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But what is a *parergon*? To think through the significance of a *parergon*, we can turn to a similar word appearing both in Derrida's texts and throughout visual culture: a parasite. A parasite is an organism that latches on to another organism, feeding off the host organism. Sometimes, such a relationship can be mutually beneficial, as in the symbiotic relationship between rhinos and oxpeckers. Oxpeckers feed off the parasitical biting flies attempting to penetrate the rhino's thick skin. Parasites, in some cases, may be lethal, as in malaria, flatworms and fungi. A parasite, in any case, corrupts the ideal of the permanent independent body. The human body is always permeable and can become host to parasites, as well as have parasitical effects, as in the current relation between humans, their technologies and the environment. The parasite fits into a logic of 'both/and', instead of 'either/or', thus fitting into a logic of deconstruction. The parasite is both an independent organism and an organism dependent upon another organism. In its mediated form within popular visual culture, parasites populate the televisual, cinematic field in ever more and new visual forms. From the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) to the video game *BloodBayne* (2002), the vampire presents the classic parasite. A dead person living off the blood of the living, the vampire provides another figuration for deconstruction that obtains its sustenance from the pages of Derrida.

The parasite also alludes to the paranormal, a fascination with which was shown in recent contemporary visual culture by the series *The X-Files* (1993-2002), about cases marginalised within the FBI. The paranormal explores something beyond the normal. Often in relation to these paranormal experiences, a transitory visual phenomenon is witnessed. The continued fascination in American popular culture with the paranormal can be linked to current series such as *Ghost Hunters* (2004-) and *Most Haunted* (2002-). Even the conspiratorial plotlines of *The X-Files* (or other conspiracy-driven television series such as *Spooks* [MI-5 in North America] (2002-), or *Lost* (2004-), involve an idea of something paranormal or beyond the normal happening within the daily frameworks structuring our lives.

Through the examples of the parasite and the paranormal, we may be able to deduce that the *parergon* is something related to an *ergon*, but not part of what we consider the *ergon*. If the paranormal is not part of normal experience and the parasite is a foreign organism, then the *parergon* is probably not part of the *ergon*. But what is an *ergon*? *Ergon* is a Greek word used by Kant to signify 'work', as in work of art, work of literature, work of music, etc. But what constitutes a work of my field? According to Derrida's reading of Kant, the work or *ergon* depends upon the *parergon*. In a footnote, Kant gives three examples of *parerga*, including clothing on a statue, columns on a building and the frame of a painting. In this minor aside, Derrida finds a word that acts as a deconstructive agent already lurking within Kant's text. Acting like a sleeper agent in the spy genre, the *parergon* becomes an agent for deconstruction already present in Kant's text.

Derrida takes the idea of the *parergon* and runs with it, exposing how the *parergon* is something that undoes the relations ordering Kant's main discourse in the *Critique of Judgment*. Derrida cites paintings, such as Lucas Cranach's *Lucretia* (1532), that represent a nude woman wearing a transparent veil, columns on buildings that are statues, such as the caryatids on the *Erectheion* (421-05 BC) at the Acropolis, and other hybrid combinations of frames, clothing and columns. In these examples, Derrida presents hybrids of the neat categories that Kant tried to construct through the idea of the *parergon*. The *parergon*, for Kant, becomes a category for relegating the marginal elements that complicate the categorical definition of a work. The *parergon* is the convenient limit to the *ergon*, even when the *parergon* exists within the work, as with a column supporting a building. Existing in potentially two sites, both within and beyond the *ergon* or work, the *parergon* complicates a relationship Derrida explored earlier in *Of Grammatology*, the relation between inside and outside. Neither inside the work nor outside the work, the *parergon* follows a logic of 'both/and/neither/nor' that complicates the 'either/or' logic of Western metaphysics that Derrida criticises for its reliance on static structures that crumble because of their rigidity.

