From the Suburbs of the Global Village*
Afterthoughts on *Magiciens de la terre*

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*The whole is the false*
Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

The exhibition of Cheri Samba’s paintings at the ICA in London (2 May — 9 June 1991) prompts a reconsideration of the strategies under which certain culturally determined products have been legitimised in recent years. The exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* held in Paris in the Summer of 1989 marked a watershed in the validation of artistic production over a wide — the widest possible — spectrum. Legitimacy and validity are the handmaids to incorporation on the one hand, and assimilation on the other. *Magiciens...* both interpreted a trend and institutionally established it. In the aftermath of that exhibition, it has become possible to level the perception of works produced outside the venue of Western-inspired ateliers with the ever-expanding aesthetization of ‘the life world’ in North America and Europe. Such a trend has to be questioned again, if only because it is here to stay and expand: this ought to justify after-thinking and invite more.

* This paper is an enlarged and revised version of a talk given at Norfolk Contemporary Art Society, Norwich, June 1990. I wish to thank Sarah Wilson for her help in clarifying certain ambiguities in the text: those which are left are my responsibility.
THE FRAMES

The development of the complex, internally articulated trend currently known as postmodernism, its many voices which claim to have drawn the logical conclusions from the Zeitgeist, and its 'sense of an ending' — to use Frank Kermode's expression — provide the polemical counterpart to the views carried in this paper. 'From the Suburbs of the Global Village' hints both at an agreement and at a distancing.

There is no doubt that we have entered an age of unprecedented narrowing of the distance between cultural formations previously held far apart. This has happened not only at the level of media communication. There has been, more crucially, a reappraisal of the role played by Euroamerican civilization in shaping a world culture that nowadays reverberates with a myriad of local vernaculars, each finding ever more attention in the fast overcrowding space of the international stage. Marshall McLuhan's and Quentin Fiore's vision of a narrowing world dominated by the media to the extent of being created in the form of redundant, spiralling representations of representations has been counterpointed by Ernst Schumacher's celebration: "small is beautiful". But here we meet a paradox: it is precisely the universalization of the 'life world' — a category dear to current phenomenological trends in the social sciences — that shapes and defines the worthiness and intrinsic value of details. As in an exhibition catalogue, the zoomed-in, magnified inch is only meaningful in that it contradicts the whole. But, in so doing, it also presupposes it as its condition of existence. The celebration of difference, the care for microscopic details, can only exist as such in the presupposition of the totality which in-tends them. We are, in many ways, facing a levelling of differences: each detail is less an episode of the life-world concluded and valuable in its own right than an instance of the whole which determines, in the first instance, its very existence as a meaningful-for-all event. The moving picture of an Amazon Indian chief pleading the predicament of his endangered village to a world TV audience finds its representational/ideological slot ready-made. It is not an instance of itself, a detail to which the dignity of the 'morally absolute' enjoyed by the totality must be granted, but a fragment in the discourse of Pandas and recycling.

The postmodern condition, in general, is characterized by an ever-expanding division of labour at all levels. 'Cultures', as the performance of exclusive, 'detailed' tasks whose symbolic use-value can be traded universally, are less and less systemic and integrated life-worlds and increasingly more mere instances of the encompassing 'cultural discourse' of the world system. The Amazon Indian Chief would wear his ceremonial regalia 'in the home ground' on certain particular occasions only. But on TV he has to wear them all the time, because that is his trade-mark in the international division of cultural labour. In this way, difference as granting 'the Other' freedom of movement turns into nailing the (as yet) unassimilated to a pre-cooked image to be absorbed and consumed. 'Authenticity', in this sense, is yet another instance of the totalitarian whole, long equipped to accommodate it on the shelves of the cultural supermarket alongside other similarly processed goods.

The celebration of difference is a central theme of postmodernist critique
of modernism, against the would-be totalitarianism of the modernist movement. It can be pointed out en passant that modernism (like its postmodernist developments) was not the monolithic whole but (like any other) a historical moment rife with contradictions as yet unresolved. But, for the present purposes, it is important to show that, far from representing the radical and revolutionary breakaway it claims to be, postmodernist theorizing carries on the same contradictions as its disclaimed father.

