

House Museum as Viral Museum: On Mahmoud Khaled's 'The Unknown Crying Man Museum' Project

Bassam El Baroni

Aalto University, School of Art, Design and Architecture

bassam.elbaroni@aalto.fi

Biography

Bassam El Baroni is assistant professor in curating at the School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Aalto University, Helsinki, and former lecturer at the Dutch Art Institute, ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem. He received his PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London, with a dissertation on democracy as a structural condition for contemporary art. His current research projects are centered around financialization in relation to artistic practices, artists' engagement with infrastructural futures and histories, and new forms of artist-led activism among other areas of interest.

Abstract

This essay examines the Unknown Crying Man Museum, a temporary and roaming 'house museum' developed by the contemporary Egyptian artist Mahmoud Khaled as a conceptual artwork. House museology is a specific practice within the wider field of museology and curating, it plays a formative pedagogical and political role in statecraft. The paper discusses how the project espouses the mechanisms of this museology to develop a narrative that engages

visitors with the issue of sexual orientation that still remains culturally and politically sensitive in Egypt. The project can be considered a specific example of artist-curatorship in which curatorial methodologies and approaches are derived from the work of artists working in the 1990s, in particular the work of Félix González-Torres. From González-Torres, the project adopts a tactical approach that is inclusive but also viral, and applies it to activate and transmit ideas that are not usually associated with house museums.

Keywords

Viral art tactics, House Museology, Memorials to the Unknown, Artist as Curator, Félix González-Torres, Dignity, Jacques Derrida, Implicated Subjects, Mahmoud Khaled

Introduction

The Unknown Crying Man Museum is a temporary and roaming ‘house museum’ developed by the contemporary Egyptian artist Mahmoud Khaled as a conceptual artwork. It first appeared under the title of *Proposal for a House Museum of an Unknown Crying Man* at the 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

The unknown crying man in the museum’s name is a reference to an image that circulated the Egyptian news in 2001. In May of that year, a floating gay nightclub moored on the Nile was raided by the authorities and 52 men were arrested and later prosecuted using laws and penal codes against debauchery and prostitution¹. On their way to the trials, photographs were taken by the press and, most of the defendants covered their faces – at least partially – with whatever they could get their hands on. In one particular image a defendant can be seen in tears and covering over half his face with a white towel. The Unknown Crying Man Museum takes this

incident as a starting point for developing a museological narrative that engages the audience with the culturally and politically sensitive issue of LGBTQ rights in the current context of Egypt.



Figure 1. Museum identity for the 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017



Figure 2. Queen Boat Arrests, Cairo, 2001, on-line found image.

Historical house museums have contributed to identity building – through their usage in different forms of pedagogy within the construct of the modern nation state. The most straightforward definition of a house museum is that it is a “dwelling, museumized and presented as a dwelling” (Young, 2007). House museology is thus a specific practice within the wider field of museology and curating since as Young (2007) has argued, houses have the capacity to become both the objects and subjects of a museum, which is to say that they are able to at once contain a museum and institute it. Pinna (2001) cites three main categories of the historic house museum. *Aesthetic*: in which private collections that are unrelated to the house or its history are displayed. *Representative*: in which an epoch or way of life are reconstructed. And, *Documen-*

tary: in which the life of a person or place of importance is rehearsed and narrativized using original objects and when permitting, original layouts. Mahmoud Khaled's Unknown Crying Man Museum falls into the latter category, however, it documents a spectral life, or rather, it constructs an entire life based on one document, the photograph of the obscured defendant.



Figure 3. Mahmoud Khaled - Entrance to *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.



Figure 4. Mahmoud Khaled - *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

In the following essay, I address how the artist approaches the thorny and largely discouraged topic of gay rights in Egypt through a tactical repurposing of this particular type or species of museum – the house museum. A tactic, as identified by de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, does not hold a proper place while strategy is about starting from, holding onto and defending a place or position. Tactics always operate on a territory that is someone else’s (Wild, 2012). The Unknown Crying Man Museum inhabits other spaces tactically it also operates on the idea of the house museum — a territory and format that by and large can be seen as one of the building blocks of statecraft; we only need to consider how many house museums for national heroes there are to connect the concept of the house museum to national identity projects.