## The permeable frame

The frame becomes a main focal point for the essay 'Parergon'. The idea of the frame is easy for us to

visualise as artists. Yet, as with the concept of *écriture* or writing, Derrida expands our everyday understanding of the frame, loosening the four sides to the frame by expanding how we think about what frames are and what they do. Frames serve as limits or borders. Traditionally, in painting, they separate a work from the wall. Even in works that don't have a physical frame, as with many contemporary paintings, there is still a frame or limit between the work and the wall. In some clever cases, the frame is painted by the artist, as in the case of Georges Seurat in some of his pointillist canvases, such as *The Eiffel Tower* (1889). Seurat exhibited his painting in a cafe at the foot of the newly opened tower with works by other members of the *fin de siècle* avant-garde, including Paul Gauguin, Paul Cezanne and Vincent Van Gogh. The Eiffel Tower is a frame of structures just as it is a structure framing the social context in which works now valued and viewed beyond imagination were once shown in anonymity. In other cases, the artist paints upon the physical frame. In still others, the physical frame is fragmented. Regardless, the frame still exists even when there isn't a frame. The frame becomes the determining limit of the work.

Or does it? What else frames how we perceive works of art? Derrida's concept of the frame is supple, suggesting through its allusions relations to larger ideas within his thought regarding cultural and academic institutions. For instance, how, as institutions, do museums, galleries and auction houses frame works of art? Museums may frame works of art as cultural treasures, traditionally with a supporting narrative of triumph or an attempt to make amends or restitutions for a historical event, in its memory. Galleries may present works of art as items indicative of what is new and hot or established and true in relation to the art market. Auction houses might provide the spectacle of theatre in the bidding wars that make headlines in the culture pages of newspapers. The media is one of the forces framing the representation of art. If one compares similar news media from Britain, the United States and France, one can see reflected a process of framing that structures the world mass media. How do we, as viewers, also frame works of art? Do we have knowledge of the artist who made the painting that we are admiring within a museum, and does that matter to us? All these questions surrounding the work of art already show that we are framing the work. No eye is innocent.

The frame, while a *parergon*, also relates to Derrida's discussion of context. The question of context is brought up in Derrida's essay 'Signature Event Context' (in *Margins of Philosophy*), a text that showed him not only to be an astute student of structuralism, but already an exponent of deconstruction. Context is critical in all acts of reading a work. In analysing language, a consideration of where and when something was written provides one layer to a text or work of art's meaning. Other layers may be provided by how a work was made or who made the work of art. Our interpretations of why a work of art was made adds further layers of text relating to trying to understand a work of art or literature. What Derrida adds or notes, concerning context, is that there is no limit to the possible contexts that any statement or work might find itself in. Context is ever expandable, never exhaustive and never finished. Similarly, the way that works of art may be framed, moving beyond not only the literal possibilities (within works of art), may allow us to consider the frame not simply as something related to painting, but simply related to the way we view the world, the way we frame the world. In framing the world, we choose what to include in our constructed image and what to exclude. We can, in this way, view framing as a subjective process.

At the same time, however, the subject herself or himself is also already framed. Institutions frame us. Experience frames us. Negotiating and navigating the spaces between the external structures framing us and the internal structures framing our narrative of the world, we have all been framed from the start. Derrida makes the working of the frame seem omnipresent, constantly shifting from one moment to another in holding together the subject. Identity, as a result, is founded on a structure that is tenuous at best. In relation to Kant's use of the term *parergon*, Derrida notes that the tradition of Western metaphysics has been able to discuss only what is inside the frame or what is outside the frame. Never is the working of the frame discussed. In terms of aesthetics, formalism discusses forms within the frame. Formalism is a discourse originating beyond the frame of painting that comes to interpret the meaning of what is represented within the frame. While grounding itself in what the eye perceives, no consideration is given to how the eye is already formed by a vast array of internal and external structures. Formalism as a modern aesthetic discourse can trace one of its multiple origins back to Kant. In determining a work of art, the frame often bears the weight of giving the work its identity as a work of art. Formalism sees significance solely in the visual forms. In early modernism, these forms may simply be there to create pleasure in the viewer, as in Henri Matisse's comparison of a work of art to a piece of furniture, or, as in the discourse of Clement Greenberg, the forms

may simply be there to affirm the identity of the medium. If what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas, as a public ad campaign for the city proclaims, in Greenbergian modernism, what happens in the frame stays in the frame. What happens in literature happens in language. What happens in painting happens in paint alone. What happens in sculpture happens in the materials. Greenberg, through Kant, structures a world where peanut butter and chocolate never collide.

