

yet, in the months leading up to 23 June 2016, the Museum's silence was deafening. From a strictly archaeological perspective, this exhibition is admirably restrained. In the wake of the most divisive vote in recent history, however, we can perhaps simultaneously commend and lament the fact that an institution founded on the principles of 'free access' and 'mutual cultural engagement' did not have more to say.

- 1 Ernest Crawley, *The Mystic Rose: A Study of Primitive Marriage and of Primitive Thought in its Bearing on Marriage*, London, 1932, p. 124; Sigmund Freud and Todd Dufresne (ed.), *Civilization and its Discontents*, (trans.) Gregory C. Richter, Ontario, 2015, p. 88.

Euan McCartney Robson

10.14324/111.2396-9008.019

'All the World's Futures', Venice Biennale, 56th International Art Exhibition, 9 May – 22 November 2015. Catalogue: Ed. Okwui Enwezor, Marsilio Editori, Venice, 2015, 954 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-88-317-2128, €85.00.

The stakes were high for the 56th edition of the Venice Biennale since, in 2013, Okwui Enwezor was announced as the curator of its main exhibition. His reputation of developing, and directing, critically acclaimed biennials preceded him, his best-known and most ambitious project having been the paradigm-changing Documenta 11 of 2001–2002.¹

Despite its title, this is an exhibition concerned with representing, reflecting on and exploring the present, not the future. 'All the World's Futures' refers to Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's

drawing *Angelus Novus* (1920). Benjamin writes of the angel of history being propelled into the future, while its face is turned to the past contemplating the wreckage of history, where the viewers stand.² This wreckage and cacophony of the present is what Enwezor displays, leaving visitors to make sense of the present moment through all the debris, while providing them with what he calls three overlapping 'filters', a set of conceptual tools to read the exhibition, to look through.³

The first two filters, 'liveness – on epic duration' and 'garden of disorder', refer respectively to the laborious enterprise that a visit to the exhibition constitutes (due to the very large size of the display, the long duration of video/film works and the high density of information that it contains), and to the fact that it aims to portray and reflect on the conflicts of the present historical moment. Both filters clearly overlap with the third and key one: 'Capital – a live reading'. The central piece of this Biennale is the daily live reading of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* throughout the duration of the exhibition, orchestrated by Isaac Julien in a specially built auditorium. A critique of capitalism and an exploration of Marx's magnum opus, along with their ramifications, constitute the core of 'All the World's Futures'. The latter is the nucleus of Alexander Kluge's installation of his nine-hour-long film, *News from Ideological Antiquity: Marx/Eisenstein/Capital* (2008), and unequivocally of Isaac Julien's *KAPITAL* (2013), a two-screen installation in which Marxist scholar David Harvey explains why capital is so hard to depict in an interview with Julien (the late cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall intervenes as well). The critique of capitalism and its effects is unambiguously present in works such as Im Heung-soon's

compelling documentary, *Factory Complex* (2014), shown in the Artigliere area of the Arsenale. Heung-soon explores the historical and present exploitation of female labour in Asia through interviews with female South Korean workers, which reveal the conditions of the not-so-new working poor in an affluent economy. Another prime example of capitalist inequality, poor working conditions and past struggles, is the room devoted to works by Jeremy Deller in the main Biennale pavilion. On the walls hang nineteenth-century photographs of workers and Victorian printed working songs; above these protrudes a stock-control device used to track and control the productivity of employees in warehouses; against a wall, a jukebox plays sounds of British factories; and, from the ceiling in the middle of the room, hangs a banner with the grammatically incorrect message that informs so-called zero-hours contract workers in the UK that they will not be working that day – ‘Hello, today you have day off’.

But if *Das Kapital* is the core of ‘All the World’s Futures’, it is also its demise, and the great ambition of building a critical historical portrait of the present through a reading of Marx’s foundational work falls short. The key problem resides in the selection of the works of art. The message gets lost not just due to the very large display and vast array of works, but due to the project’s lack of reflection on the way that art and capital interlock. Not only is there no mention of the art market, and how art has become not just a luxury commodity but also an asset for financial speculation, but more importantly, the project remains oblivious to its own involvement in this system. Many of the artists participating in ‘All the World’s Futures’ represent very expensive names in

the art market, and many pieces on display are commercial-gallery works, which now have the added value of being included in a prestigious exhibition. Such is the case of pieces by very established figures such as Georg Baselitz, but also of names that have emerged in the biennial circuit in recent years, such as Theaster Gates. In the end, what could be seen as radical gestures, like the inclusion of Gulf Labor Coalition’s campaign against the exploitation of construction workers in the building of museums, end up being mere tokenism, as no works in the exhibition tackle the realities of the art market, the private financing of culture or the precarious conditions of culture-sector workers.

