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Contemporary Art Biennials – Our Hegemonic Machines in Times of Emergency

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Cautious Mouse Holding the World after *Atlas Holding Up ' a Celestial Map,* 17th century, A. Quellinus. Linocut print on printmaking paper, 33/47 cm, 2020. Text reads in English: "Cautious Mouse Holding the World". Dated and signed in print. Edition of 5

Delia Popa
Her feminist art includes painting, drawing and prints, installation, video and performance, taking up important topics such as gender relations, power relations and the human-animal relationship. She is the co-founder and leader of ArtCrowd – Artists in Education, an arts organization committed since 2013 to creating positive change in society via art and education.
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Editorial

Editorial

Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, Dorothee Richter

Let's talk about money; let's talk about power; let's talk about structural violence; let's talk about states of emergency; let's talk about new formats; let's talk about old struggles; let's talk about representation and identities, let's talk about differentiating emancipation from domination; let's talk about the thin line between governmentality and anti-hegemony; let's talk about drop exhibitions and clashes between local art communities and international imports. Let's also talk about society and its neglect (or support) for art and culture. Let's talk about these contradictions and the new questions they raise—let's talk about biennials today.

At the turn of the millennium, increasing debate surrounded the potentiality, relevance, and effects of perennial exhibitions, such as biennials, of which there were a growing number. This growth was especially pronounced in Asia and other parts of the Global South. This proliferation was recognized, and in part critiqued, in a conference titled "The Biennale Principle," organized a decade later during the 4th Bucharest Biennale. The conference took place amidst an atmosphere of increased scrutiny around the format, exploring—not unlike *The Biennial Reader*—the assumption of art biennials as "Janus-faced." On the one hand, biennials cater to a globalized art market with a homogenizing effect of similar exhibition formats and artists/works; on the other, biennials are rooted in local, regional, or national specificities as well as in an international critical discourse with diverse trajectories taken by various participants.[1] The publication of *The Biennial Reader* in 2010, produced as a result of the Bergen Assembly gathering the previous year, invited contributions from local and postcolonial perspectives and invited several practitioners from 'peripheral zones' including Havana, Dakar, New Delhi, and Norway. The 'Assembly' has since gathered an impressive number of artists, authors, researchers, curators, and policy-makers to engage in a critical analysis of the biennial phenomenon on a worldwide scale, leading to the creation of a triennial, known as the Bergen Assembly.

Today, contemporary art biennials can be described as an ensemble of infrastructures, which do not have much in common. Being recurring events, biennials function as a node of globally conceived and produced art merging with local and site-specific contexts. Biennials in their precarious nature are not designed as long-term institutions, which often means that the whole organization has to be built up from scratch each time. Raising financial resources for a biennial (from the Venice Biennale to very small events) is often a significant and an implicit task for their respective curators. The number of biennials has proliferated rapidly, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and with an increasing number of biennials in the Global South in the last decade of the 20th century.[2] Biennials can sometimes act as a means of decentralizing the West in the cultural field, and they propose models of cultural crossovers, the merging of layers of subjectivation and differentiated models of knowledge production. On the other hand, they propose culture to be more event-based, more fluid—often with their finances unsecured on a long-term basis. This reality reflects groundbreaking transformations in societies with the emergence and proliferation of digital technologies, both at a global and local level, which have changed infrastructures,

modes of production, and propagandist mass media. These transformations can be evidenced in the new forms of social and cultural production as well as the new classificatory orders of knowledge that have flourished with the emergence of digital media.

In early 2020—**Henk Slager**, director of the **9th edition of the Bucharest Biennale**—invited us to host the conference "**Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency**." One of the aims of the conference is to potentially refresh the biennial format. One could argue that not much has changed in the last twenty years: the premise of the conference then was to critique biennials as an instrument of imaginary reproduction of national or regional identities, or at least with close ties to national and international funding bodies with their own 'soft power' agendas.[3] Still, newly founded biennials are considered as vehicles for city branding, modernity, democratization, and internationalization, often initiated with an urge to show off economic, political, and social development prowess and to create new cultural spheres where translations of cultural knowledge may potentially occur.[4]

Nevertheless, biennials are, as the political theorist Oliver Marchart has remarked, big hegemonic machines. They make proposals about how to understand the world in which we live—locally and globally—and how to be in the world as a subject. Marchart likewise probes how race, class, and gender are positioned or repositioned in contemporary societies. Insofar as biennials are part of a bio-political process in the framework of specific local situations, Marchart also propels us to reread contemporary biennials from this viewpoint. For this edition of *OnCurating*, we decided to organize the anthology into different nodes of ongoing biennial discourses, centered on aspects of the Havana Biennial as the initial prime example of resistance and refuge, the Venice model as embedded deeply in representation, and on documenta in Kassel, Germany (principally *documenta X* in 1997 and *Documenta11* in 2002) as performed criticality.

In 2020, one might feel a certain affection for the more or less transparent "big hegemonic machines" like biennials, which aim for an international discourse in a seemingly democratizing manner. With all their underlying deficiencies (canonical, hegemonic, colonialist, hot money-funded, politically influenced, hierarchical), biennials tend to establish international discourse, at best, rooted in local cultural specificities and contexts. Furthermore, it may be argued, biennials have the power to create a public sphere that has an international voice. These public spheres may offer opportunities for international exchange, and these exchanges entail traces of disobedience and rupture. Examining local and global issues, from the Capitalocene, to toxic masculinity, to permanent observation, to structural violence and its effects on artistic production, one should formulate these positions cautiously. Every manifesto and every manifestation in the art field can only potentially lead to a larger social movement if proposed in collaboration with other agents and actors in the field.

That said, biennials are each in their own way a complex constellation of different aspects and power relations of the aforementioned. With this edition of the journal, we wanted to include a variety of cases and research areas, not ordered along a historical trajectory, but rather, ordered by theme.

The **first section** entails **current theoretical thought** on recent biennial developments. The **second section** is a compilation of collected answers to **short questionnaires** around possible anti-hegemonic formats and contemporary urgencies. The **third section** is dedicated to discussing the **Havana Biennial**, in order to revise the conventional order and to use the combination of considerably different formats and

spheres as a starting point. These formats and events, which might be thought of as **biennials of resistance,** offer us evidence of the prevalent dominance of Western paradigms and ideologies, but also its refusal. In the **fourth section**, we have compiled examples of **recent biennials that oscillate between hegemony and disobedience**, which is—admittedly—a risky proposition. Here, the balancing act between local constraints, economic pressures, international demands, and state control becomes visible throughout the case studies. One also discovers a surprising and imaginative kaleidoscope of possibilities developed by curators and curatorial teams for a variety of spaces of appearance. In the **fifth section**, we have included articles related to **documenta**, in particular ***documenta X*** (1997) and ***Documenta11*** (2002) which are seen as game changers in the field of large-scale recurring international exhibitions. We end with the beginning in the **sixth section, the Venice Biennale as a representational model**, where some of the cost-benefits and challenges of the world's oldest biennial are scrutinized.

The contributions consist of articles sent to us through an Open Call, reprints of historical texts from the last three decades, and answers to a questionnaire directed to the speakers of the programme and others operating in the field. The order of articles and contributions is laid out thematically, as we wish to illustrate the discursive complexity, and urgency, to still discuss biennial formats today. We felt there was no need to outline bold dichotomies, but rather we felt that a thorough analysis was needed in order to introduce an awareness of processes and to help transform and rearticulate a cultural public sphere through curatorial practice and theory today.

We encourage readers to critically explore the challenges, and benefits, of these machines, asking how we may use them progressively and how we may maintain and strengthen the cultural exchanges that these events may possibly provide. In this sense, biennials can be thought off as imaginary machines that can help us shape and influence possible future imaginaries.

1 Current Reactions to Biennial Discourse and Practice

Oliver Marchart, in his text "**The Globalization of Art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': a History of the Biennials from the Periphery**," suggests an alternative view of contemporary biennials in their format's history and process. Examining the 3rd Havana Biennial that took place in 1989, Marchart observes a shift whereby "peripheral" practices enter the "center," requiring a re-evaluation of prevailing center-periphery theories. The short conversation with Alfredo Jaar by Federica Martini "**Art worlds into real worlds: A conversation with Alfredo Jaar**" was published in 2011, and still gives a precise insight of an artist's view into the bienniale circuit. Christian Morgner's empirically researched approach in "**Inclusion and Exclusion in the Art World: A Sociological Account of Biennial Artists and Audiences**" examines assumptions and perceived prejudices on the international biennial circuit. Morgner's paper unfolds along the theoretical line of public assemblies (articulated by Butler and Habermas), reflecting on the democratic potential of biennials, and at the same time highlighting the risks of a lack of engagement with general art audiences and site.

Shwetal A. Patel examines the role of practice in biennial-making and argues against the growing homogeneity in the field. Patel explores the notion of biennial practices and asks how we may resist *biennialization* and standardization in the field.
Fatoş Üstek, director of the Liverpool Biennial, was commissioned to select 50 Instagram posts which were tagged with the hashtag "**#biennale.**" In her contribution, Üstek ruminates on the impact of COVID-19 on our daily lives, and what changes it may bring to curatorial formats in the future. Whilst recognizing the means of social media applications, Üstek is compelled to take a closer look at her "immediate surroundings, the micro-locale." In "**The Curating of Self and Others—Biennials as Forms of *Governmental Assemblages***," Ronald Kolb proposes analyzing the *exhibitionary biennial complex* through the implications of Michel Foucault's governmentality concept. The text claims, while the beginning of public museums in the 19th century could be seen as "civic engines" in line with a liberal agenda, biennials took up the neoliberal agenda early on.

2 Questionnaire: Biennials, our Hegemonic Machines
The questionnaire on hegemonic and anti-hegemonic movements and formats in biennials has been answered by Farid Rakun (ruangrupa), Raqs Media Collective, Martin Guinard / Bruno Latour / Eva Lin, Ekaterina Degot, Bonaventure Ndikung, Yung Ma, Eva González-Sancho Bodero, Raluca Voinia, and Răzvan, Ion.

Farid Rakun (team member responsible for the artistic direction of the upcoming ***documenta 15*** in 2022 and, also in limited form, the **Jakarta Biennale**) has created diagrams to record the structure of contemporary art and exhibition-making, whilst at the same time complicating these diagrams to showcase ruangrupa's unique curatorial approach. Raqs Media Collective outline their curatorial efforts towards the **2020 Yokohama Triennale** as an "interplay between auto-didacticism, the luminosity of care and friendship, and toxicity." A discussion between Bruno Latour, Eva Lin, Martin Guinard formed the starting point of their contribution on the **Taipei Biennale 2020, "You and I Don't Live on the Same Planet.**" The discussion tackles questions of planetary climate disaster and sets up to form a new understanding of "geo"-politics, and to "propose a thought experiment through the format of an exhibition." Defne Ayas and Natasha Ginwala are compelled to rethink, through the **13th Gwangju Biennale** named *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning*, in what way "civic models and practices of care will emerge in the aftermath of COVID-19." Ekaterina Degot responds to the questionnaire with a critique of contemporary art discourse based on colonial, gender, and economic conditions and inequalities. Degot's starting point is the common historical context of **steirischer herbst**—the yearly festival she directs—and **documenta**, both originating out of a Cold War political climate. Steirischer herbst follows the trajectory of the "avant-garde," but is at the same time locally rooted in a conservative bourgeois setting.
Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung's contribution is a conversation with Dorothee Richter about his concept for the **Sonsbeek Quadriennial 2020**—currently postponed. Whilst Sonsbeek's general history is rather more of an art festival dealing with social questions within public art in public spaces, this year's iteration under the name *Force Times Distance* examines the role of labor and its sonic ecologies. Yung Ma's contribution explores his conceptions for the curation of the **Seoul Mediacity Biennale**, suggesting that popular media strategies may be a potential learning field for outreach programmes in the visual arts. Another thread Ma explores is escapism, which has notionally changed in its impact since the COVID-19 emergency.
Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, curators of ***OsloBIENNALEN First Edition 2019–2024***, a new biennial that launched in the Norwegian capital in 2019. The co-curators speculate what a lasting structure for Oslo's art in

public space may mean, expanding the duration of the first iteration to five years and attempting to create new exhibitionary encounters and forms in a contested public sphere. Raluca Voinea wishes for a strong engagement of a Biennial with its local context otherwise in her view this "can be like those international conferences which take place in hotel lobbies and include one or two local speakers for courtesy and which only use the city infrastructure like any other branch of the tourism industry." Răzvan Ion argues how the **Bucharest Biennale** came into being, and how new technologies have to be scrutinized when developing new formats that can re-envision the future for culture and society.

3 Havana—Biennials of Resistance

Gerardo Mosquera examines in his paper "**The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts**" the pivotal role of the Bienal de La Habana in introducing new elements into the biennial format. Changing an oftentimes representational exhibitory model into a discursive environment, Mosquera lays out the complex contexts of the first three editions between 1984 and 1989, navigated within a regime of political representation and postcolonial legacies. Amy Bruce examines biennial historiography in her text "**#00Bienal de La Habana Walks This Way**," using example of previous official Havana biennials and its independent, artist-initiated counterpart, **#00Bienal de La Habana**. As proposed by curator Carlos Basualdo, Bruce suggests that biennials are inherently "unstable institutions." Agustina Andreoletti delves into the history of the Bienal de São Paulo and the exceptional role of the 3rd Havana Biennial in "**A New Change of Course—Distributed Biennialism in Latin America**." The 3rd Havana Biennial, according to Andreoletti, created a new precedent for biennial formats, commencing a tradition concentrated on discourse and knowledge production strategies. With this historical outline, Andreoletti scrutinizes three contemporary biennials from South America: BienalSur, #00Bienal/ Bienal Sin 349, and La Bienal en Resistencia 2019 with a special emphasis on the "lighter" structure of these diverse biennials. Anita Orzes examines the history of the Havana Biennial in "**Curatorial Networks: The Havana Biennial and the Biennials in the South**," which for its third iteration in 1989, according to Orzes, abandoned the "Western biennial format" of separating artists by their nationalities and instead proposed the setting up of workshops and theoretical meetings alongside the exhibition. The article reflects critically on biennials adjusting to a narrative of Eurocentric perspectives in art history and exhibition-making.

4 Biennials Between Hegemony and Disobedience

Bart Van Meeteren and Lara Wissing in "**Biennials and Hegemony: Experiences from the Thai Laboratory**" critically analyze the premise of biennials as hegemonic machines through Gramsci's usage of "hegemonies as situated historic and geographic 'settlements' that are actively constructed and maintained by factions of a society that make up a 'historic bloc'." Van Meeteren and Wissing scrutinize ways in which very recently established biennials in Thailand are balanced between ideas of nation, religion, and monarchy with notions of authentic 'Thainess' foregrounded. Melody Du Jingyi and Wilson Yeung Chun Wai explore in "**'Tactic' and 'Execution': Reflections on the Curatorial Dialogues of the 12th Shanghai Biennale**" the historical context and today's adjustments of the Shanghai Biennale—founded in 1996—as the first biennial of contemporary art in China. While the biennial is rooted in an avant-garde tradition (the first iteration followed the large-scale Chinese Avant- Garde Exhibition in 1989), the biennial is now operated under strict governmental supervision. In Xinming Xia's paper, "**The Yinchuan Biennale: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Artistic Practices Linking from the East to the West**," the author examines

the history and context of the Yinchuan Biennale, a Chinese biennial established with themes of ecology and diversity alongside the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. Sarat Maharaj's co-curating of the third Guangzhou Triennial in 2008 makes us aware of a postcolonial imperative that "has generated its own restrictions that hinder the emergence of artistic creativity and fresh theoretical interface." Maharaj's catalogue essay, "***Farewell to Postcolonialism*, Towards a Post-Western Modernity**," expresses a certain unease about postcolonial critical tools ushering in their own hegemonic dominance. Patrick D. Flores describes his aim of setting up and artistically directing the 2019 Singapore Biennale in "**Time to Unlearn: Urgency and Practical Intelligence in the Southeast Asian Museum**." Flores reflects on Southeast Asia's history by escaping the traditional colonial narratives of the West, instead looking into "the civilizational discourses of China and India, Catholicism and Islam [...] and dense natural history that is close to the level of the Amazon." In the text, "**Freeing the Weights of the Habitual**," by Raqs Media Collective, the New Delhi-based artists and curators (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) ask: "Are we implicitly trapped within an already assumed intellectual and cultural narratology? And: Are we continuously crafting ways of doing things that keep certain tendencies at bay and working out modalities that can bring in different kinds of co-habitation? And: What is the mechanism—and how do we seek it—of "freeing" the weights of habitual narrative entrapments?" The text builds from an observation by Vietnamese American writer Ocean Vuong speaking about the thinking process behind his new book, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*.

"**Tomorrow There Will Be More of Us: Art as a Contact Zone**" by Sven Christian examines South African biennials, namely both iterations of the Johannesburg Biennale—*Africus* (1995) and *Trade Routes: History and Geography* (1997)—and their spiritual successor CAPE 07. Christian describes how a sudden paucity of funding provided opportunities for more experimental and locally embedded exhibition formats. The contribution is initiated through the prism of the current Stellenbosch Triennale 2020 and its complex metaphors of sickness and healing. Yacouba Konaté examines the "**The Invention of the Dakar Biennial**" and suggests that the Dakar Biennial was launched for the promotion of African artists and artists of the continent. Through promoting alternative contexts and exhibition structures for non-Western art, Konaté suggests that the Biennial can help us rethink conventional classifications in the realm of art history. Conceptual artist, sculptor, painter, writer, and curator Rasheed Araeen's essay, "**Dak'Art 1992-2002: The Problems of Representation, Contextualistion, and Critical Evaluation in Contemporary African Art**" examines the complexity of staging a biennial of visual art in Senegal and its implications for cultural autonomy and nation-building in the postcolonial era.

"**Biennials and their Siblings: Towards an Interdisciplinary Discourse on Curating Performance**" authored by Brandon Farnsworth observes a shift in biennial discourses, bringing the field closer to music and theatre festivals by discussing their shared common history. Farnsworth's argument takes up as case studies the newly established *osloBIENNALEN 2019-2024* and Florian Malzacher's event project *Truth is Concrete* at steirischer herbst (2012). Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg Tverbakk discuss their ambition of setting up a new institution whilst shaping the first edition of osloBIENNALEN with Anna Manubens. Conjecturing a future biennial model, the osloBIENNALEN—a five-year-long endeavor—concentrates on the production of artworks in the public sphere, which has so far tended to avoid commissioned works from big name artists. Robert E. D'Souza's article "**Before, During, After Biennale**" considers the overlapping experiences of both artistic inclusion and critical academic

engagement in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India and the recently launched osloBIENNALEN in Norway. These biennials are considered in terms of their specific characteristics and contexts in relation to engaging with locality and public space. D'Souza considers the attendant issues, complexities, and "biennial effects" against a developing globalized critical biennial discourse and how biennial 'knowledge' and 'genealogies' might have impacted the practice for those engaged in developing these two art biennials.

Nora Sternfeld reflects in "**Museum of Burning Questions. Negotiating with Reality at the 2016 Bergen Assembly**" on the realities of her role and ambitions as Artistic Director of the 2016 Bergen Assembly in Norway. Teobaldo Lagos Preller sheds light on two recent biennials in "**Bergen Assembly 2019, 11th Berlin Biennale 2020, the Virus, Life, and New Places**." Both initiatives may have common curatorial and artistic strategies such as concepts of solidarity, affectivity, and cultural agency, encouraging changes to biennials and their formats.

Panos Kompatsiaris examines the idea of enabling resistant narratives to neoliberalism through dialogical and participatory works in his paper "**Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials**." By investigating such dilemmas of the "biennial phenomenon," the article lays out the incongruities and potentials of biennials within the current political-economic context. The interview with María Berríos, Renata Cervetto, Lisette Lagnado, and Agustín Pérez Rubio by Katerina Valdivia Bruch, titled "**11th Berlin Biennale: On the Human Condition**," taps into a process-based, feminist curatorial approach of the Berlin Biennale team with its themes of care, vulnerability, affectivity, and solidarity. Their aim is to create sustainable relations and commitment toward the city and its people. Daniela Labra's contribution, "**Processual and transcultural: the 11th Berlin Biennale and the 34th São Paulo Biennial**," compares the curatorial concepts, contexts, and processes of 11th Berlin Biennale and the 34th São Paulo Biennial—whose openings both had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ana Paula Cohen's "**Post-Colonial or Neo-Colonialism? A Reflection on the 'World Biennial Forum' in São Paulo**,"[1] the curator and writer questions the supposedly universalist trajectory of replicating a homogenized global art. Cohen criticizes the World Biennial Forum and its organizer, the *Biennial Foundation,* as an endeavor to centralize a largely non-homogeneous field.

In "**The Modern Paradigm and the Exhibitionary Form: The Case of 'Altermodern**,'" Catalina Imizcoz scrutinizes Tate Triennial's fourth, and last, edition. Imizcoz focuses on modernity's ideological infrastructure by critiquing the curatorial narrative put forward by its artistic director Nicolas Bourriaud. In Giulia Coletti's article, "**Overwriting: In Praise of a Palimpsestuous Criticality**," the author suggests using the palimpsest as a curatorial concept, and with this, as a "fragile, aggregative, and disruptive potential of interrupted narratives," of retrieving historical layers and questioning "geopolitical hegemonies particularly in Europe." Coletti highlights this hopeful method of re-establishing proximity with singularities for the transnational biennial **Mediterranea 19 – Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean** scheduled to be held in San Marino in 2021. Miriam La Rosa examines the formation of the iterant biennial format Manifesta in "**A Guest on the Edge: Manifesta and the Quest for European Unity and Solidarity**." La Rosa assesses the last two iterations in Sicily (2018) and Marseille (2020) and interrogates the initial idea of Manifesta—a spiritual successor to French artist Robert Filliou's *The Biennial of Peace*—which is set up independently of their host

cities. La Rosa argues that these projects may struggle with their long-term desire for bringing together a sustaining relationship between local art scenes and other European regions. "**A Planetary Garden in Palermo: Manifesta 12 as Ambassador for the New Politics of Aesthetics?**" by Nathalie Zonnenberg tackles Manifesta 12, the travelling European biennial format that highlighted the theme of migration for its 2019 edition in Palermo. The essay follows the question: To what extent can biennials be regarded as political instruments in their most direct sense? "**The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence**," co-written by the Manifesta 12 Creative Mediators Bregtje van der Haak, Andrés Jaque, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, and Mirjam Varadinis, presents Manifesta 12's concept of a garden as a metaphor for coexistence. In **Omar Kholeif**'s interview, titled "**Curating the Revolution**," the curator and writer explores the 2013 iteration of Meeting Points. The seventh edition was curated by the curatorial collective WHW (What, How and for Whom?).

In Vasif Kortun's and Charles Esche's interview about the **9th Istanbul Biennial,** the curators explore the notion of "non-Western" biennials that present a new tendency: a relative distance from a purely commercial system and an engagement with local political conditions. In "**Chronosites**," curator Henk Slager suggests biennials function in rather speculative ways and in discursive environments, framing questions of artistic and political agendas, of im/possibilities, in/visibilities, and agency. In that context, Slager examines the Bucharest Biennale as a discourse production-oriented biennial with a history of experimenting in form and of artistic and curatorial thinking "in a multiplicity of modes and models." Răzvan Ion offers perspectives on biennials as civil society initiatives in "**Edit Your Future**." Ion suggests that biennials should be viewed "as independent civil society initiatives, consciously distanced from the calculating powers of the global art scene." Ion proposes that many biennials "have been realized through ongoing conflicts and crises that produced conceptual, visual, and functional knowledge providing us with many viewpoints in our quest for evocative and effectual biennales in any part of the world." Vasyl Cherepanyn announces the "**EAST EUROPE BIENNIAL ALLIANCE**," a newly established alliance of the Biennale Matter of Art in Prague, the Biennale Warszawa, the Kyiv Biennial, and OFF-Biennale Budapest. Tapping into the different historical formations of biennials in Eastern Europe—with their grass-roots approach, precariousness, and critical voice—and political concerns, the alliance intends to engage in a transnational collaboration and "inter-metropolitan friendship." Ksenija Orelj envisions the exhibition ***WE'RE OFF***, which should have been part of The 3rd Industrial Art Biennial (IAB) in Rijeka but was cancelled due to the shutdown triggered by the Coronavirus. The 'imagined exhibition' follows themes of labor conditions, and intends to remind us of the historical working-class struggles for an eight-hour workday, and new struggles of precarities in times of hyper-production.

5 documenta

Catherine David gives a brief overview on documenta's history in her introduction for the "**Short guide, *documenta X***"—the shorter publication for her *documenta X* catalogue. David highlights documenta's origin—started by local artist Arnold Bode—much in line with the Marshall Plan, exhibiting German's lost modernity, but entering into a much more complex network of exchanges after 1989. In his seminal text "**The Black Box**," the introduction to *Documenta11_Platform 5* by Okwui Enwezor, the poet and curator lays out his vision for *Documenta11* as an ultimately unfinished project with its five platforms ending in Kassel. Enwezor complicates the history of the avant-garde—which shaped documenta since its founding in 1955—and suggests another reading using postcolonial thought, which is in opposition to

postmodernism. The text also speaks about the ultimate breakdown of hegemonic Western ideology since September 11. Rime Fetnan analyzes the linguistic aspects of the curatorial discourse surrounding *documenta X* and *d11* in her essay "**Biennials and Cultural Difference: Between Critical Deconstruction and Essentialism**," implying that contemporary discourse, according to Fetnan, still retains Orientalist or primitive imaginaries. In "**How photography (re-)entered documenta**," Mona Schubert follows new media's—especially photography's—entry into art history through the lens of *documenta 5* and *documenta 6*. Sabeth Buchmann and Ilse Lafer examine ***Documenta 14*** in Athens and its legacy and effects on the city.

6 Venice Biennale—Representational Models

Beat Wyss provides bit-by-bit insights into his in-depth research project on the Venice Biennale. Launched in 2008 by the Swiss Institute of Art Research SIK SEA in "**Globalization of the Periphery: The Venice Biennale Project**," the research project critiques center–periphery relations of the history of contemporary art, as well as the "evolutionist, colonial notion of art history." Rafal Niemojewski, writing in *The Biennial Reader* (2010), argues in "**Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial**" that Havana has become the preeminent model for new biennials since its launch in the 1980s. In "**The Paradoxes of the Biennale**" by Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas, the authors scrutinize biennials through the prism of paradoxes, which are an essential feature, they claim. Bethwaite and Kangas suggest four aspects by which to analyze biennials: "the paradox of the many and the few; the paradox of money; the paradox of power; and the paradox of scale," and they examine the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale between the years 2011–2015 to unfold the entanglements between art and political and economic power. In "**Cyprus in Venice: Art, Politics, and Modernity at the Margins of Europe (A Case Study of National Representation in the Venice Biennale)**," author Louli Michaelidou unfolds the predicaments of "national representations" in biennial models, derived from the perspective of the Cyprus Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The author examines the complex task of representing a Greek Cypriot identity with the desire of attaining global recognition in a major international art exhibition. Alessia Basilicata takes up the journey to Venice through the cultural journals of how the USA Pavilion came into being, and how the pavilion found its identity in light of critics' judgment of no "national expression." "**Venice Biennale: A Showcase for the American Debut in the Global Art**" illustrates that an initial private approach relying on artistic exchange was transformed over time into representational identities of a state performing its role in arts and culture internationally.

Marco Baravalle suggests in "**ON THE BIENNALE'S RUINS?**," that the "populist neoliberal mayor of Venice Luigi Brugnaro, responds to the pandemic following the well known recipe of the shock economy: once the emergency is over, the motto will be 'as before, more than before', meaning: more tourism, more hotels, more cruise ships, more cuts to public services, more events to make up for the the time lost." Baravalle asserts: "While we all should be working in the direction of a general shift outside of the neoliberal model, it is yet urgent to start a collective reflection on how La Biennale and other institutions in the global art circuit should radically be transformed." Vittoria Martini reacts, with "**Venice, the Biennale and the Bees**," wholeheartedly to the (announcement of the) postponement of the next Venice Biennale (both architecture and art have been postponed to 2021 and 2022, respectively). Martini examines the historical changes of the presidency of Paolo Baratta, which ended in February 2020 after two decades, and suggests a renewal of the Venice Biennale as laid out in 1974 with an emphasis on critical debate and stronger participation by the public.

Notes

1 Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller, "Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle," in *STARTING FROM VENICE. STUDIES ON THE BIENNALE,* ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milan: Et Al. Edizione, 2010), 50.
2 See: Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, eds., *OnCurating* 39 / *Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018* (June 2018)
3 Wyss, Scheller, "Comparative Art History," 51.
4 Ibid., 52.

European Influenza
Daniel Knorr

European Influenza, 2005.
Materialization: Variable dimensions,
51st *Venice Biennale,* Romanian Pavilion

The Romanian Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale was left empty, showing traces of past exhibitions, and the backdoor was opened to provide access to the city's public life. The first materialization of the work, a 1,000-page reader with critical texts on the expansion of the European Union (edited by Marius Babias), was on display at the entrance of the pavilion. The work was also materialized by visitors, the media, and art professionals, who talked about it in discussions, reports, notes, writings, and media coverage.

Daniel Knorr, born 1968 in Bucharest, lives and works in Berlin and Hong Kong. His conceptual, often participatory approaches repeatedly raise the issue of historical, socio-political, economic, and biopolitical phenomena in the context of art. In different genres he appropriates, transfers and materializes states of past, present and future.

FUCK YOU, Eu.ro.Pa!

1
Biennale Discourse

The Globalization of Art and the "Biennials of Resistance": A History of the Biennials from the Periphery[1]

Oliver Marchart

1. Biennialization between Glamour and Lure

One important aspect of so-called globalization is a process that could be described as the *decentralization of the West*. It's only recently that we in the West have become aware that the rise of China and young Latin American nations (first and foremost Brazil), and the growing importance of the Pacific Rim in relation to the North Atlantic regions, have brought about a multipolar world order that has substantially relativized the standing of the so-called West. In order to understand this shift of forces, we have to look at more than just economic indicators. It also needs to be understood as a struggle for hegemony, that is, a struggle for consensus and consent: for a specific legitimate yet imaginary cartography of our world. This symbolic struggle is simultaneously carried out in local, national and transnational contexts. Within this struggle, the art field plays a crucial, and perhaps even a cutting-edge role — one that remains concealed from view as long as the questions asked are solely concerned with the economic and not the hegemonic function of the art field. More than any other institution in the art field, biennials mediate the local, national and transnational. In this context, biennials can also be called "hegemonic machines", which link the local to the global within the field of symbolic struggles for legitimation.[2]

Today, there are an estimated 100 to 200 biennials, which fulfil a wide array of functions. Many contribute to marketing cities or strengthening the tourist industry. They assist in the consolidation of cultural infrastructures in metropolises, making them a more attractive location for businesses located in these places. Smaller towns or those located on the periphery of larger cities seek to draw attention to themselves by putting on biennials. As critic Simon Sheikh puts it, the advantage of the biennial format is that it is where "the lure of the local meets the glamour of the global."[3] This reference to the biennial as a place of "lure" and "glamour" already confirms that it's not enough to examine biennials through a purely economic lens. Biennialization not only facilitates the accumulation of capital, it also aids in constructing local, national and continental identities. In reference to this, the biennial format, as has often been observed, directly links up with that of the World Fair, which provided institutional backing for the internal *nation building* of the colonial and industrial nations during the nineteenth century. World Fairs were colossal hegemonic machines of a globally dominant Western culture.

Within this historical context, the global was conceived of through a lens of competing national — i.e. colonial — states and therefore from a perspective firmly rooted in the West. That being said, even if one considers the World Fair to be the forerunner of the biennial format — particularly the first one ever, which took place in Venice in 1895 —, the globalization of the biennial format has nonetheless substantially transformed it. It is no longer merely a format in which former colonial nations of the West bask in the glamour of their own artistic production. On the contrary, worldwide biennialization has instead contributed to decentralizing the West. For this reason, biennialization cannot simply be read as an ideological reflex to economic globalization, but instead, at the very least, also as part of decolonization struggles — which certainly did not end with the era of decolonization (especially in the post-war era), but carried on for a long time afterwards, as many former colonies continued to strive, also symbolically, for emancipation. Thus, we may currently be witnessing the dawn of a new era, where (some of) the tables are starting to turn, as crisis countries like Portugal and Spain now find themselves asking for assistance from their former colonies in Latin America. In the art field, the most prominent cases of this are so-called peripheral biennials and the struggles around the legitimacy and status of non-Western art. Not without good reason did Ranjit Hoskote, co-curator of the Gwangju Biennale in 2008, speak of "Biennials of Resistance", and demand

that a "counter-Venetian" history of the biennial be told. Such a history would also consider the emergence of the São Paulo Biennale, the Triennale-India, the Havana Biennial, the Asia-Pacific Biennale, the Gwangju Biennale and the Johannesburg Biennale:

> "All of the manifestations of the biennials of resistance that I have enumerated here articulate what we may term the emergence of a global South, a network of sites of cultural production sharing common questions, themes, and, indeed, a common precariousness. Observe that these platforms take their stand on the ground of newly evolving regionalities — whether mobilized under the sign of Latin American and Caribbean solidarity, of Afro-Asian unity, of a post-Cold War position of Asia-Pacific solidarity, or of an emancipatory politics that has transcended long-standing antagonisms, as in post-apartheid South Africa. All these experiments, as well as the biennials of resistance that continue to extend themselves despite prevailing constraints, mark a cumulative counterpoint to the Venice Biennial as the universal template for the biennial as form and medium. Their existence demonstrates that there is a substantial non- and perhaps even counter-Venetian history of the biennial form that has yet to be narrated."[4]

This is certainly not the place to outline such a heterodox history of the biennial, which has yet to be written in any case. And even if it had been, it would be impossible to tell it in just one singular article or lecture. I will therefore keep to a few aspects that, in my opinion, are crucial to writing such a history of the biennial.

2. Anti- and Postcolonial Biennials

A brief genealogy of anti- and postcolonial biennials already illustrates the magnitude of the contribution biennials have made in the artistic decentralization of the West. The story begins in 1951 with the founding of the São Paulo Biennial, which still based on the Venetian model of national pavilions. Although the first Biennials were more focused on retrospectives and European modernity, as time went on, they increasingly included non-Western nations — for instance, the 1954 edition included contributions from Indonesia, Israel and Egypt, and in the years that followed, from India, Lebanon, the Philippines, Senegal, Taiwan and Vietnam, among others: "By taking part in the Biennial, these emerging nations not only confidently presented 'their own' cultures, they also inserted themselves into an international art history — even if this has only rarely been acknowledged by Western modernity."[5] With their newly won independence, many of those nations also utilized the art field as an institutional platform to demonstrate their sovereignty. On the other hand, the São Paulo Biennial also lent the Venetian biennial model a postcolonial note.

Other biennials and festivals were established in far more radical ways. A prime example is the 1966 *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* in Dakar. Senegalese president and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor initiated the festival as an institutional flagship of the *négritude* movement. Its objective was to provide a platform for all the facets of African art to be presented independently thereby reinforcing the self-confidence of the emerging African nations. Numerous other biennials, including the Alexandria Biennial (1955), Triennale-India (1968), Havana Biennial (1983), Cairo Biennial (1984) and Istanbul Biennial (1987), were situated somewhere in between these two models — a postcolonial version of the Venetian model and an anti-colonial model that instrumentalized "non-Western" art traditions in the name of identity politics. In Africa, at the end of apartheid the Johannesburg Biennale (1995) was established, (of which there were only two editions), and in 1992 DAK'ART, a *Biennale de l'art africain contemporain*, was founded in Dakar.

There are a few interesting points to be made here. It has often been noted that biennials emerge in countries that have yet to come to terms with national traumatic events, such as wars, civil wars or dictatorships. This is especially true in the case of documenta in Kassel (1955), founded in the post-war era, the post-apartheid biennial in Johannesburg (1995 and 1997) and the Gwangju Biennale (1995), where, during the military dictatorship, hundreds of students had been massacred. Even so, it should not be forgotten that both Johannesburg and Gwangju, although their national characteristics may vary, have been inscribed into a network of "peripheral" biennials, while Kassel on the other hand is perceived as one of the "centres" of the Western art world, if only once every five years. Although these biennials may seem comparable along one axis of interpretation, they may appear worlds apart along another axis, which is why Hoskote calls the Gwangju and Johannesburg Biennials, "Biennials of Resistance", but not, for instance, documenta. Here, the postcolonial axis is the most relevant for us. Even within this same axis, there are still differences among the biennials of the periphery.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to seriously refer to some of the more recently founded biennials as Biennials of Resistance, even if they do favour local and national artistic production over that of the West. For instance, in 2006, the Singapore Biennial was founded during a meeting between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Although Singapore's intention had been to signal openness, for the duration of the biennial, a general ban was placed on demonstrations in public places.[6] Similarly, the recent wave of newly founded biennials in Gulf States with authoritarian governments hardly has anything in common with postcolonial struggles for independence on a national, regional or continental level. Authoritarian regimes utilize the biennial format to glamourize their image and prepare the tourism industry for the post-oil era. These biennials are generally void of any impetus for resistance. Instead, the impetus is diverted to foreign countries, seeing as the biennials in Arabic countries — such as the Sharjah Biennial — are often used a platform for anti-Israel propaganda. It would be utterly amiss to identify any anti-colonial sentiment within such projects, because they do nothing more than comply with the anti-semitic state doctrine of the theocratic regimes that provide the financial backing for these biennials.

3. The Havana Biennial

In principle, it is necessary to differentiate between postcolonial "Biennials of Resistance" and those that, in reality, are no more than biennials of dominance, corruption, theocracy or repression,[7] even if they are held on the global periphery. The Havana Biennial is a paradigmatic example: though differentiating emancipation from domination is often difficult, it can still be done, even from *within* countries with an authoritarian regime. Although it was Fidel Castro who spontaneously had the idea for the Havana Biennial, until the third festival it had been relatively autonomous in terms of curatorial decisions. The programmatic goal of the Havana Biennial was to present art from the so- called Third World, i.e. from the global South. The goal was already realized in the festival's second edition in 1986. In Gerardo Mosquera's words, this edition was "the first global contemporary art show ever made: a mammoth, uneven, rather chaotic bunch of more than fifty exhibitions and events presenting 2,400 works by 690 artists from 57 countries."[8] It was the third Biennial, however, that made Havana a point of reference in the history of biennials — and, albeit for completely different reasons, its role as a reference is comparable to that of documenta 5, directed by Harald Szeemann.

During the 1989 Havana Biennial, the orientation toward global art production from mainly non-Western countries coincided with a number of innovative and momentous curatorial decisions. Firstly, it gave up on presenting artists by countries, and no prizes were awarded. Thus, the last remnants of the Venice Biennial model were fully eradicated. The most crucial decision, however, was another: the invitation not only went to artists from the global periphery, but also to diasporic artists living in the global centre. Mosquera, head curator, emphasized the importance of this step, as it enabled the concept of the Third World to be expanded, allowing a complex image of a world shaped by migration to emerge. This was clearly a sign that the global South had long since arrived in the North and West.

From this perspective, the Havana Biennial is markedly different from the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, which took place that same year at the *Centre Pompidou*, one of the "centres" of the Western art world. Martin's exhibition is frequently cited as having launched the "rediscovery" of non-Western art. This was mainly because *Magiciens de la Terre* abandoned the colonialist phantasm of primitivism and refrained from viewing non-Western art exclusively in terms of its reception within European modernity — which was still very much the case for the infamous 1984 *Primitivism* exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art. Instead, *Magiciens de la Terre* chose to level the playing field with an equal presentation of 50% widely known Western artists and 50% largely unknown non-Western artists. However, if, instead of comparing *Magiciens de la Terre* with Primitivism, we compare it with the Havana Biennial, which took place around the same time, the shortcomings of *Magiciens* are clear. As Rachel Weiss comments, unlike *Magiciens de la Terre*, the Havana Biennial largely refrained from presenting traditional objects of art as if they were contemporary art: "The Bienal [sic!] didn't try to draw an equivalence between those objects and the ones made by artists; unlike 'Magiciens de la Terre', it didn't orchestrate that convergence under the alibi of some universal creative spirit. It didn't claim every contributor as a magician, but rather as a citizen, and so the zone it sketched was not some neutrally shared terrain, but rather a vexed ground as much comprised of clashing particularities as of cohering accords."[9]

Observing the developments in this area, we can see that, while *Magiciens de la Terre* functioned as a kind of

"gate opener" for non-Western art within the Western art field, it was criticized across the board, and offered virtually nothing to build upon in terms of display and curatorial philosophy. Surprisingly, the concurrent model developed on the periphery turned out to be more adaptable. One of the reasons is certainly that the Havana Biennial did not subscribe to the notion that non-Western art had remained untouched by Western modernity, rendering it comparable only with a supposedly universal spiritual creativity. Instead, there were first attempts at addressing the "multiple modernities" emerging on the global periphery.[10] Within this context the Havana Biennial not only set itself apart from the Western desire for "authentic" art, but also from the paradigm of *anti*-colonial projects that also catered to identity politics-based notions of indigenous art, untouched by the West. Notwithstanding the critique of Western dominance, the discussions in Havana departed from the notion that it was even possible to draw a clear line between the West and the rest. In this way, the focus within theory, art production and curating shifted from anti- to postcolonial strategies. This enabled a critique from within the frequently nationalist projects in former colonies, which attempted to ideologically substantiate their independence.

Under the auspices of this postcolonial critique, even the early São Paulo Biennial, with its orientation toward Western art ideals, appears less as a perpetuation of colonial relations of dependence and more a part of a strategic movement to set oneself apart from nationalistic identity politics in one's own country. It would be misleading to read this orientation toward Western art as "merely mimicked copies and pale imitations ... of the authentic thing as it is constituted in the West."[11] In this light, Okwui Enwezor suggests:

> "The very notion of proximity to the West as a strategy enunciated within the dialectical framework of the relations of power inherent in the development of the discourse of artistic modernity is a double-edged sword. Such a sword cuts a swath between the revolutionary and emancipatory portents of the postcolonial critique of master narratives and the nationalist rhetoric of tradition and authenticity. From the foregoing then, we can say quite clearly that the periphery does not simplistically absorb and internalize what it does not need. Nor does it vitiate its own critical power by becoming subservient to the rules of the center. In the wake of the globalization of culture and art, the postcolonial response to it has produced a new kind of space, a discourse of open contestations which does not spring merely from resistance, but rather is built on an ethics of dissent."[12]

In 2002, documenta 11, directed by Enwezor, was the first truly postcolonial biennial to be held in one of the "centres" of the Western art field, taking up and working with this dissident understanding of non-Western art. For Enwezor, it was not only out of the question to take the position of the neocolonial discoverer of non-Western art, he also considered the notion of the "non-Western artist" basically a *contradictio in adjecto* — or, at the very least, a Western projection.[13] Not only does the Western search for so-called "authentic" art outside the Western art market's systems of circulation hold the danger of fuelling the notion of the so-called indigenous "Other", it also fails to recognize the agency of non--Western artists in their active appropriations of Western modernity, making these artists less non-Western than the West would like them to be.

4. The Centrality of the Periphery—A Change in Perspective

If it were true that the Havana Biennial model – more so than the curatorial philosophy of *Magiciens de la Terre* – has proven to be more fit to build upon and effective in the long term, would this not imply that biennial history be completely reconsidered from the ground up? I believe it is time for a change in perspective — not least because it also offers a way out of what I would like to call the *provincialism of the centre*. Living in the centre alone does not constitute provincialism. Provincialism is the province's unshakable belief in itself as the centre. However, the unshakable belief that one lives in the centre remains provincial even if one actually lives in the centre. Hardly any city in the world is more provincial than New York. It is with good reason that Adriano Pedrosa observes that putting on purely "native" — meaning local or US-American — exhibitions in places like MoMA/PS1 and the Whitney Museum reinforce the notion that the world outside New York (or the USA) hasn't got much to offer, because the interesting artists all live in Brooklyn anyhow.

And yet, expanding its outlook on the world would be nothing but beneficial for the New York art scene. In 2012, the Triennial at the New Museum appeared as a glimmer of hope, as Pedrosa — somewhat prematurely — puts it: "In a city overcrowded with exhibitions and overflowing with provincial self-importance, curator

Eungie Joo effectively brought a sliver of the global into the profoundly local cake. She looked beyond the North Atlantic pond and presented many artists for the first time in the United States. Only five out of 50 were U.S. natives."[14] By presenting many non-Western artists, unknown in the United States, Joo followed in the footsteps of Enwezor's D11, and curated a "postcolonial" exhibition at the heart of the centre. The hope of de-provincializing the centre, however, remained unfulfilled, as the Triennial encountered considerable resentment from the New York art scene. Just like when rumours spread through the grapevine in a small town, the common opinion was quickly settled: the Whitney Biennial (curated by Jay Sanders and Elisabeth Sussman), which took place at the same time and showed mostly well-known US-American artistic positions, was much more interesting, and the *New Museum* Triennial wasn't even worth going to.[15] This is a prime example of the provincialism of the centre.

The provincial resentment of the "centre" should not however lead us to falsely conclude that exhibitions with a global focus are *passé*. In reality, the opposite is true; they are happening everywhere. The West just has yet to realize its own decentralization. What this means for the exhibition and biennial industry is that, for some time now, "peripheral" biennials have succeeded in presenting themselves in much more engaging ways and are starting to outshine their counterparts in the "centre." In this regard, Sabine B. Vogel observed that the Istanbul Biennial — in terms of professional accreditations and resonance in international debates — has become the most popular biennial after Venice: "The Istanbul Biennial has increasingly established itself as the centre of global art that addresses themes in the field of contention between politics and economics."[16] The art field's coordinate system — just like global power relations — is starting to shift, to turn. This does not mean that Venice or Kassel will lose their significance, but rather that they will clearly be seen as what they really are: an expression of a specific European provincialism[17] long embedded in a North Atlantic cultural defence alliance, which became obsolete when the Iron Curtain fell. Although the phases of the symbolic, economic, military and political decentralization of the West may not be taking place simultaneously, they are still very much entangled in one another.

5. A Counter-History

Biennial history therefore needs to be re-written from the periphery. Within this history, if the Havana Biennial were a significant reference, this would not only be because of its curatorial decisions. The 1989 edition tried out a concept that is found in the philosophies behind many biennials today: it rid itself of the corset of an art exhibition in the strict sense. It began incorporating urban spaces, experimenting with different event formats, and opening up possibilities for participation:

> The third Bienal [sic!], like the second one, I insist, was not conceived as an exhibition but as an organism consisting of shows, events, meetings, publications and outreach programmes. It assembled a big main international exhibition, eleven thematic group shows (three by Cuban artists and eight by artists from other countries), ten individual exhibitions (two by Cuban artists and eight by artists from other countries), two international Conferences and eight international Workshops.[18]

By takng what was once just an exhibition and unravelling it into an array of various sub-exhibitions, venues and event formats, a model was created in Havana that is still distinctive of today's biennials. The main focus is not placed on the spectacle as such — which a biennial certainly also always is — but rather on the investigative and discursive interest in a specific problematic field. The 1989 Havana Biennial had already taken on a theme – *Tradition and Contemporaneity*– that was reflected in the above-mentioned discussions concerning anti-colonial politics and non-Western modernities. This self-reflexive mode enabled the project and the possibilities that the Havana Biennial opened up to become the focus of the debates themselves. (Similarly, the 28th São Paulo Biennial in 2008, curated by Ivo Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen, took the biennial format itself as a theme — meaning the function of biennials within the global art field —, reexamining it under changed circumstances.)

Hardly any biennial that thinks anything of itself can get away with refraining from taking on a similar topic or leitmotif, no matter how loosely conceived. Although Havana was certainly not the first biennial with thematic contours, its theme was negotiated on a scale broader than ever before. If, through a Eurocentric lens, we were to consider Catherine David's 1998 dX — with its 100-day/100 guests programme — as "the" biennial that gave discourse a more substantial place within the programme than any previous biennial, one look at the Havana Biennial reveals another genealogy entirely. The "discursive turn" (Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 2010), which has gripped the exhibition field for years now, may have

actually come from the periphery and not the centre. As Rachel Weiss states:

> [T]he integration of a major international Conference into the Biennial's structure represents a decisive step towards conceiving of biennials as discursive environments, in which the actual display of artworks is part of a much broader project of research and knowledge production.[19]

This observation is important, because it forces us to rid ourselves, once and for all, of the notion of primitivism, the idea that art created outside of Europe is founded on feeling and not intellect. At any rate, such ridiculous notions can only exist because European awareness of the intellectual traditions and life in Latin America, Africa or Asia has been, and still is, extremely marginal.[20]

Okwui Enwezor's D11 finally challenged this primitivist notion in the "centre" as well. Enwezor purposefully placed Hanne Darboven, Bernd and Hilla Becher or the political conceptual art of Maria Eichhorn in a constellation with Latin American political conceptual art (Luis Camnitzer, Artur Barrio or Cildo Meireles) and the work of African artists such as Bruly Bouabré in order to dismantle the racist cliché that artists outside Europe are more "emotional", thus positioning Latin American and African art as *conceptual art*.[21] With the four discursive platforms that took place before the actual exhibition in Kassel, documenta was decentralized even further, and in a variety of ways. First of all, it shifted the outdated relationship between art and discourse. Although the greatest amount of the available resources still went into producing the exhibition itself, on a symbolic level, it was only one of the five platforms, therefore, the discursive formats (workshops and conferences) outnumbered it by far, on a symbolic level. *Thematically*, documenta was decentralized because the platforms were no longer concerned with debating the problems of the art field but rather questions such as democracy, truth, and reconciliation in transition societies (as in South Africa), the development of African megacities, or Caribbean *créolité* or creolization. *Spatially*, it was decentralized, because documenta was no longer only located in Kassel, as the discursive platforms took place in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, Lagos and St. Lucia. This led, if you will, to a de-Kasselization of Kassel. That is to say: the province that imagines itself to be the centre of the art world, albeit only once every five years, was decentred.[22]

6. Conclusion

Much points to the fact that the global history of the future is being written from today's periphery. The power of definition held by the West, which imagined itself as the centre of world affairs, is waning. Looking back, we are slowly beginning to understand that even in the past, the so-called periphery anticipated developments that would later be of great significance to the centre. I would not go so far as to say that a causal relation exists between the influence of the model of the third Havana Biennial and other biennials today, for instance. Jan Hoet's visit to the Havana Biennale left no obvious traces on documenta IX in 1992. The relations are more complex. The general process of the decentralization of the West makes the Havana Biennial's early and successful curatorial practices seem suddenly appealing elsewhere. The idea that an exhibition should create some form of interaction with the city where it takes place (and not to simply descend like a UFO); all of the current negotiations around "participation"; the renewed interest in strategies in art education within the context of the *educational turn*, which was incidentally already anticipated at the third Havana Biennial and didn't arrive in the centre until D11 and d12[23] — the oh so critical, discursive and politically savvy West cannot claim a patent for any of this.

The fact that artistic practice and its institutional vessels (such as biennials) are supposed to reflect their relations to the political and social context they are embedded in is, for the most part, widely accepted today, along with the notion that biennials should neither descend like UFOs nor be capitalized on for location policy goodies. This however does not mean it is not happening all over the place. Despite all the critique that can be made in terms of the economic-political function of biennials and the gentrification of "biennial art" — including charges that they themselves do not live up to their claims of *site specificity*, as it is often dealt with mechanically or using standardized methods (only to appear again like a UFO that just descended), or that they are not as political as they say they are — it should not be forgotten that biennials have decisively contributed to our current understanding of artistic practice as an instrument of social and political knowledge production. However, in terms of institutions within the art field, the most important steps have been taken not by the biennials of the West, but by those of the periphery. And, though he may be speaking *pro domo* as a biennial curator who is in high demand, I agree with Hou Hanru when he says:

> Biennial culture, I would argue, has become the most vital condition for the conception and production of contemporary art. Specifically conceived to reflect recent developments in art scenes and contexts, biennials provide freedom for artists to engage with changing social, political, and cultural realities, beyond the constraints of traditional museum and gallery exhibition models. Biennials are also opening up new public spaces for artistic production outside the dominant market.[24]

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Notes

1 A preliminary version of this essay was written as an inaugural lecture held upon my appointment as Professor of Sociology, with a focus on the sociology of art, at the Düsseldorf Art Academy on 15 January 2013. The version further expands on and radicalizes arguments presented in my book *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld* (Marchart 2008).
2 One could say they are a case in point for "glocalization." This artificial term was created in order to underscore the fact that globalization does not simply take place and become globalization; cf. Robertson, 1998. The local and the global are intricately entwined and both the local and the global, in equal measure, constantly need to be reconstructed.
3 Simon Sheikh. "Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility. Questions for the Biennial." in *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*. Issue The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon. 2009/Nr. 16, pp.66-79
4 Hoskote 2010, p. 312.
5 Vogel 2010, p. 41.
6 Vogel 2010, p. 100.
7 This includes all possible variations in between liberation and domination.
8 Mosquera 2011, p. 73.
9 Weiss 2011, p. 32.
10 Mosquera writes: "The event has always focused on modern and contemporary art, developing the notion of a plurality of active modernisms, and giving little room to traditional or religious aesthetic-symbolic productions, which at the time were frequently stereotyped as the authentic art created in Third World countries, while other work was disqualified as an epigonal Westernised production." Mosquera, 2011, p. 77.
11 Okwui Enwezor. *Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form* "Enacting the Diasporic Public Sphere: Mobility, Mediation and Proximity to the West." In: *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 438
12 Ibid, pp. 438-439.
13 This is no coincidence, considering that in reality a significant number of so-called "non-Western artists" live in Western metropolises.
14 Pedrosa 2012, p. 44.
15 This was indeed the case, but not regarding the artistic positions in a strict sense. The 2012 Whitney Biennial emptied out the entire fourth floor of the Whitney Museum to present "time based arts", which included dance. This allowed the "performative turn", and even with the "choreographic turn", which had both been a discernible part of the fine arts for a long time, to be put into practice. However, although somewhat isolated, the most interesting performative piece was a production at the rival exhibition in the New Museum. Salons: Birthright Palestine? by the Israeli group Public Movement consisted of a series of discursive-performative political "salons", with relatively strict choreographies and was, in my opinion, the most successful performance piece in recent years (and, incidentally, also the Triennial's most expensive production.)
16 Vogel 2010, p. 56.
17 I am speaking, more precisely, of a continental European provincialism, as documenta has no real significance in Great Britain, which also remains steeped in its own provincialism.
18 Mosquera 2011, p. 76.
19 [is missing in the original!]
20 Weiss 2011, p. 14.
21 I must add that, by now, these traditions have indeed come into contact with Western intellectual traditions. The concern here is not authenticity, but plain and simple recognition and acknowledgement of specific art and discourse produced in countries and regions beyond the North Atlantic.
Cf. Eulisse 2003.
22 Cf. For more on these decentralizations, see Marchart 2008.
23 Cf. schnittpunkt et al. 2012.
24 Hanru 2012, p. 45.

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Oliver Marchart is professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Vienna. He works in the intersecting fields of political theory and art theory. His books include: *Post-Foundational Political Thought. Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh University Press 2007); *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (edited with Simon Critchley, Routledge 2004); and the forthcoming *Post-Foundational Theories of Democracy. Re-Claiming Freedom, Equality, Solidarity* (Edinburgh University Press 2014).

Detox Dance
Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv

Detox Dance is a public performance performed in Square Dance manner. Our easy-to-learn dancing patterns have been inspired by movements of relaxation, martial arts and fragments of Roma Dances. Every participant is part of a liquid social sculpture. By moving together and sharing a common public space we celebrate a moment of common activities into a joyful becoming "The Future is Roma".

For the conference "Contemporary Art Biennials – Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency" Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv performed in the limits of the online form.

Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv (RJSaK) is the first artist collective in Switzerland and Europe to perform in public space and art institutions with performative means in order to make the current issues of the Roma visible. The Zurich based artist group works transdisciplinary with members from art, theater, music and design. Since their first intervention in a local art space in 2013, RJSaK has shown their work in Zurich at the Shedhalle, Corner College, Maxim Theater, Toni Areal, ZHdK, Kunsthaus, Johann Jacobs Museum, Helmhaus and in Basel at the Kunstmuseum. romajamsession.org

Art Worlds into Real Worlds: A Conversation with Alfredo Jaar[1]

Federica Martini

Federica Martini: In 1989, much critical debate was arisen around the *Magiciens de la Terre*. What was your experience as an artist participating in this show?

Alfredo Jaar: I received a letter from the curators inviting me. I assumed they had seen my work at the Venice Biennale in 1986 and in documenta the following year. They invited me to create a new work. At that time, I had just begun to investigate the dumping of European toxic waste in Africa, so I proposed that this could be my starting point; they accepted. They funded my first trip to the continent – a research trip to Nigeria. I had been interested in Africa for some time – focusing on the issue of media representation of Africa in the USA in particular – but I had never been able to afford a trip to the African continent. I had already started this methodology of traveling to a place, investigating a specific issue and then making work based on my research. For the Venice Biennale in 1986 I had visited the Brazilian Eastern Amazon and transformed my reportage about gold mining into an installation. I had decided to develop these kinds of international investigations as a response to the provincialism I perceived in New York, where I had been living since 1982.

Because I came from Chile people expected me to make work about Chile and I have always fought against that. I wanted to be free to focus on anything I wanted, just as North American and European artists do. I remember being afraid that the title of the exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, was too exotic, that works would be read the wrong way. But when I saw the list of invited artists and realized that artists I greatly respected were going to participate, like Hans Haacke, On Kawara, Alighiero Boetti and Giovanni Anselmo for example, then I felt it was safe to take part myself.

During the installation period Richard Long was working just across from my space in La Villette. I ran into Hans Haacke whom I had already met in New York. I knew well some of the South American artists such as Jose Bedia and Cildo Meireles. Cildo was someone that I admired and considered very important, but he did not exist in the European contemporary art world of 1989. He had participated in the Information exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970 but I believe *Magiciens* was one of his first shows outside our continent. Also close to my space was Huang Yong Ping and his washing machines, but there was no occasion to meet him. I met other artists only when I needed to borrow some tools. I was disappointed by the lack of social opportunities during the installation – it was very chaotic and there was no time. I certainly didn't have time to enjoy Paris – I didn't even see the second part of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou! There were some incredibly smart juxtapositions at La Villette, for instance between works by Richard Long and Esther Mahlangu. Facing it, the obvious question was to ask yourself why do we see some practices as exotic, primitive, or craft and other work, which is comparably made, as conceptual?

I was puzzled by the negativity of the critical reception of the show. It was frustrating that critics attacked the exhibition almost automatically, sometimes without even having seen the show, and focusing exclusively on the obvious neo-colonial perspective; too few bothered to ask artists from former colonies what the show meant for them. I think critics were suspicious because the show was taking place in Paris, given France's very problematic colonial history – I am certain that if exactly the same show had taken place in New York at that time the reception would have been very different. *Magiciens de la Terre* was without doubts an exhibition for its time; I really think it changed our small, pathetic, provincial art world. Finally, the fraud had been exposed. Before, an international exhibition meant ten Americans and a couple of Germans. In 1989 there was a huge amount of resistance to artists from other countries and cultures; basically, the doors were closed. After *Magiciens de la Terre* there could be no turning back; it was the first crack in the Western bunker of art.

Magiciens de la Terre started an irreversible process and it was the beginning of a very long and complex journey that will never end. The status quo today is definitely much better than in 1989, but the road ahead is still very long and difficult, as real change will happen only when structural transformations are made in the dominant institutions and media.

FM: Before 2013, when you presented *Venezia, Venezia* in the Chilean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, your interventions within perennial exhibitions were contextualised in 'stateless' situations, such as documenta 2002 and, in Venice, Aperto 1986, the African Pavilion (2007) or the Fear Pavilion (2009). It is obvious that the Venice Biennial national pavilion system belongs to another century and should be changed.

AJ: Why hasn't it changed? Because the art world is a perfect reflection of the geopolitical reality of our times, as simple as that. The increased focus on Chinese artists, for example, is nothing more and nothing less than the acknowledgement that China has become the second economy of the planet and that the art market axis is shifting towards Asia. The same explanation is valid for Indian artists. These are not new artists working on the scene, they simply were invisible until the economy of their respective countries became impossible to ignore.

As I wrote a few years ago, I am not advocating for the "art world" to correct the dire imbalances of the "real world," but I would like to suggest that every effort should be made not to replicate so perfectly those imbalances.

We should perhaps all declare ourselves stateless. That would certainly trigger a major change in the system. In a way we are all stateless. There isn't a single country in the world with which I identify myself ideologically, artistically, culturally or intellectually. I do identify with certain individual minds, intellectuals who have enlightened me with their thinking, but not with a country.

I have encountered so many people that previously thought I was African, or Italian, or Brazilian, or Angolan. When I returned from witnessing the Rwandan genocide, I went to the Rwandan embassy and requested a Rwandan passport in symbolic solidarity with their suffering. They refused, of course. But today I am designing the Memorial for the victims of the genocide in Kigali. Concerned by the fact I am white and non-African, I demanded the unequivocal support of the most important survivors organizations for my design before proceeding. People do not expect an artist born in Chile to be concerned by what happens in any other country. I find it shockingly normal. This is what makes me human. I identify with a little country called the Kalakuta Republic. It was created by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, one of the most extraordinary musicians of our time. I visited him at the Shrine in Lagos, Nigeria where he performed three nights per week. In the last concert I attended, he told us in the audience: "You Africans, listen to me as Africans. And you, non-Africans, listen to me with an open mind!"

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1 A first version of this conversation was published in Federica Martini, Vittoria Martini, *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials,* Milan: Postmediabooks, 2011. The text was updated in April 2020.

Alfredo Jaar is an artist, architect, and filmmaker who lives and works in New York. His work has been shown extensively around the world. He has participated in the Biennales of Venice (1986, 2007, 2009, 2013), Sao Paulo (1987, 1989, 2010,2020) as well as Documenta in Kassel (1987, 2002).

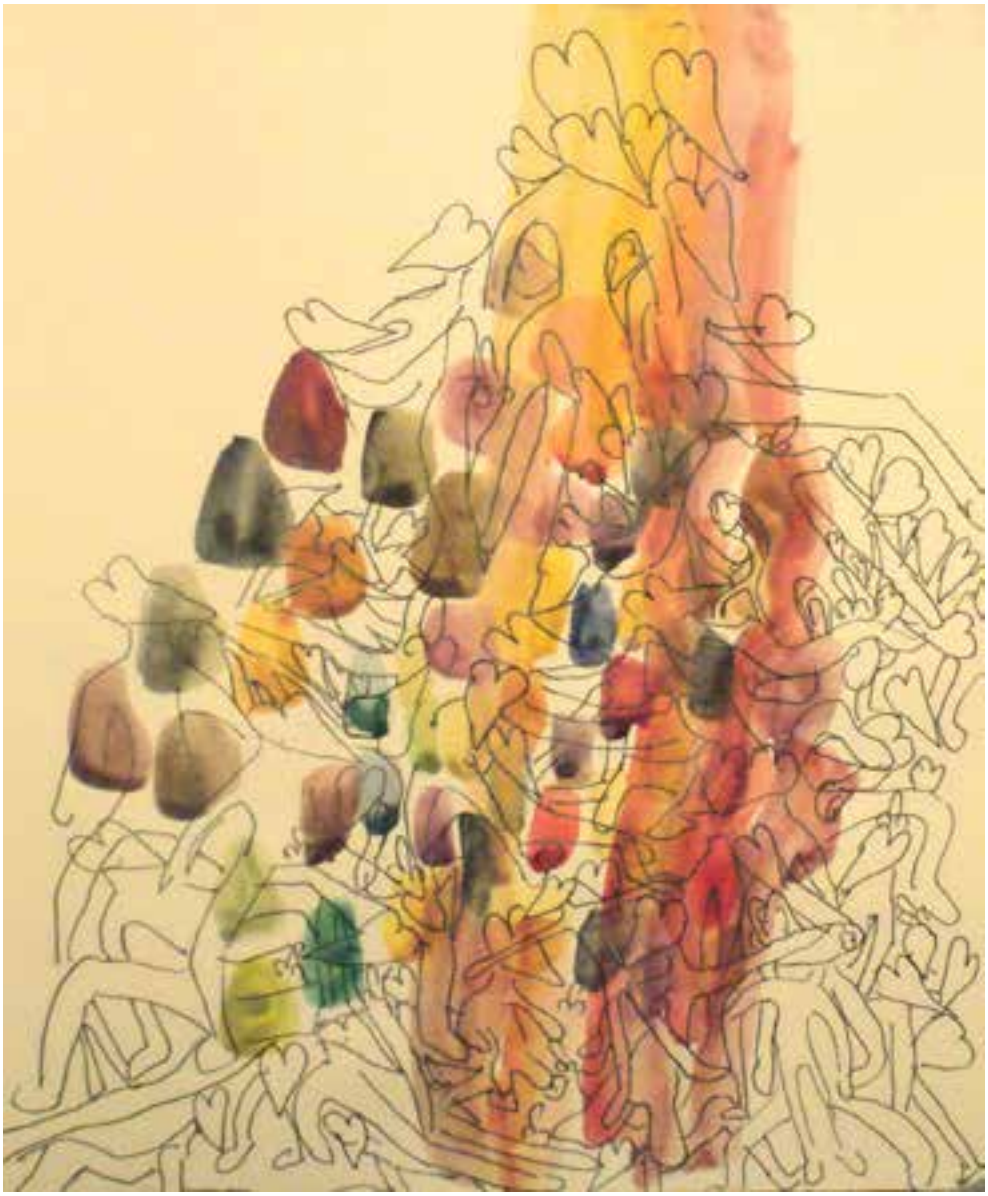
Important individual exhibitions include The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1992); Whitechapel, London (1992); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1994); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1995); and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2005).

Major recent surveys of his work have taken place at Musée des Beaux Arts, Lausanne (2007); Hangar Bicocca, Milan (2008); Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlinische Galerie and Neue Gesellschaft fur bildende Kunst e.V., Berlin (2012); Rencontres d'Arles (2013); KIASMA, Helsinki (2014) and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK (2017).

The artist has realized more than seventy public interventions around the world and over sixty monographic publications have been published about his work. He became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1985 and a MacArthur Fellow in 2000. He received the Hiroshima Art Prize in 2018 and the Hasselblad Award in 2020.

Federica Martini, PhD, is a contemporary art historian and curator. Since 2018 she is Head of the Visual Arts Department at the EDHEA School of Arts. Previously, she was Head of the MAPS Master of Arts in Public Spheres, and a member of the curatorial departments of the Castello di Rivoli, Musée Jenisch Vevey and MCBA/Lausanne. Publications include: *Pour Elle: Marguerite Burnat-Provins* (2018); *My PhD is my art practice. Notes on the Art PhD in Switzerland* (2017, with P. Gisler);*Tourists Like Us: Critical Tourism and Contemporary Art* (with V. Mickelkevicius, 2013); *Pavilions/Art in Architecture* (with R. Ireland, 2013); *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials* (with V. Martini, 2011).

Mice Insanity
Delia Popa



Mice Insanity, linocut print on Japanese rice paper, 54/4 cm, 2019, uneditioned yet.

Delia Popa
Her feminist art includes painting, drawing and prints, installation, video and performance, taking up important topics such as gender relations, power relations and the human-animal relationship. She is the co-founder and leader of ArtCrowd – Artists in Education, an arts organization committed since 2013 to creating positive change in society via art and education.
www.deliapopa.com

Inclusion and Exclusion in the Art World: A Sociological Account of Biennial Artists and Audiences

Christian Morgner

Abstract

The issue of participation is an important feature of democracy and is often debated in the context of biennials in terms of who takes part and who does not. This paper focuses on how participating artists, often described as 'biennale artists', are framed in the ongoing debate around a homogenizing biennial culture. It also addresses the nature of biennial audiences, which is largely overlooked in current debate and research in this area. Adopting a sociological perspective, the paper explores the wider structural patterns that regulate inclusion and exclusion in the art world.

Democracy and Biennials

The notion of democracy is often associated with biennials and can be seen to inform a foundation myth. Perhaps the most well-known case is the Gwangju Biennale, which has its origins in the Gwangju Democratization Movement, a people's uprising against the military dictatorship in 1980. Through the medium of the visual arts, the values of democracy, human rights, and peace associated with this movement led to the foundation of the Gwangju Biennale. Similarly, the Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung (General German Art Exhibition) in Dresden in 1946 was established in the aftermath of WWII as a perennial exhibition every three to four years. As well as its emphasis on concepts of freedom and peace, the exhibition sought to rehabilitate artists that the Nazi regime had excluded and dismissed as 'degenerate.'

Just as WWII prompted some European nation states to reconsider issues of inclusion and exclusion in the art world, Brazil's cultural and economic aspirations were expressed in part through a postwar commitment to artistic endeavors. The foundation of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1948 was followed by the foundation of the Bienal de São Paulo in 1951. In the opening pages of the catalogue,[1] its first artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado wrote that the biennial aimed "to put modern art of Brazil not simply in proximity but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world" and São Paulo "to conquer the position of an international artistic center." The phrase "living contact" expresses the vision of a humanistic relationship, having a voice and being listened to, connoting the exchanges of opinions, perspectives and arguments typically associated with democratic values. That statement also refers to "conquering"; adopting a less military tone, other newly founded biennials sought to overcome their country's peripheral status and to generate more international attention, and the dual proposition of contact and attention has underpinned biennials' further development. For instance, the second Havana Biennial in 1986 stressed its relationship with artists from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

A recurring feature of biennials is debate about democracy itself. One might think of Joseph Beuys's *Boxkampf für direkte Demokratie* [Boxing Match for Direct Democracy], performed at *documenta 5* in 1972, or the recent foundation of a Biennale Democrazia [Biennial of Democracy]. By bringing together controversial works of art and organ-

izing challenging panel discussions, the biennial serves as a platform for democratic debate. These events often take on a more activist form, especially in countries with more restrictive political systems, where the biennial invites alternative modes of thinking or expression.[2]

Biennial Culture and Diversity

In light of the close relationship between ideas of democracy and the emergence of biennials, it is perhaps unsurprising that the biennial itself has come under the scrutiny in terms of how artists are selected. Of particular concern over the years is the view that biennials have given rise to the so-called "biennale artist."[3] If biennials were seen to favor artists of a certain kind, promoted by a small elite of nomadic curators worldwide, the fear was that a homogenized "biennial culture"[4] would take over. By eradicating diversity, the biennial would become a "hegemonic machine,"[5] replicating the same assumptions and so endangering democracy.

In this regard, there are two common concerns. The first is that biennials repeatedly show the same artists.

"There have been frequent repeats of the same artists."[6]
"Biennials tend to mirror each other in terms of intent and in recycling same artists."[7]
"Go to any biennial and you find exactly the same artists."[8]

Table 1. Repeated inclusion of the same artists

The statistical data do not support the supposed emergence of a "biennale artist" or the proposition that the same artists dominate biennials across the world; in fact, all of the key biennials discussed here are characterized by very low frequency of artist repetition. Instead, biennials seem generally to promote rich diversity and a culture of newness. As part of that radical diversity, biennials are not generally subject to the hierarchical structure typically associated with the visual art market, where a small number of artists garner huge rewards while an overwhelming majority are unable to make a living from their artistic practice.[10] In short, biennials embody a flatter ordering of the art world.

A second major concern is that a majority of the artists who appear at biennials are of Western or North American origin.

"Sometimes when I wander around the big contemporary art fairs or biennales I have the feeling that I could be anywhere: I see work by the same limited group of mostly western artists, and I would find it very hard to guess where they came from if I didn't already know the answer."[11]
"…international artists, mostly from the Europe/USA nexus, thus giving it an apparent "international" validation."[12]

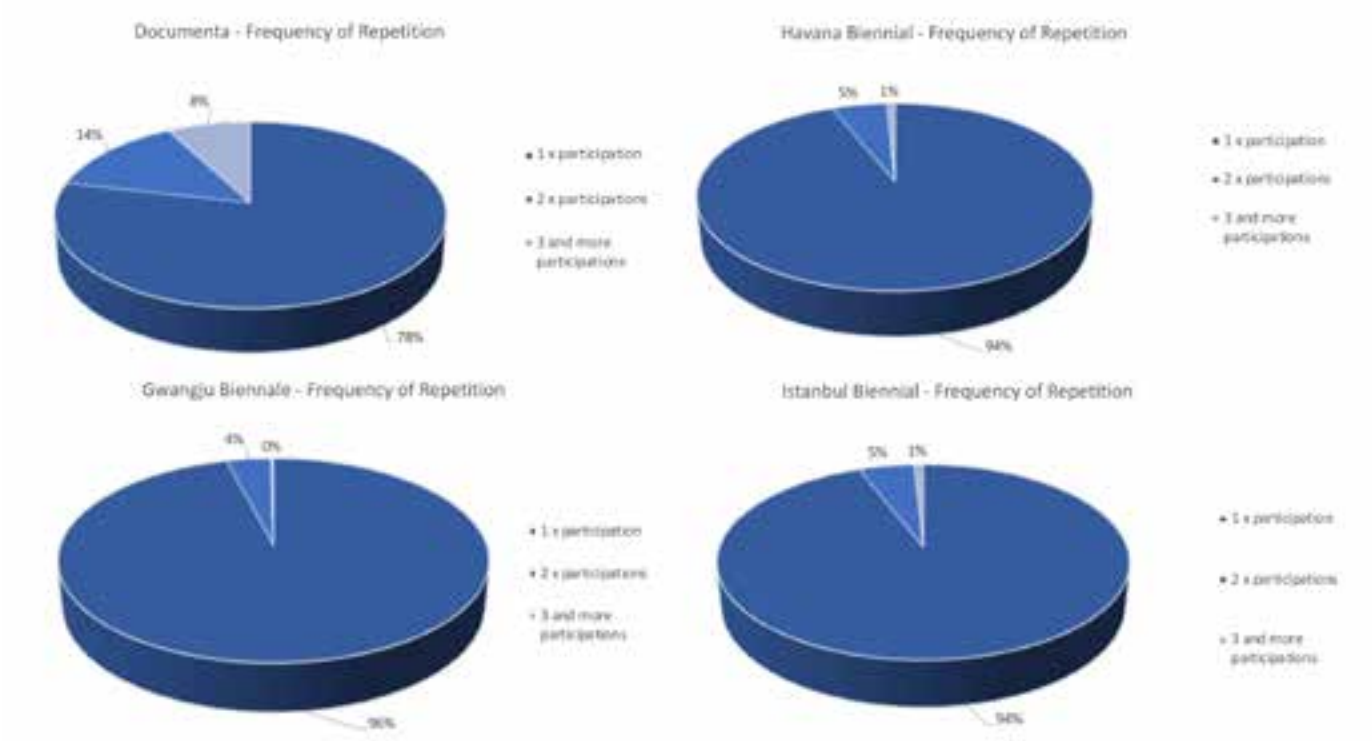


figure 1: Frequency of repetition at four key biennials (Source: exhibition catalogues)[9]

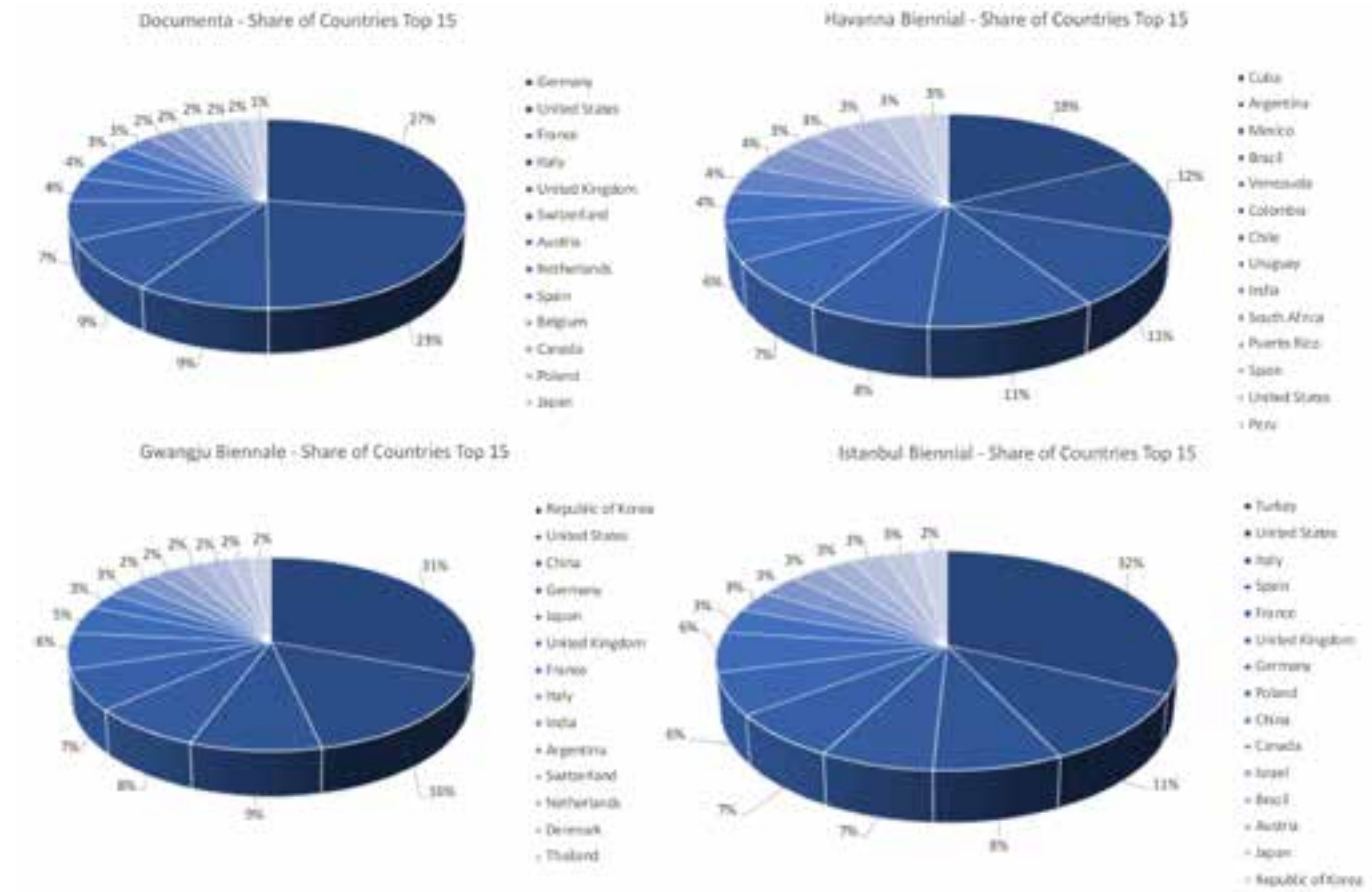


figure 2: Countries represented at four key biennials (Source: exhibition catalogues)

"The Venice Biennale released the rather epic list [...] of artists who will participated in curator Massimiliano Gioni's exhibition The Encyclopedic Palace, which is slated to run from June 1 through November 24 and, despite its title, is dominated by the same American and European artists you'll encounter at most major international shows of contemporary art."[13]

Table 2: Predominantly Western or North American artists

The supposed dominance of the European-North American complex would be seen as threat, representing a powerful and even imperialist set of values and norms that dictate the rules of the art world as a whole. This kind of hegemonic order would present a threat to the relationship between democracy and biennials outlined above. However, the empirical evidence paints a different picture. Rather than the dominance of any privileged region across biennials, each region dominates its own locale. However, this absence of any exclusive or universally favored status is not necessarily without consequences. In the context of theories of democracy, one can imagine the biennials sector facing challenges in formulating a distinct position. In healthy democracies, for instance, political elites represent certain points of view and must play a role in integrating diverse political opinion. Additionally, democracies are characterized by the possibility of change in terms of ruling party and opposition.

In a field of almost unlimited choices, it becomes difficult to make any such choice. This has implications not only for present choices and social elites but also for recollection. What does the biennial leave behind? What is to be memorialized, and what is the narrative in relation to that past? Perhaps it is because of this radical variety that many art professionals, critics and curators still claim that biennials are somewhat alike. However, as the evidence shows, this is not because biennials show the same artists but because radical heterogeneity means that exclusive or distinct positions are more difficult to formulate.

Biennials as Public Assemblies

Does this mean, then, that biennials undermine art world standards, making democratic processes more challenging? The data offer conflicting answers. On the one hand, the evidence suggests that biennials strengthen regional cultural identity at their core while also increasing diversity in surrounding regions and often internationally. This paradox clearly invites further research to assess the implications for the biennial's democratic ethos. A growing body of literature regarding similar types of events, including fairs, world cups, fashion weeks and music festivals can be clearly divided into two streams.[14] The first addresses the outward effects of such events—for example, tourism, city branding, global reception, media coverage, and urban development. The second stream focuses more on internal aspects such as rituals, negotiations, business transactions, cognitive involvement, orientation patterns, and information-seeking strategies. The present paper offers some tentative answers from a social science perspective, discussing the data in relation to both inward and outward aspects. In practice, the inward/outward distinction cannot be sustained because both work in unison to provide mutual stability. In general, diversity and fluidity represent an inward/outward view while local/global orientations are largely products of an outward/inward perspective.

In this context, Judith Butler[15] has questioned what it means to gather in public, emphasizing the centrality of bodies (both human and non-human, as in works of art)

that in their plurality lay claim to the public realm. This plurality is at the heart of the version of political democracy in which something new can appear that did not exist beforehand. This is not simply an aggregation of people or objects in a certain space but emerges from the in-between. For Butler, a key element in this emergence is that the gathered persons or objects are not just communicative acts but entail bodily enactment, or rather, bodily performance. Public assemblies can therefore be described as being performative by enacting and simultaneously highlighting the 'being-with' of other bodies. It follows that public assembly has a highly self-referential structure, in which the assembly defines what is but at the same time comes into being only in its (self-)performance.

As such, that performance is not the act of a single individual or object but depends on other individuals or objects. It can be argued that biennials are one case of 'performative public assemblies' that gather works of art, realizing the biennial in the act or performance of that gathering. The biennial emerges and thrives in this in-between. However, this is not without risk, as the gathering involves public exposure in the light of other works of art, and one cannot always know how such proximity may violate the meanings of some of those artworks. These risks are palpable in exhibitions such as *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* and *Magiciens de la Terre*. This notion of performance assembly relates the biennial to democracy in two respects: 1) as democratic amplifier (associated with increasing cultural variety) and 2) as democratic polarizing device (associated with global/local orientation).

Biennials as Democratic Amplifiers

The present findings suggest that biennials can be viewed as catalysts for a diverse range of artistic variations across different cultures. Many works of art depend on catalytic devices that attract attention through the reactions and connections they generate. Just as businesses form joint ventures or cooperatives, works of art rely on biennials. The biennial's catalytic function lies in its ability to assemble and concentrate a great number of works of art from many regions and different times or cultural backgrounds in one place for a short time, so creating a diverse cosmos in that place. Building on this idea, the biennial can be characterized as a *world public sphere*. Unlike museum studies and theories of cultural consumption or mass communication, investigations of public spheres cannot be reduced to audiences or receivers but are more active in character. According to Jürgen Habermas,[16] public spheres incorporate three aspects of immediate relevance here as a medium for public bodies, discussions, and opinions. Habermas contends that public spheres develop from gatherings in which a public articulates its perspective on the broader society. Biennials that summon works of art can be said to entail this act of assembly. However, Habermas's concept of 'the public' is more than just a large number of people assembled in one place; to forge mutual connections, these actors must share their opinions or perspectives through the medium of public dialogue or discussion, so forming public opinion.

As well as lectures, workshops, seminars, and publications, biennials create connections through the engagement and encounters of culturally diverse works of art brought together under one roof.[17] This framing is linked to the practices of nomadic curators and migrating forms and narratives that amplify these practices, forming a 'public body' in which the broader art world is affirmed or challenged. To that extent, biennials can be understood as multicultural platforms from which artistic observations are themselves observed.[18] Observational direction has profound implications for democracy; by linking observations within an encompassing structure to create a local/global perspective, biennials present something unique to the art world and, in

so doing, diversify that world. If this polarization can more clearly demarcate different artistic approaches to important issues, biennials can contribute to democratic polarization through their simultaneous roles of amplifying and diversifying.[19]

Biennials and Democratic Polarization

The biennial's global/local orientation is typically discussed as a promotional strategy that brings local artists into contact with the global art scene. However, the literature provides little information about the biennial's international 'outside.' Nor is there any explanation of why the biennials discussed here vary so widely in their intent, or why the international 'outside' should be receptive to local ideas, or how this informs a multicultural art world. The underlying assumption of this classical 'transmitter' model is that the biennial broadcasts information to an audience or public sphere according to a program that reflects its viewers' preferences. In contrast, this paper contends that rather than involving a physical 'outside' or mechanical receiver of messages, a public sphere or configuration of the public is embedded in each biennial's observational structure.[20] This pattern of 'being-with'—the presentation of the self in the light of other presentations—is what Butler (like Habermas, following Goffman) has called the "theatrical self-constitution" of the public space of appearance. As Goffman[21] argued,

> The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones [. . .] [O]n stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players; the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction.

Goffman goes on to suggest that this type of action unfolds as an encounter in which participants form a visible public for each other and their actions are influenced by the presence of other individuals; in short, they perform for each other. This performance enables the actors to present themselves to their designated public in specific ways, revealing a specific position to be observed by the public. For Butler, this idea is further transformed when people or objects assemble in public. The assembly is about the assembly itself rather than just "a performative enactment of bodies"[22]; it speaks, and about itself. Here, the public assembly extends beyond its theatrical performativity and becomes self-reflective, speaking to itself by relating itself to its other.

In each edition, the biennials studied here introduce an abundance of new artists from diverse cultural contexts and must install new frames accordingly. The creation of these frames depends on a certain density or compactness, in which deliberations occur as attributions and self-attributions of social classifications—that is, identifications emerge from a process of social comparison.[23] In this way, each biennial observes itself within the horizon of the 'outside', embedding this in its own observations and creating a particular point of view. Global/local observations are part of the overall framing process, forming the initial and closing brackets; a particular frame is formed through the inclusion of something external—something from outside its kin (i.e., habitual relationships). In short, each biennial sets the stage for a gathering of diversity—a showplace for its own construction of itself.

By affiliating and linking their kin with observations from other places, biennials create an inward outlook to which observations are directed. According to Bydler,[24] "Through the biennial context itself, artistic practices are disembedded and re-embedded." For Butler, not every biennial automatically facilitates democratic deliberation; only those biennials can be theatrical in enacting the bodily conditions of being. Beyond assembly, or even a series of assemblies, the biennial must relate itself to the

struggles of other assemblies—what Bruno Latour has called an "assembly of assemblies."[25] This entails a series of challenges, as biennials are not just art assemblies but must also serve the purposes of tourism, city branding, employment, school education, and so on. The biennial can perhaps make these other purposes part of its gathering—part of its own theatrical performance. To do so, the biennial cannot simply serve as an agent of standardization but must deploy its paradoxical structure of increasing diversity and anchoring as a polarity that can serve wider democratic goals.

Biennials and the 'Missing' Audience

The first part of this paper considered the inclusion and exclusion of artists within the global world of biennials in the particular context of participation and democracy, where the latter is understood as an important feature of biennials' foundation narrative. However, there is another twist in how biennials approach participation and the issues of inclusion and exclusion. In this context, *participation* refers to the participation of artists or countries, as for instance, in the list of participating artists and professionals or countries with pavilions. Similarly, for open-call biennials, participation is restricted to this art world group; surprisingly, the democratic discourse rarely mentions the other key 'participants'—the biennial audience—except when counting the number of visitors. These numbers are reported with pride in exhibition catalogues, on websites, or in press features.

"Its [Gwangju Biennale's] closing ceremony on October 23rd with a record attendance of around 800,000 visitors."[26]
"A record number of visitors attend Venice Biennale art show."[27]
"The 2018 Adelaide Biennial Draws Record Crowds."[28]
"Rabat's First Biennale Welcomes 51,000 Visitors in Three Weeks."[29]

Table 3: Big numbers

Some biennials collect a few additional statistical details about their visitors, such as country of origin or nature of visit (professional, etc.). Some also conduct customer satisfaction surveys or small-scale self-evaluations, as in the case of the Liverpool Biennial (2016, 2018) and the Coventry Biennial (2017).[30] Given the importance of reporting attendance figures, the biennials' neglect of audience-related knowledge production is surprising. Beyond this lack of empirical research, there is little theorizing of biennial audiences despite the wide-ranging intellectual debates in this field and the supposed role of democracy as a common motive for audience engagement. Much of the visitor studies research literature emphasizes the role of democracy, typically with reference to external education services such as lectures, films, brochures, and audio guides.[31] As well as the acquisition of knowledge, education and learning encompass broader values like empowerment, alternative thinking, social resistance, and aesthetic pleasure, but visitor studies of this kind tend to be confined to museums and public galleries, with no links to biennials. In the interests of building such links, this paper advances a more theoretical analysis to guide future empirical research.

To illuminate the relationship between biennials and their audience, the role of the art audience must first be addressed in more general terms. Practical reasons aside, there are two conceptual arguments that explain the neglect of the art biennial audience. (1)

The biennial serves a different function than the museum. (2) The audience is not relevant to the art presented at these events because it does not contribute to their status as art but is merely an epiphenomenal effect of biennials.

(1) Art museums present an art historical narrative of the development of art by focusing on established artists, often through a series of inter-connected spaces.[32] This selective practice is justified by the museum's narrative of presenting the most accomplished works of high artistic merit. The visitor's role is to enact, experience, and learn, broadening their feelings and knowledge through this narrative, which includes the selected works and environmental elements such as the architecture of the museum, the guidance provided, and additional reading.[33] Can this understanding also be applied to biennials? The following are some answers from a small survey of leading curators, who were asked about the function of the biennial.

"[…] should be fundamentally a place for new debates to emerge, new kinds of intellectual propositions to be grappled with."[34]
"I believe that the biennale should propose something […]."[35]
"I think biennials are […] more like dealing with the questions of the contemporary issues."[36]
"[…] a testing ground for new ideas […] sites for dialogue about issues."[37]
"[…] it's like a 'heat exchanger' or fishing with dynamite."[38]
"[…] to start to have dialogue in the contemporary art sector."[39]
"[…] possibility of seeing things from everywhere […] or creating discourses about everywhere."[40]

Table 4: Function of the biennial (Source: interviews conducted by the author)

These replies evidence an understanding of the biennial that places great emphasis on the present and the contemporary, with a special focus on *dialogue*. Unlike the museum's focus on a selective narrative of well-established cases, the biennial sets itself apart by seeking to present something in the making. As it does not present a proven concept or idea and cannot rely on a historical narrative, the biennial cannot adopt the educative approach to audience inclusion that is typical of art museums.[41] For that reason, the audience may not appear on the biennial's radar because it cannot operate with the visitor concept that works for art museums.

(2) In his essay "Art and Audience," Nick Zangwill argued that a work's status as art is not audience-dependent.[42] The audience is not a part that constitutes a work of art. He does not deny that audience members might have strong feelings when experiencing a work of art; nor does he deny that they may see a work of art as lacking any value. However, neither the experience nor the value status was intended by the artist. The artist did not create the work for the audience to experience or see in a given way; a work of art's creation expresses the artist's freedom or intrinsic desire, and its essence can only be explained independent of an audience. This seems especially the case in the biennial context.

"creative processes."[43]
"[…] biennial is very much focused on experimental emerging art."[44]
"[…] going beyond the borders of confirmed rules and notions of what art is."[45]
"It doesn't suppress but reflects."[46]

Table 5: Biennial as art (Source: interviews conducted by the author)

As well as emphasizing a more open outlook, the biennial format is perhaps closer in approach to what Zangwill describes as the "essence" of art, including elements like creativity and creation, experimentation, challenging boundaries, and critical refection. That may explain why the biennial audience can be overlooked —because it is not relevant to what is created at the biennial. While some biennials organize collaborative experiments with the audience,[47] the dialogue or conversation this aims to trigger relates more to involving the participating artists whose works are contrasted and compared than the audience attending the event. This lends support to the idea that the biennial audience is not part of meaning-making but is rather an external feature—like tourism, entertainment, or recreation.

It seems impossible to develop any conceptual account of the biennial audience from such a close distance. It is necessary instead to take a step back, focusing more on the art world in general than on its constituent organizations.

The Art Audience: Theoretical Considerations

Taking a step back means in the first place considering the role of the audience in other social worlds. For instance, in the world of economics, the audience as consumer is an essential part of the economic transaction, actively intervening in the economy by selectively acquiring certain items rather than others. Without consumption, capitalist economies could not function. This selective intervention works in similar ways in politics; for instance, the distribution of power in a democracy is based on choosing political parties and the values they represent through voting or social protest. Again, without this intervening audience, the political order of democratic regimes could not function.

The art audience is not interventionist. Audience members should not touch works of art; they should not speak during a theatre performance, and they should not sing louder than the live music.[48] Much has been written about the emergence of such behavior and its strong emphasis on internal discipline.[49] Historically, this kind of behavior is relatively new, having only emerged in the last 150 years. In earlier times, the painter or composer had a different relationship with their audience—usually an individual or corporate patron that had also commissioned the work. This arrangement meant that the end product was contractually defined to ensure the quality and consistency of the work.[50]

A new audience—and a new concept of the artist—emerged in parallel when the art world separated itself from politics and religion, relying instead on its own criteria. Only then did the word *artist* enter common usage, denoting an expressive mode linked to concepts like originality and uniqueness.[51] Enshrined in this social understanding of freedom of expression, what matters to the artist may matter only to the artist. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that artistic activities are often characterized as

deviant, mysterious, or eccentric. In contrast to the patron, the new mass audience is 'silent' (non-interventionist) and unknown to the artist.

Why would the art world develop this kind of audience?[52] One argument is that this configuration serves as a shielding mechanism or safe zone in which the audience is confronted with an eccentric expression. Unlike the audience in economics or politics, it does not intervene in the artist's choices but lives and experiences those creative choices within a framework that cannot be altered. In other words, the art audience participates through non-participation. This configuration is not merely epiphenomenal but confirms that the artwork results from the freedom of the artist. If the audience were to intervene—like the patron, for instance—by demanding more blue paintings or more music in ¾ time, this would reduce the artist to a mere maker. In short, the audience is ignorant of its own potential for intervention and, by virtue of its great numbers, provides fertile ground for freedom of expression in diverse forms.[53] In the art world, this audience configuration is at the very heart of meaning-making; it also means that an art audience need not necessarily physically attend the museum or the biennial. Ivo Mesquita made this point in an interview in 2008.[54]

> The biennial [Sao Paulo] is very popular; not many people come, but they defend the biennial. It is interesting because there is an identity. If you take a cab here in São Paulo, [saying] I want to go to the biennial, they'll bring you here. Yeah, they know where it is. This pavilion, this park—this is the biennial thing. They know it's right there; people know it is important. Usually, most people say "Oh, yes, I know the biennial."

There is a large art audience that does not attend museums or biennials but nevertheless respects and even defends the identity of art as something that needs to exist, and that should exist without interference, in its own right. Not much is known about this wider art audience, as research to date has focused exclusively on those attending museums.[55] However, by repurposing existing statistical data, we can get some sense of what this audience might look like. For example, research on social change in UK society identifies a subgroup of people who are "inner directed"—that is, motivated more by self-actualization.[56] This group is not reclusive but rather exhibits high tolerance of other people's positions and values like caring, autonomy, and self-realization, emphasizing the democratic process, experimentation, and self-exploration. In 1989, these people represented about 40% of the UK population, but the research does not make an explicit link with art institutions.

Research on arts and culture typically assumes that supporters of the arts confine themselves to a particular genre that reflects the tastes of their socioeconomic group—for instance, it is often assumed that the upper classes like only classical music while the lower classes prefer mass cultural products. In fact, as Peterson[57] demonstrated, people who support the arts tend to support all the arts. This does not mean that they like everything, but there is no associated aesthetic or social orientation to any specific cultural practice. In other words, the wider arts audience participates without demanding a particular aesthetic.[58] This aligns with other evidence regarding the political and cultural values of people who go to art museums.[59]

This wider audience is also considerably larger than those who attend theatres, opera houses, biennials, or museums.[60] As indicated above, its configuration is based on ignorance of its own potential for intervention, raising the question of why such a configuration is in any way appealing. As a contractual arrangement, the individual or

corporate patron's commission was designed to ensure a work's quality and coherence in line with the patron's expectations, ensuring that they would know (more or less) what they would get. The art audience seems to work the other way around, placing the emphasis on the unique and original nature of art—its potential for novelty and surprise. Rather than fully defined parameters, these new experiences depend to some extent on uncertainty; rather than predictability, this audience is aleatory, deliberately avoiding any such predetermination.[61] This moves us a step closer to conceptualizing the biennial audience.

The Art Biennial Audience

As well as the art audience that does not attend biennials, there is an art audience of the kind described above that also attends such events. There is good evidence for the widely held view that social stratification and cultural consumption are closely related, and some people seem likely to be attracted to arts-related practices that enable them to put their cultural awareness and repertoires to use.[62] So-called 'cultural elites' attend art museums, read more (and more varied) books, listen to a range of musical styles, and are the core audience for theatre and dance.[63] A range of statistical variables have been used to categories these elite consumers, including education (formal and informal), income, and mobility.

According to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, education is the strongest determinant.[64] In his early writings, Bourdieu[65] related education to the ability to "read" works of art by deciphering their meanings and codes and having the requisite linguistic skills to talk about them. At first, Bourdieu linked these "reading skills" to education, but in his later writings,[66] he dismissed this as an unduly intellectualized account. Instead, he argued, education is not simply a form of knowledge that facilitates comprehension of works of art but legitimizes certain objects as works of art under the "pure gaze"—a social apprehension that shifts the focus from function to content. As he put it, "Educational qualifications come to be seen as a guarantee of the capacity to adopt the aesthetic disposition."[67] The pure gaze determines the only valid or legitimate version and dismisses others, turning the arts into a game of class differentiation.

One might wonder why the arts would render this aesthetic disposition universally valid. Bourdieu seems to suggest that the emergence of "an autonomous artistic field capable of formulating and imposing its own ends against external demands"[68] is "the only way to recognize the work of art for what it is, autonomous."[69] For Bourdieu, autonomy is a kind of self-isolation, but does autonomy automatically mean self-isolation? As Umberto Eco puts it, "More than recognizing the world, art produces complements of the world—autonomous forms that join with those that already exist, with their own rules and a life of their own."[70] Autonomy in this sense is not a reduction or removal but an enrichment in two directions. As Eco has stressed, art adds a kind of contingency to the world, to existing forms; one might, for instance, think of blue horses.

There is also an understanding of autonomy as greater freedom of reflection and a rejection and negation of art itself.[71] Rather than advancing a single pure principle, what stands out is the seemingly endless production of artistic variety (including attempts to end art through art itself). None of the biennials repeatedly feature the same artists, and they challenge any unduly colonial gaze. Rather than scanning works from the singular perspective of the pure gaze, these events frustrate any such outcome for the viewer or reader. Kant believed that this frustration results from a kind of uncertainty, in which works of art spark "much thought, *without*, however, any definite thought, i.e. any concept, being capable of being adequate to it."[72] However,

this would be to fall into the trap of categorizing all works of art as uncertain and open; in fact, many works thrive on their blatancy. The art audience configuration described above, characterizing non-participation as a form of participation, suggests another direction. While there is a strong desire to participate, understand, and define, one must frustrate the outcome of this endeavor.[73]

On visiting biennials, what struck me most (from an ethnographic perspective) was the number of people sleeping in plain sight, transforming relaxation areas, benches, and green spaces into bedrooms. Kant hoped that the experience of uncertainty would trigger a kind of pleasure or sense of joy in some higher quality.[74] What we actually find is indeed a strong desire or passion, but one that is frustrated or overwhelmed, even enervated, from which something new can emerge—a shift in perspective, even suspense. In contrast to Bourdieu's account, this may explain why education plays a role in people's actual attendance. In most areas of our daily life, we can usually work towards a desired outcome. While education may involve a desire to learn in pursuit of a certain outcome, it is also true that no matter how hard we learn or how much knowledge we accumulate, we remain powerless over the narrative of the test and its result. The nature of the test requires us to participate without intervening in the test itself (otherwise known as cheating). One cannot design the test in support of one's desired outcome. While this may be a source of anxiety or stress for some students, there is evidence that, in an unalterable situation, there is actually an opportunity to express oneself, and to demonstrate one's knowledge and skills.[75] This highly personal dimension of testing can provide enjoyment and satisfaction.[76] In the same way, one may not wish to engage with cultural products that frustrate certain desires, but education prepares us to appreciate the value of this experience.

Works of art, especially in their abundant variety at biennials, seem to offer this potential. It follows that biennials should get to know their missing audience in order to understand what it means to engage in the essence of art by participating without intervening in the preferences of others. The frustration of existing desires can be a source of satisfaction, especially as one of many sharing that experience. Further research informed by this perspective can enrich our understanding of the democratic potential of the biennial beyond prevailing assumptions.

Summary

This paper has considered the role of democracy in terms of the inclusion and exclusion of biennial artists and audience. The issue of democracy informs many aspects of biennials and stimulates critical debate. The paper considered both the dominant issue of artist selection and the neglected issue of the biennial art audience. Artist selection provokes critical debate about selection patterns that favor the same artists, especially Western and North-American artists. This bias is a significant concern as it threatens to undermine diversity of opinion, turning biennials into hegemonic machines. However, the statistical data from a number of key biennials suggest that the situation is more complex than is commonly assumed. The inclusion of new artists co-develops with the localization of selection strategies, simultaneously creating diversity and sameness. Based on these findings, the theoretical arguments developed by Judith Butler and Jürgen Habermas were deployed to explore the theoretical consequences of this empirical investigation in more detail. These theoretical considerations offer a new perspective on biennials as public assemblies that reflect democratic potential but also highlight the risks of such gatherings of artistic objects and ideas. That risk is evidenced by the biennials' missing art audience. Critical debate focuses on curatorial strategies, artist selection, and biennial culture, overlook-

ing the role of audience. To date, no empirical research or grounding theoretical debate has addressed patterns of inclusion or exclusion in this context. To address this gap, the paper elaborates a theoretical argument that looks beyond Pierre Bourdieu's idea of art audience as a class phenomenon, highlighting how the art audience is more than the group of people attending such events and contributes to the essence of art. In the light of this important finding, it seems clear that future biennials should get to know their art audience.

Notes

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75 This notion of testing and self-expression is not confined to higher education, but may also be part of the education within broader family life.
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Christian Morgner, University of Leicester, is a social scientist working on a comprehensive theory of culture at the intersection of sociology, communication and cultural studies. Culture is not only a focus of his research but is also a conceptual resource that considers notions of practices and networks of meaning-making. While he has been working with the qualitative methods that are often used in this field, his research has taken a more quantitative direction. For example, he has used network analysis to study how meaning is transformed and mediated. As such, his research combines social theory and empirical research. To develop this comprehensive theory of culture, he has not limited his research to the study of cultural institutions, like biennials, art capitals, creative practices, and culture, but has also worked on broader, but related, dimensions of culture, such as risk cultures, arts, health, media cultures, urban culture, and subcultures. He has previously held a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Hitotsubashi University, Japan, and was a Research Affiliate at the University of Cambridge. He has also held visiting fellowships at Yale University, University of Lucerne, University of Leuven and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris).

50 HZ
Diana Dulgheru

The idea behind minim's 50 HZ is grounded in the sonic exploration of a single frequency (i.e. 50 HZ, with triangular and sinusoidal waveforms), whose initial value is altered by using different audio effects. This approach results in overlapping sound frequencies, where the generated sonic 'errors' functions to create infinitesimal experimental possibilities. This working method functions to achieve compositional variety, but, at the same time, highlights the simplicity of the repetitive beat which itself can achieve diversity through minimalist sonic techniques.

Diana Dulgheru lives and works in Bucharest, Romania. Searching for a certain purity in the particularities of the relation between sound and visual form in a postdigital context, minim develops projects in which sounds are reduced to their basic form and are used for their own sonic value. Drawing from an education involving figurative composition, minim's means of sonic expression have evolved to utilize digital technology with a minimalist approach. In complementary artistic terms, Diana has also worked with media such as photography, installation and later audiovisual performances that explore the visualization of the sound and the aesthetic possibilities of errors generated by digital technology.

Resisting Biennialisation: Institutional and Community Responses to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

Shwetal A. Patel

> *"We might be forgiven for thinking every biennale, every art event, is just one of many, and only more of the same. Indeed, how can anyone operating within these sites of practice (which require a great deal of organization, finance and partnerships) resist the clutches of standardisation and homogenisation?"*
>
> – Shwetal A. Patel, Sunil Manghani and Robert E. D'Souza, *How to Biennale! The Manual,* 2018

Introduction

In the introduction to *The Biennial Reader*, Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø aver that, "Despite its institutional-critical pretensions, the biennial itself might have become one more bonafide institution of the art world just like any other'.[1] Given this dire perspective almost a decade ago (fittingly, the book was released at Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2010) the question is, what remains the same and what has changed in the world of global biennials?

The term "biennialisation" itself is an analogism for the often dialectical tension between redemptive world-making and bland homogeneity found in the over 300 or so biennials operating today[2], and their proliferation in recent decades. Often regarded as an analogy for the wave of biennials that emerged since the 1980s, the typology has arguably led to a shift in the contours of the known art world. Biennialisation, as this proliferation has been analogized, is today widely considered a derogatory term for the popularization of the format and its ideological tropes.

