

‘The World Turned Upside Down’: art and ethics in the rise of the ‘Stone Age South’

The thrust of today’s migrations seems largely ‘Northward’—even in the Antipodes where they are clearly headed towards the opposite pole. The ‘South’ has tended to signal ‘underdevelopment and crisis’. But it has also flagged up notions of ‘other possibilities, alternative perspectives’, other ‘designs for living’. The ‘exodus from the South for the North’ is very much at odds with the idea of ‘Global South’ as a privileged vantage point from which to critique the global world-system. What we have are anomalies and crossovers that seem in one go to affirm and straddle, unpick and unravel received N/S dividing lines. How to map this topsy-turvy global space, how to take its sound?

On the one hand, with today’s migrations we see that classic, cardinal points and domains — ‘East/West/ North/South’—are constantly fixed and asserted. On the other, the migratory drives surge and spill over such demarcations blurring and undoing them — throwing up fresh spaces of contact and interaction. Do these emerging spaces mirror strands of the ‘primordial, pristine’ space into which our stone-age, homo sapiens ancestors wandered ‘out of Africa’ to roam and rove the continents? Can we speak of this as an ‘unnamed’ space prior to demarcations — a pre-cardinal space? Does it somehow resonate with the rising ‘post-cardinal’ spatial experience and mentality thrown up by the migrations today? In their streaming movement do we have the glimmerings of a ‘contemporary paleolithic non-cardinality’?

The start-up for our project is a ‘reconstruction’ of the Art History Room (Durban, South Africa) of the Apartheid years. The AH Room was at the University of South Africa, University College, Durban for Blacks of Indian origin. This is in the province of Natal with the great Drakensberg mountain range—Ukhahlamba—with one of the world’s most extensive sites of prehistoric rock art and cave paintings. The ‘reconstruction or recreation’ at Malmo can be in any mode – art installation, film,

diagrammatic or performative statement, walks, discursive picnics, critical rambles etc.

The AAH Room put on show an 'evolutionary ladder' of artefacts, artworks and cultures from across the world. An objective was to underline a Eurocentric vision of things. But what counter-views and readings did the display also open up – perhaps quite unwittingly? What light could this throw on today's world of the migratory mix of peoples and cultural elements — on prickly issues of 'multiculturalism, its limits and shortcomings', on questions of learning to live with 'diversity and multiplicity', on much-thumbed notions of 'hospitality' and tolerance, on ceaseless everyday cultural translation and cosmopolitanising forces – all in a setting of apparent 'racisme sans race'?

Our explorations will link up studies of the Swedish anti-apartheid archives — ranging over issues of South African/Swedish women and their 'overlooked' place in historical representations of the struggles; North/South prehistoric art, contemporary ancestral and aboriginal presences.

The AAH Room had evoked the idea of a world art system: in some ways, it paralleled Andre Malraux's cosmopolitan views of art and culture in a 'museum without walls'. Today, does the development of the global museum — hand in glove with contemporary creative industries — see the makings of flat-pack, 'globalised' art practices across our art education institutions, galleries and museums?

Alongside, a point to mull: how to deal with the 'decolonialisation of knowledge' in an all-encompassing knowledge society – a pansophic world? What mileage for the idea of art practice not as hard-nosed 'knowledge production' but its opposite — as 'knowledgeable ignorance', as the mode of 'Ignorantitis Sapiens'?

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