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MoHoA introduction: Contributions and reflections on Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene draws from a critical selection of the 54 papers presented at the second International MoHoA conference *Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene*, (October 26–28, 2022), hosted by The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, in partnership with the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture. The conference expanded MoHoA's aim of encouraging equitable approaches to modern heritage as an urgent and essential response to an age of planetary crises whose roots are entangled with centuries-old culture of extraction, exploitation, and domination. Building on the lessons learned from the first MoHoA conference, *Modern Heritage of Africa* (2021), hosted by the University of Cape Town and the subject of an earlier special edition of *Curator* (65/July 3, 2022), this second conference emphasized the interconnection between these cultures and the dawn of the Anthropocene. Participants were asked to reflect on reconceptualized formulations of modern heritage and its entangled relationship with the planetary crises experienced, albeit unevenly and unequally, by all living and nonliving things. This paper assembles and reflects on the contributions of 18 peer-reviewed papers that collectively demonstrate the range and depth of topics presented. In the spirit of equity, diversity, and inclusivity and in line with MoHoA's decentering, decolonizing, and reframing agenda, these have also been chosen to reflect the different contributors' experiences, from senior academics to young and early career professionals.

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MODERN HERITAGE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE—A CRITICAL ASSEMBLAGE

All the papers in this MoHoA special edition share this aspiration and address it either explicitly or implicitly through their diverse approaches to research, and contributions to knowledge. Collectively, they have been selected not only to reflect the diversity of approaches, methods, subjects, and experiences, but also to demonstrate the different scales at which research is being done to address the question of modern heritage within an Anthropocenic context. This is exemplified by *The "colonial object" an autoethnography: Examples from Ireland, Hong Kong and Zambia*, by Dr **Briony Widdis**, Research Fellow, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, whose spatiotemporally broad research is located at the intersection of museum curation, autoethnography, and decoloniality within a planetary frame. Acknowledging the public demand for museums to address the serious questions arising from the decolonial agenda not only related to their collections, but also their institutional and disciplinary practices, Widdis weaves a complex, poetic, and personal narrative to interrogate the question of what constitutes the "colonial object" in the age of the Anthropocene.

As a scholar with a familial history entwined in colonial experiences, this paper adopts a critical, self-reflexive, and autoethnographic approach aimed at decentering White identities and inviting engagement with the "colonial object" from different perspectives across time and space. For Widdis, this comprises Zambia, Hong Kong, and Ireland through their respective colonial and postcolonial eras. Adopting museological methods, Widdis asks whether the imperialist narratives wound around these domestically situated objects can be relevant to decolonization in the Anthropocene, especially as sites for developing transcultural collaboration. What is particularly insightful in this work is the author's often brutally transparent approach to, and necessary disconnection from the objects in question, which comprise family ephemera—stones, a family photo, memorabilia, letters, and photographic slides. This process of unfamiliarizing the familiar can be seen as the latest cycle in recurrent rounds of remembering and forgetting, which have led to these objects being slowly dispossessed of the meaning bestowed on them by the people who created or acquired them, or by the landscapes from which they were obtained. This process calls into question the notion of the colonial and, therefore, the decolonial. At what point do these objects cease to be colonial or is their very existence inherently colonial? Widdis makes the important point that the coloniality in these objects comes not only from their origins, but also from the new meanings they acquire once their provenance has been effaced. This process of dual- or multi-coloniality mirrors that of museum collections, whose artifacts have often, but not always, been dispossessed of the multiple meanings bestowed on them by their erstwhile owners.

An important lesson in how we deal with modern heritage in the Anthropocene is the honesty with which this paper confronts unpleasant pasts and their uncomfortable truths or stories, personally and historically. Colonial objects embody family collections that, by their very nature, Widdis writes, "problematically centre both the identities and biographies of the people who gathered them; and their interpretation is further skewed by the emotions of their present owners." In practicing an approach to history that is both ethical and equitable, Widdis accepts that she, as the owner of these objects, has "the power to mediate engagement with these materials, [but she does] not assume the right." Collaborative autoethnography becomes a way of collectivizing the memories to which these objects pertain, flattening out the power imbalances intrinsic to their afterlives. This kind of transparent and transcultural collaborative approach potentially upends the subjectivity these objects possess, making them useful sites for addressing the challenges of curatorship in the Anthropocene, offering a decentered "indigenized" practice, whether in major public institutions or privately owned assemblages.