Alongside this popularization of this type of exhibition, the field of biennial studies is vast and ever expanding, making synopses about this global phenomenon both complex and often contradictory. On the one hand, they have allowed hitherto underrepresented artists, writers, curators and audiences to participate in art, and on the other hand, they have arguably led to a standardization of practices and approaches across the globe.

In light of this paradox and unique historical perspective, the question this essay seeks to explore is whether organizations such as Kochi-Muziris Biennale, of which I am a founding team member, can resist biennialisation and create autonomous and continually reflexive entities that do not only unquestioningly follow other, mostly Western, examples. The desire not to follow is not borne out of a sense of exceptionalism, but rather an understanding that differing contexts produce unique and variable outcomes.

Furthermore, how do institutional and community responses to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale shape the outcomes of the project, and in turn help shape practices that contribute new knowledge to the field? This article critically explores my research and

practice as a biennial practitioner, firstly by outlining my experience in Kochi-Muziris and more recently working in Oslo with the OsloBIENNALEN. Although geographically, culturally and socio-economically divergent, both biennial-type organizations serve as a useful lens to analyse my practice and its contribution to the field at large. In both cases institutional and community responses help shape the outcomes of the project, in turn helping to also shape practices that contribute new knowledge to the field.

The article will conclude with practical information for biennial organizers to resist standardizing tendencies, which may lead at best to institutional inertia, and at worst, homogenous outcomes. To resist biennialisation is to resist adopting tropes and biases that have crept into the field in recent years. Increasingly we see similar exhibition models, curatorial strategies and funding patterns for a range and diversity of biennial-type organizations around the world, although these similar approaches have brought professional standards to the arts, they have also limited the scope and diversity of these projects. Too often, biennial (and other large art forum or exhibition) organisers, I have argued, imitate rather than truly innovate in their local contexts.[3] What can be done on an institutional level to change this? And does the origin of biennials as "global" exhibition spaces beginning with the original Venice Biennale in 1895 inhibit the way they have been conceived since?[4]

> *"In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new."*
>
> – Walter Benjamin,
> *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1935

Mass-produced imagery, as Benjamin noted, is different to reproductions of the past. Today the internet and World Wide Web have exponentially increased our access to cheap tools, the smart phone being the tip of the spear, and our ability to 'share' images and 'experiences'. Blue chip galleries routinely sell work 'off a JPEG', a morally contested business practice that many argue cheapens the 'aura' of the artwork. Equally, biennials who only rely on social media to communicate with audiences in place of real-time face-to-face interactions, may lead to a narrowing of discussion and complexity, dual outcomes to be welcomed.

Mass reproduction has always steered taste and aesthetic perceptions of societies; human civilization is littered with evidence of how the powerful and those in control used images to maintain the balance of power. Analysis of media theory and semiotics is beyond the scope of this article, but it suffices to say that all art is political and all politics have a visual and cultural dimension. The currency in this hyper-capitalist world of power is that of ideas and emotions, something that art and artists use as materials in their work. Hence, it makes sense that to control artistic output and consumption in a given society is to control the ideas and thoughts of its people. History is replete with examples of aesthetics being used for good as well as evil, dating back to ancient times. Numismatic images, parades, and Roman triumphs are just a few examples of how people in power have used images to influence public narratives.

Power in the art world still rest firmly with a handful of (largely Northern) institutions, collectors, media houses and art dealers. In global terms, Western art, followed by classical and ancient Chinese art are the most valuable and traded commodities in the art market, currently valued at around $65 billion.[5] As Adam Caruso of Caruso St John Architects (London/Zurich) has noted in OnCurating 39, 'I can sort of understand art biennials, although their character and purpose has dramatically changed since the rise of the art fair. The biennials are now a part of the art fair and auction travelling circus'.[6]

Biennials at the Periphery

So what could and should a biennial look like from a Global South perspective? Antony Gardener argues that these sometimes obscured histories 'do not quite fit the habitual framings of biennials as beginning with a first wave at the close of the nineteenth century and segueing neatly into the neo-imperial tidal force of the 1990s and 2000s.' Gardener and others consider that new-wave biennials coincide with globalization and neoliberalism in what he considers to be a 'second wave of biennialization' that was established from the mid-1950s into the 1980s. These biennials have arguably insisted upon 'a self-conscious, critical regionalism' as the strategy to realign cultural networks across geopolitical divides and cultural divides. In this optimistic scenario, Gardener argues that these new biennials represent sites of resistance against the image of cultural, art historical and international hegemonies.[7]

Oliver Marchant describes biennials as '"hegemonic machines" that link the local to the global' and that what is often perceived as the periphery (e.g. the Global South) often 'anticipated developments that would later be of great significance to the centre'.[8] Dak'Art, the biennial in Dakar, began in 1990 with an innovative programme alternating between artistic styles beginning with literature and transitioning to various forms of visual arts. Initially, Dak'Art ran without governmental support until 2000 and without an artistic director until 2006, demonstrating that decentralized art biennials can be successful without state sponsorship.[9]

This "peripheral" evolution can also be seen in the way that the #00Bienal, which took place in Havana in 2018, circumvented government censorship and international banking sanctions through the innovative use of crowdfunding to create a unique decentralized biennial unsupported by the federal government.[10] Perhaps due to the recent global recession and limitations on federal arts funding, this trend will continue even in the Global North.

Practice Makes imPerfect

My work with the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is rooted, like the biennial itself, in efforts to create a biennial that speaks to both the global and the local. The location of Kochi plays an important role in defining its internationalism. Situated on the edge of the subcontinent and immersed in trade and cultural exchange for millennia, the biennial organizers – myself included – integrated these real and imagined histories into our strategies. Although the Kochi-Muziris biennial shared many aspects and commonalities with other biennials, many organizational aspects were unique to the location. Apart from trade unions and other groups engaging in the project, local women's charities, the local population and volunteers were involved in the project.

In hindsight, the idea to create a biennial came from a bottom-up need from the artists themselves, in this case the two artist founders of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, the entity that organizes the biennial. The artists had long dreamed of creating a contem-

porary platform that could build on the early pioneering work of the India Triennale, which launched in 1968. Triennale India, as it was known, was a brainchild of the intellectual milieu of the period and the founders also included artists, poets and historians with the support of government. Sadly, the Triennale India project floundered by the 1980s and completely lost significance by the turn of the century. It had not been held for several years and it was in this vacuum that Geeta Kapur, Vivan Sundaram and others attempted to initiate a Delhi Biennale in 2005. Although this project did not take off, its influence seems to have come to fruition a decade later with the emergence of a spate of new biennials in South Asia from 2012 onwards (Kochi, Colomobo, Lahore, Karachi). In this sense, although the importation of a "biennial model" into the South Asian art scene was a top-down venture, the origins of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) was bottom-up. The foregrounding of the artists involved, the role of the curator and announcement strategy through social media and international communications were common to many other biennials; however, the on-the-ground experience of being in Kochi felt unmistakably rooted in local customs and cultures. Kochi-Muziris has faced a number of challenges since its inception, including allegations of elitism, abuse of power, lack of transparency and misuse of funds, though the project has remained resilient and has attempted to continually improve its governance and operational processes. This reflexive approach is essential if the project is to survive. Rather than aiming for a perfect biennial (model), the project continually learns from the imperfect nature of its enterprise so that each biennial might be better than the last. The biennial team and board of trustees view the biennial project as being in a constant state of flux, continually reshaping its structures, its strategies and management processes.

Since its inception, the artists involved have led many risky and experimental ventures, and these self-taught artists, organisers and their teams learned by doing. Practices emerged from these grassroots strategies to inform organisational and curatorial strategies. Over time, these practices evolved and became more specialised in order to function efficiently. Although these practices, which inform roles and responsibilities, can be identified, it is difficult to compare the KMB organisation across cultural contexts. As far as the KMB's relationship with local communities, many individuals developed skills and capacities that they could trade upon after the biennial had finished, like serving as cultural guides for tourists in the region. Others were able to go on to more established institutions and work in areas including curating, production, mediation, research, translation, logistics and arts management. Although these job skills had universally understood titles, they belied the highly site-specific and locally-rooted nature of these new and improved capabilities. Like Dak'Art, the KMB is involved in an ongoing process of re-evaluation, constantly attempting to keep what is useful about traditional biennial practice and discarding or reimagining everything else.

My upcoming work with the osloBIENNALEN First Edition 2019-2024 continues this strategy. It is not a case of "implementing practices," but rather, allowing practices to develop and evolve in relation to a given site. Therefore, the practices that emerges in Kochi are by necessity distinct to that of Oslo. The contexts vary but the underlying practice emphasises innovation and, above all, flexibility. It is not solely that context determines practice, however. Practice also influences the context, through involvement of the local and international communities. An ability to locate, analyse, and transfer skills between projects such as KMB and osloBIENNALEN are important in a hyper-connected world, but the focus must always be on flexibility. If what is being practiced is not working, discard it and begin again using as much local input as possible. Success here, I argue, depends on community participation and a sense of

kinship with the project and its values. Continuous dialogue with stakeholders is not a means to a predefined end, but is intrinsic to genuine dialogue that furthers mutual understanding, respect for differences, and the participation and stakeholdership of all levels of society and thus strengthens social cohesion. These outcomes cannot be simply bought or manufactured through media tools and marketing expenditure. As in other locations and "biennial cities" around the world, the controversy at Oslo Biennial also stems from the local art scene feeling excluded, with a lack of communication and consultation in the process and funding. Furthermore, a five-year period may act more like an institution with its own problems rather than a nimble, temporary project, for which biennials are typically known.

Site is the starting point of any successful biennial. Understanding your site and its complexities may take many years and several iterations of your biennial. In Kochi the biennial occurs every two years but is augmented with ancillary programmes throughout the gaps between biennials, and therefore develops and maintains a year-round audience that becomes invested in the success of the biennial. Oslo is unique in that the organisers spent two years researching a format and their local context before deciding that the first edition should be a five-year programme. This novel approach emerged from their research of the local population and site dynamics, and overturns the traditional biennial dynamic of a repeating biennial event that lasts 2-6 months but occurs every two to ten years. Oslo, like any capital city, offers a crowded cultural calendar in which biennials can struggle to find an audience. By imagining a five-year biennial, the curators have prioritized local community relationships but will also face a new set of challenges.

Since its launch in 2019, the biennial management have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism, leading to one of the co-curators to resign and plans being altered radically to assuage local government, critics and the wider arts community. By radically changing that script and slowing down the biennial format, the curators and organizers escaped one set of challenges (namely the frenetic pace of biennial planning and execution) for another. These problems must be dealt with in their own turn, again moving continually toward increasing local stakeholdership in the project. Biennial organisations such as Manifesta, the roving European biennial, regularly include local projects selected through special juried competitions. These strategies are another form of negotiation that are essential for the survival and acceptance of these sometimes-alien ideas and formats. Although it is too early to say, the Oslo Biennial has turned a corner in its evolution, barely a year after its launch. The project promises to deliver unique outcomes for the potential of art in the public sphere. It is yet to be seen if the biennial can fulfil its five-year term, and under what conditions. Here we can observe that many of the problems that beset less well-funded organisations in poorer parts of the world, also plague so-called Rich World biennials. As this journal goes to press, intense debate and negotiations still swirl around the biennial in Norway and its future.

Shaping Biennials

So what can biennial organisers and practitioners take from these case studies, given the widely varying contexts and success rates of biennials thus far?

First, one must observe and understand the local fundamentals. Even in this increasingly digital age, a physical biennial cannot be successful without the participation of its local community. This means thinking about language, accessibility, socioeconomic indicators, religious landscapes, poverty and living standards, educational measures,

and artistic traditions. Theoretical concepts and tools, usually applied in sociology and development economics, may be prudent in these types of contexts.

Second, you must be as willing to listen to your constituents as you are to experts and, indeed, even your own voice. If your local community responds to particular aspects of your biennial more than others, it may be better to focus your efforts in those areas despite your personal preferences. This is not an attempt to potentially trivialise complexities, but rather a recognition of what works locally. Practices must be site-specific and need to evolve over time. The exchange of knowledge and skills is a two-way street, and must be grounded in your particular context (be that geographical, social, cultural, economic, political or historical). Community feedback is useless if it is not acted upon and shared. One must be able to accept criticism and complaints, and find ways to effectively respond and mediate in times of trouble and dissent.

Despite increasingly globalised formats biennials are, first and foremost, local events. The emergence of Global South biennials in Kochi, Dakar and Havana demonstrate that local and flexible approaches are crucial for the success of future biennials. Although these biennials operate in highly differentiated locations, their success may lie in their ability to navigate a compendium of macro and micro challenges. These typically range from a paucity of funding, lack of arts infrastructure and expertise and Government apathy and policy neglect for the arts. On the other hand, their 'peripheral' locations mean that they are difficult to access for non-locals, and there may be linguistic and cultural barriers to entry. Despite, and perhaps in reaction to these perceived deficits, these events have found prominence within the global art circuit. Locally they have found voice and confidence, creating new audiences and providing livelihoods to a range of creative sector labour groups. A lack of resources has in many cases led to novel approaches, site-specific solutions and nurtured inventiveness. Of course, it would be myopic to romanticise these conditions, as is often the case when non-local media and art world audiences visit these type of events, far from the established art centres of the Global North. Constant experimentation and reframing, as is the case in Oslo, can successfully combat the flattening "biennialisation" effect of the traditional biennial model and must be at the forefront of biennial practice going forward – not only on the "periphery" of the art world in the Global South, but worldwide.

Edited by Bethany Hucks, PhD candidate at Heidelberg University.

Notes

1 Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010).
2 See Ronald Kolb and Shwetal A. Patel, "Editorial," *OnCurating* 39 (June 2018): 2-7.
3 Shwetal A. Patel, *Making and Sustaining Visual Art Platforms* (Unpublished PhD thesis: Southampton University, 2020).
4 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
5 S. Lock, "Value of the Art Market Worldwide 2007-2019," *Statista* (March 26 2020).
6 Adam Caruso, "on Venice Architecture Biennale," *On Curating* 39 (June 2018): 61-62.
7 Anthony Gardener, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global," *Third Text* vol. 27, issue 4 (2013).
8 Oliver Marchant, "The Globalization of Art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': A History of the Biennials from the Periphery," *World Art* vol. 4 issue 2 (2014).

9 "Dak'Art, Biennale de L'Art Africain Contemporain," Biennial Foundation, https://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/dak%E2%80%99art-the-biennial-of-the-contemporary-african-art/.
10 Shwetal A. Patel and Bethany Hucks, "Technology and Crowdfunding," *ArtTactic South Asia Special Report: Art and Philanthropy* (2020): 17-19.

Shwetal A. Patel is a writer and researcher and is a founding member of India's first biennial, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale which launched in 2012. Patel is currently pursuing his PhD at the Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. He lives and works in London.

#biennale 519,024 posts (May 12, 2020)

Fatoş Üstek

I must admit that, upon receiving the invitation from the Board of Editors of the *OnCurating* journal, I did not expect the level of challenge I was signing myself up to. The simple task of selecting 50 images was further complicated when I was also asked to reflect on and speculate about the direction that the art world is currently embracing.

We are still in the midst of the crisis. The fact that we now have a better grasp of the situation and the scale of seriousness associated with the dissemination of the COVID-19 virus across towns, cities, countries, and continents have brought us to a different level of anxiety. It is a crisis like no other. It is not only due the fact that there is a global tragedy in progress, but also our lives and livelihoods are under scrutiny. The radical uncertainty that we are experiencing will carry us to horizons that we cannot yet predict from the perspective we hold. Perhaps, this is a topic for another essay. What is also happening is that we are experiencing a global crisis, from the screens of our phones, computers, and televisions. The fact is that COVID-19 is different from SARS, Ebola and even the Spanish flu, which took the whole of Europe under its dominion at the beginning of the 20th century. We are in the day-to-day of this crisis, yet we are overly connected through social media channels. The fear of missing out (#FOMO) is replaced by Throwback Thursdays (#tbt) and anniversary instances (#lastyear). There are no parties, no biennial openings, no large gatherings, but still the memorabilia of the favored past.

This is quadrupled by the expanded activity of art fairs, museums, institutions, commercial galleries, artists, and support campaigns. There is more and more content that is generated on a day-to-day basis. *Instagram live* has gained another streak. Instagram is a platform that brings us together, where we collectively support artists, technicians, foodbanks through purchasing works for affordable prices; where we engage in high intensity workouts, yoga sessions; where we stream critical debates, webinars, interviews; where we share our love for nature and early glimpses of spring… Amongst all this, are the questions of where the art world is headed, what the future of biennials is, what kind of art we will be seeing in the near future once the lockdowns and travel bans are lifted; once we feel confident enough to step outside of our immediate confinements; once we are ready to engage with and explore the world from the viewpoints of others.

It will be a slow burner…Perhaps slower than we expect or wish for… The art world and enthusiasts will not start conglomerating around exhibitions/biennials/art fairs as they once did… Travel will not be something immediate and at hand. The world will start by looking in and looking around, engaging with the immediate surroundings, the micro-locale. The circle will grow, slowly but steadily, as new levels of confidence are gained and as relationships will necessitate new dynamics and new variables. In the light of this, social media and digital media will play a significant role. It will be the portal to the world. The virtual exchanges will inspire the local and physical ones and vice versa.

In the context of the biennials, I imagine a period of absurdity, akin to the Dada movement post World War One. *Reductio ad absurdum*: reduction to absurdity, where we will challenge the real through its negation, where we will feel more confident to tackle a hardship through its counteract. There will not be big budgets to create larger-than-life installations in the physical realm. Cheaper and easier to access materials will inform artworks (like the Arte Povera movement in Italy post-WWII), and virtual reality will provide the possibility of immersive and spatial experiences. While we will engage more with the sublimation of matter into augmented form, we will also celebrate the minute interventions in the public realm, the delicate displays in museums. I wonder what we will make of archaeology and artifacts. These two domains were very strong informants of the early 20th-century biennials. The future of biennials will want to talk more about the future, will dream more, as dreams are the first things we abandon in a crisis.

Thus, my selection from an Instagram pool of images tagged with #biennale are a mix of absurd, ridiculous, and immersive experiences obtained in solitary confinements. Perhaps we will stop taking selfies. A side effect of the crisis that our self-image and attestation of 'being there' will no longer be as relevant.

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sicardiayensbacino

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The Curating of Self and Others[1]: Biennials as Forms of *Governmental Assemblages*[2]

Ronald Kolb

For at least the last ten years, a great focus on contemporary art discourse has established itself, especially surrounding the "biennial format" from a rather new perspective, taking into account not only art historical and aesthetic trajectories often associated with museum studies, but also looking into the economic, socioeconomic, political, and geopolitical conditions. The large numbers of justified critiques of the Eurocentric hegemony of art's modernity and the constant classification of all other art practices in relation to the dominant Western canon is still a matter of negotiation and discussion in many ways. Analyses of the "exhibitionary biennial complex" find themselves in the middle of contemporary, hence complex, constellations of world-views within post-/decolonial thought through the lens of aesthetic, visual art practices and their representation, and displayability with all its distribution channels.

I want to propose adding to this discourse with a closer look into what a biennial is and can do by applying Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality. As biennials are a rather transparent amalgamation of political and economic apparatuses—of power and knowledge with local and global ramifications—within cultural expressions, they present themselves as a prime example for analyzing the function of the neoliberal and its effects on everyday life. As others may have briefly indicated, my proposal is to see biennials as a prime example of a neoliberal agenda. While the beginning of public museums in the 19th century could be seen as "civic engines"[3] in line with a liberal agenda, biennials—maybe conceived as an exhibitionary format that arose from the public museum and its origins, World Fairs—took up the neoliberal agenda[4] early on. The simultaneous loud presentations of hegemonic narratives (of national identities, of "global"—often times meaning "Western"—ideology, of economic potency) and the enabling of critical interventions[5] are inherent to contemporary biennials worldwide.

Compliance, Critique, and Compliance–Critique

Foucault's analyses suggest that the modern nation-state and its institutions are formed in conjunction with critical thought. In that respect, critique forms the institution, and does not utter the desire of getting rid of the institution all together. Critique (or the "Art not to be governed like that") regulates sovereign power. But—looking also at the various biennials out there—forms of critique can be drastically different, and this should be addressed: there is ("passive") critique and ("active") critique. There are so many forms of compliant critique (and so many captured in the hegemonic framework) that one strongly feels that the mere gestures of critical art and exhibitions are like soft pillows for a clear conscience in a bourgeois society, which might agree on the critique, but only to calm their nerves without the need to act differently. But at the same time, Foucault warns us not to easily and categorically call out as wrong everything that comes with state or sovereign power.[6]

This Biennial, That Biennial, and the Other Biennial—Never the Same

Starting with a rather simple definition of a biennial, one can describe biennials as a recurring (2,3,4,5,10 years) contemporary art event, usually displaying artworks in large-scale—"mega"—exhibitions, often accompanied with a discursive environment, with discussions and other public encounters with audience and artists. The artworks and art practices on display and in discussion are usually engaged within the framework of contemporaneity; living artists exhibit oftentimes site-specific art projects that are newly commissioned. The biennial itself is embedded in a city, a region, within a national cultural framework, and/or in a local specific setting but—one can easily observe this by the added "biennial," "triennial,"…—to the location a biennial is set up.[7] Biennials are initiated with a "will to globality"[8] as the late Okwui Enwezor put it and expresses a desire (or better: the will) to engage in a global and "modern" public sphere. This may ignite from various sources: one could see certain biennials in light of a national narrative, (often newly formed) nations demonstrating industrial development or cultural progress[9] cynically speaking so as to show the world a certain kind of democratic and political freedom to its citizens[10] or to counter certain dominant narratives, e.g. the Western narrative of modernity coming all the way from Enlightenment, and its judgement of reason with eyes only. Apart from various reasons for setting up a biennial, each biennial enters into a dialogue with an audience, a public—internationally and/or locally.

Global ~~vs.~~ Local

Some biennials are pretty much directed to the so-called international art scene (whatever this heterogenous group of actors consists of: poor artists with the hope of becoming famous? Collectors in fur? Professional museum curators and precarious independent workers?) and therefore are often founded in the hope of incentivizing tourists' visits, but also the local art scene, and hopefully also a more diverse local public is attracted by the biennial's appeal.

Biennials that cater more to the first group—the international art scene—are confronted with criticism, as they do not play out their site-specificity, their local accessibility, and tend to be seen as a vehicle of the overly dominating art market and its overshadowing interest in profit more than anything else.[11] But the often expressed critique of biennials that host only "international"—meaning art-market relevant—artists possesses a similar threat to a biennial that is solely rooted in the local or national art scene, one that would make the presentation of art fall back on a local identity, playing directly into identitarian narratives.

This can hypothetically lead strangely enough to a reinvigoration of fixed (local) identities with an inherent danger of re-identification with a national or locally connoted project. To follow Jens Kastner here: the reproduction of processes and an insistence on ethnic identities within the vernacular of even the most international biennial preserve ethnicity as a closed formation.[12] An early example of a successful counter-narrative can be found in the 3rd Havana Biennial. Gerardo Mosquera, one of the founders of the Bienal de la Habana and one organizer of the first three iterations, pointed out that, "Another significant change brought by the third Bienal was that European and North American artists with Third World diaspora backgrounds, such as those identifying themselves as black artists from Great Britain, were included, as was the Border Art Workshop from San Diego and Tijuana."[13]

Biennial Categorizations To Let Go Of

Over the course of the last ten years, various categorizations have been established in a dialectical style. These categorizations may separate and distinguish certain biennials

from others with quite a hegemonic undertone. It may dismiss certain more newly established—often "peripheral"—biennials as a mere image representation and image production for and within a national or regional identity, as art market-driven aesthetic homogenizers for economic reasons, as culture reduced to a spectacle for tourists, and so on. This comes along with polarized descriptions of biennials as "Janus-faced."[14] In the very same year, the still profoundly relevant and prominent *Biennial Reader* stated in its editorial that biennials are caught between spectacle and critique with skeptics on the one side referring to biennials as a spectacle of the art market with the ever same artists and on the other encouraged critiques claiming biennials create an experimental format of critical discourse and exhibition-making.[15]

Setting up biennials in this polarized field seems to be less helpful in our times, as it tends to shed light on things in a right–wrong mode or an either–or. Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas suggest analyzing biennial exhibitions and formats in a paradoxical way that may not be resolvable.[16] In that case, there might not be one side or the other, but an "interminglednesss" in varying degrees: economy, power, artistic expression, and other aspects come together in a sort of contested field with different outcomes, one expression dominating others in different cases.

Refined Categorizations

A more elaborate categorization was given by Charlotte Bydler.[17] According to Bydler, biennials started as "philanthropic-capitalistic enterprises" (the Venice Biennale and the biennials that followed this model, like Bienal de São Paulo, established themselves as the expression of the international political climate of the Cold War (documenta, Bienal de la Habana), and later after 1989 as a contemporary "global" format, which is often rooted in democratic aspirations in dealing with a collective trauma (e.g., the Gwangju Biennale, the short-lived Johannesburg Biennale).

The dichotomy between hegemonic narratives and formats of resistance developed by Oliver Marchart[18] directs biennials toward a conflictual reading of power relations in a Center–Periphery scheme. In the end, it questions the normative belief that a contemporary biennial format of today is a direct successor of the Venice Biennale. Moreover, within a constant struggle, biennials of "the periphery" questioned the dominant "Western" model of modernity and entered the struggle for hegemony a long time ago, and may have even won it. This thought is directly in line with the 7th Gwangju Biennale in 2008 and its narrative of resistance (as a biennial it positioned itself against a colonial Venice Biennale model). [19]

But examples of early biennials also show the distancing of a supposedly "Western" model of art history: The Bienal de São Paulo changed its narrative and departed from the original model of the Venice Biennale rather early on after its foundation. At least since 1978, the Bienal de São Paulo has turned into a very different project, and laid the groundwork for the Havana Biennial, according to Mirko Lauer, following Anita Orzes.[20] And other younger, and smaller, "Biennials of Resistance" followed.

Individualizing Biennials

In our globalized time, however, differentiation cannot be drawn with a geographical mapping. Biennials in the North can be set up as a model of resistance, while biennials in the South can express a highly aestheticized format for the art market. To complicate things even more, looking into a single biennial's history—even the Venice Biennale—reveals a mind-boggling transition between artistic forces of the avant-

garde, political-activist struggles, and, in the end, the overarching dominance of the art market in its current state.

This is the complexity of the world in which we now live: an utterance (of any sort) has to be researched and looked at with the specific context and history in mind, making it hard to apply any grand narratives from the past, like "East" and "West," or "Center–Periphery". In that regard, biennials can be seen as a mere form with a certain set of parameters; yet, while looking closer into each one, one detects a rich history of different contents and contexts. This is also highlighted by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung in the conversation with Dorothee Richter in this issue.[21]

Derailing Biennials From Their Apparent Historical Trajectories

A historical outline provided by Federica Martini (through others: e.g. Peter Sloterdijk)[22] put biennials in line with art fairs and festivals, together with the public museum (which originated through nation-states and rise of the capital system) and with that, in line with colonial pasts. In that way, biennials are often seen as remnants of World Fairs, and with every newly founded biennial and iteration, it cruelly refers to an origin in a Western colonial narrative.[23] But—alas in a rather disciplinary and educational way—at least the art fairs and early public museums had the intention of bringing different classes together. The vision of a rather newly established ruling bourgeois class that was to "educate" the working class by showing them how to behave could be differently read as a reciprocal exchange between the two social groups.

Today, the urgent desire for shared platforms where communities of different interests can come together and learn from each other discussing things (and "educating" themselves admittedly within a knowledge/-power structure) sheds maybe a different light on these old formats of fairs and festivals. I even would see it is a strength of biennials with a strong event character, as it can create a public sphere, where segregation/isolation of our contemporary finely fragmented special interest driven groups can come together.

In my thinking, contemporary biennials are unlike public museums; they are not only an utterance derived from its connectedness to a specific time and a specific place. They relate to a global sphere—with all its colonial traces and postcolonial relations—and form a complex dialogue for a rather limited group of people. Public museums and institutions submit to a much stricter function of national representations, as they are oftentimes heavily dependent financially and politically. One could argue that biennials are on the front line of contemporary art practices, showing art and mediating discourse that has not yet entered the canonical narrative of art history presented in public museums and their collections. That being said, avant-garde movements were last to be discussed in *Documenta11* with Okwui Enwezor, and only in the framework of postcolonialism and a mutually influenced historiography of modernities with more than one dominant agent over the other.

Because of their more fluid character and their relationship to the global sphere, biennials tend to move faster than traditional institutions with stricter structures. Biennials are, one could say, more neoliberal in their labor ethics, and more liberal in their line of thought.

Biennials of Governmentality

I want to highlight the shift from public museums and art fairs in light of a state-driven, national educational project[24] to biennials as a flexible structure transgressing

identities and catering to a global sphere with Foucault's concept of *gouvernementalité*. One could argue that Foucault later rearranged his own theoretical analyses of a somewhat deterministic ideology of the disciplinary power of modern states that he so famously laid out in the Panopticon as a model of the modern state. His thoughts on disciplinary power with the aim of constant self-surveillance derived from the spectacle of punishment shifted to the question of how a police state could have been overcome in the past (and may be helpful to know to be able to overcome it today!).

An important distinction in Foucault's proposed concept of governmentality—as an analysis of the neoliberal agenda, but also as a proposal of "freedom" in itself—is to position oneself much more clearly against the economic dominance of the neoliberal agenda over all aspects of the social. Foucault sets up governmentality as a much broader concept, trying to "bridge" the "modern sovereign state" and the "modern autonomous individual," and show how they depend on each other.[25] In this sense, governing means thinking of one's own rules of governance. The famous "conduct of conduct" is born. The ultimate trajectory is not getting rid of the state or state structures, but much more seeing the necessity of governing ("the self and others")[26] and institutions—that can be reshaped along the way—that help to govern a society.

Related to the (anti-)hegemonic biennial machine, governmentality makes visible (consciously or not) the critical attitude of the individual (the artists, the curators, and the publics alike), and at the same time our compliance within hegemonic structures. The questions that arise within these structures, according to Foucault, is embedded in the questions of how to be (or not to be) governed.

On that note: I would propose following Tony Bennett[27] in seeing and analyzing the *exhibitionary biennial complex* (and other exhibitionary formats with the same structure) as a form of governmental assemblage,[28] setting up proposals for governing structures (at the same time externally for the public and internally while producing an exhibition) by regulating the public's (and one's own) behavior, representing cultural identities by re-staging and reframing (or expanding) the historical, political canons and dominant narratives.

The new challenges for museums, like for biennials—if this institution still wants to exert relevance and power—is to embrace and support new knowledges and its forms, rather than continually reproduce representations from a toxic collection, while at the same time opening up to different networks (assemblages). In Tony Bennett's words:

> "Museums need to be considered in terms of their relations to […] governmental assemblages, and less as self-contained knowledge / power apparatuses than as switch points in the circuits through which knowledges are produced and circulated through different networks. As such, they play a part in the distribution of the freedom through which liberal forms of government are organized, according a capacity for free and reflexive forms of self-government to some sections of the populations they connect with while at the same time denying such capacities to others."[29]

And while the mode of self-organization seems settled, the underlying problems of the governmental assemblages rooted in neoliberal thought need to be taken care of, as the material side is often neglected or left out. Again, the geo-historical and geo-political contexts can vary so extremely that an analysis can only be thought of for each

single case. Propagating liberal ideas of education can mean extremely different things in different contexts. And self-organization—in certain contexts a much needed empowering process—can mean neoliberal structures of the "West" outsourcing responsibility of the sovereign state. One has to be careful not to so easily use these terms generically as a means of devaluing structures and processes. Again, these terms have their own topological and governmental history, varying greatly in different regions of the world. Even deploying the "neoliberal agenda" for every situation does not take into consideration that these concepts are embedded in a rather "Western" context, and mean little to nothing, besides yet again showing off a different form of colonial narrative. As a well-known example of the so-called West, one could look at the UK's neoliberal path since the 1980s, dismantling the state (for ruthless economic practices) and stripping the sovereign of its responsibility of caretaking for its citizens at the same time, as one definition of neoliberalism. In other parts of the world, the state may never have established such a high form of control and regulation altogether. Self-organization can be framed in a totally different concept than in "Westernized" contexts, where self-organization is often directly linked to commercialized self-realization.[30]

Conclusion

In our globalized world, where national identities have exceeded their purpose of producing citizens, museums have to shift their exhibitionary complex to let in "governmental assemblages" in order to open up to a broader and more inclusive formation with situated knowledges not derived from a national framework, but from smaller units of loose and open-ended communities.

For that to happen, the notion of the "audience" or the "public" has to be profoundly questioned, as it always is a thought "after" the show is up. And as beneficial as the educational turn might be, it still makes the distinction between the exhibition, the artist, the artwork, and the audience. Thinking with Foucault, I would say, it is quite clear that art is a discourse of statements uttered by all involved in culture, be it the artists, curators, writers, critics, or the public. The biggest task or challenge might be to think of the audience not as a subject to regulate, control, or reform (a non-disciplinary approach), but to think of the public as a part of the "governmental assemblage," as one important agent in the coming together in an exhibitionary complex.

For that, new forms of biennials need to not only be discursive, but set up sustainable, self-governing, long-term structures that overcome a "mere" timed display of artworks or a "mere" assembly of people in discussions. As a final hint to such new models that you can observe popping up everywhere, I want to refer here to the newly established alliance between the Biennale Matter of Art in Prague, the Biennale Warszawa, the Kyiv Biennial, and the OFF-Biennale Budapest—not only a network in solidarity, but the consequential contestation of a regional and national identity, forming a sustainable structure that can be made possible in a self-governmental manner. The signs of the time all blatantly show us that a national governmental authority is no longer a reference point in any way, neither as representative of a national interest, nor as a caretaker of the social and of equal rights.

Notes

1 The title refers to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1983, which were published under the title "The Government of Self and Others."

2 See: Tony Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory,* eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).
3 See: Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).
4 The neoliberal agenda does not only entail self-realization and the most flexible labor conditions, but places all aspects of social life under the dominance of the economy, whereas liberalism had politics—society, and its equalizing parameters—in the forefront.
5 The critical mode in Michel Foucault's "What is Critique?" indicates that critique and governmental state institutions are conditional to each other in modern democratic states. Critique in liberal and neoliberal thought is occupied with the questions of how to be governed, of self-regulation, and self-governing.
6 In the historical context, Michel Foucault addressed this critique against the radical Leftist approach of the RAF and others.
7 Why a certain number of even newly founded biennial exhibition formats like Bergen Assembly refuse to take up the term "Biennial" or "Triennial" has more to do with art's complicating play with distinction than anything else.
8 "The will to globality" expressed by Okwui Enwezor can be read through Foucault's concept of the will. A concept that lets the subject not only follow rationality or desire but acts as a subject's expression to be determined. In that line of thought, a subject is constituted through her will, because she can determine her own direction.
9 See, as a profound elaboration on the entanglements of postcolonial desires of progress and colonial pasts that does not wish to be seen in a strict historical trajectory of the biennial models starting from Venice:
Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," Biennials, monographic edition of *MJ – Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 2 (Winter-Spring 2003-4);
Ranjit Hoskote, "Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010).
10 See: Christian Morgner, "Inclusion and Exclusion in the Art World: A Sociological Account of Biennial Artists and Audiences," *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
11 For a more profound analysis, please read Shwetal A. Patel, "Resisting Biennialisation: Institutional and Community Responses to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale," *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
12 See: Jens Kastner, "Staat und kulturelle Produktion," June 19, 2020, http://www.jenspetzkastner.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Soziologie___Politik/Staat_Kult_Produktion.pdf.
13 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts," *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
14 At the *Biennale Principle*, a conference held in 2010 at the Bucharest Biennale 4, Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller expressed biennials as "Janus-faced." A text was later published: Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller, "Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle," in *STARTING FROM VENICE: STUDIES ON THE BIENNALE*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milan: et al. Edizione, 2010).
15 See: Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, "Biennialogy," in *The Biennial Reader*.
16 See: Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas, **"**The Paradoxes of the Biennale," *OnCurating*

Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency (June 2020).
17 Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).
18 Oliver Marchart, "The globalization of art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': a history of the biennials from the periphery," in *World Art* 4:2 (2014): 263-276.
19 The director of the 7th Gwangju Biennale interestingly enough was Okwui Enwezor. Ranjit Hoskote, the co-curator, expressed the resistance against the Venice Biennale explicitly in "Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader*.
20 See: Anita Orzes, "Curatorial Networks: The Havana Biennial and the Biennials in the South," *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
21 See: Bonaventure Ndikung in discussion with Dorothee Richter, *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
22 Federica Martini, Vittoria Martini, *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials* (Milan: Postmediabooks, 2011). The text was updated in April 2020 for *OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020).
23 See: Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader*, (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 293.
24 See: Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.
25 Thomas Lemke, "'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (May 2001): 190–207, 191.
26 This expression is drawn from the lectures Foucault gave at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1983. "The others" is not meant here as a philosophical concept of "the Other" in a representational way, but expresses much more the shared process of coming up with an agreed contract, how to be governed as a society.
27 Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage."
28 Governmental assemblages should not be confused with exhibitionary formats in the manner of "relational aesthetics," where basically a relation is being established between a fixed curator position and the artists, regulated within the aesthetic regime. It is much more occupied with shifting the power position of a curator or a director (and artists) into a network versus a curator with one singular vision.
29 Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums. From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage," 16.
30 Critiquing the historical trajectory of liberalism in its universalist idea, establishing a life form of freedom of choice, must be researched at another time.

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Instant Community
Daniel Knorr

Instant Community, 2013.
Materialization: Spool of 2.5 km of wire, various materials and sizes, Interactive.
Tranzit Cluj, Romania; Galleria Fonti, Neapel, Italy; Vulcano Solfatara, Italy

At the opening of the exhibition, a spool of wire over two kilometers long was unrolled by the artist and visitors to the exhibition. The wire was soft and showed signs of interaction with visitors. After the opening, it could be deformed further. The work explores a dynamic, expansive, and haptic experience of material and at the same time permits a shared perception of consumption and its manifestation in a cultural place.

Daniel Knorr, born 1968 in Bucharest, lives and works in Berlin and Hong Kong. His conceptual, often participatory approaches repeatedly raise the issue of historical, socio-political, economic and biopolitical phenomena in the context of art. In different genres he appropriates, transfers and materializes states of past, present and future.

2
Questionnaire

Farid Rakun

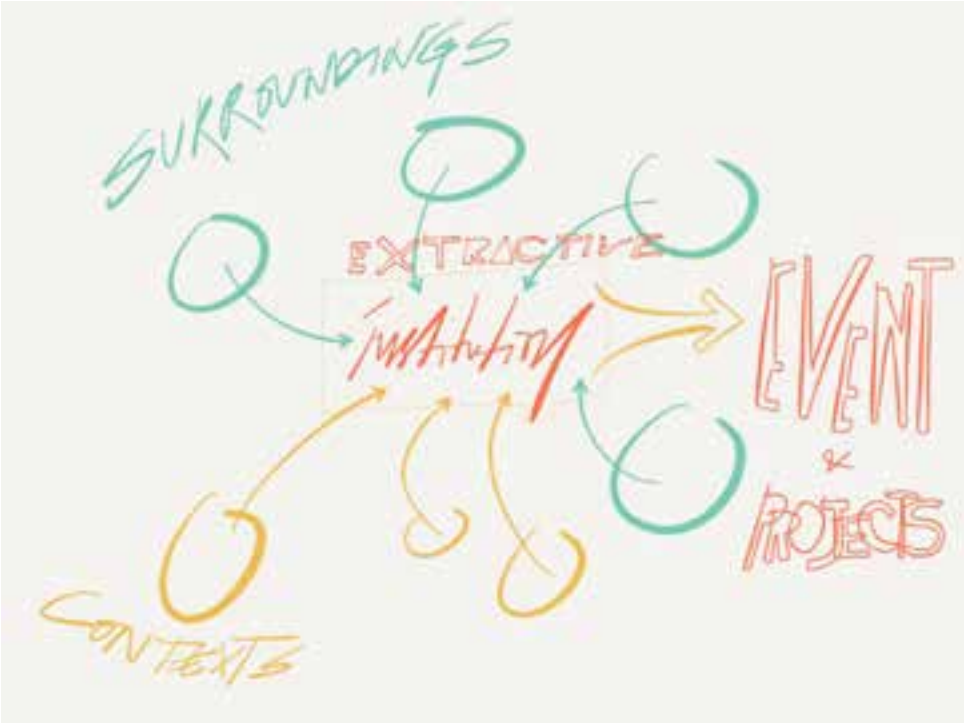
I'm answering all these with two hats simultaneously: one as a part of the artistic director team of the upcoming *documenta fifteen* (2022), second as someone still involved (albeit currently in a very limited capacity) with the Jakarta Biennale.

The following diagrams were made in an attempt to explain what me + my friends are going through. They began with, but might not answer, the four questions you posed to me in a direct manner.

In a nutshell, from our experience, what we're trying to do is to practice an understanding of art and (therefore its) institutions as something constituent, porous, in order to reach the relevancy of everyday life to sustain (at least) an ecosystem where they are based. Not many parties exercise this understanding (although for sure everyone has been writing and talking about it a lot, including those who are not practicing), by being extractive (intentionally or not).

Please dwell on the diagrams below for more…

Farid Rakun trained as an architect (B.Arch from Universitas Indonesia and M.Arch from Cranbrook Academy of Art); rakun wears different hats, dependent on who is asking. A visiting lecturer in the Architecture Department of Universitas Indonesia, he is also a part of the artists' collective ruangrupa, with whom he co-curated TRANSaction: Sonsbeek 2016 in Arnhem, NL, and currently serving as a collective Artistic Director for *documenta fifteen* (Kassel, 2022). As an instigator, he has permeated various global institutions such as the Centre Pompidou, La Biennale di Venezia, MMCA Seoul, Sharjah Biennial, Bienal de São Paulo, Harun Farocki Institut, Dutch Art Institute (DAI), Creative Time, Haute École d'art et de design (HEAD) Genève, and basis voor actuele kunst (BAK). He has worked for the Jakarta Biennale in different capacities since 2013 and is currently serving as an advisor.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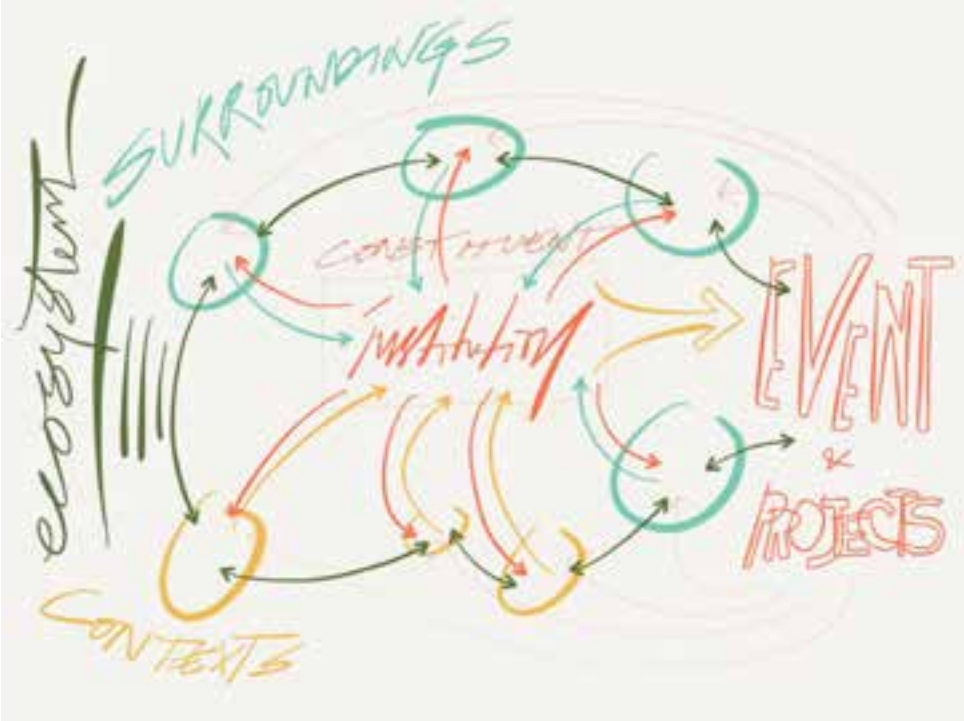
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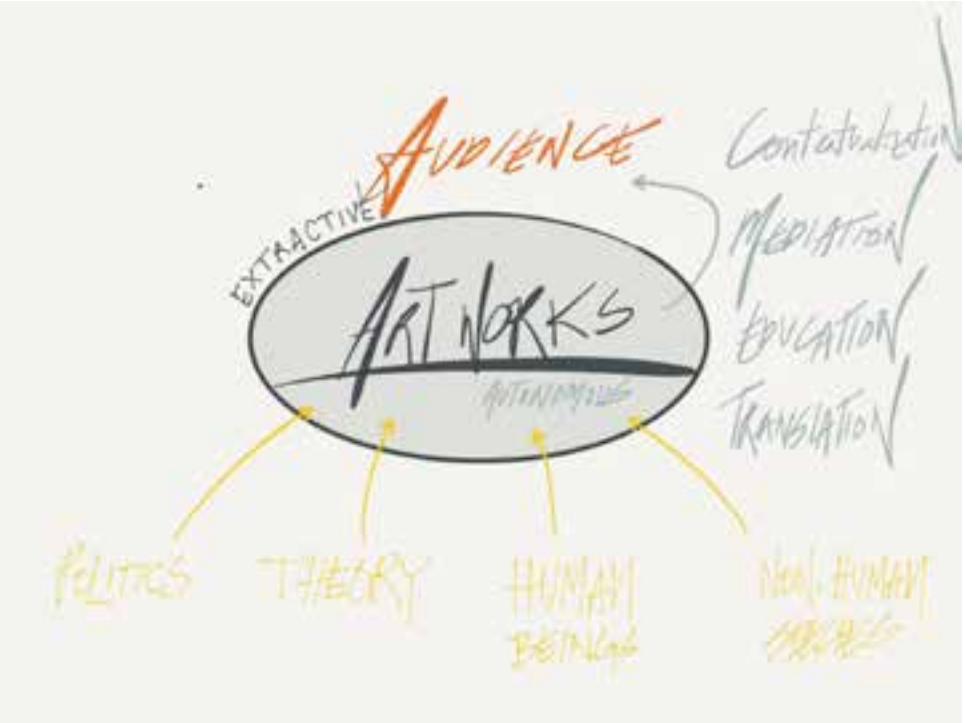
AUDIENCE
EXTRACTIVE
ARTWORKS
Contextualization
MEDIATION
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TRANSLATION
POLITICS
THEORY
HUMAN
NON-HUMAN

MEDIATION
NON-HUMAN
TRANSLATION
THEORY
EDUCATION
ARTWORKS
HUMAN
POLITICS
AUDIENCE
Contextualization
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Raqs Media Collective

Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

The driving thought, with regard to an entity as polymorphous as a triennial, is not unlike driving a car. From the ignition to the brake, from combining acceleration and de-acceleration to seeing the bend in the road, and then to desiring a detour so as to rest, as well as being alert to the moves of momentum and potential brought into play—in short, to work on with *concatenative force*.

In nature, nothing acts in a pure, isolated, state. A combination of 'impure' states combine together into an activation analogous to an "*entourage effect*" (a debated concept in therapeutic pharmacology relating to cannabis), which argues that components act much better in a relational field of interaction and combination with others than in isolation. This gives rise to a milieu formed through force-fields of epiphytic play, contagious displacements, and contaminated alterations.

Many things happen, overlapping each other, intersecting with each other. Instead of one 'destination' for the drive, one could speak of getting somewhere unknown through an entourage of dispositional desires, curiosities, and vectors of inflection, and orientation.

The 'driving' concatenative force behind this edition of the Yokohama Triennale is an interplay between auto-didacticism, the luminosity of care and friendship, and toxicity. In our public engagement on November 30 in Yokohama, we launched the *Sourcebook* (see *e-flux* announcement, also for downloading the *Sourcebook*, https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/285255/yokohama-triennale-2020/) and argued:

> We offer distant and proximate viewers, listeners, and readers of the 7th Yokohama Triennial in 2020 an array of sources. These are drawn from different periods, cultural milieus, and geographies, and are written by individuals and collectivities that have cared for life. These combine a patchwork of sparks and incandescence that can illuminate the journey that artists and co-travellers are embarking upon. The sources guide, inform, inspire, and riddle our conversations with artists, curators, writers, and everyone else interested in this specific journey. They act as catalysts that provoke us to think, to ignite, to learn, and unlearn.

Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

On March 4, 2020, we outlined the following in the next *e-flux* announcement (https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/314534/deliberation-on-discursive-justice-the-episdo-series/) about the Triennale:

> The Yokohama Triennale 2020 initiates *Deliberations on Discursive Justice* as a transcontinental tributary which will investigate, write, and perform the aporias arising from assertions to equality. These are claims made with bodies,

with words, with sounds, with costumes, with images, with instruments, and with shifting forums. The tributary draws from the insights of a minor strand in legal theory, which engages with the way people have been able to transform the courtrooms as forums to speak, and have been making the act of speech itself as the site for claims to justice.... These deliberations on discourse and equity, words and hunger, speech and bodies will evolve through the ensemble constituted of Michelle Wong (Hong Kong), Lantian Xie (Dubai), and Kabelo Malatsie (Johannesburg).

The ensemble argues:

There are songs for equality all over the world. Millions march down roads in Hong Kong. Thousands in South Africa discuss consent on Twitter. Women run households via smartphones from makeshift protest-tents blocking a highway in Delhi. Continuously unfolding events empty out prevailing discursive logics and rhetoric, populating the world with divergent sets of protocols and urgencies. Who hears, how is it heard, how is it not heard, and how is it read? The street makes itself a theatre of speech acts. The decisive question of «hearing» is to be deliberated on.

These brewing situations open a terrain of justice. They are intangible courts of poetic appeals, of argumentation through myths, stories, and care, and are not daunted by the Law; law is but one dialect. They are aware that law can act as a sanitation regime—hearing only its own voice, rendering all else as noise. But justice is a different language, one with which to break down the world and put it back together again. Prevalent discursive advantages are challenged with new ways of inhabiting the world.

We propose a party, a scenography, and a chase, as ways to enter this ferment and further the deliberation. We call in the carnivalesque and the masquerade, draw in the middle earth of healers and shamans, play with technologies of renewal and admittance, work with appeal, apology, gratitude, and indebtedness, practice the art of counter-monuments, and pose the discursive as a site of stakes & wagers, codes & limits.

Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

Radical democracy can hardly ever be planned for. Instead of templates, we could speak of infrastructure, milieux and mobile constellations of attraction and effects. A "milieu" could be seen as emerging through an assembly of concepts, dispositions, and affects—and that assembly emerges through a protocol and a procedure of sharing, listening, reciprocity, and co-presence.

Coming to what we have witnessed recently: the walking refusal of more than ten million workers to accept the terms and conditions of an inept and delusional state which administered a sudden lockdown in response to COVID-19 all over India—where they literally began walking hundreds of kilometers home. We have also experienced the earlier process (which began on December 15, 2019, and lasted 100 days) of the gathering of people in spaces to insist in a bodily way that citizenship was an evolving, transforming, and not an inert process. This is what is being referred to as

the "Shaheen Bagh moment" after the place in Delhi, Shaheen Bagh, where a protest started by Muslim women against a discriminatory citizenship law became a catalyst for an extended joyous rethinking of citizenship by many kinds of people. This lasted until it had to suspend itself in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Through witnessing both these processes, and through our own ongoing reflections, we understand that radical democratic processes can rarely, if ever, be predicted into existence. They emerge, in affirmation as well as in refusal, by responding to eruptions that either make expressivity possible, or sharply curtail it. The point is to be sensitive to the fact that these conditions exist and that the forces unleashed or restrained by them play their part.

In the *Sourcebook*, we say:

> The care of life and the care of self are not possible without care *with* toxicity. We have to think about our sickness, our offal, and our residues of the cycles of consumption and production without cruel partition, masked as destiny. Each hillock of refuse on the outskirts of a city represents a demand made by the present on the future, with no promise of recompense, until the archaeologists come calling. The splitting of the luminosity of care from the shadows of the toxic is detrimental to the future of life on this planet.

How to do art and curatorial projects in quarantine times, in states of emergency?

The State of Emergency seems now to be a normal state! As a category, it may have outlived its explanatory potency. The very notion of "normal," as prior, posterior, or exterior to a state of emergency needs to be re-evaluated. We are in a period of embarrassed capital, and muddled up state-powers. The market has lost its mythical presence and looks banal, and in constant need of prosthetics. Now a rag-tag assemblage of global institutiond and autarkic despotisms will try to re-center billions of hearts back towards productivity.

In the *Sourcebook*, we outlined:

> Life, the universe, the world, and the time of each day disintegrate and get re-constituted through innumerable acts, incrementally re-building through luminous care. Broken minutes are mended in the afterglow of time's toxic debris. Life is a luminous autodidact.

Neither art nor aesthetics, nor politics, nor therapeutics, nor ethics, nor for that matter transport or medicine or policing or recreation or governance, can be seen as entities in distinct silos. Art in quarantine times has to embody the sense that our understanding of realities, and the ways in which we live, act, think, fall sick and heal, cannot be quarantined from each other. Not any longer.

The unfolding of the virus-induced understanding of the futilities of the phantasmagoric grip of sovereign power, and the futurities of endless growth, will both need artistic and curatorial attention.

Raqs Media Collective was formed in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. The word “raqs” in several languages denotes an intensification of awareness and presence attained by whirling, turning, being in a state of revolution. Raqs Media Collective take this sense to mean ‘kinetic contemplation’ and a restless and energetic entanglement with the world, and with time. Raqs Media Collective practices across several forms and media; it makes art, produces performances, writes, curates exhibitions, and occupies a unique position at the intersection of contemporary art, philosophical speculation and historical enquiry. The members of Raqs live and work in Delhi, India. In 2001, they co-founded the Sarai program at CSDS New Delhi and ran it for a decade, where they also edited the Sarai Reader series. They are the Artistic Directors for the forthcoming Yokohama Triennale (2020).

Discussion between Bruno Latour, Eva Lin, and Martin Guinard
Written by Martin Guinard

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Latour said "Trump and Thunberg inhabit different planets—his has no limits, hers trembles."[1] In the age of the New Climate Regime,[2] it seems that we can no longer really agree on what a habitable Earth means. And this to such an extent that we seem to be living on different planets, which, of course, implies major political differences.

It is not the same thing for all of us to live in the space promised by modernity (global planet), which would require six or seven planets from which to draw its resources, and to live inside the critical zone, the thin, one-kilometer envelope on the surface of the Earth, which is fragile and reactive to our actions. The contrast is just as flagrant between those who literally want to change planets by fleeing to Mars (planet escape), and those who, feeling betrayed by globalization, take refuge in populist currents that promise to protect their identity (planet security). These examples stand in sharp contrast to Aboriginal cosmologies that approach questions of composition and the potential end of the world in completely different ways. We have in mind the example of certain Amazonian tribes for whom each action implies a retroaction as shown in the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski.[3]

In geo-politics, there is *geo* (which means Earth). The latter acts as a preposition: changing the conception of Earth will for sure generate a completely different politics. As Latour reminds us: "The climate question is not one aspect of politics among others, but that which defines the political order from beginning to end, forcing all of us to redefine the older questions of social justice along with those of identity, subsistence, and attachment to place."[4]

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

Before acting in politics, first orient yourself. When we hear politicization or depoliticization, we instantly think of the problem of the deep disorientation into which the current situation is plunging us. And by this we do not mean COVID-19, which had the capacity to put a big stop to the world economy, but the New Climate Regime, in the face of which mobilizations remain modest.

Talking about a plurality of planets is one way of approaching this problem of disorientation, talking about different attitudes that seem to be particularly noticeable at the moment. The questions of divisiveness are such that it seems preferable to assume them, to stage them, to map them, in order to know with a little more precision how to position oneself in these conflicts.

The advantage of the term "planet" over the term "world" is that it does not simply point to "visions" or "perceptions" of the world, but it directs us more towards the material composition of the latter, whether it be the gases that make up its atmosphere, the density of the rocks, the quantity of water on its surface, or any of a great many other characteristics.

"Planet" helps to talk about a multiplicity of ways of articulating social and material order. In this sense, it could quite easily be interchanged with "cosmology." And on this point, it is clear there is a cosmology of neoliberalism (yes, in our opinion neoliberalism is a cosmology). The promise of this state of the world could have been formulated as follows: "As long as you are democratic from a political point of view, and liberal from an economic point of view, you will have access to development." Although this promise, of course, concealed all forms of hypocrisy, neo-colonialism, and hegemony, the promise of development remained intact. What can we say when we now see that to reach the state of abundance of the American way of life, six or seven planets would be needed?

The reactions to the problems posed to us by ecological change are such that it seems necessary to open the breach, and to study the contrasts between cosmologies that approach the questions of future change in different ways. Obviously, the artists with whom we work register these differences. For example, Aruwai Kaumakan's practice is characteristic of what Latour calls the Terrestrial Planet. As a former jewelry maker, she decided in 2008, after a violent typhoon devastated her village, to "upscale" her productions so that she could work collaboratively with members of her community, using weaving as a resilient and social fabric. This "grounded approach" presents a sharp contrast with the "off-shore" and limitless space of the Global Planet, depicted by artists such as Antonio Vega Macotela. The latter has initiated a fairly unusual collaboration between a textile atelier (Marisol Centeno Studio), the local craftsmen, and hackers. Together they encrypted within the mesh of large tapestries information related to tax evaders, whose capital flows across borders and escapes the tax systems put in place within the boundaries of their nation-states.

Regarding the centering and "de-centering of the West," it is obvious that we cannot avoid the question of "who" speaks in the stating of this biennial's title. In this case, two Europeans from a country with a colonial history. We are, of course, aware of this, and there are two important points for us that condition the success or otherwise of this edition.

First of all, the aim is not to impose a fixed narrative, but to propose a thought experiment through the format of an exhibition. The precepts have, of course, evolved between the first intuition and the current configuration. For example, following a conversation with the curator of the museum, Sharleen Yu, it appeared important to include the planet's "alternative gravity," which is interested in astrology and invisible and vibratory substances that would affect the world according to principles that escape modern sciences. Chin Yinju draws astrological charts, which are like snapshots of the configurations of the stars at the beginning of five massacres in recent Asian history, "questioning whether such actions by humanity are inevitable under the predetermined and inexorable laws of the universe, whether these laws constitute a form of cosmic force majeure."[5]

The second point that is important for us is to use the biennial as a platform that allows us to make experiments, exercises and especially to respond to the framework that we propose. The collaboration with the curator Eva Lin is a major asset for setting

up more relevant devices (such as the theater of negotiations, which we will talk about below). As she says, the workshops are not parallel but central to the biennial. In addition, the advisers we work with help us to get in touch with local NGOs, artists and above all to reflect on the context in which we operate.

So, if we come back to the question of "hegemonic machines," yes, of course, biennials can be tools of homogenization (characterized by the term "biennial fatigue" that describes similarities between international exhibitions despite their geographical differences). What we hope to do, however, is to take advantage of the opportunity to generate forms of exchange and knowledge with visitors who wish to deepen these exchanges. What interests us is not to illustrate a Eurocentric theory, but rather to test it. To test it through the workshops but also through all the contradictory messages that the works provide us.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

There is a need to think about what we mean with the term "radical." Since the term etymologically implies a "return to the roots," we are a bit wary about the tabula rasa that it implies, this eternal Modernist revolutionary gesture. What seems to be needed more than ever is to multiply each of the steps and mediations necessary to develop a discussion.

Let's say that, when talking about the ecological mutation, there are two absolute opposites: less democracy, through dictatorship of experts; on the other hand, more democracy.

We are, of course, trying to promote the second aspect through devices that try to bring together agents/stakeholders/people who don't necessarily agree.
For example, the Theater of Negotiations is a format between that of a role play and a performance. This project starts from an exhaustive study of some controversies present in Taiwanese society, whether they concern air pollutants, reproductive technologies, or the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several science and technology studies scholars will train the participants to study who the stakeholders of the controversy are and what their agenda is. Then the participants will reenact the controversy by playing the role of the various stakeholders, and "negotiate" together.

The point here is not to be moralists, but to really understand what the "nodes" are in a controversial situation. It is more interesting for us to allow a marine biologist to get into the "shoes" of the CEO of the company that destroys the corals that the biologist studies than to preach to the choir a message of which they would already be convinced. And the museum is an excellent place to imagine these kinds of formats.

Notes

1 Andrew Todd, "Bruno Latour: 'Trump and Thunberg inhabit different planets – his has no limits, hers trembles,'" *The Guardian*, February 4, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/feb/04/bruno-latour-moving-earths-theatre-science-climate-crisis.
2 Term used by Latour to designate the impact of human activity on the Earth System, while avoiding the inability to register inequalities fostered by the term "Anthropocene."
3 Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

4 Bruno Latour, "We don't seem to live on the same planet..." — a fictional planetarium for the exhibition catalogue *Designs for Different Futures*, edited by Kathryn B. Hiesinger and Michelle Millar, Philadelphia Museum of Art and The Art History of Chicago (initially given as the Loeb Lecture, Harvard, Graduate School of Design) 2019, 193-199.
5 Chen Yinjue, *Liquidation Maps*, 2014, http://www.yinjuchen.com/installation.html

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Bruno Latour is a Professor at Sciences Po Paris, scientific director of medialab Sciences Po and the founder of SPEAP program for experimentation in arts and politics. From 1982 to 2006 he was professor at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation (CSI) at the École nationale supérieure des Mines in Paris and, for various periods, visiting professor at University of California, San Diego (UCSD), at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and in the Department of the History of Science at Harvard University. In addition to work in philosophy, history, sociology, and anthropology of science, he has collaborated on many studies in science policy and research management. He has published various books and articles, including: *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts* (1986), *Science in Action* (1987), *The Pasteurization of France* (1988), *Pandora's Hope. Essays in the Reality of Science Studies* (1999), *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005), *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (2010), *An inquiry into modes of existence: an anthropology of the moderns* (2013), *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2015), and *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018). Together with Peter Weibel he curated the major exhibitions *Iconoclash. Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (2002) and *Making Things Public. The Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005) at ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. In 2013 he received the Holberg Prize.

Eva Lin's practice is questioning reality and its perception with interdisciplinary practice. She stirs up intuitive experience to awake spectators' bodily sensation and imagination toward the space. She recently curated *Parallax 2017: Damage Control*, *The Hidden South* (2018), *The Upcoming Past* (2019), *Ryoji Ikeda Solo* co-curator Taipei Fine Art Museum 2019, Taiwan International Video Art Festival *Anima* (2020). She is now the director of mt.project where she works closely with creators, hunters, craftsmen, indigenous communities and other professionals to connect the relationship between human and nature by revealing the cultural spirits and wild knowledges endangered from the rational reality in the modern society.

Martin Guinard is an independent curator based in Paris, with a background in visual arts and art history. He has worked on several interdisciplinary projects dealing with the topic of ecological mutation. He has collaborated with Bruno Latour on four international projects over the last four years, including *Reset Modernity!* at ZKM in 2016 as well as a reiteration of the project through two workshop platforms in different geographical contexts: the first in China, *Reset Modernity! Shanghai Perspective* as part of the 2016 Shanghai Project; the second in Iran, *Reset Modernity! Tehran Perspective* curated with Reza Haeri at the Pejman Foundation and the Institute of History of Science of Tehran University. He is now a guest curator at ZKM working on Critical Zones, Observatory for Earthly Politics. Other projects include the co-curation of a section of the Socle du Monde Biennial in Herning, Denmark.

Defne Ayas and Natasha Ginwala

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

Our Biennale concept *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning* engages with the realm and dissemination of the "communal mind"—continuously emergent and rooted in healing technologies, indigenous life-worlds, matriarchal systems, animism, and anti-systemic kinship. Now more than ever, the hierarchy of knowledge is being shaken, as planetary forces compel a rethinking from individual to collective forms of extended intelligence.

We are concerned with what sort of civic models and practices of care will emerge in the aftermath of COVID-19. We feel convinced—living as we are through a traumatic interregnum—that the present co-evolution with electronic intelligence and algorithmic regimes needs to be addressed from a planetary perspective.

Toward the 13th Gwangju Biennale, we are working with artists and thinkers with mind-expanding practices that act beyond the binary framings of insider and outsider, legal and illegal, masculine and feminine. Each invested in traversing ancestral knowledge, heterodox life-systems, queer relationality, and modes of collective survival.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

The Gwangju Biennale has historically launched a critical rethinking and centering of Asian cultural practices. Our interest goes beyond art theory into the field of living cultural traditions, healing systems, and representations at the threshold between the living and the undead. This inquiry includes researching collections of folk painting as well as documents and ritual artifacts embedded as part of Korean Shamanism. Witnessing complex and durational Shamanic rituals while also meeting scholars of history, religion studies, and feminism have been a crucial learning process for us two, while framing this Biennale.

Biennials have been spaces for bold propositions that bring together the world community to engage with contemporary culture, especially in recent years, foregrounding positions of the Global South, involving collective and interdisciplinary practices. We have been in dialogue with biennial colleagues from São Paolo, Liverpool, Berlin, Kochi, and elsewhere to discuss precisely what makes these recurring formats viable and relevant through an impasse such as this. Will we all be able to use this global experience to reimagine and reengineer systems, institutions, and protocols in ways that might be relevant to the 21st century? We very much hope so. Since embarking on this process of biennial-making, we have in fact been thinking about the longer-time significance that artistic projects can assume in the 'afterlife' of a biennial—for us, the live dialogues generated through art commissions, collaboratively produced artistic works, the inclusion of performative gestures and scientific positions, research visits to Korea with around twenty artists contributing to local programming as part of a semi-public research process since last year.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

Live Organ is an active element of the 13th Gwangju Biennale that explores the set of questions at the heart of the exhibition and includes a series of public forums alongside a program of newly commissioned live works. Through a variety of media and dialogues, *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning* will share contemporary positions of particular relevance to the 40th anniversary of the May 18 Democratic Uprising.

We want to acknowledge and honor social justice movements around the world that have been impeded by COVID-19. We know their spirit is very much alive. With massive numbers of lives lost globally, it has become more vital to sustain public culture amidst drastic pulls between isolation and mass movements as well as human and planetary asymmetries.

The Gwangju Uprising holds global significance, and therefore we see it as a prism through which to understand some of the urgent questions that solidarity movements ask today. Through online/onsite forums and workshops, we intend to share contemporary positions that examine the tidal currents of people's movements, and the inventive tools including the choreographies of current citizen protests.

4. How do formats reflect/interrelate content (in your biennial)?

We have been working toward developing integrated formats to evolve connective tools and methods between the exhibition, live program, and publications, including an online platform. Last month, we launched the bilingual online journal *Minds Rising at http://13thgwangjubiennale.org*, which assembles our research processes, featuring our interdisciplinary content and artistic ideas. Serving as the "extended mind" of the 13th edition of the Gwangju Biennale, published on a bimonthly basis, *Minds Rising* includes long-read essays, poetry, sonic features, and video space for participant contributions, as well as time-based and live programming.

Our approach has been to bridge online and offline activities that extend the curatorial premise for *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning*. Another special ingredient in our publications programme is a reader drawing together debates relating to feminism titled *Stronger than Bone*. It is published together with the feminist, independent art and publishing initiative ARCHIVE BOOKS in Berlin. Understanding the wisdoms possessed and disseminated through female networks of solidarity is a vivid and urgent need, as we attempt to chart futures that sustain gender justice and ethical coexistence on a breathing planet.

Gová Lásse Lásse Elle (Elle Valkeapää). Photo: Outi Pieski

Sangdon Kim, *You and I, New Tribe – King Mountain Eagle Crocodile,* 2017, mixed media, 200x70x50cm, courtesy of the artist.

GB Talks: *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning Part 2,* January 2020. Photo: Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

Ana Prvački, *Multimask*, 2020, commissioned by the 13th Gwangju Biennale, courtesy of the artist.

Ana María Millán, *Happy People*, 2020, video game, detail, commissioned by the 13th Gwangju Biennale, courtesy of the artist.

Ritual performance by Angelo Plessas, October 2019. Photo: Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

Defne Ayas has served as a director and curator to several cultural institutions and research initiatives across the world, including the Netherlands, China, the United States, and Russia. Currently, she is the Artistic Director of "Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning", the 13th Gwangju Biennale 2021 (with Natasha Ginwala) as well as Curator at Large for V-A-C Foundation in Moscow/Venice. Ayas was the director of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (2012–2017). During her tenure there, Ayas undertook several biennial projects including "Respiro" at the Pavilion of Turkey in the 56th Venice Biennale (curator, 2015); "How to gather? Acting in a Center in a City in the Heart of the Island of Eurasia", the 6th Moscow Biennale (co-curator, 2015); and "Mindaugas", the 11th Baltic Triennial (co-curator, 2012), co-curator of the Istanbul and Bandung city pavilions as part of the Intercity Project of the 9th Shanghai Biennale, and curator of New York-based Performa since 2005. Ayas also served as a curatorial advisor to the 8th Shanghai Biennale in China, and as a publication advisor to the 8th Gwangju Biennale in 2010. Ayas co-founded several independent initiatives, including "Arthub Asia"—an Asia-wide active research and production initiative 2007, producing exhibitions and live productions including operas and performances, within the context of China and rest of Asia as well as "Blind Dates Project"—an artistic platform that is dedicated to tackling what remains of the peoples, places, and cultures of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923).

Natasha Ginwala is a curator and writer. She is Associate Curator at Gropius Bau, Berlin, and artistic director of COLOMBOSCOPE, Colombo. Ginwala has curated Contour Biennale 8, "Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium," and was part of the curatorial team of documenta 14, 2017. Other recent projects include "Arrival, Incision. Indian Modernism as Peripatetic Itinerary" in the framework of "Hello World. Revising a Collection" at Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, 2018; "Riots: Slow Cancellation of the Future" at ifa Gallery Berlin and Stuttgart, 2018; "My East is Your West" at the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015; and "Corruption: Everybody Knows…" with e-flux, New York, 2015. Ginwala was a member of the artistic team for the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2014, and co-curated "The Museum of Rhythm" at Taipei Biennial 2012 and at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2016–2017. From 2013–2015, in collaboration with Vivian Ziherl, she led the multi-part curatorial project "Landings" presented at various partner organizations. Ginwala writes on contemporary art and visual culture in various periodicals and has contributed to numerous publications. She is a recipient of the 2018 visual arts research grant from the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe.

Ekaterina Degot

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

My tenure as the director and chief curator of steirischer herbst, which started in 2018, is marked by the reflection on the roots of this established Austrian cultural enterprise and political meaning of the notion of the «avant-garde» and contemporary art as its heir, back then and today—as well as what it excludes. Steirischer herbst is a yearly interdisciplinary art festival founded in 1968 under the premises similar to documenta (and even sharing the predilection to lower case spelling): in the middle of nowhere (the province of Styria), right on a border with a communist country (in this case, the former Yugoslavia), focused on new art but rooted in something conservative and agricultural, like the flower show in Kassel or traditional autumn harvest festivals in Austria. Unlike documenta, it is a festival, i.e., it is spread out in time as well as in space, it does not have its exhibition spaces, and works in a very interdisciplinary way, in a variety of media and arts as well as discourse.

Both documenta and steirischer herbst emerged in the midst of Western Cold War political climate, translated into the aesthetics of the neo-avantgarde, meant to mark Western democracy versus totalitarianism. The opening of steirischer herbst in 1968 happened against the backdrop of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, when thousands of Socialist vacationers stuck in Austria preferred not to return, becoming political refugees. What was even more important, but not always reflected, was the fact both cultural enterprises found themselves surrounded by the vestiges of Nazism. In Austria, where denazification did not really take place, these were, and to some extent still are, much stronger. That makes the Austrian context full of «skeletons in the closets» and productive for artists and us as curators. We are very rooted in history here in Graz, in the city to which Hitler gave the honorary title of «city of popular uprising» for its pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic acts before the Anschluss. This city lacks the museum that would be focused on that, so partly we decided to play this role, among many others.

Steirischer herbst has always been a contradictory enterprise. It was founded on the initiative of conservative Catholic politicians, anti-Nazis but what often meant former Nazi sympathizers; very proudly local (its mention of Styria makes the name cryptic to the rest of the world) but with strong global ambitions; aiming for an «avant-garde» but having a conservative bourgeois audience. It has always been political and has had an articulate public component, due to the strong presence of sculpture in public space and, unlike documenta, theater. At the same time, and maybe precisely because of that, it was not really coherent with the mainstream of sleek, market-driven visual art illustrating leftist political mantras. That incoherence suits us well. Under my tenure, we are aiming at exploring how contemporary art can grow out of conservative roots rather than (partly imaginary) progressive ones. And there is rich conservative and poor conservative. We are looking at what has been excluded from the modernist canon, and this would be not only the legacy of colonized nations or of women locked in domesticity, but also things ostracized because of their low-class character. As a curator, even still in Russia, I always have been driven towards artifacts that go beyond the dogma of modernism or do not reach its level, so to speak, and are therefore labeled «not art enough.» That was always an inspiration with Russian artists from Malevich to Monastyrski and Kabakov. Here in Graz, we are looking at the notions of

popular and populist, among other things, and at the potential of the former as opposed to the latter.

The title of the first edition was ***Volksfronten***, provocatively in German and even more provocatively in plural: there is no one single antifascist Popular Front anymore; we are scattered because even the most progressive voices now often quietly obey their ethnic definition; everybody is obsessed with their roots, identity, community and DNA. Fierce internationalism and universalism are the driving forces of steirischer herbst under my tenure.

The second edition, called ***Grand Hotel Abyss***, went in the direction of a typically hedonistic "Viennese aesthetics" excluded from the mainstream of contemporary art (like Baroque or Art Nouveau), against the background of the growing feeling of apocalypse. The real coronavirus apocalypse obstructed our plans for 2020, and we are now preparing an extraordinary edition, which implies that we will never "return to normal," and art will have to reach to its audiences in other ways than those we were very comfortable with.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts:

For each of the oppositions you are mentioning, I would like to find a dialectical response that would attempt to see the phenomenon in its contradictions, and in its different disguises.

politicization and depoliticization....

In general, the issue of the political in the arts is quite simple, as we know that everything has a political meaning, especially artworks that claim to be non-political. This meaning is, however, debatable and open to interpretations, including sometimes wrong and unjust ones—this injustice is balanced by the temporary character of every interpretation in a democratic society. In latter decades, we see lots of "political art" where artists cannot live with this democracy of meanings and prefer to fully control this interpretation, by being very direct about what they want to say. I do not find this artistic practice particularly interesting. What is interesting that sometimes it actually leads to de-politicization, which now has surprising faces. One of them is the insistence on the emotional side of things, on the notions of offense, microaggression, safety for the expression of these micro-grievances. I perceive this "humanization" of the political sphere—that specifically affects art—as dangerous, and also sexist, when this affective sphere is identified with women, as is often the case. I am concerned when I see how the legitimate and highly necessary questioning of the legal system as the bourgeois and patriarchal one leads to the destruction of the presumption of innocence and further disempowerment and victimization of women who, under this way of thinking, are not supposed to be responsible for their own actions.

Another aspect of current de-politicization of art is its moralization. Contemporary art, since the historical avant-garde of nineteenth century (Courbet, etc.), associated itself with questioning, critique, the transgression of norms and a negative attitude (for which the avant-garde of the twentieth century found the aesthetic language), and is now pushed into a completely different sphere of "doing good things." This is not the public sphere where the whole issue of what is actually "good" is debatable, competitive,

Bread & Puppet Theater, *The Underneath the Above Parade #1,* 2018, performance. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '18. Photo: Jasper Kettner

Roman Osminkin, *Putsch (After D. A. Prigov),* 2018, performance and intervention. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '18. Photo: Mathias Völzke

Yoshinori Niwa, *Withdrawing Adolf Hitler from a Private Space,* 2018, installation and video. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '18. Photo: Mathias Völzke

Jule Flierl, *Dissociation Study,* 2019, performance, Congress Graz. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '19. Photo: Clara Wildberger

Zorka Wollny, *Voicers—Oratorio for Five Speakers and a Listening Crowd,* 2019, performance, Landhaushof, Graz. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '19. Photo: Clara Wildberger

Andreas Siekmann, After Dürer, 2019, installation, Griesplatz, Graz. Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst '19. Photo: Mathias Völzke

Artur Żmijewski, Plan B, 2019, installation, Girardigasse 8, Graz. Commissioned andproduced by steirischer herbst '19. Photo: Mathias Völzke

discursive, and therefore modern and political. This is closer to the religion of the good. I expect this tendency to escalate in post-coronavirus times (regardless of the virus staying or going away), where the whole public sphere, including the arts, will willingly subordinate to the "do not contaminate" commandment. On the other hand, when the mainstream of contemporary art will pass to the side of the good completely, it might open the way to new aesthetic transgressions, which for quite some time have been almost impossible, with people like Trump or Putin or Bolsonaro colonizing this zone.

de- and re-centering of the West...

One of the things truly great about the arts development in recent decades is its opening to non-European artists and contexts. We are more than ever aware of the global character of the world we live in, and I am glad art shows that, too. But here again, I would like us to be very aware of the political implications of any statement. Great names of decolonizing thinking, such as Fanon, Said, Glissant, Cesar or Baldwin to name just a few, were reluctant about identitarianism and warned against any nationalisms, including the one of the oppressed, claiming rights to the universal for people with different backgrounds and skin colors. I made an exhibition a few years ago called ***Stealing From the West***, which was about this role of the imaginary West—still universal and grand, but not inaccessible and not protected by copyrights and fences. The West, the fantasy of it, is a treasury that belongs to the whole of humanity, where everybody must be free to steal from because it is already formed by the contributions of millions of Africans, Asians, and people who prefer not to identify with any of it. I am very encouraged by the deconstruction of gender happening recently, but it has to be consequential and has to be expanded to other spheres as well.

the art-theory interface...

I am very glad artistic research has found its place in academia as well as in art practice, as it gives artists security, a frame, and time for pursuing and deepening their artistic interests outside of the market. I am also glad this particular tendency, research as art, which has always interested me, is becoming stronger. Still, I want us to remember that the private art market had positive things about it at the beginning as well, as rare purchases by even rarer educated collectors were liberating early avant-garde artists of the necessity to earn their living through day jobs, like, strangely, researching or teaching. With time and with the institutionalization of contemporary art, the art market turned into a homogenizing force, while academia now has this utopian reputation of a place of freedom. At the same time, the marriage of art to academic theory that now seems to be proclaimed eternal and indestructible bothers me sometimes, such as in the context of biennials and festivals where it can work as a class barrier. The titles of the keynote lectures and sometimes even artworks signal to people without a PhD in cultural studies that they are not welcome here, and this does not go unnoticed. It is clear that the artists of the early twentieth century, who were basically a self-proclaimed elite, had to find allies in the real elite, at that time financial—their first collectors. It is the same desire to protect themselves from the "normal audience" through teaming up with a more legitimate elite (theorists and philosophers this time) and establishing a high intellectual census that I sometimes witness today. It is good when there is intellectual curiosity at the core of these encounters, not fear of the uneducated other.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

The democratic character of contemporary art is not where one often seeks it. It is not necessarily about curatorial decisions. The latter are always extremely undemocratic, subjective, and this is how they must remain. The so-called "objective" choice is now dictated by AI, which means crypto-market forces, or even very open market forces, like a display at an art fair (one of the examples of an uncurated display).

One underestimates how the world of contemporary art is already democratic, open, and tolerant towards an artwork: we professionals—and, of course, also non-pros who are open enough—see "the best in it"; we are often satisfied when the idea was great but the realization not completely so. The work can be re-done in the next version, or gain meaning in a different context. I am very much in favor of this "what would this have been if...(the artist had had more time, or even more inspiration at this particular moment)" approach that also helps to put works together in a curatorial narrative, a very important notion for me.

At an exhibition, we can just spend five minutes with the film and be inspired by it; this is already enough to judge it positively, without even knowing how it ends. I do not know a theater or a literary critic who would say openly in their reviews that they only read half a novel or saw ten minutes of the play, but it is fine for an art critic to only see part of the biennial, which is always too big anyway. The exhibition or a biennial or a festival, which is "the new artwork" under current conditions, is too complex to be grasped in one day or in one way—there is always space for reinterpretation, and this complexity protects democracy.

Ekaterina Degot is an art historian, researcher, and curator focusing on aesthetic and sociopolitical issues in Russia and the rest of Europe from the 19th century to the post-Soviet era. Since 2018 she has been Director and Chief Curator of steirischer herbst festival in Graz (Austria). From 2014 to 2017, Degot was Artistic Director of the Academy of the Arts of the World in Cologne, as well as Professor of Moscow Alexander Rodchenko School of Multimedia and Photography while also being a guest lecturer in other art schools and institutions. She received the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory in 2014. Among recent shows she curated, the First Ural Industrial Biennial in Yekaterinburg (with Cosmin Costinas and David Riff, 2010), and the first Bergen Assembly (with David Riff, 2013). Degot lives in Graz.

Conversation between Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Dorothee Richter April 2020

Dorothee Richter, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung,

Dorothee Richter (DR): Even if the circumstances are very difficult, I'm happy to meet you here via Zoom online today. And you were supposed to do the biennial in Sonsbeek 2020, the 12th edition was supposed to take place in and around Arnhem from June 5 to September 13, 2020. And now, like many biennials, it will not happen in that way at least. Anyway, could you kind of give us an idea what your original plans were and the concepts behind it, and how much that has now changed? And how you will go forward if there is now a possibility or you see a possibility to do so.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (BSBN): Well, first of all, Sonsbeek is a quadrennial; it happens every four years, and it is a historical art festival—for lack of a better term—that started in 1949, you know, so six years before the Convention, and with some interjections it is rather an important art get-together in the past decades, especially taking into consideration the fact that it was a project that started just after the war. So, with certain urgencies on how art could actually be a possibility of getting out of the dire moments of conflict and, for that matter, it was a choice not to have it solely within museum structures, but to think about public art for public spaces. And in the history of Sonsbeek, you've had quite some important artists and curators of the 20th century that have presented work or that have worked on the project. So, I see myself in this lineage, in this history of an exhibition format, a quadrennial that takes social questions into consideration at its core.

So, the project they had proposed and that we're still working on, despite the conditions we find ourselves in, was to do something on labor, so the title of the project is *Force Times Distance*, which is the formula for work. So, we're looking at work, labor, and its sonic ecologies. Now, if you break it down, to each of the components of that formula: "force," of course, we're looking at power structures in the world, how can we work against these power structures these power asymmetries; "time," we're looking at different notions of time, we're looking at ways of thinking of time in nonlinear ways in the circularity of time; and "distance," we're looking at different ways of collapsing geographical distances and maybe also social distances. So, this is what we're working for. And we're fortunate to have not only the possibility of doing the edition in 2020 but also doing the edition in 2024. So, it is a double commission. And then things happened as they happened; we find ourselves in a health crisis that affects basically the whole world in different ways. A lot of people have said this crisis and this virus doesn't discriminate, but this is a very asymmetric crisis. It affects some more than others. Not everybody has the possibility of staying at home. Some people don't even have homes. Some people cannot afford it, there are people in the world that live on a hand-to-mouth basis—they don't have savings like a lot of us in the Western world where we can go on for weeks maybe, or we have welfare structures that can finance us even if we don't work. So, it is really embedded in the project we're doing, while the others that have to work on a daily basis and if they

don't work on a daily basis, it's equivalent to their demise. And I was listening to the radio this morning, Deutschland Funk, and there was an interview with a guy in Kenya who said most of us are going to die of hunger before we die of Corona.

So, I think it's an important moment to rethink all of what we're doing, especially with regards to the project. Thus, because we cannot do production, because we cannot have artists travel, because we have to avoid mass gatherings, we had to postpone the project. It was supposed to open on the 5th of June with the press conference happening on the 2nd of June. Therefore, we're shifting it to next year in the hope that this actually gives us more time. So, basically, we totally remixed the events; the agencies are different. The more urgent things now to talk about still fall in line with what we tried to discuss that we had proposed, but we need to rethink completely what is at stake in the world today. So, we were working on that now.

DR: I think you made a very precise point that, even in the state of emergency, actually the state of emergency has already happened for a lot of people worldwide. Okay, now it is also hitting the West, even if it's in a way better situation than elsewhere; we have at least very good healthcare in Germany and in Switzerland. I think you're totally right that the structural violence is there. And it's even more so in this state of emergency.

BSBN: What the emergency also shows us is how, even in a moment of crisis that is supposed to be a global crisis, how some people are more equal than others, some humans are more equal than others, how it is in this moment of extreme crisis where we should actually see the most solidarity that we actually see how some humans are more dispensable than others. So, it is okay for some older people to die, that is what the discourse is, the discourse is like, oh, but it's not going to affect the young people. Because these are the people that are productive in society. So, those that are no longer productive, it's fine. This is the perversity of this logic; now you see that across the board, so even if sometimes the government's come out and they say, okay, let's try to keep that logic of productivity—this is still at the forefront.

Now, what's very interesting is that one sees, for example, a country like Cuba sending medical doctors to Italy, China sending medical doctors to Italy, and so on and so forth. So, this is a kind of solidarity, but then even within the European Union it took weeks—up to today, the European Union hasn't gotten its, you know, shit together to see if they're giving out the Euro bonds or not. So, even within the structures of privilege, you know, one cannot really show solidarity; now, on the other hand, just last week you had these medical doctors on French TV. And one said out loud on TV: you know why don't we go and do the tests for the vaccines in Africa? Why don't we do that? And then the other medical doctor said, you're right, then the next statement was like: we've been doing this with prostitutes with AIDS tests, and like we've been doing this with… and so on and so forth. So, this logic, you know, of course some of us have known that it is also not a secret that a lot of medical tests have been done on the African continent without following the rules and regulations of the WHO. But now in the moment of crisis, we've lost our shame. So, it's no longer even done in hiding. It's talked about on national TV.

Therefore, one needs to take this time, and coming back to our artistic, curatorial work, what I'm currently working on is to think about the notion of prudence and precarity. Care in times of precariousness. Care in times of crisis, and I think this is really important in our practices, at least in mine.

DR: In your original concept, a lot of these issues, as you already mentioned, about labor and social distance or social closeness are, I think, already embodied, but anyway it probably has to be rethought a lot through this kind of very acute situation.
BSBN: Exactly, exactly. That's why I had to go back, with the history of Sonsbeek coming right in the immediate dawn of the war, so to say. That was a different kind of crisis. So how do we think about art in the dawn of this crisis? We would have to rethink a lot of things.

DR: Will anything happen in a digital format during the time you wanted to open originally?

BSBN: In any case, we're planning to do a lot of things digitally; we had to have a website, we are planning to do a film series, and so on and so forth. Those things will continue, which I think is good. In this period of postponement, we will come up with a couple of formats for things that will be online. I've also witnessed a lot of critique. I didn't read the article that came out recently, I think on *e-flux*, on the critique of museums or institutions that are going online, doing online formats; well, I see that differently. I think we need to make use of every medium at our disposal; I think we need to rethink what proximity is. And the one doesn't oppose the other.

So, in a moment where we cannot meet physically, I don't think we have to stop working. I don't think artists should stop working; I think we should continue working. We need to, because the Internet is a public space. Just like the museum or any other art institution, these are public spaces. If we have one hindrance in accessing one public space, we should explore the other; so, this whole kind of damning of institutions that are using the online space as a possibility, I don't buy into that, I disagree with it. Now that said, I do believe—and that is something I brought up already for *documenta 14*—that the Internet is still a very limited space; there are still a lot of people in the world that do not have access to the Internet. It's not everybody that has access, even though they say more than 50% of the world has access to the Internet, there are places in the world where people have to buy data on their phones. And that's expensive in a moment of lockdown. It's a choice, whether you can use that money for food or for data. So, we cannot be naive about these things; therefore, one of the things about *documenta 14* was to use the radio—that's why we did the radio project, to which people have more access around the world. So, at Savvy Contemporary, for example, one of the things we're doing now is exploring radio again, looking at ways of doing exhibitions in the ether on the radio, looking at ways of doing discussions, the format on radio. Same thing in Sonsbeek, so we are exploring beyond the Internet, exploring every possible technology of communication that we can find.

DR: I totally agree. I also see that with the work with our students that it is so important to keep up the social space during the crisis through, in that case of course, digital media, because otherwise people really feel so lost and disconnected. And that's kind of a real urgency and a real necessity to keep the social space up.

BSBN: Exactly.

DR: And the other way, there were kind of a lot of discussions about Zoom, that there are data leaks and so on, that with digital media in our capitalist production already whatever you do is again used for specific interests and things like that.

BSBN: No but of course, there are data leaks, but the fact that we do not use the Internet doesn't reduce the data leaks—maybe proportionately to a number of people online. But the Internet is a very poor space; everything you put on Facebook—it's all used. So, maybe this is a moment for us to use to fight against the data leaks rather than avoiding using the Internet or such spaces because we're afraid of the fact that data is going to leak. That's one thing. The second thing is that, in any case, all over the city you have CCTVs—we're being watched all the time. Whenever you buy something on Amazon, which most of us do, the data is being used and so on and so forth. So, rather than avoid data has to be used, let's find ways of resisting that and using at least the public space, that's the way I see it.

DR: I agree. I also think it's a political struggle to get control over your own data, for example. That's a political movement, and it often has to happen through the public space in a way.

BSBN: Exactly.

DR: To come back to the original question, I think we actually spoke already about politicization and depoliticization and de- and re-centering the West. Regarding theory interface and mediation strategies, it would be interesting if you could say something about that, that would be wonderful. But of course, I also understand that these are exactly the things you are now rethinking and re-positioning.

BSBN: Exactly. We are really at a threshold today, and I think it's really interesting. I think the history of pandemics, the history of plagues or health crises have been very fundamental in the shift of technology and communication and the way we deal with each other. So, we will have to rethink all forms of mediation between human beings, never before has Zoom been used so much. People do Zoom parties and so on. What does that mean? How can we imagine a post COVID-19 world? What does it mean to think about interdependencies? Interdependencies: the fact that it is not because you come from Italy that you are better than somebody from Cuba—actually at the moment you kind of depend on that person as well. I mean, we see what is happening in the US. The US has to import masks from Asia. Just this weekend, masks that we were being sent for the police in Berlin were intercepted in Taiwan by the US and taken to the US, and it is said that's again a new form of pirating. So, imagine where we are—we need to rethink all our relations. Of course, that is pirating, it's not in any way better or worse than the guys on the waters in East Africa; it is same thing. We need to think about new laws, new ways of dealing with each other. And, of course, art as a possibility of imagining possible futures will also have to change. The way we present art will have to change; who knows how long this is going to be, as you said earlier maybe we'll have to live for the next two years with a distance of 1.5 meters between each other. So, take that as a point of departure to imagine how the world would be. As a curator, how do you present works within space? You really see the way the architecture of space has changed. That is something I'm really thinking about, when the whole thing started, and we're getting more and more scared in Berlin. You could see another politics of space: you got into the metro and you would see people they wouldn't sit opposite each other, they would sit across diagonally. Now, it's even strange. A few years back, you would see somebody even on the street alone, coming up as a black man and there is somebody coming towards me, the person would cross because the person was scared of me. But now I'm the one crossing because I'm scared of that person. The politics of space

has to be reconceived in ways that Lefebvre had never thought of. If you go to the supermarket, you see the distancing. Even looking at simple things like the way we open doors, you see people use their elbows, they use body parts that didn't know existed to avoid a virus, so things have changed. What does it mean then to present works? What does it mean then to curate in a time when we have a different disposition in terms of being together and encountering each other.

DR: Yeah, very strange times. I must say, I haven't re-read *The Plague* by Camus recently; I only dimly remember it when I read it in school.

BSBN: Yes, there has been a rush, everybody wants to read *The Plague*, which is fine, but I was just thinking about it a few days ago. Yes, we should all read it, but we should also look for other spaces, because what we are facing is not unprecedented. Like Baldwin said, when you think about all your pains, all your suffering, but the people that lived before you and sometimes the people that live in your same time in different geographical areas still face those pains, so it's something that connects us, and when you look in books, you also notice that a lot of things have already happened. So, you should listen to other spaces, and so what I've been doing in the past weeks is something I've called Corona's Phonic Diary, where I post a sound daily or every two days or so. And basically, what I'm imagining is that in those sonic spaces we will also discover that what we are facing is not unprecedented. One and two, that in those spaces, you can also discover that there is a time after every crisis. So, there is hope.

DR: Yeah, I think that's a very good point you make, because the logic of the crisis, especially the health crisis, is that of segregation in a way. And it's the logic of productivity against unproductivity as you already mentioned, because it looks like old people are disposable in a way, and people who are ill anyway. You're totally right that aesthetics can transport something that goes beyond exactly these kind of usual segregations into the fit und unfit. So, that could be one answer for curatorial formats, which could propose a space of radical democracy even at the moment when it also looks kind of unreachable. You mentioned radio, and I also think that in Denmark there's this specific tradition of making radio for artists like open radio and things like that. And music was something you mentioned. How would a biennial or a quadrennial happen in this situation—let's say a post-pandemic situation? Is it in your thoughts to open up a space for exactly these kinds of negotiations?

BSBN: I think the biennial is not the issue, honestly; a biennial is a container, it is not the content. So, it is not really the issue; I think what is actually the issue is the content. Of course, we have to think properly about the container; because water takes the shape of the container it finds itself in, we will have to think about the container. But I think we are at the moment where the content shapes the container. So, rather than thinking of the biennial, because the biennial again is a form—you know, I just did the Bamako Biennale for Photography. It's very different from the Berlin Biennale or some other biennial in Scandinavia. It's very different from the Venice Biennale, so there is nothing like "the biennial." The only thing that it has and having come on is the fact that it happened every two years. And that is the biggest fiction because it's just a time scale. There's nothing like the biennial. There's absolutely nothing like that in my opinion; you know, so it's completely different the kind of things you're dealing with when you're doing a biennial in Bamako it's completely different from the kind of things you're dealing with when you do something in Venice. Just to start with the amount of money that is at your disposal, the questions, the

things that are at stake, what the artists are dealing with. We need to think about what comes into this container. Or we think about the multiplicity of containers, yeah.

DR: I meant more specifically the Sonsbeek quadrennial in which you are involved in at the moment.

BSBN: Okay, so the question is how will the situation change the formats of Sonsbeek?

DR: Yeah, more like, you know, we've now touched on a lot of things, and I would say maybe it's a moment where the negotiation over certain things are kind of rethought and reconfigured. So, my question is a little bit how this would then be possible in or through the format of a biennial, or this specific biennial, or then the thing you are most interested in is this kind of re-negotiating—you know, for example, how this could happen in a radical way in terms of living together or being-with together.

BSBN: Yeah, I think I'm hearing you. I think it's too early to say, because we are really in that moment of thinking about all these things. But there was something I was listening to the other day, a conversation in the series called *The Quarantine Tapes*: Naveen Kishore in a conversation with [Paul] Holdengräber. I think towards the end they talked about generosity, which is one of many things, they also talked a lot about translation because Naveen Kishore is the director of Seagull Books in India; it's a time to think about translation. At the end, they talked about generosity, and I have been thinking about how this moment will also be a moment to be generous, which interestingly if you look at the practice we've had at Savvy Contemporary, it's been about that. So, I think that in Sonsbeek, in the end we will take more into consideration these two notions of translation and of generosity.

DR: Yeah, that sounds really inspiring, so thanks a lot.

BSBN: Pleasure talking to you.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung is a curator, art critic and biotechnologist and lives mainly in Berlin. He compares his working method as a curator to a musical jam session. Ndikung is the founder of the art space Savvy Contemporary in Berlin. He was Curator at large of the documenta 14 and is artistic director for Sonsbeek 2020-2024, a large-scale sculpture exhibition that takes place in Arnhem, the Netherlands. Together with artist Nasan Tur, Ndikung is professor for the Spatial Strategies MA program at Weissensee Academy of Art, Berlin.

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland; She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive, Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal On-Curating.org.

Yung Ma

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

The ideas behind this year's Seoul Mediacity Biennale began with something that I have been interested in for a while… the power of popular media, and what we can learn from it, the strategies employed, to extend visual arts' reach and to have a greater impact or to be more direct and relevant? The concept of escapism came much later, in the sense that I thought it would be a very nice way to tie things together. And slowly I think escapism has become a catalyst, a means by which we can confront the troubled realities we live in today. But, of course, with the current ongoing global health crisis, the idea of escapism has taken on an altogether unexpected meaning, and it is something I would like to try to unpack. Ultimately, I have known from quite early on that I might not be able to have all the answers, but it's important I try to look for them together with all the people involved in the project.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

I'm probably going to sound very old-fashioned, or naïve, or radical here, depending on your standpoint. I think when it comes to any discussion related to the ideas of (de) politicization or (de/re)centering of the West, we often forget that whatever we produce or put forth, it's going to be a kind of human expression. So, in a sense, I hope we can actually all move beyond just focusing on the political or geographical origins of the makers, and instead try to evaluate them on a more equal playing field. These expressions can be political, or they can be coming from a Western viewpoint or elsewhere, but what's crucial is that we as curators and exhibition-makers are able to weave them into narratives that're relevant and important on a human level—regardless of culture.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

It's clear that there have been many discussions in various outlets, forums, and spaces about how our societies are going to be changed after the pandemic. And these conversations go beyond the idea of reforming democracy. I am not sure how much we are actually going to change, and whether we will change for the better… there are already signs that big corporations will once again be the big winners in this. But I think rather than thinking merely within the confines of the curatorial, it's perhaps better if we could try to get involved in these conversations elsewhere, spaces that are more open, more public, and arguably more democratic.

4. How do formats reflect/interrelate content (in your biennial)?

Like many contemporary art projects, the upcoming edition of the Seoul Mediacity Biennale will have two large components, namely the exhibition and the public programmes. I suppose this is a very conventional format, but the idea for the 'programme' is that it will evoke and, to a certain extent, mimic the logic of a distribution network within the popular media landscape. We hope, as much as we can under the current circumstance, to involve as many 'public' spaces—such as media walls, shops, cafes, Seoul-based independent spaces—as possible to display works or versions of works in the exhibition 'off-site.' So, we will essentially 'distribute' them repeatedly throughout the city, ideally just like how media contents are being 'streamed' nowadays everywhere simultaneously. We are also in the midst of reorganizing the content to make the programme even more local-facing. In the likely absence of an international audience, could this be an opportunity to truly implement and emphasize the idea of locality within the biennial framework? It would be very remiss in stopping short to rethink the meaning of staging a so-called international art event in our new, and forced, de-globalized period.

Yung Ma is currently the Artistic Director for the Seoul Mediacity Biennale 2020, which opens at SeMA (Seoul Museum of Art) in September this year. Formerly Curator of the Contemporary Art and Prospective Department at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and Associate Curator of Moving Image at M+ in Hong Kong, Ma was also twice co-curator of the Hong Kong Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2009 and 2013).

Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

The main idea has been for us to set up a structure that would help artists work in public space, which is to say, to rethink the biennial format. This new structure considers the specificities of public space, which are very different from the indoor exhibition space. A new framework that could encompass art production and display within the unprotected public space, vulnerable *per se*, and variable, very unstable in terms of reception and projection, meaning, experience, ownership, authorship, and many other parameters. These are always much more clearly defined in the indoor spaces that usually host artworks, ideas, and discourses (the museum or any other art space fulfilling the pre-established conventions in terms of art, artists, and audiences). A second parameter, closely linked to the first, was to consider and respond to the temporalities of public space, which is not the same as indoor exhibition time. When it comes to outdoor public space, time affects the context in which the art object must operate (whether tangible or immaterial). Thirdly, we did not want to make a biennial in public space that operates as a commissioning regime or as an overflow of an indoor exhibition space; nor did we accept the idea of a biennial in public space as the production of objects and situations to embellish or furnish the city's physical public space.

Within these parameters, and in response to the original brief to envision a new biennial in public space, we came up with a structural proposal: a biennial lasting for five years with artistic processes (stretching out in time or claiming ongoingness) and works that adopt different life cycles, tempos, and rhythms. The proposal was structured through four main ventures that aimed to respond as well as possible to the life spans of the work of art, which could be episodic, cyclical, or recurring, or changing gradually alongside the unforeseeable shifts and events of public space. As Rosalyn Deutsche has stated: "Social space is produced and structured by conflicts."[1] And public space is indeed a space of conflict, and not the space of consensus that we are sometimes led to believe. The question is how to apprehend dispute, contest, unpredictability, instability, vulnerability—and the temporalities these imply, the temporalities of public space—within a biennial's art production and display machinery?

Our curatorial proposal was therefore organized around four pillars associated with art production, public outreach, institutional collaboration, and art collecting, which have been named respectively: *Art Production within a Locality*, *Addressing the Myriad, New Institutional Ecologies,* and *A Collection for the Passer-by*. This biennial platform is for us constantly in negotiation, partly because it is not easy for curators to build structures, and partly because we need to adapt and reset conditions repeatedly in order to maintain the flexibility and freedom that our project and each of its initiatives demand.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

Many of the projects have played out in local communities or broader fields. This is the case of *Rose Hammer*,[2] an artistic persona comprised of a changing group of individuals, who are building and performing a series of short theatrical pieces inspired by pivotal moments in the history of Norway.[3] *Rose Hammer* deals with the re-reading of history by revisiting certain of its chapters in ways that make it possible to reconsider how those narratives impact and project in the present, and so contemplate the relations between trauma and history. These are pieces made for Oslo and Norway, but not exclusively. They inscribe their impact and effects in a wider geography and broader awareness of history.

Mette Edvardsen's project *Time Has Fallen Asleep in the Afternoon Sunshine*[4] is another example of interaction with audience members drawn from diverse communities, and an example of how some of the projects navigate the fields of history, performance, literature, theatre…but also public outreach and communication. This lends a particular status to many of the works, one that seems to resist categorization and affirms their diffusion in time and space, being ephemeral, quiet, and lasting at the same time. But these works did not arise from ideas about mediation strategies. Rather, they form a compendium of possible encounters that we felt the biennial must address: with unknown, indefinable audiences of random passers-by in public space rather than the constituted, countable, and knowable audiences of the conventional exhibition context.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

The possibility of spaces of democracy are partly determined by context. Of course, there are formats that can—in many contexts—push the boundaries of artistic expression, which we as curators have fostered at times (the comic as a platform for free(r) speech, publishing texts of undeclared authorship, anonymous production despite public funding, and so on), but when it comes to the public sphere, the potential space for radical democracy will depend on the approach to each specific context.

In our case, we are not working in a space of consensus, but very precisely in a terrain marked by differences whose resistance to consensus must be acknowledged and indeed embraced. It is expected, or desired (it remains to be seen if this is achievable) that our biennial format offers extra ground for antagonism, discussion, and ongoing re-negotiation both externally (others: free agents, unforeseen events, shifting contexts, known and unknown audiences) and internally (the self: ourselves, artists, our agency, collaborative partners). Within most Western democratic societies, the public sphere is erected through disagreement and struggle as an unstable space between people and collectives in conflict with each other. In these contexts, the public sphere is—and should be—an open space that cannot be hegemonized. If this was the case, it would no longer be a public sphere. Within this setting, time might be seen as an 'external agent' that prevents hegemonization. Oliver Marchart has analyzed the dialectics of place and time in political theory, which was of particular interest to us during the pilot that preceded the Biennial and has remained very pertinent to *osloBIENNALEN First Edition 2019–2024*.[5]

4. How do formats reflect/interrelate content (in your biennial)?

OsloBIENNALEN First Edition 2019-2024 proposes the curation of an institution (namely osloBIENNALEN) that has set out to foster, support, and facilitate art production in public space, and in particular those practices (immaterial proposals: performance, theatre, music, sound...) that have always been part of the arts and that constitute cultural input in the social and political space of the city (and originated in the early avant-gardes with the Dadaists, Surrealists, and later on Fluxus, etc.), but which are difficult to produce, promote, or even collect. So, practices that diffuse into the city fabric and into public space, the collective public sphere, and collective memory.

A structural project is not an easy task. Often, we do not have all the information we need; we depend on and are part of a much bigger administrative organization, and we have to constantly demarcate and claim the flexibility we need within a pre-existing structure, which is often an antagonistic struggle. We once titled a curatorial text *Upholding Variability* because it is precisely this impossible ambition that we want to achieve.

More than half of the content of the biennial is immaterial. It is made up of situations that most of the time cannot be completely choreographed or repeated with 100% reliability. We deliberately avoid the urge to control and ensure a tangible result, which are the typical concerns of the art commissioner.

The format we are setting up must allow for this element of unpredictability; the artists chosen and works produced feed off and feed the production framework we are attempting to implement. There is indeed a correlation between format and content. Public space is not exclusively the physical public space of the city; it extends into social media, television, press, radio… These are some of the other means of production that the biennial is adopting by setting up a radio unit and a film production unit.

There is another shared characteristic among the works in the ways that many of them are developing and growing, which is inextricably embedded in ideas of collectivity and therefore co-authorship, co-production, and co-ownership.

Notes

1 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press 1996), xxiv.
2 Although not exclusively, the name "Rose Hammer" may refer to a) the hammer inscribed on Henrik Ibsen's grave monument in Oslo; b) the former emblem of the Norwegian labor movement; c) the famous quote attributed to Bertolt Brecht: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it"; d) the rose symbol that became popular among socialist and social democratic political parties in post-World War II Western Europe.
3 National Episodes: "Grini and the Futures of Norway" was the first episode. It was based on the historical meetings that took place at the Grini prison camp during World War II.
4 In Mette Edvardsen's *Time Has Fallen Asleep in the Afternoon Sunshine — A Library of Living Books*, a group of performers have each memorized a book they themselves have chosen. Together, they make up a library of living books, which members of the public can experience in one-to-one situations. osloBIENNALEN presents a selection of 'books' from the collection.