The intention of the pages that follow is to show how the would-be 'democratization' of the dialogue between cultures, the promotion and celebration of 'difference', in the terms promoted by certain critics of modernity, leaves room for an unreflected practice of the same kind of aporias it imputes to its adversaries. The exhibition Magiciens de la terre is a paradigm of postmodernist trends in the visual arts. Its implications are of some consequence, as its organizers deliberately intended, for reconsidering the very project of modernity. One of the polemical targets of the exhibition was the by now ideologically disgraced exhibition 'Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art organized by William Rubin that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984. Having criticized the formalist implications of that operation, the organizer of Magiciens... went on to say: "I am really against the assumption (underlying in a way also Rubin's exhibition) that we have in fact destroyed all cultures with Western technology". The remark that, de facto, 'non-Western' cultures have not been destroyed by 'Western technology', ought not to blind the eye to the consideration that many (if not most) indeed have, and for those who survived the impact all the evidence suggests that the final bill has not yet been delivered. But there we are: postmodernism acknowledges synchronicity as the only legitimate site of historical evaluation. Its capability to put historical movements into perspective (including itself) is not its forte. Thus a movement such as 'Primitivism' is not given its historical due in terms of the impact it had within its own context at the time it rocked the European cultural scene. Instead, the rules of the judicial process instituted by postmodernist theorizing are applied retroactively (a most unfair procedure): the defendant is condemned in absentia and the dead dog kicked about the historical stage.

The issue at stake here is not whether or not, and what, 'Western technology' has destroyed of 'other cultures'. In historical terms, the question makes little sense; how many internal 'cultures' has 'Western technology' destroyed? How do we distinguish between 'change' and 'disruption'? Rather, one ought to interrogate and understand the nature of the changes brought about in those sociocultural formations 'the West' did not (or has not as yet) literally wiped off the world scene. It is in placing the question at the historical level concerning the nature of continuity (where it exists, that is) that the postmodernist delusion of synchronicity can be dispelled. The simultaneous existence of different 'cultural species' assumed to be the very evidence of the 'polyvocality of culture' overlooks the issues stemming from the consideration of power differentials, of the decalege that exists between centre and periphery in the contemporary situation. Such differentialcentric and biocentric interests in evolutionist
Yuendumu Community Ceremonial, Central Australia.

for ‘ideological soundness’). But they must be taken into account to break down the conception that ‘cultures’ constitute discrete entities, self-enclosed wholes ‘each speaking its own tongue’ in the dialogical polyphony of the world system. The organizer of *Magiciens...* sees in the exhibition a celebration of ‘dialogue’ and of the ‘...vivacity... and... flexibility in responding to the contact with Western civilization’.

However, his celebration of ‘dialogue’ as the legitimizing arena for different ‘points of view’ overlooks precisely the underlying process that renders translation and communication possible on new grounds. Activities of an ‘artistic’ kind are being explicitly interpreted all over the world as the carriers of ‘cultural’ and ‘ethnic’ identity. In Europe, Ladin artists are promoted as bearers and shapers of the ‘culture’ of the Ladin ethnic minority in the Dolomites. The works in the recent exhibitions of Eduardo Chillida and Jasper Johns (*et tu quoque!*) at the Hayward Gallery in London were presented as being variously connected with the former’s ‘Basqueness’ and the latter’s ‘Americaness’. Amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria new forms of theatrical performance incorporate traditional forms towards the formation of an intentional, self-conscious ‘Yoruba identity’. From Australia, a group of Yuendumu Aboriginals produced a work for *Magiciens...* ‘to defend their aboriginal identity’.

In the United States native Americans react to the suggestion that their art forms are made for the sake of the tourist market by claiming that they


are strictly linked to their culture and tradition. The list could go on indefinitely. Thus, there is in the polyphony of world cultures a tune — the same — being played in different idioms. The very fact that it is ‘traditional’ forms (however re-interpreted) that are made the carriers of what James Clifford enthusiastically called “produced authenticity”, ought to warn against an a-dialectical celebration of difference. The tune is indeed what Hegel (another abused corpse on the by now overcrowded defendants’ bench of postmodernism) foreplayed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in terms of ‘the Spirit’ becoming self-aware that reality is its own production. The more the sociocultural formations are assimilated to the world system of late capitalism, the more their differences become a matter of self-conscious representation — a matter of ‘culture’ as the system of deliberately implemented markers of distinctiveness, all the more efficacious the more everybody is engaged in the same game and recognizes the tune. ‘Culture’, thus, becomes embodied primarily in ‘art’ as ‘artificium’: the production on a surplus to fulfil an extra-demand for ‘difference’ coming from the actor as much as it comes from its audience.

