"A Corpse in the Garden": Bilbao's Postmodern Wrappings of High Culture Consumer Architecture

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> But one's own must be learned as well as that which is foreign.
>
> —Hölderlin[1]

Introduction

Since its inauguration in September of 1997, over one million visitors have made a point of traveling to the city of Bilbao each year to admire the Frank O. Gehry design of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and experience first hand the ways architecture has been used to reconceptualize the history and identity of the city. A controversial joint venture between the Basque Autonomous Government and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, the museum is but another example of the ways postindustrial areas in contemporary Europe have traded in industrial economic infrastructures for cultural ones. Urban planners in Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, London, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Frankfort, Barcelona, and other locations have promoted the culture industry as a means of opening new economic sectors in cities which have witnessed the gradual dismantling of their industrial base.[2] In the case of Bilbao, the Basque Government believed that the area's economic recovery would come about if the city were to adopt a new urban paradigm, one based on developing new architectural settings for the arts within the flux of global capital. This was meant as a kind of conceptual resolution of the historic political contradictions of the area.[3]

The Basque success owes much to the ways contemporary cultural identity in that community contrasts profoundly with the "amnesiac" quality that dominated the socio-historical context of the 1980s and early 1990s in Spain. Spanish cultural production of this period has been critiqued for thinking of culture almost exclusively as "spectacle" (as a market commodity) due to its being immersed in a process which aimed to reclaim a "newness" and "(post)modernity" for itself in its newly articulated post-Francoist European identity. The epistemological context of this shift in focus was one that substituted the historical "utopian" projects for what some have termed pseudo-reflexive systems of political action and democratic freedoms—essentially, the disenchantment with traditional large-party politics and the consolidation of a general consumption-oriented culture.[4]

The Basque socio-cultural context embodies the complex identitarian tensions that the micronational political units of government face in the Spanish/European context: self-government promoted on the grounds of cultural difference and its ties to geography. The Basque Country—one of the four "national historic communities" that the Spanish Constitution of 1978 recognizes[5]—is, like Spain, undoubtedly immersed in both the European Union's socio-political project of a united Europe in legal and social matters and in an economic context dictated by global parameters. The Basque autonomous government translated the European Union's economic unification in cultural terms by choosing to revitalize a postindustrial wasteland—the steel industry of Bilbao's Left Bank—and give international capital, high architecture, and short-term upscale migrancy (the tourist and conference industries) a place to locate. Hence the names and architectural centerpieces which are redefining a particular kind of cosmopolitan urban paradigm for the city: Norman Foster's metro design, Frank O. Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Federico Soriano and Dolores Palacio's Euskalduna Palace (a conference and arts center built on and inspired by the ruins of the Euskalduna shipyards), the Ría 2000 upscale housing, shopping, and entertainment complex, and Santiago Calatrava's new terminal for the Bilbao airport.[6]

The city's revitalization projects are teaching us lessons about how politicians, critics, social movements, and parties are interpreting urban change in contemporary Europe for Bilbao's new urban landscape and economic shift are gradually proposing novel civic and cultural configurations for itself and the region at large.[7] On the one hand, such articulations of social identity have been made possible thanks to the ways in which the processes of globalization and consumer culture challenge the strongholds of Basque nationalism, for the nation becomes a waning and somewhat "emancipatory" virtual category in this context. On the other hand, the use-value of the nationalist ideology has also shifted. Given this global/national paradox we find that the territorialization of identity—its circumspection to place—becomes an impractical enterprise in this context for the aesthetic rethinking of the city challenges and makes obsolete the rurally based ethno-Romantic notion of identity that still inspires many Basque nationalists. The implantation of international art forms in the architectural reconfiguration

of the city helps to undermine the "state" models of national identity that permeate much of Basque mainstream culture thanks to the consumer-oriented model that now underlies the new tourist industry's *flâneur*-like use of public urban space in Bilbao.

The older state-inspired paradigm or "modernist" model of statehood is grounded on territory and language or on a hierarchy of languages in the case of the multilingual state. National identity defined in these terms articulates its ontological status in political terms, i.e., in opposition to other nations in competition on equal or unequal grounds—such being the case, Basque nationalists will argue between Euskadi, Spain and France. Postmodern social identities, on the other hand, are less grounded in both geography and the logic of statehood and instead are driven by the rationality of consumer culture and market capitalism and, as such, are no longer exclusively bound to a community whose ties of identity are nationally inscribed. In Canclini's terms:

> La clásica definición *socioespacial* de identidad, referida a un territorio particular, necesita complementarse con una definición *sociocomunicacional*. Tal reformulación teórica debiera significar, a nivel de las políticas identitarias (o culturales) que éstas, además de ocuparse del patrimonio histórico, desarrollen estrategias respecto de los escenarios informacionales y comunicacionales donde también se configuran y renuevan las identidades. (31)[8]

And in political terms, this would be the emancipating effect that the Guggenheim project would have upon Basque nationalism and its symbolic sequestering of cultural and political pluralism.