5 *osloBIENNALEN First Edition 2019-2024* was preceded by OSLO PILOT, a two-year project (2015-2016) investigating the role of art in and for the public realm. It sought to lay the groundwork for a future periodic art event in public space. OSLO PILOT's programme was aimed at exploring the intersecting temporalities of the artwork, the periodic art event, and the public sphere. More information can be found at: https://archive.oslopilot.no/oslo-pilot/about-oslo-pilot/.

Eva González-Sancho Bodero is a curator with a special interest in definitions of new models of contemporary art and its production, the construction of public space, language, and art practices defined as 'non-authoritarian.'

Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk is a curator interested in developing art projects in public space, creating connections and close encounters with other social systems and discourses, external to the art world itself.

Prior to the 5-year biennial project, González-Sancho Bodero and Eeg-Tverbakk worked together as co-curators to develop and conclude OSLO PILOT (2015 to 2017), an experimental two-and-a-half-year research-based project aimed at defining the format for a first biennial in Oslo: osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024, a project conceived to explore specific questions arising from art in public space through an evolving five-year programme.

The Biennial is owned and funded by the Oslo Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Raluca Voinea

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind a form of the Bucharest Biennale you would like to be involved in?

I don't have to be involved in the biennial to desire for it to be meaningful for the place where I live. Any institution or event that operates on a longer term should aim for embedding itself in the place where it happens, it should see itself as more than a platform for (cultural) consumption; it should at least try to ask some relevant questions for communities where it takes place, not (just) for an abstract, incorporeal public. If a biennial carries the name of a city in its title, it should try to offer something in its structure, programme, and choice of venues that addresses or problematizes that specific city or that at least contextualizes the works of the artists for that specific moment and place where it is presented. This is a general remark for many biennials, and a critique to those who display a few (the same) international artists, in more or less improvised white cubes or black boxes, under generic empty thematic umbrellas where anything could fit. Of course, one can also make "pre-packaged," IKEA-style biennials, but is that the point?

Therefore, for me, engagement with the city whose name the biennial takes should be one of its important driving forces. Otherwise, it can be like those international conferences which take place in hotel lobbies and include one or two local speakers for courtesy and which only use the city infrastructure like any other branch of the tourism industry.

Taking money from the municipality or using a building that is an official municipal structure as a venue does not mean engaging with the city, not when that specific municipality is reputed for corruption, lack of transparency and wasting of public money, de-funding of cultural institutions and human rights organizations, and, not least, censorship.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies—how could these shifts be applied in the Bucharest Biennale in the future?

All of these issues are currently addressed by state or independent institutions in Bucharest. Despite the chronic underfunding, there are numerous organizations that are proposing exhibitions, lecture series, educational programmes, serious publications, direct activist and political actions—they are producing contemporary art and discussing its contexts at the same time; they are doing reading groups for key theoretical and political texts, and they are commissioning new texts of local authors; they work interdisciplinary; they meet each other and try to build on the others' work as well; they try alliances outside of the Western centers, yet they are incessantly sharing their knowledge with Western colleagues, etc. The only thing they are missing is structural funding that can take them out of the state of permanent precarity and can make the results of their work more visible.

Tranzit Garden, Bucharest, 2019

In addition to the institutions that try to operate throughout the year, there are a number of yearly festivals, some of them international, which have grown in size and reputation over the years—film, dance, theatre, performative work, literature festivals—which keep the city alive and give it substance.

Where is the Bucharest Biennale in this landscape? Where would it like to be? Where I see it could have some effect: if every two years it would commission research of the local and national/regional scene and present/produce new works by artists; if it paid decent fees to curators and art historians for this specific research and to artists for these new works; if it employed people to work for it at decent wages, and if it didn't work with volunteers; if it tried to work with new venues in the city for each edition, other than the ones everyone uses—this is even more critical in a city where there are very few spaces for culture and so many empty buildings (and no, billboards are not real venues, at least not in a city oversaturated with advertising). And, one more point: if, without self-colonizing or self-exoticization gestures, without PR stunts, it could bring international public and attention, raising people's curiosity, making them take the trip to Bucharest, not for the prosecco at the opening but for the actual encounters with the local scene here.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy? How could the BB be a platform for the urgencies of the Bucharest art scene?

Democracy is a pretty radical format in itself, submitted as it is today to all forms of authoritarian rules and neo-fascist forms of control and repression. One needs to get more radical than that, and the space of art is free enough (still) to offer itself as a platform to exercise at least the imagination of these future—more emancipatory—forms of coexisting with each other in society.

But in order to do so, such a platform should not be concerned with its formats: a simple painting exhibition in a peripheral town can be more relevant than the most tech-savvy display in an international biennial. It should be concerned with its time and timing, its motives and groundings, and not least with its ethics: does it speak about climate catastrophe from a plastic box? Does it speak about homelessness from a palace? How much does it pay its employees when it speaks about labor issues? And so on.

It's not formats we have to discuss but the ethical parameters that define our work and our institutions.

Raluca Voinea is curator and art critic, based in Bucharest. Since 2012 she is co-director of tranzit.ro Association. From 2012 to 2019 she managed tranzit.ro space in Bucharest, which included an art gallery, a communitarian permaculture garden and an Orangery (a space for hosting fragile plants and ideas), all developed organically and in response to both the local context and to more international frameworks. The institution will relocate to another space in 2020.

Since 2008 she is co-editor of IDEA arts + society magazine and since 2012 the coordinator of the (Expozitii) collection published by IDEA Publishing House.

In 2013 Raluca Voinea was the curator of the Romanian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale with the project An Immaterial Retrospective of the Venice Biennale by artists Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuş.

Răzvan Ion

1. Could you please describe the driving thought behind the biennial you are involved in?

That is not so philosophical. The Bucharest Biennale responded to a need of a city in distress. A platform where to have a dialogue with the people, a platform for artists as much as the need to reinvent new forms of artistic expression and encourage curators to make a selection of participants who would best represent the struggle of the city/society. We wished for the Biennale to provide a structure able to transform the city itself into an ongoing workshop-cum-field of action. Fundamentally, European culture has been the result of exchanges—sometimes peaceful, other times violent—that have taken place between neighboring societies and between different social groups within a given state. These horizontal and vertical forms of cultural exchange occurred in many different manners: through imitation, assimilation, dissimulation, appropriation, through either mutual understanding or hegemonic dominance. We started off the idea of Boris Groys that the biennial, just like the installation, creates a space that serves as a model for a new social and political order.

2. Could you please discuss the following shifts: politicization and depoliticization, de- and re-centering of the West, the art-theory interface, and mediation strategies.

If we discuss technocratic post-democratic forms of governance, we can also discuss "the Age of Neutralisations" (Carl Schmitt). Maybe we read wrongly the re- de- post-. Maybe we need to see more profoundly what the future is. Maybe it is about identification, not re-identification. Gen Z already surprised us with simplifying the ideas, pragmatism, and changes that come naturally. They already challenge us through multifarious ways able to provoke new possibilities of critical thinking. Research remains our main instrument of finding new topics, new paths, so I strongly believe research can and will be the art-theory interface, in a way. But, that should give us the instruments and the resources to contemplate the future. Art can be a catalyst in social and technological progress.

3. Which curatorial formats are necessary to propose a space of radical democracy?

What do we need today? When we have the answer or at least a clue about that and we look very deeply into the needs of the society, we will respond accordingly with new curatorial formats. Blockchain, artificial intelligence, deep learning will be new instruments to generate new curatorial formats and a new approach.

Maybe we should talk more about instruments to respond to future developments than to think of formats. A format can be realized, but is that format an instrument to edit our future, or to try to fix the format on something we did not even research properly? Now in the AI era, the process becomes more important than the artwork.

4. How do formats reflect/interrelate content (in your biennial)?

As I said, I do not really believe in formats as defined in the academy. We somehow decided what the next biennial will be about in order to respond to a need which is reflected in the society. Sometimes maybe we need more debates than the object of art; maybe these days we need more aesthetic objects to connect to the new public and start what I call augmented education.

Răzvan Ion is the founder of Spinnwerk Kunstverein Vienna and the Bucharest Biennale.

Trams and Institutions
Daniel Knorr

Trams and Institutions, 2007
Materialization: Four regular trams used for public transportation covered with the corporate identity of several public institutions: the army, the Orthodox Church, the Red Cross, the police
Spatiul Public Bucuresti | Public Art Bucharest

For one month, four trams of the regular public transportation service in Bucharest, Romania, were decorated using the corporate identity of the most important institutions in the state, including the Romanian army, the Orthodox Church, the Red Cross, and the police. The trams ran on regular tramlines throughout the city between September 15 and October 15, 2007. A series of photographs, films, and interviews was created during that time. In blogs, newspaper articles, and conversations, the public reacted with astonishment and bewilderment to the fact that state institutions had been transformed into service providers.

Daniel Knorr, born 1968 in Bucharest, lives and works in Berlin and Hong Kong. His conceptual, often participatory approaches repeatedly raise the issue of historical, socio-political, economic and biopolitical phenomena in the context of art. In different genres he appropriates, transfers and materializes states of past, present and future.

3
Bienal
de La Habana

The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts[1]

Gerardo Mosquera

It is amazing how misrecognised the historical role of the Bienal de La Habana remains. The event, which recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, is now well-known internationally and enjoys a certain sex-appeal due to its location, but despite its large scale it is mostly considered a minor, somewhat messy biennial. There is scant knowledge about the groundbreaking role it played in transforming international art circulation towards the broadness it enjoys today, breaking away from the restrictive situation that prevailed in the mid-1980s, and in changing mainstream hierarchies. Hopefully the development of exhibition studies as a new scholarly discipline will eliminate the 'itinerary of silence' – as Gayatri Spivak would say – that the Bienal has suffered, probably because of its marginal situation and its being too revolutionary in several senses, among them the circumstance that it was happening in Cuba.

Since I was one of the founders of the Bienal, it is uncomfortable for me to be advocating for its importance. To make things worse, I resigned from the Bienal's organising team immediately after the very 1989 edition to be analysed here. This decision was taken in part because of my disagreement with the way in which the event was envisaged and my concern for its future in the midst of post-Cold War stagnation and official conservatism in Cuba, and in the face of increasing censorship of critical Cuban artists. Therefore, I am placed not only in an uneasy but almost contradictory position to discuss the 1989 Bienal. Added to that, I am very critical of the way in which the Bienal de La Habana has developed up to the most recent edition. Thus, praising the 1989 show and its precedents is in a way like saying: the first three exhibitions, in which I was involved, were the good ones, and then, after me, the deluge! That is not true. However, on second thoughts, both my involvement and issues with the Bienal convinced me that you have to go all the way with your children.

The creation of the Bienal was suggested by Fidel Castro himself, without his having a full idea of its implications. It was the last and most ambitious international cultural event focused on Latin America and the so-called Third World that was launched by Cuba, a country well-known for organising international conferences, symposia and congresses of every kind and in all fields as a way of publicising itself and building a good image. Representation has always been a priority for the Cuban regime, and its practice has surpassed the country's scale and economic capacity. Before the Bienal there were literary awards, theatre, film and music festivals and cultural journals, some of them running since the 1960s. Many are still in place, and the Latin American Film Festival has maintained its relevance at a regional level and beyond. During the 1960s and early 70s, such institutions as Casa de las Américas and ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Art and Film Industry) exercised a top cultural and ideological influence in Latin America. Before the creation of the Bienal there was no big international event in Cuba dedicated to the visual arts, although there were Latin American print and photography contests, which included exhibitions organised by Casa de las Américas for many years.

Wifredo Lam's death in 1982 triggered the Bienal's foundation. The son of a Cuban black woman and a Cantonese immigrant, and an artist who used modernism to launch a Third World imaginary, Lam was the perfect ethnic, cultural and artistic symbol to inspire the event. The Cuban government rushed to appropriate his name when he passed away, and launched a resolution creating the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam in Havana, with the mission to research and promote art produced in the so-called Third World. The Bienal was the main assignment of the centre. The first edition was organised very fast, in 1984, by the Visual Arts Division of the Ministry of Culture, under Beatriz Aulet's direction, simply because the Lam centre had only a legal existence at the time. It thus became the fourth Biennial to be established (after Venice, São Paulo and Sydney) and the sixth international periodic art event after the aforementioned biennials, the Carnegie International and Documenta.

The Bienal, like the other international cultural events, was funded by the Cuban government, which was in turn subsidised by the USSR. Being a socialist country with a state-run, centralised economy, it was easier

for Cuba to access government resources to organise such large events. The reason for the Cuban regime's intense expenditure in cultural activity has always been ideological with a strong international side. But we would restrict our view of it if we merely think that its purposes were only to promote socialist ideas, to fight against political isolation imposed by the US, to showcase a good image of the country and to co-opt Cuban and Third World intellectuals. Since the Revolution in 1959, Cuba has been an outpost for ideological struggles by virtue of its combination of geographic location and political messianism. The Cuban Revolution has always had an expansionist agenda, and has been involved in revolutionary warfare and subversion throughout the world. Beyond obvious differences, the arts were approached in a similarly aggressive way. The Bienal took advantage of the facilities and networks that were established to implement the Cuban state's geopolitical goals, especially its immense web of embassies throughout the world – a network comparable in scale to that of larger powers and absolutely beyond what might be expected of the country given its size and resources. This network – with its diplomats, buildings, transportation, communication facilities and connections – was instrumental for the Bienal's organisation. If, during certain periods, Cuba maintained considerable political autonomy, by the 1980s it was fully within the Soviet Bloc. However, Cuba was a strange member of the Bloc: a Caribbean country with a very distinct culture, the most Spanish and simultaneously one of the most African Latin American countries, ninety miles from the United States, its clocks showing the same time as New York, with a long and consistent modernist tradition beginning in the early twentieth century… The Cuban Revolution produced one of the toughest and most radical regimes, but, since it happened in a Caribbean country famous for its music and nightlife, it was also, as Che Guevara proverbially put it, 'revolución con pachanga', or 'revolution with party'.

Moreover, Cuba had a genuine Latin American and Third World cultural and political agenda that was sometimes at odds with the Soviet Union's communist orthodoxy. And as part of the role of beachhead for communism and USSR policy that Cuba had always played, it was in competition with China, which was opposed to the Soviet Bloc and was also trying to accomplish that role. This confrontation was the reason why Chinese artists and artists of Chinese descent were not invited to the first Bienals. Therefore, on the one hand and for historical, political and cultural reasons, Cuba was inclined towards Caribbean, Latin American and Third World cultures; on the other, this inclination was exploited and supported by the Soviet Bloc to gain political influence over Third World countries.

This background made the historic role played by the Bienal possible. The Cuban regime launched the event with political aims – unaware of its artistic and cultural scope and importance – but was smart enough to leave its organisation to a team of specialists from the visual arts field. The government left considerable room for the curators involved, imposing only decisions that could have a direct political impact, such as the exclusion of the Chinese or the inclusion of North Korean artists who, given that country's authoritarian regime, were just doing official propaganda. Such a policy has been typical of the Cuban government since the Revolution: it has generally allowed a degree of freedom for the arts and culture, although it has gone through numerous repressive episodes. It was also clear that in order to organise an event dealing with such a vast range of countries and artists, it would not be possible to keep a restricted Marxist ideological frame – for example, a text in the second Bienal's catalogue began by invoking Allah and stated that the main purpose for an Iranian Muslim artist was 'to access a divine condition'.[2] The Bienal was conceived as a largely open space for contemporary artists, critics, curators and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East, including immigrants to Europe and North America, to meet and become acquainted with each others' works and ideas beyond ideology or sheer politics. The Bienal also functioned as a platform for research and promotion at a time when artists from the 'peripheries' (most of the world) were unknown beyond their own local contexts. Of course, by so doing the regime was successfully contributing to fulfilling its political goal of becoming a Third World leader. But, at the same time, it was satisfying a critical need for contemporary art outside the mainstream, and was giving room to a sincere commitment by the Bienal's curators to work inspired by a vision that they considered of global importance. There was hence a convergence between governmental politics and a plausible commitment to transform circulation, knowledge and legitimation of contemporary art at a global scale with a vision for the future.

The Centro Wifredo Lam reported to the Ministry of Culture. The Centro's director, and therefore the Bienal's director, was a Communist Party member trusted by the Ministry, but she, the curators and other specialists had a chance to shape the Bienal conceptually and in prac-

tice with considerable freedom. Llilian Llanes Godoy held directorial responsibility from the second Bienal in 1986 to the sixth in 1997. Created in 1976, the Ministry of Culture was developing a liberal policy partially in response to a radical cultural renovation carried out in Cuba by a new generation of visual artists and critics emerging at the end of the 1970s. This so-called 'new Cuban art' transformed forever the ideology-oriented, conservative, official culture that had prevailed during that decade.[3] It developed a critical, postmodern, internationally open approach in the 1980s that expanded from the visual arts to the rest of the arts, and continues today. The Bienal's foundation coincided with this very intense period of renovation in Cuban arts, and the new liberal climate was crucial to shaping the event's nature.

The first Bienal de La Habana in 1984 was huge, but restricted to Latin American art for reasons of logistics and organisation, and functioned as a sort of test and training experience for the organisers. The second edition, in 1986, reached a full Third World scope. It was the first global contemporary art show ever made: a mammoth, uneven, rather chaotic bunch of more than fifty exhibitions and events presenting 2,400 works by 690 artists from 57 countries. The Bienal's variegated structure made it a true urban festival, a *pachanga* that involved the whole city.[4] More importantly: never before had artists, curators, critics and scholars from so many places – Beirut, Brazzaville, Buenos Aires, Jakarta and Kingston, to name just a few – met 'horizontally'. What made this Bienal historic was not its curating but its curatorial perspective. If its curating suffered from the vastness and swiftness of the task and our lack of knowledge, preparation and organisation, the event's curatorial standpoint was the result of a clear vision, in the making, towards the internationalisation of contemporary art that we enjoy today. The importance of this breakthrough at the time is more evident when we witness that, even today, a deficit in South-South linkage and interaction persists as a postcolonial legacy. It is true that globalisation has activated and pluralised cultural circulation, making it much more international. However, it has done so to a great extent by following the channels designed by the globalised economy, reproducing its power structures.

Around the mid-1980s, segregation was an essential part of the visual arts system. The periodic international art events already in place, from the Venice Biennale to Documenta, were far from global. This was not only because the participating artists were mainly from Western backgrounds, but because the events' idea of art was restricted to the Western mainstream, and their organisers were not interested in exploring what was going on elsewhere. Thus the Bienal created a new space, acting as a gigantic 'Salon des Refusés' that involved most of the world, born from a spirit of action. If, in those days, the Bienal only included artists from the Third World, this was in order to confront their exclusion and lack of communication and networking opportunities, not because the event organisers considered that there existed a 'Third World art' as a distinct, ontological category opposed to a 'Western art'. As Luis Camnitzer has said, the Bienal was not about 'otherness', but about 'itness'.[5] The Bienal, of course, recognised and emphasised artistic and cultural differences, but within a shared, postcolonial practice of contemporary art. In this sense, too, it was foreseeing the current way in which art is created and consumed internationally. Paradoxically, as a result of its focus on contemporary art, the Bienal was accused of being Westernised.

The third edition of the Bienal took place one year later than originally planned, in 1989. Actually, even though the event has kept its name, it has been more of a triennial, since several of its editions were delayed owing to organisational problems and economic constraints. Such a delay was worthwhile for the 1989 Bienal. The event was brought under control and narrowed down to a more reasonable – even if still very large – scope: there were 300 artists from 41 countries.[6] Its catalogue credited the Bienal's 'general curating' to Llilian Llanes Godoy, Nelson Herrera Ysla and me.[7] However, since its inception the Bienal has always been the result of a broader teamwork. The 'general curators' travelled throughout different regions in the world and came back with information and recommendations. In my case, I visited seventeen sub-Saharan countries during 1987 and 1988, and several others in the Americas – in this case responding to invitations to conferences, to give lectures and to other events to which I was invited. For organisational purposes, the globe was divided into zones in which the different Bienal curators specialised. An important part of the curating was indirect, performed through researching the significant amount of documentation that the Centro Wifredo Lam was collecting, and by examining applications sent by artists from all over the world who responded to a public convocation. The Centro's curators Leticia Cordero Vega, Magda Ileana González-Mora and Nora Hochbaum actively participated in this process for the 1989 edition. Since the Bienal was an ensemble of different exhibitions, conferences, seminars, workshops and interdisciplinary events, these young curators were also engaged

in organising them together with the 'general curators' and other staff members (José Manuel Noceda and Hilda María Rodríguez in this case), and were credited in the catalogue accordingly. This team spirit reached beyond the Centro Wifredo Lam's staff, as we actively consulted curators, critics, scholars, artists and other experts from different countries and from other institutions in Cuba and around the world. We were curating with our eyes, but also with our ears. In spite of all this, there was plenty of improvisation and lack of curatorial rigour, especially in the main show, where the works were often badly displayed and protected, with no consistent exhibition design. The technical deficiencies and the shortages typical of communist countries affected the curatorial process.

From 1984 to 1989, all the Bienals were curated by the Centro Wifredo Lam's staff. This system has continued since then, but with a more institutional, anonymous and centralised style, focused on the Centro's director. This scheme reproduces the country's own centralised political system and shows the organisers' apprehension about opening up to the participation of foreign curators. The Bienal has paradoxically become a global event that is always curated by almost the same official Cuban team. While most international biennials present themselves as less canonical, more autonomous spaces than contemporary art museums – on the basis of the guest curators' role in their organisation and their less institutional, more flexible framework[8] – this is not the case with the Bienal de La Habana. All the more: its centralism has predisposed the Bienal to a certain authoritarian, bureaucratic and even repressive stance, and indirect or straightforward censorship has occurred in the latest editions.[9]

The third Bienal, like the second one, I insist, was not conceived as an exhibition but as an organism consisting of shows, events, meetings, publications and outreach programmes. It assembled a big main international exhibition, eleven thematic group shows (three by Cuban artists and eight by artists from other countries), ten individual exhibitions (two by Cuban artists and eight by artists from other countries), two international conferences and eight international workshops. Apart from this central programme there was a constellation of exhibitions and artistic, cultural and educational events organised by many museums, galleries, universities, houses of culture and community institutions throughout the whole city. This model intended, ideally, a more diverse approach at the general level, while keeping a specific thematic, artistic and cultural focus in each particular event. It also proposed, early on, a move away from the nineteenth-century fair-like biennial prototype, structured around national representation and the salon-style big show, whilst opposing the idea of the biennial as a big spectacle with direct market reverberations. However, the Bienal never abandoned the customary large, blockbuster exhibition – regarded by many as 'the Bienal' – surrounded by smaller events or exhibitions that appeared as fringe ventures.

The open and diverse structure of the Bienal's first editions also looked for a broader social and educational impact, and a deeper involvement with the city. Entrance to the Bienal was free, and the event was discussed in the media and in schools. There were outreach programmes but, more importantly, the Bienal was everywhere. Artists and critics worked at houses of culture in the city's neighbourhoods, they talked and danced with people at grass-roots parties, were mugged, had love affairs, were joined by students who volunteered to put the shows and workshops together… Most local artists, even if not exhibiting at the Bienal, became involved with it in one way or another.

A meaningful element of the Bienal's programme in the early days was the bar. We were always concerned with providing an accessible space for informal meetings and exchanges among participants coming from different continents, many of whom worked in isolation. This was not so easy in 1989 Cuba, before the country opened up to tourism, when the few bars, cafes and restaurants that were open to the public were usually both terrible and packed. The two bars that the Bienal created and placed at two main exhibition venues were even included in the second Bienal catalogue's long list of exhibitions and events, where they were referred to as 'meeting places'. The bars were perhaps emblems of one of the Bienal's main achievements: the foundation of a space for encounter and shared knowledge.

The 1989 Bienal made some crucial changes from previous editions. Awards and representation by countries were both eliminated.[10] A general thematic approach was also introduced. The subject for the whole event was tradition and the contemporary condition in Third World art and design. The third Bienal expanded the exhibitions and debates to include international design and architecture, in a move that was later reversed. Even if too general, the event's subject was a timely one for analysing the predicaments of 'peripheral' and postcolonial art at the time it was beginning to face

globalisation, a process towards which the Bienal had been contributing since 1986. We could say that, given its philosophy and projection, the Bienal's theme in its third edition *was* the Bienal. The event has always focused on modern and contemporary art, developing the notion of a plurality of active modernisms, and giving little room to traditional or religious aesthetic-symbolic productions, which at the time were frequently stereotyped as the authentic art created in Third World countries, while other work was disqualified as an epigonal Westernised production.

Another significant change brought by the third Bienal was that European and North American artists with Third World diaspora backgrounds, such as those identifying themselves as black artists from Great Britain, were included, as was the Border Art Workshop from San Diego and Tijuana. This move was crucial in order to open out our geographic notion of Third World, incorporating the porosities brought about by migration and its cultural transformations. It was a first step away from a problem noted by Luis Camnitzer: that the Bienal 'was still thinking international in an increasingly transnational market'.[11] However, what today seems a natural decision was only taken after intense debate. There was a persistent reluctance in the face of two perceived problems: the danger of 'Westernising' the Bienal even more, and of using the new space that it had opened up to benefit artists who were already able to circulate their work internationally.

The Bienal's international vocation was evident in the fact that Cuban artists have always had a limited presence in it, never in bigger numbers than artists from any other country. We managed to show at the Bienal the new artists who were transforming the cultural status quo in Cuba, instead of the established, somewhat official ones. The emerging Cuban artists caused a great impression on visiting curators, who invited them later to exhibit abroad.[12] Of course, this also occurred for artists from other countries, proving that the Bienal was working as a space where 'peripheral', generally ignored artists were valued by curators and critics from other 'peripheries' and from the artistic 'centres'. However, since 'central' curators had money and solid and active institutions behind them, they were much more able to scout talent than their less provided-for colleagues. This situation contaminated the Bienal, turning it increasingly into a showcase of Third World art for European and North American curators, galleries and collectors, following Cuba's own economic reconversion toward tourism. As Camnitzer has said, 'the Bienal went from a leadership of Latin America to a form of an artistic OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America), to then become an alternative independent forum, and finally to become a provider of the international market.'[13]

By 1989 the new Cuban artists were trespassing the boundaries that the Cuban regime was prepared to tolerate. Their criticism of Cuba's society and their deconstruction of the official rhetoric were becoming too radical for an authoritarian, military regime. Even if the Bienal was a particularly tolerant space due to its international implications, in the third edition Cuban artists with hard-hitting critical work – which meant most of them – were ghettoised in a group show called 'La tradición del humor' ('The Tradition of Humour'), together with cartoonists, some of them official. This decision was imposed from the top as a way to divert and reduce the artists' social and political impact in the Bienal. It was a sign of the repressive backlash that was going on in Cuba, which a little later imposed drastic censorship on some shows, while liberal Ministry of Culture officials such as Vice-Minister Marcia Leiseca and Beatriz Aulet were fired. The most repressive act was artist Ángel Delgado's sentence of six months in jail for public scandal after a performance, in what felt like a clear warning to artists and intellectuals. As a result, the 'new artists' escaped en masse at the turn of the decade and settled abroad.[14] Cuban art's golden age was over.

Even if such a dramatic diaspora made Cuban cultural authorities readjust their policy to more permissive standards, the limits for radical artistic practice in Cuba became apparent. For me, it was contradictory to continue working for the Bienal after what happened, especially since, as an art critic, I had been an advocate for the new critical art. This was one of my reasons for resigning after the 1989 Bienal, together with an erosion of trust that I experienced as a result of other incidents. Also, even if I had always been a radical component of the Bienal's team, my transgressive spirit was escalating, becoming more at odds with the prevalent inclinations. In this sense, a main question for me was the following: if we were organising a groundbreaking biennial, an event that was different and that aimed to open a new space and challenge the mainstream, why do so by repeating prevailing structures? Why put new wine inside an old wineskin? Why not create something distinct for the needs of a complex constellation of artistic and cultural practices? The Bienal never did this. Although it made substantial efforts in this direction, the issue was never an overall priority for the Centro Wifredo Lam.

On the contrary, the Bienal evolved as a standard international art exhibition instead of seeking new methods and strategies that could experiment and promote actions to transform the market-oriented approach. The Bienal never went drastically enough beyond the big-show model, and even its positively diversified structure has been abandoned in recent editions: workshops, conferences, panels, publications and outreach programmes have been reduced or eliminated, and the broad interaction with the city lost. The last several editions comprised mostly Latin American artists, giving up the effort to create a thorough global approach.

As if indicating a ghostly presence from the initial Bienals' decentralised configuration and Havana's involvement, the most interesting aspects of the last editions were the multiple alternative, autonomous or semi-autonomous shows and events conceived and organised by artists and young curators in spaces ranging from galleries to private houses, in order to take advantage of the occasion and the chance for visibility that the Bienal creates. These events have been too abundant and dispersed to be controlled and repressed, although incidents with the official authorities usually take place. This 'ghost bienal' is usually more interesting, intense and energetic than the official one. Although for the tenth edition in 2009 this informal programme was registered, publicised and thus to a certain extent controlled by the Bienal's organisers in a co-opting move, it managed to keep part of its edge, even if losing some spontaneity. A good example was Tania Bruguera's *Estado de excepción* (*State of Exception*, 2009), a nine-day programme of performances, exhibitions and events by young Cuban artists who had participated in Bruguera's 'Cátedra Arte de Conducta' ('Art of Conduct Chair'), the four-year-long independent seminar she started in Havana in 2002.

I believe the Bienal has lost its character and its possibilities. Cuba was unable to reinvent itself in the post-Cold War situation as the regime survived and maintained its one-man power system by introducing minor changes to keep everything the same instead of responding to new, challenging times. Ultimately, the Bienal was not independent enough to escape from determinations imposed by the country that created it.

Notes

1 Editors' Note: This essay was first presented as a paper at 'Exhibitions and the World at Large', a symposium organised in London by Afterall and TrAIN (the research centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation) on 3 April 2009. An abridged version titled 'The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia' was later printed in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø (ed.), *The Biennial Reader*, Bergen and Ostfildern-Ruit: Bergen Kunsthall and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010, pp.198–207.
2 Anonymous, 'Art in the Islam', in *Segunda Bienal de La Habana '86: Catálogo General* (exh. cat.), Havana: Centro Wifredo Lam, 1986, p.413.
3 See Gerardo Mosquera, 'The New Cuban Art', in Ales Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism*, Los Angeles, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003, pp.208–46; and Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
4 For its paradigmatic involvement with the public I remember in particular Julio Le Parc's workshop with young artists, which consisted of playful, interactive interventions at a park in the El Vedado neighbourhood. There was also the impressive transformation of the space of the Museo de Artes Decorativas, a Petit Trianon-looking building, by young Cuban artists who participated in Marta Palau's workshop. Another project, called *Telarte*, involved an amazing fashion show with models wearing dresses made out of fabric designed by Cuban artists and performing at night over a catwalk that was built in a colonial plaza at La Habana Vieja, watched by a crowd of people from the neighbourhood, visitors and the local art world.
5 L. Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias* (ed. Rachel Weiss), Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009, p..
6 Similar figures characterised the fourth Bienal (150 artists from 40 countries) and the fifth (240 artists from 40 countries).
7 See *Tercera Bienal de La Habana '89* (exh. cat.), Havana: Centro Wifredo Lam and Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989, p.9.
8 See, for instance, Carlos Basualdo, 'The Unstable Institution', in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam: De Appel Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007, pp.47–52.
9 The best-known case targeted a work by Costa Rican artist Priscilla Monge in 2003. This drew a strong international reaction and prompted the Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlands to withdraw its financial support from the Bienal.
10 Almost two decades earlier than the Bienal de São Paulo, which abolished national representation in 2006, in its 27th edition.
11 L. Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias*, *op. cit.*

12 For instance, José Bedia was invited to 'Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987', at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, as a result of his presence in the 1986 Bienal.
13 L. Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias*, *op. cit.* The OSPAAAL was a political organisation created in Cuba to support radical leftist movements and organisations in the Third World.
14 See the list drawn of more than a hundred young artists who emigrated from Cuba in that period in Tania Brugera, *Memorias de la postguerra*, November 1993, p.12.

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#00Bienal de La Habana Walks This Way

Amy Bruce

In their introduction to *The Biennial Reader*, the editors pose the question, "Can one even speak of a singular origin or history of 'the biennial' when the various examples that would seem to fit the category are spread all over the world and when the cultural, financial, and ideological differences between them are so vast?"[1] The question situates the problem of a larger history of biennials, which risks establishing an edition in relation to a narrative of historical progress that could negate a particular institutional and local biennial history. The concern of this paper is the consideration of how contemporary biennial editions impact institutional biennial historiographies, given that biennials are an exhibition format that are continually negotiated in the present.

In this article, I will situate the Havana Biennial as a case study because of its historical significance in biennial historiography. The Havana Biennial is art historically notable for its early editions' ideological reconsiderations and curatorial innovations in opposition to the Venice Biennale. Moreover, Havana's biennial makes an interesting case study because of the recent grassroots biennial edition, #00Bienal de La Habana (#00BH). This article considers how #00BH alters a present context for the Havana Biennial's historiography, by mobilizing on-the-ground discussions about tensions between local and global narratives.

As a grassroots project, #00BH operated on a different scale from the Havana Biennial and other Euro-American contemporary biennials. Walking as a group was logistically, economically, and strategically necessary, in addition to being subversive. I propose walking not only as part of the biennial exhibition but as a curatorial component and strategy of #00BH that through its embodied physicality reinforced the biennial's political and artistic activism and inclusivity, directly relating to its localized contemporaneities. A collective pace that was slow and contemplative provided sequences of communication, connection, and reflection in a biennial working with participants and artists to effect change. The curatorial intentions of each of these recent editions reflect their differing ideologies and visions of the global insight considerations for rethinking historiographies of biennials. What I would like to put forward is that a biennial historiography should reflect the biennial format as an "unstable institution," as proposed by curator Carlos Basualdo—that is, a history of biennials that engages with the challenges, negotiations, and re-adaptations biennials propose to the logic of modernity by way of their engagement with the present.

Out of the Gait

To briefly summarize the context of the official Havana Biennial, I will say that the biennial "expedited culture."[2] As art historian and former Havana Biennial curator Gerardo Mosquera argues, the biennial's cultural utopianism aligned with but was not exclusive to promoting socialism, a positive image of Cuba, and confronting Cuban-US isolation by co-opting Cuban and Third World intellectuals.[3] Cuba had an expansive world vision after the Cuban Revolution inclining to be a Third World leader, which was also supported by the Soviet Bloc, who heavily subsidized the Cuban economy at

the time. Confronting exclusion and a lack of communication, artists, curators, and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and accompanying diasporic communities were able to circulate their local contexts in Havana, outside of dominating global networks.[4] "Thus," Mosquera declares, "the Havana Biennial created a new, truly international 'other' space while acting at the same time as a gigantic 'Salon des Refusées' that involved most of the world."[5]

#00BH took place in May 2018 for ten days. The biennial was organised in response to the Cuban government cancelling, then postponing, the 13th edition of the official Havana Biennial. Officially, the cancellation and postponement were due to the financial strain from the wreckage caused by Hurricane Irma. The unilateral government decision to annul and defer the official biennial was cause for concern for several local artists, who had anticipated its discursive potential and public interaction with the global art world. When other international festivals and events in Havana were not cancelled or postponed, such as the International Book Fair, the International Ballet Festival, and the International Poetry Festival, to name a few, a group of artists and curators decided to take action and organize their own biennial without the government's support or help.

Typically, as art historians, we are concerned with what is exhibited, how it is exhibited, and where it is exhibited. Other than accounting for museum fatigue, an increasing reality from the growing size of various biennial editions, little concern is given to getting to the exhibition venues, especially when a biennial may include numerous sites throughout its host city. A notable contribution is the Head of Research and Public History at the Science Museum in London, England, Tim Boon, who applied Michel de Certeau's *Practices of Everyday Life* to articulate and assess museum visitor engagement.[6] Walking, much like biennials, is an ephemeral practice, bound in time and space. I would contend that since biennials are designating exhibition sites throughout the city, they are producing, or curating, visitor experiences of the city.

Human geographers in the early years of the twenty-first century proposed the "new mobilities paradigm." It advocated for considering mobilities alongside and within their "moorings."[7] For human geographers, spaces are not just contexts, but are actively produced by acts of moving. Much like how places are practiced and performed through movement and the enfolding of a myriad of people and things, so are biennial exhibitions. In this way, I am making a similar proposition for art history and exhibition practices, theorizing biennial curators envisioning the exhibition as moving, shifting, roaming entities by way of their host cities and visitors' passage in, through and with them.[8]

Believing the biennial to be national heritage, the organizers felt excluded from the state-operated institution and decision regarding its development. The #00BH organisers were not against institutions or the official Havana Biennial, rather they saw the official Biennial as too restrictive and exclusive. Much like how art historian Charlotte Bydler notes that the Istanbul Biennial has been locally critiqued for its appeals to an international audience and poor treatment of local artists, the #00BH organisers believe a local biennial should support local artists.[9] Alternatively, the latest edition of the official Havana Biennial appealed to a global art world contemporary. Its premise and title were *The Construction of the Possible*. Broadly, the curatorial theme addressed artistic confrontations with violence, injustice, social inequality, and environmental precarity. The curatorial statement by Nelson Herrera Ysla spoke directly to the Biennial's own precarity and its survival in the face of economic,

fig. 1 *Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam*, April 2019. Photograph by: José Ernesto Alfonso Fernández. Courtesy of photographer.

fig. 2–4 David Beltrán, *Installation Views of Arqueología del Color (The Archeology of Color),* 2019, at the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam. Photograph by: Amy Bruce.

"climatic reasons and arguments which threatened [the biennial's] continuity and permanence."[10] Ysla lamented the Havana Biennial as an insurmountable task with its unique disadvantages such as its geographic distance, unclear budgeting, and bureaucracy, yet achieved this and in the "lush jungle of aesthetic productions existing" in Cuba.[11] For Ysla, it would be naïve for the Biennial to "hang to transcendent changing ideas and processes that bring about new realities and complex social and political scenarios in our cultures and countries."[12]

Pacing the Possible

The Havana Biennial's vision of the global is perhaps best demonstrated by the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam (fig. 1), which exhibited part of a series by Cuban artist David Beltrán from *Arqueología Del Color* (*The Archeology of Colour)* (2019) (figs. 2-4). Beltrán is one of the most widely commissioned Cuban artists,[13] and in the series he accentuates microscopic elements in other paintings to become reminiscent of abstract expressionist paintings. The works are aesthetically appealing, where the anatomy of the paint is expanded to expose details overlooked when surveying a whole painting. In dialogue with art history, the source materials were taken from Cuban artists, Sandú Darie (1908-1991) and José Mijares (1921-2004), as well as El Greco, Van Gogh and Velázquez, for the remaining three.

Beltrán's art historical references are significant to Spanish-speaking art histories and more specifically to Cuban art history. He demonstrates an art historical lineage that is familiar to and theoretically advocated by and for the Havana Biennial. The postcolonial critique and prioritization of "art production from outside the Western core" has not been disbanded since the early editions of the Havana Biennial.[14] However, due to the current Cuban artistic system, there are local institutional concerns and therefore historiographic limitations newly imposed on the biennial that are not addressed in this official state-sanctioned forum.

In the spirit of the early Havana Biennial editions,[15] the curatorial theme of #00BH was to create "an inclusive and free civic space" for "plurality of thought."[16] Their ambition was to look beyond and counter the structural and social limitations imposed by the official Havana Biennial and to do so with an exhibition format that critically instrumentalizes art into a global interpretive discourse. The event was unsanctioned by the Cuban government, which made it essential for the organizers to not publish logistical information. There were often last-minute changes and notifications to scheduled visits, performances, and exhibitions. As a result, #00BH necessitated pedestrian and group travel (fig. 5).

By walking the city together as part of the biennial, the #00BH organisers imparted a sense of Havana as they know the city and therefore, of their contemporaneity. Walking arguably embodies contemporaneity because as art historian Karen O'Rourke argues, it "makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception."[17] Thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, and Henri Lefebvre have been foundational for outlining how urban space is produced and contested through interactions. However, I am as wary as anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee, who caution the proximity of walking as producing insights and understandings that would be otherwise hidden. They clarify that "to participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with*—where 'with' implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas, and perhaps retreating from the same threats behind."[18] As Simon Pope distills, "walking alongside becomes a means to negotiate a flow—of conversation, of movement."[19]

Travelling as a group and walking with the #00BH organizers in Havana conveyed the means by which they know Havana, a walking-with as curatorial practice, through which they imparted to participants their contemporary reality. This reality includes one major issue, which is the artist registration system in Cuba. The system either validates and supports artists or excludes artists deemed unfavorable by the state. Artists are supposed to belong to the Registry of the Creator, which is a streamlined process for formally trained artists, who become validated upon graduation by the Ministry of Culture. When they are registered, they are permitted to participate in state-sanctioned gallery exhibitions, of which notably most galleries are owned by the state. Artists denied licensing are typically individuals who have not received formal training, or their artwork is deemed unsuitable by the Ministry of Culture.[20] Such artists could be Cuban artist Reynier Leyva Novo (el Chino) or Tania Bruguera, who are notoriously critical of the Cuban state, its politics, and its history. Notably, Novo made news headlines when he donated the full amount of the sale of his work *Do Not Keep Me if I Die, the Transaction* to #00BH, and Bruguera endorsed #00BH with a video on Facebook.[21] Ultimately, the licensing system leaves little room for working artists who are not validated within the system, such as the artists who organized and participated in #00BH.[22]

fig. 5 *#00BH Logo spray painted on street in Havana*, 2018. Photograph by: Amy Bruce.

fig. 6 *Neighborhood of Marianao in Havana*, 2018. Photograph by: Amy Bruce.

Working as an unsanctioned artist in Havana at this time, limits access to resources and networks. Enabling a platform for freedom and the ability to participate and communicate with other artists, students, journalists, academics and other visitors, #00BH arrived approximately 12 km away from central Havana to the poorer neighbourhood of Marianao (fig. 6). Here artists exhibited at the home of one of the participating artists, Nonando Perea. This is where Mexican artist Armando Cuspinera exhibited his work, *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody)* (2018) (figs. 7-9), reiterating curatorial concerns of permission and liberty to pass information without stipulations.

Cuspinera's installation included text and information that was compiled by the artist from a network of friends, colleagues, and other individuals interested in contributing. They were asked to share books, texts, and other digital information they believed to be the important textual knowledge. They were asked to accompany their contribution with a reflection on why they felt the information or books were important to share. According to the artist, "The project tries to bare the social difficulties of economical limitations and political restrictions and challenge them by reproducing more than

two hundred digital texts, from cooks books to poststructuralist and decolonial discussions, shared by the collaborators and contained in one physical space to translate to another, constrained by its own logics."[23] Cuspinera's intellectual aim for this artistic project was to extrapolate information across borders digitally to communities where knowledge is less accessible. The texts build a community library in addition to affronting censorship.

In each of these biennials, the 13th edition of the Havana Biennial and #00BH, the works by Beltrán and Cuspinera suggest the differing artistic and biennial stakes. Since the Havana Biennial is mandated and operated by the state, it is principally concerned about its legitimation within an art historical, and thus canonical, framework. The aesthetic excellence of Beltrán's work appeals to a timeless and international artistic standard.[24] #00BH's lack of legitimacy as an unsanctioned, unstable, and alternative platform opened the biennial format to any artist—licensed or unlicensed—wanting to participate. Cuspinera's work embodies that shared and communal ambition of #00BH and their wider goal to access the global art world from which they are institutionally prohibited. Undoubtably, I would like to stress that by no means do I intend to undermine the Havana Biennial, the Cuban Ministry of Culture, or Beltrán's artistic practice, rather I want to highlight how the organizers and participating artists of each event were understood in relation to their particular ideological positions.

Stepping Forward

The significance of #00BH to the historiography of the Havana Biennial and biennial history writ large, I am arguing, is that both biennials should be read in conjunction with and alongside one another. The project of writing a biennial history is still cautiously ongoing, where historical surveys begin with late nineteenth-century roots in salons, world fairs, and international expositions to a growth in the twentieth century with the so-called "second wave" of biennials, namely São Paulo and Havana, to the widespread proliferation of biennials in the 1990s.[25]

Considerations for contemporary biennials in larger institutional biennial histories should not position historical context in a stable position in the past, but rather account for the structural differences reinforced by biennials' repetitive format. If biennials are understood as exhibitions within the contemporary condition—as is considered by art historians Terry Smith, Anthony Gardner, Charles Green, and philosopher Peter Osborne—where biennials are committed to displaying recent art or art relevant to the present, and contemporary art itself is an art of becoming and of occasions, then arguably a historiography of biennials should be relational to contemporaneity.

My position of taking the present into consideration for biennial historiography is not unlike how Walter Benjamin conceived of the relationship of the past as a connection between "then" and "now," where the "now" renders legible "then." If each biennial edition as a critical event is taken as a mirror of their contemporaneity, that is, as a critical moment of the contemporary, then, as Benjamin asserts, the present is specifically connected and contingent.[26] This kind of dialectical approach to framing biennial history and histories seeks to complicate the continuum of static biennial histories so they can continue to be unstable institutions. The task of writing this kind of biennial history, one that is perpetually revisited as biennials themselves revisit contemporary art, is perhaps unachievable for art historians. Yet, when events such as #00BH take place, in dialogue with the Havana Biennial, a historiography is imbued by the present.

fig. 7 Armando Cuspinera introducing his work *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody),* 2018. Photograph by: Casandra Romero Torres. Courtesy of artist.

In an article reviewing the 13th Havana Biennial, co-organizer of #00BH and curator Yanelys Nuñez Leyva questions the need for a biennial in Cuba, asking if the social and political systems would be better off with distance from the "outdated and cynical biennial model."[27] She asserts instead that the influence of Havana is not in its institutions but in alternative platforms. Perhaps #00BH walks as an alternative model, one that can reflect on the past and present like that of the biennial form and should also be considered for biennial historiography.

Notes

1 Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo, "Biennialogy," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art.* eds. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 18.
2 George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
3 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art.* eds. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 200.
4 The government set a precedent of valuing and promoting art and culture as a revolutionary tool, establishing institutions and education programming and patronizing the arts. In the 1980s, artists who were children of the revolution explored themes sometimes at odds with the utopian ideas of the state. The new works formed in new media were viewed in contention with the state, which reacted by increasing control over artistic production. Many artists were forced to leave because of censorship and a lack of supplies during the Special Period. According to Cuban art historian Luis Camnitzer, artists during the Special Period began to look towards the global market instead of the revolutionary past. Also see Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 322.
5 Mosquera, "The Havana Biennial," 203.

fig. 8–9 Installation views of *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody),* 2018. Photograph by: Casandra Romero Torres. Courtesy of artist.

6 Tim Boon, "A Walk in the Museum with Michel de Certeau: A Conceptual Helping Hand for Museum Practitioners" *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54 (06 October 2011): 419-429.
7 Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, "Introduction: Geographies of Mobilities – Practices, Spaces, Subjects," in Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects, eds. Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 7.
8 Psychogeography refers to the walking of a shape, symbol, or word as a practice of what is called a "constrained walk." What I am proposing is similar in that there would be restrictions imposed from the exhibition; however, it does not necessarily relate to the exercise of design.
9 This is based on conversations with the organisation team of #00Bienal during the event May 5-15, 2017.
10 Nelson Herrera Ysla, "The Multiple constructions of the (im)possible," in *La Construcción de lo posible: Bienal de La Habana 2019*, curated by Margarita González Lorente, et. al, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam y ArteCubano Ediciones, 12 de abril – 12 de mayo 2019, dir. Jorge Alfonso Garcia (La Habana, Cuba: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam; ArteCubano Ediciones, 2019), 29.
11 Ibid., 31.
12 Ibid., 33.
13 Ginger Danto, "'All Art in Cuba is Political': A Havana Biennial Complicated by Local Politics Aims to Rethink the Future by Looking to the Past," *ArtNews*, June 7, 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/havana-biennial-review-12717/.
14 Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, et al (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 99.
15 Gerardo Mosquera, who was part of the curatorial team for the first three editions of the Havana Biennial, posted a video in support of #00BH and their efforts to "decentralize culture, to make it more dynamic." See 00Bienal de La Habana, "Gerardo #Mosquera en #00Bienal de La Habana," April 23, 2018, video, 1:28, https://youtu.be/O0XN42uADS0.

16 Yanelys Nuñez Leyva and Luis Manuel Otero Alacantra, "Fragments of an Open Letter," in *La Habana: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, eds. Thomas Lodge, et al. (Denmark: Political Architecture Critical Sustainability, 2018), 106-109.
17 Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013), xvii-xviii.
18 Tim Ingold and Jo Lee, "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing," in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology,* eds. Simon Coleman and Peter Collins (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 67.
19 Simon Pope, "Walking Transformed: The Dialogics of Art and Walking," *C Magazine* 121 (Spring 2014), https://cmagazine.com/issues/121/walking-transformed-the-dialogics-of-art-and-walking.
20 The system was explained to me by a Cuban art historian, who wished to remain anonymous due to the political climate in Cuba. In order to respect their wishes and prioritize their safety, they will remain anonymous for the sake of this publication.
21 The state-run National Council of Visual Arts purchased the work for 3800 CUC (=USD), and with the transfer, the state symbolically funded the unsanctioned event. See 00Bienal de La Habana, "Tania Bruguera en #00Bienal de La Habana," April 11, 2018, video, 1:44, https://youtu.be/4ugRaTNAzHs.
22 To my knowledge, none of the Cuban artists who participated in #00BH hold artist licenses. Moreover, the state's control over artistic production has increased even more since #00BH. As of April 2018, and in effect as of the following December, Decree 349 legislated new censorship on artistic freedom in the Republic. The decree grants the Cuban government complete control over any independent artistic production, banning the "use of national symbols that contravene current legislation; pornography; violence; sexist, vulgar and obscene language; discrimination due to skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability and any other harm to human dignity; that attempts against the development of childhood and adolescence; any other that violates the legal provisions that regulate the normal development of our [Cuban] society in cultural matters." See Jasmine Weber, "As Criminalization of the Arts Intensifies in Cuba, Activists Organize," *Hyperallergic*, April 15, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/453423/cuba-decree-349-censorship-arts/.
23 Armando Cuspinera, email correspondence, January 29, 2020.
24 Gerardo Mosquera, "Beyond Anthropophagy: Art, Internationalization and Cultural Dynamics," accessed March 12, 2020, chrome-extension://oemmndcbldboiebfnladdacbdfmadadm/http://archive.summeracademy.at/media/pdf/pdf776.pdf.
25 See Rebecca Coates, "From the Margins to the Center: The São Paulo Biennial, the Biennale of Sydney, and the Istanbul Biennial," *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 2 (2014): 113-132.; Charles Green and Anthony Gardner; and Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetic of Experience* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).
26 Beatrice Hassen, *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London: Continuum, 2006), 110.
27 Yanelys Nuñez Leyva, "XIII Bienal de La Habana," *Contemporary Art in the Americas*, June 1, 2019, accessed January 24, 2020, https://terremoto.mx/xiii-bienal- de-la-habana/.

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A New Change of Course: Distributed Biennialism in Latin America

Agustina Andreoletti

The proliferation of new art biennials over the last ten years has been met with a great deal of skepticism. Many observers have argued emerging biennials in the periphery are mere adaptations of the late-nineteenth-century exhibition model[1] or that they arise from the desire to make a spectacle or to drive tourism in the region.[2]

However, many of these contemporary biennial models have the potential to consolidate cultural infrastructure[3] and to provide spaces for exchange between people, institutions, buildings, technologies, and archives. Together, the heterogeneous actors enable the creation and delivery of art and cultural experiences, granting them greater visibility on an international scale. Their smaller infrastructure has the advantage of not being as slowed down or constrained by the global art market as long-established, major biennials such as Venice or extremely well-financed biennials like Gwangju or Istanbul.[4]

The significance of location is something that all biennials take into consideration, although each example imposes a rethinking on the way this concept is articulated. As Monika Szewczyk suggests, the location and locating of the biennial "relates not just to the 'event,' but also to the geographies it helps to imagine and render."[5] This essay seeks to situate and re-articulate Latin American biennials as a documented past, which sets the bases for new models to emerge and creates a local history that affects the regional socio-political landscape.

Historically, Latin America has seen the creation of two of the most representative cases of biennials, which at the time changed the course of what a biennial meant for the art world and national representation systems: the *Bienal de São Paulo* and the Havana Biennial.

Change of Perspective: The *Bienal de São Paulo*

The *Bienal de São Paulo*, the second oldest art biennial in the world after Venice, was founded in 1951, sponsored by industry-linked patron Francisco 'Ciccillo' Matarazzo, who also founded the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP) in 1948. Its inauguration was motivated by cultural, economic, and political forces that shaped the postwar period within Brazil and internationally with the intention to increase the cultural capital and international commercial partnerships.[6] Being the first modern biennial to be realized in a geopolitical location in the Southern Hemisphere, it included twenty national pavilions from three continents. The national-representation format was maintained from the beginning until the early 1980s; however, unlike Venice, where the participating nations are left to their own devices and manage their pavilions independently, in São Paulo the artistic director[7] always established a spatial interaction between the artists of the represented nations and the artists invited by the biennial.

From 1961 onwards, an autonomous foundation was endorsed by the Brazilian government. The biennial could now receive funding from both city and state agencies and thus was no longer tied to private patronage.[8] In 1964, the same governmental, financial aid became a point of pressure, as the Brazilian military government in power after a military coup showed its first explicit effects on the biennial. The evidence of cultural repression on its program and the boycott adhered to by artists worldwide affected the exhibition's international prestige. International agencies maintained a diplomatic, distanced participation until political change became apparent in the early 1980s.[9] The 1983 edition marked a re-introduction of private sector funding, which financially ensured the presentation of national and international artworks of particular historical relevance. Private sponsorships supported the pedagogical ambitions of the event as established in the early 1950s, reaching by then more than a thousand teachers and nearly 120,000 students and becoming one of the biennial's most appreciated features of its legacy.[10]

Change of Format: The Havana Biennial

The Havana Biennial started in 1984, focused primarily on artists from Latin America and the Caribbean. The third iteration, in 1989, additionally brought in artists from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.[11] Instead of framing itself as a global show, the Havana Biennial was focused on what they coined the Third World. According to Rachel Weiss, "The idea of a Third World arose as a mutual political project among newly-independent nations defining themselves as 'non-aligned.'"[12] Since its creation, the Havana Biennial formed part of a Latin American political agenda proclaimed by the Cuban revolution—by means of other institutions such as Casa de las Américas. It was conceived as an alternative to the biennial and exhibition system. Organized by the Wifredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art, its particular importance lies in its declaration as openly political, intellectual, historical, and cultural, as well as its affinity towards Third World countries and marginalized minorities inside capitalist states. This discursive model started the proliferation of biennials that would follow as spaces for discussion and debate. The themes and approaches introduced in the first Havana Biennial inspired many contemporary biennials from the Global North and the Global South alike.[13]

The Cuban socio-political context allowed the biennial—as a national project[14]—to engage with a local perspective on art production and decolonization through the inclusion of multiculturalist points of view pushing a regional agenda. The Havana Biennial signaled a shift from the hierarchical influence from Europe and United States to an equal dialogue among regions,[15] as it aimed at empowering artists and intellectuals of the Southern Hemisphere and challenging the hegemonic role of the centers of economic power in the distribution of contemporary art.[16]

What has been the standard for art biennials within the canon for over one hundred years has been questioned, taking a stand against the status quo of Western art history and nationalism. Devoid of national exhibitions or the awarding of prizes, the Havana Biennial set a new precedent with its emphasis on research and discourse with the inclusion of an international conference. According to Green and Gardner, this emphasis led to the "idea of an expanded role for curatorship into curating discourse as well as art."[17] The role of curators as creators of discourse influenced how biennials and other large exhibitions have been framed to this day, broadening the set of knowledge production strategies. The new paradigm has only been possible due to Cuba's established position as a center for the arbitration of non-hegemonic world networks. The biennial aspires to a global reach from outside the European and North

American art system, creating new networks between communities from the Global South without scales.

Change of Organization

Radical content or formats are not sufficient unless the production of art itself is transformed. The new biennial models explore the possibility of oppositional thought and discourse, as many of their predecessors did before them; however, their core organization—based on cooperation and alliances—is what differentiates them from earlier models. Under different local situations, the three cases here will provide examples of structures that are intrinsically multi-voiced due to the infrastructure that makes them possible.

BienalSur

BienalSur was first conceived by the Union of South American Nations and a group linked to contemporary art and education in 2015. Unlike the models where some artists are invited directly by the chief curator or selected directly by their countries of origin, *BienalSur* announced an open invitation to any artist, curator, or art space.[18] Without the need to fit into a specific curatorial theme, the biennial opens itself to a fragmented idea of what a Latin American art biennial could be. Creating its cartography, a particular territory and itinerary, *BienalSur* reaches out to expand Latin America on a virtually planetary-scale, gathering artists and curators from the five continents. With Museo de la Inmigración and Centro de Arte Contemporáneo (Immigration Museum and Contemporary Art Center) in the city of Buenos Aires as its starting point—the 0-kilometer marker in *BienalSur*'s route map.[19]

BienalSur, *Cartography*, 2017. © BienalSur.

View of the conference, *14° Encuentro Sur Global*, June 27, 2018. © BienalSur.

With its broadly decentralized structure, *BienalSur* aims to connect with communities and alternative venues rather than traditional art circuits. To find common ground among artists from different geographic latitudes, the first iteration of *BienalSur* took place in 2017 in 84 sites, located in 16 countries and 32 cities worldwide.[20] The aspiration was to promote a periodical, real dialogue on equal grounds among different parts of the world. The program unfolded over two years across different cities, inviting active participation through exhibitions, public programs, workshops, readings, symposia, and performances. Artists, art professionals, thinkers, academics, biennial participants, and audiences met at different moments and places during the two years to articulate critical, situated thinking in close dialogue with the artworks. In this way, the biennial worked as an umbrella institution that gave visibility and support to less established spaces and practitioners in the network, becoming an opportunity for artists to emerge on the international art scene.

The 2019 edition offered some changes and additions to the initial concept, the distribution of the program across two years was mostly condensed within six months, with some events beyond the main timeline. A series of international conferences open to the public with artists, curators, critics and collectors held since the foundation in 2015 continued to regularly promote and rethink relevant aspects of art production and mediation in the region. The vast scale of the project and the cartography departing from the 0-kilometer marker—a new center—highlights the physical distance between all participants. The dispersed integration of the program has been facilitated by the information revolution, brought about by the Internet and the development of digital communication in general. With its online presence and digital archive, *BienalSur* contributes to supporting the existing network of cultural agents in the region to assist artistic and financial cooperation and alliances beyond the program of the biennial itself.

#00Bienal and *Bienal Sin 349*

The cancellation of the 2018 Havana Biennial due to Hurricane Irma in 2017 and the effects this had on the cultural institutions and infrastructure in Cuba bore evidence of the rising political tensions, as well as the debilitation of cultural and organizational structures on the country. The decision to postpone the biennial caused strong reactions in the Cuban art scene. Many cultural actors decided to join forces and create a new alternative event organized independently from the state: the *#00Bienal* (2018). Under the motto "In each studio, a Biennial," the *#00Bienal* aspired to function

as a platform for various independent spaces (studios, art residences, alternative organizations, and cultural initiatives) whose practices provide a dialogue with popular concepts.[21] More than supporting the inclusion of artists in official institutions, the *#00Bienal* confronted the challenge of validating Cuban artistic practices within a context of a more inclusive local discourse.[22]

A favorable strategy for the 2019 Havana Biennial[23] would have been to invite *#00Bienal*'s two main organizers—artist Luis Manuel Otero and art historian Yanelys Núñez—to discuss their experiences and create a common ground to foster alternative points of view. However, under the shade of Decree 349,[24] which requires artists to obtain government approval to mount their projects,[25] Otero was detained by the authorities in April 2019 to prevent actions during the biennial. This series of events has prepared the bases for a new alternative biennial to arise. Under the title *Bienal Sin 349* (*Biennial Without 349*), local cultural workers invited international artists to stage gestures or other actions alongside Cuban colleagues, reflecting on the subject of censorship in the country. The Museum of Politically Inconvenient Art (MAPI), united with the San Isidro Movement and *Los Artistas de Los 30s*, carried out various strategic actions in order to test Decree 349 and introduce questions about the latest Cuban approaches to culture. MAPI and the Museum of Dissidence in Cuba brought together works by Cuban artists who were not invited to the biennial. Most of those artists are neglected by state institutions and enjoy little recognition in the state-run media since their works rely on questions about LGBT and animal rights, governance, and racial issues in Cuba and abroad.

The different accounts regarding these two parallel, non-official biennials take us beyond art and the experience of the exhibition to provide a critical and contextual reading of the biennial format and its relevance in nation-state representation. Art biennials need to be considered as part of the fabric of a wider public sphere, as a convergence of internal politics and diplomatic resolutions. The official Havana Biennial was created to include underrepresented voices; however, the same structure relegates cultural producers who aim to cultivate a more open policy and now organize themselves to present their ideas.

Promotional material with illustration of ants, #00Bienal de la Habana, *In Every Studio a Biennial*, 2018.
© #00Bienal de la Habana.

La Bienal en Resistencia 2019
Located in Guatemala, the first edition of *La Bienal en Resistencia* presented themes that concern the Latin American region from an artistic point of view. During October 2019, the biennial worked on community outreach through exhibitions, actions, and critical demonstrations in open, public spaces in Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango, and Chichicastenango. The program presented more than forty multidisciplinary proposals from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Argentina, and Guatemala in a joint curatorial exercise initiated by Maya Juracán and Gustavo García.[26] The project was based on what they call "community curatorship," which invites horizontal dialogue between people linked to the art system and external agents.[27]

La Bienal en Resistencia was conceived as a space to generate community dialogues that highlight problems, uncomfortable issues, and social exercises affecting the Latin American region, highlighting a feminist and queer perspective. It considers 'resistance' everything that is presented as a critique and revitalizes the system. In addition to exposing the current socio-political situation in the country, the biennial encourages certain ways of creating, constructing, and thinking that do not necessarily respond to an aesthetic or market logic.

Naming the project a biennial intentionally situates its existence concerning historical exhibition-making; however, the name does not imply a particular structure, offering an openness to create alternative and counter-models. Reflecting critically on their role within the institutional ecology, *La Bienal en Resistencia* 2019 had a specific awareness on the problem of "biennialization,"[28] which does not only affect artists and curators but also transforms existing institutional models, cultural policies, and city administrations. They intended to use the concept to deinstitutionalize art,[29] making it available to a broader local public on the streets of their city, giving new meanings to what a biennial could be beyond sacralizations and academicisms.

Esvin Alarcón Lam, performance *A la defensiva,* 2019. Centro Cívico, Guatemala City. Performers: Ben Arévalo, Ghandy Anabí, Coxaj Carrera, María José L. Escobar, Julio Esquite (ChinoDancer), Naomi Hernández Hernández, Vanessa Hernández, Leonel de León, Alejandra Mazariegos, Gudiel Ramos and Lourdes Sierra. © Bienal en Resistencia, Galería Henrique Faria, and the artist.

View of *La Bienal en Resistencia*, Guatemala, October 2019. © La Bienal en Resistencia.

The tension between the peripheral and the central, and the local and the international, on the one hand, endorses the mobility, openness, curiosity, and innovative drive of post-institutions[30] (fairs, festivals). On the other hand, it shows a growing preference for local actions, collective memory, and the stability offered by the institution (museums, art centers, cultural centers). In this sense, the biennial can be described as an "unstable institution,"[31] whose identity is defined concerning the more established and symbolically weighty institution of the museum. The instability allows radically diverse projects to take place under this label, involving not only production and display but also the construction of discourse and the distribution of knowledge.

This essay argues that new, smaller, and more innovative art biennials offer a better chance for self-organizational arrangements that engage independent collectives and artist-run organizations as well as small or medium-scale art centers. The three cases explore different forms of contestatory strategy, seeking to work against the globalist model of the biennial both with and against instrumentalizing forces on regional and national levels. Their aim is not to provide an answer to biennial fatigue, the figure of the star curator, or the institutionalization of art,[32] but to be locally relevant, to create spaces for self-organization, and to look at new ways of nation-state representation from the bottom up with long-lasting repercussions.

New biennial models from the peripheries influence the current shifting times in cultural institutions, especially in connection to the process of making things public and advancing the conversation on contemporary art production. With the freedom that the peripheral status allows, these biennials could potentially foster new curatorial practices, delegating authority through collaborations with local and global institutions, curators, artists, thinkers, and audiences to establish a new type of art institution. Currently in Europe, regional, local, collective-oriented biennial initiatives rooted in the Global South are welcomed with enthusiasm to act as a counterpoint to the general belief in globalization and to create a new map of contemporary exhibitions with methodologies focused on distributed agencies.[33]

Distributed organizations can develop and adapt faster than standard institutions because they are not constrained to a single place, timeline, budget, or authorship. Creating knowledge under these conditions assumes new values that arise from social needs and self-organizing networked structures so that the distribution of knowledge itself becomes a strategy rather than a limit.

Production and exhibition technologies, dissemination practices and interventions arise when the prevailing situation does not meet the current necessities. Bottom-up workflows open up new possibilities to regain agency for practitioners who create alternative biennial models, many times overlapping with existing ones. Collective work is essential in the four new biennials presented in this article; their modalities are intrinsically decentralized, and their work is only possible through shared efforts. In that sense, exhibition-making, if only for one edition, could become zones in which participants can learn to negotiate responsibilities, social relations, and peer-based means of production.

Notes

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12 Weiss, "The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition," 18.
13 Marchart, "The Globalization of Art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': A History of the Biennials from the Periphery."
14 The Havana Biennial is an entirely governmental project. Its director and curators are a team that belong to the Cuban national project and are appointed for the long-term. Rachel Weiss, "Visions, Valves, and Vestiges: The Curdled Victories of the Bienal de La Habana," *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 10-26.
15 Green and Gardner*, Biennials, Triennials and Documenta,* 92.

16 Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," in *The Biennial Reader Vol. 2*, 128.
17 Green and Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials and Documenta,* 98.
18 "BIENALSUR. ¿Qué Es BIENALSUR?," BienalSur, accessed April 22, 2020, https://bienalsur.org/es/page/que-es-bienalsur.
19 "Pasaporte BIENALSUR 2017," BienalSur, accessed April 22, 2020, https://bienalsur.org/assets/pdf/2017_PASAPORTE_BIENALSUR_EN_ESPANOL.pdf.
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21 "#00Bienal de La Habana: In Every Studio a Biennial," Announcements - e-Flux, accessed April 22, 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/196251/00bienal-de-la-habanain-every-studio-a-biennial/.
22 Aldeide Delgado, "What Happened With the Havana Biennial?," *Contemporary And*, last modified May 24, 2018, https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/what-happened-with-the-havana-biennial/.
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24 Decree 349 requires all people in Cuba engaging in artistic activities to be registered with an institution affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, which negotiates contracts and payment with the artists and can deny permission to pursue a project and punish them for doing so in defiance of the Decree. See: Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) and Cubalex, *ART UNDER PRESSURE: Decree 349 Restricts Creative Freedom in Cuba,* last modified March 4, 2019. https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Art-Under-Pressure.pdf/.
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26 "La Bienal en Resistencia," CARTI, accessed April 22, 2020, https://carti.center/proyecto/la-bienal-en-resistencia.
27 Rosario Orellana, "Salir del cuadro para vivir en resistencia," *Periódico laCuerda y Asociación La Cuerda*, last edition October 9, 2019, https://lacuerda.gt/2019/10/09/salir-del-cuadro-para-vivir-en-resistencia/.
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30 Pascal Gielen, "The Biennial: A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour," *Open: The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon* 8, no. 16 (2009): 8–17.
31 Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," 129.
32 ZKM , *Biennials: Prospect and Perspectives. International Conference* at ZKM (Feb. 27–Mar. 1, 2014), Centre for Art and Media, (Karlsruhe 2015), 22-24, 59, 165, 167. https://zkm.de/media/file/en/2015-publication-prospect_and_perspectives-zkm.pdf/.
33 Giving great importance to the questions of how it is done and who is doing it, many small European biennials have adopted the inclusion of collectives of curators and artists as their core teams, collaborations with local institutions, and the possibility to celebrate the event over a long period. Contour Biennial 2019 (Mechelen, Belgium), Bergen Assembly 2019 (Bergen, Norway), Berlin Biennale 2020 (Berlin, Germany), documenta 2022 (Kassel, Germany).

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Curatorial Networks: The Havana Biennial and the Biennials in the South

Anita Orzes

Abstract

The Havana Biennial generated earthquakes and instability within the hegemonic culture and marked a turning point, since it opened the way for the recognition and valorization of the culture representing three quarters of the planet (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean and the Middle East) in an integrating space. Its ambitious project had to deal with the lack of knowledge of the artistic practices of these regions and the geopolitical context of the Cold War. Analysis of its triad structure (exhibitions, workshops, and theoretical meetings) makes it possible to highlight how the Havana Biennial was traversed by networks articulated around common projects and shared horizons and how intersections were created with other biennials in the South.

Introduction

The Havana Biennial, "an open window to infinite dreams and reflections, and a way to contribute to the understanding of the world,"[2] would not only have to be a place to exhibit the extensive, intense, and rich variety of artistic expressions of what was then known as the Third World, but also a platform from where to submit to judgment and debate its theoretical and critical inquiries, promoting a horizontal dialogue. In 1989, the Havana Biennial celebrated its third edition with a triad structure that was more clearly defined in comparison to the two previous editions. In fact, in the third edition, a thematic axis (*Tradición y contemporaneidad en el arte del Tercer Mundo*) of reflection was established, the competitive character of the event was eliminated and the division by nationalities was abandoned. This was the result of a work of reflection, definition, and experimentation that began after the first Havana Biennial,[3] when Llilian Llanes took over the direction of the Wifredo Lam Center,[4] the organizing institution, and its curatorial team[5] was constituted (José Luis Alaya, Leticia Cordero, Ibis Hernández Abascal, Nelson Herrera Ysla, Gerardo Mosquera, José Manuel Noceda, Margarita Sánchez, Eugenio Valdés). Taking the aims of the event as their basis, and reflecting on its singularity in opposition to the Western biennial format, the curatorial team decided to articulate the biennial in conceptually communicative and interconnected sections: exhibitions (the exhibition-essay and the special projects), workshops (between artists or with the participation of the public), and theoretical meetings. The exhibitions were configured as an essay through which to exhibit a theme and offer multiple points of view. The workshops had to favor exchange between artists from many countries, contribute to the enrichment of Cuban artists, and facilitate the approach and participation of the local public. Finally, through theoretical meetings, it aimed to enrich the conceptual character of the event and to establish the basis for future debates and relationships.

Analysis of this triad structure makes it possible to highlight how the Havana Biennial was traversed by networks articulated around common projects and shared horizons. It is possible to identify, on the one hand, intellectual networks in Latin America already active in the Seventies, and which found in Havana a new space for reflection and, on the other hand, curatorial networks and alliances with other biennials that were generated *in* and *from* the research trips.

Anita Orzes, *Curatorial networks and participation in the theoretical meetings of the Third Havana Biennial* (1989), 2020. ©Anita Orzes

Intellectual Networks and Theoretical Meetings

At the third Havana Biennial (1989), the theoretical meetings were divided into two sections: *Tradición y contemporaneidad en la plástica del Tercer Mundo* and *Tradición y contemporaneidad en el ambiente del Tercer Mundo*, and they were accompanied by the Tribuna Libre.[6] Among the participants were Juan Acha, Mirko Lauer, Frederico Morais and Pierre Restany. It is interesting to note how, throughout the theoretical meetings that aimed to analyze and question the notions of modernity, tradition, and contemporaneity in their *g-locality*, breaking down the historical mediation produced by the West, there were references and allusions to, and criticisms of, the biennial reality in Latin America and the Caribbean. In fact, since the 1950s, Latin America and the Caribbean had been experiencing the complexity of the biennial phenomenon through multiple attempts to establish the format,[7] various typologies of biennials (regional or international) and approaches (specialized in one technique or including several), different forms of financing (public or private, national, or foreign capital), and the perpetuation of the São Paulo Biennial (1951).

During his lecture in *Tradición y contemporaneidad en la plástica del Tercer Mundo*, Mirko Lauer referred to the first Latin-American Biennial of São Paulo (1978) as «the most direct antecedent of this Havana Biennial.»[8] On the other hand, Frederico Morais defined the Latin American biennials as "points of advanced cultural colonization,"[9] stressing how art history continued to be narrated from a Euro-American perspective and emphasizing the need for Latin America to "make itself seen and heard, and even to modify spheres of world art."[10] The biennial had to abandon the informative approach, adopted until then, in favor of a critical-formative one based on analysis, review, selection, and discussion.[11]

Frederico Morais and Mirko Lauer, together with Juan Acha[12] and Aracy Amaral,[13] belonged to the network of intellectuals who considered that the format of Western biennials was not adapted to Latin America and the Caribbean and instead, pointed to research biennials,[14] conceived to analyze and understand the present through a strong reflective component, specialized in a geographical area and without awards. They considered this format the most effective for researching the region's artistic production, for mutual knowledge and for promoting exchanges and relationships between artists and critics from various regions. These agents were involved in two important initiatives, the first Latin-American Biennial of São Paulo (1978) and the First Colloquium on Non-Objectual Art and Urban Art (1981) in Medellín, which sought to build a space of equality, putting the colonial power relations reproduced in the biennials up for debate, and expanding and transforming the format.

The first Latin-American Biennial of São Paulo was a biennial dedicated exclusively to artists from Latin America and the Caribbean, which abandoned the model of national representations and organized the exhibition around four concepts: indigenous, African, Eurasian and mestizo.[15] The Biennial was complemented by the symposium *Mitos e Magia,*[16] under the direction of Juan Acha, in which, in addition to analyzing the specificity and problems of Latin American art, a section was dedicated to the discussion of its second edition, which did not take place in the end.[17] The considerations that arose from this meeting, such as the ineffectiveness of biennials without a precise focus of research, the limits of the São Paulo Biennial and the imperative need to modify the structure imported and adopted from Venice, were taken up by Juan Acha to conceive the First Colloquium on Non-Objectual Art and Urban Art and the related exhibition[18] at the Museum of Modern Art of Medellín (MAMM). This colloquium was a further attempt to imagine alternatives to the conventional biennial model, bringing together theory, practice, and experience. It was conceived with two interrelated components: a colloquium, in which Latin American researchers participated (Aracy Amaral and Mirko Lauer were some of the guests), and an exhibition in which the proposals of non-objectivist artists were presented and in which public activities and discussions were prioritized.

Two other events were taking place simultaneously in Medellín[19]: the fourth Medellín Biennial[20] and the Meeting of the Association of Art Critics. Pierre Restany participated in both and questioned the Medellín Biennial itself, especially its interest in strengthening ties and making comparisons between Latin America and the West. He suggested redirecting the Biennial›s attention to Asia and Africa, establishing a direct connection between these regions and the countries of Latin America [and the Caribbean] to enrich the dialogue and make it more relevant.[21] The French critic then suggested the creation of a "biennial of difficult identities,"[22] a Third World Biennial, understanding the Third World as a methodological concept. This is not the first time that Pierre Restany advocated a change in the biennial format that Latin America had imported from the West. In fact, after his first visit to the eighth São Paulo Biennial (1965), he wrote two articles, one in the *Correio da Manhã*[23] and another in the Italian magazine *Domus,*[24] claiming that the São Paulo Biennial should be structured around a central theme, chosen by a commission of international specialists who would select the artists, and abandon the model of national representation. In fact, within the framework of the tenth São Paulo Biennial (1969) Pierre Restany was organizing the exhibition *Arte e Tecnologia* with the aim of organizing an event that would move away from the structure that São Paulo had maintained until then and anticipate the reform of the Biennial itself. His intention was to organize an anti-biennial exhibition within the Biennial itself.[25] In the end, the project was not carried out because Pierre Restany

joined the "Non à la Biennale" movement.[26] He was one of the intellectuals advocating for a change in the biennial format who attended and participated in the aforementioned editions under review of the Havana Biennial. After visiting the second edition of the Biennial, he wrote an article in *Cimaise*[27] praising the participatory (the workshops with the public) and discursive (the theoretical meetings) component of the event. In the following edition, he participated in *Tradición y contemporaneidad en la plástica del Tercer Mundo* as well as in the Tribuna libre. He emphasized the complexity of the diagnostic study of the artistic practices of the Third World, as well as their identities, and underlined the importance of the continuity of the collective reflection that had begun in the previous edition.[28]

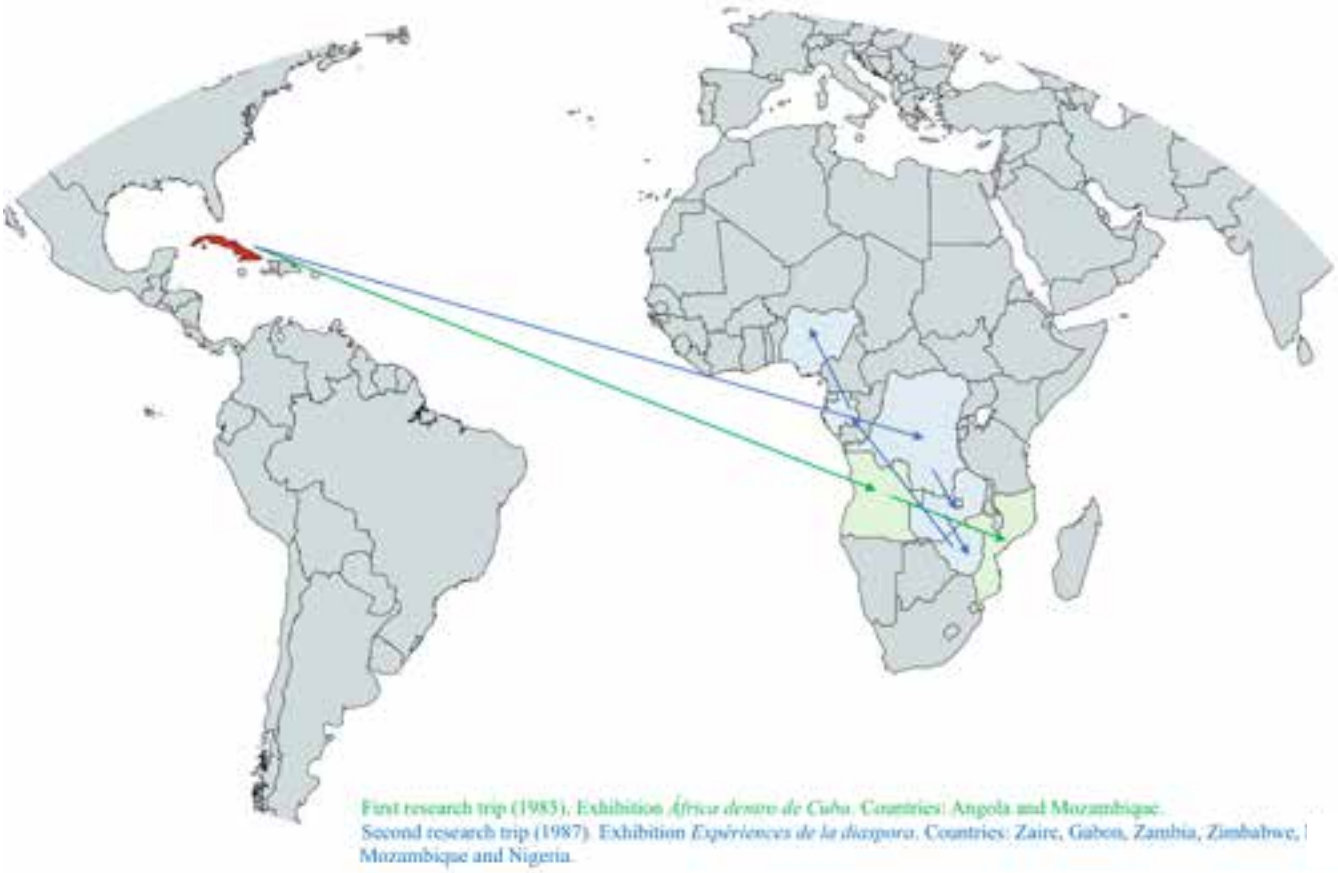
Research Trips and Biennials in the South

The ambitious project of the Havana Biennial was faced with the isolation of the island, the cut-off relations with most of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the lack of knowledge of the artistic practices of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. From the beginning, the direction of the Wifredo Lam Center understood the need and importance of carrying out research *in situ* to get to know the local art scene first-hand. Since these research trips were not financially supported by the Ministry of Culture, two mapping strategies were implemented: invitations to events abroad and cultural agreements with Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, which established a commitment to exchange exhibitions. The curatorial team of the Wifredo Lam Center prepared and offered exhibitions to these countries, on the condition that they be accompanied by the corresponding curators.[29] After the trips, meetings were organized where the specialists[30] of the Center presented the collected material and a project for the biennial, which was submitted to collective discussion.

The invitation received to attend the sixth India Triennial and the sending of exhibitions to the African continent are two examples that explain both the scale and resonance of the research trips and the partnerships that were forged.

In 1985, Nelson Herrera Ysla visited the sixth India Triennial, accepting the invitation extended to the Wifredo Lam Center by the Lalit Kala Akademi, the institution organizing the Triennial. This trip served not only to corroborate the previous selection of Indian artists for the second Havana Biennial (1986), but also to discover new artists (Vivan Sundaram and Nalini Malani) who were invited to participate, to get a better picture of the artistic scene of New Delhi and to identify Geeta Kapur as a key figure.[31] This theorist was part of the jury at the second Havana Biennial and participated in the theoretical meeting of the third edition. In her speech, she emphasized the need to rethink the concepts of tradition and modernity, to avoid replicating the exploitative relations created by Western countries, and how intellectuals and artists should consolidate a discourse and a compendium of cultural practices within the political entity of the Third World. At the same time, Llilian Llanes, in the presentation of the third Havana Biennial, underlined the extraordinary mixture of peoples and cultures that make up the Third World, the interest in the (re)affirmation of their roots, and singularities in the face of the hegemonic forces that sought to deform and homogenize them. She also emphasized the obligation to go on the offensive to take an active role in the "universal" culture that had been imposed on them until now.[32]

Two exhibitions took place in India in the 1980s that both reflect and complement these approaches: *Place for People* (1981) and *Questions and Dialogue* (1987). On the one hand, *Place for Peopl*e reflected on the dilemma between the local and the international and wondered how European and American cultural hegemony had



Anita Orzes, *Reconstruction of Gerardo Mosquera's research trips to Africa (1985-1987),* 2020.
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limited, and even denied, the advance of artistic modernism in India. Geeta Kapur participated in the curatorship and wrote "Partisans Views about the Human Figure,"[33] the exhibition's manifesto. *Questions and Dialogue*, on the other hand, was articulated around the need to reject the practices of the mainstream, to rethink the concept of national identity, and to make art a social and revolutionary tool.[34] Many of the artists who participated in these two exhibitions also took part in the second and third Havana Biennial, including Sudhir Patwardhan, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Vivan Sundaram, Bhupen Khakhar and Jogen Chowdhury. The reiteration of these names, the approaches of these two exhibitions, and the issues addressed by the Havana Biennial show that at that time India and Cuba shared interests and concerns regarding the dilemma between the local and the international, art as a social tool, and alternative approaches to the concept of identity.[35]

In addition to the Indian participation in the exhibition-essay *Tres Mundos* (third Havana Biennial), there was also considerable African participation. Some of the artists who participated were Sylvestre Mangonandza, Cyrille Bokotaka, Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Yerly Mpo or Daniel Ngaouka. The participation of these artists was part of the network that Gerardo Mosquera had been establishing with several African countries since the preparation of the second Havana Biennial (1986).

Gerardo Mosquera travelled to Africa twice: the first time in 1985, as curator of the exhibition África dentro de Cuba, which was sent to Angola and Mozambique,[36] and

the second time in 1987 as a member of the jury of the second Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art. This Biennial, organized *by* and *within* the political project of the International Centre for Bantu Civilizations (CICIBA), was dedicated to promoting and preserving the plastic arts of Bantu artists, defending their purity from Western influences. It was an itinerant biennial with seven editions between 1985 and 2002 that took place in Libreville, Kinshasa, Bate and Brazzaville.[37] At the second Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art, Gerardo Mosquera was not only part of the jury, but also curator of the exhibition *Expériences de la diaspora* in which three Cuban artists of Bantu origin participated: Minerva López, René de la Nuez and Ricardo Rodríguez Brey. They were present at the second Havana Biennial and would go on to take part in third edition. *Expériences de la diaspora* was a special project within the Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art, as it included the Bantu diaspora not contemplated in the initial approach of the biennial.[38] The catalogue justified this choice by emphasizing the effort of Cuban artists to recover the cultural values of their African ancestors, "as a reaction to the cultural *mé*tissage favored by the intrusion of Western values into their original cosmogonies and ontologies."[39] It then goes on to praise the investigative work being carried out by the Wifredo Lam Center, a transnational collaboration which continued until the fourth Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art (1991).

This collaboration was useful to learn more about the Bantu creators and to strengthen alliances. Examples of these are, on the one hand, the participation of Émile Mokoko, co-president of the Bantu Association of Visual Artists (ABAP), in the first Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art (1985) and in the second Havana Biennial (1986). On the other hand, the participation of Yerly Mpo and Daniel Ngaouka in the second Biennial of Contemporary Bantu Art (1987) and in the third Havana Biennial (1989).

Always within the mapping strategies developed through the research trips, *Expériences de la diaspora* was sent to Zaire, Gabon, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria and, through that, Gerardo Mosquera was able to gain a deeper understanding of their artistic scenes.[40] The result was reflected in the increased participation of African countries and artists in the third Havana Biennial, where the "Adiré" workshop was also held, taught by Nigerian artist Oyewunmi Fagbenro, which consisted in teaching the traditional technique of dyeing fabrics to decorate cloths.

Final considerations

The Havana Biennial held its first edition in 1984. In the 1980s, the biennial phenomenon, that is, the proliferation of biennials, was already widespread at the global level.[41] In the article, a brief reference has been made to the complexity of the biennial reality in Latin America and the Caribbean due to the typologies of biennials, approaches, objectives, and forms of financing. This complexity is common to other geographical areas such as Europe, Africa, and Asia and is intensified when their transnationality is analyzed.[42] In spite of the fact that the biennial format was already widespread, and that some were regional biennials, the arrival of the Havana Biennial marked a turning point, since it opened the way for the recognition and valorization of the cultures representing three quarters of the planet in an integrating space. The Havana Biennial enabled the construction of an immense and complex cultural architecture, creating new territories of intersection and friction between geographies and identities. It generated earthquakes and instability within the hegemonic culture. The uniqueness of this geopolitical and cultural project is unquestionable. However, when analyzing the history and evolution of the biennial format, the format created in Venice and adopted by several biennials, it is possible to identify attempts (first Latin-American

Biennial of São Paulo and First Colloquium on Non-Objectual Art and Urban Art) to change it, adapting it to the specificity of each reality. This demonstrates the need to rethink and rewrite the linear history of the biennials. Similarly, the analyzed exhibitions demonstrate the existence of intellectual networks that theorized, pushed for, and promoted these changes in different environments and institutions and that converged in the first editions of the Havana Biennial, underlining the need for a platform of horizontal dialogue such as the one in Cuba, to challenge and counteract the hegemonic narratives.

Another feature of the Havana Biennial are the research trips. Instead of waiting for artworks to be sent in by countries, which was the usual procedure at most biennials at the time, research *in situ* was carried out (when possible). As a result of these trips, curatorial networks and alliances were forged with other biennials that have begun to be defined in this article. Similarly, the research trips also provided first-hand knowledge of the local art scene and led to the training of specialists (by geographical area) among the curatorial team of the Wifredo Lam Center. This, added to the permanent character of the curatorial team, and together with a prolonged direction of the Center, has enabled the development of a solid and collective curatorial project throughout the first editions, avoiding the *on and off* effect characteristic of biennials.

Notes

1 This paper is the result of my FPI contract (PRE2018-085848) as well as the research project *Decentralized Modernities: Art, Politics and Counterculture in the Transatlantic Axis during the Cold War – MoDe(s)* (HAR2017-82755-P), funded by the Spanish Government.
2 Nelson Herrera Ysla, *Ojos con el arte* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2004), 231.
3 The first Havana Biennial was organized by the Ministry of Culture and only addressed Latin America and the Caribbean.
4 Llilian Llanes was the director of the Wifredo Lam Center from 1985 to 1999.
5 The Wifredo Lam Center has a permanent team of curators. Its members have changed throughout the editions, but many of them (Ibis Hernández, Nelson Herrera Ysla, José Manuel Noceda, Margarita Sánchez) continue to be part of the Center.
6 The Tribuna Libre (Free Tribune) took place from November 6-10, 1989 in the National Museum of Fine Arts, after the theoretical meetings (November 2-5). It was an open space where people could freely participate in discussions, go back to a subject or concept that had emerged during the theoretical meeting, or in the case of the artists, share slides of their artworks with the public.
7 Inter-American Biennial of Painting and Engraving (1958-1960), Mexico City (Mexico); Armando Reverón Biennial (1961-1965), Caracas (Venezuela); American Art Biennial (1962-1972), Cordoba (Argentina); American Engraving Biennial (1963-1970), Santiago de Chile (Chile); Coltejer Art Biennial (1968-1981), Medellín (Colombia); Latin American Engraving Biennial of San (1970-2001), San Juan (Puerto Rico); American Biennial of Graphic Arts (1971-1986), Cali (Colombia). Many of these biennials present hybrid characteristics with respect to those indicated.
8 Mirko Lauer, "Notas sobre plástica, identidad y pobreza en el Tercer Mundo," in *Debate Abierto. Tradición y Contemporaneidad en la Plástica del Tercer Mundo* (Havana: Centro Wifredo Lam, 1989), 21.
9 Frederico Morais, "Tradición y Modernidad en la Plástica Brasileña," in *Debate Abierto. Tradición y Contemporaneidad en la Plástica del Tercer Mundo,* 40.
10 Ibid, 40.
11 Frederico Morais, "Ideología de las bienales internacionales e imperialismo artís-

tico," *Arte latinoamericano (etapa republicana). Selección de lecturas*, ed. Elena Serrano Pardiñas (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1987), 238.

12 Juan Acha participated in the theoretical meetings of the second and third Havana Biennial. His lecture can be read in Juan Acha, "Reafirmación caribeña y sus requerimientos estéticos y artísticos," in *Plástica del Caribe. Ponencias de la Conferencia Internacional. II Bienal de La Habana* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 7-28; and Juan Acha, "Tradición y contemporaneidad en el ambiente del Tercer Mundo," *Debate Abierto. Tradición y Contemporaneidad en el ambiente del Tercer Mundo* (Havana: Centro Wifredo Lam, 1989), 3-19.

13 Aracy Amaral was part of the jury at the first Havana Biennial. In the first edition, the jury had already set some guidelines to modify the system of the awards, since they did not consider it to be the most suitable for the Havana Biennial. In the second edition, the jury wrote a document suggesting its suppression. Wifredo Lam Archive. Folder 1986. II Bienal de La Habana.

14 Juan Acha, "Las bienales en América Latina de hoy," *Re-vista del arte y la arquitectura en América Latina de hoy,* vol. 2, no. 6 (1981): 14-16.

15 *I Bienal Latinoamericana de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundación Bienal de São Paulo, 1978), 20-22.

16 The symposium was organized around three sections: *Mitos e Magia na Arte Latino-Americana*, *Problemas Gerais da Arte Latino-Americana,* and *Propostas para a II Bienal Latino-Americana de 1980*.

17 Aracy Amaral was going to be the curator of the second Latin American Biennial of São Paulo (1980). In 1981 (October 16-18), a meeting was held to discuss the continuity of the Latin American Biennial. Aracy Amaral, "Críticos de América Latina votan contra una Bienal de Arte Latinoamericano," *Re-vista del arte y la arquitectura en América Latina de hoy,* vol. 2, n. 6 (1981): 36-41.

18 Imelda Ramírez González, *Debates críticos en los umbrales del arte contemporáneo. El arte de los años setenta y la fundación del Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín* (Medellín: Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2010), 36-41.

19 The First Colloquium on Non-Objectual Art and Urban Art took place from May 17 to 21, 1981, the Meeting of the Association of Art Critics from May 16 to 17, 1981, and the fourth Medellín Biennial from May 15 to July 4, 1981.

20 The fourth Medellín Biennial (1981) was an attempt to reactivate the Coltejer Arte Biennial whose editions took place in 1968, 1970, and 1972.

21 Óscar Gómez, "Bienal de Medellín. Opiniones – entrevistas I," *Arte en Colombia* 16 (October 1981): 50, quoted in Miguel A. López, *Robar la historia. Contrarrelatos y prácticas artísticas de oposición* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2017), 104.

22 "III Bienal de La Habana. La Bienal del Tercer Mundo. Entrevista a Pierre Restany," in *Bienal de La Habana. Palabras críticas: 1984-2010,* ed. Israel Castellanos León (Havana: Consejo Nacional de las Artes Plásticas, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Artecubano ediciones, 2017), 149.

23 Pierre Restany, "Brasília, bienal e Vanguardia, *Correio da Manhã,* September 25, 1965.

24 Pierre Restany, "Huitième Biennale de São Paulo: comment va la cousine australe de Venise?," *Domu*s 432 (November 1965): 47-52.

25 Caroline Saut Schroeder, *X Bienal de São Paulo: sob os efeitos da contestação* (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2011), 89.

26 The "Non à la Biennale" movement was part of the boycott of the tenth São Paulo Biennial after the promulgation of the AI-5 law (Ato Institucional n.5). On June 16, 1969, a group of critics, historians, and artists met at the Modern Art Museum in Paris to sign the manifesto "Non à la Biennale," expressing their position against the repres-

sion, persecutions, and censorship suffered by the Brazilian people and renouncing their participation in the biennial. "Non à la Biennale de São Paulo,» June 16, 1969. Typed manuscript. Julio Le Parc Archive, Paris. Registration ICAAA 774569.
27 Pierre Restany, "Bienal de La Habana. Cuba, Cuba sí, No Cuba libre," *Cimaise* 187 (March-April 1987): 2-4.
28 Pierre Restany, "Consideraciones generales sobre el arte y el Tercer Mundo" in *Debate Abierto. Tradición y Contemporaneidad en la Plástica del Tercer Mundo*, 44-46.
29 Llilian Llanes, *Memorias. Bienales de La Habana 1984-1999* (Havana: ArteCubano Ediciones, 2012), 79-81.
30 Ibid, 138. Through the research trips, the members of the curatorial team of the Wifredo Lam Center specialized in geographical areas.
31 Interview with Nelson Herrera Ysla, Havana, Cuba, April 22, 2019.
32 For a comparison of the two statements, see: Geeta Kapur "Tradición y contemporaneidad en las Bellas Artes del Tercer Mundo," in *Debate Abierto. Tradición y Contemporaneidad en la Plástica del Tercer Mundo*, 3-13; and Llilian Llanes, "Presentación," in *Tercera Bienal de La Habana `89* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), 13-18.
33 Geeta Kapur, "Partisan Views about the Human Figure" in *Place for People* (Bombay: Uma Offset, 1981), w/p.
34 Anita Dube, *Questions and Dialogu*e (Baroda, 1987), accessed April 23, 2020, https://archive.is/20140422155459/http://www.theotherspaces.com/journals/001/3/1/default.aspx#selection-561.1-782.0
35 Margarita González Lorente and Carlos Garrido Castellano, "Horizontes compartidos. India en las bienales de La Habana," *Periférica. Revista para el análisis de la cultura y el territorio* 12 (December 2011), 142-144.
36 Llanes, *Memorias. Bienales de La Habana 1984-1999*, 82.
37 Nora Grenari, "Biennale d'Art Bantu Contemporain: passeport ethnique et circulations artistiques en Afrique sub-sahélienne," *Artl@s Bulletin 5,* no. 2 (2016): 74. The Biennial took place at irregular intervals of two, three, or four years: in Libreville (1985, 1989, 1998), in Kinshasa (1987), in Bata (1991), and in Brazzaville (1994 and 2002).
38 *Art Contemporain Bantu. Deuxième Biennale du CICIBA* (Libreville: Centre International des Civilisation Bantu, 1989), 15.
39 Ibid, 14.
40 Llanes, *Memorias. Bienales de La Habana 1984-1999*, 134.
41 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, Triennials and documenta*, (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 81-108. Anthony Gardner and Charles Green have begun to reconstruct the genealogy of the Southern biennials, identifying the second wave of biennials between 1950 and 1980.
42 Some biennials existing before the Eighties (with indications of their foundational year and country) are: Tokyo Biennial (1952, Japan) Spanish-American Biennial (1951, Spain and Cuba), Alexandria Biennial (1955, Egypt), Paris Youth Biennial (1959, France), Saigon Biennial (1962, South Vietnam), India Triennial (1968, India), Arab Art Biennial (1974, Iraq and Morocco), Fukuoka Asia Art Show (1979, Japan), Rauma Biennial Balticum (1977, Finland), Baltic Triennial of Young Contemporary Art (1979, Russia), and Asian Art Biennial (1981, Bangladesh).

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4
Biennials: Between Hegemony and Disobedience

Biennials and Hegemony: Experiences from the Thai Laboratory

Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink

Is contemporary art one more complicit social practice, inevitably guided by the ulterior motives of the economy and the state, or can curatorial and artistic resistance somehow help to support a more critical role? Are biennials by implication bound to reinforce existing forms of domination, or can they help to undermine power and support more hopeful futures? Of course, these questions have always played an important role in the literature on biennials. In recent years, an increasing number of authors frame this discussion in terms of 'hegemony.' The call for papers for this special issue is a case in point, questioning if biennials are by necessity "hegemonic machines." Responding to this question, we follow Gramsci's interpretation of hegemonies as situated historic and geographic "settlements" that are actively constructed and maintained by factions of a society that make up a "historic bloc."[1] We argue that the political effects of biennials need to be studied in relation to such situated hegemonies. However, the precise ways in which biennials support or counter hegemonies is all but clear. We suggest that specific organizational and curatorial strategies are crucial in structuring this agency of biennials vis-à-vis hegemony.

Thailand today provides an excellent laboratory for a reflection on the political nature of biennials. The power relations in this former art periphery have since long been structured by a hegemony that combines dominant views of nation, religion, and monarchy with notions of 'Thai-ness.' This has naturalized vast economic benefits of various core actors that make up the historic bloc, as well as dramatic inequalities. Counter-hegemonic resistance is systematically met with military coups. In this setting, art all too often functions as an affirmative supporter of hegemony. Or, as artist Mit Jai Inn explains, "Art has become a tool for the institutionalization of the values of the 'good' people."[2] Meanwhile, there is also a relatively small world of independent art spaces that organize counter-hegemonic events. In this constellation, Thailand was late in joining the biennial craze. However, 2018 suddenly saw first iterations of various perennial art events, including the Bangkok Art Biennale, Thailand Biennale, and Bangkok Biennial.[3] What is the relation of these biennials with Thailand's hegemony? Which strategies are employed to support or counter this hegemony? And what does that imply for the politics of biennials in general?

Biennials and Hegemony

In recent years, the literature on the political nature of biennials is awash with references to hegemony. Oliver Marchart, for instance, discusses hegemonic shifts regarding Eurocentrism and Occidentalism in *documenta* exhibitions, Panos Kompatsiaris looks at art in relation to neoliberal hegemonic orders, and Michael Oren studies small, innovative art biennials in the context of "Western hegemony, whether of global capitalism or the Euro-American art world."[4] These references illustrate that in the biennial discussion, the term hegemony is mainly employed to foreground two types of dominance. In the early 2000s, the pendulum of attention first swung from the instrumental nature of biennials in relation to economic 'hegemony' to appreciation of their subversive potential regarding cultural 'hegemony' in a postcolonial world. Carlos Basualdo's seismic essay, "The Unstable Institution," has been instructive in this first

shift.[5] While acknowledging that biennials are created to promote the context—city, region, country—in which they are organized, Basualdo argued that criticism of this instrumental nature disguises the radical, subversive potential of biennials in helping to open up the very Western art world. At stake here, is the potential of the biennial to help breach the Western 'hegemony' on signification that was not only controlling the art world, but also the world in general. This would become the go-to-argument legitimizing biennials for years to come.[6]

In recent years, the pendulum has swung back to attention to the complicity of biennials in economic dominance. Revisiting earlier debates about the instrumental nature of biennials, this time the discussion is explicitly framed in terms of neoliberal 'hegemony.'[7] The main target of this literature is a certain type of biennial, organized through entrepreneurial strategies of states and corporations, aiming to lure tourists, middle-class consumers, and the international art crowd to art spectacles that promote the economy of cities, regions, countries, or corporations.[8] These events accommodate contemporary capitalism's need to continuously mobilize people's desires while shaping their identities.[9] In view of their promotional agendas, they tend to be risk-averse, employing forms of censorship or self-censorship; after all, who wants to risk inconveniencing their paymaster? For Chantal Mouffe, their emergence reflects the "post-political" reality of late-capitalist societies, in which the public sphere has been transformed from a core battlefield of explicit agnostic political disagreement into an advertisement domain of consensual soft power, and where critical gestures are quickly appropriated and neutralized.[10]

This short overview suggests that in the discussion on biennials, the term hegemony is generally used to refer to forms of cultural and economic dominance operating at a global scale. Furthermore, these forms of dominance tend to be discussed in isolation.[11] Also, this literature seems to use the term hegemony without a great deal of explanation.[12] This is not surprising, as the term has become part of our everyday speech. However, this diminishes its analytical potential, especially when we discuss the role of biennials in relation to dominance in a specific place and time, like Thailand in 2018. We reach that conclusion on the basis of Antonio Gramsci's interpretation of hegemony in relation to situated forms of dominance.[13] In Nancy Fraser's reading, Gramsci understands hegemony as "the process by which a ruling class makes its domination appear natural by installing the presuppositions of its own worldview as the common sense of society as a whole. Its organizational counterpart is the hegemonic bloc: a coalition of disparate social forces that the ruling class assembles and through which it asserts its leadership."[14] Hegemony thus broadens the reach of domination as it replaces direct coercion for consent through agreement on common sense.[15] Fraser adds to her description that hegemony relates to assumptions about what is just and right regarding *both* the cultural and economic reality. It is important to stress that Gramsci was writing about a specific place and time—early twentieth-century Italy—and that hegemony in his conception relates to the dominance of a concrete situated alliance. This alliance and the worldview around which it is built need to be actively constructed and maintained.[16] Meanwhile, challenges to hegemony necessitate building an alternative political alliance—or counter-hegemonic bloc—around an alternative common sense or counter-hegemony.[17]

We suggest following Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as a situated, time and space bound "settlement" supported by a specific alliance, and expressing both cultural and economic dominance. This implies foregrounding the—so far under-researched—empirical questions "In which situated hegemony with related forms of cultural and

economic dominance does this biennial take place?," and "What is the precise role of this biennial regarding this hegemony and its related forms of dominance?"[18] Does it operate as a "biennial of resistance," or function as post-political affirmation of hegemony?[19] Furthermore, we suggest that it is not enough to answer this question by looking at the financial sources behind a biennial alone. Instead, we suggest focusing on the precise strategies involved in the organization of biennials. As will become clear, it is important to differentiate between strategies of organization and curatorial strategies in that discussion.

