On the diasporic public sphere

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Views of globalization typically swing between the two extremes of (1) raising pessimistic fears of totalized commodification and (2) announcing the potential for a new transnational sphere of human rights, diversity and equality, and judicial accountability.[1] For Okwui Enwezor, director of *The Short Century* and more recently *Documenta 11*, the globalization of international mega-exhibitions signals a new opening for previously excluded artists, and the creation of a transnational space of dialogue unrestricted by earlier national boundaries, a space frequently termed the 'diasporic public sphere'. There, we can investigate 'how local specificities create new orientations in the global discourse', notes Enwezor.[2] We can also perceive how artwork 'sits precariously in the disjunctive spaces between home and exile', where it constitutes an 'exemplary community of the transnational moment', and creates 'domains of shared discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories, a broad, complex fraternity that hinges on non-absolutist ways of practicing citizenship.'[3]

While such a proposal is undoubtedly suggestive, we surely need to examine it with the same criticality that we would bring to considerations of globalization at large: to what degree is such an arena truly liberatory, introducing 'local specificities' into 'global discourse' in a way that is really diversifying and 'non-absolutist'? Or, conversely, to what degree is the 'exemplary community of the transnational moment' susceptible to spectacularization brought to a global scale, where the artwork 'sits precariously' indeed between the myths of its own autonomy and the forces of corporate and institutional power? Further, while the model of the migrant that occupies these spaces ('between home and exile') may offer a powerful trope for critical analysis (as it does in the work of Edward Said or Homi Bhabha), can we really hope to remodel the public sphere through recourse to an identity that holds such disempowered status within the world of corporate transnational hegemony? What are the dangers here? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the aesthetics of migrancy in the age of globalization, if it means the growing saturation of all spaces by multinational corporate power and capital? Surely there are no simple answers, as the complexity of existing discourse around such questions indicates, and certainly in the end reality is constituted by a multiplicity of contra-

1 Kay Hassan, *Flight*, 1995

dictory forces operative at once. To get beyond generalization, let's consider a specific example: the work of South African artist Kay Hassan, which engages explicitly with migrancy, and the way his work operates within transnational exhibitions such as *The Short Century*, in 2001, which surveyed African liberation movements, art, and cultural artifacts of the last half-century.

Hassan's *Flight* of 1995, shown in *The Short Century*, offers a mixed-media installation comprising various elements: bicycles burdened with suitcases and loose clothing stand in front of a billboard-sized collage that shows a group of migrants carrying bags (fig. 1). Figures are pieced together into a state of fragmentation that expresses the precariousness of their presence. Fleeting forms, they are atomized and fractured as if struggling materially to exist or be in a single place. One old beaten-up bicycle holds a television set, which plays a lengthy British documentary video from 1977. It tells the story of the brutal suppression of the 1976 student uprisings in South Africa, which Hassan experienced, and the way migrant workers were exploited by the apartheid authorities during these events to put down the protesters. More suitcases sit haphazardly on the floor of the gallery, surround and immerse the viewer in a disarrayed space that resonates with the scenes of destruction and violence shown in the video. In this way, *Flight* achieves an emotional impact by setting up a relationship between, on the one hand, the documentation of the historical conditions of migrancy in South Africa, and on the other, the reconstruction of the traces of those conditions within the space of its exhibition. Viewers are thus positioned to examine their own relationship not only to the history of apartheid, but also to the material experience of migrancy. This begins with the migrant structure of Hassan's work, which exists across several mediums and between shifting exhibition spaces, malleably adopting to each new context. A history of migrancy, then, is not only told in *Flight*, but is also internalized and expressed in its uprooted format.

