The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation

Pnina Werbner \textsuperscript{a} \& Mattia Fumanti \textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a} Keele University, UK
\textsuperscript{b} University of St Andrews, UK


To cite this article: Pnina Werbner \& Mattia Fumanti (2012): The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation, Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology, DOI:10.1080/00141844.2012.669776

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2012.669776

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or
damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation

Pnina Werbner\textsuperscript{a} & Mattia Fumanti\textsuperscript{b}
\textsuperscript{a}Keele University, UK; \textsuperscript{b}University of St Andrews, UK

abstract How are transnational aesthetics transformed and appropriated in the diaspora? In theorising the very possibility of a transnational aesthetics, our primary focus goes beyond cognition to aesthetics as ‘sensuous participation’ – the making of beauty, distinction and sensual pleasure as participatory performance, embedded and re-embedded in social worlds of literary art or celebration forged in diaspora. Going beyond current debates in the anthropology of aesthetics, we argue that the transnational appropriation of aesthetic literary and embodied performative traditions, objects, sartorial styles or foods in the diaspora points to the transformational power of mimesis: what appears on the surface to be derivative and imitative, taken from elsewhere, engenders authentically felt cultural competences and a sense of ontological presence. Thus it is that diasporic sociality and aesthetic cultural performance create the grounds for appropriation and ownership in the alien place of non-ownership, that is, in the diaspora, the site of exile.

keywords Anthropology of aesthetics, embodiment, transnationalism, spatial inscription, sensuous performance, mimesis

Introduction

Diaspora aesthetics, this issue proposes, are the sensual and performative medium through which diasporans enact their felt autonomy while laying claims to ‘ownership’ of the places and nations in which they settle. The debate so far in cultural and postcolonial studies has centred on the high-cultural products of diasporic musicians, artists and novelists, their capacity to create a ‘third space’, a hybrid culture that fuses distinct aesthetic traditions to challenge ‘pure’ narratives of nation. We move beyond such texts. Our aim is to examine the appropriation of both high and popular cultural
transnational aesthetics as an experiential, embodied process. Over and above the focus on diasporic artists and intellectuals, we shift our gaze to transnational cultural aesthetics as these have affected diasporas from the late colonial period to the age of globalisation. In a digitised world, we show that the appropriation of films, videos, cassettes, popular music, CDs or celebrity culture opens up spaces for celebration and ‘community’ and enables internal claims to distinction.

The subjects of the papers presented here range from the high-cultural aesthetic creativity of the ilustrado, a cohort of Filipinos exiles who lived in western Europe, especially in Madrid and Paris, in the late nineteenth century (Johnson), to the popular aesthetics of Ghanaian migrant celebration in London (Fumanti), the mass cultural appropriations of Bollywood by Bene Yisrael Indian Jews in Israel (Shenar) and the pleasures of global American-style pop culture enjoyed by Filipinos on their Sundays off in Tel Aviv (Liebelt). Beyond high and popular culture, we also interrogate the religious aesthetics of diaspora: of Mama Mary icons lovingly decorated and carried by Filipinas through socially and economically marginalised neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv (Liebelt), and of Ghanaian spirit shrines in New York City, seeking the hidden, occult power of celebrities embroidered into their kente cloths imported from Ghana (Parish).

As this last example hints at, in different ways all the papers reflect upon transnational aesthetics as they are transformed and appropriated within often encapsulated diaspora communities. In theorising the very possibility of such a transnational aesthetics, our primary focus is on aesthetics as more than merely ‘sensuous cognition’, in Wiseman’s (2009: 7) definition. We take aesthetics to encompass ‘sensuous participation’ – the appreciation and making of beauty, distinction and sheer sensual pleasure as these come to be embedded and re-embedded in social worlds of literary, artistic, musical and performative celebration in diaspora. The affective power of transnational aesthetics and of the milieus imported and actively (re)created in exile through oratory, objects, foods, music, dance and drama derives, we claim, not merely from a nostalgic desire to recapitulate or replicate a lost ambience. It emerges from dialogical forging, in the here and now, of shared canons of taste among diasporic producers and consumers who collectively define what makes for social distinction and who together recreate the pleasure of joint celebration and worship. Our case studies draw ‘new’ diasporas into the debate on diasporic aesthetics: Filipinos, black Africans and South Asian Bene Yisrael. The selection allows for comparison: between Filipinos in
different eras, between Ghanaians in London and New York, between two different diasporas in Israel.

The transnational appropriation of aesthetic literary and embodied performative traditions, objects, sartorial styles, foods and other paraphernalia in the diaspora points, we contend, to the transformational power of mimesis: that which appears on the surface to be derivative and imitative, taken from elsewhere, engenders authentically felt cultural competences and a subjective sense of ontological presence. Thus it is that diasporic sociality and aesthetic cultural performance create the grounds for appropriation and ownership in the alien place of non-ownership, that is, in the diaspora, the site of exile. In stressing mimesis as the basis for newness, we follow theorists such as Derrida for whom there is no original authentic truth, logos, only spiralling repetitions in shifting contexts, each with its own trace or ‘supplement’. Derrida thus recognises that apparent replication and repetition nevertheless create differance, a deferral and distinction, hence a new product, through performative iteration (Derrida 1981: 168, 1982). As Benjamin too has argued, given that no literary work is ever fixed, every translation is also an act of creativity (Benjamin 1973: 72, 79). It is therefore false to glorify the hybrid products of diaspora as being in some sense superior to the ‘mere’ reincorporation of transnational popular culture. At the most modest level, popular aesthetics enables migrants to forge encapsulated worlds of alternative cultural celebration within the nation; these too constitute liminal, ‘third’ spaces, in Homi K. Bhabha’s terms; they too subvert, by their very presence, a singular, homogeneous national narrative. Though mostly invisible, such diasporic aesthetics sometimes surfaces into the open in street fiestas, carnivals, festivals and processions that re-envisage the nation as multicultural and plural.