Art and Hegemony in Thailand

As even the most cursory observer of international news will know, over the past decades Thai politics has been in virtually constant turmoil, with repeated street occupations, bloody clearances, and military coups. The by now extensive literature on these conflicts suggests that they are the expression of a fundamental rift that has characterized Thai society at least since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932.[20] This rift is rooted in fundamentally opposing views of the Thai nation that are defended by different—although changing—alliances. The dominant worldview—or hegemony—centers on the three pillars of nation, religion, and monarchy. It portrays the nation as a mystical unity (*samakkhitham*) and stresses the uniformity of Thai identity, organized around ethnolinguistic homogeneity, Buddhism, deference to a quasi-divine king, and 'Thai-ness' (*kwampenthai*).[21] Furthermore, the nation is presented as having a distinctly graded hierarchy with 'good people' (*khondi*) who aspire to be 'siwilai'[22] at the top, and with Bangkok as its Sino-Thai center, overseeing peripheries like the 'Lao' Northeast and 'Malay' South.[23] A strong state needs to defend this unity against external and internal threats, thus achieving 'progress' and making Thailand a significant country in the world.[24]

Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit argue that this hegemony remained dominant over time, as it was continuously reactivated by consecutive alliances (or "historic blocs").[25] While the monarchy and bureaucracy were original core parties, from the 1950s onwards the military became more central. Beginning in the early 1970s, the alliance changed again as the military lost its central position in favor of a 'royalist democracy' around the 'network monarchy.'[26] The dominant economic actors also shifted over time, resulting in rapid accumulation by the monarchy first, and generals later. In the 1960s and 1970s, national banks became central economic actors, and large international corporations such as ThaiBev and CP Group thereafter.[27] However, the hegemony that these alliances supported remained remarkably constant, and it naturalized the fabulous wealth of the core actors, as well as vast national economic inequalities.[28]

Of course, this hegemony has not gone unchallenged. In part, challenges came from alternative factions that also supported the strong-state worldview; see, for instance, the challenge to the network monarchy by Thaksin Shinawatra in the past two decades.[29] Challenges have also been mounted by counter-alliances propagating a second—altogether different—worldview.[30] This alternative view is built around an egalitarian popular nationalism, situating sovereignty in the people rather than the palace. This view embraces the nation's diversity, and suggests that different groups should have equal access to power. The nation-state should improve the well-being of members of these groups, while privileges and economic inequality are criticized. Over time, different alliances have again supported this counter-hegemonic view. While successfully mobilizing transformation at times, these critics of the strong-state worldview have been systematically denigrated as 'un-Thai.' Control of counter-hegemonic opposition has also involved the legal system, for instance, through draconian

lèse-majesté laws that make criticism of the monarchy in Thailand virtually impossible.[31] Whenever counter-hegemonic alliances have become too threatening, they have been systematically met with military coups, resulting in what Chai-Anan Samutwanit has termed the "vicious cycle" of Thai politics.[32] It is a stark reminder of Gramsci's warning that behind hegemony lies an armor of coercion.[33]

Art practices in Thailand have always operated within this context of hegemonic struggle. Since the 1932 revolution, we can at least discern three distinct roles of art in relation to hegemony.[34] First, as David Teh observes, after the end of the absolute monarchy, "Popular sovereignty and newly mooted freedoms had to be sacrificed at the altars of national unity and progress, and in order to be imagined, these ideals had to be imaged. There was plenty for art to do."[35] Modern art was thus conceived in tandem with an evolving conception of the modern state. A Fine Arts Department was established "to help mould the public culture of the post-absolutist era."[36] In 1933, a national art academy that would become Silpakorn University was founded by Corrado Feroci, or Silpa Bhirasri, 'the father of modern art in Thailand.' Feroci's views on art were conservative, equating art with beauty and goodness, indirectly restricting a more critical role for art.[37] Silpakorn University would come to exercise an iron grip on all facets of Thai art practice for decades to come, regulating access to teaching jobs, annual National Exhibitions, state commissions, and competitions sponsored by banks and insurance companies.[38] The gatekeepers were Silpakorn-educated 'artist-civil servants' with a monopoly on signification and expression of Thai culture. Art thus functions to image Thai culture in a way that affirms Thailand's hegemony. It is this role to which Mit Jai Inn's remark in our introduction alludes.

In the course of the 1980s, cracks started to appear in this all-encompassing 'Silpakorn system.' Alternative art schools were established and foreign-educated artists returned without "personal debts to the national institution or its senior functionaries."[39] Art spaces like the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) provided new podia. And while the role of 'artist-civil servants' within the 'Silpakorn system' was institutionalized in 1985 in the figure of the 'national artist'—a honorific for yearly elected artists, whose benefits include a considerable lifelong stipend—art was increasingly wrested free from the narrow confines of Silpakorn-mandated views and the related Thai hegemony. The result was a flurry of activities in the 1990s, including recurring artist-led events such as the Chiang Mai Social Installation, Womanifesto, and Asiatopia. Meanwhile, in Bangkok alternative art spaces opened up such as Project 304 and About Studio/About Café. Open to imagining diversity, these initiatives veered far from the official narrative, thus resulting in a second role for art of implicitly and explicitly countering hegemony.

However, the end of the twentieth century also saw the seeds of the realignment of art with the hegemony to come. One year after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, a joint effort by Silpakorn University, the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, and the Tourism Authority of Thailand delivered the Bangkok Art Project. Illustrating the utility of a new understanding of 'contemporary art,' this exhibition helped to forge a third relationship between art and hegemony. At its core was the establishment of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) within the Ministry of Culture in 2002, directed by established curator Apinan Poshyananda. According to David Teh, "In his six years at its helm, the OCAC drove both the successful reencompassing of art by the state and the concomitant collapse of art's heterogeneity."[40] Apinan and the OCAC would dream up various large contemporary art exhibitions with a remarkable similarity, including punny names, reappearing artists, and a focus on the spectacle, and sometimes centered on packaging socially disturbing events—such as the 2004 tsunami and the

violent crackdown of a popular movement—in ways befitting Thailand's hegemony. One example is *Imagine Peace*, organized in June 2010 when the casualties of the most recent bloody crackdown were barely buried. As David Teh observes, "Here we saw art's independence from the state, tentatively staked out in the 1970s, extended in the 1980s and '90s, collapse in a spectacular heap."[41] Art's affirmative role in relation to hegemony was firmly re-established.

Three Biennials

For contemporary art in Thailand, 2018 was a remarkable year. Around the world, cities, regions, and nations had been jumping on the perennial bandwagon, resulting in a 'biennial boom' of more than 300 events.[42] However, despite earlier perennial initiatives, Thailand did not yet feature on the list of global events.[43] This all changed when, in the timespan of a few months in 2017, organizers announced various inaugural biennials. The character of the three events discussed here would prove remarkably diverse. With core funding from ThaiBev—a giant drinks company with enormous real estate interests in Bangkok—the *Bangkok Art Biennale* was led by artistic director Apinan and his curatorial team. Under the tagline "Beyond Bliss," they showed work of seventy-five Thai and international artists in shopping malls, heritage buildings, art spaces, temples, and a dedicated 'BAB box'. Funded by the OCAC and Krabi municipality, the *Thailand Biennale* reflected on the theme "Edge of the Wonderland." UK-based Chinese curator Jiehong Jiang and his curatorial team commissioned site-specific work by some fifty local and international artists, presented at outdoor public sites in the beautiful natural surroundings of touristy Krabi province. The *Bangkok Biennial*—the first of the three events to take place—was a decentralized, artist-run event. Initiated by Lee Anantawat, Jeff Gompertz, and Liam Morgan, it had neither central curation nor central funding, relying instead on the collective efforts of the organizers of about seventy 'pavilions.' What is the relation of these events to Thailand's hegemony? And which strategies have structured that relation?

Bangkok Art Biennale

With a week of opening events in late-October 2018, Apinan's long-held dream of creating a contemporary art biennial finally became reality: at twenty venues, the Bangkok Art Biennale opened for three months. Seventy-five artists—including big international names like Marina Abramović, Yayoi Kusama, and Elmgreen & Dragset—showed often spectacular works to a public mainly consisting of Bangkok's middle-class and international tourists. From an organizational point of view, this biennial is the reflection of a new, capable Thai elite, valuing a certain idea of smooth professionalism. While main sponsor ThaiBev was an indispensable partner, the spider in the web creating Thailand's first "world-class art event"[44] was its artistic director. In interviews in the run-up to the opening, Apinan referenced various earlier one-off events like *Siam Art Fair* and *Bangkok Bananas*, organized while he was working for the Ministry of Culture.[45] However, in his opinion, in the complicated Thai setting, "Hosting a proper biennial requires a lot more money and professional commitment."[46] Thanks to an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Thai bureaucracy, the willing ear of the CEO of ThaiBev—to whom he is art and culture advisor—and a Moleskine bursting with high-profile international art world contacts, Apinan finally pulled off what he could not do as a bureaucrat. This no doubt informed a certain triumphant boldness, which he exuded in all manner of international (media) appearances.[47]

One has to admit, Apinan did pull it off. But *what* exactly did he pull off? Unfolding here, with many distracting bells and whistles, was the affirmation of Thailand's hegemony, through a new way of imagining Thailand—the third way of relating art to

hegemony discussed above—heavily focused on the economy, but with implicit support for the (military) regime. This link to Thailand's hegemony and its "historic bloc" was illustrated by the location of the biennial's many opening events, suggesting close links to Thailand's Sino-Thai economic elites and the army. And the instrumental nature of this biennial for the urban economy was always clear, as Apinan expected that, "it will not only encourage tourism and positively impact our economy but will lead to benefit the quality of life of Thai people in terms of commerce and services."[48] Here the biennial is employed—rather traditionally—for branding Bangkok as a city of art, while envisioning its public as consumers, finally able to reach their full potential as worldly citizens by experiencing contemporary art in leisure spaces. The Bangkok

Bangkok Art Biennale, Opening event at Sino-Thai heritage destination Lhong 1919 (October 2018). Photography by the authors.

Bangkok Art Biennale, *Zero* (2018) by Elmgreen & Dragset along the Chao Praya River, in front of ThaiBev's East Asiatic Building (January 2018). Photography by the authors.

Bangkok Art Biennale, Aurèle Ricard's *Lost Dog Ma Long* (2018) in front of the 'BAB Box' on the site of ThaiBev's One Bangkok real estate project (March 2020). Photography by the authors.

Bangkok Art Biennale, Komkrit Tepthian's *Giant Twins* (2018) at Wat Arun – Temple of Dawn (January 2019). Photography by the authors.

Art Biennale also related to economic development in a second—more innovative—way as well: by using art to 'enrich' the spaces where the exhibition took place.[49] Those spaces included existing shopping malls and hotels, but also—more importantly—the enormous real-estate holdings of ThaiBev, including its One Bangkok project located next to the purpose-built 'BAB Box'—likely to be the project's future sales office—and the beautifully dilapidated East Asiatic building, to be redeveloped into a luxury Plaza Athenee hotel. Despite a smokescreen of supposed subversiveness, to which we will return later, the biennial dovetailed with the interests of the state as well. After all, according to Apinan, "the social malaise and political upheavals of the past decade have made it difficult to organise" large-scale recurring art events.[50] It is no surprise then that, at the 2014 "Innovative City Forum" in Tokyo, he spoke about the then five months old coup d'etat in positive terms, crediting the military as "quite creative and contribut[ing] much to bringing back happiness to the people."[51]

Affirmation of Thailand's hegemony was realized by a strategy of 'total curation,' integrating organizational and curatorial strategies behind the biennial. This strategy is reflected in a string of decisions: with Apinan as artistic director and lead curator, this biennial de facto operated without an independent curator; the curatorial team mainly selected artists working on themes that do not touch on issues sensitive to the Thai hegemony; control over Thai artists—who are 'risky' for this hegemony—was further enhanced by the fact that the international curators were not supposed to work with them; and on top of this, various artists and curators participated in this biennial on the basis of personal favors relating to earlier contributions of Apinan to their careers.[52] These decisions supported in an ornamentalization of the presented works, which often had a spectacular, experiential nature. Works that were conceptual

in nature were reduced to their superficial ornamental appearance as well, through a strategy of de-contextualization. Throughout, the exhibition was very text-light, comprehensive curatorial texts were largely absent, and a discursive embedding of the works in a larger context was missing. In short, without meaning-generating components, works were reduced to mere objects in venues, neutralizing the critical potential of participating artists and curators even further.[53]

The involvement of ThaiBev meant that the wider organizational strategy was tightly locked in with the above issues relating to what is commonly understood as the curatorial. Through its highly diversified business portfolio, ThaiBev functioned as a one-stop shop for biennial organization. After all, as one person involved with the event remarked, "They have everything under their kingdom": from spaces to host the event and hotels for the participating artists and press, to commercial avenues and water bottles for advertising and Chang beers as lubricant for opening events. Even if biennial locations were not owned by ThaiBev, the company often had pre-existing relationships—for instance, through their patronage of temple complexes, or sponsorship of the Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre (BACC). To a large extent, these relationships predetermined the format of this biennial, up to the green-yellow color scheme of its brand identity, which reflected the company's Chang beer colors. Mirroring ThaiBev's investor-speak on the One Bangkok project, the Bangkok Art Biennale was Thailand's first fully integrated biennial.

Apinan's experience in organizing large-scale exhibitions in Thailand's sensitive political context surely has at least in part caused this tight control over both organizational and curatorial strategies, as this helped to neutralize the potentially risky contents of contemporary art. However, this defanged version of contemporary art is problematic if you want to present a biennial as a legitimate art exhibition to the public and the international art world. That realization has resulted in a final strategy of imaging—a strict control over communication about the biennial. In a string of media appearances, Apinan has posed as risktaker; as someone who is choosing the difficult path, sticking his neck out in Thailand's dangerous political setting. During an elaborate, fully paid-for press tour, he even did a little censorship performance: standing at the banks of the Chao Praya River, he told the press: "'We have taken risks with the biennale but I've been in so much trouble in the past, so risk-taking is part of the excitement. […] If there is any trouble, we will just deal with that when it comes.' Interrupted by the loud roar of a passing boat, Poshyananda laughed, adding: 'Ah, that must be the military, I'm being censored!'"[54] The international press lapped it up, repeating his message in their publications.[55] In the end then, the Bangkok Art Biennale is an expression of the culture industry on steroids. Linking organizational and curatorial strategies tightly together, it presents contemporary art that can be consumed, while virtually guaranteeing that this will not evoke any serious discussion of the underlying hierarchy. In order to do this job well, it needs an image of risk, empowerment and global relevance as well. And it is in this economy of appearances, that both Apinan and the Bangkok Art Biennale excel.

Thailand Biennale

"Are you researching the Thailand Biennale? Ouch! A friend of mine does some design work for them; the bureaucracy is a drama!" We are talking to a friend in the run-up to the Thailand Biennale, and our conversation proves indicative of the expectations in the Bangkok art scene: the OCAC will not be able to pull off an event of this magnitude and international allure. Insider stories of artists pulling out, and last-minute letters from the organizers aiming to tone down proposed projects seem to confirm the

Thailand Biennale, Billboard on Koh Klang, Krabi (February 2018).
Photography by the authors.

Thailand Biennale, *Two Visions of the Wonderland* (2018) by Thailand national artist Kamol Tassananchalee in Krabi Town (February 2018). Photography by the authors.

image of bureaucratic incompetence.[56] However, despite the pre-event gloating, the eventual exhibition proved remarkably enticing. Admittedly, the opening event itself was a painful amalgam of stereotypes, presented to a core audience of bureaucrats that omitted the curatorial team. Also, an almost total lack of upkeep of the outdoor artworks—combined with an impressive seasonal depression—meant that many works soon were damaged or destroyed. Meanwhile, in the very dispersed locations, works were hard to find, not least because the OCAC-maps did not correspond to reality. Visiting the sites also proved expensive, as transportation was not arranged, and the local taxi and boat mafia had a field day. However, in the beautiful natural surroundings, the high standard of the artists and their site-specific works nonetheless made for an intriguing visit. Judged from an international discourse on contemporary art biennials, the result seemed remarkably current. In the words of one surprised Thai reporter: "It is actually really nice!"

Thailand Biennale, *View-Review* (2018) by Alicja Kwade at Noppharat Thara Beach, Krabi. In the background *Ghost Island* (2018) by MAP Office (February 2018). Photography by the authors.

Thailand Biennale, Remnants of Félix Blume's bamboo flute installation *Rumours from the Sea* (2018) at Hin Pheng Floating Pier, Krabi (February 2018). Photography by the authors.

These ambiguous attitudes go back to a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the Thailand Biennale and its relation to Thailand's hegemony. On the one hand, this biennial forms a logical continuation of attempts by the state—from the Bangkok Art Project to various large-scale art exhibitions under Apinan—to use contemporary art to imagine Thailand in new ways, but befitting the existing hegemony—the third way of relating art to Thai hegemony in our discussion above. In line with those ideas, the OCAC had already started to make plans for the first Thai biennial. Initial plans centered on organizing a four-yearly national 'art Olympics,' to be organized in different Thai regions. It is probably no coincidence that the activation of these plans coincided with the Bangkok Art Biennale, guided at least in some measure by a perceived competition over competence with its former director. The Thailand Biennale then resulted from a last-minute decision to change to a two-yearly format; the original aim to re-energize regional economies remained.

The Thailand Biennale relates to Thai hegemony in a second, very different way as well. Funded through government agencies, this biennial was very much run by the bureaucracy, especially the OCAC, translating into an inward-looking, 'please the line-manager' view of success. This also intimately tied this biennial to traditional ideas about the role of art in imaging the state and Thai society, and the related Silpakorn system of signification, built around national artists. At its core, in this system, art needs to image Thai culture in line with the country's hegemony; in the regionalized format of the Thailand Biennale, this results in paternalistic notions of a Thai core showing Thai culture to the uneducated rest of the country. Meanwhile, the Silpakorn establishment has traditionally had little appreciation of the experimental fringe of Thai art and its perceived 'strange' practices, which often focus on discussion and engagement.[57] With national artists playing a central role in the Biennale Board—the unit responsible for the organizational strategies—not surprisingly, these two opposing links to Thai hegemony resulted in serious conflict.

The double-headed relationship of the Thailand Biennale with Thailand's hegemony is reflected in the ambiguity of its organizational strategy. On the one hand, following international ideas about the efficacy of art to stimulate tourism, the OCAC hired an international curator, Jiehong Jiang. He compiled a curatorial team that aimed at commissioning some fifty site-specific works with a sustainability and community focus, to be exhibited in public space. This team's selection of international and Thai artists did not include any national artists. The team also suggested developing a biennial app, transportation arrangements, and a symposium. Directed at open discussion and engagement, these ideas did not sit well with the second—Silpakorn-centered—idea that art must educate the Thai regions. Most likely, the OCAC did not have a clear understanding of the implications of hiring an independent curatorial team; according to one interviewee, "They thought that they would place some sculptures on the sites." However, while the Bangkok Art Biennale based its approach on total control of both organizational and curatorial strategies, by the time that the OCAC and the Biennale Board realized what was happening, they had lost control and would never fully regain it. From there on, a strategy of *reactive control* resulted in serious infringements in the autonomy of the curatorial team: artists were vetoed, works of Thai artists were censored,[58] national artists were inserted into the artist list, budgets were not released, and suggestions for workshops, public engagement programs, maintenance, and transportation solutions were ignored. This resulted in a total disconnect between the curatorial team and the OCAC; a divide that was illustrated by the fact that curator Jiehong Jiang organized his own separate opening event for the art crowd in late December.

Creating the first Thailand Biennale has probably been painful for everyone involved. The fact that there even was an exhibition in the end is testament to the single-minded determination of the curatorial team, who—against all odds—continued hitting theirs heads against the proverbial bureaucratic wall. While the end-result might be enticing for the interested visitor, from a viewpoint of openness and engagement the biennial could have been so much more. Meanwhile, while bureaucrats at the Ministry of Culture might have been positive about the event—despite its eventual excessive costs—for the OCAC and the national artists involved, the lack of control over the format of the exhibition and its message, and the resulting struggle, must have been deeply painful as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that the current preparations of the second Thailand Biennale, planned for late 2020 in Nakhon Ratchasima province, seem to indicate a fundamental turn inwards. The original Thailand Biennale Facebook page with its many followers has been disavowed, all communication is now exclu-

sively in Thai, and the idea of an international curator seems to have fallen by the wayside. Meanwhile, the new Facebook page—the only communication channel to the outside world—suggests a transformation towards community engagement around arts and crafts, thus moving the Thailand Biennale away from an international discourse on contemporary art.

Bangkok Biennial

Organized from July until September 2018, the Bangkok Biennial was an altogether different affair. Initiated by three artists, this biennial had neither central curator nor finances. Instead, as this biennial's *Guide to Pavilions* explains, it was "set up as a challenge to the authority of access to representation in art and curatorial practices."[59] About seventy 'pavilions' therefore replaced a main exhibition. These pavilions could be anything: the location, duration, and pavilion contents were to be determined by pavilion organizers without external vetting, thus placing responsibility for the overall event firmly in their collective hands. Away from the gatekeepers of the 'Silpakorn system' and exhibitions such as the Bangkok Art Biennale, this resulted in a huge variety of venues for experimentation with alternative social roles for contemporary art. Pavilions included physical and virtual spaces, existing art spaces and private residencies, one-day events and three-month exhibitions, and were located in Bangkok, elsewhere in Thailand, and in cities around the world. *Re/form/ing Patani*, for instance, featured artists in multiple locations in Pattani in Thailand's deep South. *Hong HUB* in Bangkok hosted French artist Michaël Harpin who organized a community project around his outdoor sculpture, built during a three-month residency. And Chiharu Shinoda directed three performances on multiple evenings as part of the outdoor *Supernatural Pavilion*, located at a Bangkok temple complex.

With these choices, the Bangkok Biennial continues the Thai tradition of alternative, independent counter-hegemonic art events. With its radical openness and circumvention of gatekeeper-control, this event did not tell the audience—perceived as participants—

Bangkok Biennial, Opening ceremony during the daily 6PM public aerobic session under the Rama VIII Bridge, Bangkok (July 2018). Photography by Bangkok Biennial.

what they were or needed to be, or what excellent Thai culture is; instead, the pavilions opened up possibilities to reflect on the variety of located practices in Thailand, and on the capacity of contemporary art to question or support those. Together, the pavilions of the Bangkok Biennial thus created avenues for questioning Thailand's hegemony. This adverse attitude was the result of various organizational and curatorial strategies. Most important amongst these was the principle of decentralized curation through the pavilions, opening an escape route beyond surveillance and control. This anti-authoritarian approach translated to every aspect of the biennial, as there was, for instance, no overarching narrative or manifesto, while pavilion organizers received full control over communication about their pavilion through a wiki site.[60] On a par with the organizers of the Chiang Mai Social Installation some thirty years earlier, the initiators of this biennial thus acted as *hosts* rather than *authors* of the event.[61]

Bangkok Biennial, *Tiger, Tiger* performance at Soonthorn Thammathan temple in Nang Loeng, Bangkok. Part of Supernatural Pavilion organized by Chiharu Shinoda (August 2018). Photography by Liam Morgan.

Bangkok Biennial, Work by Yawnghwe Office in Exile, installed in the unfinished Sathorn Unique Tower. Part of the group exhibition A/PART at Bridge Art Space, Bangkok. Curated by Bongkoch Changsri (August 2018). Photography by Bridge Art Space.

Bangkok Biennial, Work by Korakot Sangnoy at Melayu Living in Pattani, Thailand. Part of RE/FORM/ING PATANI curated by Muhammad Arafat and Zulfadhli Hilmi (August 2018). Photography by the authors.

Decentralized curation alone, of course, does not guarantee counter-hegemonic practices. However, other organizational and curatorial strategies further accommodated a move in this direction. These included an implicit strategy of networked invitations to potential pavilion organizers, who themselves then were responsible for the contents of their pavilion. In view of the convictions of the initiators, this nudged these pavilions in a counter-hegemonic direction. Next, there was a strategy of deconcentration. The inclusion of pavilions from other cities in Thailand and elsewhere enhanced the biennial's counter-hegemonic nature, as hegemony in Thailand relates to a spatial hierarchy in which Bangkok is the center; pavilions from Thailand's regions were therefore always more likely to be counter-hegemonic. A third strategy supporting this biennial's counter-hegemonic nature was radical local engagement. Overall, the pavilions did not perceive their public as passive learners, to be infused with Thai culture; instead the public was seen as diverse, and as active collaborators that need to be engaged. Not the works or performances on show, but the encounter between artists and their public was the core event. David Teh's description of the Chiang Mai Social Installation again seems apt, observing that "If the exhibition of artworks was the pretext for this encounter, it was not necessarily the main point." More crucial, according to Teh, was the meeting between artists—and their public, we would add—"unmediated by the institutions that had long governed their work and determined its value."[62]

These strategies put the Bangkok Biennial squarely in a tradition of alternative, counter-hegemonic art events that emerged in the 1990s in Thailand. As a result, it comes close to what Dave Beech has called a "critical biennial."[63] The biennial has certainly not been without its challenges, hampered as it was by well-known issues relating to independent precarious art practices. In view of the initiators' decision to reject sponsorship, this biennial was always going to be run by a very small team with minimal resources. As is illustrated by the demise of earlier artist-run initiatives, this might put the long-term sustainability of this event at risk, as well as its archiving and communication. With limited 'quality control' over the pavilions, there also have been concerns by outsiders about the standard of individual works and pavilions. But maybe that criticism misses the point of this biennial's overall aims and strategies regarding openness and engagement. Especially, it underestimates the crucial importance of this infrastructure for accommodating experimentation with alternative ideas about contemporary art and its social role beyond the control of traditional gatekeepers. After all, with their linkages to hegemony, operating within the formal confines available seems to be too restrictive altogether. Maybe, therefore, this move beyond the formal Thai institutions is the only viable option.[64]

Beyond Art: Taking Politics Seriously

With its sudden surge of events in 2018, Thailand is a great laboratory for research into the politics of biennials. We have argued that those politics need to be understood in relation to hegemony, seen as situated "settlements" of worldviews, supported by a dominant alliance.[65] We therefore started our analysis of three biennials in Thailand with a discussion of Thailand's hegemony, and we distinguished three political roles of Thai contemporary art. Next, we wondered how the three events related to this hegemony; and how that relationship was forged. In response to those questions, we conclude that there is a stark contrast between the three events, for instance, in terms of scale, finances, and curatorial and organizational choices. We also conclude that those disparities tie in with the three political roles of contemporary art in Thailand, which in turn relates to different attitudes towards Thailand's hegemony. While the Bangkok Art Biennale implicitly affirms this hegemony, and the Thailand Biennale has

been affirmative towards different aspects of that hegemony, the Bangkok Biennial developed in clear opposition to it. We also conclude that these politics of the biennials were not only determined by curatorial strategies, but also by broader organizational strategies. In the Bangkok Biennial, both of these strategies were geared towards decentralization and away from gatekeeper control. As a result, the initiators functioned as hosts instead of authors of the event. Meanwhile, the strategies behind the Thailand Biennale proved ambiguous, resulting in a painful struggle between curatorial team and Biennale Board. In contrast, the Bangkok Art Biennale organizers controlled and aligned both curatorial and organizational strategies, thus neutralizing the potentially risky nature of contemporary art.

These conclusions illustrate the political nature of each of the three biennials. However, the organizers of the Bangkok Art Biennale in particular went through great lengths to obscure that political role and the related affirmative attitude towards the Thai hegemony; they even bothered to actively construct an appearance of criticality, in clear contradistinction to various strategies employed to control criticality. These apparent contradictions make sense from a framework of the 'post-political,' which—as we have seen at the start of this paper—argues that the public sphere has been transformed from a core battlefield of explicit agnostic political disagreement into an advertisement domain of consensual soft power, where critical gestures are quickly appropriated and neutralized.[66] In this view, biennials are now instrumentalized as advertisement tools. There are, of course, differences. Whereas the Bangkok Biennial aims to approach the world from a framework of agnostic political disagreement, the Bangkok Art Biennale actively tries to suppress the political through consensual soft power. And that strategy works better when hidden from view. Providing one blatant illustration of the processes at work, in another confirmation that the Bangkok Art Biennale is all about appearances, Marina Abramović stated in an interview that while many biennials "are very political and deal with power and the art market," the Bangkok Art Biennale "is for art itself."[67] Her insistence on discussing art in isolation is itself a political act, helping to obscure hegemonic effects—or the complicity of curators and artists. As we have shown, all biennials are thoroughly political, and it is crucial that they are discussed as such.[68] We feel that a framework that understands hegemony as a situated temporary "settlement" can help in such a discussion.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 ' Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (1986): 15.
2 Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, "Interview with Mit Jai Inn," 2018, https://www.comingsoonbkk.com/mit-jai-inn.
3 Other inaugural perennial events in the same year included Khonkaen Manifesto and Ghost. For a discussion of these events, see Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, *What Should Biennials Do? Zine for the Bangkok Art Book Fair* (Bangkok: Poop Press, 2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342199721_What_should_biennials_do; and art4d's special issue "Biennale," 265 (Dec. 2018-Jan. 2019).
4 Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennalization," (2008) in #*The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hall and Solveig Øvstebo (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 466-90; Panos Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances:

Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7 (2014): 76-91; Michel Oren, "Biennials that Promote an 'Emancipatory Politics,'" *World Art* 4, no. 2 (2014): 277-305.
5 Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," (2003) in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2007, 2011 Edition), 39-52.
6 See, for instance, Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hall, and Solveig Øvstebo, "Biennialogy," in *The Biennial Reader*, 20 and 23; Hanru Hou, "Reinventing the Social," *The Exhibitionist* 6 (2012): 45; Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 3.
7 See, for instance, Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances"; Oren, "Biennials that Promote."
8 See Van Meeteren and Wissink, *What Should Biennials Do?*
9 Chantal Mouffe, "Agnostic Politics and Artistic Practices," in *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London & New York: Verso, 2013), 85-105.
10 Mouffe, "Agnostic Politics." On the 'post-political', see, for instance, Japhy Wilson and Erik Swyngedouw, "Seeds of Dystopia: Post-Politics and the Return of the Political," in: *Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 1-22.
11 The tensions between the role of biennials in relation to cultural and economic dominance is illustrated by Oliver Marchart's discussion of biennials in the Gulf region, in which he argues that, "It becomes increasingly difficult to seriously refer to some of the more recently founded biennials as Biennials of Resistance, even if they do favour local and national artistic production over that of the West. […] Authoritarian regimes [in the Gulf States] utilize the biennial format to glamourize their image and prepare the tourism industry for the post-oil era." Apparently, biennials can be subversive and complicit at the same time. Marchart, "The Globalization of Art," 266-267. For further discussion about this relationship between social and economic justice, see, for instance, Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 1/212 (1995): 68-93.
12 For an obvious exception, see Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts." However, while Oliver Marchart centers his discussion on Gramsci's interpretation of hegemony, he does not follow the situated understanding of hegemony suggested in this paper.
13 Stuart, "Gramsci's Relevance," 16.
14 Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born* (London: Verso, 2019), 9-10.
15 Stuart, "Gramsci's Relevance," 16-17.
16 Ibid., 15.
17 Fraser, *The Old is Dying*, 9-10.
18 For a comparable argument for the need to see the resistance potential of a biennials as an empirical question related to a specific biennial in a specific historical and temporal context, see Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances."
19 On the potential of art in general and biennials in particular to inform resistance, see Mouffe, "Agnostic Politics"; Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances"; Marchart, "The Globalization of Art"; Oren, "Biennials that Promote."
20 For more detail, see, for instance, Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *The Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 499-519; Michael Connors, "Ministering Culture: Hegemony and the Politics of Culture and Identity in Thailand," *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2005): 523-551; Federico Ferrara, *The Political Development of Modern Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Thongchai Winichakul, "The Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy: Two Elephants in the Room of Thai Politics and the State of Denial," in *'Good Coup' Gone Bad: Thailand's*

Political Developments since Thaksin's Downfall, ed. Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014), 79-108.
21 In his overview of the development of Thai cultural policy and its relationship to hegemony over time, Michael Connors presents "Thai-ness" as the central ideological resource of the ruling elite. See Connors, "Ministering Culture."
22 'Siwilai' is the Thai translation for civilized. See Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 528-549.
23 Research shows relatively high levels of racial prejudice by Thais. See, for instance, John Draper, Teresa Sobieszczyk, Charles David Crumpton, H. L. Lefferts, and Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Racial 'Othering' in Thailand: Quantitative Evidence, Causes, and Consequences," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25, no. 3 (2019): 251-272.
24 Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 3rd edition), 282-284.
25 Ibid., 282-284.
26 Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *The Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 499-519; Thongchai Winichakul, "The Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy."
27 Akira Suehiro, "Capitalist Development in Postwar Thailand: Commercial Bankers, Industrial Elite, and Agribusiness Groups," in *Southeast Asian Capitalists*, ed. Ruth McVey (Ithaca NY: SEAP, 1992), 35-64; Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand's Boom and Bust* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998).
28 Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, eds., *Unequal Thailand: Aspects of Income, Wealth and Power* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016).
29 Thongchai, "The Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy"; Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, "Thaksin's New Political Economy Networks," *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2005), 209-247.
30 Ferrara, *Political Development*; Pasuk and Baker, *History of Thailand*, 282-284.
31 Lotte Isager and Soren Ivarsson, eds., *Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010); Thongchai, "The Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy."
32 Chai-Anan Samutwanit, *The Thai Young Turks* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).
33 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 263.
34 For an extensive discussion of the relationship between art and hegemony in Thailand, see David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017); David Teh, "Artist-to-Artist: Chiang Mai Social Installation in Historical Perspective," in *Artist-to Artist: Independent Art Festivals in Chiang Mai*, eds. David Teh and David Morris (London: Afterall Books, 2018), 12-47.
35 David Teh, *Thai Art*, 25.
36 Pasuk and Baker, *History of Thailand*, 125.
37 Silpa Bhirasri, quoted in Piriya Krairiksh, "Thai Reflections on American Experiences," in *Suddenly Turning Visible: Art and Architecture in Southeast Asia (1969-1989)*, eds. Seng Yu Jin and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2019), 266.
38 Teh, "Artist-to-Artist," 16.
39 Ibid., 18.
40 Teh, *Thai Art*, 35.
41 Ibid., 38.
42 Ronald Kolb and Shwetal Patel, "Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018," *OnCurating* 39 (June 2018).

43 Notable earlier biennials included the Chiang Mai Social Installation and Womanifesto. On the Chiang Mai Social Installation, organised four times in the 1990s, see David Teh and David Morris, eds., *Artist to Artist: Independent Art Festivals in Chiang Mai 1992-1998*. On Womanifesto, organised biannually from 1997 until 2003, see Varsha Nair, "Womanifesto: A Biennial Art Exchange in Thailand," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 3, no. 1 (2019): 147-171.
44 See ThaiBev, "2018 Sustainability Report: Preserving and Promoting Arts & Culture," http://sustainability.thaibev.com/2018/en/arts_and_culture.php.
45 See, for instance, Nicharee Pathitit, "Behind the Biennales," *Thailand Tatler*, July 9, 2018, https://www.thailandtatler.com/life/creating-artistic-bliss; Siriya Suriyanon, "What's holding back Bangkok's Art Scene?," *BK Magazine*, September 7, 2017, https://bk.asia-city.com/city-living/news/censorship-bangkok-art-scene .
46 Phatarawadee Phataranawik, "Art with A-Peel," *ACE, Lifestyle Insert of The Nation,* April 27, 2009, 9-11, https://issuu.com/charoen_naeem/docs/name728924.
47 See, for instance, the panel discussion "Curating in Context: Making Exhibitions Work" at Art Basel Hong Kong, March 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28v-yYQquT0.
48 See Grace Ignacia, "Dr. Apinan Poshyananda: 'We want the works to relate to and reflect upon the spirit of the spaces'," *The Artling*, September 26, 2018, https://theartling.com/en/artzine/dr-apinan-poshyananda-we-want-the-works-to-relate-to-and-reflect-upon-the-spirit-of-the-spaces/.
49 For an analysis of the use of art for the enrichment of real estate in Hong Kong, see Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, "Public Art in the Private City: Control, Complicity and Criticality in Hong Kong," *Open Philosophy* 2 (2019): 280-298, https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2019-0020.
50 Siriya, "What's holding back."
51 Apinan Poshyananda, "Creative Chaos: Art & Design for Chaotic Future," Keynote address at Innovative City Forum 2014, Tokyo, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQPxPBZPO6k.
52 For an understanding of the importance of patronage in the Thai art system, see, for instance, Teh, *Thai Art*, 166.
53 Dave Beech, "Notes Towards the Critical Biennale," *Art & the Public Space* 5, no. 2 (2016): 167-184.
54 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Risk-taking Artists Defy Thai Taboos in Bangkok Art Biennale," *The Guardian,* October 21, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/21/risk-taking-artists-defy-thai-taboos-bangkok-art-biennale.
55 https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/bangkok-art-biennale-2018/index.html; https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/opinion/bangkok-biennale.html.
56 For the crowing criticism of inadequate bureaucracy in Thailand, see for instance Ariane Sutthavong, "A Government Hurling Pebbles at the Sky," *Bangkok Post*, March 11, 2020, https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1876044/a-govt-hurling-pebbles-at-the-sky.
57 Teh, "Artist-to-Artist," 19.
58 For a discussion of the censorship of Chulayarnnon Siriphol's work at the Thailand Biennale, see for instance Kong Rithdee, "A Note on Thailand Biennale," January 2, 2019, https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/1603974/a-note-on-thailand-biennale
59 Bangkok Biennial, *Guide to Pavilions: 01-07-30.09.18*, available at https://www.bangkokbiennial.com/2018-edition.

60 Gregory Galligan, "Curating the Contemporary in Decolonial Spaces: Observations from Thailand on Curatorial Practice in Southeast Asia," in *A Companion to Curation*, eds. Brad Buckley and John Conomos (Hoboken, NJ: John Willey & Sons, 2020), 220.
61 Teh, "Artist-to-Artist," 41.
62 Ibid., 47.
63 Beech, "Notes Towards the Critical Biennale."
64 This theme ties in with a wider debate within radical political theory on the best response to the hegemony of neoliberalism. For an introduction to this debate, see, for instance, Chantal Mouffe, "Radical Politics Today," in *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London & New York: Verso, 2013), 65-84.
65 The problematic nature of a more generic treatment of hegemony—for instance in the postcolonial criticism of Western hegemony—in specific political settings became painfully clear when Elmgreen & Dragset appropriated such critique—"Thai culture is a bit more soft-spoken than some other cultures"—when downplaying criticism from "people from outside" that there is too much self-censorship in the Thai art scene. As we have seen, the curatorial strategy of the Bangkok Art Biennale—in which Elmgreen & Dragset participated—leans heavily on mechanisms of control and self-censorship. Furthermore, as we have also seen, the BAB is complicit to a highly problematic economic and social hegemony against which many Thai have been protesting for a long time. Indirectly, Elmgreen & Dragset therefore use postcolonial critique to neutralize criticism on the political role of the BAB. Hiding their own complicity to this dominance to boot, their response is deserving of a Thunbergian "How dare you!". A situated understanding of hegemony helps to spot such facile forms of appropriation and neutralization. See Mary Losmithgul, "Thoughts from Elmgreen and Dragset that Make You Think Twice about Art and Bangkok," *Prestige*, November 21, 2018, https://www.prestigeonline.com/th/pursuits/thoughts-elmgreen-dragset-make-think-twice-art-bangkok/.
66 Mouffe, "Agnostic Politics."
67 Khetsirin Pholdhampalit, "The Stillness of Being," *The Nation*, October 23, 2018, https://www.nationthailand.com/lifestyle/30357025.
68 Cf. Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts," 467.

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The Yinchuan Biennale: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Artistic Practices Linking East and West

Xinming Xia

The Chinese city of Yinchuan, capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in Northwest China, is becoming a popular name in the contemporary art world because of its close association with the ancient Silk Road and "New Silk Road." The history of the Silk Road can be traced back to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) when Zhang Qian was dispatched by the emperor to the Western regions for military purposes. The explorer brought China into contact with the Central Asian states and the old Roman Empire, opening up the ancient Silk Road. The path enabled China to communicate and trade with the other Asian and European countries and set its role as the indispensable leader of the development of the Silk Road. Now, China is going to revive the glories of the old Silk Road and position itself as the center of the world through the Belt and Road Initiative. Situated along the path, Yinchuan will play a more crucial role in promoting cultural communication with Asian and European countries.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initially announced in 2013, intends to strengthen China's connectivity throughout Euroasia and the world.[1] Also known as "One Belt, One Road," the project consists of two parts: the "belt," recreating a new Silk Road land route, and the "road," which is not a road, but a route across various oceans.[2] At the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, President Xi Jinping declared that, "In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we should focus on the fundamental issue of development, release the growth potential of various countries and achieve economic integration and interconnected development and deliver benefits to all."[3] So far, 138 other countries have become part of the project, including New Zealand, Russia, Italy, and Syria.

The BRI acts as an umbrella initiative covering a wide range of projects that promote the flow of goods, investment, and people. Among them, there are cultural projects that aim to develop China's cultural soft power and improve cultural influences. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC published the "Belt and Road Initiative Culture Development Plan" (2016-2020) in 2016, claiming to support the development of the Xinjiang International Folk Dance Festival, the Maritime Silk Road International Arts Festival, the China-Eurasia Expo, etc.[4] The emergence of the Museum of Contemporary Art Yinchuan (MOCA Yinchuan) and Yinchuan Biennale also serve the purpose of providing a new cultural platform for the BRI.

Surrounded by the Gobi Desert, the Yellow River, and the Helan Mountains, Yinchuan, which means "Silver River," is known for its unique natural landscape and geographical location. It is the host city of the China – Arab States Expo, a comprehensive international expo that is attended by businessmen and government representatives from more than 80 countries. The city is also home to more than 580,000 Hui minorities, cultivating rich Islamic cultural traditions. There is, however, no apparent foundation for contemporary art to grow.[5] Established in 2015, MOCA Yinchuan is the only contemporary art museum in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. It is dedicated to

MOCA Yinchuan © Photo: Courtesy of MOCA Yinchuan

stimulating the cultural communications between China and Islamic countries. Located at the border between lush wetlands and arid desert divided by the Yellow River, MOCA Yinchuan has turned its attention to embracing the complexity of the site and highlighting the local ecological conditions and history. It is the central part of the development plan of River Origins, an emerging art town that also includes an international artists residency program, a wetland park, an ecology park, and an international school. Its multiple focuses on Chinese contemporary art, Islamic contemporary art, and ecology art can be seen through its architecture, exhibitions, collections, and education activities.

Designed by the Chinese firm We Architect Anonymous, the 15,000-square-meter complex of the museum is inspired by the rocky-folds texture of the Yellow River's rich geological changes.[6] Regarding the museum exhibitions, the *Made in China* series of exhibitions from 2016 to 2018 invited contemporary Chinese artists to employ various local materials and create large-scale installations, inspiring critical thought on the popular label "Made in China." Proposed by the Embassy of China in Moscow, *Watch: The Joint Exhibition of Valentin Mikhailovich Sidorov & Zhou Yixin* in 2019 exhibited Russian landscape paintings and contemporary Chinese ink paintings, stimulating cultural communication with Russia, which also participated in BRI. The 2016 Yinchuan Biennale, *For an Image, Faster Than Light*, and the 2018 Yinchuan Biennale, *Starting from the Desert: Ecologies on the Edge*, explored topics related to environmental issues. Among the 31 current and past exhibitions, many of them have exhibited Chinese contemporary art and Islamic contemporary art with a special focus on ecological issues. The collection of the museum can be divided into three main categories. It has around 200 pieces of Chinese oil paintings from the late Qing Dynasty, a series of contemporary Chinese artworks, and antique regional and world maps recording early Sino-Western communication.[7] The collection has provided a solid foundation for the museum staff to conduct research on the history of cultural communication between East and West and the recent development of contemporary Chinese art and Islamic art. Independent curator Lü Peng noted that: "The museum collection has filled the gap in the history of modern and contemporary Chinese art. MOCA Yinchuan has

taken the responsibility to preserve our culture."[8] Moreover, the museum has provided bilingual guided tours and workshops, such as the "Keep the Memory of the Family" sculpture workshop, "Ingenious Craftsman" weaving art workshop, and "Charm of Ink" ink flow art workshop, fulfilling its educational role. MOCA Yinchuan has taken the responsibility to spread contemporary art locally, and the Yinchuan Biennale further stimulates the cultural exchange between China and other BRI countries.

Biennials in China are usually held as large celebration ceremonies that present and summarize the recent achievements in contemporary Chinese art. It can serve multiple purposes: enhancing the reputation of the host city and boosting local tourism as well. Unlike Shanghai or Beijing, which possess a multitude of galleries, art museums, and fairs that can attract local and global art lovers, Yinchuan has had to work from the very beginning to become the focus in the contemporary art world. Within this context, the First Yinchuan Biennale planned to start from the top. Suchen Hsieh, Artistic Director of MOCA Yinchuan, invited prominent Indian artist and curator Bose Krishnamachari to curate the exhibition. Krishnamachari adopted the theme *For an Image, Faster than Light* to discuss the series of conflicts that we are all facing today based on three main indices: nature, religion, and politics.[9] Seventy-three international artists participated in the exhibition. Featuring in the museum main hall was Song Dong's *Through the Wall* (2016). The artist employed picture frames with mirrors as walls and floor to install a funhouse with densely arranged lamps hanging from the ceiling. Referencing different walls that we have to face in our daily lives, Song Dong challenged the notion of a boundary as impenetrable. The lighting inside the funhouse indicated our longing for a bright future. Yinchuan artist Mao Tongqiang recreated a KTV room, which Mao described as a complicated public space because it accommodated politicians, merchants, intellectuals, prostitutes, and whoremasters. Everyone came to this space for a different purpose, and Mao wanted to discuss how the joy of individuals formed into a collective bender in the space. Although there were only eleven Chinese artists participating in the exhibition, they were established figures in the field and brought representative artworks, spreading the general idea of

Song Dong, *Through the Wall*, 2016 © Photo: Courtesy of MOCA Yinchuan

Mao Tongqiang, *15 Decibel*, 2016 © Photo: Courtesy of MOCA Yinchuan

what Chinese contemporary art is. The international vision of the exhibition can be seen through the large number of international artists. Many of them were from countries that are less famous in the international art world. Ammar Al Attar from Ajman, the United Arab Empires brought a series of investigative self-portraits centered around acting prayers in Islam that demystify the religious rituals.[10] Nigerian photographer George Osodi presented portraits of monarchs, showing the ethnic and cultural diversity of Nigeria under the influence of colonialism. Both these artists' works have focused on race, ethnicity, and religious problems. Such issues may sound unfamiliar to local visitors, but with the promotion of the BRI, these may become common issues that we will face together.

On the opening weekend of the main exhibition, there was a symposium, "The Gates of the Sun—Between the Mountains and Waters," organized by writer Manoj Nair. Twenty-five artists, curators, and scholars gathered together and discussed the theme of the exhibition with a focus on the dynamic nature of contemporary art and society. The Biennale also included a series of public forums, a music festival, and a workshop targeting children. MOCA Yinchuan also built twenty-four art residencies, and six participating artists would move in and create portraits for the art event. The unprecedented cultural event seemed to be a decent beginning of bringing contemporary art to the desert city while making a big splash in the art world. Krishnamachari noted, "Yinchuan has incredible potential for growing as a cultural and artistic location."[11] To develop as another contemporary art center alongside Beijing and Shanghai, Yinchuan needed to continue the promising work of the First Yinchuan Biennale and establish it as a long-term cultural tradition. In recent years, the biennial boom has been taking place in China while some of the biennials ceased after one or several editions, such as Suzhou Documents in Suzhou and the Xinjiang Biennale of Contemporary Art in Ürümqi. No official reasons have been provided for the closure, while financial burdens have become a major problem for many Chinese biennials. According to Hsieh, the expense of holding an exhibition at Yinchuan is thirty to fifty percent higher than other first-tier cities.[12] It means that to continually have more editions of Yinchuan Biennale is an immense challenge that the museum needs to face.

The Second Yinchuan Biennale came as expected in 2018. Because of MOCA Yinchuan's focus on ecology and cultural communication between the East and the West, it hired Marco Scotini, Artistic Director of the FM Center for Contemporary Art in Milan, as the chief curator because of his extensive research experience in the related fields. Titled *Starting from the Desert: Ecologies on the Edge*, the exhibition responded to the imperative global issues by employing archaeological approaches. It also reviewed the abundant layers of multiculturality and biodiversity produced and left here by the ancient Silk Road and better prepared Yinchuan to develop as the starting point of BRI.[13] The Biennale's framework was articulated in four independent thematic areas. Entitled *Nomadic Space and Rural Space*, the first section explored how forms of life contributed to the creation of different physical environments. Human activities may have participated in forming the desert of sand, and rural areas have also been created partly because of natural constraints and opportunities. The second section, *Labor-in-Nature and Nature-in-Labor*, focused on how commodification, appropriation, exploitation, and accumulation link to the modern ideas of nature. The following section, *The Voice and The Book*, engaged with the questions of the production and reproduction of knowledge. The last section, *Minorities and Multiplicity*, discussed the relationship between minorities and the majority and the idea of multiplicity. Together, eighty groups of artists from over thirty regions showed paintings, sculptures, film, installation, and performance to discuss and redefine the concept of ecology. Among them, thirty-eight artists brought newly commissioned works.

In the center of the first exhibition room was Song Dong's *The Center of the World* (2018). The commissioned work was a pyramid-like wooden structure allowing people to climb up to the top and discover samples of different types of desert sand from 24 time zones. It also provided a lookout point for visitors to survey the whole exhibition. The installation was based on the Altar of Land in Zhongshan Park, Beijing. In the past, our ancestors believed that China was the center of the world, so the third Ming Dynasty emperor, Yongle, built the altar in 1421.[14] Now, we are living in a more socially diverse society, and the artist was proposing the question anew: where is the center of

Liu Ding, *The Orchid Room,* 2018 © Photo: Courtesy of MOCA Yinchuan

the world? Another newly commissioned artwork was *The Orchid Room* (2018) in the second section of the exhibition. Artist and curator Liu Ding grouped various species of orchids along with his collection of late Qing calligraphy, paintings, and epigraphy. Oil paintings from the museum collection were also displayed in the same room. Similar to Song Dong, the artist drew inspiration from the Orchid Room in Zhongshan Park, which represents the elite Chinese literati tradition, because in modern China, orchids symbolize scholarly pursuit and are often associated with honorable people. Liu Ding's installation considered the nuanced relationship between the orchids and their wider context: What is the specific political motive behind cultural objects? The Biennale inspired people to rethink relevant questions related to ecology and minorities, for instance, how to utilize Yinchuan's special geological and cultural position to develop Northwest China and how to acquire the power of limited ecologies.[15] There were also a series of rich public education events, including two university lectures led by the chief curators, three lectures led by participating artists Li Juchuan, Duan Zhengqu, and Xu Tan, and a public workshop.

The past two editions of Yinchuan Biennale have received a great deal of attention from the art world because they highlighted an international spirit like other prevailing biennials and faced enormous internal and external challenges as well, such as the withdrawal of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. The exhibition focus on countries along the Silk Road showed the ambition of the museum to decentralize the Western canon. Claimed by Hsieh, MOCA Yinchuan has received significant support from the local government especially after the announcement of the BRI.[16] The Biennale, based on the museum platform, will play a more important role in the implementation of BRI. Yinchuan is set to become a "World Muslim City" with new hotels, mosques, and other cultural attractions for Muslim tourists by 2020. The Yinchuan Biennale and MOCA Yinchuan will also contribute to approaching the goal and strengthening connections with other BRI countries.

Notes

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Concept: Farewell to Post-Colonialism, Towards a Post-Western Modernity, Guangzhou Triennial (2008)

Sarat Maharaj

For the curatorial discourse of this Triennial, we propose to say 'Farewell to Post-Colonialism'. This represents the theoretical basis from which we hope to explore our critical vision. 'Farewell to Post-Colonialism' is not a denial of the importance and rewards of this intellectual tradition; in the real world, the political conditions criticised by post-colonialism have not receded, but in many ways are even further entrenched under the machinery of globalisation. However, as a leading discourse for art curatorial practice and criticism, post-colonialism is showing its limitation in being increasingly institutionalised as an ideological concept. Not only is it losing its edge as a critical tool, it has generated its own restrictions that hinder the emergence of artistic creativity and fresh theoretical interface. To say 'Farewell to Post-Colonialism' is not simply a departure, but a re-visit and a re-start.

2008 will be forty years since the heady days of 1968. In four decades, waves of new social movement and multi-cultural theories have woven tapestry of rich and clashing colours out of the world's changing social realities. International contemporary art has also benefited from the attention to socio-political issues surrounding identity race, gender and class. But over the years, revolutionary concepts have also transformed into leading discourses safely guarded by 'political correctness'. Post-colonial discourse's analysis of the power structure within cultural expressions has triggered a series of cultural resistance, as well as guided the construction of the self as a Subject in relation to the Other. However, these forms of analysis and construction have also adversely developed an institutionalised pluralistic landscape (a multicultural 'managerialism') that has today turned into a new form of stereotyping. In this Triennial we wish to draw attention to the 'political correctness at large' that is the result of the power play of multiculturalism, identity politics and post-colonial discourse. Urgent issues facing curatorial practice today are: How do we establish an 'ethics of difference' within the framework of difference in cultural production? How do we prevent a 'tyranny of the Other' without sacrificing the grounds already gained against the power status quo?

For some years major international contemporary exhibitions around the world have worked towards building up 'discursive sites for a cacophony of voices' and 'negotiated spaces of diverse values', emphasising 'correctness' in cultural politics; these have inadvertently triumphed to the neglect of independent pursuit of artistic creativity and alternative imaginative worlds. Concepts of identity, multiplicity and difference are now slowly losing their edge to become new restrictions for practice, succumbing to the phenomena of 'false representation' and 'multicultural managerialism'. In response to this, the curatorial project of the Third Guangzhou Triennial centres of mulling over multiculturalism and its limits within the larger perspective of 'Farewell to Post-Colonialism'.

The 'Farewell' calls for the renovation of the theoretical interface of contemporary art, in order to depart from its all pervasive socio-political discourse in an endeavour to work together with artists and critics to discover new modes of thinking and fresh analytical tools for today's world. The curators hope this Triennial will be a process of discovery for ourselves, and not just the fleshing out and illustrating of readymade theories and preconceived ideas. In trying to explore what this Triennial 'is', we wish to carry out a parallel inquiry into what it should not be. In this Triennial may be understood as a locus of questions for all of us involved in the international art world, starting with an Exercise in Negative. We hope to uncover, with the help of artists and thinkers, elements of the paradoxical reality veiled by contemporary cultural discourse, to make contact with realms that slip through the cracks of well-worn concepts such as class, gender, tribe and hybridity. We hope to think together with artists and critics, and investigate through their practices and projects to find what new modes and imaginative world are for art beyond those already heavily mapped out by socio-political discourses.

Sublimated with Mineral Fury prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium Asia

Sarat Maharaj

Two birds in a tree
One pecks, flits about incessantly
The other looks on, silent, still.

– Rg Veda, from the Sanskrit

The 'ascending pile' that is Asia today–what is its conceptual shape? How to take its sound, its 'uproarious din'? What are the see-think-know modes it is spawning, its creative surges, its art practices? Should we see it as a mundane or mental patch of territory, an empirical or noumenal figure? As the Third Guangzhou Triennial project takes off from its launch pad. 'Farewell to Post-colonialism' and 'Restarting from Asia', it is shot through with such queries and quandaries: a striking example is Gao Shiming's 'Questionnaire' for the China art world and beyond. These set the scene for 'Asia-in-the-world', for unpacking its core poser: does it herald an alternative conceptual continent or simply the desire to step into the West's shoes, to be its rivalrous look-alike-in Milton's phrase, its 'nether empire'.

Hard on its heels, another query: does 'post-colonialism' not sound like a bag-all term? From its beginnings, it signalled a plethora of 'critiques and probes' often at daggers drawn. Which ones are we to bid goodbye to – the original models, start-ups or pilot versions of the 1980s? Is it their followers, the epigone, avatars, second lifers? Or their derivatives that have become the critical-curatorial jargon of the art-culture industry today – an emerging, circumambient phenomenon I call the 'spectacle of discourse'?

Also up for a grilling is the false dichotomy between 'Post-colonial theory' and art practice–the former as the usurping outsider crowding out the latter. Artists, quite early in the game, generated critical thinking on the 'Post-colonial condition' off their own bat. Their inquiries and insights surfaced from within their art activity-as immanent investigations. They sometimes brought to light themes that were until then not recognized either as theoretical objects or topics worthy of academic study-or as proper material for art. They are on par with theory output but distinct from it. Which bit are we waving off?

Fond Farewell

The 'Farewell' in question has a tricky double sense. On the one hand, we bid adieu to the post-colonial, wishing it the best of luck hoping it fares well. On the other, we wish to be shot of it, to part company, to split. It half-echoes Paul Feyerabend's 'Farewell to Reason' (1987) that sound as if it dares us to dump the very stuff of thinking and logical argument. However, it is a ruse for spotlighting his real target: the brittle 'rationalist principle' that had ensconced itself as 'reason' – a crimped version that excluded other registers of reasoning. Against this, he was proposing a more open-ended, expanded notion of reason.

A touch of Feyerabend's provocative 'Farewell' is at play here. At first, I was not a little gobsmacked by the strictures against the post-colonial that came with the invitation to co-curate the Triennial. It jolted me into nothing that 'elsewhere', 'post-colonialism' might have less approving connotations than those we were all too comfortable with in Western art-culture-academic circuits. Nevertheless, they hardly squared with my experience of how the UK had re-invented itself in post-imperial terms with investments in cultural diversity and the cosmopolitan ideal. Here post-colonial signalled stepping out of colonial subordination, even if this was a ragged affair with areas of authority yet to be unraveled. Neither did a blanket goodbye to the 'multicultural' seem to make sense for there was no readymade ideology foisted on us. It was forged both in a critique of Eurocentric thinking–and in the painful struggles for visibility by minorities and marginals, in the rub-up with quotidian immigrant difference, with the 'other' in our midst. In this light, 'political correctness' is as much a rough and ready, organic ethics secreted by everyday struggles as it is a flatfooted bureaucratic ploy to codify civil intercourse–though by

no means escaping ridicule as self-parody as 'PC gone mad'.

Johnson Chang's charge of 'PC at large', floated in the Triennial's early propositions, has to be similarly unpacked according to both China's historical experience and actualities on the ground. 'PC at large' rings alarm bells about kowtowing to the status quo, toeing the party line, herd mentality that stifles acting on one's own steam. It concerns political machination, control and being 'corrected' to fit in. In this light, we cannot but be wary of post-colonialism as one in a string of readymade ideological imports. However, for Ai Wei Wei, 'Ideology' is about having guiding principles for a meaningful life – a 'design for living'. The lack of it, in contrast to past idealism, is reason for the present malaise, for empty, self-centres living. (Ai Weiwei).

For the radical stance beyond his view, the world is a better place without ideological movements. "Without Isms is neither nihilism nor eclecticism; nor egotism or solipsism. It opposes totalitarian dictatorship but also opposes the inflation of the self to god or Superman. Without Isms opposes the foisting of a particular brand of politics on the individual by means of abstract collective names such as 'the people', 'the race'. or 'the nation'. The idea behind Without Isms is that we need to bid goodbye to the 20th century and put a big question mark over those 'Isms that dominated it". (Gao Xinjiang. The Case for Literature.2008) We might pause to ponder whether 'anti-ideology' is not itself a bit of a doctrine, an 'Ims' of sorts. At any rate, from this viewpoint, 'post-colonialism' is little more than a manipulative agenda-another 'Ism' – that overrides individual, unfettered expression. Here 'Farewell' is no less than good riddance.

Peculiarities of the English

The view that post-colonialism harbours a dead-end preoccupation with colonial power in not unlike Toni Negri's on the limits of the post-colonial paradigm with globalization (Empire.2000) But the complaint that it is inapplicable to China's historical experience, that as a theoretical model it rides rough shod over the 'peculiarities of the Chinese' need closer attention. It parallels E P Thompson's dogged defence of the 'peculiarities' of the English'–a feel for the grain of the concrete, the empirical and doable that shies away from overweening theorizing. One of the 'grand systems' he had in mind was Louis Althusser's formidably abstract, Marxist categories of analysis. (The Poverty of Theory. 1975) The quandary is whether we can grasp the 'dense peculiarities' of the 'ascending pile' of China today without even a whisper of theory or an 'Ism' – 'post-colonialism' or whatever? This is not to deny that 'stripping art bare' of all ideological constructs such as 'post-colonialism' is an invigorating exercise-especially in an age when world-wide government functionality is increasingly taking creative activity under its wing. ' Strip ping bare' resists the drive to codify art practice: it peculiarities, the unforeseeable vagaries of the art event–its singularity.

The bone some colleagues in China and beyond pick with the 'multicultural' is not so much with its spook Apartheid logic in which 'some cultures are more equal than others'. Neither is it with its 'managerial mentality' based on reductive cultural-ethnic stereotypes. It is with the fact it falls short of the universal ideal – that multicultural difference can only splinter into warring factions. But do multiplicity and heterogeneity intrinsically spell breakdown and bedlam? We should not forget they are the force-field of singularity, individual quirk, variation teeming possibilities. Likewise, totality and oneness does not exclusively imply the totalitarian steamroller: it is also about co-operative association, unity of purpose, constructing the 'commons'? Vital distinctions for the conceptual light-rope we walk in mulling over the multicultural today.

There are nevertheless some everyday examples of its skewed spin off that stick in the gullet. Two recent cases: a downtrodden caste in India, at the bottom of the social ladder, protests against being pushed too high up by new, fairer laws because they lose the benefits that go with their previous special 'lowly status'. In a court case a few months ago, descendants of later waves of Chinese, mainly Taiwanese immigrants to South Africa, who were previously classed semi-honorary Whites and were beneficiaries of Apartheid, won the legal right to be re-classified Black. This means they now qualify for empowerment schemes under law of the post-Apartheid Rainbow.

Post-colonial Pharmakon or Panacea?

To speak of 'post-colonialism' as if it were a monstrous conceptual monolith overlooks the quarrelling viewpoints under its umbrella. What is up for scrutiny is a concoction extracted from them–a cod 'post-colonial' of well-thumbed slogans and shorthand: representation, self-voicing, identity, belonging, 'other modernities', Orientalist optics, migration, citizen/refugee, diaspora, authority/subordination, epistemic block and the like. It is not so much these terms in their original skin in the realm of pure theory that are in the hot seat. Rather,

their mash up in the art-culture criticism-curatorial spheres-in the 'spectacle of discourse'– that are candidates for fond 'Farewell'.

The Post-colonial pharmakon (PP1) is a deconstructive probe in which critique is an oscillating positive-negative charge-in Derrida's figure, both 'poison and cure'. It is a 3600 swivel eye that relentlessly divide. Stopping short of simply valourizing the latter term over the former it highlights the latter term over the former it highlights their complicities and blind sports. PP1 is at odds with the Post-colonial Panacea (PP2), which is a strategy of inversion. It turns the tables on the West/Non-West, Europe/Asia power divide in a 'utopian' privileging of the subordinate, underdog term. Toppling the 'heavenly' dominant, it becomes its 'nether empire'.

An issue ripe for 'Farewell' that PP1 embodies derives from Gayatri Spivak's potent post-colonial purge. She had brewed this from a mix of East/West texts and ideas in her pharmacy lab, 'Critique of Post-colonial Reason' (1999), to show how, in the Kantian critique, the 'transcendental turn' produces in one go both the 'Enlightenment space' and the 'subaltem'. The former hinges on the 'foreclosure' of the latter. Her remedial reading includes a homeopathic smidgen of Kantian poison-the brute empirical. It is not unlike Duchamp's prescription for the retinal malady–a stringent dose of the retinal itself: 'To Be Looked At (From The Other Side Of The Glass) With One Eye, Close To, For Almost An Hour' (1918. Buenos Aires).

Is there an escape hatch from the wiles of 'foreclosure'? With each historical step a new avatar of the 'foreclosed' pops up; from aboriginal through native information to colonial subject and subaltern, from women of the South to those beneath the radar, the wretched of the earth below the NGO line through the metropolitan migrant and refugee to the 'non-Western other' – another incarnation springs to place in apparently endless succession. Is this wallowing in the 'underdog' slot for which we have already taken PP2 to task? Here the 'transcendental no-exit' seems little than a conceptual conceit–an epistemic cul-de-sac where analytical thinking perfects an apriori system only to find itself locked up in it.

With scant mileage to the 'transcendental turn', what alternatives, what possibilities for break out, for going beyond the card it dishes out? At the risk of ridicule from Kant, who scoffs at the botchers who mix up their transcendental with their empirical, we might venture a frank turn to the 'row empirical'. I mean a plunge into quotidian experience–into sounding the everyday rub-up of 'mainstream/marginal, of self/other in their rounds of communicative endeavour beyond the uncrossables of language.

Out of the prison-house of concepts, immersion in the dense peculiarities of the 'ascending pile'. With this dunking in discursive-non-discursive random encounter, pre-given lingo or grammar of self/other cracks and crumbles. From the smithereens, from 'ground zero', fumbling contact, scrapings of sound, ur-utterances well up – a tunnelling under the partitions of language. To illustrate this we might look at an extreme example the 07/07/05 murderous terror bombs in London. From within the incident, maimed mangled strangers sometimes managed to attend to one another, to eke out a lingo for the nonce – communicative gear emerging from scratch on the spot. This is not to eke out some consolation from in the terrible events. It is sound an elemental flare-up in extreme situations–the capacity to patch together ways of see-feel-think that leap over the self/other hurdle. Not least, this confounds what both fundamentalists and some theorists assume-'epistemic blockage' that does not budge.

Up for 'Farewell', is the celebrated spat over 'PC at large' between Star Theorist and Renowned Artist-the Star Curator was the missing link. The primal scene of the showdown was the making of the exhibition "One or Two Things I Know About Them" (Whitechapel, 1994). They fell out over whose rendering of the East End immigrant Bangladeshi community was more telling, more correct. The quarrel reaches back to Said's quote from Marx in his epilogue to Orientalism: " They could not represent themselves: they had to be represented". He was flagging up possibilities of self-voicing and self-fashioning-cornerstone of both PP and PP2 – that would lie at the heart of the dispute.

The Theorist's expose of contradictions within the immigrant community was unsparing: women's subordination, sweatshops, grubby money, 'backward' notions of honour and shame. The Artist was less inclined towards an unrelenting sociologizing optic, more into sounding their plight with half an eye on local racist attitudes. His photo-film emanated from an immersive meander through other lives and terrains leasing out representations from the 'dense peculiarities' of the community. It clashed with the 'transcendental tackle' the Theorist had tooled 'outside the community' to hammer home her critique. Was she a specimen of

PC gone mad? Or was the Artist-livered, overprotective? The Theorist suspected the Artist of succumbing to a blinkered, 'nativist' stance. The Artist felt the Theorist was blinded by an uncompromising analytic that rendered the community more vulnerable.

Huang Xiaopeng's 'Over-translation'

Versions of the spat reverberate across the art-culture world. In the Chinese setting, it takes the form of concern over whether the artist's work and thinking is shown in its own terms. How to escape the 'curatorial turn' that scripts them in advance-framing them as 'Dissident Artist', Post-Pop Pop Artist, 'Merchant Conceptualist' and the like? A reaction is the search for 'correct representation'–for keeping translation to an act of pure, literal transfer between the artist's identity and how it is rendered without anything else creeping in. This tends to underestimate the extent to which all translation intrinsically involves 'distortion' – a dose of something more than what is being translated and less than it. The gap between original and translation highlights the sense of its 'impossibility', its stickier, no-go areas.

Huang Xiaopeng's 'over-translation' pointedly captures the sense of a troubling surplus or a shortfall vis a vis the original. His video soundtrack features pop songs translated from English to Chinese and back again through machine translation in random permutation. The process shows up not only distorted representation, slipshod translation, flat mistranslation but also 'creative mistranslation' – 'out of sync' rendition that spawns new insight, fresh semantic stuff. The clamour of diverging representations and translations add up to a liberating 'anything goes' situation, to use Feyerabend's phrase. In the jostle of disparate versions we are free to size up representations one against one another constantly-as opposed to judging and prescribing the 'correct' one.

Talk Run

With PP1 and PP2 above, the anxiety over 'correct' translation and depiction-always at stake in identify politics-drifts towards 'representationalism'. This is, in Nietzsche's terms, a 'reactive stance', where art and thinking are so embroiled with what they retaliate against that they are almost solely defined by it. Though the 'deconstructive mode' (PP1) tries that to shake free of this oppositional stance-typical of PP2-it remains within the ambit of the reactive syndrome. Modes of detoumement, inversion or transgression too are caught up in varying degrees by what they knock. For Deleuze, breaking through the representational crust is possible with the erupting force of an aesthetics that both harnesses and releases energies. This is the capacity for unhampered expression that emanates from its own occurrence and takes shape with reference only to it – a self-organizing event or autopoesis. A little like the flow, the 'spontaneity' (chi) in same Chinese aesthetics or the primal outburst (Sphota) of creativity in Sanskrit metaphysics?

The sense of an explosive, non-mimetic force resonates with the self-processing event of the marathon in Haruki Murukami's 'What I talk about, when I talk about Running' (2006-2008). His grueling long-distance runs 'sweat out' body-mind states in random order. The highs and lows do not 'represent' anything. His down-to-earth obsessions are with pulse rates, knee-joints, ligaments, oxygen. They undercut the impulse to 'read' his long-haul symbolically-as if it 'incarnated' myths of arduous test, sacrifice, sublime transcendence. The run is passage through peculiar body-mind circadian cycles, filling to brim, emptying to the lees. Each threshold crossed, is a build up of sensation, affect, emotion but, as with the gamelan's sonic flat-line, there is crescendo but no climax. Here 'hitting the wall' is ordeal, pain, a morale dipper, flagging stamina and both heightened and blank consciousness. During the endurance course, there are flickers of body-mind illumination. Nothing as grand as Enlightenment only the 'opaque' brain-brawn torrent pushing the run to its edge.

The peculiarities of Runner and Writer seldom cross paths in Murakami's circuits. The run of writing hugs the inside lane of the grammar track: it is organized, static even when in motion. The marathon, on the other hand, presses on through wordless syntax-the body without organs. The contrast touches on Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's proposed marathon cum drawing event: Breathing is Free: A Running-Drawing Project 12,756.3 km –Jack and the Guangzhou Bodhi Leaf, 193km. The route of the run through Guangzhou is in the shape of a giant Bodhi leaf. Perhaps nothing as grant as the Tree of Enlightenment for it is also Jack's Beanstalk of fairytale fame that shoots up unstoppably to the Giant's heaven. It leaves us in two minds. Jun is at pains that this not a performance: it is always more than a representation and less than it. It is less 'acting' than perhaps 'simply an act' or the 'enactive'. Here the running body-mind self-propels on the spume of the scriptless event.

Zeitdiagnose & Abhijnanasakuntalam

In the wake of the 'Farewell', we have a prelim probe for 'Asia in the world' – quasiclinical notes on the current conjuncture:

Memories of Underdevelopment
Grey Matter Economy
Thinking Through the Visual
Avidya
Non-Knowledge
Know How & No How
Light of Asia
The Great Learning
The Subjective Enlightenment

There are two pointers to the above: Max Weber's Zeitdiagnose or diagnostic of the present, taking the sound of modernity and the global forces of 'Asia in the world, –a non-totalizing score. The second is ancient India, Kaidas's Sanskrit play: Abhijnana-sakuntalam (Sakuntala Recognized by a token). King Dushyanta, who fell in love with Sakuntala when they met in the sacred forest grove, fails to recognize her later because she had fatefully lost the ring, the token that was to 'awaken' their reunion. In the erotic mode or Rasa the play engulfs us with body-mind states of love, languor, desire, the flood and ebb of rapture and enlightenment. The text had circulated in Enlightenment salons: its prologue and the vidhUSka figure so enchanted Goethe that he crafted a similar device for Faust.

Weber's Zeitdiagnose is about cognitive signs, social facts, statistical data that have to be configured to take a reading of the current state of play, of incipient developments and new bearings in modernity. Kalidas's play, on the other hand, 'embodies' body-mind fill up and damp down – non-cognitive charges, feel-know indexical markers, affect traces, clouds smudges. The token by which Sakuntala is to be recognized is not an abstract sign that to be 'read' by code but a it is ring on her finger, the piercing force awakening consciousness. Here the modalities synthesize in seesaw. Objective subjective key. We have a glimpse of the approach perhaps in the Sakuntala series by King Rama V1 of Thailand (National Gallery of Art, Bangkok, 1910-25). His rendering verges on the angular with jabbing strokes, a querying, futurist tone-quite different from the attenuated, sinuous line of Indian depictions. With this modal mix, the suite 'prefigures' a proto-probe where the Zeitdiagnose annotates the Abhijnanasutalam and vice versa.

Why Pandemonium? In Milton's Paradise Lost, Lucifer/Satan and his rebellious Band, kicked out of Heaven, fall precipitously through dementing zones of Disorder and Chaos, the hell holes of Din and Hiss. Milton sound the cacophonous 'other' of the old 'harmonious order' – his epic reverberates with the topsy-turvy of new possibilities the English civil war had ushered in. The Band pass over sulphuric lakes, scurfy deposits, toxic fumes-not unlike the cratered, damaged environment of contemporary 'Asia in development'. Nevertheless, the blasted landscape is also one of inventive construction where the architectural spectacle of Pandemonium goes up-the 'ascending pile' of giant columns, palatial halls, massive architraves. Satan's labouring cohorts give us a snapshot of today's towering engineering feats in Asia. The continent is a plane of transmutation: furious input of raw materials and minerals through a 'sublimation' filter: output of futuristic buildings, cities, crystalline commodities.

At the Pandemonium think-tank, the fallen Band scheme to regain their lost power by erecting a 'nether empire' to match and beat Imperial Heaven. To get at God, they plumb for the more devious plot of corrupting his new creation-the primal duo in Paradise. Pandemonium seethes with energies, a lab for alternative projects, uncreated worlds. The wild atmosphere of things on the boil visualizes a continent bristling with transformative, unknown potentials–Pandemonium Asia.

Memories of Underdevelopment

I am taking the title of Tomas Gutierrez Alea's renowned film by that name (Cuba, 1968) as an initial component of the proto-probe. The film had looked back on Cuba after the revolution to note traces of underdevelopment that had not been 'superseded'. 'Backwardness, rottenness, lack of culture' linger on in a society with pretensions to modernity and advanced socialist ideals. I am using this as a backdrop to evoke Seydou Boro's (Paris/Burkina Faso) 'dance-non-dance–that kicks off with the question: 'How to get to Brazzaville?' A woman fingers a nightmare route on a map: head far south to Johannesburg, then a maze-like backtrack to Central Africa, Perhaps onto Paris just to get to the country next door.

For Seydou, the regulation of movement in colonial travel networks mirrors how 'dance' regulates body-mind movement. The way colonial categories organize space-motion parallels how art genres parcel out creativity. They are structures of authority that define

'identity' as colonial subject, as 'Dancer'-even as 'contemporary African performer' as curatorial jargon has it. These representations melt always as Seydou flexes out into action, writhing, thrusting out across a sandy patch, in between the cage bars of a container truck, down a long road, through the market place, For gobsmacked bystanders, is this a performance, someone crazed on the loose, an avant-garde Dancer? Neither 'choreographed sequences' nor entirely random workaday spurts of movement, they elude fixing as folk, modern, traditional or 'Africa Now'. They tense, convulse to the edge. Emanating from its own propulsive force the body-mind presses n beyond given theoretical constructs such as 'Post-colonialism' to which it says 'la ra love'

Emma Maresk and Over-Development

A key component of the post-colonial conceptual pantheon that is up for a seeing-to is the centre/periphery couple. This was flagged up with the arrival from China of the world's largest container vessel, the Emma Maersk, laden with 'Made in China' Christmas goodies for the EU. To the gawping crowds at Tilbury for the spectacle, the ship encapsulated China's manufacturing might. It also meant that other upcoming zones in Asia's 'ascending pile' now mattered-regions previously beyond the pale as 'Third World basket cases'. Re-drawing the classic N/S lines of division was a priority if we were not to be left fumbling with a skewed, out of date map.

Early in post-colonial debates, Trinh T Min-ha spoke of a 'First World in the Third World, a Third in the First' to highlight more complicities between centre/periphery than met the eye-a view fleshed out later in empirical terms in Amartya Sen's 'Development as Freedom' (1999). With globalization, these entanglements become labyrinthine with ceaseless translation and mix across developed/developing lines. At modernity's high tide, therefore, the 'development plot begins to thicken'. Pockets of decline and malaise appear in the developed world: the effect of 'post-development' or should we say, in the wake of 'over-development'? This does not imply that the N/S divide is less of a fault line: grave disparities and inequalities persist 'in the South'. Rather, straddling the old divide, an unnerving space of 'development and its discontents' opens up.

The inside structure of the Emma Maersk shows computerized storage for precision location of every commodity on board. The programmed stacking momentarily recalls eighteenth century slave ships, their tiered bays in the hold choc a bloc with African bodies. This 'memory of underdevelopment' brings up a salient fact: the packing system shows how well China is plugging into the knowledge economy. However, it should not blind us to the abiding economies based on muscle-body labor power with their sweat-shop, suicide belts, factory regimen. The sobering fact is that brute toil of the visceral world hangs on as more than a memory in the knowledge economy's pristine virtual world.

Grey Matter Economy

Two birds: Who is the real worker: piano-maker or piano-player?
Marx: Grundrisse

Why grey matter? Because it spotlights the brain as a porridge –colour knowledge –producing lump of muscle. It brings back the visceral vis a vis the virtual in the knowledge economy that tends to be seen as entirely ethereal. As the brawn bit is spirited away, brain is thought of as a disembodied, purely mental affair. To speak of the knowledge economy simply as 'immaterial' or 'intangible' is only part of the story.

The query here is that if the knowledge economy is transforming relations between work, labor and creativity-then what are the implications for 'creativity' as understood in the sphere of art? Are these spheres folding into each other or is there still a specific creativity to art? The 'deep' concept of work, according to Andre Gorz (Farewell to the Working Class & Reclaiming Work, 1997) is an anthropological-philosophical construct, a project with a Hegelian ring, in which the self tussles with brute nature in a self-fashioning, world crafting process. Today work increasingly become mundane as it were, a matter of serial, changeable jobs (Jeremy Rifkin. The End of Work. 1995) it is no more 'mere labour' but involves creative thinking, imagination, capacities for planning and innovation. These qualities, once associated with only the managerial elite, are increasingly the ABC of the general workforce, especially against the backdrop of IT know-how which now permeates the oddest crannies of agricultural labour.

In his prelim notes to Capital, Marx saw there was no simple loss up between piano maker and player in deciding who was the 'real worker'. It required establishing rigorous criteria for 'productive labour' in capitalist production to pinpoint the group of workers from whom maximum surplus value was squeezed put. If the piano maker fell in this core group, the piano player was

lumped with the rest. They were 'non-productive' workers in the sense that 'objectively' less was milked out of them. This was a teaser

for the Labour Theory of Value-tied up with distinctions in old-style industrial production between workers and planners, brawn and brain, makers and thinkers. Post-Ford conditions were to overhaul the distinctions. The spotlight now falls on the piano player as the symbol of how creativity-grey matter activity in the heightened sense-is not extraneous to work anymore. It folds back into it and feeds productions with new ideas. We see the system actively tapping into the worker's 'creativity and imagination'. The shift away from the idea that he or she is an 'alienated automaton or operative' means that he or she is now billed as a 'knowledge engineer' whose store of inventive capabilities becomes the linchpin of production.

Knowledge-Pleasure Dome

An early, striking attempt to put place a 'knowledge economy' was liferally, in the far South, in Chile. President Allende had invited Stafford Beer, the cybemetics management theorist, to set up the Operations Room from where worker-managers could keep track of national economic performance. The Ops Room was a futuristic, Star Trek HQ. The base constantly received updates of data from around the country in real time. By 1974, the Pinochet coup spelled the end of the experiment.

More than thirty years after, Mario Navarro revisits the Chilean interlude with his Liverpool project (2006). He erected a Buckminster Fuller dome, blood red translucent, as a version of the Ops Room in the Rotunda of the Municipal Library. The brain-shaped dome forms are encircled by wall-to-wall bookshelves – an earlier knowledge regime quietly passing into obsolescence. The Ops Room central command was for total surveillance and control over the economy, the management of resources, labour and information. Today these ring Big Brother alarm bells let alone those of 1984 dystopia. For Mario the renowned ergonomic armchairs of the Ops Room increasing look like machines for body-mind regulation. To design the chairs for his Ops Room the invited a group of people who had experienced change in their thinking or behaviour because of some event or accident. What they came up with was seating for comfort, for wallowing in. They took pleasure in wild, synthetic fur covers, garish cushions, kitschy knick-knacks. The armrests were not dotted with electronic buttons and knobs but place-holders for beer glasses and ashtrays-politically incorrect 'design for living'. Mario ribs the robotic functionality of the original Ops Room. It gives way here to the vagaries of personal taste, individual quirk. Against hyper-efficiency, elements of error, mistake, accident in the vulnerable human run of things sometimes also contain glimmerings of new creative bearings. Has the Knowledge Dome mutated into the stately Pleasure Dome that Kublai Khan decreed in Xanadu – in the words of Coleridge's poem?

Mario's wit and humour enable him to raise a critical eyebrow regarding Beer's conceptual models based on the brain-autonomic system and neural networks (Brain of the Firm. 1971). Duchamp had toyed with the notion of a grey matter, cerebral art. It was partly to counter the somewhat lowly. 'manual'. Status of art encapsulated in the phrase 'as stupid as a painter' current then. He was also speculating on what an intelligent, conceptual art practice-one that sprang from the 'cortex' – might look like? The irony today is that not dissimilar smart 'work-creativity' speculations have become the order of the day in the grey-matter economy. If this marks the 'corticalization of creativity' as know-how, then it is even more crucial to keep the door open for, in Samuel Becket's phrase, no-how.

Thinking Through the Visual

As with the double sense of Farewell, so with Thinking Through the Visual: it is thinking by means of the visual, in its viscous thick-and about unpacking its peculiarities to see how it ticks. Does it spawn 'other' kinds of knowledge? Thinking here refers as much to discursive forms of think-know, as to the non-discursive. In Sanskrit, Avidya touches on the 'other' of knowledge – it is the third term between and its binary opposite, ignorance. To sound its obscure surge we need to differentiate hard-nosed know-how from the flux of no-how.

'Thinking through the Visual' is not a lookalike of verbal lingo. Its charge is non-lingual, somatic, atmospheric murk, performative splurge. As an 'aggiutinative mode' its thrust is grammarless-putting into play associative merge, juxtaposition, non-inflexional elision. It sticks together elements in a piecemeal, 'add on ad infinitum' way. This is a vital alternative, as Feyerabend noted, to the control freak of dialectical thinking that irons out and assimilates all in its path. Various merz-assemblages spring to mind-Kurt Schzwiters, Rauchenberg, Thomas Hirschhom. They embody a non-assimilative force refuses to blot out otherness and difference.

We may contrast 'thinking through the visual, to parsing, the epitome of chopping up flows of information into combinatory bits to configure algorithmic sequences. John Hoskyns's 'Wiring Diagram' (Just in Time. 2007) tends towards this mode-a map of the sorry saga of the mid-seventies British economy, a Zeitdiagnose of the condition of the 'sick man of Europe' as on 01.10.1974. it reminded Mrs. T of a 'chemical plant' – a footnote to her tough remedy for Britain: the 'Long March' to roll back socialism and roll in the free market. His diagnostic works because a modicum of rules are at play, even if only thumb-rules. They can be applied consistently-a degree of 'repeatability' that would not only be unlikely but undersirable in art where repetition paradoxically throws up divergence and difference: each re-run of the original spawns a one-off variant. This puts it at odds with computational constancy, with the calibrated equilibrium of know-how and closer to the vagaries of the swell and dip of no-how.

The Subjective Enlightenment

Two Birds: Ezya Pound did not 'know' Chinese when he translated the Sung poets through Fenelassa's notes. WB Yeats did not 'know' Sanskrit when he translated the Upanishads with Shree Purohit Swami. Cheeky Colomialists or precursors to an emerging figure key to our time-the Monolingual Translaror?

Qiu Zhijie video (1999) takes off from reflections on the Yuanmingyuan (Gardens of Perfect Brightness) or Enlightenment Gardens that British-French punitive forces wrecked in 1860 looting and razing adjoining buildings. The tone and atmospherics of his piece invite us to rove and jot down loose associations. What attitudes to the event over the years, through the Cultural Revolution and beyond to recent times when the Gardens have featured as a spot for honeymooners and tourists? Our musings drift towards two queries: what is the relationship between Enlightenment and violence? What is Enlightenment, anyway?

The first had been explored in the shadow of the Holocaust, notably in Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment – a bleak scenario of advancing consciousness shadowed by ever-new forms of manipulation, control and violation. With the end of Empire, one view was that violence was implicit in the Enlightenment project from its beginnings since it had taken shape in and through the period of conquest of 'other' cultures. In a stronger version, it is seen to have ushered in a 'modernity of extermination' that wiped out the Aboriginal world in a prefiguring of the Holocaust. Post-colonial bedlam and slaughter was harder to pin on the Enlightenment alone: this was post-independence bloodletting and strife after the colonial authorities had, as it were, decamped. We can compile an endless list: the murderous Partition of India at the tail end of Gandhi's non-violent movement, the Cultural Revolution; Cambodia's Year Zero, divided Korea, the Vietnam war, the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka and the like. Today, widespread global migration gives a particular slant to the query: can Enlightenment tolerance cope with the 'other' in our midst? The demand for assimilation that is made of immigrants, non-citizens, foreigners and 'other' marginal-that 'they' become like 'us' – is the thrust of ' repressive tolerance'. It is about erasing whatever's different and unlike in the name of making 'them the same as us', about getting rid of the non-identical-a 'xenocidal' drive.

We are back to asking 'What is Enlightenment? – a band of discourse stretching from Kant's reflections through to Foucault and beyond. So much so that Qiu Zhijie's video prompted me to wonder whether there were 'other' Enlightenment besides the European, on 'other' continents? What, for instance, of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment that had critically queried 'authorities and orthodoxies': did the 'Light of Asia' count at all?

To think on one's own feet without authorities, the capacity for autonomous thinking from within the momentum of the thinking process itself, these Edmund Husserl saw as a force singular to Europe in his landmark lecture. 'Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man', delivered on 10.05.1935 in Vienna. The self-organizing force of thinking meant that people flocked together as equals-getting stuck into discussion, crossing swords, honing argument and opinion in open rub-up. This is the 'friendship model' of discourse and knowledge production peculiar to Europe. Participants milled around as everyday equals and companions on a common plane exchange. For Husserl this was in stark contrast to the Asia model of knowledge that was a scene of one-to-one induction into wisdom based on initiation to a higher authority-the master, sage or guru. The relationship was top-down, parental as opposed to the friendship model that was lateral and sibling. The sacred grove of Asia was the site of osmotic transmission where the Master was the conduit for the knowing process passed down to the disciple. It stood at odds with the agora of Greece-an agonistic arena where knowledge was thrashed out in the rough and tumble of argument between interlocutors on the same footing.

There are a few holes we can pick with Husserl's mapping-some are apparent quibbles like whether 'Greece' was applicable to the scattering of small states he had in mind or what bearing slave-owning had on the idea of 'friendship'. He seemed unaware of the proliferation of models of discourse and knowledge in Asia: Confucian, Taoist, Tibetan Tantra, the Avestan and Sufi systems of disputation: in India, elaborate Buddhist logic, Vedanta rationalism, non-theistic, nitpicking reasoning such as the Nyaya-Vaisesika-to mention only a sliver. They could not be simply lumped as 'mystical' – term, in any event, that is often a misnomer for 'other' think-know modalities. Husserl and outlined these views at a poignant, dangerous moment when the Nazi's had stripped him of citizenship and on the eve of the Holocaust. The Nazi scene of discourse had been staked out around the campfire of tribal territory cleansed of 'the other'. It is against this rising 'nether empire' that his stark mapping took shape.

Later thinkers, notably Deleuze in what is Philosophy? (1994), updated and tinkered with elements of the 'friendship model' as a 'plane of consistency' where philosophical though is sheer conceptual creativity. Nevertheless, one query looms large: in the area of equals, how come some end up more equal than others? Is the 'first amongst equals' inevitable? Why does 'friendliness amongst friends' sour into anger and aggression let alone head-chopping? The orchestrator, the facilitator, the expert imperceptibly end up 'in-charge'–a not uncommon process that we can observe in the institutional micro-routines of art academies, universities, co-ops, communes, ashrams. In these instances, Enlightenment goes into reverse gear as authority and hierarchy sneak back in through the rear-something Adorno mulled over in his very last talk on Radio Hessen. The friendship model seemed destined to teeter between positive and negative, to pass over from pulling together to daggers drawn, from agonistic to antagonistic.

Was the antidote a more stringent accounting of Enlightenment ideals-as uncompromising a stance as possible? This seems to be the drift of one of Adorno's more robust jottings on the Upanishads. He found the Buddha community (Sangha) compromised because of restrictions on who could join. A consolation was the obscure outsider, Kankara: he saw this a radical to the left of the Buddha as an example of 'uncompromising consciousness'. However, to have the most progressive programme, an unbending 'universal' constitution or the most inclusive diversity policy is perhaps less the point then making it a lived reality and of putting it into practice. Otherwise, It becomes little more than perfecting one's stance for its own sake-rather like buffing up one's PC medals.

To shore up the 'friendship model', I venture the notice of the Subjective Enlightenment. By this I mean an auto-reflexive force emanating from the 'self-that odd construct of consciousness from which we normally derive the sense of being in the driver's seat 'in charge and in command'. The peculiar sense of self takes shapes in the zones of Hiss and Din of the neural networks of the brain: Oliver Selfridge had famously modelled it on the tiers of demonic, shrieking forces arrayed in Milton's Pandemonium. How to get to grips with the 'self' that seems both utterly illusory and all-too real? Tussling with it in both its flimsy and substantial guises, is the start-up subjective condition that complements the Enlightenment's objective ideals 'out there in the everyday area of the world.

The auto-reflexive gives us the 'view from within'-the 'first-person' take on consciousness to grasp how it ticks. It is about sounding its restless surges of aggressively and competitiveness, grappling with its violent fluctuations. The Buddha's statement: 'Held a light to yourself' signaled the idea of bringing a searchlight to bear on the 'ascending pile of the self' caught up in its own delusory structures. From the outset, however, the Buddha's statement was not to be taken simply as another 'authoritative' utterance or in-junction that had to be 'obeyed'. It was the start-up for self-inquiry backed up by constant experimenting and testing of self-investigative procedures-the idea that Enlightenment is also about enlightening yourself, with an interior illumination as much as an exterior application. It is not Buddism that is prescribed that is prescribed here as a panacea, as a 'method', as another 'Ism' – but its spirit of experimental self-tooling where methods of self-inquiry are not pre-given but invented each time for the nonce.

Varela spoke of self-inquiry as part of the 'technologies of introspection'. They are aimed at producing a state of 'mindfulness' where the mind becomes alert to its own process. One corpus of methods he mentioned was the Abhidharma texts, seven centuries of transcripts, drafts, reports on body-mind activity from around the Asia continent. He kept the door open for these introspective modes as alternatives against the positivist views that they did not come to scratch according to rationalist principles. The connotations of navel-gazing, however, are not easy to shake off: this forms the well-known

thrust of allegations by activist applications of Enlightenment ideals against Eastern thinking-that it is self-perfecting, self-absorbed, quietist. This is at odds with what self-scanning is for which is to create the subjective conditions of engagement with the other, the capacity to listen and respond to the other 'out there'. The aim is overcome tendencies towards getting the better of the other or to taking charge or control in favour of thinking and feeling with the other. Compassion in this sense is not so much about feeling sorry for or being charitable 'from on high' towards someone who is 'down'. It is urge towards oneness with the other, a sense of companionship on 'friendship model'. Varela had used the term 'technology of the self' to give self-inquiry the rigour of a methodology on par with other hard-nosed scientific procedures. Today this seems to fall in with drives towards the 'technologization' of the self, towards the application of readymade know how-rather than on the spot kluging at the heart of no-how.

Asia Wake

Two birds: Ananda Coomaraswamy saw Nietzsche, through the eyes of Indian philosophy as the ever-widening urge towards the cosmopolitan – and cosmic – state without qualities. Georg Luckac's saw him through Marxist lens as the 'forenner of fascism' bogged down in ever-delimiting qualities.

'Re-start from Asia'–or 'Asia Start-Up' in computer lingo-is a wake –up call. The ambiguity in the little 'Finnegans Wake' allows Joyce to evoke the paradoxical state of a body that is neither dead nor alive, neither corpsed nor awake. 'Asia in the world' embodies this dual state-neither self-sealing continent, dead on tribal territory, essential ground nor simply continental flow in the global wash. It is a place with its own peculiarities and a current to 'elsewhere'. This state, in terms of Sanskrit metaphysics, is both conditioned with qualities (saguna) and also a state without qualities (nirguna), condition-less Gamble alludes to the Buddhist version of this logical distinction in his reading of Tiananmen – applying it to identity 'stripped bare' of all qualities, perhaps of all ideologies too.

For her GT2008 proposal, Amy Cheung touches on the dual state through a glance at Tagore's Gitanjali: the opening 'Let my country awake!' is a plea for India to break out of it 'narrow, domestic walls', out of ancient confines and colonial subjugation in order to forge that continent-in-the-world where 'knowledge in free'. With Tagore we have the signpost of one episode in many waves of exchange India and China as they embarked on different paths to modernity. Amy's quote from the Gitanjali, sums up the dual state of identity and non-identity, being and non-being:

'I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms' hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless.'

Opera Jawa

Underwater, the tug-o-war of two continental plates cannot hold. They lose grip, split, ride up against each other glugging back the acean to the lees. Then out spews an angry flood than hurles to the coast, drowning the Asian shore.

Ezra Pound's polities and his anti-Semitism were obnoxious the pale. His translations needled the scholars let alone his 'thoughts on the Analects of Confucius', 'The Unwobbling Pivot' and the like. He got the linguists' hackles up with his penchant for pontificating on the Chinese language. To top it, and at odds with his 'attitudes', there is no let up in his dogged engagement with of 'Oriental Other' – what he called his 'decipherings'. From the eages, creative muddle of his 'ideogrammic' method an element comes up for attention today-what he saw as the opposed modalities of thinking-Confucianism and Cartesianism.

The labels are no less bag-all than 'post-colonialism'. He related the Cartesian mode to the capacity to brushes aside the particular texture of an entity, the event's singularity in order to render it in terms of general principle, the universal. Against this desiccating, abstractive mode, he pitted the Confucian way of embodying general in one swoop – a force he attributed to the 'concrete' nature of the Chinese characteristic. We are in the deep waters of a long-standing Orientalist, perhaps xerographic optic on the 'Chinese ideogram' – from Hegel on its pictorial-hieroglyphic from to Leibniz on its 'algebraic' to Derrida's reflections on its non-alphabetic, non-phonetic potential as counter to logocentric' to Derrida's reflections on its non-alphabetic. non-phonetic potential as counter to logocentric, Western metaphysics. Scholars of Chinese have been at pains explain how off the mark this is in relation to how the language actually functions. It perhaps tells us a more about ruminations on the limits of Western reason and representational systems. Today, however, the somewhat questionable distinction between the Cartesian sign and Chinese characteristics signposts the tussle with difference, between self/other to cross the epistemic divide. The concern is not so much with pointing up what is right or wrong from some fixed post-colonial stance. It is with affirming the way

concepts have to be knocked together, how the elements of know-how and no-how have to be brought into play for the 'epistemic crossing'. It is sheer creativity of the process-during which, true enough, much gets told by either side about themselves-that looms into view today. With this the visual-lingual mode that compresses the abstract-concrete that Pound attributed to Confucius: does it open up a critical chick of an alternative possibility to the increasing dominance of the retinal-computational mode?

Post-Tsunami Wake

The ocean swells, spills over drowning the Asia shore. Opera Jawa (Garin Nugroho Riyanto.2006) we might say in an after-the-deluge Wake for Asia. The swell and dip of the surf in the finale, is both threatening and soothing: nature can Intervene with brute devouring force or simply bide its time in eco-disasters yet to come. The film's backdrop is the Indian epic, Ramayana, the Abduction of Sita section. The epic is about Rama and his brothers forest exile, the snatching away of his wife, Sita, by the demon King, Ravana. The plight of Sita, who is cosmic feminine energy, is as much a volation of woman as it is of ecological equilibrium. The word Sita in Sanskrit literally means the furrow, the earth ploughed again and again. A song in the film voices the state of actual women in patriarchy as opposed to their cosmic roles as creative energies of the earth. As a Zeitdi-agnose of the Asia present, the film weaves into the epic tale everyday life and loves and conflicts of contemporary men and woman the fatal passions of Siti, Seito, Ludiro-in the bustle of trade and commerce in today's Indonesia.

In the epic, Sita's rescue can only take off once she recognizes Rama's ring shown to her by the Monkey God who is on a reconnoitre mission staking the joint of the demon king. As with Sakuntala, recognition by a token is not a reading but radiance, the blinding flash of an awakening. We are drawn in, drowned in glowing clouds of affect, orgasmic smudges, emotional charges well up and ebb through the sonic-dance-colour in the erotic mode or Rasa. The sonic flat-line of the gamelan in both its classic intensities and its contemporary surges carries this along with the Hiss and Din of its street pop forms. Elements of the Sufi and Catholic sonic-image worlds flit by mingling with the Hindu Buddhist. The sonic flat-line of crescendos without climax, source of the 1000 plateaus the body spilling beyond its organization...

A turmeric-yellow sheet, devore voile, flutters in the sea breeze. It's the bower where Siti's stabbed, a sacrifice takes place. The body-mind races fast and further into the oceanic thick the Sufis and Hindus call 'Sur'. We drift in and of its turbulence, the sound and fury of Pandemonium Asia.

Note

This essay is dedicated to my co-curators Gao Shiming and Jahnson Chang–tutors extraordinaire–from whom I have learned immeasurably. My thanks to the Research Curators, Dorothee Albrecht, Tamar Guimares, Steven Lam, Khaled Ramadan, Stina Edblom for their intelligent input and vigorous questions. To the PHD Research Group, Malmo Art Academy, Lund University, Sweden, the Solo Dance class, Universitat du Kunst, Berlin and the New Media Lab, Banff, Canada.

"Time to Unlearn": Urgency and Practical Intelligence in the Southeast Asian Museum

Patrick D. Flores

This keynote paper was originally commissioned by CIMAM – International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art and presented at the National Gallery Singapore during the CIMAM Annual Conference titled The Roles and Responsibilities of Museums in Civil Society, *in November 2017.*

Introduction

I presented this paper as one of the keynote lectures in 2017 at the CIMAM conference in Singapore. The said assembly was prompted by the concern around the role and the responsibility of museums in civil society. The anxiety over the relationship of the museum with a broadly conceived body politic within a critically formulated socius has always shaped the program of a museum, or any related affective apparatus, sensitive to the demands of its public and in the same vein open to enlist that public in difficult conversations on subjectivity and the political work of deliberation. This situation may well offer up a foil to the public sphere routinely instrumentalized by interests like the market or ideology.

It is interesting to note that a year after this keynote, I was appointed to serve as Artistic Director of the Singapore Biennale of 2019. In my 2017 presentation, I tried to propose a modality of unlearning in the Southeast Asian museum through the work of four figures who would lay bare the limits and contingencies of institutionality and, within or through it, create certain conditions of productive practice, one that was not necessarily beholden to the dialectical tradition of negative critique, or to the affirmative politics of the co-production of global modernities. This was both an art-historiographic and museologic gesture, responding to the exigency to write a history of exhibitions through the curatorial agency and the analysis of museums through the economy of complicity.

I pursued this line of reflection in the Singapore Biennale 2019 through three approaches: the procedure through "roots, basics, beginnings" foregrounded by the artist-curator-thinker Raymundo Albano; the political premise of "every step in the right direction" by the anti-American revolutionary Salud Algabre; and the curatorial aesthetic of the festival-seminar, a cross between Albano and Beuys, in which urgency and thoughtfulness would congeal. All this inflected the pervading schema of the ethical and the geopoetic, a way to speak to an inter-species world that requires fundamental transformation with patience, and the instinct for that vital step in the reworking of the world.

The desire of the 2019 edition of the Singapore Biennale was to enhance the capacity of its location, which was Singapore in the context of Southeast Asia, to produce a setting for contemporary art and to convey the energy of this environment to a wider creative atmosphere across the world. The biennial is a productive platform to concretize this desire because it lies at the intersection of the art world, the public sphere, academic production, popular culture, and social movements. Biennials today struggle with the condition of the world and the condition through which the world is expressed in art. It seeks to engage a wider audience beyond the art world and involves practitioners from a range of disciplines. Beyond the excitement, however, biennials also struggle with fatigue and repetition.

Much of what we know about modern Southeast Asia has been constructed by colonialism, wars, revolutions, and the geopolitics of the Cold War. Beyond this axis, Southeast Asia could actually cover a larger territory. This limited geopolitical construction would be further amplified in projects of nationalism and regionalism across the twentieth century. Southeast Asia is linked to the civilizational discourses of China and India, Catholicism and Islam (home to the only Catholic nation in Asia, the Philippines, and the world's largest Islamic population, Indonesia); it experiences intense economic

activity (if seen as a region, it is the sixth largest economy in the world) and dense natural history that is close to the level of the Amazon. In other words, there is exceptional difference underlying the region, thus this concept of regionality needs to be thought through delicately and not merely repeated as a given order of things.

As Artistic Director, I imagined the Biennale to reach out to a wider public sphere. At the same time, I imagined that public to also ask questions about its interlocution of the Biennale platform. This is why I insinuated an intersection between a festival and a seminar, a common ground in which contemporary art can belong to a more open sensible life, on the one hand, and to a moment of a more critical appreciation of the experience of art, on the other.

The 2019 Singapore Biennale moved away from the thematization of its material. It refused and did not encourage the question: What is the biennale about? The biennale is not about something; it instead performs a proposition and does not instrumentalize the art to become mere functions or illustrations of the theme. To carry this out, I was guided by a method that allowed me to concretize the geopoetic and the ethical gesture of art: to evoke the place of Southeast Asia and beyond as a generator of contemporary art and to present works from this place as a way to remap the world as a project of reconstruction, a kind of making right what, for instance, colonialism and globalization have distorted or denied. This method took me to two phrases: one is a title of the exhibition in Manila in the 1970s and the other the title of Singapore Biennale 2019.
The first phrase is: roots, basics, beginnings. It is taken from an exhibition by the artist-curator Raymundo Albano. The idea of Roots, Basics, Beginnings proceeds from the effort of Albano in the late seventies to explain what is happening in a contemporary work of art, or a work of contemporary art, and why it is in the world. It was a way for Albano, who was then curating the visual art spaces at the Cultural Center of the Philippines to introduce a general public to the various forms of contemporary art or the art of the present time in a world that in Albano's words was "suddenly turning visible." He organized an exhibition of the same title around this idea and focused on three categories of possibility for the work of contemporary art; and these are roots, basics, beginnings.

Now the second phrase, which is the title of the Biennale. The 2019 Singapore Biennale is titled "Every Step in the Right Direction." The line came from Salud Algabre, a Filipino woman, a militant seamstress, involved in the peasant movement in the 1930s in the Philippines. The political action that this movement waged was perceived to have failed. When a scholar years later hinted at this failure in an interview with Algabre, she would rectify the impression by saying that, "No uprising fails. Each one is a step in the right direction." For me, this signifies a movement that is successive and sustained but not necessarily progressive and one requiring rupture as in the avant-garde contemplation.

To perform this ethical agency, the Biennale worked with the Singaporean artist Amanda Heng. For her project in this year's Biennale, Heng returned to the scene of the walk and to think though "the assumption of the body as the fixated object/subject in live art practice, and the reality of the aging body in the face of its own growth, and the impact of rapid changes of the external world brought about by new technology, information, challenges and values. The focus is shifted from the physical body to the inner sources and the spiritual dimension and intangibles, the ethical, values, beliefs and to rediscover the natural instinct for resistance, healing, survival and renewal."[1]

As the director of the Biennale, I wished to explore the ability of a method to shape the Biennale and to resist the temptation to merely thematize the spectacle of contemporary art. Such a method introduces this double, but not binary, movement between the ethical and the geopoetic. The Biennale became an opportunity to remember and honor the struggle and the joy of Salud Algabre and Amanda Heng who had come from different historical climates and cultural genealogies, brought together in the event in Singapore as contemporaries, as they intuited a feminist poetics and politics that would hopefully enliven the imagination of what it means to be political in the bodily decision to do what is right in our everyday waking and walking life.

This ecology of relations, is, to quote Elizabeth Povinelli, "neither a part nor a whole but a series of entangled intensities [...] Once the multiplicity of entities are oriented to each other as a set of entangled substances [...] this sense of entanglement exerts a localizing force."[2] And speaking of ecology, apart

from the exhibitionary program of the Biennale, the Coordinates Projects ran parallel. It was a suite of initiations from the ground in Singapore and elsewhere that I did not want to conveniently assimilate into a biennial framework. I wanted their organicity and idiosyncrasy to calibrate the biennial form so that I could ultimately acknowledge the cultural work done by peers and colleagues in spite of the Biennale. I chose organizations focused on heritage; moving image; and performance to supplement what the Biennale had lacked: a long-term and robust interaction with the locality and the audience, which is not necessarily affixed to the art world, that has been formed over time. Liaising with two theater groups of Brechtian and Asian disposition, a cinematheque, a Eurasian library, an Indian heritage museum, and a tour group based in the red-light district of Singapore was immensely instructive. And this is where we are at: the possible localizing force of the biennial through the steps taken within the intimate realms of the self and the worldly geopoetic terrains of an exuding ecology. As the art and the audience of the biennial resolve to take these ethical steps, the "dynamics of towardness" begins, in the words of Ranajit Guha, with "its characteristic movements of inclining, approaching, and approximating [...] in a lateral solidarity."[3] Edgewise, or from side to side, and in a transversal way, the steps verge on each other in the right direction.

