



Malou Bergman "Santa Goza" 2010

Centrifugal desires, temporary autonomous zones and axis mundi

by Sinziana Ravini

"When a large amount of energy comes together at one point, a community starts to feel somewhere in the centre of things. In other words, we felt we were, independently from what New York or Paris had, the centre of life on Earth".

Boris Orlov 2008

"Peripheries", "rhizomes", "escape lines", "non-hierarchical organisations"... There are many words with which the nomads of our liquid modernity are hiding their centrophilic desires. As Zygmunt Bauman claims in "Liquid Modernity", fluidity and lightness have become the leading metaphors for the present state of our modern era. It has become very fashionable in the art world lately to claim that the world has lost its former centres. That New York, Paris and London are no longer the knots that keep the art world together, and that cities like Sao Paulo, New Delhi and Gwangju are equally important. Some even go as far as to claim that with the internet era we are living in, and with the rhizomatic structures of cultural production today, the idea of a "centre" as such has become obsolete.

As Deleuze and Guattari declared, the "rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo." In contrast to an arborescent concept of knowledge that is rooted, the nomadic structure of the rhizome spreads like the surface of a body of water, extending towards available spaces or dripping downwards through fissures and gaps, eroding that which is in its way.

The artists of our time don't seem to orient themselves around centres any

more, but ideas, dreams and desires. In that case, how do these new desires constitute themselves?

Has the network killed the centre? Or has this new so-called absent centre created a negative theology that produces an even bigger centre – the one in our heads?

With the arrival of postmodern theories of deconstruction, culture producers were hit by the same decentring logic that once mobilised Copernicus, realising that the white, upper class, male subject wasn't at the centre of the world any more than the earth or the sun were the centre of the universe. "Ethnocentrism", "anthropocentrism", "logocentrism" had become the new enemies that had to be fought. But in spite of Derrida's decentring of all kinds of centres, the centre persisted and still persists in the language we are using. How can we get rid of the centre when we are constantly obsessed by its so-called non-importance? As we all know, absence is producing presence.

The more you deny the existence of an object or a phenomenon, the more it persists in reappearing.

If postcolonial thinking encouraged artists to exit all kinds of centres, looking for or even becoming the other, it definitely encouraged the so-called "others" to look for those centres that those artists were trying to escape. Artists like Renzo Martens could travel into the heart of darkness of the Congo playing with capitalistic enlightenment politics, trying to take people out of their poverty or encouraging them to enjoy it. The so-called others, like Pascale Marthine Tayou or Subodh Gupta, could enter the global art industry by sometimes mimicking, sometimes deconstructing the idea of what it means to be an African or Indian artist.

If the economically privileged artists dream of escaping the centres, the not so privileged dream of settling down in them, or at least – creating new centres

around themselves by inviting the world into their studios.

The problem with this commercially fruitful nomadism, is not so much the arrogant "I can get wherever I want in the name of free exchange" logic, nor the less arrogant politics of good intentions called "resistance to homogenisation and reification", but paradoxically enough – its extreme success. In an overinformed globalised artworld, overexposed artists are hitting saturation points faster than ever. Becoming one with the centre is almost like putting an end to one's career, if not economically, at least symbolically.

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Once you've hit the centre it is much harder to escape from it, or at least to afford taking risks, experimenting, etc. That's why a lot of artists start repeating themselves, thinking that repetition means consequence and that consequence means success.

Once you're a part of the global art industry, it doesn't matter anymore where you're falling asleep and where you're waking up. What matters is which gallery or curator promotes you. And those centres of symbolic production are central to one's work, no matter how liquidly the centres or the artists relating to them operate. That's why artists have to resist their centrophilic desires, the need of being omnipresent, in every art fair, biennial, event or happening. As Duchamp famously said: "The next big artist will go underground". But how long can one stay in the underground without starving to death?

It's enough to look at the way the relation between artistic autonomy and economical survival is being used today within artist-run galleries. Alternative and peripheric practices are drawn to one another and coming together more than ever, thus creating new alternative centres.

Every Biennale has an "Antibiennale", every art fair has an alternative art fair with artist-run galleries. We have