Objects, particularly in the private or domestic realm, are the central character in *Dissent Urbanism: Dowries, Homes and Infrastructures in Iran*, by Dr **Azadeh Zaferani**, lecturer at The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). Zaferani, like Widdis, exploits the potential of the artifact to develop a critical understanding of hidden histories and marginalized voices across deep time and planetary space through a critical reading of dowry objects. Working within the context of Iran over the past century, Zaferani frames these gifted objects as representations of and interconnections between the ordinary lives of individuals, official state views, and the planetary scale of global politics. Drawing on the essential and complex interrelationship between the local and the global, which has been a consistent theme in MoHoA's various workshops and conferences, the author argues that everyday objects—smoking tools, broadcasting devices, foldable rugs, silver pencil cases, electrical appliances, clothing, kitchen utensils—can become the material representation of civil resistance against structures of power, citing the hairbrush and the simple act of brushing one's hair as the catalyst for a revolution. Framing the home as an everyday living museum, the domestic realm becomes a site through which local, national, and global politics materialize and coalesce, shaping the lives of individuals and the fortunes of the nation states as they struggled to negotiate multiple modernities. The dowry becomes a medium through which the impact of global brands, manufacturing supply chains, international markets, and industrial exchange become manifest in the spatial placement of their respective material objects within the home. Drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (1996) to frame dowries as potential assemblies of objects, the article is a subtle but effective commentary on Iran's complex encounters with modernity, charting the evolving nature of the dowry as it negotiates the turbulent political and sociocultural transitions that buffeted a post-civilizational nation throughout the twentieth century.

Aligning with the work of Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk in challenging the limiting and limited master narratives told at great expense by national museums, Zaferani makes a case for a more effective history of the human condition to be told through personal stories and the economic context of the home. For Zaferani, the domestic realm simultaneously operates at two scales by securing the states' political gains through the pursuit of central planning strategies while serving as a platform for tactics that can resist these strategies through different kinds of spatial and material expression. Mirroring the global and the local, the work highlights the interplay between top-down strategies and bottom-up tactics, citing de Certeau's assertion that strategies relate to a position of power and tactical plans stem from a lack of access to power. Of the different tactics discussed in the article, the most arresting, sadly too often literally, is that employed by women's rights activist Vida Movahedi, commonly known as Dokhtar-e Enghelab (the Girl of Revolution Street). In 2017, Movahedi transformed a street utility box on Enghelab (Revolution) Street into a symbol for freedom of expression by climbing onto it and, after taking her head scarf off and tying it to a stick, stood still for hours holding the stick in her hands, defying the state-enforced strategy of a dress code. Her actions, which embodied the contestation between the local and the global, the individual and the state, the strategic and the tactical, tradition and modernity, resulted in her arrest and imprisonment.

The structural power entangled within the local and the global, and its resulting violence, whether exacted physically or procedurally, or both, is the setting for the work of Dr **Emma Reisz**, lecturer at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast. Where for Widdis and Zaferani the unsettling and sometimes brutal confluence of the local and global are read through different kinds of personal effects, for Reisz the primary site of enquiry is the photograph. In *Photoanthropocene: The decentred lens of* *colonial photography*, Reisz focusses on this new technology's accompaniment of colonialism as an imprint of its violence. Engaging the conference's Anthropocenic framing, Reisz recasts the photograph as an instrument, and an often-partial record, of coloniality in pursuit of a decentered and decolonizing approach to colonial photography, asking what "an anthropocene-conscious approach might look like." The work exemplifies an approach that, as we have seen with Chakrabarty and Mbembe, engages the Anthropocene in established historiographical practices as a way of framing complex and contested pasts, while also acknowledging it as an existential consequence of these pasts. Before focusing on the main subject of enquiry, a late-nineteenth century photograph of the ruins of the Roman Catholic church of Notre Dame des Victoires (Our Lady of Victory or Wanghailou Jiaotang 望海楼教堂) in Tianjin, China, Reisz offers a succinct account of Anthropocene scholarship on which the article builds. Starting with its the early formulation by Paul Crutzen and the ecologist Eugene Stoermer, it proceeds through other kinds of disciplinary interpretations and critiques, such as Jason Moore's "Capitalocene" or Donna Haraway's "Chthulucene." It includes the critique by the historical geographer Michael Simpson, who, like Haraway, is concerned that the term and its deployment risk perpetuating the dominator cultures and colonial discourses upon which it was built, resulting in the perpetuation of historical and inequitable power structures.

Reisz's research acknowledges these questions through a decentered rereading of a nineteenth century photograph of Notre Dame des Victoires by the Hong Kong commercial photographer Lai Afong, asking how this image came to be in the archives of Queen's University Belfast via the Anglo-Irish diplomat and administrator Sir Robert Hart. Citing Mabel Moraña et al.'s (2008, p. 2) description of coloniality as "the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times," Afong's photograph is for Reisz an imprint of colonial violence that represents both the tangible structures of colonial power—from its mode of production to its means of collection through complex webs of dominance over time and space—and the less tangible way in which such images reflect a world created by colonial photography in how they have subsequently been viewed, perceived, and understood over time. In seeking a decentered approach to colonial photography, or as Malek Alloula (1986, p. 5) puts it, the "return [of] this immense [colonial] postcard to its sender," Reisz asks whether by looking hard enough "we can learn to unsee what colonialism has taught us to expect to see," and, if we do, what do we see instead? It is in this moment, "'staring back' into the face of the predatory colonial gaze" as Alloula puts it, that for Reisz, decolonizing becomes possible, "when the *right to look* is understood as a deliberate process of seeing, unseeing and seeing again, in which the visual 'argument' not just of colonialism but also of the anthropocene is seen, set to one side, and then reintegrated so that the photograph can be viewed through multiple frames at the same time." Drawing on Zylinska's *The End of Man*, and the Museums Association's *Supporting decolonisation in museums* (2021), Reisz proposes the photoanthropocene as a way of fostering the kinds of co-existence and collaboration that are essential to the counterapocalypse and decolonial project, and offer new ways of seeing the colonial photograph as an object and as way of seeing multiple worlds. Using a photoanthropocenic lens, the colonial photograph ceases being a single fleeting moment of artistic creation and instead tells a much larger and more important story "of social and natural processes forging connections between the people, objects, places and environments in the frame, and their wider world." As Reisz eloquently concludes, a "counterapocalyptic approach to heritage finds value in colonial photography not in spite of its decentred, uncomfortable quality, but because of it."

