

Xianyang Hu

Oct. 2nd, 2020

[In your own words, (1) please explain ONE of Terry Smith’s “Four Preoccupations of Contemporary Art” and then (2) apply it to understanding Halil Altindere’s My Mother Likes Pop Art, Because Pop Art is Colorful (1989). Based on this analysis, (3) please state whether you agree or disagree with Smith’s claim and explain why or why not.]

One of Terry Smith’s four preoccupations that he observed in contemporary art, upon which I would lay my emphasis in this paper, is “continuing work on the implications of the fundamental provisionalization of art that erupted in the 1950s and 1960s” (Terry Smith, Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question, Duke University Press, 2008, pp.16). From my perspective, Smith wishes us to believe contemporary art is, to some extent, a repetition but also an extension of the art pieces that were considered as avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s and whose traits can be possibly identified as contingent, or “always unstable and fugitive” in Baudelaire’s words. (Charles Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life, pp.9-10, Powerpoint in Lecture 4, Slide 5).

In Halil Altindere’s work ‘My Mother Likes Pop Art, Because Pop Art is Colorful’ (1998, PowerPoint in Lecture 4, Slide 31, Digital C-print, 100 x 150cm), several elements are presented in dazzling color to the audience, among which a center-positioned, mass-made magazine with Andy Warhol’s work ‘Marilyn’ as its cover stands out the most serving as a symbolistic sign of the pop culture thriving around the globe in the 1960s. (Andy Warhol, Marilyn, 1967, PowerPoint in Lecture4, Slide 31, 91.5 x 91.5 cm). Altindere seems to build a link between the magazine and those multicolored Kurdish-style cushions placed in the lower

half of the picture that forms a color-wise harmony with ‘Marilyn’. The presence of the magazine couldn’t come to reality without being circulated, by global citizens like Altindere, a convergence of different cultures, and the fluidity of the capital, hence suggesting an important context—contemporaneity. Furthermore, the togetherness of the magazine and Kurdish cushions in the visual sense implies an unstable state, or process, of contemporary art: being extremely open, constantly includes other cultures and assimilates them, which is a significant feature that can be applied to understand contemporaneity. However, it’s quite surprising if not just focusing on two outstanding elements but digging deeper into the arrangement of other subjects in the photograph and grasp it as a whole—an old woman holding and reading a magazine, sitting quietly with her legs crossed and cushions nearby piled in neat order—such a mundane scene could happen every day throughout a year in which an eternity manifests itself. Thus, I believe what was describe as ‘unstable’ in the beginning, from a contemporary artistic perspective as well as in Smith’s word, can also be interpreted as ‘stable’, which is exactly the opposite, since everything looks static here. In other words, though consisting of many essential objects in contemporary art, this work also stores something ordinary and can be perceived as a tribute to the daily life.

To conclude, I agree with Terry Smith’s first assertion on contemporary art because it precisely portraits some essential aspects to understand contemporary art pieces, including Halil Altindere’s artwork discussed in this essay; nevertheless, in ‘My Mother Likes Pop Art, Because Pop Art is Colorful’, relying on that one argument to interpret the whole work is unrealistic and experimenting with a new perspective often leads to thrilling discoveries, like the antinomy of ‘stable’ and ‘unstable’ in this essay—Terry Smith shall be glad to hear that.

Reference

Terry Smith, *Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question*, Duke University Press, 2008, pp.16

Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, PowerPoint in Lecture 4, Slide 5, pp.9-10

Halil Altindere, *My Mother Likes Pop Art, Because Pop Art is Colorful*, 1998, PowerPoint in Lecture 4, Slide 31, Digital C-print, 100 x 150cm

Andy Warhol, *Marilyn*, 1967, PowerPoint in Lecture4, Slide 31, 91.5 x 91.5 cm



Xianyang Hu

Oct. 9th, 2020

A Contradiction between Traditional Museums and Biennials

[Elena Filipovic writes, “Determined to present themselves as an alternative to the museum, these large-scale exhibitions attempt to give voice to cultures, histories, and politics underrepresented within the institution. The fact that the most seemingly progressive biennials and their curators vaunting the most heterogenous of art forms adopt a unique and now ossified exhibition format suggests that some of the most pernicious tenants of the museum and the history of modernism it embodies remain fundamental to their functioning” (p. 329). Your short paper should be organized in three parts that are coherently structured and connected to each other: In your own words, (1) please explain the central contradiction expressed by Elena Filipovic in the quote above and then (2) apply it to understanding Thomas Hirschhorn’s Bataille Monument, 2002. Documenta 11. Based on this analysis, (3) please state whether you think “the white cube” is a productive or limiting model for the display of contemporary art.]

The main contradiction Elena Filipovic refers to originated from the stark contrast between the traditional museums and the newly rising biennials. (you should write about the argument in the present tense) On the one hand, old fashioned museums exhibit artworks largely centered around a western canon, which has long been legitimized and institutionalized and whose art forms could be seen as a certain norm (e.g. traditional painting, sculpture, etc.) in a relatively permanent way that these art pieces can be visited all years around. On the other, , biennials that are thriving around the globe nowadays go a distinct road by focusing on a more diverse, de-westernized spectrum of works from various cultures and giving exposure

to artists pioneering avant-garde art forms, through a temporary way that poses a limit to the exhibitions themselves and viewers as well. Need to mention the key problem, namely that the white cube continues to be the main display mechanism used in large scale exhibitions and biennials.

Thomas Hirschhorn paid local drivers to carry the audience from those well-known museums to the Bataille Monument (Hirschhorn, 2002), named after a French philosopher, located in the suburb of Kassel where a Turkish migrant workers community gathers to live. Such an unusual act is reasonable to classify as part of Hirschhorn's work. The viewers' interiority and exteriority are both changed during this unique trip owing to the displacement both in time and space, in accordance with what the migrant workers experienced decades earlier. Since seldom would people need to go to two places during one exhibition, this act can be perceived as a challenge from Hirschhorn to the value of unity rooted in modernism and an expansion of the space-divided art form. Further digging into the architecture of this work (e.g. its specific location at the periphery of Kassel in a minority living area and the graffiti on the walls whose touch of street culture reveals the dilemma of juveniles desiring to express imagination but facing all sorts of restrictions), these properties of the work help to uncover the realities in this particular site and invite the audience to explore more about the local's poor living conditions, their socio-economic status as the succeeding generations of the migrant workers in the 1960s, and their identity recognition between German and Turkish, etc. Undoubtedly, the job of Bataille Monument (Hirschhorn, 2002) complies with what most biennials are trying to do—bring the viewers to the underrepresented, the minority, and let the interaction in between contribute to an inclusive global art culture. In conclusion, Documenta 11's staging Bataille Monument (Hirschhorn, 2002) can be considered as an

innovation, or a revolt more accurately, not only to traditional museums but also to the more and more fixed exhibiting forms of some biennials. This paragraph is strong.

