Art's Transformative Potential: Comparing Doris Salcedo's Plegaria Muda and Ludmila Ferrari's Cultus*

EL POTENCIAL TRANSFORMADOR DEL ARTE: UNA COMPARACIÓN ENTRE PLEGARIA MUDA DE DORIS SALCEDO Y CULTUS DE LUDMILA FERRARI

O POTENCIAL TRANSFORMADOR DA ARTE: UMA COMPARAÇÃO ENTRE PLEGARIA MUDA DE DORIS SALCEDO E CULTUS DE LUDMILA FERRARI

Annatina Aerne **

Cuadernos de Música, Artes Visuales y Artes Escénicas
/ Volumen 11 - Número 2 / julio - diciembre de 2016
/ ISSN 1794-6670/ Bogotá, D.C., Colombia / pp. 275-296

Fecha de recepción: 17 de febrero de 2016
Fecha de aceptación: 23 de marzo de 2016
Disponible en línea: 31 de octubre de 2016
doi:10.11144/Javeriana.mavae11-2.atpc

* Research Paper. The article is part of her Ph.D.-Project at the University of St. Gallen. The Ph.D.-Project is supported by the University of St. Gallen, as well as the graduate program "The Dynamics of Transcultural Governance and Management in Latin America", an initiative of the Swiss-Latin American Center at the University of St. Gallen (cls hsg), the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (iheid), the Center for Development and Environment at the University of Bern (CDE unibe) and the University of Geneva (unige).

** Ph.D. candidate in Organization Studies and Cultural Theory from the University of St.Gallen, Switzerland.

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformative potential of two contemporary Colombian artworks on society. The question is interesting in light of the internal conflict and a recent increased activity in the art market in Colombia. Two installations created by Colombian artists are contrasted in order to approach the question. Doris Salcedo's Plegaria muda (2008-2010) and Ludmila Ferrari's Cultus (2007-2015) provide an interesting basis for comparison because the two artworks differ with respect to their involvement with art institutions. The installations are juxtaposed along different dimensions: how they encourage connections amongst citizens and transcend their immediate publics by linking different audiences, as well as how they restructure space so as to introduce a different set of norms.

Palabras claves: contemporary art; institutions of art; violence; citizenship

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el efecto transformador de dos obras de arte contemporáneo en la sociedad colombiana. El creciente mercado de arte colombiano en un contexto de un largo conflicto afirma la importancia de esta interrogación. En el análisis se comparan dos instalaciones de artistas colombianas: *Plegaria muda* (2008-2010) de Doris Salcedo y *Cultus* (2007-2015) de Ludmila Ferrari; ambas creaciones forman una base de comparación sólida porque las dos se diferencian respecto a su integración con las instituciones de arte. Las instalaciones serán comparadas en función de tres dimensiones: cómo incentivan conexiones entre ciudadanos y ciudadanas, cómo transcienden su espacio inmediato y conectan diferentes públicos, y cómo reestructuran el espacio para introducir normas diferentes.

Keywords: arte contemporáneo; instituciones de arte; violencia; ciudadanía

Resumo

Este artigo examina o potencial transformativo de duas contemporâneas peças artísticas colombianas. Com este objetivo, são contrastadas as peças *Plegaria muda* (2008-2010) de Doris Salcedo e *Cultus* (2007-2015) de Ludmila Ferrari. As instalações são justapostas em três dimensões. É analisado como estes trabalhos encorajam conexões entre cidadãos, como transcendem os seus públicos imediatos interligando diferentes audiências e como reestruturam espaço para a produção de um conjunto diferente de normas. As duas instalações oferecem uma base interessante para comparação no que diz respeito ao seu envolvimento com as instituições de arte convencionais. À luz do conflito doméstico e de uma crescente atividade no mercado colombiano de arte em tempos recentes, avaliar o potencial transformativo da arte na sociedade é de suma relevância.

Palavras chave: arte contemporâneo; instituições de arte; violência; cidadania

INTRODUCTION

Bogotá has seen an art boom in the past years. Numerous galleries have emerged and an international art fair, artBo, was launched in Bogotá in 2005. In 2014 Bogotá Auction was founded, encouraging a secondary market for Colombian art. Colombia was invited as a guest to the international art fair Arte Contemporáneo (ARCO) in Madrid in 2015. And yet these cultural offerings contrast with the insecurity in public space that limits their enjoyment. Cab drivers cannot be trusted and walking by oneself on foot at night is not recommended in some of the neighborhoods, including the center of the city. One wonders to what extent the boom in contemporary art may induce a change in public life.

Even though violence has been a prominent topic in Colombian art,[1] the transformative potential of art is less analyzed. Colombian visual art is more often than not discussed with respect to how[2] it memorizes and reflects on violence, but not with respect to its capacity to transform society or project alternative worlds. This paper takes on a different focus on Colombian art assuming that art may not only represent the world, but also have an impact on it.

This paper addresses the question as to how contemporary art relates citizens, transcends its immediate public and transforms space comparing Doris Salcedo's *Plegaria muda* (2008-2010) and Ludmila Ferrari's *Cultus* (2007-2015). *Cultus,* in contrast to *Plegaria Muda,* has been created outside of conventional art institutions and is therefore likely to affect Colombian society in a distinct manner. Art's capacity to transform a social, institutional and spatial dimension of society is elaborated by drawing from four theoretical concepts. These theories were chosen because they illuminate contrasting ways in which art affects society. Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment and Nicolas Bourriaud's relational art allow an examining of how artworks relate citizens. How artworks may transcend their immediate publics is analyzed by drawing on Jürgen Habermas'. Jacques Rancière's analytical category of the distribution of the sensible is helpful in understanding how artworks introduce a new set of norms through restructuring public space. The paper first presents the two artworks. Drawing on the authors mentioned above, the artworks' contributions are then analyzed. In a concluding chapter, I will discuss the main results.

PLEGARIA MUDA AND *CULTUS*

The two pieces of art presented in this paper lend themselves to a comparison because they take part in very distinct settings and address very diverse parts of society. Taking into account different groups is important in order to gain an understanding of how publics are created and connected by artworks. The selection is furthermore justified because both artworks have earned important prizes.