One more article that draws from architecture and photography is *An African View* by **Noëleen Murray**, architect, academic, and Research Chair in Critical Architecture and Urbanism, University of Pretoria, South Africa, and **Svea Josephy**, Associate Professor, Fine Art (Photography) at Michaelis School of Fine Art, at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Focusing on the work of Denise Scott Brown, it makes the case for a southern, or global majority, and anti-apartheid perspective away from an architecture that is deeply embedded in inequality and a lack of justiciable outcomes, from creating spatial structures. In proposing that an analysis should proceed from what lies at the back, or the foundation for the front, gives us insight into various papers of the conference, which pose the question of what is the infrastructure of the modern? The further question posed is whether this infrastructure is ever complete in the relentless, perhaps restless, fluidity of contested notions of progress as integral to the modern and its future.

The focus on Denise Scott Brown highlights several sometimes hidden, sometimes subliminal visions of how heritage becomes constituted. In many ways Denise Scott Brown's professional work was driven by her professional interests as an architect and town planner, but was also deeply imbricated by her experience as a woman growing up in racially segregated South Africa on the eve of the imposition of the state legislated program of racial discrimination known as Apartheid. Later, in her position as a woman working in the postwar United States, she continued to encounter the traces of male privilege in her chosen profession, which delayed the recognition she deserved.

Gender as an issue is not a recurrent theme in these articles, or in the conference and workshop proceedings, but Murray and Josephy provide a welcome reminder by that it is an issue that needs further research and recognition in the context of modern heritage. Privilege was seldom confined to territorial, cultural, social, or other forms of dominator practices, but was just as frequently enforced through gendered experiences. For Scott Brown it may not have been her explicit intention to see her work as a significant signpost to the beginning of a new wave of architectural design that turns away from the form and function of the twentieth century modern to investigate side alleys and backyards, whether in the United States or in South Africa. Indeed, to read her work against the Le Corbusian typologies in South Africa that housed the apparatchiks of apartheid, provides an entirely different slant on modernist buildings and their legalized racial discrimination and oppressive functions. In the context of current and past racisms afflicting the world today, modernism might be less celebrated because of the new insights into Scott Brown's biography, her considerable output as a photographer and her architectural work. The framing of Scott Brown's photographs by Murray and Josephy is a necessary and welcome addition to heritage studies, a reminder that photography is more than merely the functional reflection of a site's architectural spatial dimensions and measurements. What, we might ask, of the rare combination of architectural spirit and photographic insights helps understand the built environment's heritage better than merely the mix of concrete, steel, and glass as an aesthetic moment?

Another article that challenges modernism's hegemonic narratives through a decentered approach to build environment research is *The Garden City: Infrastructure, Spatial Politics and Resistance Behind the Nation-Building Mode of "Tropicality" in Singapore*, by **Annabelle Tan**, Singapore-based architect, and graduate of The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). For Tan, the hegemonic force is "tropicality," a biproduct of modernity's multiple manifestations that, by its very nature, found expression in global majority regions, but was an epistemological tool used by dominator cultures "to naturalize and espouse Western rationality and modernity." Identifying tropicality's manifestation through the typologies of large infrastructures, institutionalized knowledge, and media representations, Tan challenges the tropical narrative through three chronologically defined modes: colonial, nation-building, and contemporary neoliberalism. In keeping with MoHoA's central themes, Tan's work seeks to decenter, decolonize, and reframe infrastructures of tropicality by advocating an expanded field in which a fairer, more reflexive, and plural experience of post-tropicality might be allowed to flourish.

Echoing Mbembe's unease at the decolonial agenda following the toppling of the Rhodes statue, Tan's critique is not limited to the colonial experience, but argues that the infrastructures of coloniality have been merely reappropriated through the nation building era and into the neoliberal age as a form of neo-colonialism. The principal subject or site of Tan's critique is Singapore's postwar public housing program by the Housing Development Board (HDB), which sought not only to provide a modern public with modern public housing, but also to create an entirely modern citizenry through the standardized layout of apartments, facilities, and public spaces. Casting this modernizing project as an act of "taming subaltern tropicality," Tan highlights the myriad ways in which residents defied this straitjacket of architectural modernity through everyday acts of resistance, appropriation, or hybridization, generating altogether new and unexpected encounters with modernity through "the construction of an alternate 'infra-structure' that allows for an expanded, embodied, and particular engagement with nature."