Based on these observations, I think the white cube should be a limiting model to display contemporary art. The white cube aims to decontextualize artworks and put the viewers in a complete void where they only reflect on the intrinsic values of the work. However, it is exactly contexts that most contemporary art requires to better present the audience with ample background information and immerse them in a brand-new culture they are dealing with. White cubes can be planted anywhere with the same mode while cultures differentiate and are subject to variability in space and time. As is the case in the wood-constructed Bataille Monument (Hirschhorn, 2002), its fragile architecture with the cheap inside settings like plastic chairs suggests the particular mobility in this community. Were these characteristics wiped out and replaced by a white cube, I am almost certain people would get confused by taking rides to the suburb and ending up witnessing the abrupt existence of something deprived of any trait.

Reference

Thomas Hirschhorn. (2002). Bataille Monument. Documenta 11.

Elena Filipovic. (2005). The Global White Cube, p.329.



Xianyang Hu

Oct. 16th, 2020

The Contradiction of Building a Transnational Museum

[The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was heralded as a “Global Museum” that would bring together different layers and expressions of identity on a transnational level. Yet the conflict between the physical site and discursive site revealed the tensions of this endeavor. Please explain the central contradiction in the Guggenheim Bilbao. Relate it to a close analysis of the building: Based on observation, how does its interior and exterior stage the public’s identity? Do you think it’s possible to design a transnational museum? Why or why not?]

The central contradiction lying in Guggenheim Bilbao exists in its binary identity, as the assignment description specifies, of both a physical site and a discursive site. To be discursive, Guggenheim Bilbao carries the expectation to be a transnational museum where the experiment of universal values goes on and the discourse of contemporary art is enriched so that it needs to “construct great buildings...organize great exhibitions...collect and administer great works of art...” (Tomas Krens, quoted in A.M. Guasch). However, this concept encounters great resistance when colliding with Guggenheim Bilbao’s role as a physical site located in Basque, an area with its own religion, race, and language, for its limited involvement and interaction of local culture, which causes concern about a latent destructive homogenization to the local tradition.

Based on the exterior of Guggenheim Bilbao—a sublime building with a shiny, swirling surface made of titanium and glass, imitating the streamline of a fish body and in harmony with the surrounding water, Guggenheim Bilbao’s designer managed to create a landmark of

the city during this rapid globalization period, which serves to attract the majority of visitors, mostly tourists from around the globe, by means of a strong visual strike impressing people of its queer-looking exterior. This strategy of modeling an iconic architecture proved effective by generating large tourism revenues and thus reviving the city. Besides, it also contributes to the brand circulation of a transnational museum, making Bilbao a destination for future tourists drawn by the Guggenheim franchise. Further looking at the interior of Guggenheim Bilbao, I observed several brilliant designs, including those complex spiral walkways that entitle the visitors largest freedom to delve into the art space, modern ornamentations that scatter around different galleries and lead the audience to contemplate (e.g. The Matter of Time, Richard Serra), and the most important, those mega thematic exhibitions imported from where contemporary art originated and prospered(i.e. Western Europe and North America). Providing satisfying participation in contemporary art, these features target at a group defined as global ‘citizens’ than mere tourists, the elites or upper class, those who identify themselves as part of the global contemporary art culture, come to fulfill their spiritual needs through appreciating artworks, and reciprocally promote the influence of Guggenheim back in their home country. These two groups of people, global tourists and ‘citizens’, take up the most of the public coming to Guggenheim Bilbao and are well staged by its exterior and interior.

I believe the construction of a transnational museum is possible. For one thing, before 2020 the public body of the Guggenheim is actually comprised of people from countries around the globe, signifying sufficient mobility of people in the neo-liberal capitalist world and their demand for transnational art appreciation. As the world economy grows, this trend will be enlarged, even though temporarily halted by the breakout of COVID-19(I am confident it will get back on track). For another, increasing efforts are being made to include and represent art

pieces as well as artists from the artistically peripheric regions (e.g. Guggenheim Bilbao starts in recent years to exhibit artworks by local Basque artists, reconciling its conflict of both being a discursive site and physical site.), gradually altering the long-rooted paradigm of early global museums exclusively displaying Western-centric artworks. These efforts are essential because they fight equal representing for every culture, explore multiple narratives, and contribute to the concept of ‘transnational’—that artworks are beyond the nations instead of political influences of the West. To conclude, impossible though it might seem to build a transnational museum with the current pandemic of COVID-19, I still hold great hope that the concept of a transnational museum that bears the nicest wishes of our global community will come to reality one day in the future.

Reference

Thomas Krens, quoted in A.M. Guasch, p. 192. PowerPoint 7, Slide 12.

Grade: A

Cohesive and coherent text

Explanation of the central contradiction of Gugg. Bilbao is accurate.

On the second paragraph, the description sustains the analysis of how the interior and exterior of the building relate to the public's identity.

Xianyang Hu

Oct. 23rd, 2020

The Transformation of “Otherness” in a Global Context

[Despite the curator Jean-Hubert Martin’s intention to present the 100 artists in “Magiciens de la Terre” on equal footing, this landmark exhibition was critiqued by Rasheed Araeen for making distinctions between western and non-western art. Through a close analysis of Chéri Samba’s *Quel Avenir pour notre art* (What future for our art?). 1997. Acrylic and Glitter on Canvas, 51 × 76 in, please articulate the ways in which the artist visualizes these issues in his painting. Do you think that “otherness” is still structured along the same criteria used by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989? Explain your position.]

A central issue manifested by Magiciens de la Terre (Jean-Hubert Martin, 1989) is the contradiction of curator’s initial desire to present global arts on an equal footing and the fact that the ‘other’ arts outside the West, though included, are often de-contextualized and only left with visual similarities. With the influence of modernism spreading to the whole world under the hegemony of the West, a new way of organizing global art exhibitions is formed, also referred to as “The Salvage Paradigm” by James Clifford, in which the western modernism is centered at the core while the ethnic artworks outside the western modernism framework are defined as other, situated in the periphery, and presumed to be at the edge of disappearing and waiting for salvage. Only artworks within this paradigm are legitimized to gain admission into global exhibitions, meaning non-western contemporary artists and western ethnic artists are denied the chance to present their works. In the first picture of *Quel Avenir pour notre art* (Chéri Samba, 1997), Samba seats himself behind Picasso creating a distance in between, dressed decently in suits with a melancholy look and surrounded by log,

mask, and pot that fit perfectly into the western image of African art. The suits denote his active participation in the western modern art and his look suggests that even so he still cannot be accepted into modern museums, unless he takes up the objects about and presents himself as an African ethnic artist preserving the ‘endangered’ traditional art, a typical figure in “The Salvage Paradigm”. In this picture, Samba provides a metaphor of the systematic discrimination by western modern museums in the collection of art pieces. Samba further criticizes the exclusion of non-western artists who are dedicated to contemporary art in his second painting by juxtaposing himself with Picasso, two people with the same pose and similar works in their arms. The stark contrast of Picasso being in a canon of modernism while Samba remaining outside the door of modern art strengthens the irony of judging artworks differently based on artists’ various cultural origins. In the third picture, Samba directly shouts out the sarcasm and interrogates western museums, “But what is this? Isn’t this injustice? Why do they refuse the work of Africans, and yet continue to present the same work?” The contemporary works by the ‘orthodox’ (western) modern artists whose muse largely derives from African art are privileged over similar works by unrecognized African artists. This has been the norm, as is indicated by Magiciens de la Terre, and Samba uses these three paintings to bring out into the spotlight the invisible unjust criteria and challenges the unequal power relationship behind it (“Bravo! The West!”), warning us it’s high time to make a change.

