

**Ângela Ferreira's *Maison Tropicale*: Architecture, Colonialism
and the Politics of Translation**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the possibility of presenting translation as a framework through which to address the act of remaking. More specifically, it considers how the relationship between two closely connected, but ultimately distinct terms – translatability and untranslatability – might allow this gesture to be reconceptualised within the current artistic and theoretical climate. Rather than presenting translation as the basis for a new theoretical paradigm or attempting to provide an overview of contemporary art, the thesis focuses upon a single artwork: Ângela Ferreira's *Maison Tropicale*. Commissioned for the 2007 Venice Biennale, Ferreira's project takes its lead from a colonial housing project by Jean Prouvé. Combining architecture and installation with a series of colour photographs, the work considers the implications of reproducing a modernist object in the present. Through a discussion of the social and aesthetic tensions which inform this process, this thesis explores the possibility of presenting translation as a 'properly political' framework; one which allows for a more detailed investigation into the histories and power relations at play within *Maison Tropicale*.

To set the stage for this investigation, the project begins by addressing a series of categories that have previously been used to discuss the act of remaking – namely allegory, parody and the archive. In doing so, it provides a critical reassessment of these lines of enquiry and considers the benefits of bringing translation to the fore. Having established the relevance of such a strategy, the thesis then turns to the relationship between translatability and untranslatability. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay 'The Task of the Translator', Chapter 2 raises the possibility of presenting installation as a temporal practice. By bringing the notion of translatability and the sculptural aspects of Ferreira's project into dialogue, it examines how the themes of history, loss and decontextualisation are addressed within *Maison Tropicale*. Building upon these lines of enquiry, Chapter 3 takes its lead from the question of untranslatability. With reference to the work of Emily Apter, it explores how the photographic components of Ferreira's installation might allow for an alternative reading of these motifs. The thesis concludes by considering how these ostensibly conflictual approaches might be thought together.

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Introduction

This is a thesis about translation. More specifically, it is a thesis about the relationship between translation and contemporary art; a pairing which has become increasingly prevalent over the past decade. In order to explore the connection between these terms, this project will stand at the intersection between art theory, contemporary practice and literary criticism. However, it is not my intention to revive the linguistic turn. Nor do I wish to examine the various ways in which the term translation has been used as a metaphor for travel, interdisciplinarity or cultural exchange. Rather, in bringing together these lines of enquiry, I want to consider the possibility of presenting translation as a framework through which to address the act of remaking. Whilst this gesture has been a recurring theme throughout the history of art, it acquired a particular significance in the latter half of the twentieth century.¹ With the increasing popularity of practices such as collage, montage and rephotography, remaking was assigned a prominent place in art theory and practice; a position which it continues to hold today.² Following the decline of postmodernism, however, many of the core assumptions which informed this conjuncture have been called into question. It is this moment of uncertainty that will serve as my point of departure. But how might translation allow for an alternative understanding of the act of remaking? To what extent does it constitute an intervention within current debates on contemporary art? And what type of politics does it bring to the fore? Rather than answering these questions in the abstract or attempting to provide an overview of the current state of contemporary art, this thesis will focus upon a single work: Ângela Ferreira's *Maison Tropicale*.

Commissioned by the Institute for the Arts and curated by Jürgen Bock, *Maison Tropicale* was the Portuguese entry for the 2007 Venice Biennale. In this capacity, it was displayed at

¹ As Christine Battersby notes, a number of the categories associated with remaking can be traced back to ancient Greece: 'European conceptions of the artist's task were inherited from the ancient Greeks, who did not even have a term that meant 'creation' in our sense [...] The artist's only task was to imitate nature as it had been patterned by the gods. The Greeks lacked the words for concepts that we now take for granted in discussing the arts: 'originality', 'inspiration', 'genius', 'create', 'creative' [...] When the Greeks judged painting and sculpture what they were looking for was beauty of form and truthfulness to nature. Once the perfect form had been discovered (not invented), it was to be repeated without any deviation. Progress in the arts was a matter of increased accuracy in mimicking the beauty shaped by the gods'. Christine Battersby, 'The Clouded Mirror', in *Art and its Histories: A Reader*, ed. by Steve Edwards (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 129-133 (p. 130).

² See, for example, Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 73-82; Jean Narboni, Sylvie Pierre and Jacques Rivette, 'Montage', in *Cahiers du Cinema, 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation*, ed. by Nick Browne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 21-44; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning the Game When the Rules have been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism', *Screen*, 25.6 (1984), 88-103.

the Fundação Marcello; an I-shaped building located on the banks of the Grand Canal between the Rialto and Academia bridges.³ On entering the building, visitors were directed towards a narrow corridor constructed from aluminium beams attached to a steel base (Fig. 1). Although the roof of the passageway was left uncovered, the sides of the structure were filled with a series of wooden panels. Varying in shape and size, these pieces ranged from small, undecorated rectangular planks to larger panels inset with circles of translucent blue glass (Fig. 2). On the left hand side of the passage, the glass portals were flanked by a row of seven angled planks and two large wooden chevrons (Fig. 3). On the right, however, the layout was slightly different. First, it had a single, rather than quadruple layer of the blue glass panels. Secondly, it contained a double row of the angled planks. And finally, one of the chevrons had been replaced with a series of three large rectangles decorated with a circular motif. Behind these component parts, two large triangles spanned the length of the structure (Fig. 4).⁴

On reaching the end of the walkway, visitors were presented with the second part of Ferreira's installation: a series of eight colour photographs. Although presented together, the images were clearly subdivided into two distinct groups. The first four photographs featured a large concrete platform surrounded by trees, radio antennae and a number of other miscellaneous objects, including packing crates and open paint cans (Fig. 5-8). The second group, in contrast, focused on a small cluster of dilapidated buildings. Despite differing in emphasis, all four images sought to highlight the materials used in their construction (Fig. 9-12). On first encounter, there seemed little to link the two parts of Ferreira's installation. Yet on closer examination, both aspects of the work shared the same point of reference: a colonial housing project, also entitled *Maison Tropicale*, by Jean Prouvé.⁵ Whereas the sculptural aspects of Ferreira's installation echoed the component

³ Due to the terms of its lease, the building also housed the Portuguese exhibition for the 2008 Architecture Biennale. Ferreira's installation now forms part of the permanent collection at Museion, Bolzano, Italy.

⁴ Although these aspects of *Maison Tropicale* are modelled upon the component parts of a building, I have chosen not to use architectural terms to describe them for three reasons. First (and perhaps most obviously), Ferreira's project is an installation not a building. Whilst the sculptural aspects of her work share certain visual similarities within their architectural counterparts, they are not the same thing. Secondly, on first encountering *Maison Tropicale*, the visitor is offered little explanation as to the origins of the work. By avoiding technical language within my opening description, I hope to have retained some sense of this opacity. And finally, one of the broader aims of this thesis is to consider the broader implications of remaking a work of architecture in sculptural form. As such, it would be inappropriate to privilege one medium over the other.

⁵ In order to distinguish between the two projects, the title of Ferreira's work will be italicized throughout the thesis.

parts of Prouvé's structures, the photographs depicted the now-empty sites where the houses were first installed.

In order to explain the origins of Ferreira's project, the introduction will begin with a brief history of Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales. By positioning the structures within their broader social context, this section will seek to demonstrate the complex histories and political stakes at play in Ferreira's installation. Having done so, it will then continue with a critical overview of the existing literature on *Maison Tropicale*. Not only will this subsection explore the theoretical categories which have previously been employed in response to the work, it will also provide an opportunity to distinguish my project from them. The third section will address the immediate context in which the work was displayed: the Venice Biennale. Starting with an analysis of the exhibition's curatorial framework, it will then consider the Biennale's status as a cultural phenomenon. This will be followed by an overview of the thesis.

Ateliers Jean Prouvé, 1937-1951

In April 1947, Prouvé was approached by the French authorities to design a series of prototype houses for colonial officials working in West Africa. Commissioned on the advice of Paul Herbé, the town planner for Niger, the structures were intended to serve a dual purpose. In addition to offering a possible solution to the housing shortages which had developed across the region following the end of the Second World War, it was also hoped that the exportation of French urban policies and town planning initiatives would help to stifle the calls for independence which had begun to emerge across the continent.⁶ Although he initially trained as a metalsmith and had also worked as a furniture designer, the commission was not Prouvé's first foray into architecture. Between 1937 and 1946, he had unsuccessfully attempted to patent and mass produce a series of lightweight structures that could be easily dismantled and transported.

For Olivier Cinqualbre, the invention of prefabricated architecture can be attributed to Henri Sauvage, an architect working in Paris during the 1920s. First exhibited at the 1928 Salon des arts ménagers, Sauvage's project – a metal framed cell with external vertical beams – served as a source of inspiration for a number of architects, including Prouvé.⁷

⁶ D.J. Huppertz, 'Jean Prouvé's Maison Tropicale: The Poetics of the Colonial Object', *Design Issues*, 26.4 (2010), 32-44 (p. 35).

⁷ Olivier Cinqualbre, 'Habitations démontables et maisons usinées dans la production des Ateliers Jean Prouvé', in *Jean Prouvé: La Maison Tropicale*, ed. by Olivier Cinqualbre (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009), pp. 17-29 (p. 19).

Within their introductory remarks to *Prefabrication: Structures and Elements*, Benedikt Huber and Jean-Claude Steinegger note that throughout his career Prouvé sought ‘to take advantage of the most advanced methods of producing and make use of fresh materials in order to devise a new and immediate architecture adapted to the needs of the modern economy’.⁸ Yet whilst Huber and Steinegger’s comments refer specifically to Prouvé, they are equally applicable to the other founding members of the Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM); a group of architects and furniture designers, including Le Corbusier, Robert Mallet-Stevens, René Herbst and Charlotte Perriand, who had chosen to distance themselves from the Société des Artistes Décorateurs.⁹ Like his UAM colleagues, Prouvé believed that the industrial developments of the twentieth century – specifically the introduction of mass production, standardization and prefabrication – provided the necessary tools with which to modernise the environment, thereby improving international standards of living.¹⁰ However, he also believed that, in order to achieve these goals, it was first necessary to redefine the role of the architect:

It is out of the question that the role of the architect should be purely confined to designing. A new type of architect must therefore be called into being who would quite simply be an industrialist – and why not? Personally, I can see no other hope. Such an architect, a head of industry, will be listened to, followed and not merely consulted.¹¹

Through this process of redefinition Prouvé sought to blur the distinction between architect and engineer; a decision which resulted in a series of experiments with modular prefabricated architecture. During the late 1930s, he began to design light buildings that could be easily disassembled and transported. Produced in collaboration with Beaudouin and Lods architects and the Strasbourg Steel Works, the BLPS Holiday and Weekend Home

⁸ Benedikt Huber and Jean-Claude Steinegger, ‘Introduction: The Organization of Building Construction’, in *Prefabrication: Structures and Elements*, ed. by Benedikt Huber and Jean-Claude Steinegger (London: Pall Mall Press, 1971), p. 9.

⁹ Founded in May 1929, the UAM was a group of Modernist architects and designers who had become disillusioned with the practices of the Société des Artistes Décorateurs (SAD). Whereas the SAD championed the production of overly elaborate architecture and furniture, the work produced by the UAM was without ornament and made primarily from concrete, steel and glass. Although these characteristics were undeniably present in the work of its individual members, they were most clearly visible in the UAM’s group exhibitions – for example, *L’Art moderne cadre de la vie contemporaine* (1930) and *Formes utiles, objets de notre temps* (1949) – and their manifesto, *L’Art moderne cadre de la vie* (1937). The group disbanded in 1958.

¹⁰ Huppertz, pp. 33-34.

¹¹ Jean Prouvé, ‘Un industriel de l’aviation a dit que si les avions étaient mis en oeuvre comme les bâtiments, ils ne voleraient pas’, in *Prefabrication: Structures and Elements*, ed. by Benedikt Huber and Jean-Claude Steinegger (London: Pall Mall Press, 1971), p. 24.

(1937-1939) was Prouvé's first attempt to produce an all-metal structure: the façade, floor and roof panels of the building were made entirely from steel (Fig. 13). Although the BLPS Home failed to progress beyond the prototype stage, the project demonstrated his ability to rework everyday objects – in this case, the tent.¹² The second case study in which Prouvé sought to combine mobility and mass production was the hut. In response to a competition organized by the French Air Ministry in August 1938, Prouvé produced two designs. The first, like the BLPS Home, had an external metal frame. The second consisted of a series of porticos. Although neither proposal was ever realized, both principles could be found in Prouvé's subsequent work – for example, the temporary lodgings commissioned by the Corps of Engineers (1939); the series of light buildings designed for the Central Company of Light Alloys in collaboration with Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand (1939-1941) and the F 8 x 8 m, a standardized detached house which served as the offices of Alais, Froges and Carmargue in Saint-Auban and Péchiney Aluminium Français in Bédarieux, Brignoles, Gardanne, Lunel and Salindres (1941-1942).¹³

Following these collaborations, in 1946, Prouvé was commissioned to undertake a number of other housing projects. These included private residences, accommodation for the employees of the Croismare glass works and a series of lodgings at the Rhine dams. Although each of these projects used prefabrication techniques and industrial materials, none of them provided Prouvé with the opportunity to achieve mass production. Following the end of the Second World War, Prouvé received a commission to design a house that could be used to reconstruct the Saar.¹⁴ Working in partnership with the Stalhaus Company and Aciéries Dillingen, Ateliers Prouvé applied for a patent for a wooden and metal house with concrete foundations. A year later, in February 1947, a prototype structure was erected at Saarbrücken. Yet, once again, Prouvé's houses failed to progress beyond the prototype stage. The Stalhaus Company went into liquidation and Aciéries Dillingen withdrew from the project.¹⁵

Although there are currently a number of overviews of Prouvé's career in print, very few of these texts offer an explanation for the decrease in his architectural output between

¹² Following his work on the BPLS Home, in 1939, Prouvé was commissioned by Jacques and Michel André to produce approximately twenty tents for a holiday camp at Onville. Although Prouvé's tents still adopted the traditional 'ridge tent' form, the metal frame was external and the canvas hung from it.

¹³ Cinqualbre, pp. 17-24.

¹⁴ Between 1947 and 1956, the Saar was partitioned from Germany and governed as a French protectorate. It re-joined West Germany in 1957.

¹⁵ Cinqualbre, pp. 25-27.

1942 and 1946.¹⁶ For Tristan Guilloux, however, this lull can be explained, at least in part, by Prouvé's political affiliations. For the duration of the Second World War, Prouvé refused to collaborate with either the Vichy government or the occupying forces, choosing to align himself instead with the Resistance. As a result of this commitment, he was appointed as the building consultant to the Assemblée consultative provisoire in March 1945; an interim government chaired by Charles De Gaulle.¹⁷ It was whilst in this post that Prouvé received the West African commission.

In June 1949, Prouvé's factory completed its first prototype for the Maison Tropicale, a prefabricated metal structure.¹⁸ The house was briefly exhibited at the Port des Champs Élysées before being dismantled and taken to Niamey, in Niger, where it served as the home of a secondary school headmaster (Fig. 14-15).¹⁹ Two years later, in 1951, Ateliers Prouvé produced two further prototypes that were dispatched to Brazzaville in French Equatorial Africa (now the Republic of Congo). Whilst the smaller structure functioned as the regional headquarters for the company Aluminium Français, the larger structure housed its commercial director, Jacques Piget (Fig. 16).²⁰ Erected on stilts and locally produced concrete platforms (Fig. 17-18), Prouvé's houses were constructed from a sheet steel frame and a series of static and sliding aluminium wall panels.²¹ These component

¹⁶ See, for example, Catherine Coley, *Jean Prouvé* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993); Nathalie Prat (ed.), *Jean Prouvé* (Paris: Galerie Jousse Seguin, 1998); Jean-Claude Bignon and Catherine Coley, *Jean Prouvé entre artisanat et industrie, 1939-1949* (Villers-les-Nancy: École d'architecture de Nancy, 1992); Peter Sulzer (ed.), *Jean Prouvé: Complete Works*, 4 vols (Basel: Birkhauser, 1995-2008).

¹⁷ Tristan Guilloux, 'The Maison "Tropique": a modernist icon or the ultimate colonial bungalow?', *Fabrications*, 18.2 (2008), 7-25 (p. 8).

¹⁸ This commission, however, was not Prouvé's first encounter with colonialism. His involvement in the French colonial project can be traced back to the 1931 International Colonial Exposition which was held in Paris between 6 May and 15 November. Promoted as 'Le tour du monde en un jour', the Exposition celebrated the benefits of colonialism through a series of temporary pavilions which showcased the arts, people and developing industries of various colonial empires. In addition to these buildings, it also contained the Musée des Colonies; a permanent structure designed by Albert Laprade and dedicated specifically to the accomplishments of France and its empire. Unlike the pavilions, which used architecture to represent the indigenous cultures of the colonies, Laprade's museum used sculpture and the decorative arts to demonstrate the extent of the French colonial empire. To supplement the classical architecture of Laprade's building (and also that of Paris), Prouvé was commissioned to design and build an 'African-inspired' cast iron entrance gate which was placed at the foot of the front staircase. For further information on this project, see Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 290.

¹⁹ Following the successful completion of this prototype, Prouvé was invited to participate in number of other projects, including the council palace and law courts in Niamey and a college and government palace for Ouagadougou in present-day Burkina Faso. However, none of these buildings were ever realized.

²⁰ Huppatz, pp. 34-35.

²¹ Whilst the Niamey house was set on a concrete platform, the Brazzaville structures were assembled on stilts.

parts were surrounded by an adjustable aluminium screen perforated with rows of blue glass portholes (Fig. 19). As D.J. Huppatz notes, Prouvé's design was 'a model of industrial efficiency'; 'its components, constructed in the Maxéville factory, were designed to fit within an aircraft and be assembled quickly on site without specialist building skills'.²²

Although initially intended for mass production, no further prototypes were produced. Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales quickly proved to be more expensive than locally produced structures and their industrial aesthetic was met with disapproval from the colonial officials.²³ As a result, the structures were left to weather in semi-obscurity until early 2000, when a Parisian furniture dealer named Eric Touchaleaume arrived in Africa, negotiated their purchase and returned them to France for restoration.²⁴ Yet rather than returning the houses to their original form, Touchaleaume's project sought to highlight the constructive logic of Prouvé's houses; a process which consisted of three stages. First, their component parts were disassembled, cleaned and repainted (Fig 20-23). In an attempt to maximise the visibility of their structure, the houses were then reconstructed without their interior walls and fixtures (Fig. 24). And finally, unless pieces were missing or deemed to be unsound, the project chose to avoid refabrication and instead attempted to preserve any non-structural elements that were not in pristine condition – for example, the bullet-riddled sun shutters.²⁵ In June 2007, the larger Brazzaville house was sold at auction in New York to hotelier André Balazs for \$4.9 million. Balazs subsequently loaned the house to the Design Museum, London as part of the 2008 retrospective *Jean Prouvé: the Poetics of the Technical Object* (Fig. 25). Prior to this, the smaller Brazzaville house was sold privately to Robert Rubin, a former Wall Street trader, for approximately \$1 million. In 2005, Rubin briefly exhibited the house at UCLA's Hammer Museum and Yale University, before donating it to the Pompidou Centre, where it currently forms part of the museum's permanent collection.²⁶ At present, the Niamey house is still owned by Touchaleaume.

²² Huppatz, p. 35.

²³ Jean Prouvé – La Maison Tropicale – Presented by André Balazs <www.lamaisontropicale.com> [accessed on 23 January 2011]. There were, of course, different political systems in place in Niamey and Brazzaville, despite the fact that both were French colonies. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen not to focus on these differences. My reasons for doing so are twofold. In adopting standpoint, I not only hope to highlight the universalising nature of French colonial policy and the strategies by which was institutionalised. I also want to reinforce the differences between French colonial rule and the systems of governance implemented by other European powers.

²⁴ Judith Rodenbeck, 'Maison Tropicale: A Conversation with Manthia Diawara', *October*, 133 (2010), 106-132 (p. 108).

²⁵ Robert M. Rubin, 'From Paris to Brazzaville', in *Jean Prouvé: La Maison Tropicale*, ed. by Olivier Cinqualbre (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2009), pp.117-132 (pp. 120-121).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

The Critical Reception of *Maison Tropicale*

Having outlined the history of Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales, I would now like to consider how this narrative has been addressed within the existing literature on Ferreira. Although Ferreira has been featured in a number of anthologies of contemporary African art, the majority of these entries comprise of a summary of her biographical details, specifically, her childhood in Mozambique and tertiary education at the University of Cape Town.²⁷ Yet apart from these overviews – and a handful of heavily illustrated exhibition catalogues – very little has been written on her work.²⁸ Of those accounts which do attempt to offer a more sustained discussion of her practice, the majority choose to focus on *Maison Tropicale*. For Judith Rodenbeck, the questions raised by *Maison Tropicale* can also be found throughout Ferreira's oeuvre; a body of work which 'probes the geo-temporal switchings of modernism and its neo-avant-garde reanimations, its nomadic peripheries and in-between spaces'.²⁹ Ferreira, she continues, 'has long been investigating the underbelly of modernist architecture's utopian claims – the ground, as it were, from which and on which its particular efficiencies were constructed, and in particular its colonial peripeteia'.³⁰ Although Rodenbeck does not expand upon these insights, the broader implications of this gesture have been addressed by Lydie Diakhaté.

In Diakhaté's view, because Prouvé's structures were produced for humid sub-Saharan climates, they belong to the countries to which they were originally dispatched. She therefore argues that Ferreira created *Maison Tropicale* 'as a way to give back Prouvé's

²⁷ See, for example, Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (New York: Damiani, 2009); Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, 2nd edn (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2004); Sophie Perryer, *10 Years, 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishing, 2004); and Simon Njami (ed.), *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007). Ângela Ferreira was born in Maputo, Mozambique in 1958 to Portuguese parents whose family had lived in the country for three generations. At the time of her birth, Mozambique was still a Portuguese colony and the movement for independence had not yet begun. When Mozambique eventually gained independence in 1975, Ferreira and her family moved to apartheid South Africa rather than returning to Portugal. Whilst in South Africa, she received her education at the University of Cape Town, gaining a BA in Fine Art and an MFA in Sculpture in 1981 and 1983 respectively. Since 1984, Ferreira has chosen to live and work between Portugal and South Africa, teaching sculpture at the Eastern Cape Technikon (1984-1991), AR.CO Lisbon (1992), the University of Lisbon (1994-2000), Stellenbosch University (2000) and the University of Cape Town (2001-2003). She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Lisbon, a position she has held since 2003.

²⁸ See, for example, João Fernandes (ed.), *Ângela Ferreira: Casa. Um retrato intimo da casa em que nasci* (Portugal: Fundacao de Serralves, 1999); Andrew Renton (ed.), *Front of House: Marcos Corrales, Ângela Ferreira, Narelle Jubelin, Andrew Renton* (London: Parasol Unit, 2008); Walter D. Mignolo (ed.), *Modernologies: Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009).

²⁹ Rodenbeck, p. 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Tropical Houses, metaphorically, to Africa'.³¹ Drawing on the notion of a shared cultural heritage, Diakhaté argues that Ferreira's installation both highlights the various complexities surrounding modern cultural heritage in Africa and challenges commonly held beliefs about the role of property, restitution and preservation in the formation of modern identities. Not only does *Maison Tropicale* undertake the complex task of identifying the role of sub-Saharan countries in the appropriation of modernist design both during and after colonisation, it also highlights the presence of an imperialist desire to impose French culture beyond the *metropole*.³²

Whilst still firmly rooted in questions of identity, Diakhaté's discussion of *Maison Tropicale* is also an anomaly. Though it might be possible to argue that the content of the aforementioned texts has been shaped by various formal concerns, the biographical details which they include also dominate the project's accompanying catalogue essays; a series of short texts by Manthia Diawara, Gertrude Sandqvist and Jürgen Bock. Despite differing in their aims and emphases, each of these writers adopts the standpoint that Ferreira's experiences of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique and apartheid South Africa have played a formative role in the development her practice. Given the emphasis they place on biography, the content of all three articles could easily be likened to that of a monograph or *catalogue raisonné*; two forms of art historical writing which seek to offer a coherent account of an artist's life and work. Yet, as Griselda Pollock notes, such an approach not only removes the possibility of critical or historical analysis. By presenting the artist as the sole source of meaning, their work becomes an extension of their personality.³³ The outcome is 'an unbreakable circuit which produces the artist as the subject of the art work and the art work as the means of contemplative access to that subject's [...] creative subjectivity'.³⁴

Nevertheless, Bock and Diawara both use this information to suggest that Ferreira's multi-sited life has allowed her to address a series of larger questions within her work, specifically, the relationship between European modernist architecture and Africa.³⁵ In an attempt to further this analysis, Bock cautions against viewing Ferreira's practice as a

³¹ Lydie Diakhaté, 'Museum ethics, missing voices and the case of the Tropical Houses', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 26.2 (2011), 177-195 (p. 186).

³² In using the phrase 'imperialist desire', I am referring to the policies of the French government rather than Prouvé's own politics.

³³ Griselda Pollock, 'Artists Mythologies and Media Genius, Madness and Art History', *Screen*, 21.3 (1981), 57-96 (p. 58).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵ Jürgen Bock, 'Ângela Ferreira's Modernity at Large', *Ângela Ferreira: Maison Tropicale*, ed. by Jürgen Bock (Lisbon: Instituto das Artes & Ministério da Cultura, 2007) pp. 10-17 (p. 11).

product of the postmodern *Zeitgeist*. Rather, he argues, the on-going tensions between Ferreira's Euro-African heritage and 'Western' perceptions of Africa have allowed her to produce a body of work capable of engaging with both aspects of African colonial history and its neo- and postcolonial legacies.³⁶ A similar line of argument can also be found in Diawara's essay. Like Bock, he also argues that *Maison Tropicale* challenges the oversimplistic depiction of Africa as primitive – that is, as an 'Other' which serves as a source of inspiration for artists working in the 'West'.³⁷ Yet whereas Bock's analysis adopts the standpoint that Ferreira's life has informed the content of her work, Diawara's analysis culminates in the even more problematic suggestion that *Maison Tropicale* should be viewed as an extension of Ferreira herself.³⁸

Pollock's criticisms, however, are not simply directed towards the use of biographical details. They also stem from the willingness of such texts to make recourse to causal, linear narratives.³⁹ Though present in Bock and Diawara's contributions, these structures are most clearly visible in Gertrude Sandqvist's essay 'Sculpture Revisited'. Beginning with *Sites and Services* (1991-1992) (Fig. 26) – a sculpture and photography-based installation which addressed the architectonic elements of a South African urban regeneration project – and ending with *Maison Tropicale*, Sandqvist's account presents the changes which occurred within Ferreira's oeuvre as a gradual shift from sculpture and photography-based projects with seemingly coincidental political dimensions to a more direct, often autobiographical, approach to the history and legacies of colonial rule.⁴⁰ Attributing this development to Ferreira's initial encounter with modernist sculpture, Sandqvist provides a predominantly formal account of the work. The outcome is an analysis that fails to view Ferreira's practice as 'social, political or even the product of work'.⁴¹ But although these texts are undeniably flawed, the framework for the Venice Biennale was significantly more problematic.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

³⁷ Manthia Diawara, 'Architecture as Colonial Discourse: Ângela Ferreira's *Maisons Tropicales*', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 22-23 (2008), 20-27 (p. 20) (first published in Jürgen Bock (ed.), *Ângela Ferreira: Maison Tropicale*, ed. by Jürgen Bock (Lisbon: Instituto das Artes & Ministério da Cultura, 2007), pp. 38-53).

³⁸ In order to avoid replicating this approach, I have chosen not to interview Ferreira. Indeed, I have made a deliberate attempt to avoid privileging the artist's view of her practice over the object itself. By adopting this strategy, I have sought to situate *Maison Tropicale* within the broader field of contemporary art rather than presenting it as the manifestation of a life. For a similar approach to writing art history, see Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns* (London: Reaktion, 1994), pp. 14-15.

³⁹ Pollock, 'Artists Mythologies and Media Genius', p. 30.

⁴⁰ Gertrude Sandqvist, 'Sculpture Revisited', *Ângela Ferreira: Maison Tropicale*, ed. by Jürgen Bock (Lisbon: Instituto das Artes & Ministério da Cultura, 2007) pp. 20-37 (pp. 30-34).

⁴¹ Pollock, 'Artists Mythologies and Media Genius', p. 58.

Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: The 52nd Venice Biennale

Curated by Robert Storr, the 52nd Venice Biennale ran from 10 June to 21 November 2007. Entitled 'Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind', the exhibition continued the longstanding tradition of adopting a central theme which simultaneously meant everything and nothing. The underlying premise of Storr's exhibition, however, marked a significant departure from those of its precursors. Whereas Harald Szeemann ('Plateau of Humankind', 2001) sought to demonstrate the inclusivity of his project through the use of an unthemed open call and Francesco Bonami ('Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer', 2003) chose to privilege the work of African and Latin American artists in order to fulfil a similar goal, Storr's exhibition had a different point of departure: visitor experience.⁴² Grounded in a series of oppositions – including mind and body, thought and feeling, conception and perception – the project abandoned political lines of questioning in favour of a more 'holistic' approach:

The simple proposition upon which the 52nd Venice Biennale is based, then, is: no matter how successful philosophers and ideologues have been at persuading people that these categories are not just useful working hypothesis but are inherently or historically true, the manifold challenges to understanding that reality poses, as well as the actual flux of experience, far exceed the power of systems, theories and definitions which contain them. The imagination is the catch basin into which this overflow spills, and art cuts the channels that reconnect formerly segregated parts of the consciousness while flooding and replenishing the whole of it [...]⁴³

A sympathetic reading of this argument might attempt to explore its connection to theories of affect or interpret it as a challenge to elitism. From a more critical perspective, however, Storr's exhibition reproduces a series of outdated assumptions about aesthetic experience. Worse still, it could even be read as anti-theoretical or anti-intellectual.

Despite these shortcomings, it would be wrong to suggest that the limitations of Storr's exhibition stemmed solely from its underlying premise. More broadly, they can also be attributed to a series of social and historical factors that have shaped the content and layout of the Venice Biennale since the nineteenth century, namely, the geopolitical

⁴² Harald Szeemann, 'Director's Introduction', in *Plateau of Humankind*, ed. by Harald Szeemann, Lara Facco and Cecilia Liveriero Lavelli (Milan: Electa, 2001), n.p.; Francesco Bonami, 'I Have a Dream', in *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, ed. by Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2003), pp. xxi-xxiii.

⁴³ Robert Storr, 'Director's Introduction: Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense', in *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*, ed. by Robert Storr, 2 vols. (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), n.p.

hierarchies of colonialism. But although these characteristics are deeply engrained within the fabric of the institution, their presence is not immediately obvious. If anything, the recent proliferation of biennials and triennials in cities across the world would appear to suggest that the art fair is the latest manifestation of the globalised art institution.⁴⁴ Though it would be impossible to provide an exact figure, the number of biennials which have emerged over the past decade is currently estimated to be in excess of 300.⁴⁵ Given the rapid pace at which these exhibitions have emerged, it would be easy to view them as little more than ‘high-end branding tools for promoting cultural tourism in metropolitan cities [or] market-driven “events” designed to ensure a more seamless integration of art and capital’.⁴⁶ Although there have been a number of exceptions to this rule – most notably, the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, ‘What Keeps Mankind Alive?’ – these anomalies have done little to change the structure of biennales more broadly.⁴⁷ Rather, as Boris Groys notes, the majority continue to function as spaces for ‘independent curators [...] to tell each other their own contradictory stories’.⁴⁸

Whilst the link between the art world and the economy is well known, the relationship between these institutions and colonialism has received significantly less attention; a connection which is particularly visible in the case of the Venice Biennale. As Jane Chin Davidson notes, this now-venerated institution shares a number of characteristics with another nineteenth-century phenomenon: the world’s fair. By 1895 world expositions had been held in almost every major city in Europe and the United States. Featuring elaborate displays of national production and palaces dedicated solely to fine art, these events played an active role in the promotion of colonialism. But although the Venice Biennale is a product of the ‘age of empire’, even today its layout continues to echo the military and economic power relations of the nineteenth century. Though identifiable elsewhere in the exhibition, these hierarchies are most clearly visible in the Giardini di Castello, which continues to reserve plots for a number of countries including Italy, France, Britain, Belgium, Hungary and the United States. Separated from countries such as Afghanistan,

⁴⁴ Jane Chin Davidson, ‘The Global Art Fair and the Dialectical Image’, *Third Text*, 24.6 (2010), 719-734 (p. 719).

⁴⁵ What, How & for Whom/WHW, ‘This is the 11th International Istanbul Biennial curators’ text’, in *What Keeps Mankind Alive? The Texts* (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2009), pp. 95-121 (p. 96).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of the 2009 Istanbul Biennial, see Gail Day, Steve Edwards and David Mabb, ‘What Keeps Mankind Alive?: the Eleventh Istanbul Biennial. Once More on Aesthetics and Politics’, *Historical Materialism*, 18 (2010) 135-171.

⁴⁸ Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), p. 51.

Haiti, Iran and Thailand, whose pavilions are housed in a series of unofficial gallery spaces, the location of these sites has remained unchanged for decades.⁴⁹ For Davidson, ‘this particular mise-en-sequence [serves] to keep in motion a signifying order of the old empire created to sustain fictional territories established on real property’.⁵⁰

Although Storr and his curatorial team went to great lengths to acknowledge these limitations, the measures they took to remedy them were minimal. In addition to relocating the Italian pavilion to a warehouse for the duration of the Biennale, two temporary structures were also added to the Arsenale: the Turkish pavilion and a survey of contemporary African art, *Checklist: Luanda Pop*, curated by Fernando Alvim and Simon Njami.⁵¹ Both decisions, Storr argues, emerged from ‘a desire to acknowledge a changed world’.⁵² But although the relocation of the Turkish pavilion to a more prominent position was quickly labelled as tokenistic, the decision to stage Alvim and Njami’s exhibition proved to be even more contentious. Featuring the work of thirty artists – including Tracey Rose, Olu Oguibe and Santu Mofokeng – from the Sindika Dokolo African Collection of Contemporary Art in Angola, *Checklist: Luanda Pop* was initially presented as ‘a space for thought, confrontation and proposal’.⁵³ Combining video essays and installations with painted street signs and election propaganda, Alvim and Njami’s exhibition not only claimed to showcase the diverse range of artistic practices that could be found throughout the continent.⁵⁴ In doing so, it also sought to foreground the role of art patronage in Africa today.⁵⁵ Given the scale of its ambitions, the project was instantly met with charges of overcompensation and disorganisation; two claims which were also levelled at Njami’s 2005 exhibition *Africa Remix*.⁵⁶ Whilst the desire for institutional representation was seen as an overambitious attempt to represent the art of a continent, the inclusionary logic

⁴⁹ Davidson, pp. 719-720. More recently, however, the geography of the Venice Biennale has begun to reflect the emergence of new economic powers, with the offer of permanent pavilion sites to a further eight countries including India and China. See Tom Kington, ‘Far Pavilions: Venice Biennale Opens its Doors to the World’, *Guardian*, 5 January 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jan/05/venice-biennale-welcomes-china-india>> [accessed 13 May 2014].