On the other hand, there are traditions of analysis that discuss what is outside the frame, such as the social or Marxist brands of art history. They do an excellent job of accounting for what is beyond the frame of the painting and offer information about the culture within which the work in question was produced. The most subtle and challenging accounts of art may, however, move beyond a simple frame of caricature, offering an account that tries to weave together what is inside the frame and what is outside the frame. But, as Derrida notes, there is no account of the frame and no way to account for the frame. As such, the frame embodies all the properties of the agents populating the texts Derrida explores.

In addition, the *parergon* corrupts the purity of the *ergon*. Corrupting the facade of purity covering the *ergon*, the *parergon* reveals the subjective interests vested in the time-bound structures we more commonly think of as works of art and literature. If purity is one of the key ideals in the tradition of Western metaphysics, Derrida likes to expose an impurity residing at the heart of this ideal of purity. For Derrida, the purity of any representation is marked from the beginning as a mark, something that is open to being read as a unit within a textual or visual representation and open to interpretation. In the case of the *ergon*, its non-self-identity, the inability of the *ergon* to define itself as a whole, is revealed through the *parergon*. There is no *ergon* without the *parergon*. At the origin of the *ergon* there was the work, but framing that work is already the *parergon*. Never pure, the *ergon* reveals a duplicitous origin.

From early on, Derrida's thought has been concerned with the idea that there is no singular origin, but an origin already existing in relation to some Other. Human life, life as we define it, depends on a cellular process of duplication. Derrida explores the idea of originary duplication in *Dissemination*. Here, the originality of the original is shown as being dependent on the copy. No original without the copy. In 'Signature Event Context', there is no signature without the countersignature to authenticate it. In relation to a work of art, authentication depends on the paperwork that helps to support and supplement the authenticity of the work in question.

As in his earlier work, Derrida revels in seeing a great thinker trip over the guardrail delimiting the limit between the essential and the inessential. In these situations, an act of deciding occurs, one that has to pass through moments where such decisions are almost impossible to make. In most cases, we simply impose the frames we already use to determine what is important from what is unimportant in 'our world'. These frames do not surround works of art but, rather, surround us. They are the frameworks to the structures within which our daily lives take place. By not noticing them, we become comfortable within them. Only in rare moments do these frames get shaken. Derrida's thought provides a way of shaking these structures, making what is most familiar unfamiliar. In the case of the frame, Derrida exposes something that does not reside comfortably within the rigid structures of Kant's thought, and through the *parergon* points to other possible deconstructive agents.

## Place label here

Labels are one such *parergonal* agent. Outside the work and the frame of the work, they often give a viewer information concerning the work. They help to identify who the artist is, what the title of the work is and what the medium of the work is, as well as often the dimensions, who the work belongs to and when the work was made. While not internal to the work, information gleaned from labels often frame part of our experience of the work. We move between the label and the work, and, in this movement, we slowly negate the mythical purity of the work. Ironically, the importance of labels in framing a viewer's experience happens even in the absence of labels. Moving both inside and outside the work, we can see the slippery nature of the *parergon*, its ability to reside in a para-site (almost a site).

