

RESEÑA

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**CONTEMPORARY ART.
AND THE COSMOPOLITAN
IMAGINATION¹. MARSHA
MESKIMMON. LONDON:
ROUTLEDGE, 2011, PP. 117.**

**ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO Y LA
IMAGINACIÓN COSMOPOLITA**

The process of globalization has changed our contemporary art, as well as the Cosmopolitan imagination in urban cities, their geographies and boundaries. Published in 2001 by the prestigious Routledge, Contemporary Art focuses on the effects of globalization in the way people conceive arts. In this valuable book, MARSHA MESKIMMON argues that the contemporary art rests on a great paradox. At the time the trans-national movements exert considerable gravity by imposing the interests for other cultures, customs and people, new global industries as movies, tourism and hospitality brought the cosmopolitanism to local communities. This interest or curiosity for others, Meskimmon adds, is based on a one-sided discourse of subordination of a great variety of cultures to the western cultural values. In other times, people travelled to know others. Now not only this does not happen, but also the other is constructed at home by Pc station. This affects the meeting between local and tourists as well as their communication. The world is not there to be discovered; rather, it consists in a pathway towards solipsism. Cybnauts construct the world from their mobile phones, or their Personal computers.

As the previous argument given, three significant questions articulate the argument of this project, what role does art play in configuring the political, ethical landscape of our times? Art would serve as an instrument of “mute-mirroring” to mould the understanding of the real. At a second place, what type of subject is created by global consumption of art? The answer to this question is very hard to grasp. Globalization is replicating certain modelled subjectivities with serious ramifications in the psychological mind. As a result of this, art is being produced and circulated in the same terms that capital, which are monopolized by globalized economic elites.

The globalized home alludes to a new type of dwelling, which is posed by cosmopoli-

1 Fecha de recepción: 30 de octubre de 2014

tanism, where the difference is portrayed through the lens of aesthetic. Unless otherwise resolved, new forms of materialities created new imagined worlds. Here, we are close to the main thesis of the book. There is a cosmopolitan “imagination” which determines a “global consciousness”, where every person is a world. In this stage, art serves as a mediator between the global and the diversity of self. The archetype of representation, based on the binomial original vs. copycat, has set the pace to a multi-levered cosmology of contingency.

Imagining ourselves at home in the world, where our homes are not fixed objects but processed of material and conceptual engagement with other people and different places, is the first step toward becoming cosmopolitan. Art is specially able to convey the intimate relation between the material and the conceptual that this requires, invoking the contingency of home by positioning us at the nexus of the real and the imaginary, while using the sensory force of object, image, and spaces to engage memory, desire, and cognition. (p. 8)

To cut the long story short, art plays a pervasive role in the modernity, because it articulates the cosmopolitan imagination so that people gains further understanding, but at the same time it is replicated to anesthetize the critical consciousness. The whole argument in this book rests on four terms, foundation (Chapter 1), threshold (Chapter 2), passage (Chapter 3) and landing (final chapter).

The late-modernity understands the end of place, as the result of the declination of security. If place was viewed as the shelter of subject, to be safe from external risks and threats, the concept of global-exchange effaced the connection of self with any type of stability. The cosmopolitan imagination not only usufructs the sense of mobility, in a complex world, but also encourages the con-

nection of people to geo-political networks. The multiculturalism in urban mega cities are introduced in private home in forms of decorations, allegories, motifs and post travel souvenirs. If the touring was legitimized in the needs of being there, the portable landscape traveller’s import to their homes pave the ways for the symbolic siege of this “Other”. As told, this is the innovative axiom of MESKIMMON, there is a classical cosmopolitanism which is replicated beyond the control of bourgeoisie elites. From its inception, neoliberalism has focused on individual as “a self-contained unit” (interests) exacerbating the memorable experience or the hedonist experience, always in the present time. However, MESKIMMON alerts, art may encourage a multi-cultural view that leads people to proximate exchanges, or a new mode of “affective engagement”.

Rather, to explain the definition of “threshold” in this book is interesting to cite the art-work of SALCEDO *La casa viuda* which reflects the problem of terrorism in Colombia. After travelling to hinterland, Salcedo acquired a special sensibility on the question of violence and body-disappearance. Basically, the concept of threshold denotes a border-land or a space of transition between two oppositional objects, the self and other, domestic and foreign and so forth. What would be more interesting to debate is to what an extent art reduces the tension engendering an autonomous sphere of mutual participation. Engagement is the key word to understand the role art should play in the cosmopolitan imaginary.

The point of departure in this argument is that art represents an opportunity to mobilize trauma, body and memory reconfiguring the fields of ethics and politics. Artworks not necessary are a projection of reality, but strengthen a new responsibility to find and respect the difference. Whether real events affect real people, arts open the door to engagement in the suffering of others. As a result of this, for

author, art would make a more ethical citizen. This seems to be the reason why contemporary art needs to change the world. The art echoes an ethical mandate, posing the problem of imperialism under the lens of scrutiny.

