The Ultimate Contact Zone: Addressing Shared Human Concerns in Modern Art Museums and Biennials Curatorial Practice

Giulia Battaglia
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. M. A. Leigh
Second Reader: Dr. M. Keblusek
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Introduction

In her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt introduced the concept of the contact zone as a social space in which several cultures meet and interact in a number of ways. This idea was then further elaborated by James Clifford in his seminal essay "Museums as contact zones" (1997) in which he argued that museums operate as contact zones where diverse cultures are co-present in the exhibition space and their differences can be bridged.[1]

This idea of co-presence constitutes the starting point of this research. Today, face the emergence of globalisation the world has become increasingly multicultural in that several cultures cohabit the same geographical areas. Cohabitation, however, is more often frowned upon than welcomed, and this has become more visible in the last decades that have been dominated by feelings of xenophobia often leading to conflicts and strict policies on immigration.[2] It follows that today spaces of encounters where diverse cultures can establish relations of mutual trust and understanding are strongly needed.

In this research, the concept of the ultimate contact zone will be introduced as a combination of Pratt and Clifford's theories on intercultural encounters, with Andrea Witcomb's theories on addressing shared human concerns and employing a pedagogy of feeling in current exhibition practice presented respectively in her essays "Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity. Can museums move beyond pluralism?" (2009) and "Toward a Pedagogy of Feeling. Understanding How Museums Create a Space for Cross-Cultural Encounters" (2015). Lastly, Tony Bennett's notion of the exhibitionary complex first introduced in his work *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995), and later reviewed in his essay "Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture" (2006) will also be incorporated to the definition of the ultimate contact zone. It will be discussed that for exhibitionary complexes to fully function as spaces of encounters encouraging mutual understanding across diverse communities, curators should address shared human concerns and provide safe houses of equal representations in which diverse cultures meet horizontally without the prevalence of a dominant worldview.[3] Specifically, the display strategies should aim towards generating feelings of empathy in the audiences that can help them realise how, regardless of cultural and ethnic differences, diverse communities are often connected by a thread of similar thoughts, fears, and feelings. Ultimately, empathy can empower audiences to re-shape their collective memory picturing the Other as a threat to, instead, become active citizens who are not simply tolerant towards the Other, but willing to reconcile with culturally diverse communities and embrace the world's diversity.[4]

Interestingly, while the theories on the contact zone have been largely applied to history and ethnographic museums that are constantly engaged in overthrowing the difficult legacy of colonialism when representing other cultures, less has been written about modern art museums and art biennials and the staging of intercultural encounters.[5] This despite curators are transforming both institutions into spaces where a new vision of the world as increasingly

[1] Pratt 1992, p. 6 and Clifford 1997, p. 189-192
[2] Pieterse 2007, p. 90-91 and Askins and Pain 2011, p. 804
[3] Witcomb 2009, p. 63-65 and Pratt 1991, p. 40
[4] Witcomb 2015, p. 322, 326-327 and Bennett 2007, p. 277
[5] Witcomb 2015, p. 321-322

interconnected is encouraged by means of addressing shared human concerns. [6] In light of this, it is believed that applying the ultimate contact zone theory to modern art museums and biennials current curatorial practice might lead to revealing results. Thus, this research aims to answer the following question,

By highlighting shared human concerns, how can modern art museums and biennials contribute to the creation of the ultimate contact zone?

To answer this question, Chapter 1 will provide a more in-depth analysis of the contact zone and its relevance in present times. The discussion will be contextualised within the emergence of globalisation and multiculturalism that have significantly changed the art world and the ways in which we perceive other cultures. In this respect, Roland Robertson's publication *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992) will be key to the arguments presented.

In Chapter 2 the role of modern art museums as ultimate contact zones will be explored by focussing on two case studies: Edward Steichen's (1879-1973) photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* that first took place at the MoMA in 1955 and has now been permanently installed at Clervaux Castle in Luxembourg by curator Anke Reitz, and the ISelf Collection displays *The End of Love and Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* curated by Emily Butler and currently exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery in London.

Chapter 3 will look at biennials as ultimate contact zones. Here, the focus will be on the 1989 3rd Havana Bienal *Tradition and Contemporaneity* curated by Gerardo Mosquera, Llilian Llanes Godoy, and Nelson Herrera Ysla, and the 57th Venice Biennale *Viva Arte Viva* curated by Christine Macel.

The reason why these exhibitions have been selected is that they all address shared human concerns, from the ways we experience moments of our everyday lives, to our feelings and fears, and the ways we relate to and understand the outer world. At the same time, they all reveal a strong curatorial commitment to bridging diverse cultures within the exhibition spaces by means of emotionally moving the audiences. In particular, *The Family of Man* and *Tradition and Contemporaneity* were the first exhibitions to put intercultural dialogue at the core of their mission, and the ISelf collection displays and *Viva Arte Viva* have taken on their legacy and demonstrate how the crossing of cultural and national divides still constitutes an integral part of curatorial activity today.

Specifically, when looking at the selected case studies the elements that will be discussed in relation to the staging of encounters are the degree of curatorial intervention and inclusivity of the world's artistic production in the exhibition spaces, and the display strategies employed to create safe houses of equal representation and instil empathic responses in the audiences. To do so, exhibition catalogues and visual documentation of the displays will be an integral element of this research together with relevant articles and publications about museums and biennials in the age of globalisation, particularly *Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (2013) by Belting et al., and *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that created Contemporary Art* (2016) by Green and Gardner. Furthermore, my personal visit to the Venice Biennale where I could experience the displays and narrative effects myself, as well as personal interviews with curators Anke Reitz and Emily Butler concerning the

[6] Enwezor 2003, p. 98, 106 and Belting 2013, p. 246-251

ways in which they see *The Family of Man* and the ISelf collection displays operating as spaces where the world is bridged will also support this research.

I

Addressing Shared Human Concerns: In Search of the Ultimate Contact Zone

In this chapter, the theoretical concepts constituting the backbone of this research will be discussed. First, the concept of globalisation and two of the main social changes it has generated, i.e. mass mobility and multiculturalism, will be introduced. Specifically, the co-presence of culturally diverse people within the same geographical areas might lead to conflicts and incomprehension stemming from cultural diversity. In this respect, it is argued that modern art museums and biennials can become safe houses of equal representation where cultures meet and interact horizontally. By drawing upon the theories of Mary Louise Pratt and James Clifford, it will be discussed that both institutions can function as contact zones in that, by displaying the world's artistic production and attracting culturally diverse audiences who mingle in the exhibition spaces, they provide platforms of intercultural encounters. However, what is really needed for both institutions to become safe houses is stimulating feelings of empathy and interconnectedness between diverse cultures and making audiences aware of the existence of a common humanity. In this respect, the notion of the ultimate contact zone will be brought to the fore as a combination of Pratt and Clifford's theories with Witcomb's theories on addressing shared human concerns and employing a pedagogy of feeling in current exhibition practice, and Bennett's notion of the exhibitionary complex. Within the ultimate contact zone shared human concerns are addressed to allow Self and Other to empathise with each other and establish relations of mutual understanding. This is done by humanising the cultures displayed and allowing audiences to visually and emotionally converse with them as if they are co-present in the exhibition space. When the ultimate contact zone is fully enacted, audiences will develop a sense of social responsibility that will make them more inclined to celebrate cultural similarities and diversities and ultimately develop a sense of shared global consciousness. Below, the ways in which the ultimate contact zone operates and its effects will be discussed more in-depth with particular attention to the role of curators, objects, emotions, spaces, and audiences.

1.1. The Advent of Globalisation and Multiculturalism: Intercultural Encounters in Context

In his work, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992), Robertson defines globalisation as: "both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole".[7]

In other words, globalisation determined the shortening of geographical distances and a stronger sense of interconnectedness despite cultural differences. This was possible for a number of reasons. First of all, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the world's division between Eastern and Western bloc came to an end. This fostered a stronger sense of solidarity between world countries that increasingly came together for political, economic, and social cooperation thanks to improvements in means of communication and transportation facilitating dialogue and movement between distant poles.[8]

[7] Robertson 1992, p. 8.
[8] Weibel 2013, p. 22-23, and Robertson 1992, p. 58-59.

Eventually, economic and political cooperation between countries has led to the emergence of what Appadurai calls *ethnoscapes*, namely flows of people, e.g. tourists, workers, or students – a key aspect of globalisation.[9] Today, thanks to more liberal state policies and faster means of transportation, people often migrate to other countries for various reasons. This, in turn, has determined the emergence of multiculturalism. Admittedly, multiculturalism is a concept that needs further clarification in that it has acquired both positive and negative connotations in the academic world. In this research, this concept will be discussed in a positive light. Simply put, multiculturalism is here intended as the cohabitation of several cultures within the same geographical area. These cultures, however, are not to be perceived as somehow ghettoised and disconnected from each other; rather, as Pieterse and Portera have posited, multiculturalism can be conceived of as a set of dynamic interrelations between several cultures that can lead to positive outcomes.[10] Portera argues: "otherness, emigration, life in a complex and multicultural society, are not risk factors or potentially harmful features, but *opportunities* for personal and common enrichment".[11]

Every day we are exposed to several cultures by simply walking down the streets, watching television, sitting on a train, or walking past the aisles of supermarkets selling world foods. Being exposed to different worldviews and getting to know new traditions can lead to the realisation that several cultures and set of beliefs exist, that are all equally valid.[12] This, in turn, creates space for intercultural encounters to happen. That is to say, when culturally diverse people come into contact, a fruitful dialogue for all parts involved consisting in the exchange of ideas and reciprocal influences can be established. Thus, the prefix *inter-* is used here to highlight the dynamicity and mutuality of such encounters.[13]

One of the outcomes of intercultural encounters has to do with identity perception. Being exposed to several cultures, in fact, people today tend to increasingly identify with both elements of their autochthonous culture, as well as of world cultures. Consequently, the 19th century notion of nation-states as culturally homogeneous entities is being gradually supplanted by the idea of culturally heterogeneous nations characterised by identities in constant flux and re-definition.[14] Seen under this light, then, intercultural encounters can bring about peaceful cohabitation of diverse cultures and, more importantly, the acceptance of cultural diversity.

Besides the acceptance of cultural diversity, intercultural encounters can also highlight the presence of commonalities across different cultures. The coexistence of and dialogue between several cultures, in fact, can lead to the realisation that shared human concerns do exist, being fear of ecological crises, respect of human rights, or maintenance of world peace and democracy to name a few. Evidence provided by the several NGOs dealing with such issues whose members come from across the world. [15] In this respect, then, we can speak of a sense of shared global consciousness. The realisation that we share common concerns suggests that a common humanity exists in that humans are different in terms of ethnicity, spoken languages, and cultural beliefs, and yet they are also interconnected through common fears, hopes, and ideas. This eventually generates hope for the emergence of a global community which sees

[9] Appadurai 1996, p. 35-36.
[10] Pieterse 1997, p. 128, and Portera 2011, p. 17
[11] Portera 2011, p. 20
[12] Pieterse 2007, p. 177 and Portera 2011, p. 19
[13] Portera 2011, p. 20
[14] Pieterse 2007, p. 205 and Weibel 2013, p. 23
[15] Pieterse 2007, p. 198, 200 and Robertson 1992, p. 58-59

world countries coming together through symmetrical relationships of mutual exchange and adopting an intercultural perspective to cooperate on world's issues.[16]

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. Often, in fact, cultural and ethnic diversities are perceived as threats to the stability of nations and this assumption hinders the possibilities of creating a global community by means of intercultural dialogue. This has proven to be true in the last decades as the world is experiencing the rise of nationalistic ideals and xenophobic feelings as a defence mechanism against the threat of terrorism on one hand, and fear of Western cultural supremacy which risks homogenising the whole world, on the other. [17] What is needed for a global community to emerge, then, is the creation of platforms of intercultural encounters stressing human interconnectedness while also celebrating cultural diversity.

1.2. The Contact Zone: Staging Intercultural Encounters in Modern Art Museums and Biennials

Arguably, modern art museums and biennials, by attracting increasingly diverse audiences and being more inclusive of the world's artistic production in their displays, can play a key role when it comes to staging encounters and changing people's perspectives on cultural diversity. To more effectively understand how these institutions can foster intercultural dialogue and understanding, the theories on the contact zone are key. The concept of contact zone was introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Here, it is defined as:

> "The space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict".[18]

Thus, the contact zone implies the co-habitation of members of several communities and functions as a social space where intercultural encounters take place. The co-presence of culturally diverse people within the contact zone, Pratt argues, engenders ambivalent reactions; there may be incomprehension and conflict at first, but also wonder and revelation ultimately leading to mutual understanding. In 1997, the anthropologist James Clifford applied Pratt's theory to museums, but broadened its scale. To him, the contact zone is not solely confined to colonial encounters, but encompasses any type of intercultural encounter, including those between members of different communities living in the same geographical areas.[19] More importantly, Clifford also argues that for the contact zone to take place within the museum space one key element is the mobility of people. To use his words, "moreover, contact zones are constituted through reciprocal movements of people, not just of objects, messages, commodities, and money".[20]

This idea of reciprocal movements of people seems particularly relevant today, especially if considered in relation to Appadurai's *ethnoscapes*. As discussed above, people can now travel more easily across borders and world countries have become multicultural. This, in turn, has also affected the museum, now visited by diverse audiences who all meet within the exhibition

[16] Robertson 1992, p. 73-74, 78
[17] Portera 2011, p. 25 and Enwezor 2003, p. 94-95.
[18] Pratt 1992, p. 6
[19] Pratt 1991, p. 39 and Clifford 1997, p. 204
[20] Clifford 1997, p. 195.

spaces. Seen under this light, the contact zone theory can also be applied to art biennials. Today, there are over a hundred taking place in several parts of the world, from Venice to Istanbul, Dakar, Havana, and Gwangju, all displaying recent innovations, themes, and issues in contemporary artistic practice from across the world. Needless to say, contemporary art biennials, like modern art museums, attract an international audience of traveling artists, curators, art professionals, and art-enthusiasts who all meet and interact in the same spaces.[21]

Before moving on, it appears necessary to briefly clarify both the idea of contact itself, that is, who comes into contact with whom, and the idea of co-presence in relation to the contact zone. First, the notion of contact encompasses different types of intercultural encounters taking place between members and artists from different communities, as well as between the former and the communities represented in the exhibition displays. Secondly, the notion of co-presence refers to both diverse audiences cohabiting the exhibition spaces, as well as to the coexistence of several cultures and worldviews in exhibitions where the world's artistic production is displayed. It is precisely the co-presence of diverse audiences and artworks that can really activate the contact zone and allow for intercultural dialogue to happen.