Interestingly enough, though, architectural masterpieces such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao make the articulation of identity even more contradictory given the ways the global supranational context, that of the museum, not only shatters the notion of local identities grounded on national truths but because these global entities also find little problem in allying themselves with political projects that are nationalistic in nature. This is the novelty that the Basque context offers and the contradiction this essay will attempt to address. For Canclini, urban civic space in postmodern terms is intimately tied with the workings of the culture industry and the way its commodities are linked to social identity:

> La globalización disminuye la importancia de los acontecimientos fundadores y los territorios que sostenían la ilusión de identidades ahistóricas y ensimismadas. Los referentes identitarios se forman ahora, más que en las artes, la literatura, el folclor, que durante siglos dieron los signos de distinción a las naciones, en relación con los repertorios textuales e iconográficos provistos por los medios electrónicos de comunicación y la globalización de la vida urbana. (95)

Yet he goes on to ask, "¿Qué significan, dentro de este proceso, las construcciones imaginarias que lo contradicen?" (95). It is within this paradigm of uneven cultural/identitarian formulations that I wish to frame the discussion of the Basque context.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the democratic project of overcoming the Franco dictatorship and its sociohistorical legacies was a process embedded in revealing the "phantoms" underlying the Fran-

coist formulation of civil society, a formulation based on cultural homogeneity, linguistic unity, and political violence. The cultural "uniqueness" that the dictatorial regime believed cemented Spanish society was quickly challenged on all fronts. Political pluralism, human rights, regional autonomies and linguistic diversity were demands that Spaniards from all political camps rightly made their own. The goal of the Spanish democracy was understandably to achieve a culturally and politically diverse *national* paradigm. Almost a quarter of a century later, the efforts to preserve the "Spanish nation" offer multiple readings. On the one hand, Spain as a national concept may serve to appease the deterritorializing effects of globalization for the local conceived as "Spanishness" becomes a means to ground the global, an otherwise empty category for social relations. On the other hand, Spain as a political unity can also become a threat to the political and cultural realities that make up its diversity: an excessively strong Spanish state could increase the democratic deficit that regionalism pretends to realign. And in a further move, when regionalism, more specifically in this case neoconservative Basque nationalism of both right and left-wing affiliations, is formulated upon the same kind of exclusionary national narratives that were in place in the older Spanish Francoist context, it too constricts the local into an overly narrow and inoperative sociopolitical paradigm.[9]

The sociocommunicational basis upon which Canclini wishes to ground social identities within globalization and the establishment of the city or city-state as the locus of civil identity instead of the nation finds very provocative reformulations and contradictions when translated to the Basque context as I have briefly pointed to above. In order to better appreciate the kinds of tensions I see at play in this model, I would like to begin by contrasting the paradigms at work in the case of Catalan regionalism in order to better profile the idiosyncrasies of the Basque situation in its Guggenheim showcase.

Designer Nationalism

In his *Urban Change and the European Left: Tales from the New Barcelona* (1999), urban geographer Donald McNeill argues that it has been the work of the European Left to argue in favor of grounding messages of political change and democratic freedom in the city. The city and most articulations of the local have become political metaphors for the Left in that they serve as a defense against what is perceived as increasingly chaotic global capitalism. McNeill is interested in looking at the Catalan case as he finds in Barcelona a clash between "distinct political projects over territory and the mobilization of place identity" (55): the dichotomy lying between the project of urban renewal of Pasqual Maragall, Socialist ex-mayor of the city of Barcelona (1982-1997) and that of Catalan regionalist Jordi Pujol, president of the Generalitat (the Catalan Autonomous Government) since 1980 and leader of the conservative CiU coalition.

Taking Barcelona as a model for new social democratic urban policies, McNeill describes the planning adopted by the Socialist city council as one of "urban realism" (83). In his view, Maragall and his version of Catalan social democracy dem-

onstrate a grasp of the strategic issues facing the European Left as a whole. In an attempt to reshape the Left as a progressive political force at a time when socialism is facing a crisis of legitimacy, Maragallism prioritizes a public sector-led "art of leverage" and an internationalist conception of citizenship (83). This model argues for a fusion of socialism with liberalism, retaining the principles of pluralism and social justice but questioning the instruments of centralized planning (87). His is a "specific city-based social democratic strategy that accepts capitalism as given and seeks new ways to extract some kind of public good from it" (83). And, tied in with the Left's search for new social constituencies, the city becomes the political metaphor used in its rearticulation of social identity as it tries to recuperate both a more internationalist foundation of identity and undermine the nationalist narrative of citizenship based on racial or ethnic homogeneity.[10] In this model the city makes citizenship or residency its basis of identity.[11]

By contrast, Pujol's model of Catalan identity downplays the city in favor of a national/regional stance making the rhetoric of the city, as McNeill ironically points out, "conspicuous by its absence" (66). If Maragall's notion of Catalan identity is (at least in rhetorical terms) cosmopolitan and non-essentialist, it is because he believes in a greater political and cultural role for cities in the emerging map of a new Europe. Pujol, for his part, adopts ruralist, conservative tropes of history and stresses linguistic difference as the basis of Catalan cultural identity. Hence his obsession with normalizing the Catalan language in what has become his signature "cultural" confrontation with centralist Spain as he blends what McNeill terms "ethnic essentialism with economic dynamism" (70) in his model of the Catalan nation.[12] Pujol and CiU's ambivalent attitude toward Spain originates in the ways they conceptualize the political relation between the two in terms of a struggle for the highest degree of political autonomy possible for Catalonia within the Spanish state. Maragall's strategy, instead, is to complicate the role that language plays in the formation of nations and to stress the richness and heterogeneity of urban culture. His model of Catalanism is based less on the unequal political hierarchy of centralism vs. regionalism and instead on a federalist vision for Catalonia and Spain that stresses the "potential contributions that Catalonia can give *to* Spain" (66). Unlike Pujol's model of solidarity, Maragall's political project seems to be well aware that it is also important to recognize that a strictly regionalist program

> holds dangers of an opportunistic 'cocooning' which is isolating the more affluent parts of Europe from the elements of solidarity inherent in the nation-state. (57)

Nevertheless, this does not imply that social justice might not be better administrated from within local political structures. The binary model that McNeill sees at work in Catalonia pivots narratives of national essentialism against those of civic regionalists. It is the Ajuntament vs. the Generalitat, urbanism vs. regionalism, local globalism vs. ethnic nationalism, the new Left vs. the old Right, and "designer" socialism (Blair's Third Way) vs. bourgeois regionalism.