⁵⁰ Davidson, p. 720.

⁵¹ Curated by Vasif Kortun, the Turkish pavilion featured an installation, *H-Fact: History, Horses and Heroes*, by Hüseyin Alpetekin.

⁵² Storr, n.p.

⁵³ Simon Njami and Sindika Dokolo, ‘Press Release: Checklist: Luanda Pop’ <<http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/eng/2007/tour/africa/press-01.pdf>> [accessed 1 July 2015]. For further information on the Sindika Dokolo Foundation, including a copy of its acquisitions policy, see: <<http://www.fondation-sindikadokolo.com>> [accessed 15 July 2015].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Artnet, ‘Update on Dokolo in Venice’, *Artnet News*, 18 May 2007 <<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/news/artnetnews/artnetnews5-18-07.asp>> [accessed 1 July 2015]

⁵⁶ Jonathan Jones, ‘Africa Calling’, *Guardian*, 9 February 2005 <<http://www.theguardian.com/arts/critic/review/0,,1409077,00.html>> [accessed 2 August 2015].

which accompanied this gesture was interpreted as a type of essentialism.⁵⁷ But to what extent is it possible to avoid such problems?

Translating into Art History

In order to introduce the various lines of enquiry that will be explored within this thesis, I would like to return to my initial experience of *Maison Tropicale*. Though I would love to claim that my interest in Ferreira's project developed following a chance encounter in Venice, sadly, this is not the case. I was first introduced to *Maison Tropicale* during an Essential Research Skills seminar at the University of Leeds in October 2008. Presented as an example of practice-led research, Ferreira's installation was but one of a series of works used to illustrate the various layers of meaning at play within an artwork. In many respects, this backdrop shaped my early attempts to engage with *Maison Tropicale*. Having few resources with which to address Ferreira's project, beyond an interest in architecture and a cursory knowledge of French history, my first response was to turn to postcolonial theory, specifically the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. For the early stages of my research, these writers provided a useful starting point from which to engage with *Maison Tropicale*. Indeed, as Kyung-Won Lee notes, both foreground the tensions between colonialism as a system of governance and a mode of cultural depiction; a line of enquiry which is clearly visible within Ferreira's installation.⁵⁸ Yet given the number of projects that have already explored the connections between contemporary art and postcolonial theory, such an approach risked simply repeating an existing line of argument.⁵⁹ Moreover, it seemed to me that *Maison Tropicale* raised a series of much larger questions which could not be accounted for within this framework.⁶⁰ How might the

⁵⁷ Kodwo Eshun, 'The African Pavilion', *Frieze*, 109 (2007) <<http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/t/>> (para 6 of 11) [accessed on 1 July 2015]

⁵⁸ Kyung-Won Lee, 'Is the Glass Half- Empty or Half-Full? Rethinking the Problems of Postcolonial Revisionism', *Cultural Critique*, 36 (1997), 89-117 (p. 89).

⁵⁹ See, for example, Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriadis, 'Art and the Postcolonial Imagination: Rethinking the Institutionalisation of Third World Aesthetics and Theory', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 31.1-2 (2000), 231-253; Mark Crinson, "'Fragments of Collapsing Space": Postcolonial Theory and Contemporary Art', in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. by Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 450-469; Okwui Enwezor, 'The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition', *Research in African Literatures*, 34.4 (2003), 57-82.

⁶⁰ Of course, this is not to suggest that postcolonial theory should be disregarded or deemed irrelevant. Although there have been several attempts to make such a claim, the majority have been based on a caricature of the discipline. See, for example, Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013). For a response to Chibber's argument, see Partha Chatterjee, Vivek Chibber and Barbara Weinstein, 'Debate: Marxism and the Legacy of Subaltern

decision to bring a modernist object into the present allow us to rethink the complex legacies of French colonial rule? What does the process of remaking reveal about the ways in which Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales have been reconstructed within the present? To what extent can the act of photographing the former sites of the houses be viewed as a comment on the current status of our relationship to the postcolony?

In attempting to answer these questions one of my initial touchstones was Nicolas Bourriaud's *Altermodern*. Intended as a critique of commercialisation and standardisation, Bourriaud's exhibition not only sought to contextualise contemporary art within the current moment of globalization. It also attempted to chart a new moment beyond modernism and postmodernism. Despite achieving little success in either of these endeavours, it is my belief that *Altermodern* still offers a useful starting point from which to address some of the challenges posed by *Maison Tropicale*. By initiating a dialogue between contemporary art and translation, it also highlighted the knotty relationship that exists between modernism and the postcolonial. Though it is not my intention to offer a defence of Bourriaud's neologism, I am interested in some of the broader questions which the project raises: How does our understanding of the contemporary transform our relationship to modernity? To what extent is the complex relationship between space and time, history and geography, encapsulated within *Maison Tropicale*? How might Ferreira's project allow for a reconsideration of the various theoretical and historical categories that have been used to address contemporary art?

When understood in these terms, Ferreira's installation raises a much larger question; one which not only extends beyond the remit of postcolonial studies, but also critical theory more broadly: what is the current state of contemporary art writing? In what follows, I want to suggest that Ferreira's practice both hints at a possible answer to this question and presents a number of alternative lines of enquiry. Given the breadth of these claims, I would like to begin by offering some qualifications. First (and perhaps most importantly), I want to state from that outset that I am not attempting to propose a new theory of contemporary art. Not only would such a project exceed the limits of this thesis, it would also risk lapsing into a series of uncritical generalisations and questionable neologisms. And secondly, whilst I have chosen to structure this project around Ferreira's installation, it is not my intention to suggest that *Maison Tropicale* exemplifies the current field of artistic practice. At the risk of stating the obvious, the complex lines of questioning

which currently inform contemporary art cannot be distilled down to a single work.

Moreover, such a gesture also resonates with the various attempts to position certain figures – such as Édouard Manet, Marcel Duchamp and Jeff Wall – as the ‘forefathers’ of a particular phase of artistic production; a line of argument which ultimately leads back to the canon.⁶¹

In order to avoid such pitfalls, this thesis will begin by addressing a series of debates that have accompanied the act of remaking since the 1970s. Rather than focusing on a particular strain of art theory or attempting to construct a coherent narrative, this section will take the form of three case studies. Beginning with a discussion of the relationship between allegory, appropriation and montage, the first of these studies will consider how the categories of autonomy and heteronomy have been employed in response to the compositional structure of the artwork. Following this, the second case study will examine how different understandings of parody and pastiche informed debates on postmodernism during the 1980s and 1990s. The final subsection will explore how the changing status of the archive has been addressed within the journal *October*, most notably in the work of Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Hal Foster. Although this section will attempt to demonstrate the limitations of these approaches, it is not my intention to suggest that they should be disregarded. Rather, by addressing these topics, I hope to foreground the sense of uncertainty and dissatisfaction which characterises the current field of artistic practice. In doing so, this section will seek to consider how and why these developments have resulted in a possible space from which to address the question of translation.

Building upon these lines of enquiry, Chapter 2 of this thesis will take its lead from Walter Benjamin’s 1923 essay ‘The Task of the Translator’. Written as a preface to his translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*, the essay begins from the standpoint that the purpose of a translation is neither to transmit information nor to offer an interpretation of a literary text. Rather, Benjamin proposes, the act of translation should be limited to works in possession of a certain ‘essential quality’ – that is, translatability.⁶² But although Benjamin presents this characteristic as a prerequisite for translation, this is not to suggest that he believes that all works which possess it should be translated. Rather, he argues, ‘it means [...] that a specific

⁶¹ See, for example, Clement Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’, in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. by John O’Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 85-93.; Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (eds.), *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Roundtable*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999); Peter Bürger, ‘On a Critique of the Neo-Avant Garde’, in Jeff Wall, *Jeff Wall: Photographs* (Köln: Walther König, 2003), pp. 158-179.

⁶² Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn and ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 70-82 (p. 70).

significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability'.⁶³ Consequently, as Samuel Weber notes, Benjamin's definition of translation is grounded in not one, but two relationships: that of the translation to the original, but also that of the original to itself. It is the form of the latter – and its role in shaping the form of the translation – which defines translatability.⁶⁴

Although 'The Task of the Translator' focuses primarily on literature, as Nora Alter notes, Benjamin does not preclude the possibility of translating between different media.⁶⁵ Within 'The Author as Producer', for example, he stresses the importance of 'rethink[ing] our conceptions of literary forms or genres, in view of the technical factors affecting our present situation', thus highlighting the potential for new media – in Benjamin's case, cinema and photography – to transform established genres and forms.⁶⁶ In an attempt to further this line of enquiry, this section will investigate the complex relationship between architecture, sculpture and installation that informs *Maison Tropicale*. Beginning with an overview of the various ways in which the question of translation has been addressed in art history, it will then attempt to locate Ferreira's work within the broader context of installation art and its accompanying literature. With reference to the work of Claire Bishop, Alex Potts, Hal Foster and others, it will examine how the relationship between space and time is addressed within these accounts. It is my belief that, whilst none of the aforementioned writers propose a rigid distinction between the two, their accounts ultimately privilege the spatial aspects of installation. As such, this chapter will seek to readdress this balance by considering the temporal questions raised by *Maison Tropicale*, specifically, the themes of travel and displacement which haunt the work. In doing so, it will seek to consider how the act of remaking might be thought as a form of translation.

Having examined the sculptural aspects of *Maison Tropicale*, Chapter 3 of this thesis will focus upon the photographic components of Ferreira's installation; a series of eight images of present day Niger and the Republic of Congo. Taken by Ferreira in April 2007, the shots depict a series of derelict buildings and the remnants of a locally produced concrete platform upon which Prouvé's house once stood. But although these images continue the narrative found in the sculptural components of *Maison Tropicale*, they also depart from it in a number of ways. Whereas the houses were restored and sold, the concrete platform

⁶³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁶⁴ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 57.

⁶⁵ Nora Alter, 'The Role of Translation in German Studies', *The German Quarterly*, 81.3 (2008), 257-260 (pp. 258-259).

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin as quoted in Ibid., p. 258.

was not included in this process. In many respects, this series of events is paradoxical; both aspects of the project were designed by Prouvé. Whilst it might be possible to suggest that the reasons for this abandonment were purely practical, such a claim risks evading a series of more troubling questions. What does the apparent illegibility of the bases tell us about the status of their producers? To what extent does the photographic medium allow us to confront this problem? More broadly, what can be gained from returning to the postcolony?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will focus upon the notion of untranslatability. Although the figure of the untranslatable has generated a substantial body of literature, this line of enquiry will focus on the usage proposed by Emily Apter. Presenting the term as a counter argument to the widely held belief in universal translatability, Apter's formulation addresses a series of concepts and cultural phenomena that are either ambiguous or contradictory. However, in doing so, her aim is not simply to demonstrate the existence of these tropes or to celebrate a type of linguistic indeterminacy. Rather, Apter's engagement with the untranslatable stems from the various conflicts and political tensions which underpin the term; two lines of argument which are particularly pertinent for Ferreira's photographs. In order to explore this connection, this chapter will begin with a summary of the histories and debates which inform such a proposal. Following this, it will address various aspects of the images in which the interests of the coloniser and the colonised are brought into conflict. Ultimately, however, it will seek to consider how the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* might allow for a greater understanding of the specificities of French colonial rule.

Before I do so, I would like to take this opportunity to address an as-of-yet unmentioned aspect of the thesis: its relatively limited engagement with architectural theory. Although visible throughout the project, this absence, I believe, is particularly noticeable within Chapter 1. Rather than mediating between art and architecture, this portion of the text takes its lead from a series of developments that occurred in Euro-American art theory during the latter half of the twentieth century. Given the focus of Ferreira's installation, on first encounter, such a decision might seem unusual. However, I want to suggest otherwise. As have I previously noted, one of the broader aims of this thesis is to explore the possibility of presenting translation as a framework through which to address the act of remaking. Whilst I have chosen structure my argument around *Maison Tropicale*, the decision to reuse or rework pre-existing forms of visual culture is not specific to Ferreira. Rather, it has been a recurring gesture within contemporary art since the 1970s. By

engaging with this problematic, the thesis not only seeks to highlight the relative autonomy of Ferreira's installation from Prouvé's houses. It also attempts to speak back to a series of figures whose writings have come to define the field. In adopting this strategy, it is not my intention to suggest that the innumerable debates which have occurred under the umbrella of architectural theory are of little relevance to *Maison Tropicale* or Ferreira's oeuvre more broadly. Both address a series of motifs – from the question of utopia to the development of interior space – which can be found within this body of literature.⁶⁷ But although these points of overlap raise a number of potentially interesting lines of enquiry, ultimately, they risk detracting attention away from the project's broader aims.

⁶⁷ Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. by Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982); Sigfried Gideon, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 5th edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

Chapter 1: Preliminaries

In this chapter I want to address a series of categories that have been used to discuss the act of remaking since the 1970s. In doing so, my aim is not simply to provide an overview of the field, but to unpack three recurring themes which have played a central role in the development of contemporary art theory: allegory, pastiche and the archive. Whilst the chapter is arranged in (roughly) chronological order, it is not my intention to produce a linear history; each of the topics emerged at a similar moment and continues to haunt the field. Rather, it seeks to situate these concepts within a moment of uncertainty or unease. As such, it will be my claim that, whilst these topics still provide a space for critical reflection, they no longer possess the authority which they previously held. In many respects, this uncertainty can be attributed to certain shifts in contemporary art – for example, the recent social turn. However, it can also be found, both implicitly and explicitly, in the writings of the individuals who brought these strains to the fore. By tracing these developments, the chapter seeks to provide a metacommentary on *Maison Tropicale*. Instead of discussing Ferreira's work directly, it will critically examine the intellectual frameworks which currently surround her practice and foreground the need for a new point of departure; one which functions in dialogue with *Maison Tropicale*.

Whilst this strategy might appear to depart from the artwork in question, it is worth noting that the categories under discussion form the basis of the existing literature on Ferreira's project. In this regard, the essays included in the accompanying catalogue are a case in point. Although they draw upon a host of concepts, from fetishism to utopia, the tropes of allegory, parody and the archive retain an underlying presence. Sandqvist, for example, argues that Ferreira's *Crossing the Line* – to her mind a precursor to *Maison Tropicale* – 'allegorically turns herself and her own childhood photographs into reminders of this transit expedition between Africa and Europe'.⁶⁸ Similarly, Diawara suggests that Ferreira's structure seeks to deny the authority and autonomy of Prouve's original; two claims which were also made for parody.⁶⁹ Though these comments are little more than passing references within the catalogue, their appearance is also telling. Where do these categories come from? What are the presuppositions which underpin them? How can we assess their strengths and limitations?

⁶⁸ Sandqvist, p. 33.

⁶⁹ Diawara, p. 52.

The Return to Allegory

Though most commonly understood as a linguistic trope, the question of allegory has been a recurring theme within art theory and criticism since the eighteenth century. Addressed by a range of writers, including Johann Winckelmann, Heinrich Meyer and Friedrich Schlegel, the term was assigned a prominent place within Romantic aesthetics. In this context, it was discussed in relation to the symbol. Whereas allegory was perceived to be a communicative sign which focused primarily on content, the symbol was understood as an analogue of what it represented.⁷⁰ When understood in these terms, allegory was deemed to be fragmentary and thus associated with a type of loss. The symbol, in contrast, was believed to possess a certain wholeness and plenitude. Yet despite playing a pivotal role in these debates, allegory was ultimately perceived to be subordinate to the symbol; a hierarchy which remained in place for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One exception to this tendency was Benjamin's study of the German baroque stage-form *Trauerspiel*.⁷¹ By presenting allegory as a framework through which to address the role of sorrow and mourning within these works, Benjamin sought to rehabilitate the term and thus assert its contemporary relevance.⁷² In this section, however, I want to address a different return to allegory; one which occurred in the work of Craig Owens and Peter Bürger during the early 1980s. Although both used Benjamin's argument to discuss the current state of contemporary art, they reached radically different conclusions. Focusing on their discussions of appropriation art and montage, this section will explore the aesthetic and political questions which informed Owens' and Bürger's accounts.

As David Evans notes, the phrase appropriation art most commonly refers to 'a certain time (late 70s and 80s); a certain place (New York); certain influential galleries (Metro Pictures, Sonnabend) and certain artists who were critically located within ambitious debates around the postmodern'.⁷³ Although the term has subsequently been expanded to include a variety of other practices, for Evans, its origins lie in the 1977 exhibition 'Pictures'. Curated by Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures' was held at Artists Space, New York, and featured

⁷⁰ Gunnar Berfelt, 'On Symbol and Allegory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 28.2 (1969), 201-212 (pp. 202-203). Unlike his contemporaries, Winckelmann believed allegory to be indivisible from the symbol.

⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998).

⁷² Indeed, as Georg Lukács notes, Benjamin 'constructs a bold theory to show that allegory is the style most genuinely suited to the sentiments, ideas and experience of the modern world'. Georg Lukács, 'On Walter Benjamin', *New Left Review*, 110 (1978), 83-88 (p. 83).

⁷³ David Evans, 'Introduction: Seven Types of Appropriation', in *Appropriation*, ed. by David Evans (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 15.

work by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith. Despite differing in their choice of subject matter, each of these artists shared a common goal: to reuse and rework the photographic aspects of mass media. Following Crimp's exhibition, these practices were quickly embraced by a host of other commercial galleries; a shift which culminated in the opening of 'Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture' in 1986.⁷⁴ Devised by Elisabeth Sussman, the exhibition featured the work of twenty five artists – including Richard Baim, Ross Bleckner, General Idea, Jeff Koons and Philip Taaffe – whose work made reference to media imagery as well as ideas and artefacts drawn from modernist art and aspects of American consumer culture. As Pamela M. Lee notes, 'Endgame', with its titular nod to chess and Samuel Beckett, exemplified the 'consumption of knowledge (or rather, *information*) that [...] characterised the postmodern "epoch"'; an analysis which is equally applicable to the exhibition's multi-authored catalogue.⁷⁵ Authored by a number of prominent writers and critics – including Yve-Alain Bois, Thomas Crow and Hal Foster – it covered an equally diverse of topics, from the role of satire in the art of the 1980s to depictions of mourning in twentieth century painting.⁷⁶

Although it was not included in the 'Endgame' catalogue, Owens' two part essay, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' could easily be viewed as a product of this conjuncture.⁷⁷ Whilst his text made reference to a range of artistic practices – from site specific works to performance art – the photographs of Levine, Longo and Smith took centre stage. Furthermore, it also demonstrated a commitment to a broader project: the formation of a critical postmodernism. However, in bringing the question of allegory to bear on this debate, Owens' essay also proved itself to be an anomaly. Of course, this is not to suggest that he was the only writer to engage with the term. To the contrary, his text was the product of a moment in which the decision to make recourse to allegory was becoming increasingly commonplace, both in art historical discourse and cultural theory more broadly.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Owens' formulation also differed from those of his

⁷⁴ 'Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture' was shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, between 25 September and 30 November 1986.

⁷⁵ Pamela M. Lee, *New Games: Postmodernism after Contemporary Art* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 18.

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Sussman (ed.), *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston, MA: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986).

⁷⁷ Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, 12 (1980), 67-86; 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2', *October*, 13 (1981), 58-80. For a critique of Owens' essay, see Stephen Melville, 'Notes on the Re-emergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism', *October*, 19 (1981), 55-92

⁷⁸ See, for example, T.J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 4-9; Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures', *October*, 8 (1979),

contemporaries. Rather than presenting allegory as a tool for commentary or critique, he focused on the occasions when its defining characteristics were visible within the work itself:

Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other [...] He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants and antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance.⁷⁹

For Owens, the sense of loss and departure which informed Romantic accounts of allegory could also be used as a framework through which to conceptualise appropriation art. As a result, the term's defining characteristics – most notably, its 'conviction of the remoteness of the past, and [...] desire to redeem it for the present' – became apologies for the work of Levine and her contemporaries.⁸⁰ However, his remarks were also indicative of a significantly more ambitious goal. Allegory, Owens argued, was not simply a formal trope, but a type of irreverent attitude; one which defined both the postmodern 'epoch' and its accompanying modes of artistic practice.⁸¹ By confiscating forms of imagery with little regard for their original meaning, the allegorist engaged in a process of free play, substitution and perpetual renewal.

In many respects, Bürger's comments on allegory marked a departure from these assumptions.⁸² Although he also associated allegory with decontextualisation, his analysis contained little trace of the playful and the irreverent. It also made no reference to appropriation art. Rather, Bürger argued, allegory was connected to a different historical moment and a different form of artistic practice – that is, the early twentieth century avant-garde and the principle of montage. In his view, montage allowed for 'a more precise definition of a particular aspect of the concept of allegory'; one which 'presuppose[d] the

75-88; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, 21.1 (1982), 43-56.

⁷⁹ Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse', p. 69.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸¹ When viewed from this perspective, Benjamin's claim that 'any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else' could easily be read as an expression of the arbitrary, the playful or the fragmentary. Benjamin as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸² Of course, this is not to suggest that the standpoints adopted by Owens and Bürger were entirely distinct. Both writers chose to associate allegory with a particular artistic sensibility; discussed it in terms of the fragment and presented it as a framework through which to address the formal composition of the artwork.

fragmentation of reality and describe[d] the phase of the constitution of the work'.⁸³ In order to demonstrate this connection, Bürger adopted a broad understanding of montage, thus allowing for the differences between mediums. When discussed in relation to film, for example, montage described a technical procedure rather than a form of artistic technique. In the context of painting, it played a formative role in the destruction of 'a representational system that [had] prevailed since the Renaissance'.⁸⁴ For the most part, however, Bürger's definition of montage stemmed from two case studies: the *papiers collés* of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque and John Heartfield's photomontages. Whereas the former appropriated 'reality fragments' and pasted them onto paper, the latter obscured the intervals between the photographic fragments on display. However, in each case, allegory provided a framework through which to conceptualise the distinctive visual breaks and interstices that appeared within the work. Through this process of generalisation, Bürger sought to produce a new category for defining the avant-garde object – the non-organic artwork – and to place it in opposition with the organic wholes of the 'classical' tradition.

However, this distinction also served a second purpose: to signal the avant-garde's departure from artistic autonomy. Like the symbol, the component parts of the classical artwork combined to form a unity. The non-organic artwork, in contrast, allowed each of these parts to be viewed in relative independence, thus departing from the otherworldly perfection of the finished whole. Consequently, whilst 'the allegorist pulls one element out of the totality of the life context, isolating it, depriving it of its function', they also grant it a new function within the 'praxis of life'.⁸⁵ When understood in these terms, the non-organic artwork does not point to the real. Rather, its juxtaposed fragments form part of reality; a quality which raises the possibility of political engagement. Bürger, however, doubted that this potentiality could be realised. The traditional autonomy (and resulting functionlessness) of art, he argued, was not simply a look or an artistic intention, but a social institution; one which could not be overcome whilst capitalism remained. Yet despite this realisation, for Bürger, the non-organic artwork still displayed a certain loss of innocence: 'it seems plausible to see in Benjamin's concept of melancholy the description of an attitude of the avant-gardiste who, unlike the aestheticist before him, can

⁸³ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 73. In this sense, Bürger's account is much closer to the understanding of Benjamin's work proposed by Lukács.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

no longer transfigure his social functionlessness'.⁸⁶ This ambivalence, he claimed, was particularly visible in Picasso's and Braque's collages. Although they could still be viewed as aesthetic objects, by eschewing the norms of the organic composition, they no longer fell under the remit of 'traditional' judgement. Heartfield's images, in contrast, were addressed not as aesthetic objects, but as a series of 'images for reading' that re-appropriated the emblem for their own political purposes. The 'shock' which emerged from their polemical juxtapositions, however, tended to dissipate with time. When understood in these terms, the form and melancholy of allegory convey two sides of a contradiction: the desire for heteronomy and its ultimate impossibility.

On first encounter, Bürger's and Owens' texts would appear to be markedly different. However, when viewed together, a number of commonalities emerge. Most obviously, both writers highlight the difficulty of establishing a division between modernism and postmodernism. Yet they also demonstrate, albeit with a certain level of irony, how allegory can be used to define the unity of a given artistic period or movement. In both texts, the concept is used to signify certain supposed 'breaks' in artistic production. This is achieved by reviving the distinction between symbol and allegory; or, to be more specific, by inverting the traditional value judgements attributed to these categories and associating them with the two sides of a presumed art historical rupture. In Owens' case, the wholeness of the symbol is associated with modernism. He revives the distinction between allegory and symbol in order to describe the shift from modernism – understood through the rigid categories of Greenbergian criticism – to the apparent playfulness of postmodernism. However, as Hal Foster has recently admitted, 'the model of a formalist modernism challenged by an expansive postmodernism no longer drives or describes significant developments in art or criticism'.⁸⁷ Bürger's account, in contrast, centres upon a generalising division between the classical and the non-organic. Here, montage provides a possible political break with the Western aesthetic tradition. Yet even the non-organic work cannot avoid being understood as a type of whole; integrated into the institution or fading into insignificance. As a result, every attempt to achieve heteronomy is doomed to fail from the outset.⁸⁸ Infamously, this claim would lead Bürger to view the neo-avant-garde as a

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 71

⁸⁷ Hal Foster, 'This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse', in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 123-143 (p. 127).

⁸⁸ There is, however, one exception to this rule. Bürger writes: 'The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life. This has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a false sublation of autonomous art. Pulp fiction and commodity aesthetics prove that such a sublation exists. A literature whose primary aim is to impose a particular kind of consumer behaviour on the reader is in

paradigmatic failure.⁸⁹ However, as will become clear in the final section of this chapter, many of Bürger's critics – most notably, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Hal Foster – also fell into a similar trap.⁹⁰

Parody, Pastiche, Postmodernism

The radical ideas associated with postmodernism swept through the arts in the 1970s, but have always resisted convincing summary. Repudiating Modernism's key tenets of progress, utopia and universalism, architects, artists and designers adopted strategies of parody, pastiche and quotation to re-invent the past with a new freedom.

- Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*⁹¹

Taken from the catalogue for the V&A's 2011 exhibition *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, the above quotation describes one of the defining trinitities of late-twentieth century cultural theory: the relationship between parody, pastiche and postmodernism.⁹² Encompassing a wide variety of media, from post-punk record sleeves to the architecture of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Postmodernism* traced the development of this relationship over a period of twenty years (Fig. 27). In adopting this strategy, the exhibition went some way to providing the coherent summary of the postmodern moment that it claimed to refute. More specifically, as Owen Hatherley notes, parody and pastiche were framed as parts of a postmodernist 'style'; one characterised by 'an end-of-history sifting through the wreckage, reflective of an age that could no longer do anything new, a pop-inflected recalibration of the modern'.⁹³ The curators, however, made no attempt to conceal the fact that such a narrative confirmed the worst fears of

fact practical, though not in the sense the avant-gardistes intended. Here literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and become one of subjection.' Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 53-54.

⁸⁹ Peter Bürger, 'On a Critique of the Neo-Avantgarde', in Jeff Wall, *Jeff Wall: Photographs* (Vienna: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003), pp. 158-179.

⁹⁰ See Hal Foster, 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?', in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 1-34; Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Theorizing the Avant-Garde', *Art in America*, 72 (1984), 19-21.

⁹¹ Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt (eds.), *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011) [inner sleeve].

⁹² Curated by Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, between 24 September 2011 and 15 January 2012. It then toured to the Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (MART), Italy, from 25 February to 3 June 2012.

⁹³ Owen Hatherley, 'Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990', *Frieze*, 144 (2012) <<http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/postmodernism-style-and-subversion-19701990/>> (para. 2 of 6) [accessed on 20 July 2015]

postmodernism's critics. Whilst the initial stages of the exhibition explored the critique of modernist aesthetics performed by postmodern architecture, the third part was simply entitled 'Money'. Here, the audience were presented with a series of works – including Jeff Koons' *Louis XIV* and Andy Warhol's *Dollar Sign* paintings – in which the distinction between 'postmodern style' and the ironic celebration of wealth, political stagnation and consumer culture had broken down (Fig. 28-29). Yet even this narrative of increasing compromise and complicity was underpinned by its own romantic myth: that sometime around 1990 postmodernism imploded under the weight of its own excess.⁹⁴

In recent years, this line of argument has become increasingly commonplace within contemporary art theory. However, with no clear direction as to the next step, postmodern assumptions continue to haunt the field. In order to examine the persistence of these motifs, it is first necessary to address the claims that were made for parody and pastiche when postmodernism was at its peak. As such, I want to begin with some definitions. First, it should be noted that the aforementioned tension between compromise and complicity is a structural component of parody. Parody is not simply a form of external 'critique', but rather an attempt to mock or undermine through irony, mimicry or quotation. This process can take the form of immediate copying or the mixing of seemingly incongruous styles; an activity which Charles Jencks described as 'double-coding'.⁹⁵ Pastiche, in contrast, is generally defined as a form of parody without critical distance or intent; a closed form without movement, fractures or politics. As such, whilst the V&A chose to present parody, pastiche and postmodernism as part of the same continuum, such a grouping is not uncontested. Whereas critics of postmodernism chose to associate the term with pastiche, 'critical postmodernists' foregrounded its links to parody.⁹⁶ In order to unpack these distinctions further, I will now provide a brief summary of the social, aesthetic and historical claims that informed them.

Although certain accounts of postmodernist parody trace its emergence back to Duchamp's readymades, I want to focus on the debates which occurred in the early 1980s. In this context, various aspects of postmodern 'style' were granted an explicitly critical function. Most commonly, the act of quotation was presented as a challenge to the

⁹⁴ Ibid., para. 2 of 6.

⁹⁵ Charles Jencks as quoted in Margaret A. Rose, 'Post-Modern Pastiche', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 31.1 (1991), pp. 26-38 (p. 26).

⁹⁶ See, for example, Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern: 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 1-20; Douglas Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', *October*, 15 (1980), 91-101; Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning the Game When the Rules have been Changed'.

originality claims of the modernist canon. However, it was also viewed as a means with which to critique property rights and the discourse on authorship; two claims which centred upon the work of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.⁹⁷ These arguments were not limited to the domain of 'theory'. Artists such as Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine – whose 're-photographed' images informed many of the above debates – made similar claims (Fig. 30).⁹⁸ Furthermore, they also used parody to critique representation; to parody a representational trope was to foreground the determining nature of social and visual structures that exist beyond our control.⁹⁹ But although these characteristics were deemed to be important, the central function attributed to parody was de-naturalisation. Indeed, as Linda Hutcheon remarks, 'postmodernism's initial concern [was] to denaturalise some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities which we unflinchingly experience as natural (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact cultural'.¹⁰⁰

These claims also played a central role in the debates surrounding pastiche. The most substantial body of literature on this topic was produced by Fredric Jameson, although many of his interlocutors also chose to write upon it by way of critique. Despite addressing similar themes, Jameson's argument can be distinguished from those of his contemporaries as a result of its attempt to see postmodernism in historical terms. In his view, the shift from parody to pastiche was the product of a cultural logic that stemmed from various developments in late capitalist society. To make this argument, Jameson sought to distinguish parody from postmodernism by defining it as a phenomenon characterised by a reliance upon stable representational tropes and forms of meaning.¹⁰¹ Consequently, he argued, whilst parody mimics something else, it retains a critical function as the viewer is

⁹⁷ Of course, this is not to suggest that Barthes and Foucault were postmodernists. It should also be noted that these claims have since informed George Baker's views on photography. Solomon-Godeau, 'Winning the Game When the Rules have been Changed', p. 88.

⁹⁸ For example, Levine's comment that 'Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' is an explicit reference to Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author'. Sherrie Levine, 'Five Comments', in *Blasted Allegories: an Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists* ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), pp. 92-93 (p. 92); Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Harper Collins, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 146).

⁹⁹ Linda Hutcheon, 'The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History', *Cultural Critique*, 5 (1986-1987), 179-207.

¹⁰⁰ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ However, this is not to suggest that Jameson believed parody to be a product of postmodernism. Rather, he argued, its origins dated back to eighteenth century forms of irony. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 17.

able to distinguish between the parody and its referent. Pastiche, in contrast, was a form of 'blank parody' – without humour or critical import – in which this distinction breaks down.¹⁰² For Jameson, the latter was exemplified by the nostalgia film, which provided the viewer with a sense of 'pastness' rather than an insight into the past.¹⁰³ As a result, history was transformed in series of codes without originals – that is, simulacra. More broadly, he argued, pastiche arose from the increasing fragmentation of the late capitalist subject; an event which was accompanied by a proliferation of individual styles and the breakdown of previously stable class distinctions and modes of representation.

In the years following its publication, Jameson's argument was subject to significant criticism. Whilst some writers attempted to challenge the view of pastiche as a 'cultural logic', others argued that his proposal 'indulge[d] in a nostalgia for a paradise lost of stable meanings and fixed coordinates of value'.¹⁰⁴ Yet despite this resistance, certain aspects of Jameson's argument were taken up within critical postmodernism, albeit with a degree of unease. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, for example, argued that, in the second wave of postmodernist photographers, the critical relationship between art and commercial imagery had lapsed into a type of fascination or 'style'; a characteristic which was particularly visible in the work of Frank Majore and Stephen Frailey (Fig. 31-32).¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Hutcheon attempted to salvage the critical potential of postmodern art by distinguishing between the 'ahistorical kitsch' of pastiche and political forms of parody.¹⁰⁶ In the intervening years, however, the politics which accompanied these arguments were subject to significant criticism. For Teresa Ebert, they amounted to little more than the replacement of emancipatory politics with 'the disruption of readymade meanings'.¹⁰⁷ However, the de-historicising effects of pastiche proved to be even more contentious. Although several writers attempted to present pastiche as a means to foreground the ways in which ideology shapes both history and the archive, these claims were met with the fear that late capitalist society had descended into a state of generalised amnesia or

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰³ See, for example, *American Graffiti*, dir. by George Lucas (Universal Pictures, 1973) and *Chinatown*, dir. by Roman Polanski (Paramount Pictures, 1974).