It is the dialectic of rationality in the age of late Capitalism that the postmodern project overlooks. To its theorists, Hegelian (and Marxist, by the way) rationality does not also (if not exclusively) belong to ‘the movement of the real’ as its implicit content, *pace* wellwishers. It is instead a morally wicked, imperially flawed ‘project’ subjectively created and therefore dispensable by the moral decree of cultural policies. But in so doing postmodernist theorists cannot articulate the complexities — and the paradoxes — of the present situation: that it is when ‘cultures’ have become too similar, and not when they are intrinsically ‘different’, that the game to stress difference really begins, and artificially.

In more general terms, a synthesis of the debate concerning the issue of ‘rationality’ between the modernist tradition and its critics can be found in the introduction to a recently translated work by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Habermas reconstructs the philosophical discourse of modernity as fundamentally centered upon the search for the conditions of a rational development of the resources available to humanity. The project that the Enlightenment brought to the self-awareness of Western civilization has its roots firmly established in the tradition of ‘rationalist’ thinking. A line runs through Descartes, Kant, Locke, Hegel and Marx. Even in the diversity of their strategies, they all held on to the concept of Subjective Reason understood as the possibility to work out a project characterized by both inter-individual validity and practical effectiveness. To them, ‘reason’ was necessary and cogent. A critique of reason in terms of the rejection of the dominant parameters of truth could be conducted, as it was in the works by uncompromising critics such as Adorno and Horkheimer — or even Marx himself — by the same tools of rationality as a tool that could be turned even against itself. Alternatives to the existing conditions could be conflicting and incompatible, but all of them were to claim their compelling truth-content in terms of a closer proximity to the methods of rational practice and thought. Postmodernist theorizing challenges all that. In the Introduction to Habermas’ work, Thomas McCarthy writes: “To the necessity that characterizes reason in the
Cartesian-Kantian view, the radical critics oppose the contingency and conventionality of the rules, criteria and products of what counts as rational speech and action at any given time and place".\(^{11}\) To the trans-cultural availability of rationality as the instrument of inter-subjective consensus, postmodernism opposes a radically relativistic stance: as the organizer of \textit{Magiciens}... put it, there are cultures “whose modes of thinking are utterly different from ours”.\(^{12}\) Postmodernist authors such as Lyotard, Baudrillard and Derrida oppose to the universality of reason “...an irreducible plurality of incommensurable lifeworlds and forms of life, the irremediably ‘local’ character of all truth, argument, and validity; to the \textit{a priori}, the empirical; to certainty, fallibility; to unity, heterogeneity; to homogeneity, the fragmentary (...), to the unconditioned, a rejection of ultimate foundations in any form.”\(^{13}\)

\textbf{THE PICTURES}

\textit{Magiciens de la terre} carries out at least two of the contentions of postmodernism. ‘Plurality’ and ‘locality’ come to the forefront as the major meanings of the event. The idea of plurality is put through by hybridizing the concept of the artwork. Contemporary Western works are set side by side creations from other world traditions. Furthermore, many of the works produced \textit{geographically} outside Europe and North America bear the mark of a style devoid of the traditional references that a naive viewer, trapped within the schemes of modernist ‘primitivism’, would expect.

Where could the snake-eagle have been produced? (Felipe Linares, Leonardo Linares-Vargas, David Linares-Vargas, \textit{Aguila Serpiente}, 1989). It could have been produced anywhere. By geographic accident, it was made in Mexico. Not only does the cultural necessity of the work no longer shine through the very object: its proximity to works in the Western tradition whose referentiality is reflexive, since for a long time in the Western tradition ‘the work refers to itself’, does away with the problem. “What was it used for?" asks the naive ethnographer. “It does not matter”, is the answer: "Do whatever you feel like with it", is the implicit invitation. If the snake-eagle bears implications of a ritual or religious nature, that is incidental. The work, as is proper of postmodernist solipsism, is forced to speak its own truth. It does not talk to us through its difference. It stimulates neither evocation nor prejudice in that it can be perceived as having its own language and its own referentiality. It is democratic and mute.

The snake-eagle is part of a heterogeneous \textit{bric-a-brac} in which the viewer can find objects and attribute functions. He can discover and marvel as she pleases: distances are narrowed, difference is blurred.

