

GLOBALISATION AND ART EXHIBITIONS

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Glocal Games

The state of affairs in present-day capitalism could be exemplified with the logic of multinational companies and their top down distribution or dissemination of the branded commodities worldwide, with a high level of sensitivity to local tastes and habits. The concept of “glocalisation”, that is used to describe the intertwined and interconnected notions of the global and the local was developed in social theory, as an outcome of an analysis of marketing strategies which showed that the global outreach of a campaign for a product was more likely to succeed when it was adapted specifically to each locality or culture where it was being promoted. In Japanese business affairs and economic analysis in the late 1980s, the word *Dochakuka* was used to refer to the way goods and services are produced and, moreover, distributed, in keeping with the particularistic criteria of a given locality. This term, according to Roland Robertson, could be understood as ‘indigenisation’, but is very similar to the theoretical concept of glocalisation, now seen as one of the facets of the whole corpus of ideas on globalisation. Theorists like Bruno Latour questioned the validity of the very concepts of the local and the global, as they were seen before, and claimed that these ‘labels’ were no longer of any use. He therefore proposed the term “glocal”, as an amalgam of these two notions and concepts, as both encapsulating the wide range of possibilities, from the most local to the most universal and underlining the necessity for breaking down the simple binary opposition between the reality of local experience and global concerns. He demonstrated that it was no longer viable to opt for the idea of ‘the local in itself’, without attempting to provide some kind of contextual framework for it. The actual concern that the local was being overwhelmed by the global might simply be a different way of claiming that disparate localities were becoming interconnected: in the same way as the local had been globalised, the global had been localised.

I would like to give one example here:

The increasing presence of McDonalds restaurants worldwide is an example of globalisation, while the restaurant chain's efforts to vary this menu, in an attempt to appeal to local palates, is an example of glocalisation. Perhaps an even better illustration of glocalisation is provided by the fact that, for publicity purpose in France, this fast food chain has chosen to replace its familiar Ronald McDonald mascot with Asterix the Gaul, a popular French cartoon character.

Robertson, who was one of the first to give theoretical articulation to this concept and tendency, claimed in 1997 that glocalisation could be understood as the simultaneous existence of both universalising and particularising tendencies in a certain local culture. This dichotomy of the global and the local was emphasised in the anti-globalisation movements as well, where the local was set up in opposition to the global as if it had to resist the process of globalisation. Robertson was right, when he pointed out that, in spite of the resistance of local cultures, they were all caught up in the same wave of the same process of globalisation/ glocalisation. Indigenisation could be thus better understood as the need of local cultures and traditions to be recognised and incorporated in the global arena, and not just simply to reject it. Thus, a possible strategy for achieving this goal and ‘democratising’ the process of globalisation might be called “globalisation” from below.

Rather than propose the stereotypical model of cultural consumption of the local, imposed by the market mechanisms of ‘predatory’ capitalism, I would propose a strategy of bottom-up initiative,

based on a variety of local case studies. I would like to analyse how images, meanings and values associated with specific localities are generated and circulate within the global cultural economy.

Global Flows

Another way of looking at the same problem would be to analyse the process of globalisation through the tensions between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation that is, for Arjun Appadurai, the central problem of today's global interactions. But what actually quite often happens is that homogenisation is regarded as synonymous with Americanisation or commodification, and consequently the later two arguments are closely connected. Here, the basic element omitted from the account is the fact that, no matter how fast the impulses from various metropolises are introduced into different local societies, they themselves soon enough become indigenised.

Here, we would do well to take note of the fact that the present model of disorganised capitalism is creating a new, multifaceted, intertwined, disjunctive order within the global cultural economy. This resists falling into the category of a binary oppositional model of the analysis of societal processes deriving from various discourses or practices, such as neo-Marxism (consumers vs. producers), or traditional trade (surplus vs. deficit). However, the model cannot any longer be understood in terms of an antimony between centre and periphery.

It has, therefore, become a commonplace, to state that today's world is principally characterised by objects in motion. If we were to draw up a spatial flowchart, it would encompass objects, such as ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, and technologies and techniques. Appadurai proposed the model of "scaping" and defined the flow of images, histories and information as "mediascapes"; the flows of cultural and political ideologies as "ideoscapes"; finance flows as "financescapes"; and flows of migrants, tourists and refugees as "ethnoscapes". Finally, adding to this analysis, he introduced us, later on, to the most interesting notion of "artscapes".

