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**THE GENERAL SPECTRE:
ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF IMAGE PRODUCTION, HEGEMONY
AND VIOLENCE**

There are two events that we wish to address here. One is the press conference mentioned at the end of the first instalment involving the co-operation between the museums of Prussian Cultural Heritage from Berlin, the painting collections in Munich, and the Dresden State Art Collections with the Cultural Arts Authority in Dubai respecting the conceptualisation of a universal museum in Dubai, to be completed in 2012. The conference was extended on the same evening in Dresden to include a discussion event on the occasion of »Humanism in China«, a large-scale exhibition of documentary photography from the twentieth century in China prefacing the Olympics media spectacle.¹ The exhibition serves as an example for a further collaboration: a side wing in the new National Museum in Peking is being dedicated to the European cultures and will first be endowed by these three museums. It goes without saying that both cases comprehend extraordinary dimensions as far as space and sums of money are concerned.

The events focus on these co-operations as one matter in which all three museums unite on one subject. Their involvement is highly celebrated by its respective directors, who have designated themselves as generals. It is a revenant born in the nineteenth century that has now been reanimated. It deals with the »cultural involvement of the German Nation of Culture overseas«² The spectre is the answer to the question: »Being that, due to the federal structure of the museum-related and cultural landscape, perception of the Federal Republic [of Germany] always tends to be a bit difficult. Who supports Germany? Where is Germany in this international concert of the Metropolitan, the Louvre, the British Museum?«³ During the events, this federal slight is countered with the satisfaction of »being able to step out on equal footing with the Louvre, on equal footing with the Metropolitan Museum, or even the British Museum«.⁴

Whose hand is the spectre shaking? What is concealed beneath its veil? Who freezes in fear at its touch and who does it make disappear? »Lines of argumentation are in this context not characterised by that which one normally associates with them: fixed rules of reasoning, certain modes of consistency in discourse and response [... they] are of interest here as an analysable medium of mentalities [... they] are defined by repeatedly surfacing, differently accentuable patterns of assessment and order in which collective experiences as well as

ideas and historical traditions are integrated over long periods of time«. ⁵ The specifically German line of argumentation of the Nation of Culture is made up of an irresolvable connection between historical awareness of hegemony and the contemporary issue of feeling slighted: How can an industrial monument like the Zollverein stand up against the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation? Can a PISA survey repudiate the educational ideals of Weimar Classicism? This present is much too banal to seriously rival historical existence. It has to endure the scrutinisation like a monument the discourse of Taggs on its bronzed hide. But it has lawyers who demand that police prohibit the scrawling of graffiti. The role of this line of argumentation in the history of national discourse in Germany is well-known. That the Nation of Culture has once again been frequently emerging in feuilletons and celebratory speeches over the past few years is something we consider not continuity but rather more of a conscious rift wherein the history of National Socialism, war, and post-war modernism likewise dwindles to a single argument that any which way can be contorted and pocketed away, to be summed up as: this history can no longer be defined as experience. The general spectre – revenant of a bygone cultural struggle of historicism against modernism – transposes the aged paper tigers of the national feuilletons a fin-de-siècle later. It thus allows historical experience to disappear in order to create a nationalism from the tulle of the nineteenth rather than from the mire of the twentieth century. This appears to us as elusive as the newly reconstructed façades of the Wilhelminian-style institutions in the creative industry of capital cities. Hence, it is necessary to see whose hand the spectre is shaking before we can ascertain its reality.

In both events the role of the speakers appears to have been predetermined like in a mechanical theatre. During the radio discussion in Dresden a journalist counters: »But you can surely understand that [...] the question is fielded as to whether [...] a government is being decorated by German museums that – at least as far as human rights are concerned – does not measure up to the European standard?« ⁶ He is referring to the Chinese government being that »Tibet« is a conditioned response to »China«, especially in the media-influenced public.