The first piece of art is *Plegaria Muda* by Doris Salcedo (*1958, Bogotá). Doris Salcedo is one of the most celebrated contemporary Colombian artists. She gained wide recognition in 2007 when she cracked the floor in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with her artwork *Shibboleth* (Tate, 2015). *Plegaria Muda* is an important work of Salcedo and was awarded the 9th Hiroshima Art Prize in 2014 (Hiroshima-Moca, 2015).

The second piece of art, *Cultus*, constructed a garden in one of the most disadvantaged neighborhood of Bogotá. Ludmila Ferrari (*1989, Buenos Aires) created a kind of oasis in Ciudad Bolívar as part of her art project *Prácticas Artísticas en la Grieta* (Artistic practices in the

crack). *Cultus* was awarded the Premio nacional a las nuevas prácticas en artes visuales in Colombia in 2011 (L. Ferrari, personal communication, April 27, 2015). At the time of the project, Ferrari was an art student at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá. Ferrari currently studies in the U.S. and continues to work on different artistic interventions.

Plegaria Muda (2008-2010)

Salcedo's *Plegaria Muda* consists of many pairs of tables. Each table standing on the floor supports another table that lies reversed on top of it, with its legs towards the ceiling. A layer of soil about 10 cm thick divides and unites the two tabletops. From the layer of soil, single blades of grass grow through the upper tabletop. The tables are made of wood and about as long as a human body. They are very simple in their make because they are handcrafted and therefore unique.

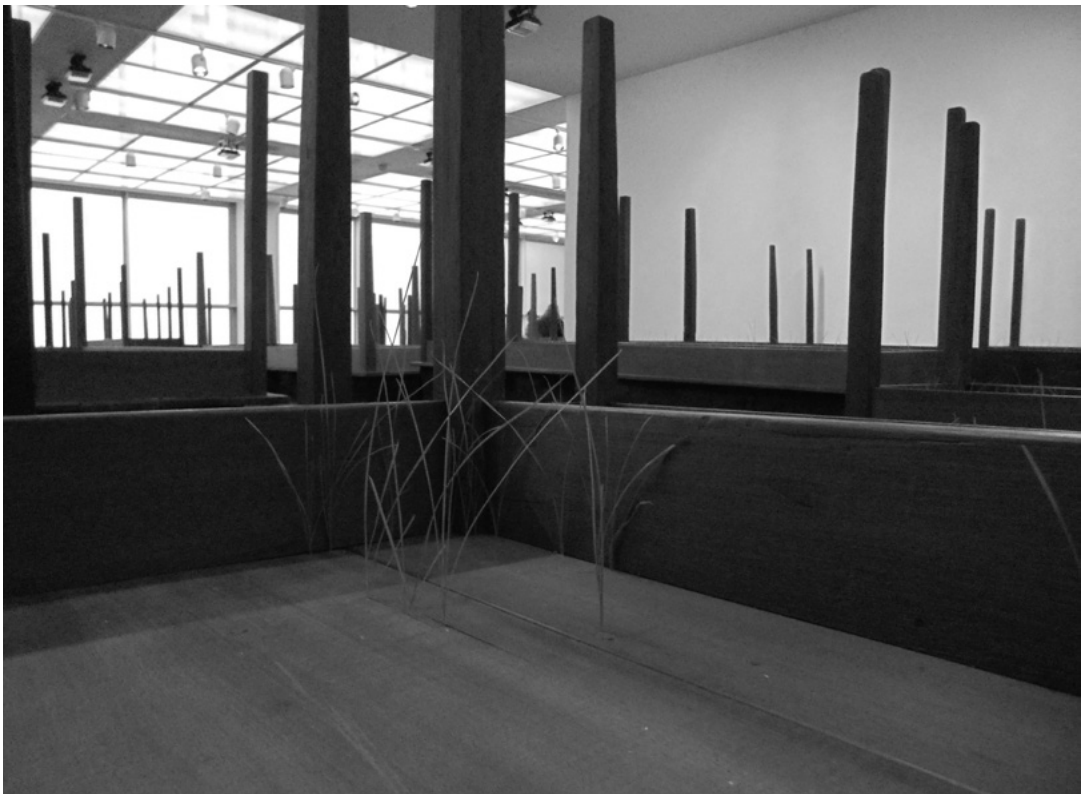

Figure 1. *Plegaria Muda* in the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015). Source: Own Data.

Walking through the tables, the visitor's eyes meet primarily the legs. The installation presents a forest of poles with narrow paths in which the passerby could lose orientation.[3] Lowering one's eyes to the table tops, the scarce green of the grass guides the way. The smell of the soil as well as the temptation to touch the grass gives the work immediacy.

Plegaria Muda can be translated with "silent prayer" (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2015, 7) Salcedo explains that *Plegaria Muda* is the result of two research processes she has engaged in (Salcedo, 2014). Visiting Los Angeles in 2004, the artist learned that 10.000 youths had died in local gang violence over the period of twenty years. Salcedo was surpri-

Figure 2. *Plegaria Muda* in the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2015). Source: Own Data.

sed by the fact that the victims and perpetrators often lived in the same neighborhood and in similarly precarious circumstances. According to the Los Angeles Police Department, more than 450 gangs, including 45.000 individuals, operate in the city and some of these groups have been active for over 50 years (Los Angeles Police Department). These organizations are sometimes involved in drug trafficking and usually form along migratory or racial backgrounds (Zilberg, 2004, 761). Gangs identify with and defend a certain area in Los Angeles and consequently fight rival cliques in their zones. This territorial logic puts civilians' living in a gang-inflicted neighborhood at risk, since they may be targeted due to their location, even though they are not affiliated with any group (Los Angeles Police Department).