I think the “otherness” is no longer the same criteria nowadays as in 1989. Thanks to the efforts of ‘marginal’ artists like Chéri Samba to call for attention to the injustice and increasing modern museums being constructed in the past underrepresented areas which essentially break the dominance of the West in art collection, the identities of artists which used to almost dictate their admission into modern museums are largely blurred and more

Asian, African and South-American artists are entering into modern global museums and exhibitions. “Otherness” ceases to be the opposite side of western modernism and the signifier of traditional static ethnic art. For instance, a recent biennial in celebration of Snoopy 70th anniversary at the Museum of Shanghai Contemporary Art juxtaposes thematic Snoopy works of contemporary Chinese artists with the original works of Charles M. Schulz, presenting brand-new American pop comics with Chinese elements like floating clouds, bold brushes, which is also a practice of transforming traditional Chinese art into modern that breaches the assumed stillness of ethnic art. I believe with such artistic exploration constantly going on, art discourses can be built in different cultural contexts and contribute to the ‘real’ contemporary art.

Reference

Jean-Hubert Martin. (1989). Magiciens de la Terre.

Chéri Samba. (1997). Quel Avenir pour notre art. PowerPoint Class 9 Slide 20,21

James Clifford. (2008). The others: Beyond the ‘salvage’ paradigm. p. 73.

Grade: A

Coherent and well-structured text.

Good understanding of theoretical concepts.

Comprehensive analysis of Chéri Samba’s work.

Interesting example on the conclusion.

Xianyang Hu

Oct. 30th, 2020

The Impact of Cyborgs on Social Reality

[In her seminal essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1984), Donna Haraway made a radical claim about the potentiality of cyborgs, “... a cybernetic organism, a hybrid machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creative of fiction. Social reality is lived relations, our most important political construction, a world changing fiction.” (p.1). In your own words, please explain Haraway’s claims about how a cyborg transforms what counts as “human” and moreover, what how it alters what counts as “women’s experience.” Through a close analysis of Poppy’s “I am Empowered,” please assess whether Haraway’s claims still hold true.

Here is the link to the work:

https://poppy.fandom.com/wiki/I_Am_Empowered?file=I_Am_Empowered

To conclude, what are the potentials and constraints presented by contemporary cyborgs?]

With the emergence of cyborgs in the 1980s, concepts like “human” and “women’s experience” are subjected to drastic change according to A Cyborg Manifesto (Donna Haraway, 1984). Cyborg, which has infinite possibilities due to its hybridity nature, signifies a transgression of binary boundaries and a transcendence of social realities. In this account, the concept "human" transforms from a religious myth standing for a pursuit for unity to a pivot connecting the non-genesis past and the endless future (p. 2) where multiple fields constantly intersect and generate infinite extensions (e.g. human-machine, human-animal, human-nature, etc.), which is no longer a closed loop but an open term. Women have been confined at home in the 1960s and divided into different groups in the later feminist movement (white women, black women, etc). The new term cyborg gives a new direction,

upon which Haraway places the hope of breaking the binary dominance framework and identity politics, forming new alliances, and heading to a post-gender world. In this process, “women’s experience” is liberated and upgraded for the fluidity of cyborgs blurs the past identity of women and entitles them with a much wider range of professions, entertainments, etc.

In *I am Empowered* (Poppy, 2018), Donna Haraway’s “human” transformation argument holds true while “women’s experience” seems to not. Certain characteristics denote that part of the lady is not traditionally “human” but cyborg-like: the meditating background music, her nonchalant, emotionless voice and facial expression, the ossified movement of stomping (with computer-synthesized sound effects) and posing with her arms that fits people's impression of robots. Besides, the repeated sentence “I feel empowered when I create high-quality content” suggests a shift in people’s interaction through virtuality in terms of what changes their motivation (i.e. likes, subscription, comments, etc.). All the above features comply with Haraway’s claim of the cyborg age—humans overcome their physical limits by replicating every part of themselves through a computer system and a whole new network of communication is constructed where everything functions in a relationship with others. However, against Haraway’s envision of “women’s experience”, this work by Poppy does not exert to portrait a post-gender world but instead strengthens a specific public image of women. The lady says, “What do you want from me?”, sparking a contemplation of the power relationship between the audience and creator and the current consumption of women images on the Internet—she loses agency when asking the question and in the delicate costumes becomes a branding of certain lifestyles. Also, the exclusion of the colored women in this work might allude to the privilege of white women in the virtual world. In this artwork by Poppy, the latent dominance of creators and capital and the division of groups within

women go against Haraway's utopian picture of a women-emancipated and boundaryless world.

To conclude, the potentials of contemporary cyborgs lie in the fluidity in circulating the information through which multiple networks can be built, allowing for a space where academic discourses can more easily be built, multiple cultures coexist and interact, and people can display their multiple identities with unprecedented freedom. For instance, Bilibili, the current most popular video streaming website in China, creates detailed sections of different content, especially for sub-cultures like Japanese animation, and develops a unique interaction function for the audience to receive feedback from other audience while watching videos, serving as a platform where creators show their incredible talent and with the audience get involved as a massive community. Entertain forms like Bilibili have reached an unparalleled level in connecting people that wouldn't be possible if were not for the contemporary cyborg form. However, for a lack of effective guidance, the constraints are also getting clear—an increasing division between different groups, the consolidation of certain stereotypes as is indicated by the video of Poppy and some other female icons in the Japanese animation—part of the Internet ecosystem is deteriorating, slowly sliding in an extreme direction and being torn apart, for which the free spreading of information ironically serves as a catalyst as well. That is what we need to caution about.

Reference

Donna Haraway. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto.

Poppy. (2018). I am Empowered.

Xianyang Hu

Nov. 6th, 2020

The Multi-functional Global City and the Issues alongside

[In “The Global City: Introducing A Concept” Saskia Sassen writes, “Global cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms. These localized forms are, in good part, what globalization is about. Recovering place means recovering the multiplicity of presences in this landscape. The large city of today has emerged as a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations—political, economic, "cultural," subjective. It is one of the nexi where the formation of new claims, by both the powerful and the disadvantaged, materializes and assumes concrete form.” In your own words, please explain the central problematic that Saskia Sassen elaborates in this passage. Then, by comparing and contrasting these two works through a close visual analysis, please state how these artists articulate the main issues connected with Global Cities in specific ways. In this exercise please connect your claims to what you see (ie, the art work); tease out the conceptual/abstract arguments in relation to the work (ask: Where? How? What?) while being mindful of its contingent conditions. In your conclusion, please reflect on what is gained and what is lost in a Global City.]

According to Saskia Sassen, with the development of globalization that induces an increasing need for digital infrastructure and the deregulation in certain fields, global cities start to serve as basic units where the process of globalization is carried on by their multiple functions covering politics, economy, and culture, etc. Besides, these basic units of global cities are not homogeneous but tend to include a highly local ground of culture by which globalization is

embodied differently and largely facilitated. Moreover, in the operation of global cities, new power relationships are constructed, triggering issues that include the imbalanced distribution of city resources and the inequality between the privileged and the marginalized.