In its gallery – only a small section of *The Short Century* exhibition – Hassan's installation was surrounded by other works of contemporary African art from the '90s. All dealt in one way or another with forms of displacement. For example, there were Zarina

2 Zarina Bhimji, *Untitled*, 2000

3 Zwethulu Mthethwa, *Untitled*, 1998

Bhimji's large photographs of weathered architectural spaces from her estranged homeland of Uganda (where her parents had immigrated from India) to which she returned decades after the forced expulsion of Asians under Idi Amin in the early '70s (fig. 2). The decrepit surfaces of buildings allegorize the trauma of Uganda's history of oppression, as well as its fading memory, which Bhimji resuscitates with these photographs. Nearby were the documentary images of Zwethulu Mthethwa, of South Africa, representing dispossessed people outside Cape Town in the interiors of their shanty-like homes, creatively wallpapered with recycled advertisement materials (fig. 3). The precariousness of these domestic spaces, invaded by the neo-colonial marketing imagery of multinational corporations, resonated with the dilapidated colonial buildings shown in Bhimji's. Then there was the installation of Angolan artist Antonio Olé, who reconstructed a township wall for the back of the gallery (the 'township' being the restricted living area for black South Africans under apartheid's segregationist policies). A giant hybrid expanse of used old doors, mirrors, and corrugated metal threw viewers into a daunting area that, in confusing interior and exterior spaces, hovered between a dilapidated domesticity and a debased homelessness. As such, the gallery offered one example of Enwezor's desire to render the public sphere *diasporic*, mediated through the exhibition space and its artwork. It also answered recent theoretical pleas to take 'the complex, often incommensurable fate of the migrant as the basis for a redefinition of the metropolitan public sphere', as Homi Bhabha has written.[4]

In considering such a public sphere – whether diasporic, transnational, or metropolitan – it is the complexity of its definition that needs to be continually stressed, lest it slip into a mythology of a purely emancipatory zone of inassimilable difference and autonomy, spatial and temporal liminality, and de-essentialized transnational identities. For according to more skeptical perspectives (like Fredric Jameson's), one thing that is disorienting about today's public sphere, and that leads to displaced identities, is the

mystifying logic of private interests that increasingly controls it. Its simulacral surfaces uproot historical grounding, ideologically structure its spaces and discourses, assimilate difference, and abridge the potential for democratic representation. If this forms part of the 'diasporic public sphere', then to celebrate it as mainly liberating may in fact misrecognize the very ideological workings of capital. Our resulting migrant identity, which in this case results from a spectacularized disorientation, may be what disables the formation of a critical consciousness and a contestatory collective sovereignty.[5] Thus, there is an ongoing need for critical histories – rather than celebratory accounts – that will map the multinational connections and institutional pressures that seek to determine the diasporic public sphere, histories that, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, will not obscure 'the financialization of that globality'.[6] Yet at the same time, it is necessary to avoid considering 'financialization' as the exclusive defining principle, which risks precisely the absolutist or foundationalist claims that the migrant model seeks to avoid because it overlooks other markers of difference.[7] Negotiating between these positions are the most convincing analyses to date, which have argued for a conception of the public sphere as no longer singular (if it ever was), but representing complex and interstitial sites of dialogue contoured by intersecting pressures (economic, technical, geopolitical, institutional).[8] These sites, which we all move between, offer discursive possibilities within conditions of unequal socio-political relations. They are certainly not all liberatory or completely repressive.

One might reconsider the gallery of *The Short Century* in such light, and question the putative freedom or autonomy of its space (whether at P. S. 1 in New York, or at other institutions where it was installed). While the artwork within it facilitated transnational political consciousness, or invited identification with its disparate subjects uprooted by apartheid or displaced by various neo-colonial conditions, the museum environment, conversely, encouraged other outlooks. For example, the institutional context tended to foster a depoliticized appreciation of an aesthetics of migrancy, one in which artworks were viewed as models of disinterested visual pleasure, or as consumable commodities for entertainment. In this case, the work not only depicted scenes of migrancy; viewers were dislocated themselves, transplanted by the art institution's interpellative functions and relocated within its aestheticizing, and also liberal, viewpoint. From such a perspective, artistic practice frequently becomes a way to transvalue the squalid circumstances of homelessness by finding creative resources within them, or a means to sublimate political tragedy through its aestheticization. If the museum's corporate sponsorship supports such work, then it is often to assimilate it as a monument to 'human creativity', or as proof of its belief in diversity and human rights – rather than acknowledge the existence of migrancy as a systemic element in the unequal global

4 Kay Hassan, *Flight* (Detail), 1995

economy that benefits, and is perpetuated by, corporate power. What is clear is that institutional interests and functions – whatever they may be – mitigate the supposed freedom its spaces offer.