Although the contact zone theory was first brought to the fore in the 1990s, it is still of considerable significance in contemporary curatorship. In the 2000s, the second wave of museum studies emerged that equally influenced modern art museums and biennials curatorial practice and prompted a response to multiculturalism and the increasing heterogeneity of national identities.[22] Ever since, curators have been seeking to include multiple voices in their displays to transform both platforms into dialogic spaces of encounters that welcome diverse communities with the ultimate goal of bridging them and encouraging the acceptance of cultural diversity.[23]

Nevertheless, if the ways in which intercultural encounters have been staged in both modern art museums and biennials have created an awareness of the world's diversity, at the same time they have often reinforced a certain distance between Self and Other. Specifically, curators have often relied upon bounded notions of culture and national identity and ended up creating exhibitions addressing the stories, concerns, and interests of specific communities in isolation and rarely in relation to wider society.[24] Consequently, Witcomb argues, such exhibitions generate feelings of sympathy in that if on one hand audiences can understand the concerns of those represented, on the other they are unable to fully put themselves in their shoes. This because audiences still perceive themselves as different and too distant from the communities represented, thus unable to entirely understand and relate to their concerns.[25] This is not to say that the enactment of the contact zone is a utopian achievement, but that the curatorial practices employed towards its realisation have often been influenced by the assumption that there should always be a controlling centre defining what the Other is in such a way that it appears distanced from the Self.[26]

The reason for this has to be found in the persistence of the 19th century notion of the exhibitionary complex in current curatorial practice. In his essay "The Exhibitionary Complex. Discipline, surveillance, spectacle" (1995), Bennett defined it as the ensemble of institutions, e.g. prisons, department stores, and museums, that the newly-emerged nation states employed to

[21] Fillitz 2011, p. 382-382
[22] Boast 2011, p. 58-59
[23] Witcomb 2003, p. 80
[24] Witcomb 2009, p. 54-55, and Bennett 2006, p. 61-62
[25] Witcomb 2003, p. 64
[26] Bennett 2006, p. 63

instil a sense of national belonging and moral conduct in the masses. Of particular importance was the museum where the objects displayed functioned as the material evidence of the achievements of the nation. This rhetoric of display largely served to create a sense of collective memory assuming that the progress of the nation had also been made possible by its citizens. The function of the exhibitionary complex, then, was mainly educational and pointed towards the "disciplining and training of bodies" to ultimately achieve social order.[27] However, having emerged in the years of colonial expansion, the exhibitionary complex also assumed Western civilisation to be at the top of the evolutionary ladder, thus reinforcing a Self vs. Other type of relation whereby the latter was perceived as inferior and its culture ended up being exoticised and reduced to few essential traits.[28]

To some extent, this dichotomy between Self and Other is still visible in those exhibitions considering culturally diverse communities in isolation. Here, cultural diversity is presented as something owned by and controlled "from and by a position of whiteness", meaning that, much like in the 19th century, the Other is addressed "as a national possession, a sign of its own tolerance and virtue".[29] In the long run, this might reinforce asymmetries of power between those who are listening and those whose voices are heard who appear relegated in a position of secondary importance, thus limiting the chances of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding taking place.

1.3. Shared Human Concerns: Towards the Ultimate Contact Zone

At this point, the question still remains as to how can contact zones presenting a more interconnected vision of the world be established. Surprisingly, the notion of the exhibitionary complex is also useful for finding an answer. Bennett, in fact, reviewed it in 2006 when he argued that face the emergence of globalisation and the increasing mobility of people, the new exhibitionary complex should be aware of the "pluralisation of public spheres", that is, the cohabitation of diverse cultures in the same areas, and be committed to granting them equal recognition.[30] The goal of the new exhibitionary complex, then, is still about educating the public, but on the benefits of interacting with diverse communities and accepting cultural diversities. To use his words, exhibitions should be created where:

> "New relations and perceptions of difference that both break free from the hierarchically organised forms of stigmatic othering that characterised the exhibitionary complex and provide more socially invigorating and, from a civic perspective, more beneficial interfaces between different cultures".[31]

In terms of how to put Bennett's ideas into practice, in her essay "Migration, Social Cohesion, and Cultural Diversity: Can Museums Move Beyond Pluralism" (2009) Witcomb argues that to stage encounters leading to a cultural rapprochement and interaction between Self and Other, "somehow we need to get to a point where we can talk about shared experiences as well as differences of experiences".[32] That is to say, curators should find themes that can encompass more visions and experiences so as to simultaneously address diverse cultures and equally

[27] Bennett 1995, p. 61-67
[28] Bennett 2006, p. 59
[29] Ibid, p. 61-62
[30] Bennett 2006, p. 58
[31] Bennett 2006, p. 59
[32] Witcomb 2009, p. 64

highlight differences and similarities. One way to do this when it comes to exhibition-making strategies, Witcomb suggests, is addressing shared human concerns, either by highlighting a shared historiographical theme, shared artistic practices and visual forms, or the everyday life and how it is experienced across cultures. This parallel to a conscious choice to be more inclusive of the world's artistic production and avoid solely focussing on the West.[33] Displaying art from different parts of the world from the perspective of shared human concerns can enable audiences to draw connections between different worldviews and become aware that cultural differences can be celebrated as variations on a common theme. This can touch audiences at the personal level, eventually encouraging feelings of empathy towards other cultures. Thus, shared human concerns can lead to the realisation that a common humanity exists, which in turn allows for intercultural dialogue to take place.

At this point, some may suggest that the choice of addressing shared human concerns, more than to enact contact zones, might be interpreted as symptomatic of a curatorial will to reduce the world's artistic production to a common denominator and homogenise it. Rather, it has to be interpreted as a form of intercultural approach aimed at simultaneously celebrating diversities and highlighting commonalities that characterise the human existence.[34] This to prevent those relations of coercion, radical inequalities, and intractable conflicts that Pratt conceives as being inescapable within the contact zone. By focussing on shared human concerns and presenting diverse cultures as being in constant dialogue and interaction, several communities can meet on equal power relations in the exhibition space. This can lead to the enactment of "safe houses", as Pratt calls them, namely spaces in which culturally diverse groups establish horizontal relations of trust and dialogue, ultimately leading to mutual understanding.[35]

Arguably, Bennett's notion of the exhibitionary complex and Witcomb's theories on addressing shared human concerns in current exhibition practice significantly add up to Pratt and Clifford's notion of the contact zone in that they provide a concrete solution to avoid distancing Self and Other. In this respect, a combination of all of their approaches might lead to the establishment of what can be defined an *ultimate* contact zone. To provide a brief definition before delving more into details, an ultimate contact zone is a space where, by means of addressing shared human concerns, affective intercultural encounters are staged with the ultimate goal of reworking the relations between Self and Other and bridging them. Here, emotional and affective responses are favoured over rational forms of knowledge production. Particularly, empathy is key to the full enactment of the ultimate contact zone in that it leads audiences to reflect introspectively on the human condition and ultimately develop a sense of human interconnectedness transcending cultural and ethnic differences. [36]

To more effectively understand what an ultimate contact zone entails and how to enact it, five elements are key namely, the role of curators, the narrative and display strategies employed with particular attention to the function of objects, the role of emotions, the function of exhibition spaces in relation to facilitating intercultural encounters, and, lastly, the role of audiences.

[33] Witcomb 2009, p. 64 and Macdonald 2003, p. 9
[34] Belting 2013, p. 247
[35] Pratt 1991, p. 40
[36] Witcomb 2015, p. 321-322

1.4. Curators, Objects, Spaces, and Audiences: Staging Affective Encounters in the Ultimate Contact Zone

Indeed, the driving force behind the enactment of ultimate contact zones are curators. Addressing shared human concerns requires the employment of a multidisciplinary approach blending art history, anthropology, and cultural studies. Purkis refers to this method as social history curatorship that draws upon a documentary approach to explore the human experience at the personal level by making people and their stories the subjects of exhibitions.[37] Parallel to this, to achieve what Clifford defines "contact work" aimed at bridging diverse cultures within the exhibitionary complex, curators should "increasingly work the borderlands between different worlds, histories, and cosmologies".[38] Thus, in line with what Bennett has suggested in relation to the pluralisation of public spheres, curators should be aware of how notions of national identities and cultures have become increasingly transnational due to mass mobility and migration and should be more inclusive of the world's artistic production as a result. What this entails, at large, is to reject notions of 19th century Western-centrism that have dictated the prevalence of North American and European artistic production in exhibition displays in favour of adopting an increasingly global perspective that also encompasses the artistic production of Asia, Africa, and South America.[39]

However, to fully enact the ultimate contact zone, co-presence of diverse cultures is not enough. When framing the world's artistic production under the perspective of shared human concerns, in fact, curators should also be cautious to not solely focus on similarities, but also on differences across cultures to encourage the acceptance of cultural diversity. In this respect, the pursuit of an intercultural education program is key. Intercultural education stands in between universalism which, drawing upon Kant's philosophy of universal values, highlights common aspects of humanity and tends to neglect differences, and cultural relativism, claiming that all cultures are equally valid and each of us is then free to express their own cultural identity.[40] Intercultural education consists of a synthesis of these two approaches as it maintains that all cultures are equally valid and, consequently, that all people are free to express their cultural identities without constraints. Therefore, both similarities and differences across human beings are equally highlighted with the ultimate goal of encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures.[41]

Besides the adoption of an intercultural education approach, to bridge diverse communities within the exhibitionary complex and stimulate a sense of interconnectedness, curatorial creativity and research alone are not enough. Rather, curators should demonstrate higher degrees of self-reflexivity and, as Bennett suggests, "dismantle the position of a controlling centre of and for discourse, paying attention instead to the multiaccentuality of meaning that arises out of the dialogic to-and-fro, the discursive give-and-take, that characterises processes of cross-cultural exchange".[42] That is to say, the notion of the über-curator holding a hegemonic control over the themes and contents of exhibitions should be rejected in favour of incorporating multiple voices into the exhibition narrative. To do so, active collaboration with community members, artists, and educators who can all be involved in the

[37] Purkis 2013, p. 55
[38] Clifford 1997, p. 210, 212
[39] Enwezor 2003, p. 114-115 and Enwezor 2015, p. 94
[40] Portera 2011, p. 16
[41] Portera 2011, p. 20 and Grant and Brueck 2011, p. 10
[42] Bennett 2006, p. 63

selection of objects and creation of texts, or sharing authorship with other curators who can combine their knowledge and regional expertise to equally give voice to diverse cultures are key.[43] What decentralisation of curatorial activity ultimately leads to is the transformation of the exhibitionary complex into a dialogic space characterised by a polyphony of voices. And if polyphony might unsettle at first, its effects can be positive as well. If the stories of different cultures and communities are equally addressed within the exhibition space without prevalence of a dominant worldview, and if their concerns are presented as shared concerns also affecting other communities, safe houses of equal representation can be established where diverse cultures can meet on equal grounds and achieve mutual understanding.[44]

Overall, by addressing shared human concerns and being more inclusive of the world's artistic production, what curators do within the ultimate contact zone is to continuously mediate between the local and the global, thus acting as *glocal* authors. The term *glocalisation* was first introduced in marketing vocabulary to indicate the importance of catering products that were distributed worldwide to each world region. Applied to curatorial practice, it refers to the curatorial ability to bridge different worldviews and cultures by simultaneously addressing how the stories and concerns of local communities also have a global relevance.[45] With this in mind, one can speak of curators as cultural mediators that, moving beyond notions of national representation and geographical boundaries, make the exhibitionary complex a space where multiple vectors conflate and connect ultimately portraying the world as complex and diverse but, yet, interconnected.[46]

As mentioned above, within the ultimate contact zone affective encounters are staged in which empathy is the predominant feeling. It follows that the narrative and exhibition strategies employed should all aim to instil a strong emotional response in the audiences. To make this possible, Witcomb proposes the employment of what she calls a "pedagogy of feeling", defined as:

> "The ways in which some forms of contemporary exhibition practices stage affective encounters between viewer and viewed through the ways in which they use a range of devices to promote sensorial experiences that encourage introspective reflection on the part of the visitor".[47]

Eventually, what these range of devices have as their ultimate goal is to enact an "ethics of care" that goes beyond simple tolerance towards the Other, to instead instil a feeling of empathy and allow intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding to fully take place. The pedagogy of feeling is not about merely stating facts and stories, rather it uses them in such a way to empower the audiences and invite them to become aware of their moral and social responsibilities in the present and critically address possibilities of improvements for the future.[48]

In terms of how to put the pedagogy of feeling into practice when addressing shared human concerns, two elements are of paramount importance, namely the function of objects and their display strategies and spatial distribution. To facilitate the staging of encounters,

[43] Clifford 1997, p. 210 and Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 28-31
[44] Pieterse 1997, p. 125 and Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 210-211
[45] Robertson 1992, p. 102 and Young 1999, p. 11
[46] O'Neill 2012, p. 71 and Enwezor 2010, p. 48, 52.
[47] Witcomb 2015, p. 322
[48] Ibid, p. 322, 332

objects should function as *aides-mémoires* that reflect larger ideas and concepts and allow audiences to discover and critically engage with the surrounding world and its diverse inhabitants.[49] To make this possible, the aesthetic appeal of the physical objects should be decentralised in favour of the historical, political, and social contexts they have emerged in. Borrowing Clifford's words, objects should become, "sites of historical negotiation, occasions for an ongoing contact".[50] That is to say, the images and performances showcased should allow audiences to both learn about the stories and concerns of other communities and cultures, and also reflect on their own that, perhaps rather unexpectedly at first, often appear similar if not equal. In this respect, traditional practices of looking and exhibiting should be disrupted in favour of a new form of exhibition-making primarily based on addressing the affective realm and stimulating sensorial experiences.[51] Specifically, non-verbal forms of communication should be favoured over a predominance of explanatory texts addressing the provenance of the works and their contexts of production. Empathy within the ultimate contact zone, in fact, more than by forms of verbal dialogue is stimulated by forms of visual language aimed at humanising the cultures displayed and giving the impression that they are physically co-present with the audiences in the exhibition space.[52]

To provide some examples, photographs, video installations, and portraits depicting members of diverse communities captured in moments of their everyday lives, especially when life-sized, can be placed unframed at head level to give the illusion of an eye-to-eye contact and bodily encounter between subject and viewer. When other kinds of works reflecting on shared concerns are displayed, instead, juxtaposition plays a key role. Placing works side by side or one facing the other in the exhibition space, in fact, allows audiences to draw a range of connections across diverse cultures and realise how often they actually relate to each other despite differences in artistic expression.[53] Thus, the function of objects as *aides-mémoires* is that of cultural mediators simultaneously revealing the differences and similarities across cultures and allowing audiences to connect with diverse communities and realise that both are part of something larger than their individuality – a common humanity.[54]

More importantly, as argued by Bennett, to facilitate intercultural dialogue objects should not be considered in isolation, but "operating always in motion in the context of complex histories of transactional exchange". That is to say, objects should not be displayed according to organisation principles based on geography and national identities and the number of physical barriers dividing them, such as walls and dividing panels, should be kept to a minimum. Rather, they should all be co-present in the exhibition space to allow audiences to make connections across cultures and become aware of the world's complexity and interconnectedness.[55]

With this in mind, then, it becomes clear that the function of the pedagogy of feeling is that of transforming exhibitions into "revelatory journeys" that deeply touch the audiences emotional spheres and trigger a rapprochement between Self and Other.[56] Specifically, reducing texts in favour of visual forms of communication and juxtaposing objects requires visitors to mainly rely on their vision and sensations to make meaning out of the displays. Vision, in turn,

[49] Skramstad 1999, p. 124
[50] Clifford 1997, p. 189, 194
[51] Bennett 2006, p. 64 and Witcomb 2009, p. 324
[52] Purkis 2013, p. 52-54 and Witcomb 2015, p. 324, 336
[53] Purkis 2013, p. 55-61 and Witcomb 2015, p. 323
[54] Bennett 2006, p. 62-63
[55] Ibid, p. 63
[56] McLean 1993, p. 195

transforms visitors from passive learners to active viewers that closely look at and engage with the objects displayed to be able to decipher the relations between them.[57] In other words, visitors are asked to visually converse with the objects and, by extension, with the cultures they represent. This visual exchange of information between subject and viewer, Witcomb argues, conveys them equal agency and ultimately allows audiences to recognise themselves in the displays and realise that shared concerns exist, although they might be expressed differently across cultures.[58] Vision, then, favours an emotional way of looking rather than a rational, more detached, one and, in turn, empowers visitors to challenge old collective memories of Self vs. Other and empathise with and feel connected to the cultures displayed upon realisation that different worldviews can indeed coexist and horizontal relations of dialogue, exchange, and mutual understanding across cultures can be established.