Housing and the home have been recurrent themes for MoHoA, often serving as a microcosm or agent of lager modernizing projects, invariably at the national scale. Echoing the experiences of Singapore outlined in Tan's work, *The Image of Modernity: An Examination of Early Republic Housing Projects in Turkey 1930–1939*, by **Mine Sak Acur** architect and PhD candidate at The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL), interrogates analogous phenomena in the Turkish context by studying spatial layouts of apartments behind the modernist facades. As occurred in Singapore and in many other global majority regions, the projected rationality and functionality of modern architecture emanating from Europe in the early twentieth century proved attractive to those charged with building the physical and administrative infrastructures of modern nation states. However, the adoption and articulation of this foreign architectural language invariably created something entirely new.

Where Tan and Zaferani identified past domestic habits and cultural practices reverberating through everyday acts of resistance, Sak Acur's research uncovers them as architectural form and space. While much research from an architectural perspective has been done on the modernization of Turkey under the Kemalist reforms following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Sak Acur offers a unique and critical perspective on this transition by analyzing the plans of homes. Challenging dominant modernist narratives that center European experiences and assert its architectural ascendency, this research draws on dozens of designs for modern houses and apartments by Turkish architects throughout the 1930s to reveal that behind the common language of their modernist façades endure aspects of social and cultural life that have remained veiled to many. Concealment here is both literal and analytical, as the obscurity of these interiors remains hidden also from structures of contemporary design knowledge that support or supplement everyday life, and therefore their value is recognized neither in terms of official planning or as architectural heritage, nor in their relation to the modernist façade. The resilience and continuity of cultural practices escapes official recognition because the interiors carry specific meanings for residents. The persistence and repetition of pre-existing social and cultural practices in many of the residential spaces points not only to a richer, more complex, and subtler history of modernization and domesticity in the Turkish context that is not beholden to European precedent, but also offers a helpful comparative example of a diverse expression of modernity born out of transcultural understandings and global interconnections.

Further underlining the complexity and plurality of architectural modernity outside the European canon is the article *Understanding the Multiple Architectural Modernities in Colonial and Post-Independence Nigeria* by Dr **Adekunle Adeyemo**, former Gerda Henkel PhD Fellow in the Department of Architecture, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria. Adeyemo's work draws on the theory of multiple modernities posited by the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt, to decenter and recast the modernist architecture of Nigeria. As with Tan's Singapore and Sak Acur's Turkey, Adeyemo explains how architectural modernism in Nigeria, as a vehicle for nationwide modernization programs, is tightly entangled with colonial encounters, tropical associations, and postcolonial contestations. Nevertheless, at its core, it shares with these, and many other works produced under the auspices of MoHoA, a desire to move beyond the canonical and universal assertions of dominator narratives imposed invariably from European scholars and practitioners over the past century, and instead to forge new inclusive histories that center the experiences of those that inhabit these environments, and played significant roles in their design and construction. While Adeyemo's research draws on many different architectural examples to support the multiple modernities thesis, architecture is employed as a vessel or framework for how multiple modernities might be applied in other contexts, beyond the built or the material.

Each of the examples from Nigeria, Turkey, and Singapore reveal important lessons about the entanglement of profoundly local experiences of modernity and the global processes that fueled their rise, but they also ask questions about how we deal with the legacies of the twentieth century when those legacies become detached, historically and politically, from the forces that generated them. In many cases, the conditions under which these modern landscapes were fashioned, whether part of a postcolonial, a postimperial, or a nation-building program, have long since expired, their legacies left stranded by modernity's high tide. This detachment has significant implications for the valorization and preservation of these legacies, as well as the local, national, or collective identities that once gave them life and meaning, and potentially still do. As these examples attest, in many cases around the world the politics that enabled and invariably commissioned and oversaw the creation of these modern landscapes using varied languages of multiple modernisms, has changed profoundly and permanently, along with the agendas and aspirations of the regimes that enlisted them. It begs the question, where do we go from here?

This is a question posed by Professor **Mike Turner** (UNESCO Chair) and **David Gak-Vassallo** of Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, in *The Colonialism of The Modern Movement and The Post-USSR Reaction in Central Asia*, which focuses on the modern heritage of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, in particular the Uzbekistani cities and UNESCO World Heritage sites of Shakhrisyabz, Bukhara, and Samarkand. What emerges from this reflection on post-Soviet Central Asian modernities and their valorization by UNESCO are the similarities and the differences of another kind of coloniality and cultural appropriation born out of a socialist project that ultimately failed. For Uzbekistan and other former Soviet republics in Central Asia seeking new, reconstituted, or restored national identities, Turner and Gak-Vassallo caution against the temptation to succumb to nationalism, citing the Nara Document's forewarnings in 1994 about “a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism,” and instead argue for a new symbiotic or syncretistic order to emerge from a process of decolonization, reappropriation, and repatriation.