What do you make of this, then? (Kane Kwei, \textit{Coffins}, Accra, Ghana, 1988). An acquaintance of mine, a member of the post-colonial set of white entrepreneurs in West Africa, bought one to place in his dining room as a bar chest. He thought that, since Africans are very humorous people, his surrealist displacement of the object would not betray its secret aspiration to make one laugh at the incongruence. The work of art is a coffin.
Why then, one might ask, has an African coffin not been displayed alongside a European coffin? Why did the organizers of the exhibition overlook function — or, conversely, why did they underplay the 'artistic' content of a European equivalent? If the 'incommensurability' of the Ghanian coffins were to be promoted, in coherence with the tenets of postmodernism, then it should have been exhibited alongside a European counterpart, to set a difference and measure a distance through comparison. As it stands, the Ghanian coffin is rendered instead commensurable. How does this happen?

We have to ask ourselves what a coffin is in the Western tradition. After the demise of the religious baroque imagination, it is an object that bears no external reference, no signs. Is the dominant idea not that one ought to be buried in a coffin 'as simple as possible'? The interest of the Ghanian coffin, then, resides precisely in its paradoxicality. It carries all the more referentiality in that it is a real object. 'To be buried in a Mercedes Benz, in a tuna fish, in a lobster: what a joke!'.

Thus, it is once again the point of view of the West that defines its 'artistic dignity': an object whose iconicity countervenes the laws of its functionality — and vice versa? What a relief in the age of design, when the demands of sales figures are such as to force industry to conciliate aesthetic form and functional content!

What is lost in this kind of cultural operation is, precisely and against
the very intentions of the organizers, the specificity of the object, its incommensurability. In fact, the uniqueness of its make, in the original context, does not reside in its ethnocentrically attributed paradoxicality. Such coffins are full of references to a context of death that exists beyond and besides them. They are part of a lifeworld, and there they are ‘normal’: coffins in Africa are for sale to be used, they are not there to be contemplated and marvelled at.

Tiptoeing on the fine details of cultural contextualization is not the strong side of the exhibition. If the perception of a time and a space are instruments, however weak, to create a perspective, and with perspective a warning towards critical consideration, then time and space are exactly what the exhibition tries to do away with.

The curator of the exhibition writes in the catalogue that one of the aims of the exhibition is to overcome the prejudice that ‘non-Western art’ is timeless. To the idea of the archaic and the archetypal, the organizers intend to substitute the idea of the contemporaneity of ‘traditional’ artistic production in non-Western countries. The implicit polemical target of this operation, of course, is the notion of ‘primitivism’ that informed so many modern artists.

Thus, a painting in the tradition of Buddhist religious art from Nepal (Nuche Kaji Bajracharya, Arja Tara, 1988) is shown together with a record of a performance walk along the Chinese wall by Marina Abramovic (Marina Abramovic, Performance Walk, China, 1988).

What is ‘contemporaneity’ made of, in this case?

We have on the one hand the actuality of a tradition in which, as the catalogue duly records, ‘spiritual life and pictorial representation’ are closely associated. Furthermore, the comment to the painting tells us that artists who associate the two ‘are increasingly rare’.

On the other hand, in the performance of the Yugoslav artist, we have the frozen, instant image of a deliberately ephemeral event. The event, though, has taken place along one of the icons of alleged timelessness and endurance. Why the Chinese Wall, otherwise? Why not the walk from home to the grocer’s, instead?

Thus, the two images trade meaning with one another: the first — the Nepali work — embodies the cultural weight of a millenarian tradition on the wane. The other represents the deliberate shallowness of a cultural tradition at odds with the repetition, fixity and reified glorification of its artistic tradition. On the one hand a resistance to change, on the other hand a ‘giving way’ to the immediate and the unmediated. Why should the two works be ‘contemporary’? Why should they cohabit the same space?

The fact that they are ‘contemporary’ is treated as a mere accident of time. No consideration is given to the depth of the works’ respective relation to their past. No assessment of the quality of that relation is attempted. All that leads to the erasure of difference and to the proclamation of commensurability.

‘Contemporaneity’, thus, is not to be understood in the relation the two works entertain with their past. Were one to understand the term historically, the fraud of the equivalence proclaimed by the organizers would be unveiled. What desperately holds out against assimilation by
clinging on to its past as to a lifebuoy is rendered compatible with what walks over its past — literally — with the self-assured stride of a civilization that cannot tolerate repetition any longer.