Salcedo also relates *Plegaria Muda* to the murder of innocent adolescents from marginal sectors in Colombia by the military. The Colombian army abducted young men, dressed them as guerrilla fighters and killed them in order to present better results in their fight against the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). The killings are referred to as *falsos positivos* (Human Rights Watch). Salcedo accompanied the mothers of the victims in their searches for their sons for a number of months. Although there had previously been extrajudicial killings, the number of victims soared under the government of President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010). The policies *Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática* during the first term and the *Política de Consolidación* during Uribe's second term in office put great emphasis on the recuperation and control of territory by state authority and the reduction of drug trafficking activities (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Humanitario, 2013). When the first protests from families of these victims emerged, the government denied its responsibility and blamed the families for making false accusations (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Humanitario, 2013, p. 11). Impunity of the responsible for the *falsos positivos* continues

to be a problem due to legal deficiencies, as well as political and social mechanisms, such as threats to victims (Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Humanitario, 2013, 145ff).

The increase of extrajudicial killings are also sometimes related to the involvement of the U.S. in Colombian efforts to fight drug trafficking. In 1999 the Colombian government under President Andrés Pastrana developed *Plan Colombia*, a strategy to combat drug cultivation, and sought financial support for its implementation from different countries. In 2001, the Clinton administration provided financing as well as technical equipment (Council on Foreign Relations, 2000). Although the funding also supported the improvement of governing capacity and human rights, the priorities were the expansion of counter-narcotics operations and the interdiction of drug trafficking (Council on Foreign Relations, 2000). The Bush administration continued the efforts undertaken under *Plan Colombia* within the *Andean Counterdrug Initiative* (U.S. Department of State, 2003).

Different aspects of this artwork are interesting for interpretation. Referring to violence in the U.S. as well as in Colombia, *Plegaria Muda* equates the deaths of Colombian civilians with the victims of gang violence. It furthermore points to the transnational dynamics of drug trafficking. The reference to both the U.S. and Colombia avoids the stereotyping of Colombia as a dangerous, "developing" country, and makes the visitor aware that violence is also a problem in industrialized societies. Assuming that each table pair represents a victim and its perpetrator, the artwork also establishes a relation between the two in which they mirror each other. Conventional understandings of responsibility and guilt are challenged by the equality of victim and offender. This reading gains support in light of Salcedo's remark on the violence in Los Angeles, where people from similar backgrounds fight one another. The work could also be interpreted as connecting the victims of violence with the audience by reminding the visitors of their own mortality. The loss of orientation experienced in the forest of table legs and that moment of fear of not being able to find a way out of the symbolized graves, makes the onlookers aware of their own inevitable death. Viewers are connected to the victims, since they are part of the same natural circle in which all bite the dust, eventually.

Cultus (2007-2015)

Ludmila Ferrari's *Prácticas Artísticas en la Grieta (PAG)* comprises two art projects, *Cultus* and *Tejedores de historias.* The projects took place in one of the poorest parts of Bogotá's south, where many internally displaced people settle. The first project, *Cultus,* initiated the construction of a garden by fifteen people living in Ciudad Bolívar (Ferrari 39). The garden was built in a vacant lot of about 20 square meters, which needed to be cleared of wood and bricks. *Cultus* continued from the 25th of October in 2007 to the 22nd of November in 2007 during the first stage and its second stage started on the 29th of November and is still ongoing. Around 22 different kinds of plants were cultivated in the garden. The group collaborated and the produce was shared equally. Some sold their vegetables at the local market while others used them for their own consumption.

Ciudad Bolívar is a very uncommon, and very difficult, area for an artistic initiative to take place. The neighborhood has traditionally received internal refugees. In the 1940s, when around 50.000 were living in Ciudad Bolívar, the locality already accommodated citizens fleeing from the bipartisan violence. From the mid-eighties to today, Ciudad Bolívar has been one

Figure 3. La huerta Cultus. Foto: Ludmila Ferrari, 2008.

Figure 4. Acondicionameiento del lote para la huerta. Foto: Ludmila Ferrari, 2008.

Figure 5. La huerta Cultus en un día de trabajo. Foto: Ludmila Ferrari, 2008.

Figure 6. Semilleros y primeros cultivos de la huerta. Foto: Ludmila Ferrari, 2008.

of the major areas receiving migrants within Bogotá and Colombia. Reaching a number of 715.000 inhabitants in 2013 makes Ciudad Bolívar one of the largest informal settlements in Bogotá (Ferrari, 2014, p. 77).

There are differences with regard to infrastructure and the effective presence of the state, but generally, citizens in Ciudad Bolívar live in rather tenuous conditions. Of the 252 quarters, only 146 are officially recognized as such (Ferrari, 2014, p. 78). Infrastructure is lacking in many parts and some of the settlements can't count on running water or heating. Moreover, many of the residencies are built in locations unsuitable for construction due to environmental hazards such as landslides. State presence, including police forces, is limited and the primary cause of death in Ciudad Bolívar is human aggression. The limited presence of state authority in Ciudad Bolívar also affected Ferrari's art project. After local elections in 2007, the new city mayor of Bogotá withdrew social programs in Ciudad Bolívar. As a consequence, paramilitaries expanded the territory they controlled. Ferrari found herself on a list with persons that were no longer welcome, and had to move her project *Tejedores* to another part of Ciudad Bolívar (Ferrari, L. personal communication, April 27, 2015).

However, the living conditions are not the only difficulty for people arriving in Ciudad Bolívar. The newly arrived often feel at a loss, because life in an urban setting is very different from life in rural Colombia. Migrating to the city, the people that worked predominantly as farmers suddenly have their knowledge substantially devalued. The space created by *Cultus* was, therefore, most meaningful to those taking part, since it allowed them to engage in practices they were already familiar with. *Cultus* gave the gardeners the opportunity to connect their existence in Bogotá to their previous experiences in the countryside by practicing skills they had learned earlier in their lives as *campesinos*. The project incited a lot of interest and many people wanted to join, but the number of participants was limited for practical reasons (Ferrari, L. personal communication, April 27, 2015). *Cultus*, apart from being a real space, also functioned as a symbolic space. Needless to say, the topic of the garden generates countless associations from the Garden of Eden to symbolizing the generative power of nature as such.

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF ART

This chapter explores different ways in which art has a transformative impact on society. The following three sections look at art's capacity to create interaction, to link different audiences, and to open up an alternative space with a different set of norms.

