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Agency and Othering in Two Art Projects Invoking Living Ethnographic Displays

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# Dealing with Nordic Colonialism

## Agency and Othering in Two Art Projects Invoking Living Ethnographic Displays

Hanne Hammer Stien and Cathrine Baglo

1 The text is based on an article published in Norwegian in *Kunst og kultur*, issue 101, number 3, 2018. We are grateful for the feedback provided by Mathias Danbolt for the first version of the text.

2 *documenta* has traditionally used a lower-case 'd' at the start of its name, with the only exception being *Documenta11* in 2002. We follow *documenta*'s general convention in this article.

3 See for example, William Schneider, 'Race and Empire: The Rise of Popular Ethnography in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 1977, pp 98–109; Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1978; Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs*, The Lowie Museum of Anthropology in association with Scholar Press, London and Berkeley,

### Introduction

In this article we explore two art projects that each, in their own way, thematise Nordic and European colonialism and exhibition culture, and the relationship between the two.<sup>1</sup> *European Attraction Limited*, by the Swedish-Norwegian artist Lars Cuzner and the Sudanese-Norwegian artist Mohamed Ali Fadlali, was presented in the context of the Bicentenary of the Norwegian Constitution in Oslo in 2014. The Sámi-Norwegian artist and architect Joar Nango's *European Everything* was commissioned for *documenta 14* (2017), which took place both in Athens and Kassel.<sup>2</sup> The article discusses the art projects in relation to a historical exhibition practice that they directly or indirectly invoke, namely the so-called living exhibition, and the continuation of this tradition in the biennale culture of today.

Originating in Europe during the nineteenth century, and prospering fiercely until the 1930s when other mass media become the locus of transnational popular culture, the living exhibitions constituted a practice where representatives of foreign or Indigenous peoples from all over the globe were brought to European and North American cities (and elsewhere), to re-enact their everyday life in reconstructed 'authentic' settings.<sup>3</sup> Entire milieus were recreated based on transported dwellings, animals, household articles and more. In her work on the Sámi participation in these exhibitions, Cathrine Baglo has raised several critical questions regarding the way this exhibition practice has been perceived and historically represented. Drawing on theories that seek actors and



Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Ali Fadlabi, *European Attraction Limited*, 2011–2014, artistic historical in Frognerparken, Oslo, Norway, © courtesy the artists, photograph: Cathrine Baglo

1983; Robert W Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984; Hilke Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt. Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt, and New York, 1989; Baltasar Staehelin, *Völkerschauen im Zoologischen Garten Basel 1879–1935*, Basler Afrika Geographien, Basel, 1993; Rea Brändle, *Wildfremd, hautnah: Völkerschauen und Schauplatze Zurich, 1880–1960*, Rotpunkt Verlag, Zürich, 1995; L G Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians 1883–1993*, University of New Mexico Press,

agency where dependent victims, passive objects, and invisible spectators previously have been the point of departure for analysis, Baglo has along with other scholars,<sup>4</sup> shown that the living exhibitions have been too simplistically explained as instruments of colonial power and racial theory. While the exhibitions undoubtedly formed part of exercises of colonial power – some more brutal than others – many of the living exhibitions (from around 1875 to 1910) doubled as field laboratories for various scientific investigations by armchair (physical) anthropologists and others, and the premises for participation depended not least on the historical and political situation within the various participants' native countries; the participants – and their animals and possessions – were never devoid of agency. 'Intermediaries' is a concept introduced by Bruno Latour to describe entities that obediently transport meaning without transformation. Latour introduces the term in relation to things and the way they have been understood as mere representations, illustrations, or empty signifiers, but it can be extended to include all types of actors. Latour contrasts this with 'mediators': '[actors that] transform, translate, distort, and modify'.<sup>5</sup> In her work, Baglo argue that the participants in the living exhibitions (and their things) should be understood in the same way.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, she argues that the living



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mixed media installation, Atrium, the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), Athens, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

Albuquerque, 1996; Bernt Lindfors, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Showbusiness*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1999; Sierra Ann Brückner, *The Tangle of Modernity: Popular Anthropology and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Imperial Germany*, Michigan University, Ann Arbor, 1999; Werner Michael Schwarz, *Anthropologische Spektakel: Zur Schaustellung 'exotischer' Menschen, Wien 1870–1910*, Turia + Kant, Wien, 2001; Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, and London, 2002; Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004; Anne Dreesbach,

exhibitions became a 'black box', a matter of fact that makes further investigation unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

The starting point for *European Attraction Limited* was to recreate a living exhibition – more precisely 'the Congo Village'. The Congo Village was part of the 1914 Jubilee Exhibition that took place in Frogner Park in Kristiania (Oslo), Norway, from 5 May to 11 October as a celebration of the centennial anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution. *European Everything*, however, had a totally different starting point. Commissioned for documenta 14, the socially engaged project, framed by an architectural-installation structure consisting of, among others, video, sound, neon, and diverse materials such as fur, wood, and metal, engaged artists, musicians, crafts people, and different practitioners in a processual manifestation that took place during the quinquennial. With its scenic design, orientation towards everyday life, Sámi aesthetics and presentation of Indigenous artists, musicians, and practitioners, we argue that *European Everything* was reminiscent of the living ethnographic displays and the exhibition culture the Congo Village at the 1914 Jubilee Exhibition was a part of. Together, *European Attraction Limited* and *European Everything* call to mind an exhibition culture that incorporates both the historical living ethnographic displays and the contemporary biennial culture.

Moreover, both art projects are intricately connected to the Nordic countries and Nordic and European colonialism, and they specifically

*Gezähmte Wilde: Die Zurschaustellung 'exotischer' Menschen in Deutschland 1870–1949*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt and New York, 2005; Pascal Blanchard et al, eds, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empire*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2008; Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck and his Empire of Entertainments*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2008; Rikke Andreassen and Anne Folke Henningsen, *Memeskeudstilling: Fremvisninger av eksotiske mennesker i zoologisk have og Tivoli*, Tiderne Skrifter Forlag, København, 2011; Rikke Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Ethnic Displays*, Tidene skifter Forlag, København, 2011

4 See for example, Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, op cit; Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments*, op cit; Cathrine Baglo, *På ville veiger? Levende utstillinger av samer i Europa og Amerika*, Orkana akademisk forlag, Stamsund, 2017 (based on doctoral thesis with the same name, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, 2011).

5 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, op cit, pp 39–40; Baglo, *ibid*, pp 42–43

6 *Ibid*, p 43

7 *Ibid*, pp 37–40; Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987

8 Andreas Breivik, 'Where Do We Go From Here?', *kunstkritikk.no*, 30 June 2020, <https://kunstkritikk.com/where-do-we-go-from-here/>, accessed 15 January 2023

9 Mohamed Ali Fadlabi and Lars Cuzner, 'In 100 Years, This Will Be Forgotten', in Line Ulekleiv, ed, *European Attraction Limited: Fadlabi & Lars Cuzner*, Oslo,

question Europe as a delimited geography and discursive category. This is stressed in both the titles and the issues that the projects bring forward, such as racism, growing nationalism, the migrant crisis, borders, and identity politics. In an interview about documenta 14 Nango reflects upon this: 'I tried to map out Europe as something beyond the picture puzzle of nation states and the EU's economic and political entities.'<sup>8</sup> Fadlabi and Cuzner on their side emphasise the importance of Europe as a backdrop for Norway's nation-building process. They argue that the 1914 Jubilee Exhibition helped define 'the nation's [Norway's] position in an industrialized Europe'.<sup>9</sup>

We would like to stress that our aim in this article is not to undermine the legacies and durability of colonialism in Norway and the Nordic countries. In recent years, there has been growing public awareness, at least among academics and artists, of Nordic colonial history, raised not least through art projects such as *European Attraction Limited*, and we see ourselves as part of that movement.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it our aim to downplay the way human beings were exploited and defined as different and inferior in living ethnographic exhibitions. But as Latour reminds us, other and competing perspectives may be revealed when controversial practices are investigated, actors are followed, and black boxes are opened. Rather than being hapless victims, the Sámi for example, exploited the living exhibitions for their own ends at a time when Nordic nation states programmes in various ways attempted to eradicate, assimilate, or isolate Sámi ways of life.

Making the living ethnographic exhibitions, the related exhibition culture of today, and Baglo's analysis our framework of investigation, the objective is rather to conduct an inquiry into the artistic approaches chosen in the two art projects. Central to our investigation are the terms agency, presence, hybridity, and relationality.<sup>11</sup> We ask: How do the art projects engage with the living exhibition as a colonial legacy and a continuous Eurocentric exhibition culture? How is Nordic colonialism dealt with in the two art projects? What kind of spaces do *European Everything* and *European Attraction Limited* create for the articulating of agency and with what consequences? Before we set out to critically discuss and assess the two contemporary examples, we will introduce the living exhibitions through a review of current research, followed by a discussion of the related exhibition culture of today.