Overall, then, within the ultimate contact zone by means of a pedagogy of feeling audiences are invited to develop a new sense of Self – one that is not superior to the Other, but connected to it and sensitive to its stories and concerns.[59]

Further exploring the effects of the pedagogy of feeling upon the audiences, Askins and Pain speak of encounters that can be remembered both "reflectively", i.e. through the mind, and "reflexively", i.e. through the body.[60] Specifically, allowing audiences to interact and empathise with the cultures displayed, makes them more prone to carry with them what they have learnt in the exhibition space and apply it to their everyday life. As Witcomb and Bennett argue, in fact, relying on vision and stimulating feelings of empathy in the exhibitionary complex leads to more "performative understandings of citizenship" in that audiences, rather than passively relying on the knowledge imposed by the authorities, as was the case in the 19th century exhibitionary complex, are free to make their decisions and ultimately develop a sense of social responsibility calling them to concretely participate in current socio-political debates that see cultural diversity not as something to fear, but as an integral part of human existence needing acceptance.[61]

Thus, within the ultimate contact zone displays are not merely aimed at entertaining the audiences but at transforming them into active citizens committed to embracing the world's complexity and learning to peacefully cohabitate with diverse communities. And these are both key elements to establishing a global community and putting an end to current world conflicts.

1.5. Modern Art Museums and Biennials as Ultimate Contact Zones

So far, the roles of curators, objects, emotions, spaces and audiences within the ultimate contact zone have been discussed from a theoretical point of view. In the following chapters, these theories will be applied to current modern art museums and biennials curatorial practice. This because curators of both institutions are now seeking to re-define the art world map by rejecting notions of Western-centrism and being more inclusive of the world's artistic production. Similarly, they are also showing higher degrees of commitment to transforming exhibitions into "topographies of critical space", as Enwezor calls them, namely social laboratories for the exploration and questioning of current social, political, and economic issues in which audiences are asked to re-shape their understanding of the world and negotiate their

[57] Witcomb 2015, p. 324-325 and Bennett 2006, p. 64
[58] Witcomb 2015, p. 337
[59] Witcomb 2015, p. 322-324, 328 and Schorch 2015, p. 453
[60] Askins and Pain 2011, p. 817
[61] Witcomb 2015, p. 322, 340 and Bennett 2007, p. 277

relation with other cultures.[62] Current modern art museums and biennials exhibitions, in fact, often find their *raison d'être* behind current historical events and social considerations rather than artistic and aesthetic ideas only, and aim to "create a certain kind of porosity across the usual boundaries, areas of overlap, meshing points, through which we filter our rethought genealogies of modernity and contemporary art".[63] That is to say, modern art museums and biennials exhibitions go beyond the simple display of art and function as discourses that challenge cultural supremacy and essentialism to instead bridge the world and show its interconnectedness.

With this in mind, it might be useful to reiterate once more those aspects that could make both platforms operate as ultimate spaces of encounter. Firstly, to be able to present different worldviews in a horizontal manner, curators should decentralise their activity by either cooperating with communities or by means or co-curating. At the same time, they should also act *glocally* by addressing communities together and not in isolation and showing that local and global concerns often coincide. Secondly, a pedagogy of feeling should be employed when it comes to exhibition strategies whereby objects, by speaking to each other and to visitors about human experiences, can stimulate them to explore and interact with different cultures at the personal level, and make them equally aware of the similarities and differences of humanity. Lastly, objects should be displayed in the same spaces so as to allow them to converse with each other and create meaning together. When this is done, Kratz and Karp argue "museum spaces can become global theatres of real consequences", a statement that equally applies to biennials and indicates the potential of both institutions to become catalysts for social changes by empowering audiences to take action towards the acceptance of cultural diversity.[64]

At this point, some might suggest that biennials in particular may never reach the status of ultimate contact zones due to the elitist audiences they mainly attract, e.g. curators, critics, dealers, collectors. Specifically, it might be assumed that if intercultural dialogue takes place between elitist audiences only, not much will change in current society in that if not all communities are addressed, especially those cohabiting areas affected by high rates of unemployment, and poor public amenities and social services, then mutual understanding and peaceful cohabitation might be hard to achieve.[65] Modern art museums, instead, would be considered the ultimate contact zones by definition in that local communities are often asked to cooperate with curators and educators for the realisation of exhibitions or art projects facilitating intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

However, it is here suggested to look at modern art museums and biennials not as separate entities, which has often been the case[66], but as complementary institutions whose joint efforts can ultimately lay the foundations for the encouragement of a sense of shared global consciousness and the development of a global community. If modern art museums can foster intercultural dialogue and understanding at the local level between members of different

[62] Enwezor 2010, p. 48, 52
[63] Enwezor 2003, p. 106 and Enwezor 2015, p. 109
[64] Kratz and Karp 2006, p. 4
[65] Philipsen 2010, p. 157 and Bennett 2006, p. 65
[66] For instance, see Terry Smith's essay "Shifting the Exhibitionary Complex" in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) where a comparative approach is taken to explore how modern art museums and biennials present a more interconnected vision of the world, or Enwezor's "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Forum" (2003) and O'Neill's "Biennial Culture and the Emergence of a Globalised Curatorial Discourse: Curating in the Context of Biennials and Large-Scale Exhibitions since 1989" in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (2012) where the biennial format is seen as being more suitable to the staging of intercultural encounters due to its cyclical nature and its massive spaces where more international art can be exhibited.

communities, biennials, by attracting an international audience of arts professionals and intellectuals, can work more at the global level by fostering regional amicability and the strengthening of diplomatic ties of social, political, and economic cooperation across diverse countries.[67]

To conclude, it has been discussed that globalisation and multiculturalism have made world countries increasingly heterogeneous in that people from diverse cultures co-habit the same spaces. Consequently, being exposed to diverse worldviews has resulted in individual identities also becoming heterogeneous. In this respect, the notion of the ultimate contact zone as a combination of the theories of Pratt, Clifford, Witcomb, and Bennett has been presented as a space in which cultures are bridged and mutual understanding is encouraged by means of addressing shared human concerns and allowing audiences to build an empathic connection with the cultures displayed face the realisation that despite cultural differences, the world is indeed interconnected. Within the ultimate contact zone, different cultures are represented on equal terms so as to allow for horizontal intercultural dialogue to take place ultimately leading to mutual understanding and the transformation of social practices. Although the contact within the ultimate contact zone is temporary, in fact, its effects are meant to have lasting impacts on the audiences by encouraging them to change their attitudes towards cultural diversity and the possibilities of peaceful cohabitation.

In the following chapters, the ways in which shared human concerns are exhibited in current modern art museum and biennial practice will be discussed with the support of the selected case studies. Specifically, by assessing the degree of inclusivity of the world's artistic production, the extent to which curatorial activity is decentralised, and the curatorial strategies adopted concerning objects presentation, the ways in which modern art museums and biennials are moving towards the establishment of ultimate contact zones and the issues that are still encountered in the process will be analysed more in detail.

[67] Green and Gardner 2016, p. 87

II

The Family of Man and The ISelf Collection: Exhibiting Human Interconnectedness in the Modern Art Museum

As argued by Witcomb, for museums to provide spaces of encounter, interaction, and exchange between different cultures, exhibitions addressing the similarities of human experiences in everyday life are key.[68] Below, two exhibitions employing this approach will be discussed, namely, the iconic photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* originally installed at the MoMA in 1955 and now permanently exhibited in Clervaux Castle in Luxembourg, and the ISelf Collection displays *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* currently exhibited in the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Specifically, whether both exhibitions function as ultimate contact zones providing safe houses of equal representation will be discussed. The focus will be on narrative-construction and display strategies with particular attention to the role of objects as *aides-mémoires* capable of evoking empathic responses in the audiences and encouraging them to connect with other cultures. To enrich the discussion, Anke Reitz and Emily Butler, curators of *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays respectively, have been interviewed to understand in what ways they see both exhibitions operating as platforms of intercultural dialogue and understanding.

From its emergence between the late 18th century and early 19th century, the role of the modern art museum has significantly changed. To fully understand its function as a contact zone and the issues that are still encountered in its enactment, a brief historical digression marking the shift of the art museum from its 19th century nationalistic attitudes to its more inclusive approach in the 20th century is needed.

The first art museums emerged in Europe on the basis of the Enlightenment ideals of equality and liberty. In their early conception, art museums were used as government instruments to civilise and educate the masses by teaching them norms of good conduct, and instilling a sense of national belonging. This to strengthen the legitimacy of nation-states and preventing those subversive thoughts that had led to the outbreak of the French Revolution (1789-1799) to re-emerge among the masses.[69] For instance, the mission of the Musée du Louvre (est. 1793) in Paris was that of making visitors proud of their nation by celebrating France's wealth and cultural refinement through the display of art. This, in turn, served the larger scope of strengthening feelings of national identity. Similarly, the National Portrait Gallery (est. 1856) in London aimed to civilise the masses by encouraging good conduct and mental cultivation through the display of portraits of famous and respectable intellectuals and prominent political figures that visitors looked up to.[70] Interestingly, art museums claimed that their objective was that of giving an exhaustive representation of the history of the whole of humanity. A history that claimed to be universal, with the museum functioning as a microcosm replicating the world outside, the macrocosm. Of course, there were plenty of issues with this contention. In reality, the narrative of the first art museums was quite narrow in that it only presented the story of a type of person: male, middle-class, and white. The society that was presented through the displays was both

[68] Witcomb 2009, p. 65
[69] Bennett 1995, p. 19, 30-33 and Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 167.
[70] Bennett 1995, p. 38 and Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 189.

patriarchal and imperialist, as it excluded women from the exhibition narratives and presented people coming from colonised nations as uncivilised.[71] In reality, as argued by Bennett, museums functioned as "spaces of emulation" providing the so-called spectacle of seeing and being seen whereby members of the middle-class and working class co-habited and mingled in the same spaces. Eventually, by becoming the object of each other's inspection, on one hand the working classes were persuaded to emulate the behaviour of the middle-classes in order to be worthy of the title of citizens; on the other hand, a sense of collective national and cultural identity was established among the middle-classes that ultimately strengthened social cohesion.[72]

Moving to the transmission of knowledge, this followed a linear path. Museum curators were seen as the sole authorities responsible for knowledge-production which happened entirely behind the scenes. Thus, no dialogue between curators and the public was ever established.

Overall, then, the first art museums had a pedagogic role as they meant to teach good conduct, but at the same time they highly relied upon mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion whereby the Western world was portrayed as superior, and the voices of those who occupied the lower seats of social hierarchies, e.g. women, inhabitants of the colonies, and the working classes, were silenced.[73]

Eventually, the first attempts to transform the modern art museum into a space of encounters are to be found in 1955, when the exhibition *The Family of Man* first opened at the MoMA. The exhibition was curated by the then director of the department of photography Edward Steichen (1879-1973) with the help of Wayne Miller (1918-2013), Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), and Dorothy Norman (1905-1997).[74] With a collection of 503 photographs from 68 countries *The Family of Man,* as argued by Steichen, "was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life – as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world".[75] The underlying idea of the exhibition, thus, is the belief that a common humanity exists. To convey this message, Steichen and his collaborators exhibited photographs depicting people from different cultures and backgrounds next to each other and organised them under overarching themes encompassing salient aspects of human life: love, marriage, birth-giving, family life, leisure time, and children playfulness.

Attracting more than nine million visitors, *The Family of Man* proved to be an extremely successful exhibition to the point that in 1994 it was permanently installed at Clervaux Castle.[76] To understand how *The Family of Man* facilitates the staging of intercultural encounters, its narrative and display strategies are key. These, following the decision of current curator Anke Reitz, have remained faithful to the 1955 exhibition to leave visitor experience unchanged.[77]

First of all, the role and agency of the photographs showcased deserves particular attention. The strategy adopted by Steichen was that of letting the selected photographs speak between themselves and to the audiences, that is, to let them function as *aides-mémoires*.[78] Interestingly,

[71] Bennett 1995, p. 97 and Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 210-211
[72] Bennett 1995, p. 30, 52.
[73] Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 15-17 and Weibel 2013, p. 20
[74] MoMA *The Family of Man* press release: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325965.pdf, and Staniszewski 1998, p. 236
[75] Steichen 1955, p. 4-5
[76] Hoffman 2005 p. 318 and http://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man
[77] Personal interview with Reitz and http://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man
[78] Bennett 2006, p. 63 and Steichen 1955, p. 5

this is mainly done by means of non-verbal forms of communication. The showcased photographs create a visual narrative whereby the people portrayed explain themselves and their everyday lives to the audiences, and ultimately reveal the existence of shared human experiences and concerns across cultures.[79] The only textual narrative present consists of quotes taken from religious and literary texts, and proverbs from different cultures, such as "with all beings and all things we shall be as relatives", or "clasp the hands and know the thoughts of men in other lands" accompanying, respectively, photographs depicting families and children.[80] These simply serve to further highlight the feeling of human interconnectedness already expressed by the photographs. The function of photographs in *The Family of Man*, then, is twofold. On one hand, as pointed out by Reitz, photographs allow all audiences, regardless of their backgrounds, to understand the message of the exhibition thanks to their visual immediacy; on the other, they become emblems of a larger idea – the existence of a common humanity.[81] And both functions are key to establishing "an ongoing contact" between the public and the cultures displayed.[82]

More importantly, Reitz confirms that *The Family of Man* employs an intercultural approach aimed at equally highlighting similarities and differences across cultures. Specifically, the choice of selecting overarching themes addressing the human experience serves to make audiences aware of the existence of shared human concerns and values, while the photographs themselves, by showing how wedding ceremonies, leisure activities, and family life variate across cultures, celebrate cultural diversity.[83] Thus, one can already see *The Family of Man* operating as a contact zone aimed at bridging cultures and encouraging the acceptance of cultural diversity as an integral aspect of humanity.