Artworks Relate Citizens

The violence in Colombia disrupts social ties in communities and families.[4] Colombia faces a higher number of internal refugees than any other country, since the conflict has led to 3-4 million internally displaced people (Amnesty International, 2013). The migration of large numbers of citizens that need to be accommodated negatively affect existing social networks (Flores, 2006, p. 354). Flores describes how tensions between newly arrived and local citizens arise, since the residents fear for their already scarce resources. Consequently, internally displaced people develop strategies of resistance, rather than actively joining a new community.

Cultural programs with aims to strengthen social ties within their communities have been introduced in some cities, such as Bogotá and Cali. During his first turn in office as mayor of Bogotá (1995-1998) Antanas Mockus set up the policy *Cultura ciudadana* in order to promote *convivencia*,[5] or peaceful living together. *Cultura ciudadana* encompassed different elements. Within the framework of this program, a group of young people, supported by the Institute for the Promotion of Culture and Tourism (IDCT), organized a rock festival in 1995 (Riaño, 2011, p. 215). This concert evolved into a regular series of events called *La cultura al parque*, which encourages people to come out and meet. Given that cultural initiatives are deemed important in public policy in order to address the social dimension of public space, it is interesting to look at artworks' capacity to contribute to social relations.

Arendt and Bourriaud: Relating Citizens

Generating connections among citizens is important in the context of disrupted social ties in Colombia. In this respect, Hannah Arendt's concept of judgment is helpful, since it outlines how aesthetic judgments create community. Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics captures how artworks generate interaction and provides a different perspective on art's capacity to relate citizens.

In her "Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy", Arendt approaches the concept of judgment.[6] Judging is important in a political sense, because we do not judge alone. Community and judgment are related in two regards: we adapt our evaluations so as to fit into our community, and we select our company based on shared judgments. We anticipate and take into account the community's most probable opinion into our evaluation. Even though the particular aesthetic experience is subjective, our assessments are inter-subjective; therefore they converge. Judgment is important with regard to forming a community, because we solicit company when communicating an opinion. When we disclose what we like and dislike, others will join us in our evaluation, or they will not.

To base a political community on the contingency of judgments is problematic. Arendt's answer to this problem is that we use our imagination taking into account the thoughts of other individuals. We need to "enlarge" our thinking in order to arrive at a judgment that escapes the idiosyncrasy of our own position (Arendt, 1982, p. 42). The more perspectives we can keep in mind, the more valid the final evaluation will be. In Zerilli's view, Arendt's concept of judgment allows us to see and consider things that are beyond our daily lives, which we have not yet incorporated into our understanding of the world (Zerilli, 2014, p. 52). Even if we achieve including different viewpoints, a community of judgment remains exclusive to the extent that it is impossible to reconcile all points of view. Nonetheless, I use Arendt's concept of a community of judgment, because it helps to trace how people align their assessments with the values in society, and how they build a community by exchanging their views with others. Furthermore, the concept also sensitizes the analysis. The paper not only traces how the two artworks contributed to form a community, but also examines in what sense these communities were exclusive.

In contrast to Arendt, Bourriaud is not concerned with the judgment of an aesthetic experience, but with the interactive aspect of an artwork itself. He coined the term *relational art* for a type of artworks emerging in the 1990's that facilitate human interactions (Bishop, 2004, p. 54). The creation of relations between the viewer and the artist is at the center of this concept. While any artwork can be defined as a relational object, the specific nature of relational art is that it facilitates relations outside the field of art: relations between the artist and the world or

between the beholder and the world. Relational artworks function like interstices, producing a particular time and space, and a particular kind of sociability. Bishop, discussing Bourriaud's concept of relational art, summarizes it as follows: "(…) relational artworks seek to establish intersubjective encounters (be they literal or potential), in which meaning is elaborated *collectively*" (Bishop, 2004, p. 54, Emph. in the original). An example for such an artwork is Rirkit Tiravanija's work *Untitled,* installed in 303 Gallery in New York in 1992; the artist prepared a curry dish for his visitors (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 26).

Bishop criticizes this concept, because it does not reflect on the kind of relationships that are established. It is not analyzed for whom Rirkit Tiravanija prepares meals, and who is excluded from enjoying his dishes (Bishop, 2004, p. 64). Although Bishop raises a valid point, it is also important to note that aesthetic experiences are always limited to a public that engages with it. Since it is difficult to prevent exclusion, it would be more useful to specify which kind of relations are more problematic, rather than criticizing an artwork for being exclusionary. Connections among those that are usually left outside of the art circuit or connections between different publics might be particularly valuable. The paper tries to take into account Bishop's criticism by addressing the question who is involved in the interactions and who is left out.

Plegaria Muda Generates Connections

Plegaria Muda hardly provides ground for interaction in Bourriaud's sense of relational art. Walking through the tables is an impressive, though not necessarily interactive, experience. However, the artwork may have contributed to build a community of judgment in Arendt's sense. The discussion in Colombia's most active art blog *EsferaPública* gives an impression of the community the artwork created (esferapublica.org). The art scene in Colombia reacted with a mixed response to the installation. Around 190 entries appear when searching for *Plegaria Muda,* and many of them were critical. In that regard, one could argue that *Plegaria Muda* generated a community of skeptics.

Keeping Bishop's criticism in mind, it is important to take into account that not all citizens in Colombia have had equal chances to join the discussion on *EsferaPública* even though it is a public blog. Although the online discussions seem to facilitate a broadening of the public, it is unlikely that citizens who did not visit the installation expressed their opinion about it online. The boundaries of the audience that visited *Plegaria Muda*, to some extent also set the limits of its online community. The interaction was therefore limited to a presumably rather privileged public interested in art.

Despite this rather exclusionary discussion, the installation offers an opportunity to enlarge one's thinking in Arendt's sense and to imagine the fate the represented lived through. Reminding visitors of their own mortality creates a connection between the viewers and the represented, and may facilitate onlookers to include the perspective of the victims. In that sense, *Plegaria Muda* encourages the audience to think more inclusively about society.

Cultus Generates Connections

Cultus facilitated interactions among its participants and shared many of the characteristics with Bourriaud's concept of relational art. Participants in *Cultus* were not only onlookers; they were placed in a unique space and time, in which they cooperated and engaged in a whole range of actions involving all senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and, since the vegetables were eaten at the end, taste.