## Living Ethnographic Displays, Human Zoos, and the Colonial Logic

While the aim of *European Attraction Limited* was to present an artistic re-enactment of a historical event, one of the aims of the living displays was to recreate the present and, even more so, the so-called ethnographic present. Environmental re-enactments with 'the most interesting natives' (translated by the authors)<sup>12</sup> were a regular part of world exhibitions, colonial exhibitions, and arts, crafts, and industrial exhibitions all over the Western world, particularly in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland, but also in the United States, Japan and other countries.<sup>13</sup>

KORO 2014, p 54,  
pp 53–55

- 10 Two examples are the art project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*, curated by Kuratorisk Aktion (Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen), and the research project *The Art of Nordic Colonialism Writing Transcultural Art Histories* (2019–2022), headed by Mathias Danbolt. See *rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org*, accessed 15 January 2023; Mathias Danbolt, 'Kunst og kolonialitet', *Kunst og kultur* vol 101, no 3, pp 126–132.
- 11 See for example, Homi K Bhabha, *The location of culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004; Camilla Mordhorst, 'Museer, materialitet og tilstedevær', in Tine Damsholt, Dorthe Gert Simonsen and Camilla Mordhorst, ed., *Materialisering: Nye perspektiver på materialitet og kulturanalyse*, Universitetsforlaget, Aarhus, 2009, pp X–X; Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*, AltaMira Press, Lanham, 2010; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, op cit; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016
- 12 Carl Hagenbeck, *Om dyr og mennesker*, Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, Copenhagen and Kristiania [Oslo], 1911, p 50
- 13 Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire and Charles Forsdick, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empire*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2008, pp 28–29

Living exhibitions of foreign and Indigenous ways of life based on peoples, artefacts, and animals, took place in the Nordic countries too,<sup>14</sup> while Sámi from Norway, Finland and Sweden, and Kalaallit/Inuit from Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland were part of displays abroad. On occasion, non-Indigenous peoples, such as Swedes from Dalecarlia, were part of the Sámi displays.<sup>15</sup> In Europe, and in Germany in particular, zoological gardens became the most important stage for this display practice. The business of Carl Hagenbeck, the Hamburg animal trader and zoo owner, was crucial in this regard.

Today the term human zoo is widely used to refer to this kind of display practice involving real people, regardless of whether the exhibitions were held in zoos or not. This was also the term used by Fadlabi and Cuzner to describe the Congo Village: 'The definition of a human zoo is the display of people who are doing nothing but being themselves in this skewed power context they find themselves in.'<sup>16</sup> It was this 'degrading activity' that the artists wanted to highlight through their art project.<sup>17</sup> The term human zoo is more recent, however, and can primarily be connected to the anthology with the same name, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empire* (2008). According to the editors, two things defined a human zoo: the explicit exploitation of racial difference, and the close connection to science and (physical) anthropology, which for a period characterised the exhibitions.<sup>18</sup> The description of living displays as 'human zoos' quickly caught on. An internet search on English Wikipedia today yields a plethora of hits. Displays that, less than two decades ago, were sorted under other labels, such as 'ethnographic', 'ethnological' or 'anthropological' shows, 'caravans', 'ethnic villages', 'Völkerschauen', or 'live displays', are now often referred to as 'human zoos'.<sup>19</sup> References to the term in the Norwegian version of Wikipedia have also changed: 'Human menagerie, ethnographic caravans, Negro Village, Congo Village...' now constitute the hits, primarily referring to the Congo Village in the Frogner Park in Oslo and other African exhibitions.<sup>20</sup> Not least, the entry 'Human Zoo Norway' yields several hits, all pointing to Fadlabi and Cuzner's project.

As rightly indicated by Fadlabi and Cuzner, the living display as a cultural phenomenon has been overlooked or even blocked out of the public memory – not only in Norway but also elsewhere. Until the 1980s variants of such exhibitions had been little investigated either in North America or Europe.<sup>21</sup> Over the next two decades, however, the phenomenon came into focus on both sides of the Atlantic, but it was only after 2000 that these works garnered attention. In parallel to the growing academic interest in the living displays, a growing interest in anthropology within the art field paved the way for artistic interpretations of the ethics and aesthetics of this cultural phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> A common denominator for many artistic and academic works on the living exhibitions has been a one-sided emphasis on power, including the use of the concept of the human zoo. The exhibitions have first and foremost been perceived as stagings (or cagings) of race and primitivism within a Western hegemonic discourse founded on exploitation and suppression.<sup>23</sup> This dominant interpretative paradigm has revealed many important aspects of colonialism and the ways in which cultural difference was normalised and naturalised through the living exhibition, but a one-sided emphasis on power

- 14 In addition to works already mentioned, see for example, Gunnar Broberg, 'Lappkaravanor på villo vägar. Antropologi och synen på samerna fram mot sekelskiftet 1900', *Lychnos*, pp 27–86, 1981–82; Jesper Schou, 'Etnografiske karavaner', *Stoffskifte*, 16, 1987–1988, pp 55–87; Olav Christensen and Anne Eriksen, 'Etnografiske karavaner. Omreisende utstillinger med eksotiske folk og dyr', in *Hvite Løgner. Stereotype forestillinger om svarte*, Aschehoug, Oslo, 1992; Jens Åge Gjestrum, 1995, 'Utstilling av levende mennesker. En historie om samisk kultur og fremmede blikk', *Dugnad* 1, pp 93–109; Herman Berthelsen, 'Skjeggete damer og siamesiske tvillinger. Fra tivoli til Big Brother', Cappelen, Oslo, 2002; Dan Jibréus, *White Fox' långa resa*, Stockholm, Fri Tankel Hagströmerbiblioteket, Stockholm 2013.
- 15 Baglo, *På villo vegeer?*, op cit, p 101
- 16 Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Fadlabi, in 'Exhibiting an Exhibition: A Seminar on European Attraction Limited', 11 September 2014, Tromsø, Academy of Arts, UiT University of Tromsø
- 17 Ibid
- 18 Blanchard et al, *Human Zoos*, op cit, pp 1–49
- 19 'Human zoo', [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_zoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_zoo), accessed 10 January 2023. The observation is based on research that started in 2003.
- 20 'Menneskelig menasjeri', [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menneskelig\\_menasjeri](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menneskelig_menasjeri), accessed 10 May 2018
- 21 As mentioned, Schneider, 'Race and Empire', 1977 and Altick, *Shows of London*, 1978, constituted early examples.

has also seriously obscured important features of the practice itself, not least the motives and experiences of the Indigenous or culturally foreign participants.<sup>24</sup> Who were they and what was their contribution in the encounters with exhibition venues, spectators, and organisers? What did they bring to the table in terms of backgrounds, life experiences, material expressions, practices, and points of view?

As pointed out by historian Paige Raibmon in her investigation of the live displays of Kwakwaka'wakw from British Columbia at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893 and other episodes of encounter from the late nineteenth-century Northwest Coast, participation in such exhibitions provided a way to access the social, political and economic means necessary for their survival under colonialism.<sup>25</sup> Her main point is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples were also collaborators – albeit unequal ones.

The public discussion concerning Fadlabi and Cuzner's recreation of the Congo Village, both the historical display and the artistic re-enactment, was based on a fixed understanding of this exhibition practice. One salient issue was the unequivocally negative understanding of the Congo Village and the exhibition phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> Following this line of thought, it was assumed, not least by the artists, that the inhabitants of the Congo Village had been passive victims. A distinction was also postulated between cultural presentations then and now, and about 'being' and 'acting'. 'We're not in 1914 any longer', said Cuzner during what turned out to be a staged recruitment of background actors for the village: 'These are people who were offered a job, as part of a performance.' The question is, of course, whether the people who were given the job of inhabiting the Congo Village a century ago perceived their role in an essentially different manner?

