

## Reluctant Nomads: Biennial Culture and Its Discontents

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### Article abstract

Depuis le milieu des années 1990, l'intérêt marqué pour ce que l'on désigne comme la « culture biennale » soulève une série de questions sur les façons dont les expositions internationales interfèrent et interviennent dans les processus difficiles (et inégalitaires) de mondialisation néolibérale qui affectent l'ensemble de la société. Dans cet article, j'étudie la biennalisation de l'art contemporain dans le contexte géopolitique de la migration et de l'exil, en posant la question suivante : la culture biennale offre-t-elle une vision utopique de l'harmonie transnationale ? Ou bien, incarne-t-elle simplement les tendances colonisantes du corporatisme mondial ? Je défends l'idée que les grandes expositions internationales ont tendance à entretenir un rapport quelque peu complice avec la critique : elles participent et profitent de la « déterritorialisation » du marché global, mais elles en abordent aussi les excès à partir d'une position privilégiée. Proposant d'utiliser l'expression « nomadisme réticent » pour désigner les artistes qui critiquent de l'intérieur la façon dont la culture biennale tend à romantiser la migration et la mobilité transnationale, j'attire l'attention sur trois artistes—Tony Labat, Yto Barrada, and Ursula Biemann—qui interrogent de manière subtile les présomptions de mobilité transnationale liées à la culture biennale. Alors qu'ils s'impliquent dans la culture biennale tout en établissant des connections souvent éludées entre les tendances nomades de celle-ci et les barrières et exclusions engendrées par le capitalisme mondial, ces trois artistes sont à mon sens l'illustration parfaite des nomades réticents; leurs réflexions complexes sur l'expérience de la migration nous forcent à prendre en compte les réalités traumatisantes d'exil, de migration et de relocalisation forcée qui stigmatisent la vie de ces nomades involontaires qui ne peuvent pas compter sur l'aide de la communauté artistique mondialisée pour financer leurs voyages.

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# Reluctant Nomads: Biennial Culture and Its Discontents

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## Résumé

Depuis le milieu des années 1990, l'intérêt marqué pour ce que l'on désigne comme la « culture biennale » soulève une série de questions sur les façons dont les expositions internationales interfèrent et interviennent dans les processus difficiles (et inégalitaires) de mondialisation néolibérale qui affectent l'ensemble de la société. Dans cet article, j'étudie la biennalisation de l'art contemporain dans le contexte géopolitique de la migration et de l'exil, en posant la question suivante : la culture biennale offre-t-elle une vision utopique de l'harmonie transnationale ? Ou bien, incarne-t-elle simplement les tendances colonisantes du corporatisme mondial ? Je défends l'idée que les grandes expositions internationales ont tendance à entretenir un rapport quelque peu complice avec la critique : elles participent et profitent de la « déterritorialisation » du marché global, mais elles en abordent aussi les excès à partir d'une position privilégiée. Proposant d'utiliser l'expression "nomadisme réticent" pour désigner les artistes qui critiquent de l'intérieur la façon dont la culture biennale tend à romantiser la migration et la mobilité transnationale, j'attire l'attention sur trois artistes—Tony Labat, Yto Barrada, and Ursula Biemann—qui interrogent de manière subtile les présomptions de mobilité transnationale liées à la culture biennale. Alors qu'ils s'impliquent dans la culture biennale tout en établissant des connections souvent éludées entre les tendances nomades de celle-ci et les barrières et exclusions engendrées par le capitalisme mondial, ces trois artistes sont à mon sens l'illustration parfaite des nomades réticents; leurs réflexions complexes sur l'expérience de la migration nous forcent à prendre en compte les réalités traumatisantes d'exil, de migration et de relocalisation forcée qui stigmatisent la vie de ces nomades involontaires qui ne peuvent pas compter sur l'aide de la communauté artistique mondialisée pour financer leurs voyages.

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It seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism which has made so many homeless, which has torn up tongues and peoples by the root, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language...

George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (1971)

Unfortunately, the world now seems divided between what Jacques Attali calls the rich and poor nomads: the nomadic elite who travel at will, expanding their world, and the disenfranchised poor who travel because they are desperate to improve their condition. However indigent artists may sometimes be, we in the art world are very distinct from those migratory laborers who cross borders illegally, return again and again, live on the margins, negotiate cultures because there is no other way to earn a living.

Carol Becker, "The Romance of Nomadism" (1999)

In October 2007, Columbian artist Doris Salcedo occupied the massive space of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with *Shibboleth*, a 548-foot fissure that snakes its way along the length of the floor, beginning as a hairline crack and at times gaping to expose what appears to be a bottomless crevasse, lined with concrete and chain-link fencing. A complex meditation on the experience of immigration that simultaneously evokes the often treacherous experience of crossing borders and the "negative space" occupied by migrants within the increasingly policed borders of the European Union, the work seems determined to implicate the Tate itself in this rendering of gaping chasms and perilous border crossings, connecting the building to a col-

onial history of exclusion and exploitation that underpins the modernism celebrated within. In this respect, and to the extent that Salcedo employs the museum space as site, medium, and object of critical analysis of embedded social structures of power and injustice, *Shibboleth* can and has been justly identified as an heir to the genre of institutional critique associated with artists like Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and Hans Haacke in the 1970s. Salcedo's work is deeply reminiscent of Haacke's *Germania* exhibit at the 1974 Venice Biennale, likewise a literal intervention into the fabric of an institutional space that sought to expose the cracks in its artifice of neutrality and universality.<sup>1</sup>

But Salcedo's intervention operates at another level that I aim to tease out in this essay. By directing her institutional critique toward the cultural, political, and geographical exclusions specific to the dislocating experience of migration, Salcedo's work also operates as an intervention into the "romance of nomadism" in contemporary art—a romance that has only grown more passionate since the late 1990s, when art historian Carol Becker identified a tendency within the international art world to embrace an abstracted ideal of transnationalism while failing to attend to its lived realities.<sup>2</sup> In this way, I further suggest, Salcedo's intervention at the Tate Modern is emblematic of a *new* model of institutional critique that has recently surfaced—one that targets not the grounded, venerable cultural institutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but rather the itinerant, situational "non-sites" of art production and reception in the twenty-first, now commonly grouped under the rubric of biennial culture.

From the outset, it seems imperative not to confuse this emerging set of critical aesthetic practices with a movement or

genre that has been identified as the “new institutionalism” in contemporary art (and which, somewhat confusingly, has itself claimed the mantle of institutional critique).<sup>3</sup> Epitomized by the relational projects of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Höller among others, and characterized by discourses of transience, flux, and relationality, the new institutionalism likewise promotes the transformation of institutional spaces (into open studios, laboratories, hang-outs, communal kitchens...). But in their privileging flux over stasis and situation over site, these relational practices actually fall quite naturally into step with the emergence of biennial culture and its almost feverishly ambulatory ways. In contrast, the artists that I would like to consider articulate a self-reflexive discomfort with the artist’s presumptive status as wandering nomad and the art institution’s emerging role as a station along the way. Like Doris Salcedo, for whom the globalized artist’s privileged mobility serves as a platform from which to address issues of dislocation and displacement, these reluctant nomads investigate what it means to belong in a world in which the conceptual legitimacy of “home” is increasingly debased, even while home as lived reality is increasingly tenuous to much of the world’s citizenry.

In what follows, I address both biennial culture and its internalized critiques in the context of the ongoing global migration crisis, suggesting that the critical aesthetic practices of reluctant nomads offer sustained and useful meditations on the concepts and conditions of local and global, centre and periphery, belonging and not belonging, home and the unhomely. I argue that large-scale international exhibitions, whether deliberately or inadvertently, participate in and promote a nomadic logic of trans-, even post-national circuitry that in the same instance is being challenged by artists who are urgently mapping the human costs of global flow.