Global Art Exhibitions

I will, therefore, now try to shift this rhetoric from social, political and economic references to the field of art references. When it comes to placing products related to art and culture in the global cultural economy, it comes to the point where adding a geopolitically infused "local flavor" to works conceived within globally accepted paradigms, adds much more to the prospects of successfully marketing an art project than any consideration of its conceptual background, or framework of internal artistic references.

The process of globalisation in the realm of contemporary art has been manifested in the proliferation of biennial exhibitions, disrupting the old geographical hegemonies of the big art centres and revealing the multifaceted, disjunctive order of the new global art space. Curators frequently turn into globetrotters, competing in global cities, producing discourses for contextualisation and developing new formats for artistic display. The side effect of this phenomenon is that many global biennials are becoming as alike as if they adopted the logic of multinational companies which disseminate their commodities worldwide, always adding a touch of a local flavour to the product, to improve the prospects of marketing it within a local context. For me, this process is a very good metaphor for what is happening with the big international biennials. The same "flavour" is to be found anywhere — it just needs to be branded — and linked to the global cultural economy.

There is mostly some minor local flavour but these biennials are all, basically, large-scale events, in which the art market has a major presence. No wonder that big art events attract sponsorship from multinational companies. It was not the curator, Dan Cameron, who presided over the inaugural press conference at the opening of the last but one Istanbul Biennial, but a representative

of a Japanese tobacco company! Of course, there is more to it than that, and it is not only the art market that initiates big events, like biennials, in different cities around the globe, but there must be a connection with the local structures that are willing to support these biennials.

The process described above could be regarded as an example of cultural homogenization, but then it should be noted that a process of cultural heterogenisation – the acknowledgement of cultural differences goes on at the same time. This tendency has a genealogy extending onwards from the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la terre*, in 1989, to its peak at *Documenta 11*, in 2002.

Here I would note that after the colonising gaze of the Western countries, post-colonial discourse and emancipation, we are witnessing the most recent, and most sophisticated tendency in the global cultural economy to explore local ethnicities and cultural specificities. The logic of multinational companies that I was describing in the sphere of visual arts is exemplified by the globally understood requirements of the art market, that the artistic language, media and visual articulation of the artworks conform to recognisable, and acceptable, (Western) standards and, still more importantly, that the content, topic and subject relate to local ethno-cultural habits and tradition, to folklore, and to local anthropological distinctiveness.

The same phenomena can be observed, not just in the visual arts, but in many cultural disciplines, such as music (world music), cinema, (viz the boom in small national film industries in the nineties), through which we can trace a similar exploration of ‘world art’ or, as we might choose to call it, “ethno-cultural global art”.

Does this mean that all local cultures should reproduce the Western art system, foster global art market and indulge global artistic celebrities? No! On the contrary, as we said before, what could be at stake is a process of grassroots globalisation in the cultural field, and the incorporation and contextualisation of a variety of different histories of art. We could, therefore, argue that the globalisation of culture should not be understood merely as homogenisation, but, on the contrary, as the interrelation between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation, which, as we have noted, is beginning to emerge as one of the key issues of global interaction, in our time.

We should be constantly seeking to demonstrate that the “genealogies” of modern art in different regions of the world are not necessarily the same as in Western European countries. The history of art that was in the period of Cold War “normatively” presented to us ‘was almost entirely based on readings of its development in the Western world, at the price of neglecting the developments in for example Eastern Europe, or sometimes including them, as marginal offshoots to the prevailing movements and –isms” of the time. This was reinforced by the “self-marginalising” cultures that did not try to “produce” their own art history and inscribe it into a wider context, as a global asset, but tried to copy the existing models of analyses. Here I would fully agree with the group IRWIN, from Slovenia, with their “*East Art Map*” project, that the art history of, in their case, East Europe has to be “produced”, and written. For this purpose, we also need to map, document, analyse and interpret all the important initiatives emanating from different regions of the world.