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# (Ir)reparability Begins in the Body: Towards a Museum of Disrepair

**Abstract:** This chapter is based on a workshop we conducted with PhD candidates attending the Summer School *Restitution, Reparations, Reparation – Toward a New Global Society?* held at Villa Vigoni, Italy. It offers reflections on the situated and embodied experience of talking, thinking, and conceptualising repair and heritage. Starting from the work of the French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, we envisaged the possibility of a “Museum of Disrepair” and invited PhD students to analyse the impacts of such a potential site. Attia’s idea of “irreparability” was at the centre of our investigation, and we thought about the notion of “repair” in relation to the racialised body, wounded by histories of colonialism and whiteness. As the analysis shows, repairing damages does not mean to erase the physical evidence of the injury, hoping for the disappearance of the violence. Rather, it is essential to acknowledge pain and damage, and to link the injury with its visible scarification. Restitution, as we argue, is only an element of a wider discourse on reconciliation, decolonisation, and infrastructural changes to Europe’s narrative of world.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Kader Attia, critical heritage, decoloniality, embodiment, irreparability, museums, repair, reparations

## 1 (Ir)reparability Begins in the Body

**Reparations begin in the body**, and that is where our poems must begin; our poems must teach us new ways to use our bodies, must watch with us and walk with us and burst through us as new light, even if it hurts, even if it means we have to relearn self-love through the eyes of a truer more unified self. *Harmony Holiday* (2016)

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In September 2021, we walked up a steep hill on the coastal flank of Lake Como to sit on a bench overlooking the former property of the German entrepreneur Heinrich Mylius, now known as *Villa Vigoni*, the German-Italian Research Centre for European Dialogue (see Fig. 1). Mylius purchased this property in 1829, before his heirs bequeathed it to the German Federal Republic. On the occasion of the first international summer school titled *Restitution, Reparations, Reparation – Toward a New Global Society?*, which sealed the beginning of the cooperation between the Cluster for European Studies (CEUS) of Saarland University and Villa Vigoni, we had been invited to convene a panel on repair, heritage, and museums.

On the first few days of the Summer School, while being lavishly hosted within rooms replete with paintings, sculptures, and an ever-distracting view onto Bellagio, a conversation we had with the legal consultant (*consulente legale*, or *Justiziar*) of Villa Vigoni, Julian Stefenelli, kept on echoing across our encounters. The discussion about the Villa and its owners made us swiftly realise that the history of the Villa itself was embedded in complex questions of care and repair. Stefenelli provided us with a series of public court-case write-ups related to the confiscation of German properties on Italian soil. Proceedings published around this issue from a previous conference held in Villa Vigoni provided further background.<sup>2</sup> At heart, Villa Vigoni – “the most attractive German object of execution” (Peters and Volpe 2021, 14) – became subject to a complicated international conflict, since the Italian Constitutional Court denied the German Republic its immunity from civil jurisdiction over claims to reparation for Nazi crimes committed during World War II, which, in turn, challenged the International Court of Justice’s Jurisdictional Immunities Judgment of 2012 (Peters and Volpe 2021, 4). Most recently, in 2015 (and again in 2019), these cases concerned a group of Greek citizens, whose ancestors had been the victims of German violence during WWII. They sued the German state in Italy and asked for reparations related to war crimes. This led the Italian state to mortgage (provisionally) German property on Italian soil, such as Villa Vigoni, as an insurance for such possible repayments (see Tomuschat 2017). Villa Vigoni became implicated – twice – in such legal processes, intricating it in a possible reparation. It was at risk, in other words, of becoming a subject and object of

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<sup>2</sup> See Volpe, Peters, and Battini (2021) for an overview of the question of post-World War II reparations, immunity, and reconciliation between Germany and Italy. In their book, the editors analyse in particular the consequences of the Italian Constitutional Court’s Judgment 238/2014. “With this judgment”, Peters and Volpe (2021: 4) argue, “the . . . Italian Constitutional Court (ItCC) denied the German Republic’s immunity from civil jurisdiction over claims to reparation for Nazi crimes committed during World War II (WWII), indirectly challenging the International Court of Justice (ICJ)’s Jurisdictional Immunities Judgment of 2012 and paving the way for a series of domestic proceedings against Germany.”



