

COCA COLA PLAN:
ICONS OF THE GLOBAL IN CONTEMPORARY ART¹
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Introduction

The object illustrated here was produced by US artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1958 and is about the size of a large trophy, with that same triumphant air. Called *Coca Cola Plan*, its PLAN is at the top, pasted to the wooden support. Here is the king of the roost, the *kopf*, the brains, the pilot, the superego of the piece. The plan's ambitions seem modest enough. In pencil are a set of directions: "LAY OUT STRETCHER ON FLOOR / MATCH MARKINGS AND JOIN." But as we examine this little wall sculpture, it is clear that its intentions go further. In the center resides the iconic heart of the piece – three trademarked Coca-Cola bottles. By 1958, when the piece was made, their shape could be recognized, even in the dark, by a large fraction of the world's population. Flanked on either side by silvery wings, these bottles form a triumvirate. They are commodities, intended to shock us by appearing in an artwork – but they are soothingly arranged like a group of classical caryatids. Their repetitive fluted shapes are differentiated only by daubs of *malerisch* paint. Below them, functioning metaphorically as the engine room, the id, or the plinth of this programmatic prize, rests a carved sphere taken from some long-abandoned piece of architecture. Tilted slightly to produce the right orbital axis, its concentric indentations can be read as the latitudinal markings on a globe of the world. (Ill. 1)

¹ Evening lecture presented on February 13, 2002 at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. Portions developed for publication elsewhere; see "Coca Cola Plan, or, How New York Stole the Soul of Giuseppe Panza." In *Panza: Legacy of a Collection*. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (December 1999), and "Commodities and Others: International Imaginaries in Post-War Art." In *Sixties Streets*, edited by Serge Guilbaut and Patricia Kelly (Duke University Press, forthcoming).



Ill. 1: Robert Rauschenberg. Coca-Cola Plan. 1958. Wood, paper, Coke bottles, oil paint. The Museum of Contemporary Art. Los Angeles; Giuseppe Panza Collection.

This is no random concatenation of urban detritus. Make no mistake about it: this is an ambitious, calculated little package. Riding on the crest of an increasingly global wave of American commodity culture, its south Texas author seems ready to take over the world.

Whether we could agree about Rauschenberg's ultimate success, we can say that his cheerfully global ambitions were almost immediately endorsed by the man who collected *Coca-Cola Plan*, the Italian Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, often pictured at his villa in Varese leaning on another Rauschenberg artwork. What I am interested in exploring is the cultural space mapped by such exchanges, investigating in particular what Benedict Anderson has theorized as their constitution of an "imagined community" in which nations and their others might be configured and contained. Anderson's is an important contribution, but like many others who study nationalism and globalism, this scholar bases his analysis on *linguistic* models of cultural exchange. As an art historian, I want to propose that we widen our view to include the *visual*, particularly the non-narrative *iconic* visual culture produced during the economic expansion of the 1950s and '60s. Further, I want to question Anderson's confinement of the imagined community to *nation*, and explore the possibility of an imagined *internation* – what Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins call the extension of cosmopolitanism to "Cosmopolitics."² And finally, I want to question the way in which we analyze the penetration of capitalist commodities or mass culture into their self-constituted peripheries, a penetration often presented as a "one-way street". I want to propose more complex dynamics of two-way exchange and transformation.

My approach is not intended to elide questions of agency, to erase the large- and small-scale physics of power, or to deny the brute facts of the United States' economic hegemony in the early sixties. Certainly the very conception of *Coca-Cola Plan* betrays the artist Rauschenberg's knowledge of that hegemony, as I will argue. Despite his own marginal status within US culture at the time, Rauschenberg could still share the benefits of America's increasing world power. *Coca-Cola Plan's* ironic commentary is staged from this privileged vantage point.

The very concept of the vantage point brings us to the question of scale and perspective. For the purposes of this talk, I will use two different levels of magnification to explore objects of visual culture. One is a local, detailed analysis; the second is as extensive and

² I thank Alice Kim for our discussions about nationalism and globalism. See Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

dispersed as the ocean. Both perspectives are needed to make effective use of the heuristic “visual culture”. This Anglo-American concept suggests more passivity on the part of the viewer than the German *Kultur des Sehens*. “Visual Culture” is an ocean of images, *eine Welt der Zeichen*, in which the contemporary viewer swims. Because it is not bound by language, the visual can drift well beyond its local point of origin, and its signs can be detached from their moorings to float freely, as if each image were a bottle cast upon the waves of the *Bilderflut*. This nonverbal aspect produces the conditions of possibility for visual culture’s global distribution. On the other hand, the inherent global potential of the visual is always tethered by the local. It is *people* who must retrieve the bottle and endeavor to make meaning of its contents – people who are saturated and constituted by language and locality, but claim their own individuality within subjectivating regimes. The situated recipients of visual culture experience their readings as specific, *re-localizing* the object in an entirely different context. In this sense, visual culture is always microscopic, even when global in its distribution. To summarize this scalar paradox: the visual can float beyond the local, but the local is the only site at which the visual can be understood.

In terms of the local origins of this specific object, *Coca-Cola Plan* was born from fragments found in the streets of New York, a city in full expansion after the Second World War. Rauschenberg was still young, unknown, and entirely peripheral to the art world. But he was doing his best to transcend the scale of local oblivion and achieve the global distribution of fame. By 1958, he could entertain at least the vision of success, with an exhibition in the wings (so to speak) at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. This was the local situation of the work’s maker. The man who would collect the work a few years later, Giuseppe Panza, brought other localisms into play from his base in the Italian hill town of Torino. Panza had the power of the patron at his disposal, but he was forced to operate with a weak Lira and a recently defeated Italian address.

Both Rauschenberg and Panza needed the power of Leo Castelli to succeed. This Italian-born dealer ran a gallery that showed European artists to America and, through its European affiliates, showed American artists to Europe. These triangulations of the local and the global were visualized effectively by Castelli’s own map – produced as an advertisement in 1964 and clearly aimed at securing his own piece of the international pie. Castelli’s map outlined a plan of attack, revealing a kind of “cultural cartography” (or cosmopolitics) that met with dramatic success when Rauschenberg, and the United States, won first prize at that year’s Venice Biennale – shortly after Panza purchased *Coca-Cola Plan*. The advertisement was thus another kind of “plan” that both endorsed Rauschenberg’s little “plan”

and played some role in getting it into Panza's collection. What is perhaps surprising is the openness with which this art dealer revealed his territorial thinking, usually hidden behind the scenes of cultural display.³ I hope to explore the ways in which such geometries, such triangulations of power, and such art objects might have worked to construct cultural imaginaries of *inter*-nation, during a period in which the fate of some states, at least, was decidedly in question.

I begin by examining how Rauschenberg and Panza produce an imagined, *inter*-national collectivity through the exchange of artworks built from commodity culture. This development will be shown to be historically specific: Rauschenberg learns to employ strategies that change from personal narratives to global icons, and Panza gains entrance to a community of subjects who are both managerial and magisterial, regnant masters of all they see. In the talk's concluding section, I leave this postwar moment of imagined potency to chart very different trajectories, showing how the international subject's consumption of the commodity is questioned by artists from both sides of the first world/third world mirror. Particularly in the case of Brazilians such as Cildo Meireles and Hélio Oiticica, working in the late '60s and early '70s, contemporary art can produce an *implosion* in the very category of nation, insofar as that category has been constructed through the spectacle of global commodity culture in its 20th-century forms.⁴

Before the Plan

To begin with Rauschenberg, we first need to go back to the mid-fifties to see the start of this artist's trajectory from local narrative to international commodity icon. That trajectory begins in intensely autobiographical works such as the untitled assemblage known as *Man with White Shoes*, and an infamous work called simply *Bed*. Both works were made in 1955; Rauschenberg called them "combines" to signal their genre confusion. The combine *Man* was purchased by Panza just before he acquired *Coca-Cola Plan*, and *Bed* was held by Castelli until he donated it to New York's Museum of Modern Art just a few years ago. There seems nothing remotely "national" or "international" about such personal works. Family

³ Laurie Monahan. "Cultural Cartography." In *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1964*, edited by Serge Guilbaut (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 369–416.

⁴ My arguments here are deeply indebted to Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Public Worlds Series, vol. 1, 1996).