### Biennial Culture and Its Discontents

Clearly, any definition of “biennial culture,” or what the editors of a recent anthology on the topic term the “global biennial phenomenon,”<sup>4</sup> will be as heterogeneous and unruly as the phenomenon itself, whose breadth is global and whose conceptual concerns are largely dependent on the country in which the exhibition is mounted and the intellectual pursuits of the curator chosen to lead it. In addition, biennial, triennial, and other large-scale international exhibitions fall under a wide variety of formats—from the Venice Biennale, which continues (since its inception in 1895) to operate according to a model based on national pavilions, to the Liverpool Biennial, which invites international artists to engage directly with the city.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding these challenges, the term “biennial culture” has come increasingly to stand for recurring large-scale international exhibitions, hosted by cities (often in order to boost international

profile) and organized by guest curators around specific themes. Since the mid-1990s, debates regarding the “biennialization” of contemporary art have focused largely on the role of international exhibitions vis-à-vis multiple facets of globalization, sparked at least in part by the increasing frequency with which large-scale exhibitions have used their international podium to debate various facets of global culture.<sup>6</sup> On one hand, biennial culture has been praised for finally abandoning modernist myths of universality, instead embracing multiplicity, hybridity, the interstices, the West’s peripheries, and so on. At their best, some insist, biennials offer “a glimpse of a transnational utopia.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the rapid proliferation of biennials in all corners of the world has been vigorously disparaged as at best “largely conceptualized around certain curators’ jet-set lifestyles,”<sup>8</sup> and at worst propelled by a “colonial logic [that simply] underwrites the expansion of the art world’s traditional borders, as if the art world itself were gleefully following globalization’s imperial mandate.”<sup>9</sup>

But the most cogent analysis of both the virtues and limits of biennial culture derives from Carol Becker’s response to the Johannesburg Biennial of 1997, perhaps the first effort to assemble an international set of actors (artists, curators, and cultural theorists) to consider the socioeconomic consequences of neo-liberal globalization.<sup>10</sup> Applauding curator Okwui Enwezor’s mandate to collectively imagine a transnational future, Becker nevertheless chides the curatorial team for neglecting the geopolitical context in which the exhibition was staged. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings were in session, and while South Africa was grappling with both the legacy of apartheid and the future of the nation, the decision to formulate an international exhibition platform that transcended both the concept of nation and its own geographic context was, Becker suggests politely, “unfortunate.”<sup>11</sup> What Becker is observing here is a perhaps inevitable paradox that adheres to projects seeking to imagine a better world: the actually existing world can have the “unfortunate” effect of making such utopian ventures seem naive, even counterproductive. But what looked to many like naivety, even negligence,<sup>12</sup> was instead the product of a well-defined (and now, more than a decade later, well-rehearsed) reconceptualization of the terms and conditions of site-specificity as a model for artistic engagement—a rethinking that, having precipitated something of a rift in contemporary curatorial methodologies, deserves some unpacking here.

The battle over site-specificity as a model for socially engaged art has been waged primarily over competing definitions of “place”—an increasingly unstable epistemological category in both theory and practice. Specifically, site-specific art has come under fire for advancing an out-dated methodology that relies on nostalgic, essentializing visions of place and emplacement. Reinforced by the “nomadology” of Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari, along with recent conceptualizations of postmodernity's "non-places,"<sup>13</sup> critics of phenomenologically oriented site-specificity have instead advocated a notion of site imagined as "an intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation."<sup>14</sup> One such advocate, art historian Miwon Kwon, does caution against overly romanticized valorizations of the nomadic condition, which, she acknowledges, are often "called forth to validate, even romanticize, the material and socioeconomic realities of an itinerant lifestyle."<sup>15</sup> But Kwon's main concern is with site-specific models that "reaffirm our sense of self, reflecting back to us an unthreatening picture of a grounded identity."<sup>16</sup>

Ongoing debates regarding practices of site-specificity have occasioned two markedly divergent methodologies for curating large-scale international exhibitions. On one hand, there are those manifestations that privilege a concentrated attention to site, such as the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, which positions itself as a series of sustained encounters between artists, residents, and the city itself. This model, widely understood to have boosted the city's fledgling tourist economy since its inception in 2000, has also been widely disparaged by critics who remain unconvinced of the exhibition model's capacity to generate an engagement that is both meaningful and aesthetically rigorous.<sup>17</sup> As if in response to a loudening chorus of claims that site-sensitive international exhibitions such as the Liverpool Biennial are susceptible to overly anthropological, even neo-colonial, approaches to site-specificity, the contrary impulse has been to renounce context altogether—to embrace the itinerancy of both the artist and the exhibition context as ideally decentred positions from which to examine how the interrelated spheres of mobility, migration, and globalization are currently reshaping the world. To a large extent, this shift away from site-specific or site-sensitive biennials has allowed curators like Enwezor to avoid indulging in essentialized, outdated notions of site, since site itself is taken entirely off the curatorial menu. But there are risks associated with jettisoning attention to place, particularly in the context of art exhibitions that purport to address current models of globalism. For once the decision is made to unmoor the international exhibition from its grounding in a specific locale, the biennial risks being transformed into precisely the paean to globalization's uneven processes of development and deterritorialization that its detractors fear it has already become.

The "theoretical transmigration"<sup>18</sup> so thoroughly endorsed by the nomadic culture of perennial international exhibitions smacks of a romanticism that is uncannily familiar. Indeed, it would appear that biennial culture has supplied contemporary art with a convenient replacement for hackneyed, now largely discredited myths of the artist-sage, artist-madman, and artist-melancholic: artists who ride the biennial circuit are once again "poets unhoused and wanderers across language."<sup>19</sup> But whereas

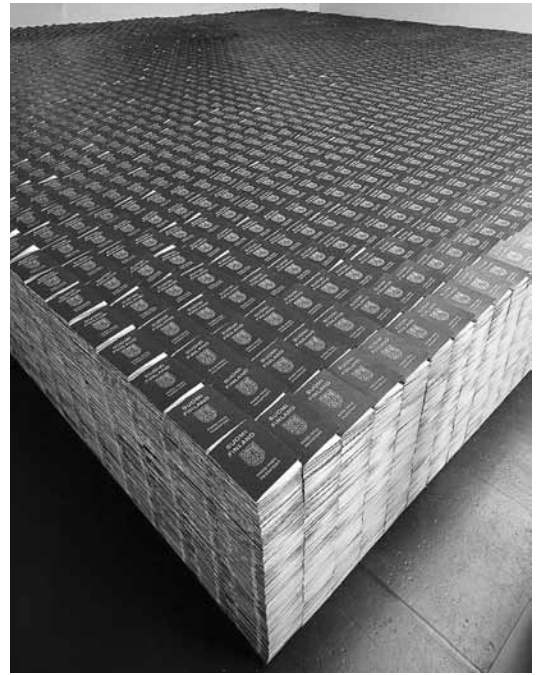


Figure 1. Alfredo Jaar, *One Million Finnish Passports*, 1995. One million replicated Finnish passports, glass, 800 x 800 x 80 cm, installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki (artwork © Alfredo Jaar; photograph provided by Galerie Lelong, New York).