Moving back to the case at hand in Bilbao, architectural pieces such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao complicate the model at work in Catalonia. Not only is it a case of having a different set of political players—it was the Basque Autonomous Government, headed by José Antonio Ardanza of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which was to promote and sign the agreement between the Basque Government and the Guggenheim Foundation and not the social democrats—but also of reappropriating the urban metaphor from the Left and making it rest upon a contradictory configuration of consumer capitalism allied with Basque nationalism. The installation of a Guggenheim franchise in the city of Bilbao was used to promote a "project of modernity" in a city undergoing a severe socioeconomic crisis, suffering endemic terrorist activity, and in desperate need of economic investment in order to revitalize what had once been the leading industrial and manufacturing center of this community. The transformation that Gehry helped design in what he called the "tough city" had little to do with the cause that the Catalan socialists were defending in their own attempt to embrace international capital and make architecture an ideological tool for the overall improvement of the quality of life in Barcelona. In their attempt to attract the New York franchise and its director, Thomas Krens, to the city of Bilbao the Basque nationalists made an extraordinary use of the ideological use-value of atavistic narratives in what Basque anthropologist Joseba Zulaika terms, the "chronicle of seduction" undertaken by the Basque officials. If the Catalan Left had used high architectural forms, urban planning, and a joint venture between public funding and international capital to transform socialism's notion of civic justice and social welfare into a kind of "designer socialism," the Basque nationalists made a splendid use of the foundational narratives in the postmodern Basque context and formulate what I propose to term "designer nationalism."

One of the reasons behind the success of the Basque government's political investment in internationalization was the ways the national narrative adapted itself to the process of seduction that both the Basque and New York players so skillfully performed. In his *Crónica de una seducción: El Museo Guggenheim Bilbao*, Zulaika studies the rhetorical processes in which the New York officials and the Basque dignitaries grounded their mutual infatuation. The Guggenheim Foundation was in serious need to find capital for a floundering enterprise in New York and the Basques were interested in "purchasing" at a costly price tag ($100,000,000) the museum trademark as their centerpiece for the city's project of urban renewal. What came up for sale in this transaction went far beyond a museum franchise. Krens was to convince the Basques to adopt a model of cultural consumption that social critics, local artists, and different party officials vehemently rejected as being too hyperbolic, devoid of Basque artistic representation, and not addressing the needs of a society in deep economic and symbolic distress.[13] But despite local political opposition and dissent within the governing party (the PNV) and opposition leaders, the Basque officials single-handedly decided behind closed doors, in what many considered at the time to be an abusive exercise of power, to convince Krens to make Bilbao the site

for the Guggenheim expansion. The Basques were successful, at least on a sociosymbolic level, thanks to the ways they were able to base their rhetorical strategies on the atavistic "truths"—on the use-value—of their national narrative.[14] The Basque officials were well aware of the seductive powers of the rhetorical strategies in the spectacle of staging Basque national myths. They were going to convince the global spokesman, Thomas Krens, of the symbolic value of Basque culture. Truth did exist in postmodern times and it lay deep within Basque sociohistorical reality. It was a striking move, for the nationalists were capable of reinventing Basque social identity in accordance with the Guggenheim project by "filling in" the empty signifier—the franchise museum—with the atavistic national "truths" that seduced Krens to the city and made the Guggenheim a Basque national project as well. The Basque nationalists were capable of offering him an insight into cultural signs which were symbolically overflowing with historical genuiness: postmodernism was to come face to face with its ontological opposite, with the messianic origin of the Basques in the example of the Santimamiñe caves. Before actually seeing the tough industrial city, Krens would visit the caves and discover what Zulaika describes as:

> Con sus pinturas rupestres y sus restos arqueológicos, Santimamiñe representa las raíces, la prehistoria, el arte paleolítico vascos. Convertido en santuarios religiosos de la imaginación etnográfica vasca, así como en centro de atracción turístico, decir Santimamiñe equivale a invocar la génesis y esencia misma de lo vasco. Picasso, Moore y Chillida eran importantes; la tradición democrática de los vascos bajo el Árbol sagrado era genuina; la historia vasca de las Juntas, gestas y guerras era rica. Pero había algo más que el americano debía conocer: estaban en presencia del Cromañón europeo, en la tierra de Santimamiñe. Allí era donde había que ambientar al americano: dentro del precioso caserón vizcaíno de piedra y madera, sentado en una mesa exquisita, pero frente a frente con Santimamiñe. (61)

If García Canclini was correct in claiming that "la globalización disminuye la importancia de los acontecimientos fundadores y los territorios que sostenían la ilusión de identidades ahistóricas y ensimismadas," (95) the Basque nationalists were able to prove that those "foundational events" are as much a part of the underlying symbolic systems within globalization as they are of the narratives of the nation.