**Fig. 1:** Villa Vigoni, German-Italian Centre for European Dialogue. Photo: Jonas Tinius.

possible reparations for intergenerational and international injury. In other words, the place in which we spoke was itself a symbolic site of thinking about repair, reparation, and redress in a multi-national European context.

Eventually, these cases were dismissed, because the Villa was used exclusively for “sovereign, non-commercial purposes” (Pavoni 2021, 95). It was, however, the interpretation of the dismissal that struck a nerve with our preparations for the summer school. The judicial mortgaging of the Villa was considered to inflict more symbolic harm than financial reparation would solve. Villa Vigoni, after all, was already a site for repairing and dialogue between two nations. As Paulus (2021, 341) notes, this act of confiscation of a German property with the purpose of cultural

mediation would therefore have come “with the added irony that this precious centre of German-Italian friendship would thereby risk to be transformed into its opposite.” It was its status, purpose, and practice as a site of dialogue that kept it from being used as a medium to redress and confront a violent past (see also Boggero and Oellers-Frahm 2021, 296). The Villa thus embodies symbolic reparation as an unfinished and often unsatisfactory process of repair (see also Tharoor 2021). The narratives of the location rendered painfully clear that while repair, reparation, redress, and restitution are often thrown together in conversation, they evoke a series of often but not always overlapping concerns. More precisely, we wish to emphasise that reparations (financial or otherwise) and restitution may form part of a process that addresses past injuries and injustices, but the process of repairing should begin by recognising the potential impossibility of healing. In this respect, institutions may incorporate, house, mediate, and become vessels for expression of pain, injury, and conflict as well as for redress and repair.

This contribution responds to the editors’ concern for multilateral government policies and agreements that have re-initiated international debates about ‘post-colonial’ restitution and reparation. It responds specifically to this volume’s preoccupation with how restitution, reparation, and the politics of memory are grappled with in the context of heritage developments, museum work, and through artistic practices – and how artistic and poetic practices can offer forms of reflection about repair and irreparability beyond reparation. In particular, it is concerned with the notion of repair as theorised by French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, whose own work over the past decades has conceived of the conceptualisation of repair and irreparability as a prism to think through colonial legacies in the present. The 2022 Berlin Biennale, led by his artistic direction, is but one example of how one may work in the field of art and curatorial practice in museums and enact visions of a world society after Western universalism (see Tinius 2022). In this contribution, rather than focusing on a single artwork or a particular museum site, we ask what an hypothetical ‘museum of disrepair’ can do to think about repair and reparation. To do so, it builds on the anthropology of art, curation, museums, and difficult heritage and considers the relational and symbolic importance of opening up rather than immobilising conflict. It also brings into conversation ideas of the racialised body intended as a site on which colonial histories are inscribed, and the impacts of the “white look” (Fanon 1952 [2008]) operating within visual registries of colonial violence.

Given our situatedness as authors, it is also an autoethnographic reflection on the bodies in dialogue through which we experienced the summer school. A white German anthropologist speaking about reparation on a site that had been confiscated by the Italian government in order to redress German war crimes during WWII, and a Black Italian scholar, who thinks about the wounds inflicted