## A Eurocentric Exhibition Culture

As mentioned in the introduction, Joar Nango's *European Everything* was shown at documenta 14. Exhibitions like documenta are difficult to understand without relating them to the universal or world exhibitions which also constituted an important venue for living exhibitions.<sup>27</sup> Originating in Europe (Great Britain) in 1851, world exhibitions were aimed at bringing prestige to the host nation, celebrating technological innovations, and contributing to the sale of new products, while also enlightening and entertaining large groups of spectators. Ideas about modernity and progress were the impulse behind the exhibitions. Manifestations of development in the various countries, or the lack of development as it was defined by the host nations, were collected, and exhibited to be observed and compared. Thus, the world exhibitions confirmed already existing power relationships, established new ones, and helped legitimise the Western world's colonial projects.<sup>28</sup> Eventually visual art, which was originally included in separate sections of the world exhibitions, developed into separate survey exhibitions of larger formats. The biennial in Venezia in 1895 is the first example of this.<sup>29</sup>

Today the term biennial is used to refer to landmark survey exhibitions of international contemporary art, including not just biennials but also triennials, and even the quinquennial exhibition, documenta.<sup>30</sup> The

- 22 Chokri Ben Chikha and Karel Arnaut, 'Staging/ Caging 'Otherness' in the Postcolony: Spectres of the Human Zoo', in *Critical Arts* vol 27, no 6, 2013, pp 661–683; Karel Arnaut, 'The Human Zoo as (Bad) Intercultural Performance', in Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtisch and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, eds, *The Invention of the Savage: Human Zoos*, Actes Sud, Paris, 2011, pp 344–361
- 23 Baglo, *På ville veget*, op cit, p 224; Baglo, 'Reconstruction as a Trope of Display', op cit, p 64; Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments*, op cit, p 64
- 24 Kirsten Thisted, 'Eskimoeksotisme – et kritisk essay om repræsentationsanalyse', in Lene Bull Christiansen, ed, *Jagten på det eksotiske*, Roskilde, Roskilde University, 2006, pp 61–77
- 25 Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians. Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*, Duke University Press, Durham, and London, 2005.
- 26 See also Cathrine Baglo, 'Tør vi se Kongolandsbyen i øynene?', *Klassekampen*, 2014, no 69, vol 3
- 27 Carol A Jones, 'Biennial Culture: A Longer History', in *The Biennial Reader*, Elene Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, Osterliden, Hatje Cantz 2010, pp 66–87, p 68
- 28 See for example Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, op cit, and Brita Brenna, *Verden som ting og forestilling: Verdensutstillinger og den norske deltakelsen 1851–1900*, doctoral thesis, Oslo, University of Oslo, 2002
- 29 Jones, 'Biennial Culture: A Longer History', op cit, pp 72–74
- 30 Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, 'Introduction: Why Biennials?', in Charles Green and Anthony

biennial phenomenon grew in the 1990s due to political changes around the world such as the end of apartheid in South Africa, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and pro-democracy demonstrations in China.<sup>31</sup> Along with globalisation – marked by growing world-wide communication systems and the experience of a world marked – these changes led curators and artists to 'seek alternative discourses and frameworks...'<sup>32</sup> and create 'a new, global art world...' that subverted the cultural perspectives and changed the terms for centre and periphery.<sup>33</sup> To highlight the relationship between the rather spectacle-oriented biennial culture, international (imperialistic) politics, transnational capital and neoliberalism, critics applied the concept of biennialisation.<sup>34</sup> But even if some experience the connections between politics and biennials as deeply problematic, others argue for their flexibility and even subversive potential.<sup>35</sup> Sociologist Oliver Marchart, for example, dismisses the idea that the biennial is merely a format in which former colonial nations celebrate themselves, as in the world exhibitions. He argues that the globalisation of the biennial has substantially transformed it and: 'worldwide biennialization has... contributed to decentralizing the West. For this reason, biennialization cannot simply be read as an ideological reflex to economic globalization, but instead... also as part of decolonization struggles.'<sup>36</sup>

Like many of the biennials originating in the 1990s documenta had a radically different point of departure from the world exhibitions. The German educator, architect, artist, and curator Arnold Bode's first documenta exhibition in 1955, which displayed art that the National Socialist Party, characterised as degenerate and modernist, grew out of an anti-Fascist and anti-nationalist movement in post-war Germany. From his position working as an artist in Kassel, Bode created an exhibition that aimed to reintroduce the avant-garde to the wider public and 'reveal the roots of contemporary art in all areas'.<sup>37</sup> Despite its alternative past, documenta, often referred to in the media as the world's largest and most important (art) exhibition, has an important role in international biennial culture, the structural progenitor of which is world exhibition culture.<sup>38</sup> We can also not disregard the fact that documenta has a Eurocentric basis where Europe and European arts and cultures serve as the benchmark and guideline against which all other arts and cultures are assessed.<sup>39</sup> Europe and European art as constituted by certain curatorial practices and display modes appear as neutral, whilst other examples of culture and art are perceived as a deviation from the norm, as expressions of something 'local' or 'other'.

In many later iterations of the exhibition, the Eurocentric perspective of documenta has been challenged by the approaches of the different artistic directors, in line with broader tendencies within biennial culture from the 1990s onwards.<sup>40</sup> The French curator Catherine David's documenta X (1997) took globalisation as a starting point and introduced an extensive guest programme, as well as several productions that were accessible beyond Kassel's city limits.<sup>41</sup> Directed by the Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor, Documenta11 (2002) worked with and challenged ideas of non-Western art. Through diffused curatorship the project spread around the globe with a large-scale interdisciplinary discursive programmed distributed via different platforms.<sup>42</sup> American curator Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev's dOCUMENTA 13 (2012)



- Gardener, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, 2016, pp 2–16
- 31 Tim Griffin, 'Worlds Apart: Contemporary Art, Globalization, and the Rise of Biennials', in Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, eds, *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden and Oxford, 2013, pp 7–16
- 32 Ibid, p 9
- 33 Massimo Gioni, 'In Defence of Biennials', in Dumbadze and Hudson, eds, *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, op cit, p 171
- 34 Green and Gardner, 'Introduction: Why Biennials?', op cit
- 35 Gioni, 'In Defence of Biennials', op cit, pp171–174
- 36 Oliver Marchart, 'The Globalization of Art and the Biennials of Resistance: A History of the Biennials from the Periphery', in *On Curating*, issue 46, June 2020
- 37 'documenta retrospective', <https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta>, accessed 10 January 2023
- 38 Jones, 'Biennial Culture: A Longer History', op cit, p 69
- 39 Terry Smith, 'Currents of World-making in Contemporary Art', in *World Art*, vol 1, no 2, 2011, pp 171–188, p 174
- 40 Griffin, 'Worlds Apart', op cit and Hans Belting, 'Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age', in Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg, eds, *Contemporary Art and the Museum*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2007, pp 20–23
- 41 Catherine David, 'Introduction/Vorwort',

included a satellite exhibition in war-torn Kabul, connecting collective traumas such as those of Nazi Germany and, much more recently, those of Afghanistan or the countries involved in the Arab Spring. However, documenta 14 was the first time that such a large part of the exhibition was placed outside of Kassel and Germany – in this instance, in the Greek capital, Athens. The choice of location was not random. Aside from being considered the cradle of democracy and European culture, the Greek debt crisis following the financial crisis of 2007–2008, and the 2015 refugee crisis, made Athens highly relevant in a contemporary political context. By giving documenta 14 the subtitle 'Learning from Athens', the Polish artistic director Adam Szymczyk turned attention towards the south–north axis and pointed out that learning is about seeing things in a new way – hence, also a form of unlearning. In the documenta 14 reader he specifically mentions the importance of incorporating 'Indigenous practices and techniques of knowledges... to question this very supremacist, white and male, nationalist, colonialist way of being and thinking.'<sup>43</sup>

The Sámi Joar Nango's participation in documenta 14 must be viewed in relation to this overarching curatorial approach. In addition to Nango, seven Sámi artists took part in documenta 14.<sup>44</sup> Nango himself has been critical of the framing of *European Everything* through the emphasis on Sámi representation. He argues that: 'in fact the project had a different and much less defined cultural perspective'.<sup>45</sup> However, as the participation of the Sámi artists at documenta 14 coincided with the centennial anniversary of the first Sámi national conference in Tråante/Trondheim, Norway, as well as with the fortieth anniversary of the action against the hydro-power damming of the Altá river in northern Norway and the twentieth anniversary of King Harald's apology to the Norwegian Sámi for the state's cultural assimilation policy, many events highlighted Sámi art, and led to what was described as a breakthrough for Sámi art internationally.<sup>46</sup> In Sámi and Norwegian media, headlines such as 'Sámi art has gained the power of definition', 'Sámi art attracts attention and the need for a Sámi art museum is urgent', 'Sámi art is some of the hottest in the international art world', and 'Rich year for Sámi art' (translations by the authors) appeared.<sup>47</sup> Based on the headlines it seemed unexpected that Sámi art would gain such attention outside of Sápmi. However, considering the great activity within the Sámi art field and the globally relevant political issues that Sámi artists address (such as the management of natural resources, the right to land, water, and identity politics), the attention should come as no surprise.

