

INTERVIEW WITH NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI

Néstor García Canclini is one of the most prominent anthropologists currently working in Mexico City. He writes about postmodernism and culture from a Latin American perspective, dealing with topics such as popular culture and local celebrations, the people in art, and cultural consumption. More recently, he has examined aesthetics, anthropology and cultural policy, and how these affect quality of life and social participation through different strategies of action in the public sphere.

García Canclini was born December first, 1939 in La Plata, Argentina. He holds doctoral

degrees from the University of La Plata (1975) and the University of Paris (1978). He has taught at the University of La Plata (1966-1975) and the University of Buenos Aires (1974-1975). Since 1990, he has been a professor and researcher at the Iztapalapa campus of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City. He has also been a visiting professor at a number of universities including those of Naples, Texas at Austin, Stanford, Barcelona, Buenos Aires and São Paulo. He received the Casa de las Américas essay prize in 1982 and the Latin American Studies Association book award for *Hybrid Cultures* in 1992.

His most notable books include:

- *Arte popular y sociedad en América Latina*, Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1977
- *La producción simbólica: Teoría y método en sociología del arte*, Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1979
- *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo*, Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1982
- *¿De qué estamos hablando cuando hablamos de lo popular?*, Montevideo, Uruguay: CLAEH, 1986
- *Cultura transnacional y culturas populares*, ed. with R. Roncagliolo, Lima, Peru: Ipal, 1988
- *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1990. Published in English as *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Minneapolis, us: University of Minnesota Press, 1995
- *Cultura y comunicación: Entre lo global y lo local*, La Plata, Argentina: Ediciones de Periodismo y Comunicación, 1997
- *Las industrias culturales en la integración latinoamericana*, Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2006
- *La globalización imaginada*, Barcelona, Spain: Paidós, 1999
- *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo*, Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós, 2002

Globalization appears to be the direction taken in almost all areas of social activity in the contemporary world. How has this process influenced the field of contemporary art?

In a number of ways. But first, we must arrive at consensus as to the definition of globalization. Some maintain that it began with the conquest of America or with other processes in the 16th and 17th centuries. In my view, those marked the beginning of a fairly unidirectional internationalization and the dependency of what we now know as Latin America, Africa or Asia on particular metropolises: London, Madrid and Paris. I believe that trans-nationalization is a later process developed during the 20th century. Globalization is moving in the same direction, but developing greater interdependency among all societies.

I'd say that globalization is the culmination of this process of internationalization and trans-nationalization in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was the appearance of satellites, internet and other methods of planetary interconnectivity that facilitated the formation of a worldwide economic and financial market. This resulted in technological conjunctions that created simultaneities among societies that were previously disconnected, or connected in a deferred manner as receptors. All this culminated in the de-nationalization of art, something that had been furthered by the avant-gardes and the trend toward internationalization during the first half of the latest century.

Secondly, we could speak of how art affects globalization. There is a globalized market for artistic goods as well as for historical and archaeological goods, which are at times related to art. A technological globalization that does not exactly follow the same media laws; the globalization of the mass media also affects the interdependency of the arts, that previously considered regional or national. We should also mention globalization's failures, at times leading to the creation of retractions, such as regional groupings like the European Union or the Pacific Rim countries. Finally, we should point out the specific globalization of art, how global markets are constructed, the system of galleries and biennales in many regions, and, of course, internet.

All this has contributed to the loss of significance –but not the disappearance– of the notion of national representation. We see tensions emerge between the survival of a national art organization and the tendency for national identities to become blurred. One example would be the Venice Biennale, which, like many other biennales, features national pavilions. Yet this can lead to situations such as, in 2003, when none of the three artists represented at the Dutch pavilion were actually from the Netherlands. These tendencies show how major globalization movements cannot be assimilated into a single affect and reorganize the development of art.

Do travel and the fact that artists tend to move around a lot also have a bearing on such globalizations?

Yes. But, we should mention not only large institutional forms like the biennales and the museums that are reproduced on different continents such as the Guggenheim and the Louvre. We should also speak about more flexible circuits like artists' travel, multi-residencies at different times of the year carried out by artists such as Antoni Muntadas and Gabriel Orozco, who live in different continents, have studios in different locations and interact with very diverse audiences, publics or receptors. Furthermore, there are many possibilities offered by internet to visit a museum not physically but rather through its website. We no longer need to wait for *Artforum* to come to us in order to find out what's happening or what's going to happen.

