

CIMAM 2009 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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FAIR TRADE: THE INSTITUTION OF ART IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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Museo Tamayo and Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC)

CIMAM 2009 Annual Conference 'FAIR TRADE: THE INSTITUTION OF ART IN THE NEW ECONOMY' 9 – 10 November, 2009 - Museo Tamayo and Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Mexico City. A two-day conference examining the role of the 'museum' in the contemporary world [published on the occasion of the 2009 CIMAM Annual Meeting, 9 – 10 November, 2009 - Museo Tamayo and Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Mexico City]; edited by Cathy Douglas and Josephine Watson in collaboration with Pilar Cortada; sessions transcribed by Mireia Bartels and Inés Jover.

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WELCOMING REMARKS

Teresa Vicencio

Saltiel Alatraste, Manuel Borja-Villel, Graciela de la Torre, ladies and gentlemen, The cultural institutions and museums of Mexico are proud to attend the Annual Meeting of the International Committee of ICOM for Museums for and Collections of Modern Art. We are therefore especially pleased to welcome the representatives of ICOM, the members of the Board of CIMAM, their members, directors and curators of modern and contemporary art museums, and the distinguished speakers and participants in this year's meeting.

The Mexican museums and institutions that have had the pleasure in supporting and taking part in the organisation of this conference hope it will succeed in meeting its specific objectives. The work carried out by the International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, and in particular its annual meetings, have become the referent *par excellence* for the studies and discussions on the present and the future of contemporary art and the role played by museums in its development. As a result we now have diagnoses, prospects, ideas and proposals that enhance in various ways our work promoting, stimulating and disseminating contemporary art.

On this occasion, the subject of the CIMAM annual meeting is highly promising. Contemporary art is an area particularly sensitive to the effects of the present worldwide economic crisis. Both in the public and the private spheres, and of course in that of artistic creation and production, there is great concern about the number of factors affecting the conditions of institutional support, the funding of artists' projects, the extension of museums, and the display, promotion and markets of art. This meeting to analyse the situation, attended by those who face these problems on a daily basis, could not be more appropriate.

The idea is to identify the problems and difficulties arising, as well as the risks they entail for the cultural phenomenon. More importantly, however, the idea is to assume the challenges posed by the economic crisis and transform them into opportunities to build new models of artistic management, more efficient forms of exchange and collaboration between public and private organisations, and to stimulate innovation in the conception and development of artistic productions. For all these reasons, the National Institute for the Fine Arts will pay special attention to the studies, debates, conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. All these ideas, which we regard as extremely valuable material, shall be our guide as we face up to the present economic situation and fulfil institutional responsibility in the contemporary art committee in Mexico and internationally.

I'm convinced that similar institutions in other countries will find this meeting equally interesting and that, as in previous years, it will be especially significant in positively rethinking the role of museums and the best ways of projecting contemporary art in today's societies. I welcome you on behalf of Teresa Vicencio, General Director of the National Institute for the Fine Arts, and thank you very much for being here.

Sealtiel Alatríste

Good morning Sofía. Thank you Manuel and Graciela.

Welcome to you all, thank you very much for attending this CIMAM conference here in Mexico. I shall only take half an hour of your time to present a brief introduction.

I find the name of the meeting, 'Fair Trade', very attractive, in fact I would have liked to extend it slightly, and made it 'Fair Market.' In my opinion, the problems faced by art and culture lie in the market and its interrelations. When we speak of crisis and say that it has extended to the sphere of the arts, I ask myself whether this is essentially a cultural crisis or whether it has emerged because we failed to examine the role of culture in good time. As you all know, I am a writer and so I must speak from a literary point of view. In his book on poetry, the last book he wrote, Octavio Paz said that the most serious problem that art would face in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries would be its relations with the market, and that if we left it up to the market to establish the rules of the game we would end up as we have. Octavio Paz was a visionary, so it is no wonder that we should now find ourselves in this situation. I am delighted that this meeting has raised the matter, because if we fail to find a new place for culture as a generator of order in our civilisation, in our markets, we may pick up in economic terms but we shall certainly fall into another crisis.

In this sense, museums occupy a key position in culture, a position that could be said to unite and condense the parameters of culture. Orhan Pamuk, the great Turkish writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature two years ago, has just published a new and brilliant novel, which I highly recommend, entitled *The Museum of Innocence*. This vast novel (six hundred-odd pages) already in circulation is a profound reflection, grounded in love and in literature, on the reasons why museums are founded, why the world is full of museums. His vision, which is no doubt romantic, derives from Proust and indisputably from Ruskin, but to a certain extent it brings the romantic notion of the museum face to face with the notion of the contemporary museum, which I think is crucial. Nineteenth-century society matured and was enlightened, i.e., it got better at what it did, and I believe that now that we are in the midst of this crisis, the time has come to restore museums to that position. And when I say museums I am speaking of culture.

Finally, I would like to say that the organisation of this meeting, in collaboration with CONACULTA (Mexican National Council for Culture and Art) and the university (institutions at the forefront of the Mexican situation), and together with the Museo Tamayo, exemplifies how institutions can work side by side to come up with solutions. So, the fact that CONACULTA and CONAM (Multidisciplinary National Conference) should work towards unity is a landmark which I think will steer our professional activity over the next few years.

Without further ado, I declare the conference open. Good luck, I hope everything goes well. Thank you all very much and have a good conference! Thank you.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel

Last year the CIMAM conference was devoted to the crisis, a crisis that is systemic, global, that affects technology, the economy and our social relations. Obviously, museums, art and culture are not external to, but rather inherent in this crisis. In an age in which cognitive work is central to economic relations, art, culture and museums could not remain apart. Crises are not always negative—they can mean a moment of change, a moment of opening in the arts that is always welcome. We know that institutions tend towards entropy, a certain sclerosis, and it is important that there be openings and fissures, that we be receptive to others.

In this sense, this year's conference is in keeping with the idea we put forth in New York—the idea of crisis—as reflected by the range of lecturers from different fields, from large institutions, such as the Los Angeles County Museum, to much smaller organisations, such as castillo/corrales, and from places like India, where there is no institutional life as such although there is a very high degree of creativity. I believe that at this point in time their contributions can be fundamental, for two reasons that are extremely relevant in this context (Mexico and Latin America), insofar as Latin America relates to the rest of the world and insofar as the conference or meeting is held in a museum, to be precise, in a university museum.

For a start, there is a basic question of exteriority, of otherness. We cannot evolve without the Other; we cannot evolve without knowing and interrelating with the Other, creating a common ground between the I and the Other. If there is one place where otherness makes sense that place is Latin America, and it makes sense because of Latin American thinking. I hope professor Enrique Dussel will enlighten us on this, just as I'm sure Cuauhtémoc Medina will enlighten us with his perspective on the South as a place of interpellation. In order to grow and in order to strike up a dialogue there must be a rhetoric of interpellation.

Interpellation transcends dialogue between equals. When it appears, interpellation is the dialogue between inside and outside. Now that I see you all here together, when I see that we meet each year to share ideas, that each year we come together to form a sort of unavowable community, to use Blanchot's term, this sort of flexible community that gradually takes shape, like the community between lovers that is woven by ties and is always alive, I realise that CIMAM can really play a key role at such a time of crisis, prompting the creation of new models, new forms of institutionalism which I believe are more important than ever.

As a result, this conference is important in our day and age. Furthermore, precisely because we are institutions dedicated to art, its significance extends beyond this time and place and takes on a worldwide dimension. Art is, above all, that object of desire we never quite grasp, that radical Other, that which brings us to life, time and again. Therefore the mission of CIMAM, indeed the mission of museums in times of crisis is, on the one hand, to help find this communal element, this relational element, and on the other, to help create these models and contribute to the understanding of the complex phenomenon, the phenomenon that brings us together and, literally, contains an element of love, that is art.

I shall add nothing further, because what is truly important is for us to hear the speakers. In point of fact, I am here to thank all those who have made this event possible. In the first place, as we are here in the Museo Tamayo I would like to thank the museum director Sofía Hernández for hosting the conference and welcoming us today, and especially (she told me not to say this but I shall) Graciela de la Torre for her invaluable help throughout the preparation of the conference.

Both as regards its assistance and because it is a university, I would like to thank the National Autonomous University of Mexico and its representative here among us, our admired friend and master Sealtiel Alatraste, Co-ordinator of Cultural Diffusion. I would like to extend my gratitude to CONACULTA, who has contributed a great deal to this meeting, as well as to the United States Embassy, the Mexican Federation of the Museum Association, BBVA Bancomer, the Jumex Foundation/Collection, the Olga and Rufino Tamayo Foundation, the Habitat Group and the National Institute for Fine Arts (INBA).

As they do each year, the Cisneros Foundation/Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection and the Open Society Institute - Arts and Culture Network Program have helped many professionals attend the meeting, both from Latin America and from Central Asia thanks to travel grants.

Finally, I would also like to thank collectors such as Gabriela Garza and Ramiro Garza, Soumaya Slim de Romero and Fernando Romero, and Marcos and Vicky Micha , alongside the Luis Barragán House and Studio, the Tlatelolco University Cultural Centre, the Museo Dolores Olmedo, the Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL) and the patrons of CIMAM who are with us here now—La Caixa Foundation in Barcelona, the Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la Création in Paris, Marc and Joséé Gensollen and Erika Hoffmann—and each year do their best to ensure that the CIMAM conference, this sort of miracle, can take place. Last but not least, the CIMAM Board and Pilar Cortada, executive director who, as you all know, is the life and soul of CIMAM. Thank you very much.

INTRODUCTION

Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy

Good morning and welcome to the Museo Tamayo.

It is an honour for us to co-host CIMAM and to greet you at our museum today. I see a great number of colleagues and friends here, many whose work has been exemplary and inspirational. I also see participants I have yet to meet and who will hopefully become members of the Museo Tamayo community. For those who have come to the Museo Tamayo for the first time, I would just like to say a couple of words. The museum was inaugurated in 1981 by Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo with a collection of more than two hundred works of twentieth-century art that he himself had acquired over the years. The Museo Tamayo was designed by architects Teodoro González de León and Abraham Zabludovsky. If you visit the city over the next couple of days you will come across other examples of their architecture, including the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo or MUAC, which will be represented here tomorrow. Their signature buildings stand out for their monumentality and concrete façades, known in Mexico as ‘concreto martelinado’.

In 1986 the Museo Tamayo joined the network of art institutions under the umbrella of the public organisation INBA, the National Institute for the Fine Arts. The museum is also generally supported by a private foundation, set up in 1989 by Olga and Rufino Tamayo in order to secure the quality of the museological programme during the economic crisis of the period, and face up to future challenges such as those of today. As an artist, a collector, a cultural entrepreneur and a dedicated citizen, Tamayo was a visionary. I hope that his figure will continue to be present throughout the conference and may perhaps inspire us to create a better world for cultural institutions today.

Thank you very much.

Graciela de la Torre

Good morning friends, colleagues and CIMAM members.

The subject CIMAM will address is relevant when it comes to considering the future of our organisations from a different point of view to the one hegemonically imposed on the museum as a modernist institution in America and Europe. The round tables will probably tackle the discourses, ideas and theories that have validated contemporary production, and the market will be studied in order to determine the value of objects in comparison with the huge range of current artistic practices. We shall no doubt have to consider whether the patterns of art consumption have varied or not, especially as a result of the present economic crisis. We should mention that the collecting of contemporary art does not seem to have been drastically reduced in spite of its apparent undercapitalisation, and that the ocean of art collecting is travelled by an amphibian—the speculative collector. The economic value of temporary exhibitions and their connection with the market laws of supply and demand may also be

discussed. Such elite forces seem to be increasingly shaping media perception to the detriment of the transcendence that formerly derived from the timely criticism and connoisseurship of the works on display, the artists and their practice.

Finally, museums are indeed the most visible organisations on the map of current and contemporary art, those that arouse greater expectations on the part of audiences and progressively plural societies. We should, however, ask ourselves whether our museums have been transformed in keeping with the momentous changes produced in the world of art over the last thirty years.

For a long time now, since the advent of modernism in fact, hegemonic museums have exerted leadership in the field. Today, when the competition between museums is fierce worldwide, they seem to be constantly driven by the idea of creating mechanisms designed to cut expenses and generate income through network marketing. As a result, from our point of view these museums seem to have been avoiding strategic issues that are essential to redefining their meaning, purpose and values as institutions and would provide a new model of management for the third millennium.

Should museums focus on orthodoxy, based on their displays and the documentation and interpretation of their collections? Or should the construction of experiences with museum visitors take prominence over the study of objects? What is the social mission of contemporary museums? Can they reach a synthesis between their traditional conservational responsibilities and their new role as communication laboratories? Is curatorial discourse the beacon of strategic action? What abilities do they require in order to exert leadership? Should their scope be local or global? What tools do museums need and what measures must they take before accepting the challenges and pressures to which they are now subject? What signs enable us to measure their success as organisations? How profitable should museum initiatives be? What role do museums play in the society of knowledge?

The scope of these and similar issues is probably more that of museology than economics, but helping museums to implement or simply to imagine another paradigm in which they are considered centres of production, experience and knowledge for building communities, and reintroducing aesthetics in training in situations of constant experimentation, discussion, criticism and equitable exchange of knowledge and responsibilities are certainly our challenges. For the time being, I should like to congratulate the organisers, Manuel, Pilar and their team, and extend my acknowledgement to the individuals, patrons and institutions who supported this initiative, and to all those taking part in it. Thank you all very much and good luck.

**DAY 1:
LEARNING FROM CRISES**

SESSION 1

SPEAKER

Michael Govan¹

RESPONDENT

François Piron, co-founder of castillo/corrales, Paris

Good morning.

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity of being here, and would like to thank Manuel Borja-Villiel and the Board of CIMAM for making this possible.

'Getting things done', was the definition of an institution given by Michael Govan. I also believe that, to quote William Carlos Williams, there are 'no ideas but in things,' which means that the relevance of what one does lies precisely in the ways in which it is done, in what might be termed or considered 'good manners' in a given context.

So I hope that it's fair to respond to Michael Govan through my own experience of the past three years running an independent art space called castillo/corrales in Paris. I consider this space an experimental institution, or at least an experience in attempting to establish a self-organised institution. castillo/corrales is a platform from where a group of people can work and think, a place from where to reflect on the circulation and transmission of knowledge and the creation of an audience, established in real time and on a one-to-one scale.

Michael Govan has talked about large, powerful, dominant institutions and I do hope we can unfold—or stretch—the idea of institution to cover more than a number of square metres, zeros in a budget or projects carried out in a year and embrace a spirit that fuels the way projects are carried out, a spirit we can describe as a public service or public responsibility.

It is pretty difficult for me, though, to clearly define what castillo/corrales is, as it is not a structure that has either rigorously planned activity or a fixed programme. The understanding of different ways of doing, the use of certain words or an obsession with certain notions, come only in retrospect; this lack of a fixed definition is, I guess, a condition of the ongoing invention of models which has been and still is a necessity for castillo/corrales.

castillo/corrales is a collective initiative, born of the common desire of five artists, writers and curators to transform a shared private office into a public space and to dedicate a part of their time to setting up a programme of exhibitions, talks and public events intended to identify and create a community of like-minded practitioners. This is something we felt was missing in a city which has a very important artistic offer but where most spaces, be they institutional, commercial or artist-run (of which only a few exist), tend to be places for the consumption of

¹ CIMAM has not been authorised to publish the transcription of Michael Govan's oral presentation.

art rather than platforms for discussion, places where programmers, artists and audiences are strictly separate entities that don't really merge or interact. We decided it would be worth trying to remedy this situation: each event we organise, whether it be a two-month exhibition or a one-hour talk, is of equal importance to us, in the sense that as an ongoing conversation with our audience it makes an equal contribution to the programme of the space.

One of the intentions behind castillo/corrales has been to provide Paris with a space that does not fit the standard categories of art spaces, and especially contradicts the usual expectations of an independent space. We have tried to avoid being both a generational place and a platform for local artists, favouring instead the introduction or reintroduction of notions, theories, practices that are underrated or unrecognised in our local context, exhibiting artists whose importance has been forgotten or not yet rewarded. This brings us to the idea of being a 'scene' place, in the sense that we think about the conditions required to create a scene. Although we believe we work for a scene—our audience—this does not necessarily mean that we work with it. So, we have exhibited works by Nancy Spero, Peter Friedl, Isidoro Valcarcel Medina and John Latham, and have emphasised the importance of collective action through collaborations with the 16Beaver Group, with Dmitry Vilensky from the Chto Delat group in St Petersburg, who is here today. We have organised debates with American painters Amy Sillman and Rebecca Quaytman, and performances and lectures by writers Mark von Schlegell and Eileen Myles. None of these people belong to the same circle or even the same generation, but they do interrelate and their sphere of activity does connect with others. Mark von Schlegell is a science-fiction writer who sometimes writes art criticism, Eileen Myles is a poet and occasionally also an art critic, and although they don't know one another, their books are published by Semiotext, a firm that began publishing French theory, which, strangely enough, is rarely distributed in France and yet is represented and distributed by the bookshop we run alongside our exhibition space. We are interested in these sometimes random connections which reflect an organic flow of information, from circle to circle, a flow in which we also aim to play an active role.

Another impulse behind the creation of castillo/corrales was to mount a critique of the communication rhetoric of most art spaces today, whatever their nature; a critique of the incredible shortage of their vocabulary, what I would call the 'e-fluxisation' of the art discourse that keeps repeating the same 100 words to define projects and practices, and to normalise the way an audience can relate to a space. We enjoy exercising our freedom to use different tones in our public communications, sometimes rather self-deprecating, at others excessively congratulatory, again in an attempt to escape clear definitions and thwart habits and expectations. This also explains why during the first year of our existence we would come up with a new definition of castillo/corrales for every project.

The name itself is a sort of camouflage, a red herring. It is taken from a very famous boxing match between Jose Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales held in 2002. We adopted it because it sounded exactly like a commercial gallery with the two surnames, and we liked the idea that people could think it was just that—a new commercial gallery opening in Paris, perhaps by two mercenary art dealers from Miami, at a time (early in 2007) when the city was opening a new

gallery almost every month. We were also interested in the way the rumour would be spread and how surprised people would feel to be drowned into thousands of boxing videos when 'googling' the name of the space. It turned out that the two Spanish names (*castillo* means castle and *corrales* means hutches) also formed a very nice word association, and matched the mix of ambition/reality of our project very well.