In what is characterised as a global artworld, the inclusion of Sámi art in documenta 14 is also less extraordinary.<sup>48</sup> On one hand art historian Hans Belting already in 2007 claimed that a new situation has arrived where '*contemporary art*, in many cases, is understood synonymous with *global art*'.<sup>49</sup> This situation Belting argues, has a double character, as it is marked by being post-historical, declining the lineage regime (of art history), and post-ethnic, insisting on the arts own environment (rejecting the anthropological discourse). Art historians such as Terry Smith and Charlotte Bydler have on the other hand shown that cultural difference is a desired element in a globalised art market.<sup>50</sup> Bydler argues that the market is always ready to incorporate marginalised positions and practices in a globalised biennial industry that offers

- documenta X*, in *On curating*, issue 46, June 2020, pp 6–13
- 42 Anthony Gardener and Charles Green, '2002: Cosmopolitanism', in Gardener and Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta*, op cit, pp 101–206
- 43 Adam Szymczyk, '14: Iterability and Otherness – Learning and Working from Athens', in Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, eds, *The documenta 14 reader*, Kassel, Documenta and Museum Friedricianum GmbH 2017, pp 17–42, p 30
- 44 The other Sámi artists who took part in *documenta 14* were Máret Anne Sara, Britta Marakat-Labba, Synnøve Persen, Keviselie (Hans Ragnar Mathisen), Mette Henriette, Iver Jåks and Nillas Somby.
- 45 Breivik, 'Where Do We Go From Here?', op cit
- 46 For more about the *Áltá Action*, see Katya García-Antón, Harald Gaski, Gunvor Guttorm, eds, *Let the River Flow. An Indigenous Uprising and its Legacy in Art, Ecology and Politics*, Oslo, OCA/Valiz 2020. In addition to *documenta 14* there are other projects that gave Sámi art much attention in 2017. It must be mentioned that the Office for Contemporary Art (OCA), through its two-year programme called 'Thinking at the Edge of the World: Perspectives from the North, (2016–2017)', has focused on Sámi art. In connection with celebrating the first national Sámi national congress, Tråante 2017, several important exhibitions and conferences were arranged.
- 47 Kåre Bulie, 'Samisk kunst på verdens viktigste utstilling', *dn.no*, 18 May 2017, <https://www.dn.no/d2/2017/05/18/1607/Kunst/samisk-kunst-pa-verdens-viktigste-utstilling>, accessed 1 October 2017;

international exposure and economic circulation for the host nation and other actors. Considering her line of reasoning, the curatorial approach in *documenta 14* and Nango's presentation of artists with Indigenous backgrounds on the mobile stage that constituted *European Everything* may appear as bittersweet, as art is in danger of being reduced to exotic goods, representations of 'the others' in a global discourse that is based on asymmetrical positions, and that helps to legitimise already existing power relationships, inscribing the neocolonial. This was also the critique Okwui Enwezor performed at *Documenta11*. For Enwezor the non-Western artist was a Western projection. Oliver Marchart sums up Enwezor's critique:

Not only does the Western search for so-called 'authentic' art outside the Western art market's systems of circulation hold the danger of fuelling the notion of the so-called indigenous 'Other', it also fails to recognize the agency of non-Western artists in their active appropriations of Western modernity, making these artists less non-Western than the West would like them to be.<sup>51</sup>

Based on this argument it is fair to ask whether the inclusion of Sámi art and art that is considered non-European/non-Western (Sápmi is part of Europe) in *documenta 14* has contributed to othering Sámi art as exotic and foreign (ethnic) to Western eyes. Looking at the reception of the exhibition, however, the response was by no means unilateral.<sup>52</sup> The Swedish art critic Frans Josef Petersson defended the highly criticised *documenta 14* in Athens and Kassel because he found that the exhibition succeeded in placing the artists and their different positions on an equal footing, thereby complying with the idea that contemporary art should lead us to unlearn what we already know: 'From this upside-down position, the history of the Scandinavian countries can be told from a Sámi perspective, and North American art is shown through traditional domestic techniques for making wooden sculptures,' Petersson stated (translation by the authors).<sup>53</sup> Whilst Petersson finds the inclusion of Sámi art to be an invitation to unlearn Eurocentric perspectives on art, the German author and critic Hanno Rauterberg considers the position of the Sámi art in the exhibition to be a horrible example of 'the end of art'. In his Danish-published essay 'Enfoldigheden triumferer' (Simplicity Triumphs, translation by the authors), Rauterberg claims that the freedom of art today is threatened, pointing to the inclusion of works by Indigenous artists in *documenta 14*:

Whether these are artistically successful artefacts appears to be of secondary importance. *Documenta* tells us that the artists come from a threatened ethnic group... The old disputes around form, composition and originality thus appear to have been brought to a standstill. It is rather about identity, origin, gender, skin colour [translation by the authors].<sup>54</sup>

Rauterberg's critique of Sámi art, which he bases on a rather superficial reading of Máret Anne Sara's *Pile O Sápmi* (2017),<sup>55</sup> goes from appearing to be an immediate reaction to exoticising the Indigenous, to

Trude Fonneland and Marit Anne Hauan, 'Rikt år for samisk kunst', *forskning.no*, September 24 2017, <http://forskning.no/blogg/museumsviten/rikt-ar-samisk-kunst>, accessed 1 October 2017; Annemona Grann, 'Samisk kunst er noe av det heteste i den internasjonale kunstverden', *adressa.no*, 2 June 2017, <http://www.adressa.no/kultur/2017/06/02/Samisk-kunst-er-noe-av-det-heteste-i-den-internasjonale-kunstverdenen-14801017>, accessed 1 October 2017; Dan Robert Larsen, 'Samisk kunst vekker oppsikt og behovet for et samisk kunstmuseum er skrikende', *nrk.no*, 28 June 2017, [https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/\\_-samisk-kunst-vekker-opsikt-og-behovet-for-et-samisk-kunstmuseum-er-skrikende-1.13579781](https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/_-samisk-kunst-vekker-opsikt-og-behovet-for-et-samisk-kunstmuseum-er-skrikende-1.13579781), accessed 1 October 2017; Elin Margrethe Wersland, 'Den samiske kunsten har fått definisjonsmakt', *Sågat*, 7 September 2017, [http://www.sagat.no/index.php?page=vis\\_nyhet&NyhetID=9273](http://www.sagat.no/index.php?page=vis_nyhet&NyhetID=9273), accessed 6 October 2017

48 Monica Grini, *Samisk kunst i norsk kunsthistorie: Historiografiske riss*, Tromsø, University of Tromsø, 2017, doctoral thesis, pp 310–342

49 Belting, 'Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age', op cit, pp 20–23

50 Smith, 'Currents of World-making in Contemporary Art', op cit, pp 171–188; Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art*, Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004, pp 150–157

51 Marchart, 'The Globalization of Art and the Biennials of Resistance', op cit

52 Eleana Yalouri and Elpida Rikou, 'Documenta 14 Learning from Athens: The Response of the "Learning

reproducing the exotic logic that makes Sámi art foreign or other (ethnic), in contrast to (the idea of) normative or universal art. Rauterberg is not interested in Sámi art per se, rather he adopts an anthropological or ethnographic perspective that locks Sámi art and artists with non-European backgrounds into a primitivistic and othering discourse.<sup>56</sup> Like the *European Attraction Limited*'s use of the human zoo concept, Rauterberg's critique appears to function as 'retrofitting', another term coined by Latour to describe an adaptation to a dominating ontological division of the world into distinct spheres, such as the 'modern' and the 'non-modern', the 'civilised' and the 'primitive'.<sup>57</sup> Even if the displays of culturally foreign and Indigenous peoples were designed to make such distinctions visible, these practices were never pure and dualist. They represented an entangled mix – heterogeneous fields where animals, artefacts and people, nature, and culture, past and present, exhibitors and the exhibited, domestic, and foreign, were assembled together.<sup>58</sup>

## *European Attraction Limited:* A Representational Space

Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Ali Fadlali launched their contribution to the bicentennial anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution at a press conference at the Oslo National Academy of Arts in October 2011.<sup>59</sup> Producing the *European Attraction Limited* (2011–2014) project under the Art in Public Spaces umbrella, their aim was to recreate, down to the last detail, the so-called Congo Village of the 1914 Jubilee Exhibition (translation by the authors, Jubilæumsutstillingen) in the Frogner Park in the Norwegian capital of Kristiania (now Oslo).<sup>60</sup> The 1914 Congo Village was initially the creation of Bernhard Henry (Benno) Singer, a Jewish English-Hungarian entertainment entrepreneur and owner of the company 'European Attraction Ltd', hence the title of the art project. As the director of the Theatre Moderne and the Opera Comique, Singer was a central figure in Kristiania's entertainment scene from 1914 to the mid-1920s.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, his career in Norway rocketed when he was appointed to head the Jubilee Exhibition's entertainment section after an open tender. The Congo Village was part of this section, along with other attractions such as a firing gallery, a Ferris wheel, and the house with many obstacles. The miniature railway 'The Flying Scotsman' ran around the section.<sup>62</sup>