Near Philadelphia, the Barnes Foundation provides an opportunity to experience art without traditional labels. Of course, we as viewers already frame the way we approach art. When going to the Barnes, a viewer knowledgeable in early modernism will recognise many of the great masters. Even in the absence of any knowledge by the viewer or any labels or guides to guide her or his eyes, not only are the viewers framed, but

also the works of art themselves. Even before viewers enter the building the works of art are being framed by a discourse of pure aesthetic contemplation. Aesthetic contemplation is never pure. The texts devoted to aesthetic contemplation bear witness to the impurity of aesthetic pleasure. If the Barnes philosophy embodies an ideal of pure aesthetic contemplation, the works themselves are already being framed by that philosophy. For Derrida, this is precisely the problem with not only aesthetics, but also the attempt of philosophy to have the ultimate say on all the fields it claims to have knowledge concerning. Philosophy is already framing art, an object that philosophy purports to be free, while in the same gesture delimiting what frames a work of art. Indeed, freedom isn't free.

If the Barnes Foundation offers one attempt to frame works of art, we can also see several contemporary artists who examine the way museums frame works. In many cases, such a critique happens through a *parergonal* space. What is a *parergonal* space? It is a space that resists any simple ordering by the opposition of inside to outside. As has been suggested, the opposition of inside and outside was critical to Derrida's exploration of the relation between philosophy and the literary arts. In extending his analysis to the visual arts, the *parergon* challenges the relation between inside and outside, occupying a space neither quite outside, nor quite inside the work or *ergon*. In resisting a simple logic of either being outside the work or inside the work, the *parergon* activates the destabilising tactics of deconstruction.

Tripping the limits between what is inside a structure and what is outside a structure, Derrida sounds an alarm for Western metaphysics. The frame provides merely one such phenomenon creating these effects. Fortunately, there are countless visual examples that allow us to perceive questions surrounding the frame and how the frame relates to the work of art. From Magritte's *The Human Condition* (1935) to Michelangelo Pistoletto's fragmented mirrors from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the idea of the frame has been explored as part of the tradition of modern art. Even earlier, one can see artists posing questions related to Derrida's analysis of the frame, whether it be a self-portrait by Nicolas Poussin or the Hellenistic relief sculptures of the Altar of Zeus from Pergamon (c. 175 BO).

Labels often bear the titles to a work of art, though sometimes titles appear within the work. Marcel Duchamp's *Nu descendant un escalier, no 2* (*Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*) (1912) provides one instance of a title existing inside a work of art. Titles can also be cited or appropriated to forge a relation between two artists. The title of Marcel Duchamp's painting of 1912 is referenced by the German painter Gerhard Richter in his own *Nude on a Staircase* (1966). Far from being marginal, a title often provides for the viewer one of the points of passage into the work.

Again, there could be a tradition structured around the title and its relation to a question of what is inside the frame and what resides outside the frame. Titles become even more informative in the case of prehistoric works that are given a title, as the transformation of the *Venus of Willendorf* to *Woman of Willendorf* can testify. Of course, the object itself may never have had a title and may never have been considered aesthetically except through the structures of aesthetics momentarily framing the object in survey texts.

Some contemporary artists have used museum labelling to challenge cultural labelling in the form of stereotypes. Fred Wilson, for instance, in his piece *Mining the Museum* (1992), institutes an angle of deconstructive inquiry in the way institutions are implicated in constructing historical identity. Working with the archives of the Maryland Historical Society, Wilson discovered many surprising items from the age of slavery. Whipping posts, shackles, and other objects associated with the institutionalised abuse of African-Americans were housed with other cultural artifacts of the colonial age. The continuation of slavery in the United States during the nineteenth century, after most European nations had attempted abolition, led to a period of extraordinarily inhumane treatment by one group of humans in power (the colonial Europeans) over another group of humans (the African slaves) who were part of the basis for this power.

Wilson's shock was not so much in the existence of the objects of torture, because there is ample sobering documentation concerning the abuse of slaves in America during the colonial period and the nineteenth century. The shock was that these physical objects were being preserved, but being preserved to be hidden. That is to say, by keeping these objects, the Maryland Historical Society devotes resources of space to preserve something documenting devices used in the torture of slaves in Maryland's history. These objects were not being exhibited, however. In selecting these objects for his exhibition, Wilson included them among other objects from the same time period, mirroring their storage in the institution's archive. In taking this approach, he constructs a synchronic frame to order the objects. Within a synchronic group of

objects (all taken from the same time period), one constructs an image of the past at a particular time. The objects in Wilson's groupings, however, are not just ordered synchronically by period, but also by material.

