

EXILES

In 2002, according to the United Nations' International Migration Report, 175 million people were living in a country they were not born in. Rather than set one fixed root against another, a mythologised 'origin' against an integrating and homogenising 'soil', wouldn't it be wiser to assign other conceptual categories to the process of mutation? With about ten million more immigrants every year worldwide, increasing professional nomadism, the globalisation of goods and services and the formation of transnational political entities, isn't it about time to invent new ways of understanding what cultural identity is?

SATURDAY 28 JUNE 2008
TATE BRITAIN

from 10:00
DUFFIELD ROOM
ULTRA-RED
We Come from
Your Future

14:00
AUDITORIUM
FLÁVIA MÜLLER
MEDEIROS
and
NASRIN TABATABAI
A discussion on
notions of exile

16:30
MODERN BRITISH ART
ROOMS 19, 20 AND 21
TANIA BRUGUERA
P6_TA-PROV(2008)029

16:30
AUDITORIUM
T.J. DEMOS
chaired by
EYAL WEIZMAN
Exiles

THE ENDS OF EXILE: TOWARDS A COMING UNIVERSALITY?

T. J. DEMOS

MODERNITY AS EXILE

VIEWS THROUGH THE LENS OF EXILE, modernity resembles a catastrophe, a storm of wreckage that propels redemption out of reach with implacable violence. Or so Walter Benjamin wrote about the storm from paradise that we call progress, as contemplated by the angel of history (he was thinking of Paul Klee's watercolour, *Angelus Novus* 1920). 'While the pile of debris before him grows skyward,' Benjamin famously wrote, he is cast backwards into the future as he views our present forlornly.¹ Gazing at that catastrophic modernity nearly fifty years later, the exiled Palestinian literary critic Edward Said rendered a verdict on the twentieth century that confirmed Benjamin's dark conclusion, written in the midst of an exile that ended in his suicide while attempting to escape the Nazis. 'Our age,' Said wrote, 'with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.'²

Such is modernity as considered through the lens of exile, a period defined by the dislocating ravages and alienating effects of capitalism as much as by the psychic disequilibrium of traumatic *unheimlichkeit* – as it is comprehended in Marxist and Freudian thought. But modernity's darkness also intimates something more than what its mere political, economic and social circumstances suggest, which is clear in Benjamin's account of historical time that in effect leaves us all refugees in the present. Other philosophical diagnoses corroborate Benjamin's ontological account, defining our very epoch as one of 'transcendental homelessness',³ according to Lukács; similarly Heidegger wrote that, 'Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.'⁴ But in Said's insistently political sense, modernity-as-exile – as glimpsed in Lamia Joreige's recent film, *A Journey* 2008, which shows a Palestinian refugee camp in 1948, the year of Israel's founding – identifies a counter-narrative and the repressed figure of the last century's otherwise celebrated glorious nationalisms, utopian political projects and vaunted technological achievements; for it reveals their failures, their human wreckage, the costs of their obscene audacity.⁵

I would like to open up that counter-narrative and that repressed figure here, yet avoid reading exile exclusively in the negative, as solely melancholic or chaotic, its identity metaphysically inscribed. As a wealth of literature, including personal and artistic testimonies, demonstrates, exile also unleashes a creative flight into the experience of multiplicity. Literally meaning 'to wander away',⁶ its etymology possessing an ancient provenance – think of the epic biblical stories of wandering peoples and tragic banishments – exile suggests involuntary displacement as much as expatriation by choice, a harsh penal-like sentence as much as an earnest political commitment. Positioned adjacent to terms like diaspora (a geographical dispersal in the collective sense), refugee (the victim of persecution or forced expulsion) and migration (the traveller by choice, whether for economic necessity or, more recently, for ecological reasons), exile is both distinct and yet shares commonalities in its relation to the 'double consciousness' – in Paul Gilroy's terms – which is bestowed upon those who expe-

rience it. This 'double perspective' (in Said's words), a 'double frame' (in Homi K. Bhabha's), results from the bi-cultural knowledge it produces, generating in its positive expression a sensitivity towards difference (that of cultures, places and communities), and a newfound appreciation of the cultural character of one's origins when looking back from exile's awry vantage. In this sense, its transformative experience inspires both critical and creative energies, even among the existential vulnerability and material destitution it otherwise may bring.⁷ Indeed, Hannah Arendt would write of 'refugees driven from country to country' in the midst of the unprecedented genocide of the Holocaust *not* as mere victims; rather, they 'represent the vanguard of their peoples'.⁸ The reason, she explained, was that henceforth, these figures, shed of their national ties (at least in 1943, before the founding of Israel), would be the creators of their own destiny ('History is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles'). Likewise, Giorgio Agamben has recently proposed that in the present circumstances of massive demographic shifts – due to warfare and political repression, as much as emancipatory desire – the refugee represents 'the paradigm of a new historical consciousness', particularly because with that figure, we glimpse a future beyond the nation-state and its destructive exclusion of non-citizens.⁹

Keeping in mind, then, that exile designates a ruptured psycho-geography of fundamental ambivalence, calling up the longing for home and the embrace of elsewhere, and that it is antithetical to any unified meaning, let us consider some of the recent intersections of the geopolitical circumstances and the aesthetic negotiations of exile. These intersections in recent years have served multiple functions in contemporary art, oscillating between the calamitous and the creative: to find forms adequate to express the ravaging spatial and experiential effects of displacement; to invent archives capable of unleashing the hidden potential of historical consciousness; to discover innovative means to forge social bonds within transnational conditions that avoid sinking into regressive atavism or xenophobic hostility; to advance forms of life that reject the restrictive categories of identity and conventional modes of belonging; to direct the forces of mobility against the capture of commodification; and to resist the fundamentalist oppositions to, and equally the homogenising tendencies of globalisation – these are some of the various imperatives that have generated an aesthetics of exile over the last few decades.