Through a comparison of Tompkins Square Crawl by William Pope L and Upward Mobility by Alex Villar, the long-rooted racial inequality stands out the most as a symbol of the political issue encountered by most global cities. Pope L, a black artist dressed in suits, crawls on a rough road with a yellow flower in his hand, quite strenuously which can be told from his facial expression. He seems to be forced to do so if the audience does not regard him as a performer but as one of the poor colored people on the street whom he tries to represent, with a metaphor of crawling that suggests a life condition of barely getting by. Nevertheless, Villar is dressed in casual clothing and freely parkouring around the city, completely reigning the agency of himself as if calling for replication among the people similar to him, usually referred to as the white middle class, to gain their part of the power of the city. This stark contrast indicates the sustaining political inequality between the white and the colored in global cities with a great diversity of races, that the white people are entitled to defend their individuality against the authority while the colored people are still struggling for a living and deprived of their voices to reclaim their deserved rights. Thus, the yellow flower in Pope L's hand symbolizes hope for the bridging of the social gap between different races and the correction of such inequality in the near future.

Furthermore, the political racial inequality to an extent leads to a second issue of the global city—the unparallel economic status and mobility between different classes. Body lying on the ground and proceeding horizontally at a slow speed, Pope L alludes to a stagnation of the

bottom class people whom he is voicing for. Lacking necessary support from the city, the people in the bottom class can hardly compete against others due to their inferiority in education and race, thus unjustly denied the opportunity to elevate their economic status through hard work. On the contrary, what Villar performed is basically an ascendance over the various buildings, an attempt to claim his rights over these properties, and a vertical displacement that potentially embodies sufficient mobility among the middle class. The middle class, however, enjoys a much larger economic mobility because cities value their labor owing to their specialization in certain fields. In a way, the juxtaposition of the two behavior arts illustrates an imbalanced distribution of city resources that couldn't effectively reach out to those who are in real need and concretes the economic barrier between different classes.

Finally, the places where these two artworks happen both represent a fragment of the global city—urban and suburban. In Pope L's work, he crawls on a dirty suburban road parked with a row of cheap cars near which situates a complex of low-cost apartments, probably where poor people gather to live. Such background demonstrates the unsatisfying living conditions of certain peripheral regions in a global city, mostly suburban areas where crime ramps and basic public service absents. However, Villar does most of his performance in the urban area where buildings are transcendent, regularly managed, and owned by the wealthy or the government. A comparison of the two background reveals the current situation that many global cities still need to improve the administration in the past overlooked areas and provide a more comprehensive public service.

To conclude, the rise of global city brings both benefits and losses. On the one hand, global cities integrate almost all the functions essential to the operation of our contemporary society, propelling the flow of the capital, communication on a global scale, and the developments in technology. For instance, Shanghai is one of the most important hinges that sustains the financial field in China, for it holds a lot of banks that serve as the bridge between China and the global capital, hence producing enormous economic developments. On the other, the loss of traditional communities in global cities cannot be neglected as well. Under the framework dictated by capital, people are more and more divided focusing on the job that the city imposes on them and their agency being torn apart, as is manifested by Pope L's artwork. Now it is much more difficult for the citizens of global cities to have strong social bonds as they did in the past when there weren't as many office booths and concrete buildings.

Reference

Saskia Sassen. The Global City: Introducing a Concept. (2005). Brown Journal of World Affairs.

William Pope L. Tompkins Square Crawl. (1991). Performance

Alex Villar. Upward Mobility. (2012). Performance. 3 minutes, 4 seconds.

<https://vimeo.com/47111351>



Grade: A. Very good work: clear, neat, eloquent.

Xianyang Hu

Nov. 13th, 2020

The Social Interstice in Contemporary World

[In his essay “Relational Aesthetics,” Nicolas Bourriaud writes, “... the artwork represents, in my view, a social interstice. The term interstice was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that escaped the framework of the capitalist economy: barter, selling at a loss, autarkic forms of production, and so on. An interstice is a space in social relations which, although it fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that prevail within the system. Exhibitions of contemporary art occupy precisely the same position within the field of the trade in representations. They create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the “zones of communication” that are forced upon us...”

In your own words, please explain the passage above and, specifically, what Nicolas Bourriaud means when he categorizes an artwork as a ‘social interstice.’

Then, by comparing and contrasting these two works through a close visual analysis, please elaborate what model of “human intercourse” they produce and how it may be both different from or in keeping with the “zones of communication that are forced upon us”.

Finally, do you think that art spaces might create “free spaces” and “periods of time” that stand in contrast to the dominant models? Why or why not?]

In Relational Aesthetics, Nicolas Bourriaud refers to a representation of contemporary artworks as “a social interstice” (3), the word “interstice” interpreted by Karl Marx as trading activities independent from the capitalist market framework in which everything is

profit-oriented. According to Bourriaud, interstice produces space harboring social relations functioning in a way that strays from the dominant interactions within the society, though it is itself part of the society. He takes the exhibition as an instance of such interstice, which immerses their audience in a place where space, time, and human interrelationship differentiates from in the mundane ordinary life and overcomes the restrictions of communication imposed by the system on people. This is achieved through certain randomness and purposelessness of that space.

This concept of “interstice” can be further illustrated by a comparison of artworks from two artists, Untitled (free/still) (1992/1995/2007/2011) by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Person remunerated for a period of 360 consecutive hours (2000) by Santiago Sierra. To begin with, the two works share a similarity dealing with the inter-human relationship by involving people as active participants. However, the intercourse between people which the two artists explore varies greatly. Tiravanija creates a space that houses daily utensils like tables, chairs, and refrigerator and cooks Thai curry to serve the visitors in need, allowing the audience from diverse backgrounds who have probably first met each other but share a common interest in arts to sit down, dine, and talk, a unique scene that barely happens in daily life. Whenever they initiate a conversation that wouldn’t have happened without the setting of the artwork and the existence of the artist, the audience is contributing to the experiment of a new approach of intercourse that transcends the modern mode of separation and explores a new three-dimensional ‘artist-object-viewer’ affiliation. Moreover, it is the idleness inside this work that essentially distinguishes it from “zones of communication that are forced upon us” (Bourriaud) since motivation is blurred and things are no longer predictable like what occurs in the everyday life.

In contrast, the intercourse presented by Sierra is mostly limited between the performer and the artist, invisible from the artwork itself. The viewers, however, seem to not play an as engaging role as they do in Tiravanija's artwork—the boundary between viewers still exists just like how they appreciate conventional paintings. Sierra pays the black performer a wage of 10 dollars per hour, which is much higher than the minimum wage in New York City at that time, to trap him 360 consecutive hours behind the brick wall. Though getting a decent salary, the black man in the performance completely loses his dignity and agency, whose sacrifice ironically trades enormous economic profits and fame for the artist. With the exploitation of the performer, Sierra alludes to the capitalist framework in which the bottom class suffer from poor living conditions and all sorts of exploitation. As opposed to Tiravanija's work that constructs voluntary engaging experience at the peripheral of the system, the interaction negotiated in Serra's work is mainly based on monetary value and hence resembles the capitalist world's central reality. As a result, this work doesn't challenge the forced zones of communication by proposing a new one—it's just a replication of the prevalent mode.