¹⁰⁴ Neville Wakefield, *Postmodernism: The Twilight of the Real* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), p. 62.

¹⁰⁵ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply Side Aesthetics', in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. by Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 191-213 (p. 202).

¹⁰⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Teresa L. Ebert, 'Writing in the Political: Resistance (Post)modernism', *Legal Studies Forum*, 15.4 (1991), 291-303 (p. 291).

repression.¹⁰⁸ For many, the response to this problem was to treat the archive as a site of memory that offered a type of resistance to the present.

October's Archival Impulse

In recent years, the question of the archive has become increasingly prevalent within contemporary art. Encompassing a range of practices, from biographies of fictitious persons to collections of found photographs, this trend has resulted in numerous international exhibitions – for example, Okwui Enwezor's *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* – and a substantial amount of accompanying literature.¹⁰⁹ Rather than attempting to address this body of literature in its entirety, this section will focus on two essays published in the journal *October*: 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas": The Anomic Archive' by Buchloh and Foster's 'An Archival Impulse'.¹¹⁰ My reasons for choosing these essays are twofold. First, their authors are closely connected with a theoretical project which has dominated art theory and criticism since the late 1970s.¹¹¹ And secondly, they demonstrate some of the difficulties that this project has encountered since the beginning of the twenty-first century. As such, the following section will consider the extent to which Buchloh's and Foster's accounts of the archive embody this tension.

Despite its recent surge in popularity, this line of enquiry is not a new one. Indeed, archival questions have been associated with the journal since the 1980s. Focused primarily on photography, the majority of these early texts treated the archive as a discursive construct or a tool for control. The first of these approaches is particularly visible in Rosalind Krauss' 1982 essay 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View'.¹¹² Here, Krauss challenged the decision to remove various photographic practices from their archival context in order to display them as 'art'; a strategy adopted by MoMA's then Director of Photography, John Szarkowski. With reference to the work of Eugène Atget, she presents the archive as an organisational structure that determines the photographer's work rather than simply containing it. In doing so, her essay furthers a narrative proposed by Crimp (and

¹⁰⁸ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 79; Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas": The Anomic Archive', *October*, 88 (1999), 117-145 (p. 127).

¹⁰⁹ *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* was held at the International Center for Photography in New York between 18 January and 4 May 2008. For further information, see Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2008).

¹¹⁰ Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas"', 117-145; Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22.

¹¹¹ The first issue of *October* was published in Spring 1976.

¹¹² Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View', *Art Journal*, 42.4 (1982), 311-319.

later continued by George Baker) in which photography is allied with a type of postmodernism; one which undermines the modernist canon by challenging the category of authorship.¹¹³ The second of these approaches is exemplified by Allan Sekula's essay 'The Body and the Archive'.¹¹⁴ Although Sekula was not a member of the *October* group, his text was published in the journal in 1986 and he maintained a working relationship with a number of its central figures, most notably Buchloh, throughout his career.¹¹⁵ Alongside the work of John Tagg, Sekula's essay has become a key reference point on questions of ordering, categorisation and physiognomy.¹¹⁶ Through a discussion of the standardised procedures of nineteenth-century photography, he demonstrates how the establishment of photography's truth claims resulted in its use as a form of legal evidence, a means of surveillance and a basis for pseudo-scientific judgment.¹¹⁷

The arguments proposed by Buchloh and Foster contain a number of assumptions drawn from these texts. Whereas Buchloh remains committed to the critique of photographic realism, Foster associates the archive's de-authoring function with postmodernism. Nevertheless, their work can also be understood as a departure from the concerns of their precursors. Rather than presenting the archive as a social or political institution, both consider how it has been assigned a critical role within a range of artistic practices.¹¹⁸ However, they do so in slightly different ways. Taking his lead from Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* (Fig. 33-35), Buchloh attempts to establish a genealogy of works that have adopted archival categories as an organisational strategy; an approach which he traces back to Kazimir Malevich's teaching panels (Fig. 36).¹¹⁹ Foster, in contrast, addresses the work of a series of

¹¹³ Douglas Crimp, 'The Museum's Old / The Library's New Subject', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989) pp. 3-14; George Baker, 'Photography's Expanded Field', *October*, 114 (2005), 120-140.

¹¹⁴ Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (1986), 3-64.

¹¹⁵ In addition to contributing a supporting essay to Sekula's *Fish Story*, Buchloh has also interviewed the artist at a number of international events. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula: Between Discourse and Document', in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 2nd edn (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2002), pp. 189-201.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1988).

¹¹⁷ Of course, this is not to suggest that Sekula was attempting to critique realism as such. By challenging naïve claims to documentary truth, his own work takes the form of a critical realism. For further information on this point, see Allan Sekula, 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)', in *Dismal Science: Photo Works, 1972-1996* (Normal: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999), pp. 117-138.

¹¹⁸ For a critique of this aspect of Foster's essay, see John Tagg, 'The Archiving Machine; or, The Camera and the Filing Cabinet', *Grey Room*, 47 (2012), 24-37 (pp. 25-26).

¹¹⁹ Begun in 1962, *Atlas* consists of 802 sheets of photographs, drawings and newspaper cuttings. According to Richter, the project features 'everything that was somewhere between art and garbage and that somehow seemed important to me and a pity to throw away'; a list which includes family photos, adverts and images of the holocaust. Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Dieter Schwartz,

artists – namely Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean and Sam Durant – who incorporate archival materials into their practice (Fig. 36-38). Despite these differences, however, the two accounts share a common goal: both seek to present the current popularity of the archive as a political aesthetic event; one underpinned by a series of shifts in image making and in capitalist society more broadly.

Before proceeding any further, it is worth pausing to consider the distinctive ways in which the two writers conceptualise this event. For Buchloh, the current interest in the archive can be traced back to a tension between three conflicting tendencies found within the early twentieth century avant-garde: Siegfried Kracauer's claim that photography destroys the 'memory image'; the forms of contingency explored in Soviet debates on the photofile and the battle against media culture waged by political photomontage. However, with the increasing commodification of the image and the institutionalisation of the arbitrary as a type of personal freedom, this tension, he argues, has since been lost. As a result, Buchloh concludes, the archive has re-emerged in response to the various forms of social and cultural anomie which inform the present moment – that is, as a random collection of repressed memories embedded within the 'sign exchange value' of late capitalist society.¹²⁰ In many respects, Foster's account shares this characterisation of current social conditions. We are currently living, he argues, in 'an amnesiac society dominated by culture industries and sports spectacles'.¹²¹ However, as a result of the 'anti-cynicism' which he identifies in the work of Hirschhorn and his contemporaries, the archive is presented in a somewhat more positive light.¹²² It appears, not simply as a denial of memory or an extension of a colonising media culture, but as a site from which to make connections. Consequently, Foster argues, the archive is entropic not anomic; fragmentary but not devoid of logic; a space of exchange, reconfiguration and sociality.

1999', in *Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters, 1961-2007* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009) pp. 331-346 (p. 332).

¹²⁰ Buchloh's notion of 'sign exchange value' stems from the work of Jean Baudrillard. It denotes an apparent shift in capitalist society from the production of material use-values to the exchange and purchase of signs which confer status or wealth. However, Baudrillard's argument is arguably premised on a deeply problematic reading of Marx. On the first page of *Capital*, Marx suggests that something akin to the desire for status, or indeed 'sign-exchange value', can be categorised as a part of use-value. A commodity, he writes, 'is a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference'. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), p. 112; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 125. For an extended commentary on this aspect of Buchloh's work, see Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 193-195.

¹²¹ Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 10.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In both accounts, the benefits of the archive are largely associated with the question of memory. Indeed, even in Buchloh's case, memory appears as one of its few emancipatory properties. Richter's work may express the forms of amnesia (and general 'death of reality') produced by the commodity image.¹²³ It can even be understood as an expression of the repressed trauma of Germany's violent past. Yet, as Richter's series goes on, it begins to include images that foreground the 'trauma from which the need to repress [...] originated'.¹²⁴ At these moments, Buchloh argues, the photographs puncture the 'universal production of sign-exchange value' and, as with Roland Barthes' punctum, the viewer is momentarily 'pricked' or 'wounded'.¹²⁵ For Foster, however, the transformative qualities at work within the archive do not necessarily require such a moment of shock or abjection. Rather, he argues, it can be understood as a repository of unfinished projects to be reconfigured and reconceptualised. In this sense, the archive 'functions as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future'.¹²⁶ Such a strategy, however, requires an engagement with capitalism's 'garbage bucket' – that is, with the reified materials of consumer society.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, Foster contends, by placing these materials into unexpected relations, a range of novel 'energies' can be found within the archive.

Despite their obvious differences, Buchloh's and Foster's reflections conform to a logic that has come to define a certain strand of the *October* project; one which reached its peak in the roundtable discussion appended to *Art Since 1900*, 'The Predicament of Contemporary Art'.¹²⁸ Though intended as an overview of the current state of contemporary art, this discussion quickly acquired a melancholic and introspective tone. Although it addressed a range of topics, including medium specificity, digital technologies and the current status of psychoanalysis, the majority of the conversation centred upon the view of consumer culture as an increasingly closed (and quasi-totalitarian) system.¹²⁹ Whilst this position was largely endorsed by all four of the event's participants, its main advocate was Buchloh. When asked to reconsider the finality of his views on contemporary

¹²³ Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's "Atlas"', p. 144.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144. For a more detailed explanation of the notion of the punctum, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard, 2nd edn (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 40-45.

¹²⁶ Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', p. 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹²⁸ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Roundtable: The Predicament of Contemporary Art', in *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 671-679.

¹²⁹ In order to overcome this problem, Krauss was even willing to revive the category of medium specificity.

art, he remarked: 'if there are artistic practices that still stand apart from this process of homogenisation, I'm less convinced than ever that they can survive, and that we as critics and historians are able to support and sustain them in a substantial and efficient manner, to prevent their total marginalisation'.¹³⁰ Although Foster made repeated calls for Buchloh to moderate his claims, even he began to propose a much more pessimistic argument to the one made in 'An Archival Impulse'. Within a society based upon media spectacles, Foster suggested, 'the mnemonic easily tips into the memorializing, that is, into a demand that the historical be monumentalized'.¹³¹ As a result, he continued, any hope that the past (or the 'outmoded') might function as a resource for the future had been replaced by the 'repressive dread of antidemocratic blackmails'.¹³² Given the severity of these arguments, it has become increasingly commonplace for this event to be viewed as the swansong for certain strains of the *October* narrative.¹³³ However, it remains to be seen whether or not the project can extend beyond these terms.

* * *

In certain respects, it would be possible to discuss *Maison Tropicale* with reference to the aforementioned tropes. As a result of its two-part structure, Ferreira's installation is simultaneously fragmentary and non-organic; two themes which accompany the concept of allegory. In a similar manner to parody and pastiche, the work also appropriates Prouvé's houses without submitting them to an explicit or direct critique. Furthermore, it also demonstrates a fundamentally archival approach; one based upon a rigorous study of the Prouvé archive. However, each of these readings only goes so far. *Maison Tropicale* does not simply engage with the arbitrary and the playful, nor is it obviously postmodern. Equally, whilst its structure is certainly non-organic, the work cannot be understood as an attempt to achieve heteronomy or break with the organic artwork. Finally, unlike the practices alluded to by Foster and Buchloh, Ferreira's project conceals the archival materials that it draws upon. In short, these disparities suggest the need for a different approach to the work. But how else might we think the twofold structure of *Maison Tropicale*? What other forms of politics can be attributed to the act of remaking?

¹³⁰ Foster, Krauss, Bois and Buchloh, p. 673.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 677.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 677.

¹³³ See, for example, Day, pp. 194-195; Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 5.

Chapter 2: Translatability

Introduction

Prior to the opening of the fourth Tate Triennial, the public were presented with a series of slogans.¹³⁴ Ranging from the inquisitive ('Are you altermodern?') to the playfully macabre ('Decide for yourself if postmodernism is dead...'), these promotional materials formed part of a larger campaign intended to mark the emergence of a new critical paradigm: the altermodern. Though instantly identifiable as an alternative method of periodisation, the specificities of this formulation were less immediately obvious. As a result, a series of explanatory texts – including an interview with the exhibition's curator, Nicolas Bourriaud, a manifesto and a cartoon strip by Simone Lia entitled 'Chipiski the Altermodernist' – were published on the Tate Britain website to allow potential visitors to familiarise themselves with the project's aims, theoretical framework and methodology.¹³⁵ Yet despite its substantial online presence, Bourriaud's neologism was neither a product of Internet culture nor an attempt to promote digital art. Rather, it emerged from the synthesis of two seemingly disparate sources: the notion of the archipelagic '(and its kindred forms, the constellation and the cluster)' and the writings of W.G. Sebald, specifically, his 1995 novel *The Rings of Saturn*.¹³⁶ Whereas the former served to illustrate the relationship between the one and the many, the latter functioned as a framework through which to address the interplay between space and time, history and geography.

Despite placing a considerable emphasis on the notion of 'otherness', Bourriaud remained adamant that his formulation should not be viewed as an extension of postmodernism or postcolonial theory. Rather, he argued, the term's main aims were twofold: to 'delimit the void beyond the postmodern' and facilitate access to 'a multitude of possibilities, of alternatives to a single route'.¹³⁷ In pursuing these lines of enquiry, Bourriaud sought to reassert the critical relevance of modernism in an era of globalization; an ambition which was further reinforced by the decision to produce an accompanying manifesto.¹³⁸ For Bourriaud,

¹³⁴ The fourth Tate Triennial, *Altermodern*, was held at Tate Britain between 3 February and 26 April 2009.

¹³⁵ These documents can be viewed at: <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/altermodern-explain-altermodern>> [accessed 27 May 2013]

¹³⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Introduction: Altermodern', in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, ed. by Nicolas Bourriaud (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), n.p.; W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. by Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 2002).

¹³⁷ Bourriaud, 'Introduction: Altermodern', n.p.

¹³⁸ Nicholas Bourriaud, 'Altermodern Explained: Manifesto' <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/explain-altermodern/altermodern-explainedmanifesto>> [accessed 27

Altermodernism can [therefore] be defined as that moment when it became possible for us to produce sense starting from an assumed heterochrony, that is, from a vision of human history as constituted of multiple temporalities, disdaining the nostalgia for the avant-garde and indeed for any era – a positive vision of chaos and complexity. It is neither a petrified kind of time advancing in loops (postmodernism) nor a linear vision of history (modernism), but a positive experience of disorientation through an art-form exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space. The artist turns cultural nomad: what remains of the Baudelairean model of modernism is no doubt this *flânerie*, transformed into a technique for generating creativeness and deriving knowledge.¹³⁹

In many respects, these aims bear a striking resemblance to the curatorial strategies which informed Enwezor's Documenta XI.¹⁴⁰ Despite being staged almost a decade apart, both exhibitions chose to examine the social and political effects of globalization. In doing so, they also sought to further discredit the category of postmodernism. Yet, as Angela Dimitrakaki notes, the two projects chose to pursue these lines of enquiry for very different reasons. Whereas Enwezor attempted to distance himself from the postmodern in order to rehabilitate the notion of the postcolonial subject, Bourriaud's formulation marked the beginning of a campaign for travel and mobility to be recognised as formal qualities of the artwork; a characteristic which he termed the 'journey form'.¹⁴¹ Such an approach, he argued, would allow the artist to 'transcode information from one format to another, and wander in geography as well as in history'.¹⁴² In order to realise this goal, Bourriaud chose to ally the altermodern with the category of translation.

Given that *Maison Tropicale* was not included in *Altermodern*, the decision to begin from Bourriaud's exhibition might seem an unusual one. Yet, on closer examination, the framework which it sought to establish has a number of points of overlap with Ferreira's installation. By examining the current neoliberal climate, the exhibition attempted to pinpoint the various social and historical factors which have resulted in the emergence of works such as *Maison Tropicale*. In doing so, it addressed a range of themes, from the changing status of modernism to the question of travel, that are clearly visible within the

May 2013]; Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Art, Globalization and the Exhibition Form: What is the Case, What is the Challenge?', *Third Text*, 26.3 (2012), 305-319 (p. 312).

¹³⁹ Bourriaud, 'Introduction', n.p.

¹⁴⁰ It is also worth noting that Enwezor gave one of *Altermodern*'s inaugural lectures. For footage of the event, see Okwui Enwezor, 'Tate Triennial 2009 Prologue 1: Specious Modernity: Speculations on the End of Postcolonial', 24 April 2008 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/tate-triennial-2009-prologue-1-okwui-enwezor-specious-modernity-speculations>> [accessed 1 August 2015].

¹⁴¹ Dimitrakaki, pp. 311-312.

¹⁴² Bourriaud, 'Altermodern Explained', n.p.

project. Furthermore, Bourriaud's decision to examine these topics with reference to the question of translation offered a novel approach to contemporary art; one in which projects such as Ferreira's – with a focus upon transnational exchange – might be deemed particularly important.

It is this line of enquiry that the following section will seek to develop; to consider how the category of translation might allow for a more detailed examination of the various political and aesthetic questions at play within *Maison Tropicale*. However, I would like to state from the outset that it is not my intention to suggest that Bourriaud's formulation should be treated uncritically or presented as a model for future study. Whilst the exhibition received a number of positive reviews, its underlying premise was ultimately flawed.¹⁴³ Though Bourriaud went to great lengths to distinguish the altermodern from postmodernism, both the exhibition and its accompanying literature suggest a vulgar understanding of the term. Not only does his account lack the critical rigour found in the work of figures such as David Harvey and Fredric Jameson, it also reproduces many of the tropes which it claims to critique.¹⁴⁴ The notion of the archipelagic, for example, bears more than a passing resemblance to the category of hybridity. Similar criticisms can also be levelled at the project's engagement with postcolonial theory. Like his comments on postmodernism, Bourriaud's remarks on the topic are equally vague, conflating a host of concepts, writers and literary traditions into a seemingly homogenous entity. Although identifiable elsewhere, the broader implications of this decision are particularly visible in his discussion of the relationship between the postcolonial and the postmodern. Whilst these terms have been addressed in tandem on a number of occasions, it would be wrong to suggest that they are inextricably linked.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this is precisely the claim that Bourriaud makes. By using the phrase 'post-colonial postmodernism' to suggest a 'type of essentialism [...] and a quest for roots and origins', he ignores the work of numerous theorists who have chosen to highlight the dangers of reactionary forms of identity politics – most notably, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Adrian Searle, 'Altermodern Review: "The Richest and Most Generous Tate Triennial Yet"', *Guardian*, 3 February 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/02/altermodern-tate-triennial>> [accessed 28 July 2015]

¹⁴⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Homi K. Bhabha, 'How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation', in *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 303-337.

¹⁴⁶ Marcus Verhagen, 'The Nomad and the Altermodern: The Tate Triennial', *Third Text*, 23.6 (2009), 803-812 (p. 804).

As a result of these misreadings, Bourriaud's use of the term translation – that is, as a synonym for the widespread communication of ideas and affects – is also flawed.¹⁴⁷ By conflating the concept with notions of travel and migration, he offers little explanation as to the specificities of his definition or its origins. Moreover, in failing to acknowledge the distinction between the realities of the international labour market and the fact that contemporary art is no longer confined to a national sphere, his argument comes remarkably close to lapsing into an uncritical celebration of globalization.¹⁴⁸ In order to avoid such oversimplifications, this chapter will take its lead from Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay 'The Task of the Translator'. First published as an introduction to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, Benjamin's text offers a series of insights into the practical and political considerations which accompany the act of translation. For Weber, the driving force behind Benjamin's argument stems from 'the way of meaning' [*Art des Meinens*]; an overarching category which attempts to highlight the differences between languages whilst also establishing the nature of their relationship to one another.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, he argues, there are number of factors that must be taken into consideration when engaging with 'The Task of the Translator'. Most notably, that a text should be understood both in terms of what it says and how it says it.¹⁵⁰ But what would it mean to think Ferreira's work in these terms? How might such an approach allow for a greater understanding of its formal and conceptual structures? To what extent can Benjamin's essay function as a starting point from which to address contemporary art more broadly?

Though Benjamin's essay will play a central role in this chapter, it is not my intention to suggest that the task of the translator is also that of the art historian. To do so would be to simply replicate a pre-existing line of enquiry. Within her essay 'Translation into Art History', Joanne Morra argues that, although art history has embraced the challenges posed by a variety of linguistic tropes, most notably allegory and metaphor, it has not subjected translation to the same level of critical analysis.¹⁵¹ In an attempt to remedy this oversight, she proposes a line of enquiry in which the focal point of Benjamin's essay, the complex

¹⁴⁷ Dimitrakaki, p. 312.

¹⁴⁸ For an overview of the various uses of the term globalization, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 53-72.

¹⁴⁹ An alternative commentary on Benjamin's essay can be found in Paul de Man, "'Conclusions": On Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator": Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983", *Yale French Studies*, 69 (1985), 25-46.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 57.

¹⁵¹ Joanne Morra, 'Translation into Art History', *parallax*, 6.1 (2000), 129-138. For an extended version of this argument, see Giovanna Morra, *Case Studies between Translation and Allegory* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1998).

relationship between a text and its subsequent translations, is brought into dialogue with the practice of writing art history; a meeting which ostensibly seeks to demonstrate the transformative potential of both. Although Morra's introductory remarks present this encounter as one which requires further study, the specificities of what might be gained from doing so are less immediately obvious. When understood literally, her proposal is immediately complicated by the lack of art historical texts written by translators. Whilst there are a number of exceptions to this rule – Edward Snow, for example, has translated the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and written studies of Bruegel and Vermeer – such texts (and, indeed, such authors) are ultimately anomalies.¹⁵² As such, Morra's enquiry continues not with a discussion of the problems posed by these absences, but rather with the construction of a framework through which to further investigate this pairing. Drawing upon a series of key themes addressed within 'The Task of the Translator', a list which includes the challenges of writing history, the possibility of an exchange between poetics and hermeneutics and the question of materiality, she offers a discussion of the transformations which occur when the aforementioned practices and their respective works and texts are combined. The outcome is 'an understanding of art history as a translative practice, and the very task of the art historian as penned in translator's ink'.¹⁵³

An alternative interpretation of Benjamin's essay – and its relevance for art history – can be found in the work of Peter Osborne.¹⁵⁴ Rather than mapping 'The Task of the Translator' onto the working methods of the discipline, Osborne presents modernism as a translational category; one which departs from prevailing notions of theoretical universality. In doing so, he mounts a challenge to the underlying imperialism of terms such as globalization and a postmodernist understanding of translation that seeks to proclaim 'the "necessary failure" of "all broad meanings"'.¹⁵⁵ For Osborne, the latter is exemplified by James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*; a text in which the act of translation is presented as evidence for a pre-existing cultural nominalism. To counter this, he argues that difference is not simply pre-existing, but rather created through translation. In furthering this argument, Osborne makes reference to Benjamin's notion of translatability. For Benjamin,

¹⁵² Edward A. Snow, *A Study of Vermeer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Edward A. Snow, *Inside Bruegel: The Play of Images in Children's Games* (New York: North Point, 1997).

¹⁵³ Morra, 'Translation into Art History', p. 129.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 53-62.

¹⁵⁵ James Clifford as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifest itself in its translatability. It is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation; in fact, this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original. We may call this connection a natural one, or, more specifically, a vital connection. Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife.¹⁵⁶

In Osborne's view, Benjamin's argument demonstrates how the act of translation results in a shift to generality. More specifically, he continues, it reveals that the meaning of a particular phenomenon extends beyond its original social and cultural context; an argument which is particularly true of modernism. Despite originating in Western Europe, the category only acquires its identity when translated beyond this context. Rather than describing an individual work, period or movement, here, the term modernism refers to the general temporal category of the 'new'.¹⁵⁷ As such, Osborne concludes, it is only by viewing it as a translational category that we can forge a 'determination of modernism as a temporal-cultural form and [...] to acquire a more adequate sense of its specifically *historical* (rather than merely chronological or abstractly temporal) logic'.¹⁵⁸

Though Morra's and Osborne's proposals differ greatly in their aims and scope, they share a common belief in the transformative potential of Benjamin's essay; a standpoint which also informs this chapter. Whilst it is not my intention to suggest that 'The Task of the Translator' should be viewed as a model for writing art history or a framework through which to address the formation of universals, I am interested in the possibility that Benjamin's text might allow for a reconsideration of certain motifs found in Ferreira's work, specifically, the complex relationship between space and time; the current status of modernism and the question of loss. In order to explain my reasons for adopting such an

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 77.

¹⁵⁷ The view of modernity as a specifically 'Western' phenomenon has been subject to a substantial amount of criticism. Most recently, this line of argument has resulted in a series of overarching categories – including multiple modernities, peripheral modernities and divergent modernities – that have sought to examine how the question of modernity has been reformulated in response to the literary and aesthetic practices of Asia, Africa and Latin America. For a more detailed discussion of these developments, see Okwui Enwezor, 'The Short Century: An Introduction', in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. by Okwui Enwezor (New York: Prestel, 2001), pp. 10-16; Benita Parry, 'Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 40.1 (2009), 27-55 and Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, trans. by John D. Blanco (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', p. 59.

approach, this chapter will begin by considering how the themes of space and time have been addressed within the existing literature on installation. In doing so, it will seek to demonstrate what this material can reveal about *Maison Tropicale*, whilst also exploring its limitations. Having established the foundations for the chapter, the second section will then consider how the question of translation might allow us to build upon this scholarship. By focusing upon the question of modernism, it will examine how the act of remaking shapes our understanding of the relationship between the past and the present. Finally, the third section will address the various ways in which Ferreira's installation brings the themes of history and memory to the fore; topics which are clearly visible within the interplay between the remade object and the original. In bringing together these lines of enquiry, I hope to demonstrate how the question of translation might be understood as a useful, critically relevant framework through which to address contemporary art.

Space, Time and Installation Art

At the opening of the 2007 Venice Biennale, *Maison Tropicale* was but one of a series of installations located in and around the Giardini. As well as Ferreira's project, the works on display included Yehudit Sasportas' *The Guardians of the Threshold, Back Home with Baudelaire* by MAP Office (Laurent Gutierrez and Valérie Portefaix) and Emily Jacir's *Material for a Film* (Fig. 40-42).¹⁵⁹ Although they addressed a diverse range of themes, from the reception of Bauhaus architecture in 1950s Israel to the overnight journey undertaken by container ships travelling between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, these projects possessed a number of common characteristics. In addition to their shared medium, each explored the themes of travel, duration and exchange. In doing so, they also called into question a number of periodizing categories, including the so-called 'radical break' between the modern and the postmodern. Yet whereas MAP Office chose to foreground the enduring presence of maritime transportation and Sasportas' installation offered a dystopian view of the modernization process, *Maison Tropicale* approached these topics in a more concentrated manner. By examining the journey undertaken by Prouvé's houses and inviting the viewer to consider the broader implications of their redisplay, the project brought a number of spatial and temporal phenomena into dialogue.

For this reason, Ferreira's installation offers a unique perspective on the relationship between space and time. Since the early 1970s, art criticism and cultural theory have

¹⁵⁹ For further information on the works included in the 2007 Venice Biennale, see Robert Storr (ed.), *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense*, 2 vols (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

tended to privilege one category over the other, alternating between them in series of successive waves.¹⁶⁰ Until recently, the question of space appeared to hold a position of dominance; a status exemplified by the popularity of cognitive mapping, human geography and the work of Henri Lefebvre.¹⁶¹ Writing in 1998, Bruno Bosteels argued that:

While resolutely sidestepping the rhetoric of temporality most typical of deconstruction, critical and theoretical enquiries today increasingly seem to be moving towards a general politics of spatiality. From the textual analysis of writing as much as from an ethical discussion of acting, both still are evidently modelled upon the ontological analysis of being, the emphasis is shifting to the cultural study of literary, artistic and ideological forms of mapping. In other words, rather than the 'event' of temporality in the Heideggerian sense dear to Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man or Reiner Schürmann, what is at stake becomes the 'locus' of the event, in a Foucauldian (if not Sartrean) sense arguably shared by thinkers such as Deleuze and Alain Badiou.¹⁶²

Over the last few years, however, there has been an apparent reversal of this trajectory – that is, a return to the question of temporality. Whilst writers such as Osborne and Massimiliano Tomba have chosen to examine the changing status of time within Western philosophy, this shift has also resulted in a return to earlier works on history, periodisation and synecopation, including Benjamin's 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', E.P. Thompson's 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism' and Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor and Social Domination*.¹⁶³ Furthermore, as Christine Ross notes, the twenty first century has also witnessed an increase in artistic practices – namely installation, film and new media art – that attempt to bring the past, present and future into dialogue. Despite

¹⁶⁰ Of course, this is not to suggest that there is no cross over between the two, merely a difference in emphasis. In 'Of Other Spaces', for example, Foucault remarks: 'Yet it is necessary to notice that the space which today appears to form the horizon of our concern, our theory, our systems is not an innovation; space itself has a history in Western experience and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space.' Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 22).

¹⁶¹ Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 347-360; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); David Harvey, 'Space as Keyword', in *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006).

¹⁶² Bruno Bosteels, 'From Text to Territory: Félix Guattari's Cartographies of the Unconscious', in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. by Eleanor Kauffman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 145-174 (p. 147).

¹⁶³ Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. by Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Farris (Chicago: Haymarket, 2013); Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2011); Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn and ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245-255; E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 56-97; Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

differing in medium and subject matter, for Ross, these practices share a common goal: to ‘inscribe the spectator in different experiences of time’; a list which includes endlessness, ephemerality and acceleration, but also contingency, randomness and repetition.¹⁶⁴ In addition to demonstrating the various ways in which art can function as a site for temporal experimentation, Ross’ remarks also serve a second purpose. Such works, she argues, are indicative of a broader shift within contemporary art: the emergence of the temporal turn. Although the decision to label these developments as a ‘turn’ could easily be viewed as faddish or fashion led, the suggestion that contemporary art should be viewed as a temporal practice is not specific to Ross.¹⁶⁵ Similar sentiments have also been expressed by Donald Kuspit, Richard Meyer and Terry Smith.¹⁶⁶

Building upon these debates, this section will explore the complex relationship between space and time that informs *Maison Tropicale*. More specifically, it will consider how this dynamic disrupts the seemingly stable relationship between installation and space. Of course, this is not to suggest that the discourse surrounding installation is entirely devoid of temporal categories. As Claire Bishop and Alex Potts have argued, the experience of viewing an installation is almost always accompanied by questions of presence and duration.¹⁶⁷ There have also been numerous attempts to historicise installation, tracing its origins as far back as the seventeenth century.¹⁶⁸ However, by bringing a historical object into the installation space, Ferreira’s project introduces an additional complexity into an already difficult field. Beginning with an overview of the existing literature on installation, this section will explore the implications of such a gesture. In doing so, it is not my intention to make a case for the spatialization of time. Rather, by examining the distinctive temporal

¹⁶⁴ Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ A similar critique of the language of ‘turns’ has also been proposed by John Tagg. In response to the renewed interest in archival questions, he remarked: ‘it seems that *archive* [...] is having its turn as one of those terms, like the body, visibility, hybridity, the aesthetic, and so on, that surge suddenly and sometimes surprisingly into fashion as the must have accessory of the moment. For a time, they then become like brand names, the focus of intense loyalties and the object of impassioned exchanges understandable only to those who belong to the code’. Tagg, ‘The Archiving Machine’, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶ Donald Kuspit, ‘The Contemporary and the Historical’, *Artnet*, 13 April 2005 <<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit4-14-05.asp>> [accessed 22 April 2013]; Richard Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013); Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁶⁷ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 4-13; Alex Potts, ‘Sculpture and Installation’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 24.1 (2001), 5-24.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Cole, ‘Bernini Struts’, in *Projecting Identities: The Power of Material Culture*, ed. by Joanna Sofaer Derevenski (London: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 55-66.

registers at play within *Maison Tropicale*, I hope to demonstrate how Ferreira's installation raises the possibility of a temporalization of space.¹⁶⁹

In recent years, installation art has been the subject of numerous surveys and critical histories. However, the majority of these texts have sought to position it within a broader art historical trajectory, constructing a narrative which spans from the Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s and 70s to the biennials and triennials of the twenty-first century.¹⁷⁰ Despite this popularity, however, it would be misleading to suggest that the response to installation has been entirely positive. Liam Gillick, for example, has sought to distance himself from the term, arguing that 'the word/phrase [installation art] has come to signify middlebrow, low-talented earnestness of production and effect with neo-profound content'.¹⁷¹ Moreover, he continues, 'this has been compounded by the frequent use of the word to indicate any repressed spectacle in a gallery context'.¹⁷² Though undeniably hyperbolic, Gillick's comments not only function as an expression his distaste for installation. They also serve a second purpose. By highlighting the frequency with which the term is used, they draw attention to its lack of a fixed definition. What, if anything at all, does installation actually mean?

