

From *Holy Land* to *Open your eyes*  
Serge Gruzinski

We remember *Holy Land* (2006), this Canary seashore that Kader Attia turned into a cemetery. It is on a similar strand that motor-boats unship stowaways who are in search of a promised land, at least those who didn't disappear swallowed up by the waves. Like so many steles or tombstones – seen from far away, one may mistake them for surfboards stuck in the sand- mirrors everywhere show the visitor his own reflection. An unsettling reminiscence of the missing in a memorial place without memory, haunted by disappearance and absence. The Atlantic strands seem quite far away from the Great War battlefields. *Open your eyes* carries our gaze towards the great theater of modern war. Kader Attia's installation visits another memorial site endowed with all the visibility granted by official histories and remembrance rituals. Worlds away from Fuerteventura beach, First World War trenches stick up with their dismembered bodies, dead or still alive. If Canary stowaways leave no trace and in mirrors the visitor sees only his own image reflected upon the blue sky, the Great War maimed, at least on the French side, did not go unnoticed : photographed, listed, studied, they are also - as much as possible – “resurrected” and rebuilt. And therefore repaired. To the invisibility of the *Holy Land* missing Africans, Kader Attia opposes these ghosts of the first half of the twentieth century whose image has been preserved because they were broken – we called them “broken faces” - and yet they were likely to be repaired, hence reintroduced in the society of the living and socially reusable in many ways. Medicine prowess, humanitarian compassion, exaltation of good works and charity organizations, heroism of the suffering combatant, war damage sublimation, reparation allows for all that and it is surprising that historians and anthropologists did not give it more attention in their works.

#### REPAIR or REWEAVE SOCIETY

A modest operation, often erased from the sources and, in theory, made to remain invisible, reparation, on reflection, soon appears to be ubiquitous. By dint of listing its uses we soon realize that it appears as a major and constant reconstruction process or simply one of cultures and societies construction. In history, absolute innovations as far as total destructions remain the exception since we wouldn't know how to start from scratch and that there will always be remnants to fix or things to redo. Thus we spend our social and intimate existence repairing: a wound that heals is a tissue that is being repaired and cell biology teaches us that eukaryotic cells are able to repair damages caused to their DNA. We repair our machines. These have increased since the end of the eighteenth century and rule the way we consider the coming centuries. So much so that reparation has become a leitmotif of Western and Asian science fiction. *Blade Runner* replicas along with all their Korean and Japanese descendants are fighting to repair aging organisms, defective or with limited life. Repairing the beloved becomes even a form of love, taking tragic, melodramatic and sometimes even humorous turns when WALL-E's little robot strives to revive his dear EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator).

#### REPAIR RAMSCHAKLE SOCIETIES

However reparation can be something else than an individual initiative or a mechanical problem. It becomes a collective endeavor when, after a defeat or a natural disaster, we must as a matter of urgency repair battered societies. The case takes huge proportions when the shock involves societies who have known nothing about one other. Under the stroke of the Spanish invasion, Mexican society collapses in 1521, a founding stage of Western modernity and barbarism. What to do after the fall of Tenochtitlan and Indian societies' rout? There remained, of course, entire parts of the defeated societies and the few thousands of Europeans were unable to bring from the Old World to the New one but snatches of “Western civilization”. Failing to go back – to the Pre-Hispanic world- or to have the means to reproduce Spain on the New World ground, we had to build, voluntarily or not, whether spontaneously or deliberately - new forms of social organization, political and religious, in other words build a colonial society. And therefore, an unprecedented society, under European domination but at the same time put thousands of leagues away from the Iberian Peninsula. Under these conditions, failing to innovate at every turn - because innovating implies a project, means, time to think- we had to clear away the ruins, recover and repair all that could be repaired. When we mention societies, civilizations or again religions constructions we paradoxically forget