Specifically, of particular importance in *The Family of Man* concerning the encouragement of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding are the installation and design strategies adopted by Paul Rudolf (1918-1997) in 1955 and continued by Nathalie Jacoby today.[84] These, in fact, are aimed at establishing an intimate contact between the audiences and the cultures displayed by creating an "empathetic interface between visitors and subjects".[85] To achieve this, most of the photographs exhibited hang at eye-level and are life-sized. This allows visitors to establish eye contact with the subjects and, more importantly, it gives the illusion that those depicted are physically present in the exhibition space.[86] This sense of physical presence is further conveyed by the choice to not frame photographs and, in some cases, to let them hang from the ceiling. This is visible in the fourth section of the exhibition dealing with family life, for instance, where visitors are greeted by four life-sized photographs depicting four families from Italy, Japan, Bechuanaland, and the U.S all hanging from the ceiling (fig. 1). Or in the fifth section exploring leisure time where a photograph of a man pushing a woman on a swing is hanging on a moveable support that can be touched by the audiences (fig. 2).[87]

Further exploring the installation techniques, *The Family of Man* first section opens with the themes of love and wedding ceremonies. This shows a series of photographs depicting

[79] Steichen 1955, p. 4
[80] Staniszewski 1998, p. 236 and Steichen 1955, p. 55, 94-95.
[81] Personal interview with Reitz, and Sandeen 2005, p.353
[82] Clifford 1997, p.194
[83] Personal interview with Reitz and Sandeen, p. 355
[84] Staniszewski 1998, p. 238 and http://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man
[85] Staniszewski 1998, p. 238, 240 and Purkis 2013, p. 60
[86] Staniszewski 1998, p. 244 and Purkis 2013, p. 56
[87] Staniszewski 1998, p. 241

couples from several parts of the world, e.g. India, New Guinea, France, Japan, the U.S., kissing, holding each other tight, and getting married. Here, photographs are installed along one large wall in what appears as a dynamic patchwork of diverse people. Indeed, the presence of diverse cultures on one wall all connected through the experience of romantic love and the desire to build a family can be interpreted as a visual metaphor of human interconnectedness.[88]
The second section explores pregnancy and birth-giving. Here, photographs of women caressing their bellies, giving birth, breastfeeding, and lovingly taking care of their children are installed on a semi-circular transparent wall. The circular layout of this section conveys a sense of intimacy and serves to embrace the viewers and make them close spectators of the intimate and emotion-filled experience that becoming a mother entails (fig. 3).[89] Particularly, the intimacy of the circular display can have quite an emotional impact on women spectators who can recognise themselves in the feelings and gestures of the women photographed and empathise with them, regardless of their culture.

Overall, the presence of life-sized photographs, circular displays, and swinging panels in *The Family of Man* largely serves to humanise the cultures displayed and consequently transforms visitors into active participants in the exhibition narrative.[90] The effect created is that of families, couples, and children intimately interacting with their counterparts from different cultures at the visual, and at times physical, level and recognising themselves, their everyday life, and their experiences in the displays.[91] This, in turn, allows visitors to realise that a common humanity exists that transcends cultural differences and geopolitical borders, and eventually encourages them to establish bonds of empathy with the subjects depicted. Thus, one can see a pedagogy of feeling employed in *The Family of Man* that by equally conveying agency to the audiences and the subjects depicted – that is, by drawing audiences into the exhibition narrative and making them feel that they too are members of *The Family of Man* – encourages them to reframe their thinking around humanity and equally embrace the similarities and differences composing it.[92]

In this respect, despite its 1955 origins, Reitz suggests that the message of *The Family of Man* is still extremely relevant today and its effects on contemporary audiences have remained unchanged. Steichen developed the exhibition during the years of the Cold War (1947-1991), when the world was torn apart by conflicts and feelings of hatred stemming from cultural and ideological diversities – all issues that are still present today.[93] In light of this, then, by seeking to bridge diverse cultures and raising awareness of a common humanity, *The Family of Man* arguably operates as a timeless contact zone that is still capable of connecting diverse cultures by means of empathy and instilling a sense of shared global consciousness as it did 62 years ago.

Interestingly, the legacy of *The Family of Man* continued to influence curatorial activity in the modern art museum in the years to come in that it has transformed the role of the curator from that of the 19th century arbiter of taste and knowledgeable scholar to a cultural mediator who seeks to bring together multiple voices and simultaneously present different viewpoints.[94] This became more visible in the ground-breaking exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and curated by Jean-Hubert Martin. For the first time,

[88] Steichen 1955, p. 7-17 and Staniszewski 1998, p. 241
[89] Steichen 1955, p. 18-33 and Hoffman 2005, p. 323
[90] Schorch 2015, p. 75 and Bennett 2006, p. 64
[91] Sandeen 2005, p. 347-348
[92] Witcomb 2009, p. 65
[93] Personal interview with Reitz, and Staniszewski 1998, p. 251
[94] Bennett 1995, p. 104-105

contemporary art from the world was equally represented within a Western modern art museum and from that moment onwards what Weibel has defined "a new cartography of art" was created.[95] Art from Asia, Africa, and South America began to circulate more widely and freely within the art world, thus challenging those mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion that had previously made European and North American artistic production prevail.[96] The wider circulation of world art has made 20th century modern art museums more inclusive institutions capable of speaking to increasingly diverse audiences. At the same time, curators have also begun to share authorship with community members to create exhibitions fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.[97] One example is the New Museum of Contemporary Art's project *Global Classroom* established in 2004 and still ongoing, which sees curators and educators partner up with high schools to transform the museum into a platform of dialogue between students, artists, and community members through the organisation of seminars revolving around contemporary art and its social relevance. For instance, in occasion of the exhibition *Emory Douglas: Black Panther* (2009), students were invited to cooperate with the artist himself and engage in critical dialogue with Harlem community members to realise the mural *What We Want, What We Believe.* This reflected on local issues related to social justice, e.g. unemployment, gang violence, access to education and health care, but ultimately its scope was also to foster a sense of interconnectedness among the participants upon realisation that social justice issues equally relate to other communities besides Harlem.[98]

At the same time, modern art museums are also trying to give voice to those members of society that had previously been silenced as shown by *Soul of the Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017) at the Tate Modern in London that displays the art of Black artists during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The exhibition disrupts visitors' expectations of American art in the 1960s which is mainly known for its exponents Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) or Andy Warhol (1928-1987). Instead, by displaying copies of the *Black Panther* magazine together with artworks by Black artists, the exhibition aims to address the violence, sorrow, and fights for equality of Black people during those dramatic years.[99] *Soul of A Nation* also does more than considering Black communities in isolation in that it provides platforms for visitors to come together and reflect on the past to improve the present and future condition. This is happening at the Tate Clore Learning Centre, for instance, with the project *The 8-14'S Studio: Painting* inviting visitors to cooperate with the artist Jacob V Joyce to create a collective artwork reflecting upon Black art and artists in the past and in the present.[100] Or with the talk *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* where the journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge, author of the homonymous book, was in conversation with the curator Zoe Whitley to reflect upon issues that Black communities still face in and outside Britain, from racism to classism, and eventually try to find ways to counteract them.[101]

Furthermore, the current *I am a Native Foreigner* at the Stedelijk Museum also gives voice to new communities by addressing the life of migrants as depicted in some of the works held in the

[95] Weibel 2013, p. 24
[96] Belting, Buddensieg, Weibel 2013, p. 60
[97] Belting, 2013 p. 251
[98] Reid 2014, p. 88, 97-98 and http://www.gclass.org/in-action/emory-douglas-what-we-want-what-we-believe-mural-project
[99] http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/soul-nation-art-age-black-power and Jones, 2017
[100] http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/soul-nation-art-age-black-power/8-14s-studio-painting
[101] http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/soul-nation-art-age-black-power/why-im-no-longer-talking-white

museum collection. Again, migrant communities are not considered in isolation here. The exhibition, in fact, claims to provide a dual perspective on displacement by showcasing photographs of Dutch immigrants upon arrival at Ellis Island and of Surinamese and South African immigrants to the Netherlands. By addressing the issues and difficulties they all faced and highlighting how Dutch people have been immigrants too in the past, the exhibition eventually aims to encourage visitors to overcome their preconceptions and reframe their thinking around migration as a common aspect of human life that needs to be accepted and dealt with positively.[102] Similarly, the MoMA exhibition *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter* (2016-2017) sought to address the current refugee crisis and how this is currently being dealt with through the establishment of refugee camps and the increase of international cooperation, while underlining the importance to always respect human rights.[103]

What these examples show is that modern art museums are currently demonstrating higher degrees of self-reflexivity. They have become social laboratories where curators experiment by decentralising their activity, including multiple voices to museums narratives, and proposing new ways of seeing that do not present the world as neither entirely black nor white, but as multi-faceted and interconnected.[104]

In this respect, the ISelf Collection displays *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* and *The End of Love* currently exhibited in the Whitechapel Gallery are a further case in point in that they seek to equally give voice to diverse cultures and show how they share some beliefs and worldviews regardless of their ethnicity. The ISelf displays have been curated by Emily Butler with the assistance of Candy Stobbs and Lydia Yee.[105] The decision to organise these exhibitions stems from the Whitechapel curatorial team's commitment to being more inclusive of the world's artistic production in their displays.[106]

The ISelf collection was put together by husband and wife collectors Maria and Malek Sukkar and contains both historic and contemporary works by international artists from across the world, e.g. Europe, the U.S, Indonesia, Latin America, China, and India.[107] More importantly, as Yee puts it, it "can be understood to reflect universal human themes" that anybody, regardless of their culture, can understand and relate to. The themes explored in *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat,* in fact, range from love, birth, joy, human frailties, and death as they are experienced across cultures.[108] Butler explains that both displays stem from a desire to bridge diverse cultures and transform the gallery space into a contact zone where audiences can interact in significant ways with the cultures displayed and realise the existence of a common humanity.[109]

In terms of how this is made possible, Butler has adopted an intercultural approach whereby the choice of addressing shared human concerns serves to highlight cultural similarities, while the co-presence of diverse artworks in the exhibition space showing how these are expressed differently across cultures celebrates cultural diversity. In both *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat*, in fact, works by artists of different backgrounds have been

[102] http://stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/i-am-a-native-foreigner
[103] https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1653
[104] Pieterse 1997, p. 125 and Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 210-211
[105] O'Day 2017, p. 197
[106] http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/press/iself-collection-self-portrait-billy-goat/
[107] Blazwick 2017, p. 184 and http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/press/iself-collection-self-portrait-billy-goat/
[108] Yee 2017, p. 6
[109] Personal interview with Butler, November 2017

juxtaposed in the exhibition space. This because, Butler explains, face the realisation that identities are increasingly heterogeneous and in constant flux, different cultures need to be addressed together and not in isolation.[110]

It follows that a significant agency has been placed upon the works themselves. These are accompanied by few explanatory texts and, in most cases, only the name of the artists and the medium are mentioned. What is central is their evocative power – their capacity of addressing the audiences' emotional spheres and moving them. Consequently, the installation strategies have been conceived under a pedagogy of feeling type of approach to enhance the emotional impact of the works showcased.[111]

To provide some examples, the theme of family life is explored in the work *The End of Love* (2012) by Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari, giving the title to the homonymous display. It consists of a series of 48 photographs exploring salient moments of human life: brides and grooms about to get married, family portraits, graduation ceremonies, and portraits of friends taken between the 60s and the 70s at the Studio Shehrazade in Lebanon. These photographs occupy half a wall and create a patchwork of diverse people looking at the audiences (fig. 4). The installation effect is meant to create a strong emotional impact in the audiences that, upon establishing intimate eye-contact with the subjects, can be reminded of their own graduations and weddings, and can eventually build an empathic connection with the peoples depicted in the photographs upon acknowledging the similarities of their experiences.[112]

The same goes for the work *Post-Partum Document: Documentation VI* (1987-2010) by American artist Mary Kelly exploring maternal love. It is composed of a series of resin tables on which the artist has documented her son's attempts at writing by copying examples of his handwritten letters.[113] Installed by itself at eye-level with dramatic lighting, the work has a strong evocative power in that it reminds of the joy of caring for children and of being proud of their achievements, both feelings transcending cultural differences. Next to Kelly's work, visitors find *My Father* (2014) by Afro-American artist Rashid Johnson, a portrait made with Afrocentric materials like black soap revealing how the love for our parents is another shared aspect of human life (fig. 5).[114]

Moving to *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat,* the frailty of the Self is addressed in the homonymous work (2011) by Polish artist Pawel Althamer – a sculpture of himself sitting in a contemplative pose with his hand resting on his cheek but with the face of a Billy goat, a figure of ridicule indicating human weaknesses. Next to it stands *A Day in The Life Of_* (2009)*,* a more conceptual self-portrait by the collective of Indian artists Raqs Media Collective representing a clock whose hands point at different human feelings, e.g. remorse, anxiety, guilt, ecstasy, awe, indifference (fig. 6).[115] Both works, although employing different approaches concerning the representation of self-identity, when juxtaposed highlight how all human beings, regardless of their nationality and culture, experience similar emotions and feelings throughout their lives.

What emerges from this brief analysis of both *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* is that the artworks showcased are the protagonists and the installation techniques are meant to let them converse with each other and create meaning together. This curatorial choice is aimed at making visitors active participants invested with the task of deciphering how

[110] Ibid and Butler 2017, p. 9
[111] Installation views and Personal interview with Butler, November 2017
[112] Yee 2017, p. 6-7 and Butler 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS23_w0fOgw
[113] Yee 2017, p. 7
[114] *The End of Love* press release, http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/press/iself-collection-the-end-of-love/
[115] Butler 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7iF2Bb8XuE and Borzello 2017, p. 22

artworks relate to each other.[116] Eventually, what they find out is that "all artists are trying to tell the same story, but each one of them has their different way of looking at it and then putting it in front of you".[117] And the story is the existence of shared human experiences transcending cultural specificities. In this respect, then, one can see artworks showcased in both exhibitions functioning as *aides-mémoires.*

Particularly, the function of artworks as *aides-mémoires* is key to making *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* function as exhibitions encouraging intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding thanks to their ability to move the audiences. The choice of showcasing portraits addressing shared human concerns, in fact, is not casual. Butler explains that portraits can equally speak to viewers from diverse backgrounds and allow them to be captured by the intimacy of the relationships between the sitter and the artists or between the artists and their inner selves, and consequently interact more closely with them. Close interaction, in turn, allows viewers to recognise themselves in the feelings expressed and the moments captured by the portraits, be emotionally transported and ultimately empathise with the artists and the sitters. Empathy, then, becomes a key element in both exhibitions leading visitors to realise the interconnectedness of human experiences across cultures.[118]
In this respect, Butler hopes that by bridging diverse cultures and moving the audiences *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* can encourage them to pause for a moment and reconsider the world around them as multi-faceted, yet interconnected; to perceive cultural differences not as a threat, but as a resource.[119]

Overall, the ways in which both *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays *The End of Love and Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* can be seen operating as ultimate contact zones are manifold. By addressing shared human concerns, they can be regarded as *glocal* exhibitions in that they bridge different worldviews and cultures, thus transcending national borders. Doing so, both Clervaux Castle and the Whitechapel Gallery can welcome wider audiences to their spaces who can relate to the themes explored regardless of their nationality and culture.

