

A Book Review: Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination

Maximiliano EK*

International Society for Philosophers, Sheffield, UK

Abstract

This book review analyzes the problem of mobilities and contemporary art in a globalized World. The ways lay-citizens perceive culture as well as the limitations of consumption that leads people to decline their critical viewpoint. Unlike the specialized literature in cultural studies, this text reveals globalized art has a positive connotation because it opens nations to a major tolerance. In this review we not only places Meskimmon's argument under the lens of scrutiny but also shows the pervasive nature of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Tourism; Mobilities; Alienation

Concept

The urban cities and their landscapes, as well as the cosmopolitan imagination have changed by the process of globalization. The discussion is given on the power of art to recycle the public life. *Contemporary Art*, the book authored by Marsha Meskimmon focuses on the effects of art in the current sense of mobilities. One of the aspects explored by the book is the paradox triggered by global modernity. At the time, transnational movements exert considerable gravitation in the "quest for others", which means the exploration of new landscapes, cultures and customs, the cultural entertainment as movies, tourism and hospitality forge a "one-sided discourse" where centre subordinates the periphery at its discretion. If in other times, peoples traveled to exotic countries to understand how the "others" lived, now these others lays at the home in forms of souvenirs. In other cases, users visit other realities by the use of their PC station alone. As it has been formulated, the meeting between hosts and guests has set the pace to the introduction of new technologies, where this Other is reshaped according to the User's interests. The world is not there to be discovered, it is colonized by the tourist-gaze. Meskimmon argues convincingly that postmodernism paved the pathways towards "solipsism" affecting not only the social ties, but also the ways people communicate with their neighbors. In quest of no-body, in no-where, art serves as an instrument of "mute-mirroring" to mould the understanding of what is real.

The question whether capital is being reproduced in the same direction of globalization, based on the commodities-exchange, leads to re-think how economic elites imposes art as an ideological mechanism of control. These types of new "dwellings" correspond with the determination of a "global consciousness" which produces subjectivities according to a micro-sociological experience. If the Enlightenment claimed the use of reason as a universal principle, postmodernism made from every person a micro-world. At this stage, Meskimmon says,

"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."

Once the "cosmopolitan mind" is created (through the imagination) to enhance the current understanding of events, the critical consciousness is immobilized. May we confirm the place, as it

has been known by ancient philosophers, has ended forever?

The shelter in ancient times not only protected the security of citizenship, but also marked the boundaries of authority. Anthropologically, the place was historically configured to protect the city from external dangers. As the concept of "global exchange" was imposed, it resulted in the decline of political stability because dangers situate the self beyond the "certainty". The cosmopolitan imagination usufructs not only the sense of mobility altering the perception of an ever complex world but encouraging the connection of global tourists to a new geopolitical network. Homes are redesigned coupling visual commodities as decorations, motifs, and post travel souvenirs to the extent to undermine the interest for the external world. Nonetheless, art may create a new model of "affective engagement" between self and its world. Alluding to the case of art-work, *La Casa Viuda (Salcedo)*, Meskimmon understands that the problem of violence, which characterized by public life of Colombia, may be shared to other much broader audience. It creates not only an atmosphere of empathy, but also "engagement" in what she considers the "threshold" (transition) between object and self. To put this in bluntly, 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. The suffering of others, which can be portrayed by art, would become the current ethic of citizens. This belief is of paramount importance to understand the attachment of Meskimmon to use art, as an instrument of transformation. Imperialism not only is placed under the lens of scrutiny if colonized cultures make art, but imagination cements the hegemony of empires over their peripheries. This is brilliantly discussed in fourth chapter, where she addresses the problem of "passage", describing the ebbs and flows of modern European imperialism. During long time, scholars criticized empires thinking they create object to dominate others. Far from this, Meskimmon says that their success to expand their boundaries to overseas territories depended on "the meanings" conferred to objects, as well as the discipline over "aboriginal bodies". To the concept of "real

*Corresponding author: Maximiliano EK, International Society for Philosophers, Sheffield, UK, Tel: +54 11 4964-4600; E-mail: mkorst@palermo.edu

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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. Unlike Marxist scholars who preclude post modernity is the axis of all evils, this book shows an alternative set of benefits as fluid communication, further tolerance and the enhancement of peace-keeping processes worldwide. The complexity of this text, which is discussed from the philosophy, conjoins to a new way of interpreting art. Since the self is never attached to a certain place, unless by its own mobility, the derived identity is never subject to tradition. The creation

of a new cosmopolitan ethic represents a valid attempt to decipher the role played by art in the mobile world of experience. Two major objections can be made over Meskimmon text. First and foremost, the argument seems to be little naïve and abstract, ignoring the negative effects of modernity in social bondages. Secondly, she falls in a classic ecological fallacy to accept we live in a mobile world. As Korstanje, in earlier texts, showed, only 1% of the global elite are legally supported to travel throughout the world. As industrial sedentary society, the whole workforce is subject to a false ideological conception of mobility. The capital produced by the division of labor confers to workers of a surplus which will be absorbed by leisure industries, preventing a real social upward [1,2]. Mobilities are ideologically conducive to a much broader ideological discourse to introduce liberty as a platform for wanting.

References

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