The extent to which street festivals lay claims to ownership is forcefully captured in an early work on the London Notting Hill carnival by Cohen (1993). For West Indians in Britain, Cohen discloses, carnival is ‘theirs’, a culmination of a year of artistic production, networking and fund raising. In their writings, carnival masqueraders declare that ‘CARNIVAL BELongs TO US, WE ARE THE CARNIVAL, CARNIVAL IS THE ONE THING, ONE TIME, THAT IS OURS AND OURS ALONE, carnival is part of the cultural and artistic expression of the slave community ... it is an outward expression of everything that is West Indian’; or, in West Indian creole, ‘Carnival is we-ting’ (Cohen 1993: 76). As a kind of liminal ritual or performance, diasporic carnivals such as Notting Hill lay claim to and sacralise the streets of their adopted cities. Carnival in Notting Hill commemorates the racial violence that occurred on its streets
and the confrontations with the police, but at the same time it also celebrates multiculturalism and the potential for living in racial harmony. This, despite the fact, as Cohen points out, that the ‘we’ of carnival has changed over the years and continues to change. Carnival really belongs, the author concludes, to the carnival players in any given year. Who these are changes and is contested, just as the value of carnival is contested by the organisers, artists and musicians: some want to prioritise carnival’s political messages or commercial potential; others argue that it is the powerful aesthetics of carnival that draws the crowds.

To the extent that they reach beyond the encapsulated group, the aesthetic works of diasporic artists have the capacity, as postcolonial theorists recognise, to ‘interrupt’ cultural narratives of colonial hegemony or national singularity. Outstanding works of high culture such as Jose Rizal’s anti-colonial novel, *Noli me Tangere*, a novel written in Spanish in Madrid and Paris and published in Berlin, illustrate. Johnson shows here, the power of aesthetic works produced in diaspora to irreversibly transform world politics and imaginaries of nationhood. Conceived in exile about a nation-in-the-making, Rizal’s novel is, for Benedict Anderson, the first example of a foundational text that evokes the ‘simultaneity’ of the imagined community, in this case of the Philippines as a nation, even prior to its existence.²

**Ambivalence, Hybridity and the Black Atlantic**

Diaspora studies have long emphasised the role and power of hybrid works to challenge or transgress fixed, essentialising imaginaries of the nation. Three authors in particular have contributed significantly to this debate: Bhabha (1990, 1994), Hall (1990, 1991), and Gilroy (1993). All three stress the fluid, contingent nature of national identity. It is perhaps worthwhile summarising briefly at the outset the main theoretical points advanced by these authors in order to set out the ways in which our argument both augments and departs from them.

In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha (1990) advances a critique of essentialist notions of national identity by emphasising the contributions made by diasporic and postcolonial writers, in particular, to a more open, ambivalent construction of the nation. Bhabha (1990) defines the nation as formed by ‘textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems’ (2). To confront the nation, then, is to encounter it ‘as it is written’ (Bhabha 1990: 2). Rather than a monolithic nationalism of singular origins, Bhabha redefines the nation as made up of ‘scraps, patches, and rags of daily signs’ (Bhabha 1990: 297). He locates the resistance to national singularity in the ‘language of metaphor’ (Bhabha 1990: 291) in postcolonial narratives (especially their ‘double-writing’), which
counter the nation (‘dissemi-nation’) with their hybrid histories and ‘displacement of narratives’ (Bhabha 1990: 319) that re-imagine a postcolonial ‘nation-people’ (Bhabha 1990: 291). ‘What I want to emphasise’, writes Bhabha,

... in that large and liminal image of the nation with which I began is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. (Bhabha 1990: 1)

In Bhabha’s terms, the ‘third space’ of cultural ‘enunciation’ and ‘performance’, the ‘place of utterance’, ‘interrupts’ and ‘displaces’ the eternalising narrative of the modern nation, perceptively described by Benedict Anderson as written ‘homogeneous time’ (1994: 36, 37).

If Bhabha’s interest is primarily in literature, Stuart Hall is concerned more broadly with cultural identity as represented and expressed in the works of diasporic artists, musicians and intellectuals (1990, 1991). Writing about the Caribbean diaspora in Britain, he argues for the need to recognise the presence of new artistic hybrids created in diaspora. ‘We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, he says, without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and continuities that constitute, precisely, the Caribbean uniqueness’ (Hall 1990: 225). Caribbean uniqueness is, historically, the product of a continuously creolising culture. ‘Cultural identity, in this second sense’, argues Hall, ‘is a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past ... far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [it is] subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power’ (Hall 1990: 225). The idea of (national) identity as we knew it, one that is exclusive and static, has ended, argues Hall (1991: 43). In its place, we need to understand identity as in fieri, in the making, in continuous transformation (Hall 1991: 47). Identity is always in the process of formation, dynamic and never static, so that identification is constituted by ambivalence (Hall 1991: 47), by the ‘doubleness of similarity and difference’ (Hall 1990: 227).

To capture this sense of difference which is not pure ‘otherness’, a paradox akin to Bhabha’s doubling up of the sign, Hall builds on Derrida’s notion of differance, the notion that difference and its meaning are always deferred (Hall 1990: 229): ‘meaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it at any moment possible’ (Hall 1990: 230). This conceptualisation of difference/differance allows Hall to rethink the positioning and
repositioning of Caribbean cultural identities in relation to three presences: Présence Africaine, Présence Européenne and Présence Americain. These moments of slavery, race and colonialism encapsulate diaspora experience for Afro-Caribbean people, ‘defined not by essence or property, but by the recognition of a . . . heterogeneity and diversity, by a corruption of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity’ (Hall 1990: 235).

More than Bhabha and Hall, Paul Gilroy’s work encompasses a range of aesthetic media: artists, novelists, intellectuals and musicians, besides interrogating the popular aesthetics of community. Similar to these other authors, The Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) critiques essentialist views of a bounded national culture, proposing that a true understanding of African American culture must recognise its embeddedness in modernity, in the experiences of slavery and the civil rights movement. Black intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois or Richard Wright travelled back and forth across the Atlantic, receptive to a range of philosophical influences, from Kant, Hegel and Marx to Existentialism; they were not locked in a nativist, pre-slavery past. Theirs was inevitably a ‘double consciousness’. Following Judith Butler, Gilroy claims to be an ‘anti-anti-essentialist’ who, while denying a singular African pre-slavery roots narrative, recognises the authentic reality of the black community in performance, born out of slavery and in the struggle for emancipation (Gilroy 1993: 99–103). Similar to Bhabha and Hall, he sees diaspora as countering ‘the idea of cultural nationalism, . . . over-integrated conceptions of culture which presents immutable ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of ‘black’ and white people’ (Gilroy 1993: 2). To such separations Gilroy responds with an analysis of ‘the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of blacks, dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing and communicating and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world’ (Gilroy 1993: 3).