or we refuse to see that to construct means most of the time to recycle and to repair: in many fields do-it-yourself is and will remain the norm. In a broken and colonized society, on each side, we repair at every turn. On the native side, we do not settle for pieces of walls as a shelter or simply tinker up ceramics to cook a scanty pittance. We must also learn to repair all that the invasion has damaged: the rituals, the stream of time, feasts and markets cycles but also networks and alliances. On the Spanish side hence the conquerors', we also repair as a matter of urgency: all is missing, starting with weapons, guns, horses saddles, torn clothes, battered helmets, armors and chain-mails pierced by Aztec darts or rusted because of the rain. Learning to fix others' things, is also entering into their world. One of the first tasks of the Franciscan missionaries in America will be to train Indian craftsmen who can mold iron and leather at the European way and, above all, liable to repair what war and time have damaged. This apprenticeship, often neglected by historians, has played a leading role in societies forced integration. On the one hand, by establishing settlers' dependency on the local labor force, and on the other hand by initiating natives into the secrets of European objects manufacturing, such as locks, weapons or musical instruments. In young colonial cities and the New World's countryside, where European imports are rare and extremely expensive, reparation is more than a survival mode, it's almost a way of life and for many a livelihood. When do-it-yourself becomes impossible and replacement just as well, humanity, even European, must change or lose its habits: for a long time in many Brazilian villages, for lack of shoes to mend, Portuguese settlers walked around barefoot as slaves and natives.

#### REPAIR / CROSS-BREED

If materials used come from the other board, DIY or reparation create an object never before seen, leading to new practices, manners or beliefs. To repair fallen cults and try to give them a colonial extension, Indians tampered with names, places, images: in Mexico the Spanish Virgin of Guadalupe served for "repairing" the cult of Tonantzin goddess, first by adorning it with a layer of Christian veneer, then by blending the old icon in the miraculous image that has prevailed to this day. In all fields repair rhymes with cross-breed and in all fields these proceedings disturb: The REPAIRED is opposed to the INTACT just as the HYBRID is opposed to the AUTHENTIC. Consequently, neither the repair nor the hybrid have their place in traditional museums. If we keep them instead of getting rid of them, objects thus listed end up most often confined to storerooms, out of the general public's sight, who is ever more asking for purity and integrality. However an old, broken marble - and, in theory, unrepaired, hence despite all intact in its incompleteness- will have the honors of an exhibition and a catalog: we can be broken and classic, and so break away from patched up or hybrid sub-worlds. The patched up and the repaired draw unthought-of *middle-grounds* that Art history but also anthropology and history in general have for a long time carefully shunned. Early twentieth century Negro Arts admirers have hardly done otherwise, as they were in search of pure forms, "authentically" African, tirelessly liable to feed their creative process. In fact to talk about reparation, rather than cross-breeding, most likely corresponds better to what the artist or craftsman might have had in mind. No creator decides to yield "hybrid" works or "authentic" works. Here are many modern categories which result from a scholarly theory of origins or a reflection on mixtures that are hardly the deeds of hands busy in workshops. However all reparations set the existence of a specific goal, of an urgency to fulfill and their achievement must meet efficiency criteria or at least fit the purpose or the effect intended. To repair is also often the will to keep all or part of the thing, thus ensuring a semblance of continuity: it is therefore to grow a special connection with time claiming to have taken a concrete, factual grip on it.

#### REPAIR / FOLD AWAY

The small Olmec mask conceived by Benvenuto Cellini and kept in Florence at the Palazzo Pitti is—it a reparation? Torn away from its pedestal, it has been through the hands of the famous Renaissance goldsmith, so much that it became listed as the Florentine master's full-fledged creation. Presentable, as it has been repaired, it undergoes a metamorphosis that inscribes it in the glorious history of Renaissance Arts. And its reparation will remain for a long time unspoken. When preparing an exhibition – *Planète métisse* at the Quai Branly Museum in 2007- I tried to get hold of an antique marble to embody the idea of classical purity. Nothing more difficult according to one of the Louvre curators, surprised at my ingenuousness: most ancient marbles are the result of several reparations that spread over centuries, going from the heart of the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century and which

