At the Met

A supplementary twist is provided by the very end of the movie, when Neo magically stops the bad squidlike machines attacking the humans by merely raising his hand. How was he able to accomplish this in the “desert of the real,” not within the Matrix where, of course, he can do wonders? Does this unexplained inconsistency indicate that “all there is is generated by the Matrix,” that there is no ultimate reality? Although such a postmodern temptation—the easy way out of ontological confusion—is to be rejected, there is a correct insight in this complication of the simple and straight division between the “real reality” and the Matrix-generated universe. Even if the struggle takes place in the “real reality,” the key fight is to be won in the Matrix, which is why the human rebels re-enter its virtual universe.

To put it in terms of the good old Marxist couple infrastructure/superstructure: One should take into account the irreducible duality of, on the one hand, the “objective” material socio-economic processes taking place in reality as well as, on the other hand, the politico-ideological process proper. What if the domain of politics is inherently “sterile,” a theater of shadows, but nonetheless crucial in transforming reality? So, although economy is the real site and politics a theater of shadows, the main fight is to be fought in politics and ideology.

—Slavoj Zizek, “Ideology Reloaded”

When the entourage decided on Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 911*, the rock star protested saying, “I don’t want to see that, it’s all propaganda.” This sparked a prolonged political debate in front of the theater where Simmons claimed that Kid Rock said, “Russell, don’t you understand, everything we got in this country, we got from fighting … I’d rather go to the bar across the street.” He then refused to go into the theater with the others and said goodbye. A couple of hours later, Simmons returned to his parked car where a note was found on the windshield that read, “Vote Bush. Bush Rocks,” allegedly written by Kid Rock.

—http://www.filmhobbit.com/forum/archive/topic/11600-1.html

Douglas and I went up to the Met yesterday afternoon - April 19, 2003 - I brought a sign - Alissa met us there - I stood w/ sign on the sidewalk by steps near the central set of railings that leads to the entrance - text:

::

Country built on plunder.

“Free” Markets DESTROY history.

people and their arts

$lavery’s legacy Unspoken and Unpaid.

Native

512 Nations Obliterated.

Who Stole Iraq’s Past?

Whose is Next?

Enjoy the “Egyptian Wing.”

::

Some encounters:

::

Well-heeled white senior couple - he “agrees absolutely” - she’s furious, fixating on provenance of items in Japanese museums - they stay quite a while - Doug in long conversation with the guy - he, Egyptian-born Jewish - she, a Brit - married 56 years - “He was probably fighting age as Rommel crossed the Libyan border,” Doug says later.

::

Af-Am kid on bicycle stops to read the sign. I say it’s a response to the sackings, describe a little of what happened - nods.

::

Two young guys from India - one notes “There are more Egyptian artifacts here than anywhere except Egypt” - gets into v. long conversation with Doug, other guy not wanting to talk.

::

Elderly white guy with slight Euro accent- “That’s what happens. War is hell.”

::

Little crowds sort of form and dissipate of people reading - mostly not commenting but trying it out - talk to some, say it’s a response to the looting, which U.S. force under Geneva convention was obliged to prevent - drawing links to earlier empires’ plundering and, at v. least, enablement of the movement of such objects - objects landing here via robber-baron collectors - compromise resolution of provenances only begun in recent years - (had looked up Dendur - apparently Nasser gave it to the U.S. in 1965 - can’t imagine)

Keep trying to focus on polit. consequences of this loss: on physical loss, on symbolic role it is likely to play, on how much it is congruent with this country’s actual history - just rolling over things in the way of doing business and getting at resources -

Careful to point out that de Montebello and others in “museum community” desperately trying to mop up (partially no doubt b/c of the remaining shaky standing of much of what they hold) - two U.S. interior ministers have resigned - need to communicate that citizenry cares about loss of life and culture even if govt determined to destroy and remove and make it look like benign neglect -

Alissa’s interviewing people and taking pictures – three museum guards seemingly on break or recon. very enthusiastic - all young males – one white, one mid east, one latino - then craggy white hipster-looking guy on bike - AQ later says he was an RTmark-er - many others.

::

Douglas later re: Dendur: “they build the aswan high damn...it was going to flood out this ancient valley filled (?) with antiquities—specifically the ‘huge legs of stone’ seen (?) & (or) reported by shelley in his poem...the reality is that the legs, unlike in the poem, are attached to the huge seated bodies of Ramsees the great....anyway, they had to move these to higher ground.

“the international community sent tons of money to pay for the movement in return for the $ and help, ‘we’ negotiated the ‘removal’ of some of the antiquities that were not going to be moved....so as the waters of the new lake nasar were licking at the base of the stones, the temple (having been hand picked by the prezident’s wifey) was dismantled & trucked away. Years later Jackie O’ was known to refer it as ‘my temple’.

“most of the above can be read on the walls of the museum when you go into the temple room itself.