Based on my own experience, art spaces like museums and exhibitions are absolutely capable of creating “free spaces” and “periods of time” away from the dominant models as what Bourriaud envisaged 20 years ago. In relational art spaces, aim, goal, and even intention are dissolved—viewers don't have to worry about how much money they can make out of this period of time but are left with their full sensoria that empower them to perceive the world around and actively engage within. Last Sunday I went to the Power Station of Art in Shanghai and gained an incredible experience. The audience is extremely diverse. People of different ages produces different paces, or rhythms, in the display halls—old couples walk slowly holding the arms of each other; youngsters in their prime age want to read and record

every moment in their phones; a lively group of first-grade students occasionally burst out into laughs seeing the artwork with a strange hybrid of legend animals and modern weapons. In the exhibition “The Moving Room” by Enli Zhang, the audience can walk freely through the colorful ‘rooms’ delicately designed and engage by making whatever poses they would like and I could hear the murmured discussions of others when standing in front of the same work. I also took some awesome pictures of the crowd combined with the tints of nature on the open platform, a place similar to a dancing floor. All these things in that warm autumn afternoon form a fantastic space that saves me out of the daily model of taking classes and renders me a moment of freedom.

Reference

Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. (1998). Excerpts

Rirkrit Tiravanija. *Untitled*. (1992/1995/1992/1995/2007/2011).

Santiago Sierra. *Person remunerated for a period of 360 consecutive hours*. (2000). Installation view.

P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center; New York.

Rirkrit Tiravanija (b. 1961, buenos aires, argentina). *untitled 1992/1995 (free/still)*.

1992/1995/2007/2011- Refrigerator, table, chairs, wood, drywall, food and other materials.

Dimensions variable.



Grade: A/ A-: Very good paper. Interesting. Just one thing: more (analytical) description of the works themselves would have been necessary. It's a pity that you didn't incorporate your photos into the paper! It would have been an interesting contribution

Xianyang Hu

Nov. 20th, 2020

The Space Created by Artworks and the Role of Spectators' Subjectivity

[According to Irit Rogoff, “Space, the production of another dimension of inhabiting location through subjectivity and representation. The connection between discourses- on geography and those on space is the understanding that power produces a space which then gets materialized as place.” In your own words, please explain the quoted passage above and elaborate on how Irit Rogoff conceptualizes the production of space? Then, by comparing and contrasting the images by Adrian Paci and Richard Mosse, please discuss how “home” is produced as a particular type of space – or experience of space -- in these two works. Pay close attention to the details (materials, media, processes and techniques) as you consider the similarities and differences in these works but make sure to also relate your description to conceptual claims. Finally, please reflect on what kind of spectator each one of these works produce and what you may be bringing to the interpretation of these two works as an active spectator.]

In Terra Infirma, Irit Rogoff states that space is produced as a concept, or a narrative, based upon social relations which consist of “subjectivity” and “representation”. Subjectivity refers to an inevitable influence of the subjective’s entity (including identity, ideology, etc.) when interacting with space. Representation is often an apparatus that conveys a partial facade of the space through media, some of which are expressive artworks like images. Moreover, such space elicits a series of discourses that construct the epistemology of geography, whose study is considered by Rogoff that it should not confine itself in a physical site but extend to the space created within that area. Then, according to Rogoff, space will get concretized into

reality by the ones possessing the power, eventually forming the "place" that is physically visible.

In the artwork Home to Go by Adrian Paci and Idomeni Camp by Richard Mosse, the space created by each share a similarity in alluding to the space of "home" but varies in its specific meanings and techniques. Paci poses the sculpture man to carry a wooden part of the house on his back while Mosse uses a military-like camera to portrait a heat map of a campsite where refugees gather to live in tents. To begin with, though the two works deal with different subjects, one with an inorganic statue made up of cheap marble dust and the other with real human beings, the subjects they depict are in a common predicament—they are both denied the kind of normal life and living a life straying like a straw. In Paci's work, the wooden component of the house stands for a broken "home", probably the only piece of the past house that remains, and it causes great burden to the man, judged from his bending posture and arms closely against his body as if his power is fading away. Besides, Paci's symbol for home, the wooden part, merely functions as a signifier, or a mark, of the man's history that can't be erased and thus provides no material support compared to the tents of the refugees. In other words, there is an absence of actual "home" in Paci's work, which is substituted by the conceptual space of "homeless" created by the representation of the vagrant man in fatigue with his broken and constant-flowing "home". In contrast, Mosse presents a picture of refugees living in tents—their actual provisional home that provides temporary shelter for them. This is communicated to the viewer through the whiteness of those human figures which indicates the warmth of their body temperature, maybe even the warmth of family bonds that are shown through the scattered small groups of people on the map. Nevertheless, this "home" is to some extent also captivity for the refugees that holds them in a state of change and vulnerable to the outside world—the fragility of "home" is

conveyed in both two artworks, given the wooden piece of house and the crude tents. As opposed to Paci's sculpture, Mosse allows that the concept of "home" doesn't simply remain a symbolization but a "testimony to the moment" (recitation), that is, materialized as an image of reality and then circulated to the audience. Employing the same way that Paci connects the sculpture man to the man's "home" via physical juxtaposition and representation, Mosse also plays with the subjectivity of his targets: a unique link between their refugee identity and the camp of tents suggests that though they are the main participants of this space of artwork, they are excluded from the broader space as the peripheral, which reveals a conflict of dependency and dis-belonging to their current "home".

The space produced by the artwork enlarges itself by incorporating the subjectivity of viewers and invites them to project their own identity and history onto the work. For instance, when seeing the sculpture of Paci in the white cube, viewers are possible to link the figure of the man in front of them to their unique memories of having left their original home but still carrying a mark of that past and struggling with the new environment. Each particular memory varies, leading to different perceptions and interpretations of the work. Different spectators may suffer, sympathize, or pray, any reaction contributing to the construction of the space. So, in a way, spectators are also produced by the artworks, as part of the space. In the work of Mosse, viewers that are not refugees might still resonate with this image since it may occur to them the act of their spectating resembles the surveillance by those heat cameras. Thus, they may pity, make good wishes, or criticize in front of this image. Even though it is the refugees that are spied on, the audience is capable of taking their part in the work through an interaction of the space created by this artwork.

To me, Paci's work reminds me of my identity as an international student and I can see myself imaginatively in this work. Like this man on his way to nowhere I know, I will be going to the United States, a place with a culture that is alien to me and my family, to further my future college life, carrying my mother language of Chinese, a dialect of the small town where my parents grew up, and a mindset that is cultivated completely through the local Chinese educational system. And I anticipate unknown shocks, those blank space in the surroundings, ready to combat it with carefulness, body poised like him to defend the danger. When I watch Mosse's work, I can't help connecting the use of this heat-capturing camera to the omnipresent surveillance on individuals in contemporary society that holds every one of us in control. For example, seconds after I search for something using the browser, targeted-advertisement has been sent to my online-shopping app. I am no different from the refugees in the picture—nothing of us can get away from that "mega-camera" made of advanced technology. My unique spectatorship leaves me with the impression that we are currently in a transparent world where every one of us is a "refugee".

Reference

Adrian Paci. *Home to Go*. (2001). plaster, marble dust, wood, tiles, and rope.

Richard Mosse. *Idomeni Camp*. (2016). Greece (Heat Maps Series).



