons, and motifs comprise Shah's extensive visual library of source material. By stripping symbols out of more familiar contexts while subjecting them to manipulation, Shah is able to display these forms in a constant state of becoming. Facilitating encounters in altogether different visual environments from where these symbols are usually found, Shah's images expose these forms to a critical gaze that is often looming in the backdrop. Constant recycling symbols and icons in her images, she is able to create cross-references within her own work to show us how the meaning of the symbol can change as the surrounding context changes. Recognizing the same imagery from different vantage points—looking at a city from its central square, and then again from be-

I am interested in how ideas from European modernism get translated to different parts of the world, and how the second and third waves of these principles are situated. I am in awe of certain Brutalist structures and buildings just because of the sheer forceful relationship between object, landscape and scale.

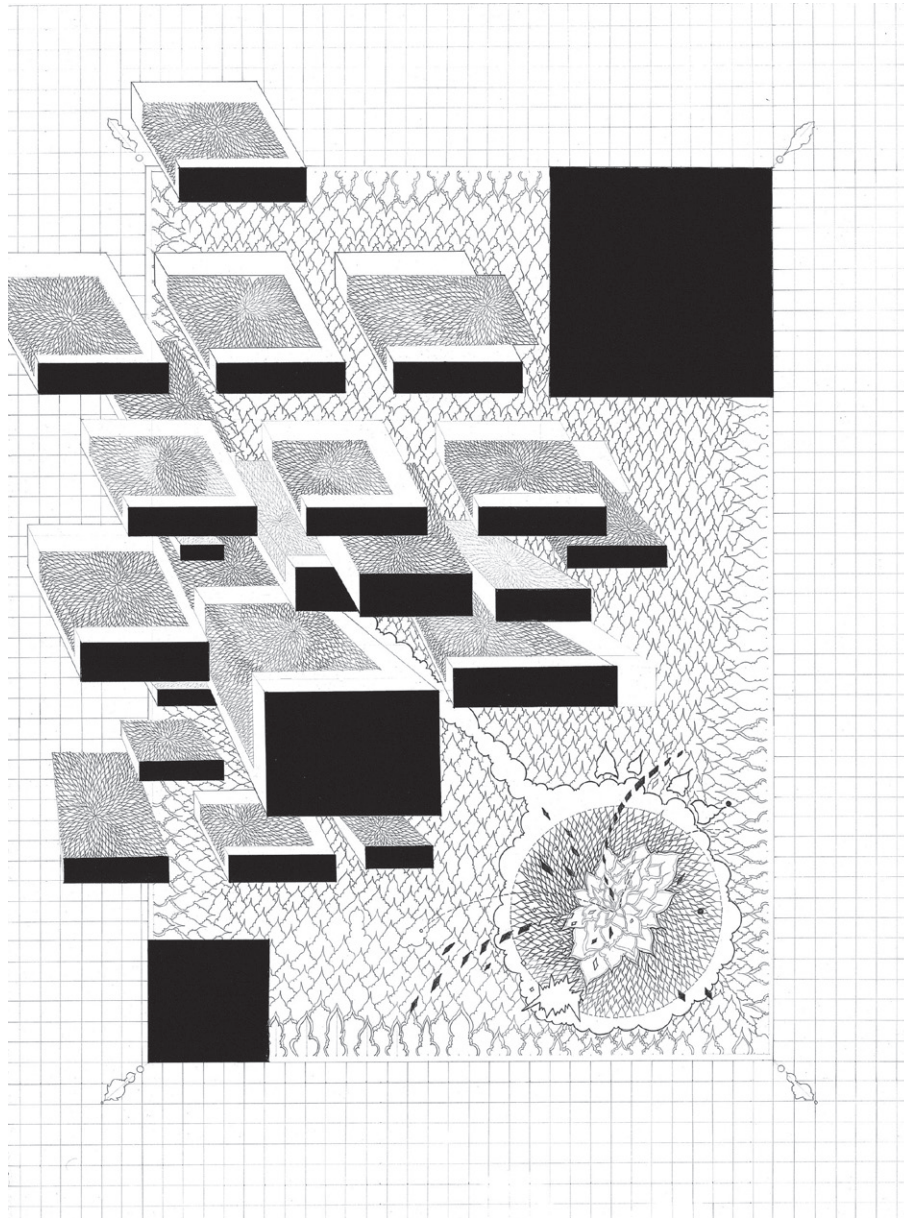
yond its boundary walls—also invokes a strange sense of familiarity and alienation. Combining forms from distinct sources, like courtyard elements from Brussels and Lahore, also manifests truly unique cultural experiences through an amalgamation of similarities and differences inherent in these forms. Objects become relics as soon as they are constructed, symbols are constantly reincorporated into vocabularies of emerging cultures, what is novel and futuristic today will undoubtedly become an artifact of nostalgia tomorrow; Shah's work is there to constantly remind us of the fluidity of the forms that construct the reality around us, and how they are always in flux and in a constant mode of redefinition.