by Italian colonial violence on racialised bodies. For Jonas, repair and reparation are concerns directly tied to his growing up and working in the postindustrial Ruhr region, whose twice-fold destruction during WWI and WWII are the direct result of industrial war mobilisation by the Germans. The reconstruction of this region has to a large extent been achieved through the invited labour of so-called guestworkers principally from the Mediterranean, whose citizenship status in postwar Germany remained unclear for decades and has created tensions about the intergenerational trauma caused by repair. The economic devastation of the working class after the phasing out of coal mining and industry in the region, and its illusions of rejuvenation through the postindustrial creative industries, has continued to solidify the layers of disrepair in this region. Jonas' work on German public theatres departs directly from the concerns of a postwar generation of scholars, teachers, activists, and artists for the recognition of German guilt for its war crimes, and a self-critical accountability of its public (cultural) institutions for the state of distress that migrant and refugee (non-)citizens in this region experience (see Tinius and Wewerka 2020; Tinius 2023, forthcoming). For Angelica, repair starts from the body and the acknowledgement of wounds and scars left by the histories of colonialism and whiteness. She sees reparation in the rehabilitation of certain experiences that have been systematically excluded by processes of knowledge production, and she seeks to draw upon new and alternative ways of knowing, in order to make visible what has been kept invisible, and to make audible the inaudible (Pesarini 2022, forthcoming).

The aim of this chapter is to provide some reflections on the panel and the workshop we conducted with the wonderful students attending the summer school in Villa Vigoni. It also offers a narrative about the situated and embodied experience of talking, thinking, and conceptualising repair and heritage. In our view, repairing damage does not mean erasing the physical evidence of the injury, as if the marks left by violence can simply be repaired, and therefore eradicated. Rather, as the analysis of Kader Attia's work will demonstrate, repairing means precisely to acknowledge pain and damage, and to link injury with visible scarification. In this way, we contend, we can contribute to a collective attempt of "dismantling the opacity of the grand national narrative of the old colonial empires" (Attia 2012b, 12).

## 2 Feeling the Wound

In preparation for the Summer School in Villa Vigoni, we provided students with a series of readings that offered theoretical positions on the body as a carrier of

injuries and wounds inflicted by the colonial discourse, on the non-neutrality of the gaze, and how (ir)reparability begins in the body.

In relation to colonialism and the production of the racial body, it was essential to start our conversation with ideas of ‘race’, a term used, if at all, with caution in continental Europe, especially in Italy and in Germany, where deeply ingrained ideologies based on ideas of race caused death and violence (see Mesling 2016). Given its implications about biological essences and its connections with the collective guilt of the Holocaust (Goldberg, 2006; Spickard and Nandi, 2014) in the aftermath of WWII, European governments eliminated mention of ‘race’ from the politics and public policy, adopting instead a “colour evasive” approach in the hope that this could prevent a return to biological ideologies of race (Pesarini and Tintori, 2020). In this respect, David Theo Goldberg (2006) illustrates the impacts of this specific form of European racial denial defined by the author as “racial Europeanisation”. According to Goldberg, race denial in Europe is a wishful but unattainable evaporation, a frustrating desire buried, and at the same time alive, that has left “odourless traces but ones suffocating in the wake of their at once denied resinous stench” (Goldberg 2006, 334). ‘Race’, as a social construct, inevitably continues to impact the lives of those who are othered and discriminated against and the erasure of this category not only contributes to the perpetuation of white privilege, but also widens the colour-line divide and enhances systemic racism.

However, rather than focusing on the concept of ‘race’, we oriented the students’ attention towards processes of “racialisation”, that is, an understanding of race as an effect of a process of racialisation, rather than as its origin (Garner 2010). It is through an active process of racialisation, as Sara Ahmed (2002) shows, that the racial body has been discursively materialised. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the idea of the performative and phenomenological nature of ‘race’ and racial categories. Ahmed (2002, 46) illustrates how the existence of the “racial body” is not anchored to the presence of skin colour or hair texture, but rather to the meaning attributed to a certain colour or hair texture.

Drawing on phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) argues how ‘race’ works through the “perception of the visible”, or in other words, how it passes through the reading of visual signs inscribed on the body. These signs are made visible and meaningful key signifiers through what Alcoff (2006, 192) defines as “learning processes”, suggesting that the perception of race is therefore an ability we learn (Alcoff 2006, 187) rather than something natural. Here lies the performativity of ‘race’ that draws on Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Referring to gender, Butler (1998, 519) claims that the illusion of gender identity is nourished by a “stylised repetition of acts” that gives gender identity consistency. According to Butler (1990, 25), gender is not something pre-