consist in work parcels more or less significant, an arm, a leg, a head, or even just a nose. Japanese temples – and many others on the planet- are subject to constant reparations that have the characteristic of remaining invisible, denying to the European visitor the vital patina of centuries. They fold away time by disappearing themselves. Out of ignorance or unquenchable passion for the authentic, facing the Cellinian mask of Florence or the Louvre antique marble, two objects repaired and repaired with art, we agree to see only what appeals to us: the Greek purity, be it a Roman version, or the pre-Conquest exotic Mexican. Reparation is then quite imperceptible so as to drag the object from one world to another, wiping off its bill and hybrid history. Florence or Greece become thus the exclusive origin of an object that has yet seen the light of day in Olmec Mexico or which has continued to move from one European workshop to another. A number of art objects were thus created with the main intention to restore life to a damaged piece, too curious or too beautiful to be purely and simply thrown away. It is no coincidence that in Spanish America and the Iberian Peninsula we speak of "renovar" whenever we restore and repair a statue, a painting or an altar.

## REPAIR / REPLACE

In theory reparation stops where substitution and replacement begin. To replace: a way to compensate for what can no longer be patched up. It is also a way to keep one's distance from what remains beyond reach: fast enough Indians in Mexico will invent organs with flutes and these instruments of a new kind will produce sounds that will delight missionaries' ear. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the waves of neo-classicism will submerge Latin America Folk and Baroque Arts. The substitution is brutal. Baroque must be destroyed and no more repaired. Giving up reparation leads so to change and rupture. Leaves that this novelty takes in turn hold of the appropriations and reparations cycle, and leaves that these cycles become- as it is the case today- increasingly rapid.

## REPAIR / CONNECT

To repair is therefore also to connect - times, people, things ... - and that's why any global history of humanity must pay a profound attention to this gesture seemingly simple and commonplace which often consists in inventing a way to insert one world into another, not in a gratuitous manner, but to yield meaning and social manners. Kader Attia's installation increases encounters and face-to-face meetings between worlds. As he explains, "It will consist in creating encounters between Western and Outer Western worlds, at emblematic times, cruel or glorious, of their history. However beyond these juxtapositions, this work seeks to present a reading of existence through "universalities", more than a bipolar confrontation between West and Outer Western world". What conclusion to draw from all these objects placed face to face? Perhaps the incentive to shift borders and viewpoints, in other words "to think global". "To think global" is a challenge which historians and anthropologists are trying to take up today, eager to get out their old disciplines from the ruts of exotic monograph, from national history or Eurocentric grand narrative . How? Since the end of the twentieth century, contemporary art has opened up to us new paths: Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's camera, Pina Bausch's dance connect worlds and synchronize them in creative gestures, that bear one or more sense full wholes. With *Open you eyes: The Reparation*, Kader Attia turns into a historian, an archaeologist, an anthropologist and ethnologist in search of objects that can show us how societies rebuild themselves, face one another, intertwine and respond to one another. The effects of European modern war par excellence, the Great War, medicine "restorative" advances and its laboratories are faced with colonization destructive assaults and natives' appropriations. As if modernity with which we are concerned today consisted of these parallel and opposite movements - African do-it-yourself craft as well as cosmetic surgery - and it is these complex dynamics that we must try to think and identify first for lack of not being used to watch them. Kader Attia sees and shows - "Open your eyes"- that which social sciences and museums are often too slow to recognize. The exercise result? A beautiful global history lesson that brings together seemingly unrelated worlds, as it detects beneath appearances the ground-swells that bind them together. Whereof the need to review the old opposition between West and non-West that we have lived upon for centuries, which nonetheless the meteoric rise of an Asia who has digested westernization, the vibrant existence of a Latin America in the heart of all United States big cities and the inevitable presence of Western Europe new populations, bearers of the unexpected and the unpredictable, are finally undermining. One would like to imagine other dialogues or extend them. When First World War cartridges turn into lumbering butterflies of metal, we would want to fly them alongside other creations such as, for example,

the Mexican artist Erika Harrsh's fragile paper butterflies. These butterflies-dollars ready to fly off this summer in Manhattan sky to meet a huge flying dragon with a Mao head tell otherwise worlds' ravel, and not simply their encounter or their mere mixture on our narrow planet.