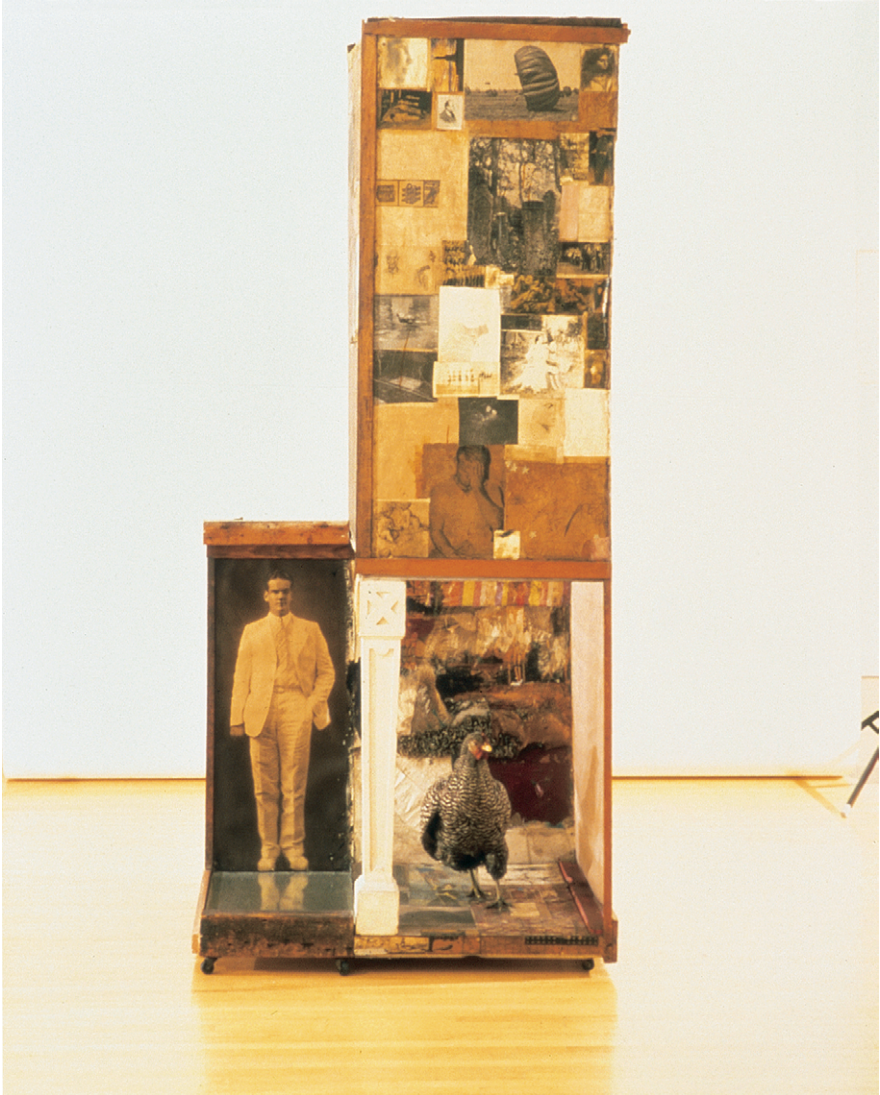
photographs, letters from home, newspaper clippings, clothing, bed linens – the list of seemingly intimate possessions that Rauschenberg was willing to sacrifice stimulates a troubled curiosity in the attentive viewer. Both bed and man exemplify the richly narcissistic vein of Rauschenberg’s work of the mid-1950s, when the artist worked in the knowledge that absolutely no one outside a small circle of intimates *cared*. But *Man* reveals Rauschenberg’s first “plan” to move from a personal past toward a deeply desired future – a *public* future that could only be built on the premise of eternal, internationally significant *Art*. It was this premise, I submit, that spoke to Panza and initiated the cultural imaginary that I seek to trace. (Ill. 2, 3)

Space constraints prohibit a full account of the referents embedded in this piece, but a few threads will reveal something of its complexity. On the “face” of the object (as it is usually installed) there is a progression, from top left to top right, that begins with a family photograph (it seems to be Rauschenberg’s sister Janet), confronted by a postcard of the statue of Liberty, followed by images of a parachute landing and an Old Master reproduction, the last directly above a newspaper clipping reporting on the silver wedding anniversary of Rauschenberg’s parents, who refer to “a son Milton, an art student in New York City, and a daughter Janet”. At this point in Rauschenberg’s career (when he was the archaic “Milton” and not yet the affable “Bob”), these disparate images form a *narrative* that arcs from the claims of home to an escape through Liberty, peaking with the parachute’s dramatic landing, coming down to be met by Art, finally anchored by the tethers of the family/name.⁵ The resolution of all these metaphors of ascension and descent seems to reside visually with the discouraged man who covers his face with his hand. Rauschenberg plots a path, but has yet to find his “Plan”. There are hints, however, of the national/international thematic that would later emerge.

These hints emerge on the lower section of the combine, where there are various versions of the American flag, visible in front of the chicken, in a “twinned” form, juxtaposed back-to-back.

Even the twinned flags here are not exclusively references to *nation*, however. That potentiality is present, but it is dwarfed by the larger theme of doubling, in which the flags form mirrored metaphors of Rauschenberg and his love object, fellow artist Jasper Johns.

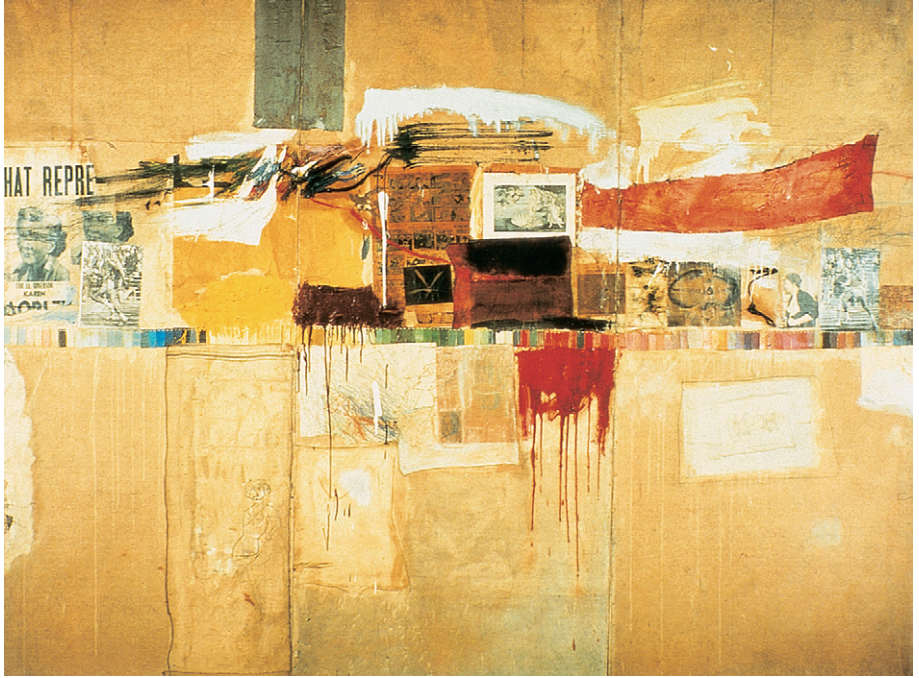
⁵ The parachute would come to be a signature icon for Rauschenberg, cropping up as a kind of aerofoil sailing behind him in his 1963 performance piece named *Pelican*. The flattened umbrellas in numerous works are also visual puns of the parachute.



Ill. 2: Robert Rauschenberg: Untitled Combine (Man with White Shoes). Wood, paper, cloth, photographs, and other mixed media. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Count Giuseppe Panza Collection.



Ill. 3: Robert Rauschenberg. *Bed*. 1955. Bedding, oil paint, others mixed media. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Ill. 4: Robert Rauschenberg. *Rebus*. 1955. Mixed media on canvas. Private collection.

This “twinning” operates as a theme within the piece as a whole, with Rauschenberg’s love of Johns framed in terms of Narcissus and mirror, beautiful dandy pursued by the evanescent Echo. Johns was himself painting American flags by this point, so the twinned flags certainly refer to him. Thoughts of nationalism and internationalism would not fully emerge in Rauschenberg’s work until the following year, when, in the “rebus” paintings, he began to plot a new imaginary of the *international* gaze. (Ill. 4, 5)

We experience the rebus game as emphatically narrative – words are coded by icons, but icons are mortgaged utterly to their meaning as words. The rebus’ narrative drive is so compulsory that art historians have taken the larger of Rauschenberg’s two *Rebus* paintings literally, translating its bits of ephemera into a long, implausible sentence.⁶ But it seems more likely that the “Rebus” games Rauschenberg intends do not hold a single verbal pay-off, but mark, again, a trajectory – a trajectory from personal to worldly, and from narra-

rhyiming, twinning, and punning than the larger, earlier *Rebus*; gone are the fragments of verbal advertisements and American political posters. In their place are pairs and twins, setting up a general structure of visual confrontation and mirror imaging between top and bottom, left and right. Note, for example: the paired bulls (above and below the central register of hardware store paint chips); the pairing of gracefully twisting gymnasts with the contorted dog (frozen in death under the ashes of Pompeii, as the gymnasts are frozen by flash photography); the line drawing of a handless (perhaps timeless?) clock at the far left, echoed by the line drawing of the mind's memory sites at the far right. Again, it is not a sentence that can be parsed but a direction – “read” from left to right, as are rebuses in English, the entire compositional arc of the painting (underscored by the direction of Rauschenberg's dragged yellow and blue lines) moves from the baroque drapery of Titian's *Europa* at lower left, over the fence of industrial color, past the nightmarish clock and agonistic bullfight, culminating in the triumphant runner (circled decisively with a black calligraphic gesture). Our terminus, our anti-climax, our fisherman's deadweight is the photograph of (Rauschenberg's) family, hovering over the map of memory that itself floats just above Death (in its material precipitate, the cast of the long-dead Pompeiian dog). The personal message seems clear: only the attempt to make art and culture can stem conflict – and only that same sporting endeavor can propel Rauschenberg to the winner's circle and keep him from the sinkhole of family-memory and death.