Though the question of what falls under the remit of installation is not a new one, the manner in which this topic has been addressed does warrant further discussion. Within her introductory remarks to *Installation Art*, Bishop begins from the standpoint that 'the word "installation" has now expanded to describe any arrangement of objects in any given space, to the point where it can happily be applied to even a conventional display of paintings on a wall'.¹⁷³ This ambiguity, she suggests, can be attributed to the art journalism of the 1960s. Here, the term was adopted by a series of publications – including *Artforum*, *Studio International* and *Arts Magazine* – to describe both the layout of an exhibition and its accompanying photographic documentation: an installation shot. These two trajectories formed the basis of what is now known as installation art. As a result, Bishop argues, the

¹⁶⁹ The phrases 'spatialization of time' and 'temporalization of space' are borrowed from Tomba.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Erika Suderburg (ed.), *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: from Duchamp to Holzer* (London: Prestel, 2003); Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry, *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003); Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁷¹ Liam Gillick as quoted in Claire Bishop, 'But is it an installation?', *Tate Etc.*, 3 (2005) <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/it-installation-art>> [accessed 1 May 2013] (para. 7 of 12)

¹⁷² Liam Gillick as quoted in *Ibid.* (para. 7 of 12)

¹⁷³ Bishop, *Installation Art*, p.6.

boundaries which distinguish the installation of art from 'installation proper' have become increasingly blurred. Despite their brevity, Bishop's remarks highlight a series of characteristics which are common to both usages, namely, 'a desire to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this'.¹⁷⁴ To suggest that she believes these practices to be indivisible, however, would be to misrepresent her standpoint. Whereas the installation of art privileges the content of an exhibition, installation art presents the exhibition space and the objects contained within it as a singular entity; one in which the completion of the work is dependent upon the physical presence of the viewer. The outcome is a multi-sensorial experience with the potential to stimulate the viewer's senses of touch, taste and smell.¹⁷⁵

These insights, however, are not unique to Bishop. They can also be found within the majority of the literature on installation. One exception to this rule is Alex Potts' article 'Installation and Sculpture'. By contextualizing installation within the broader history of sculpture, from the seventeenth century to the present day, Potts calls into question the widely held view of the medium as a type of break or rupture. But although the earlier sculptural practices which he cites share a number of characteristics with installation, his aim is not to condense them into a linear narrative or suggest an unwavering continuity between them. Rather, Potts argues,

Insomuch as a structural change has occurred, it has been most clear-cut at the level of critical and theoretical paradigms. The move to installation certainly has not resulted in a complete dissolution of the sculptural object, nor of the distinctive structures of response elicited by a traditional sculpture. Rather it has entailed a progressive abandonment of the assumption prevalent in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculptural aesthetics that the authentic art object has to be completely self-sufficient, its significance unaffected by the circumstances of its display.¹⁷⁶

In his view, this development has not only required a break with the object-orientated approach to sculpture associated with figures such as Constantin Brancusi, but also a broader socio-historical shift in the status of the object. Whereas eighteenth and nineteenth century sculpture 'induce[d] the viewer to see it as isolated from its surroundings and set in a sphere apart', installation simultaneously confronts the viewer

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-8. Since the publication of Bishop's text, these issues have been further complicated by an increasing interest in curating as a form of art practice. For further information on this development, see Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007).

¹⁷⁶ Potts, 'Installation and Sculpture', p. 5

with a series of objects and makes their status as art contingent upon the space in which they are displayed.¹⁷⁷ For Potts, this shift can be attributed, albeit at a high level of historical generality, to the ever-increasing prevalence of the commodity within capitalist society; an object which is both present as a physical use-value and absent as an exchange-value. Consequently, he argues, installation constitutes a moment in which sculpture has been fully integrated into the society of the spectacle. It is this ambiguity, rather than the sheer physical presence of the object, which defines the experience of viewing an installation. The viewer is at once included in the scene and alienated from it. As a result, Potts concludes, installation can be viewed as evidence of a 'modern realism'; one which is not simply about 'real things' but also what we project onto them.

Although they present very different accounts of the origins and development of installation art, Bishop and Potts both structure their arguments around the question of space. More specifically, they both address the relationship between the gallery space, the object and the embodied experience of the viewer. Needless to say, there is a strong temporal component to this relationship. Whereas Potts refers to a type of deferral which occurs in the act of viewing, Bishop structures her argument around the process of entering and navigating a work. Yet, in each case, the question of temporality is ultimately limited to the immediacy of the encounter. Whilst it is not my intention to refute such an argument, I do wish to address the suggestion that installation, and more specifically Ferreira's *Maison Tropicale*, should be understood solely in these terms. Through their broadly phenomenological approaches, Potts and Bishop offer a conceptual framework through which to consider the temporalization of space. However, as Briony Fer notes, 'the time of the artwork is not only the matter of the time it takes to look. But the phenomenological encounter with the art object as it occurs in time is a starting point – against which a range of other temporal modes are set in play'.¹⁷⁸ What, if anything, in the discourse on installation would allow us to unlock these other temporal modes?

Despite its apparent simplicity, this question is immediately complicated by the fact that *Maison Tropicale* differs from the majority of installations. Most obviously, it departs from the current tendency to either fill the gallery space completely or produce a type of immersive spectacle for the viewer; strategies exemplified by the work of artists such as Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller and Olafur Eliasson (Fig. 43-44). Instead, Ferreira's installation adopts the more 'traditional' approach of placing an object in an otherwise

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁷⁸ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 4.

empty exhibition space. To complicate matters further, this object contains references to both the modernist and Minimalist traditions.¹⁷⁹ On the one hand, it presents the viewer with a large cuboid that alludes to both the industrialised, serial forms adopted by artists such as Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd (Fig. 46-48) and the shipping container.¹⁸⁰ On the other, it reconstructs a piece of modernist architecture in a similar manner to the sculptures of Anthony Caro and David Smith (Fig. 50-51). As a result, the viewer is forced to engage with the work on two levels. In what follows, I want to claim that this gesture introduces two distinct temporal registers into the work. In order to explore this thesis, I have chosen to return to an essay in which modernism and Minimalism are placed in direct opposition: Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood'.

Written in response to the work of Judd, Morris and Tony Smith, Fried's essay was first published in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*. Although not the only contribution in the volume to address the topic of Minimalist sculpture, Fried's text was arguably the most provocative, sparking a series of debates about the legacies of Greenbergian criticism and the question of medium specificity more broadly.¹⁸¹ As Potts notes, prior to its publication, the 1950s and 1960s had witnessed the emergence of series of art forms – including Neo-Dada, Arte Povera and Pop Art – which had begun to question the established norms of three-dimensional practice, specifically its anthropocentrism and its reliance upon the plinth. Though each of these practices sought to challenge the prevailing definition of the sculptural object, for Potts, these changes were most visible in Minimalism. Although Minimalist sculpture did not necessarily seek to produce more sophisticated or complex bodily responses than its precursors, these themes formed the central focus of the critical responses which it provoked; a body of literature in which the physical presence of the art work was elevated to the status of form or image.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Of course, this is not to suggest that *Maison Tropicale* is the only installation to include references to modernist architecture or, indeed, Prouvé's houses. For the 2006 São Paulo Biennial, *How to Live Together*, Rirkrit Tiravanija presented a fully assembled replica of *Maison Tropicale* entitled *Palm Pavilion* (Fig. 45).

¹⁸⁰ Although Minimalism did not embrace the shipping container, as Allan Sekula states, its presence haunted much of the work that fell under the term's remit. For Sekula, there were two reasons why this potentiality was never realised. First, the containers did not pass through the streets of New York or its waterfront. And secondly, their mobility stood in stark contrast to the emphasis on stasis found in the work of figures such as Robert Smithson. More recently, however, the container has become increasingly ubiquitous, both within everyday life and contemporary art; a shift exemplified by Miroslaw Balka's 2009 installation, *How it is* (Fig. 49). Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 2nd edn (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2002), p. 138.

¹⁸¹ In addition to Fried's essay, the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum* also included articles by Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Robert Smithson.

¹⁸² Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 178.

Though the influence of Fried's theoretical framework is clearly visible within the work of Potts and Bishop, his essay has a markedly different tone. Beginning from the standpoint that 'the enterprise known variously as Minimal Art, ABC Art, Primary Structures and Specific Objects is primarily ideological', Fried argues that the critical and artistic projects of Judd, Morris and Smith should be viewed as 'something more than an episode in the history of taste'.¹⁸³ Rather, he continues, they belong to 'the history – almost the natural history – of sensibility; [...] the expression of a general and pervasive condition'.¹⁸⁴ Despite their initial opacity, Fried's opening remarks function as both an acknowledgement of the ever-increasingly popularity of these practices at his time of writing and an expression of his distaste for the liminal position which they inhabited – that is, between painting and sculpture. But although his criticisms were Greenbergian in origin, they did not reproduce the seemingly reductive notion of medium specificity outlined in 'Modernist Painting'.¹⁸⁵ For Fried, the task of the modernist artist was not to reveal the physical characteristics of their chosen medium, but to discover 'those conventions that, at a given moment, alone are capable of establishing his works identity' and which change 'continually in response to the vital work of the recent past'.¹⁸⁶ In this regard, modernist sculpture can be defined by both its presence within space and its status as the culmination of the history of the medium. Minimalist 'sculpture', in contrast, pushed Greenberg's insistence upon the physical properties of the medium to an extreme, thus ignoring the various social and historical conventions which had come to define it. As a result, Fried argues, it became a part of the physical space of the gallery; a site which could be just as easily occupied by any number of everyday objects.

In this sense, Fried's comments on Minimalist sculpture possess a strong spatial component. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that the question of time is entirely absent from his text. To the contrary, this line of enquiry has formed the basis of numerous commentaries on 'Art and Objecthood'. In *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, for example, Pamela M. Lee argues that the debates surrounding time should not be viewed as subordinate to the spatial questions which accompany Minimalist sculpture, but

¹⁸³ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, 2nd edn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148-172 (p. 148).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

¹⁸⁵ Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 85-93.

¹⁸⁶ Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 169.

rather understood as a 'limit condition' for Fried's critique.¹⁸⁷ In using this phrase, Lee is not only referring to 'foundational status of time in [his] discussion of theatricality', but also to the 'conditions of possibility' which underpin Fried's argument as a whole.¹⁸⁸ Although accurate, Lee's comments privilege a particular understanding of time; one which can be found in the penultimate paragraph of 'Art and Objecthood'. Fried writes:

Here finally I want to emphasise something that may have already become clear: the experience in question persists in time, and the presentment of endlessness that, I have been claiming is central to literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless, or infinite, *duration* [...] The literalist preoccupation with time – more precisely, with the *duration of the experience* – is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense in which, at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective.¹⁸⁹

Though this line of argument is now an established part of the discourse on Minimalism and installation, it is not my intention to suggest that it has become clichéd. If anything, Fried's comments offer an insight into one of the central temporal components of *Maison Tropicale*. In Ferreira's installation, the remade parts of Prouvé's houses are arranged to form a corridor that the viewer is required to walk through in order to reach the accompanying photographs. As a result, the two elements cannot be experienced simultaneously, but instead work together to create the sense of duration proposed by Fried. To pursue this line of argument further, it could be said that such an arrangement is 'theatrical', or, to use Potts' phrase, 'cinematic'.¹⁹⁰ By directing the viewer's experience in this manner, the work constructs a narrative akin to the structure of a play or the plot of a film. Such a reading, however, by no means exhausts the temporal dynamics at play in Fried's essay. Rather, his text contains another possible line of enquiry: the relationship between Minimalism's presence and modernism's presentness.

¹⁸⁷ Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 42.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁹ Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', pp. 166-167.

¹⁹⁰ Potts, 'Installation and Sculpture', p. 18. It is worth noting that, unlike Potts, Fried strictly distinguishes theatre from cinema. Indeed, for Fried cinema is automatically non-theatrical because: 'the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected *away* from us, and the screen is not experienced as a kind of object existing in a specific physical relation to us'. Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 171.

Throughout 'Art and Objecthood' the categories of presence and presentness are placed in opposition. Yet, by virtue of its subject matter and formal arrangement, Ferreira's installation raises the possibility of thinking the two together. For Fried, the effects of presence are produced in a variety of ways: by placing a 'non-art' object into a gallery space; by the size of the object in question and by obstructing the path of the viewer. Many of these techniques are also visible in *Maison Tropicale*. In addition to its use of industrial materials, Ferreira's installation towers over the viewer, forcing them to acknowledge its existence. By adopting these strategies, the work not only appears present – as an object – in space and time. It also requires the viewer to repeatedly change their viewing position, thereby creating a sense of endlessness. However, the work also possesses certain characteristics which, in Fried's view, produce the presentness of modernist sculpture. Like the sculptures of Smith and Caro, Ferreira's installation is composed of a number of parts which come together, not as a closed or *gestalt* form, but in a series of relations. As a result, they resist the label of 'self-sufficient objects' and instead combine to produce an additional layer of 'meaning'; a quality which Fried terms syntax.¹⁹¹ When understood in this way, the component parts of *Maison Tropicale* cease to be experienced as objects that exist in 'our' space and time. Described by Fried as the 'cognitive aspects' of modernist art, these characteristics introduce a new sense of temporality into Ferreira's work.¹⁹² But what exactly is it?

In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to consider the various ways in which the category of presentness has been understood. The most common interpretation of the term stems from Fried's suggestion that modernist sculpture can be seen in one go; a quality which he attributes to its 'open' character. When understood as a type of value judgement, this definition corresponds to Greenberg's belief that 'good art' can be understood instantaneously:

If visual art took more time to deal with, if you couldn't walk through a gallery so fast, if you had to stop as you do with literature or music, I dare say that the likes of conceptual art would never be put up with. It's so utterly boring. In an

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 162. In a later text, 'Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop', Fried relates this quality to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Just as, for Saussure, meaning is produced through difference, the modernist sculpture is arranged like a sentence. In order to avoid the suggestion that modernist sculpture is a representational art, Fried's comments upon this topic are fairly ambiguous. Caro's sculptures, for example, do not present a specific meaning, but 'meaningfulness as such' or the 'concept of meaning'. Michael Fried, 'Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop: Discussion', in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture: Number One*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), pp. 71-87.

¹⁹² Michael Fried, 'How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark', *Critical Inquiry*, 9.1 (1982), 217-234 (p. 223).

instant you know you can classify it as new. Because the fact is, a masterpiece as well as a dog can be grasped in the split second. An instantaneous look, and you can see how good Titian is when he's good. I think it's the same with sculpture, except it may take you time to walk around a free-standing sculpture if you want every view possible.¹⁹³

In Greenberg's work, this immediate experience was frequently associated with a type of intellectual and emotional plenitude. As a result of its departure from the serialised duration of Minimalism, Fried's notion of presentness has also been understood in a similar manner. Indeed, as Peter Eisenman notes, 'for Fried, presentness was a moment which collapsed time into the exorable present, where there was no difference between thinking and experience'.¹⁹⁴ However, this is not the only definition of presentness currently in circulation. The term has also been equated with a type of religious experience or a near-metaphysical suspension of time; a reading no doubt informed by Fried's concluding remark that 'presentness is grace'.¹⁹⁵ Yet whilst both of these interpretations are supported by 'Art and Objecthood', I want to suggest that another understanding of presentness exists amongst them; one which emerges from the confrontation between modernism and Minimalism found in *Maison Tropicale*.

In making this claim, I refer to Fried's discussion of the relationship between the modernist artwork and its historical precursors; a connection which is clearly visible in Ferreira's installation. Although the viewer encounters the work as an austere Minimalist form, this meeting is quickly followed by a curiosity as to its historical reference points. As a result, we are forced to go beyond its immediacy as a 'thing' and consider the broader architectural and sculptural histories to which it belongs. Although Fried's interpretation of this effect stems from one of the most derided aspects of 'Art and Objecthood' – his defence of medium specificity – it is also underpinned by a significantly stranger logic. For Fried, the problem with Minimalism is that, by breaking with the conventions which previously defined the medium of sculpture, it loses its connection to history. Without any discernible link to the past, it sits, blankly and intractably, within our literal space and time. In contrast, the modernist artwork exists within the gallery space whilst also attempting to

¹⁹³ Thierry du Duve and Clement Greenberg, 'A Public Debate with Clement Greenberg', in Thierry du Duve, *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines: Including a Debate with Clement Greenberg*, trans. by Brian Holmes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 123.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Eisenman, 'Presentness and the Being-Only-Once of Architecture', in *Written into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990-2004* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 42-49 (p. 46).

¹⁹⁵ Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 168; Hal Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism', in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 35-68 (p. 50).

convince the viewer ‘that it is able to stand comparison with the [art] of the past whose quality is not in doubt’.¹⁹⁶ In short, it exists in a permanent relationship to the past, fundamentally ‘out of joint’ with its immediate presence in space. Of course, this claim can be read in a more conservative way. In his concluding remarks to ‘Modernist Painting’, for example, Greenberg argues: ‘Modernist art develops out of the art of the past without gap or break, and wherever it ends up it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of art’.¹⁹⁷ However, Fried’s argument breaks with this standpoint. The latest modernist sculptures, he contends, have a relationship with the past, only insofar as they simultaneously further and reformulate the boundaries of the medium.¹⁹⁸ Given her decision to remake Prouvé’s houses, to what extent might it be possible to read Ferreira’s work through this lens?

Since the publication of ‘Art and Objecthood’, Fried has produced a number of texts that attempt to demonstrate the relevance of his argument to contemporary art.¹⁹⁹ However, it would be deeply problematic to suggest that Fried’s and Ferreira’s broader goals are directly aligned. Whilst Ferreira’s project possesses a number of the formal structures presented in Fried’s argument, it cannot be reduced to a formalist framework. In mediating between presence and presentness, her aim is not to defeat *Maison Tropicale*’s objecthood and thus secure its status as ‘art’. Equally, her work should not be viewed as an attempt to evoke ‘meaningfulness as such’ or re-invigorate the modernist canon.²⁰⁰ Yet, in pursuing this line of enquiry, an important connection has been brought to the fore: the relationship between the historico-temporal structures of modernism and the duration of Minimalism. More specifically, this strategy has allowed for a consideration of the various way in which the temporality of modernism disrupts the installation space. But how else might we think the concentration of literalism and intellectual distance, spatial proximity and temporal remoteness which informs *Maison Tropicale*?

Modernism Today

Over the past twenty-five years, Ferreira has produced a body of work that has sought to investigate the darker side of modernist architecture’s utopian claims, particularly its role in

¹⁹⁶ Fried, ‘Art and Objecthood’, p. 169.

¹⁹⁷ Greenberg, p. 93.

¹⁹⁸ Fried, ‘How Modernism Works’, p. 225.

¹⁹⁹ Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Michael Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

²⁰⁰ Fried, ‘Art and Objecthood’, p. 162.

the implementation and maintenance of colonial rule. Focusing primarily on the histories of Mozambique, Portugal and South Africa, her work has drawn upon a diverse range of sources including photographs of the small, often illegal extensions added to houses in the city of Porto during the early 1990s (*Marquis*, 1993); Pancho Guedes' unrealised plans for a circus school in Cape Town during the final years of apartheid (*Zip Zap Circus School*, 2000-2002) and footage of a celebratory song and dance performed by Mozambican factory workers following news of the country's independence in 1975 (*For Mozambique: Model no. 2*, 2008) (Fig. 52-53). In addition to their investigations into the history of colonialism and its neo and postcolonial legacies, Ferreira's installations can also be characterised by their engagement with archival materials; a trait which is particularly prevalent in *Maison Tropicale*. Following his death in March 1984, the contents of Prouvé's studio were acquired by the Pompidou Centre. Consisting of over 1500 items, including photographs, maquettes and preliminary sketches, the collection sought to offer a comprehensive overview of Prouvé's career as a furniture designer and an architect.²⁰¹ Although none of these documents can be found in *Maison Tropicale*, they played a formative role in its creation. As a result, the archive is not directly present, but mediated through an object.

By adopting this strategy, Ferreira's installation reveals an underlying contradiction. On the one hand, the work alludes to a history of modernism which exceeds the formalist framework proposed by Fried. On the other, this history is partially concealed within the finished work. As a result, the sculptural components of *Maison Tropicale* are perpetually at risk of lapsing back into a formalist framework or an uncritical celebration of the modernist canon. In what follows, I want to consider the broader implications of this contradiction. By making recourse to the question of translatability, this section will address the potential losses and gains which accompany the act of remaking; a line of enquiry which stems from the complex relationship between the copy and the original. In doing so, it will explore the possibility of presenting Ferreira's project as a type of translation. What, if anything, does the process of remaking tell us about the legacies of French colonial rule? To what extent can a copy of Prouvé's house function as a form of critique? How does this gesture shape our understanding of modernism?

In order to pursue these lines of enquiry, this section will take its lead from a statement made by Ferreira in 2008. Needless to say, it is not my intention to suggest that these remarks should be viewed as the definitive interpretation of *Maison Tropicale*. To do so

²⁰¹ A catalogue of this material can be viewed at: <<http://jeanprouve.centrepompidou.fr/jeanprouve.php>> [accessed 21 June 2013].

would be to reinforce a number of problematic assumptions which surround the artist's statement. Rather, my decision to adopt such a starting point stems from the broader questions of fidelity and authenticity that Ferreira's comments raise:

My first task, obviously, was to rebuild the house. But my critical approach to the whole story didn't permit for me to rebuild the house as Prouvé built it. In any case I felt I didn't need to as the house exists, renovated and sold. So what I've done here is taken the idea of the fact that the house travelled to Africa and was taken away from Africa and travelled back to Europe. And I've designed a sculpture that is, in fact, a rendition of a container and the container is now packed full of the components of the house. So what you have are four of the main components of Prouvé design. And often what you'd see in galleries is just the one component being sold. But I've chosen four – part of the roof, the two blinds and the door – and packed them into a container. So in a way I've condensed the house. I'm still building a piece of architecture. We're still inside a house. But it's a house that doesn't have the form that a traditional house has. In a way, I'm trying to keep the house in transit. I'm trying to make permanent the sense of transit that the house has gained for me. It's not a readymade of the house; it's very much a conscious rendition, a sculptural rendition. So the components are now made in wood and I'm looking for sculptural form in the development of those containers. Although the measurements and the proportions are all pretty faithful to the Prouvé design [...] The idea was that if you were a Prouvé connoisseur, you would still be able to identify the Prouvé roots and references in the project.²⁰²

Though there are a number of insights to be taken from this passage, for the purposes of this argument I have chosen to focus on Ferreira's decision to condense the component parts of Prouvé's houses into a sculptural format. In what follows, I want to treat this point as analogous to a specific understanding of translation. Such a proposal, however, requires some clarification.

As I have previously suggested, the question of translation is first and foremost a linguistic one; a characterisation which can also be extended to 'The Task of the Translator'. However, in a suggestive passage, Benjamin explores the possibility of broadening its remit. He writes:

Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. For this very reason translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important to it only insofar as it

²⁰² Thom de Bock and Heinrich Schmidt, 'Interview with Angela Ferreira', 23 May 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNdUilvANmA>> [accessed 21 June 2013].

has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed.²⁰³

Although metaphorical, Benjamin's comments reveal a possible parallel between the act of translation and the act of remaking. More specifically, his remarks centre upon a three-dimensional object – the vessel – that has been shattered and put back together. When understood at a basic level, there is an obvious connection between this passage and *Maison Tropicale*: both foreground the possibility of producing a whole from a series of parts. However, this narrative can also be complicated. Benjamin's discussion of three-dimensionality alludes to a series of concepts – including pure language and the way of meaning – that play a central role in his text more broadly. As such, it raises the possibility of extending this line of argument to 'The Task of the Translator' in its entirety. In order to explore this line of enquiry further, I want to consider how the process of remaking might be thought in relation to other aspects of Benjamin's text.

When viewed from this perspective, the decision to reduce Prouvé's houses to their component parts acquires a new significance. On first encounter, this gesture can be likened to the forms of abstraction found in modernist sculpture. In a similar manner to the work of Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, aspects of the original are stripped away to reveal its 'main' components. Though Ferreira's suggestion that 'what you'd see in galleries is just the one component being sold' cannot be taken at face value, her remark still plays a central role in the economy of the text. Whilst the process of remaking resulted in the abandonment of certain aspects of *Maison Tropicale*, this distillation has not been pursued to the point of absolute decomposition or fragmentation. Rather, it appears to have stopped at the point in which the essence or 'truth' of the original has been made visible: the trace of Prouvé's hand.²⁰⁴ Yet whilst such an interpretation might possess a certain level of validity, for Benjamin, it is the epitome of bad translation. For a start, he argues, a translation should not attempt to 'communicate' – that is, it should not attempt to explain the essential content of the original to the reader. Nor should it seek to imitate its form. In this sense, translation cannot be understood as attempt to extract a kernel of knowledge from the original. Rather, Benjamin proposes, 'whereas content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops

²⁰³ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 77.

²⁰⁴ In using this phrase, I am not alluding to the act of drafting or, indeed, any other practical skill associated with art or architecture. Rather, it is my intention to highlight the limitations of various traditional art historical categories and modes of interpretation. Both of which I hope to avoid.

its content like a royal robe with ample folds'.²⁰⁵ Although somewhat obtuse, Benjamin's metaphor contains a number of innovative suggestions. Instead of penetrating the surface of the original, the translation functions as both a type of departure and an elevation. In doing so, it takes something that was previously implicit in the text and brings it into fruition: its translatability. But what would it mean to think the relationship between Ferreira's installation and Prouvé's houses in these terms?

Before I attempt to answer this question, I would like to note that the material addressed by Ferreira is not simply the structure in its original form. Rather, to use Benjamin's term, her project stems from its afterlife. Of course, this is not to suggest that the installation completely disregards Prouvé's houses. The component parts of *Maison Tropicale* largely conform to the specifications outlined in his blueprints. However, as Benjamin argues, the original does not exist in a vacuum; even apparently fixed terms can undergo a shift in meaning. Moreover, he continues, due to the cyclical nature of literary trends, aspects of a work which once seemed outdated can acquire a new significance. As a result, 'in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change'.²⁰⁶ Although Benjamin's remarks are directed towards literature, they are also relevant to works of art. Indeed, his comments bear a notable resemblance to what Clark describes as the public life of the artwork. Like the literary text, the artwork undergoes a transformation as a result of the various meanings which are ascribed to it and the different locations in which it is exhibited.²⁰⁷ Clark differs from Benjamin, however, in his belief that certain artworks attempt to deny this public life. Modernist works, in particular, he argues, believe themselves to be removed from these concerns 'because [they see] with such clarity what the public life of visual imagery now is, and understandably would not like to be a part of it'.²⁰⁸ A more conservative version of this denial can be found in the narrative which accompanies the restoration of *Maison Tropicale*. Whereas Pollock and his contemporaries chose to pursue a form of aesthetic autonomy, the discourse surrounding *Maison Tropicale* celebrates its apparent preservation from the events of the twentieth century. Despite appearances to the contrary, however, even this gesture belongs to the afterlife of Prouvé's houses. It is this moment which serves as Ferreira's point of entry.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²⁰⁷ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 304.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

But where does the translatability of Prouvé's houses reside within this afterlife? In many respects, the answer to this question is simple: it lies with Prouvé. Although such a response could easily be read as a reiteration of a previous point, I want to propose something slightly different. To be more specific, it will be my argument that the 'special significance' which Ferreira identifies within *Maison Tropicale* is neither the fact that it was made by Prouvé nor the essence of his supposed signature style. Rather, it is the idea of 'Prouvé' that exists within art historical discourse. In making this claim, I take my lead from Michel Foucault's argument that 'the author does not precede the work, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses'.²⁰⁹ For Foucault, the author should not be understood as 'the genial creator of a work' or the 'indefinite source of significations that fill [it]'.²¹⁰ Rather, he argues, they are an ideological construct that is produced retrospectively in order to delimit the types of meaning assigned to their work. At the time of Ferreira's commission, this function was being produced in a number of different ways. Most notably, through the various Prouvé exhibitions and retrospectives which emerged following the 'rediscovery' of *Maison Tropicale* (Fig. 54).²¹¹ These events were frequently accompanied by statements such as the following:

Less known to the public than his contemporaries Charles Eames and Marcel Breuer, Prouvé has only recently been acknowledged as one of the most influential European designers of the 20th century. Prouvé's output, ranging from household furnishings to industrial buildings and residential homes, is notable for his signature use of industrial metals like sheet steel and aluminum.²¹²

Whilst it would be unfair to suggest that these exhibitions actively sought to produce the figure of 'Prouvé', this construction was an inevitable by-product of their framework and tone. Not only did they attempt to demonstrate the coherence of his oeuvre, they also sought to trace its development through a range of other sources, including letters, journals

²⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', trans. by Josué V. Harari, in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 205-222 (p.221).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²¹¹ *Jean Prouvé: Three Nomadic Structures*, Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery, Columbia University, New York (23 November 2003 - 23 April 2004) and Pacific Design Center, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (14 August - 20 November 2005); *Jean Prouvé: A Tropical House*, Yale School of Architecture Gallery, Yale University, New Haven (14 February - 6 May 2005) and Hammer Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles (4 October 2005 - 1 January 2006); *Jean Prouvé: Drawings and Photographs of a Tropical House*, Small Space Gallery, UCLA, Los Angeles (17 October - 9 December 2005) and *Jean Prouvé: The Poetics of the Technical Object*, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein (23 September 2006 - 28 January 2007).

²¹² Dorie Baker, 'Yale School of Architecture Exhibits House by Seminal Designer Jean Prouvé', *Yale News*, 21 December 2004 <<http://news.yale.edu/2004/12/21/yale-school-architecture-exhibits-house-seminal-designer-jean-prouve>> [accessed 18 August 2015].

and other personal effects.²¹³ Though Ferreira's installation adopts neither of these strategies, this absence should not simply be viewed as a form of critique. If anything, the notion of 'Prouvé' is more clearly visible within *Maison Tropicale* than it is in the structure's afterlife. Whereas the exhibitions surrounding Prouvé's houses uncritically reproduced the myth of authorship, Ferreira's work forces the viewer to acknowledge it. As a result, the project not only reveals this process of construction to be an immanent potentiality within the structures' afterlife. It also raises the possibility of viewing Ferreira's installation and Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales 'as fragments of a greater language'.²¹⁴

In this regard, it could be argued that the critical import of *Maison Tropicale* stems from the dissonant relationship between the original and its translation. However, for Benjamin, this relationship also gives rise to a somewhat more ambitious category: pure language. He writes:

In the individual, unsupplemented languages, what is meant is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux-until it is able to emerge as the pure language from the harmony of all the various ways of meaning. If, however, these languages continue to grow in this way until the messianic end of their history, it is translation that catches fire from the eternal life of the works and the perpetually renewed life of language; for it is translation that keeps putting the hallowed growth of languages to the test: How far removed is their hidden meaning from revelation? How close can it be brought by the knowledge of this remoteness?²¹⁵

Rather than attributing the commonalities between languages to their shared points of reference, here, Benjamin alludes to a type of ideal language; an overarching category which emerges from the maturation of various ways of meaning and their subsequent translations. In many respects, the tone of these remarks is mystical. Indeed, as Osborne notes, Benjamin's formulation could easily be described as a type of 'quasi-Platonic truth'; one hidden beneath the epiphenomenal flux of individual languages.²¹⁶ Although there are grounds for challenging such a reading, when viewed in the context of Osborne's argument, it serves a broader purpose: to suggest that the notion of pure language should be reformulated to incorporate Benjamin's more historical notion of construction.²¹⁷ When

²¹³ Although much of Prouvé's work did involve sheet steel and aluminium, he also used a range of other materials including wood and Plexiglas.

²¹⁴ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 77.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75

²¹⁶ Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', p. 57.

²¹⁷ For Benjamin, the notion of pure language functions as a regulative principle rather than an ideal that could be attained. Consequently, he argues, the translation comes closer to the pure language than the original, whilst also demonstrating a knowledge of its remoteness.

viewed in this light, Osborne continues, the notion of pure language is historically produced rather than progressively revealed. As a result, translation becomes the basis for the formation of historical universals.

On first encounter, Osborne's argument would appear to be somewhat removed from the themes addressed by *Maison Tropicale*. Yet despite their obvious differences, the two projects share a clear point of overlap: the question of modernism. Although he presents modernism as the product of a specific time and place, for Osborne, the term only realises its universality – and, by extension, its proximity to a type of pure language – through its translation beyond this context. When understood in this way, modernism does not refer to a specific period or body of work, but rather to a category that is perpetually reproduced and renewed. Ferreira's attempts to find sculptural form in Prouvé's houses, I believe, can be viewed in a similar light. Paradoxically, this is the case because *Maison Tropicale* departs from its precursor in several ways. By engaging with the afterlife of Prouvé's houses (and thus concealing their archival reference points), Ferreira's project is neither nostalgic nor conventionally historical. Moreover, although her work adheres to the specifications outlined in Prouvé's designs, it adopts a different format. Despite these changes, however, the sculptural components of *Maison Tropicale* immediately evoke the category of modernism. To remain within Osborne's framework, this identification occurs because modernism did not end with the onset of postmodernism, but instead lives on as a category defined by novelty and futurity. Indeed, it is only through the production of works such as *Maison Tropicale* that the category continues this life and thus acquires its particular temporality. Through the act of remaking, both Prouvé's house and its contemporary analogue are revealed as 'fragments of a greater language': the historical, pure language of modernism.²¹⁸

However, there are also a number of notable differences between Osborne's and Ferreira's attempts to address the role of modernism today. By engaging with the notion of translatability, Osborne presents modernism, not as a periodizing category, but as a politically radical universal; one which is enriched by its translation into a range of global contexts. When understood in these terms, modernism allows claims to futurity to be extended beyond a Western context. As a result, he argues, it is '*the* temporal form through which the political contest between competing futures continues to be played out'.²¹⁹ Yet despite its apparent optimism, Osborne's formulation also alludes to the fact that this

²¹⁸ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 77.

²¹⁹ Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', p. 62 (my italics).

future can be reappropriated. It is this possibility, at least to my mind, that Ferreira's installation foregrounds. By remaking Prouvé's houses, her project not only demonstrates that modernism must be constantly renewed to sustain itself as a category, but also how this process can lead to a continuation of the modernist canon and its central figures. Moreover, as I will suggest at a later point in my argument, her work also reveals how this process of reconstitution can even give rise to national claims to modernity. In many respects, these claims involve a denial of the colonial past. For this reason, Ferreira's installation can therefore be understood, at least in part, as an attempt to criticise the channels through which this history has been erased.

A Brief History of Forgetting

Translation proceeds 'not from the life of the original', Benjamin reminds us, but from its 'afterlife'. At the same time, translation, as we have seen, 'no longer signifies anything for the original itself'. It proceeds or issues out of the original, but unlike Orpheus, it never looks back.

- Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*²²⁰

In many respects, the above epigraph from Weber could be viewed as a summary of the argument made thus far. In addition to reinforcing the centrality of Benjamin's notion of afterlife, it also foregrounds the complex relationship between the original and its translation. Yet despite their breadth, Weber's remarks draw attention to a particular aspect of Benjamin's argument: translation's futurity. Although the translation stems from the afterlife of the original, this relationship is not one of co-dependence. From the moment of its inception, the translation embarks upon a forward-facing journey; one which cannot be reversed. As I have sought to demonstrate in the previous section, this futurity informs several aspects of *Maison Tropicale*, including Ferreira's engagement with modernism and rejection of preservation. A similar temporal register can also be found in Osborne's designation of modernism as a translational category. Given the emphasis that these works place upon the future, it would be tempting to view Benjamin's comments as a call to abandon the past or even a type of progressive politics. However, in what follows, I want to explore the limitations of such a reading. Needless to say, this line of enquiry should not be viewed as an attempt to reassert the 'purity' or self-identity of the original. Rather, it will be my aim to consider how the questions of loss, history and

²²⁰ Weber, p. 68.

decontextualisation inform the act of translation. To ignore these questions in relation to Ferreira's installation would be deeply problematic. Although the work does explore the translatability of Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales, in doing so, it also fragments them and relocates the component parts to a gallery space. As a result, Ferreira's installation raises a series of much broader questions: to what extent does the act of remaking allow for an engagement with a history under threat of erasure? How does this relationship shape our understanding of translation's futurity?