In this respect, the role of curators as cultural mediators is key. Steichen, Reitz, and Butler, in fact, have rejected conventional exhibition strategies in that artworks by diverse artists and depicting diverse cultures cohabit the exhibitionary complex and are placed in conversation with each other so as to allow audiences to simultaneously come into contact with several cultures. Furthermore, they have rejected textual narratives in favour of letting objects reveal the existence of a common humanity whose aspects are expressed differently across cultures. The artworks showcased, by giving the impression that the subjects depicted are physically standing in front of the audiences, create opportunities for the latter to establish an empathic and intimate contact with the cultures displayed upon realisation that they share similar experiences and feelings.

Eventually, by addressing the viewers emotional sphere, both *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays provide encounters that can be remembered both reflectively and reflexively, thus transforming the exhibitionary complex into "a place for tactile, emotional, and intellectual contact with people, ideas, or objects that have the potential to inspire".[120] The impact of the contact zone teaching audiences that they are part of an interconnected world

[116] Bennett 2006, p. 64
[117] Sukkar interviewed by Blazwick 2017, p. 184
[118] Butler 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS23_w0fOgw and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7iF2Bb8XuE
[119] Personal interview with Butler, November 2017
[120] Askins and Pain 2011, p. 817 and Skramstad 1999, p. 126

can ultimately lead to the transformation of social practices. Upon being moved by the displays, viewers are more prone to apply the message they have learnt even outside of the exhibition spaces, thus celebrating cultural differences and reframing their perception of the Self as connected to the Other. And these are key steps to encouraging the acceptance of cultural diversity.

Nevertheless, despite both *The Family of Man* and the ISelf displays *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* claim to be collective portraits of humanity aimed at bridging diverse cultures and encouraging intercultural dialogue and understanding, they do not entirely function as ultimate contact zones due to the predominance of a Western-centric point of view hindering the full establishment of safe houses of equal representation. When discussing exhibitions, one key question that needs to be addressed is "who speaks to and for whom and under what conditions as well as where and when".[121] By trying to answer this question one can see how, despite their increasing commitment to engaging with communities and speaking to several audiences, modern art museums to some extent still seem to rely on those mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion like their 19th century ancestors. Out of the 503 photographs displayed in *The Family of Man,* only 111 depict people from non-Western cultures. This means that most of the 68 countries represented in the exhibition are located either in Europe or in North America. Furthermore, the texts accompanying the photographs mostly come from Christian sacred texts and Western literary sources whose provenance is thoroughly documented with the name of the author and the title of the work. Conversely, the few non-Western texts selected are presented with vague descriptions such as "Sioux Indian", or "Maori". [122] Similarly, although the ISelf collection comprises several works by artists from all over the world, Butler and her team have selected a majority of works by European and North American artists outnumbering those by artists from India, Indonesia, Japan, and Sri Lanka.[123]

What this suggests, at large, is the predominance of a Western voice within both exhibition spaces, the reason for this being that Steichen, Reitz, and Butler solely cooperated with a Western team of assistant curators and researchers. Consequently, if on one hand it is undeniable that *The Family of Man* and the ISelf collection displays provide opportunities for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, these will always be limited to the few non-Western cultures exhibited. That is to say, the impact of the contact zone will be hindered in that horizontal relations between diverse cultures cannot be fully established due to the predominance of a Western voice. [124]

What would be needed to counteract the Western vantage point in *The Family of Man* is a better documentation of the non-Western sources. This does not have to be done necessarily in the exhibition space, but on the multimedia guide on iPad mini that visitors are given upon entering the exhibition. And perhaps the guide could also show more photographs from non-Western cultures related to the exhibition themes. Both approaches, however, are not currently considered by Reitz who has decided to adopt an archaeological approach aimed at preserving the original look of *The Family of Man.*[125]

As for the ISelf Collection displays, two more will be installed at the Whitechapel in 2018, i.e. *The Upset Bucket* and *Bumped Bodies,* exploring respectively how we relate to wider society and

[121] Ferguson 1996, p. 131
[122] Staniszewski 1998, p. 236 and Steichen 1955, p. 55, 63, 176,
[123] http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/iself-collection-self-portrait-as-the-billy-goat/ and http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/iself-collection-the-end-of-love/
[124] Bennett 2006, p. 59, 63.
[125] Personal interview with Reitz and http://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man

to our possessions. The hope is that Butler and her team would bring more world cultures to the exhibition space, thus transforming these last two exhibitions into platforms of equal representation.[126]

Lastly, it is important to point out that changes in behaviour take place after repeated exercises, meaning that to really create space for intercultural dialogue and encourage audiences to come closer to diverse cultures, a continuous effort on the part of curators is required who should create more exhibitions addressing human interconnectedness. [127] In fact, even though exhibitions like *The Family of Man* and the ISelf collection displays provide a glimpse of the world's complexity, the message they send is rarely replicated in modern art museums permanent displays. Here, in most cases objects are still displayed with an emphasis on nations and artistic movements. Rather, organising works around themes to which larger audiences, besides the autochthonous population, can relate to is needed for the staging of fruitful intercultural encounters.[128] At the same time, the number of permanent exhibitions addressing multiple voices appears smaller than those focussing on Western artistic production. This is visible in the current exhibition programme of the MoMA, for instance, where one sees an abundance of solo exhibitions of Western artists like Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) and Max Ernst (1891-1976), and only one exhibition focussing on non-Western artistic production, Brazilian art in this case, *Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil*.[129] The same goes for the Tate which, besides the above-mentioned *Soul of a Nation*, will only host another exhibition dealing with non-Western artistic production, that is *Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté 1938-1948,* out of a total of 32 planned for the year 2017-2018.[130] What is needed, then, is more exhibitions showing cultures in constant dialogue and interaction. Only then, will diverse communities feel entitled to visit and their perception on cultural diversity be reshaped.

To conclude, the exhibition *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* have been discussed to see whether they function as ultimate contact zones. Indeed, by juxtaposing several cultures and worldviews and employing an intercultural approach aimed at equally highlighting shared human concerns and cultural differences, both exhibitions provide spaces of intercultural encounters aimed at bridging the audiences with the cultures displayed. Objects as *aides-mémoires* serve to make these encounters more intimate and personal in that they humanise the cultures displayed and allow audiences to empathise with and feel connected to them.

More importantly, both exhibitions, by highlighting the existence of a common humanity, shape new worldviews whose impact can lead to social changes. Audiences, in fact, are encouraged to develop a sense of shared global consciousness and see cultural diversities as variations on a common theme even outside of the exhibitionary complex. Nevertheless, due to the predominance of a Western curatorial voice and artistic production, both *The Family of Man* and the ISelf displays *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* fail to fully function as safe houses of equal representation providing platforms of horizontal intercultural dialogue. Thus, what is required of curators is to put more efforts into bringing more cultures to the exhibitionary complex and finally reject those 19th century mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion.

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[126] Butler 2017, p. 13-15
[127] Bennett 2006, p. 66-67 and Pieterse 1997, p. 133-135
[128] Clifford 1997, p. 215 and Pieterse 2007, p. 133-135
[129] https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions
[130] http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on?event_type=exhibition&gallery_group=tate_britain%2Ctate_liverpool%2Ctate_modern%2Ctate_st_ives

III

Tradition and Contemporaneity and *Viva Arte Viva*: Shared Human Concerns in the 3rd Bienal de la Habana and the 57th Biennale di Venezia

Nowadays, biennials are increasingly moving away from being surveys of contemporary art to becoming spaces in which current world's issues and shared human concerns are addressed in the hope to encourage diverse cultures to come into contact and establish relations of mutual understanding.[131]

In this chapter, the role of biennials as ultimate contact zones instilling a sense of shared global consciousness will be discussed with reference to the 1989 3rd Havana Bienal *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and this year's 57th Venice Biennale *Viva Arte Viva.*[132] Specifically, the dynamics of intercultural encounters between audiences and artists and the extent to which both exhibitions provide platforms where diverse cultures meet horizontally will be the object of discussion. In this respect, the narrative and display strategies of *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and *Viva Arte Viva,* whether curators have employed an intercultural approach, and the agency of the objects displayed upon the audiences will be analysed. Furthermore, excerpts from Mosquera, Llanes Godoy and Macel's curatorial statements will be included to better understand their goals and expectations for the Havana and Venice biennials respectively.

The first art biennial to be established was the Venice Biennale. Still called *grand dame* by many, the first edition took place in 1895 to celebrate King Umberto I (1844-1900) and Queen Margherita of Savoy's (1851-1926) silver anniversary and promote the image of Venice as a dynamic and culturally active centre in Europe.[133] The Venice Biennale can be placed within the tradition of the famous 19th century world exhibitions, such as the Great Exhibition in London (1851) and the international art exhibitions at the Munich Glaspalast (1886 and 1888). What they all had in common was a sense of optimism about men's progress and a spirit of internationalism, i.e. the will to strengthen diplomatic ties with other Western countries, both typical of that time.[134]

The first Biennale took place in the Giardini that still host the exhibition today and was a major success. The exhibition was open to the public and brought together a total of 285 artists, 156 of which came from abroad.[135] The then Mayor of Venice Riccardo Selvatico (1849-1901) claimed that the aim of the Biennale was that of showing how art was "the most noble activity of the modern spirit no matter from which country".[136] Therefore, by displaying the best of European artistic production in the same place, the Biennale's organisers aimed to present

[131] Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010, p. 361 and Enwezor 2003, p. 105-106

[132] Most of my analysis of the display strategies and narrative employed in the 3rd Havana Bienal will be based upon the extensive descriptions made by Weiss (2011) in her book *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989.* Unfortunately, I was not able to provide photographs and detailed descriptions of the displays in that the original catalogue appears out of print and, as Weiss herself has explained, not many photographs and documents showing the original installations have survived.

[133] Bydler 2004, p. 100 and Alloway 1969, p. 32, 38.

[134] Bydler 2004, p. 85 and Alloway 1969, p. 33, 36.

[135] Di Martino 2005, p. 12.

[136] Selvatico 1894, quoted by Di Martino 2005, p. 10

national visual cultures not as separate entities, but as part of a network of cultural exchanges between nations. World exhibitions, including the Biennale, aimed to promote a sense of unity of mankind by showing how both technological and cultural progress were shortening geographical distances between nations.[137] Then, one can argue that from its first edition the Biennale provided a platform for thinking of the world as more interconnected. Nevertheless, it still provided a highly restrictive perception of the world based on mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and reflected the 19th century spirit of nationalism and imperialism. The works selected were traditional with history, morality, and religion as the predominant themes, while art from the colonies was largely excluded.[138]

More importantly, if initially the Biennale exhibitionary complex seemed to instil a sense of internationalism by showcasing the works of Italian and international artists in the same building as well as next to each other in some exhibition rooms, this began to change from 1907 onwards. At that point, in fact, the participating countries began to erect national pavilions in the Giardini.[139] This highlighted how the importance of geopolitical borders and politics was still valued within the Biennale spaces. For instance, upon briefly looking at the topography of space, one notices how the French and British pavilions appeared close to each other, while Sweden, Norway, and Finland were grouped in the North Pavilion – this to reflect the political alliances of the time. Furthermore, prizes were also awarded to the best artists, which placed countries in competition.[140] Thus, despite its claims of internationalism, the Biennale ended up reinforcing feelings of national pride. It was a chance for countries to show how their artistic production, thus their culture, was more refined than that of their European neighbours. Then, to some extent the Venice Biennale functioned as a space of encounters and provided the spectacle of seeing and being seen that might have stimulated a sense of collective identity and belonging to the Western world. But what this massive exhibition in its first editions really served to was confirming the European worldviews on history and imperialism and reinforcing hierarchical relations between European countries.[141]

However, with the coming of the 20th century and the advent of globalisation, art biennials began to drift away from their nationalistic attitudes. Their format significantly changed during what is now known as the second wave of biennalisation from the 1950s until the 1990s, when art biennials expanded worldwide from Sao Paulo (1951), Alexandria (1955), Sydney (1973), and Havana (1984).[142] These are known as Biennials of the South, where South is here to be intended as referring to their geographical location in the Southern hemisphere of the world and is not to be confused with the assumption of the South as the poorest and most undeveloped area of the world. To understand how Southern biennials work, the 3rd Bienal de la Habana *Tradition and Contemporaneity* is an interesting case in point.

