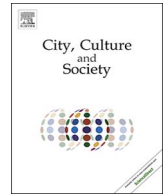




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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ccsMeditations on the ‘wrong place’: Europe in Africa; Africa in Europe^{☆,☆☆}

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From the cartographer to the artist, the practice of map-making has largely resulted in a visual output, that of the map. The following article will present the work of art practitioners, specifically the art photographers Svea Josephy (1969 -) and Omar Victor Diop (1980 -), as an illustration of the visual mapping of a migrant culture/diaspora and the transportation of a place and culture from Europe to Africa and Africa to Europe. The premise of the article being that there are many Africas and Europes, as there are pockets of ‘Africa in Europe’ and ‘Europe in Africa’. Thus, ultimately both Africa and Europe exist at times philosophically in the ‘wrong place’. The art historian Miwon Kwon outlines her concept of the ‘wrong place’ in her essay ‘The Wrong Place’ (2004, p. 29 - 41). This theory will be used as an entry into the discussion in the article.

1. Introduction

The artist is a map-maker ... Poetry is a place.

- William S. Burroughs (Barnes, 2002)

What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.

- Michel de Certeau (De Certeau, 1984, p. 129, p. 129)

Signposts are curious objects, as they appear to measure distance. They mark our landscapes and roadsides, not only indicating the direction/distance to a final destination, but as if they have miraculously measured how far we have come in order to indicate how far we have yet to travel. In other instances, the signpost has a more ornamental quality than a functional one, like the signpost situated at The Pierhead at the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, in Cape Town (South Africa) (Fig. 1). Here perched on the edge of The Pierhead is what appears to be a Victorian relic, a signpost painted in black with white embossed letters and numerals inscribing the place-names and distances to cities around the world. Like a litany it recites: *Mombasa 3985 km; Boston 12421 km; Buenos Aires 6456 km; South Pole 6131 km; Sydney 12202 km; Osaka 14330 km; Rio de Janeiro 6061 km; San Francisco 16690 km; Zurich 9086 km; Auckland 14227 km; Chicago 13662 km; Singapore 9661 km*, with its outstretched arms indicating the direction to these locations. Here the signpost acts much like a world map/globe as it

appears as if the world has converged in one place, incidentally the ‘wrong place’ geographically.

The art historian Miwon Kwon outlined her concept of the ‘wrong place’ in her essay ‘The Wrong Place’ (2004, p. 29–41), where she states:

But what is a ‘wrong’ place? How does one recognise it as such, as opposed to a ‘right’ place? [...] Is being in the wrong place the same thing as being out of place? And what are the effects of such mis/displacements for art, subjectivity, and locational identities? In light of the intensified mobilisation of bodies, information, images, and commodities on the one hand, and the greater and greater homogenisation and standardisation of places on the other [...], I continue to wonder about the impact, both positive and negative, of the spatial and temporal experiences that such conditions engender not only in terms of cultural practice but more basically for our psyches, our sense of self, our sense of well-being, our sense of belonging to a place and culture. (2004, p. 30)

Currently, the above is furthermore complicated by the world being in constant flux and the mobilisation of bodies in a post-colonial, conflict ridden and globalised world, causing the further displacement of culture and identity. Thus, the ‘sense of belonging to a place and culture’ is compounded. In terms of Cultural Mapping in this instance,

[☆] I entitled a chapter in my Masters in Philosophy in Fine Art thesis in 2008 similarly. Most of the discussion here is an extension of that chapter, with reference to more art practitioners' work and new observations.

^{☆☆} The term ‘the wrong place’ was conceived by the art historian Miwon Kwon and outlined in her essay ‘The Wrong Place’. See: Kwon, M. (2004). The Wrong Place. In C. Doherty (Ed.), *Contemporary Art: from studio to situation* (pp. 29–41). London: Black Dog Publishing. The essay was initially presented as a lecture for the International Lecture Series, which played an essential part of the art project *In All the Wrong Places* presented at The Ottawa Art Gallery in 1999. The initiative *In All the Wrong Places* was curated by Sylvie Fortin and ran for six months (May–November 1999), utilizing alternative sites throughout Ottawa with the aim to encourage a dialogue between artwork, artist, location and viewer. Kwon's lecture was first published in the periodical *Art Journal* (Spring 2000) and then amended for the conclusion to her book *One Place After Another: site-specific art and locational identity* (2002), before appearing in *Contemporary Art: from studio to situation* (2004).

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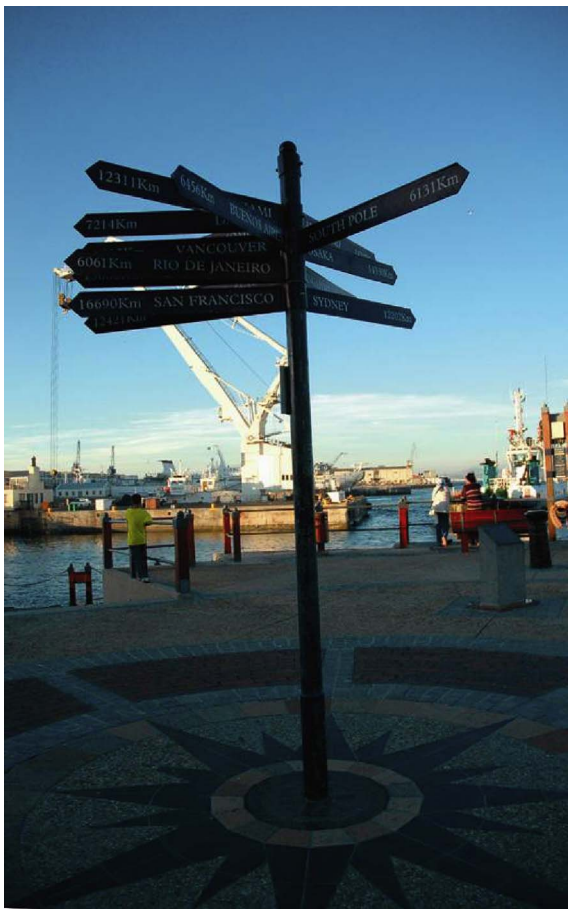


Fig. 1. Signpost at the pierhead at the victoria and alfred waterfront, cape town (South Africa), 28 April 2006.