Following the decline of postmodernism, the question of futurity has experienced a significant revival.²²¹ More specifically, it has been granted a central role within the ongoing debates on the contemporary. For Osborne, the term 'contemporary' began to acquire its present definition – as something other than 'a label denoting what is current or up to date' – in the aftermath of the Second World War.²²² Here, he argues, the word was used to describe a type of practice that sought to weaken the 'ruptural futurity' of the European avant-garde and instead embrace 'the more expansive present of a new beginning'.²²³ In recent years, however, it has become associated with a broader range of topics. For a start, there have been various attempts to present 'the contemporary' as a periodizing category; a gesture which centres upon three key moments – the end of the Second World War, the 1960s and the fall of the Berlin Wall – and the apparent fragmentation of the modernist canon.²²⁴ By displacing previously held certainties, such as the shift from modernism to postmodernism, this line of enquiry has provoked significant debate upon the possibility of

²²¹ Though the question of futurity was not absent from the discourse on postmodernism, there was a strong tendency to view it as outdated or conservative; a claim exemplified by Jean-François Lyotard's suggestion that postmodernism should be defined by its 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. In short, futurity tended to be conflated with notions of linearity, progress and inevitability. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

²²² Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 17.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22. An example of this tendency can be found in the work of Terry Smith. In his response to the question 'What is contemporary art?', Smith begins by assessing the viability of two definitions of the term that are currently in circulation: first, its characterisation 'as a continuation of the modernist lineage' and, secondly, its status as a body of work which asserts its contemporaneity by self-consciously referencing aspects of modernity and postmodernity. Having outlined the defining characteristics of these 'big picture' approaches, his thesis continues, not with an attempt to mediate between the two, but rather with the introduction of a third line of enquiry. For Smith, the defining features of contemporary art are symptomatic of a series of events that occurred during the 1960s and 70s: the end of colonial rule and the onset of globalization; a pairing which he describes as a 'dialectical supplementarity or, better, [an] antinomic exchange'. It is this coupling, he argues, which provides the key to defining both contemporary art and the broader notion of contemporaneity that underpins it. Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry*, 32.4 (2006), 681-707.

historicizing contemporary art. Several contributors to *October's* 'Questionnaire on "The Contemporary"', for example, felt moved to pose the question: how can we define a period of artistic production which seems to be perpetually moving forwards without identifiable guidelines?²²⁵ This intellectual climate has also resulted in a renewed interest in the question of contemporaneity. In certain cases, this category has been used to denote a specific temporal formation; one characterised by 'a disjunctive unity of present times'.²²⁶ However, it is also closely entwined with a much more ambitious project: the decision to present contemporaneity as a 'condition' with the potential to supplant modernity or postmodernity.²²⁷

Despite their popularity, these debates have been accompanied by a certain level of unease. Although there are a number of reasons for this apprehension, the return of the category of presentism remains the most obvious. This concept, however, is difficult to define. It cannot be conflated with the postmodern notion of the 'end of history', which hollowed out the future by proclaiming the impossibility of newness and originality.²²⁸ Yet it is also distinct from the forms of progress and permanent transitoriness attributed to modernity, qualities exemplified by Marx and Engel's now-infamous comment 'all that is solid melts into air'.²²⁹ Instead, presentism denotes a type of anchoring to the here and now; a narrowing of horizons produced through a destabilising encounter with an unregulated futurity. In contrast to the perpetual re-envisioning of the past imagined by Fried, this paradigm has often been associated with a loss of historicity. As Pollock has recently suggested, the focus on the contemporary constitutes a moment in which an older art historical paradigm, one which 'grant[ed] the present the right to define the past, [has been] displaced by a necessity to adjust to a constantly changing, liquefying present, moving for its own sake too fast for us to grasp'.²³⁰ Certain writers have chosen to view this shift as a positive development. Donald Kuspit, for example, argues that the transitory nature of contemporary art has the potential to overcome art history's attempts to reify

²²⁵ Hal Foster (ed.), 'Questionnaire on "The Contemporary"', *October*, 130 (2009), 3-124.

²²⁶ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, p. 17.

²²⁷ For a critical overview of this project, see Bill Roberts, 'Unnaming the System? Retrieving Postmodernism's Contemporaneity', *ARTMargins*, 4.2 (2015), 3-23.

²²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Polity Press, 1994).

²²⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 223.

²³⁰ Griselda Pollock, 'Unexpected Turns: The Aesthetic, the Pathetic and the Adversarial in the Long *Durée* of Art's Histories', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7 (2012) <<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/pollock.pdf>> [accessed 25 May 2015]

(and therefore marketise) the flow of artistic production.²³¹ However, this optimism is not universally held. Indeed, as Clark states: ‘we are living, I reckon, through a terrible moment in the politics of imaging [...]; and the more a regime of visual flow, displacement, disembodiment, endless available revisability of the image [...] presents itself as the very form of self-knowledge, self-production, self-control – the more necessary it becomes to recapture what image making can be’.²³²

But to what extent might it be possible to view Ferreira’s installation as a return to this type of making? On first encounter, the framework which I have used to address *Maison Tropicale* – translatability – would appear to possess a number of similarities with the category of presentism. When viewed through this lens, Ferreira’s engagement with modernism relates primarily to the afterlife of Prouvé’s houses – that is, their present form. From the same perspective, the work’s formal composition and choice of materials transform the structures into something new. But although such a reading demonstrates how Prouvé has been reinserted into the modernist canon, it also risks obscuring the purposes for which his buildings were initially created: as a tool for control and a symbol of European power. Indeed, as Huppatz notes, ‘the fantasy of colonial mastery pervades Prouvé’s design’.²³³ Comprised of a series of technical devices – including insect screens, blue glass portholes and ‘breathing holes’ – the houses were designed to protect their occupants from the ‘dangers’ of an unknown environment. In addition to reinforcing France’s distance from (and control over) the indigenous populations of Niamey and Brazzaville, the structures were also intended to demonstrate its technical superiority to other European colonial powers in Africa.²³⁴ But to what extent does the question of translatability allow for an engagement with this history? How might such a framework allow us to consider its place within Ferreira’s project?

To answer these questions, I want to begin by returning to a topic noted in the previous section: Ferreira’s decision to present *Maison Tropicale* ‘in transit’. This aspect of the work is closely entwined with the afterlife of Prouvé’s houses, both as ‘the “biggest trophy” of the New York Summer 2007 design auctions’ and the centrepiece of a range of international exhibitions.²³⁵ In this respect, Ferreira’s installation reveals the various factors

²³¹ Donald Kuspit, ‘The Contemporary and the Historical’, *Artnet*, 13 April 2005
<<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit4-14-05.asp>> [accessed 22 April 2013]

²³² T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 121.

²³³ Huppatz, p. 39.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

²³⁵ Rodenbeck, p. 107.

which led to the construction of this narrative rather than attempting to conceal it. Her decision to foreground the question of travel, however, departs from the discourse which surrounds the restored houses in an even more explicit manner. Of course, this is not to suggest that this body of literature ignores such a question. The ‘ingenuity’ of Prouvé’s decision to design a house which could easily be transported is addressed within the majority of these texts. Similarly, following its sale at auction, the owner of the larger Brazzaville house expressed a desire to relocate it to ‘a new home in the tropics’.²³⁶ Nevertheless, the scope of these narratives is limited to a myth of original purity or the sanitised futurity of a modern classic. *Maison Tropicale*, in contrast, presents a different understanding of travel; one centred upon the removal of the houses. Although this narrative is clearly visible within the relationship between the sculptural and photographic components of Ferreira’s project, it also underpins the reconstructed buildings. By reassembling the component parts of Prouvé’s houses to form a container, the structures remain suspended between a past point of departure and a future destination.

Despite its apparent simplicity, this duality has a number of points of overlap with Benjamin’s theory of translation. Most notably, it allows for a departure from the view of afterlife as a type of presentism. In order to understand how *Maison Tropicale* does this, it is first necessary to consider the motivations behind Benjamin’s argument. For Weber, the notion of afterlife can be understood, first, as a rejection of Goethe’s belief in the completeness and self-sufficiency of the individual artwork.²³⁷ Whereas Goethe viewed the artwork as an omnipresent, timeless entity, Benjamin’s account foregrounds its finitude, incompleteness and historicity. But although his remarks are premised on a view of the original as a living entity, Benjamin’s thesis should not be understood in organic terms – that is, as a linear progression from birth to death.²³⁸ Rather, Weber continues, ‘its historicity resides not in its ability to give rise to a progressive, teleological movement, but [...] in its power to return incessantly to the past and through the rhythm of its ever-changing repetitions set the pace for the future’.²³⁹ As a result, the afterlife from which the translation issues is never simply unitary or located in the present moment. In many

²³⁶ André Balazs Properties, ‘Special Projects: La Maison Tropicale’ <<http://www.andrebalazsproperties.com/special-projects/la-maison-tropicale/>> [accessed 25 May 2015].

²³⁷ For a more detailed commentary on this aspect of Goethe’s work, see John Pizer, ‘Goethe’s “World Literature” Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization’, *Comparative Literature*, 52.3 (2000), 213-227 and Richard Brilliant, *My Laocoön: Alternative Claims in the History of Artworks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 50-62.

²³⁸ Weber, p. 62.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

respects, this disjuncture can also be found in Prouvé's *Maisons Tropicales*. Although Ferreira addresses the houses within the present, there are a number of different temporal registers at play within her work; whereas some look to the future, others allude to the past.

This multi-temporal register raises a possible parallel between the concept of afterlife and one of Benjamin's fragments on memory. The fragment reads:

Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium [...] The man who merely makes an inventory of his findings, while waiting to establish the exact location of where in today's ground the ancient treasures have been stored up, cheats himself of his richest prize. In this sense, for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them. Epic and rhapsodic in the strictest sense, genuine memory must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be broken through.²⁴⁰

By presenting memory as a medium rather than an instrument, Benjamin foregrounds the impossibility of establishing a direct link between the past and the present; a line of argument which he subsequently developed in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.²⁴¹ Besides the obvious fact that we are constrained to the present, such a gesture also risks reducing history to a transparent inventory of facts. In order to avoid such pitfalls, it is therefore necessary to reconcile our investigations into the past with an understanding of the ways in which it is rearticulated in the present. When understood in these terms, Benjamin's views on memory bear a certain resemblance to his notion of afterlife. Like memory, the afterlife is also premised on a reciprocal relationship between the past and the present; one in which the original is shaped by its current rearticulation without rescinding its relationship to the past. In what follows, I want to consider how this homology might allow for a greater understanding of the place of 'the colonial' within *Maison Tropicale*. However, in order to do so, it is first necessary to consider how else this relationship has been addressed.

²⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Excavation and Memory', trans. by Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2002), p. 576 (p. 576). An extended version of this passage can be found in Walter Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', trans. by Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 595-637 (p. 611).

²⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn and ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245-255.

One response has been to present the category of afterlife as a vehicle for questions of decay, decline and forgetting; a reading which foregrounds the finitude of the original. Although visible elsewhere, this line of enquiry has recently been proposed by Aniruddha Chowdhury. Following de Man, Chowdhury's argument centres upon an understanding of afterlife as a process of mortification and decay, but also survival. As such, it can be compared to Benjamin's category of the 'unforgettable' which, rather than functioning as the 'antithesis of what is forgotten', involves 'a dialectic of forgetting and remembering. Something becomes unforgettable when it threatens to be irretrievably lost'.²⁴² Within the field of contemporary art, similar claims have also been made in response to Benjamin's category of the 'outmoded'.²⁴³ In his essay 'This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse', Foster presents the current interest in this topic as the latest manifestation of the Surrealist's engagement with outdated and now-obsolete objects.²⁴⁴ Yet whereas Benjamin viewed this interest as an attempt to unlock the 'revolutionary energies' at work within these artefacts, Foster's interpretation is somewhat less optimistic.²⁴⁵ Rather, he argues, 'it may be more accurate (and less utopian) to say that the Surrealists registered the mnemonic signals encrypted in these structures – signals that might not otherwise have reached the present'.²⁴⁶ Whilst Foster does not explicitly mention the notion of afterlife, his understanding of the outmoded has certain similarities with Chowdhury's argument. Both address the difficulty of capturing something that risks being lost within the present. In Foster's case, however, this gesture not only functions as a type of preservation. It also serves as a 'nonsynchronous protest against the presentist totality of design culture'.²⁴⁷

By focusing on questions of decay and loss, such a framework offers an alternative standpoint from which to address *Maison Tropicale*. When viewed from this perspective, Ferreira's installation appears to show a history on the brink of disappearance. Given the actions of Touchaleaume and his contemporaries, on first encounter, such a statement might seem paradoxical. However, it is precisely because of their intervention that various forms of loss are visible within the afterlife of Prouvé's structures. As previously suggested,

²⁴² Aniruddha Chowdhury, 'Memory, Modernity, Repetition: Walter Benjamin's History', *Telos*, 138 (2008), 22-46 (p. 27).

²⁴³ See, for example, George Baker (ed.), 'Artist Questionnaire: 21 Responses', *October*, 100 (2002), 6-97.

²⁴⁴ Foster, 'This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse', p. 123-143.

²⁴⁵ In making this argument, Foster takes his lead from Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', trans. by Edmund Jephcott, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 207-221.

²⁴⁶ Foster, 'This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse', p. 139.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the decontextualisation and restoration of the houses obscured both the purposes for which they were initially intended and the physical changes which occurred following their abandonment. Consequently, to return to Chowdhury's formulation, there is a 'dialectic of forgetting and remembering' at work within the structures.²⁴⁸ Yet rather than attempting to stabilise this dialectic, Ferreira's project intensifies its contradictions. Although *Maison Tropicale* does attempt to preserve some aspects of the houses' structure, it does not attempt to monumentalise them or forestall their decay.²⁴⁹ Instead of producing an exact replica of Prouvé's Maisons Tropicales, Ferreira presents them in a disassembled, materially distinct form. Equally, whilst her work takes alludes to the history of French colonial rule, it does not address the topic directly. In this sense, it would be possible to view *Maison Tropicale* as an attempt to grasp the remnants of a fading history, whilst also reflecting upon the impossibility of such a task. But although such a reading reveals a central component of Ferreira's project, it also stems from a partial engagement with Benjamin's writings on afterlife and memory. Whilst the question of loss is a recurring theme within his work, this line of enquiry is counterbalanced with an interest in how the original is reformulated within the present. But what would it mean to read Ferreira's installation in these terms? And what understanding of memory would such an interpretation require?

A possible answer to these questions can be found in the work of Pierre Nora, editor of the multi-volume *Les Lieux de mémoire*.²⁵⁰ For Nora, memory is

²⁴⁸ Chowdhury, p. 27.

²⁴⁹ However, this is not the only link that exists between monument and memory. As Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin note, the two terms are also etymologically related: 'Memory derives from an Indo-Germanic root to which terms in Sanskrit are related. Hence the words are similar in European languages [...] The English 'monument' is from the Latin *monumentum* and has cognates in French, Italian and other Romance languages. The German *Denkmal*, with the root 'to think', is an exception to the pattern, although it has the same range of meanings as monument in other European languages'. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin, 'Introduction', in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 1-11 (p. 4).

²⁵⁰ Compiled between 1984 and 1992, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* contained 127 articles which Nora believed to be demonstrative of a unique historiographical consciousness which developed in France following its transition from a Catholic to a secular state in the late nineteenth century. Two condensed versions of the project were subsequently published in English: *Realms of Memory* (1996-1998), published by Columbia University Press and edited by Lawrence B. Kritzman, and *Rethinking France* (2001-2010), published by The University of Chicago Press and edited by David P. Jordan. Whilst both contained similar material, they adopted different structures. *Realms of Memory* sought to offer an overview of the entire project, producing three volumes which, for Nora, 'echoed the contours of memory itself': *Conflicts and Divisions*, *Traditions* and *Symbols*. *Rethinking France*, in contrast, chose to include articles which could be grouped thematically into four volumes: *The State*, *Space*, *Cultures and Traditions* and *Historiography*. For a more detailed discussion of Nora's project, its aims and its reception see Pierre Nora, 'General Introduction', in *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. by David P. Jordan and trans. by Mary Trouille, 4 vols (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1, pp. vii-xxii; Nancy Wood, 'Memory's Remains: *Les lieux de mémoire*', *History*

[...] live, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.²⁵¹

In many respects, Nora's formulation shares a number of characteristics with the definitions of memory proposed by Chowdhury and Foster. Most obviously, it makes recourse to a 'dialectic of remembering and forgetting'; a problematic addressed by both writers.²⁵² However, his argument also departs from their work in its understanding of the relationship between history and memory. Whereas the aforementioned accounts are premised on the possibility of a dialogue between the two terms, Nora's formulation places them in opposition; a gesture which stems from the work of Maurice Halbwachs.²⁵³ For Nora, history is archival. It seeks to reconstruct the past through an analysis of selected artefacts and key texts. Memory, in contrast, is symptomatic of disappearing communities that exist in an ongoing dialogue with their pasts but have little or no historical consciousness. Consequently, he argues, 'there are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory'.²⁵⁴ Or, to put it differently, because history has eradicated memory, it has become necessary to create spaces for it to develop as they no longer occur naturally. Although these sites most commonly take the form of anniversaries, celebrations and works of literature, the term *lieux de mémoire* is equally applicable to places, buildings and monuments.²⁵⁵ As a result, Nora's account does not privilege the view of memory as the trace or remnant of a fading history. Rather, he presents it as something that is, in certain respects, actively constructed within the present.

By adopting Nora's definition of memory, it is possible to view the afterlife of Prouvé's houses, not simply as a period of decline, but as a process of unfolding and reconstitution.

and *Memory*, 6 (1994), 123-51; Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 22-27.

²⁵¹ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24 (p. 8).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁵³ In *The Collective Memory* Halbwachs establishes an opposition between history and memory, describing the former as an over-simplified account of the past and likening the latter to a form of collective experience. When viewed from this perspective, memory serves to establish commonalities between groups of people, thereby foregrounding the similarities between their previous experiences and knowledge of physical spaces. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁵⁴ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 7.

²⁵⁵ Nora offers three examples to support this argument: the Panthéon, the Arc de Triomphe and the Wall of the Fédérés in Paris.

But although such an approach would appear to resonate with Benjamin's remarks on memory, it also has a number of deeply problematic implications. Both Nora's project and the discourse into which Prouvé's structures have been inserted, possess a predominantly national framework. Indeed, as Astrid Erll notes, *Les Lieux de mémoire* sought to offer an internationally applicable model for the construction (or reconstruction) of national memory.²⁵⁶ Rather than studying the place of memory in culture, it focuses upon the memories of a particular culture. As a result, the communities which Nora addresses are clearly demarcated by the boundaries of the French nation state. By cataloguing the various developments which have resulted in the formation of memory, his project functions as an 'inventory of the house of France'.²⁵⁷ Given their current status as a piece of French cultural heritage, it could be argued that a similar process of construction informs the afterlife of Prouvé's structures. When understood in these terms, Ferreira's installation addresses an object that has been used to produce a certain image of French identity – one of rationality, universality and civility. Needless to say, such a framework denies both the diversity of present day France and the various international forces which have shaped its identity. Moreover, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai notes, it also ignores France's status as a former colonial power.²⁵⁸ In many respects, Ferreira's decision to keep the houses in transit can be understood as a comment on their reinsertion into this narrative. As such, the implied destination of the structures is not simply the modernist canon, but a particular type of French identity; one produced in the present with reference to specific representations of the past. Obviously, Ferreira's aim is not to further this construction but to critique it. In order to fully comprehend the implications of this gesture, it is therefore necessary to return to the relationship between translation and the afterlife.

Before doing so, however, it is first necessary to acknowledge that whilst the translation departs (or issues) from the afterlife of the original, it by no means leaves it unchanged. At the heart of 'The Task of the Translator' lies a structural paradox: 'that a translation can never – however good it may be – signify anything for the original is evident [*leuchtet ein*]. Nevertheless, it stands in the most intimate connection to the original work. Indeed, this connection is all the more intimate for the fact that it [the translation] no longer signifies anything for the original'.²⁵⁹ In making this claim, Benjamin foregrounds the translation's

²⁵⁶ Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', *parallax*, 17.4 (2011), 4-18 (p. 6)

²⁵⁷ Pierre Nora as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁵⁸ Hue-Tam Ho Tai, 'Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory', *The American Historical Review*, 106.3 (2001), 906-922.

²⁵⁹ Benjamin as cited in Weber, p. 62. I have chosen to use Weber's translation here as it contains a nuance that is obscured in the previously cited version of 'The Task of the Translator'. Zohn's

departure from the original. However, it is precisely through this departure that their connection is sustained. For Weber, this paradox has a fairly simple explanation: the translation is necessary for the original to continue its life. Or, as Benjamin puts it, 'translation transports the original into a more definite linguistic realm'.²⁶⁰ However, in doing so, it also proclaims the inadequacy of the original. In other words, the original *needs* to be translated in order to secure its significance and, by extension, its perpetuity. Of course, this is not to suggest that translation should be simply viewed as an act of negation. Nevertheless, as Weber states, 'translation [...] grazes the original, touches it without taking hold, like the interlinear translation that runs parallel to the original text without ever merging or resembling it'.²⁶¹ As a result, the intimate connection between the translation and the original is defined by a process of departure and redefinition. Whilst the translation allows the original to continue its life, it also puts it to death.²⁶²

When viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see how *Maison Tropicale* adopts a polemical approach to the afterlife of Prouvé's houses without submitting them to a direct critique. On first encounter, Ferreira's installation could easily be described as innocuous or even uncritical. Rather than attacking or parodying Prouvé's structures, it simultaneously copies and departs from them. However, on viewing *Maison Tropicale*, our relationship to Prouvé's houses is immediately transformed. As a result of their twofold existence, it is no longer possible to view the structures as independent objects. Nor can it be suggested that they are somehow 'innocent'. In this respect, the original is haunted by the translation. By adopting this strategy, *Maison Tropicale* displaces Prouvé's houses from their original register, transforming them without changing their form. Unsurprisingly, it is difficult to describe the broader implications of this transformation. One thing that can be said, however, is that the structures are no longer stable, secure or self-identical. The aura of 'uniqueness' which previously defined them has now been lost. In this regard, Ferreira's installation delimits the futurity of Prouvé's Maisons Tropicale (or at least their status as

translation reads: 'It is evident that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Nonetheless, it does stand in the closest relationship to the original by virtue of the original's translatability; in fact, this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original.' Within this context, the use of the word 'importance' suggests that the original retains an absolute authority over the translation. When understood in these terms, the translation appears markedly less significant.

²⁶⁰ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 78.

²⁶¹ Weber, p. 94.

²⁶² Equally, the translation should not be understood as attempt to preserve of the work or grant it eternal life. To return once again to Weber: 'Translation transports the original into a sphere of limited reproducibility, in which it cannot live very long'. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

timeless or eternal).²⁶³ Although the houses have been granted a new life within the translation, they are ultimately forced into a process of decline. As a result, it is impossible for the forms of memory which accompany Prouvé's structures to acquire a solid foundation.

However, the destabilising relationship between departure and reconstitution is not the only effect of translation. For Benjamin, the transformations which occur in this process reveal a 'truth' about the original that would remain concealed within a mere imitation. He writes:

To grasp the genuine relationship between an original and a translation requires an investigation analogous in its intention to the argument by which a critique of cognition would have to prove the impossibility of a theory of imitation. In the latter, it is a question of showing that in cognition there could be no objectivity, not even a claim to it, if this were to consist in imitations of the real; in the former, one can demonstrate that no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original.²⁶⁴

As such, it is only through an active process of reconstitution that the truth of the original can be reached; a sentiment which also informs Benjamin's claim that 'genuine memory must [...] yield an image of the person who remembers'.²⁶⁵ However, this is not to suggest that the act of translation provides unmediated access to the original. Rather, he argues, it is the relationship between the two that reveals a greater truth; one which both parties aspire to without ever attaining. Here, Benjamin's argument is once again underpinned by the notion of 'pure language'; a category discussed in the previous section with reference to Osborne. For present purposes, however, it is necessary to depart from Osborne's reading and consider Benjamin's original account. Rather than describing a modernist futurity, for Benjamin, the notion of pure language alludes to a 'messianic end of [...] history' that is perpetually out of grasp.²⁶⁶ When understood in these terms, the relationship between translation and original opens up a void; an unknown space which can be alluded towards, but never strictly reached.

In order to bring this section to a conclusion, I want to suggest that the relationship between Prouvé's houses and Ferreira's installation opens up a similar space. However, this space is not simply the messianic futurity described by Benjamin, but the site of an

²⁶³ There are a number of similarities between this effect and the liquidation of aura that Benjamin attributed to technological reproducibility.

²⁶⁴ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 75.

²⁶⁵ Benjamin, 'Excavation and Memory', p. 576.

²⁶⁶ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 75.

underlying unease; an allusion to an unknown danger that neither project can adequately depict. I am, of course, referring to the place of the colonial, not strictly within *Maison Tropicale*, but rather in the dialogue between Ferreira's installation and Prouvé's structures. It is worth revisiting the contours of this relationship. First, *Maison Tropicale* engages with the afterlife of an object that has been removed from its colonial context, reinserted into the modernist canon and used to construct a particular form of 'French' identity. In doing so, the work foregrounds a type of loss, both by revealing an act of erasure and actively fragmenting the original. However, Ferreira's project cannot be simply understood as an attempt to capture a fleeting trace of Prouvé's houses. By departing from the original, the work also destabilises it without offering an alternative explanation for its existence. In this sense, a void opens up. The transformative relationship between the work and the original encourages us to speculate about a past (and a series of social relations) that ultimately remain beyond our grasp.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, I have sought to foreground the various implications of Ferreira's decision to remake Prouvé's houses. In order to achieve this, I began by examining the compositional structure of Ferreira's project, exploring its ambiguous position between Minimalist 'object' and modernist sculpture; a combination which challenged many of the categorical distinctions proposed within the existing literature on installation. The exception to this rule was 'Art and Objecthood'. On first encounter, the conflicts that Fried's essay staged, between modernism and Minimalism, offered a possible explanation for the contradictions at play within Ferreira's installation. However, in pursuing this line of enquiry, it was not my intention to suggest that *Maison Tropicale* should be viewed as an extension of the modernist formalism presented by Fried. Rather, I was interested in the distinction between presentness and presence that informs his work. In many respects, *Maison Tropicale* forces us to engage with both sides of this division. On the one hand, our experience of Ferreira's installation is necessarily one of duration. On the other, the work seems to allude towards another, overtly modernist form of time; one which is never strictly experienced as a part of our space. Given the problems of Fried's attempt to conceptualise this dynamic – which ultimately amount to a defence of medium specificity – I sought an alternative explanation. My enquiry was soon directed towards a consideration of how Ferreira's engagement with modernism might be thought with recourse to the category of translation. By drawing upon Benjamin's 'The Task of the

Translator', it was possible to see the temporal structures of modernism through a new framework; one informed by questions of futurity, travel and loss.

In pursuing these lines of enquiry, I hope to have demonstrated that Ferreira's decision to present the houses in transit has a strong (and deeply political) connection to the questions of translation and translatability. In *Maison Tropicale*, the topic of travel does not demonstrate an interest in globalisation, a form of cultural nomadism or what Bourriaud described as 'the journey form'. Nor can it be understood as a metaphor for translation. Rather, it is shown to be the *result* of translatability in the most concrete sense possible. To be more specific, Ferreira demonstrates that Prouvé's houses were brought back into a European context because they were translatable. As structures which could be attributed to a named author, they were inserted into the modernist canon and made legible within a specific form of memory. Ferreira demonstrates this process by transforming the houses into a modernist sculpture and pushing their futurity further. However, by foregrounding the appropriation of Prouvé's structures, her project also retains an implicit connection to a colonial history which has been obscured.

It is this unique combination of temporal structures which allows *Maison Tropicale* to resist the problem of presentism without making recourse to simplified notions of historical transparency or remembrance. Indeed, the sculptural component of Ferreira's installation does not engage directly with the Prouvé archive or the structures and relations for which his houses were originally intended. Of course, this is not to suggest that Ferreira is unaware of this history. Nevertheless, her installation stems from the afterlife of Prouvé's houses – that is, the form which they have acquired in the present. In doing so, Ferreira's project foregrounds the multiple temporalities which are at play within *Maison Tropicale*; whilst some are fading away, others are being constructed within the present. By adopting this strategy, her project demonstrates how the act of remaking continues the life of Prouvé's structures. At the same time, however, it by no means seeks to preserve them. As a result, both the installation and the original allude to an absent history; one which neither is able to adequately account for. It is through this gesture that the work opens up a space for thought and possible speculation. Needless to say, this void is not without its problems. Is it enough to simply allude towards this absence? In the case of Prouvé's houses, this question is tempered by the fact that the history in question is available should we choose to seek it out. But what happens when this is no longer possible?

Chapter 3: Untranslatability

Introduction

Between 2000 and 2007, the journey undertaken by Prouvé's houses was subject to considerable media coverage. The outcome was a series of headlines that ranged from the provocative – for example, 'Prefab Utopia ... For the Discerning Jungle Dweller' and 'Bullet Holes Extra' – to the purely descriptive.²⁶⁷ Yet despite their differing titles the content of these reports was markedly similar, comprising primarily of factual details with the occasional anecdote from Balazs or Touchaleaume. Whilst the similarities between these accounts can be attributed, at least in part, to the constraints of their authors' chosen format, even within the broader context of Prouvé scholarship the majority of engagements with Maison Tropicale have resulted in empirical studies. Of those interpretations which have chosen to pursue an alternative line of enquiry, the majority have centred upon the ethical implications of this re-contextualisation.²⁶⁸ Rather than returning to these debates, the second part of this thesis will focus on what was left behind – that is, the concrete base. Although there were a number of practical reasons for this abandonment, its removal would not have been impossible. Indeed, as part of Documenta 13, Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolás Goldberg had planned to move a 37,000 kg meteorite, 'El Chaco', from Gancedo in Argentina to Kassel (Fig. 55). Though the project was ultimately withdrawn from the exhibition, this was not for logistical reasons.²⁶⁹ As such, the decision not to transport Prouvé's base back to France raises a series of larger questions: What are the perceived material and aesthetic properties of concrete? Why does our perception of industrial

²⁶⁷ Amelia Gentleman, 'Bullet Holes Extra: A classic of modern design has been saved from squatters, snipers and the Congolese jungle', *Guardian*, 31 August 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/aug/31/architecture.regeneration>>; William L. Hamilton, 'From Africa to Queens Waterfront, a Modernist Gem on Sale to the Highest Bidder', *New York Times*, 16 May 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/16/nyregion/16house.html>>; Alice Rawthorn, 'Jean Prouvé's Maison Tropicale at design auction', *New York Times*, 20 May 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/18/style/18iht-design21.1.5772551.html>>; Rowan Moore, 'Prefab Utopia – For the Discerning Jungle Dweller', *London Evening Standard*, 6 February 2008 <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/arts/review-23435972-prefab-utopia---for-the-discerning-jungle-dweller.do>> [accessed 8 October 2014].

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Lydie Diakhaté, 'Museum Ethics, Missing Voices and the Case of the Tropical Houses', in *New Directions in Museum Ethics*, ed. by Janet Marstine, Alexander A. Bauer and Chelsea Haines (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 103-121.

²⁶⁹ Faivovich and Goldberg's installation, 'A Guide to Campo del Cielo', was withdrawn from Documenta 13 following an international campaign for aboriginal rights initiated by the Moqoit First Nation peoples. The correspondence which led to this decision can be viewed at: <<http://d13.documenta.de/#/research/research/view/el-chaco>> [accessed 5 October 2014].

materials differ according to their context and origin? Or, more specifically, why was the foundation of Prouvé's structure deemed to be untranslatable?

Before I attempt to answer these questions, I feel that it is necessary to offer some preliminary remarks on my use of the term 'untranslatable'. As I have previously noted, the practice of translation has been addressed by a number of writers including Benjamin, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Jacques Derrida and Mieke Bal. Though unique in their aims and methodologies, each of these figures offers a perspective on translation that highlights its potentialities but also acknowledges its pitfalls and limitations. Yet whilst arguably the sphere in which it is most prominent, the question of translation is no longer specific to literature. More broadly, it has also been evoked by a range of disciplines – including anthropology, cultural geography and, of course, art history – as a possible framework through which to undertake transhistorical or transcultural study and as a metaphor for travel. Given the diverse range of contexts in which discussions of translation can be found, on first encounter, it might appear counterintuitive to suggest that the untranslatable could be equally provocative. In its day-to-day usage, the term refers to words that either resist translation – for example, *polis* or *praxis* – or are frequently re- or mistranslated. However, in this chapter, I want to suggest that the figure of the untranslatable is not only controversial, but also raises a series of distinct questions. Nevertheless, I would like to state from the outset that I am not attempting to posit the untranslatable in opposition to translation. To do so, would be to ignore the contributions of numerous writers who have chosen to address the various nuances of translation, including the possibility of its failure.

Rather than attempting to address this body of literature in its entirety, Part II of this thesis will take its lead from the usage proposed by Emily Apter. Although Apter has addressed the question of the untranslatable on a number of occasions, her views on the topic are most clearly outlined within her writings on World Literature, a sub-division of Comparative Literature which first emerged during the mid-1990s. Distinct from the lower case (and often pluralised) world literatures – an overarching term which encompasses the diverse range of literary forms adopted by the world's languages – the project has a number of broader implications for both the academy and mainstream publishing. Though supportive of its attempts to deprovincialize the canon, Apter is also highly critical of a number of World Literature's central tenets, most notably, its 'reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability [and] celebration of nationally and ethnically

branded “differences” that have been niche-marketed as commercialised “identities”.²⁷⁰ Such practices, she argues, are not simply a by-product of the transnational flow of goods, people and ideas which characterises the global capitalist economy. They are also indicative of a desire ‘to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources’.²⁷¹ In short, Apter’s main critique of World Literature is that it assumes universal translatability. To counter this, she outlines a series of contexts in which the untranslatable appears within literary studies – including pedagogy, literary world-systems, theologies of translation and the question of authorial de-ownership – and considers the possible benefits of engaging with them.