Between sixty and eighty Senegalese – children and adults – some of them are seen in this postcard of the "Department of Amusements. The Congo Village (Fornøyelsesavdelingen. Kongolandsbyen), were hired to inhabit and enact everyday life in the village, which consisted of some twenty straw huts. The fact that these people were from Senegal and not from the Congo was not surprising. With its numerous popular culture connotations, the name Congo probably resonated better in the public ear than Senegal. In addition to the huts, the Congo Village contained a school building, a cookhouse, an assembly hall, and a mosque. Signs identified buildings and activities for the spectators, such as 'school', 'draughts player' and 'tailor' (translation by the authors).

from documenta” Research Project’, in *Field: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, issue 11, 2018

- 53 Frans Josef Petersson, ‘Vi måste återövrå berättelsen om Documenta 14 som en radikal utställning’, *kunstkritikk.no*, 6 October 2017, <http://www.kunstkritikk.no/kommentar/vi-maste-aterovra-berattelsen-om-documenta-14-som-en-radikal-utstallning/>, accessed 11 October 2017

- 54 Hanno Rauterberg, ‘Enfoldigheden triumferer. Dette er afslutningen på kunsten’, in *Information*, 16 August 2017, <https://www.information.dk/kultur/2017/08/enfoldigheden-triumferer-afslutningen-paa-kunsten>, accessed 11 November 2017

- 55 The starting point for the development of *Pile O Sápmi* was Máret Ánne Sara’s brother Jovsset Ánde Sara’s public proceedings against the Norwegian state to challenge the reduction of his reindeer herd by order of the Norwegian Reindeer Herding Act of 2007. The project started out as an outdoor site-specific event following the public proceedings. Then the project travelled to documenta 14, and later one part of the project, which consists of 400 reindeer skulls creating a curtain wall, was purchased by the National Museum in Oslo. It is now hanging in the entrance area of the newly opened museum building. For more about *Pile O Sápmi*, see Hanna Horsberg Hansen, ‘Pile O Sápmi and the Connections between Art and Politics’, in Maria Huhmarniemi, ed. *Arctic Art: In the Time of Change*, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi 2019, pp 81–95.

- 56 Christian Spies, ‘Strange Objects: Ethnographic Objects in Between Self-Presentation and Contextualisation’, in Svein



‘Fornøielsesavdelingen. Kongolandsbyen’ (Department of Amusements: The Congo Village, translation by the authors), postcard, 1914, © National Library of Norway

Animals were also part of the everyday enactment. According to contemporary descriptions, spectators were particularly drawn to the making of food and the music and dancing in the assembly hall. Visitors could also watch demonstrations of handicrafts, particularly goldsmith work, and some of the products were sold during the exhibition, as was also common in living exhibitions of Sámi culture. Jean Thiam, the leader of the group, was a goldsmith in his home city of Dakar, in addition to being a property owner and local politician. Thiam and Singer had collaborated on similar exhibitions before the Congo Village in Frogner Park. Among other places, Thiam had been to the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900, where he had been awarded the Royal Order of the Legion of Honour, the highest French order of merit, both military and civil.<sup>63</sup>

In their rationale for *European Attraction Limited*, Cuzner and Fadlabi especially emphasised the function of the Jubilee Exhibition in relation to the nation-building process, thereby focusing on how the national self-image contrasted with the structural racism that existed in 1914 and that still exists today. In other words, they wanted to challenge the idea of Nordic exceptionalism – that colonialism was never part of Nordic history.<sup>64</sup> Cuzner and Fadlabi also explained how shocked they were when, in 2010, they learned about the Congo Village at the 1914 exhibition for the first time and the fact that nobody seemed to remember this event.<sup>65</sup> The term *re-enactment* was quickly adopted by Cuzner and Fadlabi to describe the artistic methodology they wanted to use in the project.<sup>66</sup> Thus it appeared that the artists attached importance, on the one hand, to the reconstruction of the Congo Village as a historical event, and, on the other hand, to the performative aspect of *European Attraction Limited* as a contemporary event.

In the cultural heritage field, it has long been common to use historical re-enactments in commemoration and celebration of earlier events, or to process traumas.<sup>67</sup> In recent decades artistic projects described as



Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Ali Fadlabi, *European Attraction Limited*, 2011–2014, artistic historical in Frognerparken, Oslo, Norway, © courtesy the artists, photograph: Cathrine Baglo

Aamold, Elin Haugdahl and Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen, eds, *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 2017, pp 195–207

57 Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1999, pp 170–171; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991

58 Baglo, *På ville vejer?*, op cit, pp 263–265

59 The press conference was held when Cuzner and Fadlabi had been granted funding to arrange

re-enactments have grown in number. The art historian Sandra Lorentzen divides this type of artistic project into two categories.<sup>68</sup> ‘Artistic re-enactment’ refers to earlier performances or self-biographical re-enactments. ‘Artistic *historical* re-enactment’ refers to recreations of earlier historic events under the direction of one or more artists. The difference between artistic re-enactments and artistic historical re-enactments is that, whereas the cultural heritage projects are mainly about recreating *the past*, the art projects aim to recreate the past to say something about the *present*. Several artists have been working with the topic of the living ethnographic displays, such as the South African Brett Bailey in his project *Exhibit B* (2012), and Annika Dahlsten and Markku Laakso’s Finnish-based project *Campfire in a Zoo* (2012–).<sup>69</sup> However, these projects have primarily taken the aesthetics and ethics of the living ethnographic displays as a point of departure and, even if they use performative strategies and stage otherness, it is difficult to describe them as artistic historical re-enactments.

Nevertheless, applying the re-enactment concept, Cuzner and Fadlabi created the expectation that the Congo Village would be recreated in its ‘authentic’ surroundings and made alive to the public, as in *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) by the British artist Jeremy Deller, where numerous



Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Ali Fadlali, *European Attraction Limited*, 2011–2014, artistic historical in Frognerparken, Oslo, Norway, © courtesy the artists, photograph: Cathrine Baglo

*European Attraction Limited* through KORO's funding scheme Art in Public Spaces (URO). 'European Attraction Limited', [https://koro.no/prosjekter/european\\_attraction\\_limited/](https://koro.no/prosjekter/european_attraction_limited/), accessed 6 October 2017.

60 Benedikte Rønsen, 'Når det skandinaviske selvbildet sprekker', *kunstkritikk.no*, 31 October 2011, <http://www.kunstkritikk.no/nyheter/nar-det-skandinaviske-selvbildet-sprekker/>, accessed 6 October 2017

61 Svendsen, Trond Olav, 'Benno Singer', in *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, *snl.no*, [https://nbl.snl.no/Benno\\_Singer](https://nbl.snl.no/Benno_Singer), accessed 15 February 2023

people contributed to recreating a series of confrontations between striking miners and the police outside a coking plant at Orgreave in South Yorkshire in 1984.<sup>70</sup> Early in their project Cuzner and Fadlali issued an invitation at an international research seminar, thereby making it appear as if they were interested in accumulating and presenting knowledge about living exhibitions in general and the Congo Village in particular.<sup>71</sup> However, as with Deller's project, *European Attraction Limited* also focused on the relevance for contemporary society. Cuzner and Fadlali themselves stated that they wanted to remind Norwegians about an incident they claimed had been erased from the collective memory, thus challenging the Norwegian self-image as tolerant and good, as international peacemakers and what they termed the 'Norwegian hubris'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it was the staging of the making of the re-enactment and the debate it aroused about racism that became the most important – and productive – part of *European Attraction Limited*, not the re-enactment itself.

*European Attraction Limited* immediately attracted attention, where the debate surrounding it was generally fuelled by the performative actions of Cuzner and Fadlali and in part by the ambiguous statements they made. On several occasions attempts were made to stop the plans

