

(FORMERLY CALLED "MINORITY LANGUAGES," NOW I DON'T KNOW...)

Carlota Beltrame

*If in the periphery we were not so  
obsessed with losing or trying to win,  
we would recognize the value that  
appropriation and recycling  
mechanisms had in the shaping of our  
culture.*

Luis Camnitzer

I believe it was in May 2016 when Fernando Farina invited me to participate in the launch of *Bienalsur*, which was to take place in the backyard of the *Casa Histórica de Tucumán*, coinciding with the commemoration of the bicentennial year of our independence. Among the speakers was Néstor García Canclini and, naturally, I felt very flattered. I had ten minutes to present, so I prepared a mini-paper that spoke not so much about my work but about *us*; that is, I wanted my participation to be political rather than aesthetic. Everything that happened that morning occurred amidst a strange and contradictory atmosphere. I thought that the presence of so many people from Buenos Aires (*porteños*) in our scene would affirm the political sense of my brief speech. However, the figure of García Canclini eclipsed my presence to such an extent that, after his words, the audience stood up to run after him, leaving the room almost empty; thus, the political direction of my short but thoughtful exposition lost its force, as it had no interlocutors to manifest interest. I suppose, being me, this is not strange, but the lack of an echo, and nothing else, is what confirms my diagnosis of several problems in non-hegemonic scenes, such as that of San Miguel de Tucumán, and in perspective, also that of CABA.

Some of my words were not new, as I had already stated them in other works, and I repeat them now because I believe they have not lost their relevance. It would never occur to an artist from the "center" to doubt the universality of their practice because, according to an already established order of things, universality is automatically present in their work. It is always others who must strive to achieve it, as if universality were a goal to be reached for an artist far from the dominant centers of production, distribution, and consumption, a goal that is always very far from their place of origin. For them, for us, the mandatory destiny would include the adoption of other identifications that would make our modest local present a mere instance of learning. Thus, the apparently desirable brotherhood of artists who are trained and reside in the center excludes as "bastard children" those who do not belong to it, even if a certain political correctness, and why not, a certain genuine

interest, includes poetics of difference in their curaturships. When that happens, we all run after the curators, denying our gaze and listening to our peers.

In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, the Indian sociologist Gayatri Spivak defines the subaltern by their inability to articulate statements that question the dominant discourse autonomously. This implies a binary scheme in which the hegemonic subject judges the *Other* based on their own cultural values, whether they consider them different or assume that the *Other* is essentially identical to themselves, a fact that will prompt them to approach based on the conceptual patterns they already know and believe they share. But subalternity is reciprocal: in the case of art scenes, those who do not belong to those that hold certain hegemony tend to concentrate their efforts on meeting the requirements for belonging without modifying power relations or dominant narratives, while reproducing them uncritically. However, the fierce resistance to this attitude of extreme universalism also configures a subaltern type, as the residual or exotic models that tend to crystallize as a result of this rejection lead to a particularism that, to avoid repeating words, I will call *intense*. Contrary to the antinomy that exists between these extremes, it is well known that between the universal and the particular there are tensions within which a surprising variety of valuable cultural experiences is revealed. Although no one can deny us the legitimate desire to be in tune with the universal and the contemporary, it is our responsibility to understand that rising to the challenges and achievements of hegemonic communities does not imply flattening local features, whose sustained familiarity distinguishes us before others.

Among artists in our contemporary scene, I have noted the appeal to a certain "minority language." I am referring to the use of a language that functions as a password. Its decoding is left to a complicit spectator, capable of inferring the implications of a narrative stated on the surface of the work that is, nevertheless, not evident to everyone. I am thinking of experiences that manage meaning by making it opaque to profane outside eyes, in our case, making it opaque to the gaze of those who do not know Tucumán with some depth. Indeed, however contemporary they may be, when an artist invokes a minority language, a certain argot, a certain allusion to colors, smells, flavors, temperatures, they are positing a reader who shares the communicational scene. This semantic quality, which is double, has its echo in the global world because the latter also develops on two levels: the universal, artists who self-define as contemporary, and the particular, artists who feel like heirs to a tradition.

So, what could be the strategies that would allow us to build autonomous discourses while echoing the tensions of the hegemonic world? In my view, two:

1. **Translation:** From Borges, but also from the controversial Nicolas Bourriaud, I take the concept of translation. To truly exist, any sign must be translatable, enabling greater access

to the artistic text and, therefore, must be modifiable even while retaining the characters that refer to its genesis. In this way, translation can be carried out within the same language, preserving a certain original sense that, nevertheless, does not prevent the entry of variables that update its meaning. Without betraying the minority language, translation allows for a closer approach to the *Other* because it seeks points of understanding, moving beyond the mere recording of difference in both time and space. I am referring to history or, if you will, the stories of the past that are still breathed in the atmosphere, tinting our perception of the present. Also to our natural and urban geography, which daily leaves its mark on language.

2. *Hybridization*: Mentioned before me at BienalSur by its own conceptual author, Néstor García Canclini, hybridization is the second strategy proposed to ward off both universalisms and extreme particularisms. Indeed, hybridization enables intertwining between the traditional and the modern, between the sophisticated, the popular, and the massive. Hybridization in languages, resources, and supports allows for a multicultural fusion whose components enhance each other while being synthesized into four concepts: emancipation, expansion, renewal, and democratization.

Assuming they dialogue with a pre-existing cultural production and moving beyond the "family resemblance" that hybridization and translation share with the *citation*, it is curious to glimpse to what extent, without being the same operations, they intertwine because they appropriate something that is foreign to them, that does not belong to them. But while the *citation* proposes a dialogue in terms of subalternity of the citer regarding the cited, *translation* preserves the sense of origin, illuminating it with new light to enhance something that already existed although it was closed to those who do not know the original language. *Hybridization*, for its part, liberates itself even further in order to blend, generating third possibilities that frequently give rise to new genres. Thus, as local as they may be, there is nothing more contemporary or more universal than assuming the challenges of hybridizing and translating one's own signs. I am thinking of pieces like *Gobernadores* (2010) by Rosalba Mirabella or *S/T* (2017) by Gaspar Núñez. Both work from pieces that precede them, very dear to the local artistic tradition. The first: the charcoal portraits of Tucuman governors made by Lola Mora from 1853 to the year of the July 9th celebrations in 1894; the second: the *Mineros* series by Juan Carlos Iramain. They use minority languages that only another Tucuman can fully understand, but which become universalized thanks to the procedures of hybridization and translation. Rosalba makes use of the resource of cut paper, the generic structure of the face in the style of a Playmobil, and wall installation; Gaspar, for his part, uses the anamorphosis resulting from pouring plaster into silicone molds without counter-molds to resist its density and expansive force, as well as floor installation.

The cases are many, also in our incipient cinema and in our poetry. I consider it unlikely that artists not residing in hegemonic scenes will have access to representation in the international arena, such as the Venice Biennale or Documenta in Kassel, because, at least as things stand, it is not in our hands. What *is* in our hands is to highlight that the demanded universality of our practice was conquered years ago, for in the provinces there are plenty of artists who have renewed, collectivized, and emancipated the sense of that which, whether recognized or not, traverses and identifies us locally and ancestrally.