existing, but it is “performatively constituted” by attributes and expressions that are considered the results of a perceived gender identity (see also Butler 1993). The racialised body, similar to the gendered body, is performatively constituted by discourse rather than being the result of a biological underlying truth. Thus, by ‘naming’ the racial body within specific sets of discursive regimes, such as normative Whiteness, this body is produced and becomes meaningful. This also implies an intimate connection between *seeing* a body and the knowledge we may presume to have of that body. As Ahmed (2002, 56) argues, “it is by ‘seeing’ bodily others that they are ‘known’, and this knowledge serves to constitute the subject (and in this case the white subject) as the who one who knows”. The visual is therefore intimately connected to racialising practices through the knowledge we have of bodies. More precisely, the visual is far from being neutral to ‘race’, but rather, as argued by Butler (1993, 17), “it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful”. It is for that reason, too, that we can speak of the non-neutrality of the gaze and the idea of the “white look” as theorised by Frantz Fanon (1952 [2008]).

Fanon (1952 [2008], 84) illustrates how the construction of the Black body has been produced through a long racial historicity, or, as he calls it, a “historical racial schema”, constituted by stereotypes, legends, racial and racist myth. In *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952 [2008]), he tells the reader an anecdote that would be fundamental for his theorisation on the white look as it clearly highlights the wounds caused by the white colonial look onto the racialised body. While travelling on a train, Fanon recounts, a French white child points at him, and he excitedly repeats to his mother the same sentence: “Look! A Negro” (Fanon 1952 [2008], 91). In this occurrence, Fanon states that he perceived how his body is given back to him distorted and dissected by the white look:

The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtones are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it’s the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A negro in fact! (Fanon 1952 [2008], 95).

The injuries inflicted by the white look on the racialised bodies are numerous, and they may include feelings of pain, shame, and violence (Pesarini 2020). In relation to gaze and shame, it is precisely the fact of “being looked at”, the experience of “coming under the regard of another” which defines shame (Bewes 2011, 153). It is through the look of the ‘other’ that one experiences because this act implies “violation and exposure” (Treacher 2007, 288). Moreover, shame also requires a witness, considering that it is the gaze of the other that shows us our own failure (see Ahmed 2004, 106).

Therefore, the wounding racialising look does not only affect bodies; it also shapes spaces and institutions, landscapes and objects. In the next section, we explore these connections in relation to the work of Kader Attia, whose practice served as a backdrop to our seminar at Villa Vigoni.

## 2.1 Seeing the Wound

Commenting on the management of difficult heritage sites, the French philosopher and philologist Barbara Cassin often evokes an anecdote about Nelson Mandela. Upon coming to power, he decided to place an inscription at the entrance to a museum: “dans les salles de l’horrible musée édifié au temps de l’apartheid, où les Khoïsan, peuples premiers d’Afrique du Sud, étaient caricaturé en statues de cire atroces de racisme” (Cassin and Fabre 2022, 13). Instead of demolishing the museum, or replacing the sculptures, he decided to place, in writing, the following question at the heart of this site: What do you think of what you see? According to Cassin, this statement obliges the visitor to take a stance, to judge, to situate the problem of colonial injustice in one’s own positionality (Cassin and Fabre 2022, 14). Instead of destroying signs of violence, Mandela decided to let people construct a position from the concrete by confronting them with an injury of discrimination and colonial violence (see Cassin 2018). It was a way to leave the wound open instead of erasing its traces.

In his work “Some modernity’s footprints” (2018, the Power Plant, Toronto), artist Kader Attia arranges wooden railway sleepers across the space of an empty gallery, seemingly cutting into the walls of the space in an imagined continuation. The old, broken, and porous wooden sleepers are held together by metal staples that seem to keep them from breaking apart, like a long cut held together provisionally by medical plasters or stitches. Among other works in the show, such as prosthetic limbs, the wooden railway sleepers evoke a bygone power, a train about to break through the gallery walls. They are traces of the technologies that enabled colonial invasion in the European colonies in Africa and the Americas, “deep scars etched into unspoiled lands” (Whyte 2018). This work, like so many others in the artist’s oeuvre, does not seek reconciliation; rather, it reduces the viewer to the moment of confrontation with several layers of scarification. The railway, a symbol of progress, is itself in a state of disrepair, removed from its original function, left in a state of rotten dismembering. The wooden railway sleepers alone do not carry a train, lacking the metal rails, and the soil into which they were etched. They scarred themselves the soil from which they were taken