George Steiner's observation reflected a Frankfurt School-inspired unease at the prospect of making art after the horrors of World War II and its legacy of mass exile and displacement, the romanticization of nomadism in the arts today speaks less to the current global crisis of migration than in oblivious *denial* of it. It is this perceived failure to address the vast gulf separating "rich nomads" from "poor nomads" that has instigated a backlash of sorts in critical theory.<sup>20</sup> But my intention here is not to adjudicate whether the renunciation of site-specificity in biennial culture is or is not capable of building a productive framework for responding to globalization's "multiple mutinies."<sup>21</sup> To do so would be to accept a dichotomy between "nomadism and sedentariness" whose coherence is belied by the fact that *any* multinational exhibition, whether located in Liverpool or Kassel, Istanbul or Berlin, whether composed of twenty artists engaged in year-long, context-specific projects or two hundred artists flown in hours before the event, is by definition a peripatetic venture, bound and indebted to the forces of globalization that it so frequently seeks to problematize. But if not even the most site-sensitive endeavours are capable of escaping the nomadic paradigm of biennial culture, is there a way instead to harness the logic, energy, and structural frameworks of nomadism to critique its very foundations?



Figure 2. Brendan Fernandes, *Future (... - - - ...) Perfect*, 2008. Shipping containers, theatre lights, hazers (artwork © Brendan Fernandes).

### Reluctant Nomads

Art critic Julian Stallabrass sees few, if any, avenues of criticality in the *modus operandi* of biennial culture, which, he argues, “not only embodies but actively propagandizes the virtues of [neo-liberal] globalization.”<sup>22</sup> To flesh out his critique, Stallabrass spotlights Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar’s *One Million Finnish Passports* (fig. 1), a 1995 installation of one million passport replicas stacked like a minimalist sculpture and intended to recall the would-be immigrants who have been turned away at Finland’s strictly guarded borders.<sup>23</sup> For Stallabrass, the work exemplifies biennial culture’s privileging of mobility over national determination and “global capital” over “local concerns”<sup>24</sup>—an argument that constructs a misleading, but also unwittingly revealing binary opposition. For let us agree (as I do) that international art exhibitions tend to perpetuate (while paradoxically condemning) a myth of unfettered mobility that validates the more pernicious world-is-flat, end-of-history, free-trade free-for-all underpinnings of the neo-liberal globalization. To map

this critique, however, onto a project such as *One Million Finnish Passports* is to reduce the complexity of globalization into an unproductively oppositional paradigm whereby claims for transnational solidarity and entreaties to rich nations to share their bloated slices of the global pie are conflated with the interests of the multinational corporate elite. Far from advancing the cause of global capitalism, Jaar’s project directly confronts the two-tiered nature of neo-liberal globalization, characterized by an unprecedented and seemingly unrestricted global flow of wealth and goods that has precipitated a global migration crisis, which in turn, in a sort of anti-domino effect, has seen an unprecedented fortification of the borders of America and Europe. Checkpoints, border fences, remote satellite surveillance systems, and regressive immigration standards—these are not the antithesis, but rather the ugly underbelly of free market globalism, and it is precisely this underbelly that Jaar seeks to expose.

Canadian artist Brendan Fernandes’s *Future (... - - - ...) Perfect* (fig. 2) conveys both the two-tiered nature of globalization and a nascent counter-iconography of reluctant nomad-

ism. Born in Kenya of Indian heritage and currently based in Toronto and Brooklyn, Fernandes's artistic practice is informed by his own personal narrative of migration and guided by critical inquiry into processes and conditions of diaspora and displacement. *Future (... - - - ...)* *Perfect* is (or rather *was*, for twelve hours on an October night in 2008) a large-scale sculptural installation at Toronto's third annual Nuit Blanche—itsself an increasingly popular global phenomenon whose distillation of the short-term perennial exhibition model into a city-wide, one-night extravaganza remains understudied and undertheorized. Over ten metres high, the installation of ten irregularly stacked cargo containers was a massive, shadowy structure lit only by the insistent pulsing of the Morse code signal for S.O.S.—three short flashes, three long flashes, three short flashes—broadcast from floodlights semi-hidden within the mysterious interiors of the open containers. Filling a parking lot in Liberty Village (a downtown neighbourhood associated with rapid upscale redevelopment), *Future (... - - - ...)* *Perfect* was clearly designed to both evoke and challenge the utopian gesture of Moshe Safdie's Habitat '67 with an urgently dystopian vision of urban gentrification, which is inevitably coexistent with scenes of displacement, marginalization, and growing inequality between the wealthy and the poor. The inclusion of full-sized shipping containers adds a bleak global dimension to this critique. As icons of globalization, shipping containers symbolize—in both name and purpose—its contradictory logic of mobility and containment. While the advent of the shipping container in the 1950s is widely understood to have played a crucial role in contemporary global interconnectivity,<sup>25</sup> shipping containers are also prone, with alarming frequency, to becoming the mass graves of suffocated asylum seekers<sup>26</sup>—a connotation that is intensified in Fernandes's installation by the incandescent cries for help emanating from within the containers. A deliberation on the politics and aesthetics of occupied space that occludes neither its local context nor the culture of nomadism in which contemporary art traffics, *Future (... - - - ...)* *Perfect* instead engages self-reflexively in a critical appraisal of both the promises and perils of mobility today.

In their complex renderings of what is now often termed “global apartheid,” Alfredo Jaar and Brendan Fernandes join a growing number of artists whose meditations on the complex paths of transnational migration are undermining from within the contemporary art world's ongoing narratives of transience and mobility. Reluctant nomads convey the risk that in our rush to embrace the language and logic of nomadism we forget or elide the very real dangers that attend to the geopolitical conditions of the migrant, the exile, the undocumented worker, the asylum seeker, and all those global citizens for whom deterritorialization is neither a trope for the fragmentation of the postmodern subject nor an opportunity to expand one's sphere

of influence and marketability, but is instead an intensely corporeal state of impoverished marginalization. Recognizing, with Jacques Attali, an important distinction between rich nomads who “experience the world vicariously and safely” and poor nomads “seeking to escape from the destitute periphery,”<sup>27</sup> these artists insist on tracing, not transcending, the cultural, political, and geographical borders that define and confine our subjectivities. In their work, borders are underlined as dynamic social spaces—sites of both repression and transgression. And when this work is carried out, as it so often is, under the umbrella of large-scale international exhibitions, they have the capacity to radically confront the romance of nomadism that biennial culture would seem to promote. Thus, while it would be simple to treat these practices, which take place in and around borders, checkpoints, and other contested sites of globalization, as examples of the contemporary art world's imperial enterprise, I suggest instead that artists like Salcedo, Jaar, and Fernandes operate both within and against the logic of biennial culture, employing what Mieke Bal terms a migratory aesthetic to critique—if complicitly—the celebratory nomadism of biennial culture.

### Phantom Scenes

The problematics that attend to modelling a transnational framework for the circulation of contemporary art, and the extent to which this framework can be understood to both reflect globalization's excesses *and* challenge its exclusions, find an ideal case study in *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, Okwui Enwezor's 2006 International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville (BIACS II). Here, ninety-one artists from thirty-five countries were invited to examine how the turmoils that seem to define the contemporary world—war, poverty, famine, and multiple refugee crises, to name a few—have transformed conventional modes of recognition—proximity, neighbourliness, intimacy—into defamiliarizing “forms of non-recognition”—self-containment, xenophobia, incarceration.<sup>28</sup> The curatorial program, in other words, sought to trace how and to what extent the vectors of contact that have materialized the long-awaited global village quickly fashioned that village into a place of fear, discrimination, and alienation, where the phantasmagoric nature of the international order is itself haunted with “phantom scenes” of conflict and confrontation that threaten our collective sense of safety and stability while radically reconfiguring the very nature of home.