THE DIASPORIC

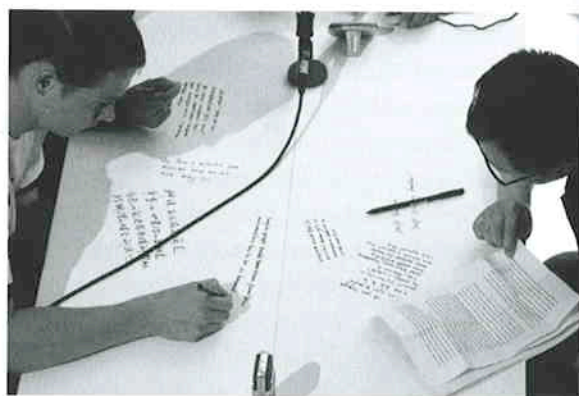
MONA HATOUM'S *MEASURES OF DISTANCE* 1988, a video that relates the impossible intimacy of the London-based artist's long-distance relationship with her Lebanese-Palestinian mother living in Beirut; Isaac Julien's film *Territories* 1984, which mediates postcolonial subjectivity (that of British African-Caribbean-ness, in the context of London's Notting Hill Carnival) by opening up its fissures and fluctuating contours through the disjunctive textures of cinematic palimpsests; and Black Audio Film Collective's classic *Handsworth Songs* 1986, a film that deploys hybrid representations, both documentary and poetic, to reveal the diversity of local perspectives on the race riots against Thatcher's repressive measures in a working class area in Birmingham – these works demonstrate a powerful intertwining of the so-

cial and political facts of dislocation with the aesthetics of exile, which distinguishes British practices in the 1980s. Of course there have been earlier artistic engagements with exile, such as the historical avant-garde's, as in New York and Zurich Dada, and in the later displacements of European artists during WWII, in which modernist forms – decontextualised readymades, disjunctive montage, visual and textual fragmentations, disorienting spaces – expressed the experiential terms of geopolitical dislocation.¹⁰ One could also cite the artistic dealings with travel – whether owing to personal desires, the commitments to internationalism or the political necessity of escaping repressive military regimes – encountered in the formations of CoBrA, the Situationist International and Fluxus, as well as in the global developments of abstraction and conceptualism (the work of Gego, Bas Jan Ader, Hans Haacke, Hélio Oiticica, Cildo Meireles, On Kawara, Yoko Ono, Yayoi Kusama and Tehching Hsieh comes to mind).¹¹ However, it was in the British context that exile was poignantly and uniquely negotiated both thematically and formally, correlating with decolonisation struggles, the experience of diaspora in the wake of the crumbling of empire, and the engagement with the discourses of identity politics and multiculturalism.

Considering the way Hatoum has directed her experience of geopolitical displacement into a post-minimalist sculptural phenomenology of disjointed everyday spaces and uncanny domestic objects, Edward Said writes how in her work 'exile [is] figured and plotted'. Born into a displaced Palestinian family in Beirut, she was studying art in London and found herself stranded there when the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975. By enacting 'the paradox of dispossession as it takes possession of its place in the world', Said writes, Hatoum's projects draw out the 'irreconcilability' of strangeness and familiarity that defines the experience of living away from one's homeland.¹² Said's reading bears directly on *Measures of Distance*, which shows Hatoum's mother in the intimacy of her shower, while Arabic fragments of her correspondence with her daughter form a barrier over the image, expressing simultaneously the painful distance and the longings for closeness that mark the artist's experience. Kobena Mercer focuses similarly on the subversive aspects of related filmic disjunctions in Isaac Julien's *Territories*, for instance, in which he mounts a 'cultural struggle to decolonise and deterritorialise cinema as a site of political intervention'. By provoking a carnivalising of cinema as much as a cinema of carnival, Julien unleashes a 'dialogical tendency' appropriate to a 'diasporic people'. For Mercer, artists such as Julien and Black Audio Film Collective developed the techniques of montage, which, drawing on Bakhtin's notion of 'multi-accentuality' and 'inner dialectical quality' of the ideological sign, were posed against what Franz Fanon called the 'ideological fixity of the signs of colonial authority'.¹³

'If the exile was the figure of early modernity,' write Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera, then 'the diasporan or immigrant was the figure of postmodernity with its decentered and deterritorialised subject'.¹⁴ Yet while such a historical distinction accurately situates the diasporic within the context of postcolonial uprooting, the projects of artists such as Hatoum, Julien and Black Audio Film Collective (as well as Ceddo and Sankofa collectives in Britain) acted more as an oppositional force *against* the postmodern, in my view, than an affirmative expression of it. According to Fredric Jameson's now classic model, postmodernism – as both a periodising term and a cultural logic – designates the schizophrenic disorientation

and debilitating amnesia of the subject in the state of advanced multinational capitalism.¹⁵ The geographical homogeneity of built space and the ahistorical imagery of the culture industry were seen by him to compromise the ability to situate oneself in time and space. Jameson's is surely a still relevant account for an expanded history of exile (one that views it as a signifier for a variety of forms of displacement in recent history), particularly in view of the forces of dislocation in the now global capitalist economy.¹⁶ But rather than viewing the diasporic position within critical art practices as an expression of that immobilisation, a work like Black Audio Film Collective's *Signs of Empire* 1984 precisely resisted that culture of simulacral vacuity and mindless consumerism. It did so by determinedly recovering the historical conditions and examining the alienating effects of the legacy of imperial dominance, as found in the visual archive of exoticised and colonised peoples, juxtaposing these images with views of London's now-worn public monuments to imperialism. Given its plural sensitivities, the diasporic was uniquely situated to address the politics of difference, connecting with civil rights, feminist and anti-imperialist struggles, and resurrecting historical, political and cultural figures, like Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes in Julien's *Looking for Langston* 1988, in order to animate and empower current political engagements, thereby defying postmodernism's debilitating image regime.¹⁷



FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE, *We Come From Your Future*, sound art and activist collective **ULTRA-RED** collaborated with the anti-racist organisation The Monitoring Group to present a sound investigation into the future of anti-racism in the UK. The audience had the opportunity to contribute statements and to listen to invited speakers, including people who have been involved in the anti-racism movement for many years and those who have recently experienced racist violence, as well as participants in The Monitoring Group's 'Rural Racism' project, based in southwest Britain. The statements, written in the participants' different languages, were mounted on the wall after the discussions, forming a multilingual collage.

If the practices of Julien and Black Audio – and one could add Hatoum here as well – propose a ‘critical dialogism’, then it is, according to Mercer, one that challenges ‘the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based’.¹⁸ They do so by eliciting the ‘disjunctive time’ and ‘internal liminality’ of the marginal and the migrant, as Homi Bhabha has noted.¹⁹ At stake here is not only the defiant retort that diasporic practices made to postmodernist amnesia and spatial perplexity, but also the critical vantage point they established on earlier and even contemporary, competing modes of identity defined within the multicultural and feminist formations of the time – particularly those that attempted to assert a branding of identity (whether in terms of race, gender, sexuality or nationality) as a ground from which to counteract the forces of political and social exclusion.²⁰ As is now well established, because diasporic experience ‘is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity’, in the words of Stuart Hall, it models ‘a conception of identity which lives in and through, not despite, difference’.²¹ Black Audio Film Collective’s *Signs of Empire* proposes just this hybridity in terms of its complex tapestry of still images, texts and sounds – as does Hatoum’s *Measures of Distance* – proposing structures that disrupt the purity of film and language alike. As a result, the categories of the visual, the auditory and the scriptural are rendered insufficient on their own, as necessarily dialogical and stranded in their incompleteness and therefore contingent on contextual determinations for their meanings. In other words, this work defeats essentialism through formal means, even while it commits to the particularities of ethnicity, race and gender that define the lived circumstances of the subject within a heterogeneous cultural frame.

Still, despite these highly nuanced artistic treatments of the effects of displacement on subjectivity, by the mid 1990s came the gradual institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Europe and North America – meaning the emergence of the pervasive administration of identity-based and minority-directed policies within dominant governmental, civil and educational institutions, contributing to a veritable ‘race industry’ of managerial practices.²² As Chandra Mohanty wrote presciently, ‘In a post-Communist, post-national era, multiculturalism has been theorised as a paternalistic, top-down solution to the “problem” of minorities, a dangerous reification of “culture”, or a new way forward to a politics of “recognition” and “authenticity”’. But is multiculturalism simply a novel project of social engineering, devised for the twenty-first century by well-meaning liberals or communitarians?’²³ Yet despite challenges such as Mohanty’s to these developments, the result has been the fixing of cultural, racial and sexual signs within the discourse of political correctness, which correlated in the 1990s both to the social divisiveness of identity politics and to the commodification of ethnic and racial difference within neo-liberal globalisation. For theorists like Slavoj Žižek, as well as Michael Hardt and Tony Negri, ‘multiculturalism’ has been instrumentalised as ‘the cultural logic of multinational capitalism’;²⁴ for others, such as Paul Gilroy, the imperative for critical intellectuals consequently becomes one of writing ‘against race’.²⁵ In other words, against the institutionalisation of multiculturalism – and its radically simplified notions of difference and cultural identity – we must continue to challenge static categories of subjectivity, whether those tied to geographical place – such as calls for a return to the local in order to resist the homogenising forces of globalisation²⁶

– or those that continue the commitment, however fraught, to sexual and racial classes as a basis for a cultural politics of recognition.²⁷

THE NOMADIC

IT WAS IMPERATIVES such as these that contributed to the development in the 1990s of nomadism, which presents us with a second formation in this genealogy of contemporary art and exile. Rirkrit Tiravanija's installation of nomad kitchens in which the New York, Berlin- and Thailand-based artist would cook free Thai food for guests, as in *Untitled (free)* at New York's 303 Gallery in 1992; Gabriel Orozco's *Yielding Stone* 1992, a ball representing the artist's weight in plasticine, rolled around New York City by the Mexican artist; and Francis Alÿs's *Paradox of Praxis* 1997, for which the Belgian artist moved a block of ice around the streets of his adopted Mexico City for nine hours until it disappeared – these projects exemplify the poetic lyricism and romantic sensibility of the nomadic. Freed from the constraints of fixed identity and detached from the postcolonial burdens of the struggle for minority recognition that sometimes reinforced those static conceptions of race, ethnicity and nationality, 'artistic nomadism' represents a new model of 'cosmopolitanism', according to critic Jean-Pierre Criqui. While the nomad is 'always carrying along ... a part of one's native country', he or she remains 'independent of the melancholy one ordinarily associates with uprooting', notes Criqui: the nomad is 'a mobile and polymorphous entity'.²⁸