- 62 'Jubileumsutstillingen på Frogner 1914', *wikipedia.org*, [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubileumsutstillingen\\_p%C3%A5\\_Frogner\\_1914](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubileumsutstillingen_p%C3%A5_Frogner_1914), accessed 15 February 2023
- 63 Christensen, Anne and Eriksen, Olav, *Hvite logner*, op cit, pp 30–39; Espen Ytreberg, *Jubileumsutstillingen i 1914 – som mediebegivenhet*, Oslo, Forlaget Press 2014, pp 318–331
- 64 See for example, Gunlög Für, 'Colonialism and Swedish History: Unthinkable Connections?', in Magdalena Naum and Jonas M Nordin, eds, *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, pp 17–36 and Veli-Pekka Lehtola, 'Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland, in *Arctic Anthropology* 52, no 2, 2015, pp 22–36
- 65 *European Attraction Limited*, op cit, p 54
- 66 Lars Cuzner and Mohamed Fadlbi, 'About European Attraction Limited', *europeanattractionlimited.com*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20141023211933/http://www.europeanattractionlimited.com/about-european-attraction-limited/>, accessed 20 August 2015
- 67 Sandra Lorentzen, 'Reenactment-praksis i kunsten. *Jeremy Dellers The Battle of Orgreave*', *Kunst og Kultur*, vol 99, no 1, 2016, pp 16–24, pp 18–19
- 68 *Ibid*, p 19
- 69 Arnaut, 'The Human Zoo as (Bad) Intercultural Performance', op cit, pp 344–361; dahlstenlaakso.com, accessed 15 January 2023
- 70 Lorentzen, 'Reenactment-praksis i kunsten. *Jeremy Dellers The Battle of Orgreave*', op cit
- 71 Stine Berg Evensen, 'Mennesker på utstilling', *kunstkritikk.no*, 23
- for the project due to concern about the consequences it might have. When the artists deliberately issued conflicting information about what was to take place, this fuelled speculation that Africans would again be exhibited. Anti-racism organisations reacted strongly to this. They believed the project would be a copy of the original village from 1914, fearing that it would feed and bolster racist attitudes and stigmatisation instead of deconstructing them.<sup>73</sup> Only after the infrastructure of the Congo Village was rebuilt in May 2014 did the debate subside. In contrast to the expectations created by the artists during the early phases of the project, the recreated Congo Village was never filled with 300 volunteers. Both people, animals, and things were conspicuously absent. Instead, the village stood in Frogner Park as an empty set, as if a performance had just finished or was about to take place, as seen in a group of pictures from a sunny day in May 2014. In one of them the 1914 entrance gate is juxtaposed with the 2014 reconstruction of it. As indicated on the 1914 entrance gate, a form of plate is attached to it. The entrance gate from 2014 has a similar plate. Below it a poem by Knut Hamsun is reproduced: 'Why should I feel so rotten? In one hundred years all is forgotten', the plate reads. Hamsun was a Norwegian writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920. However, Hamsun also openly supported Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology.
- In retrospect, there were speculations that the main part of the project was not the announced re-enactment, but rather the scandalised *discussion* that the idea of a re-enactment generated among the public, for example when Cuzner and Fadlbi travelled to Dakar, apparently to search for people who could inhabit the Congo Village. The art critic Tommy Olsson described what transpired from the launch of the project in 2011 to the rebuilding of the Congo Village: 'when we want to localise where the art is, we are forced to think about the before and after... as separate elements, with dramatically different qualities. Literally as the noise and the silence thereafter' (translation by the authors).<sup>74</sup> Olsson maintains that the physical manifestation of the Congo Village in Frogner Park triggered a form of a collective sense of shame and guilt, arguing that it was this atmosphere that fuelled the debate, which in the wake of the launch of *European Attraction Limited* in 2011 subsequently died down. The art critic Kjetil Røed, on the other hand, was not so interested in the public debate that raged, but underlined in his critique of the project that, in a formal aesthetic sense, the recreation of the Congo Village managed to get the public to turn their gaze onto themselves, thus also thematising art's quest to be 'important' or 'interesting':
- The Congo Village makes the art public uncomfortable. On attending an exhibition, one would preferably satisfy the urge to see something 'important' or 'interesting', but here there were merely set décor and props to be seen. The situation is interesting because it concerns the nexus of what art is all about, while the project's problematization of discrimination is kept intact. We have become accustomed to art being presented by experts and explained so that we can understand what is right and wrong. Here we are left naked, left to ourselves and our eyes [translation by the authors].<sup>75</sup>
- One may question who is to recognise themselves in the 'we' whom Røed felt were left standing alone after the encounter with this project. Was this

- January 2013, <http://www.kunstkritikk.no/nyheter/mennesker-pa-utstilling/?d=no>, accessed 14 November 2017
- 72 Cuzner and Fadlabi, 'About European Attraction Limited', op cit
- 73 Gabrielle Graatrud, 'Nye midler til Kongolandsbyen', *nrk.no*, 4 March 2014, <https://www.nrk.no/kultur/nye-midler-til-kongolandsbyen-1.11582704>, accessed 5 February 2018; Biame. Diouf, 'Norge trenger ikke Sirkus Fadlabi', *Aftenposten*, 27 May 2014; Bwesigye bwa Mwesigire, 'Exhibiting Africans like animals in Norway's human zoo', *thisisafrica.me*, 25 April 2014, <https://thisisafrica.me/politics-and-society/exhibiting-africans-like-animals-norways-human-zoo/>, accessed 27 January 2023
- 74 Tommy Olsson, 'Spøkelseslandsbyen', *Klassekampen*, 12 August 2014, p 29
- 75 Kjetil Røed, 'Kongolandsbyen pirke i glansbildet Norge', *Aftenposten*, 16 May 2014, <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/byliv/i/RxqK5/Kongolandsbyen-pirker-i-glansbildet-Norge>, accessed 11 November 2017
- 76 Diouf, 'Norge trenger ikke sirkus Fadlabi', op cit
- 77 The large letter 'E' was part of a sign installed on the roof of an abandoned refrigerator factory named 'Eskimo' in the outskirts of Athens, which Nango disassembled especially for the exhibition.
- 78 Gumbrecht, op cit, 2004, pp xiv-xv and p 22

not an exclusively white, Norwegian 'we'? And what would be the price to give this white, Norwegian 'we' the opportunity to see themselves in a new critical light? In a letter to a newspaper editor, the bureaucrat Biame Diouf argued that 'Norway does not need Circus Fadlabi' (translation by the authors) for *European Attraction Limited* to represent both past and contemporary Africans as a stereotype.<sup>76</sup> He characterised the project as 'sterile art and banal exoticism' (translation by the authors), concluding that it is time to liberate Africans from the role of eternal victim. Even if the intention of the artists was not necessarily to encourage reflection or a knowledge-driven debate, we also believe that *European Attraction Limited* contributed to making historical complexity banal, thus perpetuating the perception of the original inhabitants in the Congo Village and contemporary Africans as passive subjects without agency. Perhaps here we also find the reason why the discussion that *European Attraction Limited* started did not continue.

## European Everything: A Social Space of Agency

*European Everything* was first opened to the public in the preview for documenta 14 in April 2017, in Athens. When we entered the atrium at Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), a young man appeared. He stood on a podium which was part of the stage that made up the centre of Joar Nango's architectural-installation structure and picked up a microphone lying apparently discarded on the floor.<sup>77</sup> After a moment he gave a cautious sign to another man, who then moved to stand behind a studio mixer and started playing music. The audience was noticeably quiet and expectant. New people kept arriving. Many appeared from a distance, outside the atrium where the performance was playing out. Some entered the open space, leant against some trees, columns, or the side wall, or they sat down on the floor covered with olive branches, seal, and reindeer furs. Together with neon figures, wood, and metal the furs were linked with different forms of transport straps, it all appeared somewhat unfinished, and improvised, but the men quickly seemed to own the situation. The man on the podium moved cautiously back and forth, rapping in kalaallisut with a powerful presence that called for the audience's immediate attention. Between the raps he explained the content in English. He talked about loss of language and educational opportunities, as well as racism. The kalaallit musicians who were performing, Tarrak (Josef Tarrak-Petrussen) and Uyarakq (Aqqalu Berthelsen), were two of several musicians, artists, craftspeople, and different practitioners who were invited to participate in *European Everything* and who contributed to creating an aesthetics where the presence of materials, things and people were at the forefront. According to literature scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht a culture of interpretation (hermeneutics) that derives from what he calls Western metaphysics has for a long-time devaluated presence-ness and made us 'abandon and even forget the possibility of a presence-based relationship to the world'.<sup>78</sup> By prioritising consciousness, language, and narration on behalf of amongst other things materialities, bodily experiences (in space) and cosmology the culture of interpretation has created what Gumbrecht calls a "loss of world".



This is one important reason for our feeling that we are no longer in touch with the things in the world.<sup>79</sup>

*European Everything* had already started months before the preview in Athens, when Nango began driving a Mercedes Sprinter from Tromsø together with his then regular collaboration partner, the architect and artist Håvard Arnhoff. On their 5,000-kilometre (some 3,100 miles) journey towards Athens, heading in the opposite direction than the way followed by many refugees through Europe, they spent a period with Roma groups in Romania. People they met on the road, material they collected and documents from the journey were later included in the exhibition as part of the project, both in Athens and Kassel. Thus, the journey may be described as a form of fieldwork. It is also a motif that is pursued further in the project, including in a video installation shown in Kassel that encompasses the processual element of *European Attraction Limited*.