The collapse of communism and the retreat of socialism since the late twentieth century might have spawned new identities and ways of reflecting on, researching, and protecting the recent past, especially outside of the canonical heartlands of Western Europe and North America, but it is important to also acknowledge contexts in which communism remains the dominant paradigm and what modern heritage means in such contexts. No communist country is more influential geo-politically or in supporting global heritage in the twenty-first century than China. From a handful of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and a minor financial contributor in the twentieth century, China is today the world's single largest donor country to UNESCO's World Heritage Centre and boasts 57 World Heritage sites, two less than Italy, which holds more than any other country. However, the relative absence of modern heritage sites among this impressive collection attests not only to the way China is perceived and valorized by others, but also to the way China perceives its own past. “Kulangsu, A Historic International Settlement,” is the only site on China's list of World Heritage sites representative of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Confronting China's historiographical predilection for the ancient over the modern, *Early Concrete bridges in China as (dissonant) Modern Heritage: A Case Study of the Double-Curved Bridges in Nanjing* by **Yichuan Chen**, PhD candidate at The Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL), argues for overlooked and undervalued examples of modern heritage, while critically examining the causes of their underappreciation. While the subject of this article is the indigenous invention of the concrete double-curved bridge constructed throughout China from 1964 to the 1990s, and exported to Africa, this undervalued technological innovation is also a means by which to understand complex histories of communism and its discordant relationship with modernity. With the bridge's early design development and increasingly widespread construction spanning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, spurred on by zealous factions like the *Double-Curved Bridge Scientific Revolution Fighting Group*, the subject is ideologically and politically sensitive and potentially divisive, making it a challenge to research, valorize, and protect these important sites as examples of China's multiple modernities. Chen argues that these bridges, although effectively de-heritagized and stripped of their official heritage value, acquire layers of meaning as carriers of dissonant and contested histories that reveal the political, technical, and social dimensions of an era that contemporary power structures are keen to forget despite their intimate association with these recent pasts.

An important lesson China's indigenous concrete double-curved bridge teaches us about modern heritage is how uncomfortable pasts echo down the ages, their subtle traces appearing in scattered archives, fragmented collections, and the stubborn survival of material objects. Assembling these historical phantoms and piecing together the evidence of their elusive pasts so that we might learn from their incomplete stories is the task and subject of *Of Ghosts and Orphans: Traces of Local Architects in the New City of Jerusalem in the Early Modern Era and the challenges of Architectural Historiography on the Fringe of the Empire* by the independent researcher, **Adi Bamberger Chen**. For Chen and Bamberger Chen, the archive, physically and conceptually, is the principal protagonist, but not in the conventional sense. Both have had to reimagine, reconfigure, and reconstitute their archives from multiple fragments and scattered sources strewn by the fallout caused by often brutal transitions of power and buried by successive authorities keen to retain control.

Bamberger Chen's work demonstrates the difficulty of conducting architectural research on late-Ottoman Jerusalem and the "archival challenges of fragmentation, loss, access, translation and identity that reflect the very essence of the archive" and its contested relationship with the production of historical knowledge. To make sense of this relationship, Bamberger Chen enlists the ethnographer Professor Ann Laura Stoler, Professor Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulations, and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose spectral metaphors in *Archive Fever* inspired this work. Bamberger Chen's ghosts "are the individuals assumed to have practiced architecture, yet their existence appears only in traces," while orphans are "existing buildings that are historiographically detached from their genealogy." This article, along with Chen's and others in this journal, demonstrates the rich rewards to be garnered not only from exploring the gaps that gave rise to such ghosts and orphans, but also from examining the existence of these gaps as an important historiographical exercise intrinsic to decentring, decolonizing, and reframing our collective past.

The significance of reclaiming histories from fragmented and scattered archives and through the assemblage of other forms of evidence and approaches extends beyond historiography. These are essential to countering threats to modern heritage in the present and for our future. Using the controversy surrounding the construction of the Africa headquarters of the global firm, Amazon, **Tauriq Jenkins** and Professor **Shahid Vawda** highlight how heritage value can be subverted by political, legal, and institutional policies, in *Questioning Modernity and Heritage: The Case of The River Club Development in Cape Town, South Africa*. Focussing on the complex intersection of social, cultural, ethical, and political forces, this article challenges official claims to heritage protection and valorization by statal and commercial authorities by dismissing their claims on the grounds of their Eurocentric conceptualizations of emancipation, aesthetics, history, heritage, and development.

For the alliance that emerged between the City of Cape Town and the Amazon representative, the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust, a limited and outdated conceptualization of modern heritage meant they could dismiss alternative and progressive interpretations, which recognized both the tangible and intangible, the derivation from multiple historical origins in varying oppositions and contradictions of violence, genocide, and enslavement, and the guardianship of a complex mix of ruptures and continuities of mutual unequal interdependence. Yet the proposal from the City of Cape Town and the Amazon representatives suggested a museum stuck in the era of the curiosity cabinet, one that purports to recognize the "other," but only as it reinforces the binary of primitive and civilized, and in the context of Cape Town, the slave and the master. At best the proposal reflects the colonial couplet that privileges the modern over the traditional. As evidenced in other articles, such attitudes and approaches cannot be sustained, posing the question what should be the future of these intense contradictions and conflicts? The City of Cape Town and the Amazon representative, while conceding that there was a period of colonialization and acknowledging the entanglement of precolonial elements in the present as signifiers of injustice, nonetheless rejected the request to suspend the project and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation tribunal on historical injustice as a step toward restorative justice. For the community and others who objected to the development, preventing the perpetuation of the amnesia of violence, genocide, enslavement, exploitation, and historical trauma seems a reasonable starting point.