But there is something larger than this personal trajectory. *Small Rebus* begins to signal the ambitions that would emerge with *Coca-Cola Plan* in two more years. As if restating the overall trajectory from Europa the European to Rauschenberg the North American, there are two maps, buried at dead center of *Small Rebus's* lower register, dividing the painting into left and right halves (see detail in Ill. 6). At left is a portion of the US (significantly, the “heartland” so often ideologically constructed as the core of the nation), linked visually to a smattering of grey drips and “action painting” brushstrokes. At right (or “to the East”) is a map of a fragment of Europe, but a significant fragment: what were then known as the Warsaw Pact countries, veiled by one long black drip and a square of striped gauze.

Rauschenberg here makes a visual summary of wider arguments being produced in US cultural discourse, arguments that were also being exported to explain the significance of the conjunction between democracy and abstract art. With varying degrees of sophistication, defenders of the quintessentially American style of Abstract Expressionist painting had long argued that its seemingly chaotic brushstrokes were neither mad nor “commu-



Ill. 6: Robert Rauschenberg, *Small Rebus*, Detail. 1956. Mixed media on canvas. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Guisepppe Panza Collection.

nistic”, but manly marks of a generously tolerated individualism. Note here that the “AbEx” brushstrokes *do not obscure* the heartland, but “complement” and frame it, guiding the gaze to that terrain. The marks of this gestural avant-gardism remain off to the side (perhaps significantly, on the left), constructively engaging with the tidily divided territories of the American midwest, even as they serve as a foil to the dark regimentation artists could expect under the “puppet” regimes of the Soviet bloc, (here expressed as a “block” of fabric constructing a visual prison of black bars).

Rauschenberg’s small commentary on the implacable divisions between Cold War opponents may seem insignificant, or even “random” to some. But recall that when maps would emerge as Jasper Johns’s primary subject, in 1960, they did so through Rauschenberg, who had given Johns the simple school map he first painted on. Since he would not cut or collage this map, Johns remained focused exclusively on that part of the North American continent claimed by the states of the USA, never looking further than the bor-

ders of the country (with a nod to the Canadian provinces and Mexican districts at their edge). Rauschenberg had a wider view. Although he had yet to catch the smell of victory that *Coca Cola Plan* would find “in the air”, he already knew in *Small Rebus* that he wanted to think about the polemical oppositions of the Cold War; and the role culture might play on that international stage. What *Small Rebus* offers that Johns’ maps do not, then, is the inkling of a cultural imaginary that takes the *international* domain as its object of desire. The subject Rauschenberg is envisioning and that Panza would endorse is one modelled by NATO and the World Bank as much as Washington or New York.

Many scholars have charted the welter of discourses producing the Cold War cultural climate and have established the fact that the new ideologies were mobilized at the most subtle and sophisticated levels of the United States’ intellectual community. In trying to define “the liberating quality” of abstract art for a group of art professionals in 1957, for example, art historian Meyer Schapiro produced a view of abstraction identified strongly with Abstract Expressionism (rather than collage, montage, geometry, etc.). Like Rauschenberg, he located its model of heroic individualism in the paint itself:

*Hence the great importance of the mark, the stroke, the brush, the drip, the quality of the substance of the paint itself, and the surface of the canvas as a texture and field of operation – all signs of the artist’s active presence. ... All these qualities of painting may be regarded as a means of affirming the individual in opposition to the contrary qualities of the ordinary experience of working and doing. [Emphasis added]*⁷

Needless to say, the Warsaw Pact artists trapped inside Rauschenberg’s map would be perceived as imprisoned by such “ordinary experiences”, where art becomes mere “working and doing” – the brushstroke adjacent to the American map, however ambivalent Rauschenberg would soon feel about it, here stands as free-spirited polar antagonist to those rigid black bars. This is the ideology of no-ideology, in which abstraction plays a major role. In a world where both Soviet and Chinese communists had rejected abstraction programmatically, abstract painting could be constructed as inherently free from totalitar-

⁷ Meyer Schapiro. “The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art.” Address given to the American Federation of Arts on April 5, 1957 in Houston, Texas; published in *Artnews* 56, no. 4 (Summer 1957): 36–42, anthologized as “Recent Abstract Painting.” In idem. *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries, Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 218.

ian thought. For Rauschenberg at this moment, the “gesture” of American Abstract Expressionism can offer to rescue an embattled Europa, bringing her safely to an international future that both can share.

But as we know, there was another export of American culture besides Abstract Expressionist painting. This other export had much more economic power than art in the 1950s, and it kept Cold War cultural debates going at an often hysterical pitch. Even as late as 1963, when Panza would purchase *Coca-Cola Plan*, US art writers worried about the threat that this other import presented for the high culture of Abstract Expressionism, so important in the Cold War struggle for hearts and minds. As one put it:

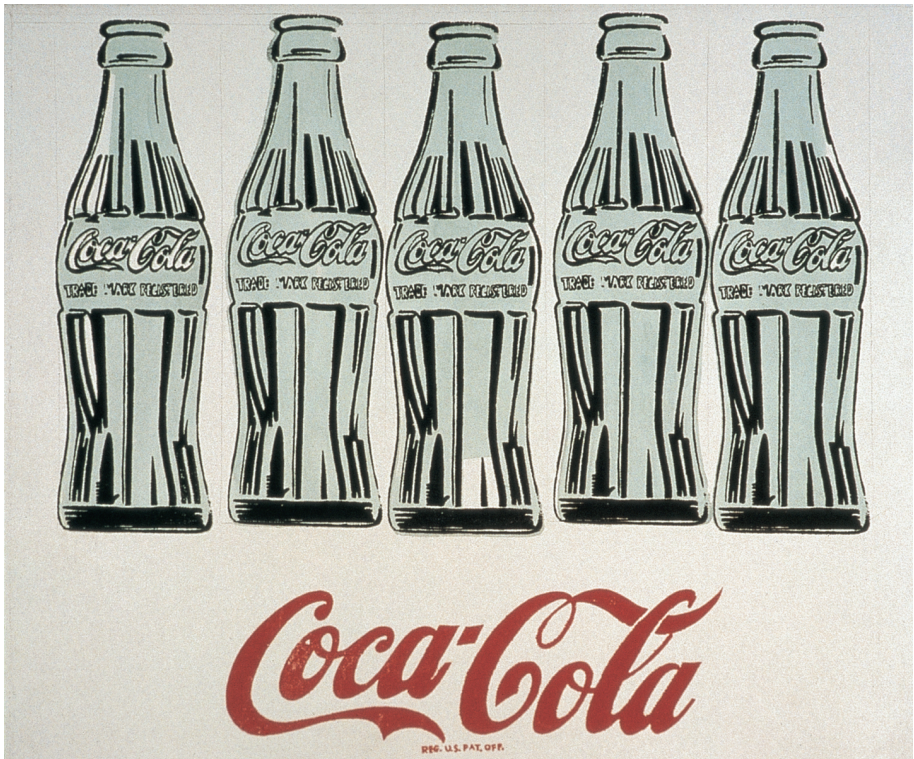
*Nothing has ever before so gloriously demonstrated the true meaning of free democracy, particularly in America, as the work of the Abstract Expressionists has done. It is not out of mere peasant philistinism that the Soviet leaders have forbidden artists to express their rage, their secret pleasures, their violent aggressions, in the form of free abstractions. [If allowed, those abstractions] could set off a chain reaction that might destroy their society as it is now organized.*⁸

The author here was Erle Loran, renowned for his interpretations of Cézanne and his formalist aesthetic. His telling atomic metaphor is all too American, constructing a view of Abstract Expressionism as the “ultimate weapon” in the Cold War armamentarium. But Loran’s paranoia had been ignited in this case not by the Soviets, but by Rauschenberg and his Pop Art followers. By making art based on the seductive sea of commercial products and graphic designs, Pop artists were simply echoing “the crassness, the vulgarity, [and] the depressing tawdriness of modern advertising art ...”, jeopardizing the respect other countries had finally granted American culture and giving those countries every reason to turn to Communism’s critique. Pop Art seemed to endorse what the “highbrows” tried to ignore: that *other* American cultural export that participated in the dangerously *motile* energies of free market commodity capitalism. For Rauschenberg and some of his admirers, however, the globalism embodied by the 1960s commodity was just the ticket – it was all part of the plan (the *Coca-Cola Plan*).

⁸ Erle Loran. “Cezanne [sic] and Lichtenstein: Problems of ‘Transformation’.” *Artforum* 2, 3 (September 1963): 34–35. “Advertising art” quote from page 35, emphasis added.

The Plan

To return to this generative object (Ill. 1). We have a spare, lucid little “combine painting”, as Rauschenberg called it. Like its namesake, the American agricultural *combine* harvester, Rauschenberg took French research and put it *into production*, as if Picasso’s Parisian collages (*Au Bon Marché*, for example) had gotten bulked up in a New York boxing ring. Rauschenberg’s piece has gone not just to the gym or the department store, however, but to the supermarket, the restaurant, and even the gas station where soda bottle “vending machines” first appeared. Rauschenberg’s implied consumer is not just the female fashion



Ill. 7: Andy Warhol. *Five Coke Bottles*. 1962. Silkscreen ink on polymer paint on canvas, Private collection.

slave who hovers over Picasso's work, but internationally-minded consumers, like the eventual collector of this *Coca-Cola Plan*.

