



ACCA

Associació Catalana de Crítics d'Art



Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art
International Association of Art Critics
Associación Internacional de Críticos de Arte

This collection is a small sample of the lectures presented by almost a hundred speakers at the six annual iterations (2005-2010) of the International Symposium on Art Criticism in a Global World, organized by ACCA, Associació Catalana de Crítics d'Art.

The selection offers an overview of the representative subjects that the Symposium has dealt with in these last six iterations. The published papers tackle a range of issues such as the new role of art criticism in a global context, the new geographies of thought taking shape in the context of decolonization, and the emergence of a new modernity; the new cartographies of art created as a result of ruptures and dislocations – cultural, political, social and economic – everywhere from the Balkans to East Asia or North Africa and, finally, the proliferation of the biennials as exhibition circuits which channel the problem of art in a global world and serve as the instruments of its legitimation.

GLOBAL CIRCUITS

The Geography of Art and the New Configurations of Critical Thought

GLOBAL CIRCUITS

the discussion of art criticism and its challenges today. Or, to write it another way, to think and rethink criticism relentlessly.

After all, what else has ACCA been doing since, in 2005, it laid the cornerstone of an initiative that, despite the liquescence of our time, has consolidated itself: the Symposium on Art Criticism in a Global World? On the strength of the successive designs configured by the curators of the event, Anna M. Guasch, Menene Gras and Pilar Parcerisas, to whom thanks are due for the success of the first impulse and their subsequent dedication, there has been much fruitful reflection on art criticism in its most current expressions. Thus, Barcelona has been a forum of debate on some of the most intense problems generated in the sector: the meaning of art criticism in the context of globalization; the concept of identity in this world apparently without borders; the manifestations of art in the post-historic era; the new intertextual and intermedial strings; the changes of model in art and criticism amid the jolts of capitalism...

In the six iterations of the Symposium on Art Criticism in a Global World many opinions have been heard from around the world, both in papers presented and in round-table talks. Now, the Catalan Association of Art Critics is taking another step and offering a selection of some of these papers in book form. This may seem to be a contradiction, but I do not think it is: in the advanced state of information technology in which we find ourselves, the ACCA does not exclude the possibility that the thinking of art, the thinking of art criticism, should still find in the printed word an enriching mode of dialogue. Afloat as we are in liquid times, the corporeal solidity of a book can help us think about art and the criticism of art in the early years of the twenty-first century.

PARADIGM SHIFTS

Anna Maria Guasch

Co-curator of the project

Since the late nineteen-sixties, thanks to the movements of decolonization we have witnessed the emergence of new discourses on art which irrevocably question the old ethnocentric discourses and their increasingly fragile claims to supposed universality. And from a less distant historical framework anyone can now declare that the world is different after the geopolitical restructuring that began in 1989. The revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989, the democratic revolution in Tiananmen Square in Beijing also in 1989, the Gulf War in 1991 and the end of apartheid in South Africa 1994 opened up a new era for the twentieth century, in which the new global economy and the new information technologies, the new media of communication and transmission not only reconfigured the concept of the 'centre' but created new spaces for this centre.

It is in the framework of this global view that I want to situate the contents of the symposia which the Catalan Association of Art Critics has organized since 2005 in order to debate the state of criticism and to reflect on the 'cultural' formation of a series of global issues. In the last 20 years, many exhibitions (beginning with *Magiciens de la Terre* and ending with the 2007 Documenta in Kassel) have opened the door to what the economist Roger Burbach has called 'polycentrism', which challenges the canon of Euro-American art. In questioning the cultural dominance of Western art and civilization, the curators of these exhibitions looked beyond the 'modern world' and offered genuine alternatives that question and correct a 'unilateral history of art'. All of these initiatives, together with a truly remarkable body of theoretical work on the part of authors such as Fredric Jameson, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, Okwui Enwezor, Geeta Kapur and others, have forced the institutions to recognize that it is no longer possible to imagine the world as it was organized before 1989. And, of course, in recent decades the efforts of international biennials, freelance curators and the theorists most closely associated with the universities have clearly revealed that the old ways of thinking about exhibitions and criticism make less and less sense.

In light of the above, in these seminars we set out to propose new ways of thinking and writing other 'histories and theories of art', taking into account issues such as the notion of proximity and locality within present-day global flows, the idea of a hybrid space, the importance of the aesthetic gesture in relation to the social inframinuscule, the transformation of the 'white cube' of the museum into a place where artists no longer see themselves as creators of objects for contemplation but as instigators of processes in which the public is the active protagonist, the increasing importance of everyday practices and the subversive potential of art.