The example of The River Club development echoes the work of **Olwen Purdue**, Professor of Modern Social History at Queen's University Belfast, both advocating for the intervention of public histories in achieving just solutions that foster citizenship and belonging. Purdue's *Our Places, Our Stories: Public History journeys from Belfast to Dhiban, and Back* confronts the messiness of the world, particularly its tragic outcomes in the everyday life of people, with their complicated local histories and multiple senses of belonging. The article addresses what appear to be widely divergent situations. In the first instance, as an engagement scholar, it is in bringing to bear the necessary expertise to overcome the sectarian conflict in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Purdue's experience of this kind of rapprochement between ostensibly different groups, drawing attention to the commonalities shared among the divided working class of Belfast, rather than the differences, becomes the reason for an invitation to address the complicated situation in another community riven with division in Dhiban, Jordan. Dhiban's contemporary conflictual situation arises both from its longue-durée history, and the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a place of refuge from the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the civil wars in Lebanon and more recently, Syria, and its complications arising from religious, political, and national affiliations among refugees, permanent settlers, and Jordanian citizens. In both Belfast and Dhiban, Purdue makes the point about how the varying interpretations of these mainstream histories and accumulated heritages inform everyday life, its affectations of group solidarities, but more importantly misconceptions and misrepresentations. Yet both situations, however different their histories of conflict, possess communities, particularly in deprived areas, who feel alienated or marginalized from the mainstream or exhibit low self-esteem or limited engagement with formal education. Purdue argues convincingly that these situations allow us, as heritage practitioners, engaged intellectuals, and especially trained historians, to explore the societal benefits of engaging in collaborative and co-produced public history projects at a local level.

Here the use of museological displays, created, and made through the discussions with local people about their perceived and direct experiences of themselves and others is critical. Purdue's approach to public history does shy away from the built-up sense of difference and exclusion. The gap between the images created and used or manipulated by official institutions, and the people's perceptions of "the other"—along lines of religious or cultural–historical identities, family histories, refugee, exile or citizenship statuses, or the lack of these indexical identifiers—are to be faced, sometimes confronted directly, through difficult discussions and self-created community-based exhibitions. The outcomes are surprising—or perhaps, not so—when grounded in commonalities such as material deprivation, disaffection, the comparable experiences of flight, refuge, exile, loss, and how to make sense of one's truncated cultural logic in new and unfamiliar circumstances.

These are difficult circumstances, as Purdue makes explicit, but they are contexts in which the platform of museums as safe places, can create the grounds for mutual respect and hope. Purdue's point, resonating with Mbembe's formulation of museums as epistemic spaces, is to question the museum as an exhibitory complex for certain kind of hegemonies, particularly those that argue for forgetting the past that maintains the divided status quo, and rather to see such platforms in new ways that create the circumstances for the future moving away from historical trauma and conflict, debilitating prejudices, and the intoxicating binaries of our age. This view aligns itself with the new International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of museums, which pays attention to its constituents and stakeholders in the interest of pursuing research and exhibitions that engender respect and tolerance for others and strive toward justiciable ends. History is, in this collaborative context, an important part of an affective sense of community belonging.

Stepping out of the institutional space of the museum, *Transmodern Heritage as a Space for Imagining Pluriversal Relations—Insights from the African "periphery"* by **Olga Bialostocka** of the Africa Institute of South Africa, Human Sciences Research Council (AISA-HSRC), is situated in the theoretical space of modern heritage as a field for imagining different kinds of diverse futures. Challenging modernism's center-periphery formulation, Bialostocka argues for a decolonial pluriversal approach to modern heritage based on the concept of transmodernity to subvert European cultural imperialism, so that a liberated space of otherness can be created. Echoing Mbembe's worldliness and Getachew's worldmaking, Bialostocka draws on the work of Colombian–American anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2020, p. xxxii), to explain that in such a space "the stories of world making are told differently," here the practice of life and human experience can be liberated from the "European gaze." Focussing on the examples of N'zima village in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, and the suburb of Abbashawel in Asmara, Eritrea, she discusses two sites that are integral to the "modern" colonial capitals of their respective national contexts, both of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. Using a comparative approach, Bialostocka uses these examples (both of which are often framed as comparative to the larger urban entity of which they form part) to challenge the binaries that have framed African heritage sites and cultural attributes as traditional, vernacular, primitive, incoherent, and "other," invariably contrasting starkly with descriptions of the adjacent European colonial landscapes.

