

Otara, Auckland, New Zealand

With this essay I would like to add a footnote to the urban intervention launched by Juan Castillo, to help frame the specific case of executing this project on the principal island of Oceania, Aotearoa, “The land of the long white cloud,” in the Maori language. From here it becomes necessary to think in terms of a geography of insularity, a place littered with the remnants left behind by the British Empire. It also becomes necessary to consider the Polynesian marginalities that insistently displace the aesthetic-epistemological center in which the almost nostalgic, though dominant, remains of the English legacy circulate.

Minimal Baroque is an intervention that would seem to be part of the artistic agenda of devising escape routes for certain kinds of minimal knowledge, forcing them to cross through the heart of the hegemonic order, if by ‘minimal knowledge’ we mean those bits of knowledge that have been erased, marginalized, forgotten or scorned by the arrogance of Eurocentric modernity. Better yet, we may also view this intervention in light of Adorno and think of it as dealing with a *minima moralia*, an ethic that has remained at the margins of the Western monumentalism that was established by the atrocity of totalitarianism, and because of which has been able to remain an ethic of the other, one that is displaced and as such is prepared to resist not only the homogenization of globality but also the various and sundry strategies for co-opting and transforming this margin into a poor imitation of a new center.

I share Castillo’s belief that globalization creates “technical homogeneities,” when the term “technical” includes things like the mechanisms of the mass production of merchandise and mentalities, and serialized structures for thinking about things and thinking about oneself. Yet, in this context in which one is no longer reflexive but reflective, to the extent that each subject is not supported in the depth of a given time or space but rather in the quality of being the interminable reflection of one and the same thing in a here and now, in that technified environment Minimal Baroque questions the inhabitants of Otara in the interest of eliciting from them their notion of art, which of course is tantamount to questioning them about their *moralia*, which Castillo has chosen to describe as Baroque, referring perhaps to the original, non-canonized sense of the term, when it described something unusual but beautiful in its imperfection. Against the hegemony of an ethic/aesthetic of the cosmos and “perfection,” that which is now being interrogated has survived as a kind of extreme otherness and as such has not been able to carry on as anything but “minimal.”

Otara is the same suburb that serves to illustrate the great difficulty of Maori life in the film *Once were warriors*, abysmally retitled in Spanish as *El amor y la furia* (Love and fury), a translation that fails to convey the reflexive quality of the original title, which remembers and pays tribute to the legacy of the Maori warrior, and instead turns it into meaningless fluff to give it an edge in the circus of media marketing. No matter: Otara is a suburb of Auckland with a population that is made up of a globality of margins far from any first-world orthodoxy. It is different from the ghettos of displaced Africans, Latinos, Asians and Muslims because it adds another element, a whole host of inhabitants from various points in the Pacific, people whose languages, cultures and epistemologies exist only as something very exotic—too minimal to even be considered minorities.

In this Polynesian Babel, adults, young people, children, mothers, artists and social workers speak, and they do it in the Samoan, Tongoan language: the émigré from Fiji, the Cook Islands, Niue, to say nothing of the pakeha, or winka in the Mapuche translation, the Australian, and even the transplant from Liverpool. After stating his or her geographical and cultural origins, after responding to the query about the meaning of art in a fluid mix of English and the mother tongue, we understand that in this polyvalence of codes, these people are the most authentic of global subjects, stewards of their very own body of knowledge, and privileged translators who, having been forced to participate in the hegemonic system, have crossed through traditions and times and nevertheless continue to be the bearers of “minimal” kinds of knowledge. What remains of the many responses to the ethical/aesthetic questions are assertions such as: “an expression of our deepest essence and of all that our environment has led us to become,” “expressions of mind and of understanding,” “what we are as subjects, as nations and cultures, to share ideas, cultures and identities,” “everything is art, the way you wear your clothes, the brands, the shows, graffiti,” “art is a job, it is doing things with ideas, with facts, with forms and experiences,” “in my community art is a way of living, you breathe it, it’s everywhere,” “art is singing, dancing, weaving, thinking, creating a vision, being part of a community, using the raw materials of your natural space, part of your personal development, growth, a talent that can be passed on to others, that is communicated,” “the word art in its translation (from English) comes with its own ideology, it doesn’t translate what creativity means in the cultures of the Pacific, its own epistemological context...art is open to interpretation and is a manifestation of the conscience. It is for people who have the guts to assume the responsibility of translating and showing an audience what is a kind of social conscience...to express where we are, what we are, where we are going.”

In a paradigmatic sense, the truck that carries the projection of the spoken portraits leaves the suburb, the well-defined space of that minimized community, to traverse the city so that this project may become a public, publicized voice that works with the visual and aural language of the hegemonic metropolis, where what prevails is the catchphrase that has been reflected a thousand times over in the advertising mirror, the Caucasian image of celebrities that transmit their ethic of success, promoting consumerism as a guarantor of individuality and identity. And the itinerary ends there, in one of the places that is the seat of institutional knowledge: the Auckland War Memorial Museum. In this sense, amid this globalization in which goods are trafficked with complete and utter ease, and bodies move either legally or otherwise across borders natural and artificial, different pieces of knowledge also move around though they remain contained beneath the same ideological boundaries as always, in the institutions that regulate knowledge and memories. It is art that makes them audible, visible, scarcely appreciable by our acculturated way of looking at things, so that at least we may say that we are standing before a Minimal Baroque.

Walescka Pino-Ojeda

The University of Auckland

New Zealand