Tradition and Contemporaneity opened in 1989 at the Wilfredo Lam Centre in Cuba and coincided with a key historical moment: the fall of the Berlin Wall marking the end of the world's division into Eastern and Western blocs on one hand, and the emergence of mass communication and technological developments on the other, marking the beginning of a new era of mass mobility and reduction of geographical distances.[143] In light of this, the curators

[137] Papastergiadis and Martin 2011, p. 48 and Bydler 2004, p. 85
[138] Papastergiadis and Martin 2011, p. 50 and Alloway 1969, p. 41
[139] Alloway 1969, p. 51 and Martini 2011, p. 120
[140] Martini 2011, p. 106 and Alloway 1969, p. 45-47
[141] Martini 2011, p. 100
[142] Green and Gardner 2016, p. 50
[143] Rojas-Sotelo 2009, p. XXVI-XXVII, 238

Gerardo Mosquera, Nelson Herrera Ysla, and Llilian Llanes Godoy decided to address these changes in the Bienal and encourage a new vision of the world as extremely diverse, yet interconnected through shared human concerns transcending geopolitical borders and cultural differences. To do so, the themes of tradition and contemporaneity were chosen that largely reflected a concern that all world countries were dealing with at the time – whether traditional culture had to be maintained or rejected face the emergence of the contemporary age.[144]

More importantly, as explained by Llanes Godoy, to really present the world as interconnected it appeared necessary to challenge the dominance of Western-centrism in the art world and transform the Bienal into a platform for Third World artists that had been largely ignored until that moment.[145] Before moving on, it appears necessary to clarify the notion of Third World. This term came to be used following the 1955 Bandung Conference, when Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean that refused to align with both the Soviet Union and the US ideologies established ties of solidarity and initiated political, economic, and cultural cooperation. Thus, like the term South, Third World here is not to be confused as a synonym of under-developed and poor countries.[146]

Tradition and Contemporaneity only included art from Third World countries and excluded Western artistic production. While this might suggest a reinforcement of inclusion/exclusion mechanisms at first, in reality it served to better favour the establishment of horizontal dialogue between Third World countries that might have been otherwise discouraged by the presence of Western artistic production claiming to be at the top of the world's cultural output.[147] Eventually, by displaying the works by artists from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the 3rd Havana Bienal aimed to provide a horizontal and non-discriminatory space of encounters and dialogue between Third World artists, critics, curators, scholars, and art-enthusiasts. [148] At the same time, Western arts professionals also attended the Bienal and the choice of addressing a shared concern that they could equally relate to eventually allowed it to function as an ultimate contact zone in which "fruitful and enriching exchange" between cultures could take place.[149]

In terms of how intercultural dialogue and understanding were encouraged within the exhibition space, the curatorial perspective employed deserves more attention. First of all, the notion of the über-curator with a hegemonic voice was rejected in favour of a cooperative curatorship that saw Mosquera, Herrera Ysla, and Llanes Godoy all sharing authorship. More than curators, Llanes Godoy saw the team as a group or researchers invested with the social task of allowing audiences to get acquainted with Third World regions and their cultures. Thus, each of them was assigned a region and conducted field research that involved talking to local experts to understand the social, political, and economic conditions, and visiting artists' studios to get to know the motives behind their practice and better represent them in the exhibition space.[150] They then met regularly to discuss their findings and come up with ideas about the exhibition narrative and displays. Eventually, shared curatorship and in-depth research allowed for an equal representation of diverse cultures within the exhibition space, thus transforming

[144] Weiss 2011, p. 31 and Rojas-Sotelo 2009, p. 240
[145] Llanes Godoy 1989, p. 178-179 and Llanes Godoy 1994, p. 5-6
[146] Green and Gardner 2013, p. 446 and Bydler 2004, p. 228-230
[147] Green and Gardner 2016, p. 81 and Rojas-Sotelo 2009, p. 67
[148] Bydler 2004, p. 112 and Green and Gardner 2013, p. 452-454.
[149] Mosquera 2011, p. 72 Llanes Godoy 1989, p. 183
[150] Weiss 2011, p. 24 and Rojas-Sotelo 2009, p. 103, 115

the Bienal into a platform where cultures met horizontally without the presence of a dominant voice.[151]

This idea of horizontality was further reflected in the decision to abolish national pavilions and the awarding of prizes to the best artists that was typical of Venice. As stated in the catalogue, the Bienal aimed to encourage a "mutual cultural rapprochement" among Third World countries, and between the latter and the rest of the world, and ultimately lead to the establishment of ties of political, economic, and social solidarity.[152] It follows that the presence of national pavilions and prizes, respectively encouraging a fragmented vision of the world and imposing relationships of competition between the participating artists, would have hindered the role of the Bienal as a space celebrating the world's interconnectedness.[153]

Thus, Mosquera and his colleagues saw the Bienal less as a survey of art and more as a pedagogical endeavour aimed at having a broad social impact by shaping new worldviews. To make this possible, Mosquera explained, the themes of the works showcased and their agency on the public were given more weight than their aesthetic qualities.[154]

The Bienal consisted of the central exhibition *Tres Mundos* and four thematic displays (*núcleos*) all reflecting on the dichotomy between tradition and contemporaneity. Here, works by Third World artists cohabited the exhibitionary complex and created meaning together. For example, in *Tres Mundos* contemporary artworks and traditional masks and bamboo sculptures by artists from Mexico, Chile, Zaire, Korea, and India to name a few were placed side by side to indicate how in Third World countries tradition and contemporaneity coexisted.[155]

Moving to the *núcleos,* the first addressed how some aspects of traditional culture, such as myths, national histories, and religious beliefs persisted in contemporary artistic practice as reflected in the works by artists like Roberto Feleo from the Philippines, Ahmed Nawar from Egypt, Victor Teixeira from Angola, and Eduardo Ramirez Villamizar from Colombia. The second *núcleo* explored the persistence of traditional elements in contemporary culture and showcased wire toys made by children living in sub-Saharan Africa and wooden effigies portraying Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), a prominent political figure in the history of Venezuelan independence. Lastly, the third *núcleo* showcased works addressing social issues such as the importance of granting women more social participation in a world too often dominated by patriarchy, as expressed in the photographs depicting matriarchal communities in south Oaxaca by Mexican artist Graciela Iturbide, or disrespect of human rights in Brazilian artist Sebastiaõ Salgado's photographs of workers in Kenya, Laos, and Thailand, and refugee camps in Ethiopia and Mali.[156]

What emerges from this brief description of *Tradition and Contemporaneity* is that the juxtaposition of works by artists from diverse backgrounds created a polyphony of voices that were equally addressed within the exhibition space. Ultimately, this rendered the Bienal a platform of horizontal intercultural dialogue which, Mosquera explains, "recognised and emphasised artistic and cultural differences, but within a shared, postcolonial practice of contemporary art".[157] That is to say, throughout the displays cultural and artistic diversities were highlighted by the works themselves with their medium specificity and references to local histories. At the same time, the choice of framing Third World artistic production under the

[151] Mosquera 2011, p. 73-75 and Weiss 2011, p. 64
[152] Weiss 2011, p. 14 and Llanes Godoy 1989, p. 180
[153] Green and Gardner 2016, p. 86 and Llanes Godoy 1989, p. 181
[154] Mosquera 1990 cited by Weiss 2011, p. 32 and Mosquera 2011, p. 76
[155] Weiss 2011, p. 38-39 and 90-95
[156] Weiss 2011, p. 44-59
[157] Weiss 2011, p. 37 and Mosquera 2011, p. 74

transnational and transcultural themes of tradition and contemporaneity allowed the Bienal curators to equally highlight the existence of stories and concerns that are shared across cultures.[158]

Particularly, curators invested the objects showcased with the role of *aides-mémoires* inviting audiences to critically engage with and reflect on the issues they commented upon. This made the Bienal function as a dialogic contact zone and site of knowledge-production where individual objects and their juxtaposition allowed Third World artists and arts professionals to get closer face the realisation that diverse cultural and artistic practices often addressed shared human concerns. At the same time, seen as the themes explored in the exhibitions were equally relevant to Western culture, the Havana Bienal allowed for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding to take place even between Western and Third World artists and arts professionals. In this respect, one can see Witcomb's pedagogy of feeling at work in *Tradition and Contemporaneity*.

Furthermore, Weiss posits that in the Havana Bienal "in some ways, it seemed that artists were there to meet each other more than to show their work".[159] This is indeed true of the international conference titled *Tradition and Contemporaneity* that was part of the fourth *núcleo* and largely contributed to making the Bienal an ultimate contact zone. Attended by scholars, artists, and arts professionals from Latin America, Africa, Asia, as well as Europe and the U.S, the conference took the form of an open dialogue in which participants expressed their opinions on how to deal with tradition and contemporaneity in modern society. The aim was not to provide a final answer on the matter, but to create a horizontal platform of dialogue in which several worldviews interacted and were bridged.[160] What emerged was that despite all participants had different ideas on the issues discussed, they realised that the world was indeed interconnected in that all countries were moving towards contemporaneity due to the emergence of mass communication and technological innovations, but at the same time remained faithful to traditional culture. Similarly, participants also realised that all countries were going through similar social, political and economic issues, e.g. unbalanced wealth distribution and disrespect of human rights. Indian art historian Greta Kapur who attended the conference remembers it as a space of revelatory encounters and mutual understanding in which diverse cultures could meet, interact, and build ties of empathy and solidarity that could endure even outside of the Bienal exhibitionary complex.[161]

Lastly, another integral element to the staging of encounters in the Havana Bienal were the bars located within its premises. To quote Mosquera, "the bars were perhaps emblems of one of the Bienal's main achievements: the foundation of a space for encounter and shared knowledge".[162] This because they allowed international and local artists and audiences to meet and interact in less informal ways and get to know each other at a more personal level that went beyond sole artistic expression and political ideologies. Mosquera, in fact, recalls that it was in the Bienal bars that intercultural encounters reached their maximum potential in that they allowed for the blossoming of long-lasting friendships and bonds of empathy between international audiences and artists.[163]

[158] Llanes Godoy 1994, p. 5-6 and Weiss 2011, p. 65
[159] Weiss 2011, p. 60
[160] Ibid, p. 61-63 and Llanes Godoy 1989, p. 182
[161] Weiss 2011, p. 61-65
[162] Mosquera 2011, p. 76
[163] Mosquera 2011, p. 76 Green and Gardner 2013, p. 452

Indeed, with its innovative curatorial strategies, the 3rd Havana Bienal proposed an alternative way of conceiving biennials as spaces of dialogue and critical reflection that was later employed in the Venice Biennale as well. From the 1970s, in fact, the Biennale curators began to frame the world's artistic production under overarching themes that could counteract Western artistic hegemony and bridge cultural differences. One example is the 49th edition *Plateau of Humankind* (2001) curated by Harald Szeemann who aimed to transform the Biennale into a space of encounters between different individuals and reflect upon the possibilities to create a global family. To do so, the works showcased all served to indicate how artists, regardless of cultural and national identity, comment upon eternal and common aspects of humanity, from religion to disillusionment and encounters with the Other. Another example is the 50th Biennale *Dreams and Conflicts – The Viewer's Dictatorship* (2003), curated by Francesco Bonami who shared authorship with eleven curators, among which Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, to create ten different sections all reflecting on global issues like the effects of social and political crises, the rapid changes in modern cities, and the concept of utopia. Both exhibitions were also more inclusive of art from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, thus demonstrating a commitment to counteracting Western-centrism.[164] Drawing upon this new role of the Biennale, this year's 57th edition titled *Viva Arte Viva* curated by Christine Macel continues to take encounters and open dialogue between artists and audiences as its *raison d'être.*[165] As stated by Macel:

> "Today, in a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. Art is the last bastion, a garden to cultivate above and beyond trends and personal interests. It stands as an unequivocal alternative to individualism and indifference".[166]

In other words, *Viva Arte Viva* celebrates art as the most precious part of humanity, capable of revealing our inner emotions and providing optimistic ways to look at the world and its people.

More importantly, it promises to reveal the world's interconnectedness by addressing shared human concerns. *Viva Arte Viva* consists of nine trans-pavilions exploring artists and books, joys and fears, the environment, traditions, shamans, women's bodies, colours, and time and infinity.[167] The reason why Macel has called them trans-pavilions is because they address transnational themes to which all audiences, regardless of their nationality and culture, can relate to. Specifically, the choice of addressing shared human concerns shows how the Biennale has been conceived in the spirit of neo-humanism, that is, the hope that through the evocative power of art diverse audiences would be ultimately encouraged to come together in a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity.[168]

In this respect, one can already see *Viva Arte Viva* operating as an ultimate contact zone, but to understand how intercultural encounters between artists and audiences effectively took place, a closer look at the exhibition is key. *Viva Arte Viva* works as a metaphor of a journey that visitors take from their inner selves, to their relation with the wider world and the people

[164] Di Martino 2005, p. 105, 109-111
[165] Baratta 2017, p. 36
[166] Macel 2017, see: http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2017/introduction-christine-macel
[167] Macel 2017, p. 38, 40-43
[168] Macel 2017, p. 38-39 and Baratta 2017, p. 36

inhabiting it.[169] For instance, the Pavilion of Joys and Fears addresses the artists' inner feelings and, by extension, human feelings. Here, Czech artist Luboš Plny's collages (2010) depicting him and his family address significant moments of his life – from the joy of becoming a father, to the sadness following the death of his parents (fig. 7). Chinese artist Firenze Lai's drawings and canvases (2012-2013) depicting uncanny figures with disproportioned bodies and faces seemingly deprived of emotions, instead, explore human anxieties face the inability to adapt to the changing world (fig. 8). Similarly, Sebastián Díaz Morales from Argentina with his video work *Suspension* (2014-2017) showing a man falling into the void provides an allegory of modern men who remain passive even face highly dramatic events (fig. 9).[170] Although this is not a complete list of the works showcased, one can already see how their co-presence in the exhibition space invites visitors to realise how we all experience feelings like joy, fear and anxiety that in most cases stem from the same situations. This, in turn, allows audiences to feel closer to other cultures.

This feeling of closeness is also encouraged in the Pavilion of the Earth exploring environmental issues and men's relationship with nature. For instance, Japanese artist Koki Tanaka's *Of Walking Unknown* (2016) documenting a trip he took from his house in Kyoto to the nearest nuclear power plant invites visitors to reflect upon how fear of environmental catastrophes equally concerns all cultures (fig. 10). Instead, Petrit Halilaj from Kosovo with his massive sculptures of night moths made of Kosovan textiles (2017) reveals how fascination with nature and its living creatures is also something that we all share (fig. 11).[171]

With this in mind, one can see how, by exhibiting works by artists from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East and letting them create meaning individually as well as together, Macel has adopted an intercultural approach that equally highlights cultural diversities and similarities. At the same time, the juxtaposition of diverse works all cohabiting the exhibitionary complex allows *Viva Arte Viva* to function as a safe house in which diverse cultures can meet horizontally.[172]

Furthermore, the exhibition operates as a discourse that is articulated by means of objects as *aides-mémoires.* The focus, in fact, appears to be less on the works aesthetic qualities, although these are also addressed, and more on the stories they tell that simultaneously reflect the world's complexity and its interconnectedness.[173] Specifically, the choice to explore issues that resonate with the audiences' personal lives and preoccupations is what really activates the ultimate contact zone.[174] This because audiences will be more prone to recognise themselves in the displays and consequently empathise with and connect to the cultures showcased. Empathy, then, is what initiates intercultural dialogue and understanding in *Viva Arte Viva.*

Interestingly, Macel placed empathy across cultures at the core of her exhibition, as reflected in her choice to include several participatory works in the trans-pavilions providing direct encounters between diverse audiences and artists. In the Pavilion of Artists and Books, for instance, Oliafur Eliasson's project *Green Light – An Artistic Workshop* invites visitors to

[169] Macel 2017, p. 40
[170] Macel 2017, p. 77-78, 82
[171] Ibid, p. 108, 114
[172] Ibid, p. 38-39
[173] These are my personal considerations when I visited the Biennale in August 2017. I noticed how, indeed, the displays reveal an interest in highlighting the aesthetic qualities of the works showcased. At the same time, the captions accompanying the objects all highlight how their themes reflect shared human concerns that all cultures can relate to.
[174] Macel 2017, p. 38

cooperate with refugees towards the creation of a series of lamps using materials selected by the artist that can be arranged in several ways (fig. 12). Another example is Ernesto Neto's *Um Sagrado Lugar* in the Pavilion of the Shamans – a reproduction of a *Cupixawa*, a tent where the Huni Kuin population of the Amazon forest holds political meetings and healing sessions (fig. 13). Here, Neto and some Huni Kuin people invite audiences to enter the tent and take part into a healing session for the contemporary world. Visitors are asked to reflect upon current world's issues and come up with potential solutions for the future (fig. 14).[175]

What these works all have in common is their ability to transform audiences into active participants by creating situations of collective creativity and learning. The co-presence of diverse audiences who are free to express their different thoughts and ideas allows these works to initiate intercultural dialogue and exchange.[176] This is possible because by encouraging diverse audiences to cooperate towards the realisation of a common goal, in this case the creation of a lamp and finding solutions to global issues, these works allow for more intimate and personal contacts between different cultures that can stimulate the establishment of bonds of empathy.[177] And this indeed further contributes to making *Viva Arte Viva* a space where mutual understanding across diverse cultures can take place.