In structuring his work as the physical result of a set of conceptual decisions, Wilson screens the works to a manageable size for a normal exhibition, functioning as a thoughtful curator. Thus, a room devoted to carpentry includes chairs, chests and a whipping post. In a room devoted to works in metal, one sees refined cutlery and shackles within the same space. In mining and maiming the objective structures ordering traditional museum taxonomy, Wilson 'mines' the museum, making it his. Little else is done to frame Wilson's intervention, but visitors were offered a questionnaire asking for their thoughts and response to the show.

Through the questionnaire, Wilson initiates a diachronic study, opening up a space to discuss issues concerning race both today and within the age of slavery. Wilson's intervention also opens up a space to question and challenge the role of institutions in ordering objects of the past. The privileging of aesthetic experience instituted through the work of Kant and his interpreters led to the ideal of art for art's sake. The ideal of pure aesthetic contemplation is offered as a means of escaping the drudgery of the everyday world. Cultural institutions are founded and flounder upon such ideals.

For Wilson, it seems that the role of institutions in constructing our image of the past impacts in some way our image of the present. In framing what is included and excluded for an exhibition, numerous decisions must be made. In the space of the archive, however, reside objects that have the potential to deconstruct the values framing an institution, as Wilson shows repeatedly in his role as a curator. Wilson's artistic interventions within institutions such as museums lead to a questioning of his own role as a producer of art. In not producing an object to be consumed, he is taking up a tradition of art that criticizes the institutionalization of objects, a tradition including artists such as Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni and other European conceptual artists. Wilson functions as a curator by working within the limits of the archive, something shared by the American conceptual artist Christopher Williams, whose own work offers powerful examples of how an artist's work can be further appreciated by approaching it from a deconstructive stance. Williams also frequently works with archives, finding in the space of the archive a space filled with potential for deconstruction.

In working with the archive, Williams considers ways to set limits upon his selection process. These hidden decisions screen the work, both framing the work presented while also adding a layer of meaning to the work displayed. For instance, in his work *Angola to Vietnam* (1989), Williams screens the famous collection of Blaschka glass flowers in Harvard's Museum of Natural History by selecting only the flowers from countries listed by Amnesty International as having experienced 'disappearances' of citizens. Frequently these disappearances involve the politically motivated execution of innocent individuals in Third World countries. That he groups carrying out these atrocities were often sponsored by Western intelligence agencies adds a political dimension to the work. The shifting frames opened up by Williams' screening process offers one way of thinking about the role of institutions in framing the world. In trying to exclude the political, research institutions often try to represent the cultural ideals of Western society. Framing the world through a screen of categories requires a series of decisions that are necessarily political, even when they seem expressly not. After all, on the surface, what does a collection of replica botanical specimens have to do with anything but flowers? Williams helps to show the many narratives intersecting in his piece, leading to a moment where the categories normally ordering botanical collections are destabilized. It is also a nice coincidence that flowers are the topic of the third part of Derrida's 'Parergon'. Flowers represent, for Kant, an ideal of pure beauty. Derrida, through the ideas at work in the *parergon*, challenges such beauty.

### Signing off

The signature is another *parergon*. Neither inside the work, nor outside the work, the signature offers another phenomenon resistant to the everyday ordering of the world by inside and outside. Even if, in the Barnes Foundation, one cannot find labels to anchor the identity of the artist whose work one is considering, one can often find signatures in the work that confer an identity to the work's creator. At the same time, the signature reveals how a work's identity is always potentially eccentric, always dependent on something residing both inside and outside the work. The signature serves as a type of threshold, existing neither fully in the work, nor outside the work. Sometimes it is presented as existing on one of the objects in the work.

