

## Discussion: The Other Today

**José Luis Barrios:** I'd like to start out with the question Nikos Papastergiadis asked, specifically, "Where is the place we can all come together?" This is a key question not only in terms of imagining a sort of utopia—a certain no-place—but as well because it is a prerequisite for positing the idea of the South itself. In other words, the South could function as an idea to order the question of where we can come together.

If historically the project of modernity is innately connected to colonization, that is to say, if colonization is not an accident of modernity, but rather the necessary result and birth of modernity, then the representation of otherness and the South is the exclusion of the excluded, an exile of the "other" from history and political action. Therefore political discussions as arise from multicultural discourses create a "let's-include-the-excluded" category. Perhaps the great fallacy in hegemonic political policy is that they take as their starting point that *everything* should be included even if the inclusion takes the form of exclusion. We would need to think of an alternative formula where the South would represent an exclusion or secession from inclusion, in order to command internal attention regarding strategies of inclusion.

A second idea is that the South presents itself as a kind of pressure imposed on forms of production that form part of hegemonic discourse. Employing

a deliberately provocative tone, shouldn't the question really be: Is it not the logic of globalization to present any attempt at the affirmation of difference in terms of a capital differential? Is it not the case that the South seems like a thought category that seeks to inscribe a method for concentration, and the production of difference, within that very flow of capital?

A third series of questions implies thinking of the South as placement or displacement. I find it curious that while every presentation [here] seeks to dislocate the idea of the South's space or territory as a fixed condition, none has questioned how to conceive of time. Yet precisely what defines the logic of hegemony, according to Deleuze and Guattari's *Antioedipus*, is the question of why it wasn't Chinese, or the Asiatic mode of production, that colonized the rest of the world. The answer they give is that the category they call "enterprise," consisting generally in the definition of a concept of the future where historical time is linear and progressive and where accumulation takes place, along that modern affect: ambition. According to all that, what happens within the South as a category as it relates to time?

**Nikos Papastergiadis:** The questions you ask us are quite suggestive and provocative. Let me start with your first observation regarding the place where we can come together and the idea of inclusion and exclusion that, logically, alludes to an understanding of this concept of "place." I don't want to spend much time driving ourselves crazy by speaking of cosmopolitanism, de-colonization or multiculturalism, but I do want to dedicate a moment to certain definitions that suggest there is a monopoly on what those concepts were. "Getting together" posits understanding the words themselves.

Nelly indicated an interpretation of multiculturalism very precisely as the "management or operation of difference." In order to define the articulation of these differences she juxtaposed that first definition and tried to inscribe a more complex process whereby a position of difference *coming from* leads us to a notion of trajectory. That is, it leads to speaking *from* and not *within*. Therefore, once we understand this concept of trajectory as a place of utterance, and also as a place for coming together, that space becomes mobilized. It is displaced and becomes much more complex. I'd simply like to make clear that the place for coming together is not a peaceful place, nor a finish line, but rather a place of constant movement. The space itself is constituted by its constant interactivity, its flow, and not as

some closed space that could well become just another ghetto. That in itself gives us the opportunity to rethink the very terminology we use to speak of “multiculturalism.”

Now then, the idea of the South as a product that stimulates the entire process of differentiation and that animates an excess to modernity is also a quite provocative point, but I’d like to precaution us against falling into the trap of saying “look at me—I can give you something more” or “don’t forget this because in reality it’s going to add value to your life.” The only thing we would do is expand the range of options and that would merely add an ongoing number of appendices and supplements to the system. We can respond to that by rethinking the concept of time, above all a relative and non-fixed time, as a space for interaction. That it is the flow itself that offers an opportunity for thinking about affinities between times and places. Criticizing globalization’s broadest discourses—the ones that have had a linear trajectory through time—implies being very conscious of risk. Here I don’t agree with an element Jean Fisher brought to the discussion: what she mentioned when she alluded to ancient time and the question of the State. Bourdieu invested a tremendous lot in the French republican State: all his work, all his oeuvre, was related to seeing how one could manage to make the State work better, how to achieve greater levels of equality. That was a very noble mission, and a quite idealistic one, but somehow, making the State responsible makes it the instrument through which our identity really must live up to its entire potential. I cannot agree, as much for personal reasons as for political ones. I simply do not see the State pulling us out of the mess we’re in, and into which the State put us; it cannot even manage to get us out of the current economic crisis even though there is an historic opportunity to re-address identity, agency and what we call State agency. In Australia, our prime minister gave ten thousand dollars to every retiree and at that same time the State has told every German “we’ll give you this many euros if you manage to do this or that thing”. Now when the prime minister awards a ten-thousand-dollar pension to be spent at will, he’s saying to retirees that it’s “their responsibility” to fix the crisis because they’ll be better consumers by shopping. He’s not saying that State is going to propose a new plan, which is the same as saying “we can’t fix this problem—we can’t solve it.” This is a small, rather trivial example but I think it indicates the State’s limitations. What I want to suggest is we can’t reconfigure this because it’s already a part of our problem.

More precisely, we have to rethink concepts of time and space as well as how to move forward.

**Jean Fisher:** Well, I shall address the matter of the State because it seems to me to be one of the most critical issues we have to take on within so-called globalization; and for Indigenous peoples their relationship with the state is a central issue. I agree completely with Nikos that there's a problem with the State as the entity to which one must appeal for help. It has its limitations, but what else do we really have? And perhaps the present problem is not the state per se, but the limitations imposed on it by transnational bodies with no obligations to citizen welfare or rights? The situation of indigenous peoples raises very interesting problems regarding the nature of citizenship, and in relation to cultural and territorial sovereignty, which are increasingly affecting us all. To pick up on Nikos's point: indigenous voices speak *from* a place of difference *to* global concerns; and these voices have the right *to be included* in international discussions on whatever terms they choose. Above all, their inclusion allows us to think in more expansive terms to understand how we relate to the Nation-State, what needs to be done with the Nation-State, or even better, what the Nation-State needs to do to refashion a more just world. I don't deny there are serious problems with the Nation-State: I'm referring to the fact we need international organizations to restrict certain State excesses. The European Union is an interesting case, as it is a federation of Nation-States with a human rights tribunal with the power to bring violations by member states to trial, as it successfully did recently against the UK government. When it comes to human rights, the important thing is that they are directly related to the individual and not to the State. There's a differential between the Nation-State's limitations and the limits these other organizations can impose on them. This is something that will be important to look at in the future and I wonder just how much the Latin American South, through its regional collaborations, has thought about organizations that might go beyond the State to encompass the entire region and that would fight for human rights and other such issues.

**Nelly Richard:** With regard to the third point you brought up, capitalist globalization promotes discourses like multiculturalism that benefit from a proliferation of difference. In this sense it seems more provocative or perhaps more subversive to understand that the South is not a place for

the self-affirmation of differences but rather a vector of decentralization that works more by means of intersections, as Nikos said. I'm starting out with the idea that neither identities nor categories nor localities are patent or closed totalities. Totalities are made, and unmade, and remade in interaction with multiple exteriorities—specifically with the heterogeneous. That's why it seems important to always insist on limits and borders for systems and institutions, since it's along borders that contact zones are found—places where the tension, if you will, between totality and centrality and dispersal is more politically charged. Therefore the “South” could be a viewpoint that activates everything that constitutes intersection and decentralization. There is a certain kind of Latin American art that features a documentalist or testimonial element that produces a naturalization of the connection between context/experience/body/identity/voice, etc., where one would say the “political” aspect of a non-essentialist identity that is born more precisely from the gaps between body and voice or between voice and identity. I would insist that the “South” is a discontinuity—the intermittence that prevents totalities, identities or localities from becoming enclosed around themselves.

**José Luis Barrios:** It seems we're clear on the fact that this is not a question of “cowboys and Indians”—the good guys and the bad guys—since the idea of the “South” is negotiated as a force and a decentralization with respect to any sort of form that lays claim to universality. But how do we rethink the South within its territory or localities? If the invention and accounts of the other—not just in multicultural discourses but also at art fairs, biennials, etc.—have done any good, it is because they produce a possibility for the South that exerts pressure not only in hegemonic spaces but as well within political spaces of belonging, if you will, within this very South. In the case of Mexico, for example, violence, drug trafficking and impunity suddenly have the potential to appear in a hierarchy of visibility that guarantees international attention. Could it be that internal forms of power territorialization will try to inhibit this? How is it that from within the territories of the State, the South can dislocate, and optimize the potential of art to produce visibility?

**Nelly Richard:** This is a highly complex question precisely because it does not allow for any univocal response, for the simple reason that critical art or an oppositional critique is always carried out in actions and

situations. Something can be political and subversive within a dense institutional context and then cease to be so because institutions are not homogeneous blocks but rather, are full of fissures through which dislocations are produced. One might say there is a technical condition within oppositional critique that consists of detecting which are the system's vulnerable points. Whether the practice is or is not critical or political in effect depends on a kind of performativity: that of being placed in action and within a situation. Therefore it seems to me that nothing is guaranteed in advance. The system also has the ability to permanently move along the margins as well as within the relationship between margin and institution. So one could say that the South is also the suspicion and insight needed to see how these relationships between margin and institution function, to the degree that the mechanism renegotiates the relationship.

**Nikos Papastergiadis:** There's a trap in this question and you are provoking us, because it has to do with the instrumentalization of culture. When we speak of a cultural politics of the South, we've already fallen into the trap, because this presupposes that culture is the social *vanguard*, and that as a vanguard it will lead us socially, economically and politically to a better place. Therefore we have to rethink this fissure within the discourse of its imaginary and avoid inducing, supplementing or adding to the discourse in that sense.

**Jean Fisher:** Most critical artists don't identify with the state as such, but are alert to the fissures and ambiguities in its hegemonic discourses. It is in their interventions at these sites of ambiguity that dislocations of meaning take place and offer new ways of thinking.

**Nikos Papastergiadis:** It's a priority to look at the alternative between "for the State or outside the State." I know the Greeks were wrong on a lot of points, but there's something to what they—particularly the Stoics—thought, and that is with regard to cosmopolitanism. The "Stoics" were thusly named for the space in which they used to meet, the so-called *stoa*, a sort of domestic part of the *polis*, i.e., the State. The *stoa*, or front entrance was located right between the house and the street, between the *oikos* and the city. It is a place of movement, of transition, a place one passes through and indeed, most of the Stoics were migrants: they had moved

from place to place, making constant comparisons as they moved. When we wonder, “what will our space for coming together be like?”, I think it’s going to be a space of transition. Here we could once more think about the following: Where are we going once the State collapses? What is the alternative? The alternative is quite simple: we’re in a phase where individualism and everything else is dominated by consumerism and it’s our obligation to re-write this moment so that individuality and collectivity can be commonly understood. This doesn’t necessarily require a return to the State, but I’m also not too crazy about free-market consumer culture. I work at a university in the classical tradition, a laboratory that creates tension between the State and our relationships among ourselves. It’s critical we understand our relationships among ourselves so as to understand what’s coming, what’s out there in the future and what’s out there in the world.

**Audience member:** This is a question for Nelly Richard. How is it that members of the Academy represent the peripheral other, yet from a space of privilege, a place of advantages? Because we are all the “North” of that “South” that has no access to culture...

**Nelly Richard:** I don’t think the Academy and intellectuals ought to represent the other. As in life, in art it’s rather difficult to *speak on behalf of* or *in the place of*. Intellectuals are the most ignorant of all when they speak of the Other using a grandiloquent rhetoric that leaves no room for forms of political intervention that may be more modest, limited—yet because of this much more effective.

And something that I’d also like to bring up is that the South—when one speaks of post-colonialism, in the context of countries like post-dictatorship Chile and Argentina—well, something that really worries me is that the victim has a certain moral superiority, which is an epistemological advantage. That place from where the victim or the other speaks is exempt from any sort of critical consideration with regard to the problematic of representation. Therefore it seems that each of the categories, both that of representation and that of otherness, are categories we should learn to deconstruct scrupulously.

**Audience member:** A few minutes ago we were talking about the conceptualization of the South not as information on differentiated defenses,

but rather as a strategy of decentralization. I'd like to know where this location could come from, because if every North has a South, the South also has its "Norths" and peripheral areas. So it's not enough to speak of Mexico's North or South; we need to see how these different circuits differ—and also within different ideologies—and we would need to speak of Mexico City or Guadalajara and look at other states that don't figure on the national scene in the way these two cities do.

**Nelly Richard:** What's known as "dislocation" is not unlike breaking up a framework. We'd need to look at the relationship between "de-centering" and "dislocation;" it's there that we could talk about some sort of political act. There's no one way to respond to this. For example, at Mexico's National Autonomous University, the relationship between center and outer limits has its own particular characteristics. What is the relationship between the framework and its edges? I don't think there's only one response to that question.