In erasing the notion of historical development, 'contemporaneity' also bans that of an irreducible difference. 'Difference' I here understand in terms of the Althusserian *decalage* (the interval, the hiatus) that objectively exists between the dominant and the dominated, the hegemonic and the hegemonized, the winner and the loser in history.

To a critical appraisal of the state of the play, postmodernism substitutes an apparently egalitarian *touI va bien*. Threatened pandas will coexist with cockroaches, '...and the lion shall eat straw like the ox' (Isaiah 11: 7). Such a projected image of a reconciled world is ideological, and therefore it is false. By granting the optimism of contemporaneity 'to all creatures great and small' it hides under the carpet of the universal dignity of art those which the process of selection has done away with.

In democratically bestowing the attributes of artistic dignity it loses sight of the infamies perpetrated through history. After all rare species, like the unique artist 'who still combines spiritual and pictorial achievements', are valuable precisely because the rest of his likes have been disposed of.

The levelling of time that goes on in the postmodernist concept of contemporaneity is paralleled by the erasure of distance in space.

Works in the tradition of folk art with religious and ritual implications
from Benin, West Africa (Cyprient Tokoudagba, Mural Paintings on a Shrine to Tohossou, the Water God and Group representing the divinities of Voodoo: Legba (front, sitting) and Zangbeto (standing), Abomey, Benin, n.d.) are shown side by side works in the line of hyperrealism inspired by photographic funerary portraits from Nigeria (S. J. Akpan, Portrait of a Chief, Akwa, Ibon State, Nigeria) and by photographic techniques of the advertising industry in what are described in the catalogue as “living images, full of most corrosive humour” from Zaire. (Cheri Samba, Hope makes you live, Kinshasa Ngiri-Ngiri, Zaire).

If the aim of the exhibition is to overcome the prejudice of an ‘archaic’ Africa stuck to the repetition of the same ‘primitivist’ art, no sooner is the prejudice kicked out of the door than it sneaks back in through the window. Who would think of exhibiting a cross section of artistic production in the West by showing side by side Schnabel and my friend Thingummybob’s works? Who has ever done a show featuring embroidered slippers from a remote village in the Abruzzi (where on earth is that?) and Jackson Pollock’s canvases?

Why is Africa, in other words, still the land of the indistinct and indistinguishable? The exhibition gives us everything imaginable that comes from Africa — tout le monde is there, everything is artistic, worthy, valuable: ‘Gee, aren’t Africans artistic?’ Is there, today, anything African not worth exhibiting?

What is this? Is this an overcompensation for the evil done in the past? Is the lack, or even the unwillingness itself, to bring upon ourselves the responsibility to judge and select, not perhaps as discriminatory and patronising as the old colonial attitudes.

The proximity of works coming from utterly different traditions, functions, purposes and skills, lifeworlds miles apart from one another both in space and time banged together without warning — all that evokes the same totalitarian attitude of the colonialists who brought back to Europe ‘specimens’: one stuffed lion, one Hottentot, one fetish, one ostrich egg, one Pygmy and one book to write about the oddities of the Dark Continent.

But there we are: Jean-Hubert Martin, the organizer, tells us that the exhibition intends to be not like a Museum “…which classifies, regiments and orders…”, but like a cabinet of curiosities, a “…place of marvel and knowledge, where the former stimulates the latter and the play of similitudes and analogies do not create the unique and exceptional piece”.¹⁷

We have to ask ourselves whether a cabinet of curiosities can exist, today, in the terms advocated by the organizer of Magiciens de la terre. Which pre-modern marvel is left to marvel about in the age when anything can be reproduced, including the work of art? What random order can suggest new combinations and foster new knowledge in the epoch when even chaos theory is well under control?

More positively, one has to point out that cabinets of curiosities led to the formation of Museums as their natural development following the historical unfolding of the Enlightenment. It is false to think that by ‘going back’ to the Cabinet one can find a way out of Museums, as they are historically built, the former inside the latter. There is no going back to the alleged rummage of a medieval mind that works by analogy and
similarity after it has been discovered and rationalized for what it was. Self-awareness, of whatever stuff it is made, is there to prevent it.

After Linnaeus — it can be further argued against the aesthetic project of postmodernism — there is no going back in innocence to the randomness of a Borgesian bestiary, except, if at all possible, as a collective regression.

Sense, in fact, rather than be created anew as hoped by postmodernist deconstructions, would creep back in the old form for the very fact of having already happened in a certain, historically determined way and not otherwise. History does not repeat itself but in the beholder’s eyes: therefore, it cannot repeat itself.