Wrapping the Nation

The Basque context of today, in light of the unquestionable economic and cultural success of the Guggenheim project, is still struggling with what some consider an anachronistic model of "late nationalism."[15] What does the Basque nationalists' drive towards higher levels of self-government and possibly independence from Spain mean given the ways the late-capitalist networks of consumption and the Americanization of culture determine the Basque context? Many ask, can the "cultura del paro," the state of urban environmental degradation, or the climate of urban decay which the de-industrialized and "reconverted" areas of postindustrial Euskadi suffer be adequately addressed in nationalistic terms? Or, on the other hand, does the national configuration of civic

space intellectually and emotionally respond somehow to the kind of ghost-like causality that writer Bernardo Atxaga believes to be the underlying epistemological and emotional threat that globalization poses and that nationalism seems to appease? He writes:

> Nosotros, en cambio, la gente de finales del siglo XX, ya no nos extrañamos ante esa concatenación; sabemos que el camino entre la causa y el efecto puede ser largo y laberíntico; [...]. Con la globalización, el mundo, lo exterior, lo que conforma nuestra circunstancia, se ha hecho fuerte, laberíntico, inextricable, y ha devuelto al hombre al estado anímico deplorable, peor aún que el que debían de tener aquellos primeros hombres que, sin poder comprender los fenómenos naturales, temblaban al oír un trueno.[16]

For nationalists from both the left and right-wing parties, trade unions, and grass-root peace organizations, the causal distance, fragmentation, and virtuality that globalization introduces into the articulation of civil society is contested by appealing, in utopian terms, to a model of citizenry based on (a) land: the unification of the French and Spanish communities of Euskadi; (b) language: the Basque language, Euskera, becomes *the* marker of "Basque" subjectivity; (c) origin: "Basqueness" articulated in terms of "racial" discrimination by the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, Sabino Arana, in the nineteenth century gradually transformed itself in the late Franco years into an issue of birthplace and has for the most part become an issue of residency; and (d) independence: the construction of an independent Basque state as a sociopolitical utopia in a united Europe of nations. In this context, internationalization, global capital, and their pragmatics in the Basque Government's projects of urban renewal graciously lend themselves to the nationalist dream, for they erase the phantom virtuality that globalization imposes and give texture and body—an undeniably spectacular one—to the utopian narrative of a future written in "Basque" terms. Architecture meets statehood and it becomes nationalism's credentials in the international and global arena.

But what if the phantom that globalization introduces—that elusive causality and sense of virtuality in the fabric of civil society—were to be remedied not with the banners of the national project but with a complex sense of place, with a rearticulation of certain modernist values which guarantees democratic freedoms in non-nationalist/non-essentialist terms for the same community? In his *Euskadi o la Segunda Transición: nación, cultura, ideologías y paz en un cambio de época* (1997), Ramón Zallo explains:

> Con la transnacionalización del capital y la relativización de las fronteras y espacios estatales—que se derivan de la comunicación internacional, de los enormes desplazamientos de personas, de los mestizajes étnicos y de la maduración democrática social—se asiste a un doble movimiento: el debilitamiento funcional de los Estados tanto hacia arriba—en beneficio de instancias supraestatales que absorben buena parte de sus competencias sobre todo económicas, militares e internacionales—como hacia abajo—en beneficio de instancias más cercanas a los ciudadanos, eficientes, representativas y controlables. (38)

One undoubtedly lives and experiences his/her citizenry locally for, like Atxaga states, "estamos sujetos a un punto concreto del mundo por una especie de atracción gravitatoria" (24). But Atxaga finds in the processes of global capitalism and in the wake of the nation-state an avenue for not only questioning the foundations of Spanish nationalism but also the Basque narratives that find their inspiration in that same model of social identity.[17] In a recent interview, when questioned on his views concerning national identity and citizenry, he outlined his position in the following terms:

> El problema del concepto de identidad es que es un concepto más allá de lo palpable, más allá de lo físico. Entonces me parece que está fuera de la historia y eso es oteicismo, que está muy bien cuando se hace escultura pero muy mal en política. Es pensar que hubo un algo que definía, que construía el sujeto vasco allá en la prehistoria y que eso es el núcleo duro que se ha mantenido. Esas definiciones, que no tienen que ver con la historia, que también se utilizan en el nacionalismo español, son peligrosas políticamente [. . .] definamos nuestra sociedad culturalmente y además digamos que es pluricultural y pluriétnica y construyamos con todo eso esa ciudad. Además de ser más práctico, todo esto me parece algo aceptable y tranquilizador para la sociedad vasca.[18]

Atxaga's political paradigm defined in terms of a Basque City (Euskal Hiria) instead of a Basqueland (Euskal Herria) stems from his wanting to articulate Basque reality in its plurality and therefore undermine the mythical national paradigms of homogeneity. Hermeneutically speaking, though, this political utopia derives from a model of citizenry based on the structures of global capitalism and the deterritorialization of the nation-state in favor of what might be termed the city of consumption. Citizenry in the global city is inevitably intertwined with consumption (of goods and culture) between and among what Canclini terms, "segmentos mundializados: los jóvenes, los viejos, los gordos, los desencantados" (113). Yet this horizontal stratification of citizenry in the global context, despite its masking fundamental social inequalities, can also serve in the Basque case as a therapeutic inoculation against the excesses of "late nationalism." Given that nationalism, as it is lived in the Basque Country, has been tainted by senseless terror, extreme violence, and wasteful deaths at the hands of both Spanish and Basque "patriots," and given the political anxiety that has arisen since the termination of the ETA cease-fire—the hard-core response of the Popular Party's politics towards Euskadi, the social fragmentation and ethical angst that the recent indiscriminate assassinations of progressive political members of Basque society has caused—has the time finally come to ask what Edward Said so eloquently posed when in the context of Palestinian identity he wrote,

> Do we exist? [...] When did we become one? [...] What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?[19]

The new urban façade provided by the architecture offers Basque nationalism an aesthetic "dressing" of sorts, one that I

would venture adds a static temporal dimension to what Frederic Jameson described in a different context as architectural wrapping. When applied to the internationalist restaging of Basque identity, wrapping achieves on the global scale what the foundational narratives are preoccupied in doing locally: turning historical discursivity into a fixed matrix or adding what Benjamin termed a "messianic" dimension to historical experience.