On arrival in Athens Nango established what he characterises as an artist studio in a three-storey deserted factory in Elaionas, on the outskirts of the city, within a metal scrapyards bordering a Roma camp. His interest in material economy and traditional metallurgy techniques motivated his choice of location. In the scrapyards he became familiar with local Roma groups and metal workers and spent time with various collaborators to assemble a diverse array of materials into sculptures and other objects, which were later installed on what the exhibition brochure describes as a mobile stage. Museologist Delia Tzortzaki has also pointed out that ‘the scrapyards served as a “field” of practice drawn on Sámi tradition of putting up and dismantling workshops, yards, camps according to needs and calculated choices’.<sup>80</sup>

The fragmentary stage that Nango assembled, first placed in the atrium of the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion) as seen in the image of people gathering on the opening day, was later moved to the glass pavilions on Kurt-Schumacher-Strasse in Kassel, as shown in the picture of the pavilion from the outside. A video installation documenting the trip to Athens and the work leading up to the opening was also shown in Neue Neue Gallerie (Neue Hauptpost) in Kassel, together with the Mercedes Sprinter, to encompass the processual fieldwork, as mentioned above.<sup>81</sup>

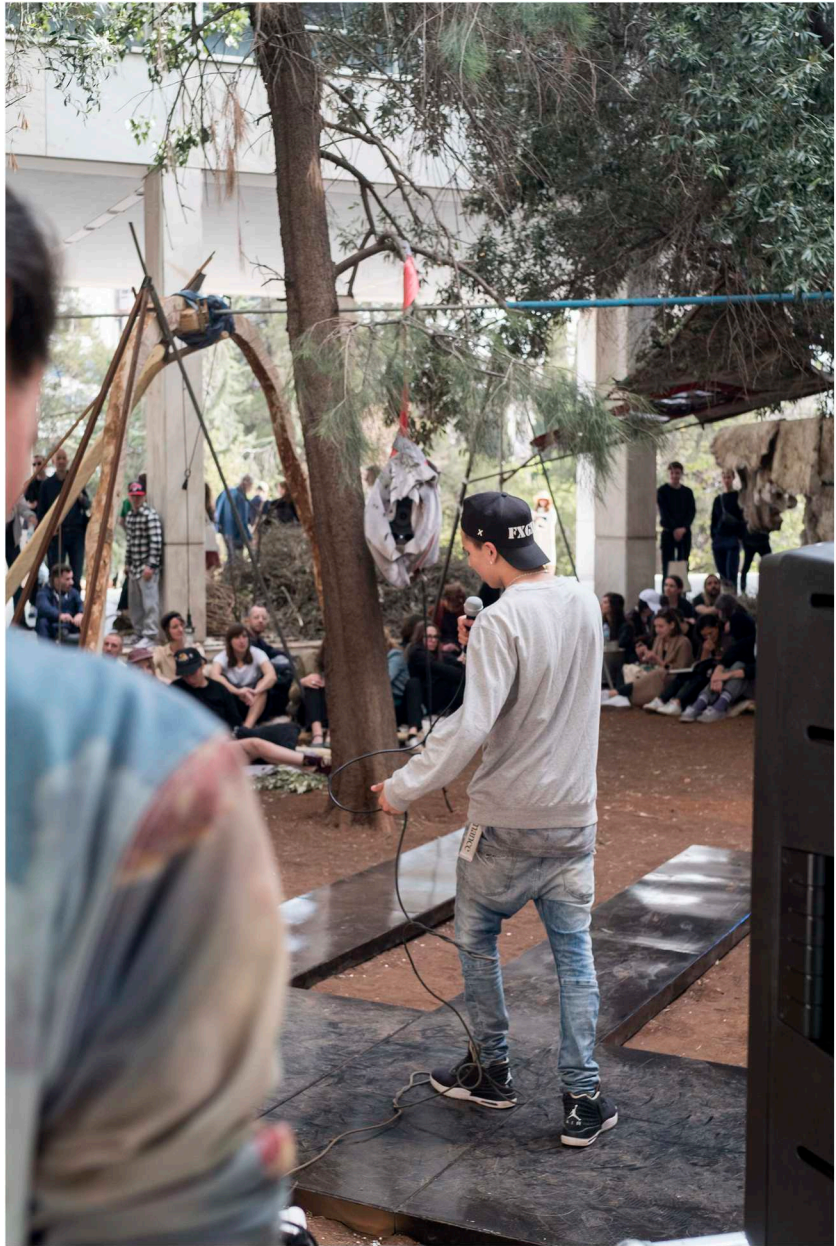
The atrium in Athens and the glass pavilion in Kassel where *European Everything* took place are neither exclusively indoors nor outdoors. The spaces establish a form of intermediate space, collapsing the inside and the outside. Such duality recurs in several aspects of *European Everything*. On the overarching level the art project creates a kind of settlement structure, with references to nomadic house constructions composed of everyday materials as used in Sápmi, and it functioned as a total installation assembled from everyday materials and elements immediately perceived as art, such as an eight-track audio work by the Sámi-Swedish musician Anders Ánndaris Rimpi and lyrical-visual work by the Dutch artist, designer and author Martijn in ‘t Veld entitled *E* (presented on an LCD screen).

In the materialisation of *European Everything*, which was always dynamic because any new performance and other participation would intervene and leave new deposits and tracks, the dividing line between art and everyday life was collapsed. Pots with leftovers from yesterday’s dinner

79 Gumbrech, *ibid*, p 49

80 Delia Tzortzaki, ‘On the Border of the Culturally “Known”’: European Everything and the Sámi Presence in documenta 14’, in *Field: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, no 18–19, 2021

81 The video work was done by Joar Nango in collaboration with Tanya Busse and Sigbjørn Skåden. Busse was responsible for the visuals, while Skåden wrote the text presented as a voiceover.



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mix media installation, Tarrak performing, Atrium, the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), Athens, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

were, for example, presented side by side with processed woods, sculptural, metal installations, neon signs, sound pieces and the results of various workshops. The artist himself and his collaborators contributed to this break by being present in the exhibition for large parts of the time – hanging out. In addition, the audience was invited to take part in various social events in the exhibition hall – at times collectively-driven activities



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mixed media installation, Atrium, the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), Athens, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

arose spontaneously, at other times meals were prepared for everyone. On one occasion, for example, it was announced on Facebook that Sámi artist Geir Tore Holm (among other things known for his relationally and social oriented art projects) would make *bidus* – a traditional Sámi dish prepared from reindeer meat, vegetables, and broth. By transcending the dividing line between art and everyday life, and combining it with a processual approach, *European Everything* actuated *duodji* (North Sámi) as a concept. Sámi *duojár* Gunvor Guttorm has pointed out that, even if *duodji* is today primarily understood as handwork or handicraft, the concept has gained new and added meaning over time. In the broader sense it can be grasped as 'the Sámi artistic way of living', encompassing both concrete products and ideas. Guttorm explains:

Historically, *duodji* and *duddjon* [to produce, production] are associated with human life, whether everyday life or ceremonies, holidays, and other special occasions, which together make up people's *birgen* (subsistence). The concept of *birgen* is not only related to being able to stay warm and obtain food, but also describes human communication, partnership and understanding of the natural environment and other creatures.<sup>82</sup>

82 Gunvor Guttorm, 'Duodji and its Stories', in Katya García-Antón, Harald Gaski and Gunvor Guttorm, ed, *An Indigenous Uprising and its Legacy in Art, Ecology and Politics*, Oslo/Amsterdam, OCA/Valiz, 2020, pp 253–264

Not only is *duodji* an important concept to apply when approaching Nango's work, the flow of objects and materials in *European Everything*, to borrow social anthropologist Tim Ingolds phrase, must also be



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mixed media installation, Glass pavilion, Kassel, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

83 Tim Ingold, 'Towards an Ecology of Materials', in *Annu: Review of Anthropology* 41, 2012, pp 427–442; Hanne Hammer Stien, 'Joar Nango: Sosial skulptur med materielt fortegn', in Merete Jonvik, Eivind Røssaak, Hanne Hammer Stien and Arnhild Sunnanå, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, Oslo, Fagbokforlaget, 2020, pp 88–104

84 Kirsten Thisted, 'Discourses of Indigeneity: Branding Greenland in the Age of Self-Government and Climate Change', in Sverker Sörlin, ed, *Science, Geopolitics and Culture in the Polar Region: Norden beyond Borders*, Farnham/Burlington, Ashgate, 2013, pp 227–258

regarded as an important artistic method in Nango's overall artistry, including being further developed in his ongoing work *Girjegumpi* that puts together the Sámi word for book and the Sámi word for a mini-camping van mounted on skis, and includes a library, an archive and the construction in which these are stored and transported.<sup>83</sup>

Whilst the spectators in some of the performances that took place in *European Everything* had the opportunity to regard the project from a distance, such as when Wimme Saari and Uyarakq and Tarrak performed *luohti* (yoik) and rap in the atrium of the Athens Conservatoire, the audiences in other performances had to participate, for example during club events in a packed glass pavilion in Kassel (see images from both events). Thus, the *European Everything* project continued to fluctuate between appearing as a representation and as a self-presentation, and in a playful way gave the public the opportunity to confirm preconceived notions about the Sámi as being reindeer herders and bound by tradition, by giving reindeer fur a symbolic function in the installation. On the other hand, such ideas were also challenged by, for instance, giving prominence to rap and audio art closely connected to urban club culture and the electronica genre, as well as including industrial processed materials such as plastic.<sup>84</sup>

It is difficult to describe *European Everything* in a straightforward way as this art project resisted any clear categorisation, opening for complexity and hybrid constellations on both the formal aesthetic and content levels. Here we draw on literary scholar Homi Bhabha's understanding of

hybridisation as the creation of new transcultural forms appearing in contradictory and ambiguous in-between ‘Third Spaces’, marked both by the colonised and the coloniser, as, according to Bhabha, they constitute each other’s subjectivity.<sup>85</sup> Even if we recognise the critique of the concept of hybridisation, as it is in danger of failing to recognise the unequal power relations that constitute intercultural spaces, downplaying oppositionality and neglecting cultural difference, we think it is productive to use the term to describe the cross-pollination that took place within the frame of *European Everything*. The open-ended character of the art project was also reinforced by Nango stepping aside, inviting collaborators and the public to join in and leaving the stage open for others. Hence it was at times difficult to know where the art project ended, and ideas about the artwork and the artist’s autonomy were legitimately challenged.