This tactic for inhabiting space and concept forms the basis for what I call the viral museum, a concept that alludes to philosopher Jacques Derrida's thinking around virology and the tactical dimension in the artistic practice of Félix González-Torres. Khaled curated the museum to be read like a lived-in space, laden with stories of intimacy, deep political tensions and a sense of societal estrangement, all waiting to be unlocked through an analysis of its contents. The project can be considered a specific example of artist-curatorship in which curatorial methodologies and approaches are derived from the work of two artists mainly operating in the 1990s – Fred Wilson and, more importantly for Khaled, González-Torres. The essay also considers how the project fosters moments of indirect pedagogy in which visitors are implicated in the museum's narrative. Furthermore, I elaborate on some questions and frames of reference that are used to construct a reading of the museum and the particular paradigm of nuanced criticality that it takes up; central to this is the complex question of human dignity and how a curated art project can approach it. I also highlight the role mirrors play in Khaled's formulation of a house museum. Overall, the project represents a paradigm that arrives at a political site through an astute practice of ordering, arranging and reengineering objects within a domestic space.



Figure 5. Mahmoud Khaled - living room, *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

How can a museum approach the concept of dignity?

Back before he had had the surgery, they had herded him into a room that contained a large medical hoop, plastic and metal, and had inserted him into it — not all of him, just his head and neck. A male nurse, a Croat or a Serb — unless he was an Albanian — had bluntly informed him they would have to inject him with contrast, and there was a chance, albeit minuscule, that this would kill him. *Please sign here.* He signed. He waited patiently while the nurse attempted to insert an intravenous needle into one arm, failed, tried again, failed, then called another nurse in to inflict the needle painfully but successfully into the other arm. He lay there as the bench he was on slid jerkily into the hoop, an apparatus within the ring spinning around,

whirring. Then the whirring stopped. *That's all?* he thought, relieved. But that was not all. As it turned out, that was only the test run. When he was slid again deep into the hoop, and the so-called contrast was injected, he felt a surge of intense, unbearable panic. It didn't last long, only a few seconds, but by the time it was done, he was, he felt, no longer the same person. Or, for that matter, even a person at all (Evenson, 2016).

In the above passage from Brian Evenson's short minimalist horror story *Three Indignities*, we are taken through the visceral details of an oddly intrusive and alienating medical procedure endured by the protagonist. The last two sentences articulate the event's eerie psychological consequences. That the patient felt "no longer the same person. Or, for that matter, even a person at all" captures a moment of indignity alluded to in the story's title. The ultimate moment of indignity provokes the loss of self-image: the deliberate or inadvertent disturbance of a person's capacity to log into their subjectivity, the stuff of their personhood. No doubt some would consider starting an essay about a museum with a discussion on dignity an awkward step. This is because dignity is one of the most slippery and intangible concepts permeating the history of philosophy and political thought and, as a result, we do not come across this term very often within museological discourses or artistic practices. Yet, it features in the constitutions of many nation-states and is a key component of modern law and legal frameworks.



Figure 6. Mahmoud Khaled - *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

“Bread, freedom, human dignity” was one of the more popular slogans during the mass protests that rocked Egypt in the early 2010s. However, while bread indicates a concrete demand for basic nourishment and the alleviation of poverty, and freedom can be somewhat simplified — albeit always insufficiently — beyond its vast philosophical and existential territory by breaking it into smaller packages of freedom (freedom of choice, freedom of movement, etc.), dignity resists being made concrete or being repackaged into more easily digestible units. It is a concept that perhaps requires immense creative input to think past its Kantian legacy and limitations but one that nonetheless operates as a guideline against humiliation and the obstruction of others’ pursuit of a life-plan (Schroeder & Bani-Sadr, 2017).