In the context of political, economic and cultural relations, are the concepts of center, margin and periphery still valid? And if so, how do they manifest themselves in art and what is their impact in México?

These three concepts have changed through an interactive transformation. We see that there isn't just a single center. Paris, London and New York are no longer what they used to be. They can't claim a monopoly in the periodic reorientation of trends. There are mobile concentrations of both economic and symbolic power, but they haven't dissolved into an indifferent nomadism as certain tendencies of postmodernism would have us believe. There are concentrations of power in nations or in capitals, specially in cities like Paris, London and New York, but also in Milan, Tokyo, Beijing, and Seoul. Correlatively, multiple peripheries tend to deemphasize nationalism. We don't talk about artists or institutions in association with a particular flag as we did in the past.

One might say that there is a dual situation in Mexico City. As with other cities, it is a capital in Latin American terms, but it is also dependent on international tendencies stemming from New York or London, or networks with a multinational presence.

Might we speak of a connection between economic power and symbolic power in these relationships?

Yes, though they do not respond to the same logic, but this is true not only in art. I'd say that symbolic activities like those carried out by the mass media –television, for example– do not adhere to the economic logic in a mimetic fashion. Just as it occurs with the economy, we could state that there is a logic to the production of industrialized material goods and that there is also a financial logic. They are not identical but they do influence each other. Symbolic logic tends to have a different dynamic, sometimes operating in shorter periods, as in fashion, for example. These movements are semi-annual or even shorter, or they may involve a recycling of previous periods. This is more complex in a bad economy. We go from one mode of production to another, or from one style of production or form of organization to another, but we almost never go back. However, on a symbolic level, there can be a recycling of fashions from the 1970s or the 1940s, of mechanisms of craft production, or a special value assigned to the forms of symbolic production, or to the forms of material production for their symbolic value.

In this context, what changes have occurred in the notions of identity and belonging?

In the first place, essentialist notions of identity have disappeared. For example, the idea that there could exist a Mexican, Brazilian or French sense of identity. I'd have to say that these notions of national identity, which were strongest during modernity, underwent two processes: a centripetal one and a centrifugal one. To begin with, the notion of nationality vanished when many of the properties or powers held by the nation state were dissolved, passing into the hands of de-localized transnational organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. And furthermore, there was also an inward movement related to regional or ethnic demands for the legitimation and recognition of multiculturalism. This occurred in Spain, China and nearly every country in Latin America. During the 1990s, some Latin American countries went so far as to incorporate the notion of multiculturalism into their constitutions, lending it more credibility. Thus, we find ourselves in a world of multiple ways of belonging.

Artists are represented by galleries with outlets in a number of cities. They work in different countries, and frequently participate in transnational artistic events, visiting these personally, or online. These multiple ways of belonging can take any number of forms. The most classic one is the movement of artists from the south toward the north, combining their

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Uruguayan or Brazilian roots with a residence in New York; or else European artists like Santiago Sierra and Francis Alÿs who settle in Mexico, or move around, spending part of their time in one country and part in another. Such movements tend to blur identity claims, but they continue to exist and at times generate social or political currents, for which people are willing to either die or kill for. As such, we cannot remain indifferent to issues of identity. We must take them very seriously. But fundamentalist identity claims tend to lose ground.

If the concept of identity has changed because it is no longer defined by geographical criteria, might we speak of the existence of a close relationship with other type of territory, such as gender or symbolic aspects which might produce a sense of belonging or association in a particular group?

Yes. I was also talking about that when I mentioned multiple belongings. We can continue to lay claim to the identity that is written in our passport, somehow taking charge of it, whether at a custom's station or at an immigration office. But, at the same time, we have gender, ethnic or generational identities, which are very important in the digital world: the difference between native young people and young immigrant newcomers. Such combinations of identities give rise to mixed cultural expressions.

Could you please discuss the processes of interculturalism, multiculturalism and hybridization? How are these viewed in Mexico, and how do they relate to other cultural contexts?

It's important to bear in mind the distinction between interculturalism and multiculturalism as discussed in the literature. Multiculturalism is the superimposition of different cultures with some differentiation. Perhaps the most visible example of this is that of the cities of the US and their ethnic neighborhoods: the Chicano neighborhood, the African-American neighborhood and the Puerto Rican neighborhood. Obviously, there is cross-contamination: they intermingle at work, at school, on public transit. This produces interculturalism, which is not multi, but rather provides real bases for a relationship and fosters interchange.