Jacques-Louis David represents his signature as if carved on the writing stand in front of Jean-Paul Marat's bath in *The Death of Marat* (1793). Not only is David's name present, but so is a dedication to the deceased, 'a Marat'. David also does this with the name of Napoleon Bonaparte, chiseling the general-turned-emperor's name alongside the names of Hannibal and Charlemagne in *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at Saint-Bernard* (1800-1). In Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere* (1881-2), the signature appears on one of the labels bearing the logos of Bass ale, a triangulation that has resisted change over the span of three centuries now. In still other cases, the signature is presented in perspective as if organised by the same structure of vision ordering the objects in the painting. In the case of Thomas Eakins, as Michael Fried has brilliantly shown in his *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), the signature poses a problematic space. The problem resides in what can be thought of in relation to Derrida's discourse on the *parergon*. Sometimes, Eakins presents the signature as if it belongs in the same world as the objects depicted in the painting, rendering it as floating in three-dimensional space. At other times, he depicts it carved into an object within the painting. Sometimes it simply appears on the painting's surface. In other instances, it appears on the painting's back. The signature poses a difficult question. As a *parergon*, it presents a challenge to the definition of the *ergon* or work. The signature exists outside the work, yet the identity of the work often depends on the signature, as does its material value.

The material value vested through the signature to the work of art moves beyond a question of identity and to a question concerning the values of institutions. In a world of limited resources, the expenditure of material wealth on the visual arts can lead to a questioning of the interests that works of art serve cultural institutions. The work of Hans Haacke, for instance, presents such a form of institutional critique. Haacke often unearths the gray ethical areas necessitated by today's world of culture. He has shown the connections between the Southern art world in America and cigarette money, one of the largest American slave crops next to cotton.

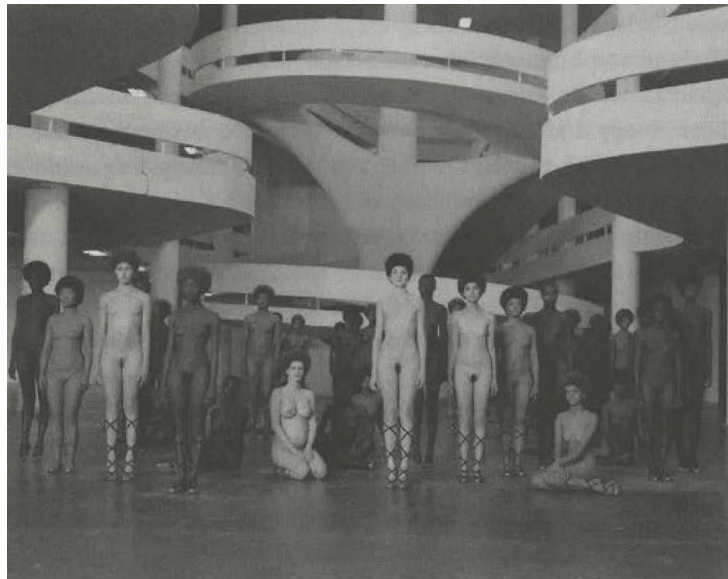
Kara Walker also explores the legacies of slavery in the post-colonial world. Utilising a medium, the silhouette, often associated with American visual culture in the nineteenth century, Walker uses this marginal medium to cut out forms invoking life in the antebellum South. Appearing in the visual language of illustrated books from the nineteenth century, Walker's large cut-outs take over their exhibition space. The content of the imagery often depicts a world of physical violence and sexual excess that complicates any simple process of labelling perpetrators and victims. Fantasies, nightmares, fictions and traumatic memories, all at the same time, Walker's work explores the intimate relation between racism and violence, as can be seen in the imagery and title of *The End of Uncle Tom* (1995). Walker's work does more than document racial injustices of the past, but continues to force viewers to consider the issue of race within the contemporary moment. Through two-dimensional silhouettes cut from black and white construction paper, she deconstructs the simple oppositions of race ordering American culture both in the past and the present. On the other side of the Atlantic, Yinka Shonibare explores issues concerning England's colonial past. Drawing upon a different slave product, textiles, Shonibare utilises Dutch wax to address questions concerning the constructed nature of colonial identity. In *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation* (2002), Shonibare suspends a late eighteenth-century carriage in mid-air, surrounding it with headless mannequins dressed in period costuming made out of Dutch wax fabric bearing his printed designs. The mannequins are positioned to visually invoke several simultaneous vignettes of two or more figures performing sexual acts. Rooted in Shonibare's exploration of the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century phenomenon, the Grand Tour, the piece poses questions about the way we represent the culture of the past. Is the Grand Tour, as read from an idealist historian's perspective, a cultural rite of passage completing the education of an upper middle-class individual and marking him or her as a promising young citizen, or was it a rite of sexual passage leading to experimentation as pictured by Shonibare? The answer, following the logic of Derrida, is both, as the sexual provides a space where, again, the effort of institutions to marginalise a perceived disruptive force appears. The role of institutions in constructing attitudes concerning sexual identity was also explored by Derrida's friend and teacher Michel Foucault in his three-volume study of *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1984).