Grade: A

Very good paper, as usual. Interesting, inquiring, trying to reflect on the central theoretical problem. The photographs of the previous paper are beautiful. Thanks for including them!

You had left us with the intrigue.

Here are pictures I took at the Power Station of Art, making up for my last assignment:)





Xianyang Hu

Nov. 27th, 2020

Immaterial Workers in Our Age

[“...The time clock for the immaterial worker is irrelevant because they work continually. And they work on what is most expected of them: the constant flow of ideas.... Their level of production is gauged by the ongoing reiteration of presence. The immaterial worker should know that they are part of a workforce in continual flux, especially geographically, often without a defined work site or city or an actual work community.... Immaterial workers are just alienated strangers connected by digital technologies until they make it otherwise... We all want to believe that we are free from the products of capital. Yet the instability of the immaterial worker’s presence, of their daily relation to time, makes the necessity for material things crucial to the ownership and control of the everyday.”

--The Bureau for Open Culture. A Manual for the Immaterial Worker: The Way We Work Now, pp. 1-2

In your own words, please explain the quoted passage and describe the critical shifts from a Fordist to Post-Fordist model. Then, by comparing and contrasting Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ Touch Sanitation with the Time/Bank project, please discuss how various forms of labor, value, community are made visible and how they relate to the issues raised in the quoted passage above. Pay close attention to the details (materials, media, site, discursive frameworks, processes and techniques) as you consider the similarities and differences in these works but make sure to also relate your description to conceptual claims. Finally, please state what you think are the benefits and drawbacks of immaterial labor – Is it a productive model for the future?]

In A Manual for the Immortal Worker, the transformation from material workers to immaterial workers can be understood based on the shift from Fordist to Post-Fordist model in which the symbolic value of a good is conceived equally important or even more important than its use value. As a result, the eight-hour time clock no longer governs the labor time and its place is taken by a continual flow of work time that spans into the personal life, at the same time affording much freedom in deciding work location and colleagues. Also, this change couldn't be possible without the development of digital technology. Immortal workers, unlike the conventional industrialization-period worker, do not process raw commodities but produce ideas, which create a corresponding series of experiences to be consumed by the public. However, despite seemingly rid of the physical constraints, immaterial workers are subject to a larger precarity due to the unstable demand in the market, hence the control imposed by capital on them is actually tightened.

A comparison of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Touch Sanitation Performance with the Time/Bank project helps to illustrate the above concepts. Ukeles went to the districts of the New York Department of Sanitation to shake hands with those workers willing to accept her gesture. The workers she encountered, whose job doesn't require much expertise and paid at an average low rate, usually will not be seen, or at least barely noticed, in the city. However, their work remains crucial to the functioning of this global city. So, what Ukeles does is to bring this long-neglected community onto the stage. The act of shaking hands with every one of them not only directly expresses the acknowledgment of their contribution to the system but also shows her intention to treat them on an equal stance. Nevertheless, the goodwill of presenting equality in artworks often alludes to the opposite side of the existing prevalent inequality—the sanitation workers have always belonged to the low-income class, lacked social recognition, and their jobs can be easily replaced due to its low requirement of

expertise, precarious, in other words. Relating this to the fact that they work according to a fixed schedule (time clock), it is obvious that Ukeles negotiates the two different identities in her performance—the sanitation workers as material workers and herself as an immaterial worker. She breaks the division of that two classes and enters the territory of material workers like a foreigner, producing some invaluable interactions, a unique experience for herself, and also artwork to be circulated. What's more, the confrontation of distinct subjectivity reveals both similarities and differences of material workers and immaterial workers, such as, they are both contingent and vulnerable to change. But, most prominently, they are perceived far different by the public—the social status of a colored sanitation worker can be told honestly not comparable to that of a female artist, as is also suggested by the work itself because Ukeles as the artist still reserves larger agency and the power to initiate such a gesture in this performance, which probably wouldn't work if the two roles are reversed. In other words, Ukeles' performance exposes a current phenomenon that immaterial workers tend to enjoy higher social recognition than material workers.

In the organization of the work, Ukeles constructs a performance which links one to many, that is, her subjectivity to those of the sanitation workers, while the Time/Bank project adopts a form that abandons the “one” and operates on an actual equal stance of collaboration since every participant is an immaterial worker. Time/Bank project functions under the principle that people exchange their skills and time directly—participants perform micro-gesture tasks for others and convert them into "hour notes" which can later be used to request services from other individuals. This constructs a bartering framework that is outside the capitalist system because it is no longer mediated by money, which is a feature shared by Ukeles' work as well whose motivation involves goodwill and the ambition to express but excludes money. Thus, in the social context that the grip of the capital on immaterial workers strengthens,

Time/Bank project serves as a resistor and challenger to the dominant system by providing an alternative approach. Besides, the two artworks share a similarity in experimenting with the reciprocity among people—one conveys gratitude for the working class and the other encourages inter-skill exchange. What's more, Time/Bank project dips into some other features of immaterial workers. Starting with its representation at Documenta 13, it as a concept is concretized by a house which is covered with marking notes that advertise different offers from its participants. The symbol of the house insinuates the increasingly significant role of "home" in the contemporary economy which has become a main working place for the majority of immaterial workers. In addition, the patch-like colorful notes allude to a certain casualness and fragmentation in the life of immaterial workers—their labor time is distributed between daily nuances so that it requires constant notification like those sticky notes to remind them of what the next task is. Furthermore, the content of those notes, for instance, one of which named stars project calls for help from someone on the other side of the world to show the star there as a complementary image, suggests the activities and ideas that the participants produce as immaterial workers usually aren't basic-need leveled but elevated to the hobby level and very discursive, satisfying the increasing need generated by the experience economy.

The benefits of the immaterial labor model are prominent—it allows a maximized flexibility that accustoms to every individual's unique rhythm of life, which means as long as the task is finished people don't have to sit through the eight-hour time clock but can have free time for their hobbies or, more broadly, self-actualization. The drawbacks, however, are also evident—it's tough for people to prevent that bulk of free time from the invasion of capital. Since the market operates in a way that constantly improves its efficiency, more complicated work will get allocated, and eventually people will live in an omnipresent flow of work. I

think overall the immaterial labor is going to be a productive model in the future given that its benefits are unreplaceable and shortcomings can be overcome through efforts. For example, the thriving of individual channels on the Internet nowadays implies the model to be more and more effective in new-born industries. Thanks to the economic sustainability of this profession, those video producers can move to anywhere conducive to the content making, their creativity thus largely liberated. Though their life is fused with the work, they aren't forced to turn in the work to a specific deadline, which is jokingly referred to by their viewers as "update delaying". This means the predicament of having to work continuously can be solved by enough income paid to a single circle of workload. Then the immaterial workers would have the freedom to choose to stop for a rest. As digital technology develops to facilitate circulation, it's plausible to believe the demand for the content produced by immaterial workers will enlarge, and as the income level elevates eventually leads to the emancipation of the self from work.

Grade: A

Excellent paper. Well organized, fluent and clear enunciation, with conceptual precision and very good development and postulation of ideas.

Reference

A Manual for the Immaterial Worker: The Way We Work Now. 2011. The Bureau for Open Culture.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles. *Touch Sanitation Performance.* 1979-80. New York City.