Strictly speaking, hybridization is a descriptive notion that appeared during the 1990s to give a name to a mix of several intercultural fusions. Some people thought that in order to avoid speaking of mestizo culture as something separate –because that would imply ethnic blending, or of a syncretism which tends to allude to religious issues or other modern forms of culture– we could broaden the concept of hybridization, which would cover different forms of blending. But strictly speaking, hybridization is a descriptive term. It does not say to us which is the sign of that interculturality. In future processes, we will have to analyze its fusion, contradiction, rejection of the Other, or the partial acceptance of the Other.

Might we say that hybridization forms part of globalization?

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Yes. However, hybridization has existed since antiquity, since the time that different societies began to have some form of exchange among them. There are texts from the first century of the Christian era where Pliny the Elder used that term to refer to people who immigrated to Rome. Obviously, modernity and globalization intensified opportunities for interaction, and as such, the conflicts and complexities of these relationships.

The concept of hybridization brings to mind other related concepts. How would you describe the border region between entities, speaking of spaces of domination, neutrality or infiltration, and by extension, the concept of gap or interstice?

The gap as a concept has had many applications. One has to do with interculturality among regions or ethnic groups, to designate zones of interchange or insertion, or what they leave unoccupied. This specific meaning of gap, as something that has not yet been occupied, a place one can infiltrate, had a great influence on much of the reflection and production of the artists of the 1960s. When you think about how to defend against hegemonic economic or political powers, where to stand without having to construct yet another party or an industrial or commercial enterprise, the solution generally lies in looking for the gaps, the places you can infiltrate.

We know that there exists a huge debate on the efficiency of these interstitial activities, but to what extent do they involve a sense of resignation as to what cannot be changed structurally, and to what extent do they speak of what can be changed? I believe it is still of some use as a concept to define artistic actions that do not seek structural change. Perhaps it is a basic tenet of contemporary art that its different tendencies try to take on the role of revealers of something that could be different, without ever actually taking on the responsibility of constructing that thing or changing things.

In terms 'of relational aesthetics,' as theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud, the idea would be to create experiences, events, relationships that are models of other ways of constituting society. Bourriaud is very shrewd in his selection of artistic examples that seem to prove his theory, and attributing it with universality. I find his concept to be very interesting from an avant-garde perspective –however much he may deny that– as a way to approach experiences such as those of Gonzalez Torres and Tiravanija, two artists he refers to often. But, for me, the main difficulty in relational aesthetics is that it is based on a very weak social theory, incapable of accounting for key social contradictions in contemporary society. Bourriaud writes about experiences that rarely deal with the contradictions between capitalism and non-capitalism, between rich and poor, between central and peripheral societies, or generational clashes. But this objection does not diminish his reflections on relational aesthetics, though I personally am drawn more to the notion of postproduction within his work.

Would you please speak a little about Mexico's geographic position as a stopping place for artists?

This is a subject that has been dealt with in a number of ways, in the artworks themselves and in theoretical or critical reflections. For instance, there is a massive amount of work dealing with the concept of the border. What does it mean for Mexico to have a 3 100 kilometer long border with the us, which is at the same time a Latin American border? Central Americans, South Americans, including Colombians, come to Mexico and traverse the entire country because they want to cross the border into the us. This has turned the southern border of Mexico –which has not been the focus of as much interest– into a trouble spot, a place of repression, similar to what Mexicans experience along the us border. Then again, Mexico has also become a stopping place for artists from Cuba and other countries who want to go to Miami, New York, or California. All this proves that geography is not immaterial. It continues to be a way of organizing space that has a bearing on things. There are still borders, customs stations, and immigration control. Although weak, they do still exist.

There is another approach to the analysis of the interaction between the us and Mexico, one which derives from the construction of Latino communities in that country. Some communities of Mexican origin consider Mexico as a utopian point of reference, like Aztlán. Another perspective focuses on the complex phenomenon of departures and returns, most clearly reflected in the phenomenon of remittance. As seen in recent literature, remittances can play a major role in sustaining the economy of countries such as Mexico,

El Salvador, even Cuba, but there are also symbolic remittances, brought back to Mexico when migrants living in California or New York return home, and also what they take to the us from here. They take back music, videos of parties and gatherings, messages, and when they come here, they bring with them the most recent signs of modernity and post-modernity, signs of economic and symbolic prestige. So, Mexico's geographic position does not exactly coincide with the territory we know as Mexico. There is some spillover. Fifteen to twenty percent of Mexicans born in this country actually live elsewhere while continuing to call themselves Mexicans. Sometimes, this blurred or open geography can have important repercussions.