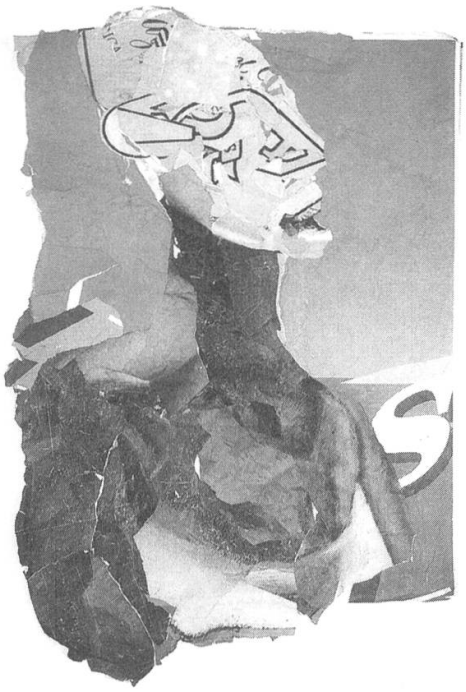
Considering Kay Hassan's work further, it becomes clear that it concerns itself precisely with such conflicting pressures of the public sphere, and how the migrant, in many ways, is both its determining condition as well as an effect. We find that certain forms of migrancy – which Hassan attempts to engage – may offer freedoms within existing conditions that would otherwise constrain identity within geographic places, regional prejudices, even historical narratives. Simultaneously, these forms may also emerge as ever compromised in the face of the institutional forces that in fact mimic the migrant within flexible systems of capitalism – which Hassan's work also exposes. What are the terms of this strategy – and the costs?

If *Flight* introduces the historical plight of South African migrants into the museum's space, its hybrid representational structure disperses historical reflection across several material sites: a television's documentary account of the brutal suppression of student protests stands next to a large paper construction showing displaced people on the move, which is surrounded by freestanding suitcases bulging with clothing that re-enact itinerant scenes (fig. 4). Such an assemblage of objects and representations suggests that any one site of historical reflection is insufficient, for history is shown to be continually re-enacted in the ongoing moments of its reconstitution. For instance, the British documentary, sympathetic to black South Africans and showing the horror of apartheid, appears incomplete on its own, perhaps because it is 'written, directed and produced' by others than black South Africans (from a post-colonial power, no less), or perhaps be-

cause it is only one viewpoint among others. *Flight*'s paper construction of migrant figures, alternatively, suggests the necessity of local definitions of history and translations of native personal experiences (like those of Hassan, who grew up in settlements in Soweto and Alexandra). And it throws up handmade images as a way to challenge the melancholy submission to spectacularized technologies of representation (like television) produced outside South Africa. This plurality of voices, culled from different historical and geographical origins, intersects with the present tense of the exhibition site, where history is again made available for reprocessing and reinterpretation. Ultimately, in *Flight* historical meaning is precariously but inextricably positioned between various geopolitical forces – global narratives, local discourses – in a variety of mediums, and narrated within different temporalities. Historical content becomes migrant itself. In other words, any notion of an authoritative, definitive history is rejected in the face of mobile, always incomplete forms of historical construction. This is further allegorized in *Flight* by the television mounted on a bicycle: here, the documentary ground of truth is itself deterritorialized, its authority questioned, even as its communicative power is utilized to introduce locally produced South African history into the museum's context.

Hassan's 'paper constructions' – a term he employs to differentiate them from the history of primitivizing collage – develop sign structures where meaning is similarly mobile, sedimented within layers of reference, located in contestatory struggles between various voices. These frequently depict migrants. In *Flight,* dark forms indicate black bodies carrying bags, other bright colors suggest South African dress. Otherwise, the particular features of the figures are difficult to discern and instead break up into indistinguishable shards of colors and forms. Such a fragmented disarray evokes the dislocating material conditions of everyday life, where local identities are continually uprooted by the pressures converging on public space. The material basis of these constructions provide further clues as to the causes behind the migrancy depicted here: the forms are assembled from shredded billboard advertisements. The migrant figures are thus shown to be exposed to, and displaced by, the intruding forces of multinational marketing campaigns, which attempt to redefine them as ideal consumers and passive political subjects. Through his (de)construction process, Hassan rather violently attacks this propaganda, and redirects its shredded material toward other aims, even while the extremely fragmented appearances of the new figures suggest both the disorienting and formative effects such publicity has on local people. If *Flight's* paper construction retains the original proportions of a billboard, its overall shape contests the ostensible quality of completion that advertisements project, as if the people in advertisements were perfect, their world ideal, its ideology incontestable. Rather, Hassan's new billboard, with its rough borders, intimates a discursive field in formation, one existing be-

