

The Contemporary Artist's Identity

-The International Artistic Identity

Questioning my own identity for myself, I realized that actually I am dealing with the definition of the identity of myself as an artist. Looking at it from a specific point of view, the roles I take, as an outsider in the globalized world, in the consumer society, and to reference to other professionals.

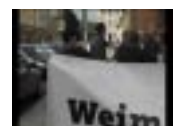
The shift throughout the history, of aesthetics and art, from the art-cultural as transcendental and metaphoric, to that of social, the political, and the behavioristic becomes crucial, when we deal with changes that happen passing through postmodernity. Some definitions about postmodernity from Fredric Jameson:



"...globalization is an intrinsic feature and which we now largely tend, whether we like it or not, to associate with that thing called postmodernity."



"...one can deplore globalization or celebrate it, just as one welcomes the new freedoms of the postmodern era and the postmodern outlook, and in particular the new technological revolutions..."²⁸



In reference and responding to the idea of postmodernity in connection to identity politics, some new artistic strategies have been created.

"Through their new strategies artists are aiming for an identity in transition, for an open, manifold identity. 'Being oneself' makes little sense to them - a continual 'becoming oneself' would indeed be more interesting. But this too they understand in a way that agrees with neither the old idea of a pre-existing Self nor the modern one of a self which is to



be produced. In the long term they don't want to be or become comprehensible. They want to remain in transition. Fernando Pessoa - with his motto "Be plural like the universe!"(55) or with his maxim "I am the living stage on which different actors performing different pieces make their entry"(56) - could have been this type of artist's prophet. Or was it rather Foucault, who wagered "that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"?(57)"²¹

²¹ Wolfgang Welsch Home Page, *Becoming Oneself*, From: Subject - Author - Experience: The Subject in the Expanse of Art, Bratislava: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1999, 11-33. <http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/>

In general, the position of the artist doesn't change in form, in connection to the old idea of his position as a *medium* (for example between the holy and the human). Metaphorically, the position of the artist nowadays is on the spots that connect the routes of a spread out net that expands mainly in width. His position is the key position in a code of communication using it as a "weapon" with technological means.



On the other side, and examining the profession of the artist is that it has become another *job*, another *employment*: The international identity of the artist, in combination with his *exported* identity as a product, becomes a commodity that carries the mark of the place of production. The more we live in a so called: *postmodern, globalized, historic-politic-social space*, the more we are marked with a relevant to our heritage stamp. Even if according to traditional democracy, we are not commodities, or products, we, involuntarily, become traders of our own historical, political, and social tradition, presenting ourselves according to this exact identity as part of our work. The universal art market is interested more and more for similar kinds of art production, with the purpose of unification, bridging between countries, traditions, and historical moments. Is it for the sake of humanity, or for the sake of the global economic prosperity? Saskia Sassen seems to point out the main idea which stands in between both:

"...the logic of the capital market - profitability at all costs - against that of the human rights regime. But it does represent a space where other actors can gain visibility as individuals and as collective actors, and come out of the invisibility of aggregate membership in a nation-state exclusively represented by the sovereign."²²

The multi-identificative (through education-institutionalized financing most of the times) presence of the artist, or artist groups in a certain place, entails a relevant perception from the surrounding itself - is a combination made from people and spaces/places - which the artist enters and within which he moves. His *presence*, performed this way, carries together and sweeps, mental spaces and perceptions. As soon as, there is raised a point (by the artist) of personal and practical redefinition of this surrounding space, in which the "immigrant artist" moves and functions, then these spaces gain a different meaning. In the postmodern world of art, instead of the term site-specific artwork, arbitrarily I insert the term identity-specific artistic tactics.

²² *The Global City: The De-Nationalizing of Time and Space*, p. 29. Saskia Sassen, *Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths*.)

I name various artist figures, in theorized categories according to a specific belief, practice, or character I am able to distinguish by now:

The artist as a tourist trainee... a rambler theater-man...a performative introducer... a institutional employee... a curator... a space maker... the obsolete, out-dated outsider... a cultural cannibal...a catalyst... a social worker... a creator of lingual and cultural codes, the intellectual, the technocrat... a scientist of his times... the avant-guardist, a political activist ... an anti-artist. As an example for some of my definitions I borrow from Linda Weintraub her reference to the following artist:

“Daniel Joseph Martinez objects to being identified as an artist. This is because many people assume that artists only create and market decorative objects, and that success for artists is measured according to these criteria. In order to demonstrate that he does not confront to this art convention, Martinez has invented his own job title. He prefers top be known as a Tactical Media Strategist. The “tactics” and the “strategies” he employs fall into two categories: Martinez defies rules, and he disrupts conventions. These methods are designed to expose insidious concentrations of social, political, and economic power. Open discussion is a prerequisite for social change. Martinez succeeds when his methods stimulate dialogue among those who are in control and those who are controlled”²³

²³ Daniel Joseph Martinez is an example of what I call here as the *anti-artist*. This quote is from Linda Weintraub, from her book: *In the Making*, in the chapter: *Measuring Success, Political Issues- Diffusing Concentrations of Power*, about the artist Daniel Joseph Martinez, p. 374.