It is, above all, black musicians and their music, performed before live audiences, that have historically expressed black popular struggles, from spirituals to jazz, the blues, reggae and even rap. It is worth quoting Gilroy on this point at some length since his privileging of the emotional dimension of musical concerts illuminates our focus in this special issue on diasporas as sensuous communities of taste and performance. The need is, he says,

... to make sense of musical performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways and sometimes socially reproduced by means of neglected modes of signifying practice like mimesis, gesture, kinesis and costume. Antiphony
(call and response) is the principal formal feature of these musical traditions. It has come to be seen as a bridge from music to other modes of expression, supplying, along with improvisation, montage and dramaturgy, the key to the full medley of black artistic practices. (1993: 78)

Gilroy goes further than Bhabha or Hall in making clear his view that the hybrid works of diasporic artists and intellectuals make claims to ownership; in the case of the Black Atlantic, of modernity and its intellectual traditions. Though more implicit, the remaking of the nation by diasporic artists and intellectuals in the critical writings of Bhabha and Hall effectively implies a validation of diasporic claims to full citizenship and hence ownership, even though, paradoxically, these very artists may deny the legitimacy of the bounded nation.

**The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Vernacular, Encapsulated and Multi-sensual**

Hybridity, ambivalence and the Black Atlantic, while remaining seminal concepts for any discussion of the aesthetics of diaspora experience, leave behind what for a better word we want to refer here as *vernacular* and *encapsulated* aesthetics. This is a sense of aesthetics that is cultivated within immigrant diasporic groups often in the confines of their own gatherings and celebrations. It is an aesthetic that is popular, sensual, materially embedded in aesthetic performance and objects, and frequently exclusive. It forms the grounds for competitive recognition and distinction within and not simply beyond diasporic groups. It is an aesthetics that is not exclusively made and consumed by and for intellectual and diasporic elites – a critique advanced by Zeleza (2005) on Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*. It is neither the aesthetics of diasporic novelists such as Salman Rushdie, nor does it aim to reach wider audiences, as they do. Unlike the recent literature on rap (Basu et al. 2006), African-American jazz (Gilroy 1993) or the global film industries and television, this ‘ethnic’ aesthetics does not engage with the national or global public spheres. It is an aesthetics that remains owned by ethnic groups whose members often defend its production and consumption as authentic expressions of cultural and ethnic identities, sometimes even fighting and competing over who ‘owns’ or controls this or that aspect of their shared culture.

Ethnic and national distinctions remain important for a conceptualisation of diaspora aesthetics. It is true that diasporas borrow from other aesthetic traditions to create hybrid forms, yet these aesthetics often remain encapsulated and are no less significant for being so. They are the medium, we contend,
for creating a sense of worth and distinction within host nations for otherwise marginalised groups, as Fumanti, Shenar, Liebelt and Parish all show in this volume. Through diasporic investment in the creation of aesthetic spaces, members of diaspora transform ugly concrete structures, school and community halls in London, the Israeli town of Ramle, or the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv, into pleasurable, homely places. Through performance, diasporic groups enact narratives of diaspora subjectivity.

By appropriating local space and imbuing it with a transnational aesthetics, whether of Indian cinema enacted and performed by Indian Jewish immigrants in Israel, Yoruba aesthetics revitalised by Ghanaians in London and New York, or Filipino ambiances recreated by migrant workers in Israel, immigrants and diasporics lay claims to being and ownership. These processes are not simply outward looking, subverting pure narratives of nation; they are inward looking and invisible to outsiders. As Werbner has argued (2002: 16), diasporans create ‘alternative identities and lifestyles in the invisible spaces diaspora groups create for themselves, far from the public eye’. Such spaces are symbolically shaped as ‘moments set apart from the flow of the quotidian, of the taken-for-granted of everyday life’. Werbner draws, first, on Handelman’s (1990) exploration of the ‘architectonics’ of public events, ‘as the crystallisations of particular symbolic complexes and representation of self and community, but also as negotiated encounters or social situations’ (1990); and second, on Bourdieu and Lefebvre’s analyses of social spaces as imaginatively and materially constructed, yet empowered or negotiated through contestation (Lefebvre 1974/1991; Bourdieu 1984). Because public arenas are symbolically constructed, she proposes, the spaces they open up are also cultural embodiments of historically situated identities (Werbner 2002: 16). Her comments advance our argument that vernacular and encapsulated aesthetics, in being sensuous, are also ontological, in the sense of making existential claims to belonging. Contrary to Rushdie’s idea of the ontological un-belongingness of ‘migrants who roots themselves in ideas rather than places’ (Rushdie 1991: 124), our understanding of diaspora aesthetics captures the ways in which diasporans actively mark their presence in the diaspora, their ‘being in the world’ in a Heideggerian sense. As Fumanti argues, through aesthetically contrived performances, they actively (re)make their subjectivities. This ontological dimension of diaspora aesthetics is rich sensuously. Diasporans, the contributors to this volume point out, create what we call a ‘multisensorial ambiance’, a space of multiple sensorial experiences that enrich their sense of self. Our emphasis on this multisensorial ambiance suggests the potential contribution
anthropology can make to a theory of diaspora which focuses on participatory celebration and sensuous pleasure.

**Between Mana, Aura and Charisma: Ethno-Aesthetics, Ontology and Mimesis**

In a volume entitled *Levi-Strauss, Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Wiseman (2009) critiques Gell’s (1998) argument that anthropology and aesthetics are incompatible; above all, according to Gell, because in pre-modern societies art is not assigned to a separate sphere as it came to be in eighteenth century Europe. In the societies anthropologists study, Gell contends, manufactured objects are valorised not for their ‘pure’ aesthetic qualities but for their occult, ritual power and agency, subjectified and humanised through their use and circulation in networks of persons, whose own personhood, in turn, is distributed and dispersed through the movement of these magically powerful objects associated with them. Against the opposition Gell poses between the modern and the pre-modern, however, Wiseman proposes that in Lévi-Strauss’s ethno-linguistics, the power and effect of both crafted pre-modern artefacts and ‘modern’, imaginatively created art objects is similar: in both western and pre-modern (‘primitive’) societies, the perceived ‘world’ is ‘detotalised’ and ‘retotalised’ via such objects (2009: 39). The result is a symbolically structured product that exteriorises mental processes to give them their magical power (Wiseman 2009: 31–2). The object is emotionally pleasurable because it both represents and exceeds reality, engaging in a dialogue between necessity and contingency (Wiseman 2009: 30) and mediating between humanity and the phenomenological world: a ‘means by which we come to “know” the world as well as construct a certain sense of self’ (31).