and created lines into (previously untouched) land. In need of repair themselves, they are helplessly held together by metal staples, which signal the superior strength of the industrial metal over the decomposing wood, leaving a pitiful impression. The work thus incorporates two levels of injury and of scarification: that imposed by modernity on the lands it exploits by way of its technologies, and the inevitable rupture of this progress, itself in desperate need of constant repair. This work does not repair itself, rather, it evokes reparation as conscience and awareness of the injury.

This work is symptomatic for Attia of how the modern West deals with injury. In his article “La réparation, c’est la conscience de la blessure” (Attia 2018a), the artist clarifies that for him “reparation” signifies, on the one hand, “d’aspects physiques et concrets de la réparation d’objets sacrés ou profanes, mais toujours rudimentaires – telles que les techniques de la réparation dans les sociétés antérieures occidentales ou extra-occidentales, de l’Afrique au Japon” (Attia 2018a, 13). Here the artist evokes for instance the art of repair called *kintsugi* on traditional Japanese ceramics, for which “the cracks on the surface of the pots used for the tea ceremony are bathed in gold” (Attia 2018b). As he puts it, this creates “an incredible fusion of injury and repair – by repairing an object so roughly you actually leave the injury visible” (Attia 2018b). In this way, he continues, “repair and the injury are linked forever” (Attia 2018b). He radically opposes the conception of a link between repair and injury to the idea that “we can rationally control everything, even the injury [. . .] to give back an object or a human body its own initial shape” (Attia 2018b). As he puts it, this is the flipside of the non-occidental capacity to leave the injury tied to the scar; there is a kind of “dogme” of “contrôle de la blessure, en s’obstinant à la faire disparaître complètement, en niant l’histoire de l’objet ou du corps blessé, et ainsi le temps qui s’associe à cette histoire” (Attia 2018a: 13).

In his public lectures, Attia often evokes an anecdote that encapsulates this ideology. He recounted a conversation he had with a curator-conservator at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, who proudly presented him with an object that was perfectly repaired after shattering, to the extent that the lines of the detailed piecing together were left invisible. All traces of the shock that cracked the object gone; a perfect replica of what was before the incident. That day in his talk, he described this as a “blindness towards injury” and a “paradigm of reparability” that represents not solely the Western obsession with the putting back together of what has been destroyed – “to think that everything can be repaired” (Attia 2018b), but also the inability of Western museological institutions to admit cracks, scars, wounds, gaps. It is a form of “denial of the injury, the denial of the destruction” (Attia 2018b). Confronting this evasiveness towards injury and illness, for

Attia, is not merely a process of practical confrontation, but a more fundamental socio-psychic anxiety.

It is for this reason that it appears for Attia so

important de travailler sur cette question de la réparation, et *de facto* d'un point de vue aussi physique que théorique, voir politique, pour comprendre la nécessité de ré-évoquer ces blessures immatérielles, de l'esclavage à la colonisation, de la dépossession à l'humiliation, qui perdurent aujourd'hui à travers toute forme d'expression à la fois névrotique, juridique, économique, politique des êtres qui dominent, qui ont le pouvoir sur ceux qui subissent le pouvoir (Attia 2018a, 14).

It is here that he concludes: “Car la réparation c’est la conscience de la blessure, même lorsque la réparation semble irréparable . . .” (Attia 2018a, 14). The question that we pose ourselves in this contribution is how this conception of repair, irreparability, and cultural memory can be translated into a museological conception. How may ideas of embodied scars and the conscience of injury inform the way we think (of) museums containing collections of difficult heritage pertaining to the colonial European past? In the following and final section of this essay, we analyse the way in which museums themselves may incur injuries, and how one might address their state of disrepair.