AA: During our earlier conversation in 2011 you were preparing for your *Object Anxiety* show at Scaramouche in New York. How have your interests developed over the past year to converge on *Brute Ornament*, and how have certain themes carried forward to your more recent work in *Radiant*

Lines?

SS: *Object Anxiety* at Scaramouche in New York (2011) and *Radiant Lines* at Nature Morte Berlin (2012) were my last two solo exhibitions showing works from an ongoing interest in landscape, repetition and basic architectural forms. The use of the object in landscape, and the ambiguous relationships inherent in structures, whether on a large urban planning scale or within an individual monument are explored through drawings, prints, light boxes and a sculptural installation. *Brute Ornament* at the Green Art gallery in Dubai (2012) was a two-person exhibition with the artist Kamrooz Aram, curated by Murtaza Vali, that explored the relationship between ideas from Western modernism, the role of ornament and the use of abstraction within our respective practices. I had several works included in this exhibition that used structure, perspective and elements of architecture to create a series of landscape and object drawings.

There are definitely overlapping interests in all three exhibitions for me, as well as references to two iconic modernist projects; the *Unite d'Habitation* and the *Capitol Complex* by Corbusier, and the ways that the basic components of architecture are broken down. The installation *Object Repetition (line to distance)* that started in 2010 at the *Headlands Center for the Arts* helped me with ideas for the smaller *Unit Object drawings* in *Radiant Lines* and *Brute Ornament*. A few



Seher Shah - OBJECT REPETITION (LINE TO DISTANCE)

selected works from these exhibitions will be exhibited at the AMOA-Arthouse at the Jones Center in Austin in April, 2013 for my first museum solo exhibition, *Constructed Landscapes*, curated by Rachel Adams.

AA: Can you describe your interest in Brutalist architecture and what it is about this particular style that fascinates you? How did you find these themes to be coalesced in diverse structures – as far apart as Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation* in Marseille and the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh – in how they come to formulate certain ideals of modern urban living?

SS: There are contradictions inherent in this architectural aesthetic and principles that involve landscape, social engineering and repetitive reductive structural forms. Aside from the aesthetics of the architecture itself it is the ambiguous relationship between landscape and object that I am interested in within these kinds of structures. Both these Corbusier projects were starting points for me to explore landscape and object, through the basic reductive elements of architecture such as the grid, the column, the wall and the frame.

The use of *beton brut*, or exposed unfinished concrete that used the

Radiant City principles for both the *Unité* housing principles in Marseille and the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh is what initially attracted me to these projects in particular. Structure, function and material are the key components of modernist architectural principles in both these projects. But my interest in these two geographically different projects was about the breaking down of its basic components as a starting point for the drawings. They are not diverse projects in terms of the common principles involved, and this is what makes these two projects interesting for me.

I am interested in how ideas from

European modernism get translated to different parts of the world, and how the second and third waves of these principles are situated. I am in awe of certain Brutalist structures and buildings just because of the sheer forceful relationship between object, landscape and scale. The use of repetitive forms and Utopian ideology is an inspiration for social housing but somehow is quite contradictory in its nature.

AA: In your collaboration with Randhir Singh, you apply black forms to aerial photographs to superimpose spaces of ambiguity onto the landscape. Is this use of erasure a means of exploring

how urban architecture interacts with the surrounding landscape? Do you find that the regulatory work of urban planning has the uncanny ability to destroy space while creating space at the same time?

SS: *The Mammoth: Aerial landscape proposal series* is collaboration between my partner Randhir Singh and myself. His aerial photographs are combined with black forms that partially block out the photograph and landscape. The use of repetition and abstraction within the landscape, and the simultaneous gesture of erasure of both image and landscape is something I was interested in exploring. The ways that

urban transformation occurs through both erasure and renewal is how spaces remain in flux and constantly in movement. The *Mammoth* works became about this simultaneous gesture of erasure and construction, which blocked the photographic image, and attempted to create ambiguously scaled structures that responded to the repetitive patterns inherent in urban planning within these images.

AA: Recently you have conducted studies of structures like silos and corrugated metal constructions in barren environments like deserts. How did you become interested in this particular contrast?

SS: The series titled *Hinterland Structures* are postcard size photographic light boxes I had taken from a trip to the American west a few years back. There were a series of trailers, sheds and silos that I had documented along the way between California, Nevada, Arizona and Utah. They are not monumental in terms of scale and material, and disconnected in terms of the relationship between landscape and object. Temporary structures, but still architectural objects, the other end of the spectrum from the iconic modernist structures such as the Unite building.