This piece takes part in the trajectory I've traced in which Rauschenberg eschewed the personal to address himself to a public beyond New York and the still-provincial confines of the USA. As the Plan notes, the indicated dimensions of its proposed "takeover" will be grander than its own modest frame might initially suggest – a grandness acknowledged in Panza's installation of the small work next to the sweeping curves of a Baroque bench. Were the Plan's instructions followed, the resulting canvas would be more than three meters in width and two and a half in height. Structured as a triptych (as are, of course, the bottles of the combine itself), the painting plotted by the Plan would thus court sublimity in both its dimensions and associations – comparable to the monumental, often religiously inflected paintings by Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Franz Kline that were then touring Europe in the Museum of Modern Art's "New American Painting" show. The image intended for the Plan's canvas remains unknown (it might even have been pure white, as in Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* from several years before) – but we could amuse ourselves by imagining something like Warhol's *Five Coca-Cola Bottles* (Ill. 7), produced in 1962, as a deferred fulfillment of this *Coca-Cola Plan*. Coca-Cola (and its near competitor, Pepsi) had already conquered the visual culture of Rauschenberg's generation, and news reports of the 1960s discussed how the two cola corporations would divide up the globe, one taking China and the other Russia. Famously, Warhol declaimed that Coca-Cola provided the class leveler that Communism never could: "It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government, [so] why can't it work without being Communist?" "[I mean,] Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too."⁹ By 1961, Coca-Cola was sold in 115 countries at the rate of more than 65 million servings a day; the US newsmagazine *Time* put it best when the editors broke precedent to feature this commercial product on their cover in 1951, reasoning that "[Coca-Cola provides] sim-

⁹ For the first quote, see Warhol interviewed by Gene Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters." Part 1, *Art News* 52, 7 (November 1963): 26; the second quote is from Andy Warhol, *The Autobiography of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 100–101. Full quote: "What's great about this country is that ... the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it."

pler, sharper evidence than the Marshall Plan or a Voice of America broadcast that the US [has] gone out into the world to stay.”¹⁰ Just before, Coca-Cola’s ad campaign had incorporated the slogan “Coca-Cola ... along the highway to anywhere.” Increasingly, “anywhere” meant *anywhere on earth*.

One British art writer, staging Coke’s takeover in the standard terms of its affront to *European* civilization (although its reach spread much farther), put it this way in a 1964 London *Times* article titled “Art in a Coke Climate”:

The point is not whether Coca-Cola culture is wiser and nicer than wine culture: the point is that it is a culture - a set of tribal tastes and customs which implies certain values and attitudes and a conception of what life could ideally mean. ... More people having a good time than have ever had a good time before. A taste for vicarious pleasure as well as vicarious cooking. Brand advertising everywhere. ... A Promethean faith that nature is conquerable. ... expendability ... standardization.¹¹

Warhol’s obsession with Coke remains fairly modest, but Rauschenberg’s combine, with its wings unfurled, indeed evokes Prometheus, but with no clear Zeus to challenge his human-helping hubris. Rauschenberg’s trophy seems to celebrate the moral equivalent of wars’ victory – postwar *bricolage* made analogous to the triumphant Hellenistic Nike from Samothrace that crowns one of the Louvre’s most exalted vistas.¹² But rather than celebrate a battle won with the help of the gods, Rauschenberg’s little votive is an imagined monument to a future takeover (or a future monument to an imagined takeover – in any case, a *plan*).

There were many other plans in the air, of course. Marshall Plan, marketing plans – both connected to *Coca-Cola Plan* and to other images (like Warhol’s) of this increasingly global drink. Tied to colonial enterprises as surely as coffee, this coca bean and cola nut soda dates back to its origins as a Southern pharmaceutical in the 1880s – even as early as 1919, it was a winning formula, and ownership of the Coca-Cola company was transferred

¹⁰ Cited in Sidra Stich. *Made in USA. An Americanization in Modern Art, the '50s & '60s* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 93.

¹¹ David Sylvester. “Art in a Coke Climate.” *The Sunday Times* (London), Colour Magazine section (1964): 14, 17. Spelling Americanized.

¹² Since I have invoked intention, it is pertinent to note that Rauschenberg could easily have seen the Nike when he was in Paris studying at the Académie Julian in 1948.

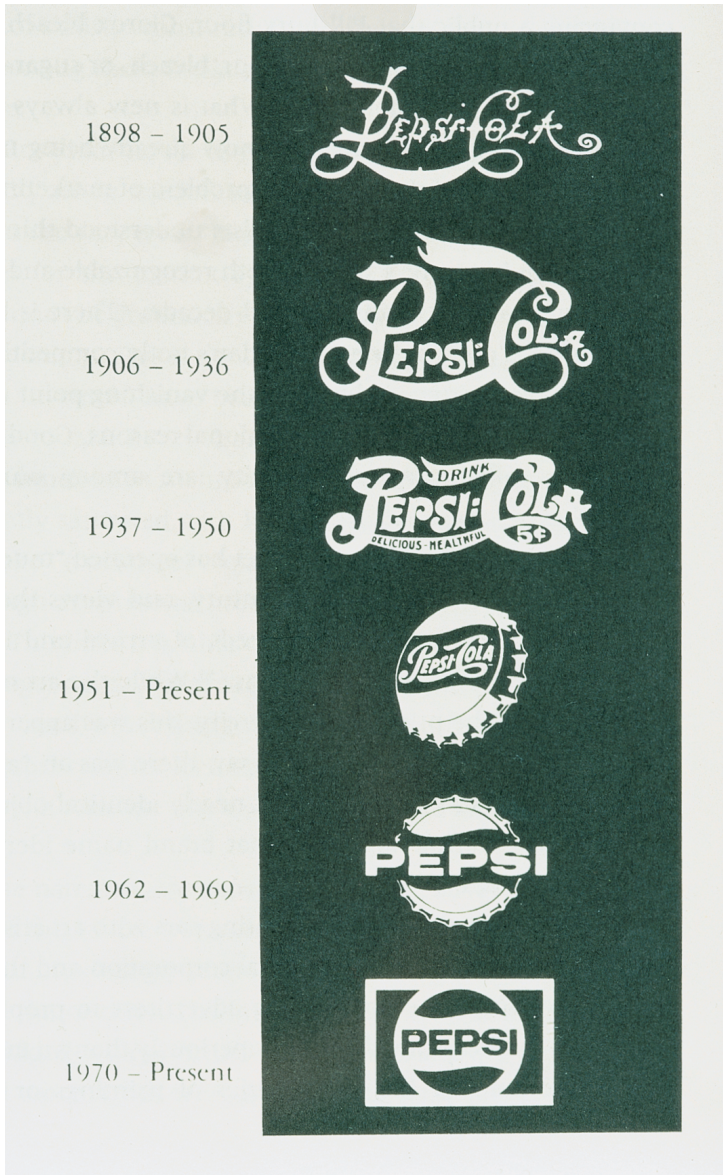
for \$25 million US dollars (equivalent to almost 300 million Euros in the present economy). The company had been internationalized as early as 1900, when plans for bottling plants were begun in England, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines¹³ – a virtual tracing of the US colonial map. By 1940, this international refreshment with its top-secret proprietary syrup had bottling plants in 45 countries; in June of 1943, Allied forces commander Dwight D. Eisenhower cabled home to request an additional 10 bottling plants to service the thirsty troops overseas.¹⁴ Rumor has it that the founding charter of the UN has a special provision for this preeminent cola corporation, protecting its access to raw materials from the southern hemisphere.

Since the earliest decades of the 20th century, the bottle shape remained consistent. As Warhol's and Rauschenberg's compositions each reveal, the "classic" Coke bottle was just that – a morphing of ancient banded columns (developed from the Egyptians' bundled papyrus) into seductively curved caryatids, the whole branded with the registered trademark of the company's 19th-century bookkeeper's cursive script.

These classical forms are resilient, but not unchanging. Perhaps most significant was the "streamlining" of corporate identity allowed by increasing brand name recognition, a process that reached a feverish pitch after the Second World War. Corporate "identity" programs proliferated dramatically in the 1960s as US executives wrestled their way out of linguistic and economic provincialism to aim at the world market. This produced the decade's dominant visual culture, as businesses made up words that fit no language group or attempted to find purely visual "logo-types". Note the streamlining of the Pepsi logo (Ill. 8). In another example, the noxious-sounding moniker "Exxon" was chosen after painstaking and expensive research had determined that all the permutations of Eastern Standard Oil's own initials wouldn't work – one variant meant "stalled car" in Japanese. Much more effective than these names were *visual* icons that had no linguistic basis. Characteristic of this

¹³ Electronic mail communication to the author, September 22, 1999, from Rosalyn Murphy, Industry and Consumer Affairs, the Coca-Cola Company. According to Ms. Murphy, "... products of The Coca-Cola Company are served all over the world, in nearly 200 countries, and the management structure of our Company truly reflects this. Our Company is divided into five geographic operating groups: the North America Group, the Greater Europe Group, the Latin America Group, the Middle and Far East Group, and the Africa Group."

¹⁴ See the personal scholarship represented in "The *Coca-Cola* Story" at <http://xenon.stanford.edu/~liao/cokestory.html>.



Ill. 8: Evolution of the Pepsi-Cola logotype, from narrative to icon, 1898–1970.

historic shift from word to image, the actual bottle shape of Coca-Cola was patented in 1960, two years after Rauschenberg's appropriation. As with Rauschenberg's own internationalizing trajectory, the pressure on corporations was to move from *narratives* based on family names or product descriptions to *pure icons*, from representations to abstraction, from signs (with their implied language-bound referents) to spectacles, which needed nothing to function but their own fulsome visual presence in the mind's eye.