### 3 A Museum of Disrepair

The Congolese activist Mwazulu Diyabanza created both international outrage and fascination when he orchestrated a series of spectacular museum “thefts”, during which he dislodged art objects from the African continent that were located within European ethnographic museum collections and had been assembled in dubious circumstances.

“We go home”. With these words, whispered to the object, Diyabanza accompanies a nineteenth century wooden funerary pole expropriated from Chad during the French colonial period through the galleries of the Parisian Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in the French capital.<sup>3</sup> He had dislodged the pole from its display and made for the exit, filmed, and protected by “comrades” (2018). Speaking live to social media while clinging his hands firmly onto the artefact and ignoring the shouting of the guards, he looks into the camera and reiterates his charge: “I have come to recuperate this in the name of unity and

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<sup>3</sup> This can be watched on YouTube via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyjH-ZIvBDo&t=133s> (19 December 2022).

dignity [. . .] We go home, and we do not ask a thief for permission [. . .] What belongs to us, belongs to us” (see footnote 3).

Diyabanza’s first action in Paris on 12 June 2020 was followed suit by similarly spectacular, vocal, and live-streamed choreographies in Marseille’s Museum of African, Oceanic and Indian Art inside the Vieille Charité (July); in the Africa Museum in Berg en Dal in the Netherlands (September), and in the Louvre (October). He was subsequently arrested, heard in court, and charged with “attempted joint theft of a cultural asset” (Otieno 2020). While Diyabanza and his colleagues faced prison terms and a six-figure fine, he received a minimum sentence of 2,000 Euro. The judges refused to engage with the vast ideological scope of his performance, stating that they are “not competent to judge France’s colonial era”.<sup>4</sup>

French officials denounced Diyabanza’s interventions as threatening negotiations with African countries, following President Emmanuel Macron’s launch of reports on restitution and reconciliation three years ago. However, this appears to be the same desperate resorting to “Europe’s self-referential legality” (Otieno 2020) that patrimony laws on inalienability have already rehearsed in previous attempts of restitution. His performances have instead raised the curtain on a complicated machinery of justifications, excuses, and anxieties; consequently, the time has come to think of a different future for ethnographic collections, ethnological museums, and, indeed, the entire Western model of the curation of objects signifying historical injury and injustice.

The questions towering over Diyabanza’s trial are simple, yet consequential: Who holds court? Who is accused? What is justice? His companions and lawyers argued that they are in fact putting on trial the entire French state and its colonial heritage, enshrined in its modern institutions and the legal framework of national patrimony that protects them as inalienably French. This goes for other countries too, where restitution lags behind the yet unsystematic work of provenance, and the public opening of inventory lists that prevent calls for restitution to be made in the first instance.

So, while the French judges in the Parisian capital attempted to scale down the trial against Diyabanza to a mere case of theft, he goes the other direction: this is a trial against an entire system based on extraction and exploitation, which has, in turn, served to build up not only the social sciences and their legacies of inventing both race and culture, but also art history and its canonised modernist guises. What is rhetorically and symbolically put on trial is European universalism, and

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<sup>4</sup> This is according to a report by AP Archive. Diyabanza’s reaction in court can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVGBdqRThYg> (19 December 2022).

the Western sovereign claim to represent, collect, display, and reason on world heritage. The museums and heritage institutions on trial are those that, while they may pluralise interpretations, continue to narrate a story of world from the epicentres of European imperial modernity.

If thus the crime scene is not the theft of a funerary pole, but the museum itself, the injustice of colonialism and its crimes against humanity, then repair may not be achieved through reparation. Loot may not be mitigated by restitution. And reparation cannot repay injustice. Instead, as Achille Mbembe (2020) posited in a conversation aptly titled “The Paranoia of the Western Mind”, the West may need to acknowledge the debt of truth and move towards a “reparative globalism” – although that is only one way of looking at it.