Under this epistemological umbrella, in the six symposia organized from 2005 until the last one in 2010 we have raised a variety of issues. One of these, at the 2nd Symposium in 2006,

entitled 'The Age of the Biennials', concerned the importance of peripheral biennials understood as initiatives which create their own version of cultural diversity as against metropolitan tastes. The peripheral biennials would thus be ways in which local cultures would have the chance to put forward their local tastes, and not just at the level of proximity but around the world. Nowadays it is not necessary to go to Paris, New York, Kassel or Venice to encounter diversity in relation to metropolitan tastes and for these to be validated by the institutions of the official 'canon'. And at the same time we have continued to ask ourselves questions such as the following: Is the biennial the best instrument for debating global problems, for making a committed political art, when in most cases a large part of the funding comes from private initiatives? Or to go to the opposite extreme: Is it up to the biennials to make local problems (the urban problems of the post-industrial city) 'international' thanks to the empowering presence of the international spectator or the cultural tourist who in many cases never comes into contact with the local community? Does the biennial have a social function within the public sphere? Where does the biennial end and the museum begin? Or could we even speak of a global museum that would closely follow the course of the peripheral biennials? Can the biennial – as Robert Storr said in 2005 – be the true 'global salon', the place from which a new shared international culture can be formed?

Following a similar line of analysis, at the 3rd Symposium in 2007, entitled 'Geographies of Art and Politics of Identity', we assumed that the work of each artist is fed by her own culture to end up transcending borders and boundaries in an attempt to balance the concepts of migration and roots. And this within the contextual phase of art, a phase that is more committed to the word 'culture' than to the word 'art', and to the question of identity more than to that of language.

Within this framework of cultural globalization approached from diversity, from local dynamics and from the championing of a new cultural ideology of interculturalism, we devoted the 4th Symposium in 2008 to the theme of 'Global Memories and Economic Power', which we inscribed in the lively debate about the value of memory and economic power that has since been situated significantly both inside and outside of the academic and artistic forums. At this symposium we presented a cultural landscape in which other and often contradictory ways of narrating the time and the manner in which those that are 'different' work within relationships of negotiation, conflict and reciprocal borrowings. A landscape in which certain values that had been overshadowed by the spectre of modernity and in certain chapters of postmodernism gained prominence, one of these being the value of memory linked to the effects of the new global economies, based on the capitalism of knowledge.

In 2009 the theme of the 5th Symposium, entitled 'The Glocal and the Singuniversal through the Biennials', took as its basis a consideration of Thierry de Duve's thesis that the problem now is not so much capitalism but the way we think about capitalism, and it is clear that from a 'glocal' perspective what is wanted is a type of capitalism that can learn to behave more ethically and more equitably.

Moving on from twentieth-century obsession with the autonomy of art we posited an open, interactive art acting in line with the network and information exchange model, bringing us into contact with such concepts as translocality, intercontextuality, transnationality, post-national identity and diasporic public space: very important concepts for understanding urban development and the urban experience under conditions of globalization.

These premises led us to the 6th Symposium in 2010, 'Alter Modernity and Global Space', where we posited the need to reinstate 'modernity' as a critical term in defining what is meant by contemporaneity. As Nicolas Bourriaud observed in his Tate Triennial text in 2009, it is time to recover the concept of totality, to reinstate the concept of meta-language (the 'big picture') on the basis of the intersection of multiple historical collisions and to promote the model of the archipelago or constellation over that of the centre while constantly championing the 'travelling form', mobility and the journey, without forgetting electronic mediation and migratory flows.

This was symposium at which we paid tribute to the late José Luis Brea, colleague and friend, curator, theorist, polemicist and Professor of Aesthetics at the Universidad Carlos III in Madrid, who left us in early September 2010. It was a good moment to recall some of the many aspects of his multifaceted work, delivered at times in increasingly cryptic wording; cryptic, too, but highly eloquent, was the article with which, in all of the consciousness and lucidity of who knows he is living his last days, he said his last farewell to all of us. I am referring to the article which appeared in *SalonKritik* a few days after his death, 'Absolutely Minerality', an exercise in reflective criticism that will undoubtedly be an extraordinary legacy for those of us who shared his intellectual project.