Unlike exile, then – whose 'essential sadness', for Said, 'can never be surmounted'²⁹ – nomadism embraces dislocation as a permanent home with lightness and joy. Indeed, positioned by Hardt and Negri as precisely a 'resistance to bondage', the nomadic represents a 'struggle against the slavery of belonging to a nation, an identity, and a people', and a 'desertion from sovereignty and the limits it places on subjectivity', a desertion they see as 'entirely positive'.³⁰ In this regard, nomadism advances a critical strategy for resisting the double tendencies of globalisation: on the one hand, its creative mobility challenges the homogenising aspect of capitalism that renders all places and things alike³¹; on the other, nomadism defies the regressive returns to localism, tribalisation and essentialist identities that the backlash against cultural and economic globalisation sometimes inspires. As Achille Mbembe puts it, 'nomadic artists exercise their right to diaspora, their freedom to wander across the boundaries of various cultures, nations and media forms ... They adopt a tactic marked by cultural nomadism to escape the perverse consequence of tribal identity and, at the same time, claim the creation of what is symbol[ic] against the commoditisation of global economy'.³²

Yet how critical is this strategy? One could ask, first of all, what means of social commonality or solidarity is available to this class of itinerant individuals? How does the nomadic avoid collapsing into the same debilitating loss of collective solidarity, the splintering of which plagued identity politics? For instance, even postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak has proposed – *pace* nomadism's anti-identitarian posture – the 'strategic' use of an opportunistic and temporary 'essentialism' to unite people in order to achieve specific political goals.³³

Critics have also pointed out that nomadism's lyrical and romantic tendency is a non-critical one, where the poetic flight of fancy – which tends to dramatise first and foremost the artist's own privileged peripatetic existence – fails to reflexively consider the institutional, historical and geographical parameters in which the nomadic is inhabited, and ends up typically 'veiling the specific material circumstances of the gallery'.³⁴ In addition, despite the nomad's purported escape from identity, the art market's star system tends to reward individuals with widespread name recognition; consequently when the promoters of discursive sites and relational scenarios are marketed as exemplary artistic personalities, we encounter what Miwon Kwon describes as 'a hermetic implosion of (auto)biographical and subjectivist indulgences', which may be 'misrepresented as self-reflexivity'.³⁵ These tensions become particularly apparent when mid-career retrospectives are organised for artists like Tiravanija, exhibitions that deploy a monographic format that reaffirms authorial identity despite the artist's attempts to variously problematise that logic via collaborative procedures, the elimination of art objects and non-autobiographical projects.³⁶

Still, one could argue that these dangers are more the results of the institutionalisation of the nomadic as an art world and mainstream cultural fashion rather than the unavoidable outcomes of artistic practices, and moreover that the nomadic nevertheless retains its radical potential when it comes to the critique of identity and belonging in a period marked by the troubling reassertion of nationalism, ethnicity, and religious fundamentalism. Perhaps the nomadic holds within itself a similar resistance to traditionalism as that one encounters in the expatriate avant-garde, the critical necessity of which has once again gained ground. In this regard, the shifts of emphases in the cultural expressions of exile over the course of modernity – from anti-nationalist exile, to postcolonial diaspora, to global nomadism – are not so clear cut, nor is their periodisation punctual or definitive. It is not surprising that Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, for instance, return to Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin in their discussions of the cultural and political effects of displacement; similarly Kobena Mercer, in his own theorisation of dialogism, revisits the Russian formalist Mikhail



TANIA BRUGUERA is a Cuban artist who divides her time between Havana and Chicago. Her interdisciplinary work focuses on the relationship between art, politics and life. Since 2002 she has been working on a series of projects in which she appropriates structures of power, creating political situations rather than just representing them. Here, **BRUGUERA** instructed the curators to 'fly post' the Tate Britain galleries with pages from the directive on the return policy for illegal immigrants (*P6_TA-PROV(2008)0293* – the title of the intervention), approved by the European parliament just a few days before the Prologue. In the manner of a protest, the pages covered the rooms and obscured interpretation panels. The intervention was 'activated' by a gallery attendant, employed by **BRUGUERA**, who read out loud passages from the directive whenever visitors asked questions, whether relevant to the intervention or not. By obstructing the usual appearance and function of the gallery and humorously blurring intended participation with the confusion of those taken by surprise, the artist encouraged the audience to engage with issues of migration and exile. **BRUGUERA** was invited to participate in *Exiles* but was unable to obtain a visa to enter the UK. Her absence, though unfortunate, resonated with the themes of the day.

Bakhtin, and one can trace the nomadic back to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'nomadology,' and from there, to Kafka and Duchamp. Rather, as competing articulations and schematic descriptions, the contours of these formations sometimes overlap, at other times operate in tandem. But what of the fate of the nomadic today, in a context where globalisation more than ever threatens to erase difference and particularity, and where the market's voracious appetite for mobility, flux and expansion makes the nomad an exemplary role-model for the trans-national capitalist? And given the resurgence of the nation-state in our post-9/11 environment, with the current governmental obsession with terrorism and security, what is the status of the nomadic in this new political environment animated by the fear and paranoia of migrants?