As I have sought to demonstrate in Part I, the translatability of Prouvé’s houses has a fairly obvious origin: their capacity to inhabit the modernist canon. Of course, it would be inaccurate to suggest that *Maison Tropicale*’s entry into this narrative was straightforward. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the structures were largely unknown. Moreover, unlike other modernist architectural projects, the houses did not acquire a stable domestic or administrative use. Nevertheless, various aspects of Prouvé’s structures did conform to established modernist conventions: they embodied a certain notion of utopian living; they were constructed from glass and metal – materials which had acquired fairly stable ‘artistic’ connotations in both sculpture and architecture – and they were based upon a serial production method. But most importantly, they could be attributed to a twentieth century European author. In other words, Prouvé’s structures were assimilated to a clear and marketable discourse; one which allowed them to be made congruous with a host of other projects. For proof of this, we need only to consider their exhibition in the grounds of Tate Modern and subsequent acquisition by the Pompidou Centre. But why was the concrete base not considered to be part of this discourse?

In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to address the divisive and contradictory nature of concrete. This status is partly the result of its physical properties: fixed yet fluid, solid yet brittle, composite yet uniform. However, it can also be attributed to the variety of reactions that concrete provokes; a spectrum which ranges from contempt to veneration. Given the range of debates which surround it, concrete has few accepted characteristics beyond its technical composition and the history of its development. Whereas the reasons for the former are fairly self-explanatory, the latter stems from the wide-spread acknowledgement of a narrative which spans from the Roman discovery of

²⁷⁰ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 2.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

cement to the introduction of steel supports following the ‘rediscovery’ of concrete in the nineteenth century. Whilst it would be impossible to divorce concrete from these technical and historical considerations, a more useful standpoint from which to address Prouvé’s base can be found in the work of Adrian Forty. He writes:

Concrete has a metaphysics as well as a physics, an existence in the mind parallel to its existence in the world. It is the place this medium occupies in our heads that interests me more than its technical properties.²⁷²

Forty’s argument cuts to the heart of the social and cultural contradictions which surround concrete. Although such an enquiry could encompass a wide variety of issues, his explanation for these contradictions is considerably more focused: ‘Concrete is modern’.²⁷³ Such a proposal not only highlights the various ambivalences which surround concrete. It also seeks to position it alongside a host of twentieth century inventions – including the internal combustion engine, genetically modified crops and digital technologies – that have played a formative role in the development of capitalist society for better or worse. For Forty, it is this constant slippage between positive and negative which makes concrete modern. And on one level, it was perhaps the same set of contradictions which ultimately rendered the bases untranslatable, which stopped them from being assimilated into a clear and coherent narrative. Yet whilst keen to establish concrete’s modern status, Forty is equally quick to refute the suggestion that it is either ‘natural’ or ‘automatic’. Rather, he argues, concrete is always at risk of ‘slipping back into its craft and earthbound origins’ and ‘into the stock of traditional – for which read “static” – building processes’; a factor which may have also influenced the reception of Prouvé’s work.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, whichever way the base was received, it was never viewed as modernist. So why did this exclusion occur?

It was not, I want to argue, solely as a result of its physical composition. For a start, a diverse range of concrete structures have been assigned the label ‘modernist architecture’, including the Montreal housing complex Habitat 67, Le Corbusier’s Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh and Robin Hood Gardens by Alison and Peter Smithson (Fig. 56-58). Yet it would be equally contentious to suggest that the exclusion occurred because the base did not conform to the specificities of a particular medium. As an integral part of the design and construction of the house, it could easily be viewed as architectural. Similarly, given the diverse range of practices which have been classified as sculpture, it would not be

²⁷² Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion, 2012), p. 7.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

inconceivable for Prouvé's base to receive a similar treatment. Moving beyond traditional modernist categories, the readymade or 'non-art' object has been a common feature of artistic production throughout the twentieth century. Needless to say, this fact also complicates any attempt to suggest that the base was ignored as a result of value judgements. The answer, I believe, is that Prouvé's structure was deemed to be untranslatable for a number of geopolitical and political-aesthetic reasons. And it is precisely as a result of this, that it offers a number of insights into both the contradictions of art historical discourse and the legacies of colonialism. In this sense, following Apter, the base not only reveals something that would otherwise be concealed by the homogenising discourse of universal translatability. It also exposes the mechanisms which enable it to function.

As such, the aim of this chapter is to argue that the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* should be viewed as an attempt to interrogate these contradictions. At the very least, they are one of the few attempts to acknowledge the significance of Prouvé's base. Of course, this gesture can be understood in a number of ways. Firstly, by bringing something into view that would otherwise be invisible, they assign significance to an aspect of Prouvé's houses that had previously been deemed ephemeral; a characteristic which is frequently ascribed to the photographic medium more broadly. As John Szarkowski notes within his introduction to *The Photographer's Eye*:

Photography was easy, cheap and ubiquitous, and it recorded anything: shop windows and sod houses and family pets and steam engines and unimportant people. And once made objective and permanent, immortalized in a picture, these trivial things took on importance.²⁷⁵

Yet whilst Szarkowski's remarks offer a possible link between Ferreira's project and the larger question of photography's indifference to hierarchies of subject matter, they reveal very little about the type of significance that the work assigns to the base. Moreover, to adopt such an approach would be to present the images as illustrations of the presumed characteristics of the medium. Secondly, the photographs could also be understood as an attempt to preserve the base. Although such a gesture could be interpreted as philanthropic, it also risks reproducing the colonialist view of 'Africa'.²⁷⁶ In order to avoid these potential pitfalls, this line of enquiry will begin instead from the possibility of

²⁷⁵ John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 7.

²⁷⁶ This argument has been used by Touchaleaume on a number of occasions to justify his acquisition of the houses. See, for example, Steve Rose, 'House Hunting', *Guardian*, 7 February 2008 <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/feb/07/design>> [accessed on 9 August 2015].

positioning Ferreira alongside a number of other artists who have chosen to address the complex legacies of European colonial rule within their work.

In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation, these works sought to address the challenges of rebuilding the nation state; an approach exemplified by Paul Strand's images of Ghana (Fig. 59).²⁷⁷ More recently, however, a greater emphasis has been placed upon the ways in which the 'psychic scars and material traces of colonialism' continue to shape the present.²⁷⁸ Zarina Bhimji's *Yellow Patch*, for example, examines the traces left by Indian migrants following their expulsion from Uganda during the early years of the country's independence. In contrast, Renzo Martens' *Episode III (Enjoy Poverty)* stages an intervention in the various visual representations of poverty currently in circulation, thus foregrounding the structural causes of economic inequality and their role in the spread of neoliberal globalization.²⁷⁹ At present, the most substantial engagement with these practices can be found in T.J. Demos' *Return to the Postcolony*.²⁸⁰ By situating the work of the aforementioned artists, as well as that of Sven Augustijnen, Vincent Meessen and Pieter Hugo, in relation to a series of ongoing debates surrounding documentary practice, postcolonial globalisation and critical historiography, it offers an overview of the relationship between contemporary art and the postcolony whilst also acknowledging the diverse range of histories and geographies which inform this dialogue.

On first encounter, both the artists discussed by Demos and the questions which he foregrounds in relation to their work would appear to have little in common with Ferreira. Not only does their work differ in terms of medium, the questions which they raise about the legacies of colonialism are primarily, if not entirely, economic. Though it would be wrong to suggest that such questions are entirely absent from *Maison Tropicale*, it would be equally problematic to suggest that they are its sole focus. Yet despite their obvious differences, these works are united by a common characteristic: the decision to return to

²⁷⁷ Paul Strand and Basil Davidson, *Ghana: An African Portrait* (New York: Aperture Books, 1975).

²⁷⁸ T.J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 9.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10. These works can be viewed at:

<http://www.zarinabhimji.com/video_yellowpatch_part1.htm> and <<http://www.enjoypoverty.com/>> [accessed 9 August 2015].

²⁸⁰ See also Jan Bremen and Arvind N. Das, *Down and Out: Labouring Under Global Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Christopher Pinney, 'Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism, and Vernacular Modernism', in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. by Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 202-220; Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy (eds.), *Unfixed: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art* (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2011); Daniel Herwitz, *Heritage, Culture and Politics in the Postcolony* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

the postcolony.²⁸¹ Although the term ‘postcolony’ has a number of obvious connotations – including questions of violence and the continuing presence of dictatorial or failed states – for the purposes of this line of argument, I have chosen to focus on the interplay between the competing narratives which combine to form its history.²⁸² Beginning with an overview of Apter’s theory of untranslatability, the first section will outline the political stakes of the theoretical framework used in this chapter. Following on from this, the second section will argue that Ferreira’s photographs inhabit a contested position between the categories of subject and subjugation. Finally, the third section will explore the possibility of presenting Ferreira’s images as an intervention within this field. In pursuing these lines of enquiry, this chapter will offer a perspective on the postcolony that ‘encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias and swings, including European narratives and representations and African experiences and histories that intertwine and (in)determine each other’.²⁸³

The Politics of Untranslatability

Building upon my previous comments, this section will present a more detailed account of Apter’s understanding of untranslatability and its difficult relationship with World Literature. Conceived in response to the recurring claims of Eurocentrism within twentieth century literary studies, the discipline of World Literature first came to prominence during the mid-1990s. Propagated through a range of channels, including journals, conferences and edited collections, it not only sought to challenge these arguments, but also construct a framework through which to address the shift towards questions of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization that had occurred within the field. As I have previously suggested, whilst Apter is largely supportive of the project’s attempts to deprovincialize the canon, she is highly critical of its decision to endorse cultural equivalence, reify national identities and assume universal translatability. In order to establish the foundations of this chapter, the following commentary will address the stakes and influences of this debate.

²⁸¹ For footage of Ferreira’s journey, see *Maison Tropicale*, dir. by Manthia Diawara (Ka-Yelema Productions, 2008). Commissioned by the Portuguese Ministry of Culture/Institute of the Arts as an extension to Ferreira’s project, Diawara’s film received its premiere at the Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon, on 10 March 2008. It has subsequently been shown at a range of other venues including the eighth Dak’Art Biennial (9 May - 9 June 2008); Michael Stevenson, Cape Town (10 July - 23 August 2008) and the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (4 February - 29 March 2009).

²⁸² For a more detailed account of the origins of these connotations, see Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

²⁸³ Demos, p. 11.

Though the challenges posed by World Literature form the central focus of Apter's critique, the characteristics which she presents as its defining features – most notably, the decision to adopt 'a logic of all-inclusiveness' – can also be found in other forms of literary analysis.²⁸⁴ Within *Death of a Discipline*, for example, Spivak evokes the term 'planetary' (as opposed to 'global' or 'international') in an attempt to circumvent the negative effects of globalisation.²⁸⁵ Likewise, Literary World Systems, when defined with reference to the work of Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, offers a framework for the study of literature that takes 'networks of cultural circulation, literary markets and genre translation' as its central focus.²⁸⁶ Yet whilst arguably the sphere in which it is most prominent, this characteristic is not specific to forms of analysis which seek to encompass a wide variety of languages and literary genres. It has also served as a starting point from which to address the development and proliferation of individual languages – for example, the responses to Francophone literature which emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Whereas the World Republic of Letters sought to promote a Francocentric notion of universal excellence, the writers' movement *Littérature-monde* chose to direct its attention towards the liberation of the French language from its longstanding ties to colonialism.²⁸⁷ Despite differing in their aims and emphasis, each of these projects shares a common goal: the creation of 'a series of fluctuating, relational and unbounded language worlds'.²⁸⁸ But although these initiatives have been praised for their attempts to expand the scope of literary comparison, they have also been subject to criticism, for Apter, they can also be characterised by their inability to prevent the establishment (and subsequent reproduction) of neoimperialist cartographies.²⁸⁹

Although Apter is undeniably critical of these practices, it would be wrong to present her standpoint as one of outright denunciation. In addition to acknowledging its attempts to deprovincialize the canon, her praise for World Literature also extends to the manner in which it 'draws upon translation to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes from [seemingly]

²⁸⁴ Emily Apter, 'Untranslatables: A World System', *New Literary History*, 39.3 (2008), 581-598 (p. 582).

²⁸⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 71-73.

²⁸⁶ Apter, 'Untranslatables', p. 582.

²⁸⁷ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M.B. De Bevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). For an overview of the various debates provoked by *Littérature-monde*, see Lauren Elkin, 'The End of Francophonie: The Politics of French Literature', *The White Review*, 2 (2011) <<http://www.thewhitereview.org/features/the-end-of-francophonie-the-politics-of-french-literature-2/>> [accessed 27 December 2014]

²⁸⁸ Apter, 'Untranslatables', p. 583.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

inaccessible linguistic folds'.²⁹⁰ As such, rather than denouncing the project in its entirety, her misgivings stem from its pursuit of a much more specific goal: the desire to achieve universal translatability. Though this objective is identifiable within a number of anthologies and edited collections, its consequences, she argues, are particularly visible in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Compiled by Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, the volume claims to offer a comprehensive overview of the developments which have occurred within the discipline since its emergence in the 1990s. Beginning with an overview of the work of number of key figures, from Goethe and Edward Said to Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, the following sections of the project are structured around a series of geographical, theoretical and disciplinary themes including globalisation, Creole cosmopolitics and the development of the novel. Whilst the desire to offer comprehensive overview of the discipline could easily be presented as evidence of the project's rigour, by virtue of its status as a monolingual anthology such a gesture also risks disregarding a host of cultural and linguistic specificities in order to do so; a decision which has broader implications for a number of fields of study. Indeed, as D'Haen and his co-authors note, 'translation studies, literary theory, postcolonial and area studies, and comparative literature as a whole are all subject to rethinking and reframing in light of these debates'.²⁹¹ It is against this backdrop that Apter introduces the question of untranslatability.

On first encounter, Apter's formulation would appear to share a number of common characteristics with Benjamin's notion of translatability. In addition to their shared use of the suffix '-ability', both terms are premised on the belief that the majority of texts selected for translation are in possession of a 'specific significance'; an inherent quality which cannot be communicated through language alone.²⁹² Though these ambiguities could easily be presented as characteristics of the original text, for both authors, they stem 'not so much from its [the text's] life but rather from its afterlife'; a perspective which stands in stark contrast to the seemingly apodictic tone adopted by D'Haen and his co-authors.²⁹³ It is this emphasis on the precarious nature of translation – but also language more broadly – which informs the project's central goal: 'to mobilise [...] theoretical (un)translatability for theoretical and curricular ventures in literary comparison that aim for geopolitical

²⁹⁰ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 3.

²⁹¹ Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, 'Preface: *Weltliteratur, littérature universelle, vishwa sahitya*', in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. xvii-xxi (p. xviii).

²⁹² Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 72.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

specificity and theoretical reach against the grain of aesthetic comparison'.²⁹⁴ But although there are a number of points of overlap between their arguments, Apter's formulation is not specifically Benjaminian. It also makes reference to a series of other writers who have chosen to address the figure of the untranslatable within their work, including Derrida, Barbara Johnson and Édouard Glissant.²⁹⁵ In addition to demonstrating the origins of her argument, such a gesture also seeks to reinforce untranslatability's status as a critically useful concept with implications for a range of topics, from the various shibboleths found at borders, boundaries and other liminal spaces to the cosmological, theological and ethical questions which accompany the notion of worldliness. The outcome is a model for the study of literature that does not simply seek to posit the untranslatable in opposition to the always translatable ('rightly suspect as just another [...] form of the Romantic Absolute, or fetish of the Other, or myth of hermeneutic inaccessibility'), but rather present it as a creative form of failure with a range possible of usages.²⁹⁶

In addition to these sources, the project is also firmly grounded in the *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies: Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* (known hereafter as the *Vocabulary*); a multi-lingual, co-authored volume edited by Barbara Cassin.²⁹⁷ Though comprised primarily of detailed entries on 'untranslatable' terms – both in ancient and modern languages – and their vernacular equivalents, the *Vocabulary* also contains notes on the development of individual languages; a series of short essays on the project's broader goals and discussions of the various themes which run throughout the main body of the text. The outcome is a 'unique experiment in plurilingual analysis' that takes its lead from the challenges posed by 'native tongues and alphabets'.²⁹⁸ Although it departs from the traditional structure of the philosophical lexicon, it would be wrong to suggest that Cassin's project is without precedent. As Howard Caygill notes, the broader aims of the *Vocabulary* could easily be likened to those of medieval *Summa* or Bayle's *Dictionnaire histories et critique*, both in terms of the scale of its ambitions and the diverse range of

²⁹⁴ Apter, 'Untranslatables', p. 584.

²⁹⁵ See, for example, Jacques Derrida 'Living On', trans. by James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, 3rd edn (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 62-142; Barbara Johnson, *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Édouard Glissant, 'Beyond Babel', *World Literature Today*, 63.4 (1989), 561-564.

²⁹⁶ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 20.

²⁹⁷ Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies: Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004). The project has subsequently been published in English as Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, trans. by Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014)

²⁹⁸ Apter, 'Untranslatables', p. 585.

strategies which it adopts in order to fulfil them. By drawing a series of unexpected parallels ‘between existing problems and traditions of philosophy’ and ‘philosophy and its “non-philosophical” others’, the *Vocabulary* seeks to present itself as an authority on the discipline’s past whilst also suggesting possible directions for future study.²⁹⁹ In doing so, however, it also reveals a second goal: to reaffirm the importance of ‘beginning not with the meaning of words but [rather] with their tasks’.³⁰⁰

For Osborne, the benefits of such an approach are twofold. First, by including terms from a range of languages, the project serves to highlight the linguistic plurality of the European philosophical tradition. And secondly, by adopting French as its metalanguage, it reinforces ‘the conceptual differences between languages, not in a pure form, but via a fractured history of translation through which European philosophies have been translated’.³⁰¹ The outcome is a standpoint that is simultaneously dialectical and self-avowedly paradoxical. In order to foreground this contradiction, Osborne continues, Cassin and her co-authors employ a number of distinct strategies: the use of multiple languages within each of the volume’s entries; a renewed interest in the relationship between translation and ‘foreignization’ and the use of a thematic – as opposed to a fixed or literal – definition of translation. Yet, despite their recurring presence throughout the text, these are not the only occasions upon which this paradox manifests itself. It is also visible in the project’s subtitle: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*. Though the use of multiple languages can be viewed as an acknowledgment of the ‘conceptually elementary’ nature of language, this line of argument must also be reconciled with the fact that each of the terms included in the project has been individually selected for translation. Nevertheless, Osborne argues, there is much to be gained from these incongruities. When combined, he concludes, they offer a perspective on the untranslatable that not only serves to reinforce the precarious nature of translation. It also dispels the myths of purity and singularity that accompany certain languages.³⁰²

Although Apter does acknowledge a number of the points raised by Caygill and Osborne, her engagement with the *Vocabulary* takes its lead from Cassin’s own ‘more geopolitically attuned’ view of the project – that is, as a ‘cartography of philosophical differences’ which

²⁹⁹ Howard Caygill, ‘From *Abstraction* to *Wunsch*: The *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies*’, *Radical Philosophy*, 138 (2006), 10-14 (p. 10).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰¹ Peter Osborne, ‘Dossier: Vocabulary of European Philosophies, Part 1’, *Radical Philosophy*, 138 (2006), 9-10 (p. 9).

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

embraces the critical potential of mistranslation.³⁰³ It is this standpoint which ultimately informs her project's central thesis: 'translation and untranslatability are constitutive of world forms of literature'.³⁰⁴ In order to unpack the implications of this proposal, Apter's argument proceeds with reference to a single literary genre: the world novel. Though applicable to a host of other works, the term 'world novel', she argues, is epitomised by Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; a text which foregrounds the challenges of translation – and, by extension, the relevance of untranslatability – through its use of multiple languages. By combining passages of French and German with Russian colloquialisms and a series of seemingly mistranslated excerpts, Tolstoy's novel not only highlights the enduring presence of untranslatable terms and phrases within literature. It also assigns them a series of metafunctions. Given the range of languages and dialects found throughout *War and Peace*, any engagement with Tolstoy's novel immediately raises the question of whether or not an accurate translation might even be possible. But although Apter's analysis does acknowledge these limitations, her reasons for addressing *War and Peace* extend beyond this point. Whilst the historical accuracy of Tolstoy's novel has been challenged by a number of writers, its approach to language raises a number of alternative lines of enquiry.³⁰⁵ By forcing the reader to reconcile the linguistic specificities of its fictional landscape with the realities of nineteenth century Russia, the text not only foregrounds the role of heteroglossia in the establishment of social relations and their accompanying hierarchies. It also highlights the various channels through which these relations are made manifest.³⁰⁶ Despite their obvious implications for our understanding of *War and Peace*, there are other reasons for foregrounding these characteristics. For Apter, Tolstoy's novel can also be viewed as a precursor for the ever-increasing body of literature which circulates the world in multiple languages. As a result, it raises the question of what a literary studies premised upon untranslatability might look like. The answer, Apter suggests, is an approach to literature which attempts to marry the linguistic pluralism inherent to translation with an acknowledgment of the various forms of singularity which exist amongst the world's languages.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Apter, 'Untranslatables', p. 585.

³⁰⁴ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 16.

³⁰⁵ See, for example, Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 97-100.

³⁰⁶ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 17.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The Subjugation of the Subject

Taken in Niamey and Brazzaville during April 2007, the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* share a number of common characteristics. All eight images are shot in colour, measure 120 x 150 cm and adopt a landscape format. Displayed without frames or any explanatory information (apart from their location and a number), they offer a glimpse into life on the sites where Prouvé's houses previously stood. However, their two distinct locations also give rise to a number of differences. Framed by trees and low walls, the images of Niamey depict the concrete base: cracked, occupied by goats and littered with debris. Surrounding it are a handful of temporary structures, constructed from sticks and straw mats by their Tuareg inhabitants.³⁰⁸ Shot from a series of different vantage points, the photos allude to Ferreira's movement within and around the space. In contrast, the Brazzaville photographs bare little trace of the area's former occupants. Instead they show a paint shop, the interior of a deserted bar, two corrugated metal roofs and a yard filled with plants, paint cans and a makeshift ladder. Primarily taken from above, these images provide less of an indication as to the movements of the photographer. By addressing a wide variety of subjects, they offer an insight into the changing face of the Congolese landscape.

Though the photographs of Brazzaville raise a number of interesting questions about the architectural legacies of colonial rule, this section will focus primarily on those taken in Niamey. More specifically, it will consider the implications of Ferreira's decision to bring the concrete base to the fore. Of course, this is not to suggest that all other references to the structure have been removed from the images. Traces of the intersecting walls, railings and ceramic floor tiles are clearly imprinted within the concrete. Ultimately, however, Ferreira's images allow the base to finally emerge from beneath Prouvé's prototype, literally and metaphorically. In doing so, they not only raise the question of whether or not the base should continue to be viewed as part of the house. They also foreground the possibility of presenting it as a distinct man-made object; one produced by an unknown individual or group. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the relationship between producer and object, this section will address the challenges of adopting such an approach. My reasons for doing so are twofold. First (and perhaps most obviously), Ferreira's photographs are not portraits. And secondly, they lack the necessary arrangement of personal objects that

³⁰⁸ For a history of the Tuareg peoples in Niamey, see Thomas K. Seligman and Kristyne Loughran (eds.) *Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 2006).

would allow them to be read as illustrations of a conscious will or expressions of individual taste; a line of enquiry which was previously proposed by Jacques Rancière in response to the dilapidated domestic interiors of James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Fig. 60).³⁰⁹ In short, the Niamey images do not possess an identifiable human subject. In order to examine the implications of this absence, it will be my claim that the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* require an alternative perspective on the category of the subject

Although the subject holds a prominent place within Western philosophy, this line of enquiry will take its lead from the usage proposed by Étienne Balibar. Departing from ideas of self-reflexive consciousness which have characterised Western philosophy since Descartes, Balibar's recent writings offer a perspective on the subject that foregrounds its translational history. By highlighting the various shifts in meaning which have occurred throughout the term's usage, they not only reinforce the difficulty of assigning it a fixed definition, but also reveal the presence of a second, conflicting narrative; one premised on questions of subjection and degradation.³¹⁰ Whilst these insights can be found elsewhere in Balibar's oeuvre, they are particularly visible in his collaboration with Barbara Cassin and Alain de Libera.³¹¹ For Balibar and his co-authors, the majority of engagements with the subject can be assigned to one of three broad groupings: subjectness, subjectivity or subjection. Rather than presenting these categories as distinct entities, their argument proceeds from the standpoint that there are a number of points of overlap between them. By examining the various combinations of these terms which are currently in circulation, Balibar, Cassin and de Libera demonstrate how their make-up differs according to the language in question. In doing so, they also foreground the fact that the majority of these usages are historically and culturally specific. The outcome is a perspective on the subject that reaffirms its status as an untranslatable term.

Though it is not my intention to examine the nuances of the subject's translational history, I am interested in the geopolitical questions which these disparities raise and their

³⁰⁹ James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*, 7th edn (New York: Ballantine Press, 1974); Jacques Rancière, 'The Pensive Image', in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 107-131.

³¹⁰ Osborne, 'Dossier', p. 9.

³¹¹ Étienne Balibar, 'Citizen-Subject', in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 33-57; Étienne Balibar, "'Rights of Man" and "Rights of the Citizen": The Modern Dialectic of Equality and Freedom', in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 39-60; Étienne Balibar, 'New Reflections on Equaliberty: Two Lessons', in *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. by James Ingram (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 99-131; Étienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin and Alain de Libera, 'Subject', trans. by David Massey, *Radical Philosophy*, 136 (2006), 15-41.

implications for the distribution of knowledge more broadly. In order to pursue these lines of enquiry, I want to consider the implications of presenting Ferreira's images as the site of a subject-object relationship; a designation which is simultaneously improbable and self-evident. Taking its lead from a series of photographic traditions which address the depopulated urban landscape, this section will begin by examining the various ambiguities which underpin Ferreira's shots. By tracing the slippage between documentary evidence and photographic 'art' at play within these traditions, it will explore the social and political effects of removing the human subject. Building upon this line of argument, the section will then consider how the concrete 'object' depicted in Ferreira's photographs allows us to rethink the status of the subject-object couplet within art history and philosophy. This will lead on to an enquiry into the different articulations of the term 'subject' which emerged from French colonial policy and the political implications of Ferreira's decision to bring them into dialogue.

Before I do so, however, I would like to begin with some qualifications. In adopting these lines of enquiry, I am not attempting to construct a definition of the subject that corresponds solely to the challenges posed by Ferreira's photographs. Nor do I intend to suggest that the term has a variety of usages and should therefore be viewed as amorphous or simply open to interpretation. Rather, by addressing a series of moments at which the subject's parallel histories intersect and diverge, I hope to foreground some of the complexities and contradictions which emerge from these points of overlap. As a result, this section will not only seek to address the possibility of presenting these opacities as a framework through which to interrogate the underlying power dynamics at play within Ferreira's images. It will also consider their wider implications for the legal, political and economic structures which underpinned French colonial rule.

i. Ambiguous Images

On first encounter, there would appear to be very little to say about Ferreira's photographs. Devoid of incident, repetitive and centred upon a seemingly non-descript object, they possess many of the characteristics which would allow them to be described as prosaic or even 'artless'. Yet on closer examination, these characteristics are somewhat less limiting than they might first appear. Indeed, if anything, it is precisely this banality which makes the images worthy of study. In addition to foregrounding the divisive nature of industrial debris, they also raise the possibility of positioning Ferreira's work alongside a series of other artists who have chosen to address the broader social and cultural resonances of the

outwardly mundane; a list which includes Dan Graham, Ed Ruscha and Robert Adams (Fig. 61-63). Taking its lead from these points of reference, this section will address the difficulties of viewing Ferreira's photographs as both art and evidence. In doing so, it will not only consider how this ambiguity functions within her images, but also what it reveals about their chosen subject matter.

In January 1975, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape* opened at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. Curated by William Jenkins, the exhibition featured the work of ten artists – including Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal and Bernd and Hilla Becher – all of whom had chosen to address the topic of vernacular architecture within their work (Fig. 64-66).³¹² Departing from the bucolic landscapes of Ansel Adams and Alfred Stieglitz, each of the photographers included in *New Topographics* sought to offer an insight into the ever-changing relationship between man and nature (Fig. 67-68). By documenting the impact of various architectural interventions on the American landscape, namely trailer parks, shopping centres and vast areas of suburban sprawl, they offered a perspective on landscape photography that eschewed the long established tropes of the beautiful and the picturesque in favour of the uniform, the bleak and the seemingly banal; a decision which ultimately proved to be pervasive.³¹³ Following the opening of Jenkins' exhibition, a number of other projects which sought to address similar themes quickly began to emerge. In 1981, the Sierra Club, a San Francisco-based environmental organisation, published the first

³¹² Following its initial showing, Jenkins' exhibition was restaged at a number of venues. In 1981, under the curatorship of Paul Graham and Jem Southam, a reduced version of *New Topographies* was shown at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. A further restaging was held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) between 25 October 2009 and 3 January 2010. Like the Arnolfini exhibition, it did not feature all of the work displayed at George Eastman House. However, each of the original participants was represented in some way. To contextualise Jenkins' project for the visitor, the exhibition also included a series of Ed Ruscha's publications, Robert Smithson's *Monuments of Passaic* (1967), photocopies of Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966) and excerpts from Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1977). In an attempt to acknowledge the recent developments in landscape photography, LACMA also commissioned two landscans of the Houston Petrochemical Corridor and the South Belridge Old Field in Kern County, California, from the Centre for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI). The exhibition then travelled to a number of other venues including the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam and the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. For further information on the LACMA exhibition and the decision to include CLUI's work, see: <<http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/new-topographics-photographs-man-altered-landscape>> and <<http://clui.org/newsletter/spring-2010/clui-landscans-lacma>> respectively [accessed 15 October 2014].

³¹³ This is not to suggest, however, that Jenkins believed his exhibition to be inaugural. Rather, he argued, the origins of this shift lay in the work of Ed Ruscha, specifically his 1963 photo series *Twenty Six Gasoline Stations*. William Jenkins, 'Introduction', in *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, 1975), pp. 5-7 (p. 5).

English language translation of *Dead Tech: A Guide to the Archaeology of Tomorrow*.³¹⁴ Structured around a series of broad categories – including military ruins, disused harbours and abandoned steelworks – the project combined black-and-white images by Manfred Hamm with a handful of short texts by Rolf Steinberg. The outcome was ‘a polemical photographic essay on the economic and aesthetic costs of industrial waste’.³¹⁵ More recently, this relationship has also been addressed by Edward Burtynsky. Premised on a dialogue ‘between attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear’, Burtynsky’s oeuvre offers an insight into the transformative nature of industry by combining photographs of industrial waste with more explicit images of environmental degradation, from tyre yards in Northern California to the SOCAR oil fields in Baku, Azerbaijan (Fig. 69-70).³¹⁶ For Marnin Young, Burtynsky’s images not only function as a challenge to the enduring view of landscapes as pristine or untouchable; by highlighting the rapid pace at which these developments have occurred, they also foreground the ‘ever-increasing difficulty in distinguishing between natural and man-made environments’.³¹⁷

In many respects, *Dead Tech* and Burtynsky would appear to be considerably more forthright in their aims than the *New Topographics* photographers. When set against a backdrop of scientific reports on ozone depletion, acid rain and global warming and a series of high-profile environmental disasters, including Three Mile Island, Bhopal and Chernobyl, their work could easily be viewed as the product of an increased level of environmental awareness that emerged during the early 1980s.³¹⁸ But although these concerns are clearly visible within Burtynsky’s work, they are more directly applicable to *Dead Tech*. By openly voicing their distaste for the ongoing degradation of the built environment, Steinberg and Hamm not only sought to problematize the economic factors which had resulted in these changes. They actively opposed them. Burtynsky’s oeuvre, in contrast, is markedly more ambivalent, attempting to ‘provoke an intelligent conversation’ rather than making an explicitly environmentalist statement.³¹⁹ In recent years, this political hesitancy has resulted in his work being described as a form of ‘deadpan’ photography; a characterisation which

³¹⁴ Rolf Steinberg and Manfred Hamm, *Dead Tech: A Guide to the Archaeology of Tomorrow* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1981).

³¹⁵ Deborah Bright, ‘The Machine in the Garden Revisited: American Environmentalism and Photographic Aesthetics’, *Art Journal*, 51.2 (1992), 60-71 (p. 66).

³¹⁶ Edward Burtynsky, ‘Exploring the Residual Landscape’ <http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/site_contents/About/introAbout.html> [accessed 14 January 2015] (para. 1 of 2)

³¹⁷ Marnin Young, ‘Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky’, *Afterimage*, 30.6 (2003), 8-9 (p. 8).

³¹⁸ Bright, p. 66.

³¹⁹ Canadian International Council, ‘Edward Burtynsky: On Manufactured Landscapes’, 10 October 2010 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FveTzZfEZuQ>> [accessed on 14 March 2015]

has also been extended to figures such as Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer and Thomas Struth (Fig. 71-73).³²⁰ However, it has a much longer history. Within his introduction to the *New Topographics* catalogue, Jenkins presents the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher as an example of 'historical analysis without [...] conclusion'.³²¹ By combining their work with a series of other images that were also ostensibly free from judgment, his exhibition sought to offer a perspective on documentary photography that was 'anthropological rather than critical, scientific rather than artistic'.³²² The outcome was a new approach to photography that privileged stylistic questions, description and anonymity. Yet despite their obvious differences, there are also a number of points of overlap between these case studies. Indeed, as Deborah Bright notes, 'each of the projects turned the old nature story – the idea that nature existed outside of civilization as a refuge from its corruptions – on its head'.³²³

Given their choice of subject matter, Ferreira's images could also be read in a similar manner. By highlighting the various ways in which Prouvé's base has left an indelible mark on the Niamey landscape, they not only raise a series of questions about the environmental implications of colonial rule. In doing so, they also foreground the possibility of viewing the platform as type of industrial waste. Yet whilst such a proposal offers a possible link between Ferreira's photographs and the work of her peers, it also risks conflating the base with a host of much more damaging environmental phenomena. Moreover, by depicting the various usages for which Prouvé's structure and the surrounding area have been repurposed, the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* could easily be presented as images of recycling. In spite of these differences, however, it would be equally problematic to suggest that Ferreira's images are entirely distinct from those of her contemporaries and precursors. Although they are not shot from the rigid, seemingly neutral position which characterises the work of the Bechers, they do avoid making an explicit statement about the base through their use of multiple camera angles. Furthermore, whilst Ferreira would appear not to have 'cleaned up' or stylised her photographs in the manner of Burtynsky and Gursky, it would be wrong to suggest that her images are simply snapshots. Like the work of the *New Topographics* photographers and their followers, they also possess a strong formal component. By combining distinct bands

³²⁰ Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 3rd edn (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), pp. 81-113.