Even apart from an obvious objection to Gell’s anti-historical relegation of anthropology to the study of pre-modern societies, Wiseman notes that in pre-modern societies as in modern ones, according to Levi-Strauss, there are aesthetic specialists of what he calls ‘wild modes of thought’ (2009: 34 passim). Whether shamans or modern artists, they inhabit the margins, mediating between the symbolic order and that which exceeds this order (Wiseman 2009: 21–3). In Walter Benjamin’s historical account of movements in art, the aura of an object of art, its powerfully compelling charisma, is intrinsically linked with the artist who created it. This aura, Benjamin proposes, has replaced the occult power or mana of pre-modern objects: if ‘originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult’, then it
... is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. (Benjamin 1973: 217)

The comparison can be taken even further: just as the aura of a work of art increases with the succession of prestigious owners who possess it, so too kula valuables gain mana and prestige as the chain of great chiefs who once owned them is lengthened. Although, according to Benjamin, photography has finally ‘emancipated’ art from ritual (Benjamin 1973: 218), as Parish shows in this issue it might equally be argued that the aura of films has not vanished in the age of mechanical reproduction: it has been displaced onto film stars.

Hence, the magical attraction, mana or charisma of artists, shamans and objects is not unique to either modern or pre-modern societies. Indeed, as Bourdieu has argued, key actors in the contested field of art are those with the symbolic capital to ‘consecrate’ the ‘charisma’ of an art work (1993a: 76–7). Art objects imbue their users and surroundings with their powerful mana, as contributors to this volume highlight. Conversely, it is in the context of diasporic celebratory performances – totalising sensory experiences-in-the-making – that the intensity of aesthetic expression reaches its zenith. Such moments of collective effervescence, Durkheim (1915) argued, endow aesthetic objects and acts with magical, occult, power and truth.

In the present volume, Jane Parish analyses the refiguration of kente cloth in Ghanaian shrines in New York City, transformed in response to the magical charisma of celebrities and the city itself; Claudia Liebelt describes the loving decoration of an icon of the Virgin Mary carried through the streets of Tel Aviv by Filipina migrant carers who also craft filigree Origami swans to be given away as gifts, while Mattia Fumanti considers the aesthetics of Ghanaian sartorial styles for different rituals and celebrations. Ghanaians living in London display in beautiful colours their aesthetically grounded sense of propriety and moral superiority vis-à-vis their host nation and other ethnic groups. Mama Mary icons adorning lovingly decorated domestic altars create their own ‘sacriscape’ of gendered sensual and affective aesthetics, in a collective effort to sanctify urban spaces constructed as dangerous and fraught with sin and temptation. Mama Mary embodies compassion, refuge and protection and through her migrants appropriate and assert cultural claims while living in exile. By contrast, the true gift of a personally crafted Origami swan embodies the possibility of moral relations and love which transcend unequal labour relationships.
In all these cases, objects, dance or music-making are embedded in wider sensuous-aesthetic contexts. The significance of these wider performative contexts is increasingly recognised as central to an adequate theorising of an anthropology of aesthetics (Gell 1998; Pinney & Thomas 2001; Morphy & Perkins 2006). Not only do objects come to be deployed and redeployed in ritual and myth, but an adequate anthropological theory of art and aesthetics also needs to disclose how such manufactured objects, music or dance are encompassed in the totality of human sensuous production and appreciation.

The emotional power of ritual ‘symbols’ in performance has been widely recognised by anthropologists, from Turner’s (1964) analysis of Ndembu ritual to Geertz’s characterisation of the Balinese cockfight as an ‘aesthetic performance’ (1973), and Kapferer or Boddy’s aesthetic interpretations of the intertextuality of exorcist or zar performances and their overwhelming sensuous impact (Kapferer 1983; Boddy 1989). Works on ritual have often stressed the multi-sensorial dimensions of ritual as embodiment (Feld 1982; Stoller 1989; Geurtz 2002) as well as the aesthetic performative skills of ritual specialists (Gore 2007). Despite the growing anthropological literature on culture and the senses, however, sensory experiences and the phenomenology of the senses are only rarely and intermittently explicitly applied to the theory of aesthetics expounded here. Thus, although Howes tells us that ‘[t]he essence of aesthetic experience by Shipibo-Conibo standards is... pluri-sensorial’, he goes on to argue, mistakenly in our view, that ‘contemporary Western aesthetics is almost exclusively visual’ (Howes 1991: 6).

More insightful for an understanding of diasporic aesthetics is Adam Chau’s 2008 critique of ‘receptive-interpretive’ models of the senses. These, he proposes, are built on the theoretical position that living in a sensorial world means merely interpreting this world (Chau 2008: 436). Instead, Chau wants to privilege the active participatory role involved in producing sensual stimuli (Chau 2008: 488). In the Chinese folk theory of ‘red-hot sociality’, what is privileged, he tells us, ‘is not so much the sensing subject as the heat-and-noise-producing subject’ (Chau 2008, emphasis in original). The sensory-production model Chau puts forwards stresses human participation as actively making the social sensorium into an aesthetics of

...noise, heat, taste, smell, spectacle, etc. (through speaking, shouting, singing, drumming, making music, blasting the speakers, honking, chanting, clapping, dancing, sweating, getting hot, embracing, caressing, cooking, feasting, toasting,
bathing, smoking, perfuming, dressing, setting off firecrackers, lighting incense or candles, processing, engaging in games or battles, torturing, etc.). (Chau 2008: 490, see also 495)

This point resonates with a number of contributions to this volume. In her paper on Bene Yisrael Jewish immigrants from India to Israel, Gabriele Shenar shows that for first, second and even third generation Bene Yisrael, Indian cinema, Bollywood, remains a consuming passion. But, films are not there only to be viewed – the aesthetics of Indian Bollywood culture must be performed in song, dance and more broadly, by creating whole, set-apart aesthetic milieus through festivals, mehndi (henna) rituals and other celebrations. Against the folklorists’ dismissal of Indian movies as inauthentic cultural kitsch, Bene Yisrael appropriate the popular cultural sensorium represented in Bollywood films to create, in Chau’s terms, an active, participatory, multisensual, performance, which mobilises smells, tastes, sounds, music, dance, drama, costumes and oratory in an atmosphere of celebration and sheer pleasure. Through such performances Bene Yisrael also emplace themselves as integrally part of the wider South Asian diaspora worldwide (on Bollywood consumption in the diaspora see, for example, Kaur & Sinha 2005). They also create a tangible, sensuous connection back to India.