tween construction and destruction, and offering renewed opportunities for viewers to imagine their own self-representations without corporate assistance. In other works, like *Untitled* of 1999, individual figures materialize from advertisement language, where the commercial functions of what were earlier slogans and logos are made to signify eyes, noses, and ears (fig. 5). The earlier semantic, phonetic, and lexical functions of advertisement language are totally cancelled out, their material recycled in the development of regional representations resisting corporate authorship.



5 Kay Hassan, *Untitled*, 1999

Hassan has stated in regard to his paper constructions that he desires to 'reclaim the mask from Picasso'. Not only does this comment indicate an intention to assault the history of primitivist assumptions with which the European avant-garde defined and appropriated the material objects of African cultures; his paper constructions also suggest that such a subversive project of reclamation and decolonization is operative for Hassan in the current neo-colonial context of globalized capital, which his constructions internalize in the form of advertisement material. More, in their act of re-appropriating cubist collage, these constructions not only contest Picasso's primitivism, but also put cubism's semiotic strategies to critical ends by directing its representational critique against the spectacle of corporate advertising and its depictions of South Africans. Many commentators liken Hassan's constructions to postwar French *décollage* – such as the work of Jacques de la Villeglé or Raymond Hains – in which billboard ads were torn up to dereify language and to oppose the saturation of public space by capitalist propaganda. Hassan's work, however, distinguishes itself by refusing the de-subjectification resulting from the totally abstracted fields of such work (ones that often eliminate any figuration). Rather, it is precisely the relay between the destruction of consumerist representation and the reconstruction of new possibilities of figuration that defines Hassan's aesthetic.

Opposing both clichéd advertisement billboards and differentiated from earlier avant-gardist negations of such advertisements, Hassan's paper constructions show disempowered migrant identities historically excluded from both arenas. In relation to this, Hassan states: 'I'd love to install my paper constructions on these billboard sites at train stations and bus stops, so that instead of people having to look at beer advertisements they can see an artist's image that speaks to them.'[9] Whether installed in a local site, or in an international exhibition venue, Hassan's strategy is to inhabit the otherwise

exclusionary spaces of institutional power – whether corporate spaces of publicity or art museums – in order to diversify them from within.

While Hassan props up his own local representation in the face of the global economy, his figures simultaneously resist any naïve essentialism or nativist neo-primitivism. Because they are so obviously constructed out of torn representations – whose traces are still visible in the reconstructions – the figures must be seen to emerge from already existing discursive fields, not from any imaginary origin of purity. The tears of collaged papers thus contest *any* essentializing definition of subjectivity – whether global or local. This puts their migrant representational structure to critical ends. The numerous cuts and fissures, fragments and uprooted signs, emphasize an identity that is constructed not only *within* representation, but one that is between various forces of determination, in the process of formation. These are identities – like those in Mthethwa's interiors – that are articulated only in the current negotiation between a precarious local culture, international representational conventions, conflictual spaces, and the pressures of globalized capital. The images seem to emphasize the existential vulnerability of such existence. Not only do Hassan's images show the wounds of the traumatic history of apartheid through their lacerated surfaces, but their status as derealized figures implies the precariousness of their current act of becoming representations in the post-apartheid present. They struggle with the neo-colonial invasion that seeks to fill the power vacuum left by apartheid. In this sense the paper constructions parallel the work of other contemporary South African artists, wherein we encounter the figure 'as a suppressed presence, abstracted and exorbitantly coded with the semiotic speech of *détournement*, a kind of shift of emphasis from its representational 'realness' to a metaphorical search for lost form', as Enwezor notes.[10]