Bialostoka draws attention to the underside of modernity. Yet she also outlines the difficult task of fitting the multiple and often differential practices and everyday experiences of people of the global majority into the neat and essentialized discrete categories and criteria of the world heritage listing process, the statistics of which so graphically demonstrate the privileging of European experiences over the rest of the world. Another approach that challenges modernity's Eurocentric assumptions in the twenty-first century is pursued by **Catherine Outram Desai** and **Yakin Kinger**, researchers at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) in Ahmedabad, India. In their co-authored article, *Questioning the Tabula Rasa in Indian Modernity: Towards a Genealogy for the Anthropocene*, they adopt a different analytical lens as a way of unseeing, or seeing differently, colonial pasts. By applying a post-humanist lens, "a different history becomes possible" for the Indian town of Kharaghoda in the state of Gujarat, once a significant site of colonial salt production and extraction. For Outram Desai and Kinger, adopting an Anthropocenic lens allowed the history of this extractive landscape to be seen not in conventional linear terms centered around the colonizer and the human subject, but multi-directionally across time, space, and both human and nonhuman agency, challenging the colonial tropes of tabula rasa and exposing a "complex interpretation of the ecological factors and their interdependencies." Centering ecology in colonial history enables the reframing of physical and intellectual landscapes, offering new ways of seeing Kharaghoda and new approaches to postcolonial enquiry. Rather than accepting the established hegemonic narrative of an empty landscape animated by human activity and made useful by modernity, an Anthropocenic lens recasts the landscape and the destructive colonial history of Kharaghoda as an unceasing negotiation between ecology and human action subject to the ebbs and flows of climate and time. The example of Kharaghoda raises important questions for post-humanist histories of built and non-built environments and their impact on the practices of preservation and conservation. Although this research focusses on the period between 1872 and 1940, the physical legacies of this experience—the buildings, infrastructures, planting, boundaries of inhabitation—by being removed from their conceptually isolated contexts, they are reanimated and reconstituted by their ecological framing, offering new approaches to colonial history, preservation, and conservation in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Colonially extractive landscapes are moreover the subject of *Heritage and Waste in the Anthropocene: A Museum Perspective on Environmental and Social Complexities* by the architect **Francisca Pimentel**. This article is the first of four pieces of work by early career researchers that have made valuable contributions to MoHoA in different ways. In support of a new generation of academics and practitioners, MoHoA has deliberately provided a platform and outlet for presenting work by young professionals so that their enthusiasm, criticality, and important contributions to knowledge can reach a global audience. The four works have been selected for their thematic, methodological, and geographical diversity. Drawing on the decolonial perspectives of Mignolo and Quijano, Pimentel's research focusses on what she calls the “coloniality of waste,” arguing that structures of waste in the Anthropocene created through in situ and ex situ production, extend beyond their geographic–spatial location to encompass ethnic, racial, class, and cultural aspects that determine its final disposal, management, and planetary impact. Emanating from design research in the context of Chile, this critical and provocative work seeks to recast and reframe the way we understand and valorize waste as a central, albeit negative, legacy of the modern colonial world system and its capitalist economy. Asking urgent questions about how we treat waste, not only as a by-product of systems of production, but also as an educative and cultural marker of our planetary age in the form of modern heritage, Pimentel explores ways of resituating waste landscapes from their ecological and geological context into the institution of the museum or gallery.

A different kind of modern cultural landscape is the subject of *Generating Modern Heritage through Changing Urban Environments and Identities: A Case Study from Prato's (Italy) industrial district, history, and multiculturalism in a polycentric urban setting*, by **Corinna del Bianco**, Postdoctoral Researcher and Adjunct Professor of Urban Design, Politecnico di Milano, Italy. Del Bianco's work interrogates how multiple migrations of people into Prato, not only from southern Europe, but also from as far as Pakistan and China, have changed the way this historic urban landscape is conceived in the twenty-first century. Prato is a former industrial city, where older forms of internal rural–urban migration have given way to new forms of transnational migration. In this context, certain local continuities give Prato its long historical identity in the built environment, juxtaposed with new forms of mobility that trace multiple arcs of contact zones across half a world, now being made visible. However, as del Bianco describes, the certainties of earlier industrial lives are now unsettled. Older binaries of internal rural–urban within a nation state make less sense in attributing affective ties that bind in contrast to the urgency of who are the new citizens, who participates, and how, in the contemporary life of people living in the urban fabric of a polycentric Prato. These are pertinent issues for Prato, as with analogous cities across Italy and throughout Europe, that must be reimagined and rethought through the prism of policy and politics that play more than mere lip service to the reality of multiculturalism. Del Bianco demonstrates the different ways in which migrants are integrated into the dominant Italian socio-cultural history. In the debates about migration and heritage, such a modern heritage in a European context must reckon with these multicultural encounters. These new encounters, del Bianco rightly points out, mean developing new methods of research that are not centered on notions and precepts of homogeneity. The idea of planetary migration and flows of people that recontextualize their cultural connections in new contact zones and how this articulates with impermanence and permeance is a key strand in studies of modernity and heritage studies.