In his *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Jameson explains the retroactive tension within the "wrapping" phenomena as the spatial solution given to the semiotics of historical representation when he describes the way Gehry remodeled his turn-of-the-century home by wrapping the old building with an avant-garde glass and metal design. In a different context, Teresa Vilarós has used this architectural metaphor to describe the processes of historical erasure that she finds taking place in Spanish post-Francoist cultural production, in particular, in the transition to democracy, in her recent *El mono del desencanto* (1998). For Jameson:

> wrapping can be seen as a reaction to the disintegration of that more traditional concept Hegel called 'ground,' which passed into humanistic thought in the form named 'context,' felt by its opponents to be basely 'external' or 'extrinsic,' since it seemed to imply the double standard of two radically distinct sets of thoughts and procedures (one for the test, the other—generally imported from the outside, from history or sociology manuals—for the context in question), and, in addition, to be always redolent of some larger and even more intolerable conception of the social totality to come. (101)

As an historiographical strategy, wrapping implies a process of legitimization to what Vilarós terms, "una reubicación espacial y temporal de las relaciones existentes entre la realidad presente y el pasado que queda 'envuelto' por ella" (173). She understands that the artistic responses to the sociocultural and political effects of the Franco dictatorship that took place under the guise of wrapping, are to a large degree strategic negotiations, a symbolic process of therapeutic healing of the "monsters" of Francoism. Likewise, this ideological/historiographical logic when analyzed within the Basque context offers a similar reading of the sociosymbolic negotiations that the Guggenheim project articulates for the national narratives and the political violence of ETA.

On a hermeneutical level, the wrapping phenomenon implies that the temporal frame of the past, the time vector that is "wrapped" or "quoted," acquires a museum-like materiality. The old that is quoted within the new is frozen in time when it achieves exhibit-like status within its new temporal structure. Yet, to appropriate the past by juxtaposing it to a temporal vector of contemporaneity is at the same time a way of calling attention to the process of historical erasure itself. The wrapping phenomena makes the past an inseparable part of the present because, at least in the Gehry's projects in both his Santa Monica house and museum design in Bilbao, he is capable of reorienting the historiographical gaze. The historicity of his home becomes as much a part of the present as does the avant-garde glass and metal design for the contemporary framing reveal its ontological dependence upon the past. In the case of the Bilbao struc-

ture, the titanium-sheathed edifice standing in the midst of the industrial remains of the old shipyards, abandoned buildings, and highly polluted waterway of industrial sewage makes us frame the museum within the historical legacy upon which it sits. Basque nationalism is using avant-garde architecture to erase the history of this postindustrial wasteland as it reformulates civil society in such a fashion that it allows the Basque nation to find and recuperate the old national (utopian) projects under the guise of cultural consumption.

The rethinking of the public sphere in terms of the arts and geography is one of the most important discussions taking place within the area of cultural studies today because of the global logic of space and identity. Many artists and intellectuals working within the Basque Country today have taken it upon themselves to make their work articulate strategies that will ground the local upon a more discursive historical paradigm than that offered by the nationalist framework.[20] Theirs is an attempt to find a political locus for a post-utopian civil society, one that privileges non-identitarian difference as its marker of pluralism. Ideally, this rethinking of the national and the regional in terms of the city or the public sphere becomes what George Yúdice, following Gramsci, defines as:

> the ensemble of symbolic practices by means of which a discursive consensus is struck among the diverse sectors that constitute the socius and through which an image of the totality of that socius is projected. (1)

Given the pessimism that globalization imbues upon projects of emancipation, this "discursive consensus" is probably one of the last political frameworks, one of the last "futuristic" paradigms described in terms of what I would like to call "minimized political maximums" or the grounding of the possibilities of citizenry within the public sphere.[21] Political involvement at the turn of the century faces the challenge of rearticulating new political meaning from within the logic of consumerism and this is not an easy task. On an epistemological level one could almost venture that new social emancipatory praxis are discourses based on a "negative" rationality, in that they are already not being what they appear to be. This unstable locus of identity serves the emancipatory project because sociopolitical "Difference" cannot be claimed as another reified category, as a self-sufficient option. For Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, the task at hand is the reformulation of a political pragmatics under a post-utopian paradigm, one that while not losing sight of the levels of social welfare or of the deepening of democracy, would still allow us to minimally respond to the politico-philosophical problem described:

> Averiguar si es posible mantener las reglas epistemológicas del espacio social (definición de los agentes y el cambio), del conocimiento (interpretación y transformación de la realidad), de la ética (pervivencia de los valores y la dimensión moral), de la estética (criterios) [. . .] sin recurrir a una fundamentación fuerte. ¿Cuáles son las condiciones de posibilidad mínimas—necesarias y suficientes—para que funcionen dichas esferas? ¿Qué cantidad de verdad, sujeto, realidad, libertad, autonomía, justicia [. . .] es imprescindible para garantizar el bienestar social, personal y el uso de la razón? ¿Qué

> fundamentación requiere esa *filosofía de superviviencia*? (13)[22]

This post-utopian paradigm is itself a direct outcome of an historical moment characterized by the tensions between two decisive economic and political phenomena: on the one hand, the development of global market and consumer economies, and on the other, the deterritorialization of the nation in favor of local difference in its different manifestations (cities, consumer sectors, etc.) within new supranational politico-economical structures (European Union, NAFTA zone, etc.). This weakening of the "national" paradigm can, for example, benefit national cultures, like the Spanish one, in that, as Gonzalo Navajas has claimed, the dissemination and reception of Spanish culture on an international scale has become more favorable because the process of deterritorialization has erased the nation associated with Francoism.[23]

Likewise, in the case of Spanish "peripheral" cultures, this "weakening" of traditional national spaces has articulated a public-civic dimension that has favored their development and dissemination in and outside Spain. This "buen momento" for cultural/ethnic difference has been, like Bernardo Atxaga or Manuel Rivas have stated, the point in which the local takes the upper hand in regards to the structures and global networks of consumption and communication. In Jean Franco's terms, "in the age of global flows and networks, the small scale and the local are the places of the greatest integrity" (qtd. in Moreiras 75). George Yúdice also finds in this process "a particular arrest of the process of consumption" or a space that he defines as "distance-towards-the-global."