In Mattia Fumanti’s paper on encapsulated aesthetics among the Akan-speaking diaspora in London, traditional Ashanti cloths, ntoma, capture this central relationship. Worn at important family occasions such as funerals and weddings, the cloths are distinguished by Twi mottoes and wise sayings printed on the textiles alongside adinkra, traditional Akan symbols. Worn in the right and proper way, the cloths ‘comes to life’, acquiring a further aesthetic value beyond their superficial beauty. This process, Fumanti argues, is both ontological and epistemological, inscribing Akan migrants’ understandings and sense of presence-in-the-world – an encapsulated, London–Ghanaian world (Fumanti 2010), and enabling them to acquire recognition and distinction among fellow Ghanaians within the diaspora. As shamans integrate different elements into a system by projecting the social onto the corporeal (Wiseman 2009: 20), so that shamanistic objects acquire efficacy once incorporated and endowed with socially inscribed aesthetic values, so for Akan diasporans their cloths are not simply objects made for consumption; they are embodied, coming to life only when worn by a person. Dress without a body is an inanimate object that requires incorporation within an aesthetically understood language to be endowed with ontological value and ‘presence’.
Sartorial and cosmetic self-adornment are central to the embodiment of distinction in many diasporic groups. At times they are highly visible and even jarring to others, as is the case for the Islamic veil (Tarlo 2010). Tarlo shows how the hijab scarf is not simply functional or static but has become an object of beauty and fashion for its wearers; hijabi veils as consumer objects have been incorporated into a spiralling global aesthetics detached from their functional use (see Navaro-Yashin 2002, Chapter 3). Such fashions now have a world market, Tarlo shows, while also reflecting the global spread of certain deeply felt values of female concealment and modesty, as Alvi has argued (Alvi, in press, 2013). Among Indian Sikhs in Britain a new flourishing designer fashion industry in ‘traditional clothing’ has emerged (Bhachu 2004).

Such displays of aesthetic beauty or ‘fashion’ are experienced ontologically and cannot simply be dismissed as imitation.

Thus, our approach to vernacular aesthetics in this volume remains deeply ontological, in the sense of being ‘concrete and rooted in experience’ (Wiseman 2009: 24). For Lévi-Strauss, ethno-aesthetics are rooted in a sensory experience of the world. Drawing on Baudrillard’s theorisation of post-modern commodity production, Parish’s account of Ghanaian Shrines in New York City shows how Akan priests incorporate into their gods’ sacred discourses revelatory knowledge drawn from the hyperreality of the American mass market on celebrity aesthetics, where fact and fiction merge in an endless chain of simulacra. As she says,

In the metropolis of simulation, invisibility is not a great disadvantage. The comings and goings of shrine-gods correspond to the ghostly appearances and fleeting celebrity images in a city that claims to be the global hub of the international media, fashion and entertainment industry.

In their endeavours to capture for their clients this powerful but distant commodity fetish – the ‘celebrity’ – the priests sew or glue strips of Hollywood stardom on to the shrine’s valuable ‘authentic’ African Kente cloth, imported from Ghana, in an act of powerful mimesis, to create a hybrid collage of sacred devotion. One shrine priest, for example, had stuck photographs of Robert De Niro, Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Cruise on his kente cloth, alongside photographs of elegant eateries in New York City allegedly frequented by the ‘stars’, and pictures cut from magazines of rich and famous hideaways in the Hamptons, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket.

How are we to understand this appropriation of the charismatic power of a distant Other? Taussig reminds us of ‘the power of the copy to influence what it
is a power of' (1993: 250). But questions remain. Does the hybrid kente cloth indicate the closeness of the gods to the celebrity stars desired by their clients, the gods’ capacity to reach and influence them? Or is the cloth simply empowered as a generalised witch finder by the incorporation of powerful celebrities? Or perhaps this is yet another advertising gimmick to draw clients to the shrine?

Encapsulation and the Multi-sensual Ambience of Vernacular Aesthetics

In the early part of this introduction, we signalled our intention to move away from an exclusive focus on outwardly looking aesthetic works of diaspora, represented in the postcolonial literature by the works of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, among others, in order to argue for the need to go beyond these theorists’ notions of hybridity and ‘third space’, and explore the aesthetics of encapsulated diasporic groups.

It is to the aesthetics of encapsulation that we turn now. We build here in our edited volume on ‘the moral economy of the African diaspora’ in which we explored encapsulation in relation to citizenship, religion and belonging (Fumanti & Werbner 2010). Here, we take encapsulation as central for the making, in diaspora, of a space that is home, one which has a distinct atmosphere, an ‘ambiance’. We take the term ambiance from Friedman’s analysis of Congolese young migrants living in France and Belgium (1994, Chapter 7). Les sapeurs, the society of elegant people as the acronym SAPE (Société’ Ambianceurs et Personnes Elegantes) reveals, are the eponymous example of sartorial elegance and ambiance in the diaspora. Ambiance refers to a multisensual space that is embedded in community and transformative of the person as a subject. Ambiance enables a diasporan to become a proper person morally, ethically and aesthetically.

The relationship between the senses and place has been much debated in recent years in anthropology (Cohen 1988; Stoller 1989; Classen 1997; Taussig 2004; Law 2005). In particular, Feld and Basso (1996) have argued that anthropologists should analyse the ‘cultural processes and practices through which places are rendered meaningful – through which, one might say, places are actively sensed’ (1996: 7). In this sense, Feld and Basso’s work addresses the need to interpret and understand place not in the literal sense but as embodied and lived through the senses ‘to describe and interpret some of the ways in which people encounter places and perceive them and invest them with significance’ (Feld & Basso 1996: 8). Similarly, Casey (1996), drawing on Merleau Ponty, examines how to be in a place is to know, to become aware of one’s
very consciousness and sensuous presence in the world. ‘Place’, Casey contends, ‘is the most fundamental form of embodied experience – the site of a powerful fusion of self, space and time’ (Casey 1996: 9). Building on Feld and Basso’s argument that ‘places are tied to identities’ (Casey 1996: 11), the contributors to this volume show how diasporans claim ownership over identity spaces in their places of settlement by appropriating and transforming them.