But, México can also be seen as a magnet for artists, can it not? One of the most prominent examples of this being Francis Alÿs.

Yes, since the 19th century, and throughout the 20th, Mexico has attracted artists. European Surrealists and American painters and artists came to Mexico seeking a sense of magic, renovation, or a critical reference to their countries of origin, thus contributing to the exoticization of Mexico.

But, I think, that this is no longer the case. People come to Mexico for many different reasons. In the work of artists such as Santiago Sierra and Francis Alÿs, I don't see any exoticization of Mexico. Alÿs achieved a complex understanding, for example, in his works about Mexico City. He worked in the streets downtown, and in situations, where he interacted with the locals. These are examples of a comprehension that is not exoticizing, in the least, and in fact, is very rich.

Another phenomenon is that of those artists who come to Mexico, but consider it as a transit point en route to the us. Sometimes they stay here; sometimes they alternate between the two countries, living both in Monterrey and in Miami –vacillating–. This is something that occurs in other professions as well. But, one might say that even for those who still work with a certain folkloric or exotic mentality, conditions in Mexico have changed. Those parts of Mexico that were once visited by people because of the indigenous inhabitants, like the mountains of Chihuahua for example, have become abodes of deaths –as a consequence of the drug trade as well as kidnappings–. So it isn't easy to idealize these places or indigenous customs in the same way that Artaud did. The traditional sense of culture has been modified in many ways, both in a good and a bad sense.

Clearly, there is a historic influence in Mexico's complex density, with culturally rich pre-Columbian cultures, massive constructions that have survived since antiquity, the viceroyalty of New Spain, with churches, monasteries and cultural influences as seen nowhere else in Latin America. Such testimonies endure in the historic centers of many cities and can be combined with contemporary artistic creations, as seen in the work of artists such as Francisco Toledo, who though Mexican still focuses on that history without exoticizing. These references continue to attract artists from other countries, and they settle in Oaxaca, Mexico City, or the northern states. The cultural richness of the border region has also drawn a lot of artists and to the InSite program with its workshops and the experiences of artists from all over the world.

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Could political or social complexity be another reason for this magnetic attraction in the work of some artists?

Certainly! Specially, when that complexity is understood as a cultural phenomenon. The system of social and cultural networks that has allowed Mexico to survive and has allowed it to face huge difficulties, from the time of the conquest to the present day, is fascinating for those artists who are seeking new social relationships. There are some relatively unknown examples that are, at times, very surprising for Europeans and Americans, who keep coming back to México.

The other day, a Mexican diplomat told me that some upper-level representatives of the Chinese government came to study how Mexico was able to develop a style of governance that has been successful for many years. If we consider the lack of efficiency demonstrated by Mexican governments, in recent years, when faced with economic crises and issues of security, one might think that they would choose to go somewhere else. One finds a similar degree of admiration for Mexico, while traveling through Argentina, Peru and Colombia. Sometimes, this is related to networks of cultural survival: from the avoidance of dictatorships during the 20th century to the richness of the cinema, visual arts, and literature produced in Mexico.

How do you visualize artistic production an urban imaginary?

There are different ways to view this. There are artists who depict urban settings, or exalt figures who are emblematic of the city. Here, I'm thinking of the neo-Mexicanists of the 1980s and the early 1990s, who were successful at this type of symbolic elaboration of urban prototypes and situations, even when they lived in the us. Another approach would be those artists who use the city as a site for interventions, like the Grupo SUMA, attempting a new kind of muralism during the 1970s, graffiti artists, and other grassroots artists. There are also artists such as Francis Alÿs in downtown Mexico City and from collectives from northern Mexico, in Tijuana and Monterrey. In other city, there are different ways of assimilating the urban. But without a doubt, beginning with the ruptures in Mexican art of the early twentieth century, with this distancing from indigenism and muralism, the city has become a central figure.

Would you please address the ways in which contemporary artists have discovered sources of reflection and support in anthropological and philosophical texts, to mention only two fields of knowledge that have a bearing on aesthetics?