³²¹ Jenkins, p. 7.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³²³ Bright, p. 66.

of colour with strong intersecting lines and geometric shapes, Ferreira's images bear a certain resemblance to the compositional order pioneered by the Düsseldorf School; a comparison which is further reinforced by their use of repetition. By bringing together these characteristics, they foreground a series of tensions between the formal picture and the document, the political and the neutral.

However, these are not the only factors which have contributed to this ambivalence. It can also be attributed to another aspect of Ferreira's images: their lack of a visible subject; an absence which offers a further point of comparison with the photographers of the *New Topographics*. For Allan Sekula, it is this characteristic which allows the photograph to mutate into a type of formalist image. Though identifiable in a number of other works, it is particularly visible, he argues, in Lewis Baltz's 1974 photo series *New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California* (Fig. 74). Sekula writes:

These 'photographs of a man-altered landscape' derive their ambiguity precisely from the absence of a human figure [...] In the case of Baltz, a depopulated industrial environment provides the source for photographs that often seem to aspire to a kinship with late-Modernist abstract painting.³²⁴

Whilst Sekula's remarks offer a possible explanation for the challenges posed by Baltz's images, the assumptions which underpin his photographs have much a longer history; one in which they are granted a different significance. As Benjamin argues, one of the first photographers to depict the depopulated landscape was Eugène Atget. Combining images of courtyards and shop fronts with details of historic buildings and monuments, Atget's images offer a window onto the streets of 'Old Paris' (Fig. 75-76). By comparing his deserted landscapes to the 'scenes of a crime', Benjamin not only raises the possibility of viewing Atget's shots as 'evidence for historical occurrences'.³²⁵ He also suggests that they have 'a hidden political significance'.³²⁶ In addition to highlighting the presence of these characteristics, Benjamin's remarks are also indicative of a broader goal: to draw a distinction between Atget's images and the photographic portrait. Whereas the portrait depicts an individual subject and is experienced through a process of contemplation, the depopulated image provokes the audience to reflect upon a hidden event or occurrence; an

³²⁴ Allan Sekula, 'School is a Factory (On the Politics of Education and the Traffic in Photographs)', in *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972-1996* (Normal: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999), pp. 139-147 (pp. 146-147).

³²⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn and ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-244 (p. 220).

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

act which is implicitly collective. Through this process of allusion, Benjamin concludes, the deserted image becomes a portal to a different time and place.

A similar argument could also be made about Ferreira's images. By providing the viewer with an insight into France's colonial past, they raise a series of questions about the concealed hierarchies which enabled it to function. Yet rather than interspersing her shots with archival material or inserting them into a narrative sequence, Ferreira asks the viewer to consider the significance of this absence. By adopting this strategy, her photographs not only draw attention to the contested origins of the base, they also reinforce the fact that the identities of the individuals who produced it remain unknown. In this sense, they allude to the difficulties which surround any attempt to reinstate unfamiliar events or marginalised figures into history. Had Ferreira attempted to perform such a gesture, her work would be unable to account for the various purposes for which history is written and by whom.³²⁷ Although these opacities prevent Ferreira's shots from functioning as a window on to the past, they challenge the viewer to consider how else these events might be made visible.

On first encounter, Benjamin's remarks would appear to contradict the analysis offered by Sekula. However, the two texts also share a number of common characteristics. For Sekula, the ambivalence of Baltz's images is closely entwined with the invisibility, yet ultimate necessity of a collective labour force.³²⁸ Equally, by foregrounding the heavily stylised nature of Atget's photographs, Benjamin's analysis identifies a number of parallels between his shots and the more 'artistic' images of the Surrealists; a gesture which prevents them from being read as simply clinical or forensic.³²⁹ In addition to demonstrating that the arguments advanced by Benjamin and Sekula are not as distinct as they might first appear, these points of overlap also raise a series of further questions: Under what circumstances does the image function as evidence? What prevents it from being read in solely formal terms? In order to address these points, Benjamin makes recourse to a now-infamous passage by Bertolt Brecht. However, in doing so, he also grants it an additional complication:

A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification

³²⁷ For a discussion of the broader implications this gesture, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 202-208.

³²⁸ Sekula, 'School is a Factory', p. 147.

³²⁹ For a more detailed account of this relationship see Dana McFarlane, 'Photography at the Threshold: Atget, Benjamin and Surrealism', *History of Photography*, 34.1 (2010), 17-28.

of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial, posed.³³⁰

For Brecht, the aforementioned ambivalence is not simply produced by the photograph, but also reality itself. As a result, Benjamin argues, it is only through the artificial arrangement of formal components – a practice epitomised by John Heartfield’s photomontages – or the use of detailed captions that the photograph can function as a type of ‘evidence’ of human social relations. Given the minimal content of their captions and relative lack of photographic staging, it would appear that Ferreira’s images are unable to perform the explicit critical (and de-reifying) work proposed by Benjamin and Brecht.³³¹ But to what extent might this absence also be seen as a form of construction? Considering the exploitative conditions in which the base was produced, it would be inappropriate to pierce the reified ‘surface’ in order to construct an explicit or positive image of the labour force; a standpoint exemplified by Lewis Hine’s *Men at Work* or the photographs of Sebastião Salgado (Fig. 77-78).³³² By focusing upon notions of productiveness and ‘human dignity’, such an approach risks concealing or even denying the injustices of the labour process.³³³ Consequently, as Sekula argues, a negative image of labour might be the only possible way to depict a situation in which the labourer does not receive full remuneration for their work; a statement which, despite being formed in the context of neo-liberal capitalism, is equally relevant to the social relations at play in Ferreira’s images.³³⁴ Given that there is little else to guide our reading of these shots, to what extent might it be possible to identify these relations within the reified object – that is, the concrete itself?

ii. Material Traces

Simultaneously totalizing and fragmentary, Ferreira’s photographs embody a host of contradictions. On the one hand, they demonstrate the impossibility of capturing the base

³³⁰ Bertolt Brecht as quoted in Walter Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2, 1931-1934*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2005), pp. 507- 530 (p. 526).

³³¹ Like Benjamin, Brecht also championed the critical potential of the caption. In his 1955 project *War Primer*, for example, he captioned a series of magazine cuttings with his own critical comments, challenging the passive consumption of images and forcing the viewer to examine their ideological content. Bertolt Brecht, *War Primer*, trans. and ed. by John Willett (London: Libris, 1998).

³³² Lewis Hine, *Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Men and Machines*, 2nd edn (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

³³³ Debra Risberg, ‘Imaginary Economies: An Interview with Allan Sekula’, in Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972-1996* (Normal: University Galleries of Illinois State University, 1999), pp. 235-251 (p. 243).

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

within a single image. On the other, they focus in on the concrete, bringing its material properties squarely into view. In addition to reinforcing the size of the base, such an approach also provides an opportunity to reflect upon its physical qualities – its lines and contours, crevices and fissures. Although there is much to be gained from addressing these characteristics individually, together they raise the possibility of presenting Ferreira’s images as a site in which the material properties of concrete and the architectural legacies of French colonial rule are brought into dialogue. As such, it will be my aim to demonstrate how this meeting foregrounds certain tensions within the theoretical categories and cultural resonances which surround concrete. In many respects, these tensions are intimately connected to the labour process. However, given that the photographs do not depict these relations, Prouvé’s base can only be read from the perspective of the object. But to what extent can concrete function as an index for these conditions? What place does it hold in the social imaginary?³³⁵

Despite appearances to the contrary, these lines of enquiry are neither specific to Prouvé’s base nor to Ferreira’s photographs. As Forty notes, more broadly, they can also be attributed to the longstanding belief that concrete is a ‘non-natural’ material; a label which highlights its virtues and failings in equal measure. As a synthetic substance, concrete has the potential to produce a range of structures – including hydroelectric dams and earthquake-proof buildings – which would be impossible to achieve with naturally occurring substances. Though such a position could easily be explored in relation to a range of technical or aesthetic considerations, the explanation most frequently offered for this standpoint is somewhat less complex: it is better equipped to face the challenges posed by nature than other building materials. But although this characteristic has been foregrounded in order to defend the use of concrete, it has also been used to charge it with limiting access to nature or destroying it entirely. In short, whilst the ability to ‘hold back nature’ has proven to be beneficial on numerous occasions, this capacity has done as much to tarnish concrete’s reputation as it has to enhance it.³³⁶

Though he does acknowledge its existence, for Forty, such a distinction is ultimately oversimplistic. Like their manufactured counterparts, naturally occurring concrete deposits – for

³³⁵ In pursuing this line of enquiry, it is not my intention to suggest that there is no difference between concrete as an object and a photograph of concrete. Nor do I hope to claim that Ferreira’s images provide an unmediated access to the base. There is, however, something important about the decision to use an indexical medium – one in which the image is caused by the object that it depicts – to portray the platform. The sense of closeness between object and image is reinforced through visual means: the more the bases come to dominate the composition, the more they appear to merge with the surface of the shot.

³³⁶ Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, p. 43.

example, those found in Point Lobos, California – have also been quarried and used as building materials. Yet despite his willingness to recognise their existence, Forty is equally quick to note that these incidences are also anomalies. As such, his opposition to the aforementioned analysis stems neither from its disregard for geological factors nor a distaste for the general terms in which it is phrased. Rather, he argues, by focusing solely on environmental questions, such a division fails to acknowledge a number of other lines of enquiry. When used in the construction of buildings and their infrastructures, concrete does not exist until its component parts are combined and left to set. Though such a starting point might appear to be equally simplistic, the questions which it raises are notably more complex. By foregrounding the process by which concrete is produced, such a perspective not only reinforces the constant slippage between solid and liquid, part and whole that allows it to resist simple definition. It also highlights its status as a product of human labour; a line of enquiry which has received significantly less attention. In order to remedy this oversight, Forty concludes, concrete should therefore be viewed ‘as a process rather than a material’.³³⁷

Although he goes to great lengths to emphasize this distinction, Forty’s attempts to explore the broader implications of the term ‘process’ are ultimately unsatisfying. Contrary to its initial promise, his discussion fails to extend beyond reinforcing concrete’s non-natural status and the importance of viewing it as a product of human activity; two lines of enquiry which are inextricably linked. Of course, such a gesture serves an important purpose. In pursuing this line of enquiry, Forty is attempting to de-reify or denaturalise concrete; to prevent something which is partially human in origin from (falsely) acquiring a purely natural status. However, as he openly admits, this argument is equally applicable to a range of other substances.³³⁸ To the extent that they are reliant upon some form of human intervention in order to become usable, the majority of materials could be described as ‘non-natural’. As such, his definition of process stems from a broader understanding of the transformative relationship between man and nature; one which shifts between the present and ancient Rome with little acknowledgement of the innumerable differences between these epochs.³³⁹ When discussed at a high level of

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³³⁹ A similar approach to the history and development of concrete can also be found in Leonard Koren and William Hall, *Concrete* (London: Phaidon, 2012); Cyrille Simonnet, *Le béton, histoire d'un matériau: Economie, technique, architecture* (Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 2005) and Michael Hein, ‘Concrete History’ <<https://fp.auburn.edu/heinmic/ConcreteHistoryindex.htm>> [accessed 20 May 2015].

generality, this view of the labour process has a certain validity. For Marx, when treated in its 'simple and abstract elements', the labour process can be viewed as 'the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and is therefore [...] common to all forms of society in which human beings live'.³⁴⁰ The problem with Forty's argument, however, is that it remains at this level of generality. Even if the interaction between man and his materials is viewed as a process, as Marx argues, this 'does not reveal the social conditions under which it takes place, whether it is happening under the slave owners' brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist'.³⁴¹ Without considering these conditions, any commentary on human labour in general has the potential to descend into a form of 'Adamism'; a term coined by Roland Barthes in response to Edward Steichen's 1955 exhibition *The Family of Man*.³⁴² More specifically, it risks eradicating a host of cultural and historical differences and lapsing into a universalising humanism. Behind such an argument lies a vague understanding of 'humanity' as a universal, undifferentiated or natural subject. Whilst such a reading might appear extreme or even disingenuous, these potential pitfalls cannot be overcome by simply suggesting that concrete is human in origin. Indeed, as Marx notes, 'the taste of porridge does not tell us who grew the oats'.³⁴³

To his credit, Forty does present a more socio-historical understanding of labour at a later point in his text.³⁴⁴ Here, however, the notion of process is obscured by the question of skill and the relationship between the artist and the art object. Rather than situating his previous comments within a broader network of social relations, Forty explores the impact that the introduction of concrete had on the artisanal status of its producers – namely, an increased separation between the roles of the architect, the engineer and the manufacturer. Whereas the wages and social standing of the manufacturer were reduced due to the unskilled nature of concrete work and its compatibility with Taylorist methods, the engineer and architect both benefitted from these developments. For the engineer, this change occurred as a result of their possession of specialised knowledge and participation in on-site quality control exercises. And whilst the cheapness and apparent rigidity of concrete challenged traditional notions of 'value' and 'creativity', it ultimately secured

³⁴⁰ Marx, *Capital*, p. 290.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

³⁴² Roland Barthes, 'The Great Family of Man', in *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000), 100-102 (p. 102).

³⁴³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 290.

³⁴⁴ Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, pp. 225-252.

architecture's status as a 'modern' profession. In short, this process of redefinition reinforced the longstanding hierarchy between intellectual and manual labour.

Despite its attempts to challenge traditional notions of originality and creativity, this line of argument is ultimately underpinned by a highly disputed art historical understanding of the subject: the artist as 'genius'. Rather than examining the category of skill and the various ways in which it has been utilised within art history, Forty's analysis focuses upon the differing 'degrees of excellence and quality' that emerged from this division; a phrase which bears a striking resemblance to the language of connoisseurship.³⁴⁵ Consequently, he argues, 'the questions for concrete are where this skill comes from, who holds it, and how it is transmitted'.³⁴⁶ Though Forty's remarks offer some explanation for the circumstances which resulted in these shifts, they are not without precedent. As Christine Battersby notes, their origins can be traced back to the Renaissance. 'Being able to execute one's design without sweating over it', she writes, 'became one of the most valued qualities in an artist. It harmonised well with the class pretensions of the new painters and sculptors, who were anxious to downplay the manual work involved in their professions. Similar values [also] spread to the literary arts.'³⁴⁷ Like the developments which occurred in the sixteenth century, the divisions which accompanied the introduction of concrete also resulted in a reassertion of the figure of the author; a designation which is particularly applicable to Prouvé. Although he sought to combine the roles of the architect and the engineer, Prouvé went to great lengths to distinguish his practice from that of the manual labourer.³⁴⁸ Whilst the concrete base was designed by Prouvé and manufactured under his supervision, he did not produce it himself. Nevertheless, prior to the removal of the house, it did bear his signature. Of course, the fact that the aluminium structure retained Prouvé's name and the platform did not raises a number of questions about concrete's capacity to sustain this label. Indeed, as Forty notes, concrete always has the potential to revert back to a mass produced or prosaic substance; a criticism which was also voiced by Mies van der Rohe.³⁴⁹ But although these insights reinforce the polyvalent nature of concrete, they still centre upon notions of private property and the individual; two lines of enquiry which, to

³⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 226.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 226.

³⁴⁷ Battersby, p. 131.

³⁴⁸ For further details on this point see my introduction.

³⁴⁹ Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, pp. 248-249.

paraphrase Foucault, have played a formative role in the establishment and maintenance of the figure of the author.³⁵⁰

In short, Forty's analysis is underpinned by two main lines of argument. First, an understanding of concrete as a process which hinges upon a vague, universal subject. And secondly, a more socio-historical account founded upon a traditional subject-object relationship – that is, one between makers and their creations. Ferreira's images, however, do not sit comfortably within either. Whilst the photographic components of *Maison Tropicale* do raise the question of the base's origins, strictly speaking, they do not evoke the question of authorship. By foregrounding the current condition of the base and the various uses for which it has been repurposed, they depart from the questions of property and conservation that frequently accompany the art object. Moreover, as a result of their framing and choice of camera angle, the photographs also draw attention to the size of the base, thereby challenging the idea of a singular author or creator and its accompanying notions of excellence. But to what extent might it be possible to think the relationship between these categories differently?

A possible answer to this question can be found in a footnote from the French translation of *Capital*.³⁵¹ Marx writes:

The word 'procès' (process) which expresses *a development considered in the totality of its real conditions* has long been a part of scientific language throughout Europe. In France it was first introduced slightly shamefacedly in its Latin form – *processus*. Then, stripped of this pedantic disguise, it slipped into books on chemistry, physics, physiology, etc., and into a few works of metaphysics. In the end it will obtain a certificate of complete naturalization. Let us note in passing that in ordinary speech the Germans, like the French use the word *Prozess* (*procès*, process) in the legal sense [i.e. trial].³⁵²

In the writings of Louis Althusser, this definition of process is placed in opposition to the category of subject. More specifically, by interpreting Marx's use of process as a synonym for a broader set of social relations, he presents the subject as an ideology; one which imposes a series of rigid constraints upon thought. Indeed, for Althusser, 'all classical philosophy depends on the categories of subject and object'.³⁵³ To pursue Althusser's

³⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 949-953 (p. 953).

³⁵¹ For an overview of the differences between the English, French and German translations of *Capital*, see Kevin Anderson, "'The Unknown" Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1: The French Edition of 1872-75, 100 Years Later', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 15.4 (1983), 71-80.

³⁵² Karl Marx as quoted in Louis Althusser, 'Marx's Relation to Hegel', in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2007), p. 185.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 184.

argument further, it could be argued that the persistence of these philosophical categories prevents Forty from fully engaging with the concept of process. However, to read Forty's text through this lens is also to change the meaning of the term subject, from a Cartesian notion of self-reflexive consciousness to one of subjugation. For Balibar and his co-authors, this shift is a common occurrence within French philosophy. It can be found, not only in Althusser, but also in the work of figures such as Foucault, Derrida and Lacan.³⁵⁴ Nevertheless, they argue, it is also underpinned by a broader translational question:

The English subject, the French *sujet*, the Spanish *sujeto*, and the Italian *soggetto* immediately reveal what the German *Subjekt* cannot evoke because of the differences between it and *Untertan*. They have a twofold etymology: *subjectum*, which is a support for individual properties, and *subjectus*, meaning 'subject to' a law or power. 'Subject' implies both presupposition and subjection, the answer to the question 'what?' and the answer to the question 'who?' It is my considered view that this linguistic fact has played a determining role in the development of Western philosophy [...]³⁵⁵

Though there are innumerable differences between Marx's and Balibar's definitions, both terms possess a double meaning. In building upon this duality, the question thus becomes: what would it mean to think these categories together in their untranslatable form? Whilst the decision to pose such a question could easily be viewed as arbitrary, such a designation ignores the political import of both terms. As such, it will be my claim that Ferreira's photographs not only invite, but require such a reading in order to fully comprehend the various power dynamics at play within them. Not least because the challenges which they pose for the viewer stem from a set of social relations which cannot be understood through traditional categories alone.

iii. Subjects or Citizens?

How might we think the categories of process and trial, subject and subjugation together? Though such a question would appear to require an in depth study of Western philosophy or a series of complex linguistic plays in order to reach a satisfactory answer, when posed in the context of Ferreira's artwork it has a much simpler one: by departing from the base and its photographic analogue and considering the broader context in which Prouvé's structure

³⁵⁴ See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 3rd edn, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. by Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 3rd edn, trans. by Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

³⁵⁵ Balibar, Cassin and de Libera, p. 33.

was produced – that is, the history of French colonial rule. But although this proposal offers a possible answer to the opening question, it also has a number of limitations. By asking the viewer to focus upon the empirical specificities of this epoch, such a strategy not only fails to confront the challenges posed by the place of colonialism within French history; a discourse which is frequently plagued by absences and disavowals.³⁵⁶ It also risks ignoring the artwork entirely. In order to avoid these shortcomings, this section will consider the possibility of presenting Ferreira’s images as a critical intervention within the notions of progress and civilization which continue to surround the history of post-war France.

Following the end of the Second World War, France witnessed the emergence of a series of commissions and agencies that were intended to help rebuild the country’s economy. Under the direction of Charles de Gaulle’s interim government, the country witnessed the takeover and subsequent nationalisation of various strands of industry and commerce – including deposit banking, energy and insurance; a process which continued until 1948. Yet whilst arguably his most prominent reform, this was not the only change implemented by de Gaulle. Prior to his departure from office in January 1946, he began work on the creation a new planning body: the Commissariat-général au Plan. Developed in collaboration with a number of national statistical organisations – namely, the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques and the Institut de science économique appliquée – the Commissariat sought to place France on an expansionist course by bringing an increased level of mathematical precision to the country’s economic planning and forecasting. Although both of these developments occurred under the leadership of de Gaulle, his policies were not the only changes to be implemented during this period. In addition to these developments, post-war France also witnessed the emergence of a series of new welfare institutions. In 1945 the groundwork for what would later be known as Sécurité sociale was implemented by Pierre Laroque, a former member of the resistance. Presented as a family-orientated system, the French welfare state not only sought to offer the population protection against the challenges posed by sickness and old age. It also prided itself upon the generosity of its family allowance scheme.³⁵⁷

As a result of these policies, French society underwent an unprecedented period of social and cultural modernisation. For Kristin Ross, these developments not only resulted in an

³⁵⁶ See Claude Wauthier, *Quatre présidents et l’Afrique: De Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d’Estaing, Mitterrand: quarante ans de politique africaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995) for an example of this approach.

³⁵⁷ Philip Nord, *France’s New Deal: From the Thirties to the Post War Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 8-15.

influx of consumer goods, the electrification of the country and the development of a modern sanitation system, but also a rapid reorganization of French industry along Fordist and Taylorist lines. The speed of this transformation, she continues, was akin to a type of shock. Contrary to the view of modernisation as a process which occurs over an extended period of time, in France this transition was experienced as an event; one whose effects were made visible by the ever-increasing popularity of topics such as alienation and the everyday and the drive to submit the social sciences to more structuralist forms of rational arrangement. In short, Ross concludes, France was transformed from a 'rural, empire-orientated, Catholic country into a fully industrialised, decolonised urban one.'³⁵⁸

Over the course of the mid-twentieth century, this transformation was accompanied by an increasing sense of homogenization and dissatisfaction; a shift epitomised by the now-infamous May '68 slogan: 'Nous ne voulons pas d'un monde où la certitude de ne pas mourir de faim s'échange contre le risque de mourir d'ennui'.³⁵⁹ In the early post-war period, however, 'it had not yet congealed into a degree of rote familiarity' and instead appeared to be placing France on a new, forward-facing trajectory.³⁶⁰

Though the end of the Second World War played a formative role in reshaping the social and political structures of mainland France, it also had a number of implications for life beyond the *métropole*. In an attempt to stifle the emerging clamours for independence, the newly elected government attempted to redefine the relationship between France and its colonies with the establishment of the Union française in 1946. Intended as a replacement for the pre-war French Empire, the Union française sought to present France and its overseas territories and departments as a singular entity.³⁶¹ In addition to these developments, the new constitution also abolished the Code de Indigénat – a series of laws dating back to 1877 which assigned inferior legal status to the indigenous populations of the colonies – and granted the citizens of French territories the right to elect representatives to a range of government institutions in Paris, including the National

³⁵⁸ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 4.

³⁵⁹ We object to a world in which we are certain not to die of hunger, but in exchange run the risk of dying of boredom.

³⁶⁰ Ross, p. 5.

³⁶¹ Guia Migani, 'De Gaulle and Sub-Saharan Africa: From Decolonization to French Development Policy, 1958-1963', in *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Development Policy, 1958-1969*, ed. by Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher and Garret Martin (Langham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), pp. 251-270 (p. 252).

Assembly, the Conseil de la République and the Assembly of the French Union.³⁶² By implementing these measures, the French government ostensibly repealed the subjugated status which it had previously assigned to its colonial subjects.

To summarise, the majority of developments which occurred in post-war France can be assigned to one of three broad groupings: the socio-economic policies of the de Gaulle government; the rapid process of modernization and the apparent rapprochement between France and its colonies. Yet despite differing in their aims and outcomes, all three initiatives could easily be described as ideological. Whilst the onset of modernisation marked a shift in the priorities of the French state, it also concealed the role of the colonies in these developments. The outcome, Ross argues, was an artificial division between the domestic history of twentieth century France and its status as a colonial power. She writes:

Keeping the two stories apart is usually another name for forgetting one of the stories or for relegating it to a different time frame. This is in fact what has occurred. For, from this perspective (a prevalent one in France today), France's colonial history was nothing more than an exterior experience that somehow came to an abrupt end, cleanly, in 1962 [...] Colonialism itself was made to seem like a dusty archaism, as though it had not transpired in the twentieth century and in the personal histories of many people living today, as though it played only a tiny role in France's national history, and no role at all in its modern identity.³⁶³

For Ross, this separation not only served to perpetuate the myths of Americanisation and progress which continue to surround modernisation. By denying France's colonial past, it also became a catalyst for the various forms of institutionalised racism which continue to affect its immigrant population.³⁶⁴

It is within this ideological conjuncture that Ferreira's images intervene. But how do they do this? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to examine the significance of her decision to focus solely upon Prouvé's base. Whereas Ferreira's photographs were taken at a moment in which the split between the colonial and the modern had been fully implemented, the same cannot be said of the concrete platform. Though the base was designed and manufactured in the midst of France's post-war modernisation project, it was also produced for the sole purpose of reaffirming the country's status as a colonial power. By transposing an object in which the colonial and the modern are closely entwined into a

³⁶² For an analysis of the Code de Indigénat, its origins and implications see Gregory Mann, 'What was the "Indigénat"? The "Empire of Law" in French West Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 50, 3 (2009), 331-353.

³⁶³ Ross, p. 9.

³⁶⁴ A powerful example of the racial tensions which continue to plague France can be found in *La Haine*, dir. by Mathieu Kassovitz (Canal+, 1995).

context in which they are deemed to be distinct, Ferreira's photographs reveal the hypocrisies of such a division. In this sense, they embody the Benjaminian distinction between exhibition and cult value: by virtue of their status as photographs, Ferreira's images are able to travel. Although they do not possess an accompanying text, they are able to engage with a particular context – that is, the discourse surrounding French history. Rather than simply reiterating the emancipatory rhetoric of the Fourth Republic, Ferreira's shots challenge the viewer to consider how else these events might be interpreted.

Despite appearances to the contrary, the reforms which were implemented following the end of the Second World War were of little benefit to France's colonial subjects. Though the offer of citizenship ostensibly marked a shift in the priorities of the French colonial administration, its primary function was to maintain sovereignty within the colonies. By granting its colonised nations the right to elect representatives, France sought to produce a veneer of democratic participation whilst also limiting its effects. These actions, however, were not without precedent. In December 1945, France's African colonies witnessed the introduction of the franc Colonies françaises d'Afrique (franc CFA); a monetary area governed by the French franc. For Guia Migani, the reasons behind this development were twofold. By compelling its colonies to adopt the franc CFA, the French government attempted to maintain its hold on Africa through monetary union. Yet, in doing so, it also sought to reaffirm France's status as an international economic power following the end of the Second World War.³⁶⁵ In order to achieve these goals, Migani continues, the Franc zone was structured around four key principles: 'the freedom of convertibility between the French franc and the franc CFA, the free transfer of capital within the Franc zone, common exchange control and a common fund to regroup all foreign currencies gained by African territories'.³⁶⁶ Although these actions were prefigured by a number of events, including the Sarraut Project and the 1935 French Colonial Conference, the origins of this decision can also be attributed the 1944 Brazzaville Conference.³⁶⁷ Held between 30 January and 8 February, the conference marked a shift in French investment policy in Africa.³⁶⁸ In statement issued at the launch of the Imperial Economic Commission on 1 February 1944, the French government described its long term objectives as follows:

³⁶⁵ Migani, pp. 252-253.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 255.

³⁶⁷ For a more detailed account of these events, see Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 81-90.

³⁶⁸ Martin Atangana, *French Investment in Colonial Cameroon: The FIDES Era (1946-1957)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 13.

The essential goal we seek in economic matters is the following: a policy of enriching our colonies. What we are striving for is to increase the buying power of the indigenous population which will allow a rise in their living standards. We no longer conceive of the economy according to certain private interests, but rather we envision an economy which serves the general interest. This policy is not intended only for Africa. It also has the goal of facilitating the provisioning of the *métropole*. It is clear that France will need a considerable amount of raw materials and that African colonies will have to do their utmost to send them all the resources. Thus this development policy does not pursue a purely African goal. It seeks as well to fulfil higher, longer term goals to contribute to the recovery of the mother country.³⁶⁹

In short, France utilised its status as a colonial power to extract resources from its colonies. Yet due to the fact that its colonies were now deemed to be ‘French’, it was possible to portray these actions as serving a ‘general interest’; a decision which serves to further illustrate France’s hegemonic project.

In addition to providing France with a seemingly limitless supply of natural and economic resources, the colonies also served as testing grounds for future domestic policies. Although these experiments occurred throughout the French empire, they were also conducted by a number of other colonial and neo-colonial powers.³⁷⁰ The resulting projects took a variety of forms, including economic reorganisations and the development of military strategies. Ferreira’s work, however, draws attention to the ways in which the colonies functioned as space in which to explore new techniques in urban planning. As Gwendolyn Wright notes, ‘the conception and implementation of plans for colonial cities revealed European ideals about how a “good” environment – including their own – should look and function [...] Not only did the European quarters of colonial cities reference the capital cities and provincial towns of home, they also suggested future directions for Western cities.’³⁷¹ Though Wright’s comments refer primarily to Morocco and Algeria, her

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁷⁰ As David Harvey notes, the ‘first great experiment’ in neo-liberal state-building occurred not in the UK or the US, but rather in Chile following Augusto Pinochet’s military coup in 1973. Under the guidance of American neo-liberal economists, the Chilean economy was reconstructed along privatised, deregulated free market and free trade lines. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 215-216.

³⁷¹ According to Wright, these practices were extremely widespread. She notes: ‘Colonial literature of all genres, from government reports to works of fiction, was filled with descriptions of archetypal urban environments and the various architectural techniques which engendered them. One author, for example, chose to lavish praise upon J.H. Collet de Cantelou, the director of Madagascar’s architectural services, as he “has asserted authority in directing new building, just as [the colonial administrators] are directing the economy: erecting rational, healthy and elegant administrative districts and decorative prototypes for dwellings”. Similarly, in 1931, children’s author Jean de Brunhoff had Babar the elephant design and supervise the construction of Celesteville, the City of the Elephants, with rows of standardised huts arranged neatly in rows beneath two monuments, the Palais du Travail and the Palais des Fêtes. Celesteville, too, offered an appealing vision of orderly

insights are equally applicable to *Maison Tropicale*. As well as his colonial commissions, Prouvé also designed a series of structures that were intended to aid in the redevelopment of post-war France, both independently and in collaboration with Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret. Yet rather than functioning as separate entities, the relationship between these projects was reciprocal. Prouvé's use of prefabrication techniques, for example, played a formative role in the development of affordable housing in France and overseas. By demonstrating this connection, Ferreira's images mount a challenge to the view of the colonies as either external to France or archaic. More specifically, they invite the viewer to consider the relationship between France and its colonies as a broader process; one in which the categories of subject and subjugation are unevenly distributed.³⁷²

Histories of Governance, Legacies of Surveillance

In the previous section, I have sought to demonstrate the various ways in which Ferreira's photographs explore the complex power dynamic between France and its colonies. But although this analysis has revealed a range of strategies by which this relationship is made visible, it also raises a further question: to what extent do Ferreira's images act upon this knowledge? Of course, this is not to suggest that these aspects of the work should be viewed as passive or merely descriptive. By foregrounding the base's modernity, the images not only intervene within a specific history. They also reinforce the various contradictions which accompany such a designation. Nevertheless, this gesture still performs a primarily analytic function. Rather than responding to a series of social conditions, it remains at the level of interpretation. In order to move beyond such a reading, it is therefore necessary to consider the performative aspects of Ferreira's shots – namely, the act of taking a photograph and the decision to display the images in a context in which they would be viewed by a primarily 'Western' audience. Taking its lead from these aspects of the work,

growth, social hierarchy, a thriving political economy, all achieved without destroying what appeared to be an indigenous African urban fabric— as was too often the result of European urban reform' (Fig. 79). Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 2-3.

³⁷² Of course, this is not to suggest that Ferreira's project is the only attempt to foreground this dialogue. A similar line of enquiry also underpinned the House of World Culture's 2008 exhibition *In the Desert of Modernity: Colonial Planning and After*. Combining interviews and propaganda films with an extensive array of architectural blueprints, it sought to examine how the intersection between colonialism and modernism became increasingly visible in the decade following the Second World War. For further information on the exhibition, see Tom Avermaete, Serhat Karakayali and Marion von Osten (eds.), *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past, Rebellions of the Future* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010).

this section will examine the possibility of presenting *Maison Tropicale* as a type of political gesture.

When viewed in this context, Ferreira's images inhabit a highly contested and problematic field. There are many different ways in which photography can function as a political act: by inserting itself into the immediacy of political struggle; reporting on political events or through the polemical constructs of photomontage, to name but the most obvious. However, by evoking a subjugated subject, the shots in question enter into a particularly risky domain; one frequently associated with social documentary, photojournalism and even ethnographic photography. Obviously, it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that these traditions were simply reactionary. For figures such as Hine and Evans, the purpose of social documentary was to represent those who would otherwise remain hidden or lack a voice.³⁷³ Yet, as John Tagg notes, this project was also haunted by the fact that, with the increasing use of photographic technologies for evidence or surveillance, 'it was no longer a privilege to be pictured but the burden of a new class of the surveilled'.³⁷⁴ Consequently, he argues, the work of Evans and his contemporaries was unable to move beyond social democratic notions of reformism, charity and welfare.³⁷⁵ In a colonial context, however, the broader resonances of these techniques are even more ominous. First, there is the history of ethnographic photography, 'native' studies and the taxonomic archive, in which the colonial subject was positioned as both an object of study and a curiosity.³⁷⁶ Secondly, there are the various attempts to represent the colonial subject as a downtrodden victim, impoverished through natural circumstances and in need of protection.³⁷⁷ And finally, there is the understanding of photography as a tool with which to protect the colonies from their indigenous occupants; a standpoint which informs the earliest accounts of the medium.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Martha Rosler, 'In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 303-342 (p. 306); Vicki Goldberg, 'Documenting Poverty', in *Light Matters: Writings on Photography* (New York: Aperture Books, 2005), pp. 177-182 (p. 177).