I wish to say at the outset that this conference is right to reclaim a sense of the common ground of responsibility. Because we are made to confront responsibility, the common ground is necessarily intersubjective and therefore difficult to inhabit because it is exceptionally social. Whether we regard this ground as the public sphere or the civil society, what is raised in high relief is the desire for collective thoughtfulness. This desire entails a process of persistent persuasion that prepares those who take part not only to be different or differentiated, but more importantly to be patiently deliberative and daringly comparative, to be strongly poised to unsettle the security of the self. In light of this prospect, I thought what could be a better place to begin this reflection on the mediation of the museum, and therefore, of the modern identity of the reflexive self than the nineteenth-century classroom in the Southeast Asian colony. It is a classroom that morphs into a museum, or what its precursor might resemble, in the form of the cabinet or vitrine that contains the equipment of science. The Philippine polymath patriot Jose Rizal, who later would become the National Hero, writes in the 1891 novel *El Filibusterismo*, translated as *The Reign of Greed* by Charles Derbyshire, a chapter titled "The Class in Physics." Rizal first describes the nearly clinical classroom and then zeroes in on an intervening substance of both enigma and disdain that reveals and obscures, excludes and invites, under the auspices of the curate-curator who presides over this precinct of learning. The school is the University of Santo Tomas, which began to be formed in 1605 and became a university in 1645. According to Rizal:

> "The walls, painted white and covered with glazed tiles to prevent scratches, were entirely bare, having neither a drawing nor a picture, nor even an outline of any physical apparatus. The students had no need of any, no one missed the practical instruction in an extremely experimental science; for years and years it has been so taught and the country has not been upset, but continues just as ever. Now and then some little instrument descended from heaven and was exhibited to the class from a distance, like the monstrance to the prostrate worshipers—look, but touch not! From time to time, when some complacent professor appeared, one day in the year was set aside for visiting the mysterious laboratory and gazing from without at the puzzling apparatus arranged in glass cases. No one could complain, for on that day there were to be seen quantities of brass and glassware, tubes, disks, wheels, bells, and the like—the exhibition did not get beyond that, and the country was not upset.
>
> Besides, the students were convinced that those instruments had not been purchased for them—the friars would be fools! The laboratory was intended to be shown to the visitors and the high officials who came from the Peninsula, so that upon seeing it they would nod their heads with satisfaction, while their guide would smile, as if to say, "Eh, you thought you were going to find some backward monks! Well, we're right up with the times—we have a laboratory!"[4]

This is an exemplary situation of learning, relearning, and unlearning. It can be read as an allegory of regulated seeing and representing, of being in the same place of the device but is distanced from it as if the thing were a religious monstrance and the person, a prostrate secular subject. Rizal here juxtaposes colonial pretensions to a supposedly transparent enlightenment

fig 1. Universidad de Manila: Gabinete de Física (Álbum *Vistas de la Universidad y Colegios de Santo Tomas, San Juan de Letrán, San José y Santa Catalina*), 1887. BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL, Madrid.

with the opacity of sensory prohibitions and privileges. A key element in this moment is the simultaneously alienating and alluring glass, the modern surface that offers the illusion of transparency and heightens the desire for property. This "vitreous view," according to the art historian Lihong Liu, becomes a site to analyze both "materiality and mediality": how the object predisposes the body in space to think of its presence in the world.[5] Lihong Liu meticulously annotates this instance in the context of Chinese art and argues: "Viewers would encounter this paradox with constant decision making and bodily coordination as their embodied eyes move between the enclosure and open space, adjusting their positions between distant looking and close scrutiny."[6] Such allegory takes on a political layer when it threatens the discourse of enlightenment and demystifies the latter as a discourse of denial, or at least an ambience of temptations and appearances, of merely beholding and not touching and not using. This unnerving proto-museological moment anticipates what we call in our time the "economy of enrichment," defined by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre as "forms of wealth creation that are based on an economic exploitation of the past, in the form of craft, heritage, tradition, identity or, more largely, culture. The idea of enrichment refers to the act of improving the value of something, but we should also understand it in its material connotation, as when we speak of the enrichment of mineral ore."[7] The economy of enrichment, therefore, takes us to the heart of the nature of the historical, the mystification of culture in the museum, and its valuation as a "collection form."[8]

I begin with the episode from Jose Rizal's novel that is tangential to the birth of the Philippine nation because it implicates a range of institutions of the modern, of art, of the museum, of the modern art museum, and the civil sphere of responsibilities. Public instruction in Rizal's fictional classroom was an achievement of the nineteenth century, and the University of Santo Tomas, the oldest existing University in Asia, mobilized both secular and religious authority that came together in the Catholic and colonial university (fig. 1). An order on secondary education in 1865 prescribed that only the Royal College of St. Thomas Aquinas of the Dominicans and the Ateneo Municipal of the Jesuits could have "a Gabinete de Fisica, a Laboratorio de Quimica with machines and instruments indispensable for good teaching, and a Museo de Historia Natural, in which besides the local products, there must be a classified collection of Zoology and another of Mineralogy."[9] The rearing of nature and the extraction of earth for industry and their relationship with the priming of culture as the principal medium of subjectivity are implicit here. Jose Rizal attended the said schools and then traveled to Heidelberg to become a physician of the eye.

What should be worth exploring finally is that the incident of the student looking at the scientific artifice through the glass leads us to the image and its political theology and not to art and its aesthetic. I think this is a more productive way to initiate the history of art: not to commence with art and the theory of its autonomy, but with image and the ways in which it is animated and alienated at the same time by the mediation of the classroom-museum and its promise of emancipation. After all, as alluded to by Rizal, the Catholic university had the potential of being breeding ground of a post-colonial consciousness that would upset the colonial order.[10] As one bishop had observed: "Every student from Manila who returns to the town of his province is a rebel."[11] The interrelationship between the critique of colonial pedagogy in the classroom that leads to the ferment of the national and nationalist mind in the student is salient in the argument that the classroom-museum is a laboratory of the history of art, history of nature, history of science, history of industry, and history of nation. By viewing these as modes of extracting and tracing birthrights, of abstraction and human intervention, we can reflect on the nature of the history of art and the modern museum in Southeast Asia as a formation of both material and medium like the glass that is the delicate surface of contact between the gaze and the ideal.

This might have been quite a circuitous way to reach the phrase in the title of this paper. I needed the birth of

the museum in the colony to reflect on the gaze and its history and make it co-extensive with the birth of other structures of visibility. For instance, the birth of the clinic, or the teaching hospital in the eighteenth century, in the work of Michel Foucault, refers to the medical gaze. It was a gaze, according to Foucault, that was not "bound by the narrow grid of structure [...] but that could and should grasp colors, variations, tiny anomalies, always receptive to the deviant [...] it was a gaze that was not content to observe what was self-evident [...] it was calculating."[12] Foucault is led to conclude that "the technical armature of the medical gaze is transformed into advice about prudence, taste, skill: what is required is 'great sagacity,' 'great attention,' 'great precision,' 'great skill,' 'great patience.'"[13] The aesthetic and the scientific, therefore, condensed in the gaze in the classroom and the teaching hospital.

It is only through a reconsideration of seeing that we can propose a process of relearning, as the theme of this session indicates. And as it was place that proved central in the class in physics in nineteenth-century Manila, it is time that is required to relearn the physics of art and culture in the seventies, also in Manila. This brings me to the practice of Raymundo Albano (fig. 2). By 1970, Albano was the director of the museum at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. He looked after borrowed collections of ethnographic materials; programed interdisciplinary spaces; published a serial; and curated a variety of exhibitions. In 1979, he curated *A Decade of Developmental Art* for which he wrote an essay assessing what he meant by "developmental art": that is, expression that was experimental and advanced. According to Albano, the museum:

> established an image of contemporariness, high [on] risks, low on establishment shows [...] It is this image of risk-taking that brought 58,000 paying visitors to the Center last year, and more this year, most of them coming back for the next 'puzzling' shows. The apparent interest is in keeping with our motives of providing didactic material—something that tries to involve the intelligence of the artist and the audience, a fine curatorial control, but still leaving some fringes that fascinate our desire for the Beautiful Unknown.[14]

The latter may have taken:

> the form of hardly tested materials. Earth, sand, raw wood, and other by-products of nature serve as oils and canvasses. Arrangements and methodologies spring from enlightened polemics. Any which way new ideas receive accusations [...] The need to introduce more contemporary ideas is logical as the activities of an art community become more developed. The measure of an institution is its contribution to the development of its concerns. Art, in this sense, is developmental.[15]

fig 2. Raymundo Albano

Albano, aside from administering the museum, wrote poetry and criticism, designed theater sets and posters, painted, and made prints. His artistic and curatorial inclinations interpenetrated. In another essay, Albano explicates the historical context of the developmental:

> Philippine Art in the seventies went into the crossroads. Art became big business. It promoted all sorts of styles and disciplines. But it bred a new group of artists who were more responsive to the time, meaning, to the social, economic, and [esthetic] requirements of the people. It was a time of questioning roots—a time to once again, as in our government and people, assert the Filipino identity. And so it was a time to unlearn.[16]

I am drawn to the phrase "time to unlearn" because it offers layers and senses of time. Time here could be of the present and therefore of the position of the present. Time could be opportunity, a chance to take action. And time could be an imperative, an urgency: that it is not just a matter of present-ness or position; opportunity or chance, but the ethical response of an agency to a critical condition, or *krísis* in Ancient Greek that is the root of the modernist critique. Time, therefore, is performative and political. In Albano's mind, it was timely to question. But it was at the same time untimely, as the gesture of unlearning went against the prevailing pedagogy, against the teaching, or the scripture, of the time. These calibrations between timeliness and untimeliness meant that the curatorial intervention was set within a particular duration, rhythm, and a direction or cycle. It might have been alternating, scalar, serial, and not necessarily emerging from the coveted rupture or radical break of the western avant-garde. A performative, or even a trickster institutionality, enacts this alternating dynamic—successive but not necessarily progressive, reversive but not immediately subversive.

Albano worked at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, opened in 1969, that was envisioned by the First Lady Imelda Marcos as a "Parthenon" built on a "land reclaimed from the past."[17] The abstractionist and cultural administrator Arturo Luz thought of the Cultural Center as the main node in the network of spaces for art radiating across the country. Luz sketched out a plan for access to what he called "community or neighborhood centers of art."[18] To overcome the "stigma of elitism," the design was low-cost, easily constructed, accessible, informal, flexible, and conducive "to active use and participation by the entire community."[19] Albano found his place in Imelda Marcos's institution and harnessed his subjectivity to mediate the tension between a Martial Law regime that suppressed the body politic and the desire for experiment that emancipated art from its" artness" or "arthood". He sharpened his instincts in relation to the incipient unrest of the social and the institution that tried to be as restive as it unsettled the complacencies of art. Do we say then that Albano was torn between these sympathies? I will not use the word "complicit"; instead, I would say he was "co-implicated". In Albano's program, three aspects interspersed: the artists and their community; the audience; and the museum. In his mind, the presentation of contemporary ideas should transpire in the context of a "learning public."[20] While the public was imagined to be in a state of learning, the art was thought to be in a condition of unlearning.

fig 3. Imelda Marcos at an opening ceremony, assisted by Raymundo Albano (in black)

Moreover, the developmental might best be performed by the reclamation itself of land from the sea and the production of space for the arts, cultural events, and international conventions on the waterfront as it had happened in Phnom Penh in the sixties and is progressing in Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi as we speak. The Cultural Center of the Philippines was part of a massive reclamation project that also saw the relocation of slums in the area so that an international metropolis could rise. Here, the modernity of development intersected with the nature of artistic experiment and the ideology of beauty embodied by a prominent political patron. The way Imelda Marcos projected herself as an incarnation of mythological beauty absorbed in the sign system of Philippine national identity cohered with the internationalist brutalism that her favored architectural style flaunted (fig. 3). Both the sculptural Imelda and brutalist architecture, while surely modes of artifice, appeared natural. In fact, Leandro Locsin, architect of the Cultural Center, was remembered by his son as saying that "reinforced concrete is our country's 'natural material' because of its ample supply, economy, durability, beauty, and the skill that the Filipino craftsman inherently possesses to render it artistically."[21]

Albano appropriated the term "developmental" from the government, a term for activities "that had the nature of being under fast-action plans. The building of roads[,] population control or the establishment of security units for instance, have to be done quickly, within a period of days."[22] According to Albano: "The implication of a fast-action learning method is similar to that of developmental art" by way of "stimulating public minds and the same time allowing the artists to question and investigate with their work. [...] It made one relatively aware of an environment suddenly turning visible."[23]

fig 4.1 & 4.2. Views of exhibition Rupa dan Jiwa (Form and Soul)

In trying to speak to this session's intentions to relearn Southeast Asia, the region that must be simultaneously reconceptualized with the modernity of the modern art institution, I would like to constellate Albano with three other figures who had been engaged with the thinking through and making of institutions, discourses, and relations. These figures express and work on the anxiety to release the local from its nativism; invest it with distinction; and dispose it to possess equivalent integrity. They translate worldliness in different registers.

The first figure is Syed Ahmad Jamal, an artist who in 1979 curated an exhibition titled *Rupa dan Jiwa* ("Form and Soul"), at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (figs. 4.1 & 4.1). According to T.K. Sabapathy: "It was to be an attempt at constructing a tradition—the authentic Malay tradition in visual form. Artifacts from Malay culture were presented as objects for aesthetic contemplation; here was a rich, culturally and emotionally charged, reservoir of resources."[24] Ahmad Mashadi walks us through the contexts of the exhibition. First is the belief of Ungku Aziz, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya, in "the indelible qualities of the Malay design and creation [...] the uniqueness of the Malay form."[25] Malay visual form was thought to be

fig 5. Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Umpan (The Bait),* 1959, oil on canvas. Collection of Balai Seni Visual Negara

signified by "584 objects consisting of weapons, textiles, earthenware, silver ornaments, and implements."[26] The second context is "the rise of global Islam in the 1970s—highlighted by the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 Iranian Revolution" that "prompted newer interests in Islamic art and Muslim cultures."[27] The undercurrent of these contexts would be the 1971 National Cultural Policy that declared Malay and indigenous culture as primordial and yet interacting with the outside world; and that Islam was central in the national culture.

It is in Jamal's breathtaking encyclopedia that we see the effort of a Southeast Asian artist to strike a stance in relation to the politics of identity as formulated by the state or the religious establishment, or by both. Jamal likewise attempted to reference civilizational discourse to critique the primacy of the colonial or the western without necessarily being its binary opposite. The civilization here is coded as Malay and Islamic. But Jamal in his own practice as an abstractionist cites American modernism as compatible with the Malay character (fig. 5). He wrote that the Malaysian artists gravitated around abstract expressionism because its "immediacy and mystical quality" suited the "Malaysian temperament, sensitivity and cultural heritage, and with the tradition of calligraphy found the idiom the ideal means of pictorial individuation."[28] He considered Abstract Expressionism a "catharsis, a direct form of release" and that it was not a "borrowed idiom" but rather a "natural means [...] a natural development from the loose atmospheric forms of the early watercolors."[29] Interestingly, Raymundo Albano would characterize "installation" as akin to childhood urges and that it was more Philippine than painting or sculpture. The

international, therefore, was perceived to liberate the local from the western and allowed agents like Jamal and Albano to struggle with the language of an inter- or trans-local discourse. The said struggle simultaneously absorbs and sublimates the expectations of this discourse, and in the process, helps them enliven an immune system that mediates any foreign stimulus and renders its effect self-limiting and not necessarily pathogenic or pathological, a vector of disease, contaminating, and corruptive.

In the excursions of Jamal as artist and curator, we get a sense of how a geopoetic imagination through craft or a cosmology of making can unhinge the modern from western modernism without refusing it altogether. We are reminded as well of the Indonesian artist Sudjojono who advances the phrase "jiwa ketok," or visible soul. To intertwine "rupa dan jiwa" with "jiwa ketok" is to introduce a different art historical and curatorial outlook: to visualize the soul, or to make it visible and endow it with form, or subject it to what the art historian Stanley O'Connor calls the "speculative investigation" into its "nature and destiny."[30]

The next figure is Chumpon Apisuk, an artist and organizer who, after his studies in the United States, worked for the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art in Bangkok in Thailand. The Institute, named after the influential Italian mentor Silpa Bhirasri[31], was founded in 1974 as it merged with the Mekpayab Art Center set up by the Princess Pantip Chumbhot. It was mainly a space for presentations of artistic projects from Thailand and elsewhere. Around 1984, Apisuk was appointed assistant director and, through his collaboration with the director of the Institute, started Wethi Samai or "Contemptre", which consisted of experimental theater and workshops on art, drama, poetry, and music. Artists were able to carry out performance, happenings, open-air sculptures, and related expressions. A crucial creative agent in this matrix was Apisuk whose initiations in Thai public life had been exemplary. According to him, his "expressive principle is based on the operational method [...] I express as I make a step. I express something meaningful to myself as I walk along. What I present reflects my expression. That thing is not art, nor is it non-art. My presentation is but an interpretation of my research work that transforms itself into a concept, or an object or a set of data."[32] From this framework, he would proceed to explore trajectories into what he calls "happening—pure communication."[33] What is important about discussing the work of Apisuk is that, alongside his artistic acumen, is the history of the Institute itself that emerged at a time of political crisis and compelling activism in 1973 when a Thai military dictator was deposed. Among the cogent presentations at the Institute were: the Third Dhamma Group exhibition in 1976 titled *Art of the People*, which opened the day before the October 1976 massacre; the exhibition of Apinan Poshyananda in 1985 titled *How to Explain Art to A Bangkok Cock* comprising objects, video, silkscreen, and live chickens and turkeys; the exhibition of Kamol Phaosavasdi in 1985 *Song for the Dead* which included firecrackers, sound sculpture, and his act of throwing black paint on Andy Warhol projections.

As it was in the turbulent seventies, a similar flash point of violence occurred in 1992 to which Apisuk's work acutey responded. He helped organize the City Art League that staged communicative action in the streets, shopping centers, parks, and public paces. In the same year, he opened The Concrete House, a performative space managed by the Naam Che-Wit project for persons with HIV and AIDS, a severe problem at that time in Thailand. According to Apisuk:

> The combination of AIDS and Art at The Concrete House is a new phenomenon in art circles. It is also a new element in the handling of AIDS to intermingle it with with movement in art. More importantly, it is one more effort that helps Thai contemporary art circles to develop broader perspectives and more diverse themes and to be in step with the brave and alert new generations.[34]

Earlier in 1985, he worked with Empower with his partner Chantawipa on the human rights of sex workers and in 1988 formed the Tap Root Society in Chiang Mai. In 1998, Apisuk set up Asiatopia, a performance art festival that has been instrumental in creating a network of practitioners in the field in the region (fig. 6).

What the practice of Apisuk demonstrates is the impulse of the artist-curator to heighten the relationality of the public of art by widening the entry points of possible interest and participation. One way to do this is to restore the ecology of creative practice through an expansive field of disciplines. Apisuk endeavored to convene different disciplines in one space and made porous the artificial boundaries of artistic categories. A central dynamic in Apisuk's program was extensity and an experiment with what can be intuited as civil society or the public sphere by way of the copious term

fig 6. Asiatopia performance, 1998

fig 7. David Medalla protesting at the opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1969

"movement," either through non-government organizations or artist collectives.

The last figure of the presentation is meant to follow through Raymundo Albano's work at the Cultural Center. When the Center opened in 1969, David Medalla staged a lightning protest within striking distance of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and their guests then Governor Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy. He unfurled the banner, "A bas la mystification, Down with Philistines" (fig. 7). The first line is instructive to the extent that it centralizes the construction of culture, the modes by which it naturalizes a way of life. To resist mystification is to deconstruct the mystification of the cultural authority that represents the social person or to fix the person in the uniqueness of heritage that is then assimilated into a nation-state identity and a global economy of enrichment. I bring in Medalla primarily because I want to generate tension between the institution and the subjectivity of the agents who mediate it. Medalla accomplishes this task exceptionally well because aside from inciting the necessary frisson to expose the contingency of the institution, he reconstructs the public sphere through his own practice of art-world bricolage. As a maker of relations beginning in the mid-Sixties, of which the work "Stitch in Time" (1967) was emblematic, the migrant Medalla was involved in global constellations of collaborations between art and science such as the Centre for Advanced Creative Study that led to the space Signals Gallery in London and the *Signals Newsbulletin*. Artists from different parts of the world converged in Medalla's orbit in London through convergences such as Artists for Democracy and The Exploding Galaxy. Finally, Medalla conceived the elusive, improvisational London Biennale that was first held in 2000. Medalla confides that it was during the 2nd Johannesburg Biennial directed by Okwui Enwezor in 1997 that he thought of the London Biennale. According to him: "At Cape Town in 1997, I thought it was time to create a viable and memorable platform for the world's 'marginal artists' [...] a biennale that would be open to every artist regardless of age, sex, ethnic origin, and artistic language or style."[35] In the words of Guy Brett, the London Biennale "carnivalizes" the biennale institution in which "to participate [...] was a poetic rather than a bureaucratic act."[36]

The work of Raymundo Albano, Syed Ahmad Jamal, Chumpon Apisuk, and David Medalla forms an arc from the sixties through the nineties in Southeast Asia. This is an arc of both artistic and curatorial practice by interlocutors, assemblagists, cultural workers, and intrepid initiators who sorted out the apprehensions of modernity but were able to do more than merely secure its negation. They were able to overcome the critique and redistributed criticality across what Albano called an "ecumenical situation" in which they recovered the "integrity and intelligence" of the local or the personal, positioning it in relation to that which exceeds it, and in the process achieving depth, density, latitude, edge, and risk as artists, in a text that may have been co-written by Albano, become "inventors, magicians, artificers, seers, thinkers, even clowns in constant search of renewal, discovery, and accomplishment."[37]

What we might relearn from these Southeast Asian figures is that the idea of learning itself is honed within multiple agencies within the structure. I call this intense co-implication in which the person who assumes

curatorial roles and gains curatorial effects refunction, translate, or remediate structural prerogatives. The agency here becomes polytropic, taking on different figurations and is in the process of variable turning. In many ways, this modality of learning is self-teaching. Where in most parts of the region, curatorial or museological education is not fully formalized, many of the most interestingly idiosyncratic curators had been self-taught, a condition that has enabled them to embody the bureaucracy and not oppose it as if it were a burden or an impediment. The nimbleness, agility, or artfulness of this agent reveals a *metis*. James Scott turns to the word *metis*, which he translates as practical knowledge that is decisively local and that is related to mutuality derived from the anarchist lexicon. He concludes that democracy rests on the "assumption that the metis of its citizenry should, in mediated form, continually modify the laws and policies of the land."[38]

As I began this presentation with the university and the museum, so will I end it with the university museum where I work both as an art historian and a curator. It revisits the exceptional question of Jacques Derrida: "Today, how can we not speak of the university?"[39] Derrida makes an urgent plea for reflection or critique that the university guarantees, something that "must make its way through the very objects we work with, shaping them as it goes, along with our norms, procedures, and aims."[40] While it needs to be intimate with the society it performs, the university can only aspire to this intimacy if it offers the chance "for dissociation."[41] As Derrida puts it: "Keep the memory and keep the chance."[42] The university, therefore, may be described as being all over, timely and untimely, an ubiquitist, or a professor at-large in Derrida's grammar, an agency that is embedded and emergent. The curator Clementine Deliss proposes the notion of a museum-university, invoking Joseph Beuys who states: "I want to turn museums into universities that have a department for objects... The museum could offer the first model for an ongoing (or permanent) conference on cultural issues."[43] This permanent or ongoing conference is crucial in carving out practical intelligence and urgency.

The museum-university or the classroom-museum or the museum-laboratory should inform the relearning procedure in Southeast Asia, instilling among agents a highly engaged intellectual position and a curatorial instinct that eludes the easy capture of either liberal affirmation or critical negation. We had felt this dynamic in the alternative and artist-initiated spaces in the region beginning in the late nineties. And we are currently sensing in Southeast Asia a strongly motivated generation of practitioners who have explored the time and space of the collective, the residency, the archive, and the discourse platform as vehicles of relearning.

I end this presentation by coming back to Jose Rizal's "The Class in Physics" in which a derisive friar-professor unravels the lesson of the day by probing his students on the classification of mirrors as being strictly either of metal or of glass. He asks: If a particular surface like wood or marble were to acquire a certain sheen or polish, would it be considered a mirror? Or if mercury were to be scraped off the back of the mirror and replaced with another substance, might the mirror still exist? The students are understandably confounded, even made more so when the teacher tosses into the discussion a specific kind of wood, the *kamagong*, or a specific kind of substitute, the *bibingka* or rice cake. I think Rizal here allegorizes the teacher's painful technique of diminishing colonial subjects by transposing them into things that cannot fit into categories and therefore cannot be represented through the colonial optic. In other words, they cannot be mirrors and represent themselves, because they are impenetrable like hard wood and glutinous or viscous like rice cake. But the students reinscribe the materiality and mediality of the racialized hard wood and rice cake in the current ecology and the post-colonial future. This compellingly comes through when one of the students offers something totally unknown or unknowable. According to him: "The mirror of kamagong (the hard wood) is among the mirrors of wood." With this utterance of both impossible *langue* and *parole*, genus and species, that overturns the inviolable taxonomy, the nature of the historical intervenes in the production of a different world; and the metaphysics of the teacher dissolves in the physics of the student, in his ability to take physics to its word as an experimental science of how the world behaves relationally from force to force. Surely, this episode in the classroom-museum touches on the difficult deeds of sensing, representing, speaking on behalf of others, comparing, recognizing, and so on. Jose Rizal saw the laboratory in the university as testifying to the "altura del siglo," or peak of the century, translated into Tagalog by Patricio Mariano as "kapantay ng mga kasalukuyan," or "equal with contemporaries," a "parity among equals," a "co-presence" of present-day people.[44] Like the much-maligned students of the curate-curator and the inspiring personas of Albano, Jamal, Apisuk, and Medalla and their mutating, calibrating, incremental, wide-ranging, sociable, kinetic, and provocative practice, we have to take risks when we

decide to return the gaze and become co-present and impertinent, when we relearn the order of things and become persons who order things differently. Only by doing so that we will be able to take hold of the time to unlearn and finally let go, or unlearn, the time itself of the modern, its art, and its museum. Distracted from that time, we will find another physics and another class, another cosmos of learning, nothing less than another nature of how we play out our work.

Notes

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4 Jose Rizal, *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed), trans. Charles Derbyshire (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912), 115.
5 See Lihong Liu, "Vitreous Views: Materiality and Mediality of Glass in Qing through a Transcultural Prism," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 8 (2016): 17-38.
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12 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), 89.
13 Claude Roucher-Deratte, *Leçons sur l'art d'observer* (Paris: 1807), 87-99. Quoted in Foucault, ibid., 121.
14 Raymundo Albano, "A Decade of Developmental Art," Exh. Cat. (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1979), n.p.
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21 Devi De Veyra, "Leandro Locsin's Brutal Opera," *Rogue*, October 2015.
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23 Ibid.
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Singapore Biennale, 2019
Artistic Director: Patrick D. Flores

Chang En-Man and John Tung at *Snail Paradise – A Gastronomic Experience*. Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Hafiz Rancajale, *Social Organism*, 2017–2019 (installation view) Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Jen Liu, *Artwork Activation of Pink Slime Caesar Shift: Gold Edition*, 2019. Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Boedi Widjaja, *Black–Hut, Black–Hut,* 2019.
Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Artistic Director Tour at Singapore Biennale 2019.
Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang, *La Camera Insabbiata (The Chalkroom),* 2017

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Untitled (Theresa's last work),* 1983 (presentation opposite Petros Moris' work); Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

Gillman Barrack, *Block 22;* Ruangsak Anuwatwimon, *Reincarnations (Hope Sangal)* in foreground.
Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Post-Museum, *Bukit Brown Index #132 Triptych of the Unseen.*
Photo: Courtesy of the Artists.

Phare, the Battambang Circus, *Phum Style* (performance), 2005, 2019;
Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Phare, the Battambang Circus, *Phum Style* (performance).
Photo: Courtesy of the Artists.

LASALLE College of the Arts, Earl Lu Gallery; Gary-Ross Pastrana, *Properties* in foreground.
Photo: Courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Curatorial 'Tactic': Reflections on the Dialogues of the 12th Shanghai Biennale

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Founded in 1996, Shanghai Biennale is the first contemporary art exhibition officially recognized and supported by the government of China.[1] As a large-scale art exhibition, the inauguration and development of the Shanghai Biennale is one of the reflections of contemporary Chinese era and society, and has witnessed the vigorous development of China's economy and culture.

Since the mid-1990s, increasingly biennales around the world have triggered 'cultural phenomena', which are closely related to cross-cultural discussions between art and society.[2] Similarly, in the past two decades, Shanghai Biennale has gradually legalized contemporary art and expanded the acceptance by audiences in China. However, the production of contemporary art exhibitions in China still lacks a mature system that takes curatorial practices into consideration. Shanghai Biennale as a large-scale art project led by the official organization must first consider how to ensure the 'safe production of the exhibition' and to attract more audiences after the opening of the exhibition. This is because this curation system not only constitutes a part of the implementation of the exhibition, but also represents the blurred boundary between art and society, which also makes contemporary art curation full of experiments and challenges.

In 2018, the 12th Shanghai Biennale *Proregress* (禹步 *or 'Yubu'*) with innovative significance was held at the Power Station of Art (PSA) in Shanghai. [3] The exhibition respected complex cultures and strove to push the limits of 'artistic possibility' in China.[4] Prior to the opening of the Biennale, young curators of the Shanghai Curators Lab (SCL)[5] including ourselves had dialogues with the curatorial team of the Biennale, including Cuauhtémoc Medina (Chief Curator of the 12th Shanghai Biennale) and Hantao Shi (Chief Coordinator of the 12th Shanghai Biennale). We discussed curatorial methods and strategies of curators, exhibition organizers and staffs of art biennales in China, as well as the impacts of the institutions on the local art ecology. This article attempts to explore the influence of the Biennale on the legal construction of contemporary art through the development and complexity of Shanghai Biennale in the past 20 years, as well as the dialogues and reflection of art and curatorial responsibility under the 'tactic' of exhibition curating.

A Brief History of Shanghai Biennale and Curation

Shanghai Biennale began as the first large-scale modern art exhibition after the Chinese Avant-Garde Exhibition in 1989.[6] Its purpose was to "establish a state-level pattern for fine arts shows' based on 'the prestige of government conduct".[7] In 1996, the first Biennale theme was *Open Space* (开放的空间) and included sculptures, paintings and installation works. The exhibition was planned by the Shanghai Art Museum (SAM) and sponsored by the Shanghai Municipal Government.[8] SAM was a one of the

fig. 1: Shanghai Art Museum, 2000-2010.

fig. 2: Shanghai Power Station of Art.

national museums, and it was the initial place to display artworks in the center of Shanghai [fig.1]. The original Shanghai Biennale was composed of an organization committee and artistic committee, and most members came from the Shanghai Artist Association (上海市美协) and the China Artists Association (中国美术家协会).[9] The first and second sessions (1996 and 1998) of Shanghai Biennale were mandated on the formal National Fine Arts Exhibition[10] and they kept 'Fine Art' (美术 or Meishu) in the middle-name of Shanghai Biennale, like '96 Shanghai Meishu Shuangnianzhan (96 上海美术双年展)' [Exhibition of the 1996 Shanghai Biennale].[11] The previous two Shanghai Biennials has official promoted the Chinese modern art to the world, and in order to easily understood by the audiences, the first biennale focused on exhibiting the traditional oil paintings and later presented Chinese ink paintings respectively.[12]

With the accumulated efforts and experience of the organizers of the exhibitions from 1996 to 1998, the 3rd Shanghai Biennale in 2000, *Shanghai Spirit* (海上·上海), transitioned its national art exhibition into "a large-scale international event",[13] and the organizers modeled it as a "Venice of the East" for the city.[14] As one of the national exhibitions, Shanghai Biennale gradually involved the curatorial mechanism to create the exhibition and served as propaganda to advocate art and culture, accompanying the development of the city of Shanghai into a metropolis in the past few decades.[15] The theme of the 7th Shanghai Biennale (2008) was *Translocalmotion* (快城快客),[16] which addressed urban patterns and local cultures. It represented the supplement to the *Better City — Better Life* (城市，让生活更美好) proposed by the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.[17] In addition, the 7th Shanghai Biennale brought contemporary art to a wide range of audiences by distributing artworks in People's Squares, train stations, airports and other places.[18] Thus, the Shanghai Biennale as a new image of the soft power of China's modern society and culture, with its multicultural and artistic openness, has become a recurring exhibition that has been displayed to the world every two years, and has gradually brought Chinese contemporary art to the international arena.

Since the 2000s, an increasing number of large-scale exhibitions have promoted the development of curation in China. Even when Shanghai Biennale Committee in SAM started to appoint curators, it was rarely assigned to individual curators until the Biennale was handed over to PSA. In the opening exhibition of PSA in 2012, the 9th Shanghai Biennale *Reactivation* (重新发电) was transferred from SAM a reconstructed

fig. 3: Enrique Ježik, *In Hemmed-in Ground*, 2018, Steel structure, recycled cardboard, 77 × 1150 × 1150 cm, photo from Power Station of Art.

old power station with an area of more than 1,000 square meters [fig.2][19] PSA is the first official contemporary art institution established in new era of China.[20] When Shanghai Biennale was moved to PSA, the biggest adjustment for them was to introduce the selected foreign 'chief curators' into the 10th Shanghai Biennale *Social Factory* (社会工厂).[21] This was the first time that Shanghai Biennale allowed foreign guest curators to decide the biennale theme and choose their own curatorial team and artists. Since then, PSA has provided more space for the public to view contemporary art and opportunities for curators to improve exhibition autonomy.

However, despite the audience's recognition of the legitimacy of contemporary art in China, the exhibition is still an 'ideology' for the public,[22] so the organizers still cautiously handle activities and behaviors in the art field. This can be traced back to the beginning of the 3rd Shanghai Biennale in 2000. The director of the SAM has emphasized that artworks contain radical issues and military facts, and that even performance arts cannot be selected in the early stage of the exhibition.[23] As a national art event, Shanghai Biennale has already represented the image of the country. The initial concern of the organizers is how to ensure the safe conduct of the exhibition. Therefore, selecting eligible contemporary art works to the public is a crucial procedure for the production of exhibitions in China, but may cause a challenge for the curatorial team.

'Tactic' of the 12th Shanghai Biennale

Based on the understanding of the history of Shanghai Biennale, it may be a challenge for the curatorial team to display works of art with sociopolitical and martial elements. In 2018, the 12th Shanghai Biennale used an alternative curatorial method, breaking the rules established by SAM in previous exhibitions and thereby reducing the sensitive issues of displaying artworks. Initially, the curatorial team conducted in-depth research on the local art ecology and enhanced the practical value of curatorial practice. The term 'tactic' was introduced by Cuauhtémoc Medina, Chief Curator of the 12th Shanghai Biennale.[24] "Sometimes, as an individual working here, you have to resort to some tactical ways. I consider my role as an assistant to the curators and the artists - what I can do is to realize the artist's and curator's original ideas," Medina said in the SCL conversation[25]. Since all imported artworks exhibited in China are subject to strict legal review by the department, international curators may encounter difficulties in solving the problems of contemporary art diversity and communication in domestic exhibitions.

In exhibition production, the tactic "may either be a compensatory device, a politicized attempt to consider works of art as interrelated rather than as individual entities, or a textual response to changes in the art world itself".[26] Through this compensation method, artworks with discussible themes could be displayed in a new form at the 12th Shanghai Biennale.

For instance, the work of an Argentinian-born artist Enrique Ježik's In Hemmed-in Ground (2018) [fig.3] in the great hall of PSA incorporated the slogan of "one step forward, two steps back", which refers to the title of a text quoted by Vladimir Lenin in 1904.[27] Based on cardboard collected by beggars, Ježik's work attempted to explore contradictions and opposition using the historical perspective. Medina expressed concerns about this work because these sentences used ironic poverty and declared the failure of the Russian Socialist Communist Revolution of 1905.[28] But this work of art had a distinct historical atmosphere, which seemed to remind people of the era of socialist. In the PSA exhibition space, Ježik's work was tactfully presented in Chinese, which not only corresponded to the theme of 'proregress', but also penetrated the uncertainty and contradictions contained in the words 'progress' and 'regress' in the theme of this exhibition.[29] The slogans in Chinese characters created a new facet for the public, and the audience could understand the artwork without having access to the story behind it. This work used an ingenious textual response or metaphors to let audiences easily access to the concept of the work.

The invited international curators have to respect Chinese society, and formulate their own strategies through adjustments and compromises through the local administration system. The review process can be regarded as a necessary process for the exhibition. Medina said, "the censorship is localized and is a condition of culture product; the censorship is not localized, but a cultural product".[30] In order to create the exhibition successfully, curators, institutions, and artists need to collaborate and adopt effective tactics to ensure the reposeful display of the artworks.

Another exhibition work, from the art group C&G Artpartment formed by Clara Cheung & Cheng Yee-Man (Gum), has paid attention to the local art ecology and created art in a mocking way to deal with social and cultural problems. Most of the art activities planned by C&G had the characteristics of collective participation and discussed the art ecology and social current affairs.[31] In the 12th Shanghai Biennale, the curatorial team invited C&G to come to Shanghai to create a commissioned work, *Not as Trivial as You Think: Shanghai Art Quiz*[32] [fig.4] In the early version of the Shanghai video, the artists and the curatorial team repeatedly communicated and adjusted the exhibition tactic and displayment mode. There were some contents not desirable for the exhibition, but in order to maintain the integrity of the video, they changed some video clips to 'white noise' and 'TV static sound' for the exhibition.[33]

Public art institutions are the main place to educate the citizens, and they more likely to attract the attention of the audience, thereby bringing more opportunities to the exhibition. "Art museums are the only public places where the government invests to gather contemporary art," said Hantao Shi, Chief Coordinator of the 12th Shanghai Biennale.[34] The biennale with a subjective sense had posed a new challenge to the implementation of contemporary art exhibitions in China. Shi also stated that "everything that artists and curators do is subject to various institutional rules". He needed to properly coordinate the curatorial activities and the placement of artists and their works.[35] Therefore, the curatorial team of the Biennale had to include PSA staffs and curators from abroad in order to achieve a balance of implementation.

fig. 4: C&G, *Not as Trivial as You Think*: Shanghai Art Quiz, 2018, Video Installation, 120'00", dimensions variable, photo from Power Station of Art.

fig. 5: Fernando Sanchez Castillo, *Swing*, 2018, Bronze, 425 x 400 x 120 cm, photo from Power Station of Art.

According to Medina in the SCL dialogue, censorship is not defined by arbitrary science analogies because of a stronger reason, but it more likely a tradition of the exhibition.[36] there is a need to make sure the exhibition artwork is structurally safe enough to display. For example, the work of a Spanish film director, Fernando Sanchez Castillo, Swing (2018) [Fig.5] was placed at the entrance of PSA.[37] Castillo brought a large 18th-century public bronze sculpture that was bent backwards and turned into a swing. He reversed the logic of public monuments and invited the audience to wave on the shoulders of enlightening heroes. This artwork provided a metaphor for our unstable concept of the times and using the disordered or reverse installations of sculpture to indicate the rapid development of social uncertainty and contradiction. The inverted public art statue has a certain social reflection effect. The artist invited audiences to engage with the activity of using the swing and the audience participated in the discussion of "the conceptual instability of our era" by shaking the swing.[38] This participation reflects the assumption about 'Progress' in the exhibition; "if you don't move with the time, then you will get carried to the past."[39] Since Shanghai Biennale attracts an increasing number of audiences to PSA, the primary concern by the organization is the security of the public. Even though use of the unstable swing obeyed the concept of the artwork by providing an interaction with the audiences, the safe use of the swing was overseen by the authorities on the opening day of the exhibition.[40]

Conclusion

Shanghai Biennale has transformed China's domestic fine art exhibitions into international contemporary art exhibitions by expanding its openness and diversity by adding more art forms. It not only companied the development of urbanization in Shanghai, but also formed an official display platform for contemporary art. The rise of global curatorial practice is also reflected in the path of the Shanghai Biennale moving to PSA. The international curators invited by the Biennale committee have brought more opportunities for curation, implementations and collaboration between the East and West, thus gradually forming a new look for the Shanghai Biennale and contemporary art exhibitions in China. Despite the complexity of the Shanghai Biennale inserted by the complex environment of different eras, the experimental tactics created by the Biennale team has enabled the scalability and feasibility of contemporary art in China to be recognized.

We place this article under the shadow of the COVID-19 crisis as economic stimulus measures conducted by governments may exclude the art and biennale sectors that create our future. Through continuous research that combines biennale exhibition research with curatorial practice, we look forward to the revival and transformation of biennale culture after the pandemic, as well as the challenges and possibilities facing us all. We hope that the 13th Shanghai Biennale will proceed smoothly as scheduled.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the recordings and information from Shanghai Curators Lab, Shanghai Academy of Fine Art (Shanghai University) and Cheng Yee-Man (Gum). We would also like to thank Bethany Hucks's editorial assistance.

Notes

1 Shanghai Art Museum. 1996. *1996 Shanghai Biennale: '96* 上海（美术）双年展. Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum. unpaginated. In the initial pages of the catalogue, the Vice Mayor of Shanghai who is the chairman of the organizing committee of the '96 Shanghai Biennale provided a congratulatory message. After that, the Deputy Director of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture also posted a dedicatory message to the exhibition.

2 Green, Charles, and Anthony Gardner. 2016. *Biennials, Triennials, And Documenta*. 1st ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.p.4

3 Medina, Cuauhtémoc, Power Station of Arts (eds.). 2018. *Shanghai Biennale 2018: Proregress*, Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Publishing House.p.6.
"The Chinese title of the Biennale we have chosen the concept of *Yubu* 禹步, the basic mystic dance step which was purportedly invented by in ancient China by Yu the Great."

4 Ibid.3. p.7.

5 Shanghai Curators Lab (SCL). 2018. Shanghai Curators Lab (SCL), is a dynamic curatorial platform for young curators focusing experimental and critical discussion of the ecology of curatorial practice, hosted by Shanghai Academy of Fina Art, Shanghai University (SAFA)上海大学上海美术学院 and Shanghai International Art City Research Institute 上海吴淞国际艺术城发展研究院, in collaboration with Shanghai Biennale. Accessed April 2, 2020, http://www.curatorslab.cn/2019/en/

6 *China / Avant-Garde* held in February 1989 is a landmark exhibition designed to represent a comprehensive review of various experimental art practices that had emerged in mainland China from 1985 to 1988. The result was a large-scale exhibition with more than 180 artists and 290 artworks.

7 Shanghai Art Museum (1996), *1996 Shanghai Biennale: '96* 上海（美术）双年展, Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum. preface. unpaginated. "'96 Shanghai Biennial is to be presented for the purpose of establishing a State-level pattern for fine arts shows, that is, to have a standard system and well-defined academic norms and to possess the nature of periodic continuity, with the State art gallery as the operating centre and on the strength of the prestige of government conduct."

8 Ibid.7. preface. unpaginated. In the initial pages of the catalogue, the Vice Mayor of Shanghai who was the chairman of the organizing committee of the '96 Shanghai Biennale provided a congratulatory message. After that, the Deputy Director of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture also posted a dedicatory message to the exhibition.

9 The China Artists Association 中国美术家协会. 1949. is the official national association of Chinese artists, with its headquarters in Beijing. It was established in

July 1949. Accessed April 2, 2020, https://www.caanet.org.cn/about.mx.
10 National Fine Arts Exhibition全国美展 is a national exhibition hosted by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles, and the Chinese Artists Association. Accessed April 2, 2020, http://12qgmz.artron.net/index.html?hcs=1&clg=2
11 Wang Lin王林. 2016. 20 Years | Witnessed the Shanghai Biennale, *Contemporary Art,* Issue 15, No.08, p.35
12 Ibid 11. p.35.
13 Shanghai Art Museum. 2000. *2000 Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai: Shanghai Book and Painting Press, preface. unpaginated.
Shanghai Spirit demonstrated the changes in Shanghai, which are typical of changes undergone by China in the past century. It is embodied in the eager readiness of this city to assimilate various cultural elements and renovate its own cultural tradition.
14 Roces, Marian Pastor. 2005. "Crystal Palace Exhibitions in Filipovic", in Elena, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo (eds.). 2010. *The Biennial Reader: The Bergen Biennial Conference*. 1st ed. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz. p.50-65, esp. p.55.
15 Wang Lin王林. 2005. Art, Exhibition and Institutionalization, *Contemporary Art,* Issue 16, No.06, p.18
16 Fang Zengxian方增先, Xu Jiang 许江 (eds.). 2008. *Shanghai Biennale 2008: Translocalmotion* 快城快客, Shanghai: Shanghai Book and Painting Press. unpaginated.
17 Expo 2010 was held on both banks of the Huangpu River in Shanghai, China, from 1 May to 31 October 2010, Accessed April 2, 2020, http://www.expo.cn/.
18 Ibid. 15. unpaginated. In the first part of the Shanghai Biennale, *PROJECT*, the curatorial team invited 25 emerging artists to use The People's Square to present their works.
19 Li Xiangyang 李向阳, Xu Jiang 许江 (eds.). 2012. *Shanghai Biennale 2012: Reactivation* 重新发电, Shanghai: Power Station of Art. unpaginated.
20 Ibid.18. unpaginated. The Director of the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film and TV, as the Director of the Organization Committee of the 10th Shanghai Biennale, provided a foreword on the first page of the catalogue.
21 Franke, Anselm, and Power Station of Art. 2014. *10th Shanghai Biennale: Social Factory*. 1st ed. Shanghai: Power Station of Art.
22 Paul O'Neill. 2007. The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse, Issues in *Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*. p.14.
23 Zhu Xiaojun朱小钧. 2010. Chinese Rules of Shanghai Biennale, *Art Market, No.11,* p. 31-37. esp.p.33.
24 Shanghai Curators Lab (SCL). 2018. Transcript *On the Ideas of 12th Shanghai Biennale and Beyond by Cuauhtémoc Medina* (7th November 2018)
25 Ibid 24.
26 Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Sandy Nairne. 1996. INTRODUCTION, T*hinking About Exhibitions*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge. unpaginated.
27 Medina, Cuauhtémoc, Power Station of Arts (eds.). 2018. S*hanghai Biennale 2018: Proregress*, Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Publishing House. p.40.
28 Ibid 27. p.41.
29 Ibid 24.
30 Ibid 24.
31 Ibid 27. p.330.
32 Ibid 31.
33 Yeung interviewed Gum by phone on April 20, 2020.
34 Shanghai Curators Lab (2018), Transcript *How to make it happen — On 12th Shanghai Biennale by Hantao Shi,* translated by Chinese. (7th November 2018)
35 Ibid 31.

36 Ibid 24.
37 Ibid 27. p.34.
38 Ibid 34.
39 From "Swing Theory", Accessed April 25, 2020, https://www.sohu.com/a/271745743_450640.
40 Shanghai Curators Lab (2018), Transcript from *Conversations in PSA,* translated by Chinese. (7th November 2018)

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Freeing the Weights of the Habitual

Raqs Media Collective

In a recent conversation, the Vietnamese American writer Ocean Vuong elucidated the thinking process behind his new book, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*:

> "It was important to me, at least in this book, that violence remain independent from any character's self-worth, rendering it inert, terrible, and felt—but not a means of "development." Through Kishōtenketsu, violence becomes fact and not a vehicle towards a climax. Having been a student mainly of Western literature, it became clear to me that the most perennial protagonist is not necessarily the main character, but conflict-driven plot. In Western narratology, the plot is the dominant mode to which all characters are subordinate. But I wanted a novel to hold these characters thoroughly and, most importantly, on their own terms, free from a system of governance, even one of my own making. I could not employ the plot-heavy strategy because I needed these people to exist as they are, full of stories but not for a story."[1]

The question of forms and premises of the "system of governance" that brings in multiple subjectivities and stories, interlacing and colliding, is something we all engage with. In exhibition making, through the curatorial act, this question is what runs through — explicitly or implicitly — from the first announcement to the last review.

As a writer, Vuong expresses something that seems to be at the core of the discomfort shared by practitioners of the curatorial mode.
Are we implicitly trapped within an already assumed intellectual and cultural narratology?
And: Are we continuously crafting ways of doing things that keep certain tendencies at bay and working out modalities that can bring in different kinds of co-habitation?
And: What is the mechanism — and how do we seek it — of "freeing" the weights of habitual narrative entrapments?
Every exhibitionary frame works within a milieu. But it also *creates* a milieu in which it streams the diverse currents that it encounters, and amplifies. This is how exhibitions partake in the making of populous milieux through their practices. Formed of stratified sediments, hibernating worlds and immediate urgencies, complexities also contain multiple milieux. This marks the relevance and critical force of this mode of thinking.

What are these milieux constituted of? Each can be thought of as a thicket of affective and conceptual densities and deletions, of prerogatives and lesions, and of known unknowns, and unreachable edges. These milieux are contingent formations — but they are also historically perforated, and therefore open to various drifts and forces. Exhibitions are milieux that are staged and ported within complexities. Complexities are entanglements of material, technical, and social forces, often with an uncertain compass, generally incomprehensible, sometimes intelligible.

Crucially, a heterogeneity of time horizons nests within them – each of whom are contending and contesting each other, playing truant or violent games with each other. As we all now understand, these are in small measure human-engendered, but in large measure escape human agency.

And about time horizons, a minor detour.

If you are in CERN in Geneva (as we were, recently), walking through accelerator tunnels and staring at solenoids in detectors, it is commonplace to hear of limited space-time of the human as an obstacle to a radical comprehension of the universe, with time horizons bending to a fraction of a millionth of the moment of the emergence of matter and time.

Or if you were in silent meditation session (which we step into sometimes) or under an influence of a psychotropic substance (which we step into sometimes), then to feel a loosening of the grip over your mind's ability to cohere the formulation of reality is commonplace. These are demanding experiments and experiences.

All of this to lead back to the curatorial: it is an engagement with both the question of the milieu and the multiplicity of time-horizons.

Here, we would like to present a way of working that we have been trying to develop over the last decade so as to stake a claim in the building of a milieu.

Let us begin with a *Scroll of Sources* for an exhibition. We shared this scroll with the artists we were in conversation with for the exhibition "In The Open or in Stealth" at MACBA, Barcelona last year.[2]

– A juggler's ability to make appear new images, a kind of afterimage, (early 20th century)
– An erotic print portraying the embrace of an octopus, (1814)
– Harry Houdini's techniques of escape from confinement, (1930)
– The laws of courtly love in early medieval Europe, (1500)
– The emergence of suicidal tendencies in Robots, (2017)
– Our own delineation of a mathematical equation for forms of anacoustic reasons, (2006)
– A notion of the unfolding of contiguous infinity in the performance of a raga, or mode, in Hindustani classical music (1997)
– And a glimmer of a radiance emanating from a reading of the gaps in the transition from human to automated labour in worker's newspaper in a north Indian Factory town. (2017)

This gathering of seemingly unrelated fragments constitutes and gestures to the making of a milieu, nested within many other milieux of diverse times and experiences. An archipelago of meanings and resonances ties them together — dexterity, liberation, limit, longing, utterance, love, fear, infinity and radiance all come together in a way that make sense in the now, in the present.

They are all particular moments which by themselves would be considered insignificant or minor or peripheral, but in their re-alignment and re-drawing through each other, they suspend a frame that acts as a riddle and an enigma, which further demands a sustained examination, elaboration and extension. An exhibition, then, becomes a specific rendering among many other possible renderings. It is one option among many options. It is not a unity that is searched for and consolidated, but a plurality of complexities, each drawing from each other and yet diverging from each other.

We quote from a text, "Upon the Fabricatory, In the Open or In Stealth, A Viewer Braids a Verse", by Shveta Sarda, which is part of the long text online series of MACBA, called Quaderns Portatil (or QP for short).[3]

> Confidence is tested; arguments for a retake on lost time unfold everywhere, at all times. These warrant an awareness of the present moment. Every new generation has to rethink its own ways out of the psychotropic force and nature of our attachment to this world. It has a grip that is both ingenious and cruel; it has to be re-crafted, re-viewed and asked questions of. Its hold loosens, then grips, loosens again and grips again. And again. (a source) 'And then a robot, scanning 360 degrees, hearing with its sensitive microphones, checking the air with its sensors, reviewing the images it has gathered, walked into a fountain. It let go, in solidarity with everything around it.'
>
> A state change is possible because we have innumerable states within us. Being overpowered and forced from one state to another is what leaves us feeling ambushed, blindsided, dispossessed, and thus keeps not just us from ours, but also our worlds from their potential. And yet, we all also have uncountable moments when that tiny fraction within – which cannot be absorbed and which keeps up its whirling and its tending towards unintelligibility and illegibility, between remaining unfixed and becoming unplaceable – gathers force.

"Every island assumes other islands," writes the Caribbean poet Édouard Glissant[4]. We could paraphrase this to say: 'Every source demands other sources'. From Glissant, we learn that archipelagic thought makes it possible to say that every kind of stance about being someone or something can change through exchange and contact with others, and that this does not necessarily lead to a loss of self.

To him, the slave leaves a shore but returns as someone else—a free entity. She returns multiplied. The unity of enslaving wills gives way to the multiplicity of liberating will. The itinerary of the former slave changes the source from which the slave arose. That orbit—which produced some of the greatest poetry and music in the world—shows how the future transforms the way we see the past.

We learn the importance of the challenges of choosing our ancestors, of discovering our sources, of inventing fraternities and sororities, as we journey through life. Not all of us come from any one place, or time. We find our way into and through subterranean caves of structures of thought and practice with giant crystalline lattices that might contain the codes of lost and dormant forms of life. To find dormant paths and new itineraries, somewhere we need to eschew inert themes and post-factum taxonomies. Moves that would classify us by theme, or provenance, or for that matter, telos, need to be made inoperable, so that the sources may begin to speak in new dialects.

A profusion of sources, of seven billion people, could be discovered—some of these fictionally invented, and some activated as they lie hibernating, in wait. Just as the forest floor does not parcel out the benefits of its layers of compost according to the apoptosis of individual fallen autumn leaves, so too, we recognize that the fertility of our time is a distributed milieu, made of many milieux.

To be within the "curatorial" is to witness within ourselves, and around us, the collision of artistic forms, and a call to diverse sources to world-making. There are head on collisions, unforeseen accidents and jolts born of contact, eerie afterimages as well as the quiet readings against the grain of accepted interpretations.

Right now, we are engaged in a yearlong process in Delhi, the city in which we live, and Kolkata, which lies a few hundred miles to the east, in conjunction with the Goethe Institutes. This is a procedure and an expanse that we call 'Five Million Incidents'[5]. In this instance, instead of being 'curators' or 'artistic directors' we are calling ourselves 'catalysts' of an unfolding situation, who are working with a collegium of mentors and custodians. We have set a process in motion, and now remain attentive to its chemistry as it unfolds.

To quote from the "Second call for proposals":[6]

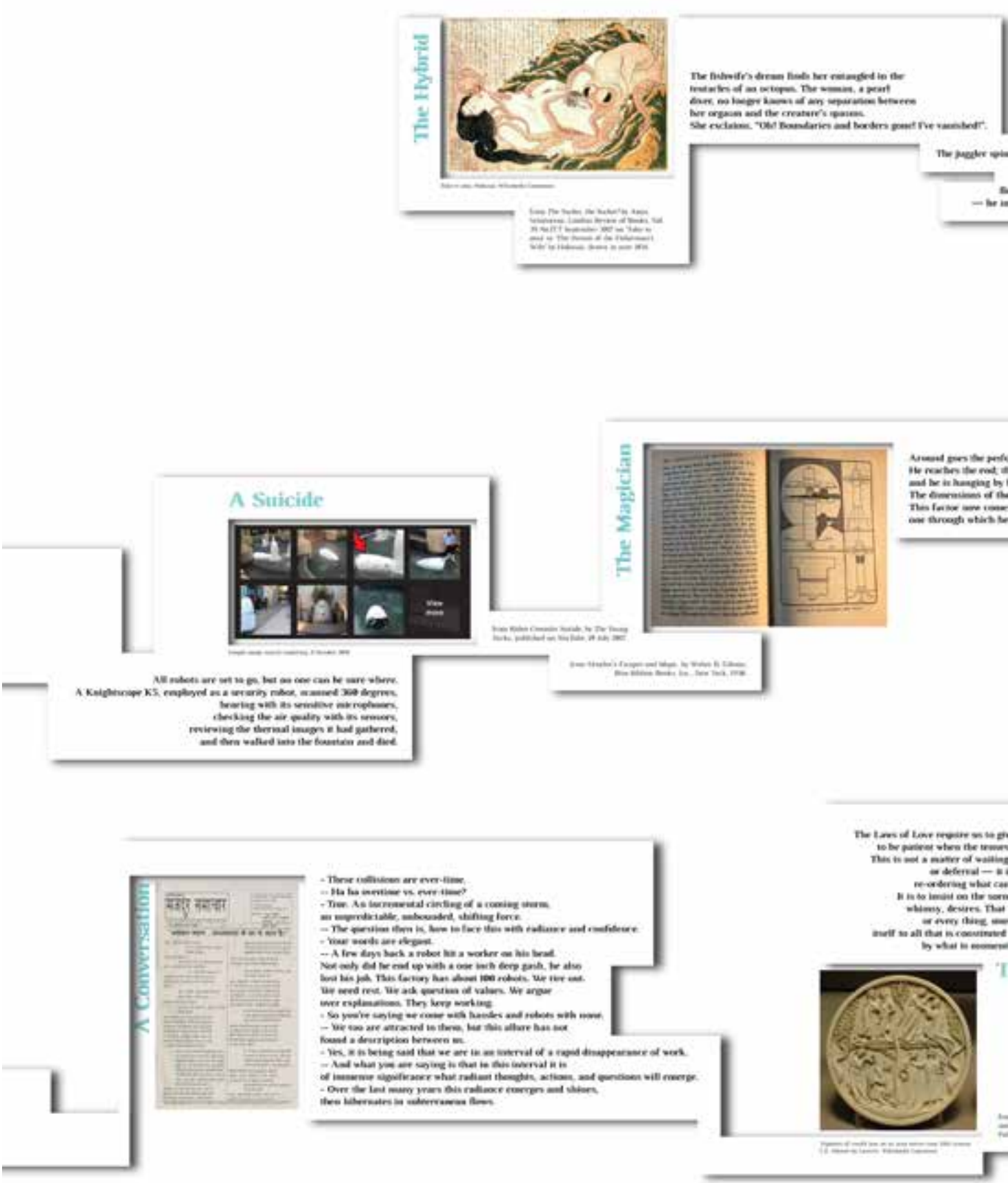
> Five Million Incidents are underway. This undertaking is a thickening of space by time. This is why we foreground the idea of an incident, or an episode.
>
> An incident is a fold in time: an occurrence, an encounter, a sighting, an event in time and in memory; a quickened heartbeat, an epiphany, a flash of insight, an outbreak of goose-bumps, a moment of excitement, an encounter with a person or an object that transforms the way you live or think, a conversation that carries a wake with it, an event that makes you rethink everything. An hour can be crowded with incidents, and years may pass without incident. Incidents depend on recognition, experience, sensory quickening, and alertness. They may also rely on slowing down, reflection, thoughtfulness, and ripeness. Thinking and interacting with incidents is a mode of conscious engagement with time.

Each artist produces their own interpretation of what an incident can be – sometimes it lasts an afternoon, sometimes a few months. Looked at another way, contact and confrontation, in art as in life, are occasions for the multiplication of generative misunderstandings, or a sort of generative collision. The 'trans' in trans-disciplinarity (in the title of the invitation to give this talk) is suggestive, for us, of a fluid state of plasma between different modes of practice, thinking, and becoming. It asserts a non-assertion of primacy, even as it prioritizes different modes of doing, acting, thinking for different purposes, in a way that is always alert both to the specificity of a hosting context as well as the desire for a plurality of planetary horizons.

This form of curatorial 'trans-action' is to know and hold an egalitarian, non-rivalrous stance between divergent, and occasionally even contrary, arcs of making, vision and utterance. We could think of these too as 'sources' that act like water sources do in an ecosystem: sometimes linked to each other through subterranean channels, sometimes isolated from each other, but at all times acting as nodes of sustenance, refreshment and nourishment. Thus we allow them to be contagious and contiguous with each other.[7]

In the Shanghai Biennale of 2016, titled "Why Not Ask Again",[8] which we had curated, we drew from within the history of cinema and science fiction for a conversation around the import of precise historical moments within the second half of the 20th century. These sources allowed us to move into specific subjectivities and a philosophical quest by asking questions. This was nested within a dance of ideas, memories, prophecies and images.

One of the ways in which an oppressive sense of historicity deprives people everywhere is through a conscious or unconscious limitation on the kind of 'sources' that can be accessed in the course of a



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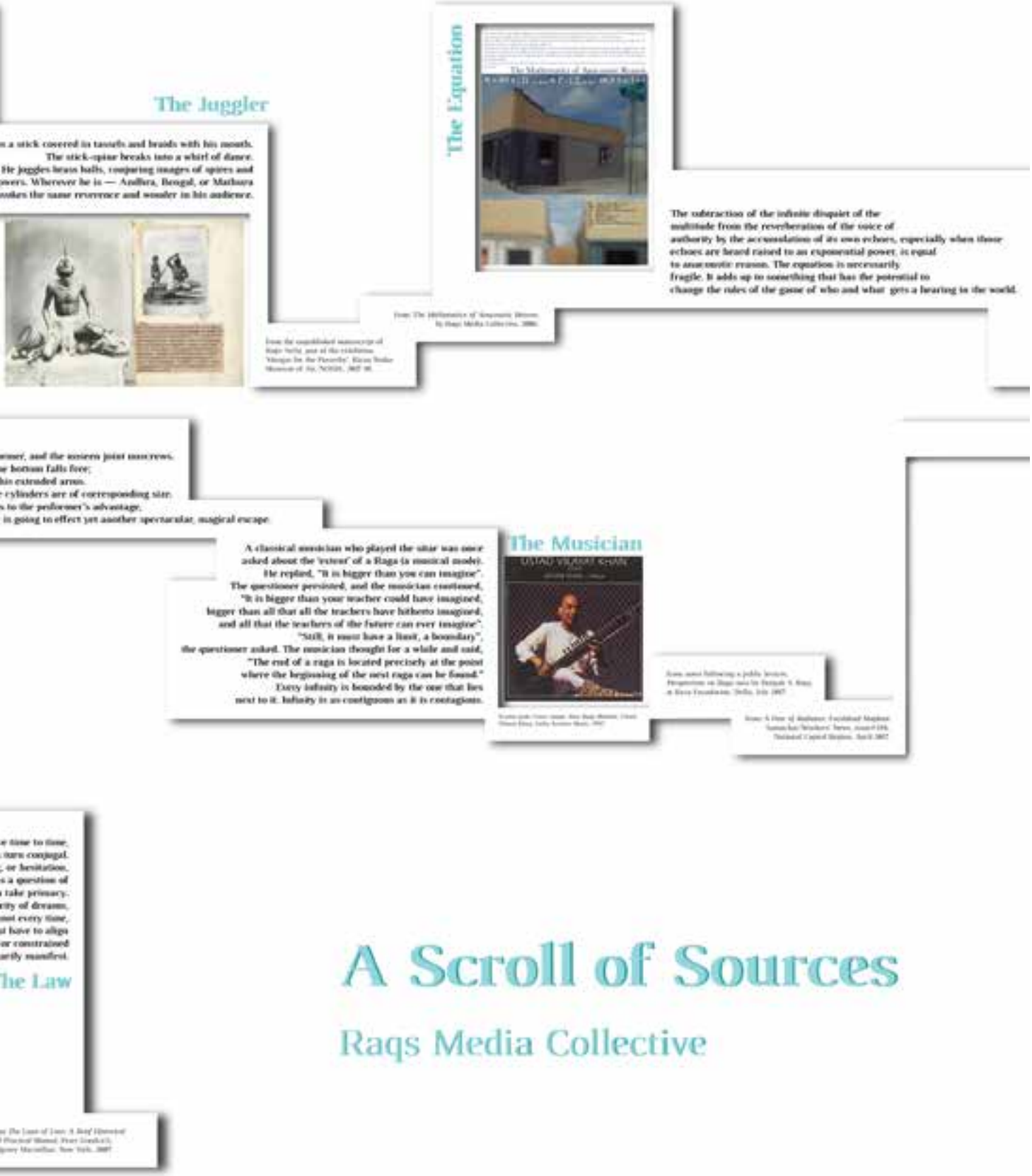

A Scroll of Sources

Raqs Media Collective

Sourcebook (published November 2019, for "Afterglow", the forthcoming Yokohama Triennial) cover/s

contemporary practice or conversation. To us, the contemporary is a space to join-in the ridiculed and halted and mythopoeic *Bhole ki baraat* (the marriage procession of Shiva).[9] The god Shiva went to his wedding in a raucous procession. The wedding party included wild animals, outcasts of all kinds, ghosts, and goblins with distorted, imperfect bodies, unresolved consciousnesses, in delirious moods and states of being. The story of Shiva's wedding ends with him being insulted by his in-laws for the nature of his companions. Enraged, the god danced a dance of destruction, *tandava*, in response. Shiva could have been Nietzsche's favorite god.

Such processions will always find it difficult to enter history, and by extension the museum. Rather, these unruly energies are detours. They take paths and seek connections that are not yet there; they play with instruments whose sound is yet to find an amplifier. Biennales are on that cusp that Hannah Arendt marked as the present - the indistinct zone between the "no longer" and the "not yet"[10]. It is a tight rope dance, like in the Paul Klee painting[11].

The scaffolding of a "sensation of thought" through the two sources further allowed the exhibition to became a creature that could argue and listen, express eloquence and riddle complexities, and be playful and taxing. Not hindered by settled affirmations, the experience of the exhibition could be both personal and distant, depending on how a source traversed through the world in the mind.

Here we would like to go back to one of our own sources. A project, which still seems to have a second life, and which fertilized some of the ways in which we are thinking about sources today. This is "OPUS" (Open Platform for Unlimited Signification)[12], memories of which we think are interesting to share at this point.

"OPUS", a do-it-yourself online platform, made a claim to the creation and sustenance of a potentially global digital commons. Just as the urban pioneers who squatted empty space created new zones of habitation in Delhi by extending the city's commons, and just like the principles of free software – the freedom to download, modify and redistribute – so too, OPUS users could create, extend and maintain their corner of a digital commons by uploading, downloading, sharing and transforming content in different media. A 'ball' of cultural material could be 'passed' and 'tackled' by different players in a never-ending session of digital *ginga*.[13] Each act of transforming or tagging a 'source' media file contributed to the creation of what the OPUS system,

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borrowing a term from philology, called *Rescensions.*[14] *Rescensions* are non-rivalrous-iterations of clusters of signs which are related to each other through the acknowledgement of descent from common sources. This meant that the system could draw visualizations of relationships between different objects, based on word frequency distributions in the metatags.

If anything, the operational protocols of OPUS demonstrated that a source could never be viewed as a mere resource. It does not simply lie inert like a seam of raw materials in the ground waiting to be mined and extracted. When we invoke sources, it is with an awareness of their already thickened life as well as of their potential efflorescence. A particular instance of rescension does not preclude or exclude the existence of other instances. When a plurality of rescensions derive themselves from more than one set of sources, the paths of their iterations collide and entangle with each other, creating thickets of meaning as they grow.

In time, even rescensions become new sources. When even one of these source-recensions miscegnates with another, it imbues 'source-ness' with multiplicity, producing invented and inventive fraternities and sororities of affiliation. The paths of different recensions are inflected by their fealties and their magnetic attractions towards different sources and their emanations.

This leads to curving, eccentric orbits, as recensions travel in the space between different acts of creation and transformation. The tracing of these curving paths leads to the marking of a whole new set of relationships between widely dispersed actions. These relationships are constantly on the move - one can speak of them as having itineraries. The source, when it unfurls a rescension, also reveals an itinerary. The itineraries circulate and transport memes, images, ideas with a great energy, unimpeded by any blockages, since nothing stops them from entering new combinations or finding new paths. They determine that no particular source or recension ever gets to dominate a system of linked meanings, affects or information.

And so the thicket grows.

The recently released "*Sourcebook*"[15] of the forthcoming Yokohama Triennale that we are curating is a gathering of sources embracing the formation of a milieu with ideas of care, toxicity, auto-didacticism, friendship, luminosity, persistence and radiance — all of which come together in a way that helps make sense of the now, in the now. The "*Sourcebook*" registers this attitude and records it as the curatorial framework's awareness of itself. One source opens the door to another, and then another, and another.

This *Sourcebook* learns from Nishikawa Kimitsu, a Yokohama day labourer[16] who embodies what it means to be a curious sojourner, an autodidact adrift in the universe. Elsewhere, it gleans from two itineraries back in time with points of origin elsewhere in space, on how to care for the self and for selves: In 16th century Southern India, heavenly bodies, plants, minerals, animals and angels crowd the Deccani book *Nujum al 'ulum (Stars of the Sciences)*[17] written as a 'medicine to care for the lives of friends'. And then, a hundred odd years ago, Hariprabha Mallik[18] leaves a town in what is now Bangladesh, travels to Japan for the love of a stranger, Takeda Uemon. Her memoir dives into the creation of the farm and the kitchen as she traverses another world.

Nishikawa's musings that connect the street to the cosmos, the many forms of life and matter thought of as "friends" in the 16th century Deccani manuscript, and Hariprabha Takeda's journey all light up different corners of consciousness. They point to energies that irradiate the co-existence of complex forms of life. The biologist Shimomura Osamu[19] spends a lifetime of research being lit by the phenomenon of bio-luminescence. The theorist and writer Svetlana Boym seeks the luminosity of friendship in her essay, "The Scenography of Friendship."[20]

To quote from our essay in the Sourcebook publication, where we speak of flickering light,

> "A woman named Hariprabha Mallik left a village in eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) to accompany a foreigner, the man she had fallen in love with, an itinerant merchant named Takeda. She sailed with him to Japan and found herself in a new world, which surprised and delighted her. She knew next to no Japanese and at first could only communicate in silence. Her encounters with the family and friends of the man she had travelled half the world to be with, left a mark on her. To us, they seem lit by a light of a woman teaching herself to become a part of a new world."

A friend, the artist and philosopher Svetlana Boym, wrote about a kind of light in her essay 'Scenography of Friendship'.

> "In circumstances of extremity… illuminations do not come from philosophical concepts but from the 'uncertain, flickering and often weak light' that men and women kindle and shed over the lifespan given to them. This luminous space where 'men and women come out of their origins and reflect each other's sparks' is the space of humaneness and friendship that sheds light on the world of appearances we inhabit. In other words, friendship is not about having everything illuminated or obscured, but about conspiring and playing with shadows. Its goal is not enlightenment but luminosity, not a quest for the blinding truth but only for occasional lucidity and honesty."

Hariprabha wrote:

> "One by one many people came to meet us. Young or old, they took off their caps, sat on folded knees and bowed to each other in greetings. They introduced themselves, greeted each other, asked about our health, gave thanks and expressed their joy at meeting us. At each exchange of question and answer, it was expected to bow three or four times to each other. Since I knew no Japanese, I bowed silently."

If you do not know how to say something to a stranger, you can still glow, as one does sweating after a day's labour, or even just share your shadow with them, creating an outline of light in the narrow space where your shadow just shies away from meeting theirs. A form of knowledge grows out of the jostling of untranslatable experiences.

A version of this text was delivered as a Keynote Talk at Contemporary Curating Rethink: In the Context of Asia and Beyond: *Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taipei, October 2019.*

This essay has been first published at https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/326489/curatography-e-journal-based-in-taiwan/

Notes

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3 *Upon the Fabricatory, In the Open or In Stealth, A Viewer Braids a Verse* by Shveta Sarda https://img.macba.cat/public/uploads/publicacions/quaderns_portatils/QP_36_InTheOpen_F4.pdf
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Raqs Media Collective was formed in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. The word "raqs" in several languages denotes an intensification of awareness and presence attained by whirling, turning, being in a state of revolution. Raqs Media Collective take this sense to mean 'kinetic contemplation' and a restless and energetic entanglement with the world, and with time. Raqs Media Collective practices across several forms and media; it makes art, produces performances, writes, curates exhibitions, and occupies a unique position at the intersection of contemporary art, philosophical speculation and historical enquiry. The members of Raqs live and work in Delhi, India. In 2001, they co-founded the Sarai program at CSDS New Delhi and ran it for a decade, where they also edited the Sarai Reader series. They are the Artistic Directors for the forthcoming Yokohama Triennale (2020).

Tomorrow There Will Be More of Us: Art as a Contact Zone

Sven Christian

The title of the inaugural Stellenbosch Triennale, *Tomorrow There Will Be More Of Us* (2020), reads like a proclamation—a statement of intent, assurance, solidarity. Premised on the understanding of love as "a revolutionary act,"[1] it conjures up a field of budding flowers (almost, but not quite in bloom). After Pablo Neruda, "Spring is rebellious."[2] *Tomorrow There Will Be More Of Us* is thus also a position, a provocation. It possesses the cinematic confidence of a last stand—the holding of ground and the inevitable influx of reinforcements. As described by chief curator, Khanyisile Mbongwa, Stellenbosch is "inherently sick."[3] Like the rest of South Africa—indeed, the world—it remains paralyzed by inequality, intolerance, and denial. The question posed is how to heal, how to find a point of "mutual coexistence on terrain that is contested."[4]

Although brought to a premature close after South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a National State of Disaster (March 15, 2020), the curatorial vision of the Triennale has since taken on a profound, almost prophetic urgency. On March 26, 2020, South Africa went into lock-down. For three weeks, all citizens were required, by law, to stay inside their homes. These were precautionary measures, adopted to avoid the crippling effects of COVID-19 on our population and public health systems. At the time of writing, the outcome is unknown, yet as Yuval Noah Harari points out, short-term solutions implemented in times of crisis have a habit of becoming the norm: "That is the nature of emergencies. They fast-forward historical processes."[5]

Donna Kukama, Chapter Z: *When Everything and Everyone Returned*, 2020: Stellenbosch. Photograph by Sven Christian

Ronald Muchatuta, installation view of *Chimurenga*, 2020: Collage drawings, washing line, sketches. 'Curators' Exhibition', Stellenbosch Triennale. Photograph by Sven Christian.

For Harari, the COVID-19 pandemic marks a watershed moment in which deadlocked systems of totalitarian surveillance and national isolation threaten to eclipse the necessity of citizen empowerment and global solidarity. He attributes this to a lack of trust and cooperation—the prioritization of individual/national needs over those of the collective/globe, without recognizing that it is only through collective/global efforts that individuals/nations will be empowered. This view seems to echo that of Irmgard Emmenelhainz, who draws on the example of the Ferber method—"which 'teaches' babies to self-soothe by letting them cry themselves to sleep in their crib"—to demonstrate the widespread belief that self-worth is derived from self-reliance.[6]

In contrast, the rapid spread of COVID-19 has shown just how dependent we are on one another. In the midst of the pandemic, perceived distinctions between the individual and the collective, the local and the global, are simultaneously blurred and exacerbated. What has become clear is that, within such a context, the "cultivated capacity to dissociate from our bodies and from everything else surrounding us" is not only foolish but dangerous.[7] No one is immune; everyone is infectious. If the future is being ushered in at an alarming rate, then Mbongwa's optic is paramount:

> For me, *Tomorrow There Will Be More Of Us* is about imagining (and creating) common sustainable futures by looking at the wounds […] We need to heal, and for that to happen we have to be brave enough to look at the places that hurt the most, the places of discomfort […] I think of the histories of migration and the current human flow in the world—and how we need to rethink how we conceptualise and use space. So, there is a literal meaning to *Tomorrow There Will Be More Of Us*, where human flow requires us to think about space and resource sharing beyond colour, gender, sexuality, religion or tradition.[8]

For Mbongwa (and here I am also invoking the rest of the curatorial team—Dr Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Mike Tigere Mavura, Gcotyelwa Mashiqa, Silas Miami, Pieter Mathews and Jay Pather), thinking 'beyond' such constructs and belief systems does not mean overlooking them. Nor does it mean rainbow-nation-level inclusivity. Her vision is about acknowledging the fallout of past and present injustices so that we can make sound decisions about our collective futures. Although universalist in outlook, her use of pronouns like 'us' and 'we' (the collective) do not imply a single homogenous body. her position seems to align with that of Koyo Kouoh, who recently described her own universalist view as something that "does not dilute specificities, diversity, multiplicity, plurality [...] [which] does not mean one becomes one," but rather "that we all have the same rights, and that most people aspire to the same basic thing."[9]

It is a form of emancipatory politics which does not attempt to reverse "positions of dominance" but insists on the dismantling of power structures, all the while acknowledging the interdependent, fragmented, and incommensurable nature of our lives.[10] From this perspective, politics ("the capacity of individuals to organize and make decisions collectively") and love (the ability "to handle difference, and to experience the world from the point of view of difference") are no longer mutually exclusive. Their cross-pollination allows one to "ground politics" through "a trust in difference rather than a suspicion of it."[11] This is important, not only to the future of the biennale/triennale model—which is intricately tied to totalizing notions of nation-state, capitalism, and globalization—but how we choose to face up to the realities of our time. As described by Harari, "Every crisis is also an opportunity. We must hope that the current epidemic will help humankind realize the acute danger posed by global disunity."[12]

Euridice Getulio Kala, *Terra Incognita*, 2020: Workshop (Patterns against the stream or how to occupy the public space in a different way). 'Curators' Exhibition', Stellenbosch Triennale. Photographs by Sven Christian.

Of course, the desire to heal is not new, and trying to fast-track 'unity' has shown to prolong suffering. Deeply embedded within the South African imaginary, this desire manifests itself in different ways—in how we work, sleep, create; in moments of anger and solitude, pride and humility. We all have different coping mechanisms, yet it is how they manifest in our relationships that is perhaps most telling. Premised on the understanding that biennials are also inherently social, this paper explores the contexts, impulses, developments, differences, and intersections that underpin their trajectory in 'post'-apartheid South Africa. It asks how we have arrived at this present juncture, and to what end. To adopt a phrase of Mbongwa's, "We are here today, thinking through yesterday to imagine and manifest tomorrow."[13]

Becoming International

In 2003, David Koloane asked a very simple yet profound question: "How does regional art become international?"[14] In other words, what are the channels through which art, born of a specific context, enters into the broader lexicon of global art discourse, and to what effect? Does its specificity get lost in transit? Does it accumulate unwanted baggage? In what state does it 'arrive'? His question is backed by an equally profound statement: "In order to be internationally acceptable: a South African exhibition [had] to be shaped so that it could satisfy different perceptions and expectations."[15] Between February and April 1995—when the first Johannesburg Biennale, *Africus*, took place[16]—such expectations included an exhibition that might reflect the air of optimism and gestural inclusivity that so marked the dawn of the 'new' South Africa and its talk of national transformation.[17]

One could add to this the increasing demand for biennials worldwide. And why not? After all, "The utopian promise of the biennial was that while the museum […] was the place for authoritative pronouncements, classification, canonization, and preservation, the biennial's *raison d'être* was to provide a site for experimentation, contingency, testing, ambiguity, and enquiry."[18] Given the parochial perspective of South African institutions, the promise of such a biennial must have been appealing. At the same time, the history of the biennial model—with its rhetoric of a homogenizing universalism, tourism, and economic development—may have provided an alluring out for those eager to take up the preemptive banner of a post-racial society.

To provide some historical context, the period between 1991 and 1995 saw the establishment of the Lyon Biennial (1991); the Dak'Art Biennial (1992); the Asia-Pacific Triennial, the Sharjah Biennial, and the Vento Sul Biennial (1993); the Shanghai Biennial (1994); and the Gwangju, São Tomé e Príncipe, and SITE Santa Fe Biennials (1995).[19] In addition were the earlier emergences of the Venice Biennale (1895); the São Paulo Biennial (1951); as well as the Havana (1984) and Istanbul Biennials (1987)—"both particularly remarkable for the catalysing effect they had in sparking debate about the so-called periphery."[20] The widespread reputation of other mega-exhibitions like documenta (1955)—"made possible, or even necessary and urgent, because of decisive 'local' events and issues, [namely] Germany's postwar reconstruction"[21]—must also have contributed to the biennial model's allure in South Africa.

It is worth noting, however, that despite the various debates that occurred in the 1980s—debates which challenged hegemonic modes of exhibition-making within biennial circuits and would thus seem appropriate within the context of the first Johannesburg Biennale—its organizers, Christopher Till and Lorna Ferguson, chose to fashion the event on "the pavilion representation common to both Venice and São Paulo."[22] Championed as a form of nation-building, this approach could have been

expected within the context of a newly democratic South Africa. Nevertheless, it exposed a predilection to cosy up to the old, sanctioned symbols of the European art world. In 1996, David Koloane took the Biennale to task for its Eurocentrism and its song of inclusivity:

> When one scrutinises the motives and objectives of the Biennale, it soon becomes apparent that reconstruction and development of any kind were as conspicuously absent as an art market in Soweto. It is ironic if not downright cynical that people who never sacrificed their privileges, who never suffered incarceration for their beliefs or experienced the isolation of compulsory exile, should have been the ones to call for a celebration of South Africa's readmission into the international fold. This is like the jailer celebrating the prisoner's release in the prisoner's absence.[23]

For Koloane, the execution and scope of the first Johannesburg Biennale reflected many of the problems faced within the macrocosm of South Africa and the microcosm of its art world. Most notable was a whitewashing of continued socio-economic inequalities to meet the expectations of the international arena, as well as an essentialist, patronizing attitude that drew distinctions between "community" and "mainstream art,"[24] with the former being placed in remote spaces around Johannesburg, with delayed funding and inadequate support.[25] According to Koloane, such conditions did little to bring about the envisaged transformation that formed the basis of the event's rhetoric:

> The Biennale lost the opportunity to transform South Africa, and the city of Johannesburg specifically, into the pulse of Southern Africa. The link with Africa is essential to the redefinition of creative expression and the interchange of skills and resources. A common sense approach would have shown that the

Mitchell Messina, still from *How to get your work overseas,* 2017: Youtube video, 27 secs. Image courtesy of the artist. © Mitchell Messina.

> country urgently needs to cultivate relationships with Southern Africa before even thinking of the continent as a whole. With reduced participation the Biennale would have cost taxpayers far less. There would have been no need for expensive 'five-star' fact-finding missions, no need for an international contingent of curators and writers.[26]

The criticisms levelled by Koloane are valid. Establishing modest networks and relationships with our immediate neighbors may have led to a robust foundation for local artistic practices, providing the right set of ingredients to prevent the Biennale's eventual collapse.[27] Grounded by an understanding that regional art does not 'become' international overnight (or if it does, that it runs the risks of being appropriated or commodified), Koloane's perspective questions the long-held belief that to be validated, art by South Africans needs to first gain approval from the West—an impulse that is beautifully captured in Mitchell Messina's YouTube video, *How to get your work overseas* (2017), in which a wooden crate, presumably full of art, is trebucheted into the ether.

Trade Routes

The failure of *Africus* to connect—to empower citizens and establish solid ground—appears to have been mirrored by the second Johannesburg Biennale, *Trade Routes*. It ran from October 1997 to January 1998. Led by artistic director Okwui Enwezor, its focus—"the global traffic of culture"[28]—aimed to hot-wire severed threads, to short-circuit and reboot neural networks, and to grapple with the rapid changes brought about through new technologies and historic processes of globalization. "The basis of *Trade Routes* was the idea of exchange," he explained, "the flow of commodities, the flow of history, of contestation, of the range of ideas transmitted via the trade routes."[29]

Enwezor drew on the example of Vasco da Gama's fifteenth-century passage from Lisbon to Calicut (via the Cape of Good Hope) as a critical "moment of both rupture and connection with the rest of the world."[30] From this historic vantage, he sought to expose the roots of apartheid and its fallout, the better to attend to its continued manifestations. Determined not to pander to regional or international expectations about what a biennial in South Africa might look like, Enwezor opted for a wider focal range, treating South Africa's locality "as a structuring device to get inside the local/global question."[31]

This was in the 1990s, when national borders were thought to be 'dissolving'; the distinctions between the so-called 'center' and 'periphery' "levelling out."[32] Consequently, many who benefited from such hierarchies scrambled to re-establish their dominion. In 1995, the Venice Biennale's artistic director, Jean Clair, proudly proclaimed that "there would be no Third World artists" included. For him, the Western conception of art was "strictly associated with a certain culture which raised the image to a point of sophistication not known in any other form of culture." Driving Clair's separatist view was a deep-seated fear of difference, the belief that "cultures alien to Western culture" were "on the up and up, in a conquering phase, to such an extent that we can't be at all sure the great museums we are opening will still be there in a few years' time."[33]

This may seem laughable, but for Enwezor it was synonymous with "the return of fascism in Europe and the great wave of conservatism [that was] sweeping through America."[34] To explain the policing of boundaries, James Clifford observes how cultures and identities—as "currencies" or "performative acts"—necessitate the tactical maintenance of "coherent insides and outsides."[35] This matter is complicated within

the context of globalization, where contact zones are not only ubiquitous but barely perceptible, and where the power of global capital has often meant absorbing or containing that which lies 'outside' of its orbit. As described by Terry Eagleton, capitalism is "an impeccably inclusive creed. It really doesn't care who it exploits."[36] By returning to a fifteenth-century moment of compression and fracture, Enwezor highlighted the existence of such processes since time immemorial. The point is that, far from being able to salvage some imagined purity, cultures are already and always constituted relationally. Given that such processes long pre-date the earliest colonial encounters, one could ask why Enwezor chose to highlight this particular moment. I would venture that it is because it is at this point that our present sickness—the fear of difference—gains momentum. As described by Hito Steyerl:

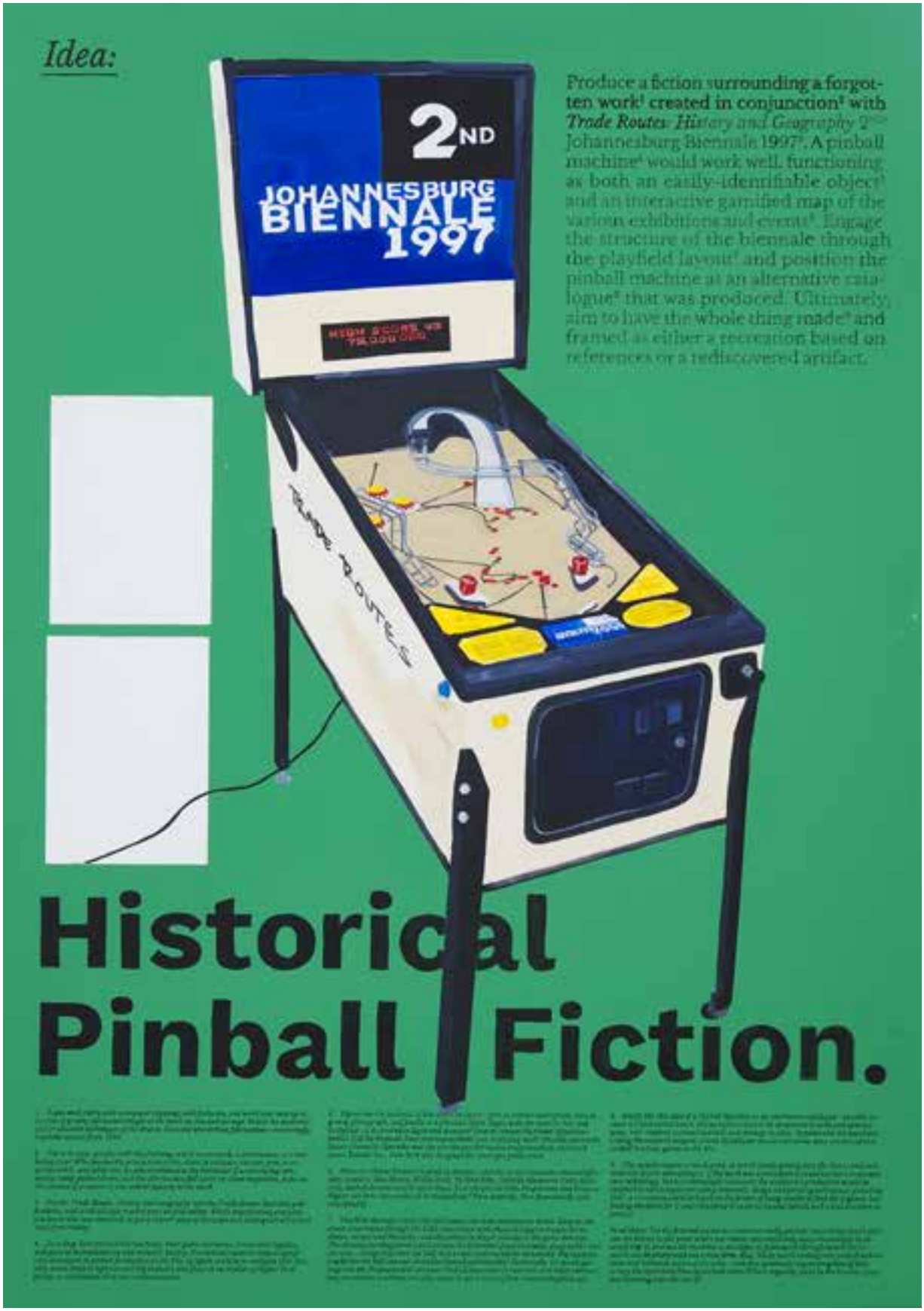
> Okwui's idea of the world was of an incomplete entity which needed to be changed [...] by becoming more complex, more nuanced, more challenging, by acknowledging more colors, different sounds, unknown beauty in between the trodden stereotypes designed to rule and conquer. Importantly, his view of the world differed from the liberal mantra of just adding more consumer-packaged identities. The world wasn't incomplete by chance, but because of historical violence and exclusion.[37]

This might explain why Enwezor did away with the national pavilion model (a decision aimed at developing "a critical paradigm for the reorientation of biennales").[38] It might also explain why he drew Cape Town into the fold of exhibition venues, appointed a team of (primarily) international curators to oversee a series of thematic exhibitions, and why the Biennale included a disproportionate number of new media and conceptual works of art. Well-suited to grapple with questions of globalization (and perhaps to dispel the essentialist telos of Jean Clair), the latter decision was, however, also the Biennale's most controversial.

"The worst only becomes apparent when we realize that Black South Africa is brutally marginalized twice-over," wrote Koloane. "Black South Africa has by and large not been asked to participate in this Biennale and neither has Black South Africa been addressed by this Biennale."[39] Although it aspired to make room for a plurality of voices, Koloane argued that the Biennale's focus on new media inadvertently derailed such a possibility. To have been accepted into the Biennale, many would've had to forego their practices and adopt the 'cutting-edge'/conceptual approach favored internationally. An apt metaphor here is Raqs Media Collective's conception of the "waiting room":

> The figure of a person biding time in a waiting room helps us to imagine the predicament of people living in societies often considered to be inhabiting an antechamber to modernity. In such spaces, one waits to be called upon to step onto the stage of history [...] The passage from 'waiting rooms' to the 'stage' often requires a person to go through intense scrutiny [...] One achieves citizenship, one loses it, one's performance is either applauded or it fails to live up to the demands, requirements and standards that accrue to it. To live with these conditions is to be always on trial, to know that in the eyes of the examining authority one is always, and necessarily, an impostor, unless proved otherwise.[40]

Of course, the image of people biding time in a waiting room is somewhat misleading. In a context where people of color were forcibly denied equal citizenship (Koloane's own metaphor was that of a prisoner), he, like many others, actively sought ways to



Mitchell Messina, Historical Pinball Fiction, 2019: Oil on canvas, 170 x 120 x 5 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.
© Mitchell Messina.

connect: instigating workshops, pooling skills and resources, and hosting exhibitions in spite of incredibly hostile conditions.[41] In 1977, Koloane played an integral role in the establishment of The Gallery, as well as the Federal Union of Black Artists (FUBA). In 1985, he helped to orchestrate the first Triangle Workshop in South Africa and establish the Thupelo Workshops. Six years later, he and Triangle's Robert Loder established The Bag Factory (1991).[42] The international networks realized through these endeavors and the artistic traditions they nurtured—primarily in paint, sculpture, and print—were rich with histories of cross-cultural exchange. As such, there is no reason why the Biennale's concerns could not have also been addressed through this lens—an oversight which must have felt like a continued refusal of self-governance.

Not only did the Biennale's focus deny many a seat at the table, but it also set the template for the future direction of local artistic engagement. "If the biennale was also for South Africa, then perhaps it needed to consider its local audience much more closely," wrote Carol Becker, "not with the sense of where South Africa *should* be but realistic about where it is and where it wants to be." She expresses disappointment that the Biennale "could have happened anywhere in the West."[43] While I do not altogether agree with this, the point being made is important: To what extent are biennales like blueprints? How do they account for the specificity of place beyond geography? As pointed out by Elena Filipovic, "The 'crisis of biennials' that so many critics have decried lies not so much in the proliferation of these events as in the proliferation of a form."[44] To return to Raqs' paper:

> Many contemporary methods of spatial intervention necessitate the hollowing out of ways of life, ecologies and habitation practices from a space, and then filling it with a one-size-fits-all imagination. Architectural plans, interior design catalogues and real estate brochures determine the 'value' of a location. To have a design on space is half the battle won in terms of the possession and control over that space. Everything that is in the way—people, settled practices, older inner cities, nomadic routes, and the commons of land and water—disappears into the emptiness of the un-inked portions between the rectilinear inscriptions on the surface of the masterplan.[45]

Here, we see the root of Koloane's frustration. "Perhaps more than anything else," he wrote, "what defines the South African biennales is the issue of power [...] of who ultimately had the power to set the terms of reference."[46] He describes the second iteration as an act of "privatization," equating its role to that of CNN, whose denizens —"a global syndicated membership"[47]—assume a monopoly on cultural expression:

> Foreign curators now often come to South Africa with ready-made concepts and agendas which only accommodate the new media approach in art making. The new media approach has, so to speak, often become synonymous with cutting-edge expression which in South Africa has succeeded in entrenching the aesthetic marginalisation of most Black African artists in a repeat cycle of the system the new democratic South Africa has just emerged from.[48]

This perspective may seem narrow-minded, but the operative word is "only." Koloane's criticisms were not levelled against foreign curators, artists, or the inclusion of new media, but the exclusion of other approaches which have a long-standing relevance in South Africa, and the disregard for pre-existing networks that would have enriched the focus of the Biennale. The question of whether "biennials in some way change the

nature or tenor of the art being made, or, conversely, [if they are] the direct product and development of art"[49] seems applicable here, as does the question about how regional art becomes international (or its flip—how international art becomes regional). Another way to phrase this question would be to ask, as Ashraf Jamal provocatively does, whether "local matters only become relevant once they have found their parallel elsewhere in the world?"[50] Or, on a more personal level, if what concerns me only concerns you if we are in the same boat?

What I find striking is how such criticisms were dismissed by members of the international community as unimaginative, parochial, and populist. Matthew DeBord referred to them as "indigenous Philistinism" and as "code […] for the Biennale's organizers not manufacturing a show that would parallel South Africa's revival in international eyes." At the same time, he celebrated Enwezor's approach as "visionary," "inclusively international," and "ahead of the curve."[51] How does one account for the failure to recognize such concerns as integral to the overarching focus of the Biennale? How does someone simultaneously denounce and celebrate both sides of the same coin? Is this a simple matter of allegiances? Surely in any discussion of the global, the local matters? Far from irrelevant, the concerns raised demonstrate how much of a footprint even the most well-intentioned sites of global exchange can have on regional landscapes.

This is not to say that the Biennale did not have its merits. It was an important occasion for many, and the debates it generated would've no doubt filtered back into the global machinery. That it did not take place "anywhere in the West" is thus significant. But to borrow a phrase from Arundhati Roy, "It's as if you shine a light very brightly in one place, the darkness deepens around it."[52] By applying Enwezor's line of inquiry to the Biennale itself, it is possible to understand its own histories of exchange and contestation; to understand it as its own moment of "rupture and connection with the rest of the world." This helps to understand the systemic nature of the beast that Enwezor was grappling with, and its continued relevance today.

Crisis as Opportunity

Over a decade after *Trade Routes*, Koloane's criticisms found their parallel in Anton Vidokle's now famous paper, *Art Without Artists?* (2009), delivered at a curatorial conference in Leipzig, Germany. "If there is to be critical art, the role of the artist as a sovereign agent must be maintained," he wrote. "By sovereignty, I mean simply certain conditions of production in which artists are able to determine the direction of their work." Like Koloane, Vidokle's challenge was targeted towards a form of "overreaching" on the part of institutions, curators, and critics who perform an intermediary role "between producers of art and the power structure of our society."[53]

This issue is not specific to biennials, but given their scale, the economic and political umbrellas underneath which they function, and the web of curators, funders, institutions, and media personnel involved, processes of mediation tend to multiply. An important observation made by Vidokle in 2019 is that while the 1990s saw the dissolution of national boundaries and an increase in human traffic, it also witnessed the flow of capital on an unprecedented scale. He argues that, despite being a mask or foil for corporate control, capitalism's "flair for flexibility and recombination" were often "mistaken for a democratic, autonomous, or anti-authoritarian character, sealing it in as a new form of sublime non-governance."[54]

It is this "flair" that has led to the view of the global market as something of a colonial proxy through which local artistic expression gets "swallowed up" and "made banal by easy money and borrowed ideas and fashions."[55] Again, it is about the replication and imposition of a form that is ill-equipped to deal with the specificities of place. This is not an issue specific to biennials, but a hallmark of neoliberalism. A case in point is the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Held in South Africa, it used the rhetoric of shifting the continent's image internationally to attract foreign investment. While the country's most vulnerable were rounded up and placed in temporary "transit zones" (out of sight, out of mind), million-dollar stadiums were erected that now sit like hollow monuments to Budweiser and Castrol Oil.[56] As described by Raqs:

> The building of a military airstrip or a highway or a dam or a resort or a housing estate sanctioned by a masterplan can suddenly turn people into trespassers, and their way of life into a culture of trespassing [...] As masterplans cordon off greater and yet greater swathes of space, they begin to come up against each other, leading to meta-masterplans that stitch different masterplans together, until more and more stretches of territory end up looking and feeling like clones of each other.[57]

Stacey Gillian Abe, *Sylvia's Letters to my Future Self*, 2020: an ongoing project installed during 'Curators' Exhibition', Stellenbosch Triennale. Photograph by Sven Christian.

The same could also be said of biennials which, by virtue of their global aspirations, threaten to either mute or essentialize cultural difference, sugar-coated as they are in an "international dressing."[58] The promotional video produced for CAPE 07 (March 24–May 2, 2007)—the first Biennale to take place in South Africa following *Trade Routes*—reads like a litmus test for the 2010 FIFA World Cup's 'Brand South Africa' campaign. It includes footage from the Venice, Sydney, São Paulo, and Dak'Art Biennales, and is laced with buzz words like "vibrant," "innovation," "cutting-edge," "high-profile," and "uniquely African":

> The world has become a global village where nations converge, engage, and celebrate culture [...] Cape Town is no longer a remote and beautiful city on the southern tip of Africa. It is developing an identity as one of the arts and cultural capitals of the world, and Africa's foremost city. The mother city has become a new cultural centre, a high-profile, hit player in the global arena, combining a natural splendour and historic resonance with a vibrant creative energy. Cape Town needs to harness this creative energy, increase resources for culture, and create new art events that unleash this unexploited economic potential.[59]

Tempering the hype surrounding 'contemporary African art' is the need, expressed by Ashraf Jamal, to challenge its "blithe absorption [...] within a global economy."[60] One of the surest ways to do this is to create a solid foundation for the arts on local soil; to develop, as Koloane initially suggested, a robust framework for artists by controlling the means of production. The challenge here, of course, is that while "there are many suggestions" about "how to create a model genuinely different from that propagated by the time-honored model of Venice and its progeny," there are also "few examples."[61]

Speaking to Rasheed Araeen in July 2006—in the lead up to CAPE 07 (at the time, TransCape)—CAPE's artistic director Gavin Jantjes mentioned a similar need for self-governance and appropriate infrastructure, observing an uncertainty about "where to start." His perspective paints a clear image of the motivations underpinning CAPE 07, albeit under different leadership and a different name: "If one thinks of the number of African nations trying to create what they call biennales, there are some building blocks," said Jantjes. He cites iterations in Egypt, Dakar, Angola, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Kenya, asking what might happen "if each of these [...] were to focus, for just one occasion, on their local history. Meaning they would dedicate their resources and research to a specific local goal."[62] For him, such an endeavor might lead to the establishment of an appropriate platform from which to build, a perspective which was recently echoed by Anaïs Nony and Phokeng Setai, who argue that, "It is only through collective access to a cultural genealogy and history that the individual can thrive in the present and persevere in the future."[63]

Months before CAPE 07 was rescheduled to open, however, its funding fell through, leading to Jantjes' resignation and a drastic recalibration of what was possible with the funds at hand. Without romanticizing lack of funds, what interests me is how this development pushed the event's organizers—Gabi Ngcobo, Jonathan Garnham, Lebohang Tlali, and Mirjam Asmal-Dik—to adopt a DIY attitude, relying on informal channels to realize the show. "The initial plan was very ambitious" said Garnham. "Maybe it wasn't the model for the South African situation, where there just isn't the funding [...] There was just no money to market it and get it out there, make a publication, none of that. We just did it and, you know, it was the little things that happened."[64]

Generally speaking, Garnham's emphasis on the 'little things' runs contra to the 'bigger is better' mantra pervading biennials. His sentiment is reflected by the number of artists included (forty, a much more manageable figure than its predecessors)[65] and its improvised nature. On one occasion, Garnham recalls walking through Cape Town Station, where the vast majority of commuters pass on their way to and from work. There, he came across someone selling TVs and HiFis. "We gave him some money and just on those televisions, video-installations were playing by top artists, with commuters walking past."[66] Would such an approach have been viable had the funding materialized? Would funders have backed something so unassuming? That CAPE 07 included a large number of video works was itself a byproduct of not being able to transport works—works that would've necessitated their inclusion in a more controlled (and less accessible) environment.

I am not raising this to suggest that we should do away with exhibitions in formalized spaces, or limit ourselves to a particular form of work simply because it's cheaper. Rather, I am raising it to highlight, after Khanyisile Mbongwa, how the crisis of funding experienced by CAPE 07 may have opened the way for us to "rethink how we conceptualize and use space." Although the Biennale made use of formal structures like the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG), Spier Gallery (Stellenbosch), the University of Stellenbosch Gallery (USG), and the Centre for African Studies, much of its energy concentrated around venues like LB's Lounge and Bar and Lookout Hill, where the opening was held. Over the phone, Garnham's smile thickens as he recounts the opening speech, which was delivered by the then Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan, and accompanied by the clamor and chorus of a wedding in the adjoining room.

Victor Ehikhamenor, *Power House*, 2020: Site-specific installation for the 'Curators' Exhibition', Stellenbosch Triennale. Yellow and black paint on abandoned generator building, Millhouse. Photograph by Sven Christian.

This seepage—the ability to sink back into the fabric of its surrounds—appears as one of CAPE 07's many idiosyncrasies. For example, Thembinkosi Goniwe's review for *Artlink Australia* begins with a descriptive of William Kentridge's *Time Table* and Churchill Madikida's *Like Father Like Son*, both of which were on show at ISANG, but neither of which formed part of the Biennale.[67] Although unintentional, there is something to be said for an exhibition that does not force a distinction between itself and its surrounds, that allows space for its immediate environment. "We're still talking about it," said Lebohang Tlali, who has continued to work with Gabi Ngcobo on a number of other events (including the 10th Berlin Biennale):

> It received such mixed opinions from the South African public and the art world in Cape Town and Johannesburg. It was very unclear whether people liked it or were totally against it, but for us it was an amazing triumph. We saw the impact it had on a lot of artists and were quite pleased with what we did.[68]

Again, I don't want to romanticize a dire situation. That some of the artists (and its organizers) had to dip into their personal reserves to realize the show is far from ideal. But if, as Olu Oguibe suggests, the real potential of biennials is to "provide opportunities for communion" by enabling "artists from around the world to get to know one another better across divides of nation and gender and race, and to discover what is best and most engaging of the art of each and every society,"[69] then we need to ask why biennials are often made to look and feel the same the world over?

CAPE 07 demonstrates that such moments of cross-fertilization can be realized with far less, and to greater personal affect. After all, biennials are also inherently social creatures. People get together. They meet, talk, drink, break bread. They get locked into heated debate and say things they regret. Such moments—rarely archived for posterity—are important in the long-term. That CAPE 07 has largely been overlooked is not surprising. It did not impress itself on the archive or leave a weighty footprint, yet it is often the case that what gets excluded from the official record is most deserving of attention.

Today's situation is very different from that of the '90s, and even from the first decade of the new millennium. Borders that were thought to be dissolving have sprung up on every front, and although the Internet is fast becoming central to the visibility of artistic practices, there remains a need for real-life interaction, for experiences beyond the echo chambers of virtual reality. "Marked by identitarian fragmentation and political closure in many parts of the world," Anton Vidokle writes that it is quite possible that biennials might give way to "beer festivals, local food and craft fairs, or other types of events that reaffirm a particular identity and sense of belonging, rather than offering an encounter with something or someone outside of that tightly constructed place."[70] Similarly, Tim Schneider writes that, "The lockdown era could accelerate the momentum toward economic nationalism and regional self-reliance that has been building […] since the 2008 financial crisis."[71]

On the one hand, this poses a very real threat for artists living in countries like South Africa, who are still very much dependent on global markets. At the same time, there is an opportunity for a drastic overhaul. As described by Arundhati Roy, the recent pandemic has by-and-large brought "the engine of capitalism to a juddering halt. Temporarily perhaps, but at least long enough for us to examine its parts, make an assessment and decide whether we want to help fix it, or look for a better engine."[72]

Speaking to Matthew McClure about the necessity of Thupelo's informal structure under apartheid, Jill Trappler made the following observation:

> The thing with Thupelo was when David Koloane came back from the workshop in New York [Triangle: 1982] [...] what they decided to do was to make it so informal that they would invite twenty artists together, get some funding, rent a space, work together, and before anything could go anywhere, it was over, and everyone had gone home. It could never be shut down because it didn't exist.[73]

In other words, it was the very informal nature of Thupelo that enabled it to resist and outlive the hegemonic imperatives of the time, and *when the time was right*, formalize itself into something with a lasting and widespread impact. As described by Roy, pandemics have a way of forcing "humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." The real question is whether we "choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."[74]

Like CAPE 07, this spirit permeates the curatorial vision for *Tomorrow There Will Be More Of Us*—an awareness that "art's task 'is the task of all localities, together, against the power of the global.'"[75]

Notes

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64 Jonathan Garnham. WhatsApp interview with the author (Johannesburg and Cape Town: May 16, 2019).
65 *Africus* included 250 artists from eighty countries, while *Trade Routes* included 145 artists from thirty-five countries (see Bisi Silva, "The Johannesburg Biennale," *Artnet* reviews (1998), http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/reviews/silva/silva4-28-98.asp.)