Nine years after Enwezor's observation, in his 2nd Johannesburg Biennial curatorial statement, that “[o]ur cities and lives have been transformed by the ever changing direction of the compass as populations drift and masses of people are submitted to the most horrific methods of genocide, starvation, and cruelty,”<sup>29</sup> the stakes appeared to have multiplied. Ongoing

conflict in the Middle East, unprecedented levels of police surveillance in cities and on borders around the world, sharply increasing rates of incarceration and detention, and refugee crises from Colombia to Iraq constitute what Enwezor, borrowing a term from postcolonial theorist David Scott, calls the “problem-spaces” in which the “multiple mutinies and upheavals that currently beset global society” are localized.<sup>30</sup> And insofar as *The Unhomely*'s mandate was to address the increasingly antagonistic expressions of belonging and unbelonging in the twenty-first century, it might be argued that the exhibition was itself a reluctant champion of the nomadic condition. But while promoting a rhetoric of proximity and neighbourliness, BIACS II, in almost programmatic form, itself became a problem-space whose own sense of neighbourliness was quickly called into question.

For Enwezor, it was important that *The Unhomely* look “beyond the metaphor of the city”<sup>31</sup> toward a more global reflection on the complexities that define contemporary models and counter-models of adjacency; in this way he hoped to circumvent the perceived tendency of location-specific biennials to “colonize” their host cities.<sup>32</sup> Thus, with a few modest exceptions, the exhibiting artists refrained from any critical or sustained engagement with the local context. But in an exhibition so attentive to questions of intimacy, proximity, and neighbourliness, the marked absence of attention to the city of Seville rendered the exhibition itself something of an unhomely presence. Consider, for instance, Thomas Hirschhorn's contribution, *Re* (2006), a large, seemingly haphazard installation of bookshelves, seating, video screens, and DIY signage, all covered in packing tape, that both documented and reconstructed the artist's *Musée Précaire Albinet* (2004), a fragile outdoor gallery in a working-class suburb of Paris built by locals and temporarily displaying major works from the collection of the Pompidou. On the streets of Paris, Hirschhorn's exhibit explored whether art can have a viable political impact and whether it can contribute to dismantling the artificial borders of class and race. Reconstructed at the Seville biennial, the project—itsself literally a phantom scene—seemed to abandon even the pretence of such an attempt.

Phantoms also stalked the exhibition venues themselves. The exhibition was staged in two locations, both of which invite, indeed demand, analysis of Spain's principal role in the historical trajectory of globalization. The first, the Andalusian Centre for Contemporary Art located at the local Carthusian Monastery, was a favourite retreat of fifteenth-century explorer Christopher Columbus and, for several years after his death, the site of his remains. A prominent statue to Columbus is difficult to miss on the gallery's grounds. The second location was the recently refurbished Royal Shipyards—coincidentally where many of the ships used to “discover,” conquer, and colonize the Americas were built and launched. Given these historically loaded settings, the absence of attention to the disastrous consequences of the Western

world's (and in this particularly context, Spain's) propensity to test the limits of neighbourliness, proximity, and intimacy in the conquering and colonization of the Americas seemed to haunt the exhibition with its own barely repressed memories.

The absence of reflection, at least in the curatorial focus, on Seville's geographical position in the increasingly troubled southern region of Spain was likewise conspicuous. Spain's southern border has in recent years become a deadly battleground in Europe's war against undocumented migration; each year 300,000 to 500,000 hopeful migrants swim, hire inflatable rafts, or otherwise attempt to cross the Strait. Since the turn of the century, thousands of people have been rescued and several thousand more are believed to have drowned, leading refugee aid organizations to refer to the Strait as the “largest mass grave of post-war Europe.”<sup>33</sup> Those who do manage to make the treacherous crossing are likely to be captured by the sophisticated surveillance system that now blankets the entire coast. *The Unhomely* did acknowledge the proximity of North Africa with the organization of a film festival at Cinémathèque de Tanger in Morocco's second-largest city; the program, *Among the Moderns*, was intended to problematize the stereotypes that now plague representations of the Arab world while highlighting film and video production in the Maghreb region of North Africa. But this moment of transnational neighbourliness and collaboration only underscores biennial culture's arguable tendency to trumpet its broadened boundaries of art production and reception while failing to acknowledge that the borders crossed so effortlessly by the presumably (white) Western biennial audience are relentless patrolled against southern incursions, making it difficult to imagine that North African art audiences were offered equivalent access to the Seville exhibition. To wit, since the European Union enacted the Schengen Agreement in 1995, Moroccan citizens must now present a passport, a Schengen visitor visa, and a compelling justification to cross into Spain. As French-Moroccan artist Yto Barrada, represented at the Seville Biennial and the Director of the Cinémathèque de Tanger, suggests, the right to cross the Strait of Gibraltar has “become unilateral across what is now legally a one-way strait”<sup>34</sup>—a situation only exacerbated by post-9/11 geopolitics of fear and hyper-surveillance. The Seville Biennial's cross-border logic seems to verify a prevailing suspicion regarding the opening of contemporary art to a post-colonial rhetoric that nevertheless operates according to neo-colonial circuits. For while *The Unhomely* clearly reflected Enwezor's pioneering inclination to present a globalized roster of artists (of ninety-two participants, thirty-eight were born in and/or live in Asia, Africa, or South America), the exhibition's logistics revealed the presumption of an English-speaking Western audience, able to travel freely between Spain and Morocco—suggesting that twelve years on, Gerardo Mosquera's misgivings about globalized art circulation,



Figure 3. Tony Labat, *Day Labor: Mapping the Outside* (Fat Chance Bruce Nauman), 2006. Surveillance station, 2-channel projection, LCD monitors, dimensions variable, installation detail (artwork © Tony Labat; photograph provided by Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco).

that “the world is practically divided between curating cultures and curated cultures,”<sup>35</sup> still ring true.

But while the questions raised by biennial culture’s perceived failure to address, interpret, and respond to the repercussions of globalization in an appropriately self-reflexive manner are valid, indeed urgently necessary, the answers are not necessarily as straightforward as, say, inviting more participation from local artists, hosting only interactive community art projects, or abandoning the system altogether in favour of a return to nineteenth-century exhibition models. One of Enwezor’s curatorial mandates for BIACS II was to treat the relationship between North Africa and Europe as one of many “problem-spaces” associated with the current global order, and, indeed, two of the artists whose work will be discussed further—Ursula Biemann and Yto Barrada—investigate the Gibraltar region, a flashpoint in this relationship, in precisely this way. What I would like to suggest is that the staging of BIACS II itself functioned productively as a problem-space, defined by David Scott as “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.”<sup>36</sup> For if the curatorial outlook of the Seville Biennial seemed disinclined to reflect more than cursorily on either the

complex (even “unhomely”) nature of Spain’s southern border or the politics of belonging as they pertained to the exhibition’s socio-geographical context, it did create a space for such reflection in its choice of artists, and it was precisely this slippage—between the curatorial message and artistic practices that I have identified under the rubric of biennial critique—that revealed the exhibition to be a productive site of negotiation. Simultaneously enacting and challenging the romance of nomadism that pervades biennial culture and renders it relevant to debates over globalization’s “phantom scenes,” BIACS II demonstrated that large-scale international exhibitions, for all their apparent sins of geotouristic ambition and corporate pandering, are perhaps uniquely positioned to dissect the intricately tangled relations between nations and nomads, borders and utopias, the West and its peripheries.