Source: Milia Lorraine Khoury

culture can be perceived as the following: culture as associated with a place and culture as relating to identity. This refers to Cultural Mapping the 'intangibles' within a culture like stories, expression, heritage, identity and place. As within the practice of Cultural Mapping, there are 'tangible' and 'intangible' resources of a given culture. Thus, artistic expression or artwork on place and identity can be seen as an intangible resource. As Clark, Sutherland and Young (1995) outline:

Cultural mapping involves a community identifying and documenting local cultural resources. Through this research cultural elements are recorded – the tangibles like galleries, craft industries, distinctive landmarks, local events and industries, as well as the intangibles like memories, personal histories, attitudes and values.

These ideas around culture - as relating to place and identity - will be explored below, as well as the concept of the 'wrong place' illustrated in contemporary artistic practice by referring largely to the photographic series by the South African photographer Svea Josephy (1969 -) entitled *Twin Town* (2007) (Malcomess, 2007) and the photographic project by the Senegalese photographer Omar Victor Diop's (1980 -) series entitled *Project Diaspora* (2014) (De Dieu, 2014)¹. Further, the transplantation of place: Europe in Africa; Africa in Europe will be discussed. Additionally the South African artist Gerhard Marx's

¹ These artistic projects are presented here as an illustration of Cultural Mapping intangibles. Cultural Mapping is an emerging research field and practice.

'map drawings' will be referred to (Dodd, 2006).

2. Defining the 'wrong place'

In defining the 'wrong place' in relation to contemporary artistic/cultural practice Miwon Kwon further elaborates that this unhinged question of 'belonging to a place and culture' has been particularly interrogated in current site-specific art produced by a new generation of artists, namely Andrea Fraser (1965 -), Mark Dion (1961 -), Renée Green (1959 -) and Christian Philipp Müller (1957 -). In their interrogations they have moved beyond the original concept of site-specific art as 'phenomenologically-orientated' and bound to a specific site/place, as exemplified by works like Richard Serra's (1939 -) *Tilted Arc* (1981) (Kwon, 2004). James Meyer, in his writings on site-specific art, distinguishes between the site-orientated works of the 1960s and 1970s and those of current practice by referring to two concepts of site: 'literal site' and 'functional site'.² Meyer defines 'literal site' as being 'in-situ'; it is an actual location, a singular place³ (Meyer, 2000), whereas 'functional site' (more prevalent in contemporary practice) may possibly not include a 'physical place' but rather a dialogue and discourse between different sites/locations, essentially creating an inter-textual network between sites (Meyer, 2000). As Meyer explains:

In contrast, the functional site may or may not incorporate a physical place.⁴ It certainly does not *privilege* this place. Instead, it is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all). It is an informational site, a palimpsest of text, photographs and video recordings, physical places and things: an allegorical site, to recall Craig Owens's term, aptly coined to describe Robert Smithson's polymathic enterprise, whose vectored and discursive notion of "places" opposes Serra's phenomenological model. It is no longer an obdurate steel wall, attached to the plaza for eternity. On the contrary, the functional work refuses the intransigence of literal site specificity. It is a temporary thing, a movement, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories: a place marked and swiftly abandoned. The mobile site thus courts its destruction; it is wilfully temporary; its nature is not to endure but to *come down*. (Meyer, 2000, p. 25, p. 25)

This concept of the 'mobile site' brings to the fore the idea of the artist as a 'nomad'⁵ or 'artist-traveller', moving from site to site, and of his/her practice itself being nomadic (Meyer, 2000). Meyer suggests that as the artist moves from place to place, the site does not just impinge on the work a set of associations, but the place is impinged on or is affected by the artist's subjective and historical relationship with that particular place. This is particularly noticeable in the artist Christian Philipp Müller's earlier work, where he created several performative site-specific works by carrying out 'illegal border crossings'. From 1993 onwards, posing as a hitchhiker, Müller crossed official Austrian borders into neighbouring countries, like the former Czechoslovakia and Poland, without the necessary travel documents/visas required by

² Miwon Kwon on page 30 & 31 of her essay 'The Wrong Place' also references James Meyer's new definitions on site-specific art as an entry into her discussion on the 'wrong place'.

³ James Meyer in his definition of the 'literal site' quotes Joseph Kosuth in saying that the artwork is 'in-situ'. The original reference to Kosuth's statement is as follows: Kosuth, J. (1991). '1975'. In G. Guericio (Ed.), *Art after Philosophy and After: collected writings* (p. 134). Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁴ To further define, the 'functional site' need not be an actual place/space, as in the case of the 'literal site'. The 'functional site' is a means of creating intertextual references or a means to critique by, for example the critique of 'the body' or 'the institution' can be a 'functional site'. For further reading see: Meyer, J. (2000). *The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity*. In E. Suderburg (Ed.), *Space, Site, Intervention: situating installation art* (pp. 23-37). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁵ For reference to these concepts see: Kwon, M. (2000). *One Place after Another: notes on site specificity*. In E. Suderburg (Ed.), *Space, Site, Intervention: situating installation art* (pp. 38 - 63). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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