The museum directors reply: »I find it extremely difficult when this is said by a country that only a few decades ago attempted to slay half of the world's population. [...] Of course not everything goes the way we would wish in many countries in which we are involved. [...] And I also think that there will be a relatively high number of our people in this country who will say, how are you treating your foreigners [...] and so forth.« ⁷ This answer borrows the integrity of anti-fascist arguments in order to make one's own position neutral and operable. Since the Kosovo War we have been confronted with this voicelessness of governmental

anti-fascism as a point of departure for arms dealings and participation in war. The journalist suggests exporting culture as a means of resolving the apparent dilemma. »Exhibitions present opportunities for transferring education or, if one wants to put it dramatically, perhaps even enlightenment. What are your hopes in this respect for the joint China project?«⁸ The answers follow along the lines of the cultural mission seeing its success confirmed by its refraining to censure its exhibitions in China. The bourgeois sphere of liberty opens up and shows this typical void, which – aiming to be universal – knows no positivism and swallows all political demands for universality. The origins of the Nation of Culture go back to this void, in the determination of an autonomous space beyond political relations. »The nation-state emerged in the framework of already existing states, their populations having risen to sovereignty [...] This is fundamentally different in the case of the Nation of Culture. The national unification movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in continental Europe [...] were formed irrespective of existing states, indeed even in direct opposition to these [...] Those who were, or were supposed to be, associated with these pre-political national alliances identified themselves according to [...] common background and language, settlement area, religion«.⁹

The autonomous space of the Nation of Culture offers a sense of identity as opposed to political rights. At the press conference in Berlin, Michael Schindhelm was attempting to conjure a picture of Dubai as an instance of modern globalised society, one that understands culture as a *melting pot*. »You must imagine that eighty-five per cent of the people come from other countries. Only fifteen per cent of the population are natives. [...] the challenge Dubai faces is that of reconciling this cosmopolitan presence.«¹⁰ As we had already mentioned in the first instalment, this eighty-five per cent yield the profits attained through construction investments and tourism by working in largely slave-like conditions. The autonomous space can lend the *façon* of a state to the emirate companies. This state is not legitimised by a »populace«, which is for the most part comprised of replaceable human resources, but rather by the vacuous space. The things in this vacuous space are without dedication and without history. This makes them logically and aesthetically genuine in the sense of the power obliterating the history of things and the violence with which they were robbed or commanded. Yet the power is looking straight into the refined and timeless face of its own process of appropriation. In the production of this ideational reflection, it as power becomes cognizant of itself. It says: Me. That would be another German type of argumentation. Thus, our general spectre is the midwife of real monsters. But maybe their elites sense that that will really never be enough, that this face – that they themselves – can again and again be unmasked as the visage of a paper tiger. »In 2015, Emiratis will make up 10 per cent of the

population. And in 2025, at the same rate of growth, zero per cent. »At the moment when we have everything, we're in danger of losing it all – our very identity««. 11

1 The exhibition was organised by the Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, and travelled to the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Museum for Modern Art in Frankfurt, and to the Dresden State Art Collections.

2 Joint press release (May 2007): National Museums in Berlin, Dresden State Art Collections, Bavarian State Collections.

3 Peter Klaus Schuster (director of the National Museums in Berlin), press conference in Berlin (28 May 2008): »Expanded Horizons: Museums Create a New International Public«.

4 Reinhold Baumstark (director of the Bavarian State Collections), discussion event in Dresden (28 May 2008): »Culture and Enlightenment – From Peking to Dubai: Museums Create a New International Public«.

5 Georg Bollenbeck, *Tradition, Avantgarde, Reaktion*, Frankfurt: S. Fischer 1999, pp. 22–23.

6 Stefan Koldehoff (journalist), »Culture and Enlightenment«, op. cit.

7 Martin Roth (Dresden State Art Collections), ibid.

8 Stefan Koldehoff, ibid.

9 Website of the Brandenburg State Centre for Political Education, glossary on right-wing radicalism. The website is part of a public-awareness campaign against racism and xenophobia in Brandenburg, where racial-abuse threats against citizens occur on a daily basis.

10 Michael Schindhelm (Dubai, Arts and Culture Authority), »Expanded Horizons«, op. cit.

11 Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, professor for political science at Emirates University, described by the author as the »most outspoken person in the country«; »We've made a pact with the devil to be here. But if you're a silly girl who gets into trouble, forget it«, Carole Cadwalladr, *The Observer*, Sunday, 5 October 2008.