Hassan's constructions suggest a fraught sense of self defined by the post-colonial tension between nativist particularity and capitalist globalization. This reveals a dialectic that structures perhaps all identity today, but is especially relevant to post-apartheid South Africa. Regarding his work we encounter the question of whether post-colonial subjects should strive for a determinedly local expression (but potentially fall into essentialist traps), or embrace global discourses (but potentially uproot regional identity).[11] But rather than opting for one position over the other, Hassan's work indicates the inevitability of both in today's world: locality only materializes through its relation to globalized flows, just as his figures emerge from the substance of corporate publicity ads that are inescapable in any given urban context. But torn up and reconstructed, Hassan's work destroys the fetishism of the local by multinational marketing campaigns in order to allow an independent regional language to emerge, even while acknowledging the impossibility of essentialism.

Sites of transnational negotiation are not only depicted by Hassan, they are also performed by his mobile structures as they move through international exhibition circuits. Just as *Flight* positions itself between mediums – paper construction, video, sculpture, ready-mades – it also internalizes its own 'flight' through various institutions. For each new exhibition, the artist appropriates local second-hand materials – the numerous suitcases and bicycles – to continually reassemble its contents. The installation, in other words, adapts to each new context. Ever contingent upon its location, it becomes malleable, always setting up new relations between its fluid identity and its local sitings. This strategy, which emphasizes the artwork's porousness to site, takes on a subversive dimension when it juxtaposes the striking inequality between the pristine spaces of art institutions and the desperate artifacts of the refugee that spill over into it. In this case, the work reads critically *against* its institutional sites, throwing into stark contrast the inequity between institutional power at large (the 'institutions' of and within apartheid, multinational capitalism, broadcast television, art museums, and so on) and the utter desperation of the South African migrant's impoverished material existence and dispersed identity.

But more complexly, *Flight*'s identity appears further split between its artistic status – where it is institutionalized and presented as mobile work of art – and its political representation of the socio-economic crisis of the geopolitics of forced migrancy. In this sense, *Flight* not only dramatizes the socio-economic differences between migrancy and institutional power (whether of the museum or the corporate institutions that underwrite it), but also suggests that the two may in fact be intertwined: migrancy is comprehended as an effect, but also the constitutive possibility of institutional power (institutions like the Guggenheim, for example, exploit transnational opportunities to their benefit, even as they displace local populations through the gentrification they initiate). At the same time, however, Hassan's work also seeks to create a *parallel* between migrancy and the museum site, reading one through the other: the deracinated circumstances of the current institutionalized artwork become an allegory for the displaced experience of migrants. Rather than 'site-specific' – increasingly impossible in this age of virtualization, capitalist mobility, discursive definitions of space, and so on[12] – Hassan's work depends on a 'mobile siting'. As such it elucidates similarities between uprooted artistic and socio-economic conditions as a way to generate awareness of both. His work implies that migrants are in some way the dehumanized counterparts of exchangeable commodities flowing through the international art market. Additionally, museums are exposed as commodity-driven, reproducing the smooth space of market exchange.

In many ways, these are strategies that differentiate Hassan's work from recent art practices. For instance, certain work of Hans Haacke invites comparison – even if in

6 Hans Haacke, *MetroMobiltan*, 1985

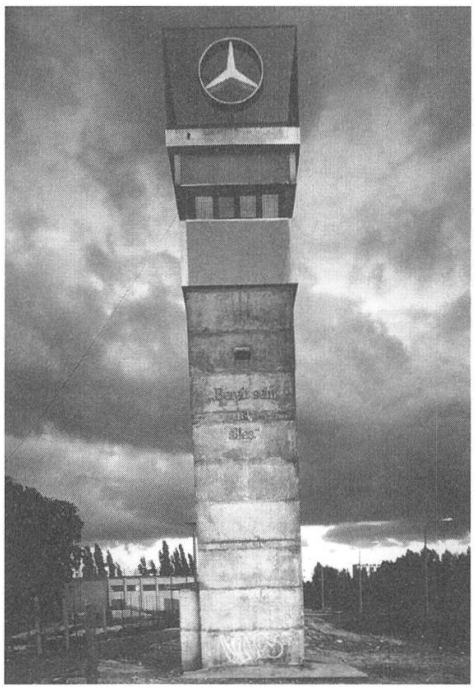
many ways it is artistically very different from Hassan's – because it has also critically examined South African apartheid as well as the neo-colonial multinational power that supported it.[13] Consider Haacke's *MetroMobiltan* of 1985, for instance, which exposes Mobil Oil's dealings in South Africa during apartheid (fig. 6). Like a giant corporate advertising display, the installation features banners with statements from Mobil's marketing department: 'Total denial of supplies to the police and military forces of a host country is hardly consistent with an image of responsible citizenship in that country – Mobil.' These hang between an elaborate cornice and a faux-marble base, indicating the authority of the classical heritage into which Mobil ingratiates itself, as well as the kitsch reproduction of classical forms in corporate culture where they take on mortuary overtones. Behind the banners is a large photograph of black people bearing coffins – the ostensible results of Mobil's 'responsible' policies, which Haacke reveals to be motivated by a callous and deathly profiteering.