We could speak of many influences, but will name just a few. B_books, the collectively-run Berlin bookshop is one, because it has demonstrated the long-term viability and growth of a self-organised collective project, creating a community of interest around its space, leading to the development of series of public discussions, a publishing department and even to film production work. The people running this bookshop have also managed to pursue their own individual work parallel to their involvement in B_books, which is something that is crucial for us—that we don't get too consumed in castillo/corrales, that we can still develop our own individual practices, not least because that's how we make (and should be making) a living instead of from what we do at castillo/corrales. Another reference was the experience of the Orchard Gallery in New York, a three-year gallery project run by artists, including Andrea Fraser, Moyra Davey, Gareth Jones and Jason Simon. We looked carefully at the history of their projects and, perhaps more importantly, at their decision to try and grapple with the commerce of art and counter the non-profit model.

This is a critical issue since we also had decided, as a guiding principle, not to apply for any public subsidy. Right now France is experiencing a critical situation in terms of funding, as public money for the art has been decreasing since the mid-nineties and bureaucracy is quite discouraging. Having previously run more classical institutions, we were aware how time-consuming it is to raise funds and we knew what to expect for such a project in terms of public resources, so we decided that one of the characteristics of the space would be commerciality. Although we never wanted to turn it into a commercial gallery proper, we did think that part of the impropriety of the space would be for it to become a small business venture, sufficient to cover rental costs and other expenses and allowing us to sustain the programme and preserve its autonomy.

In any case, being autonomous means inventing or using business models and adjusting them to your realities, and diversifying and trying out different things to match your needs, to ensure the management is effective and also productive in terms of work and intellectual conditions.

Believing that books are ideal vectors of conversations, we welcomed a bookshop in the space. What began as a shelf hosting few publications from small independent international publishers working outside mainstream distribution networks is now a permanent activity, with a thousand titles available, including our own publications.

Running a bookshop is still something we consider as a project. We don't intend to become booksellers by profession, and again our interest lies in the invention of models bookselling generates. Since we started this activity, we've been asked several times to curate libraries for

different institutions or exhibitions, and this activity has also provided us with our main institutional partnership—the research library at the Centre Pompidou.

The budget we invest in our programme, in the production of exhibitions, art works and publications, is of course limited; however, we try to turn this factual limit into something positive. Having a low budget means having to be careful in our expenses and setting up a dialogue based on mutual, although obviously not economic, profit with the artists we invite. It is important that the relationship we establish with artists is based on shared responsibility, mutual involvement and even at times on common financial investment. It is important for us to make it clear that a space like this must rely on artists for its survival, it must be supported by the artistic community and not the other way around; we cannot have an ‘artist versus institution’ situation. It is also important to shed the classical notion of the self-focused genius-artist versus the problem-solving institution that gets things done in a snap of fingers. This, I believe, is infantilising both artists and audience.

Our thriftiness is also revealed by a form of exhibition making that as well as art works often includes books, printed matter and documents downloaded from the Internet and presented in a non-hierarchical way. Without appearing amateurish or disregarding of art works, this reflects the importance we attach to notions such as the availability of knowledge, access to information and its circulation rather than excessive concern with original objects and their status. The circulation of art works today is an issue that every art institution deals with, and it’s obvious that the shrinking circulation of art works, due to many reasons, primarily financial, increases inequalities and creates a situation where only a few institutions in the First World can work together on an equal level.

A large part of the selection of books and magazines we have at the bookshop is not easy to find elsewhere in Paris, which is the main reason why we decided to branch out. There are many explanations as to why these publications can’t be found in Paris, but one of them is that bookshops don’t make much money with small press publications. To be a profitable bookshop today you either have to sell a few titles in high numbers, which is the way museum bookshops see things, or else sell fewer but expensive books, which is how specialised bookshops survive, finding and selling rare out-of-print titles to book collectors. Before they became rare, old and therefore expensive, there seemed to be no place for these publications unless they were given away or swapped. So, once again, we thought it was important to set up a space where they could be promoted and sold, and consequently find the audience they deserved.

Many of the publishers and magazines we admire are the initiatives of artists and writers. This is certainly a reaction to art publishing in recent years, where too many books and catalogues have become communication tools for galleries, institutions, artists and even critics. Many publications are in fact entirely financed by galleries, legitimating artists and facilitating their promotion, and because they can’t be too complex or distinctive, this produces a striking homogeneity. Since no art publication really pays off, there are fewer and fewer publications whose only reason to exist is to be consistent and interesting—they always seem to have a different agenda behind them. This is why many artists have decided to take the matter into

their own hands and start their own publishing houses to release their own books and those by the artists and writers they like, or basically just the books they themselves would like to read. I would mention only Dutch artist Mark Manders and Roma Publications, American artist Joe Scanlan's Commerce Books, and New York-based artist Alejandro Cesarco who runs A.R.T. Press, all of them perfect examples among many more.

Running a bookshop means being able to play an active role in this ecology of small press publishing. We know from experience, as most of us have been involved to some extent in publishing before, that it is always a hassle to deal with bookshops. Most of the time you send them books and you never hear from them again, you have to write to them constantly to know if the books have been sold, and you often give up. So we really make an effort to be very serious with our accounts and keep up communication with publishers. It takes a lot of our time but it is crucial, even if the sums are small. It is important to get feedback; it means that the books circulate, that there are interested readers out there. That's all an independent publisher wants to know. We also devote a lot of time to talking to visitors, telling them about this or that publishing project. No doubt the greatest advantage of having a space slightly remote from the central art circulation in Paris is that although we don't have that many visitors per day, we can actually be available for each of them.

This is certainly the most performative aspect of our involvement with our audience. What is most important for us is to put the right book in the right hands, and we hope that this book will influence the way in which the readers will later think or write about art, in the case of writers, or how they will conceive a publication, in the case of designers or editors. Sometimes this requires a lot of talking, going into the details of a publication and having a conversation about many other things. But the same goes for the shows we present in our space—not having too much traffic in the space is a blessing because it allows us to really approach the problematics of an exhibition with the people who come see it.

At the end of the day, this relationship with the audience is the most important issue. Stimulating an audience, inspiring others is clearly an achievement for us, not in terms of introducing our own ideas but of showing other practitioners that they can build up their own space, their own activity; that it is possible to gain self-sustainability and keep a space running with a certain degree of freedom, a space that is not totally commercially-driven or indebted to local politics. The main thing is probably making sure that our involvement, resources and needs coincide, and guaranteeing pleasure and excitement in a shared practice.

For this short presentation, I have taken some excerpts from an interview castillo/corrales gave the Vilnius-based magazine *Interviu*, published in Lithuanian and Russian. It has not only allowed me to speak in my own name and in my own words, but also on behalf of the whole group. Thank you.

SESSION 2

SPEAKER

Oswaldo Sánchez

Museums in Mexico: Agents for Change?

I would like to thank the CIMAM team, Manuel Borja-Villel, the staff at MUAC and Graciela de la Torre for this invitation.

All great social crises are the expression of paradigmatic crises. However, the remains of crises are not just the carrion of news programmes but have now become our arguments for life, and always end up masking this breaking of the compass, concealing this pressing need for new agreements.

Barely a few months ago it seemed as if we were all set to believe that the crisis fracturing Mexico was the spin-off of a global, external schism with which we were supposedly evilly synchronised. And yet is obvious, at least for those working from within, that the sclerosis (and not only the financial sclerosis) of our public institutions relates to the amounting irrationality of an inefficient, simulating and politically stagnant state structure. To recover the vitality of the country's institutions today, and this includes museums, implies rejecting the old centralist mechanisms and political self-regulation of the Mexican state.

According to local tradition it is unusual for us, the directors of Mexican museums, to discuss this reference to the political framework in which the mission of all public institutions is confirmed and regulated. But how are we supposed to assess what we are doing and what we *cannot* do; how are we supposed to gauge the country's museums today and establish connections with their audiences if we pretend we are not where we really are?

I shall now refer to Mexico's public museums, taking as a starting point the criticisms, frustrations and shortcomings of my own practice within the team at the Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM). So I'm afraid that my lecture will be somewhat run-of-the-mill. However, the directors of public museums in Mexico live run-of-the-mill lives and are exasperated by the regressive administrative, legal and labour framework that restricts and minimises our management. For some years now the management of public museums in Mexico has had little to do with their professional contents. Every day we seem to have to wrestle with the absurdities of an administrative bureaucracy that is satisfied with the fiction of efficiency that derives from its multiple trades, formats, controls, regulations, reports, handbooks and authorisations.

1. Public museums in Mexico today: a mirror of the country's structural crisis

Forty years ago Fernando Gamboa—for some a heroic promoter and for others an enlightened dictator of Mexican museology—saw the museum as the most important mechanism for the country's intellectual and educational transformation, and considered both the cultural density of Mexico's past and the tumultuous vitality of a present still to be defined the only feasible grounds for peace and social progress. From this certainty he managed, for better and for worse, to place Mexican museums at the core of official discourse.

But this didn't last long and a lot of water has passed under the bridge since. Many artists emeritus have been awarded grants and Fine Arts decorations, many blockbuster exhibitions have been officially staged in distant countries and many magnificent catalogues have been published to be given away as Christmas presents. The museum's potential as a democratising mechanism, the strategic mission of the public museum, have yet to be asserted and embodied. Why do I say this? A short time ago in a straightforward tribute speech someone said that the problem was that we needed 'many Gamboas.' But I'm afraid that today Mr Gamboa wouldn't have remained as head of any of the numerous museums he had directed for even a month.

Barely a few decades ago several Mexican museums were publishing their own specialised journals, maintaining continuous exchanges with Latin America, commissioning complex works, collecting and setting up middle-term and long-term joint strategies with intellectually prestigious international spaces. I am not referring to the kind of exhibition that enlivens the country's diplomatic agenda, or to the eagerness to buy expensive exhibitions in order to make a mark on the global stage, but to establishing a systematic professional relationship with other models of experiences and with a certain degree of honest dialogue. Today, seeing how other museums and spaces in Barcelona, Frankfurt, Karlsruhe, São Paulo, Istanbul or Malmö have consolidated their commitment to promoting public debate on available development models through their curatorial programmes and their openness to communication and experimentation, we ask ourselves why such objectives are missing in our country. Why is this not the case of Mexican museums, public or private?

In recent years insistent claims have been made for the implementation of cultural policies. With the best intentions, I should like to point out that the problem could originally lie in the fact that the public management structure for culture is obsolete and unproductive. If we understand cultural politics as the collective visualisation of a paradigm of development instead of the old symbolic investiture of a generous power in commemorations and monuments, it is unable to achieve agreements, unable to challenge and to be challenged by artistic practice, unable to offer open models of belonging, unable to materialise a change in the modes of entertainment and the lifestyles of audiences.

I shall now proceed to describe the sclerotic framework in which we find ourselves, not in order to trigger a fairer appraisal of our work, but in order to call for the immediate conception of a strategy for change and emphasise the pressing need for a cultural structure able to generate politics and a political structure able to generate culture within the institutions.

Public, state-run museums in Mexico 'operate' according to the following regulations in different areas:

Administration

- Expenses cannot be programmed or resources assigned outside of the yearly financial exercise.

- The amounts and areas to which budgetary items are destined cannot be changed once they have been assigned.
- No resources or expenditures are available between late November and mid-April.
- The payment system of public museums requires advance invoices for services yet to be carried out, based on advance estimates and valuations and almost immediately restricted in time to each monthly financial period.
- Museums are forbidden to generate or manage their own resources, which are directly absorbed by the Treasury and never return to the museum in their original form or amount.
- Delays in approving restricted expenses hinder the programming and organisation of events that require centralised authorisations.
- Closing budgets months in advance of events prevents cumulatively capitalising resources within yearly programmes. Amounts assigned to specific projects, areas and periods that are not used up cannot be accumulated but are transferred to the Treasury.
- The legal administrative ban on purchases of technological devices includes computers, projectors, screens, telephones, sound equipment and DVS systems, chargers for iPods and audio guides, Wi-Fi connection cables, Internet services and digital portals, etc.
- The resources for the maintenance of buildings and installations are centralised and therefore not contingent on the museum's own plans or resources.
- The resources for acquiring works, updating records and cataloguing permanent collections are centralised and therefore not assigned to individual museums.

Employment

- The organisation and salary scale of museum personnel, determined by the Ministry of Public Credit and Finance, have become obsolete.
- Rank-and-file workers (trade-union members) in technical positions, assigned according to length of service, are unqualified to occupy such positions.
- The contracting of personnel is restrictive and centralised.
- Rank-and-file museum positions are passed down from generation to generation as a right of the trade-union members.
- Automatic promotion: positions are filled according to length of service instead of public selection processes based on qualifications.
- The collective productivity rate is low and across-the-board incentives like historical trade-union privileges are still maintained.
- Ineffective working hours and expensive overtime continue to be predetermined by historical agreements.
- Expensive collective contracts are defrayed by public funds.

Programming

- The lack of information concerning budgets prior to each new tax year makes it impossible to set up collaborations based on cost sharing, even one year in advance.

- The lack of budgetary items affects public services such as diffusion, the purchase of book collections, material and equipment for educational activities and the hiring of sporadic professional services not contingent on exhibition programming.
- Professional staff deficiencies and the inability to outsource mean that a minimum six-month period is required to produce an exhibition and that travelling shows are unworkable.
- Administrative regulations of expenditure make co-producing independent projects and even producing art works complicated exercises.
- The purchase of works and archives by museums is expressly forbidden.
- Opening cafés, shops and bookshops is either forbidden or is subject to hypothetical red tape. (Several public museums have been attempting to open cafés for over two years. Nobody knows how to achieve this, or why it doesn't seem possible, but it doesn't.)
- In legal and administrative terms, museum directors are vulnerable before a huge and abstruse legal system and institutional regulations that oblige them to assume responsibilities in areas that operate by rules and standards decided by third parties.

Civil associations

- No legal rule or document formalises or regulates the relations between state-run museums and philanthropic organisations, stating the mutual rights and responsibilities established by law.
- No rule or document defines the attributions and premises of directors' committees or associations of patrons in the running of public museums in order to curb coercive philanthropy.
- The advantages for tax deduction enjoyed by Mexican museums and their heritage are minimal, almost symbolic.
- Activities and plans for alliances with civil society in public museums are subject to unregulated restrictions bound by interpretative criteria.
- The lack of economic models and administrative permits makes it impossible to combine the museums' strategies for attracting audiences and funds with the initiatives stemming from organisations in civil society.
- Extraordinary opening hours for museums are unviable, as are mutually beneficial joint activities and programmes with non-governmental organisations or other public and private institutions.

In short, this is the framework in which we 'operate' and that a legendary art dealer and friend of mine called Motel Hell!

These are but a few of the many restrictions imposed by the Mexican state on public museums as institutions. I should like to point out that many of these regulations do not apply exclusively to museums but to all areas of public management and reveal a deplorable lack of professional counsel and a huge gulf between management policies and the specific practice where this 'institutionalisation' of our functions should be verified.

Our museums need to change, shed some red tape, gain in self-management, alliances and independence if we are to exert a serious influence, despite the general context in which only a few newspapers still have arts pages and television has won the battle to turn a poorly educated population into resentful consumers, helped along by the state and civil society.

If we want Mexican culture to help the country move towards an economy based on knowledge and create over 4% of its gross domestic product, if we want to be able to create productive jobs in the field of the arts we should put our faith in culture's ability to achieve greater social cohesion and influence other fields, such as information technologies, innovation, sustainability and tourism.

In order to place our museums at the heart of the country's educational management and begin to promote a new spirituality that will favour the creation of large-scale intellectual resources, we need to bring about an urgent organisational transformation with administrative regulations aimed at guaranteeing efficiency and changes in budgetary expenditures based on the requirements for cultural production and new communication formats.

We need to reconsider the workforces and employment policies in museum institutions, according to specific goals and standards designed to measure performance that cannot be established as a bureaucratic generalisation by the Treasury offices or the (happily extinct?) Ministry of Public Management. We need to be realistic, visionary, and responsible as regards the critical situation of the country in terms of education and culture.

Many of you, our visitors, must have had first-hand experience of what it means to embark on an exhibition project with Mexico, the slow enduring complications it entails. By drawing up more complicated procedures than those of any other country or institution that make it difficult to establish exchange networks and share our programmes and experiences in a professional manner, we have disqualified ourselves. From time to time we are regarded as 'good collaborators', although more often than not instead of being asked to act as partners in the conceptualisation and co-production of specific projects we are invited to participate in blockbuster shows that represent 'the greatness of the nation' held in museums in London, New York, Paris, Tokyo or Seoul on special occasions! Expensive exhibitions for Mexican taxpayers, cooked up by curators with standard procedures rushed through on the same day on account of some official emergency or festive calendar. We are good at producing hegemony and at collaborating on an international scale to co-produce it—maestro Fernando Gamboa's expertise in this field was impressive. This is not, however, the sort of exchange that professionalises an institution, ensuring that its programmes are respected and affording public benefit.

2. Mexican museums and the production of hegemony

I should now like to refer to another factor limiting our work. Ideological rather than structural, this limitation represents an old bureaucratic demand and is an example of professional inertia: *the Mexican museum as a producer of hegemony*. Traditionally, public museums in Mexico (and I'm sure that in other countries too) have assumed the production of hegemony

as their greatest commitment to the nation-state, understanding the state equivocally as a substitute for, or sole guarantor of, a disarticulated civil society unable to achieve the transparency a mandate of its own would require. Both the qualification of museums' management and the decision as to which museums are favoured by centralised budgets and discretionary increases are contingent on this capacity for the production of hegemony.

At a lunch held few years ago a wealthy lady boasted that she was not a patron of any public museum. I asked her the reason for such stubbornness and she replied that she wasn't going to give her money to the Mexican state. I tried to defend the idea that giving money to a public museum was not giving it to the Mexican state, but obviously, like many others, she disapproved of the way in which *the public, public interest*, is usually misrepresented as a *national* spectacle in keeping with the cohesive discourse of officialdom in mega-exhibitions—*the public* shaped by the institution itself as a mass effect of hegemonic positioning that confirms the symbolic self-referentiality of a centralised structure of power.