To put this in bluntly, imagination is the key factor that alludes to corporeal circulation of goods but this engenders a risk. Empires are erected by the efficacy of communities to circulate goods through the periphery. This point is brilliantly discussed in the chapter fourth, where MESKIMMON addresses the problem of “passage” to describe the details of European Imperialism. In perspective, empire does not create objects, but meanings in order for objects to be interpreted. Therefore, the empire’s success is based on its ability to discipline subjects and their bodies. To the concept of “real economy”, she insists, which facilitates the circulation of persons and goods it is important to add a new concept, “corporeal economy” given by the productions of objects to make bodies meaningful. The question of passage rests on the idea that one product may be fabricated with source coming from diverse points of the world, and transported to be sold in Europe or any geographical place. The ideological success of Imperialism consists in processing raw material in fine finished products. Following this explanation, “landing” is understood as simple pauses characterized by moment of self-reflection when the subject may opt to change its life-direction. Landing can be viewed as a hope, as a promise of a good future which put us face to face with ourselves. Whenever migrants feel nostalgia for their lost home, this means landing. Late modernity is not a demon, post Marxist scholars precluded. Rather, it has some benefits such as further tolerance, fluid communication, or trans-cultural swaps that will foster the peace-keeping process someday.

Although this philosophical text is very hard to grasp, in some respects, the primary point

of entry is that the identity is never fixed to a certain place, or territory, nor is it interpreted by means of art. This happens because passages give forms of thinking the subject as embedded in a new cosmopolitan ethic. It represents a valid attempt to decipher the reasons and effect of postmodernism in art and global mobility as well as its effects on the configuration of place. At a first glance, MESKIMMON gives a good description art in post-modern times, but it fails to provide a convincing explanation on how a new modern ethic is articulated with art.

Two major objections can be done to MESKIMMON. First and foremost, the argument seems to be a little naïve and abstract, without taking into consideration the negative effects of fragmentations brought by post-modern art; the rupture given between meaning and object. Secondly, she falls in a classical error to preclude we live in a hyper-mobile world. We indeed dwell on a sedentary society, an industrial society which is based on a false consciousness of what means being mobile. Unlike other times where societies wander in quest of new lands and resources for surviving, our society is enrooted in a specific territory, exploiting land to fabricate surpluses. Travels are not real indicators of mobility. In earlier research, KORSTANJE (2012) equalled tourism and mobility as a carousel (Merry-go-round). This amusing machine is fitted up with horses, cars, planes, that not only connote mobility but the displacement is always on the same axis in a circularly basis. Its function aims to socialize children in the paradigm of mobility, but this mobility is not complete. Travellers (as children) have no opportunity to change the itinerary of their trips, they rather remains subject to the necessary immobility proper of sedentary societies. It is no surprising that nomads do not build walls, only sedentary tribes need walls to protect from outside. As TIM INGOLD put it, nomads developed a relational paradigm to be engaged in the world. They do not perceive the

dichotomy between objects and subject, art and non-art, work and leisure. The principle of contemplation is based on the dwelling modern perspective, which means that we, human beings, have been created to domesticate nature, to administrate a vast world by the introduction of rationale (INGOLD, 2000). Surely, INGOLD adds, like a map, artwork is necessary when the consumer is not familiar with the contemplated landscape. In view of that, nor art as a whole neither contemporary art may be relational as MESKIMMON said.

Last but not least, centred on a biased diagnosis, *contemporary art* is not taking seriously the conditions of creative destruction, explained by the radical changes industrial economies suffered after the 1970s oil embargo. HARVEY's account is still fruitful to understand how capital and culture are inextricably intertwined. To what an extent, art can be viewed as an instrument of engagement or alienation has been discussed by SKOLL & KORSTANJE (2013) recently. Based on a comparative case study methodology, authors examine how art may be independent or dependent of economic forces. Riverwest, situated in Milwaukee, US seems to be a clear example of how art-works decelerate the negative effects of modernity such as gentrification, discrimination and real-estate. The social conditions of Riverwest evidence the fact that artists may very well strengthen the social bond in the neighbourhood. Rather, El Abasto in Buenos Aires, Argentina takes the

opposite direction. The process of gentrification is accelerated by a rapid reproduction of capital where art plays an active role. Art, music, tango and tourism would weave an exclusionary narrative where "undesired migrants" are unvoiced, traced and exiled to other peripheral spaces. The divergence between one and other example is explained by the adoption of cultural industries as tourism to refurbish the architecture of building. Whenever tourism is adopted as main industry, art is subordinated to be systematically replicated at a large scale, without any type of cleavage or resistance.

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