Anton Vidokle and Julieta Aranda. *Time/Bank.* 2012. Documenta13, Kassel.



Xianyang Hu

Dec. 4th, 2020

The Archival Arts in Contemporary World

[“The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense; they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing. Archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces...these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.” Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 5. In your own words, please describe Hal Foster’s definition of the Archive. Then, by comparing and contrasting Xaviera Simmons’ Sundown Series (no. 1), 2018, with Dana Schutz’s Open Casket, 2016, please discuss how each work produces an archive. What might be “the incomplete projects” they are bringing to the present and what new “points of departure” might they be trying to create in their respective works? Pay close attention to the details (materials, media, site, discursive frameworks, processes and techniques) as you consider the similarities and differences in these works but make sure to also relate your description to conceptual claims. Finally, please elaborate on how you relate (artistic) archives to specific formations of power. Do you think, for example, that all artists should be able to produce every kind of archive or should some archival art only be created by specific artists?]

In *An Archival Impulse*, Hal Foster defines “archive” as a discursive place that stores not only physical concretizations of history but also a system of knowledge. The knowledge produced by the archive is not factual or complete but indeterminant and offers infinite

interpretations. Such an archive provides the open soil that nurtures creativity and always expects new affiliations to be made. Archival arts refer to the past elements in those archives, many of which are fragmentary and minor pieces, and construct artworks that create new archives as a demonstration of the present or future.

The two artworks, Dana Schutz's Open Casket and Xaviera Simmons's Sundown Series (no. 1), share a similarity in negotiating the history and identity of American black people. In Sundown Series (no. 1), Xaviera Simmons holds a picture that depicts a scene of black people picking cotton, citing the American slavery history in the late 18th and early 19th century. Standing in front of a botanical wallpaper that used to signify a wealthy socio-economic status, she points to a class of white people who exploited black people as plantation workforces in the South. So, by juxtaposing the background and photograph in her hand, Simmons looks into the archive of American slavery history, represents the collision between two different subjectivities, the white and the black, and brings the relationship of these two identities into the present consideration. Moreover, she is dressed in what is called "African prints", which are not produced in Africa but Indonesia, the past colony of Netherlands, exported to the Netherlands, and circulated into the world market. Thus, the dress serves as a symbol for the past system that organized the world, a market based on the exploitation of non-western people in the Colonialism Era. The dress pattern also largely caters to the stereotypical Western impression of African culture, by which Simmons possibly reveals that under the Western narrative, African culture has been deprived of its contexts and degraded into simple, exotic, visual signs. Through this work, she challenges that unjust world order and the Western artistic narrative as a black artist. Besides, Simmons places a device called View-Master above her eyes, which returns a gaze to the spectators and signifies a shift of the spectatorship at the historical course represented in this work—a shift

from the white supremacy to the contemporary equal rights perspective. By condensing multiple historical fragments of the black oppression into her work, Simmons constructs an archive that records the inequality suffered by the black community, which brings this deep-rooted inequality into visibility, protests against the injustice, and calls for deeper reflection. In 2020, unfortunately, the murder of the black man George Floyd by the police force creates a new affiliation of the archive which Simmons builds in Sundown Series.

Unlike Simmons, Schutz focuses on a single historical event in her work and expresses her thoughts in a different artistic form—via oil painting, compared to the color print adopted by Simmons. The most prominent difference between these two works, nevertheless, are the identities of their artists—Simmons is a black woman, while Schutz is a white woman, and they both deal with the African American's archive. Although the painting seems abstract, its name specifies the scene it portrays—a 14-year-old black boy Emmett was brutally lynched in Mississippi by a white family for a false accusation, and his tortured body was shown by his mother at the funeral in an open casket to inform the America of the pain felt by African Americans. On the left side of the painting, Schutz employs an impasto to delineate the distorted face of the boy, the visual impact thus enhanced to remind the spectators of that bloody murder which happened when the Jim Crow Laws still in effect. In contrast, the painting's right side utilizes thin paint and stresses the clear division of the color black and white. Despite it being a representation of the casket, to some extent, it also somehow insinuates the wide gap and extreme inequality between the black people and white people at that time—the white can mutilate a black person and escape punishment, a period also mentioned by Simmons in her work when “sundown” towns as a lethal threat to black lives prevailed in the US. Compared to Simmons, who will not be doubted the validity to create upon the black people history, Schutz's motivation to create this artwork based on Emmett's

death is under fierce debate because of her race—some black artists strongly oppose this painting with the opinion that white artists should not create upon the black suffering. According to Schutz, however, she is connected to this incident because her role as a mother connects her to the pain felt by Emmett's mother. The archive Schutz produces varies from the one created by Simmons because of the distinction in their identities—not only does it condemn the systematic violence against African Americans represented by Emmett's death, but it also expresses an act of reflection from the white's perspective and a strong sense of empathy that comes from her motherhood.

The right to access and construct artistic archives is an explicit indicator of the formation of power. Those who own the power usually speak for whom to be inside the archive and deny the unqualified out of the system. This power is not displayed through law force or any other but the public voice. For example, around Schutz's Open Casket, the black artists can ask the painting to be removed (though the painting eventually remained), while there is little for Schutz except for defending her stance since the archive of black sufferings has its power in the black community. What's more, a shift in the power relationship can be shown from almost no artworks that portrait the injustice toward the black community in the 19th century to more and more works like the Sundown Series by Xaviera Simmons entering the discourse of arts and forming archives. I believe artists should have the right to produce archival arts no matter if they are considered to be granted access to this archive. First, it is impossible to set up a censorship system that determines each artist's access to each archive because no archive is independent of the relation to another. If white artists are not allowed to access the archive of black pain in the American slavery history, would they be allowed to discuss the white plantation owners at that time, and if the answer is yes, how could they depict only half of the history without the other half? The artistic archives are intertwined and thus, to some extent,

undividable. Besides, if there were certain archives that exclude "other" artists, such otherness would unavoidably be amplified, and the division between different groups will enlarge, which will be detrimental to society by putting identity above anything else. So, every archive should be open to all artists, which guards the freedom of artistic creation and facilitates the communication of different groups of artists. What artists should do is just remain respectful to every archive they refer to.

Grade: A.

Excellent exposition of the ideas, the analysis and the interpretation of the works and of the theoretical question posed and the problems that arise from the way in which these archives would be constituted. The ideas are very clear and well argued. BRAVO !

Reference

Hal Foster. An Archival Impulse. 2004. pp.3-22. Copyright@ MIT Press.

Xaviera Simmons. Sundown (No. 1). 2018. Chromogenic color print. 114.3 x 114.3 cm.

Dana Schutz. Open Casket. 2016. Oil on canvas. 99 cm × 130 cm.



Xianyang Hu

Dec. 15th, 2020

Globalization, Modernity, and Identity

Question 1: According to John Tomlinson, “Globalization is really the globalization of modernity and modernity is the harbinger of identity... “What we call ‘identity’ may not be a universal but just one, particular modern way of socially organizing” (p.271-2). If modernity is the “abstraction of social and cultural practices from contexts of local particularity and their institutionalization and regulation across time and space,” (p. 272) then globalization “distributes the institutional features of modernity across all cultures.” (p. 273)

Please explain the meaning of this claim in your own words. Make sure to focus on this quote and its key propositions and not refer to Tomlinson’s entire essay.