While both Hassan's *Flight* and Haacke's *MetroMobiltan* create billboard-scale spaces and subvert marketing structures, their strategies are distinct. Hassan appropriates advertisements but dismantles them in order to examine the possibilities of local representation, traditional forms of creativity, and hand-crafted objects, as we have seen. Conversely, Haacke strategically mimics advertisements in order to implode the language of capital, and to map out the multinational operations in a globalized world. For Fredric Jameson, this indicates Haacke's 'homeopathic' tactic, whereby the artwork, in an act of critical ventriloquism, internalizes and thereby subverts the structure of corporate publicity, or as Jameson puts it, it 'choose[s] and affirm[s] the logic of the simulacrum to the point at which the very nature of that logic is itself dialectically transformed.'[14] In the process, Mobil's liberal rhetoric of universal equality and support for the arts in South Africa is exposed as mere propaganda that hides the company's opportunistic pursuit of its own interests in apartheid, resulting in the scenes of death that Haacke's documentary photograph reveals behind the corporate advertisements.

Such a homeopathic tactic, however, appears less compelling after certain contemporary artistic models have moved away from the staunch truth claims and political

polemics of this type of institutional critique (even if one agrees with its intentions). For its mimicry of the spectacle appears total, not a tempered inoculation, and the danger is that in replaying the language of corporate power to critical ends, the artwork may collapse into those very representational forms it internalizes. Doubling corporate publicity, even with a radicalized content, risks the repetition of the authoritarian rhetoric of its target. Rather than opening up new areas of political awareness, this homeopathic strategy may invalidate all political claims, whether neo-conservative or progressive. Further, in its reproduction of an absolutist language, Haacke's model bases itself on a foundationalist claim – the stable grounding the migrant model would contest – which apparently grants it clear access to the reality of global multinational capitalism.[15] In other words, Haacke's work may fall into an old problem of *realism*, as if one can clearly see the simulacrum in order to double it critically, which ends up reifying a structure intrinsically mobile and multinational (here, the 'real time social systems' of Haacke's earlier work appear more flexible). Further, Haacke's constructions extend a problematic foundationalist identity to its audience as well, where political praxis follows primarily from an economic identification with a class position that would contest multinational policy, but one that eclipses other markers of difference that might complicate such a politics.

Hassan's migrant model also presents identity within the grips of a struggle with neo-colonial spectacle; however, its authorship is not authoritative, its language resists truth claims, its viewership is itinerant rather than grounded. Its own weakness may be that its very mobility transforms into passivity within the institutionalized context it seeks to 'diasporize'. Its migrant identity offers little traction against the acculturating powers of artistic institutions beholden to corporate interests, even if it reveals this process self-reflexively. How are we to react, for instance, when Hassan's work is applauded by the very corporations that have been historically intertwined with South African apartheid? This occurred when Hassan received the 'first ever' DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Contemporary Art in 2000. The award, we are told, recognizes the 'universal expressive power' of Hassan's work, which depicts a human oppression 'effective beyond Africa',[16] one that resonates with 'the displaced peoples in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Caucasus [...]'.[17] In this case, Hassan's work becomes a new flag for a corporation's multi-cultural self-fashioning, an agent in a liberal-humanist gambit that would naturalize oppression through geopolitical generalization. By supporting work critical of apartheid, the corporation evidently sought to obfuscate its own historical involvement in apartheid, for which, not surprisingly, it is currently contemplating paying reparations. We learn more about Daimler-Benz (before its merger with Chrysler) from Haacke in his Berlin project of 1990, *Freedom is now simply sponsored – from petty*