With CAPE 07, almost half the artists were based in South Africa, with a selection of works by artists from Cameroon, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Egypt, and Zimbabwe, as well as eight from the diaspora. The vast majority of artists from the diaspora were from Germany, most likely due to the funding acquired through the Goethe Institut. See Jonathan Garnham 2019 and CAPE 07 Report 2007.
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Between 2015 and 2017 he was the assistant editor at ART AFRICA magazine. Prior to that he founded Ism-Skism, an ongoing artist-led initiative that encourages participants to produce work in the public domain. He also holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from Rhodes University (2008–11).

The Invention of the Dakar Biennial (2009)

Yacouba Konaté

For Africa to really get away from the West implies having an exact understanding of what it costs to break away from it; it implies knowing how far the West has, insidiously perhaps, come closer to us; it implies knowing what it is, precisely in that that which enables us to think against the West remains Western; and measuring the degree to which our recourse against it may still be a trick that it puts in our way, behind which it is there waiting for us, unmoving and elsewhere.

– V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'Odeur du père*

The Advent of Biennals in Africa

To understand the invention of a biennial in Africa, because it is of "invention" that one must speak, one might first of all ask: Who plays the role of the People in the history of art in Africa and in the emergence of the Dakar Biennial? Who makes the history of African art? What are the infrastructures and productive forces in the field of the history of art in Africa, and what are the subjective and objective elements that make this history meaningful and valuable? These questions are approached via the framework of a theory of the history of art, conceived not as a succession of styles, but as a social and political field. The inception and institutionalization of the Dakar Biennial (Dak'Art) is the positive result of debates within Senegalese society. These historically coded discussions were and continue to be social, political, and aesthetic. They participate in the inscription of the Dakar Biennial into history. As for the event itself, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy on many levels: Pan-African, international, and contemporary.

According to the German Web site www.universes-in-universe.org, there is a total of some two hundred art biennials around the world. Among the events that have established themselves on the international cultural circuit, Africa is represented by the Cairo Biennial (Egypt), the Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie in Bamako (Mali), and the Dakar Biennial. The Biennial of Bantu Arts, organized by the Centre for Bantu Civilisations (CICIBA) since 1985, has not been able to carve out a niche either internationally or in the region. The triennials in Luanda and Cape Town, launched one after the other in early 2007, will certainly improve the general picture with regard to major artistic events in Africa. In the meantime, Dak'Art remains the standout event for contemporary visual arts in Africa. It has forged its identity over the years, becoming a springboard for its own history and an engine of creativity. Artists make work specifically in order to take part. Dak'Art is part of the general history of biennials.

Most of the major cultural events contemporaneous with the Dakar Biennial emerged from the sociohistorical situation of the nineteen-nineties. This historical coexistence makes sense, corresponding as it does to the general renewal of social and political governance undertaken in Africa. The nineties, which worked through the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall, were marked by the end of the apartheid regime, which some analysts interpreted as the end of colonialism and the beginning of postcolonialism in Africa. Before the fall of apartheid, nearly everywhere in Africa the principle of the one-party state was threatened, forced to give ground and allow a political pluralism that was seen as political openness.

The age of biennials was thus, also, a time of political rupture and reorganization and, above all, a time of a general clamoring for liberties. At the forefront of this movement were the young and the working classes rebelling at the general failure of the one-party state. Biennials open up public space, that is to say, space for encounter and debate where art professionals meet and discuss cultural policies or the lack of them, or organize joint projects. In the same space, the work of the visual artists was socially and politically engaged, and in this sense they helped animate the debate on the governance of Africa and the world. Biennials in Africa were part of this general movement of social and political emancipation, a vector of its intensification. They signaled Africa's reawakening to freedom, expressing its new self-belief. In this sense, they contributed to the general logic of "enlightenment" emphasized by Okwui Enwezor with regard to the creation of Documenta in Kassel, Germany. Just as this latter event gave international expression to Germany's determination to turn a new leaf after Nazism and take part in the movement of new ideas, the creation of the African festivals also

coincided with a period of rebirth in Africa. Documenta was conceived, among other reasons, as a home for forms of art that the Nazis condemned as "degenerate," particularly abstract art, and to help the moral and physical reconstruction of the city of Kassel, which had been completely destroyed by Allied bombs.

It can be agreed that the advent of biennials in Africa articulated what was at least a double movement: the reception of an unloved art and self-reconstruction. The contemporary art biennial is connected with the problematic of the reception of African art, which was seriously low in the pecking order of the international art system. It partook of the efforts to reconstruct Africa in the midst of its democratic crisis. Also, the positive PR resulting from the biennial helped put Dakar on the map, establishing a place for Senegal and Africa in the world of fine art. The African biennial of contemporary art therefore relates to the question of Africa's place in an ever more globalized world.

Theodor Adorno would have rejected blockbuster exhibitions in the style of the Dakar Biennial as a manifestation of mass art, with mass art being a form of the culture industry that turns the individual into a faceless creature, lost in the anonymous cohort of visitors, rather than stimulating people's critical potential. At the same time, are people visiting biennial exhibitions not to confront the enigma of art, helping to prove Adorno's point that "art has lost its obviousness"? Does this face-to-face between an unlikely artwork and its occasional visitor not bring with it tension and critical wakefulness? It does insofar as the viewer realizes that the contemporary artwork is not only a two-dimensional pictorial work or a kinetic and tactile work in three dimensions, but increasingly involves installations, that is to say, "spatial units that may be descriptive or imaginary, and that are capable of evoking a technological environment in order to attain the virtual." The confrontation with works is a critical moment that makes it possible to verify and evaluate the problematic character of the contemporary artwork. I recall several moments in the evolution of this problem that, in the history of Dak'Art, have proved controversial.

I have not tried to make the Dakar Biennial a theme, attempting to recite Adorno by heart. I have stirred a few moments of debate and tried to understand from the inside how the need for a major cultural event like the Dakar Biennial elaborates a kind of mass art while resisting blindness or standardization. In analyzing this question, one faces some of the problems that confront the vanquished when, as Walter Benjamin and Adorno recommended, they take it upon themselves to recount history from below-history from the loser's viewpoint. And we have gained a sense of the victor's power and resonance. When he chooses to play the viewer, he is taken on as a player. And when the match is a draw, he ends up the winner. Even more seriously, when one believes one has won, even against oneself, it would seem that the most one has succeeded in doing is producing a weak copy of his masterpieces. We refer to him, in time and in an untimely way, for better and for worse.

What is (African) Art?

The point of the list of misconceptions that follows is to compare differing accounts of the construction of the Dakar Biennial, starting from that initial question: Who makes history? Looking beyond the different subjects that come up in the invention of the Dakar Biennial, it is our hypothesis that the Biennial itself functions as a machine for making the history of art, of Pan-Africanism and contemporaneity. That history employs the notion of art as if it were self-evident. But this view is shared only by those who consider the notion of art as an external one that is not really compatible with African reality.

"In what sense can one speak of 'art' when one speaks of African art?" The answer to this question, which sounds deliberately provocative, is not simple. One can choose between two types of answer. The first is to state that there is no African art because there is no equivalent term in African languages. "Most African languages have no words to designate a work of art, an artist or art."[1] This conception assumes that words are the verbal confirmation of things and the events leading up to them. It thus closes the door on the unnamable or the ill-named and forgets that behind a word there is more than just a thing for which it is the more or less appropriate name. The second option is to state that African art does exist and, with generous condescension, to extend the category of art to include works produced for nonartistic purposes that can nevertheless stand up to a formal, aesthetic interpretation. The art nègre movement takes its place within this second approach, at a distance from those who claim that the concept of art is not African but Western, and that pseudo "African art" is at most a form of Art Brut, or naïve art-in a word, the childhood of art. It would therefore follow that what has taken its place throughout the Western and Westernized world under the label

of the "fine arts"-the expression itself exudes a sense of the duty to contemplate the sublimity of these outstanding works produced by men of genius-has no equivalent in Africa. In both cases we remain caught in the vice of the postulate that, whether brutally expressed or not, boils down to this: Africa has a problem with art.

Africa has been under the Western gaze at least since the turn of the twentieth century, if not before. This recognition is part of a historical sequence that began with the modern age, if not before. It culminated with the notion of art being removed from the matrix of beauty and made to revolve around the notion of the artwork. This aesthetic shift is one of the theoretical conditions for the reception of so-called *art nègre*. It followed the depletion of the resources of classical painting whose key innovation, at least during the Renaissance, had been perspective. It also made the criteria of adroitness and technique intrinsic in the notions of *artes* and *tékhné* obsolete. When visiting museums in New York, Tokyo, Dakar, or Paris, you will often get young or older people coming up to you and asking, "Where is the art in all this? Where is the beauty? Where is the emotion?" And more than once, men and women will say-and not without justification-"Well, if that's art, then I'm an artist!" As Adorno would say, "Art has lost its obviousness."

The question of the status of art could be enriched by opening onto that of "artiality," understood as the set of objects that are, actively or potentially, art objects. "Much that was not art-cultic works, for instance-has over the course of history metamorphosed into art; and much that was once art is that no longer."[2] Jean-Hubert Martin has often formulated this question: when Michelangelo was decorating the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, did he claim to be making art? In the same way, the Dan sculptor making a mask for an altar does not see the creation of beauty as his main objective, but he does render the mask concept he has been asked to as best he can, with all his talent, style, and inspiration. In the same way, photography was first seen as a technology for reproduction, and therefore for imitating nature, but later became a form of representation, like painting and sculpture. It is worth diffracting the term *art* in order to see how it is used to signify and crystallize the *artial* as the *artistic*. The extraordinary variety of versions of art goes beyond the supposed unity of art. There are different kinds of *artiality,* each one mobilizing a specific range of affects. Art is not an exclusive attribute of glorious humanity.

As for the notion of African contemporary art, it touches on the relations between Africa and the West. What Africa must do is be contemporary with the world, with or without the mediation of the West. Africans must be their own contemporaries in a world whose shockwaves they themselves feel and in which they would like to be active players. Africa is not a country but a continent. Why do people get that wrong? It all comes down to prejudice, ignorance, and misinformation-in short, to the representations that we form both of ourselves and of others. These representations concern what are common images of Africa as well as images that Africans themselves put into circulation in the inventive course of everyday life. Art is part of this everyday life. As a maker of forms and rhythms, it liberates images that may invalidate or confirm, but that fundamentally express the concerns of the man or woman engaged in abstract activities, for and by whom ordinary men abandon, more or less provisionally, their duty to create and invent: the artist. Self-expression may directly or indirectly help repair or restore one's self-image. Artistic representations remind us all that images are plastic and mobile, and that they bring internal tensions to the surface of consciousness, making painting, sculpture, or video their avatars.

The Biennial Effect

In 1989, explaining the absence of African partners in the curatorial team for *Magiciens de la terre,* Andre Magnin pointed out that the organizers simply didn't know of any professionals likely to fit in with their projects. Of course, this justification judges itself, in that it reveals the organizers' level of information. Putting on a biennial implies having men and women who are competent or can be trained. The construction of the event is a performance that creates qualifications, that enriches the professional competence of the art workers striving to make it a success. Dak'Art can take pride in having contributed to the visibility and validation of a certain number of skills in the artistic professions. It has not only validated competence, but also actually brought it into being. The involvement of African critics and curators in defining the content of the event reestablishes the truth as to the purported lack of contemporary art professionals in Africa. Dak'Art demonstrates that a curator is someone who has been certified as a professional, but also someone who has been professionalized. Dak'Art is a platform for the professionalization of artists, critics, exhibition designers, and cultural operators.

In September 2005 torrential rain beat down on Dakar. Unusual for a Sahelian country such as Senegal, the duration and intensity of this rain caused a real natural catastrophe. The national TV channel showed men, women, and children in distress. Desperate men were explaining to the authorities that they had lost everything they had.In many neighborhoods the waves climbed up the pavement and into houses. The infiltration of water forced the inhabitants to wrap their possessions in plastic. It was like a tropical adaptation of Christo's work. This was when an important figure at the Ministry of Culture in Dakar put to me the following question: what will you say if one of these poor people asks why you devote so much money to organizing a biennial for a privileged few when the houses of Dakar's poor are flooded with rainwater? The answer that immediately came to mind was as follows: The money that we could save by cutting the Biennial would certainly not be spent on improving the poorer districts! True, poor people may not necessarily need a biennial, but they don't wait to have everything they might need before starting to love music, dance, beautiful forms, and beautiful things. The answer I actually gave was more convivial: the million or so francs that Senegal agrees to pay for the Biennial are next to nothing when compared with the huge sums that we effectively need to find in order to fight flooding. Beyond these answers, the fundamental question raised by the friendly objection formulated above is that of financial viability. It is also that of the financial viability of festivals and other events. Artists and cultural professionals are on the wrong track if they respond by arguing that painting can immortalize memories of the floods of 2005 and elaborate a tropical version of Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa!* That landmark painting from 1819, which refers to the sinking of a frigate that occurred in 1816 off the Senegalese coast, speaks of the atrocious sufferings endured by its passengers for ten whole days. The work also raises the question of responsibility (who made the disaster inevitable?) and denounces the inequality of the different classes before death. The privileged passengers were saved while the less well-heeled were abandoned, left on that raft.

It is also a waste of breath answering the culture skeptics that art and culture, a fact attested by the so-called development theater, can help in the fight against malaria and AIDS and may also, let us not forget, serve to formulate more or less educational arguments on social issues such as democracy and human rights. Culture skeptics are impervious to arguments demonstrating the effects of culture on social cohesion, the construction of dignity, social development, etc. As Saint-Exupery's Little Prince observed a long time ago, "Adults love numbers." Figures are the only language they understand, and what they expect is a mathematical demonstration of the benefits of culture in cash value. Now, most of the cash generated by culture doesn't find its way directly into its coffers, hence the joke made by Minister Abdoulaye Elimane Kane: "Yes, Dak'Art does have a structuring effect. I mean, it has a structuring effect for airlines, hotels, restaurants, shops, taxis, and gallerists."

In effect, the Biennial does often incite airplanes and hotels to work at a constant rhythm. Most of the meager budgets allocated by the public authorities and international cooperations do not go into artists' pockets but are injected into the national economy.[3] The Biennial creates the conditions for the general activation of the national economy. It follows that the real budget-eaters are not those who are singled out for attention, but the airlines, the hotels, and the communications agencies. If only a fraction of the sums spent by festivalgoers in each of these areas ended up in the Biennial's coffers, then surely it would not always need to go from financier to financier in order to make up its budget. Having been financed once, it would remain in funds for many years. And it would then no longer be seen as financially voracious.[4]

Festivals are also powerful vehicles of communication, a dimension confirmed by the many posters around the city and the coverage in the press, on the radio and television, and in various international media with an interest in African issues. Thanks to the Biennial, Senegal enjoys prime coverage in the most prominent media. Press response in and beyond Africa, plus airtime, sends images of the country's vitality all around the world. In addition to this indirect publicity for the country, there is also the aspect of diplomatic communication. The authorities of the host nations that provide limousines and cocktails for their prestigious guests use the Biennial to reaffirm their role in the subregion of West Africa, in the larger region of Africa and in the world. This cultural diplomacy is aimed at ministers in the subregion and the higher bodies of international cooperation (European Union, World Bank, etc.), as well as at representatives of civil society such as associations and NGOs, which use the festival as an occasion for organizing initiatives and consolidating their work with urban and village communities.

Origins of Dak'Art

Man is born of man. Such is the law of the species. But is a biennial born of a biennial? The Venice Biennial has on occasion been presented as the model purportedly "under-developed" by Dak'Art:

> The first Dakar Biennial was organizedi in 99, again with a structure close to the pavilion model of the Venice Biennial. The first edition of Dak'Art was an international exhibition of contemporary art at which artists were grouped together by nationality. In order to select and invite foreign participants, the organizers contacted embassies, foreign cultural institutions, and international organizations, using a network linked mainly to the government and supplemented by a few personal contacts. It was therefore inevitable that the first Biennial should consecrate international political relations more than contemporary art.[5]

This presentation of events gives Venice a great deal of importance. In fact, there were no national pavilions at the 1992 Dakar Biennial of Arts and Literature. In the catalogue, the artists were presented by country for the sake of editorial convenience, as they were again in 1996, but this did not reflect the reality of the concept or the design of the exhibition. Certainly, the cultural centers of international partners facilitated the participation of artists from the countries concerned. But the Ivorians expected at this edition did not all appear and were not registered by the government. In her report, commissioned by the European Commission, Isabelle Bosman noted: "It was announced that Africa, Europe, America, and Asia would all be taking part. The reality was that several countries, especially from Africa and Asia, were represented by only one or two works by a national based in Senegal or Europe. There were few direct relations with the countries concerned."[6]

A misconception: the Dakar Biennial has sometimes been presented as a replica of the Parisian exhibition devoted to those famous *Magiciens de la terre* held at the Centre Georges Pompidou and La Villette in 1989. Not only does this way of looking at things impute goals to Dak'Art that it does not have, but it implies that if you want to refute an exhibition put on in Paris you need not only another exhibition but a whole institution. Indeed, in 1990 or 1992, how many Senegalese even knew of the existence of *Magiciens de la terre?* And furthermore, how many Senegalese and African artists and intellectuals considered that exhibition as something that urgently needed to be refuted? In the presentation texts for the Biennial of Arts and Literature, and then of Dak'Art, *Magiciens de la terre* is nowhere to be seen. Indeed, neither the Venice Biennial nor Documenta nor *Magiciens de la terre* has claimed to have invented Dak'Art.

So, if the Dakar Biennial is neither a replica of the Venice Biennial nor an effect of *Magiciens de la Terre,* what is its origin? Of what is it the sign? How did it attain the undeniable renown that makes it one of the important events in the calendar of international biennials, and one of the biggest cultural events in contemporary Africa?

Rather than hypothesize, I propose to consider the thoughts of the social and political players who, in the field, while at the same time inventing the conditions of their everyday survival, were dealing with the shifts and orientations that have positioned the Biennial in the contemporary history of art and of Africa. The Dakar Biennial is an avatar of the Biennial of Arts and Literature. How could it be otherwise in the home of Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first president of Senegal?

Senghor voluntarily stepped down on December, 1980, after a twenty-year rule, retiring to France and leaving his heir apparent, Abdou Diouf, to complete his term of office. On March 9, 1984, the former president, a founding member of the Senegalese Socialist Party, was elected to the Academie Française. This was the culmination of a long campaign waged by his friend Maurice Druon, and supported by the opportune accession to power of François Mitterrand and the French Left. In 989 Amadou Lamine Sall, the disciple that "the bard of negritude" considered the most gifted poet of his generation, and who had followed the master in his retirement in France, returned to Senegal and to the Culture Ministry. His name remains intimately linked to the implementation of the Biennial.

In his great solicitude, President Senghor, "the poet-president" who was also a critic and patron, had provided artists with a number of structures. The regime of President Abdou Diouf, when faced with the structural adjustment programs, chose not to maintain these. Consequently, important aspects of Senghor's cultural heritage were eroded. The privatization of Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines (NEA), the transformation of the Musée Dynamique into law courts, the termination of the aid and subventions that benefited artists and poets, the closure of the Village des Arts de la

Corniche in 1983–all these acts of renunciation heightened the impression of a process of "de-Senghorization," causing much nostalgia and resentment.

Artists became increasingly militant in their attitude, albeit reluctantly. For them, the opening of the National Gallery of Arts looked like no more than a feeble consolation prize. Under the directorship of Papa Ibra Tall, a comrade of Senghor's, the National Gallery hosted a Senegalo-Afro-American exhibition that featured only a handful of Senegalese artists. Those not included reacted by organizing the first National Salon of Visual Artists.

The following year, in 1986, the Salon chose an overtly political theme: "Art against Apartheid." That year, President Abdou Diouf "made the struggle against apartheid the defining theme of his tenure."[7] Since that edition, the Salon has been placed under his patronage. The decision to organize a Biennial of Arts and Literature was announced by Diouf in October 1989. Oussey-nou Wade, the second secretary general of the Dakar Biennial, links this step to the realpolitik of the time. The Diouf regime was all the more ready to lend an ear to artists' concerns because it had just completed its second structural adjustment program. It was economically more comfortable and could more easily entertain the project of a Biennial of Arts and Literature, while at the same time opening a new Village of the Arts. Then, at the awards ceremony for the Grand Prizes of the Arts and Literature on August 6, 1990, when speaking about writers and artists, the head of state stated:

> They will be offered a new expressive framework, the Dakar Biennial. As I previously announced in this same place, Dakar will be hosting the Biennial of the Arts and Literature from December 10 to 18, 1990. This regular event will enable men of culture on this continent and in other countries to meet and communicate and to share the fascinating experience of creating and recreating. Dakar will thus offer our peoples one of those moments of fraternity when a civilization creates, thinks about what it is, and prepares to go forth and conquer its future.[8]

Towards the Pan-African

Dak'Art began to present itself as a Pan-African arts festival in 1996. By positioning itself in this way it took as its center of gravity the intertwining of the "History of the Dark Continent" with the more or less edifying "story-ettes" of individual or collective subjects who partly or wholly identified with its destiny while at the same time moving it forward, rather as the walking man transports and projects his own shadow. It was standing up and speaking on behalf of Africa and in the name of Africa. The Pan-African option induces a theoretical position, an argument of a philosophical nature, and a style of case-making that are not unproblematic. The Pan-African role of the Dakar Biennial reduces participation by Senegalese artists in a biennial to only a limited number of places in an event for which they fought so hard-a meager share, in fact. Those who thought themselves naturally entitled to the Biennial reluctantly found themselves confirming the proverb, "There is only one hunter, but the whole village feasts."

Becoming a Pan-African arts festival meant that the Dakar Biennial exhibited fewer and fewer Senegalese works. Thus despoiled of their birthright, many have found an effective alternative in fringe events.

For Pan-Africanism the idea of African unity or union is a question not so much of essence as of meaning. It represents a determination to confront the complexity of reality while gesturing towards a historico-mythical origin. The idea is to make Africa a living pulsation, to help it live and accept itself with as much dignity and as freely as possible, and to make the idea of African unity come alive, while keeping it from a monolithic conformism. The Cairo Biennial, which is particularly open to the Middle East and to Arab countries, hosts more artists from Europe than from sub-Saharan Africa. The Dakar Biennial bases its identity on a claim to promote African artists.

In 1995 the first Johannesburg Biennial was deliberately international, in which respect it was just like all the other biennials glittering in the firmament. Africa was its space, but in terms of time it was plugged in to the simultaneity of the global village. In Pan-Africanism, Africa was engaging with its internal and external realities, with the plasticity of its fixed and shifting identities. This was an Africa that was constantly moving, open and outspread in the complexity of its children's relation to their adoptive lands, on the one hand, and to the motherland on the other. Between, so to speak, the father-earth and the mother-earth, several nodes of memories formed, and one could choose a number of them without contradicting oneself. The new information and communication technologies have changed man's relation to space and time. Africa and Africanness have consequently been potentially reconfigured. While remaining the center of gravity for

men and women who feel that they are named through its history and geography, Africa is constantly shifting on its foundations, in keeping with the movements of its children and their departures and returns. The African integration effected by Dak'Art is not only internal; it is also external. Dak'Art and events like it take on board an Africa that is open to its historic divisions and dismemberings. This approach is not authoritarian: those concerned and enrolled are only artists who recognize and accept their African origin.

The opening of Africa to its diasporas sets Africanness in motion. It also reminds us that Africa is not only a geographical reality, but also an idea. In the words of Simon Njami, "an artist like Moataz Nasr discovered that he was African when he went to Dak'Art. He didn't know that such an event existed in Dakar. He went back to Cairo with a totally new physical, intellectual, and human map of Africa."

Behind the idea of Africa is a desire for Africa, a project sustained by the ambiguous energy and unconditional love and impatience of men of action. The fact of meeting up in Africa around a Pan-African project is part of this dynamic. The experience of the Biennial and of its strengths and weaknesses helps bond all those, both Africans and non-Africans, who dearly want Africa to be respected and worthy of respect. It feeds the desire for unity. For all that, however, the idea of Africa does not need to be either real or just. For it is a more or less phantasmal representation, and believers never ask for a certificate of authenticity.

This openness affects both the form and content of Dak'Art. The diaspora has accelerated the acceptance of new styles, including video and multimedia installations and performance, both at the Dakar Biennial and around Africa. It has thus exerted all its influence on the content of selections, haunted as these were by the question of so-called international criteria. From the outset, the bulk of selected artists were Africans from Europe. The selection process in place since 1996 is founded on the applications sent directly by would-be exhibitors to the Biennial's general secretariat, and it is manifest that artists from the diaspora have been better than their continental counterparts at adding the technological trappings (transparencies, slides, then CDs) to their inherent talent, and that the quality of this presentation added to the value of their works. Better informed of artistic developments because of a more richly furnished cultural environment, better equipped, and highly motivated, they quickly develop a sublimated relation to the continent. All of this stimulates the imagination and enhances art-making. Arithmetical data aside, the artists of the diaspora show that distance can be a motivation for getting more intensely involved in the questioning of origins. More than Africans living in Africa, communities that have exported the idea of Africa feel the need to keep a living connection to the continent. Culture is one way of doing so. Between history and memory, domination and resistance, it sustains the will to survive and remember in men and women living in different contexts and time frames who, despite themselves, are reinventing their identity. Leibniz's theory of the monad offers the brilliant idea of the subject's radical singularity. As a monad, each subject sees the world from a unique viewpoint, and, to speak like Aime Cesaire, from the viewpoint of a cry that only he can articulate. Depending on the amount and quality of reflexive effort put into making his particular relation to the world intelligible, the subject helps or does not help to make the world better. But the general state of efforts produced by all, validated at every moment by God, produces the best of all possible worlds. The privilege and responsibility of artists and men of culture is that they are aware that it is their role to understand and communicate their particular relation to the world.

The Biennial: A Stage for the Contemporary

All art bears a relation to society. It can rehearse its cultural and moral givens and change form when its social base is irremediably transformed. The notion of contemporary art adumbrates a visual space in which societies, all societies, are encouraged to be in tune with the historical and technological changes informing artistic practices. In Africa, contemporary art has been popularized by biennials and festivals. Better than museums, which are to a great extent the prisoners of the anthropological vocation of conserving heritage, and better than galleries, which are focused on the model of the artwork as something that can be transferred to a private living room, biennials have managed to find a place for this new aesthetic that validates a certain number of operations, including the substitution of the representation of the object for its presentation, the abolition of boundaries between disciplines, the subversion of style, the destructuring of forms, the transfiguration of disciplines, the integration of new media such as photography, video, installations, and all the approaches drawing on the language but not the machinery of cinema, etc. We may note in particular that contemporary art is pursuing a radical questioning of the traditional notion of approved modernism.

Henceforth distanced from the models of the demiurge and the genius, the artist no longer even needs to have talent or to exhibit a particular know-how. It is enough for him to have an idea, a concept, and to ensure that he has the means to put on a powerful and even spectacular visual presentation.

The problematic of the contemporary came to the fore at the same time as major exhibitions, such as the Dakar and Johannesburg biennials. There is a factual contiguity between contemporary art and the biennial as a specific form of exhibition. The biennial as authority and institution is an element within the contemporary art system. It designates great artists in collaboration with the active community of gallery directors, museum and non-museum curators, and critics. It is worth describing the conditions in which this element emerged. Dakar has no contemporary art museum, only a national gallery, cultural centers run in cooperation with other nations, and a few private galleries. In this environment, the event that is the Biennial holds all the power that would devolve to institutions if they existed. This state of affairs endows the Biennial with immense institutional power. In fact, the Biennial assumes and exercises the power of the museum before sharing it with curators. And there is much to be shared. The time of biennials is also the time of curators. This makes the Biennial a performative instance of the contemporaneity of art in Africa.

Biennials stage the contemporary. Indeed, they have promoted this adjective, which implies certain international criteria for the selection of artists. Consequently, the Dakar Biennial has been the home of international critics and curators who, along with a few African specialists, have articulated their version of contemporary art in Africa. This construction is based not on unanimity but on debate and confrontation.

The blockbuster exhibition fits with the modern and postmodern logic of the "society of the spectacle." In the Biennial, Senegal puts Africa on stage and attempts to negotiate a place in what Heidegger defined as the time of representation. The Dakar Biennial represents Africa not only by speaking in its name, but also by its presence in places where Africa is absent: in the supermarkets of culture and the spectacle. It also represents Africa in that it gives it a new presence: a presence in the contemporary, when Africa is endlessly associated with tradition and folklore. It represents it in a different light, so to speak: it gives it a makeover. In this respect, it is a form of resistance against residual colonialism. But at least since Cain, we have known that it is not enough to destroy the other if we want to escape the power of his gaze.

Africa an the Global

The nineteen-nineties were characterized by a play of forces on the art system that encouraged relative optimism. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Eastern Bloc gave wings to the discourse of globalization. One practical effect of these discourses was precisely that more and more Africans could make themselves heard in the world of contemporary art. The first African presences at the Venice Biennial (the world's oldest) are part of this context. In 1986 Venice thus saw its first participation by artists from South Africa, which was still under the apartheid regime at the time. This signal to Africa was stronger at the 1990 edition, which included five African artists: Tapfuma Gutsa, Henry Makembera, and Muyarase from Zimbabwe, El Anatsui from Ghana, and Bruce Onobrakpeya from Nigeria. Mustapha Dime was invited to Venice in 1992, and Ousmane Sow in 1998. These timid but regular overtures whetted African artists' appetite for visibility. Could it be said that the call for an African biennial was driven by the desire to make up for the lack of visibility of African artists? To answer this question in the affirmative would be tantamount to saying that a satisfying representation of African artists at existing biennials would have removed the need for an African biennial. However, the organization of a major cultural event is not just a solution to problems of the "artistic showroom" variety; it is also an undertaking in which human resources are mobilized and remobilized on a number of levels. A lack of visibility does not mean only that Africa is not sufficiently shown. It also implies the dubious nature of those infrequent presentations in which Africa is poorly shown and inappropriately named.

In a general context where criticism is timid, galleries rare, collectors unlikely, and the public evanescent, the Biennial helps to polarize, inject dynamism, and mediate. It provides proof that an art system can exist without a formal museum. It also makes the case for contemporary African art, illustrating its existence and showing that it can be encountered somewhere in Africa, if one makes an appointment. Another challenge is to get African art away from provincialism so that, without having to go to New York or London, an artist in Bangui or Bujumbura can become known and recognized and sell his work. Unlike other major exhibitions, such as *Magiciens de la terre,* which have aroused interest and stirred debate about contempo-

rary African art, the Dakar Biennial is held in Africa. It stands as a concrete record of the consciousness and memory of African professionals and of the general public. It does not relate to history by proxy. It is, rather, an objective given in which the main protagonists are both Africa and the situation. One important function of Dak'Art is thus to integrate it into the distribution circuits of so-called global art, which tends to mean Western art.

Recognition of Africa by the West came slowly and late. It remains incomplete and can perhaps never be complete. The fact remains that the history of this recognition shows art and artists to have been in the vanguard of a struggle that was heavily conflictual, both symbolically and in reality. This recognition has not been without violence.[9] The recognition of African art as part of universal art is the humanist aspect of a violent practice of expropriation. At first real and brutal, this has since become more diffuse, more complex.

What is at stake in a theory of African art (and therefore of a biennial of African art such as Dak'Art) is determined around a central proposition: Africa may have in some ways been "underdeveloped" (you never know), but certainly never on the level of the arts.

This essay is an abridged and translated version of several chapters of: Yacouba Konaté, La Biennale de Dakar: Pour une esthétique de la création africaine contemporaine: Tête à tête avec Adorno *(Paris, 2009).*

Translation by Charles Penwarden.

Notes

1 Éliane Burnet, "L'Africain de service: Des zoos humains aux biennales d'art contemporain," Éthiopiques, no. 73 (2004), http://www.refer.sn/ethiopiques/article.php3?id_ article=117&artsuite=4.
2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Christian Lenhardt (London and New York, 1974), p. 3.
3 These budgets expected but rarely obtained by FESPACO, MASA, and Dak'Art are, respectively, two million, one and a half million, and one million euros.
4 In 2008, for the 150 professionals invited by the Biennial, including the chosen artists, 300 other professionals made the trip on their own initiative. We can therefore say that in that year, for every ticket or hotel room provided by the Biennial, two others were bought by international art professionals and cultural tourists. The Biennial also has this stimulating effect where exhibitions are concerned. In 2009 there were 160 exhibitions in the unofficial part of the event and their average budget was 5,000 euros. In all, Senegalese, African, and international cultural operators invest more money in the Biennial than do its state and international partners. The sums thus injected are of benefit in the first instance to artists, for whom Dak'Art is a space for exhibiting and selling work. It is estimated that an average of three works are sold per exhibition. Of course, not all exhibitions offer works for sale. With the average price being 1,000 euros, it's easy enough to do the math.
5 Iolenda Pensa, "Les Biennales et la géographie: Les Biennales de Venise, du Caire et de Dakar," http:// io.pensa.it/node/1417.
6 Isabelle Bosman, *La Biennale internationale des arts plastiques de Dakar, 14–20 décembre 1992,* audit carried out for the European Commission, p. 14.
7 Abdou Sylla, *Arts plastiques et état au Sénégal: Trente-cinq ans du mécénat au Sénégal* (Dakar, 1998), p. 138, n. 89.
8 Ibid., p. 148.
9 The violence of seizure and theft was still in evidence when the Dakar–Djibouti mission led by Marcel Griaule with, among others, Michel Leiris crossed Africa in 1929. To put it simply, while in Paris the Cubists were celebrating "negro" sculptures, scientific missions were confiscating and stealing objects from "the natives," working under the immunity provided by the colonial administration.

DAK'ART 1992–2002 The Problems of Representation, Contextualisation, and Critical Evaluation in Contemporary African Art as Presented by the Dakar Biennale

Rasheed Araeen

DAK'ART 2002

The 10th May 2002 was a beautiful sunny morning in Dakar. As I approached the grounds of the grand premises of CICES (Centre international du commerce exte´rieur du Senegal), I sensed an atmosphere of great celebration and festivities. Musicians and dancers, with their specially designed colourful dresses, were around everywhere, perform ing among the people – both Senegalese and their international guests – who had gathered there for the official opening of DAK'ART 2002. What really pleased me most was not only the celebratory spirit of the whole thing, but also the fact that so many Senegalese people who would otherwise be unemployed most of the year were able to earn some money by participating in this event. The whole thing was so overwhelming that one expected it to be a prelude to an extraordinary event, particularly when it was also a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Dakar Biennale.

After being received in such a festive atmosphere, which produced an optimistic mood in me, I proceeded to the hall where the actual opening ceremony was to take place. The hall was in fact packed with thousands of people, with a dozen or so TV cameras installed there to record the ceremony. And although I myself was an hour late, the podium was still empty. It took at least another hour before the whole entourage of government officials and Biennale organisers began to arrive. At least another hour was lost in listening to their unnecessarily long and vacuous speeches before the doors of the exhibition were officially opened.

Compared with the festivities outside in the grounds of CICES and the great enthusiasm of the public around, who patiently and attentively listened to all the speeches of the high officials, the actual event urned out to be an anti-climax. If the exhibition represented, in the words of Marie-José Crespin, 'the vibrant artistic heart of the continent',[1] then it was a big dis appointment. First of all, the continent wasn't there. How could a mere thirteen countries (mostly Francophone), out of more than forty African nations, justifiably represent 'the heart of the continent'?[2]

In fact this has been one of the main problem of the Biennale from its very inception in 1992. Its inability to attract the participation of sufficient artists across the whole of Africa, so that it could justify its claim to be 'the Biennale of Contemporary African Art', has constantly left a big gap. Of course there have been many other problems – of a material, organisational, artistic and ideological nature – to which it seems little attention has been paid, and which consequently has prevented the Biennale from fulfilling its his torical objectives. As these problems are of a fundamental nature, and they remain unresolved even after the ten years' existence of the Biennale, I feel that it is more important that we pay attention to these problems rather than just looking at the Biennale as a unique event of African art. It is of course a unique event, but what signifies its uniqueness? Is it possi ble to answer this question with out looking at the whole thing and taking stock of what the Biennale has done in its ten years' exist ence? In fact, it will not be imper tinent even to ask: what has been its achievement? If it has not achieved much beyond just showing works of some African artists every two years, and celebrating them without any context or crit ical evaluation, shouldn't the whole idea of this Biennale and its performance now be subjected to critical scrutiny? But, first, let us visit the remaining exhibitions.

The next day I found myself climbing up the high steps of the (ancien) Palais de Justice. Again there was a music

and dance group at the door to welcome the audience. As I entered the building I faced rows of pillars; around each of these pillars were placed bags of agricultural products indigenous to Senegal – rice, sorghum, millet, beans, etc. It was an impressive display. At the other end of the building colourful chairs were arranged in the usual manner of a public meeting. I wandered around thinking what all this was about, as there was no information whatso ever about the nature of this exhibi tion. On enquiring from an official of the Biennale present there, I was told that they were just Senegalese foodstuffs on display; and the chairs were for the people to sit on – which they were in fact doing. Only when I returned to my hotel room late in the evening and looked in the cata logue did I realise that I was looking at the installation works of two (in fact there were three) invited Euro pean artists – Jannis Kounellis and Franz West (the third artist was Jaume Plensa). Why were they there, and what was the significance of their participation in an African biennale? If their presence in Dakar was part of the Biennale's 'quest for reciprocated exchange relations and shared social, economic and cultural growth',[3] it failed miserably despite the quality of their work. In the absence of a context or framework in which this 'exchange' could take place, the whole thing in fact became a farce. I will return to this question again later, when I will point out the impossibility of this 'exchange' within the prevailing dominant framework.

My next stop was at the Muse´e de I'FAN. As I entered the premises I saw a row of beautiful young Senegalese girls in front of the door of the museum, dressed in a beautifully tailored Biennale's typical costume, welcoming the audience. I passed through them and climbed up to the first floor, where there were installations by three artists. For me it was another disappointing show. But maybe I should let its curator N'Gone Fall enlighten us:[4]

> Identity, authenticity, africanity. None of these words has a meaning when we talk about [these artists]. What, then, they have in common? A feeling of belonging to Africa. West, Southern, Central Africa. Amahiguere Dolo with Mali, Berry Bickle with Zimbabwe, Aime Ntakiyica with Burundi. Three exhibitions, three atmospheres, three personal stories.
>
> Dolo is a Dogon. In Dogon society, a sculpture has a specific function; it is a link to God, it represents a symbolic area whose spiritual dimension is only accessible to the initiates. If Dolo's sculptures are intriguing, it is because they are full of mystery. Dolo speaks to the spirits. There is no relation to the cult, nor any invocation of the Word in his creative process. His sculptures do not have a utilitarian, sacred or secular function. They are meant for a public on whose senses and imagination they call.
>
> To live or rather to survive, such is the goal of Berenice Josephine Bickle. In a country which is on the verge of achieving a record of 'isms' (racism, homophobism, totalitarianism, anarchism), to be a woman, and a white woman and an artist is to personify a cocktail of attributes very difficult to manage in Zimbabwe. Can Berry Bickle be a barometer of artistic trends in Zimbabwe? Can she discharge that when, in the collective unconscious, Zimbabwean art is lim ited to stone sculptures?
>
> There is always interaction between the work [a video installation by Aime Ntakiyica] and the public. The latter are not mere spectators, they move between the periphery and the centre, among suspended objects, in levitation. . . . Fragments of space (a fountain, a corri dor, a shower, a patio, a summer room), these installations enable him to con quer a place and mark his territory.

Language can reveal what an object hides, but it can also mystify. Thus the object becomes cocooned in the play of language without revealing its real sig nificance or lack of significance. So I returned to the ground floor where a band was playing traditional instrumental music. It was beautiful, but there was no one listening.[5]

It may seem that I am being dismissive of everything. But this is not so. The Biennale is full of interesting work, as interesting as one would find in other biennales or international exhibitions. If I am disappointed it is only because I have somewhat different, if not high, expecta tions from this Biennale. For me the Dakar Biennale is an event of unique historical importance, with a specific objective that should differentiate it from other biennales. If this uniqueness is not supported or underpinned by the works in the Biennale, then there is something wrong. Biennales or international exhibitions are often of a thematic or historical nature, underpinned by rigorous scholarship that gives them their specific contexts that highlight their aesthetic as well as sociohistorical significances. In view of the fact that the Dakar Biennale has emerged out of a different

struggle and history, I cannot merely use the contexts of other biennales or international exhibitions, and what legitimises them as historically significant events, to evaluate its real significance and/or what it contains.

One cannot just look at artwork and say whether it is good or not. It must say more than just offering itself for appreciation or enjoyment; this is particularly so when the work of different artists is put together. They must have a context or framework that justifies or legitimises their togetherness, and enables us to understand their collective significance. It is therefore necessary to go beyond just looking at artworks and ask: what is the context of the Dakar Biennale? If Africa is the context, what does it mean? If it means its achievements in art, how do we recognise them? The answer to these questions is not as obvious as is assumed by the organisers and supporters of the Biennale. In fact I find no satisfactory answer from the works on display or the texts in the catalogues.

However, I do find it interesting that so many people to whom I have talked– particularly from Europe and North America – are so fascinated by the Biennale and are full of praise for it. In some way, this is understandable. After all, most of these people – museum directors, gallery owners, curators, critics, journalists, and so on, from the West – are the guests of the Biennale. They have been given free air tickets and are accommodated in four- or five-star luxury hotels with cash for daily expenses. This may be a facile or cynical observation, but should we not look at the whole thing beyond the West's fascination for the others, which often is no more than a patronising gesture by the benevolent power? Can we evaluate the real significance of the Biennale and what it shows as works of art without its own specific context and, more importantly, a critical framework, which are historically justified? Works of art have little value without their sociohistorical contexts and without the context in which they are collectively presented. Is it enough to say that it is a biennale representing Africa, or that it is now the only African biennale of visual arts showing the works of African artists living in both Africa and abroad?

What do the ciritics say?

Clementine Deliss, reviewing the very first Biennale in 1992, says that 'the misguided faith in the so-called international art circuit [has] deterred the organisers from developing a pan-African approach, [with] a focus on greater communication and familiarity within Africa between practising artists and writers'.[6] Four years later, Brian Biggs finds 'that there was no attempt to pursue a pan-African approach, or to give the artists a central role in shaping and participating in the event. The focus . . . on an all-African selection went only half-way to addressing the . . . issue with large areas of the continent hardly represented at all. . . .' He then raises a very important question: 'So what were the objectives set out by the DAK'ART organisers, and what role do international gatherings like this [mostly from Europe and North America] have in the developing framework of contemporary cultural discourse on the African continent itself? Reading through the . . . catalogue, answers to these questions proved frustratingly evasive.'[7]

Katya Garcia-Anton goes even further: 'However intoxicating the festival spirit must have been, the spectre of colonialism cast a sombre shadow. The voice, as well as aesthetic values, continued to reside within a dominant western centre.'[8]

I am in total sympathy with these comments, as they have raised some very fundamental issues and to ignore them would be tantamount to not recognising the historical nature of the Biennale. Pan-Africanism is an important concept, as it brings Africa's whole body together. But can contemporary art produced by African artists, whether in Africa or abroad, be contextualised only by and within the idea of pan-Africanism without recognising its history of struggle against colonialism? If the African 'voice, as well as [its] aesthetic values, continued to reside within a dominant centre',[9] was there no struggle against this centre? Why is this struggle, or its spirit, totally absent from the Biennale?

The struggle of Africa was not only against the crude and brutal forces of political domination and oppression but also for its right to define itself in its own way and within modernity. Although it would be a truism to say that modernity was an arm of colonial domination, Africa – like other colonised continents – did adopt its ideas of universal progress and emancipation, with a hope that it would help construct its liberated future in terms of advanced scientific and technological developments. This consciousness also gave rise to the emergence of art that not only defied Africa's old traditions, particularly those which in some cases had become an obstacle to its modern progress, but also challenged the West's perception of Africa and its creativity perpetually trapped in its old structures. Since the work of Aina Onabolu of Nigeria in the early twentieth century, and subsequently the struggle of many other African artists

(such as Gerard Sekoto, Ernest Mancoba, Iba Ndiaye – to mention a few from the African mainland) against the West's monopoly of modernism's history,[10] African art has come a long way; it has now reached a position where there seems no longer to be conflict or struggle with the dominant centre. But can this really be true? If the social, economic and political conditions of Africa are still struggling against the global hegemony of the West, how can its art be free from this hegemony? The present generation of African artists – those we see in the Dakar Biennale as well as in international exhibitions – may not feel that there is any need to confront the dominant system, but are they not then abandoning the very principle of modernism or the avant-garde (dissent from or challenge to the established order) from which they derive their formal strategies?

We can, however, say that African artists are as good as their Western counterparts, in terms of the use of modern techniques and technologies, but should this really be their only aim? Modern techniques and technologies are necessary means today by which the contemporary artist is able to reflect on the complexity of modern life with all its contradictions. But if this is only determined or achieved by the internal mechanisms of making art and is removed from the specificity of the sociohistorical forces of Africa and its critical relationship with the dominant world, would it not lead African art to naive and facile ends? It would be unfair, however, to attribute these characteristics only to the works in the Biennale. They are in fact also part of what is now inflicting art globally, and as the Biennale wants to be part of the global art community this condition of African art is understandable. However, we cannot avoid asking the question: why is African art part of this global phenomenon, emerging from the centre in the West, but also what does this mean for Africa? Can Africa assert its independence or develop its own Direction and Vision within this context without critically confront ing the dominant structures of art around the world today?

What are these structures?

While lamenting the absence of 'inter-African links' free from 'colonial relationships', David Elliott, President of the Selection Committee and Jury of DAK'ART 2000, says that 'the masters had departed yet their structures remained'.[11] Who would disagree with him? But is he seriously concerned with 'their structures', or just shedding crocodile tears? Is this not just a passing gesture of Western liberalism that can only see these structures in operation away from its own home territory, and forgets that these structures are in fact the very source of its power and privilege?

What are these structures, and how are we to deal with them? Should or can Africa alone deal with them? If the issue is of freedom from these structures, can it be achieved without a struggle against these structures? If these structures are still found on African soil, where are their roots? Are they in Africa? If their roots are elsewhere, outside Africa, but they continue to affect whatever Africa does or produces, shouldn't we look at these roots? What is the nature of these roots? Who and what nurtures these roots?

What is remarkable is not that people like David Elliott can see these structures and that they can point to the detrimental effects these structures have on African art and its position in the world, but their inability to see or recognise that they themselves are in fact part of the problem. If Elliott is really concerned with these structures, what has he been doing to confront them on his own ground? David Elliott is not an ordinary person but represents an important pillar of the Western art establishment, and his influence on the British art world in particular has been considerable. In fact he is part of the worldwide system that continues to defend and maintain the power of 'the masters' and 'their structures'. I'm not alluding to the political and economic structures of the West but its liberal institutions, and I have seen no evidence of fundamental change in these structures since they were formed to uphold the 'humanism' of colonial power. They are still intact, both in art institutions and academe, and are rigorously protected from the subversive onslaught of the others, who are kept outside their boundary walls on the pretext that they belong elsewhere.

The structures of colonialism cannot be dealt with only by those who are colonised. Colonialism is a process or phenomenon that affects both the coloniser and the colonised, and decolonisation implies a dialogical process by which both should be liberated. The freedom of the colonised without the coloniser undergoing the process of decoloni sation is an illusion that maintains the power of the coloniser over the colonised even when the colonised is supposed to be free. Western liberalism represents this power. If people like David Elliott really want to see the others liberate themselves from these structures, they will have to be actively part of this liberation. They themselves will have to confront the institutions of which they are part, and in the process help liberate their structures from the colonial

legacies. The problem is that the power and privilege of these people depend on the continuation of these structures, and it is this power that brings them to Africa. When these people come to Africa and tell Africa that it is still the victim of these structures, all they do is to display their white liberal guilt mixed with arrogance of power.

It is therefore no wonder that the work of such a historically important European artist as Jannis Kounellis should end up falling flat in the abandoned building of the Palais de Justice – the very same Palais de Justice through which the colonial power bestowed its 'justice' on the colonised and by which it justified its power. As this building now lay shattered, dilapidated by its lack of historical purpose, with what new 'justice' is Kounellis now seeking a dialogue with the society when it has not yet recovered from the old one? How can an artist who had no dialogue with his African – or the other – contemporaries while they were there on his home ground, have a meaningful dialogue with them now on African soil? And on what basis? Did Kounellis ever ask himself why the discourse that privileged him and gave him the power to assert his presence in Africa kept the others outside this discourse? Did he ever realise that these others were immigrants as much as he was an immigrant?[12] How could he? They were different, and were meant to do different things. In fact, he would have been surprised – to say the least – if he had found them doing similar things, within the same context and seeking the same structures for their recognition on a par with his status as a white/European artist.

Africa's real achievement

What exactly has all this got to do with the achievement – or non- achievement – of African artists, or the Dakar Biennale? The answer to this question lies with the historical position of African artists of the last hundred years or so, both within and outside Africa, and the lack of its sufficient recognition. It is of particular historical importance when it is measured as part of its struggle within and against the dominant centre. My aim here is to argue that without the full recognition of this position we have no other way to judge what is produced as African art today.

The struggle of African artists in the West in particular offers an important clue to the problem I have alluded to, and reveals the difficulty of the problem. This difficulty does not necessary lie with the artists themselves, or their failure to enter the discourse of the country they make their home, but with the system which often shuts its eyes whenever it encounters them at the centre of the modern discourse; with the result that these artists remain invisible to the system as well as to Africa.

Migration of artists to the centres of power is not a new or unique phenomenon. Artists have always migrated; in the early twentieth century Paris was their destination. In the postwar period, London attracted many artists particularly from the former British colonies. However, the issue here is not the migration (despite postcolonial theories of migration and diaspora) of these artists but what they actually produced and how their work was received by their hosts.

What did African artists really do when they found themselves in the West? Did they just follow the already beaten track of Western art, or did they find their own way within modernist developments? The institutions in the West are silent about this important question. They would rather prefer this question never to be raised, because they cannot answer it within the context of prevailing colonial structures while they still protect them. There are of course some sympathetic voices, from within the establishment, with great admiration for African artists' 'Africanness'. But this admiration often overlooks the modernity of African artists' work, and use their 'Africanness' as the only measure of these works. Some others have been totally dismissive of them, even to the point of being openly hostile to Africa's quest for modernity and allowing their hidden racism to appear on the surface.

Art moves forward only when there emerge new perceptions, innovations and breakthroughs – both formal and conceptual – and in this respect we have no reason to presume that there is or should be any difference between the aspirations and quests of white and non-white artists. Given the global spread of modernity during colonialism, and with modernism now being the common inheritance of artists from all over the world, it would be presumptuous to think that they should have different goals on the basis of racial or cultural difference. If artists from all cultures find themselves within the same context of the metropolitan centre, and they all want to produce something new within this context, what is the problem? The answer to this lies in the philosophy or ideology of the history of modern art, without the understanding of which one cannot deal or engage with whatever one encounters as an established thing, and what one produces as a result. And here lies

the main issue. The problem is not of entering the discourse of history and establishing one's position by confronting whatever history represents as an accumulation of knowledge, but the recognition of this entry and what it has produced. How can a historical discourse whose very structures are formed on the differentiation between the white/European subject and what is continued to be perceived as its others, and which legitimises only whites/Europeans as its players by excluding the others from its system, see the presence of the others within it? Wouldn't this otherwise destroy the very basis of its institutional power?

As this differentiates the others from their white/European contemporaries and removes them from the consideration of their place in history on the basis that the history of modernism is the exclusive domain of the white/European subject, the position of the others – and in our case of African artists – becomes precarious. They are thus forced to exist in a vacuum, reduced to nothingness. While the position of white/European artists is thus firmly established within history, according to the Eurocentric philosophy of modernity, bestowing upon them the exclusive status of canons, this exclusivity then becomes a barrier that one has to break through to claim one's place in history.

So what African artists faced was a double task, both of producing something new within modernism but also of challenging and redefining its historical context beyond its Eurocentric legacy. The point I'm trying to assert is that African artists have indeed crossed the barrier of the white/European exclusivity of modern art history, and that this is where their historical achievement lies. In other words, Africa does have a place in modern art history, and it is the duty of Africa to claim this place. This place is not of a secondary nature but is fundamental to what would then provide African art or the Dakar Biennale with its historical context or framework.

How can Africa claim this historical context?

It is perfectly legitimate to critique the West and to demand from it whatever it owes to the others. It is also historically legitimate to demand that Western institutions should undergo their own decolonisation in order to liberate themselves as part of the liberation of humanity at large. Without this decolonisation they should have no claim to possessing humanist discourses of universal values; and it is our intellectual responsibility to expose them when they resist decolonisation and are involved in the perpetuation of lies about the others, their misrepresenta tion and ignorance of their true historical achievements.

But can we change the whole thing by merely critiquing the West or appealing to its sympathetic and benevolent liberalism and seeking its help? How can this liberalism help when it refuses to accept its responsibility within its own territory? Can the West really absolve itself of this responsibility? It would, however, be silly to reduce the West to a monolith unable to aspire to radical change, and not to recognise that there also exist voices of dissatisfaction and dissent. These voices can be our allies. As this problem is not exclusive to Africa or the others but is the legacy of colonialism that affects humanity at large, there is no reason why the radical elements in the West cannot play an important role in dealing with this problem. But they must first recognise the problem as their own problem and then be prepared to have a dialogue with those who have already been struggling to confront it.

However, the problem is not of a mechanical nature, in the sense that we can persuade the dominant discourse or its liberal institutions to accept the others among its ranks on the basis of equality between all artists irrespective of their different racial or cultural background. What I am alluding to is in fact a philosophical problem: how can we eliminate the idea of the Other, which continues to inflict the others with their colonial past and denies them a central place in the progress of humanity? Although this problem has already been somewhat dealt with by the other or African artists, as I have suggested earlier, and we have empirical evidence to claim their place in history, this claim cannot be dealt with successfully unless it is also dealt with in philosophy. It is imperative that the philosophical underpinning of the subject of history is decolonised and redefined, so that we are no longer inflicted by the idea of modern art as the exclusive monopoly of the white/European subject. In fact we need a new universal philosophy that recognises the equality of all races and cultures and their equal roles in the dynamic of emancipatory modernity that can lead us to a better future.

What, then, can Africa do in this respect? Of course Africa alone cannot do everything to deal with what is a vast problem beyond its own resources, both material and intellectual. However big the problem, Africa has no choice but to do the groundwork itself. It will have to take the first step itself to lay the foundation for an institute that is fundamental to this pursuit, which is of

both and artistic and a philosophical nature. The institute can be in the form of an independent art museum of contemporary art representing art from all over Africa and also art produced by African artists abroad, but not exclusively; it can also be affiliated with an institute of higher learning – a pan-African university? However, whatever form it takes, it must have a compre hensive archive, which should provide resources for research work, leading to scholarship that can present Africa's own interpretation of not only its own art but contemporary art in general. Using the available empirical evidence it can then proceed to assert Africa's independent position within the modern history of art.

This need has also been expressed somewhat differently by Ery Camara, President of the Selection Committee and International Jury for DAK'ART 2002:

> The working conditions of our African artists are most often not the best, because of lack of infrastructure, namely lack of proper space, promoters, collectors or sponsors, committed to turning the work of art something of a higher value than a trophy or a mere luxury article. I insist on this point because without a circulation process guaranteeing a successful approach to these works, most of them would end up, as before, in hands that draw more profit from them than us, or they would rot in attics, offices or, at times and unlawfully, in private collections. It is the responsibility of African intellectuals to remedy this lack of interest making our heritage vulnerable and at the mercy of perverse manipulations. … I fully understand that economic circumstances may impose limits to many of our projects but developing an organisation and a suitable space that would exhibit and promote a selection of the most representative of our artistic production would be most useful in monitoring, with keen interest, the development of arts in our community. We need a space within which a great number of analyses and interactions among visitors, artists and the arts would be expressed in order to record, over the span of time, the ideas subscribed to by each generation [13]

My own proposition may appear as too idealistic, given the reality of Africa today. But a small start can be made in Dakar as part of its Biennale. If an institute with a comprehensive archive (comprising slides/ photos, already written and published material, catalogues, books, videos, etc) and a library stocking essential theoretical and philosophical material, is established in Dakar with facilities for research work, with the provision for scholarships for both resident and non-resident scholars, it will provide not only tremendous resources but also a historically viable framework for the Biennale. It can also operate as a base for the publication of a journal in which research papers are published on a regular basis. Publications of monographs on historically important African artists will add to its resources.

If the Dakar Biennale wants to play a historically important role in the development and evaluation of contemporary African art, it must now think hard instead of indulging in facile self-gratification. Merely collecting some artists and putting their works together and then calling it a Biennale is becoming a farce. The Dakar Biennale is too important to let it slip into being a mere spectacle. It was an extremely important historic moment in 1992 when Dakar took the initiative to launch the first African biennale, and it must now undertake this responsibility seriously. It is absurd for African artists to follow global trends emerging from the West, when the West is undergoing a serious crisis of the collapse of its enlightened bourgeois vision. All it now has is its marketplace where it celebrates its dehumanising decadence and sells it as a precious thing. Why does Africa want to be part of this decadence? It is somewhat true that 'Western-dominated art is running out of steam', but to believe that African artists in the Biennale are 'affirming their independence'[14] from it is a kind of fantasy that does not help them. On the contrary, by trapping them in this fantasy they are prevented from moving forward in a way that would assert their independence. The historical struggle of Africa demands that it should develop its own Direction, within modernity, and its own Vision. The Dakar Biennale can provide these if it can put its house in order, free itself from unimaginative bureaucracy, and let other people with knowledge, expertise and intellectual understanding of things come forward and help the Biennale realise it true objectives – and thus fulfil its historical responsibility.

African intellectuals have a particular responsibility in this respect, as Ery Camara has also pointed out. It is no good merely saying that we should show our solidarity with the Biennale and support it whatever it does. Why are the African artists and writers I have met in Dakar afraid of self-criticism? Self-criticism is fundamental to one's growth and maturity, without which we allow

ourselves to drift into the abyss of the narcissistic self and with it turn Africa into a spectacle of nothingness.

I should not, however, end my reflections with a negative note. I will therefore give the last word to Marie-José Crespin, President of the Scientific Council for DAK'ART 2002:

> DAK'ART is a channel to the future that should lead us to the reconciled world to which we all aspire. It may sound utopian, but I sense this vital breath, which is ready to become a gust of wind that will blow across the planet.[15]

DAK'ART 2002, 5ème Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain, was held from 10 May to 10 June 2002, in Dakar, Senegal.

Notes

1 Marie-José Crespin, President of the Scientific Council of Dak'Art 2002, *A Course Set by a Poet President*, introductory statement for the catalogue of DAK'ART 2002, pp 12–13.
2 There were forty-four artists (their number shown in brackets) representing thirteen countries in this international section of the Biennale: Algeria (1), Benin (2), Burkina Fasso (1), Cameroon (2), Egypt (1), Ethiopia (1), Ivory Coast (4), Madagascar (1); Morocco (8), Nigeria (4), Senegal (13), South Africa (4), and Tunisia (2).
3 Bruno Cora, curator of the European artists at the ancien Palais de Juctice, *Seeds of the 21st Century: From One to Several*, a catalogue essay, DAK'ART 2002, pp 103–4.
4 N'Gone Fall, curator of the exhibition at the Musee de l'IFAN, the following quotes here are from her introductory essay *Myth, Memory and Concept*, catalogue DAK'ART 2002, pp 110–12.
5 Besides these three exhibitions, there were three more main shows: (1) three African artists from the diaspora, curated by Ery Camara, at the Maison de la Culture Douta Seck; (2) at the Galerie Nationale was a homage to Senegal's popular artist Gora Mbengue; (3) and *The African Design Salon*, representing fifteen designers, at Espace Vema, which I found most interesting. There were also some small shows around the city, besides a week of discussion at the *Forum des Arts Atelier*, CICES.
6 Clementine Deliss, *The Dakar Biennale 92: Where Internationalism Falls Apart*, Third Text, no 23, Summer 1993, pp 136–41.
7 Brian Biggs, *DAK'ART 96*, Third Text, no 36, Autumn 1996, pp 83–6.
8 Katya Garcia-Anton, *DAK'ART 98*, Third Text, no 44, Autumn 1998, pp 87–92.
9 Ibid, p 87.
10 See Olu Oguibe, *Appropriation as Nationalism in Modern African Art*, Third Text, no 60 (16:3), September 2002, pp 243–60.
11 David Elliott, *Dakar: Real Action*, introductory essay, catalogue DAK'ART 2000, pp 14–16.
12 Jannis Kounellis is originally from Greece, but he has lived and worked in Italy. He is considered to be an important member of the Italian art movement Art Povera that emerged around the mid–1960s
13 Ery Camara, 'Essential Undertaking in the Field of African Art', introductory essay, catalogue DAK'ART 2002, pp 17–19.
14 Marie-José Crespin, op cit.
15 Ibid.

Biennials and their Siblings: Towards an Interdisciplinary Discourse on Curating Performance

Brandon Farnsworth

Sixteen people stand in a group in Birkelunden Public Park, looking forward. In front of the group has been placed a small blue sign reading "Carole Douillard / *The Viewers,* 2019– / An artwork of the osloBIENNALEN / *For more information, visit www.oslobiennalen.no*." Some people coming from the nearby flea market stop and look at the group, many take photos. Other people out on a Sunday meeting friends sit on a nearby bench and chat, facing the group instead of the public fountain behind them. In this park on this day, the group becomes a sculpture to observe, though one that also returns your gaze. Later, the group stands in front of the Nobel Peace Center, and the new context changes the meaning of their collective action: they seem to be staring back at the building, questioning it.

As the label indicated, the work was part of the osloBIENNALEN, a new biennale for art in public space in Oslo, Norway begun in 2019, and which will spread its activities out over a five-year period ending in 2024. *The Viewers*, and by extension the format of the osloBIENNALEN itself, are the most recent manifestations of contemporary arts biennials' ever-increasing interest in programming performance, and in trying to reach an audience beyond a perceived art world bubble. While august events like the Venice Biennale (e.g., with Anne Imhof's *Faust* at the 2017 German Pavilion) or *Documenta 14* are themselves now intimately familiar with programming performance, more recently conceived biennials focus solely on presenting performative practices.[1] This is producing unique new biennial formats tailored to programming interdisciplinary performing arts, such as Public Art Munich, Bergen Assembly, or the aforementioned osloBIENNALEN.

This article argues that these new formats being created in in Oslo, Munich, or even Venice, are programming new forms of artistic practice that are reformulating their approaches to creating a cultural public sphere. This shift in production will be approached via a corresponding shift in the biennial discourse that re-examines perennial arts exhibitions alongside music and theatre festivals—siblings with whom they share both a common history and now an emphasis on the event of artistic production itself. It will argue that these arts events share common historical precedents, and that aspects from both their divergent histories must be combined together in order to adequately understand them.

osloBIENNALEN

osloBIENNALEN is a newly conceived biennial currently in its first edition, which began in 2019 and will span until 2024. Curated by Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, it is the result of a pilot project researching potential formats for a biennial of public art in Oslo by the same curators called OSLO PILOT, which took place between 2015–2017. osloBIENNALEN is using its drawn-out running time to emphasize longer-term processes of creation for the artists it invites to participate.

Carole Douillard, *The Viewers*, 2019–. Photograph by the author.

The primary goal is for artists' projects for public space to be informed by in-depth knowledge of the spaces and contexts for which they are producing. As the curators write, "The artist who sets out to produce work destined for public space or the public sphere must embark on a process of analysis and reading of the specific contexts he [sic] wishes to address."[2] A second outcome of this curatorial decision is the ability for projects to exist and develop over the entirety of the five-year period. This can be seen in Knut Åsman's *Oslo*, an ongoing film project (using studios provided by the biennial) that will attempt to portray the city in new and unconventional ways over the course of several episodes until its final release in 2024.

It is conceived of as a biennial of art in the public space, emphasizing that its goal is to address the public sphere, understood as a wider and more diverse population group than those who visit the "controlled environments" of traditional biennials in the museum or gallery.[3] To this end, the biennial is striving both to present works in public space (such as *The Viewers*), but also to create what it calls "new institutional ecologies," partnering with a wide range of institutions both in Norway and abroad.[4] The list includes both universities and institutions like the public library, but also other arts festivals, including the city's own Ultima Festival for contemporary music.

Taken together, the osloBIENNALEN represents a new approach to the biennial format, one that seems to be explicitly formulated as a response to criticisms around 'biennial fatigue' and biennials' questionable benefits to their local communities.[5] This has been done through a decided focus on working with the existing people and resources that already exist in the city, rather than creating a biennial consisting mainly of works and artists flown in from around the world, often with only tenuous relationships to site, as is often the norm with biennials.

A further "localist" ambition can be seen in the opening curatorial statement to its *Oslo Pilot* project:

> But the motivations behind this new biennial are not the usual ones of a desire to attract attention or the need to resolve some problem. Instead, the biennial represents another step in Oslo's long tradition of major art projects in the public sphere.[6]

Going on to cite the example of the city's Vigeland Park, as well as other egalitarian-minded examples, the curators' unwillingness to "solve some problem" can be interpreted as an unwillingness to position the biennial in relation to others worldwide; the emphasis lies instead on producing what it contends are specific benefits for local communities. This interpretation is further strengthened by examining the publication further, consisting of an initial collection of texts and interviews by artists and writers around the issues concerning the biennial. The book focuses on presenting the voices of artists, in particular those working in socially engaged art: authors and articles that analyze biennials worldwide are conspicuously absent.

Can the osloBIENNALEN thus be seen as a biennial format that, responding to criticisms about lack of relation to site, has developed a unique new biennial format for the 21st century? If so, how can its principles of operation be understood?

In the essay "One Biennale, Many Biennials," Federica Martini details how since the 19th century and the format of the first Biennale in Venice, perennial arts events can be described as symptomatic of their specific national and international contexts, stakeholder constellations, and the image that they wish to project into the world.[7] She rejects such a view, however, as only holding true on a superficial level, and argues instead that they function "just as their nineteenth-century counterparts, according to the presence of international artists and the promotion of the local scene," and that they continue to create "images and representations of the outside world" in precisely the same way as their predecessors.[8] Martini's argument centers on the historical view that biennials since Venice exist in the shadow of their larger 19th-century predecessors, the universal exhibitions, and specifically the Crystal Palace exhibition in London in 1851.

She ends the essay by underscoring that it is the format of the biennial exhibition itself that must be intervened in in order to find an escape from the criticisms that plague biennial formats around the world.[9] The osloBIENNALEN, with its emphasis on art addressing a 'larger' public sphere outside of the exhibition site, on socially engaged practices, and on performative practices, fits seemingly well to this call for new formats. Such developments do not, however, exist in isolation, and themselves must be traced back historically to a different line of development from the universal exhibitions of the 19th century.

The Crystal Palace Exhibition

Never before in the history of the world was there so large a collection of valuable gems and exquisite specimens of the lapidary's art collected in one building. […] Never was there such a display of these gems as in our Crystal Palace. The Exhibition contains the finest diamonds, the finest ruby, and the finest emerald known to the world.[10]

The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 is seen as one of the earliest precursors of the biennial format, serving as an important cardinal point for mapping the origination of biennials since the mid-19th century. It was an early instance of a large planned event on the scale of current world expos or Olympic games: over the 141 days the exposition was open, it attracted over six million visitors and featured 17,062 exhibitors.[11] The exposition's four sections, of which visual art was only one, were meant as a display of innovation and progress typical of early modernism. It emerged out of a desire to present a showcase of all of human production from around the globe within a carefully organized system of spatial classification, compressing it down into an exhibition suitable for consumption by local audiences.[12] This approach creates a positioning of the local in relation to a global, assembled by an imperial British gaze.

This act of self-definition in relief, of 'putting our city on the map' in relation to global developments, would prove to be a viral meme for industrializing Western nations. Following closely after London, in a bid to stake its claim to superiority over other American cities, New York initiated its own universal exposition in 1853, complete with a Crystal Palace replica. An exposition in 1855 in Paris would quickly follow, succeeded by the end-of-the-century expositions across both Europe, the USA, and Australia with the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition.[13]

Contemporary biennial discourse understands these large-scale events as the conceptual basis for later perennial arts events and biennials over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. The new relationships between capitalist ideology, nationalist sentiment, the leisure needs of a growing, educated middle class, and cultural production that were established in these earlier forms are understood as pre-empting the biennale formats that would come after: Laurence Alloway would already make the link to the cosmopolitanism of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in his 1968 account of the Venice biennale.[14] More recently, Martini argues that biennials form a continuation of the processes of globalization initiated by universal exhibitions, whereas Caroline A. Jones views them as miniaturizations of those larger early formats, brokering internationality solely via art.[15] Donald Preziosi argues that the scopic regime the Crystal Palace deployed understood the displayed objects as indexical of their circumstances of production, and the exhibition itself as responsible for establishing these indexical relationships. This understanding of the exhibition focuses on it as a site for presenting, negotiating, and brokering these symbolic relationships. [16]

What these approaches have in common is their understanding of the Crystal Palace, and by extension also contemporary arts events and biennials, as primarily sites for the production and exchange of various forms of capital. This can be the brokering of various forms of cultural capital, negotiating international reputations of countries or artists via the exhibition practices or curatorial concepts mentioned above, but also through prizes (Venice's Golden Lion, the Berlinale's Golden Bear). As is obvious with the Crystal Palace, but sometimes forgotten when discussing biennials themselves, capital also plays a direct role, such as via income from tourism, hotel reservations, or directly through ticket sales, or sales of artworks.[17] Such an approach produces readings such as that of curator Marian Pastor Roces, who argues that the true subject of the universal exhibitions was the concept of capital in all its facets: the capital city, capitalist conquest, even the capitals of letters and columns.[18] This perspective functions well for understanding the role of biennials in processes of nation-building and fostering cosmopolitan identities, be they in Victorian England, the 19th-century Kingdom of Italy, or more recently in China or the U.A.E.

It has also played an important role in promoting critical perspectives on such societal-level definitional processes, in particular since the relational and educational turns of the late 1990s/early 2000s: After the rapid expansion in the number and size of biennials around the globe during the 1990s, curator Okwui Enwezor formulated *Documenta 11* (2002) as a site for reinvestigating the relationship between the artistic practices of Europe and North America to the rest of the world. Rather than promote the further propagation of the Orientalist gaze on non-Western work, *Documenta 11* was intended to challenge the hegemony of the West and its ability to define the practices and discourses of contemporary art.[19] This meant using documenta to propose a worldview based on the fundamental *entanglement* between places across the globe brought together by the flows of globalization. Just as earlier biennials were intended to 'put a city on the map,' *Documenta 11*'s intention was to redraw such maps

by intervening in those entangled networks, but now from a critical, anti-hegemonic perspective. What was understood to be "international" was really just a focus on the "milieu of the artistic industry clustered in a limited art market in the Western Europe [sic] and North America."[20]

Part of the solution was to disrupt Kassel as the sole site of *Documenta 11*, creating instead a series of five platforms beginning a year before the quinquennial, four of which took place in various locations worldwide—and outside of Kassel itself. The first four platforms (in Vienna/Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos, respectively) consisted of debates, panel discussions, and lectures before the fifth and final platform in Kassel itself, the traditional 100-day exhibition. This format disrupted Kassel as a locality that was positioned in relation to an assembled vision of its global connections, and produced instead an obscurity or incomprehensibility that disrupted the ability for a visitor to achieve an 'overview' of the exhibition and its interpretation of the assembled artifacts, a cornerstone of the scopic regime of modernism first deployed with the Crystal Palace Exhibtion.

Documenta 11 can be seen as a programmatic unwillingness to cater to the local cosmopolitan visitor looking to survey "the finest … of the world," as the promotional text for the Crystal Palace exhibition proclaimed. The debates and discussions of its first four platforms would pre-empt many further biennials' similar turn to relational formats that critically engage structurally with the biennial format. Such approaches focus on the performativity of the encounter, and the immanence of eventgoers' experience, precepts that would be heavily emphasized two decades later at the osloBIENNALEN described in the beginning of this article.

Understanding Oslo's Relation to Performing Arts Festivals

The relationality and performativity of the biennial would be so heavily emphasized in Oslo's format that it was arguably no longer best viewed via this same relationship between infrastructure and processes of knowledge creation. It is understood better as a place for the negotiation of societal values, and as attempting to form a cultural public sphere. While this emphasis can be seen as a culmination of various art world 'turns,' a problematically teleological concept in itself, it is also a reconnection to performing arts festivals and their strategies for addressing publics. This means taking an interdisciplinary scholarly approach to biennial studies, putting established accounts by Jones, Roces, Filipovic, and others in relation to the strategies of performing arts administrators.

This link to performing arts festivals is not as far-fetched as it may seem, as they share a great deal of common history with visual arts biennials: performing arts festivals in Europe emerged under the same conditions as visual arts festivals after the universal exhibition boom. The Bayreuth Festspiele (1876), dedicated to realizing Wagner's operas, even predates the Venice Biennale (1895) as the earliest purely artistic festival in Europe.[21] Also notable during this time were the Salzburger Festspiele (1920), and Donaueschinger Kammermusiktage (1921), which were both founded under similar conditions as Venice and other biennials, and also similarly continue to have a major impact on European cultural life.[22]

The discourse on performing arts festivals distinguishes itself from that on biennials in that it is less focused on issues of capital, its exchange, and its subversion. Rather, the focus is on understanding the relationship between these festivals and their production of, or contribution to, a cultural public sphere.[23] This approach focuses on festivals'

function of (re)affirming community bonds and identity through local co-presence, and is often implicitly based on anthropologist Victor Turner's work on the liminality of festivals, and the concept of *communitas*.[24] In this understanding, the emphasis of the festival event thus lies in creating a temporary context that functionally suspends social structures—a kind of Foucauldian heterotopia—dissolving norms in order to create a structure where processes of individual transformation can take place. Festivals are moments that suspend the everyday, and create a temporary state of exceptionality, using this as a moment to either reaffirm community values, or otherwise question and transform them, thus ensuring their stability and continuity.

Such a perspective focusing on creating a situated cultural public sphere are relevant for visual arts biennials that are increasingly programming performative practices and socially engaged art. The problem that emerges with this knowledge transfer is that because of the different history of performing arts festivals, there is not a comprehensive parallel discourse to draw on.

Paul O'Neill argues that much of the discourse around curatorial strategies emerged in the 1990s as curators were required to articulate and demystify their positions, in doing so becoming a nexus of critique and debate. This combined with the first curatorial programs, histories, and the worldwide spread of the profession would result in the discourse of curating as it is being formed today.[25] Though there is a lack of analogous discourse in the performing arts during the same period, a curatorial discourse in the performing arts has been forming over the past decade, at the latest since the rise of interdisciplinary performing arts, and performing arts intersecting with visual arts institutions. The example of Florian Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete* project will help articulate this shift in references we are pursuing with the osloBIENNALEN.[26]

Curating in the Performing Arts

As part of the 2012 Steirischer Herbst festival in Graz, Austria, chief dramaturg Florian Malzacher initiated a seven-day/24-hour "marathon camp" called *Truth is Concrete*. The project occupied a black-box theatre and neighboring gallery, in spaces designed by raumlaborberlin. Activities continued through the night, with participants invited to also sleep, live, and eat at the camp for the event's duration. Its goal was to rediscover the link between the arts and politics against a background of intense geopolitical upheaval: Malzacher recounts the watershed events transpiring as the team was conceiving the project: the Arab Spring was spreading across the Middle East, the Occupy Wall Street movement had started, the European debt crisis was taking place, and the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe had begun, to name just a few.

The question for the organizers became whether art could have a role to play in these global crises, or would only ever be a 'leftist hobby,' as one populist extremist politician put it. Among those involved in the event and its subsequent documentation were many names that have today well-established practices operating between art and activism, including The Silent University/Ahmet Öğüt, Slavoj Žižek, Rabih Mroué, Center for Political Beauty, The Yes Men, raumlaborberlin, International Institute of Political Murder, Ultra-red, Forensic Architecture, and Pussy Riot.[27]

The marathon presented these artistic projects engaged in social and political change through talks and presentations, as well as through performances, concerts, and workshops that engaged participants directly. Events included: daily general assemblies, short presentations of concrete artistic practices called tactic talks, thematic blocks and panels hosted by guest curators, a series of recurring events such as yoga

and screenings, an open marathon of "non-curated" contributions where anyone could sign up for a slot, and a series of durational projects (hair salon, media archive). The central program points adhered to a strict timeline, with a so-called "continuing room" existing as a space where conversations could spill over the allotted time limits.[28]

The dissolution of the spectator/actor divide allowed for *Truth is Concrete* to take on a permeable relationship to the external world, becoming a place for the exchange and application of knowledges for all involved. It became a mirror of society and its problems, but also a place to discuss these problems and develop responses. This corresponds with Malzacher's view on the theatre's historical function, as a space "in which societies have long explored their own means, procedures, ideals, and limits"[29]: the theatre as a public sphere in which to develop answers to society's challenges.

Suspending hierarchies between participants, using the theatre to address and transform societal issues, and the overall question of art's societal function are established characteristics of performing arts festivals. Malzacher's curatorial method uses these practices and tacit knowledges to organize an arena for debating the role of art in activism. As he says:

> When you invite people to stay for [170 hours, the duration of *Truth is Concrete* –Ed.] you have to think about what time means. What does it mean when people spend time together, when they become a collective? When they get annoyed with each other what group dynamics kick in? What's what I think is specific for the field of theatre in the practice of curation… Thinking from the specificities of theater itself—that's the interesting part.[30]

While at first glance Malzacher's questions and concerns seem banal, they offer a glimpse of the less-codified but still very existent tactics of the performing arts for creating and shaping events. The intersection with the visual arts, and the curatorial discourse in particular, over the past decade is, however, beginning to enunciate these practices in greater detail.

A Hybrid Approach

It is finally at this junction between visual arts biennials' desire to subvert their perceived subservience to global capitalism and reach out to alternative publics, and performing arts festivals' experimentation with and reflection on producing cultural public spheres that a project such as the osloBIENNALEN can be situated. This is because it constitutes a new form of arts event that is best understood by combining these two separate histories together.

It first must be contextualized as part of visual arts biennials' focus on experimentations with form in order to create counterhegemonic knowledge production and subvert their entanglement with the art market and global capital. This comes from seeing themselves in lineage to universal expositions, Western networks of power, and the scopic regimes of modernist imperialism. These considerations are what have led osloBIENNALEN to subvert the festival logic of a shorter-duration biennial event, instead spreading activities over a five-year-period, and focusing on local production for local publics rather than the exoticism of an international survey, while still maintaining the title of biennial in its name.[31] Desires to subvert market logics, and to create art out of the interaction with individuals and disadvantaged communities lead the biennial to focus on singular, unrepeatable performances sometimes in public space—like Carole Douillard's *The Viewers*.

At the same time, this move 'into' performance of an event from the visual arts tradition is also a reterritorialization of performing arts practices, and their history of gathering audiences into cultural public spheres in which to debate societal issues and reaffirm values. This biennial would also be unthinkable without the rise of the interdisciplinary performing arts, which are mixing disciplinary references, and are site-specific, participatory, and global in scope. This is embodied by artists like the biennial's Mette Edvardsen, whose practice is part of a recent generation of 'conceptual dance' practitioners.[32]

These shifts mean that curatorial discourse, as it has developed since the 1990s, must also shift how it creates knowledge about performative arts events. This does not mean describing new practices using existing curatorial theories and references (though it does not exclude this per se), but rather effecting a shift in its methods that allows new space for the knowledges of performing arts curation to be brought to light. Because of the nature of performance, this must involve finding ways to document and share these situated practices, without them losing their unique identity.

Just as there existed a need in the 1980s and 1990s for the curators who had amassed a great deal of power in the art world to provide transparency and explain their decision-making, so too must there today be calls for transparency on this new register. While the osloBIENNALEN readily puts out publications and brochures justifying its relationship to the city and the performative, operationally *how* it produces the cultural public sphere that it contends remains completely opaque, unchallenged, and therefore almost certainly under-reflected. As shown with Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete*, this 'operative how' is the decisive factor in performative events. It is exactly the energy, the atmosphere that is created in the moment, and which can only ever be partially documented via photos, videos, etc., that is the very motivation for organizing such a performance in the first place. It also comes back to modes of working, communicating with artists and organizers that, in unseen ways, contribute in turn to the establishing of this mood.

A second important aspect that must come along with this shift to a more nuanced, historically informed understanding of performative curatorial practices is to evaluate their stated impacts. It is understandable that curators be skeptical of measuring and (worse) quantifying the outcomes or impacts of their festivals, as it represents an additional potential infringement on artistic autonomy, in addition to the requirements of funders and other stakeholders. However, biennials like osloBIENNALEN make considerable claims to contributing to and expanding (through addressing disadvantaged groups) a city's cultural public sphere. Accountability must therefore be developed that goes beyond opening curatorial statements. To borrow from event studies, evaluating stated claims about biennials "must interrogate the extent to which the interests of those who are claimed to be the beneficiaries of event outcomes are truly being served by the political and social elites that are most often the drivers of event management and strategy."[33] Such a model has the advantage of corresponding to the same desire to foster counterhegemonies as has already been shown to exist in the curatorial discourse itself. Developing adequate means of evaluation must therefore be seen as an additional curatorial challenge that can be pursued with the same level of ingenuity as devising the curatorial concept itself.

Conclusion

As many biennials turn to programming performance as a means of redefining their relationship to their constituent communities, the historical precedents against which the biennial itself is measured must be re-examined, and calls for their transparency must be reformulated. The newly conceived osloBIENNALEN is one such arts event making major claims about its relevancy to a more diverse and more local public sphere than the international contemporary art community. In order to contextualize this distinction between local and international interests being served by an arts event, the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition was shown to be a decisive historical point that the curatorial discourse views as having established this gesture of positioning localities in relation to a survey of their international counterparts, assembled by an imperialist gaze. It must be remembered that the universal exhibition phenomenon also spurred the development of modern performing arts festivals as well, in a history that would run largely in parallel to that of biennials. Comparatively underdiscursivized in relation to biennials, performing arts festivals nevertheless form a history of creating cultural public spheres that question, reaffirm, or transform community values. The example of Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete* shows that this history manifests itself in practitioners' knowledge of the specific, situated *how* to create such outcomes.

While curatorial discourse has focused on creating a transparency of intentions, the specificities of how these goals are realized are still undertheorized. Because the turn to performative formats at biennials like Oslo brings them by definition into the territory of the performing arts, and because it is precisely the performative event onto which they stake their claim to criticality, the 'operative how' becomes both central and yet still unacceptably invisible according to the standards of transparency that spurred the curatorial discourse in the first place. Having framed this problem, two suggestions are made to address this gap. The first is the call for the curatorial discourse to examine also the 'operative how' of situated practices, despite the material resistances against generalizing a 'theory' of practice. The second is that claims regarding the outcomes of performance-focused biennials must be evaluated to ensure they are plausibly serving the intended beneficiaries, and that solutions must be found that do not *a priori* cater to capitalist logics of the event.

The aim has been to establish a basis for understanding the new kinds of performing arts events that are being produced by biennials that acknowledges the interplay of their double histories between desires to subvert their own instrumentalization by capital, and as sites for collective gathering and collective transformation. It is hoped that this preliminary attempt at framing these issues can foster debate and knowledge creation focused on how all aspects of their execution and management must be considered in order to properly analyze their curatorial practices, and how these practices shape aesthetic perception and production.

Notes

1 On the incorporation of performance in visual arts institutions more generally, see Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (December 2014): 63–76, and Claire Bishop, "Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention," *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 22–42.

2 Eva González-Sancho and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, eds., *Oslo Pilot (2015–17): A Project Investigating the Role of Art in and for the Public Space: Laying the Groundwork for Oslo Biennial First Edition* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2018), 13.

3 González-Sancho and Eeg-Tverbakk, *Oslo Pilot*, 9.
4 osloBIENNALEN, *October 2019* (Oslo: 07 Media, 2019), 9, accessed March 20, 2020, https://issuu.com/kul43/docs/oboctober.
5 On biennale fatigue, see Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, "Talking and Thinking about Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity," in *The Biennale Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010), 360–277.
6 González-Sancho and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, 7.
7 Federica Martini, "One Biennale, Many Biennials," in *Just Another Exhibition: Histories and Politics of Biennials*, eds. Federica Martini, Vittoria Martini (Milan: Postmedia Books, 2011), 109.
8 Ibid., 110.
9 Ibid.
10 Great Exhibition, "Precious Stones in the Crystal Palace," *The Illustrated Exhibitor: Guide to the Great Exhibition (12 July 1851)*, (London: Cassell, 1851), 1, accessed March 20, 2020, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-illustrated-exhibitor-guide-to-the-great-exhibition.
11 Verena Teissl, *Kulturveranstaltung Festival: Formate, Entstehung und Potenziale* (Festival as cultural event: formats, emergence, and potentials) (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 28.
12 Donald Preziosi, "The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary," in *The Biennale Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010), 34.; Martini, "One Biennale, Many Biennials," 100.
13 The Paris Treaty of 1928 would later come to regulate the frequency and list of responsibilities of these universal exhibitions. Enforcement of the treaty is managed by Bureau International des Expositions, also based in Paris. The bureau includes a list of "historically important" universal expositions that predate its founding on its website. See Bureau International des Expositions, *Protocol: To Amend the Convention Signed at Paris on the 22nd of November 1928 Relating to International Exhibitions*, accessed March 20, 2020, https://www.bie-paris.org/site/images/stories/files/BIE_Convention_eng.pdf.
14 Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich CT: New York Graphic Society LTD, 1968).
15 Caroline A. Jones, "Biennale Culture: A Longer History," in *The Biennale Reader*, 81.
16 Preziosi, "The Crystalline Veil," 38–45.
17 As was the early concept behind the Venice Biennale, and is currently the case with art fairs like Art Basel or Frieze, which, while having a different status in the visual arts community, nevertheless function in almost precisely the same way.
18 Marian Pastor Roces, "Crystal Palace Exhibitions," in *The Biennale Reader*, 57.
19 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, "Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the 'Global' Exhibition," in "The documenta Issue," special issue, *OnCurating Journal*, no. 33 (June 2017): 111, accessed March 20, 2020, http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html.
20 Okwui Enwezor, "Curating Beyond the Canon: Okwui Enwezor Interviewed by Paul O'Neill," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (London: Open Editions, 2007), 111.
21 Teissl, *Kulturveranstaltung Festival*, 35.
22 After the end of WWII, the number of festivals in Europe would rapidly continue to rise until the 1970s, due in part to the advent of the counterculture and the consequences of the 1968 revolution. See Jennifer Elfert, *Theaterfestivals: Geschichte und Kritik eines kulturellen Organisationsmodells* (Theater festivals: history and criticism of a form of cultural organization) (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009), 27–28.
23 This mirrors also the findings of Getz's literature review on festival studies in general. See Donald Getz, "The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies," *International Journal of Event Management Research* 5, no. 1 (2010): 4.

24 See for instance Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 94–130.
25 Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 42–49.
26 Florian Malzacher, along with Johana Warsza and Tom Sellar, has been a major force in publishing much early writing on curating performance. In addition to Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete* publication, he has published, together with Warsza, a four-part "Performing Urgency" series with Alexander Verlag. Warsza's catalogue for Public Art Munich 2018 (with Patricia Reed, *A City Curating Reader* [Berlin: Motto Books, 2019]) is also worth mentioning here. Sellar, though American, mainly drawing on European practitioners, dedicated two special issues of his journal *Theater* to curatorial practices within the field of theatre; see Tom Sellar and Bertie Ferdman, eds., "Performance Curators," special issue, *Theatre* 44, no. 2 (2014); Tom Sellar, ed., "Curating Crisis," special issue, *Theatre* 47, no. 1 (2017). Most recently, the anthology *Curating Live Arts* has enriched the field with a number of new perspectives, including ones from outside of Europe. See Dena Davida, Marc Pronovost, Véronique Hudon, and Jane Gabriels, eds., *Curating Live Arts: Critical Perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).
27 Steirischer Herbst, "Participants," Steirischer Herbst webpage for *Truth is Concrete*, accessed March 20, 2020, http://www.truthisconcrete.org/participants/.
28 Steirischer Herbst, "Timeline," Steirischer Herbst webpage for *Truth is Concrete*, accessed March 20, 2020, http://truthisconcrete.org/programme/PDFs/sh12_TIC-Timeline-Web.pdf.
29 Florian Malzacher, "Feeling Alive: The Performative Potential of Curating," in *Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performativity as a Curatorial Strategy*, eds. Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 38.
30 Florian Malzacher, "Agonism and the Next Word. Florian Malzacher interviewed by Tom Sellar," *Theater* 47, no. 1 (2017): 18.
31 The curators refer to this as a "new biennial model." See osloBIENNALEN, *October 2019*, 7.
32 Others include Xavier LeRoy, Boris Charmatz, Tino Sehgal, Jérôme Bel, and Mårten Spångberg.
33 Mike Weed, "Towards an interdisciplinary events research agenda across sport, tourism, leisure and health," in *The Routledge Handbook of Events*, eds. Stephen J. Page and Joanne Connell (London: Routledge, 2012), 66–67.

Brandon Farnsworth, born in 1991, works as an independent music curator, and as a research associate at the Zurich University of the Arts, where he also studied classical music performance and transdisciplinary studies. He pursued his doctoral degree in historical musicology at the University of Music Carl Maria von Weber Dresden, and was an affiliated researcher with the joint Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practice doctoral program at the Collegium Helveticum. His dissertation, *Curating Contemporary Music Festivals,* has recently been published with Transcript Verlag. Brandon's research focuses on the intersection of performance and curatorial studies, and strives for a global perspective.

A Conversation on osloBIENNALEN with Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk

Interview by Anna Manubens

Anna Manubens (AM): I would like to start by quoting Eva on something she said in a recent presentation of osloBIENNALEN First Edition (OB1): "We want to set up an institution." What do you mean by that?

Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk (PGET): We should start by mentioning that this mission and the role that we are taking on respond to the assignment that was originally given to us. The two-year project OSLO PILOT,[1] on which OB1 is grounded, was a response to a call to present a model for a future new biennial. So already from the very start, the mission was not a typical curating job. We were not asked, "Can you select artists for a biennial?"; we were asked, "Can you come up with a new model for a biennial?" So, the idea to set up a structure was somehow embedded in the original assignment. The typical situation would be that you already have an institution with a structure and a history, and then you have a curator who organizes an exhibition within that structure. The curator's task is usually to be in charge of artistic content, but they rarely touch the pre-existing structure.

Eva González-Sancho Bodero (EGSB): The idea was to set up an institution that could support the ideation and production of artworks in the public sphere. Often, when it comes to art in public space, curators follow something that we call a "commissioning regime." The artist assumes all responsibility for the development and production of the project. This is perhaps why it is fairly common to see the same artists on the list of participants, the ones considered fit to deliver within this kind of regime. We intend to depart from that model.

AM: So, you don't commission?

PGET: Not in the traditional way of understanding the commissioner as an institution or organization that sets the rules and a framework and then expects a delivery.

EGSB: We prefer to say that we *invite*. We think of the invitation as something like welcoming artists into a residency programme rather than initially asking for a concrete outcome. We like to share the risk and responsibility with the artists. We are not juxtaposing individualities that are coming from all over the globe without affecting one another; we are creating a coherent programme and mission that needs a new institutional set-up in order to improve the conditions under which artists develop work. We intend to move away from the situation in which the artist works alone to one where the projects both trigger and receive long-term support. If you provide artists with optimal conditions, you get a better art scene. Plus, we are working in public space, an environment that is very different from the protected exhibition room and has its own needs, so we have to respond to this specificity, too.

PGET: People think that all we do is select artists. But we want to *curate* a structure, and that is troublesome because structures are not usually curated.

AM: Your struggle or caution with concepts—"inviting" vs. "commissioning"; "makers" or "curators"; stating that you are curating a structure rather than content—is a symptom of the structural work that you are intending to pursue. I recently realized that my interest in how we take care of institutions beyond what is presented in them, is rooted in structuralist thinking, and thus in language. Naming things and finding new ways of telling the things we do is already structural work. You are literally defining the terms and conditions for engaging with art practices in a different way.

There are a couple of words that I would like to ask you about more particularly. The first one is "institution." Why stick to a concept that, briefly put, is not living its most popular moment when you could do without it? In your case, there was no biennial institution previously; you are deliberately deciding to set up a completely new one.

Oslo Collected Works OSV. by Jan Freuchen, Jonas Høgli Major and Sigurd Tenningen. Photo: Niklas Lello / © osloBIENNALEN

EGSB: I have never been opposed to the institution. Quite the opposite. For me, institutionalizing something means giving it the chance to develop in a professional way. When I directed *Établissement d'en Face Projects* in Brussels,[2] for example, my job was unsupported by a proper contract. When I left the project, at least one position had been created for a coordinator working alongside me. Setting up an institution means responding to the needs of people who have to work and get paid for their work. This is maybe the first level of what an institution should mean: creating working conditions.

PGET: At a time when cultural institutions are both under sectorial criticism and under attack from capitalist forces, reclaiming the institution can prevent its delegitimization. Building an institution is an opportunity for rethinking it. If you look at commissioning regimes, they are based on expectation, on pre-ordering or pre-figuring what the work of art will be. The worse that can happen in such a scenario is that artists don't deliver what was anticipated. It is interesting to think about the possibility of creating an institution that could allow experiments, and even failure… Another key term for us is *contingency*. The structure that we are setting up intends to admit—even embrace—contingency. This is why we may find ourselves in situations where the artists completely rethink their work or want to change it or re-route it. The commissioning machinery never makes room for that.

AM: The second word that I wanted to ask you about is "biennial." OB1 will last five years, so why still call it a "biennial"? It seems like both words, "institution" and "biennial," should be used *"sous rature"*—Derrida's term that is not ideal but still the only one available. Why change the duration while keeping the word?

EGSB: We are working in this long processual chain—from ideation to a possible collection. And we don't think this is at all possible within a six-month period.

Installation view of *Immigrants in Oslo* from 'Seven Works for Seven Locations' (series) by Hylnur Hallsson. Photo: Mark Brydin, Lumopolar / © osloBIENNALEN

AM: But you could work for three years without public visibility and then open for six months. Why did you decide to make the whole process open?

PGET: Our use of duration makes us very different from documenta, for example, where you have a five-year research process and then the presentation of the outcome lasting 100 days. We have somehow reversed this; we would like to have five years of production time in order to invite artists to use time in different ways and make room for the unforeseen.

AM: There is a recent trend in biennials to modify their duration. What makes your use of duration singular?

EGSB: We were indeed not the first ones to announce that the time span would be prolonged, but we were the first ones to think of it in relation to a structural commitment and without a theme. Our theme *is* the structure. It is the evolving biennial. When you extend the period of work, it does not necessarily mean that you are working with the idea that things can evolve and perhaps change and adapt, that things are still undecided. The list of artists was not announced beforehand or drawn up in advance. It is growing as we move forward, in parallel to the structural work.

AM: You just said, "Our theme is the structure," and this raises two questions: on one hand, how has that affected your way of curating? And on the other, how does curatorial sensitivity translate or materialize structurally? Let's start with the first one: if you don't invite artists based on a theme so to say, do you invite them based on how their practices could rehearse a new institution, for example? As a means to stretch the institutional muscle?

PGET: Yes, but I don't think it is deliberate. We are not looking for projects that might challenge us in a self-conscious way.

EGSB: When we invite an artist, we explain that we are curating a structure. This is in a way all we say. But there are a series of things that are very much present across the projects that the biennial has produced so far: ideas such as co-authorship, co-production, long-term or episodic proposals, and practices that question the autonomy of the work… Personally, I have always worked like that, and I vindicate what in psychoanalysis is called the "*après-coup*."

AM: I allow myself to underline the fact that everything that you have just mentioned are hows rather than whats. How to do something, rather than a discourse or concept. One way of interpreting this is that, because you are proposing a different set of coordinates to work in, you allow—and naturally facilitate—practices that are both made for and making this structure and thereby connect to each other. If I take Dora García as an example: in response to the conditions available, she has initiated a long-term project which eventually became a group work and suppressed her name from

Visitors listen to Øystein Wyller Odden's *Power Line Hum (Composition for the Organ in Oslo City Hall)* at Oslo City Hall during osloBIENNALEN. Photo: Niklas Hart, Hartwork / © osloBIENNALEN

the equation. It is now a Rose Hammer project.[3] Should you want to acquire it, who would you buy this work from? The project pushes the institutional gymnastics forward. Towards an institution that would not only welcome co-authorship but would also have to find practical and legal ways to preserve it, for example.

EGSB: The acquisition of something that is not tangible and that is made by 20 people who don't want to give their individual names is indeed complex. I am quite sure that it is a matter of identifying precedents. Drawing inspiration from other fields such as film, for example, in which ways of paying immaterial rights and labor have already been established. We can also look at re-enactment contracts and agreements in dance and theatre. This is nothing new; looking at previous examples will help make all this possible.

AM: I was first attracted to your project because I saw it as a form of coherence. A coherence between claiming and doing. The announcement of institutional renewal is usually celebrated, but I hardly ever see the practical translation of renewal claims. You can in fact declare "we need new institutions" in a very irresponsible manner. That is, within a framework that you did nothing to reset or rethink. So, I am attracted to what you intend to do because your concept is a practice. And this takes me back to the second question: How do you materialize an institutional concept?

PGET: Usually, there is a division between the curator's area of operations and the institution's, but we need to merge them. What we need to do is to take some of the behind-the-scenes work we are doing and bring it to light. The making of a contract, how works are produced, we need to provide this information, which is not always given… For us it is not 'behind-the-scenes,' it is at the core of what we want to do.

EGSB: It is a venture that we need to develop further. So far, what is mostly visible is that we have produced about 25 projects, something that can be shown. But we should go further in giving our other working premises the same value and stress that they are equally important in shaping an art scene, even though they do not take the form of an art object. It would be very good to place value, for example, on the fact that the biennial has been one of the driving forces in letting 50 subsidized artist studios in a building that was abandoned and which is also our headquarters. This was a move that also placed an obstacle in the path of gentrification, which would rather see the studios away from the center.

AM: Two other examples of material translations of your structural effort could be the radio unit and the production unit that you are setting up. Could you say something about these?

EGSB: We have very good artists working with film and video in Norway who are straddling two chairs (art and cinema). However, talking to them one realizes that they don't have any structure that is particular to that in-between field and able to support their production or distribution in the long term. The idea behind the film production unit is to fill this gap by providing the technical support and skills that are needed.

We also want to set up a radio station through a residency of La Publika, a radio project based in Bilbao led by consonni.[4] We have invited them for a residency to help us set up our radio unit.

AM: And what will happen when they leave? The biennial is the occasion for creating a long-term accompanying structure, but who will take care of it later?

PGET: We need to leave a structure that it is possible for the institution and other institutions to make use of if they want to. However, we cannot force the city to adopt our curatorial concepts in the future.

EGSB: Who says that the next curator will stick to the five-year time frame? He/she can also decide whether to collect works or not. It is very much our concept. Our title, *osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024*, is rather problematic because it is quite technical. It can easily get confused with the institution that we would like to build (osloBIENNALEN), with what we would like to leave behind—a legacy.

AM: Since you understand the structure as a curatorial matter, I see how for you, what remains is subject to its curators. However, I also think that the advantage—and even the political agency—of what you are proposing is that it counters the event logic in favor of long-term nourishing groundwork. The set-up that you propose runs against the usual 'intensive' consumption of the event, i.e. the disposal of a big budget over a short time with little—or no—compost left. By contrast, your structural work could allow us to talk about OB1 as a sustainable biennial, one that uses its resources and its programme to nourish a soil, a scene, a city. Therefore, if things vanish after your edition, you run the risk of making your curatorial position legitimate and singular by saying "we are working structurally for the city" and then failing to do so if nothing remains. The structural dimension would be a bit compromised if everything vanishes after five years…

PGET: There are many potential scenarios. One scenario—a bad one—is that when we leave nothing is kept. The city disregards our work and forgets about the whole thing. I have experienced that as a curator working for an institution: once you leave, the new person completely forgets or neglects everything you did before. A better scenario is for OB1 to be the birth-giver of a modus operandi, which the city takes on and turns into an institutional practice. Nevertheless, they might do that in a different way from how we imagined it.

AM: I would imagine that having a biennial that intends to leave something available for the city would be well perceived…Especially considering that your public funding comes from the city's investment budget, a source that deals with infrastructure, too.

PGET: And this is a different source from other cultural institutions. Our budget comes from a different area.

PGET: We receive a percentage of the investment budget. It comes from urban development for example, new buildings, new roads…

AM: This is something you often (unsolicitedly) clarify, why?

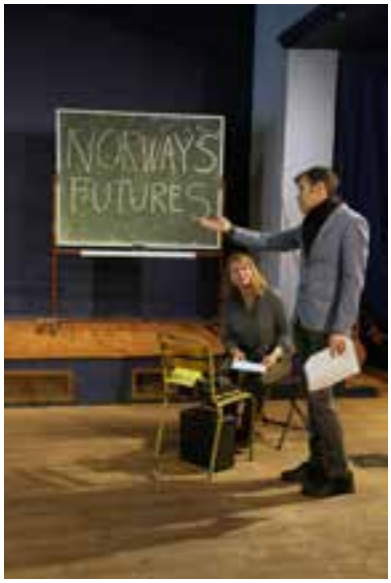
EGSB: Every city seems to want its biennial, but when it arrives, the money is usually pulled from other budgets, cut from other institutions in order to host the biennial. In our case, it doesn't work like that. It is a very different situation, which is more comfortable when it comes to creating collaborations with other institutions.

AM: And what do the other institutions and collaborators say about it?

PGET: In the beginning, they were kind of skeptical about us because they assumed the biennial would unfold in the usual way: using loads of money on invited artists that come and go leaving no infrastructure and no sediment. But we did it another way.

AM: Are the sediments there already so they can be publicly appreciated?

EGSB: Yes and no. A lot of the structural/instituting work is still in process, in its early stages.



Rehearsal of *National Episodes: Grini and the Futures of Norway* by Rose Hammer.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

Grini and the Futures of Norway, National Episode No. 1 performed by Rose Hammer at the Påfuglen Perlen for osloBIENNALEN.
Photo: Niklas Lello / © osloBIENNALEN

A workshop is underway for *'Another Grammar for Oslo'* by Mônica Nador and Bruno Oliveira
Photos: Courtesy of the artists and Asle Olsen / © osloBIENNALEN.

Performance of *Intet er stort intet er litet (Nothing is big nothing is small)* by Julien Bismuth. Photos: Niklas Hart, Hartwork and Martine Stenberg / © osloBIENNALEN

Mette Edvardsen's ongoing project *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine – A library of living books* with participants at the Tøyen Bibiliotek. Photo: Niklas Lello / © osloBIENNALEN

Marianne Heier, *And Their Spirits Live On,* which will be performed at the former Museum for Contemporary Art as part of osloBIENNALEN's 2019 opening programme. Kristine Jakobsen / © osloBIENNALEN

The former Museum for Contemporary Art where Marianne Heier's *And Their Spirits Live On* was performed as part of osloBIENNALEN First Edition's 2019 opening programme. Niklas Lello / © osloBIENNALEN

AM: As soon as you start to do things differently, you enter a sort of never-ending re-explanation of what you are doing. Inertia in cultural formats is difficult to counter. But you are already exploring other forms of communication, I would say. Take, for instance, the book that you are now holding.[5] It only includes the artworks—and not yet the structural work—but it is already different from a book that another biennial would produce.

PGET: A biennial would never produce a book that distinguishes between "new works," "ongoing works," and "completed works" as in our case. It highlights the evolutionary structure and its time frame.

AM: The title of the book is a date, October 2019, which makes it stand as a sort of provisional extraction within a longer timeline.

EGSB: When we opened in May, we had texts about the works, but we also asked a few authors to write about works that were not yet made. We put those essays in a folder with the name of the artist, and we thought this folder could grow as the work evolved and that it would be made accessible to visitors who wanted to know more.

AM: So, the text material would thicken as the project grows, with different voices speaking about its evolution? That's such a nice idea. What happened then?

EGSB: When we were making the book *October 2019,* which is the second one, we looked back at those essays that, at the end of the day, almost no one had requested because we couldn't find the right way to announce their existence. As we looked back at this existing material, we realized it was an interesting exercise to write and read about something that is not yet there or not finalized. And this is how we arrived at the idea of having a book that deals with that which is done, that which is ongoing, and that which is still to come.

AM: So, you have writing strata being compiled alongside the works. Have you started a similar writing process about the structure?

EGSB: Not yet.

AM: Maybe this interview is a first step; a first attempt to communicate the structuring principles of OB1 beyond, before or below the artworks.