Max length: 250 words

Question 2: By comparing and contrasting these two artworks, please analyze what model of ‘identity’ is given form in Claude Monet’s painting Boulevard des Capucines 1873, and how it is transformed in Kader Attia’s installation, Ghost (2006-2007) and Untitled (Mural), 2006.

Make sure to connect your argument to a close analysis of the materials, technique, composition of these artworks.

Max length: 500 words

Question 3: How is the friction between these two models of identity – modern and global – negotiated in the following “institutions of contemporary art”? Specifically, how do they make evident the negotiation of the ‘national.’ You can refer to Tomlinson and the course powerpoints for further grounding.

The Guggenheim Bilbao (125 words)

Documenta 14 (2017) (125 words)

Max length: 250 words

Question 4: Does Xu Zhen's Poseidon – Eternity, 2017, exemplify Tomlinson's claim about modernity and globalization? Why or why not?

Max length: 250 words

In The Global Transformation Readers, John Tomlinson argues that the spread of modernity across the globe is what is known as globalization. That modernity, which originates from western Europe and later merges with American culture, is a set of social norms that have been consolidated as consensus over time under the past world order. These norms regulate individuals' ways of thinking as well as behaviors, which can be reflected in the institutions of the modern society built upon them, including administration, education, and law system, etc. Also, Tomlinson points out that identity is a central issue among the wide field covered by modernity. Triggered by the arrival of modernity, the drastic social change in material and ideology results in a new identity being constructed. The identity Tomlinson refers to is a specific one with an exact origin, just like modernity, which is essentially a western way, or, more specifically, a French way of perceiving the relations between the self and others. Modernism is specifically French / modernity was a process that also took place elsewhere, for example, in England. Furthermore, the France-based identity, the modernity, and the social organizations as the concretization of them are branded to the rest of the world and disseminated as "universal," even though separate modernity models have been recently discovered in non-western regions.

In Boulevard des Capucines, Claude Monet portrays a picture of Paris people (Parisians) walking on the boulevard in 1873. This scene distinguishes Paris from its contemporaries and suggests Paris as a pioneer in the construction of modern cities, which leads to a new model of modern identity being formed. Monet utilizes similar smudges of paint to stage the figures of Paris people (Parisians), which generates a unity in visuality and stresses the existence of a crowd. The anonymous crowd points to one feature of modern identity—to live with others, or, in short, to be secular. To live with others doesn't necessarily mean being secular – the Republican ideal in France draws a firm line between religion (private) and secular citizenship (public). Members of the modern society inextricably share some similar living styles, in this picture, for instance, commuting via wagons carriages or walking. However, the multi-scaled particularity is another part of the modern identity negotiated. Judged from the view of Monet while painting, he possibly looks down at the boulevard from a balcony. The difference in position differentiates him from the crowd in this picture—he is physically outside the crowd, yet in some way connected to them through spectatorship. Thus, Monet's being at that moment is unique, and so are the ones' inside the crowd and other spectators—the city dwellers head toward different directions in the picture, and the spectators like us generate different experiences while watching the work. Also, the nature-human relationship is altered, as it can be inferred from the few trees in the middle of the boulevard. Nature starts to be treated as mere ornamentations of human society—alienation from nature acts as another feature of the modern identity.

Dealing with a theme of the city just like Monet, Kader Attia combines a mural of the city and an installation of aluminum human figures in his work Ghost. Positioning the figures in

front of the mural, Attia creates visual seclusion of the people from the city, which is significantly different from Monet's setup. Besides, Attia poses these figures to be bowing toward the city, suggesting a power relationship where the city gains complete dominance. So, this represented group of people is no longer the protagonist, as those in Monet's work, but becomes the periphery relative to the city—they are affiliated with the city through the salutation but can't really benefit from it due to their detachment from the city, which might allude to the minority's living state in the suburban today. Moreover, the aluminum figures seem as mere replications of each other, with hollow space at the place of their heads, which insinuates a homogeneity of identity, in contrast to the contingent identity presented by Monet. The difference between individuals has been erased and the visual similarity takes over, by which Attia may point to a social trend where modern identity is losing its fragmentary nature and violently separated as mere signs—the drawbacks of identity politics, for example. In addition, the complete absence of nature in this work paired with the mono-colored mural and figures may suggest modern citizens' further deviation from nature and humdrum urban life.

The Guggenheim Bilbao's design, coming from the concept of the Guggenheim in the US, is essentially a transplant of the modernity that begins in the West, revealed by its displayed mega exhibitions revolving around a western canon. Initially, this global identity of Guggenheim Bilbao tried to reject local participation and cultural roots, but it was resisted by national forces that are products of modern identity in the Basque region—nationalists even tried to bomb the statue nearby. The sharp conflicts between these two identities are gradually reconciled as Guggenheim Bilbao starts to accept local artists. As is suggested by the

museum building that adjusts to the surrounding environment, the fusion of its modern national identity and global identity constructs the global image of Guggenheim Bilbao.

Documenta 14 has its exhibition location split into two—one in Kassel and another in Athens. Documenta is a large-scale exhibition that emerges to challenge the traditional model of museums. And Documenta 14 further breaks the norm that exhibitions usually are held in a single place. Pursuing new inventions, it is in its form modern. Moreover, Documenta 14 constructs its global identity through connecting two cities in two different nations that both bring a particular national context to the exhibition, and artists have to work in two places, which further facilitates communication in this "shrinking world." Such apparatus contributes to the concept of transnational by transcending the past framework of nation-state and creating a new exhibition under global framework.

Poseidon – Eternity by Xu Zhen well illustrates Tomlinson's argument. Several wooden ducks, which usually appear on the roof of traditional Chinese buildings and stand for royal power, are sitting on the stretched arms of a western sculpture that probably has its origin in ancient Greece but later becomes a sign for the West. This western sculpture could not be seen in China until the globalization initiated by the West reaching China in the 19th century—it is viewed in China as a foreign object that comes from globalization. According to Tomlinson, globalization is the circulation of western modernity that is propagated as universal. In this work, Xu Zhen negotiates the modernity that is forced by the globalization on China (linking to the colonial history) and local Chinese culture by juxtaposing the two sign objects that symbolize the two distinct systems. Furthermore, the visual effect created by this work is quite harmonious—the statue is stabilized by both its pose and the firm base, the

ducks are, on the contrary, dynamic in postures, and the entire work is placed against a calm sea. The uniformity of this work implies the fusion of the two different identities, East and West, into a new hybrid one mediated through globalization. Thus, the design of this work complies with Tomlinson's claim that "globalization, far from destroying it, has been perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity."

Grade: A

The paper addresses the issues confidently, but perhaps slightly less specifically than possible or desirable, knowing your intellectual maturity to do so anyway.

Reference

Claude Monet. Boulevard des Capucines. 1873. oil on canvas. 80.3 cm × 60.3 cm.

Kader Attia. Ghost. 2006-2007. Aluminum foil (installation detail) and Untitled (Mural).

Xu Zhen. Eternity – Poseidon. 2017. Bronze, granite base. 220 x 70 cm.