7 Hans Haacke, *Freedom is Now Simply Sponsored – from Petty Cash*, 1990

cash: 'During the years of apartheid, the company supplied the South African military and police with more than 6,000 vehicles, including rocket launchers, in spite of an international arms embargo'[18] (fig. 7). For that work, Haacke placed a large neon Mercedes star atop an old GDR watchtower located in the no-man's land of the old Berlin Wall. In so doing, he re-associated the company's logo, also seen over its headquarters on Berlin's commercial Kufurstendam avenue, with the corporation's historical relation to police brutality (symbolized by the baleful watchtower). Haacke's research revealed that Daimler-Benz also supported Nazi Germany with military materials, supplied vehicles to Berlin's oppressive police force in the '70s, and sold helicopters, military vehicles and missiles to Iraq in the '80s.

When confronting the situation where migrant identity is exploited by multinational power, one wonders if this is a failure of the 'diasporic public sphere', or conversely, its perverse confirmation? Rather than viewing such cooptation as a breakdown, however, we might read it instead as an inevitable outcome of the migrant model's self-exposure to the vulnerabilities of discourse in the 'diasporic public sphere'. In this case, Hassan's work reveals the degree to which such an arena is not so much failed but fragile, ever exposed to the manipulative machinations and domineering takeovers of corporate, multinational forces. If his work can't fully contest this system, then it will migrate through its networks, benefit from its opportunities, and attempt to spread its history and experiences where it is able – even if this means that support may come from those who would opportunistically exploit the rhetoric of democracy and human rights as an alibi to dissimulate their own anti-democratic activities and violations. While the 'diasporic public sphere' may be a laudable formula through which we might imagine a new 'exemplary community of the transnational moment', wherein we might cultivate 'non-absolutist ways of practicing citizenship', we need to acknowledge that its very language may also be abused for other ends. Such a realization indicates the bind of artistic practice and the task of criticism today.

1 The first is most clearly articulated in Marxist analyses, particularly the work of Fredric Jameson, for instance, *Postmodernism, or, The cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, 1994. The second is frequently stressed by post-colonial theorists, such as Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, 1996. Attempting to synthesize the two positions, however convincingly, is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, Cambridge [Mass.], 2000.

2 Enwezor cited in Brian Wallis, 'Worldly Wise', *Artforum*, May 2002, p. 87.

3 Okwui Enwezor, 'Travel Notes', in *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale*, Johannesburg, 1997, p. 12.

4 Homi Bhabha, 'Novel Metropolis', *The New Statesman*, no. 16, Feb. 1990.

5 See the work of Fredric Jameson, especially *Postmodernism* (see note 1): 'the transitional nature of the new global economy has not yet allowed its classes to form in any stable way, let alone to acquire a genuine class-consciousness' (p. 348).

6 Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge [Mass.], 1999, p. 164.

7 See, for example, Bhabha's critique of Jameson in 'How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, post-colonial times and the trials of cultural translation', in *The Location of Culture*, 'It is the value invested in the visible difference of class that does not allow [Jameson] to constitute the present moment as the insignia of other insterstitial inscriptions of cultural difference', p. 223.

8 For further theorizations, see Miriam Hansen's 'Foreword', in Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, Eng. trans. by P. Labanyi et al., Minneapolis, 1993; Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (see note 1), particularly chapter 2: 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'; and Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Bruce Robbins, ed., *The Phantom Public Sphere*, Minneapolis, 1993.

9 Cited in Rory Bester, 'Kay Hassan', *NKA: A Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Spring/Summer 1999, p. 20.

10 Okwui Enwezor, 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation', *Third Text*, no. 40 (Autumn 1997), p. 38.

11 This tension resonates with the discussion around decolonization in African literary theory, represented, for instance, by Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, who attempt 'to fend off all foreign domination of African culture' in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, Boston, 1983. Others, like Wole Soyinka, respond with accusations of essentialism. See Okwui Enwezor, 'An Introduction', *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, New York, 2001, pp. 13–14.

12 On the movement of contemporary art away from site-specificity, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge [Mass.], 2002.