This is a topic that I am currently working on, because it plays a key role in the current transformations in art theory. One way of looking at it would be to say that we are coming out of a period with a sociological angle, as in the art of the 1960s, which was accompanied by the development of the sociology of art and also sociological art, with people such as Hervé Fischer, who had some resonance in the political art of Latin America. Then there was a semiotic angle, including conceptualism and other tendencies influenced by the way semiotics affected our understanding of the urban context – identities, forms, and of representation–. More recently there has been an anthropological angle, based on the writings of Kosuth and Hal Foster, and even a trend which I would say has three angles: first, a multidisciplinary one; second, an 'intermedial' one, because artists work in several different disciplines simultaneously, utilizing painting, video and digital media in a single piece; and a third one which involves globalization, or the desire for a globalized presence.

I'm not so sure about calling this an interdisciplinary, 'intermedial' and globalizing angle, because the word *angle* implies a turn, like a car turning from one street onto another. The sense of the word angle implied a move from a compact world oriented in one direction in order to reorient the universe in another direction. Strictly speaking, there is no compact universe anymore; rather, it is multidirectional. As such, the notion of angling or turning also needs to be reformulated in order to see it not as a unified redirection. What we really see are multiple angles at once.

In all this, we see that art, as a route to knowledge, is changing along with the social sciences. Anthropology, sociology and history are also debating what it means to possess knowledge, and in these disciplines we see approaches to artworks or artistic

experiences that try to understand the work of anthropologists and sociologists in a positivist rather than in a simplistic manner. I see a lot of commonalities between the redefinition of art and the redefinition of the social sciences.

Something that I'm working on now is a comparison between the redefinition of artistry in the terms of Nathalie Heinich and other theoreticians who have postulated the question "When is there art?" instead of simply asking "What is art?" Other inquiries include what occurs with the historic and cultural heritage, which is a huge international debate in the UNESCO and other organizations regarding what it means to discuss cultural heritage, and about the heritage of humanity. The whole idea of the heritage of humanity, as set out in the list of 878 sites that the UNESCO has declared to be the heritage of humanity, affirms that there are "cultural objects of extraordinary value." From the point of view of current theories of art and culture, it's absurd to speak of cultural objects of extraordinary value. No theoretician would approve of that phrase. Nevertheless, this formula still sustains a UNESCO project under consideration, and a committee has been formed to study the issue. The debate about art and heritage are comparable though not identical, but it is worthwhile to draw a link between the ongoing debate in the social sciences about the notions of cultural heritage and value, and the notion of art in aesthetics.

There has been some progress made in that conjunction between the social sciences and aesthetics. A few months ago, I visited the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, where perhaps one of the riskiest operations that has so far been attempted to combine the historical heritage of Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania. They decided to use the collections of the Museum of Man and the Museum of Art and Civilizations, which featured a display style from the 19th century, to form a new museum in a building designed by Jean Nouvel. They reorganized these collections into a new kind of aestheticism, which repeats some of the errors of the aestheticism of the fine arts, such as de-contextualizing the works, not providing dates, and giving very few indications regarding the practices of the cultures to which those works belonged to. But at the same time, this has sparked a dialogue in France which I find very interesting. It has resulted in an interdisciplinary colloquia coordinated by Bruno Latour, with the participation of art historians, artists, anthropologists and sociologists from different continents. They addressed the conception of the museum and the type of crossroads museums are at right now, the interaction between these different forms of knowledge which we call art, cultural heritage and anthropology. The ongoing debate in books and journals which have devoted entire issues to the museum is more interesting than the museum itself. I feel that this museum is a failed attempt to force transcultural relationships into existence. To overstate the matter somewhat, I'd say that the only justification for the museum is the marvelous eloquence of the works. They are extraordinary but displayed in a confusing manner.

James Clifford tells an anecdote about one visit he paid to the museum, when he overheard someone talking on a cell phone to someone else in the museum. They couldn't find each other so when one asked "Where are you?" the other answered, "I think I'm in America". And in effect, there are moments when you see a piece and are astounded by its beauty, but if there are no clear references in the manner of displaying it, or in the infrequent wall texts, how are you supposed to know what you're looking at?

In order to face the very interesting situation of the current moment –to construct new questions as to what it means to create art, to make culture, to look at artworks, to witness experiences– we have to formulate transdisciplinary questions. They can no longer be addressed from a single discipline.

This brings us to the reformulation of epistemological criteria in the construction of knowledge, not only in the social sciences but also in the exact sciences.