Overall, it is possible to see how by letting objects address the affective realm and showcasing several participatory works, curatorial intervention in *Viva Arte Viva* has been reduced in favour of employing a pedagogy of feeling that maximises audiences' emotional responses and allows them to intimately interact with diverse cultures that are co-present in the exhibitionary complex.

Specifically, the choice of addressing shared human concerns has transformed the exhibition into a journey of wonder and revelation with a strong educational impact. *Viva Arte Viva* aims to provide a platform in which new worldviews are encouraged in the hope to reinvent the world. By operating as a space of intercultural dialogue and exchange, in fact, the exhibition aims to transform audiences' worldviews and attitudes towards other cultures, and ultimately invite them to embrace neo-humanism and develop a sense of human interconnectedness transcending geopolitical borders and cultural differences.[178]

Overall, the 3rd Havana Bienal *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and the 57th Venice Biennale exhibition *Viva Arte Viva* function as glocal exhibitions in that by addressing issues and concerns that are shared across cultures, they hold both a local and a global relevance. In this respect, their curators Mosquera, Llanes Godoy, Herrera Ysla, and Macel all operated as cultural mediators committed to creating spaces where cultures could meet horizontally, as reflected in their choice to be more inclusive of the world's artistic production and showcase the works of several artists side by side to let them create meaning together.

Specifically, bars and conferences in Havana and participatory works in Venice allowed audiences to acknowledge diversities as well as shared aspects of humanity and, consequently, to connect at the personal level through bonds of trust and empathy. Eventually, these feelings of trust and empathy are meant to influence the actions and worldviews of the audiences even outside of the exhibitionary complex. Thus, one can see the contact zones in Havana and Venice operating as catalysts of social changes in that they invite audiences to leave with a sense of

[175] Macel 2017, p. 70, 128 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RuF2uCsMxk&t=1718s
[176] Birchall 2017, p. 70 and Rugaard 2017, p. 83, 89
[177] Baratta 2017, p. 36-37 and Thobo-Carlsen 2017, p. 109
[178] Macel 2017, p. 38-39 and Baratta 2017, p. 36

shared global consciousness which is key to encouraging nations and communities to establishing ties of reciprocal respect and understanding.[179]

This notwithstanding, both the current editions of the Havana Bienal and the Venice Biennale do not entirely function as ultimate contact zones. Due to lack of funding, the Havana Bienal has changed its format since 1989. Bars and conferences providing platforms of direct encounters between artists and audiences have been often cut out.[180] Furthermore, although the last editions have all addressed shared human concerns, e.g. how technological innovations in communication have increasingly reduced human personal contacts making us more secluded in *One closer to the Other* (2001), and how people construct their social spaces and establish relationships with others on the basis of common interests, personality, and individual subjectivity in *Artistic Practices and Social Imaginaries* (2012), the Habana Bienal has now become less inclusive of diverse cultures in its displays in that the majority of the artists displayed are Latin American. [181] This, in turn, has hindered the establishment of a horizontal intercultural dialogue between Third World countries.[182] More funding for future editions will hopefully allow the Havana Bienal to once again operate as an ultimate contact zone.

Similarly, although *Viva Arte Viva* works as a safe house, this year's Biennale still employs national pavilions and awards prizes to the best artists. Although according to the Biennale's president Paolo Baratta these aspects are essential to making the Biennale a space in which a plurality of voices and visions are equally addressed, in reality they reveal its extremely contradictory character.[183] This because if on one hand the main exhibition reflects upon the possibilities of a unified world and the heterogeneity of nations, on the other the presence of national pavilions reinforces bounded notions of national cultures and identities.[184] Secondly, besides placing countries in competition around the idea of which is best, the awarding of prizes ends up pushing audiences to focus more on the style and medium of the works showcased, and less on their evocative power.[185] Perhaps, as curator Achille Bonito Oliva has suggested, to really transform the Venice Biennale into an ultimate contact zone, national pavilions curators should address how identities are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and choose artists regardless of their nationality so as to create smaller ancillary exhibitions where the world's interconnectedness can be further explored.[186]

To conclude, having put intercultural encounters and dialogue at the core of their approach, Mosquera, Llanes Godoy, Herrera Ysla, and Macel have transformed the Havana Bienal *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and the Venice Biennale *Viva Arte Viva* respectively into spaces of intercultural encounters where a more interconnected vision of the world is encouraged. This was done by framing the world's artistic production under shared human concerns, namely, the survival of traditions in contemporary societies in Havana, and human emotions and fears in Venice.

Specifically, the role of objects as *aides-mémoires* equally addressing cultural diversities and shared concerns, as well as the creation of platforms of direct encounters between artists and

[179] Ferguson and Hoegsberg 2010, p. 372-373 Green and Gardner 2016, p. 87
[180] Rojas-Sotelo 2009, p. XXX, 113 and Mosquera 2011, p. 79
[181] Herrera Ysla, 1994 and Fernández Torres, 2012
[182] Mosquera 2011, p. 79
[183] Baratta 2017, p. 37
[184] Martini 2011, p. 110
[185] Green and Gardner 2016, p. 86, 98-99
[186] Martini 2011, p. 108, 110

audiences in both Havana and Venice, have largely allowed them to become safe houses of equal representation in which diverse cultures met horizontally and established bonds of empathic connection.

Nevertheless, if in 1989 the Habana Bienal worked as an ultimate contact zone mediating between Third World and Western artists and audiences, this no longer happens today seen as only Latin American artists are showcased and direct intercultural encounters appear limited. Similarly, if the Venice Biennale still maintains national pavilions and the awarding of prizes providing a highly fragmented vision of the world, a full establishment of the ultimate contact zone will continue to be hindered.

Conclusion

Building on the theories of Pratt, Clifford, Witcomb, and Bennett, in this research the role of modern art museums and art biennials as contact zones where intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding can take place has been discussed. Specifically, in Chapter 1 the concept of the ultimate contact zone has been introduced consisting of three main aspects: a curatorial approach focussed on shared human concerns transcending cultural differences and geopolitical borders, a larger inclusion of the world's artistic production in the exhibitionary complex, and display strategies aimed at evoking an empathic rapprochement across cultures.
These approaches have then discussed more in-depth in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 has looked at the exhibitions *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays *The End of Love* and *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* to explore the role of modern art museums as ultimate contact zones. Chapter 3 shifted the focus on biennials and analysed the 3rd Havana Bienal *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and the 57th Venice Biennale *Viva Arte Viva*.

Now, coming to conclusions, it is possible to see how modern art museums and biennials have followed similar patterns in terms of the curatorial practice employed. What Steichen, Reitz, Butler, Macel, Mosquera and his team all have in common is their choice to employ a social history curatorship and give vision an affective agency whereby audiences are allowed to critically reflect upon their inner selves and their understanding of the wider world and concretely seek to redefine their relationship with the Other. Steichen and Reitz in *The Family of Man* and Butler in the ISelf Collection displays did it by displaying photographs and works depicting how diverse cultures experience shared moments of everyday life and human feelings, e.g. leisure, work, love, fear, and weddings. Mosquera and his team in *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and Macel in *Viva Arte Viva* did it by showcasing works revealing how some concerns, from anxiety about the future to environmental issues, are all experienced across the world.

Specifically, the curatorial practice employed in these exhibitions reveals a commitment to disrupting traditional exhibition-making strategies and ways of seeing. First, curators have been more inclusive of the world's artistic production and, instead of addressing cultures in isolation, they have revealed the world's interconnectedness and heterogeneity by juxtaposing works by artists from diverse backgrounds and depicting diverse cultures.
Secondly, the dominance of an authoritative curatorial voice has been rejected in favour of conferring objects the role of *aides-mémoires* "expressing ongoing moral lessons with current political force".[187] That is to say, in both modern art museums and biennials exhibitions, the objects showcased create meaning by speaking for themselves and with other works. Ultimately, they reveal how the stories and concerns of the cultures depicted are shared aspects of humanity, what differ are the ways in which they are expressed that largely depend on cultural differences.

It follows that, being placed in a frame of intercultural exchanges and relations, objects allow audiences to recognise themselves in the displays and become aware of the existence of a common humanity. Reduction of curatorial intervention in *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays, as well as in *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and *Viva Arte Viva,* transforms

[187] Clifford 1997, p. 191

visitors into active participants who come into contact and interact with the cultures displayed as if they are physically co-present in the exhibitionary complex. This, in turn, allows audiences to establish bonds of empathy and mutual understanding with the cultures displayed based on the acceptance of both similarities and diversities across cultures.

In this respect, one can see how in modern art museums and biennials as ultimate contact zones exhibitions become spaces of critical analysis where a plurality of statements and voices are addressed. In other words, both institutions have begun to operate *glocally* in that they address local issues in the global context, thus creating the possibility for several cultures and worldviews to be represented in the exhibition space. And this is of extreme importance to the activation of the ultimate contact zone in that the co-presence of diverse cultures in the exhibitionary complex transforms both institutions into "places of crossing, explicit and unacknowledged occasions for different discoveries and selections"[188]. That is to say, being more inclusive of the world's artistic production and framing it under shared human concerns can make diverse audiences feel entitled to visit modern art museums and biennials. This, in turn, allows for direct intercultural encounters to also take place as seen in the international conference *Tradition and Contemporaneity* and in the participatory artworks in *Viva Arte Viva,* and in *The Family of Man* and the ISelf displays all attracting diverse audiences who meet in the exhibition spaces.

Thus, coming to a final answer, by highlighting shared human concerns modern art museums and biennials can contribute to the creation of ultimate contact zones in that they bridge cultural differences and stage encounters that can be remembered reflectively and reflexively. More importantly, although they cater to diverse audiences, local communities in the case of museums and arts professionals and intellectuals in the case of biennials, both institutions do not walk separate ways; rather, they are complementary and it is their synergy that can bring about social changes.

Operating as spaces of encounters, museums and biennials become platforms where relations between cultures are mediated and negotiated. By raising awareness of the existence of a common humanity they allow their audiences to "narrate their biographies into the museum experience, and the museum experience into their biographies".[189] Consequently, all visitors, from artists to arts professionals and art-enthusiasts will be encouraged to leave with a sense of shared global consciousness.

At the beginning of this research, the concept of global community was introduced to refer to world countries coming together in symmetrical relations of social, political, and economic cooperation. Indeed, by encouraging a more interconnected vision of the world, modern art museums and biennials can encourage mutual understanding across cultures which can indeed contribute to the strengthening of diplomatic ties and the emergence of a global community.

That said, although modern art museums and biennials curators have demonstrated a considerable commitment to bridging diverse cultures, both institutions still only partially work as ultimate contact zones in that they fail to provide safe houses of equal representation. In *The Family of Man* and the ISelf Collection displays, in fact, there is still a predominance of a Western voice partially silencing the other cultures displayed, the Havana Bienal has now eliminated most platforms of direct intercultural encounters and majorly displays works by Latin American artists,

[188] Clifford 1997, p. 201
[189] Schorch 2015, p. 446

and the Venice Biennale still awards prizes and employs national pavilions. What these examples show is that museums and biennials curators still need to leave behind bounded notions of cultures and nations and mechanism of inclusion/exclusion that were typical of the 19th century exhibitionary complex.

Indeed, the creation of safe houses of equal representation is a hard task and some might even consider it a utopian achievement seen as the world is constantly changing and there will always be audiences who do not feel represented in the displays.[190]

As Homi Bhaba said, "the globe shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders and frontiers".[191] It is precisely for this reason that curators need to be more committed to transforming museums and biennials into safe houses of equal representation. The outcomes achieved so far are indeed promising and changes are still occurring as shown by the increase in confrontation and cooperation between curators, artists, and communities. Thus, future research will be needed to assess these changes.

Word Count: 18412

[190] Clifford 1997, p. 208 and Bennett 2006, p. 64-65
[191] Bhaba 1992, p. 88

Images

Fig. 1 Installation view of *The Family of Man* section on family life. On the left-hand side, it is possible to see the four life-sized photographs of families from Japan, Italy, the U.S, and Bechuanaland.
© CNA/Romain Girten
Retrieved from: http://steichencollections-cna.lu/fra/collections/1_the-family-of-man (November 2017)

Fig. 2 Installation view of *The Family of Man* section on leisure time. On the right-hand side, it is possible to see the photograph depicting an old woman on a swing mounted on a moveable support hanging from the ceiling.
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Retrieved from: http://steichencollections-cna.lu/fra/collections/1_the-family-of-man (November 2017)

Fig. 3 Installation view of *The Family of Man* section on weddings (on the left wall) and maternal love on a semi-circular transparent wall.
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Retrieved from: http://steichencollections-cna.lu/fra/collections/1_the-family-of-man (November 2017)

Fig. 4 Installation view of Akram Zaatari's *The End of Love* (2012).
© Whitechapel Gallery London, Stephen White.