This role played by the museum in the production of hegemony has not, of course, been shaped only by or from the state but derives from a long tradition of collaboration. The symbolic service that our post-revolutionary painters have paid the state and their own personal demands for social exclusiveness have established guidelines and expectations that are not only still in force but continue to be the blackmail resources employed by artists with a certain experience, or of a certain age (which are sometimes synonymous). To this we should add the convenient bureaucratic officiousness that is vulnerable to all the requests made by our celebrities. Mexican museums have formed the core of this desire to co-opt and be co-opted. The obsession with congratulating individuals who stand for social success (whatever the nature of the service for which they obtain this state recognition) has devastated the agenda of our museums, distorting their legitimising role. But as I said, the state is not the only instigator of the production of hegemony, nor are many distinguished figures its only clients. For years the Mexican media (press and television) have been adapting this vulgar taste for the spectacle of individuals, making it their best model for universal recognition. Institutions began to focus on this type of exhibitions-cum-tributes, which threatened to turn our museums into unimaginative pedestals. In connection with what we continue to call historical heritage, with very few exceptions the production of hegemony in such exhibitions is an academic source of nostalgia and classicism. The same can be said for current programmes: contemporary artistic practice is usually displayed as a springboard to and from global stardom, and praised as a local promise of synchrony. How this contemporary concern with fame and novelty works in the production of hegemony is seldom questioned. There is a pressing need in Mexico to strengthen the visionary social mission of our cultural institutions and readjust the priorities of a public service that cannot continue to be directed towards the mystification and vainglory of individual careers or rhetorical tributes, spectacularly manipulated into the public aim of museological practice.

For a number of years now the professional discussion regarding who the museum serves in essence has become increasingly visible. I suspect that in Mexico today this subject would provoke heated, yet perhaps productive, debate. Do Mexican museums serve first and

foremost their artists? And if so, should they also be in the service of their careers? Or should they serve art? Perhaps they should serve and emphasise the transgressive, liberating and transformative power of art? Or else serve primarily the state and its symbolic machinery? Or maybe History, with a capital H—perhaps the role of museums should be to sublimate that hegemonic fiction, maximising the genealogy of the canon worshipped by some curators. Or are museums perchance under an obligation to their public, the social network, in which case should they create experiences capable of counteracting the multiple entropies of an awkwardly over-articulated society? Who do public Mexican museums serve predominantly today? Could it be that the public character of our task consists in the *lobbying* of these interests? Can the majority of visitors to our museums automatically be considered the beneficiaries of the productivity of their discourses?

Where do we start to transform the institutional structure in order to ensure that public museums operate as social spaces and centres for heterogeneous activities? From where are they supposed to emerge as vivid experiences, the fabric of the public domain? How can we involve the political class in these challenges? The calls to ennoble the role of the museum in the national educational network oblige us to regard the museum as a situational culture-producing institution, a centre for proto-political experiences in the realm of culture, understanding proto-politics as the flows of individual categorisation articulated by the available models of belonging. This would mean conceiving the museum as a territory capable of encouraging non-normative exchange formats and exposing visitors to non-directional experiences of cultural erosion. In this sense we would assume the museum's duty to art, to the experience of art—sometimes as an aesthetic experience, sometimes not, but always as a chance to take part in the heuristic production of sociability. This would imply providing a platform beyond the sacralisation of artistic careers, or styles, or monuments, or moments of synchrony starting from the consumption of status or identity adhesion to the nation-state.

Of course, this view will have difficulty complying with Mexico's traditionally symbolic avidity. A more democratic re-categorisation would oblige us to reduce the prominence of this role, making it more discreet, especially if we would like our public programmes to cease to endorse the polarised symbol denounced by Jesusa Rodríguez as *the eagle that devours the maid*—a parody of the Mexican national symbol, an eagle devouring a snake.

Paradoxically, in Mexico we are lucky to have these state institutions—at least they are not as temperamental as private spaces, which are vulnerable in their political commitments, running the risk of being dismantled and dispossessed by a stepmother or closed overnight in the blink of an eye as a result of divorce proceedings, a sudden preference for football or the Tecate racing car. Our philanthropy also entails political and civil responsibilities in the museum field, and faces the task of making its cultural engagement with the country more structured.

3. Public museums in Mexico: towards a sustainable social paradigm

This broad and not too exciting context is the real framework of the steps to be taken in our professional attempts to change the status quo, not only by the staff at MAM. I believe that our museum's strategic vision (in fact I would even suggest that this applies to all public museums in the country) must be reoriented according to the pressing implementation of a

sustainable social paradigm in Mexico. Not only should the museum as an exhibition space make the progressive expression of this paradigm explicit, but it should also play an active role in defining this paradigm of social sustainability. I think we need to continue to defend the museum's intellectual platform as a political stage, a civic structure, and deploy it as a malleable network that reflects broader social concerns, presents more mindful cultural offers and promotes greater social cohesion.

I must admit that my work as head of MAM has yielded no clear results that allow me to endorse this initiative, but I honestly believe in the convenience of sharing certain fields of specific action that will make the museum permeable to visitors and to its own challenges, enabling it to trigger these changes.

I shall now list a few guidelines for action, many of them uncertain and lacking pre-established practices although allowing for their implementation as strategies for institutional reintegration in a broader social base.

- i. The gradual de-objectualisation of the museum experience. The debate around this issue is not new, and yet artistic objects continue to lie at the heart of our practice. Regardless of Mexico's backwardness in the field of art collecting and of the collective interest of museum directors in restoring the public artistic heritage, museums must encourage approaches that focus less on the veneration of objects as patrimonial treasures and call into question the mystique surrounding the memory of collective identity in connection with accumulations of trophies. This entails prioritising other referential ties to curatorial discourse and working with new display models, thanks to which artistic practice will manage to convey levels of articulation beyond its metaphysical presence and reveal the process of its production (I am not referring here to its technical making but to its potential impact as a public value). How can we bring about this change of focus? That's the challenge we are facing. Serious commitment to the de-objectualisation of the museum experience meets with a number of obstacles and maladjustments to the present situation. Not only do most of our contemporary artists continue to focus on producing objects, consumer objects, which nowadays usually also appear as self-mystifying devices, but in their turn many of our curators are still attentive to the legitimising volatility of the market for luxury objects that also allows them to capitalise on the programmatic potential of their intermediation. To operate from the communicative and heuristic contents of the work of art, to call upon the museum to transcend the idea of the 'art work' in terms of heritage or luxury accessory implies conscientiously erasing traditional hierarchies in the museological use of other cultural products which, when they *are* included, usually only serve to establish heritage and help exhibit it as a historical index of status or, in the case of contemporary art, as the plunder of some programmatic war. I think it is important that we stress the underlying rebelliousness of art as regards the established canon in which it was historically categorised. It lies in our interest to reconsider curatorship as an activity that stands outside of the order of history, and to establish it in the sphere of the construction of the public, like a fabric that must needs

be evoked and or mediated in the present, like an uncontrolled process involving friction, erosion, connection and alliance that is triggered by art and which, as the new cognitive situation unfolds as a museum experience, reveals the emergence of a social network that symbolises its own ongoing construction.

- ii. The gradual expansion of what has traditionally been accepted as our specialised subject matter to include curatorial and museological experiences based on multidisciplinary, interaction theories and a more composite idea of public culture. This implies understanding the exhibition as a form of cultural production exposed to the most varied exchange practices. The exhibition as a process in itself wouldn't be concealed behind the work or emblematised by it, but would open up as a node of relational practices, discourses and accesses that do not necessarily address art. Multidisciplinary would become an opportunity to transform the *beaux-arts* and 'high culture' inspiration that is still claimed by our museums. Perhaps this attempt would afford us more honest communicative resources that would be more efficient as regards the level of education and intellectual curiosity of the majority of Mexican audiences.
- iii. An interest in de-objectualising the museum experience and in opening up to multidisciplinary will enable a better understanding and acceptance of its situational quality. I believe we need to improve our professional training in what are known as flow experiences, in interaction theories and in the heuristics of social articulations, and perform curatorial work to draw such flow experiences. Perhaps the idea of the museum as a laboratory or as a workshop does not refer to cognitive or productive formats that specifically consume the process quality of the art work, but to the construction of alliances, communication strategies, accesses and all sorts of cultural networks. Perhaps this vision of the museum as a laboratory will catalyse a critical space for the refunding of circumstantial belongings against the entropic inertia of all formalised models of cultural integration.
- iv. A matter often overlooked by all criticism of the public management of museums is that of publications. Publications bear witness to the real communication priorities of our public institutions. On the one hand we have humble gallery leaflets, and on the other extensive catalogues (that is our lot). The vast majority of museum publications in Mexico are catalogues produced at a cost of approximately \$40 or more. Who are they destined for? Who do they pay tribute to? What sort of erudition do they make available, and for whom? What sort of knowledge do they seek to share? If the publication formats only cater to preferential audiences, who are the preferential audiences of our editorial and publishing policies? Who are the interlocutors of curatorial language? Is the academic world the prime objective of our practice? All these issues arise in a context in which very few periodical publications in the arts have a large circulation, there is no serious arts press or spaces for debate or cultural reflection on prime-time television, no art-inspired editorial programmes accessible to

the masses. The field of publications should serve to support the public-funded undertakings that form the basis of our museological institutions.

- v. We believe in the need for better ethical and intellectual expectations to meet the sort of philanthropy required by the country in the present crisis. Public institutions must strengthen reflexive exchange and critical debate with potential philanthropic sectors in Mexican culture, and praise the civic value of informed and responsible philanthropy. We feel it is important to pay increasing attention to the way in which the development plans of public institutions set up intelligent dynamics for the redistribution of resources and accesses. It is also vital to articulate programmes that will channel existing philanthropy into new opportunities, far from ostentatious and class-conscious models, and discredit the manipulation of coercive philanthropy.
- vi. Another pressing issue in Mexico is overcoming the huge patrimonial gaps that have characterised museums since the second half of the twentieth century. The significant works produced in the country over the past fifty years are not kept in public collections. As a result, we are unable to produce a minimally informed account of developments in artistic practice since the systematic acquisitions made in the late sixties. However, I shall not refer to the vast amount of key works that must needs be rescued from the market and brought into our public museums. Paradoxically, the disadvantage of a museum that has made no purchases for a number of decades is a source for concern, for we are obliged to act as a network that is continuously renegotiating, at each exhibition, the construction of heritage between individuals (collectors), private and public institutions. This constant loaning of works, on long-term deposits or otherwise, entails a certain mobility of available works and groups of works, not always totally controlled. Consequently, rather than becoming treasure troves or theme parks of endless accumulation, we are forced to come up with an idea of heritage, agreed upon by consensus. In order to be able to shape a discourse of Mexican art after 1964, the year MAM opened, we must enter into a public call for loans that somehow equates the idea of *patrimony*. But I would like to stress another kind of heritage and refer to the pressing need for our public museums to work perhaps more urgently on finding and rescuing private archives, oral memories, records of events, peripheral rituals, experiences lacking material structure, collective or individual experiments never before recorded as art or public gestures, etc. Every day such forms of heritage are either forgotten or abandoned in lofts and cellars, making it impossible for us to compile, index and advertise them. I believe we should heighten esteem for the role played by so-called *intangible heritage* and its possible archives in public museums and emphasise the need to provide spaces for such intangible practices.

To conclude, I should like to insist once more on the pressing need for these changes. The fact that public museums in Mexico and their directors operate within a limited and even regressive framework wouldn't be so dramatic if it didn't go hand in hand with the fact that the economic, ecological, political and social model they are based on is unsustainable and

that as public institutions we can no longer afford to endorse it. Ours is a paradigm in ruins, a much broader crisis that must be reverted. Museums should make the effort to do so now. Thank you very much.

RESPONDENT

Dmitry Vilensky

To speak here, and in particular to respond to Osvaldo's talk, is a hard task. I think that in my place there should be some local person—an activist who has no involvement with local museums but who might share general concerns about what kind of Mexican museum we should have for the people, and what's wrong with the current ones.

But I am a stranger who appears here for the first time, is not at all involved in local politics but is very curious about what's going on and why. Furthermore, I am the only artist invited to speak here, and what makes the situation even more confusing is that I am an artist from a very particularly peripheral context—not just an artist, but a representative of a grass-roots collective which builds its politics on radical dissent from local Russian governmental structures. So, what can I say here?

At the same time, however, I think that my presence is not simply a matter of chance, and our artistic and discourse politics are really related to the framework offered by this meeting, so maybe I'll try to concentrate on that rather than reflect on Osvaldo's talk.

The question is, what can museums learn from the crisis?

What museum? What crisis?

There are obvious differences between museums. About a year ago, I was chatting to someone who was amazingly inspired by the beginning of the crisis, which in his opinion definitely gave relatively small institutions many more opportunities to rival the larger ones that operate with a hundred times their budgets. [He felt that] in the current political situation one might get by with a secure budget of just a few million in hand, small change to a few ambitious people.

And then I spoke to another guy (I won't hide his name, Charles Esche) who confirmed that many museums in Europe with long-term budget plans are not affected by the financial crisis at all, because they enjoy long-term governmental support.

So, once again, what museum and what crisis are we talking about?

Before answering these questions, we should pose another more essential one: how can a museum keep its promise to be an emancipatory force in society? How can it regain its role of opening up new horizons, not just to understand a society, but to transform it to something closer to a more human and just world? Since Marx's profound analysis of capital we have

known that systemic crises are inevitable—that is the nature of capitalism. This is not the first one and it won't be the last.

Can this crisis be healthy?

I hope so, yes, as long as we manage to use the moment to implement a new vision and a new way of transforming museums into something else.

The economisation of museums. Getting rid of populist politics

I would suggest that the core issue of the transformation of the museum is that of class, and class directly relates to the issue of who is the public. Which interests do museums serve? Or to put it better, in the old cruel rhetoric, to what part of society does the museum belong?

We cannot deny that great art works were produced in the past, despite the subjugation of their creators to the ruling class, sponsors and those who formulate a 'demand' for new works. Because all great artists have a goal of their own, and different more complicated and urgent forms of responsibility.

As we recognise this fact today, we should emphasise the vital proviso, 'despite'. We thus constantly remind ourselves what art could and should be if the subjugation to the dominant classes and tastes were to disappear.

I think that there is no sense in repeating the myth about a classless society—being in Mexico for a week and seeing the enormous poverty, racial tensions, segregation, it is clear that class structures do not disappear. Confrontations between oppressors and oppressed have shaped most of our societies in a brutal form, and the current crisis brings these tensions to another level.

But the issue of class composition and class theory is currently experiencing its own crisis. Class, a sense of personal belonging to a class, and class sensibility, is never a given. It is in a permanent process of formation and becoming, and I would suggest that the responsibility of museums today might be an attempt to trigger the formation of a new emancipatory subject, and provide the tools for its political subjectivation through a wider concept of aesthetic experiences based on education of class-consciousness.

As we know from history, the museum is a product of the revolutionary ideas of the bourgeoisie. But if museums simply continued to serve the dominant classes, that would be the end of museum politics. Yet, how do we address a class sensibility that is different to the bourgeois sensibility? I think this is a key issue.

On the one hand, it is easy to speculate on the proliferation of a worldwide petite bourgeoisie, which to a certain extent is true, although this is not the case.

I would like to point out in my talk a few issues that may hopefully help us to rethink certain elements of museum politics today and conceive new hybrid museum structures based on participation, the formation of emancipatory subjectivity and ideas about education in emancipatory class-consciousness.

I think that despite our differences, we may share a common ground; that the most urgent task for all cultural workers is to seek forms and places where art can gain its emancipatory role in society.

This is also directly related to the question of what is the use and/or value of art, and the museums which are supposed to be depositories of its true historical value.

Recently, there has been much interest in and speculation about surplus value, which correctly reflects the current status of art in society, where art became a pure commodity and the whole activity of most cultural institutions can be correctly described as sheer propaganda for commodity fetishism. So, I would like to start with what could be considered a 'crude' question [addressed at those working in] the arts and critical theory: What is the use of what you do?

This question can, of course, provoke a quite negative reaction—it may be regarded as completely out of bounds, naïve or just meaningless. If we take a closer look, however, we'll find that it is both legitimate and essential.

It is clear that when we analyse it, we arrive at the age-old problem of the difference between the exchange and the use values of everything produced by human activity. Today, the idea that art's importance has to do with its anti-functionality, its attempts to escape instrumentalisation on the part of the culture industry or direct political action is difficult to take seriously.

The idea that art should dissolve into life, that it should be totally abolished in favour of daily life's most basic functions, is also hard to be taken seriously.

How can we find a way to continue not only the project of building the process of individual development via aesthetic education (despite all the obvious sympathy for it) but also find a new continuance for the project of art as a tool of the radical transformation of people-consciousness?

From Schiller's time on, the goal of art as aesthetic education was the harmonious development of the individual, the formation of a whole man capable of creativity. This concept, however, was oriented toward the individual bourgeois subject; in the final analysis, it leads to the formation of the egotistic individual obsessed with private accumulation of different commodities. It is clear that a return to this concept today would be reactionary, which is exactly what the last Documenta, unfortunately, proved.

At the same time, I think there is a general consensus about the statement that today's decisive battle is shaping up around the production of subjectivity.

This statement brings us to an important analysis of Soviet Productionism and avant-garde, which in their starkest forms posed the question of a programme of 'life-construction'. 'Art as an immediate and deliberately employed instrument of life-construction: such is the formula for the existence of proletarian art', as Boris Arvatov declared in his book *Art and Production*.

Can we share these feelings today? And if so, where can we find a way to continue the project of proletarian art? On the one hand, we are living through the prolonged transition to post-Fordism and knowledge capitalism.

The farewell to production frees our hands, but where is the factory that the Productionists dreamt of? What was once upon a time a source of hope for progress and emancipation has turned out to be a reactionary phenomenon that had to be overcome. The formation of 'new political subjects', whose analysis was undertaken by Italian Operaismo in the sixties, is the complete opposite of what the Productionists had hoped for. As the natural exodus of workers from the factory commenced, the 'assembly line/collectivist' model of subject formation and its forms of political organisation began to collapse.

