

# What the World Was Like Once We Learnt that It Was the Other.

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'[...] Barbarians, they were a kind of solution'. C. Kavafis

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If we were to become radical in this matter, it would be necessary to say that nomadism is an exercise of de-classing, of withdrawing both the prejudices which are convenient to us and the tools which have made us efficient and automatons. Because the idea of setting oneself the task of forgetting one's origin and *transforming travelling into a method* undermines the notions based on settlement as a way of material and conceptual production; thus, modifying political and personal relationships.

It is also necessary to say that, for almost everyone, nomadism is *a state of exception*.

The economy of symbols and things is still based on notions promoted by a dying, empty and impoverished substitute for German Romanticism which still regulates and contains what is possible (to us). Because it organises our perception, moralises events and holds us together.

Because *every system of meaning also organises what is beyond the system*. This, our contemporary system, fantasises about what is outside, creating myths about its existence and procedures, reinforcing, however, the advantage of being here. Its most significant pragmatic triumph has been the definition of parameters and successive aesthetics of rebellion to reinforce the need for home, tradition and family.

Its praise for nomadism is *nomadic*. That is to say, the point to which it returns is always more important than the reason for leaving. This establishes the difference between migration and tourism; demonstrating, for example, that the former seeks to find a place to settle down, while the latter intends to experience a departure and then return after being affected by, but also protected from, the other; the latter becomes an *experience of controlled risk*.

The expeditions of the 19th-Century Naturalists have taught us an inventory model (of symbols, objects and ideas) which *leads us to confuse colonisation with adventure*. Their images hide the execution and dissemination of both economic and cognitive colonialism. Darwin worked for the Empire.

We soon discovered that it was *not possible to learn without organising knowledge* and that we cannot organise knowledge without establishing limits and preponderances.

It is here that, as a group working on contemporary art, our first hypothesis was (and still is) performed through actions: we sought a way of representing (ourselves) so as *to do justice to that which is beyond the inevitable structuring of what is ours upon what is alien to us*. We sought to design and test some diagrams which allow us to make evident and contrast the links between those who produce (artistically and in discourse) in order to understand their causes, specificities and consequences. For this, we look for evidences which affect the way in which we understand what is in front of us and structuring, each time, the accumulation of knowledge from previous experiences, transforming it into a tool for analysis.

A first evidence is that, in contemporary art, the *notion of network has been objectified and institutionalised in a way which considers the nodes as static spaces*. These nodes, on the one hand, allow for circulation between them but, on the other hand, they do not allow for the effective modification neither of themselves nor of their immediate context, given that this context is defined by the previous interaction (between the node and the context) which acts as the selection criteria for entering and exiting. This *is an idea based on the exploration of multiple destinations* which views exoticism as that which establishes a difference between very similar and specifically designed initiatives.

The second evidence is that *those who circulate between these static nodes tend to reproduce the positive discrimination of public policies and social imageries* (of the countries from which they come), making it possible to gain profit from their actions when returning home. Circulation becomes a *habitus*; it shows the specific cultural abilities and the remains belonging to its own class of origin.

The third evidence is *the way in which the efficiency of the relationship with the other is feigned*. That is to say, what is actually made from what is outside the network? The implementation of institutional or autonomous programmes has had a social (or socialist) attitude; a laudable idea which is actually full of hierarchical organisations which are executed, only slightly disguised, in workshops (the privileges of whoever holds knowledge), in clinics or seminars (the privileges of any authority) or in community / relational actions (the discursive privileges of making meaningful what is not). The maximum exhibition of power is the ability to delegate.

That is why *we cannot avoid feeling that we have carried out someone else's plan*. Continuously.

The other's plans are felt and deduced from individual actions, even when we do not know the cultural imperatives by which they are affected or the ways in which personal satisfaction is achieved. In contemporary art, the manifest destiny and individual freedom are combined.

What can we do, then, with this obligation which liberates us?

A first step is to expose ourselves to effective risk. A sort of extreme experience (such as abandonment, fascination, suffering, madness and poetry) which simultaneously breaks the subject and the limit. But this break does not occur in favour of some anarchy of the analytic categories or the dissolution of the idea of the (unified) subject; rather, it occurs so that *the requested demand and the actualisation converted into action allow for understanding and acting upon the overwhelming reality*: that which occurs and which we cannot describe and the possibility of collective, collaborative work.