³⁷⁴ Tagg, p. 59.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181. Tagg has since argued that Evans should be viewed as an anomaly within this context. John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 95-178.

³⁷⁶ Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*, 2nd edn (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010), p. 15.

³⁷⁷ Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the Making of European Identities* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 38-72; Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 57-81.

³⁷⁸ In an 1839 report on the daguerreotype, Dominique François Arago remarked: 'While these pictures are exhibited to you, everyone will imagine the extraordinary advantages which could have

As a result, terms such as ‘victim photography’ or the ‘unreturnable gaze’ have remained a constant presence within the critical discourse surrounding social documentary since the 1970s.³⁷⁹ Although these concepts reveal the various hierarchies at play within the relationship between photographer and subject, in recent years, they have also become increasingly clichéd or risked foreclosing other lines of enquiry. In response to this shift, a number of artists, including Santiago Sierra, Renzo Martens and Boris Mikhailov (Fig. 80-81), have actively sought to flaunt the boundaries which previously defined the field. However, this process of redefinition has also resulted in a series of attempts to turn the gaze back onto the perpetrator; a gesture epitomised by Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin’s *Enemies of the People* and, more recently, Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*.³⁸⁰ Needless to say, Ferreira’s images adopt neither of these strategies. They do, however, attempt to demonstrate that photographic medium cannot be reduced to a series of rigid structures. As such, it will be my claim that they reveal the underlying polysemy (or instability) at work within even the most codified technique.³⁸¹ In many respects, this approach bears a striking resemblance to the notion of untranslatability. Both embrace the multiple meanings at play within a given linguistic or representational trope. Yet rather than simply identifying these meanings, this section will examine the limits of such a comparison. Whilst the polysemy of the photograph can be understood as a basic feature of all images, one associated with a type of undecidability or a chain of endless signifiers, the untranslatable seeks to examine the moments in which these potentially contradictory meanings are brought into conflict.³⁸² In this sense, the term is not simply a celebration of

been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt; everyone will realise that had we had photography in 1798 we would possess today faithful pictorial records of that which the learned world is forever deprived of by the greed of the Arabs and the vandalism of certain travellers’. Dominique François Arago, ‘Report’, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (Stony Creek, CT: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), pp. 15-26 (p. 17).

³⁷⁹ Rosler, ‘In, Around, and Afterthoughts’, p. 306; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 64. For an updated version of this argument, see Martha Rosler, ‘Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?’, in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), pp. 207-245.

³⁸⁰ *Enemies of the People*, dir. by Thet Sambath and Rob Lemkin (International Film Circuit, 2009); *The Act of Killing*, dir. Joshua Oppenheimer (Dogwolf Productions, 2012).

³⁸¹ Roland Barthes, ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 32-51 (pp. 38-39).

³⁸² This is not to suggest that the notion of undecidability should be labelled as apolitical or equated with notions of arbitrariness or indeterminacy. As Derrida argues in *Limited Inc.*: ‘To be sure, in order for structures of undecidability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, nonidentity. Not of indetermination, but of *différance* or of nonidentity with oneself in the very process of

ambiguity or indeterminacy but rather an explicitly political and dialectical concept. I will therefore attempt to show how the multiple meanings at play in Ferreira's images can be allied with this politics.

A possible framework through which to examine this relationship can be found in the work of Ariella Azoulay – most notably, the books *From Palestine to Israel, The Civil Contract of Photography* and *Civil Imagination*.³⁸³ Although there are a number of notable differences between these texts, their underlying premise can be summarised as follows:

In photography – and this is evident in every single photo – there is something that extends beyond the photographer's action, and no photographer, even the most gifted, can claim ownership of what appears in the photograph. Every photograph of others bears the traces of the meeting between the photographed persons and the photographer, neither of whom can, on their own, determine how this meeting will be inscribed in the photo. The photograph exceeds any presumption of ownership or monopoly and any attempt at being exhaustive. Even when it seems possible to name correctly in the form of a statement what it shows – 'This is X' – it will always turn out that something else can be read in it, some other event can be reconstructed through it, some other player's presence can be constructed through it, constructing the social relations that allowed its production.³⁸⁴

Though Azoulay's remarks are intended as a theory of photography in general, they are particularly relevant to Ferreira's images. Through their undirected presentation and apparently 'artless' technique, the photographs depart from notions of individual ownership or authorship. Indeed, many aspects of the shots, including the wandering goats and seemingly indifferent bystanders, serve to foreground their lack of staging. Equally, the images are presented without commentary, in a way that allows for a range of possible interpretations. There is, however, one obvious difference between Ferreira's images and those which form the basis of Azoulay's argument: as previously suggested, they do not

determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. Someone might say: but if it renders determinacy possible, it is because it itself is "indeterminacy". Precisely not, since first of all, it "is" in *itself* nothing outside of different determinations; second, and consequently, it never comes to a full stop anywhere, absolutely [*elle ne s'arrête nulle part*], and is neither negativity nor nothingness (as indeterminacy would be). Insofar as it is always determined, undecidability is also not negative in itself. ' Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. by Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 149.

³⁸³ Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950*, trans. by Charles S. Karmen (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. by Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008); Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. by Louise Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012).

³⁸⁴ Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, pp. 11-12.

possess an identifiable human subject. It is this absence that the following lines of argument will address.

This issue is particularly important because the relationship between spectator, photographer and depicted subject plays a central role in Azoulay's understanding of the ethics and politics of the photographic act. Here, the basic instability and negotiability of this relationship not only allows for a departure from traditional notions of photographic violence, voyeurism or the unreturnable gaze. It also underpins her claim that photography can function as a type of intervention. Indeed, for Azoulay, 'photography – taking photos, being photographed [...] – provides a privileged access to the problem of impaired citizenship, as well as a moral practice in the face of the vulnerability this condition creates'.³⁸⁵ There are two sides to this argument. First, an acknowledgement that many of the subjects depicted in social documentary or photojournalism have been subjected to various forms of violence due to their secondary status. This status, she claims, is the result of the various ways in which the state allocates citizenship and its accompanying rights and protections. And secondly, a belief that the photographic gesture provides access to a more universal form of citizenship; one in which the violated parties appeal to those who have been granted 'full' citizenship. In this context, the instability of photography is equated with the instability of the term citizen.

For Azoulay, the majority of usages of the term citizen can be assigned to one of three broad groupings. First, the term can be used to describe the permanent residents of a particular state; a usage which grants the holder access to series of legal rights, but also requires them to fulfil a number of civic obligations. In its second manifestation, it suggests membership of a political community and the rights to participation which stem from such an affiliation. Though this usage initially emerged in relation to the Greek *polis*, it has since been rearticulated as the legal and democratic structures of the nation state. Finally, the term also functions as a framework through which to consider the relationship between the citizen and the sovereign power. Within this context, it describes 'a person owing allegiance to and entitled to the protection of a sovereign state'.³⁸⁶ Although they encompass a wide variety of political structures and historical epochs, these definitions are not as distinct as they might first appear. Despite their differing aims and emphases, all three usages point to a similar conclusion: citizenship 'is not simply a stable status that one struggles to achieve, but an arena of conflict and negotiation'.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

In many respects, these definitions are also at play within Ferreira's photographs. By highlighting the changes which occurred in French foreign policy following the end of the Second World War, the shots present the category of citizenship as both a means to extend democratic rights and as a form of control. Yet rather than presenting these contradictions as a type of obfuscation, they seek to reinforce the hypocrisies of French colonial rule. Of course, this is not to suggest that Azoulay's argument should be used as a framework through which to address all images taken at sites of conflict or oppression. Though her analysis has the semblance of universal applicability, it is deeply embedded within a specific context: the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Given the singularity of this backdrop, it would be problematic to conflate it with the relationship between France and its colonies. In addition to the structural differences between these situations, there are a number of obvious distinctions between an ongoing conflict and a historical event. Needless to say, this is the most straightforward explanation for the lack of a visible subject within Ferreira's images. However, this absence also has broader implications for both the photographic medium and the questions of performativity that it provokes.

By removing the human subject, Ferreira's images circumvent a line of enquiry that is central to Azoulay's argument: the ethics of spectatorship. In proposing this category, Azoulay's main object of criticism is the notion of 'image fatigue'; a type of anaesthetisation towards images of suffering caused by repeated exposure.³⁸⁸ Although present in the writings of Barthes and Jean Baudrillard, this characterisation of mass media, she argues, is particularly visible in the work of Susan Sontag.³⁸⁹ Sontag writes:

To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more – and more. Images transfix. Images anaesthetise. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs [...] But after repeated exposure to images, it also becomes less real.³⁹⁰

For this reason, she concludes, 'the ethical content of photographs is fragile'.³⁹¹ Since the publication of *On Photography*, Sontag has attempted to nuance this standpoint. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, for example, she argues that, despite the risk of

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁸⁹ See, for example, Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 117-119; Jean Baudrillard, 'The Evil Demon of Images', trans. by Paul Patton and Paul Foss, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 444-452.

³⁹⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 18.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

desensitisation, images of suffering still have the potential to haunt the viewer.³⁹² For Azoulay, however, even this gesture is not enough. Rather, she contends, it is ‘patently insufficient to account for photography through a focus on photographers or spectators, as occurs in any discussion suited to the title *Regarding the Pain of Others*’.³⁹³ Not only does such a gesture foreclose the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between the various parties involved in the photograph, it also risks removing the agency of the depicted individual. In an attempt to avoid such shortcomings, Azoulay presents the photograph as the site of an appeal made by the photographed subject. This appeal, however, is not made to the photographer or a specific spectator, but rather to ‘a universal spectator, a moral addressee – an addressee who is situated outside of the time and place of the photograph and to whom the photograph can be addressed as the “subject who is supposed to see”’.³⁹⁴ Although the actual addressee is only ever an ‘imperfect copy’ of this universal spectator (‘who is supposed to be free of any personal interest[s]’), it becomes an ideal to which they should aspire.³⁹⁵ By viewing photographs in this way, Azoulay concludes, the spectator ‘is less susceptible to becoming immoral’.³⁹⁶

Given that Ferreira’s photographs are unable to produce such an effect, how else do they operate? A possible answer to this question would be to suggest that they perform a different type of ethical gesture. By refusing to depict the subject, Ferreira’s images could be viewed as an attempt to avoid the violence of the photographic act. This violence can be thought in a number of ways. First, in relation to the hierarchical relationship between photographer and photographed. And secondly, as part of the act of ‘taking a shot’. Indeed, as Sekula notes, the language of photography is often ‘primitive, infantile and aggressive – the imaginary discourse of the machine’.³⁹⁷ When understood in these terms, Ferreira’s images function as an attempt to respect the rights of an unknown subject – to privacy, self-determination and protection. Unlike Azoulay’s attempts to show how the photographic gesture produces a type of ethical code, such an approach belongs to the tradition of negative rights. More specifically, it pertains to a tradition which, rather than establishing moral laws or strictures, seeks to protect the ‘individual’ from the interference

³⁹² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 89.

³⁹³ Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, p. 18.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁹⁷ Allan Sekula, ‘The Traffic in Photographs’, *Art Journal*, 41.1 (1981), 15-25 (p. 23).

of others. For Norberto Bobbio, this definition of ethics is central to both the liberal tradition and the constitutional and legal mechanisms of the modern state.³⁹⁸

As should be fairly clear, this is not a conclusion that I wish to draw. If anything, I want to claim that the issues raised by Ferreira's work require the question of ethics to be placed in parentheses. Whilst it is not my intention to suggest that this line of enquiry should be abandoned, in recent years it has tended to dominate debates on contemporary art and politics. As Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz note, the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed the re-introduction of a series of ethical questions into the humanities and social sciences, particularly within the Euro-American academy. Tracing its development through a series of writers – from Aristotle and Kant to Levinas and Foucault – Garber and her co-authors argue that throughout its existence the term ethics has been repeatedly 'reconceptualised, reformulated and repositioned'.³⁹⁹ Consequently, rather than being confined to a singular field of study, it has established itself as a line of enquiry which transcends disciplinary boundaries:

Ethics is back in literary studies, as it is in philosophy and political theory, and indeed the very critics of universal man and the autonomous human subject that had initially produced resistance to ethics have now generated a crossover among these various disciplines that sees and does ethics 'otherwise'.⁴⁰⁰

Although Garber's remarks would appear to champion the re-emergence of ethics within contemporary scholarship, their optimism is not universally held. As Peter Dews notes, the occurrence of an ethical turn has been acknowledged with some unease, even amongst its key proponents.⁴⁰¹ Despite various attempts to distance ethics from humanism and the notion of natural rights, there have been significant fears that we are entering a moment in which, to quote Alain Badiou, 'politics is subordinated to ethics, to the single perspective that really matters in this conception of things: the sympathetic and indignant judgement of the spectator of the circumstances'.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy*, trans. by Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (London: Verso, 2005), p. 15.

³⁹⁹ Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'Introduction: The Turn to Ethics, in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. by Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (London: Routledge, 2000), p. viii.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁰¹ Peter Dews, 'Uncategorical Imperatives: Adorno, Badiou and the ethical turn', *Radical Philosophy*, 111 (2002), 33-37 (pp. 33-34).

⁴⁰² Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 9.

These criticisms, however, are not specific to Badiou. They can also be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe and Fredric Jameson.⁴⁰³ Throughout his oeuvre, Jameson has openly voiced his distaste for ethics.⁴⁰⁴ In *Valences of the Dialectic*, for example, he states that ‘the return of ethics as a philosophical sub-discipline and its subsequent colonization of political philosophy is one of the most regressive features and symptoms of the ideological climate of postmodernity’.⁴⁰⁵ Similar sentiments can also be found in *Fables of Aggression* and *A Singular Modernity*.⁴⁰⁶ In many respects, these criticisms stem from the emphasis that such a line of enquiry places upon the individual; a practice which stands in stark contrast to his own belief in collective social processes. For Jameson, such a gesture can be likened to the various personal taboos and rules found within liberal thought. Moreover, he argues, it has an implicit tendency to force all problems into an oversimplified dichotomy of ‘good’ or ‘bad’. When understood in these terms, the return to ethics can therefore be viewed as an attempt to ‘replace the complex and ambivalent judgements of a more properly political and dialectic perspective with the comfortable simplifications of binary myth’.⁴⁰⁷

Despite its brevity, Jameson’s argument problematises the idea of a purely ethical interpretation of Ferreira’s images in a number of different ways. For a start, the (non-) relationship between spectator and subject established by a such an interpretation clearly confirms Jameson’s concerns about the individuating nature of the recent return to ethical lines of questioning. In addition to denying all dialogue between the two parties, this approach also falls back into a notion of personal or property rights; one which obscures the collective origins of Prouvé’s bases.⁴⁰⁸ In this regard, the analysis is also constrained by

⁴⁰³ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 12.

⁴⁰⁴ However, this is not to suggest that Jameson’s attitude towards ethical lines of questioning is entirely negative. During the early 1980s, he extended his support, albeit briefly, to Aristotelian ethics, primarily due to the emphasis which it placed on collective and social virtues. For Aristotle, such virtues were not a series of commandments that required strict self-imposition. Rather, they suggested the opposite: the absence of virtue can (and should) be viewed as a form of violence towards an on-going collective project or community. More recently, Jameson has also acknowledged the possible benefits of Alain Badiou’s notion of a political ethics. Fredric Jameson, ‘Morality versus Ethical Substance; or, Aristotelian Marxism in Alisdair McIntyre’, *Social Text*, 8 (1983-1984), 151-154; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) p. 217.

⁴⁰⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009) p. 406.

⁴⁰⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp.55-57; Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 56.

⁴⁰⁸ The connection between property rights and the individual played a pivotal role in the development of bourgeois society. Indeed, for Marx, the two are mutually dependent. He writes: ‘The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole [...] Only in the eighteenth century, in “civil society”, do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which

the aforementioned opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Whereas decisions which result in a violation of these rights are inherently problematic, those which respect them must be celebrated. Such a reading, however, raises a much broader problem: the very notion of rights itself; a line of argument which plays a formative role in Azoulay’s argument. In formulating the category of the ‘universal spectator’, she presents photography as a site in which the rights to protection and fair treatment granted to the citizen are measured. Needless to say, Azoulay’s decision to focus upon the question of rights has a specific purpose. The majority of photographs which she discusses emerge from a situation in which the even most basic rights are denied to a substantial portion of the population. When extended to Ferreira’s images, however, this line of enquiry becomes somewhat more problematic. Following the end of the Second World War, the French government did extend certain rights to its colonies.⁴⁰⁹ However, as I hope to have demonstrated, the benefits of this gesture were minimal. This was not simply because these policies were corrupted or incorrectly implemented (although such a reading of the situation would not necessarily be inaccurate). Rather, they were underpinned by a broader structural problem, specifically that pre-existing forms of inequality cannot be eradicated by the extension of rights alone. Of course, this is not to suggest that the question of rights should be abandoned; the consequences of such a decision would be dire. However, by foregrounding the limitations of such an approach, Ferreira’s photographs allow us to see the foundational tension that underpins the discourse on rights.

This tension is particularly visible in the following passage from Marx:

The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and, where possible, to make two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length. There is here therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day, presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that

produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.’ In many respects, the suggestion that the individual possesses a series of natural rights can be seen as a continuation of the history described by Marx. For Badiou (and others), the normative claims which arise from this development can be viewed as the dominant ethical assumptions of bourgeois society. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 84; Badiou, pp. 8-10.

⁴⁰⁹ For further details on this point, see pp. 116-117.

day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e., the working-class.⁴¹⁰

Within the wage relation, the worker and the capitalist are both granted a basic right: the right to private property. When the worker sells their daily labour power to the capitalist they exert this right, freely and without coercion, and expect an object of equivalent value in return. Yet in paying this price – the cost of the worker’s daily provisions – the capitalist also possesses the right to demand that services be delivered in full. Within the law of equivalent exchange this period does not have a fixed duration. As such, the length of the working day is determined outside of the field of rights, by means of ‘force’. However, it would be a mistake to assume that, in making this claim, Marx is referring to direct violence.⁴¹¹ Rather, to paraphrase Jameson, his argument alludes to a ‘properly political’ field of class struggle; one which cannot be reduced to questions of rights and duties.⁴¹²

A similar tension between ethics and politics is also at work within the polysemy of Ferreira’s images. Indeed, it is this tension which allows the photographs to be viewed as untranslatable. To be clear, the ethical questions raised above cannot simply be disregarded or removed from the shots. As such, they exist in a state of permanent confrontation with another set of issues: those pertaining to the categories of subject and subjugation. Despite their co-existence, these two poles cannot be easily reconciled. Whereas one is based upon a series of rights, social institutions and individual responsibilities, the other stems from inequality, political struggle and collective processes. By examining this conflict, it is possible to see how the question of untranslatability might be thought in visual terms. This conflictual structure also raises questions as to how *Maison Tropicale* engages with the question of spectatorship. When confronted with Ferreira’s photographs, the viewer is forced to engage with the ambivalences which emerged under French colonial rule. As a result, Azoulay’s notion of the universal spectator is further complicated by the fact that policies akin to a form of rights were implemented with little effect. To her credit, Azoulay does attempt to provide a political framework through which to approach such a situation. Throughout her work, the universal spectator functions as an ideal which must be fought for. However, in Ferreira’s images, there is no stable form of measurement, only a dialectical conflict between ethics and politics. The viewer is

⁴¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, p. 344.

⁴¹¹ Indeed, the section ends with the statement that ‘the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital’. Ibid., p. 416.

⁴¹² Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 56.

presented with an inadequate rights discourse which can only be changed through political struggle. Nevertheless, this discourse also makes all forms of politics appear unwarranted or extreme. Or, as Marx put it, 'between equal rights, force decides'.⁴¹³

Conclusion

Contrary to initial appearances, Ferreira's images evoke a diverse range of narratives, histories and aesthetic structures. Given the vast array of sources which inform her photographs, it would be wrong to suggest that these strands can be neatly summarised or brought to a unified conclusion. However, by examining a series of moments at which these materials intersect and diverge, I hope to have demonstrated both the political importance of this strategy and how it differs from stock notions of fragmentation or indeterminacy. Ferreira's photographs encourage the viewer to follow a series of branching paths; each one leading to failures, opacities and recapitulations. Yet they do so in order to establish the complexity and inequality of the field that they inhabit – that is, the history and legacies of French colonial rule. As a result, the photographs not only evoke a distinctive understanding of the category subject; one which foregrounds the parallel concept of subjugation. They also reveal its existence within a multitude of different narratives, aesthetic traditions and discursive formations, thereby destabilising the singular notions of the subject and citizen which dominate these sites. These established notions are as follows: the notion of a 'positive' labouring subject; the individuating subject-object categories found within traditional art history and the apparent extension of citizenship to the colonies within French colonial law. Ferreira's images, in contrast, confront these tropes with the absent labourer (who does not receive full remuneration for their work); a collective labour force that exists within social relations and the subjugated nature of France's colonial 'subjects'. In short, the initial banality of Ferreira's photographs ultimately gives way to an increasing instability that is fundamentally political in tone.

Over the course of this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate how the notion of untranslatability can be used as a framework through which to interrogate this instability. When understood in its broadest sense, the term refers to a word or phrase with a range of possible usages. In this regard, its main political import is a rejection of the notion of universal translatability and its accompanying tropes of homogenization and global consumerism. However, it also has a number of other functions. By embracing the critical

⁴¹³ Marx, *Capital*, p. 344.

potential of mistranslation and retranslation, the untranslatable sheds light upon those moments in which a clash, power relation or contradiction informs a shared situation or linguistic field, thus demonstrating how the duality of a particular concept can be employed for specific material or ideological purposes. This line of enquiry can also be extended to visual and, more specifically, photographic forms. For example, in many respects, Ferrara's images evoke the environmental questions and post-Fordist tropes of the *New Topographics* photographers. However, in their ambivalence, they also allow for a number of other, far more troubling, categories to be alluded to within the same space. In this sense, the politics of the untranslatable arise from holding such categories together in conflict and activating their tensions.

One of the most important gestures performed by Ferreira's work, I believe, is its attempt to reconnect the base with present day France. To show that the apparent untranslatability which resulted in the base's initial abandonment also corresponds to a more widespread denial of the implications of French colonial rule. In many respects, the question of untranslatability was central to my thinking about the contours of this link. In order to make this connection, it was necessary for categories such as 'process' to be dislodged from the confines of their apparent singularity – that is, as a term which refers to a physical and technical movement – and related to the Marxist notion of broader social relations. As a result of this shift, it was possible to see how France's rapid process of modernisation not only had a direct connection with, but was ultimately underpinned by, its status as a colonial power. The establishment of this link, however, should not be read as an attempt to reconstitute the colonial subject as citizen or to re-insert them into French history. If anything, such a gesture allows for the assertion of a historical inequality, the effects of which remain visible today; albeit in the new forms of racism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric which continue to proliferate across Europe and beyond. As such, I want to conclude, the main political gesture that Ferreira's photographs make is to call for an end to this problem; a form of reconciliation which could only occur by accepting and analysing the link between the former colonial powers and their now-independent colonies. However, there is one final connection which still remains to be analysed: the relationship between the untranslatability of the base and the translatability of the house staged within *Maison Tropicale*.

Conclusion

In order to bring this thesis to a conclusion, I want to return to my initial point of departure: the experience of encountering *Maison Tropicale*. In many respects, Ferreira's project adopts a narrative form. The viewer is directed through the sculptural components of the installation into a space containing the accompanying photographs; a journey which echoes the one undertaken by Prouvé's houses. Yet despite its apparent linearity, this seemingly straightforward framework soon becomes increasingly complex. There are a number of reasons for this. Most obviously, the work does not possess the traditional three-part structure of a beginning, middle and end.⁴¹⁴ By keeping the structure in transit, Ferreira ensures that its final destination remains unknown. Is the structure moving away from the bases or back towards them? On entering the exhibition space, which of these journeys are we preparing to embark upon? A similar set of ambiguities can also be found in the composition of the work. By mediating between architecture and sculpture, documentary and tableau photography, *Maison Tropicale* resists simple categorisation. Furthermore, as a result of its choice of subject matter, Ferreira's installation places the viewer in a series of distinct temporal moments; a list which includes the duration of Minimalist sculpture, the history of French colonial rule and the afterlife of Prouvé's houses. In addition to these questions, the work also cuts across a number of geopolitical boundaries. Despite being experienced in a fixed location, the work encourages its audience to move – or at least think – beyond their immediate surroundings. Given the diverse range of topics which inform these contradictions, it would be tempting to suggest that *Maison Tropicale* lacks a coherent structure. Such an interpretation, however, immediately risks lapsing into the uncritical celebrations of flux and indeterminacy proposed in Storr's 'Director's Introduction'.⁴¹⁵ In order to avoid such oversimplifications, the question thus becomes: how might we understand the unity of Ferreira's installation?

On beginning this thesis, my aim was to propose a framework through which to answer this question; a project which emerged, not from a desire to produce a definitive statement

⁴¹⁴ Initially proposed by Aristotle, this structure is explicitly unidirectional. 'A *beginning*', he writes, 'is that which itself does not follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it. Conversely, an *end* is that which does itself naturally follow from something else, either necessarily or in general, but there is nothing else after it. A *middle* is that which itself comes after something else, and some other thing comes after it'. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), pp. 13-14.

⁴¹⁵ Robert Storr, 'Director's Introduction: Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense', in *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*, ed. by Robert Storr, 2 vols. (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), n.p.

on the work, but rather from a scepticism about certain strands of contemporary art theory. In order to pursue this goal, it was therefore necessary to depart from a number of possible interpretations from the outset. In addition to the various attempts to present *Maison Tropicale* as an extension of Ferreira's biography, this list also included interpretations of the work as an extension of the modernist canon or a form of restitution; an approach epitomised by Diakhaté's suggestion that Ferreira sought 'to give back Prouvé's Tropical Houses [...] to Africa'.⁴¹⁶ Whilst these approaches have been subject to criticism since the early 1970s, as the literature on *Maison Tropicale* demonstrates, they continue to haunt curatorial texts and biennial culture more broadly. Within the broader field of contemporary art writing, there were also a number of other approaches which, despite offering an insight into certain aspects of the work, seemed unable to fully account for it – most notably, the discourse surrounding allegory, pastiche and the archive. Although each of these categories could be viewed as a potential starting point from which to address the act of remaking, the politics which they made available were somewhat one-sided. Whereas the debates on the archive offered a melancholic view of the current state of contemporary art, the literature on parody failed to progress beyond the idea of subversion. Moreover, each of these approaches remained caught in an opposition between modern and postmodern; a pairing which, in many respects, continues to define the field.

My response to these difficulties was to focus upon the question of translation. In doing so, it was not my intention produce a new theory of contemporary art or to add translation to the ever-expanding list of 'turns' within art history and critical theory. Rather, by adopting this framework, I sought to reconsider the act of remaking in response to the broader shifts which had occurred within contemporary art theory. In order to do so, it was necessary to adopt a critical perspective on the various ways in which translation had been addressed within this literature; a decision which ultimately led me to Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'. Having begun to pursue this line of enquiry, however, I quickly realised that Benjamin's notion of translatability was unable to account for all of the questions raised by *Maison Tropicale*. Although the term allowed for an engagement with the sculptural aspects of Ferreira's installation, it offered little explanation for the photographic components of the work. Whilst translatability offered a useful framework through which to address the problems of decontextualisation and authorship raised by *Maison Tropicale*, it failed to account for a number of the power relations at play within the work. As a result,

⁴¹⁶ Diakhaté, p. 186.

my research turned to the notion of untranslatability and its accompanying themes of absence, incommensurability and polysemy. But although this decision allowed for an examination of certain histories and socio-economic structures that would have otherwise remained hidden, it also presented its own set of challenges – most notably, the lack of a coherent body of literature on the topic. Of course, this is not to suggest that the figure of the untranslatable is radically new. However, within the context of the visual arts it has received very little attention. As such, it was necessary to draw upon a wider range of materials in order to consider how the term might function as a tool for critical analysis.

It is this pairing, I believe, which allows us to see some of the tensions at work within Ferreira's installation. However, in making this claim, it is not my intention to reiterate the point – made by writers from Benjamin to Weber – that untranslatability plays a central role in translation. Rather I have sought to show how the relationship between translatability and untranslatability must be understood as a concrete political and historical relationship; one which allows us to see both the boundaries and the power relations which underpin *Maison Tropicale*. Throughout this thesis I have sought to demonstrate how these questions can be explored by considering the separation of Prouvé's houses from their bases. However, the fact that Prouvé's houses were deemed to be translatable cannot simply be understood with reference to aesthetic categories. They also tell us something about the construction of the individual artist; France's relationship to its colonial past and the act of expropriation. The untranslatability of the bases, in contrast, contains traces of a historical power relation which continues to have implications for the present. In this sense, the unity of Ferreira's installation must be understood in a political context defined by the legacies of colonialism; one in which the flow of goods and people is regulated.

Of course, there were certain risks involved in my decision to address the two components of *Maison Tropicale* in relative independence. First, the thesis risked being misunderstood as a return to the notion of medium specificity; a line of argument which, as Ferreira's work demonstrates, has been called into question by the history of installation art. Though it was not my intention to pursue such a line of enquiry, it was impossible to avoid reproducing some of its characteristics. Whereas Chapter 2 was oriented towards theories of sculpture, Chapter 3 took its lead from the history of photography. Although there have been various attempts to 'solve' this problem – for example, Rosalind Krauss' notion of the expanded field (and its subsequent extension into photography) – I

purposefully chose to avoid such an approach.⁴¹⁷ My decision to address the work in this manner also raised a series of problems at the level of content. Whilst I have chosen to attribute certain themes and concepts to one half of the work, many of them are equally visible within the other. Amongst other things, this list included the relationship between memory, amnesia and preservation; questions of individual and collective labour and the ethics and politics of contemporary art. To pursue these line of enquiry in detail, however, would require another thesis entirely. To give but one example, any attempt to extend the debate on memory – which I have discussed in relation to the sculptural components of *Maison Tropicale* – to photography would require a consideration of range of other works, from the writings of Siegfried Kracauer to more recent debates upon the digital image.⁴¹⁸ Nevertheless, my choice of structure was not simply an attempt to limit the scope of the thesis or a convenient way of organising my thoughts. Equally, it has not – at least to my mind – disfigured or obscured Ferreira’s installation. If anything, it plays a crucial role in understanding it.

First, the twofold structure of this thesis seeks to unpack the various ways in which we experience Ferreira’s installation. It can even be understood as a journey through the work. Beginning with the assumptions which precede our experience of *Maison Tropicale*, the thesis then traces the viewer’s movement down the corridor to the photographs at the end. By adopting this strategy, I sought to demonstrate some of the ways in which Ferreira’s installation continually introduces additional ‘layers’, thereby producing an increasingly complex picture of the relationship between modernism and French colonial rule. In doing so, however, it was not my intention to suggest that the work adopts a linear structure or attempts to reveal a greater ‘truth’. On the contrary, by treating translatability and untranslatability in partial independence, I hope to have retained some of the contradictions of the work. Indeed, as I noted in my earlier remarks upon minimalist sculpture, *Maison Tropicale* cannot be experienced as a complete or unified whole. Whilst in the corridor, the viewer is unable to see Ferreira’s images. However, when we view the photographs, the sculpture is absent. As such, the question remains: what type of unity is *Maison Tropicale*?

⁴¹⁷ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, *October*, 8 (1979), 30-44.

⁴¹⁸ See, for example, Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Photography’, in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 47-63; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980); Geoffrey Batchen, ‘Ectoplasm: Photography in the Digital Age’, in *OverExposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. by Carol Squiers (New York: New Press, 1999), pp. 9-23; Daniel Rubenstein and Katrina Sluis, ‘A Life More Photographic’, *Photographies*, 1 (2008), 9-28.

Needless to say, the work's compositional unity is contradictory and multiple. But although its structure is extremely complex, I hope to have demonstrated that it differs from other models that have been used within art writing to describe similar projects – for example, the notions of hybridity and the archipelagic. Rather, it is my belief that *Maison Tropicale* can be placed on a spectrum that Bürger attributed to the avant-gardiste work of art. Although his main points of reference stem from early 20th century modernism, in many respects, his argument remains relevant. Bürger writes:

[...] Even in the avant-gardiste work, the emancipation of the individual elements never reaches total detachment from the whole of the work. Even where the negation of synthesis becomes a structural principle, it must remain possible to conceive however precious a unity. For the act of reception, this means that even the avant-gardiste work is still to be understood hermeneutically (as a total meaning) except that the unity has integrated the contradiction within itself. It is no longer the harmony of the individual parts that constitutes the whole; it is the contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements.⁴¹⁹

In short, the individual parts of such an artwork can (and must) be viewed in separation, if they are to be distinguished from the organic artworks of the past. However, this does not mean total fragmentation. To the contrary, the unity of the whole is defined by its contradictory form – that is, by the clash between its various parts. In producing these gaps and conflicts, *Maison Tropicale* not only reveals an open or fragmentary structure. It also creates a space for political intervention. Over the course of this thesis, I have addressed a number of these interventions. I began by examining how Ferreira's decision to keep the houses in transit disrupted their insertion into the modernist canon. Equally, I sought to demonstrate how Ferreira's decision to remake the houses dislodged the plenitude which had been attributed to them. However, in bringing the bases into view, Ferreira also encourages the viewer to engage with France's colonial past, joining together two histories which would otherwise remain separate. By staging these moments of conflict, Ferreira's installation can therefore be read as an attempt to produce a visual language with which to depict the complex legacies (and flagrant inequalities) of French colonial rule.

⁴¹⁹ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 82.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: Ângela Ferreira, *Maison Tropicale* (Detail of Aluminium Beams), 2007. Mixed media installation, 10 x 2.17 x 1.2 m plus eight 120 x 150 cm prints. Museion, Bolzano.

Fig. 2: Ângela Ferreira, *Maison Tropicale* (Detail of Blue Glass Portals), 2007. Mixed media installation, 10 x 2.17 x 1.2 m plus seven 120 x 150 cm prints. Museion, Bolzano.

Fig. 3: Ângela Ferreira, *Maison Tropicale* (Detail of Wooden Panels), 2007. Mixed media installation, 10 x 2.17 x 1.2 m plus eight 120 x 150 cm prints. Museion, Bolzano.

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Fig. 5: Ângela Ferreira, *Maison Tropicale* (Niamey #1), 2007. Mixed media installation, 10 x 2.17 x 1.2 m plus eight 120 x 150 cm prints. Museion, Bolzano.

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