Where can we find the factory or the means of production that would supply us with a maximally precise emancipatory impulse today?

Today such a factory is nowhere and everywhere. The development of capitalism reveals the production of false subjectivity in the totality of capital's practices, which are now realised everywhere: in the thick of daily life, in institutes of culture, in the very networks of social interaction.

This is the current situation in which new art practices combine aesthetics, theory and a recently emerged activism. Over the last few years, a number of artists, activists, collectives and writers have succeeded in both realising and finding the theoretical grounding for a variety of works which allow us to speak of a new situation in art. These projects have found points of connection between art, new technologies and the international movement against neo-liberal capitalism.

The lineage of this new interest in political art can be traced back to Documenta 10 (1997) and coincided with the emergence of the 'movement of movements' which appeared on the political horizon in the riots against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999. This situation has subsequently been manifested through a variety of cultural projects with critical stances

against the process of capitalist globalisation and emphasis on the principles of self-organisation, self-publishing and political understanding of autonomy (as the realisation of political tasks outside the parliamentary system of power). All these factors have evoked the idea of a return to the 'political' in art.

But these practices have a very important genealogy in the history of socialist art internationally. I would like to draw your attention to one very important historical phenomenon that developed in ex-socialist countries, namely the concept of the 'workers' club' or 'workers' house of culture'.

The workers' club was introduced in the USSR in the mid-twenties, and is best known through the piece made famous by Alexander Rodchenko. Created in 1925 for the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, it was never actually produced but was just a sort of a model of how such places should be organised. The piece introduced to a Western bourgeois audience the completely different method of staging workers' free-time activities in the USSR.

The task of the workers' club was to orient workers in issues of political struggle, and introduce them to a new type of aesthetic experience and to practical art by means of seminars, lectures and creative workshops.

It critically undermined the obsolete idea of an idle consumer who could derive pleasure and 'emancipate' himself from his shabby everyday existence through experiencing art objects in museums. It was about building a space based on educational methodology, creativity and participation.

But let's take a closer look at the concept of the workers' club and its late implementation in the everyday life of the Soviet Union in the form of workers' cultural centres or 'houses of culture'. How did they function?

Unfortunately, there is very little research into this topic, carried out in Soviet times and later, but we should take into account the dimension of these developments. In 1988 there were over 137,000 of these clubs established in the Soviet Union, and I think that all people of my generation had at least some direct and positive experience of such places.

The *dom kulturey* (house or palace of culture) was an establishment for all kinds of recreational activities and hobbies: sports, collecting, arts, etc., and was designed to accommodate them all. A typical palace contained one or several cinemas, concert halls, dance studios, various do-it-yourself hobby groups, an amateur radio station and a public library, all of which charged no admission until very recently. They were usually built and run by the trade union of a particular factory, but were often set up by local authorities (the Soviets) and served the general public, focussing in particular on after-school education for children.

So, it was a structure that embraced all sorts of so-called harmonious personal development. The Rodchenko room, for instance, was a quite modest proposal for the design of a unit-space, but a few years after his Workers' Club took off, it became the biggest challenge for many famous architects to construct huge multi-purpose buildings.

Another important aspect of my observations of the possibilities of transforming art institutions is the current discussion of the concept and role of social centres. It is important to note that there is a move by progressive museums to rethink their public role. This was one of the topics of discussion at the recent conference at MACBA, 'The Molecular Museum. Towards a New Kind of Institutionalilty', which approached the relationship between museums and

social centres. I think that the concept of the social centre, as a place where art can reveal its pure use value is very important.

The new social centres strive to engage a broad spectrum of oppressed people, offering them an opportunity to come into contact with culture and thereby complement the defence of their right to recognition. The discussion about the future of social centres can be linked to the concept of the workers' club developed in the Soviet Union because they share an approach to the value of art and culture and the way people can participate in their production.

I believe that if we are ready to rethink the development of the culture of the oppressed, we should somehow return to the old question posed by Paulo Freire: 'If the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution? This is a question of the greatest importance; one aspect of the reply is to be found in the distinction between systematic education, which can only be changed by political power, and educational projects, which should be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organising them.'

Why this quote?

The grammar of this quotation poses quite precisely the question of organisation processes. 'Them' obviously refers to all those people who, by virtue of their class, acutely experience the injustice of the world, but who at the same time do not possess sufficient knowledge to be aware of the strategic tasks of their own emancipation. In other words, according to the age-old, universally accepted model, there are certain privileged external agents who develop these practices of emancipation, and this is why the discussion about the figure of educator played such an important role in the Soviet Union and in Latin America.

In many respects, if museums want to preserve their progressive role in society they should find a way to maintain their position as popular educators, acknowledging the fact that the figure of the teacher/pedagogue is rightly regarded with serious suspicion.

It might make sense, however, to reconsider this figure dialectically, as someone prepared to mediate that knowledge: someone who knows something but is ready to engage in a process of learning and becoming, as our friends from the Nomad University once postulated.

For quite a while now, a certain portmanteau word has been circulating in the debates of the Nomad University. In an attempt to sum up what we believe should be one of the results of the critical work carried out by social movements and other post-socialist political actors, we *discussed creating new mental prototypes for political action.*

(<http://transform.eipcp.net/transversa1/0508/universidadnomada/en>)

I would suggest that the same approach be developed in relation to museum practices.

So, what should be built as a result of museum exhibition and educational politics are spaces where viewers can encounter works of art in appropriate and educational settings. I do not think that this requires a universal 'concept' but we should try to develop a method, an

approach to the production of the space that has a universal dimension. In my opinion, these claims for universality are sometimes misunderstood as totalitarian or exclusive of any difference. But you don't have to be a philosopher to recognise that this is not true. Real universality is built on singular, local and differentiated experiences, exactly as Marx noted in *The Communist Manifesto*: 'From the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.'

DAY 2:
OFF-CENTRE CENTRES

SESSION 3

SPEAKER

Cuahtémoc Medina

Museums Will Be Convulsive ... Or They Won't Be Southern

1. The globalised rat

Late in November 2008, when the new Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo [MUAC] opened its doors in Mexico, one particular artistic intervention had the dubious luck of provoking a variety of terrors and agitated defences. Following a much less ambitious and notorious presentation at the Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló [EACC] in Spain, artist Miguel Ventura of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent produced an installation entitled *Cantos cívicos* (Civic Chants), which in monumental proportions suggested a strange cross between a circus architecture, a futuristic airship and a rat. For months the artist and the museum immersed themselves in a hidden battle about the possible legal and political risks that a staging such as Ventura's could entail. Ventura's work, the most extreme creation in his fictional linguistic/neo-political/post-right-wing/meta-Freudian organisation, the New Inter-territorial Language Council [N ILC] would be, as all members of the local circuit suspected, deliberately excessive, anal, coprophagic, pornographic, alarmist, apocalyptic and declamatory. But what made this piece particularly explosive was the fact that it invited the museum to celebrate its opening, shooting itself in the feet.

Ventura's installation was designed to question, in the least delicate way possible, the alliance of private interests, humanist prestige and aesthetic capital that had produced the main local organisation of recent decades. *Cantos cívicos*, that 'corrupt rat procreated between Carlos Slim and Miguel Alemán Jr. Alojada in the TELMEX hall at MUAC', as it is described by the website that documents the operation, harboured a true pandemonium of social monstrosities. Enveloped in a wave of parodies of 'neo-conceptual' art works peppered with pound and dollar signs and swastikas, viewers discovered a labyrinth full of reproductions of pro-Nazi propaganda by Mexican intellectuals and politicians, scatological and pornographic collages with society column photos of the relatives of patrons and collectors, and pictures that traced the relationship between global capitals, artistic institutions and mainstream artists. Taking off a post-modern *wunderkammer*, Ventura displayed hundreds of stuffed animals and dedicated a prominent wall to Nazi memorabilia of the most banal sort—portraits of SS soldiers and officials wearing complacent smiles, Teutonic landscapes characterised by a naive nationalism and all sorts of apologetic documents of Aryan normality. The sweetened grotesque culminated in a science laboratory where several dozens of rats dyed in different colours were subjected to certain preparatory routines that were repeated in the exhibition hall with choirs singing Francoist and fascist hymns as if they were Christmas carols.

Let's allow ourselves a first provocation: *Cantos cívicos* was indeed an infernal representation of the kind of art world in which you and I and the artist himself are immersed, considered from within the system that entailed forsaking the globalised minimal-conceptual orthodoxy and the outrage provoked by the complicity between the culture of global capitalism and

domestic oligarchies. Regardless of how fair, hysterical or hilarious the imaginary of the piece were, it was a southern vision of the workings of the symbolic and material economy of the art world. Apart from the mistakes that the museum could have made in its relationship with the artist, the fact that such a work could be included in the exhibition programme of a new museum was extraordinary. But we could also argue that the decision bore unexpected fruits, as it contradicted the idea that the construction of prestige is obtained through agreement, consumer satisfaction or complacency with patrons.

Ventura's *anti-museum* was, of course, an *agent provocateur*. As usual, what matters is not what Ventura 'meant' but the surprise it caused. A few weeks later the debate surrounding the new UNAM [National Autonomous University of Mexico] museum had transcended the notes section in the arts pages and triggered responses of both condemnation and support by a wide range of political scientists, intellectuals and publicists whose hysterical views filled the leaders of newspapers and magazines. The chief allegation against Ventura was of a platonic nature: he was accused of perverting the young and uneducated with a potential defence of Nazism. On the one hand, liberal political scientists were shocked by the equation of capital and fascism that the work established with the game of prestige associated with the global art market. But above all they reproached him for a presumed omission: according to them, the fact of not repeating the Shoah in connection with any representation of Nazi Germany amounted to denying the so-called Holocaust. Yet what was ominous was not, of course, the existence of a critical process—rather than Ventura's work, the articles questioned the fact that the University, its museum and the late-Modernist architecture of the new edifice should have accommodated an ambiguous and shocking discourse. '*Cantos cívicos* are "Nazi cantos";' wrote the chief ideologist of the pro-entrepreneurial liberal right wing Enrique Krauze, 'unworthy of the marvellous building that houses them, unworthy of the great institution that inexplicably welcomes them.'

What was at stake in such debates was the threat of an economic sanction: the museum was supposed to pay for having supported a type of contemporary art that did not entail respect for the shared truths and the extolment of patronage. The answer to these questions involved upholding the idea of the museum as a container of discourses that did not meet the agreements and forms of usual debates. It also involved the celebration of expense. It is not my intention to contribute to the complex network of curatorial clashes, critical debates and social symptoms that *Cantos cívicos* prompted in its day. What I would like to do is refer to the way in which public interference with the work suggests, in a highly illustrative manner, the tense economic, political and discursive negotiation that the contemporary art museum symbolises, and the painful complication posed, in the South, by the emergence of the public space of contemporary art as a gigantic institutionality. This is an otherwise eloquent case of a paradox. Of course, the possibility of a museum of the size of MUAC requires mobilising an economy of prestige that to a great extent depends on the visibility attained by local artistic practice both in Mexico and in global circuits. However, a significant part of the energy stems from local art's reputation as a pitiless, cynical, fierce and brutish practice. The Mexican cultural scene was not welcomed into global culture because it articulated the ethos and tastes of the upper and middle classes or the municipal intelligentsia,

and even less because it befitted the late Romantic dawns of local philosophers. On the contrary, the reference value of a work such as Ventura's derives from its condition of exasperated criticism, its cynical allusion to social flaw and its iconographic and auditory aggressiveness. And yet, this very distinction (the fact of it being as indocile as the society around it) implies that the increase in spaces and means of the local art scene can only lead to an increase in symbolic violence or perhaps even in hissing. In these parts art doesn't emerge as a romantic irony, a nostalgic reflection on the modernism of development policies or an exercise in décor and design. To open a museum such as MUAC would therefore seem to be the perfect recipe for a disaster, where radicalism and barbarism would bite their own tails driving away the investment in prestige required by the work in order to have a bearing on the public scene.

However, as Ventura's case suggests, this debate had the effect of boosting the museum's recognition albeit not in a linear way. Indeed, if MUAC today welcomes the Cildo Meireles show organised by the Tate Modern and displayed at MACBA [Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona] this is not simply because as a result of the present economic crisis several northern museums cancelled their participation in the exhibition tour and enabled the unthinkable to happen, making it accessible to a southern museum. The Meireles exhibition in Mexico was also the result of the museum's need to negotiate the crisis of legitimacy derived from the controversy created by Miguel Ventura—a front for the mousetrap, if you like, but what a front!

Eventually, I'm sure, the accumulation of prestige and audiences can only be repeated if museums are able to awaken passions and even divisions in their milieux. So there is a synergy between traumatic success, the geographical disruption of cultural circuits caused by the global economic crisis, and the energy derived from the discordant forces of the art scene and public opinion. With a bit of luck, the combination of fury, administration, prestige, theorising and pleasures will not only be possible but also necessary.

2. In favour of the Casa de Salomona

Somehow or other we all know that museums are no longer mausoleums, as Theodor Adorno suggested in *Prisms*, where our chief activity is contemplating objects 'to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying'. In other words, they are vestiges of the 'neutralisation of culture'.² In an otherwise eloquent manner, the dominant form of museum, once the cultural cemetery, is now an institution whose social role reveals a rapid increase in the connections between living art and public awareness; sanctuary, memory and reinvention of radical criticism. What I am trying to say is that today the museum-mausoleum is gradually being replaced in the civilised imaginary by the museum-market-airport-customs-public square-supermarket-theme park-kindergarten-library-parliament—the contemporary art centre. As we saw yesterday during Michael Govan's presentation, the museum-mausoleum hopes to 'vampirically' capture the sense of vitality of contemporary art and its actors, even if only as decoration for Mayan vessels. What dominates the new cultural

² Theodor Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in *Prisms*, translated from the German by Shierry Weber Nichol森 and Samuel Weber, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1983, pp. 173-186.

machine is not the perpetuation of tradition but the generalisation of the museum as a centre of global cultural flows, as an observer of the present in theoretical, intellectual, sensitive and street terms and as a review of multi-regional culture. The museum as a platform, as a harbour of culture and counterculture is the museum as a space of agitation and of political, economic and cultural negotiation.

So we find ourselves before institutions that to a greater or lesser degree, for better or for worse, express on a daily basis all that which was anathema to the ideology of modernism—in other words, the convergence, confusion or synergy of politics, thinking, aesthetics, festival and trade. What works such as the one by Miguel Ventura strive to define and activate, in all their violence, is the sprout of a new mechanism of the general economy. The novelty doesn't lie in the visibility of signature museums of the developed North and their preference for the disguised varieties of post-Cubist architecture. A whole range of conditions exists for the production, consumption and archival administration of the cultural that have begun to converge around the construction and operation of these spaces, which we haven't quite perceived as a rearrangement of the relations between society and culture on a global scale. Suffice it to list four paradoxical features of this institution to understand that we are in an apocryphal episode of *Star Trek* in which Doctor Spock suddenly looks at the camera, his eyes popping out of his head, and exclaims, 'It's culture, Jim, but not as we know it!'

a. An esoteric mass culture

Beyond the demographic changes in the art circuit and save for regional differences, contemporary art has begun to operate as an intermediate sector between mass culture, academia, counterculture and trade, a sector where a new economy of prestige and a variety of often esoteric structures of thought, feeling and production converge. In other words, we find ourselves before a strange cultural industry that mediates between tremendously complex academic discourses, artistic enclaves, political models and identification games. The size of audiences is, of course, a relevant feature but it is not everything. In spite of the fact that blockbuster exhibitions and marketing seriously threaten museological policies, for they are always suggesting that organisations should merge their economies, it is a fact that such values are constantly mediated by a certain rivalry for the cultural capital: the administration of educational legitimacy, the role of defining historical-cultural narratives and rivalry for curatorial prestige. I would dare to suggest that even the fact of sustaining a growing popularity depends to a greater or lesser degree on provoking rejection, complexity, mystery, shock and deception. Popularity is not necessarily choosing what is transparent, well known or pleasant.

b. A global machinery of prestige

Despite the recent crisis suffered by the global financial machine and its repercussion on the increasing difficulties in securing sponsorship, we have reasons to believe that the inclusion of contemporary art in the economy of prestige of global capitalism is too important a historical event to be reduced to the immediate availability of cheques. What lies behind the hyperinflation of the art market of the last decade and the explosion of collecting and patronage around museums all over the world is the fact that for the very first time we have a

globally integrated market of social prestige. The old national bourgeoisies that to a greater or lesser degree supported secondary markets and organisations separately are now a global bourgeois class that has established a significant part of its social and symbolic interactions around contemporary art and its centres. The economies, interactions and operational circuits of contemporary art events and institutions increasingly involve an ever more de-territorialised upper class, simultaneously 'based' in several metropolises of the North and the South, and which considers these an important source of sociability and pursuit of prestige. I suspect that one of the reasons why these agents take part in the network of cultural organisations is the relative obsolescence of such powerful and wealthy classes as business heads and interlocutors of nation-states. Indeed, the dematerialisation of financial capital and the surrendering of businesses to the bureaucracy of chief executive officers have minimised the role that these individuals played in defining an existing economic structure. The novelty of this contingent, however, is its geographic diversity—the involvement of the elites in institutions worldwide is one of the key elements of the inclusion of southern art in the global canon. Their economic contributions, more than our theoretical discourses, have succeeded in undermining the monopoly of the account of modernism and the unidirectionality of culture. Even so, it is undeniable that the contribution of southern elites to central institutions implies a strengthening of the centre's actual centrality—it is still an expression of dependent capitalism. I am not trying to sell the idea that northern museums are stripping southern organisations of their resources; I am simply suggesting that the development possibilities of southern centres are restricted by the trend of philanthropic flows to focus on northern institutions and artists. It is not unusual to discover, as I recently did, that the same patron who reluctantly promoted the pavilion of an artist from his hometown at the Venice Biennale was more than puffed-up to sponsor the Bruce Nauman catalogue. The fact that such behaviour was not precisely supportive didn't depress me as much as seeing how a jury that included a number of well-known post-colonial critics went on to prize the boldness of the American pavilion. Similarly, I am convinced that the same bankers and government officials who led the São Paulo Biennial to its permanent state of crisis as from the year 2000, or the agents who dismantled Mexico's mixed economy in the nineties contributed to the financing of neo-colonial exhibitions in the North with titles that sounded like shampoo slogans, such as *Brazil: Body and Soul*. The fact that there are always academics and curators on hand to carry out all these operations clearly reveals how economic flows do not only consist of contributions in cash.

c. Contemporary art is really contemporary

Obviously, no interaction could have been possible without a genuine change in the politics of cultural representation. For the first time in the modern age, advanced art is not organised around a spatial metaphor that places the hegemonic centre in the North Atlantic and represents other regions and artistic spheres as victims of cultural anachronism. What has made us stop talking of 'international art' is that this notion led to a geopolitical division of space that attributed the monopoly of the 'modern' to something which, to be concise, we should call 'NATO Art', condemning other spheres of culture to represent residues and anachronism. The fact that the artists, trends, discourses and possibilities of the South have undermined the tropes of central artistic thought is due more to the world economy and

cohesive social circuits than to our curatorial arguments or the effects of our scholarly criticisms of neo-colonialism. As a result of this synchronisation, and of the crisis of the concepts of modernity and avant-garde, the expression 'contemporary art' is not an empty or conventional category. 'Contemporary art' means the matrix of art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that was obliged to face the temporal unification of the relations between art and society, between centre and periphery, and between the museum and the present.