In this respect, encapsulated diasporas are not concerned primarily to assert multicultural rights. They do not necessarily want to enter into a dialogue with the state. They do not only wish to challenge narratives of nation or try to insert themselves into them. Their (self) recognition happens in the sensually saturated spaces of community halls, family meetings, and devotional and religious events. Even if multiculturalism grants symbolic licence and sometimes funding, this is not the primary impetus for creating new diasporic cultural milieus. Fumanti, Shenar and Liebelt all show that in creating distinctive cultural milieus, diasporans aim to create a sense of homeliness through sensual saturation [see Deleuze (1986: 13–14) for a discussion of visual saturation in cinema]. What surrounds these milieus are often alien spaces. So, in this issue, Claudia Liebelt describes the ways in which Filippinos migrant workers transform the ugly space of the Tel Aviv central bus station from a concrete monstrosity into an exciting and vibrant milieu saturated with music, colours, images and the smell of traditional Filipino food; a place of discos and karaoke where domestic carers on their day off can wear the latest fashions, from jeans to mini skirts, and meet friends, compatriots and migrants from their home towns. As Syjuco (2010) describes it in his ironically titled novel, Ilustrado, Filipino culture has been Americanised in all its brash, cheap, mass consumer-oriented splendour. As Liebelt shows, however, Filipinos’ mimicry of mass-mediated (‘American’) popular culture is a complex and often contradictory process of aesthetic formation and spatial ‘homing’ in ironic contestation, embodied in the image of the ‘sinful’ Manila girls’ refusal to be contained by the grind of their subordinate position. By refashioning a non-place into little Manila, Liebelt shows, the Central Station has become yet another ‘Other space’ within a city that prides itself on its urban cosmopolitanism. As has been recognised more generally in the literature on the ‘glocalisation’ of mass consumerism, Filipinos appropriate this everyday aesthetics of mass culture and make it distinctively their own (Robertson 1995).

Similarly, Gabriel Shenar and Mattia Fumanti describe the aesthetically infused sensoriums inhabited by Bene Yisrael in Israel and Ghanaians London in ephemerally transformed spaces of celebration. From being
non-descript, mundane and ugly, public community centres are redecorated as milieus in which all the senses are awakened in a rich display of sartorial elegance, abundant food and loud music, accompanied by elaborately designed event cards. These celebrations and rituals are videoed, to be sent back home, in the case of Ghanaians, or to record the visits of Indian artists, in the case of Bene Yisrael, thus creating and recreating a shared transnational aesthetic community.

Recognising that the aesthetics of diaspora are rarely uniform and singular, that diasporas may foster quite different aspects of a shared culture and different aesthetic genres, the question then is: to what extent are particular aspects of a culture as performed in diaspora ‘owned’ by the whole ethnic group, and to what extent are they claimed by specific, positioned groups, such as women, youth or male elders. Werbner has suggested in relation to the Pakistani diaspora in Britain that culture as a medium of social interaction confers agency with a field of power relations. Embodied in domestic rituals like mehndi, cricket, musical performances or religious devotions, different social actors – pious elders, secular poets and musicians, men, women and youth – have a stake in ‘translocating’ the aesthetic practices that were ‘theirs’ historically, and reappropriating them in diaspora. Clearly, then, Werbner argues, the translocation of cultural practices to Britain was never automatic, a matter of nostalgic clinging to ‘tradition’, but the product of locally situated power struggles, which have resulted in the creation of a complex diasporic public sphere in which different cultural aesthetic traditions co-exist and are performed situationally (Werbner 2002: Chapter 7, 2005). Ultimately, then, diaspora is a not just a matter of ‘imagining’: it is a material project requiring investment of resources, labour and imagination by self-motivated actors within the diaspora (see contributions to Leonard & Werbner 2000).

**Writing the Nation from Afar: The Literary Art Worlds of Writers in Exile**

We return now, in these final sections, to the elite aesthetic works of diaspora discussed at the outset. One of the remarkable features of the late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century writers’ landscape in Paris, London, Madrid or Berlin was the extent to which writers in exile created literary art ‘worlds’ away from home. These often centred on publishing houses, bookshops and small literary journals with limited circulation. Hence, we find that the *ilustrados*, the Filipino novelists, artists and journalists who are the subject of Mark Johnson’s article in this issue, formed a dense network of compatriots in Madrid centred around *La Solidaridad*, the critical journal of the Propaganda movement...
produced in Barcelona (Schumacher 1997; Anderson 2005: 96–104), who met in cafes, homes or art studios, such as that of the Filipino painter Juan Luno in Madrid, or the salons of wealthy Filipinos living in other European cities (Reyes 2008: xxvi, 108). They formed connected networks across western Europe to the Philippines. Jose Rizal, a polyglot doctor, novelist and critic whose execution by the Spanish made him Philippines’ national hero, lived in no less than five European cities during his 10-year stay in Europe, a fact marked in street names and plaque in many European cities, including ‘the singular distinction of having a garden square named after him in Paris, and a monument erected in his honour in Madrid’ (Reyes 2008: xi).

Similar to the ilustrado, some 40 years later, the ‘lost generation’ of modernist American and Irish diasporic novelists, from Ernest Hemingway to James Joyce, clustered in Paris around ‘Shakespeare and Company’, a small English lending library-cum-bookshop located on the Left Bank that was owned by a remarkable American woman, Sylvia Beach. Beach acted as intellectual interlocutor, banker, confidante, postal address, patroness and much loved friend, mediating among American writers and between them and the literary French avant garde in Paris during the inter-war period. She became, ultimately, the publisher of Ulysses after Joyce moved from Trieste to Paris, and after all attempts to find an established publisher had failed. Her bookshop displayed banned books and held regular readings by distinguished writers living in or passing through Paris (on Beach and this period see Fitch 1983). Gertrude Stein’s weekly salon was another gathering point for American writers in exile.

Francophone black African writers in Paris from the 1940s onwards clustered around another publisher-cum-bookshop and journal, Présence Africaine, which hosted African writers’ international conferences and was home to what became known as the negritude or pan-African movement. For several decades, Présence Africaine was instrumental in organising the cultural space, institutional frameworks, and market opportunities for African writing (Jules-Rosette 1998: 2). W.E. Du Bois, an African American educated in Europe (see Gilroy 1993), was ‘the motor behind four of the five pan-African congresses held between 1918 and 1945’ (Jules-Rosette 1998: 50). In the post-war era, Paris also became a haven for African American writers, such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, and Jazz musicians and singers, such as Paul Robeson, who were escaping American racism (on Wright’s friendship with Beach see Fitch 1983: 408–9; Jules-Rosette 2007: 56; on Wright’s oeuvre, his pan-Africanism and membership of Présence Africaine, see Gilroy 1993, Chapter 5). Some American artists were loners, like Josephine Baker (Jules-Rosette 2007), as
indeed were American diasporic writers Henry James and Edith Wharton in the late nineteenth century. These authors, who came from moneyed backgrounds, lived the affluent lifestyles of the European aristocracy (Ernst 1968), but they were the exception: most American writers came to Paris because it was cheap and because that was where their readership lived. As Fitch says, ‘For two hundred years – from Benjamin Franklin to James Baldwin – (American) writers have sought Paris, walked the same streets, stayed often in the same hotels’ (Fitch 1983: 163).