In view of this now pervasive geopolitical framework, a further risk of the nomadic is to naively romanticise the privileges of borderless travel while overlooking how the less-privileged are excluded from that same freedom. In 1993, for example, Christian Philipp Müller performed *Green Border*, a project included in the Venice Biennale's Austrian pavilion, for which the Swiss artist was photographed crossing Austria's eight national borders, including those of the former Eastern-block countries of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia as well as the others shared with the Western states of Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Germany. Along with his installation at the Austrian pavilion, which interrogated the architecture's historical relation to spatial partitioning and territorial divisions, Müller's was a complex symbolic act: it not only retrieved the historical connections between Austria and Nazi Germany (in 1938 the country had been annexed and its newly built Venice pavilion was formally associated with Germany), but also contested the remaining forms of geographical exclusion in the post-Wall era by transgressing Austria's borders in the fictional persona of that nation's representative artist.³⁷

Yet against Müller's implication that Europe was becoming a free, borderless zone, the reality in the EU, conversely, was shifting towards the political imperative of stemming the tide of migration from North Africa and Eastern Europe. The Schengen Agreement, instituted in 1990, is key to this history, for it created an open region within Europe but simultaneously acted to reinforce Europe's borders with its neighbouring areas. It did so, moreover, by exacerbating the impoverishment and oppressive political circumstances of nearby African countries by conditioning economic aid upon strict population control achieved through militarised border security.³⁸ As refugee camps and detainment centres for illegal immigrants have since proliferated across the European continent – as shown in various maps by migrant rights groups, such as Migreurop³⁹ – it seems increasingly problematic to celebrate the nomadic today. Doing so once expressed the radical hope of global citizenship, situated in the period of the waning of the nation-state and its social-political hierarchies, particularly in the jubilant years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was the historical context for Müller's project. And while this hope may survive in current struggles – for instance, one reads in the pages of *Empire*: 'circulation must become freedom ... In other words, the mobile multitude must achieve a global citizenship'⁴⁰ – to sing the praises of nomadism today within the narrow scope of the European framework without that radical political demand – as is so often done in contemporary art discourse –

appears self-congratulatory, even narcissistic. In such cases, nomadism suggests a contemporary 'primitivism,' one that subscribes to a fantasy of freedom from all attachments, but which cruelly operates in a system that denies that freedom to the very people from whom it borrows its name.

WE REFUGEES

THE IMPERATIVE TO AVOID perpetuating the separation of citizen and refugee, and to contest the withdrawal of political rights from the migrant, has led to further modellings of exile within contemporary art, which build on the above-mentioned critical antecedents and yet are still in the process of emergence today. Consider Christoph Schlingensief's sardonic reality-TV event *Please Love Austria (Foreigners Out!)* 2000, which offers a compelling dramatisation of the current limits of nomadism. For that project, the German theatre director and provocateur invited a group of immigrants to live in a shipping container in Vienna's main square for a week. During that time, Austrians could monitor their existence online in real time and vote out – Big Brother style – two asylum-seekers per day for deportation. The longest to survive was designated the winner, and he or she could 'look forward to a cash prize and the prospect, depending on the availability of volunteers, of Austrian citizenship through marriage'.⁴² The biting sarcasm of the event was that in performing the ideological truth of Jörg Haider's recently elected extreme-right party (the FPÖ, or Austrian Freedom Party), the event pitted the spectacle of xenophobia against itself, inviting Austrians – in Schlingensief's words – to get in touch with their 'inner Nazi'.

A related response to Europe's geopolitics of exclusion has been to relinquish the false universality of the nomadic and turn instead to ethnographic procedures and documentary tactics to expose the often far from romantic living conditions of actual refugees. Multiplicity's *Solid Sea 03* 2003, for instance, compares two parallel voyages of the same 70-kilometre distance through the West Bank, one travelled by a Palestinian from Hebron to Nablus via checkpoints and gravel roads, and another travelled by an Israeli from Kiryat Arba to Kdumin on special Israeli-built highways. Whereas the distance was roughly identical, the Palestinian's trip took five hours, compared to the Israeli's hour-long journey. The divergence between the two dramatises the significant disparities of mobility today, which depend on the identity of the traveller. Or take Ursula Biemann's video-essays, such as *Sahara Chronicle* 2006–7, which investigates northward transmigration in the Sahara, with Biemann interviewing and documenting people desperately and daringly making their way from Niger to Libya or Algeria, with hopes of eventually gaining illegal access to Europe. This critical exposure has also been the goal of various recent exhibitions on migration, such as *Port City: On Mobility and Exchange*, at Bristol's Arnolfini, 2007;⁴³ and *No Place – Like Home: Perspectives on Migration in Europe* at Argos in Brussels, 2008, which organisers described as an investigation into the status of 'illegal refugees who are today's modern nomads'. Both exhibitions explored the 'variegated tale of migration networks and refugee trafficking, cartography and geographical military data, migration management and border infiltrations, international rights, lack of rights and lawlessness'.⁴⁴ These shows – and others like them – are salutary

in that they reject the superficial romance of the nomadic in favour of exposing the circumstances of those excluded from its privileged realm; as well, they contest media stereotypes and governmental spin regarding migrants as so many criminals and terrorists, which tend to polarise camps, drawing citizens and refugees ever apart. The challenge of the documentary treatments found commonly in such shows is therefore to avoid reaffirming the excluded as victimised objects of representation, ironically reiterating the relations of inequality they are otherwise trying to contest. It is not surprising that these problems have inspired the creative reinvention of documentary strategies of representation in order to avoid such objectifications, leading to the disavowal of truth claims in favour of subjectively reflexive narrative approaches, and the installation of multiple screens and projections that construct a participatory physical mobility on behalf of the viewer, as in *Multiplicity's* and Biemann's work. Inevitably, these artists employ deracinating presentations to disavow objectifying representations, which suggest a correspondence with nomadic tendencies, even while these documentarists would disavow the fashionable celebration of nomadism as a form of artistic identity.