Figure 7. Mahmoud Khaled - bedroom, *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

Thus, the question is, how can a museum center itself around this legally recognized yet politically contested concept? What would constitute a tangible representation of dignity? These difficult questions are at the core of The Unknown Crying Man Museum. Dignity is represented as a complex struggle that escapes precise definition but is communicated through a dynamic spatiotemporal encounter with meticulously constructed evocations of memories, a carefully curated selection of objects, books and paraphernalia, and a piercing solitude. The solitude is, in fact, generated by the absence of the unknown crying man himself as a fully constituted subject. He is an empty signifier who has a noteworthy backstory — he was one of fifty-two men arrested in 2001 on the Queen Boat, a floating gay nightclub in Cairo — yet remains unknown to us, despite the reproduction of his generic image to document the humiliation of those men and to send out cautionary signals to anyone identifying as gay.

In his essay *Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?* Ernesto Laclau (1995) writes that the empty signifier is “strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified”. The concept’s application within the context of a house museum is as follows: any empty signifier plays the role of an unknown; this unknown is to be constructed as a subject with a life story by the museum’s visitors based on the cues, clues and various materials (textual, audible, artifactual) on display at the museum, thus linking up the empty signifier with a signified subject. Hence, the indignity epitomized in the empty signifier’s facepalm gesture is turned inside out in this process of subject construction and the unknown crying man regains some semblance, some kernel of subjectivity and, accordingly, a fraction of dignity ². As a result, the museum presents a version of dignity that — rather than being inviolable and intrinsic to humanity, as Kant would have it — is always severely fragile, volatile and emergent in the relationality between humans and systems, humans and humans, and humans and things. The museum is an invitation to think of dignity as a work in progress. It is no coincidence that it adopts a nomenclature mostly associated with monuments, memorials or tombs for unknown soldiers. If memorials of unknown soldiers are meant to reassert a conformist idea of dignity shaped by the patriarchal ethos of the nation-state and its mythologies, then The Unknown Crying Man Museum expands the phenomenon of “commemorations of the unknown” to challenge such understandings by shifting the terms of the debate on dignity.



Figure 8. Detail, *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

Viral museums and implicated subjects

“I don’t want to be the enemy anymore. The enemy is too easy to dismiss and to attack. The thing that I want to do sometimes with some of these pieces about homosexual desire is to be more inclusive. Every time they see a clock or a stack of paper or a curtain, I want them to think twice” (González-Torres, 1995).



Figure 9. Felix Gonzalez-Torres – *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991, clocks, paint on wall, overall, 35.6 x 71.2 x 7 cm, photo: MoMA

Undoubtedly, one of the most iconic, trendsetting moments in artist-as-curator history is Fred Wilson's seminal *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. Selected and installed by Wilson, *Mining the Museum* was a game changing exhibition that the artist developed on invitation by The Contemporary, Baltimore to use the archives, stored items and resources of the Maryland Historical Society. Installed inside the Society's museum, the exhibition aimed to excavate the site of institutional racism and recover neglected and excluded African-American artifacts and heroes (Wilson & Halle, 1993). The many curatorial constellations Wilson put together for *Mining the Museum* include: carved figurines of "Indians" - used to decorate old cigar shops in the 19th century - observing photographs of actual Native Americans, a Ku Klux Klan hooded garment nested inside a vintage baby carriage near an early 20th photo of African-Americans pushing strollers carrying their infants and, slave shackles infiltrating a display of period silverware. The selected objects and the ironic twists

the artist pursued unpick and subvert the biases that often underpin historical exhibitions and displays (Wilson & Halle, 1993).



Figure 10. Artist Fred Wilson in front of a 1904 dollhouse, part of one of the installations featured in *Mining the Museum*, 1992-1993 at the Maryland Historical Society, ca 1992, unprocessed, MdHS.