Also contesting the notion of homogeneity as an assumed outcome of modernity is *The Myth of Being Modern: Digital Machines and the Loss of Discovery* by **Carson Smuts**, PhD candidate in the Chair in Critical Architecture and Urbanism, University of Pretoria, and Research Scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). While within the debating chambers and contemporary policies of UNESCO and its various advisory bodies steps have been taken to counter the trend toward privileging the Eurocentric over the vastness of others in the world, Smut's article points to a rather more fundamental problem. He probes the value of digitization as a signifier of the modern. This article does not provide an illustration of the digital or digitization as it functions within the heritage site, or the already determined act of aligning an artifact or human experience with the way the digital operates. Instead, Smuts makes the distinction between the digital as uncompromisingly exact, and the analogue as real and symbolically allowing the space for other interpretations, and hence the possibility of plurality or multiplicity. Smuts poses the incipient, if not insurgent, question whether digitizing our worldly experiences and archives, past and present, will reduce them to modernity's exclusive linearity of the Eurocentric gaze and its categories.

Drawing inspiration from the concept of multiple modernities and Latour's work on decentering humans, especially *We have Never Been Modern*, Smuts' focus is on the digital technologies of zeros and ones. This is an important consideration as the argument for digitization of archives (including intangible heritage) has been made. Like Latour, Smuts evinces an aversion to categories and conceptual thinking that steer away from the abundance and complexity of life, and by extension from treating that "messiness" with equal measure. Smuts' point is that digitalization works to precision and mathematical calculation. This is not in dispute. Rather its appearance as only rational and exacting provides the ground for skepticism. Smuts' decentering of digital technologies that currently provide visibility to things, and by extension to matters of heritage is a warning about the social and political consideration of such technology. It is the reductionism to fit the already decided abstract categories of modernity that is crucial for all heritage institutions, including museums; hence the requirement to be aware of this unerring underlying logic.

The uncritical adoption of digitization seems to be of crucial significance in a world lurching toward greater inequalities and less tolerance for others. Indeed, the warning signs already exist. There is a vast array of organizations that digitize public archives for profit based on already existing categories of arts and culture that can yield the highest reward for private companies. Such an approach challenges ICOM's conceptual tools of classification regarding an object on display as semiophorous, where an object, such as that which is digitized, becomes excluded from its original function or use and is further alienated from the public and cultural sphere, becoming a different object of attention or gaze, and further decontextualized. Obfuscating the richness of its originality, an object becomes transformed into something else. This shift may well further entrench a digital divide, rather than advance the implicit premise of Smuts that technology should be moving toward equality and inclusiveness in recognition of the multiplicity of modernity's experiences. However, its potential to be precise and exacting of the "other" raises questions about how digitizing can enhance equity of the multitudes of humanity and their representations in different forms of heritage globally.

Also tackling questions of equity and inclusivity in response to modern heritage is the final article in this special edition, *Decolonizing African (Hi)Stories Through Visual Arts: African Contemporary Art as a way of looking back and moving ahead* by **Alyssa Barry**, MoHoA partner and independent heritage consultant based in Dakar, Senegal. With prior experience working in the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris, and contributor to every

MoHoA workshop and conference, including organizer of the AHRC-funded Research Networking workshop in Senegal in July 2023, Barry is a key voice and future leader in this field.

Undoing African stereotypes within and beyond the continent is a primary theme of Barry's work, which focusses on how Africans in all their diversity seek ways of affirming themselves in the world through visual art practice. Barry's article speaks to the concept of worldliness that Mbembe invokes as part of the public heritage of Africa and its cosmopolitanisms. As a way of looking back and moving forward, Barry seeks to understand the multiple creative forms of expression that encompass the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial phases. With new vigor, Barry addresses the issue of Africa's multiple historical cultures as having no fixed starting point from which they could be said to diverge, escape, or merge with colonialism's cultural practices and legacies. In doing so Barry bypasses the sterile debate about primitive art, and instead provides the entry point for artists to claim a future without recourse to whether they fit within the conventional European discourse about the history of art or not. In this way African artists that surface "magical" invocations alongside new social media need not be concerned about "western" canons. Art, for Barry, must come with whatever the present offers, cognizant of lineages or traces to past and contemporary cultural practices, real or imagined, but fully aware of growing into the future. In doing so, contemporary African artists, within the continent and in the diaspora, can question the past and assert their identities simultaneously. Barry thus invites new ways of understanding, analyzing, and indeed critiquing Africa. It does not have to be based on the imagined gap between a so-called western model of the modern and what Africa is not. It is rooted in the contemporary.

Barry's work aptly brings us full circle to the context of Africa where MoHoA, like our species, started and where many consider the next phase of our Anthropocenic journey is most likely to be played out. Whether this phase will be one that accelerates existing problems by perpetuating the extractive, exploitative, and exclusionary practices of successive dominator cultures across more than half a millennium or is the source of planetary solutions founded on equitable, restitutive, and restorative agendas, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it has been MoHoA's aim to make a salient contribution to supporting and helping others support the latter. We are indebted to our colleagues at Wiley for enabling us to dedicate not just one, but two editions of this exemplary journal to that endeavor, thereby enabling us to publish and disseminate the outstanding work of so many contributors to MoHoA from around the world, as well as the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage*. As a collaborative global initiative founded on the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusivity, MoHoA welcomes current and future participants to propose and take the next steps, so that this precious constellation of researchers, scholars, and practitioners advocating for radical, urgent, and systemic change, can continue to grow, evolve and, most importantly, achieve this change.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest related to this article.

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