These models not only bear witness to the deeply ambivalent experiences of displacement, relaying both the hardships and pleasures, the pathetic indigence and the productive possibility; they also generate powerful aesthetic constructions that dislocate the viewers' space and time of perception and self-positioning. In doing so, exile becomes a shared experience between artist and viewer alike, suggesting the basis of an emergent political construction. Think of Emily Jacir's performative, installation-based investigations into the everyday lives of those caught in the Palestinian diaspora, such as her *Material for a Film* 2007; Yto Barrada's *A Life Full of Holes – The Strait Project* 1998–2004, comprising a photographic cycle depicting Moroccan migrants on the Strait of Gibraltar; Steve McQueen's cinematic treatments of migrant labourers that liberate them from the bondage of representation, as in *Gravesend* 2007; and the Otolith Group's films that destabilise the temporality of nationality and empower the potentiality of historical oppositional struggles, as in *Otolith* 2003 – in these cases, the viewer is placed in proximity to what Edward Said has called 'permanent exile', a term that draws on exile's metaphorical sense to describe a protean state of being, rather than a local reality defined by specific social and political circumstances. Said's notion comes close to what Giorgio Agamben calls 'being in exodus', that is, a perpetual state of revolution.⁴⁵ This positioning declines an ultimate redemption, a deferred homecoming, a naturalisation or national independence; instead, the deconstructive force of this conceptualisation of exile suggests, finally, a form of 'singularity' that is more about infinite becoming than static existence, and which is posed against citizen and nation-state alike – an existential exile without state, nation or identity.⁴⁶ While this articulation reaffirms the nomadic surpassing of identity, it nevertheless insistently invents new criteria for the specificity of lived reality and collective association – whether it be territorial-based (for instance, using urban space as a site of connection and transit for ephemeral communities of displaced persons); or transnational political affiliations (as in global movements for social justice and environmental sustainability); or again they might be communities of sense (as in the building of social connections through artistic participation and discourse); or what Okwui Enwezor calls the 'diasporic public sphere' of international biennial exhibitions

(where participants reflexively problematise their economic and social position, as well as the exclusions of the location, even while they create the terms of cross-cultural interaction).⁴⁷ Most importantly, these models represent forms of sociability that remain open to foreignness, mobility and flux – in distinction to the potentially generic nomadic set, and to the biological and ethnic ties of familial and regional bonds.

Consider Emily Jacir's project *Where We Come From* 2002–3, which assembles a series of some thirty photograph and text diptychs that narrate the stories of Palestinians unable to travel due to Israeli restrictions. Jacir asked her invited participants, 'If I could do something for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?' The texts present the various responses in Arabic and English: 'Visit my mother, hug and kiss her and tell her that these are from her son'; or, 'Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street'; or, 'Go on a date with a girl from East Jerusalem whom I have only spoken to on the phone.' The photographs portray the artist carrying out those requests, as Jacir could move about Israel and the Occupied Territories at the time with her US passport (although this would no longer be possible today, due to the worsened political situation). With this project, Jacir constructs a Palestinian diasporic community, one based on, even constituted by, the conditions of dislocation. What these participants share is the occupation of a position of exclusion from national belonging, and this relation touches the viewer as well. When we view the piece, we become displaced, owing to the ambiguity of representation, to the divisions between text and image, and to the multiple stories and fragmented structures of identification. Munir, for instance, who was born in Jerusalem, lives in Bethlehem, and has a Palestinian passport and a West Bank ID, writes: 'Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray. I need permission to go to Jerusalem. On the occasion of my mother's birthday, I was denied an entry permit.' When we look at the image, we see the artist's shadow cast over the grave. But that shadow also becomes ours as we gaze at the picture. Owing to the ambiguity of pronouns, for a fleeting moment, Munir's 'I' becomes ours as we share a proximity with the excluded. What if this form of sociability – one based on occupying a position of exile – was held in suspension, posed against the de-



T.J. DEMOS, writer, critic and lecturer, investigates the ways in which artists operate in the context of an emerging global co-existence of political sovereignty and statelessness, and the relationship of contemporary art to the experience of social dislocation and political crisis. For the prologue **DEMOS** explored concepts of exile with reference to contemporary art in the context of the 'altermodern'. The talk was followed by a discussion, chaired by Israeli architect **EYAL WEIZMAN**.

sires for nationality, channelled against xenophobic communities, against the cycles of fear and violence that have torn the world apart? What if this community of the displaced was put to task against the desires for a national home, against the nationalism of Israelis and Palestinians alike, which violently divides all, geographically, socially and politically?

EXILE AS THE COMING UNIVERSALITY?

AGAMBEN HAS SUGGESTED that only when 'the citizen has been able to recognise the refugee that he or she is – only in such a world is the political survival of humankind today thinkable'.⁴⁸ The radical nature of this proposal is that the recognition of one's fundamentally dislocated self dissolves the division between citizen and refugee, proposing a space 'where exterior and interior in-determine each other', where one is placed in 'a relation of reciprocal extraterritoriality' to the other.⁴⁹ In opposition to the regime of social and political separation that constitutes what Étienne Balibar has identified as a 'virtual European apartheid'⁵⁰ – by which he means the undemocratic and exclusionary policies of the EU in regard to its non-citizen residents – this 'relation of reciprocal extraterritoriality' breaks the seemingly inextricable bonds between nation, state and territory, and severs the ostensibly natural links between citizen, nationality and human rights. What opens up, according to Agamben, is the possibility of a 'refuge of the singular', where rights are reinvented on the basis of residency rather than citizenship, and where nationality can no longer operate as the logic of segregation and discriminatory justice.