PGET: It mirrors the way in which we work.

AM: One last aspect I wanted to address is budget, as I believe it is at the core of the design of an institutional architecture such as the one you are building. A lot of what we are able to do in general depends on how it is managed and translated into numbers. Since you are "an evolving five-year programme," how do you handle a budget where you have a significant part of activity that is deliberately left undecided or to-be-decided?

PGET: We don't handle the budget. It is a matter of working on a five-year biennial project with annual budgets that we do not handle. This is another example of a very challenging aspect of a structural project, how to proceed when some structural aspects are not under the auspices of curatorial praxis or when praxis does not inform the curatorial.

AM: What does that say about the real agency or transformation ability of our professions when we seem to be given absolute freedom content-wise while limited interference with structural/institutional/administrative matters?

EGSB: Our project is a curatorial statement of praxis, in other words, it intends to implement structural thinking rather than depict or illustrate a theory. This would indeed require access to the administrative machinery (budgets, definition of contracts, etc.). But generally, it is taken for granted that curatorial work must be concerned with the production of objects, texts, ideas, but not the redefinition of structures or tools.

PGET: The reason why we are given freedom to determine content but only limited possibilities for intervention in structural/institutional/administrative matters is that the latter might actually challenge existing systems and the social and economic realities they produce and maintain.

AM: What is the impact of speculative programming on budget management, for instance? You told me that there are artists who in a spontaneous way—as they were producing their own work—have also requested to work with other artists. These collaborations would be unforeseen work, how would you integrate them?

EGSB: Unforeseen?

AM: From the standpoint of budget planning, I mean…

EGSB: Yes and no, because these are artists who are in a "long engagement" with the biennial. So, we would understand collaboration as a part of their durational involvement.

AM: What is a "long engagement"?

EGSB: It means that some of the artists are in a long-term dialogue and work process with us, three to five years. Lisa Tan, Dora García, Julien Bismuth, Mette Edwardsen…

AM: This category, "long-term engagement," is it something you use publicly?

EGSB: No, we've only used it between us so far; it is not public.

AM: But it could help your legibility. It follows the logic of the adjectives that you are already using, such as "completed" or "ongoing," which really help an understanding of how you are handling time and production.

EGSB: We would end up having too many terms: "slow process," "long-term"…

AM: The different durations are such a big part of your singularity that the variety of names gives an immediate sense of this plurality.

PGET: It could become beautifully poetic, because we would also need a category for Hlynur Hallsson's work, which would be "disappearing"…[6]

AM: I am inquiring about this because changing or adapting the regulations can be a form of long-term policy making.

EGSB: But regulations are also fragile. I've seen events being cancelled with institutions not sticking to what they agreed in a contract without any major consequences.

PGET: The juridical language of contracts falls—unfortunately—a bit beyond what is curatorial. They include the budget, the fee, state what the artist is about to do… To our knowledge, the contract does not have any kind of curatorial or artistic element.

AM: I am not sure I agree with that.

PGET: When we invite someone, we start by having a conversation with the artist. Then we pay the artist to come up with a proposal. In this first contract, nothing is said about the potential new production. Then, with the biennial director, we will check whether their proposal is something we can and want to do in terms of artistic content.

AM: I would say that paying for a proposal is a curatorial decision. The way of undertaking curating sets in motion consequent forms of administration.

EGSB: There are some things we can influence. But not everything, as we do not have access to all the information. From the beginning, our curatorial proposal has rested on the desire to influence cultural policy.

PGET: We are constantly wrestling with the trouble of explaining to the outside—but also inside, within our team—that the biennial has a modus operandi that is its theme. If we relax for a second, we fall back into the trap where things are explained in the usual way.

EGSB: It is exhausting.

PGET: We opened in May and now we are in November. We have just started…

AM: Not having all the answers and tangible outputs yet is an expression of the honesty and coherence of the evolving nature of your endeavor.

EGSB: We have five years…

This text is a shortened version from a longer conversation held in Oslo in October 2019.

Epilogue

For OB1's second year (2020), budget and resources were not allocated until March 2020 with a reduction to the expected budget. Moreover, the developing Coronavirus crisis in public health is conditioning all decisions as to how to move the biennial forward. Most probably, this will allow us, or force us, to proceed to the implementation of our original plans to operate beyond the physical public space and invest in the public sphere and its media (TV, radio, digital platforms). At the time of editing the above interview (originally held in October 2019), we are rethinking the 2020 programme, which must now respond appropriately to a completely

Ed D'Souza's *Migrant Car* makes its way to Myntgata 2 from Eddie King's Furniture and Upholstery Workshop in Grünerløkka, Oslo. Photo: Niklas Hart, Hartwork / © osloBIENNALEN

unforeseen and tragic public catastrophe. We must decide not only how to operate and on what basis, but also how to address possible audiences, in plural, via platforms that may not be accessible to everyone and in some cases may be quite exclusive; social media had already been deemed as generating 'social distance' long before COVID-19 came on the scene.

Notes

1 OSLO PILOT was a two-year project (2015-2016) investigating the role of art in and for the public realm. It sought to lay the groundwork for a future periodic art event in public space. Oslo Pilot's programme was aimed at exploring the intersecting temporalities of the artwork, the periodic art event, and the public sphere. More information can be found at: https://archive.oslopilot.no/oslo-pilot/about-oslo-pilot/, last accessed December 1, 2019.

2 From 1998-2003, Eva González-Sancho Bodero directed *Établissement d'en Face Projects*. Her programme included a series of individual projects always involving new production (including projects by Lara Almacegui, Dora García, Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter, but also a two-year research project entitled *Legal Space Public Space,* dealing with the use of legal gaps by citizens, artists, urban planners, architects, etc., within the construction of public space).

3 *Grini and the Futures of Norway* is the title of a project existing under the authorship of Rose Hammer, an artist persona comprised of a collective of individuals. For osloBIENNALEN, Rose Hammer will produce a series of performances entitled *National Episodes* in the Brechtian *Lehrstücke* (lesson play) tradition. These will revisit low-key but transcendent episodes in Norwegian history, such as the mythical meetings that took place at Grini prison camp, Barrack 12, during the Nazi occupation of Norway. More information on: https://rosehammer.home.blog/, last accessed December 1, 2019.

4 consonni is a publishing platform based in an independent cultural space in Bilbao. Since 1996, they have been producing critical culture and they have more recently prioritized the printed word, together with the word that is whispered, heard, silenced, or recited, the word that becomes action, that becomes body. From the expanded field of art, literature, radio, and education, their ambition has long been connected to the public domain. For more information on La Publika: http://lapublika.org/index.html, last accessed December 1, 2019.

5 *October 2019* was published on that date and encompassed all the projects—completed, in process, or for the future—that the biennial was working on.

6 *Seven Works for Seven Locations* is a multilingual text-based work that is spray-canned directly onto public walls/surfaces around the city. Each of the seven works consists of a compilation of three texts in different languages reflecting on Oslo's population composition and/or language: English, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Sami, Swedish, and Somali. As time passes, some of the texts remain but others are covered over or deteriorate.

Eva González-Sancho Bodero is a curator with a special interest in definitions of new models of contemporary art and its production, the construction of public space, language, and art practices defined as 'non-authoritarian.'

Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk is a curator interested in developing art projects in public space, creating connections and close encounters with other social systems and discourses, external to the art world itself.

Anna Manubens is an independent curator, writer, and producer with a preference for hybrid roles at the intersection between research, public programming, close project development, structural explorations and exhibition-making.

Prior to the 5-yearbiennial project, González-Sancho Bodero and Eeg-Tverbakk worked together as co-curators to develop and conclude OSLO PILOT (2015 to 2017), an experimental two-and-a-half-year research-based project aimed at defining the format for a first biennial in Oslo: osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024, a project conceived to explore specific questions arising from art in public space through an evolving five-year programme.

The Biennial is owned and funded by the Oslo Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Before, During, After Biennale

Robert E. D'Souza

A great deal of this article is based on a close relationship with art biennials[1] both in terms of the dynamic overlaps of critical interest as an academic and in terms of my presence as an artist and participant at both the second edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale[2] (KMB) in 2014 in India and the inaugural osloBIENNALEN[3] (OB) that launched in May 2019 in Norway. My focus in revisiting some of the texts written about Kochi's Biennale over nearly a decade and introducing Oslo's Biennale is to consider particular characteristics of these biennials, tracing back some of their 'genealogies' that might allow for reflection on how experiences 'on the ground' forged in Kochi become relevant later in Oslo. An awareness of biennial critiques has informed my artistic practice through specific projects *End of Empire*[4] and *Migrant Car*[5] produced for Kochi and Oslo, respectively, and developed to respond to particular local contexts when the projects were realized, testing thematic or propositional claims within the respective frameworks in respect to locality and public space. Both projects were produced locally as part of the performative, public-facing aspect of the work while engaging with local collaborators and agents as part of a social practice developed with respective local communities. Artistic inclusion has afforded me the opportunity to experience first-hand the particular complexities of local participation while engaging directly with biennial formats sitting between the intensity of local scrutiny and played out against wider global biennial discourses and critiques. Working directly with biennial teams involved in developing, producing, communicating, and managing these complex formats also gives some understanding of the internal struggles, pressures and dynamics of the often of the reality in 'building an art biennial.' The efforts and resources to even make an event happen are large, while the issues in sustaining and surviving the weight of expectation make the fact that these formats have proliferated quite exceptional. There is, of course, very little detail of biennial experience and certainly space for more research into the 'practice' of making art biennials.

Much has been written recently about the global development of biennials and any understanding of Kochi's Biennale is to recognize its historical trajectory located in the body of research, texts, publications, and events about and around biennial phenomena (see the comprehensive *Biennial Reader*, 2010, that that came from Bergen Biennial Conference in 2009).[6] Amongst the many more recent scholarly publications on biennials, Charles Green and Anthony Gardner's publication *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (2016) gives a useful historical and contextual framing of the phenomena of the biennial, acting both as a useful reference when locating some of the 'genealogies of transcultural exchange' that are pertinent here in terms of biennial editions, especially from the 90's, that also challenge some conventional narratives on 'biennalization.' Importantly Green and Gardner note that there is a research gap that scholars are just beginning to address, and "It is the rapid turnover of biennials and their curators, as well as the diversity of their themes and forms of infrastructure."[7] What their account importantly provides is a route map as to the 'before' of developments of biennial characteristics that might give some insight into current essential biennial modes and approaches and a narrative that paves the way for the launch of the biennales in Kochi and Oslo. Importantly, with the KMB there is the possibility of looking at longer consistent

Kochi-Muziris Biennale poster on an exterior wall in Fort Kochi during the launch of the 1st Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India, December 2012. Photograph by Robert E. D'Souza.

narratives because key individuals have worked from its inception—including one of the founders, Bose Krishnamachari, along with trustees and other support staff and osloBIENNALEN curators Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Eeg-Tverbakk—worked together as co-curators developing and concluding OSLO PILOT, an experimental two-and-a-half-year research project with publication[8] to conceive the format for Oslo's first Biennale, allowing for the development of sustained research during the five-year period of this Biennale.

Before the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

Firstly, in broad strokes, to give some context to my relationship to the KMB is considering the last three decades of visiting India from the UK, witnessing a nation's contemporary art emerging within a national globalization narrative. Parallel was the country's rapid economic growth, which foreshadowed a growing international interest in Indian arts that has been seen as one of the benefits of the economic reforms of the '90s and the concurrent "biennial boom" that was occurring. Some see this period as key to countering Western and European hegemonies, while other see this period as recolonization under the auspices of breaking these hegemonies down. What is clear is that the global proliferation of biennials has challenged the predominance of certain global centers within the art world.

In India, this economic liberalization allowed an alignment of commerce, through the art market, of internationally focused artists as ambassadors of a certain idea of a contemporary Indian art world, making artworks that spoke more directly of universally understood issues and aesthetics of globalization. The resultant economic optimism of India in the '90s helped shape a boom in investment in contemporary Indian art, paving the way and creating the conditions and international interest for some of those Indian artists and future KMB artist/founders Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu and future artist curators Jitish Kallat, Sudarshan Shetty, and Anita Dube, all benefitting from these changes having developed their international profiles during this period. The critical reception of the KMB and this new international character can

be linked intrinsically to this period of expansion in free-market capitalism conflated into a particular globalization identity for India. This new international identity for a generation of Indian artists who defined themselves internationally through this period can be seen to be key in influencing and being represented through Kochi's development as a biennale.

In terms of Green and Gardner's biennial 'genealogies,' Riyas Komu's invitation as an artist to participate in curator Robert Storr's 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 (India did not have its own national pavilion at Venice until 2011) and the Gwangju Emerging Asian Artists Exhibition in South Korea in 2010 are significant precursors to the KMB in 2012. Ranjit Hoskote is an important connecting figure in this narrative writing on biennials and on contemporary Indian art (including *Indian Highway*, 2008, Serpentine Gallery, London and *India: Art Now*, 2012, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Denmark). Hoskote also curated the Gwangju Biennale in 2008 and the first Indian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011. Hoskote describes Gwangju as the "biennial of resistance" because of its model of socially and politically led curation which will have certainly influenced some of the positioning of Kochi as a biennial within the political scope of Kerala. Hoskote goes on to allude in a KMB publication in 2012 that, "The gestation period for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale has involved extensive discussions and consultations between the founders and a wide range of participants in global biennale culture: curators, politicians, theorists, critics, managers, artists, civic bureaucrats, industrialists, foundations [...] They have acquainted themselves not only with the visible manifestations of such international festivals but also with the vast infrastructure that supports and sustains such endeavours, which usually remains invisible." [9] As one of the supporters of the KMB, Hoskote would have brought experience to the KMB from his curatorial roles in 2008 in the Gwangju Biennale and the 2011 Venice Biennale in the build-up to the KMB's development.

Some of my own speculations about this particular biennial were informed from a number of conversations with one of the trustees I was working with in Delhi with the complexity of the different internal situations for art in India, the infrastructure available to be able to start such an endeavor, and that this event took place in Kochi, a small southern coastal city more famous for its colonial histories of global spice trading and more recently for tourism. How and why would India launch its first biennial outside of the national confines of the established Delhi-Mumbai axis of Indian contemporary art, and what kind of reaction would this have on a national level, given that India had previously had repeated failed attempts to conceptualize a biennial prior to this endeavor (read Nancy Adajania's chapter on the now defunct Triennale-India launched in 1968, the failed attempt at India's international reach through contemporary art)?[10]

It was actually Kerala's cultural minister that approached established Mumbai-based artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, asking them "to suggest an event that would reaffirm the state's position on the cultural map," with the final decision made in the Prime Minister's office in New Delhi. However, the initial approach by the cultural minister to these two practicing artists was significant. Both Kerala-born, astute to the context they were working in, they took an artist-led approach, forming a community with both participating artists and local residents and traders. It is an approach that has proved distinct for this particular biennial and its relationship to the state. As with any endeavor, there was already a backlash and questions growing in the media and in the Indian art world, already indicating issues at stake in trying to launch an event synonymous with the wider burden of national representation on the global art stage.

Writing in the months leading up to the launch of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, I mused on how India might develop the "situation of art" in India in terms of its global standing in a chapter, "Outside Art: Art, Location and Global Tensions," speculatively ending with this biennial as a potential opportunity for India to gain some critical notice. Referencing the curatorial note on the Biennale website, one could unpack a particular conceptual conceit that collapsed together a particular local, pre-colonial history of cosmopolitanism. I wrote, "I have considered the motivations behind contemporary artists' concerns to look beyond the production of artworks towards ideas connecting art with society and everyday life. The new Kochi-Muziris Biennale launching in Kochi in 2012, heralds a return to significant international engagement for India [...]. This biennale has set out its international outlook: '[t]hrough the celebration of contemporary art from around the world [...] invoke the historic cosmopolitan legacy of the ancient port of Muziris' [...] this event might be a key opportunity in India [...] to connect internationally on home ground and help banish predisposed ideas of India and its art while bringing artists, curators critics and collectors to India to experience India and its art from the 'inside'."[11]

Kochi's Biennale Effect

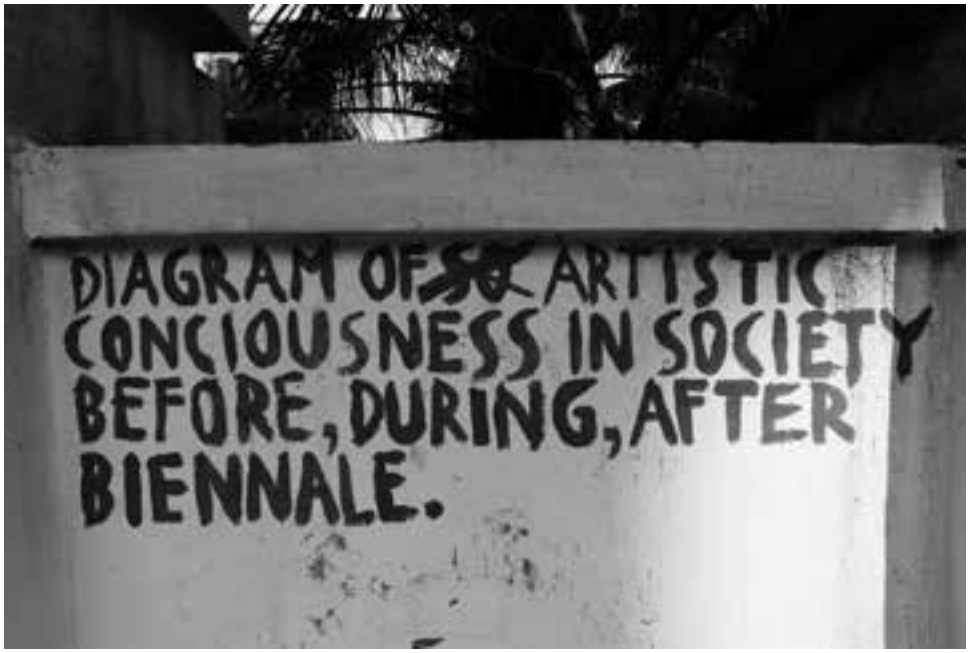
Traveling to India from the United Kingdom to visit the launch week of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in December 2012 (the auspicious date of its launch was set as 12 December 2012), I arrived in Fort Kochi not only as an observer of art but to also consider the Biennale through the lens of critical possibilities posed in earlier writings. Attending the launch was to witness a 'work in progress' with delays attributed to the late withdrawal of some of the expected funds from a newly elected state government, sensitized by bitter criticisms from local pressure groups, a paucity of professional art infrastructure, and a highly unionized workforce (a legacy of local histories of socialism and communism). This was coupled with inexperienced and sometimes ill-equipped technical support and specific artistic demands, and the logistics of exhibitions across citywide sites was visibly challenging. The effect of this was not wholly detrimental to the event, lending a grassroots feel and communal problem-solving. It seemed apt in this deeply socialist state to see the visibility of the labor needed in the 'production' of art, which, in other circumstances, might have been a less effective avant-garde gesture or performance; seen in Kochi, this was both an honest and a welcome antidote to the self-conscious performance of reality or 'white cube' exhibition experience.

The result of artists' abilities to connect and make sense of a place is not lost for some critics on many of the works made in situ at this Biennale. Lefebvre's[12] important insights on the dialectical, rather than oppositional, relationship between the increasing abstraction of space and the 'production' of particularities of place, local specificity, and cultural authenticity—a concern that informs many site-oriented art practices today. The curators' embrace of Kochi for a Biennale takes a certain logic, taking a site that conflates their curatorial history/globalization myth in a post-colonial city where there is already a historic resistance to cultural homogenization. It might be said that the 'effect' of the city in itself has been a large influencer on those artists attending, and the best works of those artists invited to produce on-site have been those that have paid heed and attentiveness to the local contexts. A number of projects absorbing and re-encoded colonial historiographies back into art again grounded even international contributions through shared cultural referents anchoring projects into the locality.

In terms of audience reception, it is notable that the KMB and the Gwangju Biennale have both been attracting significantly more visitors than the Venice Biennale. These numbers might be attributed to a more expansive audience made up of a larger contingent of local visitors and not just reliant on the middle–class, informed, cultural consumers or wealthy global 'art tourists.' The huge local audiences might be considered as another phenomenon and 'effect' that critiques the insular nature of many other contemporary art events. The need to engage and to develop a sense of community and opportunities for local inclusion has been important to both Gwangju[13] and the KMB, developing new relationships between local audiences and maybe non-art audiences who feel able to engage their curiosity whilst also engaging artists to have a deep engagement with the city and its social and historic fabric.

By meeting with artists and organizers, the attended seminars, talks, and performances meant making a collective sense of the 'biennial experience' and understanding what was unfolding as a reading of the Biennale's effect on the locality. A memorable incident that captures a political reality within the local public was an attack on a series of charcoal wall portraits of local Keralites by Australian artist Daniel Connell, which were defaced utilizing burnt coconut husks. The attack was accorded some significance as a particularly localized signal of opposition to the work. The artwork itself was an intervention in public space, with an implied endorsement by the Biennale that could be seen as evidence of a form of cultural imperialism that some locals felt had been brought to Fort Kochi, under the auspices of the Biennale as a "festival of international contemporary art." This gesture reported as vandalism can be seen as fulfilling the potential for public artworks to be both politicized and localized and, in this case, by subverting the artwork's and artist's authority. When considered against Kerala's active Marxist past, this gesture becomes redolent of the kind of fringe conceptual or performance art and an honest radical gesture in the vein of the politics of Rancière, marking the merging of life into art within this format.

In reflection, Kochi has become a good example of an art event that developed from the ground-up, meaning that its format and structure have been aligned with the locality in mind, a criticism aimed at many contemporary biennials that proclaim locality but do not deliver on these promises. In the Biennale's speaker programme, *Let's Talk,* Paul Domela (a previous director of the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art) spoke at the opening symposium of, *Site Imaginaries* and Sabine Vogel writes that his particular experience of developing a biennial format is responsive to the city but, "In Liverpool the strategy is to not exhibit works that have been selected in advance but to invite artists to create in-situ projects in direct response to local problems," a strategy Kochi curators have taken to activate the city through the Biennale's judicious use of space.[14] '



Artist unknown, hand painted statement on an exterior wall on a street in Fort Kochi produced during the 1st Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India, December 2012. Photograph by Robert E. D'Souza.

Biennale Knowledge

By December 2014, the Biennale team was better equipped in terms of skills, experience, and logistics with a better knowledge of the spaces that allowed for a more strategic planning of artworks than time or money previously allowed. Building on early critical success, the second edition of the KMB had to work hard to develop its identity. This was refined further through a more controlled exposition by selected Indian artist Jitish Kallat who developed a curatorial approach based upon synchronically ordered artworks, with the title *Whorled Explorations*.[15] This formed part of the continued development of the Biennale concept to take in the historic navigation of the globe as part of a mapping exercise connecting time, space, and history as a contemporary turn. Kallat built upon the original curatorial proposition of a paradigm of historical cosmopolitanism in the city of Muziris,[16] a nod to a pre-globalization India and a critique of conventional historical thinking of globalization as a more recent phenomenon. We held an in-depth interview with Kallat in his Mumbai studio after the second KMB, which provided invaluable insight into his curatorial approach and methodical, systematic, conceptually driven and highly researched approach (see the chapter "Curation As Dialogue" in *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art*).[17]

As part of Kallat's second KMB, I contributed to the Biennale both as an artist producing a collateral art installation, *End of Empire*, and as an academic with colleagues through the Biennale talks programme. Using the basis of observations made in a previous journal article, "The Indian Biennale Effect,"[18] produced after the first Biennale provided an opportunity to look at the knowledge gained from the use of the city by the Biennale within the public forum of the Biennale's *History Now* seminars and talks. We saw the importance of connecting at multiple nodes of Biennale activity by curating talks that engaged with the contestation of space, thematically focusing on what we saw as a key character of this Biennale. Importantly, we were building mutually beneficial research by seeing a gap within the discourse within the Biennale about its own expansive role in respect to the city and the political ramifications of place and space. My contribution as an artist allowed me to integrate 'glocal' ideas of space both through discussion of

social practice with producers in Kochi and of opening up the engagement to communities by the Biennale by building more socially orientated projects (see the chapter "End of Empire" in *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art*).[19]

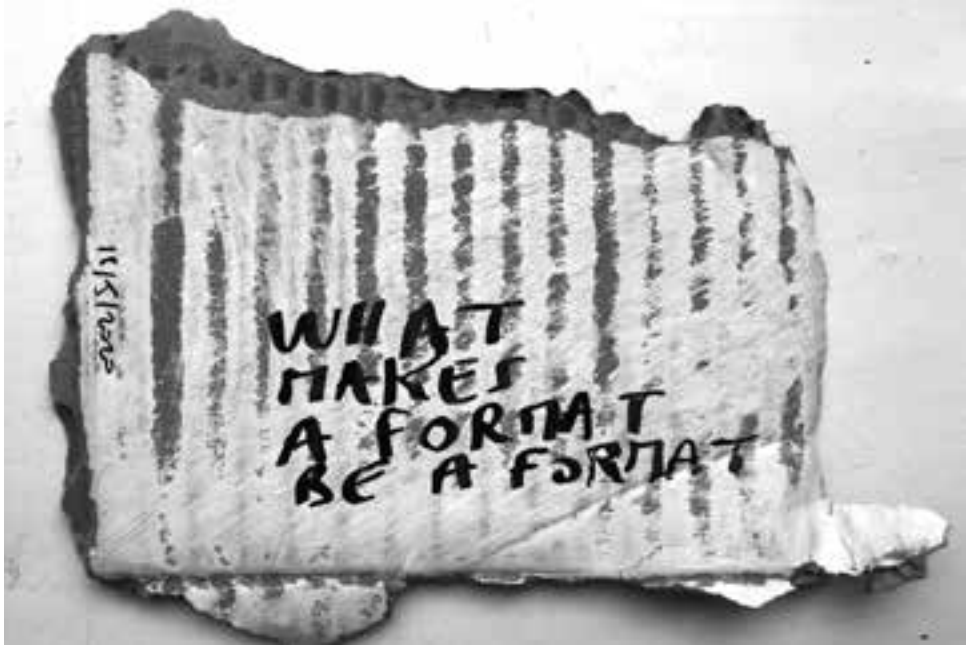
In continued discussion by Skype interview with Riyas Komu in 2014 leading up to the second KMB, my colleague Sunil Manghani and I discussed the particular descriptions of being a 'people's biennale' and 'productionist' in nature that Chris Dercon (an early KMB champion and previous director of Tate Modern) had made. Referencing comments Komu made in a documentary from the start of the Biennale: "He says simply, 'Stress is there. Artists are putting pressure.' There is a double sense to his remark. Artists are putting pressure *onto* the situation and equally are being put *under* pressure by the circumstances. In contrast to the typical biennale set-up that offers refined exhibition spaces and technical support, Komu describes the scene as a real community, saying 'it's almost like an artist camp.' [...] And what was particularly exciting was that everybody was learning at work. People were being introduced to art, art making and its history as they were working and engaging with artist. We didn't have the luxury of a team that were already inducted to contemporary art. Even we were learning." Komu also notes how the best art will survive if we take risks. He suggests the Kochi Biennale itself has "become a kind of synonym for getting artists ready to take risks' [...] The Biennale gets made again, each time: 'What happens in every edition of the Biennale' he suggests, 'is that risk comes back. Every edition of the Biennale is almost a new project. [...] We start afresh every time'."[20] The idea of knowledge production through the experience of artists working at the Biennale exemplified a concern with education and learning leading to later initiatives such as a Student Biennale indicative of the ambitions beyond the scope of the Biennale to actively raise issues such as arts education nationally.

Performing The Biennale

This section draws on the online review, "Timely Provocations: The 3rd Kochi-Muziris Biennale," written with my colleague Sunil Manghani for the Biennial Foundation in 2017.

We had just published our sustained writings on the KMG in *India's Biennale Effect* and were travelling to Kochi to launch the publication and attend the third edition of the Biennale in December 2016. There was a great deal of anticipation as to where this Biennale would attempt to take its audience, testament to the critical interest the Biennale had generated since its inception. If the first Kochi-Muziris Biennale, under the curatorship of its founders Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, was distinctive for its site-specificity, and the second for Jitish Kallat's conceptual 'journey,' the third edition under the curatorial direction of Sudarshan Shetty was concerned philosophically, materially, and politically with *time,* and we felt that was arguably the most challenging of the three editions we had visited (a visit to curator Anita Dube's fourth edition was not possible in 2018 although we connected with her through the *Imagined Biennales* event we held at Tate Exchange in April 2018 in the run-up to the launch of the fourth Biennale).

Moving between the various opening events, you could pick up a mixture of delight and high praise, but also confusion and ambiguity in response to the latter uncertainties: this was precisely what Shetty wanted—that there was no center point, no required navigation, only multiple possibilities; a biennale that unfolds with time and patience. To have visited the previous Biennale was to experience the mapped and precise logic of Jitish Kallat. Shetty's curatorial ideas were more amorphous and



Biennalist, *What Makes A Format Be A Format*, May 2020. Courtesy of the artist Thierry Geoffroy.

The Biennalist is one of a number of art formats (including Emergency Room and Critical Run) used by the Danish-French artist Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL to comment on biennales through the production of artworks, 'guerrilla style' live on-site debates and interventions. His engagement has been described as 'flagrantly provocative' by reflecting on and testing biennale propositions, curatorial thematics and marketing statements, often directly by visualising questions in simply produced and immediate artworks/responses. He has produced sustained provocations over the last two decades to contribute to or start essential debates on subjects ranging from themes such as hypocrisy, colonialism and immigration that engage with certain contextual and local realities, sometimes mirroring ideological and even utopian desires embedded in biennale themes.

elliptical in description, clearly not wanting to be pinned down. He went on to describe how he saw the Biennale "as existing in process, something which flows, and I wanted to engage artists whose practices will create works that exist not only for the duration of the Biennale, but into the time beyond."[21]

Under the curatorial title of *Forming in the Pupil of an Eye*,[22] Shetty's staging of the Kochi Biennale stretched over twelve official venues. Many of the sites, such as Pepper House, Kashi Art Café, and Durbar Hall, have been associated with the Biennale from the start. The iconic Aspinwall House provided the Biennale with its primary site, presenting key infrastructure as well as the opportunity to make more direct curatorial groupings of related works due to its extensive exhibition spaces. A number of new venues also appear in this edition, including the TKM Warehouse: offering large spaces, with 'white-cube' rendered walls, this venue has been used with confidence, giving breathing space to just five artists. Out of the ninety-seven artists participating from thirty-five countries, under half were of Indian origin with a high representation of lesser known Indian artists alongside more nationally established artists such as T V Santhosh and Himmat Shah. Notably, there were fewer internationally known artists that might typically draw large crowds perhaps pointing to another expression of confidence, with a more determined move to allow the Biennale to be a site of opportunity for emerging artists.

Shetty is much admired for his sensibilities towards art making and materials. The act of making itself is a palpable theme that is picked up in the selection of a number of works. Projects present that produced work over extended durations and also presenting

performative works that are true to the process of making and performing can be lost on audiences. Nonetheless, this edition of the Biennale will be remembered for is its turn to the temporal arts. A particularly powerful and demanding work is Padmini Chettur's *Varnam*, a contemporary dance production of three hours. Given the complex history of women's status in India's hierarchical social structure, along with a defiant feminist movement since the 1970s, and more recent media attention on continued violence towards women, Chettur's *Varnam* [23] provides a radical and multiple re-imagining of the female body. It was certainly ambitious to exhibit such performance work and artworks *in the making,* not least because biennials tend to attract itinerant, international audiences who often only attend for a matter of days. But, again, this formatting and curating of works implies confidence, favoring those audiences who might invest more time in Kochi and also those local to the Biennale. This is one of the key observations from the first Biennale about making key decisions that break with conventional cycles of time, not only in scheduling but in respect to place and locality and the message that this gives locally. In an interview in *The Hindu*, Shetty discusses how his curatorial approach has evolved through wide-ranging conversations with practitioners in theatre, poetry, film, music, and dance. "I'm not trying to make visual artists out of theatre, music or dance performers," he explains, but instead, "I'm trying to see how I can keep the integrity of the art form but blur the demarcations."[24]

For the Curator's Talk, as part of the opening events, Shetty was in conversation with the philosopher Sundar Sarukkai. The notion of "multiplicity" came up repeatedly, and Sarukkai kept referring to various iterations of the curatorial note (as if somehow there was no definitive version, but only a rich palimpsest of views). Shetty's recursive (and anti-authorial) interest in conversation presents not a dialectical approach, but rather a multiple, layered *gathering* of meanings. Interestingly, earlier curatorial statements were much more explicitly conceptual.[25] During the curator's talk, in front of a packed audience at the purpose-built auditorium of Cabral Yard, Shetty appeared reluctant to break away from the intimate dialogue with Sarukkai, uncomfortable perhaps to give definitive or unequivocal answers in the ensuing Q&A session. However, if we read this third iteration of the Biennale as bound to temporalities and multiplicities, you come to accept a much slower engagement than any didactic curatorial statement might allow. We might suggest Shetty's curatorial *practice* is revealed as being structured precisely as he wishes us to view the work: as layered, cumulative, shifting, multiple, provocative (even at times duplicitous). Shetty's focus on the temporality of artworks, art forms, and material processes present a challenge to the biennial format, which typically is anchored by considerations of place and space. Yet, from its inception—and largely due to its artist-led approach—the Kochi Biennale has by no means adopted an 'off-the-shelf' model. Outside of the metropolitan sphere, Kochi has allowed for a renewed freedom to experience art, with less separation of art and everyday life; and with artists themselves engaged in the *making* of the event. Unlike some large-scale art events, which we might characterize as 'legitimating forces,' the Kochi Biennale suggests a humble invitation to 'build it' rather than be placed *within* it. At its best, a biennial is greater than a collection of its material objects and sites of display—it bears social connections, it addresses the surrounding local and global politics, it impacts upon educational contexts, and it forges new narratives. All of these things are true of Kochi, and through Shetty's curatorship we gain further dimensions arising from new provocations of form, content, and time. The question we left with was if Kochi could sustain itself as a progressive force, or whether its own success will place too great a pressure upon it having delivered, with its third and arguably subtlest edition, *multiple* ways of thinking about this problem, offering as it does a 'gathering' of contemporary art that is radically (un)sustainable.

Imagined Biennales event, part of *Building an Art Biennale* at Tate Exchange, London, April 2018. Photograph by Robert E. D'Souza.

Tate Exchange at Tate Modern in London is a pioneering programme launched in 2016 working with 66 Associates from the arts, health, education and charitable sectors has been inviting the public to collaborate on an unprecedented scale. The first of its kind anywhere in the world, the programme asks the public to test ideas and explore new perspectives, illuminating the value of art to society.

Building An Art Biennale

The following edited interview[26] was published at the launch of osloBIENNALEN in May 2019, between myself and Norwegian student Åshild Kristensen Foss, studying at Oslo Metropolitan University and one of the participants in my *Migrant Car* project who was documenting the production of the car sculpture over a period of one month at the furniture workshop of Eddie King, one of the project collaborators in Grünerløkka[27] in Oslo where Foss also lived.

AKF: Can you tell me a little bit about the evolution of the project previously titled *End of Empire* at Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which has become *Migrant Car* for osloBIENNALEN?

ED: I made a version of my car sculpture for Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2014. Documentary evidence of this work was shown at Tate Modern in London in 2018 as part of an event *How to Build an Art Biennale* organized by Winchester School of Art in the UK.[28] A chance meeting with the curators of osloBIENNALEN that year led to the present invitation. Rethinking the project for the city of Oslo meant new conversations about the concept of art in public space and subsequently the new car-free zone came up. For me, the restrictions placed on this space could be used as a geographical framing device to connect the presence of the car sculpture to the city dynamics, at

the same time engaging with local debates. The idea of the car as a visitor suggested contextualizing the city as a host, which led to a discussion about the possibility of renaming the car, thought of as a migrating object—*Migrant Car*. This opened a wider discussion on the situation of migrants in the city. It would enact the idea of a car on a journey—the actual movement would be a performative gesture in itself—providing this motion was driven by people power, which would also give non-art publics a chance to encounter art in action. Important questions for me were: How might a project such as this promote cultural understanding and 'forms of exchange' as part of a strategy contributing to social engagement that would benefit the locality of Oslo, while contributing to a better understanding of peoples and societies within the context of the globalized urban situation that exists here. This led to my invitation to local students to develop participatory projects along the route the car would follow and to work collectively in shaping this journey, while also grounding the project locally. Part of my discussion with the student participants were around current critiques and political dialogues that focus on migration/immigration and "tensions around difference," and what affective responses might inform attitudes and give voice to those who might feel marginalized in these dialogues.

AKF: I like that the underlying political theme in the project is based on engaging with issues in society, but you're using participation and generosity to disseminate ideas rather than making an overt political statement, though the project title *Migrant Car* is provocative! Do you want the engagement to generate a learning situation and be a good example of how we can also work together through the dialogues generated by a project?

ED: An engagement with socially orientated issues underpins my critical interest in making artwork and has been a focus in my own practice. I don't believe it is the job of artists to solve social problems, this takes away from the state's responsibility to improve the social situation for those within a society; imposing this burden on artists distracts from sociopolitical responsibility. I do believe, though, that being socially aware, provocative, and active can be part of an engagement which, for some artists, can be a frame of reference to personally respond to what is happening in their time. In these terms, I really like the quote from Bertolt Brecht that, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but rather a hammer with which to shape it." This thinking applies to art becoming a performance that might shape a social reality. The everyday becomes a universal and local language that might bring people closer to the art rather than separate them from it, while revealing new ideas about the familiar. I'm encouraged by the fact that the more successful the project, the less it needs me. I like the blurring that might happen between spectator and participant and that they all might have the potential to be the art. I'm heartened at how the project has grown via the workshop into the local community and beyond. Going back to the project's genesis, to me it has been interesting to see how ideas tested in the Kochi Biennale and previously considered critically through my research and writing have informed the project. It has now developed more as a durational public participatory performance, with different audiences over time and space, where participants become performers of art, serendipitous guests bringing contingent art 'actions' and 'situations' into a space, and where the audience become part of a 'spectacle' of this art. I'm attracted to the proposition that art in public space might close the distance between art and everyday life, a possibility I think about often. That we might produce a situation for people to rethink their locality through the most subtle of actions, or even simply by moving this object, this Migrant Car, through the streets of Oslo is a possibility of making art accessible and allowing for a testing of a democracy of art.

The project *Migrant Car* represents a project developed with the curators of OB extending both critical experiences and approaches honed through the Kochi Biennale, my academic research into social practices, and through a number of deeply engaged and rigorous conversations to ensure coherence of the project for the locality of Oslo. These conversations and the research generated from Oslo will also contribute to ongoing research into practice and forms a significant personal engagement in a significant and challenging art project that has been meaningfully informed by Kochi research and practice. There are a number of interconnected components developed, built, and performed in public space developed between November 2018 and August 2018 in Oslo. The work comprises a moveable mixed-media sculpture based on a full-sized Hindustan Ambassador car built with local craftsmen whose workshop was transformed into a public-facing space allowing for the production to act as live performance of making the sculpture over an extended period prior to the launch of the Biennale. A documentary was made of the production, later installed in the window of the furniture workshop alongside a film I made of the Indian carpenter who built *End of Empire*, connecting craftsmen and projects from Kochi to Oslo. After the sculpture left the space, a documentary video was screened as part of a public event for the closing of the project in August 2018 in Oslo. This film documented the production of the sculpture, a community-initiated street party and street parade (this evolved spontaneously out of the project), eight student co-produced temporal projects/performances in Oslo's car-free zone documented online in a blog,[29] and the sculptures invitation to and engagement with events and public spaces in Oslo including Oslo Cathedral during refugee week and the Oslo Pride parade. The project has since moved on to Bergen Kunsthall 3,14[30] where it has been re-curated for the locality and will move to Kirkenes later this year to collaborate with art collective Pikene på Broen.[31] This final journey across the Norwegian border into Russia will attempt to retrace the journey on bicycles via the Storskorg border post where 5,500 refugees, mostly Syrians, entered Norway via Russia.[32] As *Migrant Car* moves, it continues to creates curatorial possibilities and evolving situations and participations extending the space of the Biennale's reach while following the logic of the ambitions developed with the curators that supported a temporal work that might challenge ideas of space, time, and locality.

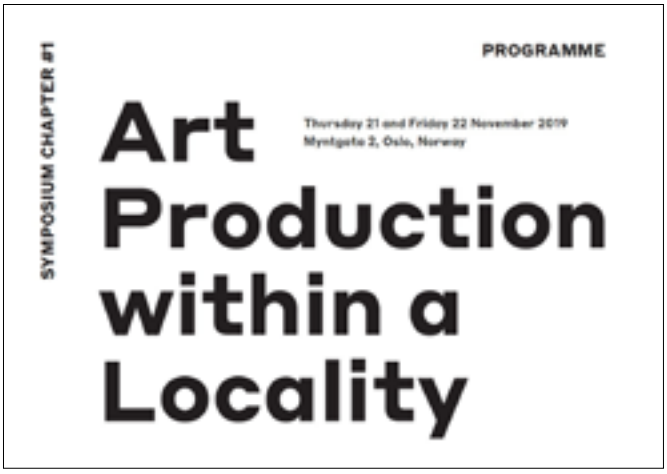
Taking the logic of the work is to take sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's thoughts about the provisions of arts in society and the need for 'access' that goes well beyond simple economic considerations, but rather concerns deeper barriers based upon social and cultural grounds. This becomes particularly pertinent within the premises put forward in both Kochi and Oslo Biennales, with both privileging making art more accessible. Access in general is a highly contentious issue and there are clearly structurally, socially, and economically many barriers that separate Indian society, so Kochi's statement of intent in bringing 'everyone' in is highly political and at the same time chimes with a particular progressive socialist political past in the state, not necessarily replicated in wider India. Maybe the choice of Kochi as a base for a biennial starts to make more sense than the hubs of Delhi and Mumbai, as a more egalitarian testing ground for the reception of this Biennale's format. In the same way, in Oslo I have been supported in developing a collaborative project in an area of the city with particular recent histories of social change and reinvention in the eastern district of Grünerløkka that connects in sociopolitical terms back to Kochi.

A three-month period of developing the project prior to the launch of the Biennale meant a swift grounding within the locality/community, building dialogues to localize my approach, and building collaboration while finding common ground and building

Cover of the osloBIENNALEN Prologue Symposium Booklet, *What does it mean to launch a Biennial that breaks with the usual ways of addressing space, time and theme?* May 2019. Courtesy of osloBIENNALEN.

Speakers included: Mikaela Assolent, Dora García, Marius Grønning and Shwetal A. Patel, with guest participants Binna Choi, Chto Delat, Claire Doherty, Jesús Fuenmayor, Lara García, Marianne Heier, Ulrike Neergaard, Paul O'Neill, Farid Rakun, Ruben Steinum, Tereza Stejskalová and Vít Havranek.

trust with everyone. OB has importantly developed crucial support structures for artists like myself, which becomes key to making meaningful projects and engagement in a locality, and this included research support, mediation, and production. For the project to be truly localized and collaborative meant that to some extent it would emerge and be determined by actions that came from its own internal dynamics, rather than any top-down, prescriptive, or defined project plan. It becomes a distinct dynamic nature in an unfolding project like this that the biennial format over a more fixed institutional format can accommodate. Of course, this open-ended approach has risks for both artist and sponsor and if an artist's ambitions and complexity are too high or risk is mitigated out of the project, then both extremes can negate being reflective of the locality. This is one of the key reasons that the biennial format is still relevant as an alternative site to offer the space for risk-taking, for experimentation, for failure. Controls are needed but the right ones for each project, and these need space and time to get right, to interrogate and develop appropriate approaches and strong curatorial support. With OB, there has been an unusually high level of support and discussion in developing projects to ensure viability, coherence, and ambition. Key to my conversations with curators were the unfolding nature of increased engagement from the collaborators, the positive reception and self-organized response from the community in Grünerløkka and the students' participation and ownership. During the process of this project, a point of collective ownership was reached where the project was as much owned by the collaborators and local community in Grünerløkka as it was a Biennale project.



Cover of the programme for *Art Production within a Locality,* Symposium Chapter #1, November 2019. Courtesy of osloBIENNALEN.

osloBIENNALEN has developed rather than a theme a set of four pillars, the Biennial's founding concepts and supporting infrastructures starting with Production in a Locality, Collections for the Passer-by, New Institutional Ecologies and Addressing the Myriad. Each year over the five-year duration a symposium will take place engaging key questions and challenges related to the 'pillars'. The symposium outcome will constitute an initial set of premises to help the biennial develop its own archive, which it is hoped will provide a valuable resource for professionals and academics in this sector.

After Biennale

In conclusion, those reading this article involved in the arts might consider what 'after biennale' might mean now, during the current impacts and restrictions of the COVID-19 global pandemic? It is inevitable that there is widespread reluctance to cancel events sometimes years in the making and with commitments made; finding alternatives, in the main virtual, has become the way forward for now. So, continuing to hold a conference on *Contemporary Art Biennials* with a title *our hegemonic machines in states of emergency* might be apt for the current situation. Here the 'emergency' is moving well beyond economic impacts and the underlying financial crisis, but ones that will transform an arts sector previously dependent on events, on participation, on bringing audiences together and the global movements of artists and professionals. It will be interesting in particular to consider the usefulness of learning from biennials in cities such as Kochi and Oslo, where the respective Biennales are exploring different ways they might operate locally across multiple sites, creating sustained engagements within their localities, investing in building arts projects that might give a useful or meaningful presence within the fabric of the city, initiatives supporting local artists and placing art in the city as part of everyday life. A different understanding might be made of those biennales that have worked to benefit and privilege those who are more local, to engage in more sustained and sustainable mechanisms with their arts, who look to develop programmes beyond the 'event' fixation of many biennales or by opting to work beyond conventional cycles, using outreach and alternative forms of engagement. Oslo is still early in its cycle with twenty-four projects spread throughout its first year with varying temporalities, lifespans, and repetitions. This strategy was developed so that it might allow for increased opportunities especially for those living locally beyond those coming for the traditional 'biennial spectacle' that has become synonymous with grand opening events. On the ground, there are criticisms of visibility of the Biennale within the city, and it is clear from my conversations with the curators that they have resisted the impulse to rush to meet expectations without diminishing what was designed as a progressive and open-ended format to benefit locality. Working with time and format might not reach the expectations or experience of art for some in the

city but certainly privileging artists in general and the locality are certainly admirable and needed. Of course, there are myriad internal and external forces and pressures at play and, like Kochi, highly informed and engaged publics who want to have their say, but time needs to be given to give the space needed for some of the very issues raised in the framework to play out. Importantly, there is a space for potentially helpful discourse on the arts through formats such as biennials by reconsidering and rethinking particular strategies and practices that might support the emancipation and transformation of public and social space. The contemporary biennial can be seen as an active site for developing innovative approaches in participative arts, community engagements, pedagogic opportunities, as well as a space for broader cultural production, dissemination, and reception. So maybe now more than ever, the repetitive discussions and dialogues on biennial formats might give way to a wider discussion to those of urgent ideas and of artistic possibilities, to catalyze actions and create interventions within a world currently in a state of 'emergency' where there is little state imagination, only a shorthand politics of policies of constraint.

While Kochi and Oslo have joined well over 300 biennials that exist across the world, we have surely become ever more familiar with this format. In looking forward, we can also look back to reconsider lessons from the past, to revisit the 'genealogies' and to look closer so we don't accept 'standardization' just because this is the familiar and easier path. Even in the shadow of a pessimistic prognosis, we might be forgiven for thinking every biennial, every art event, is just one of many, and only more of the same. Indeed, how can anyone operating within these sites of practice (which require a great deal organization, finance, and partnerships) resist the clutches of standardization and homogenization and remain risk-free?

Kochi and Oslo face different pressures on different points in their evolutions. Oslo must deal with the inevitable expectations when the format they have proposed doesn't conform to expectations in much the same way that launching a Biennale in Kochi was initially questioned in India. Kochi, like many biennials, continues to weather critique and scandals but prospers because of a clear commitment to art and place. If, in our contemporary, global circumstance, artistic practice is to be allowed to develop freely, to experiment and deviate from the norm, then I am in no personal doubt that both biennales in Kochi and Oslo are trying to achieve this. The biennial format is still relevant, and even if Oslo faces scrutiny from the artistic community then they like Kochi must build over time the supportive local base to prosper. The focus on benefits to locality, to the passerby, to democratizing access to art, participations might all be seen as derived from essential characteristics of both Kerala's communist past and Norway's history of social democracy, both of which can be replayed through these respective biennales. This might be a well-intentioned utopian ideal of the role art might play in contemporary society but isn't that the role of a biennial to be a site of arts resistance to the perceived status quo, to explore new ways of thinking and acting? We need ambitions more than ever that are rooted in an authentic reflection and the needs of the particularities of time and place. One thing we can be sure of is that real life has offered up the radical character of a pandemic phenomenon, which means we are all trying to understand a situation that is exceptional in its affect and simply accelerates the need for a structural challenge to this current paradigm. Beyond uncertainty, beyond what we might hope are temporary situations, is an opportunity not for the repetition of discourses of the 'before' and 'during' biennale, but to revisit and make space for not only a more radical imaginary but also a more credible imaginary. The unknown artist in Kochi reminds us of a continued need for 'artistic consciousness in society,' which is also a warning to be vigilant, now more than ever as we think to the 'after.'

Notes

1 The terms 'biennale' and 'biennial' are used interchangeably with respect to their use amongst the many written uses in discourse present in this article.

2 The Kochi-Muziris Biennale launched in 2012 in the coastal city of Kochi in Kerala, India. The Biennale has been critically hailed and is now considered an influential platform for contemporary art and art education in Asia as well as being the largest art event of its kind in South Asia. It has gone on to be curated in 2014 by Jitish Kallat with *Whorled Explorations*, in 2016 by Sudarshan Shetty with *Forming in the Pupil of the Eye*, and in 2018 by Anita Dube with *Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life*. The Biennale has a tradition of appointing Indian artists as curators since its inception. The 5th edition of the Biennale is slated to run from December 12, 2020 until April 10, 2021, curated by artist Shubigi Rao.

3 *osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019-2024* has launched a new biennial model—an evolving program of art in public space and the public sphere. During a five-year period, the audience will be able to see and experience projects with varying tempos, rhythms, and time spans. These will take place over a number of sites in Oslo and beyond.

4 *End of Empire* was a collateral project produced in Fort Kochi for the 2nd Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The project extends my research interests in *how artistic production might act as a dialogue with other agents of spatial process in the city and how can artistic conventions might be revised to articulate dialogues between art practice and public space.* Publicly situating the artwork was a method to rigorously test and extend the local reach of the Biennale, questions I originally raised in my essay "The Indian Biennale Effect" (2013) referencing other critical dialogues on issues of biennial formats in terms of local engagement, relevance, and in reaching local, non-art audiences and communities. This was achieved through a particular methodology of project design, in locating and engaging the makers/producers of the sculpture as active local participants and collaborators and by making the process of production highly visible and documenting this in public space. My intention was to build a temporal and performative 'living' artwork as an extension of 'everyday life.' As a collateral project, this was significantly the only project working outside of the official designated Biennale structures and spaces in Kochi.

5 *Migrant Car* was developed through invitation from osloBIENNALEN curators, rethinking the previous site-specific project *End of Empire*, engaging critically with OB's relationship to locality and community. The complex project engaged and collaborated with local communities, events, places, and people in the city while connecting to the interlinked local and international realities that represent the current multicultural and migrant populations of Oslo and the attendant social and political concerns. Focusing on impacts that migration into Norway is having on traditional social structures and modes of relations between different groups, linked to loss of community engagement, the project aimed to find relevant ways for locals to think about migrants by bringing people together across the city by developing situations for new relational possibilities. Central to the project was a number of co-produced projects with local students studying programmes such as Art in Public Space and Art and dissemination at local Universities KHiO and Oslo Met and the use of newly restricted space of the car-free zone in the city.

6 Bergen City Council's plans to establish a biennial for contemporary art in Bergen, Norway in 2007 led to the Bergen Kunsthall organizing an international symposium to study and discuss the status of the biennial as an exhibition model, and also to launch a debate on the plans for a biennial in Bergen. A proposal for a biennial in Bergen was

discussed during Bergen Biennial Conference (2009) with the question "To biennial or not to biennial?" by experts and researchers from both academia and the arts leading to the establishing of Bergen Assembly and a triennale launched in 2013. The Bergen Biennial Conference was followed by the publication, *The Biennial Reader* in 2010.
7 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 5.
8 Eva González-Sancho and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, eds., *OSLO PILOT (2015–17)—a project investigating the role of art in and for the public space—laying the groundwork for Oslo Biennial First Edition* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2018).
9 Ranjit Hoskote, "The Catalytic Role of the Biennale," in *Kochi Muziris Biennale: Against All Odds*, ed. Sabin Iqbal (Kottayam: DC Books, 2012), 178–185.
10 Nancy Adajania, "Globalism Before Globalisation: The Ambivalent Fate of Triennale India," in Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design, ed. Shanay Jhaveri (Bombay: The Shoestring Publisher, 2013), 168-185.
11 Robert E. D'Souza, *Outside India: Dialogues and Documents of Art and Social Change* (Delhi: W+K Publishing, 2012), 157.
12 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).
13 The 7th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea was directed by Okwui Enwezor with co-curators Hyun-jin Kim and Ranjit Hoskote. Widely acknowledged as the spiritual center of the struggle for participatory democracy in South Korea, the city of Gwangju made the first steps toward claiming the political importance of open civil and cultural forums as indicators of a stable democratic sphere by launching the Gwangju Biennale. Enwezor is seen as an important figure in terms of debates on globalization and postcolonialism through biennial formats, directing critically important events such as *Documenta11* in 2002 and the Venice Biennale in 2015.
14 Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials: Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2010), 64.
15 Nandini Thilak and Gautam Das, eds., *Whorled Explorations: Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2014* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2016).
16 Muziris was an ancient harbor and urban center in the Indian state of Kerala (formerly the Malabar Coast) that dates from at least the 1st century BC. The exact location of Muziris is unknown to historians and archaeologists. The Government of Kerala initiated the Muziris Heritage Project to reinstate the historical and cultural significance of the legendary port of Muziris and is the largest conservation project in India. KMB's move was strategic to include Muziris within the conceptual conceit of the Biennale name while connecting to a major government-backed heritage project.
17 Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani, "Curation As Dialogue: Jitish Kallat in Conversation," in *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art*, eds. Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani (London: Routledge, 2016), 132–159.
18 Robert E. D'Souza, "The Indian Biennale Effect: The Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012," *Cultural Politics* 9, no. 3 (November 2013).
19 Robert E. D'Souza, "End of Empire," *India's Biennale Effect*, 180–207.
20 Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani, "The Biennale Was Not The Issue: An Interview with Riyas Komu," *India's Biennale Effect*, 84–85.
21 Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani, "Timely Provocations: The 3rd Kochi-Muziris Biennale," Biennial Foundation, January 10, 2017, accessed Jun. 5, 2020, https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2017/01/timely-provocations-the-3rd-kochi-muziris-biennale/.
22 Andreas Koller, *Forming in the Pupil of the Eye: Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016 Guide A-Z,* Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2016.
23 Padmini Chettur, Indian Foundation for the Arts, accessed May 5, 2020, http://indiaifa.org/grants-projects/padmini-chettur.html.
24 Parvathi Nayar, "The art of conversation," *The Hindu*, Oct. 31, 2015, accessed May 8, 2020,

https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/the-art-of-conversation/article7824390.ece.
25 Biennial Foundation, "Kochi-Muziris Biennale Announces The Curatorial Vision," accessed May 8, 2020, https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2016/10/kochi-muziris-biennale-curatorial/.
26 Åshild Kristensen Foss and Ed D'Souza *Beyond Participation into Art*. [booklet within a project folder of artist information available to the public at the Biennial launch May 2019]. Oslo: osloBIENNALEN
27 Grünerløkka is a borough in the east of Oslo and is a traditional working-class district known for production in several factories placed here because of the advantages of being located close to the river. There have been shifts in the socioeconomic levels of the district as manufacturing has disappeared, waves of migrants have moved in, and now a gentrification process has taken place in the area.
28 The title of Winchester School of Arts' (University of Southampton) week-long event at Tate Exchange in London in April 2018 led by Professor Sunil Manghani and developed in association with Shwetal A. Patel, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, and international partners. This programme invited members of the public to engage in activities and debates concerned with the production of contemporary art and the biennial format. The programme was framed around key research conducted around the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, in particular the publication *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art* (Routledge, 2017). Key to the programme was participation from curators from all three editions of the KMB and a final event, *Imagined Biennales*, with presentations of speculative ideas for future biennales followed by a live broadcast from the forthcoming curator of the 4th KMB by curator Anita Dube, six months prior to its launch.
29 The online blog was initially set up by student participants when it was discovered that the OB web architecture could not host this. A separate archive was produced by the OB to host the archiving of the documentary materials produced by students of their projects with a rich array of material including blog posts, photos, and video material. The blog has been extended to include other collaborations with the project, including time spent in Bergen at Kunstall 3,14 in October 2020 where five projects occurred.
See: https://mcprojects.blog/about-mc-projects/.
30 See: https://www.kunsthall314.art/migrantcar.
31 *Pikene på Broen* is a collective of curators and producers based in the northeastern Norwegian town of Kirkenes, located 15km from the Russian border and 50km from the Finnish border. The town of Kirkenes is ideally placed for cross-border cooperation and cultural exchange in the Arctic. See: https://www.pikene.no.
32 Thomas Nilsen, "Russia will accept return of migrants in busses," *The Barents Observer*, Jan. 14, 2016, accessed Jun. 5, 2020, https://thebarentsobserver.com/ru/node/301.

Robert E. D'Souza is a London-based artist, writer and professor of Critical Practice and co-director of the Critical Practices Research Group at Winchester School of Art at the University of Southampton. He is known for his temporal, site-specific, and participatory/collaborative art projects. His work explores critical practices that engage with a variety of production processes and producers and is supported by his contributions to critical writings around social, political and cultural change, including writing in relation to biennials that includes *The Indian Biennale Effect: The Kochi-Muziris Biennale 12/12/12* (Journal of Cultural Politics, Duke University Press, 2013), *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art* (Routledge, 2016), and "Timely Provocations: The 3rd Kochi-Muziris Biennale" review for The Biennale Foundation (2017). He has contributed with Sunil Manghani and Shwetal A. Patel to a

forthcoming publication *How to Biennale! The Manual: Making Art Events & Exhibitions in the Age of Institutional Hybridity & Globalisation* that was originally part of the workshop, *How to Build an Art Biennale* at Tate Exchange in 2018 with contributions from Kochi-Muziris Biennale and osloBIENNALEN.

Recent projects have been shown in art institutions, biennials, and public spaces in China, India, Spain, and the UK include *Outside India* at W+K Exp Gallery, Delhi, 2011 and the accompanying publication *Outside India: Dialogues and Documents of Art and Social Change* (W+K Delhi, 2012); *Barcelona Masala: Narratives and Interactions in Cultural Space* (Actar, 2013); the installation *End of Empire*, at the 2nd edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2014. His current project *Migrant Car* launched at the 1st osloBIENNALEN in May 2019, and he is continuing this project working closely with the curators as it moves within Norway in collaboration with other Norwegian art projects and localities. *Migrant Car* has already been re-curated with the art foundation Bergen Kunstall 3,14 and will continue to the art collective *Pikene på Broen* later in 2020 (a group of curators and producers based in the northeastern town of Kirkenes). Here, the project will collaborate locally across borders and attempt to travel over the Russian border retracing a particular infamous route that Syrian migrants and refugees have previously taken in their bid to find ways of entering Norway via Russia.

Museum of Burning Questions: Negotiating with Reality at the 2016 Bergen Assembly

Nora Sternfeld

Are exhibition contexts places of refuge for critical teaching and learning, precursors to the total economization of those activities – or both? And what does that mean for a critical praxis of art education?[1] In a neoliberal world and an age of increasing fascistization, there are doubtless no clear answers to these questions. That is because, on the one hand, critical art spaces are used to promote other capitalizations – for example when the establishment of new institutions contributes to the upvaluation of certain urban districts, leading in turn to rising real estate prices, or when critical discourse draws more paying students to universities that are themselves operating increasingly as private enterprises. On the other hand, it is precisely the critical art institutions that are presently being recast, starved out, disbanded and shut down. Over the past years, I have tried to confront these contradictions in theory and praxis, naturally without coming to any conclusive solution. In the following I would like to introduce the activities and approaches of a project I would describe as "negotiating with reality".

As a member of the *freethought* collective (Stefano Harney, Adrian Heathfield, Massimiliano Mollona, Louis Moreno, Irit Rogoff, Nora Sternfeld), I was one of the artistic directors of the 2016 Bergen Assembly, a triennial in Norway that, since 2013, has sought to occupy an explicitly alternative position to a process of biennialization dominated increasingly by market logics. The research and exhibition project *infrastructure* formed the framework for a curatorial praxis residing between public education, collaborative knowledge production and the presentation of our research in an exhibition. Over a period of two years, in a public seminar taking place in Bergen, we discussed and tried to understand the subject of infrastructure. The concern was with collective investigations and debates inquiring into the ways and means, desires and emotions with which we are governed and organized to an increasing degree by logistics, algorithms and management structures.

For example, we presented a multidimensional project which insisted on the possibility of assembly, joint study and debate. Here we undertook a critical assessment of "infrastructures" as techniques and conditions that exercise ever more control over us. At the same time, we worked on shifting "infrastructure" as a concept, in a sense prying it away from the technocrats and planners and recasting it in a new and different way. Our aim was to promote emotional, solidary, ephemeral and para-institutional praxes in the midst of the prevailing circumstances. In the *freethought* project, we accordingly posed questions such as: What comes after oil? How should a history of shipping be linked with a history of the shipped? How do infrastructural apparatuses work? What emotions create infrastructures and resistances? How can we act together, learn together?

Yet above and beyond this investigation into infrastructures of the present, a further concern of the project at the *Bergen Assembly* was a collective engagement with the theme. Within the framework of a *City Seminar*, we discussed these questions and inquiries with a growing number of participants over a two-year period. At an *Infrastructure Summit* taking place at the opening of the *Bergen Assembly*, we raised the questions anew with international thinkers, researchers, activists, artists and performers. The many joint discussions and readings as well as a collaborative research endeavour resulted in five sections of an exhibition and two performative platforms which we presented in Bergen in September 2016.

Along with the artists Phil Collins and Anne Marthe Divy, for example, my colleague the anthropologist Mao Mollona devoted himself to the matter of the possible consequences that can arise from ever stronger competition in the oil industry and bring significant changes for the Norwegian economy and society in their wake. Stefano Harney worked with the artists and theorists Ranjit Kandalgaonkar, Arjuna Neuman and Wu Tsang on the relationship between shipping and the shipped. The performance theorist Adrian Heathfield joined with the artist Hugo Glendinning to take a look

Bergen's historic fire station, Photograph by: freethought

at life in its affectability, with its memories and relationships, but also with its transience as infrastructure. Irit Rogoff carried out a project on the possibilities of a "substance infrastructure" of assembly – that is, on the elements of "content, desire, aspiration and shared hopes" that do not readily lend themselves to being appropriated and depleted by economization. Finally, the urbanist Louis Moreno and Paul Purgas devoted themselves to the interrelationships between feelings, infrastructures and apparatuses. What all these projects had in common was the effort to confront the workings of a world of infrastructures from within that world and – in the process of learning to comprehend it, not from the perspective of a synoptic view but rather in intense proximity to it and at the same time under its radar – to take possession of it.

What does this all mean in a large-scale exhibition that calls itself an *Assembly* – a term originating primarily in the vocabulary of new social movements, where it refers to general, open gatherings? In my contribution to the collective process, I envisaged addressing myself to the conditions of current post-representative exhibition and art education themselves. And I wanted to do this not only in theory, but also in curatorial-art-educational practice. Rather than an art-educational space or an exhibition, I dreamed of a coffee house that would double as a public space, assembly venue and place of education. Naturally, I would not neglect the fact that coffee houses are among the fundamental infrastructures that work in favour of gentrification processes in the cities of this world.

My aim was thus to discuss the conditions of exhibition praxis from within the midst of these conditions, to publicly "negotiate with reality". The question that served as my starting point was, accordingly: how can we assemble in a world that increasingly isolates us? Here I would be taking orientation from the issues Judith Butler raises in her most recent book, which is concerned with performativity and the importance of assemblies where social attachments, common goods and matters of survival are all being increasingly capitalized.[2] My questions were, on the one hand,

top left : Ariel Schlesinger, *Fires need audiences* (tote bag), 2015. Photograph by Sarah Peguine, © Ariel Schlesinger

top right: Nora Sternfeld, Isa Rosenberger and the Retired Firemen of Bergen, *The Museum of Burning Questions* (at Bergen's historic fire station), Photograph by: Isa Rosenberger

left: Charismatic Megafauna concert at the Partisan cafe, Sept 2016. Photograph by: freethought

general: How are we being pitted against each other? And how can we conceive of solidarities and alliances? On the other hand, they were also quite specific: What does it mean for a term such as "assembly", with roots in the vocabulary of social movements, to be applied to the context of a large-scale exhibition? Is the latter a cultural infrastructure serving the purpose of distinction, or a basis for new publics and solidarities? Or both at the same time? And how can these questions be posed in a biennial?

Apart from the formulation of theoretical deliberations, my concern was thus also to create specific – if inevitably temporary – infrastructures for a praxis of art education. To this end, I worked with a team of six art educators, performers and café staff: Jenny Moore, Tora Endestad Bjørkheim, Freja Bäckman, Kabir Carter, Johnny Herbert and Arne Skaug Olsen. In an intensive process, we together developed the working conditions we thought desirable for such a project. We talked about our roles from the artistic, activist, feminist and

following page:

top left: The Partisan Café Team: Jenny Moore, Freja Bäckman, Kabir Carter, Tora Endestad Bjørkheim, Johnny Herbert, Arne Skaug Olsen, Nora Sternfeld, Bergen Assembly 2016

top right: The Partisan Café with Jenny Moore, Freja Bäckman, Kabir Carter, Tora Endestad Bjørkheim, Johnny Herbert, Arne Skaug Olsen, Nora Sternfeld, Bergen Assembly 2016, Photograph by: Thor Brødreskif

centre left: Mike Berlin, Roger Mayne archive, Research Architects, The Partisan Coffeehouse Installation, freethought Infrastructure Project, Bergen Assembly 2016, Photograph by: Thor Brødreskif

centre right: Mike Berlin, Roger Mayne archive, Research Architects, The Partisan Coffeehouse Installation, freethought Infrastructure Project, Bergen Assembly 2016, Photograph by: Thor Brødreskif

bottom left: The Partisan Café with Jenny Moore, Freja Bäckman, Kabir Carter, Tora Endestad Bjørkheim, Johnny Herbert, Arne Skaug Olsen, Nora Sternfeld, Bergen Assembly 2016, Photograph by: Thor Brødreskif

bottom right: The Partisan Café with Jenny Moore, Freja Bäckman, Kabir Carter, Tora Endestad Bjørkheim, Johnny Herbert, Arne Skaug Olsen, Nora Sternfeld, Bergen Assembly 2016, Photograph by: Thor Brødreskif

the Partisan.

the Partisan.

art-educational perspectives, jointly defined the requirements of the space and the contracts, and wrote a (post-)manifesto as a concept for the *Partisan Café*. Throughout the preparatory phase, the process was situated in the constant intersection of art education issues, artistic conception, labour conflict and theoretical (self-) reflection. We used the concept as much to negotiate the contracts of the art educators as to imagine ourselves in the future of a different possible world with different possible organization forms. We reflected on forms of hospitality, the necessity of feminist spaces, and a form of politicization that restores heterogeneity and the convergence of struggles to the realm of the conceivable. This we called a "partisan atmosphere" that was to breathe something of a different possible future.

We also set out in search of a space in the city of Bergen where we could talk about precisely these matters in public, with many other people, and thus transcend the boundaries of the admittedly very small art context. The former fire station was suggested to us as a possible venue. Our first encounter with this building took place after we had discussed the role of culture for neoliberal urban development processes with Louis Moreno in our *City Seminar*. The former fire station is in the city centre and, in view of its two large garages and beautiful interior courtyard, immediately seemed to us to be quite a suitable venue for a café. The municipal authorities and the persons in charge of the *Bergen Assembly*, however, informed us that it might not be easy to get the space. When we asked what the difficulty was, we learned that the station was occupied; the squatters were retired firemen. On the day the fire station had moved out, they had moved into the old facility with large historical fire trucks and other impressive objects and machines to prevent the city from abandoning the undoubtedly attractive property in the city centre to commercial use. They also had a demand: they wanted a fire brigade museum to be realized in the historical fire station. This demand was justified by the quite spectacular collection of historical artefacts on the history of firefighting in Norway, Scandinavia and internationally, but also by the fact that the city's history has been shaped to a decisive degree by fires. We faced a dilemma. Should we forget about the space or go along with the suggestion – and endanger the building's occupation by the retired firemen? After all, once the massive equipment and fire trucks had been moved out of the space, who would guarantee that the occupation could be maintained? Were we to be exploited for certain interests?

I found myself in the middle of a local conflict that bore very real significance for all my questions about the pitting of social players one against the other. How might unexpected alliances emerge from this specific situation of occupiers threatened with being forced out of the space they were demanding from the authorities? In other words, how could we assemble when we were being increasingly isolated from and pitted against one another? I was able to gain the support of the artist Isa Rosenberger in taking on this challenge. We decided to make the conflict itself our point of departure and proposed a joint project to the firefighters: *The Museum of Burning Questions*. They thought about our proposal and ultimately agreed to it. Isa Rosenberger made a video entitled *Brandstasjon* which, based on interviews and photos of the objects in the collection, documented the struggle over the former fire station. She showed it during the *Assembly* and placed it at the firemen's disposal for their future museum. What is more, the establishment of a coffee house in the fire station garage involved certain infrastructural improvements to the building that would be of service to a future museum. Within the framework of the *Museum of Burning Questions*, the firemen gave guided tours of their future museum twice a week. They offered insights into the history of fire and the fire brigade's rescue operations in Bergen, presented the important and relevant collection, and told the story of the occupation. And in fact they were already able to announce the future museum entirely officially because, a month before the opening of the *Bergen Assembly*, they had received municipal approval for their museum plans.

We were sharing an occupied space at a time of a major stage victory. And a lot happened in the fire station garage, where we spent many an hour over the course of the month of the *Assembly* – a lot that kept our questions suspenseful and contradictory. In addition to concerts, discussions, daily conversations and guided tours with very different people, we were in a process of constant negotiation with the *Bergen Assembly* over conditions and work processes. Sometimes we touched the essentials, and sometimes the essentials got lost in the scuffle of everyday life at the fire station. Many of the conversations we had were about an everyday life that, for many of us, means to subsist (before and after the month in Bergen) in precarious working conditions characterized by pressure and uncertainty. We founded feminist reading groups, danced whole nights through at queer concerts and parties, met with firemen from all over Scandinavia and served them beer. We discussed contradictions with local players, explained why we

were showing solidarity to a group of white men – although it actually seemed obvious to us that solidarity is not something you can "curate", and that the question of what alliances are necessary at a given political moment is not one that can be answered at the drafting table, as it were. Sometimes we were simply exhausted to the core from our workdays full of demands and ambitions. Over the course of six weeks, during the *Bergen Assembly*, the *Partisan Café* really did become a place of assembly in which very many questions were posed, connections experienced and conflicts discussed, and where unexpected encounters took place. As a curatorial and art-educational project situated between presence and representation, I see it as an interstice that cannot provide a conclusive answer to the question asked at the start – of the economization of everything that is important to us – in large-scale exhibitions, but rather offers an example of ongoing praxis.

Translation from German by Judith Rosenthal.

Notes

1 The term "Kunstvermittlung" came into use in German in the 1990s to describe a critical form of art education. The term "art education" is not a precise equivalent, as it lacks the element of questioning and criticism conveyed by the German prefix "Ver-" in "Vermittlung", comparable, for example, to the "un" in "unlearning".
2 See Butler 2016.

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Nora Sternfeld is an art educator and curator. Since January 2018 she is documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel (School of Art and Design Kassel). From 2012 to 2018 she was professor for Curating and Mediating Art at the Aalto University in Helsinki. Furthermore she is co-director of the /ecm – Master Program in Exhibition Theory and Practice at the University of Applied Arts Vienna; part of the core team of schnittpunkt. ausstellungstheorie & praxis; a co-founder and part of trafo.K, Office for Art, Education and Critical Knowledge Production (Vienna); and since 2011, a member of freethought, a platform for research, education, and production (London). In this capacity she was also one of the artistic directors of the Bergen Assembly 2016. She publishes texts on contemporary art, exhibitions, politics of history, educational theory, and anti-racism.

Bergen Assembly 2019, 11th Berlin Biennale 2020, the Virus, Life, and New Places

Teobaldo Lagos Preller

The viral crisis is the beginning of a fictive retrospective[1] story to be told. The narration could be one in which life is controlled and at the same time, biology controls economic, social, cultural, and political life. The virus, among other things, is the first manifestation in our time of forced deceleration, and it's questioning our presence in the world. Two biennial projects produced in the last two years attempted to make new turns on solidarity, affectivity, and cultural agency. These are Bergen Assembly 2019, *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead*, curated by Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ, and the 11th Berlin Biennale (2019-2020) curated by María Berríos, Renata Cervetto, Lisette Lagnado, and Agustín Pérez Rubio. They share forms of engagement with narratives and living archives located beyond standard commitments of a community.

Since a growing internationalization and partial inversion of South-North/periphery–center relationships took place around 1989, the present seemed for many years to be characterized by the unusually exponential multiplication of biennials around the globe, the acceleration of exchanges on a worldwide level, and the relevance of the idea that one of the tools offered by art is that it helps us imagine different, better futures[2].

To speak now about these biennials implied in the past several trips to Norway and then several trips inside the city, which are impossible at the moment in many countries in the world. Therefore, the form this article should take would be the one of a topographical writing excerpt, a sample of punctual situations to be reproduced in a general and iconic way, attempting personal contact with their authors/curators. Topographical movements or topographical writing involve always diverse levels of interaction between places and the critical map emerging therefrom[3]. Or they are formed by recent events and memories. The present and future conditions do not allow us to write a linear story, but maybe to make some notes on curatorial discourses, focusing on testimonies and impressions.

Bergen Assembly: Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead

Bergen is a city of 300,000 inhabitants, and it holds the record in rainy days per year. It is a relatively conservative city, in which social and interpersonal contact are eased by its geography: it's not easy to ride a bike in the middle of the mountains, it's easy to find always the little fishing harbor and see a monument to the Vikings in one pedestrian square. Its geographic position is peripheral and its position in the European landscape is constantly communicating from a sort of insular European perspective. The intention to produce a biennial in such an area presents challenges that are similar to other biennials in territories where hegemony is distant: "The biennial has become the art circuit's proof that *we too* are part of the globalized world. Just like the nation-states needed their museums to signal cultural independence, the biennial today is used to indicate global agency (…)" asserted Anne Szefer Karlsen and Arne Skaug Olsen in the introductory chapter of LOKALISERT/LOCALISED, an edition of the minutes of the Bergen Biennial Conference that took place on September 2009 –

Bergen Assembly Opening Days – *Voicing the Dead and the Politics of Mourning.* Panels and discussion, Belgin, 6.9.2019. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

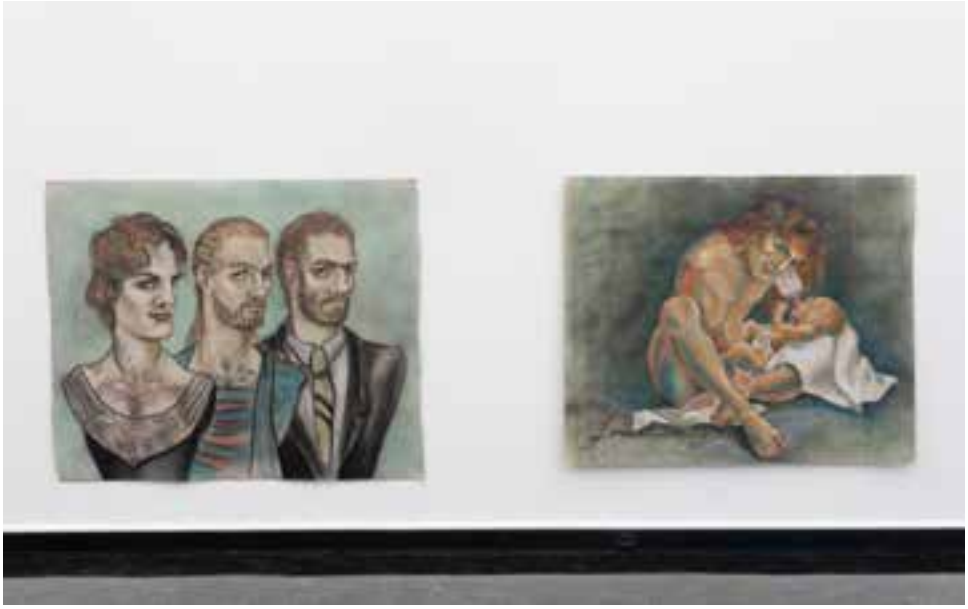
Bergen Assembly Opening Days – *Voicing the Dead and the Politics of Mourning.* Panels and discussion, Belgin, 6.9.2019. Paul B. Preciado, Viktor Neumann and Andreas Angelidakis: *Introduction to the Parliament of Bodies and The Society of Friends* of Lorenza Böttner. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

LOGOS, 2019, 81 vinyl and foam seating modules featuring quotes by: Bergen, Mykki Blanco, Virginie Despentes, María Galindo, Jack Hal-berstam, Donna Haraway, Johanna Hevda, Pedro Lemembel, Audre Lorde, José Esteban Muñoz, Sunaura Taylor, Soujourner Truth, Monique Wittig; dimensions variable. Courtesy The Breeder Gallery, Athens. Co-produced by Bergen Assembly. Installation view. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

"There are many ways to approach such a question, and the answers will mirror different positions within the Bergen art scene. To say that utility value is the pillar of Norwegian society is not an incorrect claim[4]".

That was ten years ago. Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ engaged in this version in a project for exploring levels of the agency in the realm of the not living. The idea of a ghost, or living substance inside the material and elsewhere—like permanent fog or light rain, typical for the northern city—is absorbed in a circuit of connections between Bergen's daily life: possible walks, discovering institutions. Dressler and Christ wanted to do teamwork and to let different processes expand and interweave. The strategy took the form of a CORE group (Conveners Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler in collaboration with Murat Deha Boduroğlu, Banu Cennetoğlu, María García, Hiwa K, Katia Krupennikova, Viktor Neumann, Paul B. Preciado, Pedro G. Romero, Simon Sheikh, and Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa), and different levels of agency led contributors (around 60 artists and agents of different fields) and the Parliament of Bodies (conceived and led by Paul B. Preciado and Viktor Neumann): "a celebration of self-loss, [5]" as Christ asserts at **Belgin**[6], the venue for the Parliament and former storage wing of the KODE Museum now functioning as a sharing space.

Chilean/German artist Lorenza Böttner and his plastic and performative work in '80s West Germany challenging conventions on gender and capability get a central space at **Bergen Kunsthall**. Inside Ole Landmark's functionalist building from 1935, histories and narratives of resistance, cultural and political negotiations take place in a bodily sub-text. Kurdish/German artist Hiwa K's video *Pre-Image (Porto)*, a one-channel video showing one of the versions of a performance led in Gdansk, Vienna, and Porto. In the performance, the artist balances on his forehead a bar on which motorbike mirrors are mounted. Austrian artist Ines Doujak and British writer John Barker work together on *Cartographies of Desperation*, an adhesive carpet showing a dystopian world represented through cellular shapes, the internal structure of the Earth and brain cells. On a higher floor-side-level of Bergen Kunsthall, we can find *Asking Out: A Project Exploring*



Left: Lorenza Böttner, *Untitled* (n. d.), pastel on paper, 137 × 170 cm Courtesy private collection
Right: Lorenza Böttner *Untitled* (1985), pastel on paper, 130 × 160 cm Courtesy private collection

Left: Lorenza Böttner, *Untitled* (1985), pastel on paper, 130 × 160 cm, Courtesy private collection
Right: Hiwa K, *Pre-Image (Porto),* 2014, Video, colour, sound; 6'34", Courtesy of Hiwa K, Prometeo Gallery di Ida Pisani, in Milan and Lucca and KOW, in Berlin and Madrid

Francisco de Goya / Rosario Weiss, *Dibujos dobles (Double drawings),* 1821–24 Brush, pen, ink and gouache; facsimile reproductions. Photo: Bergen Assembly

the work of Muriel Pyrah by Ruth Ewan. Muriel Pyrah had led a class at Airedale School and achieved an incredible performance through a radical pedagogical approach for the emancipation of children of the postwar era. Ruth Ewan displays works made by the children, in which tensions and conflict zones in their lives can be observed.

At **KODE 1 PERMANENTEN**, the idea of an *assembly* and the museum as an institution are questioned, achieving a growing engagement with different forms of bodily experience. The exhibition is divided into **SALON** and **CABINET**, two forms of organization of knowledge at the construction of modern imaginaries of convivence and the political. The cabinet is approached in contributions such as *Political Parties*, a curatorial project by conveners Pedro G. Romero and María García: "Everything depended or ended up revolving around the possible selection of a series of Goya's *Disparates* (Follies) which were available at the KODE Museum in Bergen. This arbitrary selection of *Disparates* has to some extent determined our selection, and it is listed below as a kind of index to explain the lines of work, selection, and structuring of the various works.[7]", say the authors at their publication called "General Assembly".

Alexander Kluge is a relevant presence in the same space. *The Assembler's Wife* (1986) is a touching video-interview in which several levels of translation take place: Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich speaks with German filmmaker Alexander Kluge with the help of Russian-German translator Rosemarie Tietze about the testimonies of the wife of an assembler at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant who in 1986 got extremely sick and affected by the famous explosion. The writer transfers with incredible depth the slow and terrifying process of irreversible change and destruction of his body, as well as a process of remaining in convivence and love towards death in the Cold War context.

Hordaland Kunstsenter is a house on a hill, where in 1976 the first artist-run space in Norway was founded. It hosts *Sick and Desiring*, an ongoing curatorial research project by Nora Heidorn that asks: How can we politicize sickness and organize around shared vulnerabilities to experience the body as a space for resistance? It encompasses an exhibition, workshops, and screenings, with contributions by Sarah Browne, Juliana Cerqueira Leite and Zoë Claire Miller, Feminist Health Care Research Group (Julia Bonn and Inga Yimprich), Joscelyn Gardner, Paula Pin/BioTransLab. **Bergen Kjøtt** is a former slaughterhouse around 20 minutes away from downtown.

Alexander Kluge, *Die Frau des Montagearbeiters,* 2017, Video Still.
Photo: Bergen Assembly

With contributions by Alexander Kluge, like *Conversation with Otto Schily* (1978) about the autopsy of RAF members during the 1970s. Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa's *In a very low voice, so then you're sort of there* deals with her research process on Bergen's colonial past, specifically regarding the estate of the Bergen University Museum of Cultural History. Daniel García Andujar awakes the public with *World's Best Democracy (Political Slogans)* (2019), a series of drawings executed by a robot that shows political slogans from all over the world. A precedent of our viral present could be seen in a way in the project developed by *The Mycological Twist* (Anne de Boer and Eloïse Bonneviot) at the project space **Entreé**, some blocks away from the central zone. The duo works as both a collective fungi garden "and as a nomadic project, infecting and spreading mycelium alike," based in London, then Paris and then Berlin. *Troll Swamp* is the name of the multilevel board game with some elements of virtual reality, emulating the classical role game "Dungeons and Dragons".

Bergen Assembly's approach revealed 2019 issues related to several forms of crises at a global level, and looking for connections with other territories, felt or perceived as peripheral, marginal—as marginal as the North can be. Hans D. Christ asserts that "the character of Bergen Assembly in this version is determined strongly by the conformation of the CORE Group, which is a decision taken from the point of view of the political. Inside this temporary dispositive, we're talking about different formations of solidarity. Or at least in terms of a formation based on reciprocal feedback.[8]"

Regarding the focus on the living and not living, Dressler adds:

> If we take total distance from the reality of the living [...] It's a weird construction by itself: something that has happened marks and determines us. It is a rare construction, very strange in itself. That what happened marks and defines us. It is a somewhat constructed concern: to say, here is the living, here the dead and that there is an exchange, a dialog between both levels. What we want to see is what are the levels of responsibility to which we can come if we let ourselves be led by thinking about the dead and the undead. These dead are not those who aren't here anymore, but those who don´t exist yet. The images that best show what are the ghosts of our colonial heritage and then we see an eternal recurrence of the repressed[9].

Visitor in front of Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, *In a very low voice, so then you're sort of there,* 2018 Photography, text; dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

Sick and Desiring. Curatorial contribution by Nora Heidorn, Installation view, Hordaland kunstsenter. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

Visitor at John Barker / Ines Doujak Economies of Desperation, 2018 a Carpet, self-adhesive vinyl sticker, 650 × 160 cm. Courtesy John Barker / Ines Doujak. Photo: Thor Brødreskift

11th Berlin Biennale: Sustainable Relationships

There is something obvious about films, biennials, and other forms of cultural manifestations, namely their need for time and the processes involved to achieve one premiere, one exhibition, one version of the whole. In an interview with curator and sociologist María Berríos for Revista Artishock[10] from Chile at the beginning of December 2020, I had the chance to get to know more about sustainability as a focus for a biennial, a concept that has been transferred from different social practices and in which affectivity is the level at which new challenges manifest.[11]

"The epilogue will be the beautiful moment." It was a sort of epical last sentence I heard from Berríos, a curator, writer, and sociologist from Chile at the end of an interview at Ex-Rotaprint, the former venue of a company for printing machines and nowadays a 10,000-square-meter space for different creative organizations. The process made the curators María Berríos (CL), Renata Cervetto (AR), Lisette Lagnado (BR), and Agustín Pérez Rubio (E)[12] choose Rotaprint at a certain point as the central venue for a continuum of different *experiences*.

"Sustainable relationships" is one of the main tropes we can find in this situation and at this moment in time. María Berríos talks about a project that is also developed in a team of curators, looking for a form of extended processualism, in which exposing the whole life of a biennial and several cycles of curatorship should transform the way we relate to art inside the exhibition space and outside of it. The curators make a poetical statement in this regard when they open one prelude event, Housewarming (September 6, 2019):

> "As incomers we consider our surroundings to be our learning environment—we are here to listen. We bring with us some baggage from our South, artistic

> alibis and stories, devices to help us navigate the metropolis and listen to its inhabitants. Gazing through the ground-level curtain-window onto a single street in the neighborhood of Wedding, we will begin by creating a scene setting for encounters, dialog, and exchange. We trust in the unforeseen outcome of mutual exposure, not a spectacle of process, but the effort of being present, open, and in proximity. We are aware that our time is limited, but we believe in developing sustainable relationships. Rumor is we have already begun[13]."

The cycle opened by this Latin American and Spanish team conceives the whole biennial as a process, involving three experiences until the "actual" exhibition is realized (formerly planned for June, now by the end of August 2020). *Experience 1: The Bones of the World* is based on the question "How do each of us bare ourselves to the world?" A travelogue written by Brazilian artist Flávio de Carvalho during his stay in Europe in the mid-'30s entitled *Os Ossos do Mondo* (The Bones of the World) is used as a point of departure for the collective knowledge stratagem: "Not an obsession with the ruins, but an attempt to be attentive to what is made with the rubble." *The Bones of the World* took place between September 7 and November 9, 2019, at the ExRotaprint complex in the Wedding neighborhood; the second, *Experience 2: Virginia de Medeiros—Feminist Health Care Research Group*, continued at the same venue until February 8. *Experience 3* consisted of contributions by human geographer Sinthujan Varatharajay and artist Osías Janov. His research-based display deals with the consequences of the Tamil genocide in the context of the Sri Lanka civil war, such as their seeking asylum in East Berlin, which was a possibility for many to emigrate afterward

exp. 3: Affect Archives. Sinthujan Varatharajah – Osías Yanov, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint, 22.2.–2.5.2020. Photo: Mathias Völzke

to the West. The third stage, now suspended because of the virus, began on February 22 and would have ended on May 2. The epilogue was supposed to begin on June 13 and to end on September 13 this year.

In a dialogue between Renata Cervetto and Lisette Lagnado for Arts of the Working Class,[14] they ask themselves the question on how effective it could be to expand the idea of an "educational" biennial:

> LL: We decided that the 11th Berlin Biennial of Contemporary Art would not have the structure of an "educational" one restricted to the exhibition period (June to September 2020). We are going to open the first venue in the Wedding district nine months earlier. This space will be for collective thinking, listening, discussing, and showing processes. To what extent does this form of "public program" allow a more concrete connection with the reality of a city that is unknown to us even in its language?
>
> RC: Being present in a building in the ExRotaprint recovered by the artists Daniela Brahms and Les Schliesser since 2004 and currently inhabited by social, artistic, and educational enterprises, predisposes us to an active presence in the place, with the people and neighbors who share the space. I cannot think of our initiative only as a "public program," as it crosses other spheres of commitment. Inviting two Latin American artists (who, together with local agents and us, have experienced that space implies a "being here, present").

Installation view, *exp. 2: Virginia de Medeiros – Feminist Health Care Research Group*, 30.11.2019–8.2.2020, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint. Photo: Mathias Völzke

Berríos explains the curatorial decisions operating on the background:

> "This whole bomb of names for biennials, spectacles, the 'big thing' [...] In this sense, we proposed in several interviews that we as a team considered that Berlin has been devastated because of it. Not because of the biennial itself and only, but also because of the whole culture coming, installing, and then leaving: these international art projects, pop-up projects, etc. Even the impulses and inputs coming from people who pass by over here. And it's worth to make the question to ourselves on how does that work and how does that relate to different processes of gentrification. This is evident even if we think about the biennial itself: ten years ago, the biennial could use an empty building and see how this has changed. So, I think that, from our point of view, the way of relating to the city has to be respectful, and it has to consider how to deal with that violence of throwing this 'bomb' of names and contexts and then withdrawing without further ado, which is normally what happens in biennials. There is a certain humility that is necessary to create an interrelationship and that I also believe has to do with our ways of working, which come from many different practices." (...)
>
> "Our way of working is a slow approach. How can we achieve that within the framework we are in, which is quite the opposite? A biennial is held every two years, but it's a super limited time. Doing biennials is crazy: run, install and leave. And the truth is that that work process is always a constant work process. All the biennials that are taking place and that are going to happen in two more years are taking place now. And the idea of starting with a first experience, a second experience, a third experience, and an epilogue consists in that: in finding a way to be able to inhabit that time, to build trust, to generate relationships. What we have sometimes called "sustainable relationships" not only has to do with the city, but also with the artists. And what we want is to achieve that space within the framework of what is a biennial or a global exhibition, which in general is not designed for that purpose, at all. I'm not saying that it is seen as a problem, it is something that our team does with very goodwill, but opening this process in this way creates difficulties for the existing institutional structures, for the way the biennial itself works, because working in a process becomes, in reality, defending that process which in one way or another is always going to take place. It is a question of trying to make this process of approaching, of research more permeable, through a curatorial methodology that consisted of the production of experiences. [15]"

It is December 2019. María Berríos walks around with me, showing me one of the *histories moving them as a team,* namely *exp. 2*, specifically the work of the Feminist Health Care Group in front of the entrance. We can see manuals of sexual education, hygiene, and health care achieved in a moment of the '70s and '80s in West Berlin through the alternative health care movement. María explains:

> "This space, what we do at ExRotaprint is as relevant as what will happen this year. The idea is to start a dialogue and raise some concepts [...] what is coming is a continuity. But the idea is not to reach a culmination or a climax, but we could even be talking about an anti-climax since by then everything will begin to end. We would then find ourselves in front of the corpse of the process, I mean a body that passes to another state, a death in a certain sense. But that death is not a fixed state, but a passage in which each of these pieces, practices,

> projects and people return to their social fabric, leaving behind our care—which will no longer be needed. The epilogue is the beautiful moment when the works begin to return to the world, to continue with their lives.[16]".

Two Situations, One End

It's autumn in Norway. We experience revolts in several places in the world, and I hear the news at a hotel in Bergen: the army is on the streets in Chile, state of emergency. The political seemed then to resemble the biological, and now the political seems to be overwhelmed by the biological, as life itself reacts with deceleration and even disappearance. I was in a hotel in Bergen in the frame of COAST Contemporary, a trip an encounter of artists and artist workers through the Norwegian fiords. I was having breakfast, sitting close to many people at round tables. It was one of several trips to the northern country, where I met Antonio Cataldo, curator of the Norwegian Pavilion in Venice in 2015 and nowadays director of Fotogalleriet Oslo. Trying to connect all the disperse pieces of these topographical notes, I asked him about models for the exhibitions and biennials in a harassed present and a harassed future: "What the current crisis brings forward [...] is exactly how infectious capitalism has been on a global level, bringing back to imperial states its darkest face, with the enormous repercussions it continues to have on the rest of the planet. [...] The game set by Western financial elites will hit even harder on the workers and lower parts of the population in the months to come. As in the 2008 crisis, there is little doubt about it. Borders have already closed, and we fear what will happen to migrants and other workers whose rights are asymmetrical."

"Biennales are forms of assembly," continues Cataldo:

> "Not by chance Paul Preciado termed his public programs for *documenta 14* the Parliament of Bodies. I think these forms of public address and finding a non-objectual form of coming together are still meaningful and possible, and the circulation of ideas cannot be stopped by autocratic regimes or regimental viruses. Judith Butler had spoken about the primacy of political representation as appearing, being seen: the body entering the visual and audible fields when accessibility is still based on the right of having rights—the need to rethink accessibility to the very democratic system we are so proud of. Before thinking about the post-pandemic, I think we should think that we have lived in a state of emergency, a state of crisis for decades now, and this is only one of the many waves we will have to go through under the predicament of capitalism. We have learned how to move in between these archives, but in this darkness (including the dark web), new possible futures may be possible, as well as reimagining real forms of democracy. I believe art is such a form allowing the very concept of democracy to gain meaning, and potentially such due openness.[17]"

Notes

1 A fictive retrospective is a narrative resource by which a fictional story is narrated in a fictional point in time in the future. Such a text aims to review the present as it would be overcome and to project onto another present contemporary conflicts, issues and themes. An example of this form of narrative is provided at the novel "Distant Star" by Roberto Bolaño (New York: Random House, 2014).
2 Cf. Dessislava Dimova and Eckhart J. Gillen, *Globalization and Cultural identity—The Perspective of Contemporary Art.* Background paper. Salzburg Trilogue (2017).
3 The definition of some "topographic writing" is approached by Nikos Papastergiadis: "There is a form of writing called topography that is conventionally understood as

referring to either a system for mapping a landscape, or the contours and form of a place. I would like to extend this concept for rethinking the relationship between art and place. Art can never totally represent a specific place. Even the most comprehensive map cannot contain all the details of a territory. Art that has come from a place, and which refers to a place, must also acknowledge its own exile. It leaves, it does not remain left behind, but the success of its movement is bitter-sweet. The representation of place will always conceal more than it will reveal. It is not just the practical impossibility of everything from one place fitting into another, but also the different manners for response. Maps require at least two levels of reading, the topos and the tropos, for getting from one place to another." (Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010: 11.)
4 Anne Szefer Karlsen, Arne Skaug Olsen, and Morten Kvamme , eds., *LOKALISERT/ LOCALISED*, Bergen: Ctrl+Z Publishing, (2009), 8 and 11.
5 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Interview with Hans D. Christ at Bergen Assembly, Bergen, 11 September 2020.
6 The space is named after a 1980s Turkish singer mutilated and finally shot dead by her husband.
7 Pedro G. Romero and María García, eds.: GENERAL ASSEMBLY, Flanders, 2019: 63.
8 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Op. Cit.
9 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Interview with Iris Dressler at Bergen Assembly, Bergen, 11 September 2019.
10 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, "El epílogo será el momento hermoso: María Berríos sobre la curaduría de la Bienal de Berlín," in *Revista Artishock*, January 27, 2020, https://artishockrevista.com/2020/01/27/el-epilogo-es-el-momento-hermoso-maria-berrios-sobre-la-curaduria-de-la-bienal-de-berlin-2020/?fbclid=IwAR0V3G_XfUNeaPv-p7Le5M0sC9FoeHmWc25kI9AVljcwjZx1AoPMv2PxgHGw.
11 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Op. Cit.
12 Their biographies can be read at https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2018/10/curators-of-the-11th-berlin-biennale-announced/.
13 Berríos, María, Cervetto, Renata, Lagnado, Lisette, Pérez Rubio, Agustín: *Housewarming*, in https://11.berlinbiennale.de/event/exp-1-housewarming
14 Renata Cervetto and Lisette Lagnado, "I Junto a las curadoras de la Bienal de Berlín," *Arts of the Working Class* 7, "The Exhausted Land" (2019).
15 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Op. Cit.
16 Ibid.
17 Teobaldo Lagos Preller, Excerpt of E-Mail Interview with Antonio Cataldo, director of Fotogalleriet Oslo, March 30 – April 9, 2020.

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Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials

Panos Kompatsiaris

The idea of enabling resistant narratives to neoliberalism through dialogical and participa- tory works, steadily informs the agenda of perennial large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art (biennials) around Europe and the world. Somewhat paradoxically, the proliferation of such shows since the early 1990s depends on this very neoliberal model that values culture for its measurable outcomes. By discussing such predicaments of the "biennial phenomenon," this article lays out its ambivalences and potentials within the current political – economic context. Moreover, through looking at the case of the 7th Berlin Biennale (2012), a controversial exhibition that prioritized activism and the "real effects" of art in society, the article suggests that such biennial complexities could be better addressed through ethnographic methodologies.

Large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art are increasingly engaging in explicit extra-visual dialogues with and within the public sphere.[1] Most evidently since the 2002 Documenta 11[2] took place across five different platforms around the world, the idea of enabling global and resistant "knowledge production" is steadily informing contemporary artistic and curatorial practices seeking to denounce self-referentiality while proposing a socially dialogical approach to art and exhibition-making (Day, Edwards, & Mabb, 2010; Hlavajova, 2010; Hoskote, 2010; O'Neill, 2007). At the same time it has been argued that the "biennial phenomenon," that is, the proliferation of periodical large-scale exhibitions around the world since the early 1990s, "partakes of a capitalist production regime" (Dimitrakaki, 2011, p. 307), namely a post-Fordist production model, which, among other objectives, prioritizes intercity competition for attracting touristic flows via the co-optation and manipulation of esthetic regimes and cultural symbols. Furthermore, there is ongoing debate on how this model interpellates subjectivities that need to be virtuosic, entrepreneurial, communicative, networked, flexible, canny, and, indeed, career-wise "successful" (Berardi, 2009; Gielen, 2010; Mylonas, 2012; Virno, 2004). In this sense, as parts of a larger socioeconomic arrangement, biennials are ambivalently positioned in their claimed attempts to manufacture liberating "new worlds."[3] One must necessarily begin by asking *what kinds* of worlds are these institutions capable of producing and more importantly *for whom*.

In the past 10 years a growing number of texts on individual "biennials" or "biennial" editions have appeared in art magazines or academic journals. These texts provide accounts of the "biennial phenomenon" bringing together knowledge from different disciplines ranging from art history, and curatorial studies to visual culture, sociology, and political theory. Recently, the editors of the book *Biennial reader* (2010) that included most of the major texts on biennials to date, proposed to construct a field of inquiry called "biennialogy" so as to treat "this contemporary phenomenon as a separate subject of study" (p. 16). The editors suggest that systematic studies on biennials are necessary today, for a contemporary demystification of the autonomy of the artwork and thus for helping us avoid overlooking the crucial "ideological and aesthetic impact of the context, dramaturgy, and discursive armatures that bring an artwork into public view" (p. 17). Taking on board this suggestion, this article discusses the predicaments of the "biennial phenomenon," laying out its ambivalences and potentials within broader political–economic contexts. Through looking at the case of the 7th Berlin Biennale (2012), an exhibition that performs the above contradictions by operating both as a brand and a proclaimed site of resistance, the article emphasizes the need to problematize such complexities through the use of ethnographic methodologies.

The "contemporary art biennial"

Mainly through the success of the Venice Biennale that started operating in 1895, the very word "biennale" has gradually imprinted itself upon the mental landscape of the artworld and its publics as the periodical site of art display. "Biennale" (or Biennial or Triennial) has been heterogeneously used by a range of periodical art exhibitions proliferating throughout the globe over the last

100 years. While up until the early 1990s no more than 10 contemporary biennials operated around the world, now more than 100 of them take place in regular or irregular intervals.[4] The sheer number of these perennial large-scale exhibitions has literally skyrocketed in the past 20 years or so. Apart from the increase in their number, contemporary art biennials have arguably become one of the most notable and celebrated formats for the display, production, as well as for the generation of knowledge around contemporary art (Ferguson & Hoegsberg, 2010; Greenberg, Ferguson, & Nairne, 1996). In the past 2 decades, the most celebrated of these such as the Venice Biennale and Documenta have increasingly acted as art "hubs" for establishing the most prominent trends and discourses within contemporary art fields. At the level of formal display the temporary, "event-like" structure of the biennial makes it distinct from traditional art institutions such as the gallery and the museum, which usually tend to be associated with an immutable physical location and thus have the capacity to build more enduring ties with the places in which they occur. The biennial can change location between editions, can take up different formats of display, and can generally be more experimental and daring.

The contemporary biennial , though, can hardly be theorized as a homogenous phenomenon; it largely consists of heterogeneous projects, significantly varying in terms of funding, aims, visibility, politics, and economic and cultural contexts. However, there are some common attributes that these types of shows share. First, they are committed to a cosmopolitan perspective combined with a desire to articulate the artistic and cultural particularisms of their host cities, an attribute that turns them into agents of what has been termed as "glocalization" (De Duve, 2007). Second, in contrast to the "art fair," which is the more commercial format of recurrent contemporary art shows, the biennial is financed by public or private sources that are usually not directly dependent on art investors (Basualdo, 2010). Therefore, the contemporary biennial has a more "public" character than the art fair and thus a greater potential to include formats of art display not exclusively destined to sell, such as large-scale installations, video installations, ephemeral art projects, and generally works of an interdisciplinary nature. Apart from this, the biennials in contrast to most art fairs are usually grounded upon a concept or an idea that is expected to be communicated by the curator(s). (Tang, 2011). Accordingly, biennials largely depend on the figure of the curator for delivering these ideas. The curator, who can even be seen as a "recent reincarnation of the model of the independent intellectual" (Basualdo, 2010), is regarded as the main "author" of the event. This time though, curators are not *the* authorial figures that possess "supposed authorial primacy" over the rest of the participants that take part in a show. The curator is primarily a "cultural mediator" pertaining to the "organization of emerging and open-ended cultural encounter, exchange and enactment" (O' Neil & Wilson, 2010, p. 19).

Spaces of capital and hope?

When attached to a specific art show the word "biennial" promises a priori symbolic capital—primarily granted via the success of Venice Biennale—through which organizers gain the legitimacy needed to address sponsors, artists, volunteers, the public, and so on. In turn, each specific "biennial" or "triennial" is perceived by its organizers as a "brand" that cultivates its particular and differentiated brand identity, its particular "soul," effect, trace, and signature, that have to be made more or less clearly recognizable to respective audiences or "niche markets" through the course of time. "Success" then is measured according to how successfully the individual biennial has positioned itself within the larger "biennial field," that is to say into the cognition of artists, art critics, journalists, audiences, and so on. Funders are principally operating within the paradigm of "creative cities," the more "successful" the festival becomes the more firmly it is expected to enable touristic flows to respective localities, make sponsoring firms look more "creative" and "caring," boost the economic value of the local art's scene and further integrate it in a global art circuit.

Nevertheless, as Simon Sheikh has recently noted, apart from "spaces of capital," biennials are also "spaces of hope" (2010, p. 163). In the last decade several biennial editions aligned themselves with the most critical sides of the contemporary artworld (Day et al., 2010), embracing an attempt to "politicize culture" (Lafouente, 2009), engaging in a practice of exhibition-making that prioritizes critical educational and emancipatory practices (Rogoff, 2009). This takes place against a political background that as O'Neil and Wilson put it, is "increasingly dominated by rhetorics of culture- as service, knowledge production, the creative economy, immaterial labour and educational outcomes" (2010, p. 14). In this regard, several grandiose statements have been made regarding the emancipatory/political potential of such shows. Various curators and scholars have seen biennials as apparatuses capable of transforming in one way or another aspects of contemporary

social life; capable for example of introducing "into the public debate political themes" (Marchant, 2010, p. 467), creating "new public formations that are not bound to the nation-state or the art-world" (Sheikh, 2010, p. 157), nurturing an "agonistic repoliticization of cultural labour" (Hlavajova, 2010, p. 293), or even being a "force for the breakdown of class distinctions" (Basualdo, 2010, p. 133).

The biennials as agents of critical discourses

Along these latter lines, curatorial practice and theory have recently prioritized the role of the contemporary art exhibition as a site where critical educational discourses can circulate, a process described by O'Neil and Wilson as the "educational turn" in contemporary art (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010).[5] This turn understands the exhibition space not merely as a site for art display, but principally as a discursive space, where art display becomes part of a broader "knowledge production," with lectures, seminars, publications, tour guides, and discussion platforms performing a central rather than supportive role in relation to the show (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010). Discussions, symposia, talks, extensive publications, and educational programs have become in the past decade the "main event" in exhibition practice (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010, p. 12). The recent leaning toward exhibiting works of art with a documentary, journalistic, or archival nature (Cramerotti, 2009) signifies such an endeavor to generate discursive meanings that expand into social reality. For example, the desire of 2012 Bucharest Biennale to become "a form of agency within the city"[6] is very characteristic in conceiving the exhibition space as an expanded discursive agent with an interventionist function in society.