In terms of the institution, the upshot of this conceptual transformation is tremendous. One of its main signs is the crisis of exhibition policies regarding modern art. Since 1794, when the second installation of the Louvre imposed chronological criteria in the organisation of the museum's collections, thereby creating a progressive sequence from the infancy of art to our day and age,³ most permanent displays in museums observed the creation of progressive narratives that culminated in the 'torpedo moving through time, its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past of fifty to a hundred years ago',⁴ as in Alfred Barr's MoMA [Museum of Modern Art]. From the point of view of art history, museums of contemporary art are wonderful machines of historical criticism: the narratives of permanent collections have become tough dilemmas that call for radically new forms of historicity such as the gravitational circles of the 'historical centres' at Tate Modern. I think it is obvious that the inclusion of southern art in the story of modern and contemporary art has a lot to do with the crisis of the metaphor behind the story of these permanent collections. However, such a curatorial task—that of the production of effective self-critical accounts of permanent displays—is increasingly unattainable in the South. While the flow of exchanges and reflections on the art of exhibition making, biennials and specific events between North and South is very constructive, the truth is that the setbacks in the course of the general economy of art are expressed by the loss of direction of southern museums as regards the story of their collections.

d. The refuge of the self-awareness of global capitalism

Finally, we should point out that this prodigious machine has the peculiarity of housing (and occasionally mobilising) a ghost. *The ghost in the machine* is no less than the memorial, the voices, the affects and effects of radical tradition, not only of thought and visibility, which is no trifle, but of political and theoretical radicalism. Indeed, if the territory of contemporary art debate has any kind of symbolic power this is because it contains the murmurs, residues and discussions of the history of the social and cognitive dissidence of the West and the Westernised. It is not at all illogical that a whole range of counter-hegemonic positions with little currency in the real academic and political realms should have sought refuge behind the mask of the supposed banality of the art world. Indeed, the fact that most genealogies of contemporary art should tend obsessively towards the utopian experimentation and political explosion of the sixties, counter-culture or post-68 theorising has contributed to make the museum a haven for negativity, criticism of the subject, financial speculation and anti-capitalist

³ Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Cambridge, England and Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994, p. 42.

⁴ Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 368.

politics as the 'leftovers of the neutralisation of culture', if you like. I realise, horrified, that in this order of ideas, Adorno's notion of the museum-mausoleum is back with a vengeance. Even so, there is an inexorable logic to the fact that the contemporary art circuit is the sanctuary of radicalism: what we refer to as 'contemporary art' is, first and foremost, the field that welcomed the experimentalism and questioning of disciplines and subjects rejected by the other cultural industries in their return to traditional forms. Perhaps the realm of interaction with such radical contents and devices will prove to be the most favourable space of interlocution of the South.

3. Metropolis or politics?

So, as you see, instead of repeating that we live in a globalised economy and culture, the idea I have attempted to put forward, albeit perhaps rudimentarily, is that the system of museums of global contemporary art is indeed interwoven in a general integrated economy: a combination of structures of expenditure, prestige and excess that are necessary in order to operate inside, in spite of and against the logic of accumulation of capital. My problem is not academic—I think the absence of reflection on the kind of economic and symbolic networks in which we operate strengthens the perception that we are bereft of the power of political intervention and articulation and turns us into automatic victims of the restricted economies of global capitalism, either by convincing us of our helplessness on account of the 'lack of resources' or by making us resign ourselves to intellectually and ethically confirming the mandate imposed by the cheque flow. We have, to be sure, a new symbolic capital capable of ensuring the intervention of extremely complex social agents and driving forces on an expanded geographic scale. What we do not realise, however, is that as organisations we are imbricated with networks in a much deeper way than we are led to believe by our domestic practice and professional duels.

A first task is to transcend the epistemology that links the museum as an institution to the mission of being an organ of the city, its clients, physical spaces and symbolic interactions. Indeed, there are many areas in which we aspire to become a part of the service economy of the cities we inhabit, to operate with those clients-communities-audiences-patrons-groups who cross, or who we oblige to cross, our threshold. The fact that the art of the nineties superficially appears as a collection of actions, symbolic interventions and explorations of the physical and imaginary territory of the city is of no help at all. It would seem, in effect, that the contemporary art museum expresses a historical moment in which cities have become the privileged objects of cultural representation, against the territoriality of the nation-states of the past that hoped to narrativise themselves through culture.

I believe that an important exercise, especially in the South, is to define the museological tasks that may not correspond to the ideological apparatus of the nation-state but do resist the simpleness of conceiving us as a part of the cityscape. I am reluctant to believe that the politicisation and action of museum organisations disregard the mediation and agitation potential of such institutions. First and foremost, the rare energy, continuous productivity and social impact of contemporary art museums depend precisely on the tense heterogeneity they involve. Far from posing an anomaly, the fact that they stand at a crossroads of such startling

desires, mobilisations and interests is what explains the role they play in public enthusiasm. But above all, I would like to convey the impression that museums are beginning to trace a diagram of forces, a territory of disputes and transactions; to paraphrase Deleuze, they are a 'plane of immanence'. The converging directions of contemporary art organisations, as opposed to other social mechanisms (commercial culture, parliamentary culture, the capitalist market), determine that contemporary art is one of the few areas where essentially dissatisfied classes, cultural stances, ways of life and practices can still enjoy a significant degree of visibility and be effectively and symbolically sensed and tensed. My argument is that we do indeed find ourselves before organisations in which the tense complexity of the *res publica* paradoxically still exists, despite having been almost entirely expurgated from other branches of social operation.

Let's take this reasoning even further. I couldn't agree more with Jacques Rancière when, quoting Raymond Aron and in contrast with the demagoguery of our triumphant democracies, he declares that 'All states are oligarchic', for 'what we call democracy is a statist and government operation that is quite the opposite: eternally elect members (...) whose chief connection to people is that of the representation of regional interests; governments that make their own laws (...) ministers or ministerial collaborators who also hold positions in public or semi-public companies (...) [and] proprietors of media empires who use their public functions to monopolise the empire of public media.' In other words, the politics of the unipolar world consists, universally, of 'the monopolisation of the *res publica* by a solid alliance of the state oligarchy and the economic oligarchy'.⁵ If the idea of cultural independence makes any sense it is because our role as professionals working in organisations may reside in setting in motion a machine of contrasted positions, interests and mobilisations. In such an arena of tensions and conflicts, the apparent logic of the global oligarchic state should not be expressed unrestrainedly.

5. To sleep awake ...

I don't know who had the fortunate idea of calling this lecture 'fair trade,' but I thought this meant regulating our trade in order to help Third World producers and support their sustainability strategies, i.e., establishing ethical regulations for the cultural market that are implemented through the market itself. I find the way in which we have avoided this premise quite revealing. On the one hand, I am inclined to believe that the strategy is not completely expressible in this lecture. As I suggested in the workshop I imparted yesterday, I feel that by renouncing the obsolete idea of making deontological statements, associations like CIMAM have lost their effectiveness. What are the upshots, beyond the fact that curators from the North continue to offer us slide shows of their successes and curators from the South continue to present refined complaints? Wouldn't it be possible to set up a regime in which central organisations interacted with the South to help disadvantaged institutions in favour of mutual sustainability? Wouldn't it be possible to create a space in which organisations from the South display their ability to play a powerful part in the economy of prestige, in spite of their relative financial poverty?

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, translated from the French by Steve Corcoran, London, Verso Books, 2007, pp. 72-73. Our version from the Spanish quoted by the author.

With all due respect, I think this cosmopolitanism, to quote the classics, is a Robinsonian idea. Like many of my Latin American colleagues, over time I have chosen to take control of the cultural canon and strategically use spaces in the global debate to introduce a greater complexity or radicalism that will make it essential to include the South. I admit that the strategy often involves complex global negotiations when in fact it seeks to produce municipal effects, but now we've entered into the realm of fantasy, let's say that there will be some advantages in reversing the flows of cultural circulation between organisations and in defending the thesis that the art of the South has resulted in an effective interlocution by coming to terms with its controversial nature.

I know I'm dreaming ... I think what we need is something closer to complicity as regards concrete experiments rather than widespread 'fair trade' policies, a category which, with your permission, reminds me more of the organic food shops in Woodstock than of any specific effect in the South. I can say, for instance, that the need central organisations had of assuming a global role favoured the complexity of artistic play in Latin America, and that this unequal symbolic coalition could be boosted if such processes sought to educate Latin patrons and southern cultural officials and teach them to develop networks of local institutions. Part of the potential contained in such transfers of symbolic technology emerges spontaneously, as in the case of the Museo de Arte de Lima and other places, where the double agents of support groups of central organisations maximise models of patronage and/or curatorship learnt in London or Amsterdam, adapting them to the southern context. Whether or not the educational agenda of the elites produced by the global economy of prestige could include helping to train patrons to improve their communication with the institutions that their development departments do not serve is, I think, a pertinent question. *I get romantic.* But this would, of course, involve acquiring a vision of the global cultural system according to which we would realise, for instance, that in the long term the possibility that museums in the North could be conceived as global museums implies the existence of increasingly refined and complex art in the South. So, in spite of the number of mediations it lies in the selfish institutional interest of the North to strengthen the texture of the scenes from where many of the artists, curators or voices with whom they work come from.

Consequently, this would imply realising that rather than suppliers of services or clients they must include southern museums and artists as a part of their republican political game. This spirit could well materialise in certain alliances with unequal benefits. For instance, arbitrarily choosing to strengthen certain southern institutions and their directors by working with them on exhibition projects that intellectually and politically spring from the South, in the knowledge that in any event the resources will also derive in part from the South. To reverse the flow of museological undertakings so that it will begin to operate from South to North must be seen as a way to strengthen the organisations that you already admire but do not yet perceive as being true centres. All right, I'm not dreaming, I'm fantasising ... But generally speaking, I still believe that the first step is for these institutions in different locations to begin to develop some form of critical thinking that will enable them to understand their interactions at a distance, in other

words, to contemplate the forces they have brought into operation and therefore their possibilities of acting politically within them.

Finally, I am convinced that the main effect of this interaction would be the avoidance of aesthetic and political complacency. Although many of my southern colleagues would like to work in the opposite direction, that is to say, in support of a certain neo-modern refinement, I believe that the best opportunity for southern organisations to progress in the future lies in feeding the beasts. I can't understand how we lose sight of the fact that our symbolic capital in the global game lies in the more controversial areas of artistic production instead of the exportation of delicatessen. It is up to our museums to draw attention to the fact that their power depends on their ability to embrace intellectual, social and sensitive agitation, esotericism and politicisation, and the constant friction with a numbed public opinion. Over the course of time, one effective connection between the operating capacity of the North as regards the art and culture of the South is revealed by the fact that organisations in different parts of the world validate cultural forms that would appear unacceptable in other areas. Let's not delude ourselves—we are immersed in a network of post-colonial powers. Whenever a central museum or a biennial lowers its guard and promotes shallow, conservative or irrelevant practices, the ricochet effect on audiences, politicians and patrons in the South is tremendous and undermines the authority of local aesthetic play. Whenever they wickedly collaborate with the market in selecting the most consolidated artistic and reflexive spectrum, they are sanctioning a widespread banality that affects the loss of operational space on the fringes. Whenever they think that the task of inclusion is an obligation to others and not their perverse pleasure, they are perpetuating the existence of colonial ideas between you and us. Here and there, in the centre and in the South, the purpose of public organisations is defeated when they tolerate and promote established values, when they reward what is already enriched, when they forgive what is intellectually unrefined and when they flirt with what is politically appeased.

RESPONDENT

Galit Eilat⁶

⁶ CIMAM has not been authorised to publish the transcription of Galit Eilat's oral presentation.

SESSION 4

SPEAKER

Geeta Kapur

Where to Look: when there is no modern museum in sight

Straitened Circumstances

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi: Participants in this conference will find it difficult to believe that in a major country like India there is, but *there is not*, a museum of modern and contemporary art. In actual fact, a National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) does exist in New Delhi. Mooted at the point of Indian Independence in 1947, it formally came into existence by the direct intervention of Prime Minister Nehru in 1954.⁷ It has since sprung branches in Mumbai and Bangalore, and expanded three times with a new building at its site in Delhi (erected 25 years after the design was selected, this is, in terms of today's requirements, a literal folly). A post-independence assertion of national pride necessitated that the NGMA be entirely state-funded and it has remained so to this day. It has also remained fund-strapped and straitjacketed within the bureaucratic control of the Ministry of Culture, which hasn't a clue about the professional profile of modern and contemporary art museums in the rest of the world, including Asia.

At the same time as there is deep regret that a democratic and forward-looking country should have failed to develop a stabilised commitment to the modern—in culture and in art—and thereby also the punctual moment of its critique, what needs to be acknowledged is that basic sovereignty is maintained by the Indian state, by the polity and by the interlocutors within public sphere. Until today the idea that an institution be erected for a hard sell before the imperialists has been unthinkable in India. In its initial mandate, the NGMA *had* shown some signs of struggle with relevant definitions of modernism. We should consider that the NGMA virtually began with an exercise of unilateral will by an impetuous leader: I refer to the acquisition by Jawaharlal Nehru of the available oeuvre of the brilliant, prematurely dead, Indo-Hungarian Amrita Sher-Gil, our equivalent of Frida Kahlo and roughly of the same period. We should also remember that Nehru was the man who in the 1950s invited Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh, thereby signalling his simultaneous commitment to hardcore modernity and a statist utopia. The NGMA subsequently developed major holdings of twentieth-century Indian art, including artists' estates, that merit the name of the *national-modern*—a political category that underlines much discourse in post-colonial cultures.⁸ The institution is today caught in a time warp of a national narrative of Indian modernity and its petrified 'masters' with no capacity to investigate this narrative.⁹ It follows that there is neither a recognition of

⁷ See Vidya Shivdas, 'National Gallery of Modern Art: museum and the making of national art', *Towards a New Art History*, Shivaji Panikkar, et al. (eds.), D.K. Printworld, 2003. Also by Shivdas, see 'Museumising Modern Art: the National Gallery of Modern Art, an Indian Case-Study', in Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh (eds.), *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: Modalities of the Museum in South Asia*, Routledge, forthcoming.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ In 1982, J. Swaminathan, an artist with a Communist Party background (and then more anarchist leanings that coincided with other Third World intellectuals, not least the Breton-inspired Octavio Paz, Swaminathan's very close friend from the 1960s), conceived and built a provincial museum with twin aspects: the living art of peasant/tribal communities from the central Indian region *vis-à-vis* urban/modernist art. Both wings were designated by a

avant-garde alternative, nor the wherewithal to support a spectator-friendly 'post-modern' contemporaneity that chips off the modernist aesthetic with multimedia interventions.

The lapses of the Indian state in matters of culture is a tedious story; what has to be understood is that with a meagre *institutional* structure, the vast processes of change at work in a society like India are not easily tracked and translated into democratic, socially accessible and also dissenting forms and sites of cultural transactions. Worse, a medley of centre to right-wing ideologies is now producing a pincer movement *against* the modern. Neo-liberal agendas turn culture and art into ersatz industries for the high-spending, exponentially growing Indian middle class. On the other hand, right-wing majoritarian movements adopt a cultural agenda of building techno-savvy temple complexes, with Disneyfied spectacle and kitsch pedagogy on offer. In these metropolitan, museum-type institutions, religion masquerades as a heritage narrative, winning, in the spectacular staging of Hindu culture, the iconophilic allegiance of the pilgrim-viewer whose visual field is already saturated with Bollywood. This reinforces religious identity at the cost of the secular that has been a constitutive characteristic of the modern, and it makes the modern art museum—or for that matter, a classical art or an anthropological museum, certainly a poorly funded state institution—redundant. Without pressing upon any glib equivalence of effects, it needs to be mentioned how the global art market signposting global capitalism with its art fairs and auctions, also undermines the museum, but that is another debate.

What is ironical is that this right-wing turn and its kitsch aesthetic is met not by a secular state but by private players working for an aesthetic makeover whereby the regional, the national and the global are sought to be self-consciously and somewhat (dis)ingenuously combined. There is a pressure felt by the Indian bourgeoisie to accomplish on behalf of India a global profile better and sooner than the state can muster. A handful of private collections are in the laudatory process of turning into museums.¹⁰ India, slated to be a rising power (like China but always way behind and therefore unlike China!) is legitimately also embarking into private-public partnerships, and we have, as an example, the upcoming KMoMA project in Kolkata. A colonial city that nurtured India's multi-faced nationalism and several phases of its modernity project, the Kolkata art scene has been unable to make a move from provincial to international modern to global contemporary. The city and the region are unique in that they have, for thirty years, elected the Communist Party (CPI-M) to lead the Left Front government, and it is this government, embroiled as it is now in a frequently violent conflict with left-wing extremists (also called the Maoists/Naxalites), that has offered land and support (worth \$32m including public land) to a privately launched trust for KMoMA founded in 2003. In a country and a province strapped for funds, professional museums and curatorial expertise, KMoMA is to be

common rubric: the Contemporary. Not at all unusual for, say Africa or Australia, this was among the more radical, artist-led redefinitions of the terms of discourse among India's modern artists. Since then the contradictions of, and beyond, the modern have been addressed in more complex ways, but via discourse more than institutional transformations.