From this abstract theoretical speculation, it is hard to grasp what such a 'refuge of the singular' would actually be or look like in reality. What post-national institutions, political infrastructure and administrative mechanisms would guarantee its protection? Who would



FLÁVIA MÜLLER MEDEIROS invited artist NASRIN TABATABAI for a discussion during which they each took one of their previous works as the starting point to question and reflect on notions of exile. In 2007 FLÁVIA MÜLLER MEDEIROS spent time in the capital cities of the Baltic region as part of a 'Holiday in' residency, and became interested in the European Humanities University, a Belarusian university which relocated to Vilnius, Lithuania after its forced closure by the Belarusian government in 2004. Her video *Untitled 2007* documents the making of the first group portrait (see above left) of the politically displaced EHU students at the Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius. NASRIN TABATABAI in her video *Passage 2005* presented a portrait of an immigrant performing her daily life while selling magazines at a shopping mall in the city of Rotterdam.

protect the rights of those within it? What would it mean to transvalue statelessness and universalise it as a condition of political equality and radical democracy? These questions have yet to be answered. In this regard, exile still promises a future redemption that seems out of grasp, just as it did in Benjamin's apocalyptic time. That future redemption might designate, following Žižek, a 'universality to come' – specifically an age of the universality of the singular. *To recognize oneself as the refugee*: this means that the relation to the shadowy figure of the exile defines the way one relates to oneself; in other words, it demands, paradoxically, 'identifying universality with the point of exclusion'.⁵¹ For Žižek, this manoeuvre is the converse of the standard one of deconstructing universality as false, by revealing, for instance, the hidden interests behind some abstract universal idea – such as the 'his' of history that exposes the traditional patriarchal construction of the past as presented in supposedly 'objective' accounts. Similarly, it is easy to show how the segregation of citizens and migrants creates the terms of social and political inequality. But to merely criticise that system remains a reactive response, which fails to provide alternatives other than further reforms that potentially leave the structures of division intact. Far more radical is to universalise exile as the condition of being human, and to determine a politics of equality on that basis. It may currently be unlikely to conceive of this eventuality in today's political environment. But perhaps this is exactly where artistic practice may assume its most radical role: to imagine alternatives otherwise impossible to contemplate, unleashing an imagination that may produce material effects in turn.

NOTES

1. WALTER BENJAMIN, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', (1940) in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York 1968, p.258.

2. EDWARD SAID, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Granta* no.13, Autumn 1984, p.159.

3. GYÖRGY LUKÁCS, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock, London 1971, p.41.

4. MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell, Routledge 1993, p.243.

5. See NIKOS PAPASTERGIADIS, *Dialogues in the Diasporas: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity*, London 1998, p.1: 'Does modernity still promise to be the home of enlightenment, progress and reason, or is it an exilic state shrouded by techno-mystification, sliding deeper into chaos, committed to inequality, a shabby justification for ecological and cultural upheaval?' See also NIKOS PAPASTERGIADIS, *Modernity as Exile: The Stranger in John Berger's Writing*, Manchester and New York 1993.

6. The etymology of exile dates from c.1300, from the Old French *exillier*, and from the Latin *exilare*

and *exilium*, meaning 'banishment', and *exul*, meaning 'banished person', combining *ex-* 'away' and *al-* 'to wander' (cf. the Greek *alasthai* 'I wander'). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, exile variously signifies penal expatriation, banishment and voluntary expatriation for any purpose.

7. PAUL GILROY, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass. 1993; HOMI BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, London 1995; EDWARD SAID, 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', in *Grand Street*, Autumn 1993, p.121. This double frame also implies a space of aporia, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, in 'Asked to Talk About Myself ...', in *Third Text*, no.19, Summer 1992. Still, we must keep in mind Said's warning that to think of the literature of exile as solely 'beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations', 'Reflections on Exile', p.160.

8. HANNAH ARENDT, 'We Refugees', in *Menorah Journal*, no.1, 1943, p.77.

9. GIORGIO AGAMBEN, 'Beyond Human Rights' (1993), in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, Minneapolis 2000, p.16.

10. I have written about these contexts elsewhere. See T.J. DEMOS, 'Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile', *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman, Washington DC 2005, pp.7–30; and T.J. DEMOS *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge,

Massachusetts 2007. See also STEPHANIE BARRON, *Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, Los Angeles 1997.

11. See *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. L. Camnitzer et al., exh. cat., Queens Museum of Art, New York 1999; MONICA AMOR, 'Gego: Exploding the Field', in *Art Journal*, Winter 2007; and FRAZER WARD, 'Alien Duration: Tehching Hsieh, 1978–99', in *Art Journal*, Autumn 2006.

12. EDWARD SAID, 'The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's Logic of Irreconcilables', in *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land*, exh. cat., Tate, London 2000, p.17.

13. KOBENA MERCER, 'Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: the Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain', *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, London 1994, pp.253–4.