Thus, the ‘new look upon reality’ advocated by the theorists of postmodernism turns out to be the old look of an undistinguished, undistinguishing reason that has come to the end of its historical tether. The creative confusion so optimistically advocated by the critics of the Enlightenment turns out to be a particular case of artificial hybridization. Hybridization, today, cannot be any longer a scoop of fantasy: it is, ironically, a process controlled by genetic engineering, one of the most powerful, if disturbing, children of the Enlightenment.

Out of metaphor, the plurality and locality of the art work that enterprises like Magiciens de la terre claim to promote and sustain are tainted by the very commensurability that the West has taken over, unrequested, as its historical duty to promote. This leads to other contradictions.

The exhibition puts on show the work of an artist named as Nera Jambruk (Facade Painting for Men’s House, region of Maprik, East Sepik Province, New Guinea 1988). Such paintings are collectively produced by all men in the community at the time of the initiation of a new age set into the men’s cult in New Guinea. As the anthropologist Donald Tuzin tells us in a comprehensive study of initiation cycles in the region, artists draw their authority not so much as individual creators isolated from their social surroundings, but as leaders capable of organizing and directing the collective enterprise. Hence their political role within Arapesh and Abelam societies.18

Contrary to the contextualization of the artist produced in anthropological literature, the exhibition presents the artist as ‘the Artist’, with a capital A, in line with the Western tradition. This is deliberate. Jean-Hubert Martin writes in the Introduction to the catalogue that one of the aims of the event is to dissolve the Western prejudice that non-Western art is anonymous. Thus, every work is attributed to a single individuality, named and family-named. To drive the concept home, no indication of the ethnic identity of non-Western artists is given, but only his or her nationality.

This kind of approach does violence to the work. It becomes decontextualized, stuck on the necessity of its having been produced by somebody as if that individual necessity alone, following the Western tradition, might be sufficient to identify it. But it is not. Such works have sense precisely because they are collective. Their author is a still integrated society in which things come to existence through a collective effort — but for how long yet, incidentally? In the West, the terrors of anonymous crowds have rendered collectivity synonymous with loss of the self and degradation. Thus, the exhibition ethnocentrically mistakes ‘collectivity’

for 'anonymity' and does away with the former by sticking a name below the work. But in so doing, it assimilates the work to the schemata of authorship. If 'Men of the Abelam Community, village of Apangai, New Guinea', is its ethnographic author, then that very author is what gets lost. Paradoxically, and in spite of its own intentions, by naming a work the exhibition has rendered it anonymous.

The solipsism advocated by postmodernism as the triumph of the individual over 'society' comes across in the attempt to redraw the World map so as to make every artist the centre of the World. In the catalogue, the name of the author is placed under a projection of the World Map shifted in such a way that, in all instances, the black dot marking the provenance of the artist is set at the very centre.

Such revocation of the Galilean tenet according to which humanity is not at the centre of the universe, transfers the logic of the Inquisition from humanity to the individual. It is the author rendered, as we have seen isolated, lonely and exclusive, that is now dragged onto the centre of the World. But that proclamation of a centrality for all ends up by suggesting interchangeability, overlapping, commensurability: an individual who occupies on earth the same place as hundreds of others is identical and henceforth disposable, equivalent and therefore redundant.

Notwithstanding the aporias of postmodernism, there is in it, perhaps, a genuine attempt to escape the trap of a totalitarian, judgemental Reason held responsible for both the horrors of the Congo and for those of Auschwitz. Yet, the postmodern project of relativizing all criteria ends upon by being as totalitarian as its counterpart. Cultures, in fact, are proclaimed 'equal', contemporary and proximate, at the end of an epoch that has assimilated them all to a world system in which the rate of interest is the truly universal, commensurable leveller.

_Magiciens de la terre_ is part of that process. It requisitions the bits and pieces which are left of formerly autonomous languages, and sets them in dialogue through the grill of World Culture to buttress up the exhausted international jargon of art production and marketing.

'Cultures' are permitted to take off at dusk, like the Hegelian Minerva's owl, when history has been made and the subsumption of diversity under the umbrella of the World System is a fait accompli. Postmodernism, in one sense at least, is ancillary to that process. It rounds up and closes the circle by setting the exchange rate of cultures — their common denominator as 'art'. 