Wilson's approach laid out a blueprint for how to question the institutional modes of historicization that write and reproduce the socio-political narratives animating power, violence, privilege and injustice. He put forth the idea that artists could contribute to the rewriting of these narratives, curatorially intervening into displays of historicization by reworking the exhibits through a pronounced juxtapositional approach that unpicks and disturbs the ideological pretenses constituting a museum's established *raison d'être*. But if the historical quarry that *Mining the Museum* extracted its fragments from was the deep history of slavery and dehu-

manization hidden in the storage facilities of public collections, *The Unknown Crying Man Museum*'s quarry is the history of a particular mode of praxis that can be traced back to the artist Félix González-Torres.

González-Torres' aesthetico-political mode of operation — while still navigating the complex terrain of systematic social and institutional discrimination, hostility and denigration — was, of course, not addressing the bottomless injustice inflicted upon African-Americans. Rather, his subject, drawn together from the intimate fragments of lives lived in synchrony with queer struggle, is stretched out and broadened to generate affinity with its plight. This stretched subject is born out of a tactical approach to the not-so-distant socio-political context of late 80s to mid-90s America, with its conservative reactions against corporeal representations of queerness. The type of subjectivity that González-Torres delineated and cultivated in his post-minimalist installations also functioned as a safeguard against antagonistic public backlashes. Rather than understanding this stance as some form of self-censorship, it should be read as “an impulse to dissolve the boundaries of subjectivity in artistic communication” (Bacal, 2018). This tactic is precisely what creates the sense of inclusivity referenced in the González-Torres quote above.

The aesthetico-political core of González-Torres' work has little to do with juxtaposing the self-propelling and indoctrinating narratives of the state with the historical artifacts marking its atrocities, or with highlighting the glaring injustices and inequalities in a nation's history. Instead, this tactic is about the artifice of accessibility and inclusivity for a general and diverse audience, and the crafting of conditions that would allow such an audience to engage with the works and interpret them from the vantage points of their own backgrounds and experiences (Bacal, 2018). González-Torres himself puts this aptly when he explains that he wants “to be like a virus that belongs to the institution” (González-Torres, 1994, as cited in Chambers-Letson, 2009). Although explicit desire and bodies performing their sexuality are much more a part of *The Unknown Crying Man Museum*'s approach than González-Torres likely would have

attempted, the museum can still be seen as an updating of González-Torres' tactical stance, taking it further to become a viral museum and institution itself. Here, it is perhaps important to mention philosopher Jacques Derrida's formulation of viral writing and thinking:

“The virus is in part a parasite that destroys, that introduces disorder into communication. Even from the biological standpoint, this is what happens with a virus; it derails a mechanism of the communicational type, its coding and decoding. On the other hand, it is something that is neither living nor nonliving; the virus is not a microbe” (Derrida as cited in Brunette & Wills, 1994).

The Unknown Crying Man Museum is a viral museum because it introduces disorder into a well-rehearsed communication system and inhabits, derails and reformats the mechanisms of a particular communicational type we know as the house museum. It contaminates this legacy-type inherent to museological history, using all its rules, codes, cues, modes of signification and articulation to museumize a fictional dwelling for a gay man whilst being inclusive of visitors who might not share the same political and ethical standpoints on gay rights. Viral museums are tactical and transient institutions that inhabit other constructs – conservative, patriarchal and nationalist to name a few – to transmit ideas and positions that they would not normally be associated with.



Figure 11. Detail, *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

During González-Torres' time, we lacked proper concepts for describing the subjectivity of the audience he targeted (hence the insufficient "stretched subject" previously used in this essay). This is no longer the case. Viral museums are, simply put, museums curated with implicated subjects in mind. Implicated subjects are those who cannot be identified as the victims nor the perpetrators of an injustice and who also elude being characterized as passive bystanders. Implicated subjects overlap, occupy or intersect with sites of privilege or power but without ever directly inflicting harm on others. As described by theorist Michael Rothberg, they are the subjects that make us realize that direct forms of violence can turn out to depend on indirection because they "contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes" (Rothberg, 2019). Implicated subjects cannot be refashioned into victims or perpetrators; they stand in the face of power's oversimplification.