It might be commonplace to point out that a civil society within a democracy rests upon the degree to which the diversity of its interlocutors finds representation, yet I would problematize the stance that measures the value of the democratic project exclusively on the representational value of the local—as if the confirmation of cultural difference would be a guarantor of a democratic articulation of diversity. Instead of thinking of the local in terms of spaces that vary in the degree to which they become part of the mechanisms of global consumption, I think it might be more helpful to conceptualize the local as a moment of *apparent negativity* in the global paradigm. This is to say, that on the one hand, in contrast to the processes of globalization and homogenization that the development of late capitalism establishes, the local can appease the uneasiness that the erasure of local histories creates in terms of a "deficit" in democratic terms. In this situation, the local, as Franco and Yúdice rightly point out, can be conceptualized as a moment of disequilibrium, of "resistance" in ideological terms within the global paradigm; a moment of arrest in the chain of global consumption, at least in the sense of being an "other" that has yet to negotiate its integration into that process. On the other hand, one must not forget that global consumer networks also need "difference" in order to articulate the rhythms and processes demanded of endlessly renewed consumption, therefore bringing the exchange value of the local to the forefront. The Left should not fall into the trap of what Alberto Moreiras terms, "(re)producing local difference for the sake of a merely regionally-diversified consumption of sameness" (61). The ground-

ing of civil society or its study within cultural studies should not be based on:

> what our understanding of social processes gains once we include increasingly larger segments of the world's historical experiences but why we should want to include those experiences into our knowledge; that is, for what purpose. (61)

What does the local as a "narrative of resistance" offer in terms of politico-pedagogical projects that enable wider and better access to levels of democratic civic communication and participation in society?[24]

The debate of the value of difference with the Basque context is almost exclusively grounded on issues of national identity and the legitimacy of violence to achieve that goal. The situation is almost always framed within a reductionary binary paradigm that limits the debate to asking if the Basques need more political independence from Spain, or if Spain should help the Basque government fight ETA terrorism with stronger police and military intelligence. When local difference gets sequestered into becoming a tool for new narratives of political authoritarianism albeit in "Basque" terms, we have come full circle and made Difference an issue of Identity:

> As you begin to watch Identity turn into Difference and Difference back into Identity, you grasp both as an inseparable Opposition, you learn that they must always be thought together. But after learning that, you find out that they are not in opposition, but rather, in some other sense, one and the same as each other.[24] (Jameson 76)

Notes

[1] Quoted in Kristeva XI.

[2] See Zulaika (127).

[3] This option was not always apparent to the Basque Autonomous Government or to the Bilbao City Council. One should not forget the intense debates surrounding the *Centro Cultural de la Villa* project that mayor José María Gorordo (PNV-Basque Nationalist Party) fought hard to secure for the city of Bilbao and which did not receive financial backing from the Basque Government despite its initial support for the center. The Gorordo project wanted to transform the Alhóndiga building (a former wine warehouse located in the center of Bilbao) into a center for the arts. Popularly known as "El cubo de Gorordo," the new building was conceptualized as a massive glass cube to be built on top of the 1909 structure. Agreements, talks, and planning started in 1988 and the project had been abandoned by 1990 because of internal political reasons. The Cube would have added 360,000 square feet of much needed cultural space to the city and it would have been distributed in four major areas: a library, a museum of modern art, an arts center (complete with auditorium, exhibit halls, and workshops for artists in residence), and the Bilbao Conservatory of Music. Gorordo's project wanted to transform the contemplative museum experience into a more interactive one. The project's failure was one of the major reasons why Gorordo resigned from his post as mayor of the city in December of 1990 after a short three-year term. For further information on the political players surrounding the Cube project see his *La política de otra manera* (1993).

[4] No sociocultural moment is ever homogeneous. For a further discussion of this issue in the case of Spain and postmodernism in the nineties see my "You Who Will Never Be Mine: Internal Exile, Civil Identity, and Ethical Epistemologies in Pilar Miró's *El pájaro de la felicidad*" (2000).

[5] The three other communities granted this status by the 1978 Constitution were Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalusia.

[6] Among the many other architects involved in this project are César Pelli's (Argentina) Abandoibarra transformation, Arata Isozaki's (Japan) shopping center, José Antonio Fernández Ordóñez's (Spain) pedestrian bridge framed in wood, and Zaha Hadid's (Irak/UK) commission to overhaul the neglected Zorrozaurre area of Bilbao.

[7] One should also point out that the new social configurations that the buildings and projects of urban renewal are making possible are not all equally interesting in terms of proposing advanced models of civic freedoms and social justice. The democratization of the civic sphere of any city unquestionably entails making its "social minorities" (the handicapped, the elderly, the unemployed, etc.) part of that dialogue. For recent studies on gender and the city in the Spanish context see Teresa del Valle's *Andamios para una nueva ciudad* (1997), María Angeles Durán's *La ciudad compartida* (1998), or the projects of Catalan arquitect, Ana Bofill. Emakunde (The Basque Women's Institute) also dedicates its December 1999 issue to the topic, *¿De quién son las ciudades?* as does *Zehar*—the journal published by Gipuzkoa's leading arts center, Arteleku—in its summer and winter 2000 issues on *Mujer, espacio, y arquitectura* and *Espacio, género y crítica,* respectively.

