

⁴ See Hans Ulrich Obrist's contribution in this volume.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Reference here is to Araeen's collection of his early writings, *Making Myself Visible* (London: Kala Press, 1984).



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We are immersed in the time and multicultural ideology of global, multinational or late capitalism; many things have changed since that time when the world was divided into binary structures (civilized and primitive, the raw and the cooked, center and periphery, culture and subculture) and dominated by an ethnocentric gaze and highly stratified society based on “monoculturalism” and fundamentalist homogenization.

Of course, this intervention of mine does not allow me to outline a genealogy of this multicultural identity which has, as a precedent, the acknowledging of the politics of difference within the framework of post-structuralism- already in 1984, philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's essay *La difference* transferred the micro-aporias of Derridian deconstruction to the realm of difference-as well as milestones in multicultural and post-colonial discourse¹ in both mainstream and peripheral versions (so-called pluralism and cultural heterogeneity). An ideology-the multicultural-which in the early 1990s promised a new world full of “integration and cultural harmony”² but that is greeted with greater skepticism every day. We can cite Paul Ricoeur as an example when IN HIS CRITIQUE OF American multiculturalism he considers that the emphasis should be placed on the politics of acknowledgment rather than on identity³, and also Slavoj Zizek when he states: “Multiculturalism is a form of denied, inverted racism, ‘a racism with distance’. It respects the Other's identity, conceiving it as genuine, closed community, from which metropolitan multiculturalism maintains a distance that is made possible thanks to its privileged position.”⁴

But what is certain is that in a world straddling the fence between Marshall McLuhan's "global village" (which, at the height of the modern period, summed up the utopian idea of a universal motherland, though it disregarded differences) and Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle"- both of these concepts metaphors of the pros and cons of globalization; in a world characterized by the breakdown of limits, borders and margins, by the unrestricted mobility of information and capital and by soft technologies of control, there have been many changes in processes of creation, and especially in processes of reception, in our contemporary-art environment, implicating artists, critics, theorists, curators, museum directors and people in charge of cultural politics.

We would like to discuss all this within the context of this Symposium, and we would like to do so with the help-if possible- of philosopher-historian-cultural critic Michel Foucault's "unfinished" legacy, a legacy closely tied to the model of "critical post-modernity", the postmodernity of "strategies of democracy"- a postmodernity of multiple perspectives which circulate among cultures and subcultures, communities and lifestyles and emphasizes knowledge/language/power relationships (constructing power on the basis of culture). In a multicultural, multidimensional world at the height of globalization, any analytical framework- as Foucault's legacy suggests⁵ -should interrelate the social, the cultural and the political with artistic creations.

As an art historian (that is how I would like to represent myself here today, though I am conscious that this field has been somewhat eroded or at least needs a great deal of "regeneration"), I think that one of the priorities of those of us who have attempted to narrate or find the "meaning" of contemporary art in the academic context but also in the context of art criticism, is to divide the field of work, delimiting it conceptually, methodologically and ideologically (the key for me is not so much in methodology, but rather in the ideology of the "intellectual", in the broadest sense of the term).

In this sense, I share the opinions of historians such as Hervé Fisscher, Hans Belting, Donald Preziosi and Victor Burgin⁶ who in the last few years openly posit the end of art history- understood as one of the humanities- and the end of general, universalist histories; I thus locate myself in the realm of "posthistory", a history that in its shift towards social histories, cultural histories, ethnohistories, gender histories, queer studies or postcolonial histories situates itself openly in the realm of cultural studies, with everything that this implicates, focusing on the term "culture", above and beyond that of "art".

And within this field, what I would like to point out is the problem of inter-, in- or trans-disciplinarity- a topic tied to today's cultural debate, and one which I would take into account new social movements or what Deleuze calls "microgroups", polarizing opinion between the defenders of a broadened and inclusive concept of culture, closer to critical social theory. In this case, we would be speaking of a second version of Frankfurt School "critical theory", paraphrasing Douglas Kellner when he claims that a theory of society is needed to shed light on political, social and cultural phenomena, though excluding its Marxist or clearly politicized element⁷.