Bishop's criticism regarding the exclusiveness of relations could not have been addressed more carefully. Ferrari was very much aware of the interactions she facilitated, and between whom and where *Cultus* enabled connections, as she consciously located *Cultus* in a difficult neighborhood, where the establishment of relations among citizens was most needed. Even so, the participation in *Cultus* was limited to 15 members, excluding some of the people that would have enjoyed gardening as well.

Cultus also led to an exchange of opinions, and potentially created communities of judgment. While the number of interested people indicates a positive attitude towards *Cultus,* the threats by the paramilitary manifest opposition. The diverging attitudes reveal that *Cultus* generated distinct and conflicting communities of judgment.

Comparison: Exclusiveness and Strength of Relations

Both artworks generated relations among citizens and created communities of judgment as proposed by Arendt. In addition, *Cultus* is likely to have contributed to interactions between its participants as outlined in Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics.

Several features indicate that *Cultus* created stronger relations. First, the kind of sensory experiences the two artworks provide are different. *Plegaria Muda* relied on sight as a main experience, while *Cultus* touched all senses. Sharing more than just a visual impression helps to establish bonds. Second, *Cultus* took place over an extended period of time; whereas visitors in *Plegaria Muda* probably did not spend more than a couple of minutes within the installation. A further difference concerns the amount of people that took part. *Cultus* was limited to 15 gardeners knowing each other; *Plegaria Muda* was seen by many anonymous visitors. All of these features —the greater intensity, the extended period of time and the acquaintanceship— contribute to *Cultus'* creating stronger relations between participants.

The two installations established exclusive communities, as participation and attendance in *Cultus* and *Plegaria Muda* was limited. Nevertheless, to the extent that society can be thought of as a multiplicity of different publics, the two artworks may be seen as an important contribution. By generating links in precarious conditions, *Cultus* is arguably a particular achievement, since creating a public in such conditions is both more needed, and more difficult.

Artworks Transcend their Publics

Although Colombia is one of the oldest democracies in the region, state institutions' inability to secure peace and stability resulted in the "Colombian paradox" (Tuft, 1997, p. 2). Colombians distrust government institutions, because they are incapable of protecting citizens and are perceived to be involved in the violence (Blanco and Ruiz, 2003, p. 286). In the light of Colombians' disregard towards public institutions, Martín-Barbero suggests that the cultural sector might provide a shared realm and proposes setting up a calendar of festivities reflecting different regions and groups in Colombia (2001, p. 27). It may be interesting to look at artworks' capacity to relate different audiences and to provide a basis of identification.

Habermas: Institutions and Media

Public sphere is a term originally established by Jürgen Habermas to denote a realm apart from the state in which citizens build a community. Habermas describes how institutions, aside from the state established and stabilized publics, and integrated citizens to a larger group over

time. This is interesting in the Colombian context, not only due to the lack of a shared identification as discussed above, but also because of the growing number of art institutions.

Habermas' account analyzes how a public sphere has evolved. In the middle ages, the gathering of citizens served merely as a background for the public representation of the potentate. The citizens did not form an independent part of society. As markets and trade relations evolved, a horizontal network of dependence developed, stretching beyond the hierarchical domain of the aristocratic houses. Citizens integrated more and more into their own social strata and formed a counter weight to the state. Following Habermas, cultural institutions played an important role in creating a public sphere. People informally gathered in salons and coffee houses in order to discuss literature (Habermas, 1990, p. 89). Concert halls, theatres, and art museums became accessible to people outside of the aristocracy and provided a focal point where citizens met. In Habermas account, the different publics were eventually united by being addressed by an institutionalized press (1990, p. 116). The description of the integration of different publics into a collective readership bears similarities to Anderson's notion of imagined communities. Anderson emphasizes an awareness of others reading the same print products as important to facilitate the imagination of large communities, and as a basis for a national consciousness. People connected to their fellow citizens through the awareness of sharing the same books and newspapers, and they formed a nation (Anderson, 1991, p. 44).

Although neither Habermas nor Anderson analyze the international dimensions of art or book markets, one may think of the connections of institutions across borders leading to transnational publics in an analogous manner. Art visitors in different locations see the same artworks travelling to institutions around the world and are addressed by publications that operate across national boundaries.

There are different dimensions to the concept public sphere: it may refer to a social process, to physical space and to institutions that are not part of the state. Moreover, it can be understood as a discursive space, requiring certain normative principles. In the following, I concentrate on the institutional aspect of public sphere, leaving aside its normative implications.

The concept has been criticized for its exclusionary nature since Habermas' account limits this realm to the bourgeois and male citizens.[7] The problem of exclusion is particularly salient in Colombia. Some authors argue that the origin of violence lies in the exclusion of relevant actors from political participation that, consequently, had no other option than resorting to force (González, 2004, p. 12). Exclusiveness is also a striking characteristic of art institutions. Even though art organizations form publics, they are not equally open to everyone.[8] Bourdieu analyzed the accessibility of art museums and found that the majority of those who visit art institutions enjoyed higher education (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 248; Bourdieu, 2011, p. 26). This observation also holds for Colombia, where socio-economic status and lack of education are the main constraints inhibiting the attendance of art performances (Aguado & Palma, 2012, p. 16). Despite its exclusionary nature, I still apply the concept in the following, because its distinction of a sphere apart from the state is analytically useful. This merit is appreciated even by some of Habermas' critics (Fraser, 1990, p. 60). In the following I adopt Frasers' revision of Habermas' concept. Fraser proposes a public sphere as consisting of multiple publics that overlap and interact (1990, p. 65). While the adaptation intended to address the exclusionary nature of an overarching, unitary public sphere,[9] I incorporate it because it fits well with my intention to analyze how the two artworks connected different audiences. Furthermore, the paper takes into account the exclusionary nature of art institutions by comparing two artworks that take a very different stance with respect to the art circuit.