[7] See Néstor García Canclini's *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (1995).

[8] The tensions between the national and local political contexts can be observed in the ways electoral votes in the Basque political context are distributed between the large national parties (the conservative Popular Party-PP, the socialist Basque Socialist Party-PSE, and the left-wing communist-dominated coalition United Left-IU) and the Basque nationalist parties (the Christian democrat Basque Nationalist Party-PNV, its independist faction The Basque Fraternity Party-EA, and the left-wing radical coalition Unity-Batasuna). There have been different coalitions among the parties especially between the PNV and the PSE, i.e., between nationalists and socialists. This had been the working coalition until October of 1998 when the three nationalist parties signed the "Pacto de Lizarra" together with the United Left Party and nationalist trade unions. The Lizarra document was meant as a symbolic agreement among the different parties to work towards higher levels of political autonomy from Spain, levels that could demand an amendment of the 1978 Constitution if the right to self-determination were to be resolved under a federalist model of statehood for Spain. The ETA cease-fire that followed shortly afterwards together with the nationalist victory in the March 1999 elections for seats in the Basque Parliament brought about the first nationalist coalition government for the Basque Country in 1999. At the time of this essay, the ETA cease-fire agreement has been broken after talks with the Spanish government were stalled for several months and the nationalist coalition has been rescinded. Political violence has also reappeared after a hopeful fourteen-month hiatus. Since December of 1999, ETA is responsible of forty-two killings and Jarrai—a youth group closely affiliated with the radical left-wing nationalists—has claimed the fire-bombings of the homes of Conservative and Socialist Party politicians in the Basque Country. Political action taken by members of Jarrai and their social cohesion can be explained in part by the "cultura del paro" that affects in some cases nearly 35% of all Basque youths and offers what appears to be a countercultural means towards socialization. Similarly, the Euskal Herritarrok coalition (now Batasuna, previously Herri Batasuna) attempted to reformulate the political structures of the Basque Country with an "Assembly of Townships" that would somehow address the needs of Basque citizens better. This municipal assembly has the attraction of offering a short-term ideological and practical solution to the issue of Basque sovereignty. In the context of globalization, this new political framework serves the purpose of eliminating the virtual cause-and-effect conditions within civil society. Unfortunately, radical political policies have only been articulated from the nationalist camp. Today's Euskadi is faced with Judge Baltasar Garzón's attempt to illegalize Batasuna because of its alleged links with ETA and with a future referendum on self-determination as announced by Lehendakari (Basque President) Juan José Ibarretxe in September of 2002. The Basque Left has yet to articulate a non-na-

tionalist imaginary for Basque citizens within its "natural" ideological terrain in regards to the issues of identity, democratic freedoms, and sovereignty in possibly federalist terms.

[9] When asked if Catalan identity is based on racial identity, Pujol has always been quick to point out in the press and in interviews, such as the one given to art historian Robert Hughes at the time of the Barcelona Olympics, that his vision of Catalan unity is based on shared cultural/linguistic features (his notion of ethnicity) and on political and economic structures, not on racial uniqueness. See Hughs's study of the city *Barcelona* (1992).

[10] One of the first urban geographers to formulate this position was Spanish professor Manuel Castells in his groundbreaking, *La Question Urbaine* (1973) later translated into English as *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (1977).

[11] McNeill's analysis falls too neatly at times into the binary model he sees at play in Catalan politics and conflates cultural identity with ethnic essentialism. The Pujol model is, of course, based on cultural conservatism but when placed within the larger context of other nationalist groups within Spain, his is still ideologically very distant from the racial paradigm that some Basque radicals still uphold. For a study of the different models at work in Spain see Xavier Rupert de Ventós's *Nacionalismos: el laberinto de la identidad* (1994).

[12] An issue that many Basques felt the Gorordo project could address more effectively. Zulaica writes about the "Cube:"

> Una vida cultural cosmopolita y floreciente se convertía en estrategia fundamental para internacionalizar un centro urbano o así poder atraer capital extranjero y gente especializada. Pero no sólo los *yuppies*, decía inicialmente el discurso, también los parados, emigrantes, marginados, jóvenes podían integrarse en las nuevas actividades culturales. (*Crónica* 127)

The urban policies of the Basque Government were to be directed otherwise. Culture was not to be the logical terrain of protest and dissonance.

[13] In the late 1980s early 1990s, when the conversations first took place, (the final agreement was signed and the economic transaction took place in June 1992 at the New York Stock Exchange) many Basques responded to the museum as if it were a "negative" in ontological terms. It was perceived as a simulacra of Basque cultural identity, in the sense that it was an excessively commercial enterprise that had little if anything to do with the cultural production, needs, and interests of Basque society at large. Basque sculptor and aesthetician, Jorge Oteiza, who had been deeply involved in the Gorordo project felt that the Guggenheim had little to do with advancing and promoting avant-garde notions of Basque cultural production. He termed the museum's cultural strategy the "Euskodisney" project. For more on Oteiza's response see Zulaika 278.

