
The Influence Of Modernity And Globalization On Cultural Identity

In his essay *Globalization and Cultural Identity*, John Tomlinson, contra popular view that modernity and globalization destroy cultural identities, argues that the production of identities is, in itself, a condition of modernity. Modernity, according to Tomlinson, institutionalizes and codifies cultural practices, “including those by which we imagine attachment and belonging to a place or a community,” producing cultural identities – the “self and communal definitions based around specific, usually politically inflected, differentiations: gender, sexuality, religion, race and ethnicity, nationality.” To an extent, these modern constructions confine human beings and their social contexts to a set of identifications, substituting the essence with a representation. To quote Tomlinson, “What could be a much looser, contingent, particular and tacit sense of belonging becomes structured into an array of identities, each with implications for our material and psychological well-being, each, thus, with a ‘politics’”.

Contemporary art that is involved with what Okwui Enwezor calls ‘conditions of social life’ raises awareness of these modern constructions by making them visible. But, addressing relevant social and political issues, art is ultimately risking to fall victim to them. The artworks that utilize such modern constructions risk falling short in challenging them. As Enwezor writes in his essay *Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights and the Figure of ‘Truth’ in Contemporary Art*, the boundaries of the official artistic discourse today are set through the disciplinary formations, which identify with conditions of social life, such as, among others, human rights and globalization. Enwezor emphasizes the importance of social conditions in shaping certain artistic practices, especially those using the documentary as a tool. “When we frame certain types of artistic practice around issues of identity – be it cultural, gender-based, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nationality,” – he notes, “we are basically witnessing the serious force given each of these domains by human rights and its evolution in the last fifty years.” Being and belonging are codified into identities – and art needs to be self-conscious as it addresses these issues.

As Mark Hutchinson rightly noted, the politicization of art today is the result of art being “weighed down by the world in which it is made.” But could what Tomlinson describes as a “much looser, contingent, particular and tacit sense of belonging” exist in such conditions? And what could be a manifestation of such belonging in art? In this essay I will argue that a seven-channel video installation *Faith in Friction* by Neha Choksi presents an example of such belonging. The work was commissioned by an art institution in the UK and shot in India; it is a collaborative project created by and with people from India and the United States. Therefore, it offers an opportunity to consider a belonging that is not bound to the specific geographical, national or cultural contexts. Moving across borders and beyond social constructions, *Faith in Friction* creates an inclusive space where the community functions as an empowering force that allows the participants to claim and regain their subjectivities. The collective construction of meaning is the result of a very specific mode of collaboration. *Faith in Friction* is not a co-production of individual artists or an artistic collective, nor is it an artistic production which is closely tightened to social activism and involves local communities who are given voice and visibility as a result of an artistic action, although it retains certain similarities to such form of collaboration. The responsibility is shared on all stages of production of the work. It is “the

process of collective involvement” that produces meaning in Faith in Friction. It is, to quote Emiliano Gandolfini, “an aesthetic investigation that leads reality, or rather the community, to transform itself from being the object of artistic action into being an actively involved subject.” In the video work, the people involved undergo a process of transformation, in which a “collective, cultural mirror is replacing an individual one.”

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