Shonibare uses Dutch wax to explore the ways that clothing helps to construct identity. Shonibare, in selecting Dutch wax as his medium, points to the contradictions structuring the identity of this material, its appropriation historically, and his own use of it in his installations. The fabric was produced in English and Dutch colonies in Indochina by slave labour. It was then shipped to Holland and England, where it became a

garment used to clothe Africans within European colonies during the age of colonialism. Later, many Africans appropriated the fabric during nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s. In constructing African identity, a non-African product, one intimately tied to colonialism, ironically becomes a sign of African nationalism. Moreover, this fabric becomes prone to Shonibare's own acts of appropriation. Clothing is one of the examples of a *parergon* cited by Derrida in his discussion of Kant, as in clothing on a sculpture. Shonibare's work raises the question of clothing on mannequins within an installation. Far from inessential, the clothing makes the installation for Shonibare. His work is dependent on the clothing, revealing an interdependence between the *ergon* and the *parergon*.

In a similar fashion, Vanessa Beecroft addresses the *parergonal* structure of clothing in her performance installations, where she presents a group or several groupings of models to a select live audience. The exhibition entails both the live event and the documentation of the event that leads to a series of photographs presenting her models, often nude, as in the terms of Kenneth Clark's seminal text *The Nude* (1956). Clark presents the tradition of the nude as an aesthetic genre removing the body from overt sexual significance. Through *parergonal* features, such as the towel and bracelet in the *Aphrodite of Knidos* (350^10 BC), the nude separates itself from the naked. Kant's own work initiates such a discussion through the example of a nude woman wearing only a veil. For Kant, the aesthetic gaze is devoid of any sexual interest in the case of the nude.

Beecroft, however, along with Derrida, complicates the disinterestedness of the aesthetic gaze. Beecroft's work challenges the gender rules normally ordering the depiction of the nude. As a woman presenting live nude women, her approach feeds on a confrontational tradition of art fuelled by discussions of the gaze.



1, Vanessa Beecroft. VB 50 (2002).

The concept of the gaze appears in several guises within the Western tradition, particularly as it pertains to the nude. If Kenneth Clark's idealist vision of the nude as art for art's sake echoes Kant's own thoughts, T. J. Clark's reading of Manet's *Olympia* (1863; shown here in 1865 Salon) shows how there is always more to what meets the gaze in relation to the tradition of the nude. Beecroft reverses the traditional role of artist and model in the nude. She also instructs and trains her models to ignore the audience. In not acknowledging the gaze of the viewer, Beecroft's work presents a complication of the traditional act of looking within the genre of the nude. Again, *Olympia* provides a good predecessor in the way the gaze comes to frame the nude. Instead of simply looking at photographs of Beecroft's women not looking at us, something implied in all acts