¹⁰ First and foremost the Poddar Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, re-named The Devi Art Foundation (opened in 2008 in Gurgaon/Delhi), is now a cutting-edge private 'museum' in the making with an outstanding curatorial programme. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Noida/Delhi opened in 2010. The Jehangir Nicholson Collection of Indian modernists is now housed in the famed Prince of Wales Museum/Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Chhatrapati, Mumbai, and slated to open its doors soon.

designed—hold your breath—by Herzog and de Meuron!¹¹ The project at the moment promises only a beautiful shell. It looks like it could turn out to be a major folly in terms of collection and curatorial policy—or it may, *just may*, evolve a content, by and by, though indeed this is the wrong way round to go about envisioning a museum.

This right-wing turn followed by a self-congratulatory power profile launched by a neo-liberal India has raised urgent issues for contemporary culture: ethical/aesthetical conundrums that have to be answered with something *more* than what we have desperately yearned (and ineffectively struggled) for: a functioning alert, and responsive museum of modern and contemporary art in Delhi, Mumbai or anywhere else in India! While continuing to press for such institutional structures, we must also break the bounds of our national imaginary to address bold options for work and vision within the *changing contemporary*—at least discursively if not (always, and yet) institutionally.

Elsewhere in the Third World: It is worth glancing at a couple of examples from elsewhere in the Third World, at the strange role modernity/modern art plays in the absence of a national democracy, especially in relation to (American) imperialism.¹² In 1976, with high-powered loans from American museums and private collections, Imelda Marcos, wife of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, put together a modern art museum called the Metropolitan Museum of Manila. The occasion was a meeting of the IMF and the World Bank in Manila that helped endorse the Marcos' bid for Western-style modernity and, not least, perpetuate the Marcos regime. (The fact that her museum was shut down soon after, and much later refurbished on an entirely different and contradictory basis makes of course for a fascinating story of radical reversal). The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art was inaugurated by the Shah of Iran in 1978 (just before his downfall) on the inspiration, among others, of Queen Farah Diba and with the intent of confirming the modernity of this royal autocracy before Western eyes. This very expensive collection (\$30 million at that time) included works from the post-Impressionists to Picasso to Pollock in a museum that was manned mostly by American curators. This collection was stored away after the Islamic revolution, but neither destroyed nor dispersed. In subsequent years, the museum has moved on to show contemporary Iranian art under a fairly sophisticated, if constrained, curatorial programming. That the collection of modern Western art remains in storage, invites easy ridicule from the Western museum fraternity and media—the masters are imprisoned in a dungeon, they say. At the same time, an exercise of historical and cultural retrieval by the Islamic regime is mocked when, in an

¹¹ The architects were chosen from a shortlist which included Frank Gehry and David Adjaye. The estimated Rs2.1bn (\$50m) budget of the new museum will be funded by a tripartite public-private partnership between the Indian government, the government of West Bengal and the private sector. The state of West Bengal has pledged Rs1.2bn (\$32m), mainly via land allocation. Central government has promised a one-off grant; the artist community of India has already donated over Rs35m (\$830,000). The museum work was expected to begin in 2010 and be completed by 2013. Rakhi Sarkar, who is the head of the FICCI Committee on Art and Business of Art, is the managing trustee of KMoMA. There have been comments from the international as well as Indian art historians that the museum should be 'Kolkata-specific'. The four wings would house a national gallery, whose focus will be Indian visual art of both the colonial and post-colonial phases; an academic wing; galleries representing art from the West and West Asia; Far Eastern Galleries of art works from SAARC countries as well as from Japan, China and Korea.

¹² I borrow the following two examples of Manila and Tehran from Kavita Singh's, 'A History of Now', *Art India (The Art News Magazine of India)*, special issue: *The Art Museum*, Vol. XV, No. 1, Quarter 1, 2010. Singh, in turn, refers to a well-known source: Carol Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (eds.), Smithsonian, Washington D.C., 1991.

exchange-sale of a contemporary American ‘master’, the country seeks to buy back the leftover pages from a priceless manuscript of the Safavid period (Shah Tamas’s calligraphed copies of the *Shahnameh*, decimated by Western collectors in rampant greed).

Let us for a moment pursue the example of modern art in the Islamic world. Apart of course from a long-Europeanised Turkey that has, besides avant-garde artists, a museum and biennale culture of high repute, there is now an energetic production of contemporary art in Arab countries: Lebanon in particular, and also Egypt. On another plane, there is an extravagant push to ‘showcase’, that is to say, display and consume, contemporary international art and architecture in the Emirates that reads like a cross between the fantasy of some conspicuously cosmopolitan Emirs and Euro-American agendas for lucrative dealings in the region. Before it is glibly proven that modern art is an anomaly (and a waste) within cultures of the South, and the more so under Islamic regimes, there is the example of a nationally fought-for project in adjacent South Asia: I refer to the impulse to complete the modernity project by a vocal intelligentsia, nurturing an interventionist public sphere within a *putatively democratic polity* in Pakistan. The National Art Gallery in Islamabad (inaugurated in 2007)¹³ can claim an immanent birth —way beyond the fake promptings of the dictator-friendly United States of America. Delayed for over a quarter of a century on account of dictatorships, political (and sometimes theological) opposition to un-Islamic modernity/modern art, Pakistani artists celebrated their long-awaited moment of democracy with a show titled *Moving Ahead*. In the full range of contemporary art language, the exhibits are modernist of course but also avant-garde, political and audacious in ways that are both cutting edge and vulnerable to possible censorship. The Ministry of Culture in Pakistan has given assurances; on their part, the exceptionally courageously Pakistani intelligentsia anticipate difficulties but, among other issues in the public domain, see it as their right to adopt the contentious contemporary as a frame for critical self-reflection.

Transcultural discourse

I would like to draw attention here to the fact that the terms used in the description of CIMAM’s 2009 sessions are steeped in Enlightenment terminology: substantive rationality, regulatory ethics (Protestant/capitalist bedrock term); fair trade (early capitalist economics shading into liberal, now neo-liberal, agendas, by which time the term is turned on its head with impunity); and systemic crisis (Marxist understanding of capitalism). Honourable as these concepts are, they are of course entirely Eurocentric and may also be anachronistic. The modern has now been upstaged by the *contemporary*—a conjuncture based on a precipitate sense of the historical—and this is the subject of complex and ongoing discourse worldwide. Precisely for this reason, it becomes necessary to think through non-European histories of modernity and break open the teleology of Western modernism, not as a de-historicising drive played out by global capitalism’s neo-liberal agenda (and in favour of a self-endorsing contemporary) but, more radically, as recognition of a putatively transcultural public sphere realised by contestatory histories that are at last recognised as shaping this contemporary.

¹³ The 132,000 square-foot, 4-storey building cost 8.9 million dollars; on display now are 600 works borrowed from public and private collections of over a hundred artists.

This is where alternatives build up *curatorially* as well. This critical discourse on culture and curating, forged in the South in extreme conditions of political stress, is what has stretched the context and definition of modern and contemporary art. Let us consider the curatorial interventions in the global art scene of Lillian Llanes, Gerardo Mosquera and Paulo Herkenhoff in the Americas, and Apinan Poshyananda in Asia, during the eighties and nineties; that of Okwui Enwezor across the world since the turn of the century, and those of Vasif Kortun and Jack Persekian in West Asia today. They have mounted a reconsideration of key historical agendas, of what remains an incomplete mandate of decolonisation after the abandonment of Third World solidarity; of how the post-colonial takes over and plays out a similar function, then goes on to offer a self-reflexive critique of late twentieth-century history; how the violated territories of Central and South America, Africa and West Asia are positioned in relation to global capitalism and how, then, the contemporary call for a transnational consciousness must stand in direct contradiction to its appropriative use by the corporatised global.

The title of my paper, 'Where to Look: when there is no modern museum in sight', is, of course, polemically pitched for the very purpose of diverting a lack and a farce into some form of compensatory investigation. What we find in India is an advanced and committed discourse on the interrelation of history, society and culture—such as, for example, institutionalised academic discourse in Marxist historiography, critical post-colonialism, subaltern studies and, now, the possibility of a new democracy with its virtual yet activist citizenry multiplied by networks into communicational 'commons' and indeed into transitive, shape-changing communities. The volatile play of confrontations continues to operate on parliamentary and extra-parliamentary platforms—i.e., in civil and political society and their respective public spheres, where discourse is galvanised by action and the players include a broad swathe of intellectuals, critical theorists, the independent press, political and juridical activists, cultural workers, film-makers, documentary makers and artists. Politically progressive public discourse in India now foregrounds a critique of the statist aspects of the modern from the standpoint of multiple nationalities, ethnic and religious minorities and all categories of anti-state dissenters, and from here we can extrapolate a subaltern deconstruction of the elite social order, and an interrogation of hegemonies not only in the form of established political power but of culture itself.

The post-colonial/post-modern problem (with the issue of religion and culture imbedded in it) has tended to unsettle the very institution of art (and art as institution), to the extent that even a default position of 'lack', such as I have described for India (and true of many places around the world) may turn the museum imperative on its head. At any rate, the lack of viable cultural institutions for the modern in so much of the world should make established museums count their privileges in the full glare of our sublimated envy. This envy should not be dismissed as gratuitous: a reckoning with privilege will lead in fact to a degree of alertness, and the possibility of comprehending how many of the non-players are, in their criticality, their desire, their struggles and their absent-present status, players of a kind in contemporary global art. So, *what sort of players are they?*

Institutions of/ around contemporary art:

I shall now touch briefly on:

- a. The status of the biennale(/triennale) as an institutional supplement, even substitute, for the contemporary museum.
- b. The ubiquity of the art market; the exponentially growing enterprise of the art fair.
- c. The putative projects for a real and hypothetical global art history and towards global museums.
- d. Alternative contemporaneities emerging from cultural spaces/cultural politics resistant to coherent institutionalisation.

Biennales: contestations in the contemporary: In counting the stations for critical reflection on the roller-coaster ride of contemporary global art, I have hinted at the importance of conceptual curating in relation to site and situation as this corresponds to advanced discourse, marginalised localities and the politics of interstitial spaces. Only when a diversity of cultural spaces is seen to come alive can there be a transcultural public sphere premised on an agonistic reckoning of the forces at play in the contemporary. I believe that this possibility is curatorially manifest, even more than in the museum, in the biennale format.¹⁴

For a decade now, there have been doomsday warnings about the exponential growth of biennales outside the Euro-American gambit. Many of the global exhibition venues are in Asia. Impelled to examine this biennale-bashing, I construct a kind of maze to track what might be that teaser called Asian 'difference' which is causing such alarm in the exhibitory circuit. This is a tentative attempt to practice the kind of reflexivity I mentioned above: about conceptualising contemporaneity in relation to divergent contexts.

Throughout the following exposition, there will remain an open question: how viable is a regional (intra-regional) grouping like Asia in what is no doubt an ambition to think globally? Asia is a vast spread, covering from West Asia through South, Southeast and East Asia. Within the very rubric of this region's ancient civilisations there is, indubitably, the hard fact of its compromised account with global capital. And precisely for this reason, the madly flourishing art production in these fast-growing economies may turn out to be a kind of nemesis: many of the questions that haunt the contemporary—self-disintegrating, crisis-ridden and systemically irreversible as that concept is—are played out in the exploding cities of Asia as extravagant nihilism, reflecting as it were a renewable death-wish within late capitalism.

But to come to the scene of 'crime'—most Asian Biennales have been seen as opportunistic occasions deployed by Asian capitalism's self-endorsing spectacle wherein the empowerment of the region's artists, critics and curators is only a side business. I want to suggest ways to turn

¹⁴ I have argued this position on other occasions. See, Geeta Kapur, 'Cities of Contemporaneity', *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon*, La Biennale di Venezia International Symposium, Robert Storr (curator/ed.), Marsilio, and 52. *Espisizione Internazionale d'Arte*, 2005. See also my contribution to the Guggenheim Museum's Asian Art Council Symposium, 'Contemporary Reflections on Modernity in Asia', *Yishu- Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Vol. 9, No. 3, May/June 2010.

this evaluation around, to view the biennale phenomenon critically, yet make regional configurations of the global into a productive ground of contradictions.

- i. Can these Asian biennales be taken as a form of civilisational exchange? Cast a glance at the great Asian empires and consider their historical dismantling, accompanied by a critical recognition of current economic strategies and power-bloc alliances. In an annotative continuation of that theme, it is in our interests to unpack curating as a form of narration that deals with endings and beginnings, as it also deals with scrambled sequences and contrary moves that characterise our critical understanding of the narrative paradigm itself.

In more provocative terms, if the Asian 'hordes', viewed from the perch of old Europe, provoke the familiar cry 'The barbarians are coming!', we might do well to assume the masquerade and ask ourselves the following: within Asia's inherited and reconstituted systems of knowledge (including religions), how much of that 'interim' historicity of the modernist project (multi-ethnic nationalisms and secular mediations) survives? If contemporary pluralism dissolves modernist universalism in an act of critical scrutiny, does it then restore the barbarian persona and rage, or does it leave us the more tamed by our own ethnicity?

- ii. In an exactly contrary move, Asian civilisations are seen to have, throughout history, the lure of high sophistication, of cosmopolitanism: consider Baghdad, Tehran/Isfahan, Istanbul, and in the twentieth century, Shanghai, Mumbai, Tokyo. It can be argued that the cultures of these flourishing cities have extended the mandate of modernity in a way that makes it not only co-existent with European modernity, but in effect the more keenly personified: a twin whose face is quizzical, sometimes uncanny, and certainly problematic.

There is now, after Edward Said, a tendency among artists to invert the thesis on Orientalism, to enhance the masquerade, making it at once audacious and melancholy. There is also, in the framework of post-modernism, a retake on beauty that is, not unwittingly, a retake on an Asian-Oriental aesthetic to be renewed through curatorial (and through art-historical) expositions.

New cosmopolitanism must include the inadvertent transnationals—migrant labour and political refugees, for example, who are world citizens but are nevertheless excluded from that status, and from the privileges bestowed by global consumerist cultures. The very figure of the cosmopolitan, then, gestures towards a darker counter-drive. Recognising the compound trope of loss and greed, artists will sometimes make a (narcissistic) sign of self-mortification and tease out a death-wish in the very practice of art. This is observable in several Asian artists.

- iii. There is a mythologisation of Asia's material cultures in terms of richness of resources, traditions and continuities in language, styles and skills. These assets, still quoted by

contemporary artists, are used in fact at various levels of respect and expediency. Not only is there a tendency to gloss over the class/caste-based definition of artisanal practice, but the actual role of available labour, and the use of these material cultures in the manufacture of contemporary art, often remains unexamined. These aspects of 'value' and 'surplus' need to be considered critically and in relation to aesthetic and market conditions alike.

- iv. In contrast to the legacy of delicately wrought artisanal practices, and the playful recycling of everyday visual cultures, both invoked in the making of contemporary art across Asia, there is a bold new Asiatic scenario that is cognisant of the global purchase on post-production art and is studded with spectacles derived from media-based art works that seemingly cut across the globe with no undue prejudice in favour of any given culture.

Apropos of a value-based economy, the illegal—that is, unsanctioned—is a telling trope. In terms of contemporary art, it qualifies in favour of what has been pushed to the edge: art that is erotic-illicit and/or political-transgressive. How do Asian artists deploy these means?

- v. Is there a counter-geography that marks out a new social imagery and a differently charted ground of history? The interrupted relationship between country and city in what were until recently peasant economies has resulted in demographic imbalances, as it has in a ruptured consciousness. This is now an urgent concern in the economy and the ecology of the globe. Is ethics, then, inscribed in a counter-geography?

The globe is mapped as urban archipelagos, many of which are in Asia. Networked with each other, Asian cities are on the move (as even curatorial titles are). Art works seem to chase memory through virtual landscapes, through the detritus of material obsolescence and urban entropy. What is the measure of the speed at which consciousness comes to terms with this accelerated history? How slowly can the aesthetic impulse establish a spatial phenomenology that best locates works of art?

- vi. To address the problems of the public sphere more directly, the literary, theological and social systems of knowledge in many Asian cultures have a long tradition of oral commentaries, textual annotations and elaborate argument. These make up what would be the prototype of the public sphere: they index styles of interlocution/intervention within established conventions of collective knowledge.

Colonial and national archives, both textual and oral, are an important feature in the recuperation of histories. This refers to codes that open and retrace the materials of memory, the documentary voice-over of the present-day interlocutor who reads and translates these testimonies; it raises questions at the vernacular level, of caste and gender alike, exposing the structural blindness built into state machinery (as well as cultural institutions) towards subaltern interventions.

- vii. In societies with diverse histories ranging from liberation movements to Communism, from parliamentary democracies and republican states to genocidal dictatorships, the modes of address that the contemporary intelligentsia (among them artists) might deploy in their traversal of national politics is judged by the level of subaltern interrogation. Do evidential 'truths', reconstructed fictions and the ethics of retrieval of that which is left out constitute the political in contemporary Asian art in some especially, culturally, designated way?
- viii. There is a 'worlding of art' in that contemporary art presents itself as a volatile phenomenon that can nevertheless be comprehended. As a mass of fragments, as new universals, as barely differentiated images and objects in the gargantuan consumption mechanism of global capital, it poses itself in many different ways. How do we make sense of these developments: as anti-hegemonic politics, as an expository ground for resurgent identities, as an index of democratisation, as a spectral triumph, as a fresh franchise on creativity?

By way of a conclusion: we are seeking (and sometimes, in the given roster of Asian biennales, approximating) a curated exhibition that is thematised and problematised through and beyond the rhetoric of the global; art practice that opts for a critical contemporaneity, for a politics of culture, for avant-garde art practice, where we can witness on occasion some hitherto unknown artist-citizen 'performing' his/her subjectivity with an urgency lost to the tired representatives of the West's humanist/universalist conscience-consortium.

