

## EDITORIAL

*The Chinese read time in the eyes of cats.*

*One day, walking in the outskirts of Nanking, a missionary realized he had forgotten his watch, and he asked a little boy what time it was.*

*At first the child from the Celestial Empire hesitated; then, reconsidering, he answered, "I am going to tell you." Not many moments later, he reappeared, holding a very fat cat in his arms, and looking at it, as they say, straight in the eye, he asserted without hesitation, "It is not yet quite noon." Which was true.*

Charles Baudelaire, "The Clock"

Travel and exploration swept the world during the Renaissance, spinning between societies those fine initial threads which now mummify the Global Village in networks of information. The Roman Catholic Jesuit order, founded in the 16th century, and famed for its pursuit of scholarly investigations and missionary work, became instrumental in the dissemination of knowledge between East and West.

Seventeenth century Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher was refused a mission to China at a time when many of the missionaries sent there had themselves begun to convert to Buddhism. He remained in Europe, became a centre of encyclopaedic knowledge, and, through writing books and collecting, emerged as one of the key recorders of the explosion of world civilization.

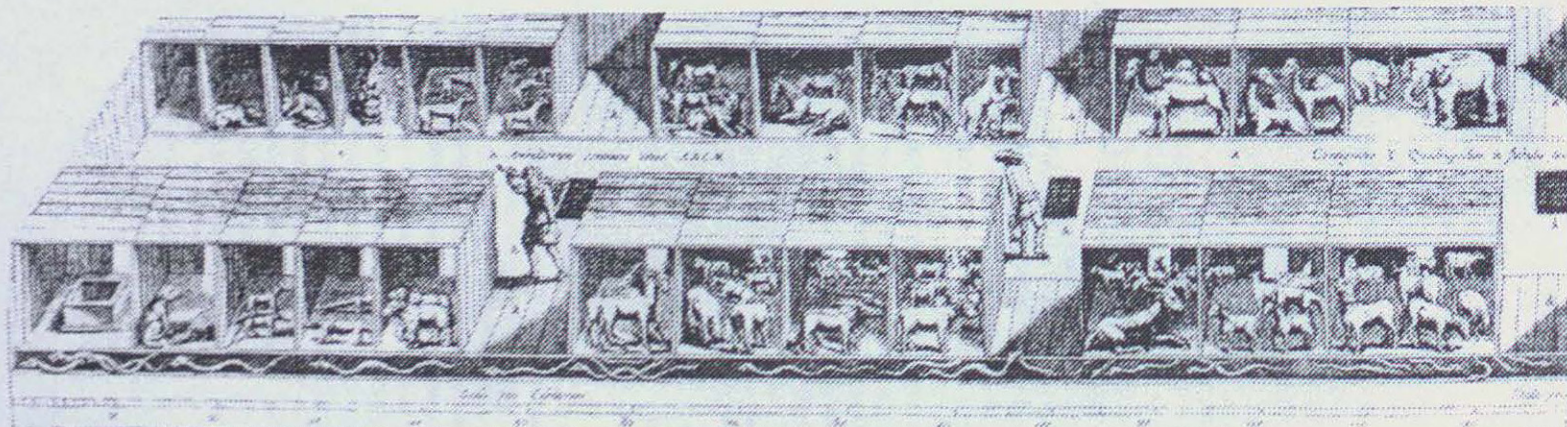
The growing Baroque fascination with origins and genealogy had led to a quest for the *Ursprache*, the font of universal language before Babel. World travel had brought new alphabets to be situated in history, including Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Aramaic and Chinese pictograms.

As travelling and collecting increased, this surge of available knowledge posed a challenge to a world whose most sophisticated ordering system had been draughted by magicians. The cabalistic format of *ars combinatoria* used great tables of symbols in rows and columns, which, read across or down, referenced significant numerical correspondences of the universe. Whereas, previously, mainly letters and numbers had been organized in this structure, the visual opacity of language in these foreign alphabets began to obscure the distinction between word and picture.

Frames and grids are devices employed to separate an object from its place of origin. This combinatoric grid, which had spatially organized the relationships within the matrix of symbols, now took precedence over the symbols themselves. At first, visual images, and later, the subjects which they depicted, would take on the abstract, ambiguous qualities of words. Kircher's drawings of the menagerie of *Arca Noë* (Noah's Ark), embody the antagonistic relation between a rigidly framed architecture and its animate inhabitants.

Kircher had also begun to build a private collection of natural and man-made articles encountered on the travels of the Jesuit network. In his book which documents the *Musaeum Kircheriana*, the drawings represent the corresponding struggle of temporal, sited matter whose natural relationships were being displaced by an enveloping colonial grid of homogeneous space.

Enframing each figure served to collapse the physical distance that had previously existed between subject and object, displacing depth of field by intangibility. Over time, the form in which symbols had been arranged became integral to the representation and perception of images. A crisis in representation followed with this division of perceptible 'form' from intentional or causal 'content,' echoing a similar disengagement of History and Mythology.





Artifacts brought back from Egypt or China to be placed in the Museum necessarily had been dislocated from their architectural environment; as well as being fragments of their culture they were often fragmentary in themselves. At the root of the Baroque quest for origins was a belief in the presence of a type of 'genetic code' (recording an invisible yet all-pervasive master-plan within an object) at an atomic level, so that any part would bear the same meaning or significance as a complete thing.

Instruments, ornaments and monuments could now be organized in a mania of information. The operating principle at work was the epistemological transfer of the source of meaning from the Macrocosm (outer space) to the Microcosm (inner space). Now the museological ordering and representations of life and space in the microcosms represented by the Museum and Noah's Ark remade the world accordingly. Modern progress advanced on the magical precept that, via the fictions of representation, reality could be changed, recreated, or transcended. However, for these 'sorcerer's apprentices,' the consequence of appropriating Baroque forms of thaumaturgy was that these universal correspondences had their own unruly dynamic of raw power which was to prove uncontrollable.

For 17th century Europe, Asia or Africa could represent the mysterious exotic East, or the dark, uncharted world which is completely *other* than oneself. A traveller in himself represents his world, but being both unified with and complementary to his world, he also brings along an ark. In his suitcase he arranges the essence of his existence, the particulars of his rituals, what he cannot obtain elsewhere and cannot live without; in it he places *the difference between where he is and where he is going*.

The itinerant hero is as rootless in a foreign land as his spoils are back at home. By contrast, an enlightened traveller, one who engages in the life of

another place, immersed without prejudice in its culture, may understand the universality of human existence by means of particular instances, seeing in the desires and creations, habits and rituals of the foreign society an opaque reflection of his own life. To this traveller, the world is a mirror.

The traveller who has a passion for life, however, brings something superfluous, because he knows that the symbolic exchange of trust between strangers made manifest in offering a reciprocity of culture - be it a capricious gift, a shocking image, or a ludicrous story - is what perpetuates the leakage of knowledge across borders, which, without levelling differences, recharges the resilient dynamics of a range of choices and freedom. This traveller is light-footed and yet able to respond to any situation. For such sage travellers are also messengers of love, mercurial recording angels, who steal memories only to weave narratives which enchant the world.

Is the world in which we live really 'disenchanted' as we have learned to believe, or have we merely become blinded to its enchantments? One hears the echo of Zarathustra, Friedrich Nietzsche's wandering poet-philosopher:

In order to see *much* one must learn to *look away* from oneself —