#### Migratory Aesthetics I: Mobility and Melanchronia

Art critic and cultural theorist Mieke Bal has proposed a way to rethink the terms and stakes of site-specificity in the context of an increasingly internationally oriented art world. “Globalized art?” she asks. “What would such a term mean? This is not an





Figure 4. Tony Labat, *Day Labor: Mapping the Outside (Fat Chance Bruce Nauman)*, 2006. Surveillance station, 2-channel projection, LCD monitors, dimensions variable, installation detail (artwork © Tony Labat; photograph provided by Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco).

art from nowhere, for such an art, I contend, does not exist. Since art making is a material practice, there is no such thing as site-unspecific art.<sup>37</sup> With this observation, Bal acknowledges two important facets of contemporary art practice: first, that art today is inextricably linked to the logic of the global marketplace; second, that the globalization (and, in the context of this essay, the biennialization) of art cannot and should not obscure the geopolitical nuances of its production, distribution, and reception. To respond to this apparent stalemate, Bal proposes “migratory aesthetics” as a way to conceptualize the “aesthetic encounter [that] takes place in the space of, on the basis of, and on the interface with, the *mobility* of people as a given, as central, and as at the heart of what matters in the contemporary, that is, ‘globalized,’ world.”<sup>38</sup> In ways that resonate sharply with Bal’s observations, several artists represented at the 2006 Seville Biennial elaborated a reluctant position vis-à-vis the culture of biennials, posing subtle but significant challenges to the exhibition’s oblique self-narrative of post-national utopianism. What connects these artists—notably Cuban-American neo-

Conceptual artist Tony Labat, French-Moroccan photographer and video artist Yto Barrada, and Swiss video artist and curator Ursula Biemann—is that they each both enrich and are enriched by interaction with the concept of migratory aesthetics, the tenets of which are particularly suited to the task of unpacking and testing biennial culture’s romantic attachment to nomadism.

In her elaboration of migratory aesthetics, Bal suggests that video art, which since its inception has been deeply invested in explorations of temporality, is uniquely apposite to explorations of migration’s spatio-temporal complexities:

Video is the medium of our time, available to many, and put to many uses. It is also the medium of time; of time contrived, manipulated, and offered in different, multi-layered ways. It offers images moving in time—slow or fast, interrupting and integrating. Migration is the situation of our time. But it is also an experience of time; as multiple, heterogeneous. Video is, arguably, eminently suitable to understand what this means—to feel it in our bodies.<sup>39</sup>

It is, then, neither coincidental nor insignificant that one of the threads connecting the practices of Labat, Barrada, and Biemann is their privileging of video as a medium through which to explore mobility and migration. Consider Tony Labat's 2006 video installation *Day Labor: Mapping the Outside (Fat Chance Bruce Nauman)* (figs. 3 and 4). For this work, Labat installed four surveillance cameras in the window of his San Francisco studio, which overlooks a parking lot where migrant labourers regularly convene, hoping to be called upon for temporary work. The installation includes two large projections—a four-split screening of edited footage from the surveillance cameras taken over several months, and a projection of video shot intermittently from a fifth, handheld camera.<sup>40</sup>

Labat's piece confirms in several interrelated ways Bal's contention regarding video's "eminent suitability" to the migrant experience. The use of video surveillance technology, for instance, reminds us that the life of the migrant is a life under constant surveillance. It also conforms, at least in part, to Bal's observation that video's most significant contribution to migratory aesthetics is its capacity to express "temporal discrepancies and disturbed rhythms," particularly via techniques of cutting and distortion.<sup>41</sup> As Bal suggests, such discrepancies and disturbances are expressly felt by migratory subjects, "permanently on the move," who experience "[t]he time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling, provisional present, with its pleasures and its violence."<sup>42</sup> And certainly, Labat's installation both documents and rehearses this experience of multitemporality, or what Bal terms "heterochrony," the multiple screens competing for our sensory attention to the various states of boredom, anticipation, and panic that measure the temporary worker's day.

But what emerges, even more forcefully, from the installation is a sense of temporality stalled. Notwithstanding sporadic episodes of relative hyperactivity (such as the unexpected arrival of a police cruiser), what the installation documents overwhelmingly is endless time spent waiting—playing cards, drinking coffee, napping, reading the paper, listening to music, leaning against a concrete wall with toes tapping. In fact the life of the migrant worker appears, from this footage, to be marked less by a heterochronic experience of time than by an experience that I would like to describe as *melanchronic*. In this way, a traumatic element is introduced that resonates with Freud's concept of *nachträglichkeit* or belated action.<sup>43</sup> Like the stalled temporality experienced by the subject who is unable to integrate, or "claim," a traumatic experience,<sup>44</sup> time stands still for the migrant, for whom days turn into months waiting for papers or for work, waiting in refugee camps or at border checkpoints, waiting in detention centres to be sent back to a home that is unsustainable, only to begin the entire process anew.

What I find particularly interesting about *Day Labor* is how Labat piggybacks this investigation of the melanchronic experience of migration onto video art's own history of investigating delayed temporality. The installation's subtitle, *Mapping the Outside (Fat Chance Bruce Nauman)*, is an explicit reference to Nauman's 2001 *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)*, also a large-scale video installation that documents surveillance video taken, in this case, *inside* the artist's studio. Nauman's work, which records nocturnal activities in his studio (eerily calm except for the occasional appearance of a cat or mouse), is likewise a meditation on duration and ennui, as such, revisiting concerns that make Nauman a key figure in the early history of video art's temporal dimensions. While it is true that the multitemporal possibilities of video are key to its criticality in art and culture, it is video's capacity to express the banality of time that has enchanted artists since its inception in the late 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Tony Labat's intervention into these explorations is, I suggest, twofold. First, the work employs video art's relentlessly narcissistic gaze to cross-purposes, wresting the camera's lens away from self and towards the other in a move that renders the terms of video art's engagement with melanchronia decidedly relational. But secondly (and more pertinently), like early video, which sought to both explore and disrupt conventional understandings of time, Labat's installation challenges the narratives of speed and acceleration that buttress contemporary culture's embrace of itinerant lifestyles. And it is precisely in this way that Labat's aesthetic enunciation of melanchronia constitutes an oblique aesthetic challenge to biennial culture's postmodern embrace of what David Harvey famously terms "space-time compression."<sup>46</sup>

Like Tony Labat, Yto Barrada—a photographer and video artist based in Tangier, Morocco—offers a radical take on what Enwezor calls the "complex nature of adjacency," in the process demanding a rethinking of the ethics and aesthetics of nomadism in a world increasingly composed of closed and contested borders. And like Labat, Barrada employs a migratory aesthetic to convey the challenges of living between worlds. *The Smuggler* (2006) (fig. 5) is a silent eight-minute video consisting of a slow, methodical step-by-step demonstration of the process by which an elderly Moroccan woman, identified only as T.M., prepares to smuggle fabrics out of the Spanish town of Ceuta—an enclave inside the territory of Morocco that artist and theorist Ursula Biemann describes evocatively as an "incision in a complex fabric that is defined by border relations between Europe and Africa"<sup>47</sup>. The woman prepares for her daily trek following the tradition of wrapping layer after layer around her body, securing them with rope, then concealing them under her *djellaba* robe, as if illustrating Biemann's observation that "[t]he economic logic of the border inscribes itself onto every layer of the transforming, mobile female body."<sup>48</sup> On one hand, the smug-



Figure 5. Yto Barrada, *The Smuggler*, Tangier, 2006. Video still, 11 min. (artwork © Yto Barrada; photograph provided by Galerie Polaris, Paris).

gler's demeanour and facial expressions evince an unmistakably dignified desire to demonstrate the proper techniques for her trade. At another level, however, is revealed the mundane daily struggle of fashioning a living in the Gibraltar region; the woman's diminutive frame seems to groan with every layer added, and at one point a young girl appears from beyond the frame to assist with the wrapping.