The muffling of radical gestures and critical potentialities is a constant in the way the exhibition is organized. The display of key works directly engaging with *Das Kapital* and its ramifications mirrors what happens to the conceptual aspect of the project. In the Arsenale’s Corderie, not far from Heung-soon’s documentary, sit the complete works of Harun Farocki, which are rendered inaccessible due to the way they are displayed – a collection of little screens with no sound, crammed together on the walls of a room. Something similar happens to Julien’s *KAPITAL*, installed in a very noisy and busy area, which makes it very hard to follow. In an analogous fashion, ‘All the World’s Futures’ treats *Das Kapital* as a closed, sacred book, and forgets to generate a space in which to discuss, explore and deploy it as the analytical tool that it is. In the end, its daily reading ends up being nothing more than an empty gesture.

1 See Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, London and Cambridge, M.A., 2012.

- 2 Okwui Enwezor, 'The State of Things', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *All the World's Futures*, Venice, 2015, p. 17.
- 3 The explanation of the filters was available to the public at the Giardini, on a wall-text statement by Enwezor. See also Okwui Enwezor, 'Exploding Gardens', in *ibid.*, p. 94.

Irene Montero Sabin

10.14324/111.2396-9008.020

'Ape Culture', Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 30 April – 6 July 2015. Catalogue: Eds Anselm Franke and Hila Peleg, Spector Books co-published with Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Leipzig, 2015, 220 pages, paperback, ISBN: 9783959050067, €29.00.

'Ape Culture' interrogated the relations and continuity between humans and their primate kin, and explored how apes have figured in human culture throughout history. Donna Haraway's book *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989) served as a theoretical linchpin for this exhibition, which featured artworks by Marcus Coates, Pierre Huyghe and Rosemarie Trockel, amongst others, as well as a separate display charting a history of apes in human culture and the development of primatology.

In the exhibition catalogue, the curators observe that: 'Situated at the threshold of humanity and animality, and thus of nature and culture, figures of apes do not merely serve as tokens marking these divisions, but [...] introduce slippage and ambiguity into these borders'.¹ Indeed, apes have been used as surrogates for humans in medical experiments, cosmetics testing, space

travel and even waiting tables, dissolving dichotomies of human/nonhuman animal and nature/culture, whilst simultaneously highlighting the unequal power relations inherent to these entanglements. Such reinforcement of evolutionary and behavioural continuity between humans and other primates can exhibit anthropomorphic tendencies, which undoubtedly serve to contribute to the 'slippage' and 'ambiguity' to which the exhibition's curators refer.

Marcus Coates's *Degreecoordinates: Shared Traits of the Hominini (Humans, Bonobos and Chimpanzees)* (2015) was a wall-mounted text installation made in collaboration with evolutionary anthropologist Volker Sommer. The pair posed over 300 questions to viewers based on behavioural traits exhibited across the Hominini subtribes. Including 'Can you walk on two feet?', 'Do you feel joy?' and 'Do you throw your shit?', it is clear that when reading these questions, viewers would recognize such characteristics in themselves and other primates to differing degrees. The work highlighted a contradiction in the ways humans relate to other animals, since there is a tendency to divorce oneself from traits perceived as 'animalistic', yet readily attribute human qualities to other animals. Animal behaviourist John Kennedy has suggested that anthropomorphic thinking about animals is 'built into us', and that we 'could not abandon it even if we wished to', making it all the more probable that we read the behaviour of nonhuman animals in terms of our own, despite the potential for error.²

Pierre Huyghe's film *Untitled (Human Mask)* (2014) opened with a drone panning over a Japanese neighbourhood, deserted following the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The camera comes to rest inside a dank, abandoned restaurant. Sporting a dress