Berlin in the inter-war period was another diasporic literary centre. Experiencing a ‘Jewish renaissance’ at this time, it drew together distinguished thinkers, critics and publishers such as Martin Buber and Gershon Scholem along with a number of outstanding Hebrew writers, among them Haim Nahman Bialik, the national Hebrew poet (Laor 1993: 79, 80). One of the most talented of these writers, S.Y. Agnon, was adopted by the publisher Shlomo Schoken who became his lifelong patron, enabling him to pursue his literary career. Agnon, a central figure of modern Hebrew fiction and Nobel Laureate, had arrived in Palestine in 1908, moved to Germany in 1912 and lived first in Berlin, before ultimately returning in 1924 to Palestine. Unexpectedly, perhaps, his Hebrew writings during the German interlude were entirely focused on the lost world of Eastern European Jewry, a central topic that preoccupied Jewish thinkers at the time in what Laor describes as a ‘cult of Ostjuden’ (i.e. eastern Jewry, Laor 1993: 79). In the 1970s, a different Jewish diasporic writers’ circle, this time of Iraqi writers, emerged in Israel. Among their writings in Arabic and Hebrew are outstanding novels describing evocatively the lost world of 1940s’ Baghdad, a city whose population was said to be 40% Jewish before their departure for Israel in 1948–51 (Berg 1996).

Despite the ubiquity of these diasporic writers’ circles living in European or Middle Eastern exile or ‘exile from exile’, Rizal stands out as almost unique, one of the few exilic novelists to recreate in nineteenth-century realist style, tinged with humour, cruel satire and a hint of magical realism, a ‘nation’: the superficial manners and lifestyle of bourgeois meztiso Philippine society, the colony’s elaborate class structure and deep racist biases, the unthinking gaiety of its leisureed youth, the gross absurdity of its social climbers, the misery of its peasants and above all the mendacity, sheer cruelty, greed and promiscuity of the friars who controlled the colony with an iron grip. His novel, *Noli me Tangere*, evokes an ominous sense of imminent threat and looming disaster as the nefarious plans of the clerical protagonists unfold inexorably to their tragic dénouement. The immediacy and vividness of the novel’s descriptions, testimony to
the power of the novelist’s imagination in exile, invoke the existence of the Philippines as a ‘nation’ and tell a story of violent and non-violent resistance to colonial oppression.

The point for our broader argument, that diaspora aesthetics are embedded in sociality, is that the critical ideas expressed by Rizal through the novel, and even more explicitly in his polemical articles and essays, were not uniquely his (see Reyes 2008, Chapter 4). They were shared by other members of an elite new Filipino group known as the Propaganda movement, composed of young Filipinos educated to university level in the Philippines, which at the time boasted the only university in the whole of Asia. Their aim was to liberate the Philippines, for the first time grasped as a single country despite its multitude of islands, peoples and dialects, from arbitrary colonial rule and particularly from the stranglehold of the clergy. In this they shared the project of liberal democrats in peninsular Spain itself. For Rizal and many others within the movement, the ultimate aim was not violent revolution but autonomy and representation in the Spanish parliament, a project that ultimately failed as Spain refused to relinquish its colonial domination, and violent revolution toppled the colonial state (Schumacher 1997; Anderson 2005). Rizal, who returned to the Philippines in 1892, was first banished to an outer island and finally executed by a firing squad in the dying days of Spanish rule. His book was banned and had to be smuggled into the Philippines. Written in Spanish it could only be read, ironically, by the 5% of the population who spoke and read Spanish. With the American colonisation of the Philippines, English became the dominant lingua franca. Rizal, a national hero, is read in translation today.

Few other diaspora authors have written such foundational novels narrating their nations as imagined communities. Among these, Joyce’s Ulysses, set in Dublin on a single day (Joyce 1922), and Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981), invoking the polyglot multitudes of India, stand out exceptionally as modernist and postmodernist works depicting, unforgettably, from afar, the imagined nations of their authors’ birth. All three novels, as well as being experimental, are trenchant political and social critiques, and all were banned by the countries whose stories they narrate so memorably.

By contrast, most diasporic writers are more like Agnon who, during his time in exile, Laor tells us, though ‘coming from Palestine, . . . invested almost no aesthetic or intellectual effort in trying to come to grips with the “brave new world” that he had found there’ (Laor 1993: 83). Henry James’s oeuvre exemplifies, perhaps, the prototypical theme of the American writer in exile: the encounter between the old and new worlds, innocence and experience. Travel, being a
foreigner, stranger, expatriate or migrant abroad, is a major genre in diasporic writing (see Monk 2008), exemplified in Hemingway’s, Henry Miller’s or Joseph Conrad’s novels, in much diasporic South Asian writing or, among Francophone African writers, in ‘Parisianism’, the genre that replaced negritude and which narrates the African gaze on French society (Jules-Rosette 1998, Chapter 6). Nostalgia for lost worlds, as we have seen, became a major genre in Hebrew diasporic writing. The return home of the wayward son, a theme which frames *Noli*, is dominant in a postmodern novel by another diasporic Filipino writer, *Ilustrado* by Miguel Syjuco, mentioned above. Some novels written in exile range globally in place and in time, such as Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, which moves back and forth between London, Iran, the Hijaz, Pakistan and India (see Rushdie 1988; for an analysis of this movement see Werbner 2002, Chapter 5). For such novels, cultural worlds criss-cross the planet mythically and imaginatively, challenging the boundedness of any single imagined community.

**The Ilustrados: From Art Worlds to Cultural Distinction**

Whatever the art medium, musicians, artists, playwrights, film makers, performers or writers often gather in diaspora to constitute art worlds in the sense analysed by Howard Becker. Becker recognised that,

> All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation. The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we call an art world. (Becker 1982: 1)

Complex divisions of labour in such art worlds apply not merely to theatrical or cinematic productions but equally to the works of apparently lone artists. They too rely on resources, distribution networks, aesthetic conventions, critics, publishing houses, museums, galleries, collectors and audiences. Who these audiences are is critical to understanding not simply how the art world operates but the whole field of competitive cultural production, in Bourdieu’s terms, the way in which distinction is claimed and conferred (Bourdieu 1984, 1993a: 34–5, 74–111). Significant in the case of American, Irish or Hebrew writers in Paris, London or Berlin, it seems to us, is that unlike Filipino, African, Caribbean or South Asian colonial and postcolonial writers who
wrote in the language of the colonisers, their claim to distinction was to be recognised as *avant garde*, modernist *world* writers, whose primary readership nevertheless lay in their home nations. They were neither appropriating nor claiming ownership over the countries in which they wrote, even though several, such as Gertrude Stein or T.S. Eliot, lived and died abroad. If anything, being a stranger abroad had its own magical appeal for most.