of traditional representation at some level, there is a situation, for a few hours, where an audience experiences the denial of its presence by barely clothed women who occupy often unavoidable spots within the historically laden spaces they occupy. In *VB 35* (1998), for example, Beecroft's models occupy the central corridor of the Guggenheim Museum, the signature space of Frank Lloyd Wright's modernist structure. Daniel Buren had tried to penetrate this space visually in the early 1970s with his vertically erect stripes. Beecroft, in following a long line of visual artists, succeeds by having her models simply occupy this central space by standing erectly still for several hours. Often women in Vanessa Beecroft's work wear items associated with designer labels. In *VB 35*, many of the models wear swimsuits and shoes by Gucci and Prada. Others wear nothing at all. The exposed bodies of Beecroft's models open up a dialog with the field of fashion, aping the appearance of fashion models, while removing the sheen of fashion's artifice through the physical strain of her models. The world of fashion, interestingly, is one of the fields exerting a heavy influence on the world of contemporary art through financial support. From Prada to Estee Lauder, the world of fashion has come to stamp its identity on the world of art. Concerning the subject of identity, clothes not only make the man, they frequently, sometimes literally, unmake female identity. In the modern world, fashion has often been at the forefront in negotiating issues of identity across visual culture. From Francisco Goya's bandit *maja* to David's toga-wearing *nouveaux riches*, the role of fashion in constructing identity can be seen. In the late nineteenth century the world of fashion went further in posing the eccentric nature of our constructed identities through the advent of the designer label. These labels often provide a mark of authentication when it comes to the value of an article of clothing.

Interestingly, fashion was one of the realms to be affected in the 1980s by the idea of deconstruction. Even if designers were not quoting passages of *Glas*, as Valerio Adami was doing as an artist in the late 1970s, designers were beginning to be self-reflexive, making work that reflected back on itself and its production. In the work of Belgian designers such as Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela and Dries van Noten, items of clothing were presented as if half finished. Paper patterns were left pinned to the fabric. Items normally inside a garment were often presented outside. Whole garments were presented as inside out or falling apart. Margiela, for a 1997 exhibition, even added parasitical bacteria in an effort to undo some of the traditional ideas concerning creativity and function within the realm of fashion. Focusing on decay and literally falling apart at the seams, these garments offer another instance of trying to give deconstruction a form.

While Beecroft subjects her models, friends and sometimes her own family to the gaze of exhibition audiences, James Luna subjects himself to the exhibitionary gaze by inserting himself into a cultural space in his *Artifact Piece* (first performed 1986). First done at the San Diego Museum of Man, Luna submitted his body to the gaze of a museum audience, revealing marks that begin to expose both the reality and the fictions structuring the reception of Native American experience. Through labels, bruises and scars are attributed to fights, drunkenness and clumsiness, inscribing a narrative that plays on stereotypes of Native Americans. In a room devoted to artefacts pertaining to Native American culture, Luna is presented as a living artefact. The idea of a living artefact embodies a deconstructive logic that one could relate to other oxymorons from artistic discourse, such as still life, or the French *nature morte* (literally, dead nature). As a living entity, Luna is alive today, but also is presented as something from the past, as an artefact. In a similar manner, in the still life (or dead nature), an object prone to decay, often bearing signs of decay, is presented frozen in time through the image. Between life and death, between reality and its representation, Luna's work focuses on the role that labels play in framing our construction of cultural images. In the case of European Americans, cultural institutions often elide the history of oppression that marks the United States' ascent as a world power, as well as the continuation of this oppression.

Marginalised in the process of this ascent as a people, Luna, as an artist, uses his position to take apart many of the stereotypes pertaining to the construction of Native American identity within American popular culture. He reframes his body with labels that identify cuts and bruises within a narrative built around cultural stereotypes. The labels may bear authentic information or they may bear inaccurate information. Presented as labels, they take apart cultural labels. In the context of Luna's piece, they raise questions about the role of institutions in constructing the information that we as museum goers imhibe. Luna, like Derrida, asks that we read more critically, especially when it concerns institutional representations of the Other. Luna's work utilises a *parergonal* site, the label, as a means of questioning the values structuring our cultural traditions,



K.M. Richards, *Derrida Reframed*. Selection from chapter 2, “Framing *The Truth in Painting*”

challenging the role of institutions in framing the past.

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