The Unknown Crying Man Museum, as a viral museum, is a technology of implication

because it fully absorbs implicated subjects into its web of associations, spatialized memory and lingering sense of loss. It absorbs them through an aesthetic of political seduction, only to further entangle them in their own implication. This viral museum is also a technology of political seduction, pertaining to the original etymological sense of the Latin *seducere*: to lead away, lead astray, take aside. In the bedroom and bathroom, on the coffee table, among the book titles, the figurines and picture frames and in every detail, the hauntological remainders of acts of intimacy by missing lovers bring the audience into its somber plot. The Unknown Crying Man Museum is also viral in a more literal sense; its bylaws state that it inhabits locations, sites and institutions all over the world, except for one particular city: Cairo, where it all began.

The non-reflective mirror

“Reflection works only from oppositions and rests on oppositions” (Schelling, trans. Vater, 2001).



Figure 12. Corner with mirror from *the Unknown Crying Man Museum*, 15th Istanbul Biennale, 2017.

The language of mirrors and their metaphors cuts across *The Unknown Crying Man Museum*. The mirror, as a technology, is central to the history of philosophy, ideas and culture. From antiquity to the present, its psychological, scientific, aesthetic, philosophical and social implications and possibilities have been explored by artisans and artists. From the ancient use

of water as a mirroring device to the dark volcanic obsidian mirrors of the Aztecs, the mirror contributes to the metaphysical interpretation of the world and its phenomena. Not until the advancements in glassmaking in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, along with a deeper understanding of the mechanics of vision in the seventeenth century, did this metaphysical dimension to the mirror begin to diminish. When the mirror became a flawless yet ordinary everyday object, it gradually became instrumental to social conformism (Melchoir-Bonnet, 2002). In the intellectual history of statecraft, nation-building and renaissance movements, the mirror and its family of metaphors provide important building blocks of vocabulary through which such attempts at conformist shaping gather their strength³.

Reflection is the primary activity at the core of philosophical practice. This abundant metaphor — alluding to the cognitive process of recognizing an image in a mirrored surface — inserts a temporal and spatial gap in the relationship between the subject and its object. The attempt to exceed its limits or reconfigure it has been a staple part of critical thinking for centuries. René Magritte's engagement with reflection as a philosophical and aesthetic question permeates his *oeuvre*; his painting *Time Transfixed* (1938) represents a train penetrating the stillness of time captured in a mirror's reflection above it, while his painting *Not to Be Reproduced* (1937) is a portrait of a man standing in front of a mirror with his reflection inverted, so that the reflection is of the back of his head rather than of his face.

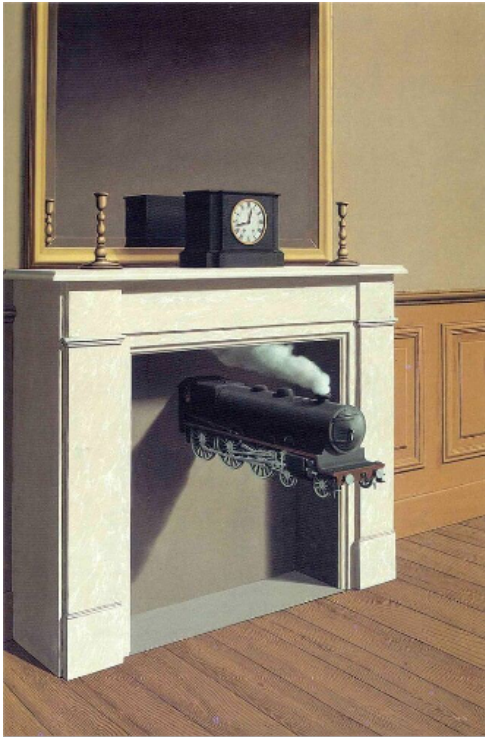


Figure 13. René Magritte - *Time Transfixed*, 1938, oil on canvas, the Art Institute of Chicago.

