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Abstract

Robert Galeta explores the legacy of globalisation on historical and cultural memory. For cultural diversity to survive in the newly expanded Europe narrowly economic parameters are not sufficient and indeed tend to cultural and linguistic homogeneity. In his essays, Galeta argues that art, with its combination of imagination memory and fictionality, is essential for us to survive as active historical agents, able to navigate through the forest of globalising signs which threatens to engulf us. Background This paper was originally written for the first Hibrida catalogue. Hibrida is a twin exhibition of contemporary printmaking opening simultaneously in the two major historical industrial cities of Bradford and Brno, Czech Republic. As the title of the show suggests, Hibrida is a fusion of new and old, tame and wild, materiality and content, time and place. The twin shows open at the same time and contain the same selection of work from both countries. The venues will be utilised as a platform to launch a series of publications, debates and events which will inform and underpin the on-going critical development of the subsequent Hibrida exhibitions to be shown in Britain and the countries that have recently joined the new European Union.

Introduction

Notions of hybridity are much in circulation in cultural studies. There is a growing literature about the future of community and identity faced with the globalising of the communication and entertainment industries, as writers such as Homi Bhaba, Jen Budney and Rem Koolhaas speculate on the erosion of cultural difference and the metamorphosis of traditions. More than eclectic, hybrid points to a cross-cultural awareness that commerce in communication is producing. It is apparent across art practices; from the clothes and costumes of Jean-Paul Gaultier or John Galliano to the upsurge in multi-media installations. From a review of a recent show by Sarkis: 'Each installation functions as a trawl basket of souvenirs and allusions. In other words, like a memory. Letters float in the darkness before forming a word. Divinities from every culture dance slowly and melancholically. Africa, Asia, the West have sent a few fetish objects. Sarkis has made additional ones. You might think you were in the reserves of a universal medium or disused chapel. The disenchantment of a world which has no more elsewheres and less and less of a past...' [1].

Whether we live in the first or third or fourth world the 24 hour cheap 'infotainment' is seductive and is variously modifying our sense of history and the faculties and functions of memory and aiming [2].

In a sense, current reflections on postmodernism identity and values are our coming of age from the 1969's 'ad-mass scene', in Alvarez' phase, and a continuation of the high/low culture debates of the Frankfurt School. In the 1960's artists wanting to respond to the new consumerism were attracted to print to put their images and texts alongside adverts, record and magazine graphics. Paolozzi and Kitaj made cultural images

about culture, producing both homage and subversion. Warhol's work in retrospect shows he was prescient about the implications of the growing commerce in our desires and symbols. Sometime in the 1970's the entertainment industries, especially TV and advertising, began to feed on themselves in a complicity with the visually literate audience they, rather than the fine arts, had nurtured. The process has of course accelerated. This audience was recently described as wearing 'the sneer of those in on the joke' [3].

It's not surprising that many artists have been drawn to multi-media to do their own re-circulating and editing of cultural messages. The result tends to look less anchored than in pop art: what is the status of sampling, quoting, versioning? – a more relaxed kind of homage?; a re-uniting with traditions in the face of Modernism/modernity's relentless forward agenda?; a new way of determining a repertoire? Has the twentieth century's theoretical debate about high and low culture been de facto overtaken? The Chief Curator at the Serpentine, Lisa Corin recently wrote: '...the new Tate Modern as well as the Serpentine Gallery... will remain porous to the challenging insight of artists and scholars of visual culture who no longer accept a disembodied view of contemporary art. That is to say, a view which removes art from the world of other kinds of stuff and from the interdisciplinary, polysemous and multivalent perspective that currently defines the critical study of history.' [4].

Amanda Levet of architects Future Systems recently said: 'Designing the new Selfridges, I've had to question the boundaries between fashion, art and the department store, which are continuously merging to form an intoxicating blur of public entertainment...' [5].

The phenomenon of World Music epitomises our new appetite for and capacity to respond to diverse symbolic codes: west african kora musicians, north african rai or Buena Vista Social Club, the best selling World Music disc to date - despite/because of revisiting 1940's dance styles. A generation primed as never before for eclectic cultural stimulus, and this is the nub: the product is out there and, unlike books of philosophy or difficult poetry, is actually broadening public knowledge and taste. But is the commercial, casual way this is happening a condition for losing or gaining a sense of history and geography? Or is this again a redundant way of putting the question? It is very interesting how globalising is indeed bringing into focus questions about modernity as a comprehensively good thing. For example Mohammed harbi, reviewing *The West and the others*, history of a supremacy by Sophie Bessis, talks of an 'abstract modernising', 'insofar as modernisation is inscribed in a raw break with a historical fabric' [6].

Similarly, the sociologist Edgar Morin has described what he sees as the four motors of globalisation – science, the technical, industry and capitalism – as 'uncontrolled' a blind, Western economic 'growth' process [7].

Hibrida and the exhibition and event programme to 2008 operate in the double context of the European Capital of Culture and the maintenance, through art schools, of a critical art practice. The Capital of Culture programme was set up partly as a focus for regeneration, especially of post-industrial cities and communities which are typically multicultural. It has been followed in several countries by putting citizenship on the school curriculum. Civic culture, particularly regional, is vulnerable. The identity and solidarity of the industrial city – having displaced earlier allegiances of its population – have been unravelling over the very period when the entertainment industries have been penetrating out imaginative life. The postmodern communication environment is often characterised with two phrases, ‘white noise’ and ‘permanent present’ [8].

One of art’s abilities is to open dialogues with the past and invite it to speak; not to confirm a fixed position of heritage but as part of a process to open up the present. Homi Bhaba has a phrase for what this can achieve: ‘a reflux of astonishment’.

Notes

1. Philippe Dagen, ‘Proteiform irony’, *Le Monde* 28/10/01
2. The term is Herbert Schiller’s, author of *Information Inequality* 1996 and *Culture Inc.* 1989
3. Richard Tomkins, *Back to the Future*, *Financial Times Weekend* 3/11/01 p.1.
4. *Give and Take*, Serpentine/V&A 2001 (catalogue made possible by Agnes B) p.8.
5. *Financial Times How To Spend It* magazine 5/1/02 p.46.
6. *Le Monde des Livres* 15/6/01 p.VII
7. *A plural globalisation*, *Le Monde* 26/3/02 pp.1, 19
8. The latter was given form in a strange, crumbling chair called ‘Nothing continues to happen’ shown by Howard Meister in New York in 1981. The name joins up for me with the two chair portraits by Sarah Lucas, *Armchair Morning*, *Armchair Afternoon* (1994)