Any examination of a biennial exhibition or international art journal makes it clear that at the present moment, the tradition of art as a cultural phenomenon that can be analyzed and criticized according to cultural categories has had to open itself up to two major referents. The first is nature or ecology –the natural or biological basis for human phenomena–

the other, involves technology that simulates human beings. Those gives us tools that substitute the arm, or the brain, instead of extend the functions of our arms as in the technologies of early modernity. These combine biotechnological studies, genetics and the most advanced technology, all of which have a terrible potential. Many artists are situating themselves at this intersection.

Faced with the different power systems in the world and on a regional level, what is your assessment of the resistant nature of the contemporary artwork?

Answering this necessarily implies the problematization of the notions of power and resistance. Beginning in the 1970s, there was a radical rethinking of the notion of power which replaced the pyramidal vision of a single power with the idea of a number of discrete powers that act in different directions and through different bodies, not only in society but in institutions as well. In this way we begin to conceive the institutions as multipolar, complex sites. However, there is a less critical discussion on the notion of resistance. When we consider what goes on with social and political movements, we find ourselves before a scission between the old party systems on the one hand—even the single-party systems like those that exist in Cuba and China—and on the other, the massively complex networks of social, cultural and artistic movements. Digital networks allow for a circulation of the information that constructs accumulations of powers or potentialities which exist outside of the hegemonic system.

Furthermore, at this point in time, the old opposition between the included and the excluded has become blurred. Though it does not even disappear, but it does become blurred because there are many who do not want to be included. There are excluded individuals, specially young people, who use informal channels to find work, who consume clothing, music and supplying their needs without ever showing an interest in voting or changing parties. In this context, the notion of resistance changes along with the notion of power. But, I think we have not reflected much on this question. There is work, Antonio Negri and other Italian writers, who try to take such discussions in new directions. Yet we are still lagging behind in how we think about the possibility of overhauling our notion of resistance. There remains a polar system of opposition between a power that still believes itself to be absolute, and a resistance which repeatedly challenges it, perhaps becoming a power in its own right rather than constructing a new society.

Could the example that you mention of young people creating a system separate from the dominant one be considered a process of resistance or of affirming an alien identity?

There's a little bit of everything there. In music we come across alternative circuits that function quite well, independently from major multinational record companies, outside the sphere of influence of institutions such as the cultural ministries, and then there are also a lot of erratic cases.

This is precisely one of the aspects we are addressing in the catalogue for the *Extranjerías* exhibition. It refers to the experience of those who choose to remain foreigners, or those who discover benefits in not being included. An Argentine writer named Graciela Speranza deals with the advantages of being a foreigner, as in the case of writers who leave their countries of origin and as such, are able to view their society and writing in new and innovative ways that they might not have thought of otherwise. It is not necessarily a case of consecrating foreignness, because it does have an aspect of upheaval, but rather to consider the possibilities it offers. This tendency has spread to every country. When I traveled to China and Japan in March and April, I witnessed some similar phenomena. This is not something that happens only in Western countries, or in the countries of the center, or in the desperate peripheral countries, and this is forcing us to rethink the whole inclusion-exclusion opposition in theoretical terms.

What is your assessment as do the nature of resistance in contemporary artistic production?

There is a wide variety of phenomena. What predominated in the 1960s was an opposition to the hegemonic institutions of the art system that was at that moment becoming internationalized, globalized. During that period, it was common for artists to abandon the gallery system, or even to abandon painting altogether, or what we consider to be true artistic production. They did not want to be artists and today are artists of much renown, such as León Ferrari, who stopped producing art for eight or ten years in order to join movements such as *Tucumán Arde*, which was actually later incorporated into art history. Currently, he shows his work in exhibitions, museums, and is recognized for the role he played in art history, but when he first made a name for himself it was in a movement to document a rural Argentina impoverished by the closure of sugar refineries, and the ghost towns left behind by all those people who had to go find work elsewhere.

The documentary and photographic exhibition based on the written and visual record created by the members of this movement was not shown in a gallery or museum, but rather at national and local trade union centers. They did not claim to be making art. The only thing artistic about all of this was the fact that people with an artistic background utilized their abilities as visual organizers to document, gather and present information.

These days, there are interventions in the media which simulate actions, which produce capacity for simulacrum; fiction and the relationship between fiction and reality that exists in the media; they propose questions regarding mediatization and the manner of creating new mediations or new doubts and suspicions. As in the case of *Tucumán Arde*, many of these phenomena wind up being integrated into art history, shown in recognized museums or consecrated in books and journals. This does not necessarily take away their importance. They continue to be valuable precedents, and significant as ongoing experiments.