What someone like Erle Loran detested, however, was not just Rauschenberg and his ilk's celebration of icons appropriated from American industry. The real difficulty lay in these younger artists' identification of the heroic Abstract Expressionist style as *itself* a commodity. In *Curfew*, Rauschenberg smears the boxed bottles with the same turpy dregs that he slathers on the canvas; and on the bottles in *Coca-Cola Plan* are gestural brushstrokes that ride on Coca-Cola's advertising genius but also announce themselves as advertisements *for* genius. As Rauschenberg presented the imperial nation's plan, commodity and culture had fused more deeply than even its worst critics had feared. Indeed, an entirely new entity had emerged in the worldwide export of Abstract Expressionism: free brushwork had become *commodified culture*. Cultural exports had come to play perhaps the biggest role of all in the production of a new *international* imaginary linked to capitalist democracy. Or so Giuseppe Panza came to think.

The Man

I have argued that Rauschenberg's *Coca-Cola Plan* held up a mirror to the aspiring internationalism of American commodity culture and culture-as-commodity, and I have also intimated that Count Panza saw himself in that same mirror. The model of exchange here is not a semiotic one of signal and receiver, but a discursive web constituting both artist and patron as subjects in a shared imaginary. Produced through their exchange of *Coca-Cola Plan*, and through their active appropriation of its many meanings, Panza, Rauschenberg, and others in the web comprise an "imagined community" that is not national but *international*. Rauschenberg may have crafted the plan, but he needed the man – or rather, as dealer Castell and the staffers at the US Information Agency would have wished, many men, strategically placed, with deep pockets and long attention spans. Count Panza, whose fame now rests entirely on his extraordinary art holdings, was a young lawyer in 1956, when he began buying art. His appearance on the scene was so unexpected that Castell – himself an Italian, remember – spent several years doubting Panza's *bona fides* before sell-

ing him a single work of art. (Indeed, Panza had to buy his first Rauschenberg from someone else – and only then did Castelli take him seriously.) Panza's father, a wine dealer and town official, had acquired the villa in Varese during the '30s, and had been given his family title by the otherwise functionless king of Italy in 1940. Despite this somewhat murky link with the European aristocracy, Panza became convinced that his cultural future lay in the hands of middle-class American artists, and he accommodated himself to the scale of Rauschenberg's ironic little trophy when he consummated its purchase from New York's Martha Jackson Gallery in 1963. In weighing in with Rauschenberg's *Coca-Cola Plan*, Panza left behind the austere struggles of European painting and placed his bet on the untried braggadocio and untested internationalism of American art. In believing Rauschenberg's vision of global triumph, Panza helped make it so.

The local context for Panza's Italian gaze is important to establish. Probably unbeknownst to Rauschenberg but certainly rote to Panza, the Italian Futurists had announced similar designs on European culture during and after the *First World War*. Referencing precisely that same rousing Hellenistic Nike of Samothrace as Rauschenberg had, the *Futuristi* announced in their statements that her kind should be smashed for the lime kiln and replaced by their own mechanomorphic analogues of speed and steam.

Wine, not Coke would be their first vessel for the new modern lifeform. The Greeks' winged victory was a trophy worth destroying, since it had long been possessed by France, whose ownership of post-Renaissance culture both infuriated and intoxicated well-traveled Italians. Making their own bid for control of world modernism, Futurists like Umberto Boccioni soon produced mechanomorphic figures that broke the stable plinth of classical Greek form. Seeking, as they said: "the beauty of speed ... more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace* ...",¹⁵ their yearning for the power and the glory of a civilization in ascension took shape as a winged, propulsive form – resembling nothing so much as the despised Nike herself. (Ill. 9, 10)

Panza recalled that by the 1930s "there was very little interest left in [Boccioni-type] Futurism", and the right-wing leanings of these artists did not endear them to subsequent historians of (supposedly progressive) twentieth-century modernism. By the end of the *Second World War*, the fate of Italian modernism seemed in an even deeper slough. Seduced by a posturing imperial *Duce*, ashamed of their failure to hold on to even the most rudimentary

¹⁵ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism." (1909) Anthologized in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. *Art in Theory: 1900–1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 147.



Ill. 9: Nike (Victory) of Samothrace, ca 200–190 B.C.E. Marble. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Ill. 10: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. Bronze (cast 1931). Museum of Modern Art, New York.

colonial outposts, and deeply implicated in the bad business of fascism, Italian modernists had few legitimate local outlets for dreaming of an international future.¹⁶

Marino Marini's endless horses grew tiresome, and even Giorgio Morandi's humble still lifes were tainted by their mobilization as icons of the *stralpaese* or "super-countryside" branch of the fascist movement.¹⁷ Panza had no affection for such elemental rural pieties or for what they seemed to predict for Italy's future as continuous with its agrarian past. Just how bleak cultural prospects looked for technocratic modernism can be intuited from the name Italian artists and critics gave to the first postwar Italian movement that aspired (again) to international status: *Arte Povera* (Ill. 11).

Despite its unassailable success, this '60s movement seemed to carry a refugee sensibility, as if to say "we, too, were victims ..."¹⁸ And again, its rural references seemed to connect with some imagined Italian primordia rather than the future envisioned by Italy's new managerial elite. Or at least that was Panza's conclusion: "I saw a lot of work by the *Arte Povera* artists," he recalls. "[They] were interesting to me ... they had an international value But ... I decided to keep my attention concentrated on the Americans ..."¹⁹

Panza's postwar views of the US had a context determined, among other things, by an erudite Italian steel-industry magazine titled *Civiltà delle Macchine* (The Civilization of

¹⁶ Panza recalls the Futurists, in particular, as seeming entirely irrelevant to the future of culture during his childhood: "... in the '30s there was very little interest left in Futurism. Most people considered Futurism a strange idea, there wasn't much interest in it anymore." Giuseppe Panza, interviewed by Christopher Knight in *Art of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies: The Panza Collection* (New York and Los Angeles: Rizzoli and Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1986).

¹⁷ Emily Braun. "Speaking Volumes: Giorgio Morandi's Still Lifes and the Cultural Politics of Strapaese." *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 3 (1995): 89–116.

¹⁸ The name *Arte Povera* was coined by a critic, Germano Celant, who put the first exhibitions and publications together. Some of his first publications linked young Italian artists with contemporaneous New Yorkers like Richard Serra (whose identification with powerful industrial processes would otherwise seem to preclude his inclusion under the rubric "poor art"). For the "victim" role in *Arte Povera* one thinks, for example, of Giuseppe Penone's comic, mysterious, yet somehow also abject and mournful pieces in which regular spuds are exhibited alongside casts of carved potatoes depicting ears, mouths, or disembodied hands.

¹⁹ Panza to Knight, 41. The history of *Arte Povera* in Italy is only beginning to be written. Here my interest is in what Panza, as a collector living near Turin (the movement's home base), may have made of its complex relations with international art movements. Significantly, he seems to have determined that he would not participate in the development – perhaps because it was too home-grown? For an interesting view of *Arte Povera*, its history, and Germano Celant's writing of same, see Dan Cameron. "Anxieties of Influence: Regionalism, *Arte Povera*, and the Cold War." *Flash Art* 164 (May/June 1992): 75–81.



Ill. 11: Guiseppe Penone. *Potatoes*. 1977.

Machinery). A devoted reader of this unique technocratic literary journal, Panza encountered in its pages a 1957 article on “Franz Kline’s Signs and Images”.²⁰

Panza recalls today the shock of seeing Kline’s graphic markings on the magazine’s page. In the context of turbine ads and industrial engineering projects, the paintings looked, as he said, “like a steel structure, only broken”. Since the work, *Cardinal*, was shown flopped sideways, it was perhaps more “broken” than Kline intended. At any rate, on the basis of this one-page essay, Panza turned from European art. He contacted Kline’s New York gallery

and bought the 1956 painting *Buttress*. It is worth digressing a bit to examine just what this magazine was, to forge the necessary link between Rauschenberg's ambitiously internationalist *Plan* and Panza as the European agent who helped it to succeed.

Civiltà delle Macchine was founded in 1953, and there is no analogue in the English-speaking media for its complex groupings of translated intellectual essays (by the likes of Lewis Mumford and Siegfried Giedion), incisive art criticism (by such gifted critics as Reyner Banham and Paolo Portoghesi), human interest stories on scientists and inventors, and sober industrial reports on productivity and assembly-line technologies. Astonishing as it may seem for a magazine founded by a consortium of Italian steel companies and later funded by the Italian state, things large and innovative were cheerfully attributed to other nations – often Americans, occasionally Germans, rarely the French. Mostly these attributions focused on industry, but increasingly praise and interest shifted to the art and culture of Italy's New World transatlantic relation. The magazine quickly began to provide English summaries of all its essays, leading one to wonder whether USIA funding lay behind it. In any case, this publication was strictly internationalist – things Italian were too provincial by half. In a 1956 essay on advanced sculpture, for example, the (Italian) author describes the various national pavilions at the Biennale, concluding with a sigh, "The many sculpture halls in the Italian Pavilion give off a dusty air of restoration, indicative of the crisis of values in which Italian sculpture is now struggling, tied down to old patterns of style" By contrast, the same author reports on Kline's work only a few months later: "Perhaps it is too soon to say how far these images in black and white can go, to what extent they can be symbols and modes of our reality, but we can safely acknowledge them to be *our time, our life, our poetry*."²¹ The "our" here is not the Italian citizen *per se*, but the business-man-of-the-world. American culture and American "know-how" stand here for a newly global cultural imaginary. Rather than seizing on foreign innovations *for what they could teach Italy about itself as a nation* (an obsessive theme of the Futurists), the reader of

²⁰ Achille Perilli. "Segni e immagini di Franz Kline." *Civiltà delle Macchine* 5, no. 3 (May–June 1957): 33. *Civiltà delle Macchine* begins publication in 1953, under the auspices of the "Gruppo Industriale della Società Finanziaria Meccanica FINMECCANICA, Roma", which seems to have been a trade group or consortium of Italian industries. Just before the issue with the short essay on Kline, the publisher switched to IRI, the Industrial Reconstruction Institute. It would be very interesting indeed to learn whether any Marshall Funds or other foreign development monies supported this publication.