In *The Smuggler* the melanchronic aspects of the migratory life are expressed in ways that both resemble and diverge from Tony Labat's work. Again, the video records a daily process that reveals the border to be a *temporally* liminal site of mundane, repetitive acts. But rather than exploiting video's capacity for lengthy recording, Barrada instead employs the loop to reiterate the repetitive nature of the woman's livelihood. This again is resonant with traumatic temporality, wherein time stands still in perpetual repetition, and indeed, time seems to stand still for the smuggler in multiple ways. The woman is filmed in front of a black backdrop, which adds a sense of timelessness to her performance; one quickly develops the impression that T.M. has been smuggling fabrics across the Spanish border, and will continue doing so, forever. The fleeting presence of the camera-shy young girl disrupts this timelessness to a certain extent, but it also signals another mode of timelessness, for the viewer is obliged to consider the possibility that the training is for her benefit, that she will one day carry the burden (literally) of this borderline existence.

Cultural theorist Jenny Edkins conceptualizes "trauma time" as the halted, disruptive temporality that interrupts the "smooth time" of hegemonic cultural narratives. Edkins suggests that trauma, "which refuses to take its place in history

as done and finished with,"<sup>49</sup> has the capacity to trouble the temporal linearity of cultural narratives. Trauma, she suggests, "challenges sovereign power at its very roots"<sup>50</sup> by insisting on bearing witness to that which cannot be integrated into national myths and narratives. Thus in all its despondent, repetitive temporality, trauma can also be understood productively as the Barthesian *punctum* that both pricks the conscience of history and rewrites its future. In the practices of Labat and Barrada, I see melanchronia operating in a parallel fashion, wherein traumatic temporality is introduced into the ongoing narratives of unfettered mobility, uninterrupted speed, and infinitely crossable borders that circulate in, and facilitate the existence of, international exhibition practices.

#### Migratory Aesthetics II: The Spatial Politics of Smuggling

Challenging normative narratives of smooth, rapid experiences of temporality, Yto Barrada's practice also challenges spatially demarcated borders. Troubling, if only implicitly, her own status as a bi-national, indeed international artist whose art world credentials grant her relatively easy border passage—and troubling, by association, the privileged status of the Western art tourist, whose access to Spain is likewise unimpeded—Barrada insists on tracing the existence of otherwise elided borders, endorsing art historian Irit Rogoff's observation that critical art practices can function to manifest "a kind of physical stamping of the terrain, an insistence on a border where everyone else is denying its existence."<sup>51</sup> Critics have noted that Barrada's photographs often feature roadblocks, holes, and other impassable geographies,<sup>52</sup> but these impasses expose the materiality of the border in a way that also challenges its structural integrity. Barrada's ancient smuggler defiantly crosses and recrosses the troubled border, each passage underlining and undermining its power to shape her movements and livelihood. As critic Nico Israel acknowledges, "What at first appears absolutely impossible—overcoming a difference, bridging a treacherous strait—seems possible, if only for a fleeting instant, through art."<sup>53</sup>

Fortuitously, *The Smuggler* also resonates with Rogoff's recent theorization of a "smuggling aesthetic," a concept according to which "the notion of journey does not follow the logic of crossing barriers, borders, bodies of water but rather of sidling along with them seeking the opportune moment, the opportune breach in which to move to the other side."<sup>54</sup> This concept is particularly useful for its twofold applicability to the thesis we are considering in this paper: besides animating the border with her documentation of (literal) smuggling activities, Barrada also "smuggles" into the biennial context a subtle critique of the presumption of open borders that underwrites and even legitimizes its artistic offerings. The smuggling paradigm is equally salient

to Barrada's *Série Autocar* (2004) (fig. 6), a restrained and elusive series of four photographs that initially appear to be colourful geometric abstractions. In fact, the photographs depict logos painted on the backsides of tourist buses, each of which serves a second, inadvertent function of surreptitiously alerting teens and children as to the conditions according to which a particular company will unwittingly accommodate undocumented passage across the Strait. One logo, for example, purportedly carries the following information: "Bus parks in front of the port near the ticket booth. 4 a.m. arrival in Tangier, 6 p.m. departure. Bring biscuits and dates, and plastic bag for shoes. They notice in Spain right away if your shoes are not clean. Bus goes onto Bismillah ferry, room for three small people [to hide] under the bus."<sup>55</sup>

Like *The Smuggler*, *Série Autocar* operates as an insistent reminder of the perils of crossing borders. But by demonstrating an instance in which the iconography of unobstructed global tourism is subversively transformed into a counter-iconography of illicit passage, the photographs indicate as well the (slim, costly, and dangerous) possibility of transgression. Thus, while Barrada's practice uncovers the troubled Gibraltar region as a complex site of economic hardship, physical struggle, and monotonous survival, what ultimately emerges in her work is a sense of borders breached. Like Doris Salcedo, Alfredo Jaar, and Tony Labat, Yto Barrada is clearly not seduced by what art historian Nikos Papastergiadis terms the contemporary "fantasy of unrestricted mobility" (whether spatial *or* temporal) that both operationalizes and obscures "the violence of penetrating boundaries."<sup>56</sup> But in this artist's aesthetic rendering of these moments of subversive penetration, the contested Gibraltar Strait becomes imaginable as a space of both control and resistance, checkpoints and blindspots, borders and breaches. In the same instance, biennial culture under these terms becomes imaginable as a space where nomads and smugglers might ideally meet to negotiate and debate the conditions for a reconceived future of globalization.

Yto Barrada's work reveals the existence of borders in order to propose their transgression. This is also the proposition offered by Swiss artist Ursula Biemann, whose 2003 experimental ethnographic video essay *Europlex* (figs. 7–9), a collaboration with anthropologist Angela Sanders, is likewise concerned with the material and social realities of the Spanish-Moroccan border area. A twenty-minute documentation of various activities that animate the border, *Europlex* articulates Biemann's Lefebvrian understanding of territorialization: "Territories," she suggests, "do not exist prior to contact and traffic. They are sustained through them. Appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things: this is how space is made."<sup>57</sup> The video is actually composed of three separately composed "border logs," each of which focuses on a specific intersection

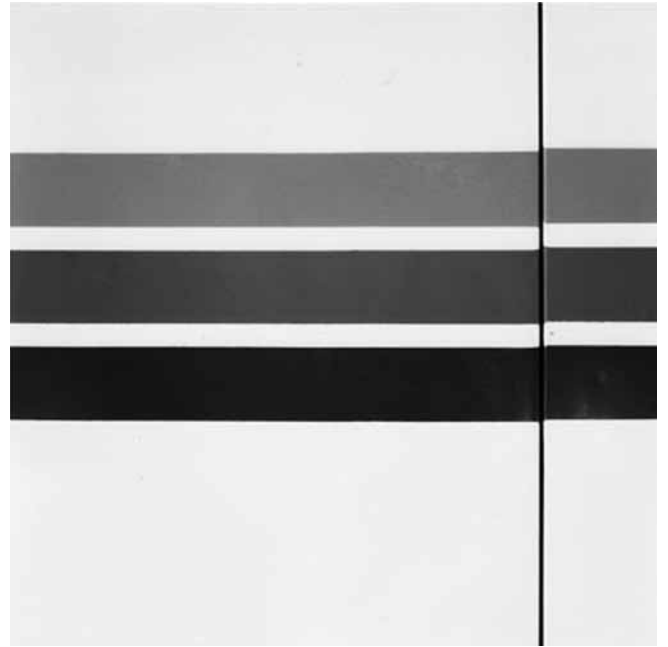


Figure 6. Yto Barrada, *Autocar #3*, from *Série Autocar*, 2004. Series of four C-prints, 88 x 88 cm (artwork © Yto Barrada; photograph provided by Galerie Polaris, Paris).