I do not consider myself a cultural-studies expert, nor do I take part in the academic battles, power struggles or cultural wars that take place in certain American universities. But I would never share Rosalind Krauss' opinions when she considers the interdisciplinary project of Visual Studies (linking art history, film theory, media analysis and cultural studies) and Cultural Studies as symptomatic of a lack of autonomy, or a lack of discipline in art history, as dangerous since it might lead us to adopt a reductive notion of identity: "the interdisciplinarity derived from Visual Studies can entail a loss of certain specialization or ability by certain academic scholars when they seek to master determined critical skills characteristics of the discipline of art history. And this is something I cannot cease to oppose."⁸ Nor would I share the opinions of Néstor García Canclini, another intellectual who, in this case, does not suspect that he is defending an authoritarian cultural project when he equates the current state of Cultural Studies with "inflationary stagnation": "I think that the anthropological relativism that rests on a simple, de-hierarchized acknowledgment of these differences has demonstrated enough limitations for us not to conform to it (...). We must develop civil politics based on a transcultural ethics, sustained by knowledge that combines the acknowledgment of different social styles with rational rules concerning multiethnic and supranational coexistence."⁹

If we pay any heed to what the latest, great international manifestations and exhibitions (biennials, *Documenta*) have brought us, we realize that works of art can no longer be explained based on the form-content binomial, nor even on a simple sociological or economic-theory approach, nor from the perspective of the art institution (studio, gallery, museum), but rather from the perspective of complex dialogical spaces situated between social movements, of theoretical developments and of diverse disciplines: literature, social history, film theory, feminism, psychoanalysis.

And it is from this point of view that it makes total sense to speak of a new critical-theoretical-historical model (the polar opposite of the philological, erudite, formalist, positivist model) as well as of a new model of curator- and this is another very exciting topic, that of the methodology of curating, that we will merely mention. The figure of the curator of exhibitions as the main actor in the *comedia dell'arte*, as a "divine artists" or even as a usurper, to quote Bernard Fibicher¹⁰ - a predominant figure throughout the 1980s- now wishes to embrace, it seems, the qualities of another kind of intellectual: not so much that satisfied with merely offering a visual display of a formal-aesthetic nature, will not give up his or her right to express his or her critical commitment to the problematics of contemporary society, while creating a discourse of freedom vis-à-vis the tyranny of styles, nationalities, nationalisms, the market and chronologies- in other words, vis-à-vis art, politics and history.

In this sense, we need only note the deep gulf that opened in the art world over a mere five-year period if we compare Kassel's Hoet¹¹ asserted that art needed eyes, the intellect, the body and desires in his defense of art tied to the experience of the artist's body, five years later the same art-world stage witnessed a notable turn of events at the hands of Catherine David, while Okwui Enwezor- in *Trade Routes. History and Geography* (Johannesburg) - wagered on the "aesthetic strategies" of artists who formed a tribe of interpreters of some of the

metaphors illustrated by acts of interpretation. To Enwezor artists were above all individuals who, beyond the language of forms, depicted some of the complexities of contemporary art processes, individuals who spoke of culture- at a time when culture was a challenged notion under attack- and of history- at a time when history was no longer subjected to the notion of authority. What was the biennial's cutting edge?, Enwezor wondered. The degree to which artists pose enduring questions, operating within the upper echelons of research in the philosophical, political, phenomenological and social processes of our time.¹²

Harald Szeemann, another curator-come-cultural-theorist from our point of view, gave us the 2001 Venice Biennial-another example of a shift, in this case of anthropology versus art.¹³ Szeemann presented an exhibition understood as a platform, a stage depicting life which he conveyed to us his particular, committed outlook on current art practice with a biased glorification of the anthropological, privileging the ethical over the aesthetic. It did not seem strange for Szeemann to present work by Joseph Beuys, showing his emblematic installation *Das ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* ('The End of Twentieth-Century Art,' from 1982-3) as the exhibition's pivotal axis, as the unique, paradigmatic model, displacing to a secondary level another model that seemed to be relegated to the former century, the "Duchamp model". Omitting any theoretical, thematic, narrative or literary referent, that is to say any element that might "expose his thesis", Szeemann gave the lead role (in addition to Beuys) to the freedom and creativity of artists, "the new social artists" who make art that is an extension of their own lives, artists with a "humanitarian calling" who plainly expressed their interest for and commitment to human existence and the human condition.