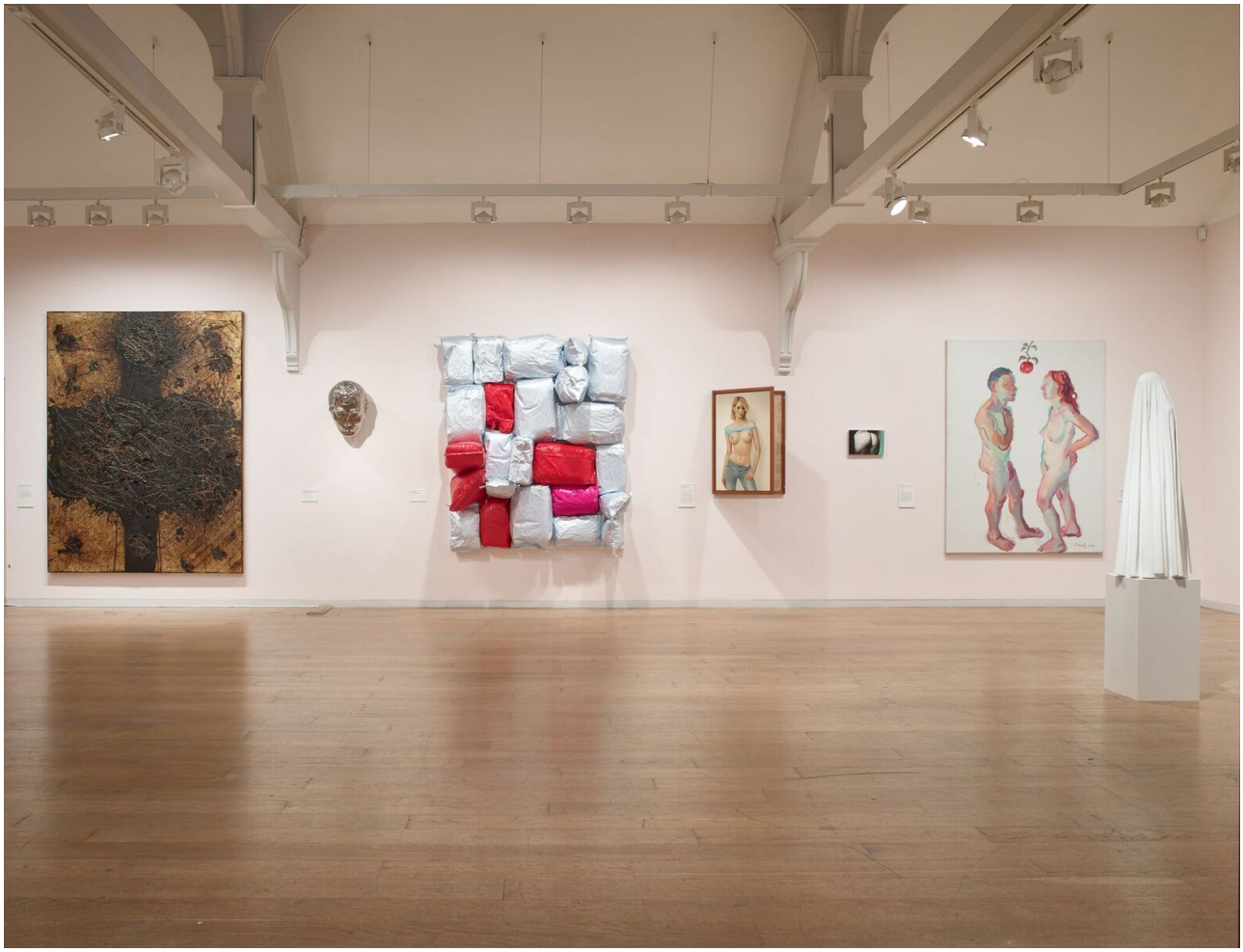

Fig. 5 Installation view of *The End of Love*. On the left-hand side is *My Father* (2014) by Afro-American artist Rashid Johnson.

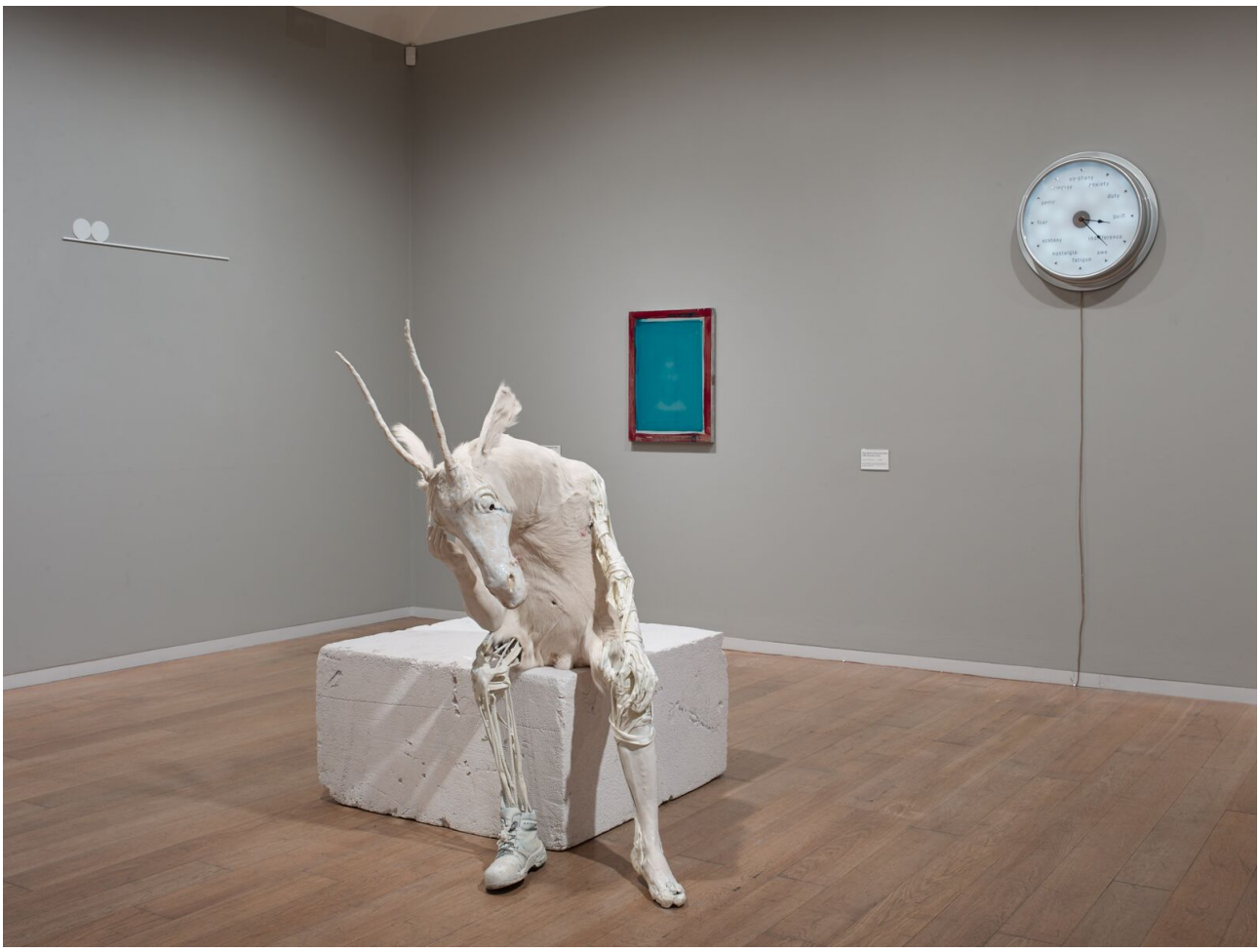

Fig. 6 Installation view of the sculpture *Self-Portrait as the Billy Goat* (2011) by Polish artist Pawel Althamer, and of the Raqs Media Collective's clock *A Day in The Life Of__* (2009).

Fig. 7. Installation view of one of Luboš Plny's collages (2010) displayed in the Pavilion of Joys and Fears in the Giardini section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
Photo taken during my personal visit to the Biennale in August 2017.

Fig. 8. (starting from left) Installation view of Firenze Lai's *Run Run Run* (2010), *The Singers* (2011), and *"Look at you"* (2012) displayed in the Pavilion of Joys and Fears in the Giardini section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
Photo taken during my personal visit to the Biennale in August 2017.

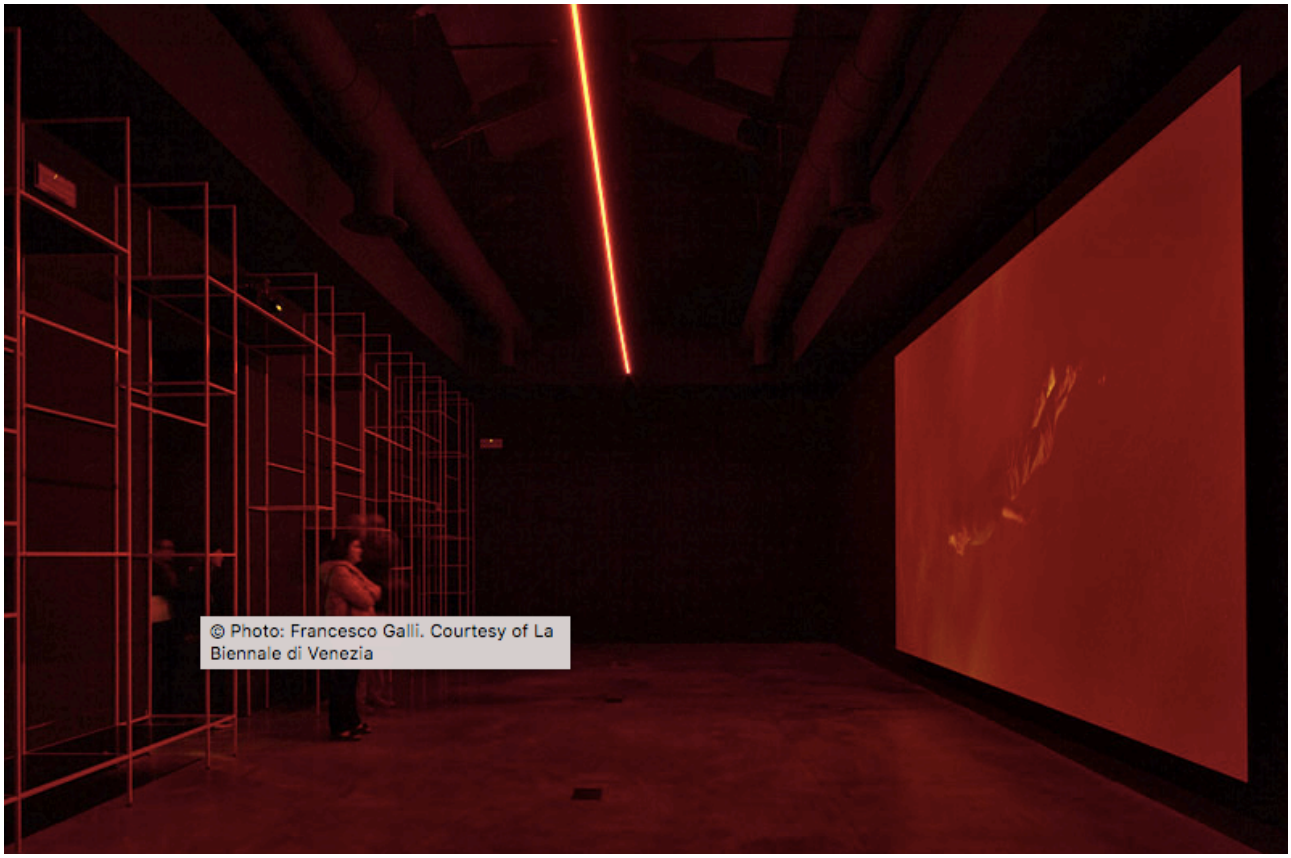

Fig. 9. Installation view of Sebastián Díaz Morales' video work *Suspension* (2014-2017) displayed in the Pavilion of Joys and Fears in the Giardini section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
Retrieved from: https://universes.art/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-giardini/sebastian-diaz-morales/ (November 2017)

Fig. 10. Installation view of Koki Tanaka's video work *Of Walking Unknown* (2016) displayed in the Pavilion of the Earth in the Arsenale section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
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Retrieved from: https://universes.art/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-arsenale-1/koki-tanaka/ (November 2017)

Fig. 11. Installation view of Petrit Halilaj's *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night?!* (2017) displayed in the Pavilion of the Earth in the Arsenale section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
Photo taken during my personal visit to the Biennale in August 2017.

Fig. 12. View of Oliafur Eliasson's *Green light – An Artistic Workshop* (2017). Here, visitors and refugees all cooperate towards the creation of lamps using materials that the artist himself has selected. This workshop takes place in the Pavilion of the Artists and Books in the Giardini section of *Viva Arte Viva*
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Retrieved from: https://universes.art/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-giardini/olafur-eliasson/ (November 2017)

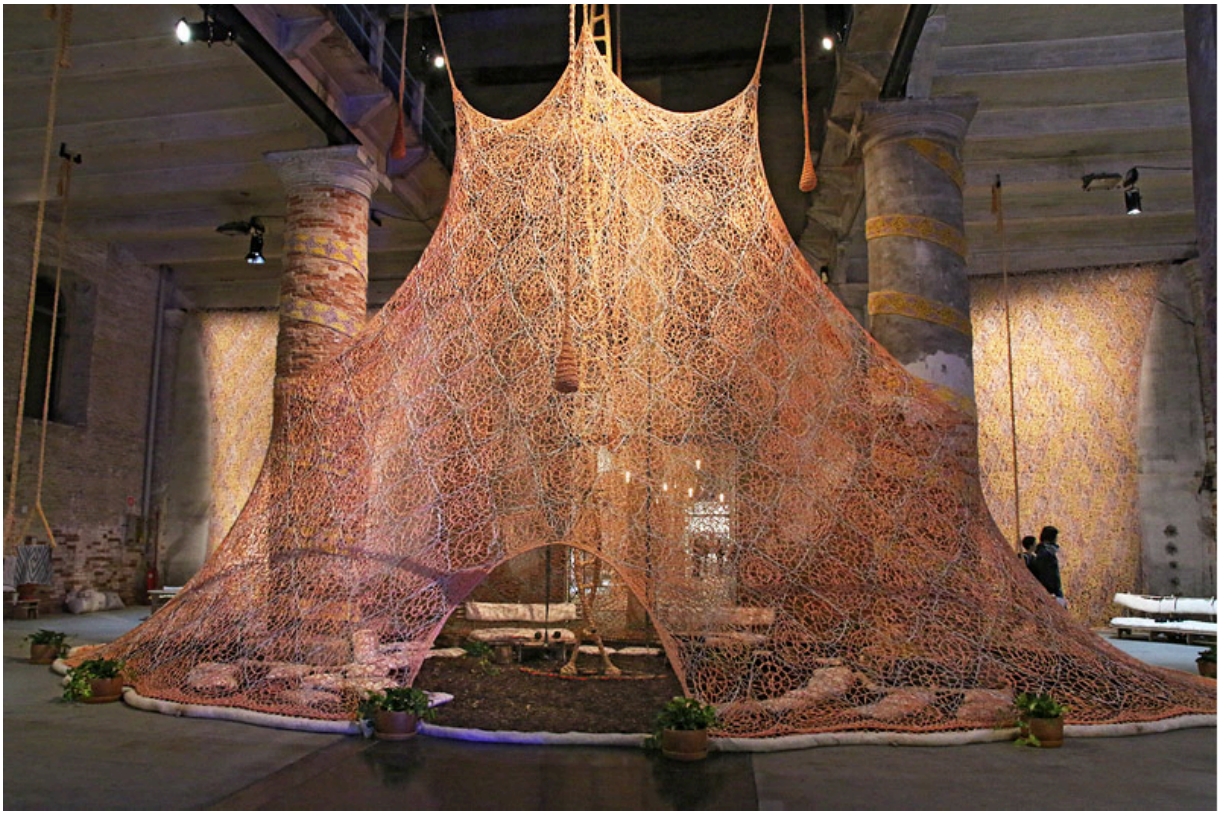

Fig. 13. View of Ernesto Neto's *Cupixawa* (2017) displayed in the Pavilions of the Shamans in the Arsenale section of *Viva Arte Viva.*
©La Biennale di Venezia.
Retrieved from: https://universes.art/venice-biennale/2017/viva-arte-viva/photos-arsenale-2/ernesto-neto-huni-kuin/ (November 2017)

Fig. 14. View of Ernesto Neto's performance *Um Sagrado Lugar* (2017) taking place in the Pavilions of the Shamans in the Arsenale section of *Viva Arte Viva.* Here, members of the Huni Kuin population interact with the artist and the visitors.
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