When Mwazulu Diyabanza walks through the courtyard of the Vieille Charité in Marseille during his second attempted recuperation of African heritage, and finds himself locked into the vicinity by observant security and harassed by local bystanders, he turns around and addresses the tourists in the courtyard cafe: “Are you complicit with the Occident’s crime against humanity?”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps, the issue at stake thus is justice and equality on a more than national level. If “reparative globalism” (Mbembe 2020), “a new relational ethics” (Sarr and Savoy 2018), and the “politics of making humanity together” (Diagne 2019) are what is being negotiated, then museums of world heritage are not getting rid of the stains on their histories by simply sharing a few of their most problematically acquired items (Sarr and Savoy 2018; Diagne 2022).<sup>6</sup> In fact, shared heritage can rightly be called a “coward, but genius” invention of the western museum of world (see Tinius 2021a; Tinius and Carroll 2020).<sup>7</sup> Restitution can only be an element, albeit an important one, of a wider discourse on reconciliation, decolonisation, and infrastructural changes to Europe’s narrative of world. Justice, then, may exceed the framework of Europe’s self-referential legality, and become a form-giving vector (Hofmann and Messling 2021). Reflections on justice can give rise to ethical and aesthetical practices in museal terms (Rotinwa 2020).

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5 This video, like many others, can be watched on his personal Facebook site called Mwazulu Diyabanza Siwa Lemba official.

6 See the *Restitution Report* by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, published as *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics* (2018), accessible via: [http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf) (28 August 2022) and a lecture given by Souleymane Bachir Diagne at the University of Nantes in 2019 under the title “Faire humanité ensemble”. It is accessible via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MS-TvPVT7u8> (19 December 2022).

7 A member of the public during an event on restitution during the Manifesta 2020 in Marseille accused the director of the public museums in Marseille of acting thusly. Watch the video and access full documentation of the event here: <https://manifesta13.org/programmings/rencontres-tracing-fractures-across-listening-movement-restitution-and-repair/> (28 August 2022).

The future of European museums of world with problematic collections will have to undo a number of assumptions, beginning with their approach to repair and injury. Many proposals have been made, for example, to reconcile old museum infrastructures with their contemporary critique. Notable propositions include those of former director of the *Museum of World Cultures* in Germany's Frankfurt am Main, Clémentine Deliss (2020), to open up storages and create artistic engagements, or the frank account of death-writing about looted objects by Dan Hicks, curator at the *Oxford Pitt-Rivers Museum* (2020), which have together suggested museums as “investments in critical discomfort” (Modest 2020). Such investments may challenge the very infrastructures, personnel, and programming of museums, or reconsider what a museum may do.

In his article “Those Who Are Dead Are Not Ever Gone” (2020), curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung asks whether museums cannot, perhaps, be considered as apoptotic archives that allow for its objects to be rehabilitated, resocialised, or even abandoned – asking for a broader and corporeal conception of museum work. Ndikung evokes the metaphor of museum-choking, suggesting that the “coughing from the choking throes of the ethnological museum / world museum / universal museum is becoming loud and blaring” and that the “blows and punches” needed to unblock the windpipe of the Western museum, which devoured its objects “with little focus on mastication”, come in multiple ways. Besides the proposed reckoning with its process of devouring and choking, Ndikung makes a proposal that puts to one side the museum and its collection and instead asks for a different, incorporated view on how we view processes of repair and injury in relationship to the museum of world. He proposes “to think of the body as the primary museum” (Ndikung 2020), which puts centre-stage the question “How then does this primary museum of the body encounter the secondary museum, which tends to be those spaces in which ‘objects’ are conserved?” Put most bluntly: “If the secondary museum becomes a site of concern, of insult, of epistemic violence; a site of the erasure of histories, a site of hubris, then what impact does that have on the beholder, the visitor, the citizen, the human?” (Ndikung 2020).