14. JEAN FISHER and GERARDO MOSQUERA, 'Introduction', *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2003, p.3.

15. FREDRIC JAMESON, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, North Carolina 1992.

16. FREDRIC JAMESON, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. F. Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Durham, North Carolina 1998.
17. On this general development, see AMNA MALIK, 'Conceptualising "Black" British Art Through the Lens of Exile', in *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer, London 2008. On the diasporic, see JANA EVANS BRAZIEL and ANITA MANNUR (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, Malden, Massachusetts 2003.
18. MERCER 1994, p.62.
19. HOMI BHABHA, 'Dissemination: Time Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation', *Nation and Narration*, London, 1990; also see, HOMI BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.
20. One such formation was the YBA phenomenon, inaugurated in 1988 with its notorious Freeze exhibition organized by Damien Hirst, the reception of which made claims for a resurgence of British identity. For a critique of that resurgence, see KOBENA MERCER, 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness', in *Third Text* 49, Winter 1999–2000, pp.15–26.
21. STUART HALL, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1990), in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, Malden, Massachusetts 2003, p.244.
22. On the 'race industry' see CHANDRA MOHANTY, 'On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s', in *Cultural Critique* 2, 1990.
23. Mohanty, pp.179–208. See also TARIQ MOODOOD, ed., *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, London 1996.
24. SLAVOJ ZIZEK, 'Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism', in *The Universal Exception*, London 2006, pp.151–182. See also Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, who query: 'What if a new paradigm of power, a postmodern sovereignty, has come to replace the modern paradigm and rule through differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities that these [postcolonial] theorists celebrate? In this case, modern forms of sovereignty would no longer be at issue, and the postmodernist and postcolonialist strategies that appear to be liberatory would not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule!' MICHAEL HARDT AND ANTONIO NEGRI, *Empire*, Harvard 2000, p.138.
25. PAUL GILROY, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2000; see also ERIC HOBBSBAWM, 'Identity Politics and the Left', in *New Left Review*, May/June, 1996; and on the question of post-black aesthetics in the United States, see DARBY ENGLISH, *How To See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007.
26. See LUCY LIPPARD, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, New York 1997.
27. For instance, in MAURA REILLY, ed., *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, London 2007.
28. JEAN-PIERRE CRIQUI, 'Like a Rolling Stone: Gabriel Orozco', in *Artforum*, April 1996.
29. SAID 1984, p.159.
30. HARDT AND NEGRI 2000, pp.360–1.
31. For further consideration of this development, see MIWON KWON, 'One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity', *October* no.80, Spring 1997.
32. ACHILLE BONITO OLIVA, 'The Globalisation of Art', in *Belonging and Globalisation: Critical Essays in Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Kamal Boullata, London 2008, pp.43–4.
33. Spivak proposed 'a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' – yet not without a controversial reception. See DONNA LANDRY and GERALD MACLEAN (eds.), *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, New York 1996, p.214.
34. JAMES MEYER, 'Nomads', in *Parkett* no.35, May 1997, p.207. Meyer differentiates 'lyrical nomads' (such as Tiravanija and Orozco), who practice 'a mobility thematized as a random and poetic interaction with the objects and spaces of everyday life', from 'critical nomads' (including Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller, Renee Green and Mark Dion), designating those who work out of the tradition of institutional critique. The latter model 'does not so much enact and record a discrete action or movement as locate the structures of mobility within specific historical, geographical, and institutional frameworks' (p.206).
35. KWON 1997, p.104.
36. Exemplary is RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA, *A Retrospective (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)* in 2005 at Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC at the Couvent des Cordeliers, Paris.
37. Müller exemplifies one of Meyer's 'critical nomads'. Also see: GEORGE BAKER, 'Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics. The Art of Christian Philipp Müller', in *Artforum*, February 1997, pp.74–7, 109.
38. See ALI BENSÂÂD, 'The Militarization of Migration Frontiers in the Mediterranean', in *The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa*, ed. Ursula Biemann and Brian Holmes, Barcelona 2006. Also see T.J. DEMOS, 'Europe of the Camps', in *Manifesta 7: Companion: The European Biennial of Contemporary Art, 19 July – 2 November 2008, Trentino, South Tyrol, Italy*, ed. Adam Budak and Nina Möntmann, et al., Milan 2008.
39. See www.migreurop.org/. See also CLAIRE RODIER, 'The Migreurop Network and Europe's Foreigner Camps', in *Non-Governmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher et al., New York 2007.
40. HARDT AND NEGRI 2000, p.361.
41. It also suggests a logic whereby the excluded are necessary to the self-constitution of the nomad's position of freedom – which is similar to the mutually constitutive logic of minority and majority, and subaltern and hegemon, as developed in HOMI BHABHA, 'Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', in *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, ed. Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer, Columbia, South Carolina 1996, pp.191–207.
42. http://www.schlingensiefel.com/projekt_eng.php?id=t033.
43. TOM TREVOR (ed.), *Port City: On Mobility & Exchange*, exh. cat., Arnolfini, Bristol 2007.
44. Argos's description on its website: <http://www.argosarts.org/articles.do?id=431>. Other relevant recent exhibitions include *B-ZONE: Becoming Europe and Beyond* at Berlin's Kunstwerke in 2005–06; and *Bel(com)ing Dutch*, Charles Esche's 2007–08 project at Eindhoven's Vanabbemuseum.
45. SAID 1993, pp.116, 119; AGAMBEN 1993, p.25.
46. SAID 2000, p.17: 'Better disparity and dislocation than reconciliation under duress of subject and object; better a lucid exile than sloppy, sentimental homecomings; better the logic of dissociation than an assembly of compliant dunce. A belligerent intelligence is always to be preferred over what conformity offers, no matter how unfriendly the circumstances and unfavourable the outcome.' Not surprisingly, before his death Said came to favour a binational – and distinctly anti-nationalist – solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. See EDWARD SAID, 'The One-State Solution', in *New York Times*, 10 January 1999.
47. OKWUI ENWEZOR, 'Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form', in *Manifesta Journal*, no.2, 2004.
48. AGAMBEN 1993, p.26.
49. Ibid., p.25.
50. ÉTIENNE BALIBAR, 'Droit de cité or Apartheid?', *We, the people of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson, Princeton 2004.
51. According to ZIZEK, in 'Multiculturalism', 'this, perhaps, is how one should read Rancière's notion of *singulier universel* [as developed in his book *La Méésentente*, 1995]: the assertion of the singular exception as the locus of universality which affirms and subverts the universality in question', note 27.