Art fairs: The international art market is supposed to have hit its peak in 1988. There is little doubt that contemporary art derives its purchase from the art market, the art fair and the auction house, and it does so as *against* the museum, the biennales and temporary exhibitions in public galleries. Until a couple of decades ago, the validation of art works had the museum (the preserver of art, let us say the Tate Gallery) at the pinnacle of the pyramid; public art institutions (with exhibition programmes, say the Whitechapel Gallery) in the next tier; then private collectors (as patrons); and then the commercial art world (of galleries and auction houses) at the bottom of the pyramid. Now the pyramid is inverted and the auction houses, galleries, art funds and private collectors (in that order) form the high plateau, and public art institutions have slipped to the bottom, tapering into relative insignificance in the validation process.¹⁵

We have a first-rate example in India: while the National Gallery of Modern Art flounders, and the Triennale India (started with a convincing Third Worldist flourish way back in 1968) is a bureaucratic showcase of no consequence in world art, we have a Delhi art fair (called Art Summit) begun in 2008 and already bounding to unprecedented levels of success, a perfect example of where and what the priorities of artists, patrons and viewers now lie, and what institutional vision we can now entertain.

¹⁵ See Anders Peterson, 'Commercial Circuits' (the Art Tactic Survey, serving as a lead feature), *Art News Magazine of India*, Vol. xiii, Issue 1, Quarter 1, 2008.

Once we have arrived at fairs and booths—a spatial phenomenology derived from the circus and freak shows, from techno-parks and merchandising events—what level of attention, let alone contemplation, can viewers muster? With commodification/reification and the euphoric ‘acting out’ on the grounds of transactional expediency, there is a decline of the curatorial concept (itself only a few decades in the making), of aesthetic protocol and exhibitory ethics. *In a situation created for distraction and deals, what rationality, what regard, what definition of value can we envisage?*

In the current round-up of the global art world, the unruly outsiders—players from the South who have a shaky grasp of the modern and career in with a free handle on a marketable contemporaneity—are often seen to be the villains. It is true that only yesterday, at the turn of the twenty-first century, contemporary art from China, India and the Middle East came into global focus through biennales and art fairs, and thence into the MoCAs in the making. Not to speak of the Chinese, even Indian artists are hitched to what is, despite a temporary setback in 2008-2009, a booming art market, including a succession of auctions in Delhi, London and New York. These art scenes have had no substantial museum or academy support, and their players are novices at the game; yet, if the villains in the game *are*, let us say the Chinese, the buzz and the business leaves all scrambling after profits—and the winners are the great Euro-American auction houses, Sotheby’s, Christie’s, et al. So, who’s complaining?

What is disturbing is not the fact of the art market but that market and the museum, the biennale and the smaller, more radical initiatives, engage a similar-sounding rubric for globalisation (with direct plug-in points into ancillary interests such as city tourism, commerce and political purchase). At the art-historical level, the universalist institution(s) of (Western) modern art, and also the nationalist (to avant-garde) art movements related to the nation-space—in Mexico and Brazil, for example—have dovetailed into a more standard global ‘institution of art’. Instead of ideologies and eccentricities relating to co-produced, sometimes insular, certainly uneven modernities and their corresponding modernisms, there is now a programmatic investment in a profile that requires less historical narrative, more (urgently construed) contemporaneity that suffers from a paradox: *the sameness of difference!*

The global art museum: There are concerned efforts underway to theorise a global art history as, for example, David Summers and James Elkins have done.¹⁶ Quite predictably, the initiative comes from Western scholars, inclined to map and survey, classify and categorise, and they undertake this epistemological exercise for the sake of comprehension as much as to contain the damage, or is it to meet the challenge from intruders? In 2006 Hans Belting and Peter Weibel initiated the Global Art and the Museum (GAM) project at ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. GAM was initiated with the aim to explore the impact of art’s globalisation on art museums, their audiences and the art market, thus linking global production of art, global expansion of art museums and global patterns of art consumption. As part of GAM, Hans Belting conducted workshop/seminars in São Paulo (2008), New Delhi (2008) and Hong

¹⁶ See David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2003; and the review by James Elkins, ‘Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism’, *The Art Bulletin*, June 2004. See also James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?*, Routledge, New York, 2007.

Kong (2009). The Delhi stopover, titled 'Global Art and the Museum. The Global Turn and Art in Contemporary India' was summarised in a few pages by his colleague, Andrea Buddensieg (present on the occasion) for the book *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*.¹⁷ Their global traversal was premised on a minimum responsibility: of re-presenting these intellectual encounters between and beyond their specific locality. We found to our dismay that Buddensieg (and by implication, Belting) had misunderstood just about everything that was stated by Indian speakers in the seminar. Buddensieg, for example, managed to flip my entire life's mission, to historicise every cultural circumstance that I encounter, by this sterling observation: 'In conclusion, Geeta Kapur stressed that participants ought to "de-historicize" the global present and forget the cultural premises which differ in each case.'¹⁸ In more respects than one, they had actually squandered the opportunity to engage, misused the brief by a lazy and prejudiced interpretation of 'other' cultures—cultures in contemporary discourse, entirely capable of presenting themselves within the global problematic in what we are now calling the transcultural public sphere. Fortunately, because the second part of the publication(s) includes textual contributions by guest authors critically engaged with culture and politics from their agonistic positionality within the global, a much greater cognisance of the issues at stake emerges. What I wish to point out is that this possibility, of a vexed fuzziness (or is it false ideology?) may colour much global prognoses coming from a Western perspective. When a highly prolific world-travelling art historian like James Elkins, or a profoundly honed philosopher and art historian like Hans Belting, attempts to map the global contemporary (*vis-à-vis* the more classical modern, institutionalised in the academy/art history and the museum), the phenomenon, rendered unfamiliar by what must appear to them as self-serving aliens, produces seething anxiety; worse, they get the politics (whether shallow or radical) dead wrong.

A critique by Western scholars of the de-contextualised global/contemporary (at the cost of the modern) is fully justified. What is needed, however, is not damning or even indulgent surveys of the scenography, but attention to the foundational changes in political equations across the globe, changes that shift the context, as defined in sociological, ethnographical and political terms. But, then, the priority to evaluate the terms of the context may no longer rest with the guardians of the Enlightenment, precious as that knowledge is to the very dialectic that spells historical change. It may rest at least as much with those who have been interpellated into global contemporaneity by forces of history that still appear entropic and which therefore produce new and strange subjectivities, urgent definitions of the artist-citizen and a seemingly unassimilable, potentially volatile aesthetic.

Meanwhile, the boom in art and globality translates into multiplying museums (eg. 100 new museums in Shanghai by 2010!): the East Asian region (including Southeast Asia, especially Singapore) has, in tandem with an economic push, initiated a kind of professionalism in museum policy. It is of further interest that some of these museums, especially in economically or culturally depressed regions, have spectacular architectural signage: the building itself is a

¹⁷ See Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, Hatje-Cantz, Ostfildern, May 2009. Also see Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern, 2007.

¹⁸ *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, op. cit., p. 22.

grand and ostentatious gesture. Global Guggenheims have sprung up/will spring up in relatively remote Bilbao, relatively barren Abu Dhabi. If the Bilbao effect is one of economic and cultural upturn in the region, soon there will be the Abu Dhabi effect, whereby no economic miracle will be sought, only the profit of profile, prestige and a negotiated aesthetics—a museum where the provenance of the art works on display and their curatorial programming is up in the air as a fabulous bargain with good and bad forces at work in the global ‘gold rush’.

I would like to conclude this argument by suggesting that given the options opened up in Biennale-space, the modern museum, a prime object of desire tantalising us to this day (and indeed irreplaceable as a key institution of art), *need not take on the omnivorous scale, nor the nomenclature of a global art museum*. And I choose a particularly cruel comparison to frame the likely travesties that may ensue from such an ambition. Consider a double allegory within the Arab world: the tragedy of the looting of the Baghdad Museum and the comedy of the Guggenheim fantasy (amidst other fantasies in the cultural district of Saadiyat Island) at Abu Dhabi. Consider how the epistemological integrity of the enlightened West crumbles before a cosmopolitan but ‘absolute’ feudatory offering lucrative patronage for contemporary (Western) culture! Then consider, in a spirit of redoubled irony, who the client and who the patron might be in these new sites of ‘cultural exchange’ in an over-accelerated global circuit.

Alternative spaces (KHOJ, India)

Newer exhibition circuits—mostly the biennales—deliver a worldwide range of artists into the cosmopolitan contemporary. Artists, in turn, find themselves responding to curatorial concepts that incite new forms of thought and practice and they find modes to address transcultural imaginaries unravelled by travel, traversal.

This transcultural space offers what one might call *alternative contemporalities* (in extension of alternative modernisms). Often emerging from cultural spaces/cultural politics that lack coherent institutionalisation, these ‘contemporalities’ address issues differently: they are less pedagogical than museums; not-for-profit as against galleries; more anarchic as well as more dialogic, with many strands of argument weaving through everyday life, civil society, and dissident forums.

I am referring especially to informal, artist-initiated infrastructures that privilege workshops and residencies; forms of relationality, conviviality; a social aesthetic with participatory situations; and, by extension, interactive practices that now designate the field as networks, blurring territoriality, privileging multiple/virtual modes of a nomadic and transitive aesthetic.

Every cultural context today can provide examples of this kind of discourse and practice.¹⁹ I take the example of an alternative space that has developed in Delhi since 1997, Khoj: International Artists’ Association.²⁰ An artists’ initiative, Khoj (with Pooja Sood as co-ordinator

¹⁹ The contemporary conjunction of artists’ spaces with politically annotated public engagement emerges in the West during the 1960s and in various parts of the world at different times, since.

²⁰ Bare facts: Khoj began its activities in the form of international workshop-residencies in 1997. It acquired its permanent space for Studios in 2002 with the support of the Triangle Arts Trust of which it continues to be

and then director, her successive colleagues in the advisory committees, and the young Khoj crew) has galvanised international funding to become diversely experimental and evermore ambitious. Besides linking up various initiatives in India and South Asia, it has staged international avant-garde performance art festivals (Khoj Live!, 2008), supported large public art projects in the city, sustained research and residency for emerging curators. Further, the great variety of participating artists from around the world, provoke an imaginative rendering of the very term *alternative*, exposing for scrutiny its various forms and spaces: the differential ground between artists' collectives, communes and community arts practice; between art works in public spaces and public art projects; between site-specific works that are performative, provocative, and those that are interactive on a sustained basis.

Khoj has also opened up the debate on the premise of alternatives when the institutional structure is underdeveloped. Not conforming to an ideological brief, Khoj aspires to a praxiological rigour on the assumption that even sheer practice can push the resulting art work into a reflexive zone, and indeed, Khoj's own history—its ten years alive and kicking—has mapped new territories that can now be theorised.²¹

As a typical nineties formation, Khoj emerges with an implicit mandate: to quizz the notion of 'absolute' freedom that artists have singularly claimed in the first half of the twentieth century; to interrupt the protocols of what may have been secret cabals of experimentalists by introducing equally pressing interventionist modes addressed to consciously gendered, multi-ethnic, multi-religious publics; to interpellate the experience of diverse citizenships and develop an aesthetic that is *incorporated* within societal/communitarian contexts.

We know of course that this very ethics poses something of a dilemma: the pull of neighbourliness and the push of the irreverent artist towards anarchist gestures and performed risk. Artists continue to seek representational value outside sanctioned representational norms; to allow meanings to slip through the gaps of cultural goodwill; to gain solitary visions, paradoxical manoeuvres; even to scuttle art's burden of social concerns. Most of us have divided loyalties on this question—of autonomy and responsibility—and we need only to acknowledge the potential of such informal institutions in their ability to stage these antinomies as creative options.

member. Its international activities include residencies for artists from Africa, West Asia, especially South Asia. Over the decades, Khoj has helped develop parallel artists' initiatives in Pakistan (Vasl), Shri Lanka (Teertha) Bangladesh (Britto), and Nepal (Sutra). Khoj is now helping to develop partially supported, ideologically autonomous, project-based nodes in India: Khoj Calcutta, Desire maching@khoj, Guwahat, Khoj Kasheer in Srinagar, Khoj@1 Shanthi Road in Bangalore, and CAMP, Mumbai. See, Khoj: International Artists' Association website.

A ten-year reckoning of Khoj is now available in the form of an ambitious publication, *Khoj*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2010. It has detailed history of Khoj by Pooja Sood; four theoretical texts; interviews with lavish illustrations by one hundred and one Indian artists; glimpses of international participants' work, in between. See my essay, 'A phenomenology of encounters at Khoj', in the same volume.

²¹ There are now critics of the curricular attractions and of the spectacularisation of alternatives offered by Khoj. This can overtake the very criticality that prompted the alternatives, it is argued. Newer artist-initiatives come to be postulated that wish to resist institutionalisation, to continue testing their agendas on new sets of marginal, ephemeral and dissenting platforms.

Because they combine civil society transactions with what is undeniably a new aesthetic, high claims are staked via theory on such 'post-utopian' modes of imbricating art and life. Indeed, these interventionist/relational manoeuvres are now arguably on a par with the privileged site of the museum and even perhaps in proxy of art 'proper'.

In conclusion

I end with a note of self-irony. Where to look', I asked at the beginning of the presentation, and proceeded to lay multiple tracks so as to lose sight of the desired monument, to dislocate the centrality of the edifice that rises in the modern period and confirms the authority of 'art as institution.' The modern museum is the site where canons are established and wherefrom the avant-garde overtakes them; it is the site against which key gestures of iconoclasm are played out and where, in blatant contradiction of its historical premise, avant-garde art is 'enshrined'.

When there is no museum in sight or none that performs the function of briefing and debriefing the public in the paradoxical manoeuvres of institutionalised art history, the tracks I laid out can run aground. And here is when the 'outsider' status I assumed must shift from voluntarism to self-reflection: how much rhetoric of otherness, how many hypothetical alternatives will suffice to face the legitimate positionality of the museum fraternity that CIMAM represents.

Postscript: As it happens, my initial query and concluding paradox was addressed within the session itself by the perfectly pitched response of the assigned Respondent, Natalia Majluf, director of Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), Peru. She built up a case for an appropriately modest, precisely motivated museum that sustains the poetics of real and imaginary distance, an outsider-insider status. Besides the 'case,' she offered a form of address before the aforesaid fraternity that looped in the irony of my elaborate elisions.

RESPONDENT

Natalia Majluf

Reading Geeta's paper and hearing it now, I was moved by the startling familiarity of her critical description of Indian art and its institutions. As I told her in one of our brief exchanges prior to this meeting, she could have simply replaced India with Peru and the text would have been a perfect account of the situation of modern and contemporary art in Peru, as it is surely an equally fitting description of the trajectories of art in the vast majority of countries where the museum as an institution, like modernity itself, is largely an incomplete project.

I can only agree with Geeta on her proposition that art institutions have been seriously unsettled; I truly don't believe (and actually don't want to believe) that the current situation 'may turn the museum imperative on its head', as she claims. For there is one important thing museums do that other spaces for contemporary art, be they cultural centres, *kunsthalls*, biennials, art fairs, artists' residency programmes or web-based arts projects, cannot do, and

that is to shape and preserve a collection of works and place it in the public service. The virtual world of post-modern media is not equipped to handle the materiality of art.

But as Geeta has remarked, and as we have been reminded time and again at this conference, the weakness of the museum is one of the consequences of the new scenario defined by a globalised art world. The art market today makes poorly-funded state institutions 'redundant' to cosmopolitan professionals, she states. Trapped by bureaucracy and strapped of funding, unable to compete with its patron-collectors, the museum moves slowly in the face of the accelerated rhythm of the art world. And to this reality we must add a factor that is even more critical—the devaluation of the museum, which, having lost its aura as a site of knowledge and authority, is beginning to be perceived almost as a kind of cultural charity.

How this situation has emerged is related to how a globalised art world has expanded through the workings of the international market. Over the past two decades we have seen a radical, wide-ranging and comprehensive rupture in the institutions of art, and unlike the modern revolution, this is not marked as much by a change in the forms of art-making as it is by changes in the sites of international distribution and exchange. What I would like to consider today, in the light of Geeta's paper and from my own regional experience, is precisely where the museum and local art production now stand in this process.

It wasn't so long ago that Latin America's systematic exclusion from the narratives of modernity still seemed like an irreversible fate, and there is perhaps no more fitting image of such an exclusion, and of the blindness of the modernist canon to cultural difference, than John Yau's evocation of Wifredo Lam's major painting *The Jungle* hanging by MoMA's cloakroom, literally on the margins of art and its history. In less than two decades we have seen a radical transformation in the piercing of the modernist canon and its paradigms of development, as a result of both an increasingly globalised art market and the sustained efforts of Latin American collectors in the United States and, more recently, in Europe. Yet the inclusion we fought for was as necessary as it was blind to the consequences of what it proposed, although in the process we forgot the sites of production, the locality of culture and the place of institutions like museums in this new field of production and exchange.

We cannot just lament the failure of museums in the periphery, or delude ourselves into thinking that the growing international visibility of regional artists somehow serves as an alternative. The issue is that peripheral production is now not necessarily located in the periphery. The access of a local artist or curator to the new global art market usually produces that artist's or curator's disengagement from the local scene, institutions and networks and, in the case of art, the price of success is often literally translated into impossible sums that effectively impede local institutions from acquiring works—a privileged form of deracination.

So I can only agree with Gustavo Buntinx's questioning of Glenn Lowry's wishful claim at the last CIMAM meeting that there is no longer a periphery, that major museums in the centre have moved towards a growing inclusion of the modern and contemporary peripheries does not mean that the situation of those peripheries has changed. Added to the modernist dream

of a universal language of art, we now have a global dream of a new kind of contemporary survey museum that can claim to collect the world. And we know that not all of us can collect the world. The Lams at MoMA may no longer hang by the cloakroom, but they are certainly not hanging in many Latin American museums.