One of the questions many artists are addressing is how to avoid being devoured, how to produce while incorporating into their works or experiences elements of "vaccination" or counter-information which will continue to put up resistance despite attempts to appropriate some of these experiments which were carried out within the art system itself. Here I am thinking of Santiago Sierra's intervention at the Venice Biennale when he closed down the Spanish pavilion. His way of representing Spain was to speak of the exclusion of immigrants and other phenomena of the art system. I thought it was a powerful work because it left a lot of questions unanswered. Closing the pavilion and only allowing in Spanish citizens with valid identity documents forced the next Spanish artist, Antoni Muntadas, to confront the dilemma of how to represent his country. Well, Muntadas' response was to create a kind of airport inside the pavilion, but I feel that the most interesting aspect of all this were the questions and doubts that were raised.

What role has censorship played in contemporary art?

Naturally, there is still political censorship in many countries, specially in those dominated by single-party systems like China and Cuba. But, also in the us, in western countries which claim to be democratic. We know that there is still censorship in the us when it comes to sexual subject matter and any questioning of the wars that country has waged outside its own borders, or of how capitalism is organized or corrupted. There is political censorship, but it is perhaps not as widespread in these societies which are more and more democratic, specially in the West or what we still call the West. There are other forms of censorship, for example, deriving from the unequal distribution of cultural power.

I'm intrigued by one notion that has been used by several authors: the international division of cultural labor. Toby Miller uses it to explain how Hollywood has been reorganized. Much of Hollywood's production is actually done on a commission basis by screenwriters, designers, etc. outside of the us—like a *maquiladora*, or assembly plant—. George

Yúdice has discussed this with regard to the music industry. In a sense, his approach resembles that of Jacques Rancière when he speaks of the partition of the sensible, and how resources are redistributed in order to experiment with the sensible in contemporary cities. Based on this question, he proposes a very interesting restructuring of the aesthetic movement. It isn't exactly censorship but something more structural. It is not the isolated act of political or military power which is how we are accustomed to viewing censorship. It functions in an equivalent manner and sometimes this occurs within the art system itself. In the late 20th century, there was a fairly dogmatic rejection of painting in the name of conceptualism, installation art and performance. This is no longer the case. There has been a rehabilitation of painting, but we still see tensions, appropriations and disputes over cultural power, spaces, institutions, circuits and theoretic criteria, and this sometimes functions as censorship.

How do artists confront this censorship?

Always with metaphors, saying things another way, talking about something else in order to talk about what truly interests them. A phenomenon which has been on the rise in recent years is the attempt to confront censorship or those unequal redistribution processes through provocation, in the sense that distribution through the mass media or Internet –of experiences, works, the rejection of works and censorship– may also boost the work's impact. Provocation becomes a key resource, which at times may be legitimate and valuable, but which certain artists use as a strategy. We are faced with a complex interplay between the use of provocation as a valuable strategy and the danger of becoming stuck in the provocative role. The former increases the significance of the work and its public appeal, by fostering communication or innovation. In my view, Santiago Sierra is an example of this oscillation.

What do you think about many contemporary artists' ongoing strategy of recycling and paraphrasing, and what does it say about present-day creative?

The notion of recycling or paraphrasing alludes to the notion of postproduction. This refers to the reutilization of prior elements of a society's art or cultural life in order to produce something new. Strictly speaking, throughout the history of art we find examples of creation as a deferred or derivative process, not absolutely original. This notion has intensified in this period of increasing amounts of information and resources for appropriation. In this sense, the proliferation of paraphrase, quotation, recycling, plagiarism and co-production in contemporary art makes a statement about a society where all this has become easier, and where illusions regarding originality and a return to the source are less and less credible.

At the same time, going online to discover that the cultural habits we acquired at school are either no longer useful or have a limited relevance now is an everyday experience. We have to learn new ways of relating to information and entertainment, and at the same time, engage the possibilities for interconnectivity on a planetary scale.

In the midst of such a terrible situation, the question of the future is very important. But we have to formulate it with caution, because we risk falling into the trap of the authoritarian utopia or the five-year plan. I don't mean to imply that utopia has become unnecessary. In fact, ideas of utopia continue to exist, and have shown themselves to be an anthropological necessity. But, the conditions under which we can aspire to a utopia and put it into practice have changed.