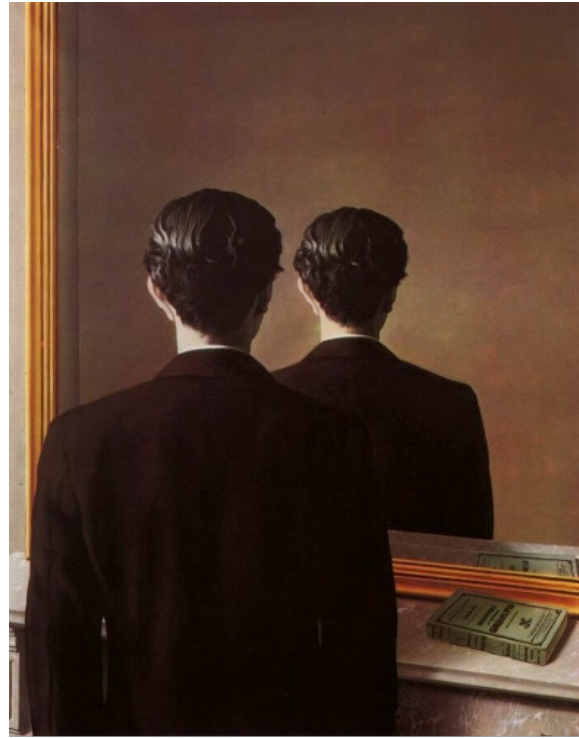


Figure 14. René Magritte - *Not to Be Reproduced*, 1937, oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

The mirrors in this museum seem to have the primary function of resisting reflection. These are not mirrors that invert reflection, penetrate reflection's time, play with the spatial and visual possibilities of reflection (van Eyck, Velázquez) or use reflection to accomplish a realism before its time (Vermeer). In contrast to all these examples from art history, the mirrors in this museum seem to push back against the division between subject and object and the oppositionality that reflection rests upon.

The most striking of these is the mirror encased in a mahogany frame atop a semicircular-legged shelf. The silvering of this mirror has turned into a pool of murky water engulfing the image of the unknown crying man, as if the silvering is working in unison with him to mask his face. This fossilized reflection embedded in the chemistry of the mirror's silvering

works to commemorate the traumatic encounter the unknown crying man had with the state apparatus. This is no broken mirror; it still works in parts and patches, momentarily reflecting other objects in the museum. But when we look into it, our faces are not simply reflected in its surface. Rather, like some encounter with an ancient face-recognition system, we witness our features warp and convolute as they attempt to fit into the narrative of this unknown crying man. They never map onto his but, in this mirror-dance, traces of his trauma tattoo our faces and traces of our reflections intersect with his image.



Figure 15. Mirror detail from the Unknown Crying Man Museum

This is a dissolving of binaries through the chemistry of a mirror that is less concerned with surface reflections than with what is referred to as the mirror's tain, the lackluster plate of metals behind the mirror that makes its functioning possible⁴. To truly come to terms with the unknown crying man's trauma as a more-than-personal, societal and ultimately political situation, the tain of the mirror oozes up to the reflective surface, tainting it with a chemistry of entanglement, love

and implication. This *tained* and *tainted* love is operative throughout the museum; it appears when there is a crystallization of the dynamic by which the tain of ideological apparatuses interflows with the molecular, physical and societal strata of love and desire. The glimpses into the “behind-the-scenes” of the unknown crying man’s life, the construction of the unknown crying man’s backstory, the implicated subjectivity of the viewer, and the solitude permeating the sites of intimacy across the museum are all haunted by this form of inescapably politicized love. No reflection will suffice to undo the alchemy of ideology; only a dive into its deep waters will. At this point, an image of a crying man, hands on face, emerges from the waves, lashing out against the mirror frame. Do we know him? No. But we just might recognize his struggle.