Plegaria Muda Transcends its Public

Plegaria Muda was exposed in many recognized museums abroad, arguably connecting different publics internationally. The installation has been commissioned by the *Foundation Calouste Gulbenkian* (Portugal) and the *Moderna Museet Malmö* (Sweden) (ArtNexus, 2014). After exhibitions in Lisbon and Malmö, the installation travelled on to MUAC *Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo* (Ciudad de México), *MAXXI Museo Nazionale dele Arti de XXI Secolo* (Rome) and *Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo* (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 103). *Plegaria Muda* was exposed in *Ars+Flora* (Bogotá) from February to March 2014 and consequently in Hiroshima, Japan. The work was showed in Doris Salcedo's first retrospective in the *Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago* in February 2015 and travelled on to New York and Miami.

As *Plegaria Muda* was exposed in different locations, it might have contributed to form a transnational public. Anderson describes how reading the same print products merge different audiences. Correspondingly, people contemplating *Plegaria Muda* in different locations were united into one audience as they shared a visual experience. The idea of an emergence of such a transnational public is supported by the international audience that attended the retrospective in Chicago. The exhibition was inaugurated with a panel discussion in the presence of a high-ranking Colombian delegation, including the minister of culture, Mariana Garcés Córdoba. There were also Colombian citizens in the audience. Moreover, *ArtNexus*, the leading magazine on Latin American contemporary art, published an article on the exhibition of *Plegaria Muda* in Chicago and two short notes mentioning where and when it could be seen. *ArtNexus* reaches out to readers in Latin America as well as North America, which underlines the suggestion that audiences from different places may converge to a transnational public.

Plegaria Muda also merged different audiences within Colombia, addressing separate publics through the media. Interestingly, the installation's reception in Colombia seems to have depended more strongly on the exposition abroad, than on the local presentation in *Ars+Flora* from 22nd February to 29th March, 2014. Adapted to the dimensions of the available space, the installation comprised only eight pairs of tables. As Salcedo has not exposed in Colombia in recent years, the installation in *Ars+Flora* was one of the few occasions her work could be seen in Colombia. Surprisingly, the Colombian press reported on the exhibitions abroad much more than on the one in *Ars+Flora*. The Colombian Art Magazine, *Arteria*, featured an article on the show in Chicago in February 2015 (Brinson, 2015, p. 4), while it did not write about the exhibition in *Ars+Flora* in Bogotá in 2014. Moreover, a few weeks before the opening of the retrospective in Chicago, the front page of the Colombian news magazine, *Semana,* titled: "El año de Doris". The article expressed pride of the Colombian artist:

> On February 21st the Museum of Modern Arts in Chicago inaugurates the retrospective of the artist with her most emblematic works; on June 26th the exposition will travel to Guggenheim in New York and from May 6th 2016, it will be exposed in the Museum Pérez in Miami. Few Latin-American artists have enjoyed similar recognition. (*Semana*, 2015)[10]

Through mainstream media, the artwork might thus have reached a Colombian public usually not interested in arts. While this is quite an achievement for an artwork, it seems likely that it was not the installation itself which generated attention but rather the fact that a Colombian artist had attained recognition abroad. The comparative tone of the news article suggests that the success of a Colombian artist was at the center of attention.

Cultus Transcends its Public

Cultus was deliberately created outside of any official cultural institution. Ferrari describes how she wanted to search for an alternative to the rather exclusive art organizations (L. Ferrari, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Artworks and exhibitions representing violence in comparatively safe parts of the city did not convince Ferrari as a strategy for an artwork addressing the precarious circumstances a major part of Colombian society live in.

Despite maintaining a distance, *Cultus* relied on the cooperation with institutions in order to bring the project to life (Ferrari, 2014, p. 41). This corresponds to Habermas' idea that institutions are needed to stabilize a public over time. A soup kitchen providing meals for the poor, *Cuna del Arte*, delivered material resources, such as compost and water.

Even though Ferrari successfully competed for a Colombian art prize in 2011, winning the award did not generate a wider recognition of the artwork. *Cultus* was not discussed in the Colombian press, despite the prize. There are currently two scholarly publications on *Prácticas artísticas en la grieta*,[11] but neither the Colombian art magazine *Arteria*, nor the international publication *ArtNexus* reported on the project. *Cultus* did not expand its audience through publications. On the one hand, this might be interpreted as evidence of the exclusionary forces at work in Bogotá's art circuit that hesitate to integrate artworks taking place outside of their conventional sites. On the other hand, this exclusion was also incorporated within the project itself, since it avoided art institutions and accessing Ciudad Bolívar is very difficult for the usual art audience.

Comparison: International Recognition Connects Colombian Publics

The comparison of the two artworks suggests that institutions are important in order to create a public even on the local level. Moreover, media coverage broadens an artworks' audience. Such publications are facilitated by the recognition of international institutions of an artwork.

Institutions are crucial to establish and maintain a public. Even *Cultus,* renouncing on participation in the traditional art circuit, relied on local institutions to generate a community, as it mobilized its participants by cooperating with local institutions. Reaching a wider audience among other factors seems to depend on the media coverage. While an artwork may create a public, as *Cultus*, it is difficult to extend its reach beyond an immediate audience without publications on it. Such media response seems also to rely on recognition abroad. The popularity of *Plegaria Muda* with the domestic press was related to its international success. *Semana* explicitly mentioned its international journey and compared Doris Salcedo with other Latin American artists, while *Arteria* only reported on the artwork once it was exposed in Chicago. An artwork like *Cultus*, taking place in a marginalized area, has difficulties entering the press and reaching a wider public, even when winning a national art prize.

Artworks Provide a Spatial and Normative Experience

In Colombia, public places are often unused, since the majority of Colombians does not feel safe outside. According to the Colombian Statistics Department's yearly poll from 2014, in Bogotá 82, 7% of the population does not feel secure in the street, 79, 9% feel unsafe in public transport, and 52, 5% feel at risk in market places (Departamento Administrativo Nacional

de Estadística, DANE, 2014, p. 8). As citizens get used to living with a feeling of insecurity and the necessity to watch their backs the expectation of violence becomes embedded in daily life (Pécaut, 2001, p. 197). Some of the research in Colombia concentrates on how public space can be modeled in order to be of service to the citizens (Burbano, 2014, p. 188). Space is also attributed a transformative function, since an adequate design of public arrangements is seen to reduce violence. In Medellín, efforts to rehabilitate public areas were undertaken in order to stabilize the rule of the state after authorities had gained control from armed non-state actors in the 90's (Celli and Angeli, 2011, p. 31). Artworks are physical artifacts and in that sense, might transform space, and hence norms.