In our workshop at Villa Vigoni, we confronted students with these thoughts on irreparability, the body, and the primary and secondary museum. We asked them what thinking about injury and irreparability could change in our understanding of these “secondary museums”? Considered as mediators and carries of possible relationships between the body as museum and objects incorporating historical injustice, museums offer ways of pointing to the wound without repair. Thus, we suggested, they are ways of thinking about the state of disrepair of relations between bodies and objects, institutions and societies. Considering that museums of world are thus themselves in a state of disrepair, what would it mean to point to the incompleteness of such museums, the injuries they inflict? Instead of

imagining a museum of repair or museums *as* repair, what about a museum of disrepair that points to the incomplete processes of healing?

## 4 An Open Conclusion: Towards a Museum of Disrepair

Together with the students of the Summer School, we split in pairs, and with some material – cardboard, objects brought by participants, pens, scissors, sticky tape – we imagined possible forms and paths for a museum of disrepair. We asked, among others, the following questions: What would such a museum be called? What – if any – objects would it house? Would *your* objects be in such a museum? How would like to be and feel within this museum? Do you feel like injuring it for the injuries it has caused? Do we even need a museum of disrepair?

The miniature model of the museum, placed in front of Villa Vigoni – a site of negotiation for repair, redress, and the mediation of injury – evoked both refusal and embrace. Half of the students questioned whether a museum as a *site* and a physical *institution* was indeed necessary. If a museum is about the people whose objects it contains or about communities to whom its objects should speak, one student put it poignantly, then why do we not try to make the museum about these communities – “why do we even need objects at all?”. “It needs an agora, a place of encounter and dialogue”. “Reparations”, another student interjected, “are about building new relationships”, by which she was referring to the argument of the Sarr-Savoy restitution report (2018), she added. Moreover, it was felt that a museum that is about relationships should change directions itself, somehow be in flux and think about displacement more than fixation. This could be done, another student suggested, by thinking about the story of its collections and the museum itself – “opening up the instability of the institution”. To this, another student added that collections could themselves “travel and in that way move the museum itself”. A concrete third suggestion was made: “A museum of repair or disrepair”, the student remarked, “should contain the history of all the mistakes and inexactitudes of its labels, its decisions, and its descriptions – and show their progressive corrections and changes. We need a museum that shows its own ability to see its mistakes.”

A second strand of the discussion erupted when a student began a strand of thought about Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung’s text that we had read earlier that afternoon (see Ndikung 2020). The student remarked: “When someone dies, their descendants continue to honour the deceased and thereby their lives; if museums contain the stories of others, then the museum becomes a body multiple. It

is about the creation of life, and not about the conservation of the dead". "Why then", another student responded, "do we think about a museum that looks inwards to bring things into it, rather than looking outward to bring what it has into the world?" The student continued to reflect: "Before asking what kind of museum we want, we have to ask ourselves what part of society this museum – and museums in general – is; in other words, what is the relationship of this museum to the society in which it is built?"

A third and final strand of the discussion erupted itself in violence. "I want to cut the museum into pieces – this cardboard box", one student provocatively interjected, prompting laughter and some shouts of "yeah, yes" among the students. "We should not have objects, but actions!", the student continued, saying that thinking about repair, as we did with Kader Attia, is not about erecting more monuments, but about "inhabiting a future together". "It is a social project, and societies are broken – so the museum itself should be broken, and not be a museum *of* repair."

The students' forceful remarks, concluding into an action of destruction itself, left us wondering how to put together these suggestions as theorisations about a museum conception that take into account our discussion of racialisation, brokenness, and injury. Most evidently, it seems to us that a museum that deals with the impossibility of repair and erasure of injury should itself bear both the marks of pain and scarification. It is not an empty museum devoid of memories of pain, and neither is it a peaceful projection of conciliation and peace. In some way, it should put on display the brokenness of its past, the failures, and the attempts of repair that it has undertaken. A site that, like Villa Vigoni, hosts encounters about its own status, that constantly asks what its purpose is, and challenges its self-evidence. A Museum of Broken Relationships.<sup>8</sup> A Museum of Scars.

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<sup>8</sup> We discussed the actual crowd-sourced project called The Museum of Broken Relationships with the students, too (see: <https://brokenships.com>, 20 September 2022).

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