²¹ Achille Perilli. "Scultura all'avanguardia." *Civiltà delle Macchine* 5, no.5 (September–October 1956): 17–21; English summary provided on page 81; Achille Perilli. "Segni e immagini di Franz Kline." Op. cit., English summary p. 82. Emphasis added.

Civiltà is invited instead to the domain of worldwide commerce and civility, based on a universal technocratic wisdom combined with a leisured appreciation of internationally cultural things.

We can see, then, why Rauschenberg's *Coca-Cola Plan* would have functioned so effectively for Panza as an emblem of this international imaginary. The new postwar Italy would need to wean itself from the poisonous cultural imaginary of a *localized* and *primordial* nation (what Futurist Marinetti had celebrated as the "maternal ditch" of Italian factory effluent); now the new, postwar Italy was to become itself only by merging with a *supra*-national entity known only as "capitalism". In *Civiltà's* frame, and in Panza's chosen reading, American-style modernism was linked with this capitalism, increasingly based on the production of commodities and the stimulation of their consumption. Modernist art and capitalist business practices, in this context, were constructed (however misleadingly) as democracy in action. For Panza this seemed the only way to rebuild a culture and economy for Italy after the war.

One World, One Coke?

The view of American commodity-based art as initiating the global – what I have named, in Rauschenberg's shorthand, the "Coca-Cola Plan" – collapses many problematic issues and minimizes post-colonial critiques of US arrogance on earth. (Arguably, the basis for criticism can come into focus even before the nation constitutes itself, beginning with the destruction of Native American populations through the globalizing of European pestilence, and extending to the present, in the aftermath of the September 11 attack by Al Qaeda on the American symbol of "World Trade".) These critiques are not new, nor have they ended. During the moment of the 1960s we have been examining, however, they gathered particular force, focusing precisely on the twin fronts of commodity culture and the equally global presence of the American military. At the time of Rauschenberg and Panza's exchange, the military component was escalating as the US gradually took over from French colonial administrators in Vietnam and maintained a military presence in Korea. The cultural problems of the "global" imaginary became still more evident in the late 1970s, as Panza's collection failed to escape from the gravitational pull of its stubbornly local audience in the USA. For of course, the Panza collection found its final resting place not in Turin, Bonn, or Berlin, but in Los Angeles and New York, rejected by Europeans because of other localisms (most proximately, the *Arte Povera* crowd's protests that Italian

funds should not be spent housing a collection that didn't include them). But Panza's astonishing vision of the late 1950s and early 1960s has, I have argued, other lessons to teach us. In the first place, we should keep a sense of amazement at this Italian's extraordinary connection with objects that began from a profoundly local, New York gaze. And we should understand that his turn away from nativist "primordialism" and state totalitarianism to the seeming fluidity of free markets is a cultural trajectory that has been echoed elsewhere. It has not been confined to art, nor restricted to Europe and America; since the late 1980s, the free market and its commodity emblems have played a major symbolic role in this restless world of exceedingly uneven economic development.²² Without digressing too far, I would simply add that constructed primordia and ever more fractured nationalisms continue to return (in the former Yugoslavia, in Africa, in Indonesia) as the repressed residues of totalitarian regimes and the globalizing markets that were thought to undo them. The larger question remaining outside the purview of my comments is whether the utopian dream of the global can be disentangled from the vehicle of commodity capitalism that seems to be its only surviving form.

Giuseppe Panza had explained his Americanophilia by observing that "In some way the Second World War was the end of Europe".²³ And we have seen that Rauschenberg outfitted this cultural imaginary with its icon. But I would not want to end my presentation here. Rather, I want to conclude with yet another perspective glimmering from that same moment in the 1960s, in which some saw the beginning of the end for systems of imperial inter-nationalism. Truly, they reasoned, arrogant multi-nationalism could only survive through the compliance of its consumers. And indeed, trouble with consumers has forced even Coca-Cola Incorporated to alter its stance, stating in the 1990s, "We are not a multi-national, we are a multilocal."²⁴ In a sense, this is the curious fate of all conquerors – in expanding their empire of signs, American corporations, artists, and other globally-minded exporters began to experience the mixing, the hybridization, the downright *miscegenation*

²² In shorthand, and as only one example: Germany's move from Marshall Plan abjection, to "Economic Miracle", to the collapse of Eastern Europe and self-anointed leadership of the next (free-market/capitalist but also new age/Green) millennium.

²³ Giuseppe Panza, interviewed by Kerry Brougher in October 1984, as published in *The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Panza Collection* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), n. p.

²⁴ There is no citation for the quotation, available in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. "Introduction" to their edited volume *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

that seems inevitable between consumer and consumed. After all, “Exxon”, “Pepsi”, and “Coke” are not vernacular English, but an invented worldspeech. In the re-localization accomplished by varieties of situated speakers, that language could make strange poetry that escaped being defined by “nation” altogether.

Panza once mused that in the best times for art (namely, the Italian Renaissance), “power and culture were together and couldn’t be split”. And to a large extent, this is how scholars have viewed commodity culture – as fused power and culture blasting from the center of the capitalist “free” world to its neo-colonial peripheries. But anyone studying the art and political culture of the ’60s knows that things are more complicated than that. Images and objects assumed an unusual motility during that decade, and the ideologies supposedly implicit in signs and things began to seem potentially separable, manipulable, and capable of being freed from an instrumental economy. Those were frankly utopian times, when Guy Debord could identify, and so attempt to manipulate, the “society of the spectacle,” when Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and others marked by May ’68 could theorize how to fold power back upon itself by manipulating its representations of the subject, and when artists on both sides of the first world/third world mirror could begin to question the power of empires to define their experience of modernity.

For example, Venezuelan-born New York artist Marisol Escobar questioned the “freedom” of the free market in her sardonic sculpture *Love*, from 1962, in which the plaster mouth of a woman is “penetrated” by an actual Coke bottle. A year later, Japanese sculptor Jiro Takamatsu installed a liter Coke bottle (with Japanese logo) from which a white rope unspooled, implying that Coke’s achievement of an Asian market might be only temporary, doomed by the Asian body’s rejection of the foreign invader. These clever artistic manipulations of the commodity icon are only part of the story, however. What interests me even more are the conceptually-based artworks that interrogated the *systems* enabling commodities to achieve their hold on global culture. Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles, for example, produced in 1970 a remarkably subversive conceptual artwork, in which an anti-capitalist message was attached to existing bottles of Coke via print transfer (Ill. 12). Placed on the shelves with new message intact, the bottles circulated, revealing the systems of distribution on which they depended even as they dismantled the naturalization of the commodity as culture. Meireles’s compatriot, Hélio Oiticica, did even more to create cultural imaginaries that definitively dis-oriented the magisterial gaze.

Oiticica began working around 1965 to address the issues of nation, place, and global commodity culture that Rauschenberg had identified a half-decade before. As a Brazilian,