Rancière: The Distribution of the Sensible

Rancière's concept, the "distribution of the sensible", suggests that the structure of physical space has normative implications. The word "sensible" may be understood as perceptible, as well as reasonable, and the concept seems to aim at exactly that: a distribution of physical things that can be experienced, and is also socially accepted.[12] Two aspects of the concept are particularly interesting for the discussion that follows: neither the norms in society nor the inclusion of marginalized citizens into the political order depends on formal political institutions.

Norms in society are not defined by an institutionalized order, but by a distribution of what can be sensed and experienced. The distribution of the sensible delimits the common and the private in society, and determines the positions of each individual in the sphere of the common. It defines who has access to the common parts, in what forms, and at what times (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). The concept attributes artworks a political potential to the extent that they restructure space. According to Rancière:

> Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames the time and peoples this space. (Rancière, 2009, p. 23)

As discussed, violence has affected public space in Colombia for a long time, leading to a normalization of the phenomenon. A different structure in a physical order would ideally result in peaceful living together. The emphasis in Colombian literature on the transformation of public space fits well with Rancière's account. Both share the assumption that exposure to certain sensitive experiences translates into a change in behavior.

Another interesting aspect of Rancière's concept is the procedure in which marginalized citizens become regarded as equal political subjects that does not rely on formal mechanisms, but on sensitive experiences.[13] In contrast to other authors, Rancière understands politics as the processes by which previously excluded individuals claim access to the distribution of the sensible by manifesting their equality with those that currently participate. People excluded from the distribution of the sensible perform actions that emanate from equal human beings and that do not match their current status as excluded (Rancière, 1995/2004, p. 45). Political action, in that sense, does not need to take on a certain form, such as demonstration, or an election, but depends on the performance of equality of individuals that were not perceived as equal before (Rancière, 1995/2004, p. 44).

One question that arises from attributing a normative function to aesthetic experiences is how a locally contained aesthetic impression translates into different public realms.[14] An artwork is unlikely to be seen by all members of society, since aesthetic experiences depend on the physical presence of a person. Moreover, our perception is subjective, and we may or may not agree on the meaning of what we see. The contingency and local restrictedness of aesthetic experiences may make their effect on society more complicated and less certain than conceptualized by Rancière.

Plegaria Muda Redistributes the Sensible

Plegaria Muda introduced an alternative set of norms insofar as it confronted visitors with the threatening reality of death in a museum in which they usually feel safe. The installation established a particular space with the table tops confusing sight, the earth smelling, and the green grass blinking through the wood. Trapping the visitors in a mazy cemetery, the installation reminded them that they eventually face the same destiny as the victims of violence. Even so, one can also question to what extent the installation was able to override the norms operating within the museum space, and whether visitors actually felt threatened in the secure surroundings of the art institution.

The artwork also stated the equality of the marginalized victims in Colombian society. *Plegaria Muda* brought the deaths and their grieving families from peripheral positions in Colombia and Los Angeles to cultural centers. Salcedo took these experiences to places where the represented have probably never been. Reminding onlookers of their own mortality, *Plegaria Muda* can be seen as an attempt to manifest the equality between the visitors and the victims. However, the equality remains one of representation. Neither the dead, nor their families were actually present in the art museum. The claim to equality that is raised by *Plegaria Muda* is limited by the fact that the victims do not speak for themselves. Whether someone can demand political equality on behalf of someone else may be questioned, since the very act of doing so denies the represented equal status.

Furthermore, *Plegaria Muda* may be seen as a request to renounce on hierarchies in the international realm. By referring to violence in the U.S. and Colombia in the same piece, Salcedo put Colombia on the same level with the U.S. This challenges conventional classifications of violence as a "developing country" phenomenon and advocates the equality of "peripheral" regions in the international arena.

Cultus Redistributes the Sensible

Cultus transformed a small enclave in a difficult surrounding covered with rubble into a flowering garden. This new space followed a different set of norms as *Cultus* would not tolerate violence as an option. The art project did not fall short of its symbolic potential as a Garden of Eden, in which citizens could interact and trust each other without feeling at risk. Within the context of Ciudad Bolívar, where authorities are not capable of granting the rule of law, the artwork effectively restructured space and norms. However, the newly created garden depended on the acceptance of its surrounding. As discussed, Ferrari had to change locations due to threats from the paramilitary. The strength of the safe haven provided by *Cultus* was limited by the adjacent space.

The artwork can also be read as a manifestation of the equality of the *desplazados* as political subjects. *Cultus* put the citizens of Ciudad Bolívar in charge of their own garden. In contrast to public policies, the project refused to see them as victims that needed to be cared

for, but featured their skills as farmers. The displaced were not represented; instead, they acted and organized themselves. The artwork can therefore be read as an opportunity for the *desplazados* to claim their status as political subjects.

Cultus may also be seen as an inversion of the hierarchies in urban planning. Ferrari suggested a way of thinking of the 19th district as equally important as the other parts of Bogotá, setting up a garden in this area. The neighborhood does not enjoy priority in city planning projects. Ferrari's proposal marks a protest at a time during which the mayor of Bogotá withdrew social programs in this neighborhood.

Comparison: Limits to Restructuring Space

Both artworks created their own physical space, and suggested alternative norms along with them. In Rancière's term, they "redistributed the sensible". *Plegaria Muda* created a space in which visitors felt just as mortal as the represented victims. *Cultus* provided a zone in which citizens from Ciudad Bolívar felt secure. In that sense, the artworks each translated a different reality to the audience: *Cultus* brought a sense of trust into a very precarious area, and *Plegaria Muda* conveyed a sense of threat to a part of society that was not exposed to violence. Both artworks found their limit in the surrounding space. The secure museum space restricted *Plegaria Muda*'s effect of threatening its viewers, and the instability in Ciudad Bolívar limited the sense of security and hope *Cultus* provided to its participants. This suggests that different spaces incorporating different norms compete with one another – an aspect that is not explicitly discussed by Rancière. Rancière's concept does not conceptualize how a locally contained physical experience reaches different publics in society. The distribution of the sensible is helpful in order to assess an artworks' potential to introduce a different structure; however, it is less useful to conceptualize how this proposed change generates an effect across different audiences in society.