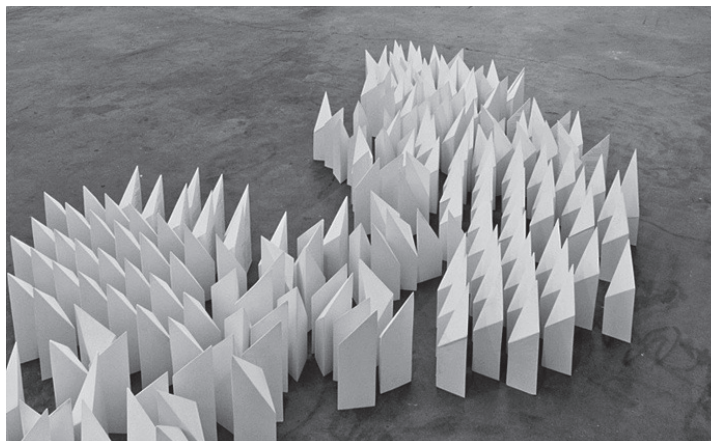
AA: Can you walk through how starting from a geometric shape defined by a series of inscriptions and lines on a paper you arrived at conceiving an actual object through casting hydrocol and then reproducing hundreds of almost identical crystalline objects as an installation to create a truly unique effect in the exhibition space?

SS: *Object Repetition* (line to distance) is an installation that uses small shard like cast objects that repeat physically into the space. This work started at the Headlands Center for the Arts during a residency, and then expanded into the work at the *Object Anxiety* exhibition. The use of the grid, repetition and drawing found themselves in this site-specific work. Drawing as purely repetitive formal marks move physically through the grid of the installation. I had been reading

the *Fractal Geometry of Nature* by Mandelbrot, and wanted to develop a simple reductive form that could allude to both natural and architectural forms.

AA: In our last conversation we touched on the spectacle of the military parade and how certain formations along with the visual dynamics of the onlooking observers give a spatial representation of power relations. I was wondering how you would relate similar socio-spatial dynamics to buildings where they might be seen as physical renditions of power-relations themselves?

SS: The relationship between spectacle and spectator is an interest of mine, whether seen through archival photographs or through structures such as monuments or civic architecture. I relate these constructions whether they are objects, or physical spectacles such as military parades, or nationalistic parades of any kind as a type of constructed theater. They are designed constructions. And this is a path into drawings of a particular kind for me that can explore this area of power dynamics. They are fascinating and perplexing simultaneously because they can show the power struggles and aspirations of the context in which they are placed or imposed. The meeting of time and purpose are what makes searching and finding these structures interesting to me. Amphitheatres, civic buildings,



mortuary architecture and large-scale housing projects amongst others are the large areas that can show these renditions of power relations.

AA: Moving from buildings as totems and monuments, to structures and mega-structures and ultimately towards cities themselves as repetitions of these structural patterns – how do you draw the distinguishing line, both visually and conceptually, between nature and artifice, where a building could be seen both as an object in itself while cities might be considered to be natural products in themselves (akin to anthills or coral reefs)?

SS: There is a great scene in Wong Kar-wai's *Chunking Express* where a character runs through the Chunking Mansion in Hong Kong. The story starts in this architectural space of Hong Kong that feels autonomous. Hostels, restaurants, clothing and fabric stores and foreign exchanges are seen through the narrow corridors.

The demographic ranging from a variety of South Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries in particular are seen running various businesses within the scenes. I read an article that stated there were 120 nationalities that passed through the Chunking

Mansions every year. I am curious to see this space in person, but this is the kind of space I would consider where the building could be seen as an object by itself.

I recently visited Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, the planned city by Norman Foster, which will rely entirely on solar power and attempt to be the first carbon neutral city. The relationship of nature and artifice comes to mind here, where a definite boundary will exist for this future city and the exterior environment. I am curious to know how this idea of a future city will function within this insular context. The image of the ant-hill could be relevant here just by its use of insular conditions.

AA: Finally, at this juncture, what possible visual and conceptual terrains are you thinking of exploring, and what future directions could your work take from this point on?

SS: I've been working towards more object related works. The *Object Repetition* work has led to a few new directions for the way I have been thinking about objects and drawing. And I'm keen to continue working through these issues that relate to physical sculptural objects.



On The Slave Ship Brooks of Frantz Zéphirin

By Marcus Rediker

Alluding to the famous British abolitionist image of the Brooks, originally drawn in 1788 to evoke the horror of the slave trade for the reading public, Zéphirin creates a dungeon ship, out of which peer haunting red eyes. The artist renders the European crew as animals: the imperial alligator captain holds the deed to the land on which the enslaved will work. The first mate is Death incarnate. The vodou deity of the sea, Agoue, announces the arrival of a shipload of new souls. On

the sail of his boat in the background is his judgment: "We are in a lot of trouble." Chained to the outside of the vessel as food for the sharks are a group of rebellious slaves, the neckplate of each showing a different African ethnicity, the message being, "from many, one." Two of the enslaved, at right Toussaint L'Ouverture and at left Boukman Dutty, break free of their chains, gesturing hopefully ahead to the Haitian Revolution they will lead.