of economy, geography, and gender. "Border Log I," subtitled "smuggling: a cartography of struggle," details how women like Yto Barrada's elderly smuggler transform their bodies into vehicles of cross-border commerce by concealing goods and fabrics under their dresses. "Border Log II," "domesticas living in a time lapse," documents the movements of Moroccan women who cross the border as domestic workers, while "Border Log III," "the transnational zone," tracks the North African workers, mostly female, who produce goods destined for European and Asian markets. Like Yto Barrada, Biemann understands the Spain-Morocco border as a space of both repression and subversion, struggle and survival. And, like Barrada, Biemann insists on exposing the material, embodied dimensions of the global market, which, as Imre Szeman observes, are "still too often passed over in discussions that focus on the spectrality of new communications technologies, the disembodied circulation of finance capital, and so on."<sup>58</sup>

What renders *Europlex* such a fitting example of migratory aesthetics is the way in which Biemann challenges the rhetoric of disembodiment that attaches to both economic and cultural discourses of globalization by tracking and charting the movement of bodies back and forth across the border; her tactics once again reveal the border as both a temporally and a spatially liminal space. "Border Log II," for instance, examines the curious fact that the domestic workers who live in the Moroccan



Figure 7. Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders, *Europlex*, 2003. Video still, 20 min. (artwork © Ursula Biemann).



Figure 8. Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders, *Europlex*, 2003. Video still, 20 min. (artwork © Ursula Biemann).

town of Tétuan, but work in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, cross not only a border, but also a time zone (with a two-hour lag) each day. To convey the complex spatio-temporal dimensions that characterize the lives of these “permanent time travellers,”<sup>59</sup> the video employs advanced digital editing techniques that allow for a dense layering of video and audio tracks. The technical complexity of the work fulfils two functions: first, video’s non-linear, non-logical dimensions are exploited to emphasize what Mieke Bal calls “the anti-narrative thrust of heterochrony” in migrant culture.<sup>60</sup> But the video’s complexity—stacked moving and still images, running text, and elaborate soundtrack—also signals Biemann’s intention to underscore what she identifies as migrant women’s high-tech competence as dynamic participants in the cross-border micro-economies of Gibraltar. As she observes, “Many of them use the same state-of-the-art technologies of transportation and communication as high-tech businessmen do, in order to get to where they are.”<sup>61</sup>

This last point is particularly relevant in understanding Biemann’s migratory aesthetic. For Biemann, as for Barrada, the border represents both tightly controlled movement and the daily potential for subversion. Expressing impatience with representations of migrant women “in images of need, poverty, and helplessness, placed in humanitarian and development discourses, or in scenarios of exploitation,”<sup>62</sup> Biemann instead populates her video essay with images of women—smugglers, domesticas, and factory workers alike—who animate the border area in a way that resonates with Michel de Certeau’s notion of the itinerary: the mode of travel that subverts both the logic and authority of the map.<sup>63</sup> The smugglers of “Bor-

der Log I” in particular, followed by a handheld video camera as they create a kind of geopolitical network of desire lines<sup>64</sup> from Morocco into the “grey trade” zone outside Ceuta, develop itineraries that both define and challenge the space of the border. In the tracing of this network of desire lines, neither designed nor sanctioned but rather worn away gradually by people finding the most expedient distance between two points, Biemann’s migratory aesthetic offers a model for site sensitivity that is neither anthropological nor indifferent, neither melancholic nor transcendent, neither nostalgically sedentary nor romantically nomadic.

## Conclusion

In different ways, the artists in this essay each reveal the embodied materiality of border spaces only to trace how bodies circulate within and against the logic of these spaces, compelling them to admit a certain mobility. To this extent, these artists agree with Okwui Enwezor’s characterization of borders as “problem-spaces” of generative tension. Somewhat more provocatively, however, the borders in these works can furthermore be understood as traumatized spaces. Jenny Edkins proposes that trauma, rather than being understood as injury, might be productively conceived as *itself* a form of border crossing, “something to do with the crossing of distinctions we take for granted, the distinctions between psyche and body, body and environment, for example.”<sup>65</sup> For Edkins, trauma understood in this light becomes a way to imagine the possibility of “radical relationality”:



Figure 9. Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders, *Europlex*, 2003. Video still, 20 min. (artwork © Ursula Biemann).

We prefer to think of buildings as solid, of home as a place of safety, of ourselves as separate from our neighbours, and of our bodies as made of living flesh not inorganic atoms. A traumatic event demonstrates how untenable, or how insecure, these distinctions and these assumptions are. It calls for nothing more or less than the recognition of the radical relationality of existence.<sup>66</sup>

Trauma, in other words, undermines the presumed impermeability of self-other borders in the same way that the smugglers and temporary workers documented in recent video projects destabilize the presumed infallibility of national borders. By treating these troubled borders as wounded spaces, these practices also suggest the potential for suture.

Consider, for instance, the fate of Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth*. On an October evening in 2007, hundreds or perhaps thousands of Londoners, young and old, convened in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall to participate in the popular contemporary ritual of mobile clubbing. At precisely 7:01 p.m., this motley assembly of perfect strangers, each wearing a personal music player with earphones, turned on their music of choice and began dancing on and around Salcedo's *Shibboleth* in utter, joyous silence (fig. 10). I began this essay by describing the fissure that Salcedo tore into the Turbine Hall, and suggested that the work, which sought to bear witness to the enormous pressures and barriers that confront the contemporary immigrant, offered a way to begin thinking of a new model for institutional critique—one that counters the romance of nomadism in the transnational circulation of contemporary art with a sustained deliberation

on the often traumatic aspects of mobility and migration. I conclude with this work as well because I believe it also provides, if somewhat inadvertently, a way to begin thinking how art can become a vehicle for forging itineraries out of maps, desire out of despair, and hope out of catastrophe. Much like the artists who challenged the elision of borders underwriting the Seville Biennial of 2006, Salcedo likewise undermines the art world's "glimpse of a transnational utopia"<sup>67</sup> that, in order to function, must remain blind to its less than utopian context and conditions of production and circulation. But consider *how* Salcedo reconfigured Turbine Hall. Rather than building an imposing fence or otherwise insuperable barrier to act as metonym for the difficult crossing of borders, Salcedo's negative space offers instead an infinitely transgressible border zone. Indeed, it seems to invite violation. Salcedo's *Shibboleth*, in other words, creates the opportunity to transform a wounded space into a site for the performance of "radical relationality"—an opportunity that was seized by London's mobile clubbers.

Engaging a migratory aesthetic to both convey and perform instances of mobilized subjectivity, reluctant nomads occupy a position that indulges in neither an uncritical romanticization of itinerancy nor a nostalgic attachment to static notions of place. Instead, they draw attention to the mobile subjects whose activities and itineraries are constantly activating spaces of belonging and unbelonging, transforming them into zones of subversive economics and radical relations. In the process, these artists produce nuanced contemplations on the global politics of borders, belonging, and the unhomey nature of the migrant experience that, at the same time, initiate a subtle but much needed critique of the elided connections between the nomadic tendencies of biennial culture and the barriers and exclusions engendered by global capitalism.

#### Acknowledgements

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Figure 10. Dean Ayres, *Dancing on the Edge*, 2007 (photograph © Dean Ayres, [www.flickr.com/photos/deano/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/deano/)).