[14] The economic figures have surpassed even the most optimistic forecasts of the enterprise. For example, in 1999 then Basque Minister of Culture María Carmen Garmendia declared in the Basque Parliament that the museum had already generated sufficient revenues that year to cover 75% of its total expenditures. The Basque institutions had initially spent $100,000,000 to cover the initial construction and franchise costs. Garmendia also announced that should the rate of visitors remain constant, by the end of 2000 the tax base generated in the Basque economy would be the equivalent of the initial investment. In 1999, the museum's activities were responsible for 0.55% of the Basque GIP in addition to generating a supplementary $600,000,000 to the Basque economy. The museum now boasts of having over 11,000 associates in its Friends of the Museum program (tripling those of The Prado Museum) and has secured the financial backing of 133 private enterprises. See Larrauri.

[15] See his essay "Globalización y fragmentación" in Francisco Jarauta (ed) *Egungo Mundaren Globalizazio eta Fragmentazio. Globalización y Fragmentación del Mundo Contemporáneo* (1997): 18-19.

[16] Joseba Gabilondo has used the term postnationalism in reference to the articulation of Spanish national identity in the wake of the modernist territorialization of political space. He finds that contemporary Spanish national identity reterritorializes itself so as to configure a postnational (in

the modernist sense) identity *vis à vis* the peripheral communities. See his, "Travestismo y novela terrorista: deseo y masoquismo femenino en la literatura vasca postnacional" (1999). Jon Juaristi has used the Habermasian term in the sense of overcoming the national narrative. His is a "beyond nationalism." For more, consult his "Posnacionalismo" (1994).

[17] See the interview, "Bernardo Atxaga: 'Echo de menos la definición de un nuevo horizonte utópico.'" *Elkarri* 50 (1999): 27.

[18] See *After the Last Sky* (1986): 34. Similary, Basque anthropoligist Mikel Azurmendi writes in his introduction to *La herida patriótica: la cultura del nacionalismo vasco* (1998):

> El consenso es el que fragua el *nosotros* como comunidad de intereses convergentes de los *yoes* individuales: el *yo*, planteándose como condición del valor da su asentimiento a algún *nosotros* desde el cual se sabrá protegido y tratado como igual. Se trata de un *nosotros* que, en sana práctica liberal, no debería cobrar valor absoluto, pues no es sino la forma contingente y circunstancial de que todos vean posible crearse a sí mismos según sus capacidades, meta que exige la protección de las libertades y la paz y prosperidad. Sin embargo, varias modalidades del consenso-nosotros han cobrado valor absoluto, superior al de los propios consensuantes. Por su importancia para estas ideas sobre el abertzalismo, me ocuparé del *nosotros* del nacionalismo y del que genera la tiranía de mayorías legítimas. (19)

For Azurmendi Basque nationalism is a "wounded" cultural matrix:

> una tupida maraña de símbolos que compactan una identidad densa y una visión dualista de las cosas humanas, hasta de las más ordinarias, posibilitando un campo experiencial, desde lo estético y ético hasta el sentido común, determinado por un sentimiento de pérdida-recuperación y por una inefable ansia de Estado *propio*. Una cultura generadora de deseos e intenciones siempre dolientes, a modo de herida siempre abierta, porque nos han robado lo que debimos ser y hemos perdido lo que debimos conseguir. (65)

[19] One of the most important outlets for this rethinking of the role of the arts takes place in the projects organized and funded by the city of San Sebastián's leading avant-garde cultural center, Arteleku. Directed by Santiago Eraso, this publicly funded center for the arts sponsors experimental art exhibits, edits graphic art, holds seminars and international conferences, publishes the interdisciplinary journal *Zehar* (*In that Direction),* and houses a library and media arts and research center. Recent conferences at Arteleku include, for example, "Interpassion: On Creative Cognition and Artistic Production in New Social Spaces," "Untimely Homelands and Heterodoxy" and artists and thinkers like Ricardo Ugarte, Eduardo Chillida, Guillermo Gómez Peña, Giulia Colaizzi, Sami Naïr, Ignacio Ramonet, Jean Baudrillard, Francisco Jarauta, Bernardo Atxaga are regulars. Arteleku has become a European reference point for intellectual debate and this has had an astounding effect on the Basque intellectual climate. Thanks to the leadership and vision of Santiago Eraso, Arteleku achieves two very important goals: it helps inoculate Basque society against the excesses of ethnic nationalism and it simultaneously offers a countercultural space that resists the tendency towards homogenization that globalization imposes on contemporary culture.

[20] Jean Franco questions the self-sufficiency of the Habermasian public sphere in terms of its being an ideal sphere of "public rationality" by preferring instead to speak of "public space." For Franco, the public sphere is never divorced from sociopolitical interests. The critical enterprise, then, would not be so much about finding the ideal conditions for political action but rather in configuring a "weaker" or more permeable paradigm that finds the transformational potential of a social group to depend on the strategies of negotiation that it is capable of generating. In this respect Yúdice writes:

> It is incumbent on intellectuals and critics, then, to come to understand how these phenomena are produced and not disdain them because they do not conform to an idealized critical discourse thought to be necessary for the conduct of society. (80)

[21] See her study on postmodernity and post-utopian political negotiations *El modelo Frankenstein* (1997): 13.

[22] Without minimizing the positive effects that the introduction of Spanish cultural production may have on the type and variety of interlocutors within the global cultural debate, rather than limiting the discussion to the degree of visibility of Spanish culture, it might be more interesting to focus on the ways the permeable borders within the deterritorialized paradigm become the markers of "value" of the cultural text itself, thereby constituting the new conditions of legitimization of cultural production. Navaja's position is quoted in Yúdice.

[23] I am thinking in terms of feminist political postulates that especially conceptualize politics as a pragmatics close to the everyday, as a kind of pedagogy of communication, interaction, and transmission of information and power.

[24] See his essay "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue" in the collection *The Cultures of Globalization* (1998).

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