13 In fact, both Haacke and Hassan were presented in Enwezor's *Trade Routes* of 1997, though not placed in direct relationship.

14 Fredric Jameson, 'Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism', in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, Cambridge [Mass.]/New York, 1986, pp. 42–3.

15 Even if Jameson would deny the very possibility of such a representation. Indeed, such for him is the very bind of our postmodern condition. The danger of the transformation of conceptual art into spectacle is discussed in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, no. 55 (Winter 1990).

16 See: http://www.daimlerchrysler.com/specials/dcaward/dcaward2_e.htm.

17 Martin Hentschel, 'Kay Hassan – Living in an Installation', in *Kay Hassan*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2000, p. 72 ('published on the occasion of the awarding of the first DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Contemporary Art 2000'). Interestingly, Okwui Enwezor was a jury-member for this Award.

18 Cited in Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange*, Stanford, 1995, pp. 92–3.

Summary

The 'diasporic public sphere' is a new theoretical term that has enjoyed popularity in recent years, especially in the art world, which has experienced the growth of international mega-exhibitions and biennials. The public sphere defined by diaspora refers to a space of discourse and representation wherein transnational identity arises freed from older constraints of national boundaries, offering new ways of realizing citizenship, and protected by universal claims of human rights. Often celebrated, such a term also has its detractors: those who would caution against a naïve affirmation of our new mobile spaces and identities, for the 'diasporic public sphere' may only disguise a world of globalized capital, ruled by further spectacularization, commoditization and vulnerability, less one of emancipation and freedom.

In many ways, the work of Kay Hassan, an artist from South African, engages this conflict and provides further ways to think about it. Participating in the recent exhibition, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994*, which traveled internationally in 2001 and was directed by Okwui Enwezor, Hassan displayed his installation entitled *Flight*. The installation deals with migrancy in several forms: the forced migrancy of South African workers during apartheid, the dislocation of traumatic historical events as they are continually retold, the mobility of artwork on the international exhibition circuit, the placelessness of mixed-media art in the current age of the post-medium condition. Hassan's work, I argue, interweaves these disparate forms of migrancy to critical and productive ends.

Hassan's art constructs a 'diasporic public sphere' of its own. This functions in several ways. His work introduces South African history into international exhibition spaces, which diversifies public space and renders it a site of transnational connections. More specifically, it shows the traumatic scenes of South African apartheid in a video documentary included in the installation and through collage-based images of South African migrants. These force viewers to confront their own relation to that history. *Flight* also encourages viewers to consider the inequality between the pristine exhibition spaces of Western art museums and the desperate conditions of forced migrancy that it invokes. Such a public sphere, however, is far from simply emancipatory or enlightening; rather, it represents a space of conflict and oppression. This is evident in Hassan's paper constructions, which show South African figures composed out of torn-up pieces of disused billboard advertisements. The site of Hassan's work, in this case, becomes the ongoing conflict between the self-representation of local identities in South Africa and their resistance to the predatory presence of capitalist propaganda – what many would call a struggle with neo-colonialism.

Lastly, I consider how the work of Kay Hassan offers new strategies of artistic practice, even while it is indebted to certain artistic lineages such as conceptual art and European *décollage*. In terms of its investigation into the history of apartheid, Hassan's art is compared to certain examples of Hans Haacke, which have also investigated South African apartheid, but through very different artistic concerns. Hassan's aesthetics of migrancy, I argue, resists some of the disadvantages of Haacke's mimicry of corporate advertisement, which is conducted in order to expose its ideology. The danger of such a tactic is the repetition of an authoritarian voice, which may render all political claims suspect. Conversely, the corresponding danger of Hassan's artistic strategy is its own vulnerable exposure to appropriation by corporate institutions, which would exploit it as an alibi to escape from their own historical responsibility in apartheid. In conclusion, I suggest that such scenarios of co-optation represent not the *failure* but the *fragility* of the 'diasporic public sphere', which is revealed by the work of Kay Hassan. It shows how the spaces of democratic dialogue, egalitarian participation, and emancipated identities are continually under threat and ever exposed to the manipulative machinations and domineering takeovers of corporate, multinational forces. Such a realization indicates the bind of artistic practice and the task of criticism today.