



The absence of the thematized subjects

Building bridges between Kassel, Lima, and Trujillo: An art mediation project in the documenta 12. *By Hansel Sato*

The global complex of cultural translation that seems to be somehow embedded in art and its mediation sets the stage for a potentially all-inclusive public debate. Bildung, the German term for education, also means "generation" or "constitution", as when one speaks of generating or constituting a public sphere. Roger M. Buerger

About Peripheries and Sub-peripheries

During my time as an art student in an elitist art college in Lima, most of my colleagues and me had the strong feeling that the centre of the art world was somewhere in the so-called first world. This idea was reinforced by the fact that the many prestigious Peruvian artists had studied and developed their careers in Europe or the United States.

On the other hand, we also saw the art schools in the provinces as unimportant and "marginal". Consequently, we constructed the idea of a "sub-periphery" which exists in this art scene outside from Lima.

Documenta or the imagined navel of the art world

Peripheries assume a centre. For many, not only in Peru, the epicentre of the art world is in Kassel, in the documenta art exhibition. When I got the opportunity to make a project within the scope of the art mediation in documenta 12, I wanted to pick out as a central theme the situation mentioned above.

There were, as expected, hardly any guests from South America, Africa, or Asia visiting the exhibit. An exception was the few wealthy people who could pay the expensive trip to Europe and get a Visa (something that has

became nearly impossible for middle class people in Peru). From these "selected" people, an even smaller group booked a guide for the exhibit. On the other hand, there was another group made up of journalists and curators whose trips were financed by museums or galleries; it means, a specialized audience who are part of the small intellectual elite in their respective lands.

Where are the others?

One of 3 leitmotifs of d12 was the question about the "bare life"; it means – in allusion to the texts of Giorgio Agamben – the life of the people who are excluded by the policy. Accordingly, many works were dealing with the subject of Power and exclusion/inclusion mechanisms in the globalized world. For example, there were works like the ship made of oil jerry cans by the African artist Romuald Hazoume dealing with the destiny of African refugees, or the "infernal" Karoussel, placed on the Friedrich's place, by Andreas Siekmann. But there was something that I have perceived as more intensive and more full of expression than the presence of these works: the absence – as visitors – of the thematized subjects, namely the migrants themselves.

However, at this point I also would like to stress that in d12 many interesting projects of the Documenta advisory board, the Documenta magazine, and the art mediation team were

touching the above mentioned political problem. But these commendable activities which have been generally confirmed as successful in Kassel, cannot fight on a continuing basis



against a structural global situation. The main fight must be developed, above all, in the terrain of the macro policy.

On the other side, my purpose was not to directly touch the subject migration, but the bulk heading mechanisms of the international policy which make a simple fact like a visit to the d12, practically impossible for people of other regions in the world.

It could be argued, that Documenta is a German exhibit, made for a German or European



audience, and that the whole world does not need to come here. This is true: also not all Europeans want or are able to travel to Havana or Sao Paulo when the biennials take place there. But there is a big difference: a European would get a visa.

Building bridges with “Skype“

In view of this situation, and in collaboration with Sharon Learner and Nora Landkammer, we developed a project which tried to offer the students from Peru a possibility to visit d12, via the Internet. With the help of Internet, camera, and microphone, we became mediators between d12, the pieces of art, and the art students in Peru. An exchange of experience and information-transfer, straight around the globe, was produced.

The participants visited a blog designed by us, with photos and videos from the show, and talked with us during one hour while they were watching them.

We wanted to generate a feeling of nearness which could contribute to a demystification or de-idealisation of various art events of worldwide importance. In a few words: The dichotomy

still existing in the international art world of centre/periphery, should be questioned and dissolved by an interactive dialog and by the virtual presence at the very place of the “big event”. On the other side, it was very important for students, to have access to information in Spanish. Most of them did not speak other languages.

Results

One group from students from the Peruvian province, Trujillo, and 4 groups from Lima were contacted, but also other interested people called us (curators from Trujillo, artists, etc.) We have already spoken with about 50 people between the end of August and the end of September 2007, and there is the possibility that we will further work with other groups until the end of the year.

The Internet mediation required, as expected, the development of a new format. We supported ourselves with verbal descriptions, whenever the visual information was absent or missing. There were also some problems with discontinuous connections and with the time difference which meant we had to work sometimes until late in the evening

The design of the blogs attempts to correspond with the spatial constellations from the galleries and rooms. This is the most important difference between our blog and a “normal” catalogue or website with photos from d12. We wanted to translate the central ideas of the exhibition in a web format (migration of forms, formal correspondences, etc.) as far as possible. In view of the numerous works, we have selected only certain rooms which we considered exemplary to understand the concepts of the show.

The virtual mediation does not pretend to substitute the experience of psychically visiting

the exhibition. The “mediated mediation” belongs to another ontological category. In view of the “absence” of original works which have become a sum of pixels in the virtual reality, transference from the aura of art objects to the art mediator will take place necessarily. The mediator plays accordingly a very important role; moreover, he or she assumes the role of a curator by selecting the pieces to be discussed. This process, in which the subjective consideration of the mediators is becoming very important, could be seen as a disadvantage. On the other hand, our experience showed that even in a “real” guide this phenomenon of selections, displacements, and influences can be observed too. How the future looks for this new (?) format, will be decided during the next months. There is the possibility to expand the project to other countries of Latin America; but we are convinced that the virtual mediation has a large potential and that our idea will further offer, in support of Buergeles words, a chance of an all-embracing public debate.

<http://d12puentevirtual.blogspot.com/>