Moreover, both artworks can be read as an expression of the equality of marginal sectors of society as conceptualized by Rancière. While both artworks aim at giving disadvantaged parts of society a place in the distribution of the sensible, *Plegaria Muda*'s representation of victims precludes an understanding of the victims as acting subjects. *Cultus,* in contrast avoids such representative logic and gave victimized citizens an opportunity to act as subjects in their own garden.

Both artworks can be read as reversing geographic hierarchies. *Plegaria Muda* challenged conventional hierarchies in international relations by positioning the U.S. and Colombia on the same level, while *Cultus* reversed the hierarchy in Bogotá's urban planning.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed the potential of select artworks to generate relations among citizens, to transcend their immediate public as well as their capacity to establish a different normative order. Arguably, *Plegaria Muda* in contrast to *Cultus* has connected different publics, but the relations among citizens created by *Cultus* were probably more significant than the relations facilitated by *Plegaria Muda*. The transformation of space by both artworks was limited by the surrounding environment.

While both artworks created social connections among onlookers, the strength of the relations an artwork creates seems to be negatively related to its dispersion. The relations facilitated by *Plegaria Muda* through the blogs and media involved more people, but the relations

were probably not as close as among the participants in *Cultus*. The close ties *Cultus* enabled are difficult to replicate in a wider setting. Institutions and the media play an important role in the expansion of artworks' publics. The wide recognition in the media of *Plegaria Muda* in contrast to *Cultus* was based on the triumph of a Colombian artist on an international level. The key to a wide audience in Colombia lies outside national boundaries; as such a comparative logic cannot be generated without relations to foreign institutions, or markets. This makes it much harder for visual propositions from the margins to reach out.

Artworks' capacity to incorporate normative claims into society is difficult to assess relying on Rancière's distribution of the sensible. The transformation of space is locally restricted, and it is unclear how a normative claim reaches other publics. While both artworks transformed space, they also competed with the surrounding area incorporating different norms.

NOTES

1 For an overview on the representation of violence in different kinds of artistic genres, see Suárez (2010).

2 Malagón-Kurka i.e. distinguishes different styles of representation of violence in Colombian art: During the 60s in a reaction to the bipartisan violence, artists represented violence literally, painting distorted human bodies. In the 80s, artists referred to violence related to drug trade, and represented violence in a conceptual way, i.e. using damaged furniture to represent human bodies (2008, p. 17).

3 The description refers to the installation as it was curated in Chicago. In its installation in *Ars+Flora* (Bogotá) this experience was likely to be different, since only eight table pairs were exposed (Contreras, 2014).

4 Even so, some authors find that ties and reciprocity increase locally in Colombian communities that are directly affected by violence. Experiments show greater contributions to an abstract common good in municipalities with a high outflow of citizens due to violence (Hopfensitz and Miquel-Florensa, 2014, p. 12).

5 Convivencia is a term coined by the Antanas Mockus (Rojas, Gómez & Baracaldo, 2008, p., 100) and refers to more than just coexistence but means the tolerance of diversity and the absence of violence (Mockus, 2002, p. 20).

6 Whereas Kant is careful to distinguish the aesthetic from the political, Arendt does not draw such a line (Arendt, 1982, p. 105; Beiner 1982, p. 105).

7 See Fraser (1990) and Benhabib (1991).

8 A similar observation holds for the represented artworks. Zuidervaart observes that it requires cultural organizations so as to disclose concerns that merit public attention (2011, p. 126). However, a formalization and consecration of a selection of art is problematic, since art may take many different forms, and selections are always contingent. Ferguson describes that there is a tension between the permanence of a selection and the contingency of an aesthetic judgment (1999, p. 44). With the internationalization of art markets, such selections in exhibitions may also misrepresent another culture entirely. Ramírez describes how certain forms of Latin American art, such as video, were systematically excluded from exhibitions of "Latin American" art in the U.S. during the 1990s in order to present Latin American art mainly to build contrast to Western art (1992, p. 64).

9 Multiple publics may accommodate different needs and avoid the assumption of a seemingly homogenous public which discriminates certain groups. Since these public spheres are not politically autonomous, but operate under a single political framework, the concept of public sphere even in its form of multiple publics remains problematic (Fraser, 1990, p. 76)

10 My translation. Original: "El 21 de febrero el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Chicago inaugurará la retrospectiva de la artista con sus más emblemáticas creaciones; a partir del 26 de junio la exposición pasará al Guggenheim de Nueva York y el 6 de mayo de 2016 estará en el Museo Pérez de Miami. Pocos artistas latinoamericanos han gozado de semejante reconocimiento".

11 The two publications are one by the artist Ferrari, titled *En la grieta: práctica artística en comunidad* (2014); and one by Yepes titled, *Lo político del arte: Cuatro casos de arte contemporáneo en Colombia* (2010).

12 Rancière (2014) defines the distribution of the sensible as the form of physical things (p. 263), and defines the ethical order as an aesthetic one (p. 269f).

13 Similarly, Corcoran finds important parallels between visual perception and political recognition. The question of what looks "good, beautiful, right" is not only a question about our personal taste, but has normative implications that also shape our thinking in the political realm (p. 75).

14 Norval is concerned with a similar issue and asks under what conditions a new demand is actually incorporated into the "distribution of the sensible". She suggests certain normative criteria for a distribution of the sensible to be more open to new demands (p. 194).

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Cómo citar este artículo:

Aerne, Annatina. "Art's Transformative Potential: Comparing Doris Salcedo's Plegaria Muda and Ludmila Ferrari's Cultus". *Cuadernos de Música, Artes Visuales y Artes Escénicas, 11*(2), 275-296, 2016. http://dx.doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.mavae11-2.atpc