## Notes

- 1 As part of this intervention, Haacke—who shared both the German pavilion and the 1974 Lion d’Or with Nam June Paik—smashed the interior marble floors of the German Pavilion.
- 2 Carol Becker, “The Romance of Nomadism: A Series of Reflections,” *Art Journal* 58 (Summer 1999). In the epigraph above, Becker is referring to Jacques Attali, *Millennium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order*, trans. Leila Connors and Nathan Gardels (New York, 1991).
- 3 See Jonas Ekeberg, ed., *New Institutionalism* (Oslo, 2003).
- 4 See Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds., *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Bergen, 2010).
- 5 In Canada, large-scale recurring exhibitions (such as the Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art in Edmonton, the Quebec Triennial in Montreal, and the Canadian Biennial in Ottawa) tend to serve as showcases for Canadian art, a significant exception being the Biennale de Montréal, which includes both Canadian and international artists.
- 6 Witness a selection of recent themes: “Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War” (Istanbul, 2007); “Integration and Resistance in the Global Era” (Havana, 2009), “What a Wonderful World” (Gothenburg, 2010), and “Rewriting Worlds” (Moscow, 2011).
- 7 Carlos Basualdo, “Launching Site: Interview with Rosa Martinez,” *Artforum International* 37 (Summer 1999): 39.
- 8 Jen Budney, “Politics in Aspice: Reflections on the Biennale of Sydney and Its Local Effects,” *FUSE Magazine* 30 (January 2007): 10.
- 9 Pamela M. Lee, “Boundary Issues: The Art World under the Sign of Globalism,” *Artforum International* 17 (November 2003): 165.
- 10 Arguably, it was Enwezor’s 2002 Documenta 11, a sprawling multi-city series of lectures, symposia, and exhibitions that rendered the “deterritorialization” of the international art circuit a global phenomenon.
- 11 Becker, “The Romance of Nomadism,” 26.
- 12 See Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, eds., *Grey Areas: Repre-*

- sentation, *Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Johannesburg, 1999); and Jen Budney, "Who's It For? The 2nd Johannesburg Biennial," *Third Text* 42 (Spring 1998).
- 13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York, 1986); Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York, 1995).
  - 14 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 159.
  - 15 Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 160.
  - 16 Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 163. Kwon here is responding directly to Lucy Lippard's place-based counter-argument to the nomadic model of art practice, in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York, 1997).
  - 17 See, for example, Claire Doherty, "Location Location," *Art Monthly* 281 (November 2004).
  - 18 Becker, "The Romance of Nomadism," 28.
  - 19 George Steiner, "Extraterritorial," in Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (New York, 1971), 11.
  - 20 Tim Cresswell's critique of what he terms "nomadic metaphysics" and concomitant espousal of a "politics of mobility" is paradigmatic in this respect. See *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York, 2006).
  - 21 Okwui Enwezor, "The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society," in *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society*, exh. cat., Seville, Foundation for the International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville (Seville, 2006), 13.
  - 22 Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford, 2005), 37.
  - 23 According to Jaar, one million is the number of migrants that Finland would accept if its immigration policies matched those of its European neighbours.
  - 24 Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*, 43.
  - 25 See Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).
  - 26 In April 2009, for example, sixty-two Afghan asylum seekers were found dead in a cargo container in Pakistan.
  - 27 Attali, *Millennium*, 105, 5.
  - 28 Enwezor, "The Unhomely," 14.
  - 29 Okwui Enwezor, "Trade Routes," in *Trade Routes: History and Geography. 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997*, exh. cat. (Johannesburg, 1997), 8.
  - 30 Enwezor, "The Unhomely," 12.
  - 31 In Paul Achiaga, "Okwui Enwezor Interview," *El Cultural* (Madrid), October 2006, [http://www.elcultural.es/historico\\_articulo.asp?c=18937](http://www.elcultural.es/historico_articulo.asp?c=18937).
  - 32 Luis Sánchez-Moliní, "La BIACS que viene," e-sevilla.org (9 September 2006), <http://e-sevilla.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=832>.
  - 33 Helmut Dietrich, "Das Mittelmeer Als Neuer Raum Der Abschreckung: Flüchtlinge Und Migrantinnen an Der Südlichen EuAußengrenze," Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration e.V., Berlin (24 April 2007), <http://www ffm-berlin.de/mittelmeer.html>.
  - 34 Yto Barrada, *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (London, 2005), 57. The Schengen Agreement abolished "internal" borders between participating EU nations and harmonized external border controls.
  - 35 Gerardo Mosquera, "Some Problems in Transcultural Curating," trans. Jaime Flórez, in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London, 1994), 133, 35.
  - 36 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC, 2005), 4.
  - 37 Mieke Bal, "Lost in Space, Lost in the Library," in *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices between Migration and Art-Making*, ed. Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord (Amsterdam and New York, 2007), 25.
  - 38 Bal, "Lost in Space," 23–24.
  - 39 Mieke Bal, "Heterochrony in the Act: The Migratory Politics of Time," paper presented at the Encuentro II: Migratory Politics/ Politics of the Migratory workshop, ASCA, Amsterdam, 19–21 September 2007, 203.
  - 40 In three months, Labat recorded 672 hours of surveillance footage and twelve hours with the handheld camera.
  - 41 Bal, "Heterochrony in the Act," 210.
  - 42 Bal, "Heterochrony in the Act," 203.
  - 43 Sigmund Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology I" (1895), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 1*, ed. James Strachey (London, 1974), 353–54.
  - 44 For elaboration, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, 1996).
  - 45 Christine Ross, "The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited," *Art Journal* 65, 3 (Fall 2006): 83.
  - 46 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).
  - 47 Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders, "Europlex" (Zurich: Women Make Movies, 2003), 20 minutes, colour, VHS/DVD.
  - 48 Biemann and Sanders, "Europlex."
  - 49 Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), 59.
  - 50 Edkins, *Trauma*, 230.
  - 51 Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London and New, 2000), 122.
  - 52 See, for instance, Nico Israel, "Border Crossings," *Artforum* 45 (October 2006), which discusses Barrada's *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998–2004).
  - 53 Israel, "Border Crossings," 247.
  - 54 Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling: A Curatorial Model," in *Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice*, ed. Vanessa Müller and Nicolaus Schafhausen (Cologne, 2006), 134.



- 55 See “Yto Barrada,” Sfeir-Semler Gallery (Beirut), <http://www.sfeir-semler.de/sites/barrada/barrada.htm>.
- 56 Nikos Papastergiadis, “Art in the Age of Siege,” *Framework: The Finnish Art Review* 5 (Helsinki) (July 2006): 36.
- 57 Biemann and Sanders, “Europlex.”
- 58 Imre Szeman, “Remote Sensing: An Interview with Ursula Biemann,” *Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 24, 1/2 (2002): 93.
- 59 Biemann and Sanders, “Europlex.”
- 60 Bal, “Heterochrony in the Act,” 215. In her examination of Biemann’s practice, Bal considers *Remote Sensing* (2001), a video essay that concerns the trafficking of women for sex work.
- 61 In Szeman, “Remote Sensing,” 93.
- 62 Szeman, “Remote Sensing,” 93.
- 63 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984).
- 64 “Desire line” is the term used in landscape architecture to refer to the paths that pedestrians create as short cuts linking roads and sidewalks.
- 65 Jenny Edkins, “Remembering Relationality: Trauma Time and Politics,” in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, ed. Duncan Bell (New York, 2006), 110.
- 66 Edkins, “Remembering Relationality,” 110–11.
- 67 Basualdo, “Launching Site,” 39.