“(i don’t know when the exhibit opened, but i’m pretty sure it was not on view till the 70’s)”

::

Older Ossie Davis-looking guy: “Are you crazy? You must be crazy.”

::

Young South Asian woman – stylish, pageboy-like hair - asks if she can take my picture with the sign - “I’m going to take this back to Pakistan.”

::

Cop tells me to keep moving. I say, I’m on the sidewalk. She says, it’s the Met’s sidewalk, and they don’t condone political activity - I say, I’m just standing here, and there’s no way they own the sidewalk - she says, they do, from 81st to 88th, I’m just informing you - I think, if I move around a little for a minute or two she’s done her job, and we can do another round if necessary - I say “ok” - she drifts off - I move around a little - seems to work, though this I think though would be a problem with more people in an organized thing - and there’s no way they Met can actually have control of “their” sidewalk, is there? Were granted land as part of Central Park?

::

Kid Rock-looking guy - small blue eyes - long, shiny thin mouse brown hair dyed appealingly and lightly blond - rangy guy, tall - very thin - maybe 30 - little mounds and white opaque calluses on his white outstretched hand - says -

You see this hand [visibly shaking]?

This is a working man’s hand.

Hands like this built this country.

Get a job.

Looks me in the eye threateningly. I’m in a bourgeois panic and have no response. I don’t say: you’re right: I don’t have hands like that and hands like that built the country, but those who did build the country have not been given equal share, and the neglect and destruction of the work of people over centuries in Iraq/Mesopot. is just like the govt’s neglect and destruction of working people here. He stalks off with girlfriend. Need to learn from this.

(I do think though this is the way to draw the link plunder of the U.S. labor and natural resources similar to artifact plunder or its enablement - need to be able to articulate this simply.)

Hilarious touch - as we’re walking a little about 10 minutes later, pass him going in the other direction - our eyes catch, and he immediately gives me a sign - his hand makes and “L”-like shape, and he bangs it into his forehead repeatedly - I’m completely freaked out and scared that it’s some Nazi thing - Doug laughs and tells me it’s “Loser.”

::

Two young white British women and their silent white male companion - middle classy but Yoof affected - plus a white old-school UFT guy who has glommed onto us and been yelling at people - challenges one the women as to why she’s for the war - she says “I have my reasons” and the guys says - “What are they??” - and she just looks at him - and he repeats it, with maniacal glee - and she says, “I can’t listen to this” - and turns quickly with other woman in tow - sentry looks at us sympathetically - and follows.

::

A white German-looking guy with professional-looking video equipment is filming us, sweeping the crowd of steps and back.

::

An Af-Am guy w/ close cropped hair and wraparounds late 20s early 30s - w/ two friends - he stops to talk and they keep going - specifics of the library and museum sackings - some back and forth over how it could have been prevented - I get to that I didn’t know what else to do except make this sign - as he’s leaving: “I’m with you, you keep doing your thing.”

::

Doug meanwhile in long, friendly but pointed exchange with white male Gulf War vet now TV news cameraman over whether the troops could have prevented plunder - chipping away at his story - but the yelling guy keeps interrupting, escalating.

Seems like debate, but Doug says not really:

“i know why i get angry when rich people go on and on about tax cuts, but what makes the pro war people so angry about people who are against it?

“it’s like being mad at a fan of the losing team in a sporting event...oh, those people are angry too? i never figured out what made the winning fans so angry & mean either.

“probably not the same thing though.

“the WAR people don’t act like winners, they act like you are really threatening them...”

::

Greta later posts:

“At the Intersection

stopping traffic, small action in iowa city, two weeks

ago:

me holding a sign that says ‘us out of iraq’

big m.f. SUV, driver 40-ish white male. he shouts

‘bitch’ and clips me where i stand, knocking the sign

out of my hands. with his big ass m.f. SUV.

i mean really.

& that’s what it looks like here.”

::

High-fashion Latina in mid 30s - “Yes, and? They were going to come and kill us.”

::

Realizing standing there that “Who Stole...” is a page right out

of Baraka -

Ok - but wld. he see as another theft -

later recall Steve Burt remarking (remarking ironically, since was re: deep image or something) that when members get proprietary over techniques, literary movements fall apart - but yet,

materialist analysis in a way yields allusions and (even unconscious) steals as stolen labor - art and market capital share this quality - the knock-off - the sellable parody - the incorporation - who gets to go home after this?

the sign as pressure valve

::

Sun setting behind museum - different little groups catching last warm patches - lots of eyes on the sign but no one wants to talk - lots of fatigue.

::

White woman mid-40s - middle class brown hair loose shortish and a little frizzy - thick but not overdone lipstick - looking intently, looks up slow - “The whole time we were in there I was thinking: what if we came in here and stole everything? How would people here feel about that?” Pause. “We should do it.” Eyes far off imagining it.