The issue is not to engage in yet another round of MoMA-bashing (other major museums in Europe or America will do just fine), I would just like to point out that, for the moment, and until some kind of alternative is found, the terms 'global' and 'museum', when placed together, give shape to a curiously reconfigured form of the imperious universal survey museum, a format few off-centre centres may expect or want to achieve. Museums on the periphery have to understand exactly what the problems are and where new possibilities arise.

At the same time, we have to address the issue of a different political and geographic framework that remains firmly in place in this new era, one that, in our obsession with the global, has perhaps not received sufficient attention, and that is the status of the nation-state and its place in this new scenario. I suggest that the global art scene has managed to do something that not even global capitalism managed to achieve, and that is to dispense with the nation-state. And for us here, working mostly within museums, this is a crucial issue, as the nation-state remains the main framework for determining the economic subsistence, the institutional framework and the political functions of museums, even in societies like that of the United States in which museums are not directly dependent on state bureaucracies. The world of museums is not quite post-national.

Museums are, almost by definition, local institutions: they are firmly embedded in a location, tied to those buildings that are indispensable to house their collecting functions, and by the states and constituencies that shaped them in the first place. Luis Enrique Pérez Oramas has stated, quite rightly, that there is as yet no such thing as a global museum. The Global Art Museum at ZKM that Geeta has referred to is, from what I can tell, more a platform for discussion of the global than a global art museum. Pérez Oramas has consequently claimed that an opposition should not be made between global and local museums—as he rightly acknowledges, all museums are local and we don't yet know what a global museum will look like—but between locally centred and internationally oriented institutions, whose, 'local ambition' (I quote) 'builds up an international dimension'. Yet there is a flaw in his argument, for local ambitions usually face very real limitations, as attested by uneven development, unequal distribution of wealth and the one-way flow of funding in the museum world. The cost of being international is usually far too high for most museums.

The notion of 'fair trade' that this conference introduces therefore seems a very pertinent proposition. Yet as far as I can tell, fair trade in the non-art world functions largely through charitable organisations. There is no fair trade without economic aid. And what becomes very clear to most of us working in off-centre institutions is that the globalised art world has yet to produce a global philanthropy. Without it, there seems to be no clear path to follow towards equitable access.

Who sustains cultural exchange today? To see just how alive the nation-state is today in the geographies of art, we have only to look at the institutions that promote most forms of artistic exchange on the margins of central circuits—the British Council, the German Ifa and Goethe Institutes, the Spanish SEACEX, the Dutch Mondriaan Stichting, the Finnish FRAME, the French AFAA, i.e., governmental agencies of cultural diplomacy that, willingly or not, preserve and promote national conceptions of artistic value. Many a good thing, often a great thing, comes out of these foreign policy endeavours, yet it is hard for professional priorities to survive unscathed or local needs to be duly met by institutions that have other interests at base. Their budgets are very clearly defined by two predominant factors: the prestige that local venues may offer their artist-producers, and each government's foreign policy requirements, which are largely based on the promotion of the nation's business interests. The larger the economy of the local venue, the more significant it may be for a government's foreign policy of art. What are the alternatives? Don't get me wrong, I'm sure none of us wants to see the establishment of a supranational bureaucracy—a United Nations of art would in all likelihood be a true nightmare.

Geeta has proposed that larger regional circuits (the Asian circuit she discusses, for example) may be a key to the establishment of new sites for 'a productive ground for contradictions'. Yet regionalism exists largely in a space rarely accessible from within local museums. Latin America, for instance, exists as an institutionalised cultural formation in the US academy and museums in a way that it does not exist in Latin America. It is a concept, not a political reality, not a tangible interlocutor, and is harnessed only with difficulty into the praxis of art. There are of course networks of artists and curators that do engage in regional problematics, but this discourse is very often forged in the very spaces of the new globalised market. In terms of museum practice, it is still largely ineffectual. And I would be interested in hearing more from Geeta of how the regional banner works in the Asian case.

And so the nation remains a defining factor in museum practice, whether we like it or not. Museums of modern and contemporary art were built on a different tradition, however, one which is heavily infused with the utopian universalism of modernity. This may explain the failure of modern museums in countries where state limitations and nationalist imperatives drive museum-building, for such universals are rarely funded by states that need to justify spending to constituencies through the discourses of state nationalism. This may again explain the continuing difficulties of the contemporary museum on the periphery, where justification for assigning resources towards the realisation of an international ambition is strictly determined by the lack of sufficient justification in the face of both state policies and economic considerations. This in fact is a determinant issue in the double standard of global business philanthropy. The local offices of global businesses that support the arts in their countries of origin have different agendas, which are more directly tied to the expectations of local governments and tend to promote the idea that culture is not a priority in emerging economies. So global businesses tend to act in response to local demands even more strongly than to their stated global policies. With extremely few exceptions (the Prince Claus Fund among them), culture is not a priority either for foreign aid policies, international foundations or global enterprises.

So the question finally is whether peripheral museums are to be caught only between a salvage anthropology and a cosmopolitan mirage. What are the conditions for a public sphere for art in this globalised scene? Is it possible without museums? What kind of community will globalisation produce on the margins of the nation-state and beyond the purview of the market and the media? Or rather, is there perhaps something to rescue from what we perceive as the outmoded local museum. Is it outmoded?

One thing the local museum can do far better than any other institutional framework for the visual arts we know is to foster a public sphere. The physical materiality of museums forges a necessary relationship to particular communities, establishing the possibility of more precise demands of accountability, becoming a space for debating the specific needs of groups within society and making a pertinent politics possible. Global space is largely run by the market; it is a site for the circulation of commodities, one that cannot escape the banality of a communication network run by transnational media.

It is very difficult to preserve the museum as a site of exception and resistance to the market and private interests, to grant it a space to resist the coercive philanthropy that Osvaldo Sánchez has rightly questioned. Yet the local museum is, in the final analysis, the requisite precondition for any sort of international exchange.

I have been referring to museums as local institutions because I believe that this is the most appropriate term from which to think out the museum's possibilities in this new era. It is from the local that we can devise ways of engaging the global art world productively, but also reflect upon and contest the imperatives of national and official state ideologies.

And if we think of local and international communities as opposed to national and global communities, we can begin to imagine something different. One possibility that emerges today is the constitution of specialised communities of knowledge in an international scenario, one in which, due to the new relevance of the increasingly international purview of central institutions, local knowledge becomes not only necessary but also indispensable. This is a strength and a possibility for local museums. Let us consider some recent initiatives that are bringing together large central museums and institutions on the periphery. I am thinking for example of the participation of MACBA [Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona] and MNCARS [Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía] in the Southern Conceptualisms Network, the Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art, led by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, or recent projects promoted by the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art. These work specifically through the constitution of specialised international communities of knowledge. For such initiatives actually to become productive locally, we need to have strong institutions. That is the only condition that will make us into something more than mere scouts or informants, or the subjects of patronising pedagogical models. However, local institutions can only be built up locally. In other words, their strength depends on their ability to harness local energies into the production not of mammoth buildings, but of a mission that is relevant to particular publics.

And this is possible. As regards the situation in Peru, I can say that over the last decade a number of institutions, such as Gustavo Buntinx's Micromuseo, the artists' space Espacio La Culpable, the cultural association working with new media and artists' projects ATA, Alta Tecnología Andina, or my own museum, working independently and often together, have rather quickly been able to build up new possibilities, both for local art production and for a growing internationalisation of art in Peru. Where there were no collectors, now there are a number of individuals who are active in the arts internationally, although their ambition is largely based on their association with local institutions. A significant part of the most important works produced over the last half-century are now in local collections, making new conditions for public access and critical reflection possible. It is by no means a perfect scenario, but this collective endeavour has at least strengthened the possibility of harnessing international movements to serve local agendas.

So perhaps we could see the localness of museums in a more positive light if we were to imagine a vast network of local nodes forging dynamic spaces for the construction of relevant communities, placed in the service of the particular interests and the needs of specific audiences, rather than endorsing chauvinistic notions of the nation. Their institutional strength, the interest of their programmes and their professional rigor are the only certain base that will allow local institutions a larger role in fostering a more egalitarian framework of international exchange and a greater relevance to their audiences.

We obviously cannot exactly counter the art market—we lack the strength and the resources to do so—but we *can* find ways of making it serve local agendas by strategically tapping the movements of the global art world, as Cuauhtémoc Medina has keenly suggested. We can also engage the very issues that define their problematic status, serve as forums that can make global issues locally pertinent, and grant local issues a new visibility. Above all, we can work towards the fulfilment of the museum's basic function, which is to forge a public sphere for art. So, my answer to Geeta is that where there is no contemporary museum in sight we need to build it ourselves, not as a response to global branding initiatives *à la* Guggenheim, but strategically and critically, to meet local needs and to give local audiences a more equitable access to the art of our time.

CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSING REMARKS

Bartomeu Marí

I have gathered a number of ideas and statements put forward by the members of the group, which I find significant, as they have elaborated different issues of common interest focusing on the relationship between private and public at a time of changes in the economic and financial environment.

In the first place, the fact that museums in Europe seem to be more and more dependent on the private sector. The relationship between the private sector and public institutions like galleries and museums is changing hugely all over the world, and we have varying definitions of what public and private mean in different cultural contexts.

Secondly, we discussed the situation in Mexico and asked whether museums really suffered the consequences of markets crashing, how this was no longer a question of lack of money but of a lack of ideas. We saw how artists are beginning to find alternatives to their traditional relationship with the art market and institutions in order to function within the new situation. The present crisis is one of many to come, and is a great opportunity to show and explain how and why art continues to be relevant in an age of global needs and demands.

Thirdly, we asked whether museums had to undergo any change, to what extent they should vary their institutional behaviour or should modify their role. Museums in Mexico should probably take more pride in their independence and their innovative capacity, even though the relationship between the public and the private sector is not articulated as such. Another consideration was the responsibilities of museum directors in deciding how these changes should be produced as regards public funding policies.

Finally, I would also like to draw attention to the Spanish Association of Art Museum Directors (ADACE), a civil organisation that has proven instrumental in changing the way museum directors are chosen to favour public competitions instead of political nominations. This is an example of our responsibilities and potential as museum professionals.

Inti Guerrero²²

Robert Fleck: I led a group together with Sofía Hernández and I must say that discussions were very intense, particularly yesterday, and I think we were very happy with the situation of talking to people from so many different countries. Around the table sat colleagues belonging to different generations from Argentina, the United States, Georgia, Germany, Brazil, Croatia, Great Britain, Australia, Finland, the Netherlands and France. This was perhaps a unique occasion to have an informal discussion with colleagues from such different countries.

Today, the four interventions of this morning, especially, as mentioned, Natalia's presentation, have helped us to see our situation in a more defined way. Yesterday the debate was very

²² CIMAM has not been authorised to publish the transcription of Inti Guerrero's oral presentation.

different because we began by discussing the financial crisis and then other crises faced by museums today. In relation to the financial crisis, we discussed certain precise cases. One interesting example of public-private is the case of the Museo Tamayo here in Mexico, a museum founded by a private collector, run privately with private funds and sponsors, which was subsequently nationalised following the founders request.

It is interesting to look at the different strategies of collectors, even those of the patrons of CIMAM, who are also asking for the nationalisation of their collections, because in many parts of the world the relationship between public and private is usually seen as a reinforcement of the private sector, but this is not always the case. The Museo Tamayo is also a very interesting example of a state museum that is also a foundation [the Olga and Rufino Tamayo Foundation], and the foundation helps to solve some problems that arise due to the bureaucratic organisation of state museums in general.

The second case we were discussing yesterday was the situation in Georgia, at one specific moment, and the Baltic states at another. Georgia actually has an international funding system that is functioning quite well, while in Lithuania and Estonia, where the art world was booming some years ago, as a result of the huge economic crisis international funding shifted to other parts of the world. So, our conclusion is that international funding is of utmost importance for many different countries, but it can also be dangerous as international organisations and influential states may decide to give support to other countries for political reasons.

It is finally time to see things differently, change our habits, spend less money on insurance and shipping, and devise programmes that don't need insurance and share them. The question arose of whether CIMAM should make an appeal for this, have practical activity, a network platform, and I think we all agreed that it should, for instance, in order to share costs.

The second crisis we discussed was that of the independence of centres and their programming. We have seen a number of conservative reactions on the exhibitions proposed by museums, in particular in the case of Bordeaux, where charges were brought against three colleagues of ours, Marie-Laure Bernadac, Henry-Claude Cousseau and Stéphanie Moisdon, following the exhibition entitled *Presumed Innocent: Contemporary Art and Childhood* organised at the CAPC contemporary art museum. CIMAM is effective publicising cases as such where autonomy is attacked.

Another aspect questioned is whether this censorship is the expression of another conservative moment or the reaction, or the effect, of a larger public, a larger audience. New publics and broader audiences also create new reactions, and we need to think very carefully about content and education for new audiences and generations.

Kwok Kian Chow: We are Group Four, which comprises museum professionals from Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, United States, Spain, United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Belgium, Japan and Singapore. We greatly treasure the opportunity of this international gathering for us to share our mutual concerns.

Yesterday we discussed four main points. Point number one was the notion of 'crisis'. This was firstly considered in terms of the recent financial crisis. Many museums have to work within great financial constraints and we need to find ways to solve these problems. We also looked at crisis in philosophical terms, stating that crises have always existed, in fact they are very much a part of the awareness of museum professionals. We went on to consider whether we would still be asking ourselves the same key questions about museums that we need to ask now if the current sense or state of financial crisis did not exist, and consequently, whether crises at a given point in time can actually encourage us to ask such pertinent questions.

Point number two was this very gathering of international museum colleagues. The ability to share our concerns as museum professionals encourages and empowers us, and we wondered whether CIMAM could continue to play such a pertinent role in facilitating international museum discussions.

Point number three was the number of organisational changes in museum re-structuring, such as the amalgamation of different institutions to produce larger ones. These exercises are predicated on competitive and administrative considerations and may not be founded on curatorial concerns, so it is all the more urgent for international forums such as this one to reflect on the museological and curatorial implications of such organisational changes.

Point number four was the need to really think about programmatic changes in museums, to conceive new forms of meaningful collaboration, either as a response to crises or to forms of new collaborations. We need to be creative and think up new ways together.

These were the four main points discussed by Group Four yesterday. Now we will move on to the points discussed today.

We appreciate the opportunity of attending an international forum such as CIMAM to help us move beyond bilateral relations between institutions. These should not be the only basis for museum exchanges; international and multilateral exchanges are undoubtedly beneficial, and this is where CIMAM and other international organisations can certainly play an important role.

Such a role will have a number of implications. Firstly, it will lead us to consider museum premises, procedures, protocols and the need for international sharing and references. Secondly, it is pertinent that we share project ideas at the point of their initiation and not just exhibition projects that have already been packaged. Individual curators and museum professionals should be the ones proposing and discussing these concepts and curatorial ideas, which may lead to important projects instead of having everything predetermined by extra-curatorial considerations. Thirdly, we should exchange collection information other than databases that will facilitate new curatorial thinking about possible programmatic changes. Lastly, as regards the existing projects there is a broader platform for discussions and sharing, so as to generate a corresponding curatorial discourse.

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro: I led Group Five together with Sabine. The first point was quite similar to the one discussed by Group Four, the analysis of what we mean by crisis. More than just an economic crisis, this is really a socio-political, and perhaps more importantly, a philosophical crisis. This prompted a discussion, in particular of the second point.

Oswaldo Sánchez's address was analysed, in which he complained about the inability to create crises because the extreme stability of the administrative structure hinders any movements forward. I asked whether the task of the museum was to generate crises—museum directors may actually consider that generating crises is a part of their job in advancing the museum as an institution. So we should not be surprised by crises, but should instead really consider them a part of our job description.

Another role played by the museum is that of re-contextualising and regenerating meaning, but as it also has a responsibility towards the heritage in its care; we could say that the presence of stable aspects helps keep a balance. Museums are therefore always torn between the need to change and the need to preserve a certain stability.

The second point was whether art itself was more than the objects in museums. Art works are created by unstable process and it would be totally inappropriate for those institutions in charge of looking after them to take the notion of crisis too seriously and end up withdrawing the works from their collections.

The third point was the importance of achieving the power to generate new situations and knowledge at all levels within the institution, including, but not only, at the directors' level.

The fourth point was the public nature of museums and how we can deal more specifically with their public functions.

Finally, the fifth point had to do with this question of fair trade, in other words, the existence of other forms of exchange.

Patricia Sloane: Trying to find the common ground of the four discussions generated by the four speakers yesterday, we realised that there was much antagonism between the speakers and that antagonism should be a part of our dynamics. In this kind of conference, it is very healthy to have large, more corporate institutions represented alongside self-generated and self-funded smaller institutions, and for these to strike up a dialogue. It is very important that this antagonism be a point of tension between alternative structures and practices.

We also discussed similarities [between organisations], and concluded that the main similarity is the current crisis experienced by art institutions, one of the many crises in today's world. We believe that we have an ethical obligation to discover alternatives and new models for artistic institutions without losing sight of the essential ingredients of art as we understand it today.

Art's relation to the market was also a point of discussion, as part of a future conference. The new model of museum should focus on the production of knowledge and education as well as artistic practice. We feel that the centre has created a very antagonistic model; we spoke about it and re-evaluated it, and agreed with Natalia's decision of giving more importance to the local, and with Zdenka Badovinac's proposition of a local-local narrative leading to a multitude of narratives that can be articulated and negotiated in search of quality in local dialogue.

This led us to another consideration, which is basically how to discover common ground between these different social-political regions; how to work together and find a common place from where we can create jointly. We also discussed who writes history, who produces knowledge and how it is shared, and concluded that one area of common interest is that of the archival materials of each art form, so that rather than negotiating exchanges of collections we could negotiate how to share our histories and knowledge. This would truly be an ambitious global project, and I think that CIMAM would probably be very good at articulating this proposal of sharing archives between art institutions.

List of participants in the conference whose lectures are not included in this publication:

Keynote: Enrique Dussel, philosopher and lecturer at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico City

Session 1: Speaker Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles

Session 3: Respondent Galit Eilat, curator and founding director of the Digital Art Lab, Holon and co-editor in chief of *Ma'arav*. Lecturer at the Department of Film Studies, Tel-Aviv University, Tel Aviv

Conclusions and Closing Remarks: Inti Guerrero, independent curator