We are undoubtedly witnessing an "ethnographic turn"¹⁴ in contemporary art that allows for the possibility of horizontal, synchronic work focusing on one topic after another and on one political debate after another, supplanting the historical paradigm based on a diachronically activated "vertical" axis (i.e. past-future). A turn that leads us to talk about a new model of creator- the artists as ethnographer, living in a transnational metaculture and participating in a complex process of globalization-differentiation which is the polar opposite of the homologizing process characteristic of hierarchized internalization (or of its postmodern, postcolonial version, so-called New Internationalism) and also the polar opposite of peripheral or folkloric localism.

And it is at this point that I think that one of the most interesting aspects deriving from cultural studies is its own towards the ethnographic, as is demonstrated by certain artists' practice which –besides its "aesthetic quest" or even its quest for "political relevance" (this model also casts aside the "creator as producer" model that Walter Benjamin proposed in 1934)-plainly posits relationships between people and given spaces, something that is by definition the object of anthropology in its most ethnographic, most descriptive bent: "the ethnographic ideal", asserts French anthropologist Marc Augé, "is to rediscover the initial movement by which the occupants of a given space conceive their interrelationships inscribing them within the space or, in other words symbolizing them".¹⁵

And in this third turn (the ethnographic), language and style are replaced by an interest in the human race and its relationships with space and things on a specific, localized rather than abstract level. Hence the notion of site specificity or of the "return to the local", to places

understood as “zones of contact”, zones for collaborative activity and debate in contexts of complex connectivity. The artist wants nothing to do with historical time, with diachronic, temporal journeys, and chooses a space, a site¹⁶, enters its culture learns its language, conceives and presents his or her project, mapping out the site while hardly establishing any dialect with the other, vertical axis.¹⁷

This turn is the one that Antoni Muntadas (Barcelona, 1942) posits in *On Translation*, a project he has been working since the early 1990s and which he has undertaken in various places and cities such as New York, Bogota, Helsinki, Madrid, Kassel, Budapest, Rotterdam and Barcelona,¹⁸ with one common denominator: broaching the issue of communication (communication as a substitute for language) and, in a last instance, the issue of the reception of “cultural productions”, Muntadas uses translation, encoding, encryption and interpretation in the terrain of global culture not only to analyze the crossing over from one culture to another, but also to question and explore relationships with institutions, power, media, place and context.

On Translation: The Audience, presented for an eleven-month period in different cultural institutions in the city of Rotterdam –among them the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art- was conceived as a series of moveable structures or artifacts similar to billboards whose images changed from one place to the next and associated the advertising medium’s technical features with the transports system’s functional features and the iconographic montage’s symbolic characteristics. Muntadas thus sought to foster a critical relationship between art, the public –which was never treated as consumers or simply as “statistics”-, the place and the cultural institution, which today can so easily be considered a church-like space of worship, a place for learning, a market providing spectacle and entertainment and a place for social relations or educational services.¹⁹

In every case, language and image are used to foster symbolic communication between spaces and audiences and to trigger interrelations between spaces, objects and individuals on a global level that overcomes the local-universe binomial. It is from this perspective that one must relate Muntada’s works to the concept of the “non-place” (as opposed to the sociological and anthropological concept of place)²⁰, that is to say a symbolic place where public opinion is formed or a space circulation, communication and consumption –an identity-based concept of place that speaks of particular identities in relation to historical and social events of a local nature.²¹

I would also like to present one of Santiago Sierra’s (Madrid, 1967) last pieces which essentially broaches –like almost all of his work- economic relationships and relationships of power in today’s postcolonial world-diaspora. In *Trans Sexual Express Barcelona 2001. A Classic for the Third Millenium*, Sierra presented yet another of his “economic metaphors” –the installation-performance *Persona remunerada atada a un bloque de madera* (Person Paid To Remain Tied to Block of Wood), in which his interest in using “space” and “place”; the wages and ethnic characteristics of the sociopolitical area in which the action took place, in this case the city of Barcelona.

In September 2000 Santiago Sierra had already made a first performance-installation-photograph-video at PS1 in New York City entitled *Person Remunerated for a Period of 360 Consecutive Hours*. A diagonal brick wall cut PS1’s second floor in two, hiding from the public’s sight

someone whom the artist had hired to remain there for fifteen days, for a total of 360 hours, without any instruction or obligation. PS1 caretakers fed this person through a slit at the base of the wall. He could not be seen by the audience but could converse with “the other side” through a small hole in the wall. And what could the public contemplate then? Only such an abstract thing as the selling of time bereft of its productive sense or social significance.

The installation in Barcelona was more spectacular than the one in New York since an aesthetic and, in a last instance, a symbolic component were deliberately added to the piece’s economic aspect –a woman (or rather a transvestite) would be paid to remain isolated for four hours a day with her ankle tied to a wooden bench, earning the same amount that a prostitute from the Raval neighborhood would charge for her services, i.e. 15 000 pesetas per day –and ethical implications–“the woman was paid for putting their intelligence at the service of the others” as one of the curators, Rosa Martínez, explained in the exhibition’s presentation. The ropes with which the woman’s ankle was tied to the bench extended outside the closed room which the public could not enter –after the first week, the room was opened and the public could observe the empty bench, residual objects and a television- and projected throughout the whole space of the exhibition, tying columns together and creating an airborne web that implicated spaces, people and objects in the same symbolic relationships.

In our current world, dominated by what Marc Augé terms supermodernity²² –a supermodernity ruled by the figure of excess, by a superabundance of events, many of them unpredicted by economist, sociologists or historian, and also a superabundance of spaces and “non-places”- the critic or theorist who wants to broach this issue, acting as a “bridge” and explaining it to audiences, would be hard pressed to do so by making use solely of specific materials or of the historian’s disciplines, without knowing culture well enough in order to be able to map it and narrate it.

And it is at this point that I will refer directly to the culture theorist –not an anthropologist, nor a philosopher, nor a political analyst, nor a theologian, but rather an interdisciplinary character who constantly “de-territorializes” him or herself. Who takes into account a series of “sideways glances” (outside the scope of frontal, academic points of view) –and if I am pressed, to the critic as intellectual. And by intellectual I do not mean an anonymous civil servant nor a painstaking bureaucrat, nor someone whose goal is to please his or her audience, nor a sad or moralizing preacher but rather, as Edward W. Said he stated,²³ an amateur or enthusiast, a thinking member of a society, an individual endowed with the faculty of representing, embodying and articulating a message, a vision, an attitude, a philosophy or an opinion for and in favor of a public, striving to persuade in an effective manner –and yet never avoiding the fact that he or she might arouse perplexity–and, in a last instance, undermining authority, telling the truth to the powers that be, not relinquishing any possibility of change –a sniper, in brief, who upsets the status quo.

¹ We should mention in this regard that not all multiculturalism is the same and, as Néstor García Canclini states, we must distinguish between conservative multiculturalism (in which the separatism between ethnic groups is subordinated to WASP hegemony), liberal multiculturalism (natural equality and cognitive equivalence among races) and leftist liberal multiculturalism. Néstor García Canclini, “El malestar de los estudios culturales”, *Fractal magazine*, <http://www.fractal.com.mx>

² According to Jean Fischer in “Editor’s Note”, *Global Visions. Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Jean Fischer (ed.), Kala Press, London, 1994, p.X.

³ P. Ricoeur, *La critique et la conviction: entretien avec F. Azouvi y M. Launay*, 1995. “In the notion of identity there is only the idea of sameness, while acknowledgment is a concept which directly integrates otherness, which allows a dialectic between the same and the other, Vindicating identity is always somewhat violent in regard to the other, while the quest for acknowledgement implies reciprocity”.

⁴ Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, “On Cultural Studies”, *Social text* 34, vol. 11, no. 1, 1993, pp.15-52 & “Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism”, *New Left Review* no.225, September-October 1997, pp. 28-29. We referred to the Spanish version, *Estudios culturales. Reflexiones sobre el multiculturalismo*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 1998, p. 172.

⁵ We are rereferring to the following works by Michel Foucault, among others: *Les mots et les choses* (1966) and his first formulation of the “anti-humanist” paradigm; *L’Archéologie du savoir* (1969), which depicts a history full of discontinuities beyond technology and the transcendentalisms, explaining the present through archeological analysis; and *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975), in which he examines forms of social control in modern societies.

⁶ We are referring to the following texts: Hervpe Fischer, *L’histoire d’art est terminée*, Balland, Paris, 1981; Hans Belting, *L’ Histoire d’art est-elle finie?*, Jacqueline Chambon, Nimes, 1989 and Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History. Meditations on a Coy Science*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1989.

⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Routledge, London 1995, p.49.

⁸ Author’s interview with Rosalind Krauss, *Lápiz* 176, October 2001, pp.74-75.

⁹ N. García Canclini, “EL malestar en los estudios culturales”, *art.cit.*

¹⁰ Bernard Fibicher, “Les Faiseurs d’exposition” in *L’art exposé. Quelques réflexions sur l’exposition dans les années 90, sa topographie, ses commissaires, son public et ses ideologies*, Cantz & Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Sion, pp. 271-278.

¹¹ Jan Holet, “An introduction”, *Documenta IX*, Kassel, 1992, vol.1, pp. 17-20.

¹² See Okwui Enwezor, “Introduction. Travel Notes: Living, Working, and Travelling in a Restless World” in *–Trade Routes. History and Geography*, II Johannesburg Biennale 1997, pp.7-9.

¹³ Harald Szeeman, “La grande narrazione furoi del tempo dell’ esistenza umana del suo tempo”, *49 Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte. Plattea dell’Umanità/ Plateau of Humanikind/ Plateau der Mensschheit/ Plateau de l’Humanité*, Electa, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, 2001, pp. XV-XVII.

¹⁴ We are referring to a broadened concept of ethnography, of ethnography as a critical-cultural field stemming from James Clifford's theories in *The Predicament of Culture* (1995), translated in Spanish as *Dilemas de la cultura. Antropología, literatura y arte en la perspectiva posmoderna*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 1995; and also to Clifford Geertz's theories, "Géneros confusos. La refiguración del pensamiento social" in C. Geertz, J.Clifford *et al*; *El surgimiento de la antropología posmoderna*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 1996, pp.63-77.

¹⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-Places; Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London, 1995.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the "site" see Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art. Performance, Place Documentation*, Routledge, London & New York, 2000.

¹⁷ Regarding the relationships between "place" and "space" see also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984. Certeau understands "place" as an ordered, methodical system realized in "spatial practices".

¹⁸ Muntadas uses a wide range of media in each one of his *On Translation* projects: dioramas (*The Pavilion*, Helsinki, 1995), video-conferencing sessions (*The Transmission*, Cyberconf 5, Atlanta-Madrid, 1996) cyberspace and telematics processes (*The Internet Project*, Documenta X, Kassel, 1997), furniture-sculptures (*La mesa de negociaciones*, Madrid, 1998), the language of street advertising and truck-mounted billboards that travel around the city (*The Audience*, Rotterdam, 1998-1999) and audiovisual installations (*The Monuments*, Budapest, 1998 & *El aplauso*, Bogota, 1999).

¹⁹ See Bartomeu Mari "Audiences and Translation" in *Muntadas. On Translation: The Audience*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 1999, p.11.

²⁰ According to Augé, while the "anthropological place" is made up of individual identities with local references, the "non-place" is created by passing "through" a place. The "non-place" would thus designate two complementary yet distinct realities: spaces related to the idea of destination (transport, time off, commerce) and the relations that individuals maintain with spaces. Augé concludes that the "non-place" becomes real as one travels through anthropological spaces, that is to say through a process of "displacement". See M. Augé, *op.cit*; pp. 99-101.

²¹ Marc Augé, "From Space to the Gaze" in *Muntadas. On Translation*, *op. cit.*, pp.15-16.

²² M.Augé, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

²³ See Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Vintage, London, 1996.