Bourdieu’s theorisation of the ‘field of cultural production’ as a competitive field of distinction and taste has been critiqued on various grounds, including its stress on habitus that leads to an inability to theorise historical change, the ‘waxing and waning of aesthetic formations’ (Born 2010: 194), its elitism, its reductionist approach to aesthetics and its apparent exclusive focus on French society (see Lash 1994 with Bourdieu’s response 1994; Born 2010).

It is this latter critique that Mark Johnson takes up in his paper on the Filipino artists, writers and intellectuals who came to Europe, initially to Madrid, in the 1880s. Johnson argues against Bourdieu’s ‘methodological nationalism’ that it fails to include the colonial world or even ethnic minorities living within France. The point that Johnson makes is that rather than seeing the *ilustrado* as merely another class fraction imitating European bourgeois lifestyle (on this see Reyes 2008), we need to recognise that they pursued this lifestyle precisely because, as part of the colonial meztiso elite, they were fully schooled in it. The lifestyle was, in other words, theirs already, part of their habitus. Indeed, Johnson argues, the field of west European distinction was and has been trans-local since colonisation – a fact Bourdieu ignores. Yet, despite the fact that the European elite’s lifestyle was intrinsically theirs, the *ilustrado* were effectively denied ownership of that classed habitus and lifestyle because of their raced bodies, Johnson contends. Thus, what in others is acquired and experienced as ‘second nature’ because it was recognised as fitting their class and race is something they had to actively claim, an act of appropriation rather than mere *mimesis*.

At least one artist among the *ilustrado* won prizes and prestige for his paintings while Rizal was adopted by a European patron. But, when it came to political power, the refusal on the part of colonial metropolitan elites to extend political and social reform and symbolic recognition to indigenous Filipino *ilustrado* as fellow citizens – not separate from but part of the colonial state elite, a demand at least some of the propagandists sought initially – ultimately engendered a sense of estrangement and distance, literally and figuratively, from their colonially elite-crafted bodies and from the Spanish motherland. In other words, Johnson argues, it nurtured the idea of a separate, distinctly Filipino
nation – as well as of a distinctly Filipino bodily aesthetic. Hence, for example, Rizal encourages fellow propagandists to shave their facial hair to mark out their distinction from Spaniards, and while *Noli* is written in the language of the colonisers, it is nonetheless peppered with Tagalog and other local cultural referents. In other words, Johnson proposes, imagining a new nation was about crafting both a distinctly Filipino elite subjectivity and an authenticating audience who would recognise and deem legitimate their now newly minted Filipino elite aesthetic sensibilities.

Second, it is precisely because of that refusal to accord recognition, and the impulse towards imagining a Filipino nation, Johnson argues, that the *ilustrado* also simultaneously became transnational migrants and diasporans. That, in turn, created the possibility of hybridity – a kind of dual movement of detachment and appropriation – from the elite colonial habitus they were originally schooled in but which they now had to reclaim in new ways as their own. Thenceforth, the Filipino homeland that they were both literally and figuratively distant from had to be recreated and constructed as theirs, which meant, in turn, that much of the *propagandista* and *ilustrados* work was in creating for themselves a legitimate and recognisable Filipino historical past. That, additionally, was compounded by what in Bourdieu’s terms might be seen as the ambivalence of those who, as artists and writers, the heroic intellectuals, were both estranged from while seeking to make anew the field of economic and political power. Cultural and aesthetic appropriation, Johnson shows, implied being forced to encounter and remake anew that from which they were in part forcibly and in part electively estranged and excluded.

**Conclusion**

This special issue proceeds from a focus on communal popular culture, aesthetic participation and transnational sensualities (Fumanti, Shenar) to the celebration and ironic appropriation of hybrid lifestyles and the aesthetics of religion in diaspora (Liebelt, Parish). In the final essay, Mark Johnson considers the high cultural aesthetics of Filipino elite exiles and diasporics in order to critically amplify Pierre Bourdieu’s and other postcolonial theorists’ understanding of aesthetics.

Broadly speaking, in this introduction we have traced the growing interest in an anthropology of the senses and in the properties of visual art objects and lifestyles, alongside a long-term anthropological interest in the aesthetics of ritual. Considering the plural aesthetics of diaspora as they relate to appropriation and claims of ownership, we rejected two exclusive tendencies in the literature: a
singular focus on the outward-oriented aesthetics of diaspora, often produced by postcolonial elites, and a tendency to reduce ‘aesthetics’ merely to the analysis of visual ‘art’ objects or texts. Instead, we have argued for a multi-sensual, ambient, ontological aesthetics, embedded in sociality and actively produced by participants, much of it invisible to outsiders, oriented to audiences elsewhere or members of their encapsulated local communities. We thus rejected the idea that aesthetics is always the work of elites or that distinction is reserved for dominant cultural groups within a society. Through performance, migrant groups, diasporans and artists in exile, we show, claim ownership to the countries they choose to live in, whether temporarily or permanently, by creating liminal aesthetic spaces that are theirs, and which inevitably in the long run enrich the cultures of their new homes and adopted nations’ identities.

**Notes**

1. We use community loosely here, to refer to any social group within a diaspora whose members perceive themselves to share distinctive cultural understandings and, quite often, a sense of ‘amity, mutual support, and homeliness’ (Bauman 2000).

2. Anderson (1983: 26–8); for an inspiring discussion of the aesthetics of Rizal’s two novels, see Anderson (1998: 235–62); and for a detailed historical account of Rizal and his compatriots’ involvement in the anti-colonial movement, see Anderson (2005: 9–167).

3. Scott Lash notes *inter alia*, against the over-discursive approaches of Giddens and Habermas, that ‘the notion of community implicit in Heidegger’s “workshop” model in *Being and Time*, his ‘being-in-the-world’(,) involves not ‘subjects’ but situated human beings absorbed in routine (or pre-reflexive) practices or activities with(,) not objects but *Zeuge* (tools, ‘gear’, equipment) and involved in shared meanings.’

**References**


Handelman, Don. 1990. Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