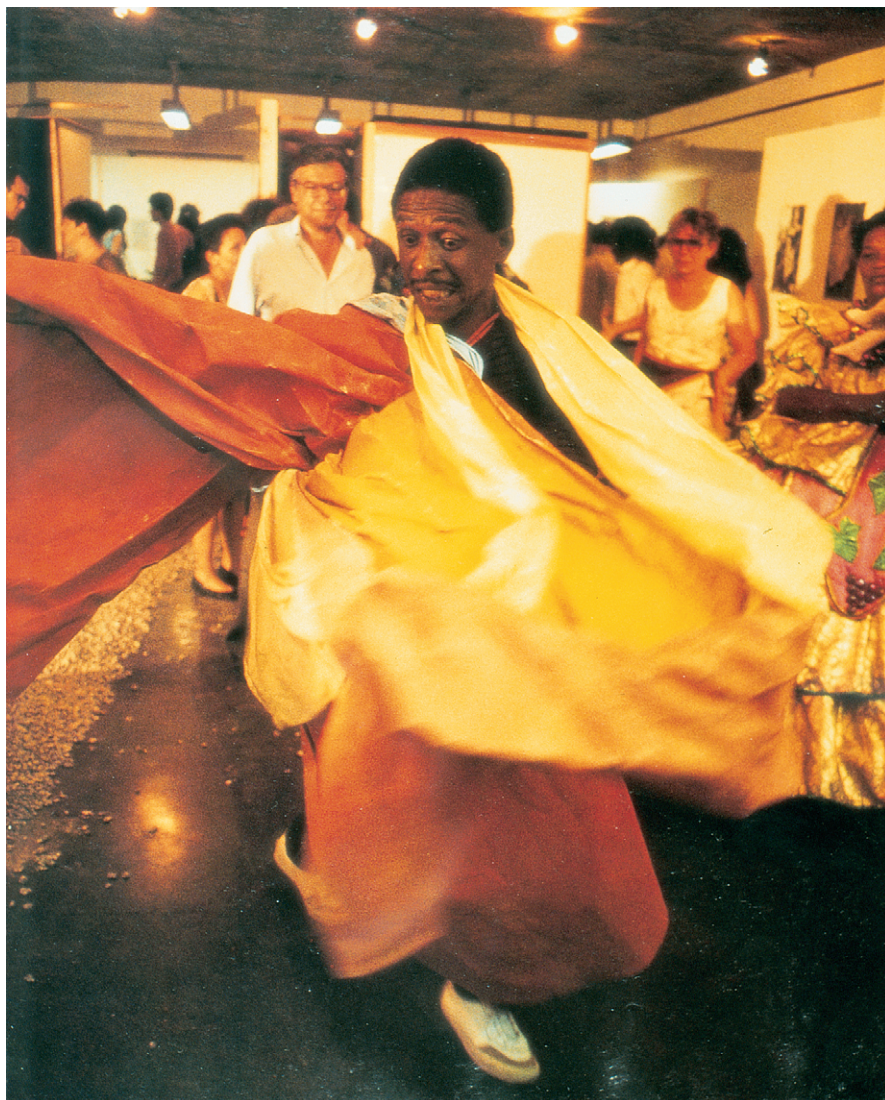
Ill. 12: Cildo Meireles. *Insertion into ideological circuits*. 1970.

he was heir to the paradoxical situation that scholars of Latin America have identified as “modernism without modernization”. The survival of artisanal production methods was one legacy of Brazil’s pre-industrial colonizers, but illiteracy and extreme poverty were, even in the 1960s, equally widespread. Yet for the educated Brazilian, high cultural modernism was comfortable and familiar. It came early in the 20th century – in the form of geometric abstraction in painting and sculpture, and surrealist experimentation in literature. Later, in Oiticica’s own generation, Brazilian musical culture produced *bossa nova*, the dramatic fusion of European popular music traditions and African rhythms. How did Oiticica, in particular, chart his way through what Nestor Garcia Canclini has called a “hybrid culture” of modernism, crafted from fragments of European culture mixed with localisms intended to subvert its colonial regime? Oiticica began this critique within the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, where his installation and performance works intended the kind of dis-orientation I have been speaking of. They turn the viewer quite literally against the kinds of certainties produced to secure our notions of *nation* – against those cultural verities routinely produced through tourism, through commodities, through stable art objects – through all the imaginary’s modes of consumption. Oiticica can be seen as an emblem for a much larger group of dis-orienting artists that would include Robert Rauschenberg and Hans Haacke in the 1970s, or, in the last decade, performance and new media artists like Mona Hatoum and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Focusing on Oiticica, however, allows us to see the beginnings of that late ’60s transformation in which certain artists abandoned the false promise of *internationalism* and turned to the periphery in order to disorient the center. Such artists sought a different kind of globalism through its infinite pulverization – turning against language, against the stability of earth, and against constructed primordialisms such as ethnicity, race, and even time.²⁵

By 1965, when Rauschenberg had turned to flat silkscreen painting and other New York artists were constructing an austere technocratic style called Minimalism, Oiticica was just beginning to theorize his extraordinarily embodied, kinetic, and ephemeral *Parangolés* (Ill. 13), reclamations of samba and street performance where, as he described it, “the action is the pure expressive manifestation of the work.”²⁶ In these performance works and in the

²⁵ See Appadurai. *Modernism at Large*. Op. cit., and Nestor Garcia Canclini. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

²⁶ Hélio Oiticica. “Notes on the Parangole.” Translated in *Hélio Oiticica*, edited by Guy Brett et al. (Rotterdam and Minneapolis: Witte de With center for contemporary art and the Walker Art Center, 1992): 93.



Ill. 13: Hélio Oiticica. *Parangolé dancer in Tropicalia*. 1966.

installation *Tropicália*, Oiticica's frame of reference was the uneven constructivism of the developing world (with whose flaws he was intimately acquainted). His imagery found its source in the bodies and bricolage of cast-off architectures that constituted the *favela*, the Brazilian slums where he lived for a time. Transformed by his dual experience of the samba school and the makeshift Rio shantytown, Oiticica produced the *Tropicália* installations and the *Parangole* performance works *against* the universalist myth of a melting-pot Brazilian culture and *against* the false imaginary offered by the Brazilian state. He labored *for* the various transnations he was engaged with: most notably the gay community and the worldwide culture of *bossa nova* and rock and roll. It was Oiticica's aim to surface the infinities of difference that lay beneath modernism's relations with its Others, and to make obvious the failure of the center-periphery binary to stay put.

Since its 1965 opening in São Paulo, *Tropicália* has been rebuilt many times, as in the 1990 version at the State University in São Paulo; or a London *Tropicália* in 1969. Photographs do not do justice to the labyrinthine installation. *Tropicália* was like the spontaneous assemblies the artist photographed in Brazil's urban centers, ephemeral architectures which would appear on street corners overnight, cobbled together from scavenged wood and fragments pilfered from building sites. Critic Waly Salomão²⁷ called Oiticica's structures "Brazilian Merzbaus", the phrase itself typical of the hybrid modernism Garcia Canclini identifies in the Latin American context.²⁸ In the artist's own complex notes, Oiticica wrote that *Tropicália* was meant to offer a site for what he called "Cre-leisure" (a word combining the Portuguese word for "belief", *creer*, with the English for "create" and relax).

Visitors laughed as they traveled through Tropicália's fun house or visited one of Oiticica's "Babylonests", moving in bare feet from straw to sand, from black tents piped with *bossa nova* to translucent scrims, lolling in magazines or smelling humid air heavy with leafy plants (apparently some were *cannabis sativa*). COME AND GO STOP STAY WANDER PLAY were the artist's directives, but this incredible lightness of being had a culminating point aimed at the jugular of commodity culture. In the core of Oiticica's "labyrinth" of sensual pleasures, a television was to be installed, its screen described by the artist as a cannibal that "devours the participant, because it is more active than his sensory creating ...".²⁹ At the heart of darkness, then, Oiticica placed not the savage, but a commodity

²⁷ Waly Salomão. "Homage." In *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., 241.

²⁸ Garcia Canclini. *Hybrid Cultures*, op. cit.

²⁹ Oiticica. "Tropicália." In *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., 124.

carnivore, already there (as Coke was, on that highway to anywhere), offering its unequal bargain of cultural exchange.

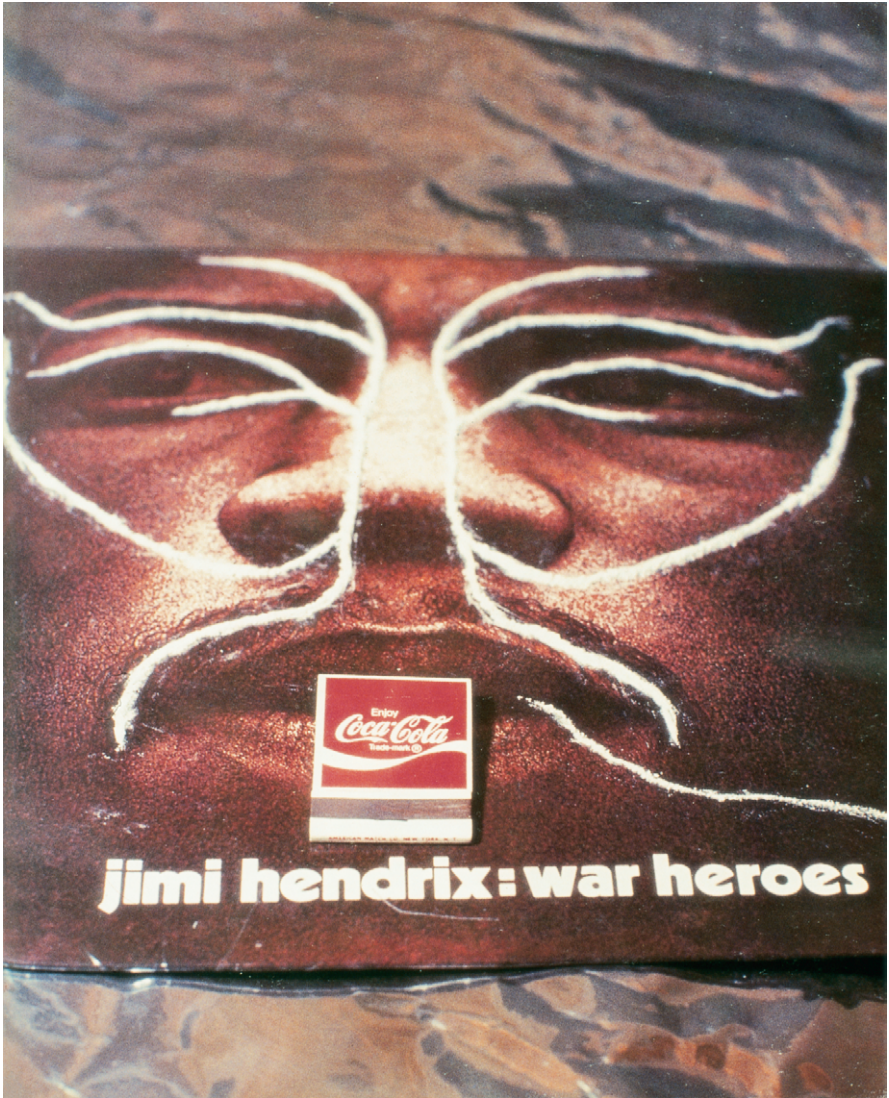
What is crucial to this trope of the TV cannibal, however, is its ambivalence. Oiticica was working with the extraordinary theorization of colonial trauma known as *antropofagia*, that model of *cultural* cannibalism in which the colonized turn to devour elements of the colonizers' culture, both killing and literally in-corporating them in a mysterious Dionysian process of transubstantiation. The primary framing for Brazilian encounters with modernism since Oswald de Andrade first developed it in the 1920s:

Antropofagia is ... the critical swallowing up of the universal cultural heritage, elaborated not from the submissive, reconciliant perspective of the "good savage" but from the disillusioned viewpoint of the "bad savage", the white-man eater, the cannibal. It involves not submission (catechization) but transculturation, or better still, "transvaluation" ...³⁰

Along with this Nietzschean transvaluation, we can place the transnational. For if the nation defines itself in relation to imagined Others – whether internal Indian savages or external barbarians at the gate – to *consume* and be consumed in turn sets up a less controllable metabolism. Rather than the wholesale destruction of the primordial Other envisioned by "the melting pot", Oiticica modelled a molecular dynamic, in which the directionality of the play of differences is much more unclear.

Oiticica's later productions push further on this ambiguous road. When making line-drawings of snortable cocaine on images of American mass culture icons (as in Ill. 14 from a 1970s series he called *Cosmococa*), Oiticica shuffled entire decks of cultural signifiers. The black hero of electric guitar, Jimi Hendrix, seems to be ready to devour the omnipresent Coca-Cola logo. But the cocaine snorter, in turn, will imbibe the image and destroy the mask to reveal Hendrix's commodified face. This is *antropofagia* with a vengeance, in terms far from Rauschenberg's imagined takeover of the world. Here we come back full circle to coca, that mysterious jungle plant at the colonial "root", so to speak, of commodified Coke and around which these cultural imaginaries and meditations on nation have circulated. This mingling of South American narcotics, masked North American celebrity icon, commodified pharmaceutical, and corporate logotype produces each form of commodity to be

³⁰ Haroldo de Campos. "De la Raison Antrophophage." [sic, as reprinted] *Lettre Internationale* 20 (Spring 1989), in Catherine David. "The Great Labyrinth." In *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., 252.



Ill. 14: Hélio Oiticica. *Cosmococa Hedrixwar*. 1973.

contemplated, consumed, and incorporated in the viewer. We could even circle back again, to the historical moment in which cocaine was eliminated from the Coca-Cola product and found itself removed to the status of smuggled stimulant, where it initiated the powerful shadow economy linking both American hemispheres and their transnational communities of wealth and poverty, junkies and users, crime and punishment. But that is another story. Here I want to ask, where are we in the empire of signs, still thinking about that sixties culture of the commodity? Have the issues of global culture, of cannibalism, of inter- and trans-national imaginaries come any further?

Clearly the Internet has provided a new, two-way permeability to the TV screen, its ideology of interactivity speeding cannibalism and serving as a powerful “surfactant” to the new global economy and its imaginary realms. Coca-Cola, that “coin of the realm” of the *pax Americana*, emerges now through thousands of homepages on the web, attesting to a worldwide youth culture affiliating itself imaginatively, if nostalgically, with the icon of Coke. By molecular exchange and market-driven transvaluation, it is this same multicultural/transnational youth that “cocacola.com” imagines in its own corporate discourse. As Jóan Bonet, the Catalan author of this particular site, proclaims in his own English: “In the moon or the Earth, in Europe or Asia, the north or the south, anywhere of the world we will find Coca-Cola. ... So send ... the photo in compressed format We want to shape the passage of time through an only filter, an only datum point: Coca-Cola and the world to his around.”³¹ This web author has cathected to the object of the Cola bottle with photographic and emotional evidence of “all bond”, as he says of his images (this one in Ill. 15 from 1958) – “familiar meetings, trips, the photos of the grandfathers, your father in this day of rest”. He sees this past from a future that Rauschenberg glimpsed that same moment in 1958. As Rauschenberg, Panza, and Oiticica each intuitively understood, from the 1960s on, the future was to be mapped not as political territory, but as cultural imaginary – not as sacred ground, but as spectacle. Paradoxically, the question of who mobilizes that spectacle must be locally answered, as never before. The gods may be crazy, but they know where that Coke bottle comes from.

In *Coca-Cola Plan*, Rauschenberg produced a powerful cultural imaginary of *internation* to which Panza offered an approving, mirroring gaze. But by the end of the decade such mirrors came to seem warped and refractive. Oiticica’s *Tropicália* and *Cosmococa* pulverized locality *through* the power of the imaginary, and Meireles’ insertion projects focused

³¹ <http://www.tangaworld.com/oldfilei.htm>, available as of 1999.



El autor, a la salida de una reunión familiar, hace ya unos pocos años, ya tenía claro cual sería su marca favorita.

* Autor: Joan Bonet

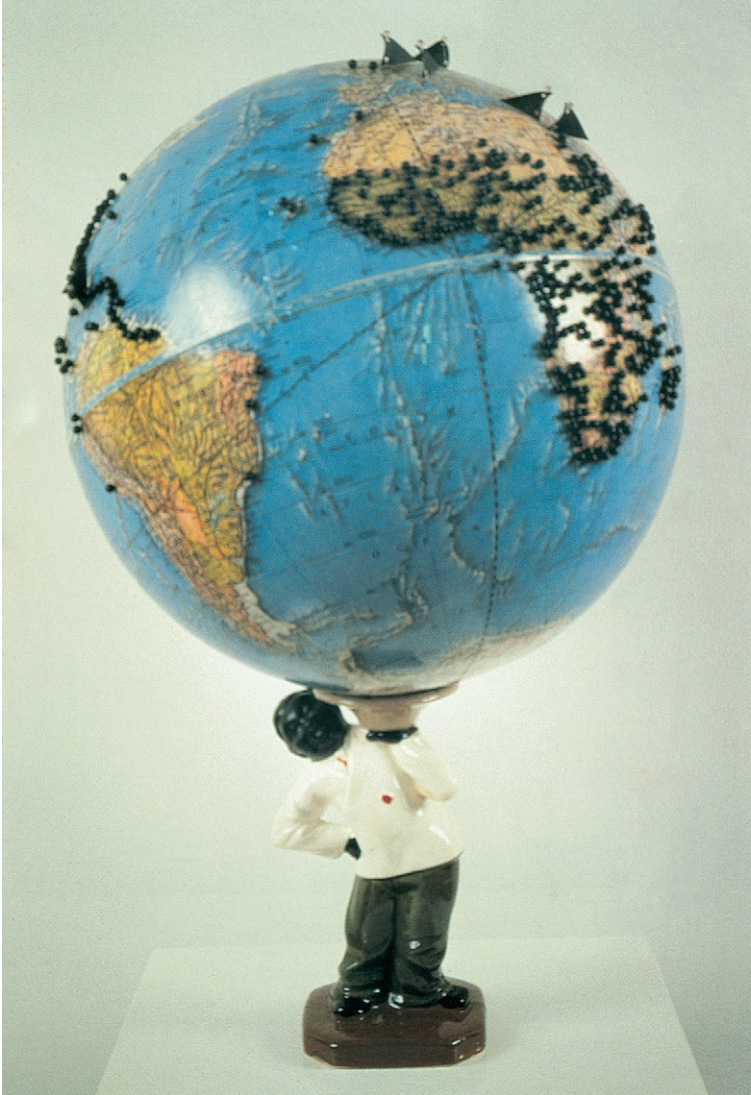
* Lugar: Barcelona (España)

* Año: 1958



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Ill. 15: Joan Bonet. "The autor with his favorite trademark" 1958, personal website available 1999.



Ill. 16: Fred Wilson. *Atlas*. 1995. Mixed media sculpture.

on the *systems* required for commodity exchange. African-American artist Fred Wilson, in a 1995 piece called *Atlas*, continues this trajectory (Ill. 16). He inverts Rauschenberg's geography completely, using the commodified racist kitsch of a ceramic African servant to show the hidden labor undergirding all imperial triumph. In place of victory, there is work; in place of imagined instantaneous flight there is the slow, painful counter-colonization of the globe by capitalism's subalterns. The globe and its pins and flags, all emblems of conquest, here illustrate the importance of the local; specific sites where African culture and its diaspora continue to burrow, hybridize, and thrive. Oiticica and Wilson bring us to places we need to be. Utopian globalism cannot be found in the old dreams of an imposed universalism; nor can it be built from the fragments of primordialist "nations". Our imaginaries can produce the transnational only, paradoxically, by attending to the hybrid nuances of the local. We can find the common basis for a globe-spanning visual culture only from within the widest possible range of situated perspectives on what we see. From their critical differences, carved out of the naturalizing discourse of hegemony, these other views can help counter the homogenizing effects of the commodity, and reveal something of the violence that still attends its rule.

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Wilson, Fred. *Atlas*. 1995. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures.