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Abstract

The biggest contribution to globalisation has been to redefine its practices in the light of a world of transnational connections and communications, which to a certain extent imply the end of the nation state and of the provincialism (parochialism) implicit in national culture. In this essay we would like to confront, on the one hand, the case of the journal *Third Text* in relation to *Art in America* in order to the dismantling of the Western paradigm based on a hegemonic and centralised notion of art occurred in the area of post-colonial thinking, which was slowly replacing the “old” and “Eurocentric” internationalism of the art world with a wider notion of a “globalist” imaginary in contemporary art.

Keywords

Postcolonial World; Western paradigm; *Third Text*; *Art in America*; Centre-periphery model.

Resumo

A maior contribuição para a globalização tem sido redefinir suas práticas à luz de um mundo de conexões e comunicações transnacionais que, em certa medida, implicam o fim do Estado-nação e do provincialismo (paroquialismo) implícito na cultura nacional. Neste artigo gostaríamos de confrontar, por um lado, o caso da revista *Third Text* em relação à *Art in America*, para o desmantelamento do paradigma ocidental, baseado numa noção hegemônica e centralizada de arte que surgiu no campo do pensamento pós-colonial, que lentamente tem substituído o internacionalismo “velho” e “eurocêntrico” do mundo da arte por uma noção mais ampla de um imaginário “globalista” na arte contemporânea.

Palavras-chave

Mundo pós-colonial; Paradigma ocidental; *Third Text*; *Art in America*; modelo centro-periferia.

Globalisation seems to suspend that which was central to the debates of postmodernity: the category of representation. On the contrary, globalisation would be readable in the relationships that have always been considered primary to representation and, within it, culture would be only one of many aspects of the production of goods (Szeman, 2006). And, finally, that which would most distance globalisation from postmodernity would be the public ambition of the concept in and of itself:

There is clearly more at stake in the concept of globalization than there ever was with postmodernism, a politics that extends far beyond the establishment of aesthetic categories to the determination of the shape of the present and the future – including the role played by culture in this future. Even if both concepts function as periodizing terms for the present, globalization is about blood, soil, life and death in ways that postmodernism could only ever pretend to be. (*Ibid* : 8)

How would these questions affect the terrain of literature or artistic theory? Perhaps in this sense the biggest contribution to globalisation has been to redefine its practices in the light of a world of transnational connections and communications, which to a certain extent imply the end of the nation state and of the provincialism (parochialism) implicit in national culture. From here, many theoretical and visual practices within globalisation direct themselves towards the transfer and movement of culture: changes from one place to another, the recently discovered mobility, decontextualisation and recontextualisation in new places, and the new concepts that all this entails: diaspora, cosmopolitanism, the politics and poetics of the “other”, and the language of postcolonial studies in general (Kellner, s.d.).

In this essay we would like to confront, the case of the journal *Third Text* in relation to *Art in America* in order to show the dismantling of the Western paradigm based on a hegemonic and centralised notion of art that occurred in the area of post-colonial thinking, which was slowly replacing the “old” and “Eurocentric” internationalism of the art world with a wider notion of a “globalist” imaginary in contemporary art.

The case of *Third Text*

Two years before what can be considered as the first attempt at a global exhibition in the area of the visual arts – we refer to *Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989 – from the field of post-colonial thinking and the anthropological-artistic-cultural area, the first voices started to emerge defending a historic change towards the periphery and a moving away from the centre of the dominant culture. To be specific, it was Rasheed Araeen, an artist and postcolonial theoretician based in London since 1964, who, as a continuation of his reflections published in three editions of the magazine *Black Phoenix* (1978),¹ led from 1987 in the editorial project of the *Third Text* magazine² the need to find a way out of the intellectual paralysis of most Western critical discourses in the 1980s and to recover “alternative” modernities that had been ignored by the main current of modernity itself. In the text *Making Myself Visible* (1984), which gathered together his artistic work and writings to that date, Araeen started to raise the question of “who” is made visible and “where”, at the same time indicating that “cultural identity” was not a priority issue within the official system of Western modernity, nor could it be identified by a simple return to art of a nationalist or traditional character. Beyond the progressive spirit of modernity, non-Western artists continued to experience a total exclusion from the history of modern art. Hence the choice of the word *third* in the framework of contemporary art in a post-colonial society, in clear reference to the “other”, converted into the “third”, as a challenge to the model of binary opposition based on a system of fixed

classification, according to which cultural practices are catalogued in terms of “self” and “other”. As Araeen asks: “If the original understanding of the Third World as that underdeveloped entity which was only aspiring to Western models and standards can no longer be sustained [...] can ‘culture’ be privileged as a more authentic representation?” (Araeen, 1987: 4).³

It was thus essential to localise the manifestation of domination in the functions of the cultural practices in question. And in this sense, it was necessary to fight against a modernity associated with the internationalisation of artistic practices, as happened after the Second World War with North American abstract expressionism and the resulting homogenisation of its practices in terms of style. A modernity which had excluded artists of the Third World in terms of recognition and acceptance, given that from the 1960s – with movements such as Black Power in the United States – a real crisis of legitimacy was being experienced at the heart of Western culture:

The ‘crisis of legitimation’ in Western culture has a long history, but what is new in its postwar manifestation is a recognition of the lack of (positive) representations of both women and colonial peoples. This recognition is a direct result of anticolonial/antiracist struggles and the women’s movement. (*idem*: 6).

In the face of this crisis in Western culture, it seemed necessary to reclaim the cultural identity furthest from any return to a nationalist and “traditional” art and in the framework of an art that was not separate from politics. Hence the appearance of an editorial project such as *Third Text*, which – distancing itself from magazines such as *October*, which enshrined the theoretical-artistic discourse as its main current, or *Frieze*, which represented the Young British Artists (YBA) – sought to analyse that which was excluded and repressed by power and institutional structures (Araeen, 2002: 334). The question was not so much the exclusion of artists from the artistic scene as the ignorance and suppression of their contributions to the different developments of the main current. In this context, *Third Text*, following the teaching of Edward Said and his post-colonial theory, came to the conclusion that the actual situation was not only the result of human negligence but also represented the ideology of the artistic institution: “*Third Text* represents a historical shift away from the centre of the dominant culture to its periphery in order to consider the centre critically.” (*idem*). And if the celebration of the exotic was not new, what was indeed new was the fact that the “other” had stopped being the culturally exotic “other”, including Afro-Americans and African blacks, who, living in different Western countries, shared not only the fact of being abroad but also the constant concern about their countries of origin. A Palestinian artist could articulate his experience of the diaspora, a South African could show what took place during apartheid, and thus an endless number of examples.

But the buck stops here. Try to turn your eyes towards the ideological and institutional structures of the institutions which are now so concerned with the plight and struggle of peoples in other countries and you will see how the doors shut in your face (*ibidem*: 342).

A paradigmatic example of how the renewed “other” was appearing in the successive issues of the magazine *Third Text* is offered by Geeta Kapur’s text “The Centre-Periphery Model or How We Are Placed? Contemporary Cultural Practice in India,” (Kapur, 1991) which puts forward the dualism between internationalism and regionalism pointing to the need to talk not only of a “regional diversity” but also of a “cultural difference”. The concept of centre-periphery as a kind of political geography of world cultures is based, in Kapur’s opinion, on a model of superstructure and base. The advanced industrial cultures (the First World) constitute the centre, corresponding to internationalism, while the underdeveloped and economically dependent post-colonial subcultures (the Third World) fall into the category of the periphery. Since the Second World War, internationalism as ideology suppresses the possibility of a

historical vanguard in spite of simulating its conceptual reflexes. This suppression of the vanguard as a historical category would connect, according to Kapur, what Fredric Jameson calls the logic of late capitalism: consumerism, artistic markets, media networks.

In opposition to this, an attempt to recover the old concept of regional diversity or the renewal of cultural is imposed, which implies reclaiming the term regionalism, with all that this implies in terms of territorial and cultural integrity belonging to the peripheries. Against the cosmopolitan centre or even the notion of multicultural difference, the concept of “cultural difference” is imposed, which introduces a relativism that in turn encourages the idea of the principal of universality. The regional would provide the sources that make up the universal, argues Kapur: “We on the periphery should desist from using essentialist categories of an ancient civilization including perhaps those of myth and other indigenously romantic, organic-symbolic modes of thought.” (Kapur, 1991: 10).

The contribution of *Art in America*

Another fissure in the new post-Eurocentric condition of art, in this case from a defence of the work of contemporary artists from various geographical contexts, was led by one of the most mainstream magazines, *Art in America*, whose July 1989 edition, “The Global Issue”⁴, put forward the definition of that inaugural moment of the global through a series of declarations from artists and cultural theoreticians – such as Martha Rosler, James Clifford, Boris Groys, Robert Storr, Craig Owens, and Michele Wallace – in which a common idea seems to stand out: that of the danger of an unwelcome homogenisation and culture of consumption caused by the growing process of globalisation. A process which the US economist Theodore Levitt had associated in his 1983 text “The Marketing Imagination” with the concept of “marketing imagination”, according to which it is the imagination (in the sense that people do not buy things but rather solutions to problems, with all that this means in terms of jumping from the evident to the significant) in which the origin of the success of different commercial transactions resides.⁵

Drawing on Levitt’s theories, which saw the world in its totality as being unified in a few markets of cultures of taste (“More and more, people everywhere are growing more alike in their wants and behavior, whether we’re talking about Coca-Cola, microprocessors, jeans, movies, pizzas, cosmetics, or milling machines”), Martha Rosler traced a parallel between the incipient globalisation and the post-modern context.

Whereas culture tends to emanate from the metropolis, in the postmodern world of the internationalized transmissions, the culture of the peripheral areas paradoxically is increasingly valorised as the object of a progressive revaluation, whether these areas are the fringes of the metropolis itself or distant, marginally incorporated locales.

But, warns Rosler, the history of “global connections” which made possible theories about the postmodern is also the history of the “disconnections” of people of different classes and identities, within the same city and country, including in the advanced economies: “If we re-consider the photographic image of the whole world –of spaceship earth- it represents an identity that can only be envisioned from outside, a mirror-phase identity firmly located in the imaginary.” (Rosler, 1989: 151)

From another point of view, the anthropologist James Clifford – exploring the questions of whether the arrival of a “new postmodern global visual culture” means the end of local and regional specificities, and whether we are witnessing the emergence of a hybrid international culture which respects difference and heterogeneity – points to the need to establish distinct orders in the study of “difference” in the new neo- or post-colonial map which take into account the impact of technology and the production of culture in any local context. One of these orders would be the “disappearance” of difference, a second would consist of the “translation” of certain orders of difference, while a third would involve the “creation” of new orders of difference. And if it is relevant to take account of these three levels, Clifford suggests that the important thing is that the processes of “translation” of this difference which makes it possible to “create” new orders of that difference (Clifford, 1989: 87).

For his part, Craig Owens, who at that time was preparing the exhibition – never staged because of his early death – *Exoticism: A Figure for Emergencies* (ICA, London), emphasised the growing interest on the part of academics, curators, critics, and artists for the cultural products of the so-called Third World through the reconstructive and/or archaeological work of post-colonial intellectuals such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, and indicated that these authors had been influenced by the European theory that was the fruit of the effects of decolonisation, specifically by Foucault’s ideas on the power-knowledge pairing, Derrida’s critique of Western ethnocentrism, and Lacan’s formulation “the desire of man is the desire of the other.” A conjunction which would explain the emergence of a “new exoticism” or, in other words, the recovery, beyond the distortions of racist/imperialist representation, of an authentic voice of the “other”: the native, the tribal, etc. The paradox would reside, according to Owens, in the fact that post-colonial intellectuals were interested not so much in the “native” as in the “European subject” of imperialism and, more specifically, in the mechanisms through which Europe consolidated itself as a sovereign subject in situating its colonies as an “other”.

And, Owens concludes: “Instead of representing the Third World (as the site of difference or heterogeneity), we in the increasingly routinized metropolitan centres might ask the question of what (or who) cannot be assimilated by the global tendencies of capital and its culture [...] Perhaps it is in this project of learning how to represent *ourselves* – how to speak *to*, rather than for or about, others – that the possibility of a ‘global’ culture resides.”⁶

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Notas

* É professora de História da Arte e Crítica da Arte na University of Barcelona. Nos últimos anos, tem concentrado no estudo da arte internacional da segunda metade do século XX e as exposições que ela gerou. Esta linha de investigação levou a publicações *A Arte do Século XX e suas Exposições: 1945-1995* (Edições Serbal, Barcelona, 2009) e *Os Manifestos da Arte Pós-Moderna: Textos de Exposições 1980-1995* (Akal / Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, 2000) com contribuições de C. Joachimides, D. Kuspit, A. Bonito Oliva, K. Power, D. Crimp, H. Foster, T. Crow, H. Szeemann, C. David, JH Martin e T. McEvelley, outras.

¹ In January 1989, Araeen published the "Black Manifesto" (*Studio International*, nº 988), in which he defined the term "black artist" not alluding to skin colour but in reference to the "other" in the world of art. In this manifesto, Araeen posed the question of how people of the Third World try to enter the modern era and create their own contemporary history. See the Manifesto, republished in Rasheed Araeen, *Making Myself Visible*, London, Kala Press, 1984, p. 73.

² The magazine's subtitle was *Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* until, in 1999, in a determined attempt to eliminate the concept of the Third World, it was replaced by *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture*, a clear commitment to a global discourse.

³ See also Rasheed Araeen, "¿Cómo se ha convertido *Third Text* en *Tercer Texto*?", in *Third Text/Tercer Texto. Una perspectiva crítica sobre el arte y la cultura contemporáneos*, nº 1, primavera 2003, pp. 11-20.

⁴ *Art in America*, "The Global Issue", July 1989, pp. 11-12.

⁵ In 1983, the professor of marketing and editor of the *Harvard Business Review* Theodore Levitt wrote the article "Globalization of Markets" (*Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1983), in which he referred to the term "globalisation", popularising it and applying it to the currents of economic thinking. Levitt coined the concept of "global corporation", understood as the recognition that the "Republic of Technology" had made the international bourgeoisie into a growing, homogenous – and locally fitting – culture of consumption. See also Theodore Levitt's 1983 text *The Marketing Imagination*.

⁶ Craig Owens, "The Global Issue", cit., p. 89. Already in 1986 Owens had written about the work of Lothar Baumgarten, calling attention to the "rhetorical strategies" of ethnographic discourse. See Craig Owens, "Improper Names", in *Art in America*, October 1986, p. 130. According to Owens, Baumgarten, more than being interested in racial and ethnic stereotypes, was interested in the historical construction of Western notions of the "Western" and the "exotic". Indeed, Baumgarten's project for the Venice Biennale of 1984, in which the artist superimposed the topographic structure of the Amazon Basin on the Venice Lagoon, was fundamental to the theoretician's later reflections.

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