In the web presentation of documenta 14 *European Everything*, written by Candice Hopkins, Nango’s Sámi identity is highlighted.<sup>86</sup> The focus of Hopkins’s introductory text agrees with the overarching curatorial approach of documenta 14, as mentioned earlier. Even if *European Everything* partly dealt with this by allowing itself to be presented as a counterpart of a Eurocentric norm, the art project physically challenged the idea of the ‘purity’ and ‘unity’ of the positions, whether in reference to space, subjects, or objects. By handing over the stage to several individuals with different and overlapping identities, but who were nevertheless linked to each other through a comprehensive network, the use of the concept ‘Indigenous’ is expanded to also comprise what is anchored in relationships and locations, echoing a post-humanistic and ecological worldview as it is formulated by amongst others Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016): Here Haraway argues that ‘nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing’, but that things always exists in relationships to one another, and as such, make each other, even if it does not mean that the relationship is ‘mutually beneficial’.<sup>87</sup>

Seen in relation to ecological thinking, *European Everything* is not about displaying a contradiction between Indigenous peoples and other peoples, but rather rendering this distinction unclear – fostering intra- as well as inter-action.<sup>88</sup> In an interview in which Nango is asked about his relationship with the discourse of decolonisation, he answers:

I have deliberately avoided using the term [decolonialisation] because I feel that this is a kind of language that continues to polarise an already polarised debate, on the terms set by colonialism. Still, the concept of decolonisation is used so widely that it would be naïve for me to pretend it doesn’t exist.... I speak to Liisa-Rávná Finbog, a Sámi museologist, who uses the term ‘indigenise’. This is a more active concept which tries to talk about the same things, but from an autonomous Indigenous perspective. It is more about traditional knowledge, crafts, and ways of relating to land resources and self-determination.<sup>89</sup>

The cultural scholar Thomas Kintel has earlier commented on Nango’s ability to evade the straitjacket of categorisation, writing that:

Joar is of a generation of artists with a Sámi background who have long realised that there cannot be any essential qualities. Here neither the

85 Bhabha, op cit, 1994

86 Candice Hopkins, ‘Joar Nango’, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/1405/joar-nango>, accessed 6 October 2017

87 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, op cit, pp. 58–59; see also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010 and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, ‘Ecological Thinking, Material Spirituality and the Poetics of Infrastructure’, in Geoffrey C Bowker, Stefan Timmermans, Adele E Clarke and Ellen Balka, eds, *Boundary Objects and Beyond: Working with Leigh Star*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp 47–68

88 Intra-action is a term introduced by Karen Barad. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007. Intra-action replaces “interaction”, which necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces in which all designated “things” are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably. Intra-action also acknowledges the impossibility of an absolute separation or classically understood objectivity.’ Whitney Stark, ‘Intra-action’ (15.08.2016), <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action.html>.

89 Breivik, ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’, op cit



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mixed media installation, Charlotte Bendiks performing, Glass pavilion, Kassel, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

90 Thomas Kintel, 'Den nordlige pragmatismens universale kapasitet', <http://knipsu.no/den-nordlige-pragmatismens-universale-kapasitet/>, accessed 6 October 2017

91 Ivar Winther, 'Kulturutveksling på Kvam', *Arkitektnytt*, 10, 11, 2017, <https://www.arkitektnytt.no/tema/kulturutveksling-pa-kvam>, accessed 21 December 2017

92 Charlotte Bydler, 'Decolonial or Creolized Commons? Sámi Doudji in the Expanded Field', in Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal and Ulla Ankjær Jørgensen, eds, *Sami Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 2017, pp 141–162

work of art nor for that matter a 'Sámi' has any essence. The absence of traditions, introduction of lifestyle and the freedom (of choice) from tradition represent a post-structuralism critique of essence [translation by the authors].<sup>90</sup>

In an interview in the Norwegian magazine *Arkitektnytt* (Architect News) Nango's repeated use of nomadism as a motif in art appears as an ideal and exemplary rationale. He states that: 'Nomadism is the ultimate place-specific way to live. Many think of nomadism as being rootless, but it is rather closely linked to context and land because one is connected to what is available there and then. One is at the mercy of the place. It is an economic-resource activity.'<sup>91</sup> In the article 'Decolonial or Creolized Commons? Sámi Doudji in the Expanded Field', the art historian Charlotte Bydler argues that such a position may help to expand what being Sámi is, because it attaches importance to relation and attachment rather than kinship.<sup>92</sup> She asks whether *duodji* should be defined as an inherent and exclusive Sámi practice for Sámi artists or as a *decolonised, creolised common* (a hybrid) that is open and accessible to all. By referring to the poet, author, and philosopher Édouard Glissant, Bydler establishes a dividing line between an approach to tradition that attaches importance to economic rights and an approach to tradition that attaches importance to relation. The term 'commons' is used in this context neither



Joar Nango, *European Everything*, 2017, mixed media installation, Charlotte Bendiks performing, Glass pavilion, Kassel, 'documenta 14: Learning from Athens', © courtesy the artist, photograph: Mathias Völzke

to refer to exclusive individual access and use, nor to how everyone has an equal right to use something. Glissant's concepts 'créolité' and 'créolisation' processes space for an alternative approach to authenticity that 'bring into Relation but not to universalize; the principles of creoleness regress toward negritudes, ideas of Frenchness, of Latineness, all generalizing concepts'.<sup>93</sup> For Bydler, an art project such as Nango's is an example of the extension of what being Sámi is and the poetics of duodji precisely because it attaches importance to relationships. Thus, duodji becomes an accessible common resource, a concept with which to think, however, without meaning that everyone has the same right to access it.

With *European Everything*, Nango extends the concept of Europe and Europeans. He highlights the encounter between marginalised peoples who are not usually recognised or voiced among the European public. Ethnicity is not the important aspect in this context, but rather the creativity, the knowledge, and the skills that these individuals possess, which is not necessarily formalised or institutionalised. Through *European Everything* the connection between creativity, knowledge, skills, and ways of constituting lifeworlds are emphasised, and it is suggested that a potential model for future lifeworlds, must foster the relationships between landscapes, cityscapes, individuals, materials, structures, and things. This relational and social approach allows for processes of self-presentation and the articulations of agency.

<sup>93</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* [1997], Betsy Wing, trans, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2010, p 89

## Recognising the Past, Negotiating the Future

In this article we have shown how *European Attraction Limited* is based on a restricted perception of the Congo Village and the living displays – a perception that fails to consider the significance of the displays as arenas for intercultural encounters. Even if the intention of *European Attraction Limited* was to contribute to the deconstruction of the patterns of colonialism and racism, it did not break out of the binary grid, and thereby missed its potential for making contemporary self-presentation and articulation of agency possible. Consequently, the project ended up solely as a representational space, where there was little room for the recognition of historical agency and no space for interaction between different kinds of contemporary actors.

Profoundly embedded in the biennial culture, *European Everything* was at risk of becoming such a representational space. However, due to its emphasis on the social-material as artistic material, *European Everything* managed to create a social space – a space of agency in which interactions between different contemporary actors took place.<sup>94</sup> At the same time as making processes of self-presentation possible, the project escaped the binary grid and managed to build a basis for the reciprocal production of culture.

Moreover, our investigation shows the problem that may arise when artistic projects are placed in specific identity policy categories, where the distribution between power, visibility and politics has already been decided. Instead of creating spaces in which the recognition of the past and negotiation of the future can take place in all its social-material and aesthetic complexity and messiness, such projects are in danger of being silenced.

94 Fiona Sigenthaler, 'Towards an Ethnographic Turn in Contemporary Art Scholarship', *Critical Arts* 27, vol 6, pp 737–752, p 742; Nina Möntmann, *Kunst als sozialer Raum*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2002, p 28