If we consider art to be a practice located at the interstice of other territories, would you say that the practice of contextual art (the artist as the catalyst for self-sustaining changes in a region) or relational art (produced with the participation of the other) can, in fact, become a way out of the previous paradoxes?

I don't see it as a way out. I see it more as a need to contextualize, so that artists take greater and greater charge of the conditions under which they are going to present their work, to communicate, to encounter their audience whenever possible, not to control the effect but rather to guarantee a minimal significance in what they do. It's curious how in this world, where the visual arts are so decentralized and dispersed, and interact with fashion, urban development, tourism and architecture, the dangers of isolation are significant. The effect of distinction as described by Bourdieu, in terms of how resources are handled when so few have access to them, and of the cultivated hermetism to preserve those resources, is still relevant today.

The consequences of homogenizing policies are often referred to when discussing the creators and managers of contemporary art. In your opinion, how diverse is the art world?

Clearly, it is much more diverse than it used to be two or three decades ago, during the era of conceptualism, of certain postmodern tendencies, like little dictatorial tendencies. There used to be fewer ways to legitimate art within hegemonic circles. Today, there is a more widely recognized diversity, a more legitimate and accepted eclecticism. I think that this has to do with a diversification in the social insertion of art, which not only links artists to art institutions, but also to fashion, architecture, urban movements and political movements. This interplay, this opening up, this diversification of themes and procedures situates art in a process of subordination to heteronymous tendencies, to demands that come from outside. There is often a talk, and rightfully so, of market exigencies as heteronymous exigencies. But, there are also unfair laws in terms of the powers of the mass media. It is difficult to develop a career in art without reaching a pact with the mass media. One of the rules of the mass media is the so-called law of the funnel. A limited number of options are selected from our diverse society and presented to mass audiences. There are a few television channels that respond to minority interests, and there are certain media strategies that are more mindful of diversity, but there is that law of the funnel that tends to trap artists, which makes it difficult to accept diversity or to make an appeal to minorities.

In a country such as México, where the government agenda is mostly occupied with matters of crime and national security and the economy, how can culture survive and be recognized as a fundamental aspect of public policy?

Over the past three decades, Mexico has missed out on many opportunities to strengthen its symbolic capital, both in the sense of its historical and cultural heritage and in the great potential offered by its artistic and literary creators. This can be seen in the new location of publishing houses that have moved from here to Spain, or in the whole catalogues of works produced by publishers that used to exist here that have passed into the hands of Spanish publishers, or other multinational corporations that don't have headquarters even in Spain. The archives of artists are leaving the country. There are fewer public funds devoted to research and in promoting innovation. Mexico was and continues to be the Latin American country with the most efficient system of museums, libraries, and certain localized cultural goods, which provide an indispensable infrastructure. There has been a loss of opportunities, partly due to the privatization of cultural initiatives, beginning mainly with the administrations of Miguel de la Madrid and Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who separated many

institutions from the public sphere and shut down many others. The slimming down of the State has affected not only culture but many other resources as well. It was also brought on by the lack of imagination of the political class as to what to do with what remained, which was a lot. What do I mean by imagining new uses?

I mean what the politicians can do, and I'm also thinking about the unions linked to the INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) or the INBA (National Institute of Fine Arts). In other words, I am talking about the management of Mexico's historical and artistic heritage. These unions have expressed their opposition to a connection with tourism, sometimes rightfully so and sometimes with a fundamentalist obstinacy. In the midst of this debate, the possibility of uniting public and private protagonists with other social protagonists has remained in the shadow. There have been some interesting participatory experiments, including funding for major exhibitions to promote Mexican art in other countries, but they have been few and far between. There has been a perverse combination of this weakened State and the loss of public funding for culture, art, and research, together with the lack of imagination regarding the utilization of existing resources and a lack of knowledge concerning the current movement of the market as well as social and cultural interactions in other countries. We still see a lot of money being invested in things like bringing an exhibition on the Aztecs to the Guggenheim, which for a number of reasons represents a squandering of resources both by the Mexican government and by the Guggenheim. Of course pre-Columbian art must be promoted, but we don't see contemporary artists being promoted in the same fashion. There have been notoriously far fewer international exhibitions. Both public and private organizations can be held responsible for that. I'm also referring to the reduction of public resources and the virtual inability to manage heritage, the existence of collections with too many years already, and also the closing of experiments such as the Contemporary Art Cultural Center in Polanco. The latter was due to the "lack of social responsibility among corporations," to use a resonant phrase of the kind often used in international forums.

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