Conclusion

The *Unknown Crying Man Museum* project is constructed in such a way as to engage audiences with the sensitive issue of sexual orientation in Egypt through a historical precedent of injustice. Rather than approaching the struggle for equality from an antagonistic perspective — which, because of the context it responds to, could lead to public outcries or censorship — it demonstrates that there is much to be gained from a closer reading of the inclusive artistic tactics developed by artists such as Félix González-Torres in the 1990s. Importantly, the project’s main proposal is that such tactics can be practiced on the same turf as the legitimizing apparatuses, structures and touchstones that nation-building adopts to create and narrate its necessary mythologies. Examples of these apparatuses are memorials to unknown soldiers and the house museums of key national figures. The project repurposes these apparatuses to accommodate the life stories of those who must hide in plain sight and whose lives are largely considered incompatible with the societal and moral values of the normative national narrative. Through this repurposing, the project instigates a complex process of implication in which visitors find themselves in familiar channels of ideological communication whilst encountering the well-laid

out clues from a life that would not otherwise inhabit such channels. This proposal could be understood as a plot, not in the sense of a conspiracy to overthrow or dismantle but rather as a plot for a piecemeal transformation of societal views through implication.

References

- Bacal, E. (2018). *Bodies withdrawn: The ethics of abstraction in contemporary post-minimal art* (PhD thesis, University of Toronto). Retrieved from https://edwardbacal.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/bacal_edward_d_201806_phd_thesis.pdf
- Brunette, P., & Wills, D. (1994). The spatial arts: an interview with Jacques Derrida. In *Deconstruction and the visual arts: Art, media, architecture* (p. 9-32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,.
- Chambers-Letson, J. (2010). Contracting justice: The viral strategy of Félix González-Torres. *Criticism*, 51(4), 559–587. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2010.0002>
- Evenson, B. (2016). *A collapse of horses* (reprinted ed.). Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.
- González-Torres, F. (1995, January). Félix González-Torres, interview by Robert Storr. *Art Press*, 198(1), 24–3.
- Laclau, E. (1996). *Emancipation(s)* (2nd ed.).
- Melchoir-Bonnet, S. (2002). *The mirror: A history* (1st ed.). New York, London: Routledge.
- Pinna, G. (2001). Introduction to historic house museums. *Museum International*, 53(2), 4-9. doi: 10.1111/1468-0033.00306
- Rothberg, M. (2019). *The implicated subject*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Schroeder, D., & Bani-Sadr, A. (2017). The quest for dignity. In *Dignity in the 21st century*. SpringerBriefs In Philosophy. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-58020-3
- Vater, M. (2001). F. W. J. Schelling: Presentation of my system of philosophy (1801). *The Philosophical Forum*, 32(4), 339–371. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0031-806x.00073>
- Wild, H. (2012). Practice and the theory of practice: Rereading Certeau’s “practice of everyday life”. *Journal of Business Anthropology*. Retrieved 13 August 2020, from https://rauli.cbs.dk/public/journals/20/StaticPages/review_essays/WildReviewEssay.pdf
- Wilson, F., & Halle, H. (1993). Mining the museum. *Grand Street*(44), 151-17.
- Young, L. (2007). Is there a museum in the house? historic houses as a species of museum. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22(1), 59-77. doi: 10.1080/09647770701264952.

Notes

¹According to the 2019 ILGA report ‘State-Sponsored Homophobia’ by Lucas Ramon Mendos, consensual same sex relations are not explicitly illegal in the country, thus the use of other laws in the prosecution of cases.

²The original image and the museum’s logo both share the gesture, which can also be found in stock photography and emojis. The gesture’s capacity for transference across different forms of representation while retaining its communicative significance indicates its generic, universal traits. This makes the image the perfect empty signifier.

³See Nadia Bou Ali's important work on the Arab Nahda ("Renaissance") in the late nineteenth century, and how the idea that language should mirror the nation became a battleground for various Arab enlightenment projects: "In the Hall of Mirrors: The Arab Nahda, Nationalism, and the Question of Language," (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2012).

⁴Theorist Rodolphe Gasché, in his book on Jacques Derrida, "The Tain of the Mirror" (1986), describes the latter's project as the philosophical effort to get behind the mirror, behind what produces the reflection: the tain.