The residencies of contemporary art (including the *Summer Camp* format and excluding residencies as the mere moving of the workshop), the seminars and the clinics *must follow a discipline of containment to avoid uncritical acceptance*; in them, the teacher ignores (as said by Jacotot through Rancière) and learns, while teaching, what he/she does not know and what was passed by word of mouth at research trips on methods and pedagogies. These spaces demand the *construction of criteria and parameters of authority which avoid authoritarianism* and are motivated by the *effective exercise of art as a system of interrogation and decision-making*, so that they do not turn a self-legitimation (of local scenes, for example) into a test of (the subjects') self-esteem and self-help.

This is evidently promoted by the absence of a centre for the collection of canonical definitions and norms. A system which can avoid the franchise model. What is found, left, learnt, forgotten or restructured can be implemented in unforeseen ways, given that there are no mechanisms for supervision and standardisation because misunderstanding and recurrence promote the review, revision and reconstruction of the local experience contaminated by other experiences.

This is our method and our requirement: we will attempt to make that which we do not know, to reflect upon that for which we do not have the tools, to test ourselves affectively and effectively in our relationships with others, with their prejudices and preconceptions. We will attempt to not reproduce ourselves in formal resources and quick responses.

But we know that the scenes which we collaborate with and investigate *must reflect the specific proceedings and requirements of continuity and daily routine*. The autonomous and institutional administrations of contemporary art, at each place, are the result of contextual relationships crossed with ideological arguments which exceed the field (of knowledge) of contemporary art and which regulate its practice. They attempt to unify their meaning, which they portray as univocal, because, *in this way, culture comprehends contemporary art: as if it were an additional form of culture*.

But we know that culture is built on agreements (of meaning) which have taken place within society. Contemporary art, rather, is built on dissidence, on the *questioning of the validity, relevance and opportunity* of the definition provided by culture about the world and things. The tension between them is inevitable and the place in which this tension takes place is anywhere where there is an intervention of contemporary art; however, it is evident mainly in the contemporary art institution, which is the most visible space for this.

We have often cited Dan Cameron as saying that an art institution is, first, an institution and, then, an art institution. This means that, like any institution, it will care, first, for its subsistence and survival and, secondly, for its self-imposed objective. This is how the daily influence of culture is exercised upon contemporary art: sometimes restricting it and, at others, making it possible.

What can an autonomous administration, an institution, an initiative of contemporary art do – wherever they are – to combine the demands of culture with the production of contemporary art? In other words, what can a settlement do if it is the opposite of nomadism? The short answer is simple: take part in a confabulation.

The long answer is more complex. *Our own vulnerability must be acknowledged*, without being on the defensive, because the systems of protection exclude us from the possibility of learning. *We must become permeable*, yet constant and explicit, because the criteria for entering and exiting, when they are implicit, behave as undeniable norms. *Dissidence must receive funding* because the worker is already in charge of sustaining the framework and the dissident questions, requires and prepares this for unforeseen circumstances.

One must acknowledge being oneself and still pretend to be someone else.

It is, in this respect, that the effective exchanges and residencies are useful to the institutions (in a broad sense, given that we refer to anyone who has, and who follows, any kind of proceedings) and the institutions are useful to the people who are directly part of them and to the non-specialist public.

In what way? The uncomfortable guest, the fact of entering the community in the building, the game which regulates a portion of the chaos and the laughter which reveals the nudity of the emperor, are tools for knowledge about a culture, about public policies, about the notion of the subject and the possibility of the citizens. *One learns about the unforeseen*. These are direct questioning initiatives about identity through the activation of the recognition of identity processes.

This is the great confabulation.

We can produce a coincidence of interests between the mobile and the static, between the forces which claim us to be homogeneous and those which disperse us; each of them having their strengths and weaknesses. *A network is a coincidental choreography*, a codependence which reviews itself and renews itself during each activity.

The rest depends on what we still do not know. We are getting ready for that.

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——— “Nuestra filosofía es sencilla: meternos en problemas” (Our Philosophy is Simple: To Get Ourselves into Trouble). Interview held by Alejandra Villasmil for *Artishock*. Published on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011 at <http://www.artishock.cl/2011/09/curatoria-forense-nuestra-filosofia-es-sencilla-meternos-en-problemas/>

——— “Armar campamento. El formato summer camp en las residencias de arte contemporáneo” (Going Camping: The Summer Camp Format for Contemporary Art Residencies). Published on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010 at <https://curatoriaforense.net/niued/?p=803>

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