Along with this tendency toward education, a parallel trend has also been made visible in contemporary art discourse since the end of the 1990s: a drive to discover a "new emancipatory potential" through the articulations of cultural producers, a potential capable of pointing toward new ontologies that aspire to decenter "the common *capitalocentric* vision" (von Osten, 2010, p. 7), or as Mark Fisher has recently put it the "business ontology" (Fisher, 2009), which largely informs the mental framework of neoliberalism.[7] Such politicization was made evident in art's alignment to a growing dissatisfaction as it was expressed in the antiglobalization movement with the postcommunist neoliberal consensus in Europe and to a neocommunist revival in political theory that was specifically felt in the artworld through the publication of Hardt's and Negri's *Empire* (2000).

In fact, the last decade has seen several editions of contemporary art biennials conceiving themselves as educational laboratories and sites where discursive and dialogical models come to be tightly connected with political utterances most usually articulated in opposition to the dominant neoliberal hegemonic orders. From Documenta 11 in 2002 that critically dealt with postcolonialism to the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009, which attempted to politically mobilize the process of exhibition- making, a range of biennials have combined the tendency toward discursivity with the instigation of political encounters, crystallizing within the field of contemporary art as Day *et al.* put it, "an anti-neoliberal structure of feeling" (Day et al., 2010, p. 148). This kind of militancy taking place in biennials is additionally vitalized within the context of the current financial crisis in Europe, where a sense of urgency for being politically relevant and not "neutral" seems to dominate their programmatic statements.

For instance, the third Athens Biennale wishes to "transform the biennale into a sit-in and a gathering of collectives, political organizations and citizens involved in the transformation of society, an invitation to create a political moment rather than stage a political spectacle."[8] In turn, the curator of the 7th Berlin Biennale Artur Zmijewski calls the invited artists to "identify their political positions" and describe what they are doing as artists "also in pure political terms."[9] The 12th Istanbul Biennale seeks to "explore the relationship between art and politics, focusing on works that are both formally innovative and politically outspoken,"[10] while the 2012 Manifesta edition focuses "on aesthetic responses to the worldwide 'economic restructuring' of the productive system in the early 21st century."[11]

Funding criticality

Yet, biennials and other cultural institutions are not only autonomous agents of various discourses, they have to come up with sustainable economic models, something that requires organizing their internal relations of production and finding ways to secure funding within the increasingly dominating neoliberal cultural policies that are employed across Europe and the world. This process most usually entails a respective "adjustment" of some of their statements or practices. Even when they pursue criticality, they also need to demonstrate their role as city promoters or as sites where networking and portfolio-career building are reproduced in order to somehow engage with the necessary capital flows. If not, they run the risk of losing parts of their economic support or go bankrupt. If they decide to operate as so-

cial critics, they usually have to bear in mind that their critique should not disturb or push the limits to the extreme. As Dimitrakaki (2003) and Lesage (2007) have suggested Documenta 11, which is commonly regarded as the archetype of the politically engaged art show, in practice depended on an "availability of a surplus labour force for showcasing its critique" (Dimitrakaki, 2003, p. 154) and "did not result in a type of organization that matched its discursive counter-thoughts" (Lesage, 2007, p. 94). This type of conflicting attitude is crucial to highlight not only for biennials but also for a whole range of other contemporary cultural institutions and practices within creative economies that draw their legacy from or employ certain modes of critical discourse. It has been argued that practices that recourse to criticality but still engage with neoliberal economic models and procedures, provide the lifeblood of contemporary capitalism in that they neutralize and institutionalize a mode of critique that owes its legacy to May 68 and the countercultures of the "60" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005 —see especially their criticism against "artistic critique" as a means for consolidating a "soft," culturally sensitive capitalist ideology; Gielen, 2010; Hardt, 2011). On the other hand, critique has to unarguably engage in processes of instituting in order to transform existing patterns of thought and action.[12] The question then to be answered for curators and critics is *how* this can be done, what tactics can be employed and questions be raised toward that direction, always within the given particular conditions and limitations of specific individual cases (Hlavajova, 2010).

Since the 1970s, according to Christian Marrazi (2011), the very concept of capital accumulation has been transformed within the productive paradigm of post-Fordism due to the incapacity of Fordism to drain surplus value from the "immediate living labour, the wage labour of the factory" (Marrazi, 2011, p. 248; see also Berardi, 2009). In Fordism, the extraction of surplus value was mainly circumscribed to the production site, while in post-Fordist processes of accumulation it becomes increasingly diffused in the sphere of circulation and reproduction of capital, that is, financial, touristic, and cultural sector. Since the displacement of traditional industrial units, the setting in motion of investments and the seeking of valorization in collective desire (Berardi, 2009; Pasquinelli, 2008) has been capital's response to the problem of growth. From this point of view, the biennial proliferation can be seen as concomitant not only with the expansion of experience economies, the ongoing economization of creativity, the expansion of culture-driven regeneration projects, which have enormously increased the past 30 years, but also with the ever increasing mobility of capital, goods, people, and deterritorialized information and communication flows. In this sense, cultural festivals, exhibitions or fairs usually come to be regarded "as vehicles of economic generation or as "quick fix" solutions to city image problems" (Quinn, 2005, p. 927) for their funding bodies. Accordingly, cultural policies in Europe increasingly tend to focus on economic growth as a measure of artistic value[13] and certain social and cultural issues related to these festivals are usually dropped from the agenda, such as participation, democracy, education, or the civic potential (Quinn, 2005). In this context, an art event bears the promise of adding symbolic capital to respective locales and of turning previously industrialized downtown zones to attractive business opportunities for retail investors and real-estate developers.

The operation of a biennial is usually understood by state and private sponsors within such frameworks.[14] It has been demonstrated how such culture-led regen- eration schemes contribute to the gentrification of "deprived" areas, a process that involves the displacement of less privileged classes and the dislocation of traditional communities (Smith & LeFaivre, 1984; Tretter, 2009; Zukin, 1987; Zukin, 1988). The mobilization of cultural production for urban revitalization schemes are advanta- geous for real-estate developers and private investors who, as Gray puts it, transform "elements of cultural distinctiveness into 'fixed capital'" (2010, p. 37). Thus, it is usually a process with strong class characteristics as it dispossesses poorer populations from their communities in order to open up ways for business. As it has been shown, artistic production has often inadvertently played a significant role and contributed in such procedures in different cities around the world with prominent examples New York, Berlin, and Barcelona (Ley, 2003; Deutsche and Ryan, 1984; Zukin, 1988).[15]

Biennials as workplaces

Unlike the much-debated subject of art and rent speculation discussed above, a largely neglected issue in debates on contemporary art and biennials is the condition of artistic and cultural labor.[16] The status of artistic labor has been mainly tackled outside official institutions, by networked cultural worker collectives and activist cultural groups that have emerged in the last decade or so, such as the London-based "Carrotsworkers Collective" and "Precarious Workers Brigade," he Paris-based "Coordination des intermittents et pre´caires," and the New York based "W.A.G.E." (Working Artists and the Greater Economy). The basic consen-

sus in such groups is that, as Carrotsworkers Collective puts it, "free labour, internships, volunteer work" are not a separate sphere of activity but a necessary "condition of late capitalist cultural economy."[17] Especially recently, as the "Occupy" movement has spread, the exploitative practices in the artworld is a main theme in the agenda of various collectives claiming to represent the majority of artists and creative workers, who struggle to make a living within the field, the largely invisible mass of cultural workers that provides the conditions of possibility of celebrated art to take place (Sholette, 2010).[18] Groups such as the newly formed collective "ArtLeaks," following the Wikileaks practice, call to draw attention to leaked abuses concerning artistic work, underscoring the precarious condition of cultural workers and the necessity for sustained protest against the appropriation of politically engaged art, culture and theory by institutions embedded in a tight mesh of capital and power.[19]

Such discussions are usually excluded in official biennial programs, as the majority of these events often rely on the voluntary or underpaid labor of the participants. Volunteerism in the official artworld is mostly career-oriented and is different than volunteerism in more horizontalized structures based on prefigurative politics and voluntary associations, where the participants have a potentially more equal relationship with each other. In large-scale spectacular events, it is usually the few who decide and maintain their authority, while on the other hand there is usually a mass of unpaid volunteers and interns who strive to enter the world of artistic recognition as a promise to "be part of the action." Such logics tend to exclude in the long-term lower socioeconomic classes from art production, as creative producers with alternative sources of income will much easier pursue a career in the sector.[20]

As a matter of fact, contemporary biennials often use a language derived from a neoliberal vocabulary. Volunteering positions that reproduce a class-based career trajectory are often advertised as a "unique opportunity of interacting with established artists, professionals, local and international visitors,"[21] or a "fantastic opportunity to be part of a major international art event."[22] This is often problematic for art institutions that aspire to a social and political relevance distinct from that of art market competition. One could also suggest that this type of language, based on the cult of the creative personality who despite personal turmoil eventually "makes it to the top," impoverishes the collaborative potential that the word "volunteerism" implies. In fact as Lorey (2009, p. 197) notes, cultural producers, due to the belief of their own freedom and autonomy, are so prone to exploitation that they are almost presented by the state as "role models" or "model entrepreneurs,"[23] forecasting the ongoing process of casualization of all work that is currently becoming predominant all across Europe (Gielen, 2010; Ross, 2009).[24]

Engagement with activist politics: "Forget Fear" in 7th Berlin Biennale

Apart from theoretical and curatorial accounts that see biennials as stages for enabling radical politics, the complexities regarding their role are often addressed in dismissive terms. In their article, "Event and Counter-Event: The Political Economy of the Istanbul Biennial and Its Excesses" (Harutyunyan, Aras, & Goodfield, 2011) on the explicitly politicized 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009), Harutyunyan et al. argue that despite all the Brechtian rhetoric on liberation and emancipation that the curators of the show mobilized, the event remains a capitalist spectacle that serves to validate the specific interests of its sponsors, such as the multinational giants Koc¸ and Turkcell. Their view holds in short that effective political action must take place outside an event such as a biennial, as the latter due to the structural affinities with neoliberal modes of development, post-Fordist work paradigms and the institutionalized, conservative artworld is unable to weaken the system. For the authors, such contradictions between the ideological and economic conditions of the biennial, as well as the postideological paradigm in which the biennial functions ultimately hinder any convincing potential of emancipatory politics. For them, the streets and self-organized initiatives are the places where real ruptures in hegemonic order can be enacted as they are able to forge new social relations and practices from below. However penetrating, such a view fosters a fatalistic conception of political and social relations that overlooks the particularities of social interaction. If we think of the constitution of the social as ontologically contingent, contradictory, and diverse (Mouffe, 1988), the encounter with or the participation in cultural manifestations of whatever kind is capable of enabling different significations for audiences and participants, the effects of which cannot be exhausted in the agendas of their sponsors. I argue here that from the perspective of social sciences these complexities could be better understood through thorough and enduring examinations of the relations between subjects and objects in the sites they appear and their conceptualizations within larger configurations of meaning. To manifest my point, I will discuss how such complexities could be

better understood by addressing questions more familiar to ethnographic research (Siegenthaler, 2013) within a biennial setting that attempted to activate "the streets" within its actual space. Rather than arriving at definite conclusions about the "biennial phenomenon," through this example, I wish to open up a series of enquires for informing future research in the field.
The 7th Berlin Biennale took place from April 29 to July 1, 2012. KW, its main venue and hosting institution, is located in Auguststrasse in Berlin Mitte, an area full of commercial art galleries, where processes of gentrification and rent speculation have been functioning smoothly since the unification of Germany. Presenting a hyper-politically engaged exhibition in such a privileged area seemed already a contradiction in terms.
Titled "Forget Fear," the exhibition held an explicit political-activist agenda that stirred up public debate and controversies both in Berlin and abroad. The curatorial team avoided the usual practice of implementing an overloaded theoretical discourse for framing the artistic content, returning, as the cocurator Joanna Warsa puts it, to "action and non-knowledge."[25] This was only partially true, as the educational program of the Berlin Biennial was in reality far from limited, with numerous panels, seminars, conferences, and symposia. The difference to other biennials was that instead of inviting world famous philosophers and social scientists, the curator Artur Zmijewski and cocurator Joanna Warsa chose to involve activists, activist artists, or groups active in a struggle for social change. The curators deliberately chose to include actors normally excluded from the institutionalized artworld, tackling the issue of artistic labor, institutional structures and symbolic fees, pointing out explicitly among other things that, "the biennale, whether we like it or not, is a form of artistic exploitation" (Zmijewski, 2012).[26]

In a nutshell, the main curatorial strategy can be described as follows: The curatorial team essentially attempted to use the anticipated possibility of noncensorship, freedom, and autonomy that the category of art enjoys in Western liberal societies, in order to offer visibility and material support to excluded or repressed individuals, collectives, and institutions. This included works and cases that have been either subordinated to state censorship, such as the censored exhibition "Ukrainian Body" in Kiev, state oppression such as the artist/activist groups Voina, and Pussy Riot in Russia, or are committed in one way or another to struggles for social change, such as the "Berlin Occupy" movement. Works exhibited in the Biennale range from direct agit-prop, such as Marina's Naprushkina's newspaper *Self-Governing* that opposes Luckashenko's oppressive government in Belarus, to controversial pieces targeting official German history, such as Martin Zet's *Germany gets rid of it*, where the artist calls Germans to get rid of Thilo Sarrazin's infamous best-seller *Germany Does Away with Itself* . The curators chose also to give visibility to cases like the Palestinian struggle for statehood through the display of the "Palestinian Key of Return" that symbolizes freedom for Palestine, the "Jewish Renaissance Movement" that calls for a return of 3.3 million expatriated Jews to Poland and to the victims of the drug-wars in Mexico. In many occasions the interested groups were physically present in the Biennial space. In this sense the 7th Berlin Biennale expanded its scope beyond the traditional artworld to nonartistic actors, such as contemporary activist groups and marginalized communities.

A characteristic work that illuminates the curatorial practice was *New World Summit* by Jonas Staal. For the work, the artist and his collaborators invited for a 2-day summit various representatives and political spokesmen of organizations that are designated as terrorist by international terrorist lists so as to open up democratic debate and give visibility to the issue. During the summit, the speakers were surrounded by flags of so-called terrorist organizations, many of which were prohibited from public display in Germany. As a researcher who closely worked with the project informed me, it would be very difficult to realize such a meeting without the institutional support of Berlin Biennale. Despite the controversies, the work gave the physical stage and voice to an otherwise homogenized social group in public imagination, the so-called terrorist organizations. In a similar fashion, the curators decided to provide the main space of KW Institute to the recently evicted and disempowered "Occupy Berlin." The goal on behalf of the curatorial team was to strengthen and position within the activist map the Berlin branch of the Occupy movement through its financing and visibility, as well as to create a space where the movement could exchange knowledge, skills and information with the Spanish "Indignados" and activists from all over the world. In this way, spectatorship was hoped to be turned into active participation. The presence of the Occupy Berlin in the Biennale space created rippling effects to the institution that organized the show. For example, with the initiative of the activists, assemblies were held with the exhibition workers and curators in order to negotiate working conditions in KW, wages and equality in decision making. Despite all the largely valid criticisms and

complaints for the movement's institutionalization and neutralization by the Biennale, most of the participants in the Occupy Berlin that I talked with, who were themselves actively involved throughout the duration of the Biennale, felt that the movement was indeed strengthened and reorganized.

In the last decades, contemporary art as a field of action has become significantly socialized and nontechnical so as to often merge or overlap with that of political activism. Here, this merging is expressed within Berlin Biennale, a dominant player in the configuration of trends and discourses in the global art world. The event demonstrates that the binary opposition that Harutyunyan *et al* set up between, on the one hand capitalist circuits and their overdetermining effects on exhibition's meanings, and on the other hand "the streets" is a weak explanatory framework for examining these types of shows. An analysis of the often conflicting institutional logics present in the exhibition space such as in the case of the Berlin Biennale, i.e. of the curatorial team, the German Cultural Foundation and BMW as sponsors, Occupy Berlin, artists and the so-called terrorist groups demands a research method attentive to and able to account for the ways that such logics are transformed, contested, affirmed or compromised through their encounters. The decision of the German Cultural Foundation to threaten to stop funding during the preparation of the show in fear that it would be a "political catastrophe," as a tour guide of the exhibition put it, is a good case in point for thinking through these conflicting logics.

In this sense, the curatorial approach and the relations it staged complicates a straightforward analysis of the show that will either dismiss it as a "'capitalist spectacle'" or see it as a potential stage for radical politics. I would argue that its extremity and complicatedness raises questions as to how biennials and similar events should be approached from a scholarly perspective in general. Some questions that could illuminate the ambivalences and potentials of the biennial in relation to its condition as both a proclaimed site of resistance and a brand could be the following: How are the social values and scripts of contemporary art understood by those involved in these settings, the workers, the artists, the activists and the general public? How does the larger social context, whether physical or symbolic, interact and shape possibilities and expectations of public intervention? How do the discourses on social change, anti-capitalism and pedagogy inflict a specific mode of understanding and being within these settings? What kinds of new worlds are produced within such settings and for whom are these worlds potentially valuable? Through systematic engagements with their dynamic and transient modes of being, these questions can advance an understanding of biennials as translocal spheres of action (Nelund, 2013). As far as they account for the particularities of social interaction, ethnographic approaches on contemporary art institutions can shed light on constellations of discourses, practices and interpretations that largely remain obscured in prevalent art historical or theoretical narratives.

Notes

1 "Extra visual" here refers to a practice of exhibition-making that does not principally focus on the visual qualities of the show, but moves beyond them to employ discussions, publications, guide tours, seminars, symposia, and so on.
2 Following Niemojewski (2010) "contemporary art biennial" here will signify the city or region-specific "large-scale international survey show of contemporary art that recurs at regular intervals but not necessarily biannually" (p. 92). Documenta, therefore, which occurs every 5 years, as well as triennials that occur every 3 years, are included under the umbrella name "biennial."
3 See Venice Biennale, 2009, "Making Worlds," http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/archive/ exhibition/.
4 Source http://www.biennialfoundation.org/.
5 For more material on the educational turn and knowledge production in contemporary art and curating, see O'Neil and Wilson (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010), *E-Flux* 14. Retrieved March 2010, from http://www.e-flux.com/journal/issue/14.
6 See http://www.bucharestbiennale.org/concept.html.
7 As "knowledge economy" and "lifelong learning" demand more and more education, certain contemporary art institutions and projects, from the A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. project (2006) to the BAK institution in Utrecht and the "Copenhagen Free University," responded to the call by attempting to radicalize the content of their educational practice (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010). The rationale goes that since knowledge and creativity are incorporated in the economic cycle of post-Fordism in the form of labor, they should at least be employed for producing critical discourses and militant resistances.
8 See http://www.athensbiennial.org/AB/en/ENintro.htm.
9 See http://www.berlinbiennale.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=189&Itemid=253.

10 See http://bienal.iksv.org/en/archive/newsarchive/p/1/327.
11 See http://manifesta9.org/en/manifesta-9/concept.
12 This is a recurrent tension that time and again appears in discussions concerning forms of critical cultural production and which in curatorial terms is very much addressed in what is known as "New Institutionalism." "New Institutionalism" has been a popular buzzword during the 2000s in contemporary art curatorial discourse. It expresses a will to critically reengage with art institutions like biennials, art fairs and galleries, in order to transform them from within. According to Claire Doherty, New Institutionalism "classifies effectively a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within. New Institutionalism is characterized by the rhetoric of temporary / transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness" (2004, p. 1).
13 See for instance, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/creative-europe/documents/ communication_en.pdf.
14 Murray Whyte, a Canadian newspaper visual arts writer, in his 2009 article "Why Kitchener-Waterloo Has a Biennial, but Toronto Does Not," understands the need for a biennial for Toronto in similar way: From an economic development point of view, that's the advantage of biennials: They're on for extended periods of time, so you can really leverage them as tourist events ... just having a biennial is a flag firmly planted in the community that says, loud and clear: Art matters here." http://www.thestar.com/ entertainment/article/686996
15 See, for example, David Ley's article "Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification" (Ley, 2003) for the role of artists as agents in contributing to the gentrification of areas in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, also "The Fine Art of Gentrification" (1984) by Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan for the role of artists in gentrifying New York's Lower Eastern Side, Sharon Zukin's *Loft Living*: *Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Zukin, 1988), as well as the manifesto from Hamburg "*Jammin the Gentrification Machine*" by Not In Our Name! http://www.signandsight. com/features/1961.html.
16 In the past 10 years there has seen a significant body of literature generated in the sociology of labor regarding the nature of cultural and creative work mostly in media industries (Beck, 2003; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Huws, 2006 –2007; McRobbie, 2002, 2004; Ross, 2009). These accounts most usually describe cultural labor as self-fulfilling and self-rewarding, low-paid, nonunionized, and highly flexible. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) have further identified cultural work as extremely competitive, with large amounts of young people willing to work for free.
17 See http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/on-free-labour/.
18 See for instance the collective Occupy Art Basel: "We represent the people who can barely afford the entry fee to see the art at Art Basel, let alone make an offer on their favorite art piece. We are the 99% who can't afford to buy this art. We are the people who install the art, transport the art, guard the art, dress up and sit behind a desk and try to sell the art for their bosses. We are the countless artists who haven't made it into Art Basel, into the art commodity marketplace. We are the countless craftspeople who help make this art or exclusively produce this art on the instructions of the artists. We are the countless art lovers who read about art, study art, appreciate art, need art around all the time, but don't have the cash to own it." http://www.occupyartbasel.com/about
19 See http://art-leaks.org/about/.
20 The consequences of the lack of social diversity in contemporary art has recently been noted in relation to art education after the pronounced cuts in public spending in the English higher education sector by the current British government that in the long term will mostly affect people from lower classes (Beagles, 2010; Bishop, 2011).
21 See, for example, Singapore Biennial http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2010/11/600- volunteers-and-interns-needed-for-singapore-biennale-2011/.
22 See, for example, Dublin Contemporary, http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2011/06/ dublin-contemporary-is-looking-for-volunteers/.
23 See "Organic Intellectual Work: Interview With Andrew Ross" (2009), http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/geert/interview-with-andrew-ross/.
24 In a recent talk Italy's PM Mario Monti advised young people to forget about life-time jobs. http://schirachreport.com/index.php/2012/02/02/italian-prime-minister-monti- tells-young-people-to-be-flexible-and-forget-about-life-time-jobs-the-young-respond-that-they-want-job-security-risk-averse-italy-will-never-grow-fast/
25 See http://uninomade.org/berlin-biennale-7/.
26 See http://artnews.org/berlinbiennale/?exi=33388.

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11th Berlin Biennale: On the Human Condition
An Interview by Katerina Valdivia Bruch

The 11th Berlin Biennale chose to start its activities one year before its opening date. Following a process-based curatorial approach, the team of four curators began its undertaking at the ExRotaprint complex, working in small groups, and involving the locals and the artistic community. The programme includes reflections and discussions around vulnerability, care and solidarity, as well as extractivism, fanaticism and the rise of nationalisms. While a worldwide pandemic has forced us to stop and go back to basics, all these issues have become more urgent than ever. We spoke with the curators on creating sustainable relationships, doing things on a human scale, and the meaning of community in times of the pandemic.

The Female Voice and Ways of Working from the South

Katerina Valdivia Bruch (KVB): In recent years, political identity has been a recurring topic in the arts field. The team of curators of the 11th Berlin Biennale presents itself as a female voice. What do you mean by that?

Agustín Pérez Rubio (APR): Today, after decades of feminism and queer theory, of theories on political thought around gender, there is still—mainly in society, but also in the arts field—a macho way of thinking and a reduction of powers, managed mostly by men.

When we speak about the feminine, we do not only group what is not the masculine. What we are actually doing is seeking to break the idea of machismo. As you know, in our countries – Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Spain – the situation of violence against women and LGBTQ communities is horrendous. That is why we are interested in defeating this macho and violent view of reality that is present and reproduced in many institutions as well.

KVB: How does this voice manifest itself?

APR: It's about not imposing positions, not having prejudices, being open to communication, or doing something between several people. We, with our curator's voices, are a small example of this, but you will see that several projects of the Biennale are collaborations between different artists. The idea of process, that is at the core of our project for the Biennale, is also a way of understanding this kind of voice. Also, by slowing down the machinery of the Biennale itself, in favour of more sustainable relationships with the locals and with the idea of care. All these are modes of trying to change our ways of doing and saying, which are based on feminist and queer accounts.

KVB: The South is a concept implicit in the Biennale's proposal. How would you define it? What characterises it?

Renata Cervetto (RC): We bring different ways of doing things. For example, in the way each one of us thinks the programme or an exhibition, or in our communication with other people. Improvisation comes into play, but also a different way of planning, in which things are not so regulated. We are always in this negotiation, between a less formal structure and an established institution, trying to generate more porous and fluctuating processes that adapt to the requirements of each situation.

APR: Actually, we are not thematising the South, but there is a part of our South that is impregnated in ourselves. And, with this, I don't mean only a geopolitical relationship. What interests us is to explain that there are other achievements, lessons and theories, that come from our South and from there extend to the Global South.

Establishing Sustainable Relationships

KVB: Why did you choose to start your first actions at the ExRotaprint building complex in Wedding, a popular neighbourhood with a fairly high migrant population?

APR: It was clear to us that we didn't want to work in the city centre, nor within an art facility. We were also very careful to not further accentuate the gentrification that has already happened in certain areas of the city, occasionally as a result of the arts context. We wanted to find an initiative that was already working, an umbrella containing social, artistic, and business parts in equal terms, as it is the case of the projects developed by the ExRotaprint community. In fact, we didn't choose to work in

Installation view *exp. 1: The Bones of the World*, 7.9.–9.11.2019, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o, ExRotaprint, Photo: Mathias Völzke

Flávio de Carvalho wearing the New Look-suit and walking on the streets of São Paulo, Experiência n. 3, 1956, Photograph, b/w. Source: Fundo Flávio de Carvalho/CEDAE-UNICAMP, Campinas © The Heirs of Flávio de Carvalho

Wedding. We chose to work with ExRotaprint, that happened to be located in Wedding. The district interested us, because of its migrant communities and also because there are other artistic initiatives nearby that have been working for some time in this neighbourhood.

RC: When we began to think about the project, we were asking ourselves how we could work with the format of the Biennale in such a way that it would generate a sort of commitment, not only with the city, but also with the people we are working with. We are not revolutionising the space or bringing in novelty. For us, it's more about integrating what people can bring to the project from what they are already doing, from their own initiatives. And that takes more time, more presence from us in the space, a different engagement. One example of this are the schools we were working with in the first stage. We offered them a project that might work for their curriculum, and opened up the space to develop it.

APR: With all this, what we are trying to do is to point out how a biennial might help to establish sustainable relationships and intertwine different agents: artistic, social, economic, political, etc., within a city, among themselves and with the rest of the community. We consider it fundamental to understand the Biennale as an open process that includes the neighborhood, the people and its initiatives, and, of course, the artistic community of Berlin. Besides this, our space at ExRotaprint is a sort of tribute to the famous CAM (Club de Artistas Modernos, English: Club of Modern Artists), founded in 1932 by Brazilian artist Flávio de Carvalho (1899-1973), who is like our ally in this Biennale's edition. We are trying to bring Flávio's experiences back to the present, and also include the current experience we are going through due to the pandemic. While the CAM of São Paulo proposed a kind of open artist workshop for the community, our idea is that of an open curatorial process, in collaboration with and open to our social surroundings in Wedding and with the ExRotaprint building complex.

Reflecting from the Arts

KVB: Why did you choose to work with the legacy of Flávio de Carvalho for the first phase of the Biennale?

Lisette Lagnado (LL): I have always been attracted to working with artists who have a conceptual density. For instance, I have spent many years researching Hélio Oiticica's writings. For me, it was no longer important to show his work, which was widely known, but rather to present his urban and environmental programme for the public space. The case of Flávio de Carvalho is also an example of an artist with multiple interests, including anthropology, psychoanalysis, architecture, etc. I could have started referring to theorists such as Walter Benjamin or Hannah Arendt, philosophical figures who have formed my own theoretical background, but I needed to start from an artist's point of view. This allows the Biennale to have a more conceptual structure. Of course, it is completely legitimate to take references from theorists or social scientists, but it is different to work with an artistic perspective as an entry point. From there, we can elucidate common points, difficulties or contradictions, and then contrast them with the present.

María Berríos (MB): For us, it was necessary to have something, a kind of vehicle or guiding principle that was familiar to us. This was one of the reasons why we chose to work with Flávio de Carvalho's artistic practice.

LL: We began to think about Flávio's failed experiences and how they could be contextualized today. The idea of experience brings with it the idea of failure as well, of things that don't turn out the way one wants. We are interested in dismantling a modernist narrative that only chooses the highlights within a trajectory and doesn't problematise the failures. Flávio was considered a transgressor in his time, and this also reflects how civilization has been thought of over the years.

On Building Alliances and Collective Work

KVB: The Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende (Salvador Allende Solidarity Museum), presented as part of the Biennale, was inaugurated in 1972 by Brazilian art critic and journalist Mário Pedrosa, who was in exile in Chile at that time. What is the meaning of the museum in today's context?

Virginia de Medeiros, *Trem em Transe,* 2019, Video stills, Courtesy Virginia de Medeiros

MB: The history of the Museo de la Solidaridad has been usually told either from Allende's or from Pedrosa's perspective. But, the truth is that the principles of the museum were developed long before that. In the late 1950s in Chile, for example, there were a number of initiatives that took art to remote locations, by train or by bus, managed by an entourage of artists. The museum project itself was the collective work of a group of Chilean artists, journalists, and art historians. They were the ones who invited Mário Pedrosa to take on the direction of the museum. Many artists, including the strategic incorporation of some internationally renowned artists at the time, donated works as a political act of solidarity with the Chilean people and their struggle.

The generation of alliances between more fragile positions and the need to bring together vulnerabilities, principles that were at the base of the museum's establishment, are present in what we are doing for the Biennale. I think the Museo de la Solidaridad is an exceptional experiment in that sense.

Solidarity and Care in Times of the Pandemic

KVB: The Biennale had to close its exhibition space due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19). What reflections can be drawn from this worldwide pandemic?

LL: Before closing our space, the Biennale had more than 50 invited participants. Several projects were already taking place. In the midst of all these changes, I began to

The Fatigued Compassionate Oracle: Q&A, participative format by Sickness Affinity Group/Feminist Health Care Research Group, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint, 8.2.2020. Photo: Mathias Völzke

reflect on how we would be able to process such a radical global change. Immediately, the motto "ninguém solta a mão de ninguém" (no one should release the hand of anyone) came to my mind. This slogan arose in 2018, as soon as the results of the presidential elections in Brazil were known. Many people went out to the streets to protest against the newly elected president Jair Bolsonaro, known for his racist and sexist statements. However, the vast majority were afraid to go out alone to demonstrate, because inside the crowd were infiltrated members of law enforcement agencies and police, who generally use violence against protesters. That phrase, told by a mother to her daughter, just before the latter was about to leave the house to protest, allowed us to feel the strength of the collectivity, of a united and protective crowd. And now I think: our strength, the fact of holding the hand of our peers, has become a danger of contagion. What a cruel contradiction!

MB: At the moment, it is fundamental to insist on different ways of supporting each other. A "social distance" is demanded, but what is actually needed is to think socially, to take care of one another. This is not just an individual or isolated act —it is a social act. The virus accentuates inequality, which means that those who will perish will be the most vulnerable. It is essential to reflect on how people are going to meet again during and after the pandemic. Instead of this, what is unfolding around the world are severe measures, typical of authoritarian regimes: border closures, police and military deployments, restrictions on free movement or citizen denunciations. The current situation forces us to think about how to slow things down, to return to a more human scale, without accentuating the fierce elitism and violent exclusion that are already structural to and systematically reproduced by the cultural institutions we work in.

Feminist Health Care Research Group (Inga Zimprich/Julia Bonn), *Collages of materials from the health movement of West Berlin during the 70s and 80s,* 2018, contribution to *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft 19*

RC: I believe the change has to happen first in oneself, in order to be able to transmit and generate a collective consciousness of care. This virus makes it clear: any decision one makes in relation to one's body is going to affect others sooner or later. Coping with this virus implies trusting strangers, trusting that there is someone else who takes care of herself/himself in order to take care of me as well. It is a very powerful gesture, since it generates a network of containment and support among people. We are privileged, because we have a job that allows us to think of new ways to meet and, from there, continue to build a joint journey. This also entails a great responsibility, because it is not a change that will happen in a year. It will take time to meet again, not only physically, but also emotionally and from our own feelings.

Osías Yanov, *Soplo de humo,* 2019, Courtesy Osías Yanov

Osías Yanov, Josefina, Poroto y Tronco, 2019, Courtesy Osías Yanov

exp. 3: Affect Archives. Sinthujan Varatharajah – Osías Yanov, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint, 22.2.–2.5.2020, extended until 25.7.2020, Installation view, Photo: Mathias Völzke

LL: Several of the urgent issues we are experiencing right now were already part of our agenda for the Biennale, among them the emphasis on the local audience, small meetings on a human scale, as well as issues on solidarity and crisis management, a job mostly done by women. Right now, borders have been closed again. This is something against essential human rights, such as mobility and the right to life, especially in the case of migrants and refugees. How can we re-found a community of human beings in a situation of confinement, prohibition of mobility, and restrictions on physical contact? It is too early to draw conclusions about this pandemic, but enough to observe that neoliberalism is fueling human arrogance, instead of reassessing and putting into place the necessary measures to provide a greener economy and global solidarity. I would like to finish with a sentence by the artist duo The Black Mamba, that sums it up quite well: "Some curves will not be flattened".

Translation from Spanish: Katerina Valdivia Bruch

This interview took place in September 2019 at KW Institute for Contemporary Art and ExRotaprint. It was updated in May 2020, during the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

A shorter version of this interview, with the title "11ª Bienal de Berlín: Voces femeninas, acciones colectivas y enfoques desde el Sur", was first published in November 2019 in the online magazine of Goethe-Institut Argentina (in Spanish and German). The Portuguese version was published in May 2020 in the online magazine of Goethe-Institut Brasil.

11th Berlin Biennale

The 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art is conceived as an extended process of unfolding artistic projects and encounters. The Biennale's presence in the city has not been limited to the dates of the exhibition. The intergenerational, female identified team of curators is composed by María Berríos from Chile, Renata Cervetto from Argentina, Lisette Lagnado from Brazil, and Agustín Pérez Rubio from Spain. They started to build up their programme in a temporary space at the architectural complex ExRotaprint, located in the district of Wedding.

The curatorial group was established from its personal backgrounds and affinities with South America, mainly Brazil, Chile and Argentina. The three countries, together with Spain, form a particular constellation, which served as a starting point for discussing various social and political issues that we are currently experiencing, such as the "return" of racist and fascist manifestations, the growth of hate speech and religious fanaticism, the appreciation of an ecological feminism, among others.

Over the last few months, the curators have developed a series of experiences in three moments:

exp. 1: The Bones of the World

The experience of arriving in Berlin was marked by the meteorite that survived the fire that burned down the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro in September 2018.
It is an attempt to hold on to the complicated beauty of life when the fire erupted.
It is not an obsession with the ruins, but an attempt to be attentive to what is made with the rubble. A way of working with and remaining beside what moves us now.

exp. 2: Virginia de Medeiros and the Feminist Health Care Research Group
Series of discussions and meetings on topics such as the repoliticisation of health and illness, care, accessibility and sharing vulnerabilites, amongst others.

exp. 3: Affect Archives, with Sinthujan Varatharajah and Osías Yanov
Recollection and reflections on bodily memories and practices of survival, communion, borders and mobility, through different political and affective geographies.

Since September 2019, the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art has been unfolding as a process through a series of lived experiences with exp. 1, exp. 2 and exp. 3. In a fourth step, conceived as an epilogue, the 11th Berlin Biennale will bring these experiences together with artistic participations from around the world. In their diverse modes of articulating solidarity, fragility and resistance, these contributions rise up to materialise the complicated beauty of life amidst the turbulent times we inhabit.

The Corona pandemic has affected the preparations for the 11th Berlin Biennale, which was originally scheduled from June 13 to September 13, 2020. We are currently looking into new dates, in close cooperation with the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the exhibition venues. The dates will be made public as soon as they are determined.

11. Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst
(11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art)
https://11.berlinbiennale.de/

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Processual and Transcultural: the 11th Berlin Biennale and the 34th São Paulo Biennial

Daniela Labra

March 2020. While the art world seems postponed for a few months, this essay analyses the curatorial proposals with a processual profile of the 11th Berlin Biennale and the 34th São Paulo Biennial, scheduled to open in the second half of the year, but traversed and suspended by the process of history itself.

The Biennials of São Paulo and Berlin were conceived in different contexts and times, founded from radically different projects, and yet carried out in cities that projected prominence in the international cultural and economic scenes at the time. The exhibition in Brazil, inaugurated in 1951, was the artistic axis of a modern and civilizing developmental model, naturally elitist and white. The German show opened in 1998 and was born of an innovative, interdisciplinary, and multimedia proposal, which reflected the art of the end of the millennium in the future European-global capital for culture and politics.[1] These two biennials are today paradigmatic for their history, formats, and international relevance, and this year they coincide in curatorial projects focused on the process and the expansion of the leading exhibitions throughout each city in institutional networks, performances, residencies, installations, and exhibitions before and during the final event. Thus, they extend their program and dialogue with communities, organizations, and subjects from many sectors. The dialogic procedure that penetrates the social fabric beyond the art exhibition has become indispensable in many biennials because, in addition to increasing the outreach to the public, it helps to justify the large budgets invested in these events.

The Berlin Biennale, open to experimental standards and concepts from the start, brings a revisionist approach to homogeneous historical narratives in its eleventh edition, and a critical look at the model of biennials themselves. The curatorial proposal has been developed by a temporary collective identified as South American, white, trans-generational, and feminine, formed by Maria Berríos, Renata Cervetto, Lisette Lagnado and Augustín Pérez Rubio, whose different professional experiences go through both the Latin American and European cultural contexts. With a *sureño* conceptual positioning, the collective thinks issues related to dissident bodies, subjectivities in confinement, collectivities, creation and political actions, communication and language in their infinite manifestations, among other topics that continue to add to the project. Its title, though, is not clear yet because it is not only one up to now.

Initially, the curators divided their activities into two spaces: the KW Institute, the administrative spot, and a wing of the Ex-Rotaprint, a 1950s-era industrial, graphic complex in the Wedding district occupied since 2004 by creative and social initiatives. There, the group launched the public programs in a kind of soft opening of the Biennale extended in three sequential moments called experiences (exp.) 1, 2, and 3, developed since September 2019 until the inauguration of the concluding exhibition, the Epilogue, planned for June, when Martin Gropius-Bau and the Akademie der Künste will also be occupied, in addition to KW itself.

The exhibitions evoked the actions of the controversial and restless Brazilian modernist artist and architect Flávio de Carvalho (1899-1973). The exp.1 was called *The Bones of the World*, in reference to the title of Carvalho's travel journal in Europe in the 1930s, read curatorially as a reverse ethnography of Europe.[2] The exp. 2 brought the relational, performative, shamanistic, social, and queer-oriented work of the Brazilian Virgínia de Medeiros, together with the program of the Feminist Health Care Research Group, by Inga Zimprich and Julia Bonn, focused on feminist and self-care practices based on methodologies of West Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s. In late February, exp. 3 began with Sinthujan Varatharajah from Sri Lanka, and Osías Yanov from Argentina, but soon activities were suspended. All the invited artists developed their proposals directly in Berlin. They dealt, in their way, with the political body, *cuir* activism, historical memory,

Installation view *exp. 1: The Bones of the World, 7.9. – 9.11.2019,* 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint. Photograph by Mathias Völzke © Berlin Biennial

Installation view, *exp. 2: Virginia de Medeiros – Feminist Health Care Research Group*, 30.11.2019 –8.2.2020, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint. Photograph by Mathias Völzke © Berlin Biennial

ancestry, power relations, territorial boundaries, rejects of modernism, and other issues, through actions, installations, screenings, conversations, documentaries and educational materials, and more. Their works were presented to a varied audience that included school groups, neighbor associations, activists, children, and the elderly. When the curatorial collective opened its first experience, they declared that, "*The Bones of the World* is an attempt to hold on to the complicated beauty of life when the fire has erupted"[3]—suggesting that the proposal, until then without well-defined guidelines, was open to chance, error, and precariousness. In March 2020, however, a fire spread throughout the world, forcing a deceleration of all production systems, including the cultural one, and this curatorial and artistic ongoing process was then also temporarily closed.

Installation view, *exp. 2: Virginia de Medeiros – Feminist Health Care Research Group*, 30.11.2019 –8.2.2020, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint. Photograph by Mathias Völzke © Berlin Biennial

exp. 3: Affect Archives. Sinthujan Varatharajah – Osías Yanov, 11th Berlin Biennale c/o ExRotaprint, 22.2. –2.5.2020. Photograph by Mathias Völzke © Berlin Biennial

In general, in contemporary biennials, the process is often instrumentalized as an alternative to soften limits imposed by institutional, social, political, and financial requirements. The process, as part of the curatorial project, discussed publicly, is then commonly related to experimental platforms, sometimes manneristic and well behaved, developed with little publicity in the attached spaces of educational programs, artistic labs, and parallel discussions.

At the 11th Berlin Biennale, however, the place of experimentation sets the tone for the general proposal—and not the other way around. The promoted meetings of individuals and groups generated transference of knowledge in the Global South-North direction, including the critical approach to clichés such as organicity and spontaneity

Ximena Garrido-Lecca, *Botanical Insurgencies*, 2020: installation at Pavilhão Ciccilo Matarazzo. Photograph by Levi Fanan © Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Ximena Garrido-Lecca, *Paredes de Progresso,* 2020: installation view at Pavilhão Ciccilo Matarazzo. Photograph by Levi Fanan © Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

of the Southern form, seen as positive as original. This curatorial argument brought more questions than answers, and finds in the modern debris of the colonialist project less failure and more the possibility of rebuilding worlds from referrals emerging from the ruins. While in the history of this Biennale the bet on risk is not new, the *sureño* vision, educated in terrains of uncertainty and scarcity can bring as many new as strange—and therefore productive—operational modes to the German institution rooted in a culture for which an improvisation is only an option as a project deviation.

In Brazil, a nation where improvisation is a basic rule of sub-existence, this year the 34th edition of the São Paulo Biennial is being held. It is the second oldest in the world and the first in Latin America, founded by Italian-Brazilian industrialists inspired by

Neo Muyanga, *A maze in grace,* 2020: Performance with Legitima Defesa theater group and Bianca Turner at Pavilhão Ciccilo Matarazzo. Photograph by Levi Fanan © Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Neo Muyanga, *A maze in grace,* 2020: Performance with Legitima Defesa theater group and Bianca Turner at Pavilhão Ciccilo Matarazzo. Photograph by Levi Fanan © Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

the nineteenth-century model of Venice. Its first artistic director was Lourival Gomes Machado (1917-1967), an illustrious man committed to modern values. Throughout its existence, the Brazilian show has become contemporary and gaining in international relevance. However, its traditional structure, with rooms designated for national representation lasted until 2006, extinguished precisely by the curator Lisette Lagnado—today in the curatorial collective of the 11th Berlin Biennale.

The long history of the São Paulo Biennial has accompanied not only the transition from modern to contemporary art but also the maturing of a market, oriented by the critical trends of Europe and the United States after World War II. Today, it is the cultural event with the largest budget in Brazil, and its mission is not only to attract international attention but also to receive as many visitors as possible,[4] as it deals with internal and state political expectations that demand once and for all excellent media return inside and outside the country, prestige in the art system, and wide reception . Its spectacular scale is in line with the numbers of the nation, the ninth-largest country in the world, with more than 200 million inhabitants, 44 million of them in the State of São Paulo alone.

Unlike the Berlin Biennale, which is defined by experimentation, novelty, and a modest budget for such an event, the São Paulo Biennial carries the weight of the developmental tradition and, in the face of the Brazilian social inequality , needs to justify its existence, legacy, and public importance at each edition.

In its sixty years, however, many editions, including recent ones, have remained more committed to the international art system than to the local community, succumbing to the institutional protocol in tedious proposals. Others, however, sought to problematize the traditionalist and developmentalist model, managing to oxygenate the exhibition with works and expographies that challenged standardization and stimulated urgent discussions and the engagement of visitors, students, and artists in general.

In turn, the 34th edition bets on innovation, although it does not claim to question the bases of biennials as a whole. It has a curatorial body with a conventional structure divided into a chief curator, co-curator, and three invited curators: Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, Paulo Miyada, Carla Zaccagnini, Ruth Estévez, and Francesco Stocchi. The title, *Though It's Dark, I Still Sing*, was taken from a 1962 poem by the Brazilian writer Thiago de Mello, *Madrugada Camponesa* (*Peasant Dawn*), written in "a time of some promises of transformation, nurtured by progressive policies and some desire for the expansion of basic rights, such as education," according to Paulo Miyada. "But then the horizon changed, 'Brazil had been torn asunder by a military coup supported by part of the citizenry, a dictatorship was being consolidated', and the poem was published 'more as a call to resilience'."[5]

The initial curatorial project of *Though It's Dark, I Still Sing* was proposed by Jacopo Crivelli, Italian living in Brazil with a PhD in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of São Paulo, producer of the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo for several years and an independent curator in the last decade. He started from the concept of "relationship," freely inspired by the thought of Édouard Glissant (1928–2011), author of *Poetics of Relations* (1990), and the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (b. 1951), whose Anthropocene theories and Amerindian worldviews are widely discussed today. The project "emphasizes the potential of art as resilience, reinvention, repetition, translation," and claims "the right to the complexity and ambivalence of the expressions of art and culture, as well as the identities of social subjects and groups,

offering alternatives to the exacerbated antagonism that has characterized the political and social arena in recent years," according to Crivelli.[6]

Like the 11th Berlin Biennale, this São Paulo Biennial is not tied to a single theme, thesis, or discourse, and its project is articulated in three main axes: time, surface, and depth. The process, then, is in the order of time, like an essay in continuous construction that affirms the vitality of artistic creation despite the anti-democratic moment Brazil is going through, whose government despises the arts, especially contemporary production.[7] Although this edition evokes resilience and resistance, the political element has so far appeared in works by artists who deal less with a confrontational approach, and more with the sensitive, conceptual, poetic, and historical element. They reflect on the political darkness of the recent past and present, including the Brazilian military dictatorship period (1964-1984), which has lately been reborn as a heroic phase that must be restored, in popular discourse and that of Brazilian leaders.

Like Berlin, three exhibitions and performances would also be scheduled before the official opening, but in this case, only the first ones took place. Activities began in February with an individual exhibition of Peruvian Ximena Garrido-Lecca, who works between Lima and Mexico City and researches Peru's history and the contemporary effects of colonial processes; and the musical and collective performance by South African Neo Muyanga on the floors of the Biennial Pavilion, a 1957 modernist building designed by Oscar Niemeyer.

However, with COVID-19 the "time" vector tore apart the curatorial process itself, suspending the following exhibitions by Clara Ianni and Deana Lawson, and performances by León Ferrari and Hélio Oiticica, which were absorbed into the collective exhibition *Though It's Dark, I Still Sing*, rescheduled for October.

The space-time dimension of the 34th Biennial remains ambitious, as can be seen in the articulation of the curators based in São Paulo, Crivelli and Miyada, who wove, in cooperation with 25 museums, cultural centers, and independent spaces, a network of individual exhibitions throughout the city connected to the halls and installations of artists who are also in the group exhibition. Thus, the curators believe the public can learn more about the thinking behind the works of these authors presented at the Pavilion. This program, assembled following already defined calendars of the institutions, led to the completion of the list of names of artists in the Biennial. In terms of mobility, however, the tour of exhibitions can be challenging to accomplish in its entirety, considering that the traffic in São Paulo can be chaotic. In any case, visitors should draw their own map and thus construct unique aesthetic and urban experiences, further dilating the vectors of time and space proposed by the curators.
The contemporary city, with its scale, transits, meetings, communities, and multiple visualities in constant transformation, is still an element that inspires the expography in the Pavilion, which would be built in the process of the architectural demands that have arisen since the first exhibition in February. Developed by the Andrade Morettin Arquitetos office, the expography takes the interior of the Pavilion as a neighborhood of São Paulo, and the exhibition volumes are meant to establish a natural-scale relationship between the visitor's body and supposed projected "buildings." They have also used translucent and permeable materials to aerate the environment and create access routes between rooms and art installations. Once the architectural project is done, perhaps more clues about the "surface" curatorial vector will be found, because at this point it still seems to be just a poetic and generic erratic concept.

The processual element in the curatorship of a large-scale periodic exhibition runs the risk of being just a manneristic strategy to achieve visibility and will always deal with the paradox of promoting flexibility, improvisation, and spontaneity at the level of creation while responding to pre-defined institutional, political, and budgetary pressures. The process depends on negotiation with various entities , in turn, anchored to structures that are of interest to spheres of power far away from the gentleness of art. However, the Berlin Biennale, for its still cutting-edge profile and less grandiose dimension, allowed approaches between artists, curators, and the public on a more human scale in the initial events of the 11th edition, almost domestic in terms of spontaneity and warmth; São Paulo, with its historical weight, public ambition, and responsibility toward high-ranking social counterparts is at the same time accessible, eloquent, and sophisticated, attracting many visitors at the very first activations of the Pavilion. Because of its show structure and expanded proposal in the city, it needs to be more formatted even if the process is on the agenda of the curators' discussions.

This year, which will enter the history of exhibitions as the one of postponed biennials, will later require the revision and definition of new bases of coexistence and existence, less extractivist and personalist, including in the arts. The projects that will come after the lockdown period will probably be infused with the feeling of blockage, isolation, suspension, and redefinition of goals that all individuals in countries affected by the pandemic experienced in the critical months, and this experience should remind us for a long time that every process in art is, in the end, part of the processes of life.

Notes

1 The curatorial team of the 1st Berlin Biennale was composed by Klaus Biesenbach, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Nancy Spector, and it recognized in the future capital a place to deconstruct conventionalities, in its multiple layers. "The exhibition was conceived as a forum for artists, architects, designers, writers, musicians, choreographers and fashion designers, theatre directors and cinematographers." The first edition was divided by four spaces around the city, besides KW, organizer of the event.
2 "*The Bones of the World* is an initial point of departure aware of the rawness of time and its broken promises. At the same time, it is a joyful recognition of the life that occurs in the midst, against and despite the general states of fracture around us. From here we move." Curatorial text from the 11th Berlin Biennale, *exp. 1 The Bones of the World,* accessed March 17, 2020, https://www.berlinbiennale.de/en/biennalen/5/berlin-berlin.
3 http://11.berlinbiennale.de/, Accessed in March 19, 2020.
4 The Biennial Foundation estimates between 800 thousand and 1 million visitors in recent editions, http://www.bienal.org.br/transparencia, accessed March 19, 2020.
5 Gabriela Angeleti, "The 34th edition of the Bienal de São Paulo explores 'calls to resilience,'" accessed on March 24, 2020, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/the-34th-bienal-de-sao-paulo.
6 http://imgs.fbsp.org.br/files/aec39aaf910e96693401afd397237fec.pdf
7 One of the first measures taken by the Jair Bolsonaro government, which began in January 2019, was to eliminate the Ministry of Culture and practically end its budget. Public cultural and educational institutions have been systematically persecuted with budget cuts, dismissal of qualified employees, and closure. At the same time, industrialists members of the board of Fundação Bienal de São Paulo expressed support for the unbelievable president at the beginning of his term, confirming the conservatism of the base that maintains the event and indicating that the choice of the chief curator of the 34th edition also responds to internal political and diplomatic interests.

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Post-Colonial or Neo-Colonialism? A Reflection on the 'World Biennial Forum' in São Paulo[1]

Ana Paula Cohen

In order to reflect upon the World Biennial Forum nº2, organized in São Paulo by the *Biennial Foundation*, [2] entitled *How to Make Biennials in Contemporary Times*, [3] it is important to distinguish a few notions and practices that traverse such an event.

The first would be the very notion of a biennial exhibition, as a model that is initiated in Venice in 1895, having as reference the international fairs of the nineteenth century, followed by São Paulo, [4] in 1951, and numerous others throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. The 'biennial' model can be, at first, analyzed as a colonial project and, currently, as a neo-colonial one, that feeds a capitalist system of global circulation (of goods, products, and people), reproducing the format created in Europe according to local political needs, aiming to reach and dominate a narrative of international art. The 'original' model would then be replicated—always serving as a parameter—and would form a global system of biennials, appearing homogeneous with respect to its frequency (every two years) and to its format of an art exhibition with national representations, artists, etc. Nonetheless, it seems essential to counterpose the "collective fantasy"[5] of an abstract model of a biennial that would repeat itself around the entire world infinitely and without distinction, to each exhibition project entitled "Biennial," created from different contexts and coming together in completely different forms.

The Bienal de São Paulo, despite having followed the Venice model [6] rigorously, consolidates itself, as the years go by, as a way of looking at an international art production from a South American perspective, reformulating possible art histories, not always controlled by the artistic centers or in accordance with the hegemonic canons, creating a local scene that is in constant dialogue with the continent's artistic production. The public that these events address is also significantly different: while the international public of the Bienal de São Paulo makes up 3% of its total public—the so-called specialized audience—the Venice Biennale's public is, for the most part, international. Venice, with its national awards and pavilions, is produced above all for a specialized audience, while in São Paulo close to 97% of the public is made up of visitors from the city, the country, and the continent. This fact makes it so that the concrete project of each of the first biennials in the world be absolutely different in relation to each local context and its complexities.

One may even think that there is some kind of autonomy to these biennials, if we consider that they are initiated by local political and financial forces, and thus, are not subject to an external central control, unlike most global systems of circulation of capital.

Beyond the sexagenarian Bienal de São Paulo, most biennial projects in the world do not follow the model of national representations, and may vary in scale, budget, timeliness, frequency, materializing in many different ways, from projects that began in an artist's apartment (like the London Biennale, created by Filipino artist David Medalla), or in a neighborhood of Bogotá, Colombia (the Bienal de Venecia, created in the neighborhood of Venecia), to the ones that may serve the new needs of representation of power, as in the case of Manifesta in post-Cold War Europe, contributing to the building of the image of a Common European Community.

In this sense, one can even think of a democratic character in the use of the magic word "biennial," which instantly transforms any group exhibition, in any city of the world, into an accepted institution and with visibility within a certain international contemporary art scene. No city in Asia, Africa, or Latin America needs to ask for permission or pay duties to Venice when creating a new biennial. The current system of biennials, while problematic, seems less centralized, Euro-centered and homogeneous than other circulation systems of art exhibitions, for example,

those conceived in large museums in Europe and the United States, and sold as a package deal to museums of the so-called developing countries.

Most of all, it seems important to think about how the different forces that come together for each biennial event can create a space for critical inquiry, even if temporarily, through artistic practices, discourse, and public debate within a local context.

Another point that traverses the same event, and which I hope to distinguish here, would be the exhaustion of a critical discourse on the biennial model—a discourse which the World Biennial Forum proposes itself. Questions like: "Why Biennials?," "How to Make Biennials?," or "What to Do with Biennials?" were elaborated and answered thoroughly in the last fifteen years by projects and studies of theoretical and practical nature, in conferences, articles, books, and even in biennial exhibitions which dedicated themselves to questioning their formats, to look into their histories, among other strategies, creating forums around the world for discussing the relevance of this 'abstract' global model through concrete objects of study.

The problems intrinsic to the biennial model are therefore already known by professionals; yet, biennials continue to take place. New biennials are created every year, the existing ones follow their programs, some cease to exist, and the circulation system of artworks, artists, and curators comes second only to the art fairs, that, albeit at a faster pace, are more and more presented to the public in events very similar to biennials themselves.

If, on the one hand, creating new biennials or not does not seem to make a difference in such a complex and extensive system, just as criticizing the model also appears to not have any impact on the present, on the other, I believe that acting in a decolonizing way in every new project is a responsibility of those involved in critical thinking and in the production of art and exhibitions. Even so, if it were possible to go into the details of what it would be to act in a decolonizing way here, we would have to, once again, analyze specific projects, since the notion of ethics and the urgencies to be questioned are different in each region of the world, are in constant transformation, and should therefore be reconsidered at each new edition of a biennial.

And so we arrive at the third point that traverses the event, the format of the very *Biennial Foundation* and of the "World Biennial Forum." Following this line of thought, the relevance of a *Biennial Foundation*, detached from any specificity, a hyper-institutionalization that bases itself solely on the abstract idea of biennial, homogenizing collective exhibitions of such diverse contexts, and capitalizing on a critique that, despite having been exhausted (or precisely because of this) still gathers audiences and sponsors, could be questioned. If the Venice Biennale, in 1895, proposed itself as centralizing stage of a geo-political territory of national representations, in a hierarchical and euro-centered form, gathering national territories within its own territory, the *Biennial Foundation* seems to operate within a similar logic, albeit in the molds of transnational corporate capitalism. When trying to gather all of the world's biennials under its dominion, in a pyramid-like power structure, where it places itself at the top, and organize a discursive apparatus with a name that claims to be unique in the world, "World Biennial Forum," while all the institutions in this system have names linked to the cities where they take place—and thus connected inevitably to local specificities—the *Biennial Foundation* and the "World Biennial Forum" can be seen as an attempt to claim a center for something that is neither homogeneous nor centralized, following a colonial logic with respect to those who provide knowledge, those who produce the goods in remote, tax-free regions, and those who consume these, when sold in major global capitals of the world.

In this sense, and in an attempt to decolonize our way of thinking and our daily practices, I ask: Does the Bienal de São Paulo Foundation, with its 63 years of existence, and the know-how of having produced 31 biennial editions, all with public programs, conferences, publications, artists, curators and international artworks, need to import an event conceived by the *Biennial Foundation* in the Netherlands, initiated in 2009, that follows a transnational corporate logic in respect to its circulation as a service offered from Europe for having a legitimacy that we supposedly do not have in Brazil, to organize an international conference whose theme is *How to Make Biennials in Contemporary Times*—despite the Bienal de São Paulo having held similar forums in its previous editions? Would paying for an event of this scale with local public money to bring the "World Biennial Forum" to São Paulo be underestimating, by the local organizers themselves, the legitimacy, visibility, and repertoire that the Bienal de São Paulo Foundation conquered decades ago? Finally, the realization of the "World Biennial Forum," as a parallel event to the 31st Bienal de São Paulo (which

included a vast program of conferences and lectures interconnected with the curatorial concepts and projects developed by participating artists—none with the amount of exposure in the local and international media as the "World Biennial Forum"), serves as a reflection and self-criticism of how we still live—in the so-called 'Global South'—buried under a colonial structure, deeply rooted in the collective imaginary and in the construction of subjectivities that populate our sides of the world. This mark, I believe, is more profound and interiorized—and therefore much harder to heal—than the external impositions of the global economic or financial circulation.

It is worth remembering that for a deeper investigation on "How to make biennials?" one of the most relevant archives is located in Ibirapuera Park, at the Bienal Pavilion, 200 meters from where the forum took place. The Wanda Svevo Archives began operating in 1954, and therefore systematically documents the entire history of the Bienal and the surrounding events related to contemporary art in the city, country, and continent.

Notes

1 The text comes from a brief introduction presented at the roundtable: "No More Imagined Communities: Creating New Biennials Beyond National Art Competitions and Neoliberal City Marketing." The introduction was thought as a response to the context in which the forum took place, the discussions and lectures presented in the first two days, and the audience that was present there, as well as a critical reflection on the subject and title of the table I was invited to moderate.
2 Seeking clarity in my argumentation, the title *Biennial Foundation* will be used in English and in italics to refer to the online platform with offices in The Netherlands, established in 2009, *Biennial Foundation*; and Fundação Bienal, in Portuguese and without italics, when I refer to the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, that started from the Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo, established in 1951, and transformed into a foundation in 1962.
3 The WBF was co-organized by the *Biennial Foundation*, ICCO and Fundação Bienal de São Paulo. [Editorial note]
4 The second major periodic international exhibition created just after Venice was the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, USA, in 1896. Until 1955, the exhibition occurred annually and was, from the beginning, more geared to the local context and less an attempt to create narratives in an international discourse, systematically following the practice of acquiring international works for the museum that created the event.
5 Notion developed by Peter Osborne in the keynote speech of the World Biennial Forum nº2 in São Paulo.
6 In addition to national representations, there are details, like the dimensions of the catalogues of the Bienal de São Paulo, that carefully followed those of the Venice Biennale; each time the size was modified in Venice, the one in São Paulo was also changed in its next edition.

Ana Paula Cohen, "Post-Colonial or Neo-Colonialism? A Reflection on the 'World Biennial Forum' in São Paulo," in Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum nº2 São Paulo, *2014, eds. Galit Eilat, Nuria Enguita Mayo, Charles Esche, Pablo Lafuente, Luiza Proença, Oren Sagiv and Benjamin Seroussi (Amsterdam: Biennial Foundation; São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo; ICCo - Instituto de Cultura Contemporânea, 2015).*

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The Modern Paradigm and the Exhibitionary Form: The Case of Altermodern

Catalina Imizcoz

The newborn field of research that looks to reconstruct histories of exhibitions is yet to address in full the tour de force of exhibitions in terms of implanting topics into the public sphere. It would benefit the field to acknowledge that, on many occasions, it is not an exhibition per se that merits examination or historization but instead, it is the conjuncture at which it was put together and the broader theoretical, political, or social context the nexus brings to the fore. Without discrediting an individual exhibition's merits, the study of the cluster within which it takes place helps illuminate the broader context—the climate, the ideas, the discussions—that it precipitates or responds to. Importantly, such macro level of analysis might also allow for the study of exhibitions to gain sociological agency—looking to trace the impact of the ideas they communicate in the public sphere, functioning from but also beyond art circles and their discourse.

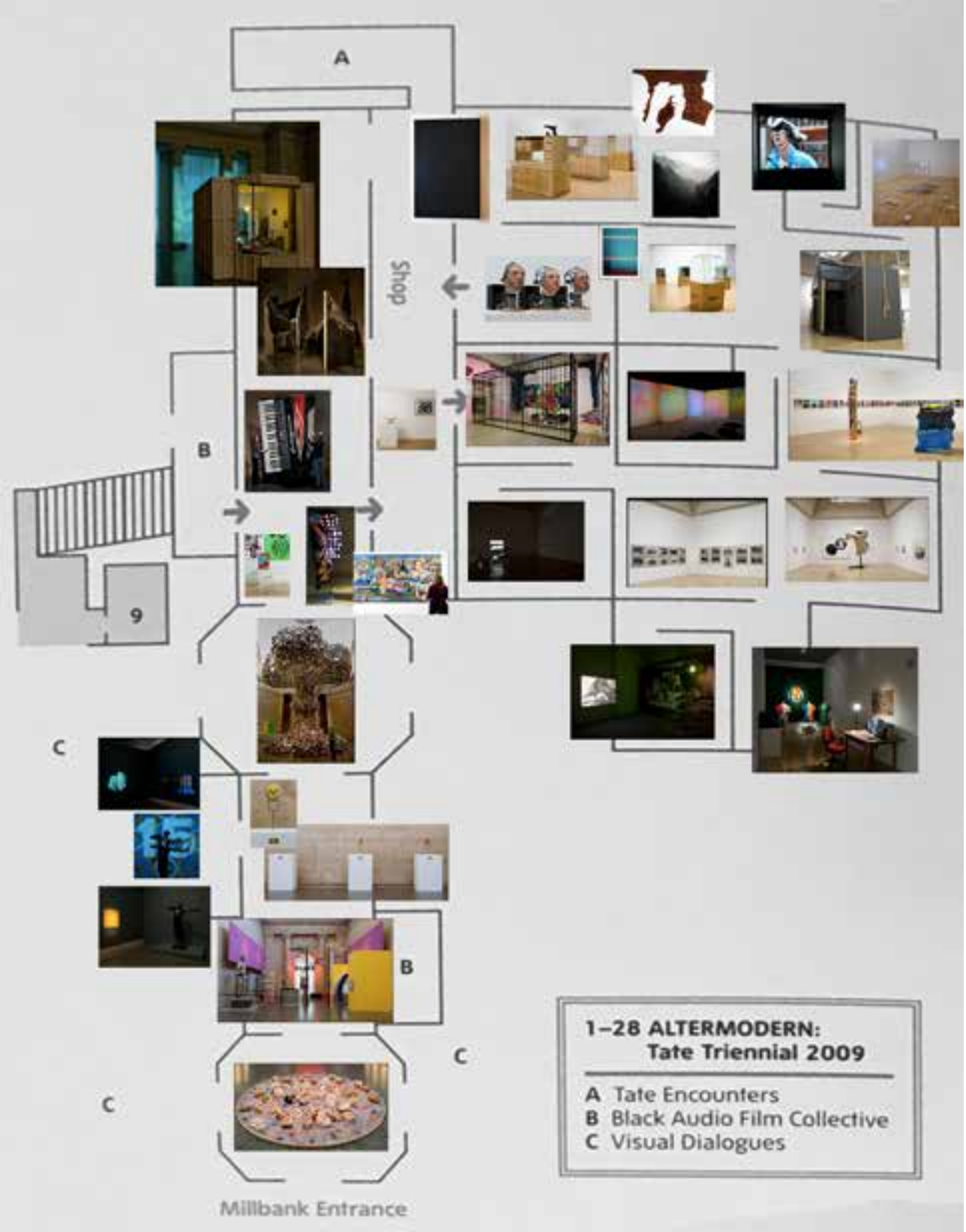
One such case is the emergence of several large-scale exhibitions that thematize modernity within prominent Western European institutions at the end of the 2000s, beginning of 2010s. Their approach appears to have been influenced by the simultaneous advent of critical theories that reassessed the modern paradigm. This exhibitionary phenomenon achieved particular density c. 2008–13, with examples such as *Modernologías*, *Altermodern*, *Modernités Plurielles*—a group of exhibitions that have received no joint scholarly attention, and only scattered secondary sources trace the links between them and how they attest to a wider theoretical phenomenon.[1] This article zooms in on the case of *Altermodern* (Tate Triennial's fourth edition that ran from February 3 to April 26, 2009 at Tate Britain, London) within this 'modernity' phenomenon as its wider context.

Modernity and modernism were the subjects of new waves of scholarship in the early 2000s, specially focusing on their engagement with imperialism and colonialism. Aníbal Quijano's modernity/coloniality concept was first translated into English and published in the journal *Cultural Studies* in 2007. A concept that grew amongst Latin American scholars during the 1990s and early 2000s, decoloniality postulates the inseparability of modernity from the European colonial project (Quijano; Walsh; Mignolo), and has produced critiques of culture (Torres Maldonado; Alban Achinte), epistemology, universalism (Castro-Gomez; Grosfoguel), gender (Lugones, Segato), and development (Vazquez; Izaca). Different from postcolonial discourse in its geographical remit, decoloniality also postulates a heterochronic narrative—starting c.1492—and is characterized by a particular relationship with English-speaking academic communities.[2] Simultaneously, and also diverging from postmodernism in its ambitions, sociologists that were inspired by the postcolonial and globalized worldview of the turn-of-the-century conceptualized alternatives to modernity and its overwhelming Eurocentrism. Multiple modernities (Prakash; Eisenstadt; Bonnett) was one such divergence, also reaching its maturity in the early 2000s.

My research into the aforementioned cluster of exhibitions starts from the hypothesis that it was precipitated by the advent of these critical theories—but that the actual influence of the theory on the individual is divergent. *Altermodern* itself included important exponents of these discourses such as Okwui Enwezor, Walter Mignolo, and Peter Osborne. The last two featured as opening speakers in a symposium titled *Global Modernities* that took place on March 14, 2009 and functioned as an appendix or discursive event complementing the displays. Both presenters addressed their reading of the modern paradigm, detailing how and why they detached from the concept of the altermodern while also reinforcing the importance of a critique of modernity. While Mignolo summarizes it in short statements like "I inhabit a different tribe" and "Altermodern reproduces imperial design," Osborne unpacks the issue by explaining: "It's not clear to me that there is any connection between either the curatorial or artistic logics of the Tate Triennial and the body of theory towards which the word 'altermodern' so vaguely gestures. I think these are just parallel, instrumentally related discusses with no conceptual connections."

Generally speaking, and from an art historical perspective, the cluster of exhibitions took place at a time characterized by the emergence of fields like Global Art History following from prevailing discussions around multiculturalism. The turn of the century had brought a solidification of global worldviews—a process triggered by the 6th and 7th editions of documenta (1997; 2002) and the biennial boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. From a wider viewpoint, the 2008 economic crisis shook the neoliberal, post-capitalist system on which much of (post)modernity functioned. This snapshot is significant because the exhibitions share a similar point of departure in their Western European setting. The hosting museums and venues are typifications of the kind of cultural institution that both grew alongside but also served as condition of possibility for the modern paradigm to flourish. Part of modernity's backbone, the fact that these institutions worked as spaces from which to articulate and/or contest Eurocentric thought-systems is paradoxical.
My research stems from the consideration of the birth of the art exhibition as a cultural form being coetaneous with the 18th-19th century dawn of European modernity, and asks if, given these shared and entangled roots, the exhibitionary form can be used to critique modernity as a socio-cultural phenomenon.[3] What I find novel and important is that these exhibitions seem to offer a contemporary reassessment of ideologies that, while seemingly in the past, still hold sway in the sociological mesh on which art rests. They open up a space for a critical discourse on exhibitions' ideological infrastructure. Symptomatic of their moment of crisis, the cluster exposed the extent to which modernity pervades 21st-century exhibitions and offered a contemporary re-evaluation of its influence and leverage. It is within this framework that the following analysis unfolds.

Altermodern was curated by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud. It took place at Tate Britain with twenty-eight artists displayed across almost all of its space for three months.[4] That previous editions of the triennial had focused solely on British practitioners while *Altermodern* included a third of foreign artists and another third based but not born in the United Kingdom, was one of the big controversies around the curatorial proposition. Amongst the numerous and mostly uncomplimentary reviews the exhibition spurred, the geographical spread of the artists' nationalities became a somewhat insignificant piece of information. However, having been established as an occasion to showcase British contemporary art, it could be argued that Bourriaud's failure in complying with the triennial's parameters was one of the breaking points for this fourth edition to become Tate Triennial's last.[5] In a press release that explained the



Sketch that was put together on Photoshop, using a floor plan and screenshots of the works in the exhibition (when possible, installation shots were used rather than straight-on artwork photographs). For the study of exhibitions, sketches like this one become useful tools of research; however, they are often unavailable from the curator or institution, and have to be pieced together by the researcher.

discontinuation due to construction work in the gallery, the institution also asserted that it was pointless to wait for any further editions of the short-lived mega-exhibition project. How much the overambitious curatorial proposal—and its chilly reception—was responsible for this halt, remains unanswered. What is interesting is to speculate on the extent to which the institutional mission—Tate Britain being the guardian of British modern and contemporary art—mingled with the triennial's: How independent was the curator? How was the mega-exhibition conditioned by the collecting institution's ethos? Can biennials, triennials, and other periodical exhibitions be subsumed under the conventions of art institutions successfully?

At the core of Bourriaud's theoretical framework for the exhibition lay the concept of 'wandering'—the circulation of producers and well as production the world over, in a circuit of art that allegedly knew no boundaries and left no part of the world unexplored. "And so the artist, *homo viator*, turns nomad. They transform ideas and signs, transport them from one point to another. All modernity is vehicular, exchange-based, and translative in its essence; the variety apparently announcing its arrival today will become more extreme as it develops, for the first time in human history, on a planetary scale."[6] Ironically, as this article is being prepared for publication, the world begins to lockdown in response to Coronavirus—which makes this 'wandering core' feel all the more politically incorrect, and even (although it may be premature to say so) outmoded. The *homo viator* statement was probably difficult to digest in 2009, given its infatuation with a planetary scale that in reality omitted so many parts of the globe and its populations, its disregard for economic sustainability (let alone an ecological one), and its generalization or 'taken-for-grantedness' manner when it comes to the nuanced issue of these nomadic ventures' horizontal accessibility. In the current context—when all flights have been cancelled, countries have closed their borders, and the majority of the world's population is behind closed doors—Bourriaud's statement compares to insipid sci-fi: flaunting a futuristic view that fails to impress.

And yet over and above my anachronistic analysis of his theory's core, what was criticized at the time and still remains current (as much today, in March 2020, as it did in November 2019),[7] is his pretentious invention of the word 'altermodern' (it was editor-at-large of *Frieze* magazine Dan Fox who aptly used that word to describe the discomforting curatorial gesture in a review from the time).[8] Altermodern as a term was badly received on many levels, given its lack of accuracy from a philosophical and historical point of view, and the therefore lukewarm message it sent out to the general public about contemporary art. Academics, curators, artists, and institutional producers and leaders were unable to endorse a concept that appeared to only serve the purpose of adding further controversial terms to Bourriaud's career.[9] Extensive literature published at the time of the exhibition already covers the flaws of this curatorial framework, which is why I'd like to focus on how some examples of the works on display—and even *Altermodern* itself—can be read in productive ways, which deconstruct the predominant and ever-present notions of Western modernity and thus deliver what the curatorial concept did not. The triennial seemed to suffer from its curator's suffocating presence—re-reading the press reviews and scholarly articles from the time, 'altermodern' feels like a rife shortcut to discredit the exhibition's contents and prosthetics.[10] That the art and the discursive events might have been eclipsed by the term is then another failure to add to the effects of this word. Philosopher Tristan García's dissection of the exhibition's ontology crisply explains that "the one who exhibits prepares his own disappearance"—and thus distinguishes an exhibition from a gesture, a show, or a representation.[11] Such a maneuver is lacking in the case of Bourriaud.

Coming in through the Millbank Entrance—and after walking past Pascale Marthine Tayou's *Private Collection, Year 3000* (2008)—Matthew Darbyshire's grand 're-dressing' of the exhibition's threshold awaited. Red neon lights and spots set the tone, yet the artwork's engagement with the gallery's space operated beyond the bling-bling thanks to more subtle, complex resources. "It seeks to analyse the ideologies and social policies that underpin large cultural buildings such as Tate," states the artist's profile on the triennial's bespoke website.[12] In a statement about his work published later on, Darbyshire recalls that the project originated when he realized the "uncanny similarities" between Tate's building and Warsaw's Palace of Culture (where he was conducting research for a different exhibition).[13] That these two geographically distant buildings could be united in a style of architecture says less about the virtues of neoclassicism than it does about the long-stretched influences of Western models. Suspicious, the artist proposes a hybrid of three cultural buildings' aesthetics: "A hypothetical face-lift on the Palace of Culture and Science, inspired by The Public in West Bromwich [UK]."[14] *Palac* questions past and present histories and the effectiveness of the current, somewhat ubiquitous, colourful space design for which The Public is an archetype. How different is the agenda of this new celebrity architecture from the one neoclassicism pushed at the time? Darbyshire appears to caricature the hegemonic values that underlie these styles—equating those of our time with the ones that prevailed two-hundred years ago. In his critical reading of trendy architecture as a vehicle of power, he exposes the fact of modernity's continuity. Considered within other efforts to revisit modernism in Northern Africa that happened at the time,[15] the merit of Darbyshire's installation is to highlight the significance of discussions around colonialist architecture, adding current agency to a necessary re-examination of models of the past.

Peter Coffin's *Untitled (Tate Britain)* (2009) uses a similar strategy, drawing connections between disparate objects and allowing new readings of them—or different perceptions of the narratives they convey. A selection of eleven artworks from Tate's collection become altered through a video projection with sound, in another eclectic dialogue between local and foreign. Examples include kaleidoscopic patterns that twist and turn behind the silhouette of *Teucer* (1881—by Sir Hamo Thornycroft, actually part of the Royal Academy of Art's collection), while Joseph Albers' *Study for Homage to the Square: Departing in Yellow* (1964) sits beside it and is distorted by the light and shadows that bounce on its color fields. Opposite, *Linear Construction No. 2* (1970–1, by Naum Gabo) is in turn a cloud, a twirling ballerina, or the volume of a hexagon. In Coffin's installation, the systems that allow us to apprehend things as one thing and not another gently collapse. With other possible appearances comes the grasping of an object's many possible readings, and the revelation that might follow is that of wanting to know how much could reality itself be read differently. Questioning perceptions can function as the anteroom to questioning epistemologies, which means the critique does not stop at the collection of artworks but moves further into the ideologies that form its foundations. One of modernity's strongest achievements is the hegemonic establishment of Western epistemology—with Science and History determining nature, gender, race, etc. Coffin's is an invitation to explore the many ways in which we can see a given object, and possibility of furthering this deconstruction on to the world around us.

While these two works greeted the public at the triennial's entrance, it is only after zig-zagging through most of its rooms that they arrived at Olivia Plender's *Machine Shall Be the Slave of Man, but We Will Not Slave for the Machine* (2008). Tucked in a long rectangular space departing from the one where works by Tacita Dean and Charles Avery were displayed, Plender's installation showed three mannequins framed by a

green curtain, a working desk—complete with a computer, lamp, and notebooks—and a wood-and-glass vitrine. All these elements document the artist's investigation of Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, a 1920s socialist youth movement that is hard to pin down.[16] In examining them, Plender's work reflects on the layers of modernity's knowledge production systems. First, the mixture of both museological and private furniture—such as studying desks and personal computers—blurs the limits of the archival and the DIY, of the institutional and the personal, questioning the authoritativeness of the former over the latter. Second, the video playing on the desk computer moves back and forth in time, furthering the integration of the public and the private, as fragments of the group's history and the artist's personal history interweave, always with the same legitimacy. Finally, the object of study—Kindred of the Kibbo Kift—in itself dismantled many of modernity's core values and placed nature over productivity, commons over consumerism, ancient knowledge over the scientific one. Slender grapples with the apparatus of modernity, its methods, its classifications, and its values.

This article does not present a comprehensive review of all artists in the triennial, but brings in these three to illustrate the ways in which the art opened up a discussion, a reframing of modernity. They are a useful counterpoint to the exhibition-making, which provided little food for thought in this regard—in spite of Bourriaud claiming it was a central concern of his.[17] On the one hand, the project was stuck between wanting to include some of the eccentricities of mega-exhibitions—big site-specific installations such as Subodh Gupta's—while accommodating to the setting of a collecting public institution with its multiple-rooms plan. Incongruent, the final product joined both strategies with little unity. On the other hand, and compared against, for example, the efforts made by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic exhibition on the postmodern and the irruption of technology into everyday life—*Les Immatériaux*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985—the glimpse of the altermodern era that Bourriaud presented felt very much like any other previous experience of an art exhibition. In *Les Immatériaux*, disturbing lighting, unstable narratives, and fragmented displays helped convey the confusion that the irruption of technology was causing for society in the 1980s. On the contrary, the public of *Altermodern* was invited to follow a one-way route where the nomadic spirit that made up the core of the displays was left as a theoretical point of connection.

Already the fact that there was one entry point and one exit point is telling of the lack of materialization of the curator's ideas on to the exhibitionary form. But a more powerful sign is that of artists being allocated a space each—in what feels like the substitute for national pavilions in other periodical exhibitions. What message could have been conveyed if Charles Avery's *Untitled (The head of an Aleph)* (2008–9) had been separated in space from the drawing depicting a bourgeois couple contemplating the sculpture? Rather than an odd wink to Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965)—and a link to its Western canonical weight—Avery's work might have reinforced the fantastic-realist narratives of his alephian creature. Imagine the excitement of finding a drawing that kind of portrays the situation one was in a few minutes ago, as one stood in contemplation of the sculpture. If altermodernity is the time when we are able to see the whole world at once, why not spatialize this idea, moving between the time and space of the exhibition?

Two ideas constitute the open conclusion of this article, ideas which in turn form the basis of further propositions that are part of my wider research project. The first is asking if and how a critique of the modern worldview transpires into, and constitutes a demand for, a fundamental change to the exhibitionary form. The case of *Altermodern*

is a case in point of the paradoxical aspects of art exhibitions' relation to their modern ideological infrastructure. The tension between the curatorial concept, the exhibition-making, and the artworks emerges from their dissimilar levels of engagement with a critique of modernity. The fact of the overambitious concept being of use only at face value meant that it had no impact on the organization of the space, on the exhibitionary props and ephemera, on the distribution of the works, on the lighting or the wall-coloring, or on the conventionality of the route through the displays. Any of these aspects could have been employed to subvert the modern structure that all exhibitions share. 'Altermodernity' could use the space of display in a way that embodies its nomadic and heterochronic ethos; employing lighting and other tools to express the "chaotic journeys" that characterize this new present; allowing the organization of space and its floor-plan to concretize the overwhelming globalization of culture, its constant "translations, subtitling and generalised dubbing." If indeed humanity were entering such a new time with such a new set of values, the exhibitionary form that emerged as a product of the worldview that is being left behind would have to be ditched and reconfigured. The (modern) exhibition emerged and has been used to push forward universality instead of "creolization," the scientific method in lieu of "cultural relativism and deconstruction," the organization of the world in center and periphery rather than "planetary negotiations."[18] When this ideological infrastructure shifts dramatically, its ramifications on the space and form of the exhibition shift, too. The second concluding point is a speculative consideration of the public sphere as a realm that is more easily impacted by a cluster of exhibitions than by any individual example, and hence the querying of a methodological aspect: needn't exhibition studies start addressing clusters of exhibitions as its object of study? When the inspection of the case of *Altermodern* proves futile in terms of imagining new exhibition models, a broader analysis of what it shares with other contemporary examples might still give fruitful grounds for the reconstitution of the exhibitionary form. A methodology that reassembles a connected history of these exhibitions according to their shared approaches and theoretical sources—considering the forms of display that trended at the time and mapping the networks of power, circulation, and influence within which the exhibitions were enmeshed—might best serve to address the cultural concepts underlying their displays and informing their curatorial approach. It is, ultimately, in this nexus where the public sphere gains traction.

Notes

1 My PhD research proposal looks at this cluster as one of its case studies. The full list of exhibitions that I am aware of includes: *In the Desert of Modernity*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2008; *Altermodern*, Tate Triennial, 2009; *Modernologías*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009; *The Deep of the Modern*, Manifesta 9, Belgium, 2012; *Modernités plurielles*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 2013–15. Also related although less pertinent to this research: *Modernism as Ruin*, Generali Foundation, 2009; *Desvíos de la deriva*, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2009; *Animism*, Extra City and MuHKA, 2010; *Museos y Modernidad en Tránsito. Modernidad fetiche*, Red Internacional de Museos Etnográficos, 2011. Other scholars who have studied this cluster are María Iñigo Clavo and, indirectly, Marion von Osten (2018) and Francisco Godoy Vega (2015), unpublished PhDs.

2 Gurminder Bhambra, "Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues," *Postcolonial Studies* 17:2 (2014): 115–121.

3 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (Spring 1988); Tristan García and Vincent Normand, eds., *Theatre, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019).

4 Other than the triennial, Tate Britain also displayed *Tate Encounters*, *Visual Dialogues*, and works by the Black Audio Film Collective.
5 The Tate Triennial started in 2000. See also: the Biennial Foundation's website <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/tate-triennial/> for factual details; and *The Observer* <https://observer.com/2011/12/tate-torpedos-2012-triennial/> for the news of its discontinuation. Accessed March 2020.
6 Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern," in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 23.
7 Coronavirus emerged in December 2019.
8 Dan Fox's review of the reception of the exhibition by the British press was published in Frieze <https://frieze.com/article/altercritics>. Accessed March 2020. Interestingly, Fox's book *Pretentiousness: Why it Matters?* came out in 2016, and in an interview with Haley Weiss for *Interview* magazine that same year, he recognizes the article on the triennial's reception as one of the precedents for his thinking around the concept of 'pretentiousness'. In a nice series of coincidences, that article bears a spot-on remark about the trajectory of words, alluding to another critic's use of the adjective 'degenerate' to describe British art, which is, of course, a careless choice in view of the history of the word 'degenerate' in art. I found it interesting that Fox's use of the word pretentious here would then move on to have a history of its own, too.
9 Bourriaud coined the term 'relational aesthetics' in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998).
10 Some articles on the triennial include Marcus Verhagen, "The Nomad and the Altermodern: The Tate Triennial," *Third Text* (2009); Andrew Hunt, "New Journeys in a Teeming Universe: Tate Triennial," *Tate Etc.* (2009); David Cunningham, "Returns of the Modern," *Journal of Visual Culture* (2010). On prosthetics, see, for example, Stewart Home's sarcastic description of the typeface in the article "Bourriaud's 'Altermodern', An Eclectic Mix of Bullshit and Bad Taste," <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/bourriauds-altermodern-eclectic-mix-bullshit-bad-taste>. Accessed March 2020. On exhibition prosthetics in general, see Joseph Grigely, "Some Stories, Various Questions," *Exhibition Prosthetics* (2010).
11 García and Normand, *Theatre, Garden, Bestiary*, 185.
12 See the triennial's bespoke website: <http://www2.tate.org.uk/altermodern/explore.shtm#>. Accessed March 2020.
13 "At the time I was making a show at the Hayward Gallery called Fun House which was looking at Cedric Price's Fun Palace plans of the 1960s on the now-Olympic site in Stratford. It was a sort of collision. I was over in Warsaw doing some research at the Palace of Culture for my Hayward project and then realised that the Palace of Culture was uncannily similar to Tate Britain. They had these really weird architectural crossovers with everything from the entrances to the floors, columns, the emblems in the floors, so many things." <https://museu.ms/article/details/111833/artists-statement-matthew-darbyshire-on-tate-shopping-malls-smoking-shelters-and-student-halls> Accessed March 2020.
14 Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, 23.
15 See, for example, the exhibition *In the Desert of Modernity*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2008.
16 "The Kibbo Kift Kindred were a British youth movement established in the 1920s by an artist and novelist named John Hargrave. Originally part of the Boy Scouts, the Kibbo Kift split from Baden Powell's conservative organisation in order to establish a left wing youth movement, in collaboration with veterans of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage and the Co-operative Movement. Inspired by the writings of Ernest Thompson Seton, as well as the Arts and Crafts movement, they were opposed to the 'useless toil' of the factory, adopting William Morris's ideal of a return to a pre-industrial golden age. They were initially involved with such emancipatory causes as environmentalism,

clothes reform, pacifism, vegetarianism and the democratisation of the arts, but were radicalised during the economic crisis of the 1930s into forming a single-issue political party advocating Social Credit – a now discredited monetary reform theory." <https://elephant.art/5-questions-olivia-plender/> Accessed March 2020. See also Annebella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books, 2015).

17 "BR: If the Altermodern is a new paradigm, did it change your approach to exhibition making? I am interested in how you approach space and material concerns—it is something I think you rarely get asked about though I have noticed some positive reviews relating to the installation.

"NB: Thank you for asking this. I tend to think that the spatial organization of an exhibition has to be directed towards a specific effect, and has to be articulated in order to make a certain pattern appear. Here, it was a certain feeling: scattered or fragmented forms, archipelago-like, and the impression of a journey. One critic from a London newspaper wrote that he had the same feeling visiting the show as when browsing on his computer: he summed up what I tried to provide to the visitor. More concretely, I tried to organize the exhibition as a maze, with many pathways leading to smaller rooms, and a general plan in the form of a snail, that comes from and leads to the spacious Duveens' Hall of the Tate Britain." <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/altermodern-a-conversation- with-nicolas-bourriaud-56055/> Accessed March 2020.

18 Altermodern Manifesto <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/altermodern-explain-altermodern/altermodern-explained> Accessed March 2020.

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Overwriting: In Praise of a Palimpsestuous Criticality

Giulia Colletti

Premise

The act of washing out Anna Boghiguian's wall texts—after the closure of her exhibition *Woven Winds* (2017), where I served as assistant at Index, Stockholm[1]—is still a vivid memory. The mundane process of whitewashing walls to make them ready for the upcoming shows provoked in me a reflection on vanishing words, memories, and stories; is there a way to retrieve imprinted narratives that are no longer visible? It might be through the structure of a palimpsest (from the ancient Greek πάλιν + ψηστός, which literally means "again scraped"). A palimpsest is a parchment written upon twice, whose peculiarity is the retention of the underlying erased script, resurfacing due to the iron oxidation in the original ink.

Gesturing to this paleographic connotation, the palimpsest can serve as a speculative device to interrogate figurative frontiers and fictional layers, which have often empowered geopolitical hegemonies, particularly in Europe. As Ida Danewid argues,[2] a new humanism flattening into notions of mourning and bodily vulnerability is permeating European politics. Such a political strategy is conniving in covering up Europe's long history of empire, slavery, and racial violence, with consequences seen in the current Mediterranean crisis.

As agents in the art world, what kind of criticality can we set forth to resurface eradicated marks and to avoid reproducing mechanisms of cultural domination within curated biennials and large-scale international exhibitions? The logic of the palimpsest might provide a set of principles for reconsidering our ethical position when approaching diasporic narratives, inherited trauma, and radical care. When we turn to recent occurrences in the contemporary art practice, the case study of the *Mediterranea19 – School of Waters*[3] seems to overlap a few fundamentals of a palimpsestuous vision in its aim of fostering perpetual openness to relational readings, while attempting to wash off stereotypes still permeating our Eurocentric geographical imaginaries. Its palimpsestuous approach centers on how discarded and erased groups can become major players in reconfiguring forms of proximity among distant narratives, in reshaping the complexity of the present through the past and in releasing imbricated stories.

Far from providing a linear historical evolution of the palimpsest and/or expecting to establish any alternative curatorial vectors, this article is an eulogy to the fragile, aggregative, and ungovernable potentials of interrupted narratives and a deliberately heuristic attempt to exercise patterns of proximity between discarded singularities.

A Palimpsestuous Criticality

Tracing back to Thomas De Quincey the substantivization of *the* palimpsest—since then merely referred to *a* paleographic manuscript—scholar Sarah Dillon endorses it as a device to introduce her notion of "theoretical criticism," a type of writing where the purity of frontiers is contaminated. In *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (2007), she conceives the palimpsest as an active agent with a generative power. Dillon refers to it as "an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other."[4] Thus, "palimpsestuous" stands for a reading of the world made of intimacy yet separation:

Dominique White, *Ruttier for the Absent,* 2016, installation view at Curva Blu Residency, Favignana, Photograph by: Ilaria Orsini, courtesy of the artist and Incurva

"an inventive process of creating relations where there may, or should, be none."[5] The palimpsest speaks to a cohabitation of seemingly alien narratives folding and unfolding in dialogue. It is an interpretative tool that produces meaning through intricate webs of connectedness rather through isolating processes.[4] This criticality discloses a state of duality, where we feel both aware and unaware, empowered and disempowered. As a critical tool, the palimpsest does not merely present an attitude of embodiment; it also conveys the production of new subjects. Here stands its poietic function that leads us to question inherited master narratives, as they cannot longer accommodate the complexity of reality. One can refer to the palimpsest as an "active othering,"[6] as proximity experienced through distance. To a certain extent, the palimpsest might be

assimilated to what philosopher Armen Avanessian refers to as *metanoia.* Moving from the portrayal of the term as repentance, metanoia—as much as the palimpsest—stands for a new understanding coming from overwriting the old one. Due to this overwriting, "We no longer perform our earlier 'readings' of the world."[7] We trace a state of instability, an inconclusive tension from within, which produces a new singularity. The palimpsest is then not a collection of archival shreds, but rather a process of composing a new layer of individuation. According to this theorization, the palimpsest produces an active nihilism, where underlying erased script ushers in something different from before. It is suggested the palimpsest is the locus of a complex set of transformational relations, a shift of existing relations of thinking about the world.

The palimpsest operates as a principle of movement, of fluidity that disregards boundaries. Within this movement, the identity of the narratives themselves is visible and invisible at once. Ideas that are not really comfortable within a given structure of knowledge thrive in such a movement, as they cannot settle into a legitimating frame or environment. The line of the palimpsest is porous to the extent we do not work to retrace the former imprints of the existing separation—rather navigating them. In fact, the porosity of the palimpsest is an elusive disruption, as it does not produce itself as conflict, but as proximity. It is a movement of vicinity in remoteness, where the singularity of the narratives is maintained over the whole. This attitude implies that through the palimpsest we inhabit the space asynchronically.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the palimpsest in this theorization is that such model makes it possible to reshape the relations between our present and discarded past. As Akiko Busch puts it, "The physical presence of unspoken things is enough sometimes to fill a page."[8] The main paleographic attribute of the palimpsest is to

Yesmine Ben Khelil, *Le mond est couleur menthe à l'eau,* 2018, mixed technique, 160 x 120 cm, courtesy of the artist

preserve in its fibers the effaced writing which was thought to have been scraped off. The erasure becomes an ephemeral process, which cannot prevent the words from their reappearance. Words, sentences, and entire paragraphs acquire a physical presence through their absence, upholding how a subject can heal from traumatic expunctions. *La Disparition* (1969) by Georges Perec is a literary instance bringing to bear these considerations. Perec composes a 300-page French lipogrammatic novel, erasing the letter 'e' according to Oulipo constraints. As both of Perec's parents perished in World War II, scholar Warren Motte reads the absence of the letter 'e' as a reference to Perec's own sense of absence.[9] His void does not stand as a static act of mourning, rather it takes the shape of a coded discourse on loss and recovery. Perec is not able to pronounce the words *père*, *mère*, and *famille* in his novel, nor can he write his own name. The absence the reader perceives in *La Disparition* speaks with an urgent voice about the existential struggles of an orphan attempting to deal with his parents' absence. In French, *sans e* (without 'e') sounds interestingly like *sans eux* ("without them"), which adds another layer of complexity to the reference to loss.

To open up the speculative exercise initiated, it could be useful coming back around to our initial questions: Is there a way to retrieve imprinted narratives that are no longer visible? A later writing tool somehow discloses the process of erasure and overwriting already explored with a palimpsest, while constituting its metaphorical further step. A *Wunderblock* is a writing pad made of a wax board and a sheet of cellophane. Once the cellophane—where the text is written over—is pulled away, the text on the tablet disappears. However, the text is never fully erased, as a faded trace from each word is retained upon the wax slab itself and is still detectable. Thus, the *Wunderblock* is an expression of an unlimited narration yet with a permanent word retention. In his *Notiz Über den "Wunderblock"*[10] (1925), Sigmund Freud expands on this devise as a metaphor to illustrate functionalities of our unconscious, where memories are stored and from where they may resurface. Human memory expresses a similar dual capacity for unlimited receptivity and the preservation of durable traces, though deformed or altered. It implies traumas and individual memories are engraved within the waxy surface of our unconscious. Bites of erased narratives relentlessly emerge in a different shape from within their own carvings.

White Innocence

The taking on of the role of curator implies a dedication to both practical and theoretical resources to challenge our agency and face fallacious critical assets that might feed our imaginaries. Appreciating Adorno's negative dialectics remark, according to which art must recognize the uncertainty of any form of constituted knowledge, we should tend to adopt a dissenting-within research method. When we turn to the situated Mediterranean crisis, the palimpsestuous approach spurs us to brings to the fore the layered subjectivities of European history, scraping off mainstream narratives to trace back the interconnection of apparently disconnected memories. As philologists, we should learn to decodify the earlier erased script of that manuscript called Europe, to realise that the "Mediterranean crisis [is revealed] not as a moment of exception or as a discrete event in time but, rather, as a late consequence of Europe's violent encounter with the Global South."[11] There are invisible premises to visible occurrences. The Mediterranean is the page where unrepresented bodies and distant singularities are intertwined in a complex narrative of power, equality struggles, and migration.

Can we hazard the contamination of such a palimpsestuous attitude by art production? How do we position our voices in the contingency of the making of biennials and large-scale exhibitions? An international art biennial nurtures encounters between

local and global entities, yet the terms of these encounters can be heavily compromised by certain dynamics of power. As curators, we might likely find ourselves in the crossfire of several ethical, cultural, and political conundrums. It is due to the fact that, "The frame around the artwork— geopolitical, institutional, discursive, and spatial—is never neutral [...]. The container, too, should not be assumed to be negligible, innocent, or disinterested."[12]

Mediterranea19 – School of Waters might constitute a relevant case when coming to navigate such concerns. This transnational biennial is promoted by BJCEM Foundation (*Biennale des jeunes créateurs de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée*), a network of fifty-two members— cultural institutions as well as independent organizations—from eighteen countries of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Such a structure presents heterogenous layers of interests, in need of being mediated and from time to time re-negotiated. With this in mind, the adoption of the palimpsestuous vision implies that as curators we prevent imagined conflicts by adopting the principle of proximity and distance, namely exercising a profound understanding of our each one's intentions while negotiating the best conditions of support to the artists.

The biennial is a hodgepodge of diverse subjective productions to be navigated. This mission has intensified with the 19th edition, which pivots on an imaginative reshaping of the factual and symbolic agency of waters. *Mediterranea 19 – School of Waters* envisages a biennial as a temporary school, inspired by radical and experimental pedagogies. From this perspective, *School of Waters* acts as a collective exercise to defamiliarise stereotypes manipulating our geographical imaginaries, pulling together artistic practices that retrace memory, diasporic trauma, and liminal existences. These practices combine the making and re-making of the past and the present, triggering a shift from chronological and geographical cartographies to scattered knowledge, incorporating into fluid textualities. The desire to rely on waters discloses the intention of practicing a liquid syncretism, which makes of the Mediterranean a complex realm of singularities in coexistence while challenging notions of static identities and our sense of belonging within the lands. The programmatic and centuries- old erasure of the European history of subjugation, transatlantic slavery, and colonial conquest corroborates the misleading "belief that the Mediterranean crisis originates outside of Europe—and that Europe, as a result, is an innocent bystander."[13] Acting from a watery perspective implies a deeper understanding of the contemporary crisis as part of Europe's ongoing relationship with the world, experienced through years of obscuration of the singular actors.

The latest edition of the Biennale is to take place in San Marino, a microstate enclave surrounded by Europe. Albeit not part of the EU, with respect to other European microstates the Republic of San Marino seemingly experienced a remarkable growth in economy commensurate to the development of an extensive banking system. However, after the early 2000s, the international fight against tax evasion and money laundering practices, as well as the financial and economic crisis of 2008, "San Marino's banking system has come under severe criticism, and its economy now has to be entirely restructured."[14] Operating in a similar stratified system also means to us defamiliarizing stereotypes that manipulate geographical imaginaries, such as San Marino being one of the richest countries of the world—yet with no apologetic attitude, as much as to scratch the surface of its self- promotional narratives, which might undercover compelling stories to be told. The aim is to question inherited and conventional visions in favor of marginal grammars, whenever we are asked to handle complex cartographies.

Mediterranea 19 Young Artists Biennale – *School of Waters*, courtesy of BJCEM and *A Natural Oasis?*

Conclusion

Taking on a palimpsestuous criticality must make us aware of the uncertainty of any form of constituted knowledge, especially those linked to a Eurocentric interpretation of the Mediterranean area. The palimpsest is oriented toward the future as much as toward the past; it is part of a dynamic discourse that must generate imaginary matrices to avoid recognising the spatial uniformity, which is a side effect of globalisation. The idea of the variable form— porous, prone to infinite transformation and open to otherness is what we pursue as so-called *zimmendari*,[15] namely as guarantors taking the risk of suggesting a different perspective of things. Fostering the substantive attributes of the palimpsest might challenge the way we look at our agency as a European cultural producer. The palimpsestuous epistemology moves from a desire to form a question and not be satisfied with the received answer[16]. It implies a skepticism concerning narratives layered on unquestioned platitudes about identity, memory, and nation. It produces an asynchronous criticism: disregarding factual and figurative frontiers and questioning procedures of fictional layering that have empowered Europe in particular in its geopolitical dominance. Traversing the archetype of the palimpsest stimulates a transformative repair in critical thinking. Transformation emerges as inseparable from maintenance, which is produced when we take responsibility for our controversial heritage. Inhabiting the present does not mean imposing a form, but rather re-establishing a relationship with the past, which can never be evenly whitewashed.

Notes

1 "Anna Boghiguian: Woven Winds," accessed May 3, 2020, http://indexfoundation.se/exhibitions/anna-boghiguian-woven-winds.
2 Ida Danewid, "White innocence in the Black Mediterranean: hospitality and the erasure of history," *Third World Quarterly* 38:7 (2017):1674-1689, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1331123.
3 See https://mediterraneabiennial.org/School-of-Waters.
4 Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 4.
5 Ibid., 83.
6 Armen Avanessian and Anke Henning, *Metanoia: A Speculative Ontology of Language, Thinking, and the Brain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 8.
7 Ibid., 3.
8 Akiko Busch, *How to Disappear: Notes on Invisibility in a Time of Transparency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 102.
9 Warren Motte, "The Work of Mourning," *Yale French Studies* 105 (2004): 56-71
10 Sigmund Freud, "Notiz Über den 'Wunderblock,'" GW XIV, 3-8.
11 Danewid, "White innocence in the Black Mediterranean," 1679.
12 Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds., *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 17.
13 Danewid, "White innocence in the Black Mediterranean," 1680.
14 *The Economic Crisis and the Politics of the Republic of San Marino A Comparative Case Study*, Conference Paper for the 6th ECPR General Conference August 25 - 27, 2011, Reykjavik Iceland Section 28 (Small States and the Global Economy), Panel 204 (The Politics and Political Economy of Tiny European States): 1.
15 Raqs Media Collective, "On Curatorial Responsibility," in *The Biennial Reader,* 276-288.
16 Ibid.

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A Guest on the Edge: Manifesta and the Quest for European Unity and Solidarity

Miriam La Rosa

1. Introduction in the Time of Coronavirus

Melbourne, April 12, 2020

I am writing these words from what has been, for over three weeks now, my new office, i.e. the dining table of my living room in Melbourne. Exactly one month ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic, and an unforeseen chapter of life in isolation began for us all. From that same day, however, my thoughts have been housed in Europe. The current health crisis is wildly affecting cities and regions of all continents, with my home country, Italy, and other European neighbors contending for pole position. The effects of the virus surpass both physical and mental health to also impact global politics and economy. They are mainly negative effects, since the number of confirmed cases and deaths has been increasing, and most political structures and economic systems are being challenged. Yet, there is hope for positive change as well, regarding, for instance, our future relationship with the environment and a revised understanding of community, communication, and work. These events have shaken the world as we knew it, but my concerns equally relate to the aftermath; how much of the isolation, social distancing, cleaning, and closing down will be scarred into our bodies and minds? Whilst we are strengthening the links to those who are the nearest and dearest in our hearts, will we forever remain afraid of getting close to strangers?

On a geopolitical level, Europe is facing the revaluation of two notions deemed as foundations of its modern constitution and identity: unity and solidarity. The latter has become the 2020 buzzword. From the UN declaration[1] to the clinical trial launched by WHO[2] to find a treatment for the novel virus, "Solidarity" stands as a desired yet controversial objective. The European Union plays the role of protagonist in this scenario. At the point of writing, the EU member nations are in fact struggling to find agreement on how to respond to the health crisis in economic terms, with some countries still refusing to support the conversion of the European Stability Mechanism—a tool to help those confronted with financial hardship—into Eurobonds (now also dubbed Coronabonds) that would generate a shared debt rather than individual obligations for each nation. The political leaders of the member states that advocate sharing resources, and with them responsibilities, are therefore asking, "What are European unity and solidarity?" Thinking about the way the EU has handled the flows of people landing on its shores thus far, I am afraid they should not be surprised. Most likely, unity and solidarity are not priority targets of the European agenda, for we always knew that the EU was primarily born as a strategic placeholder.

In light of these events, this paper is located in Europe to look at the nomadic biennial Manifesta, whose 13th iteration was supposed to take place in Marseille, France, in June 2020 and has now been postponed, along with its very timely title: *Traits d'union.s*—

which in English translates into 'hyphens,' elements of conjunction. Among the large-scale exhibitions that have shaped contemporary art since the mid-twentieth century, Manifesta was founded with the ambition of building bridges throughout European cities of the East and the West. By its third edition, this aim further grew to tackle the gap between center and peripheries and, by the fifth edition, the North-South divide of the region. This paper references the biennial's inception, discussing in greater detail the latest iteration to address the following question: does Manifesta imagine values of unity and solidarity in the European context, or does it instead present in the contemporary art field an idea of Europe as a fragmented hegemony?

2. Manifesta en route from The Planetary Garden to Traits d'union.s

The history of Manifesta has been thoroughly outlined in several accounts.[3] The biennial was established in Rotterdam in 1996, after a five-year gestation of an initiative launched by the Dutch government, with the twofold mission of connecting European cities of the West and former Communist bloc, hence unifying and showcasing the work of emerging practitioners. It followed in the steps of the Paris Biennial, which closed in 1985, and counterpartyed Venice, which had just interrupted *Aperto,* a program in support of young artists. Nonetheless, at a conceptual level, the true precursor of Manifesta was The Biennial of Peace, organized by French artist Robert Filliou in Hamburg, in 1985, and conceived as a nomadic biennial. Its second edition was scheduled to take place in the Netherlands, but it never occurred, because Filliou died and the project faded.[4] Judging from Manifesta's ambitions, The Biennial of Peace was a model not only in terms of structure, but also of ideals. The 1996 statement of Manifesta had in fact proposed that: "Through its charter and its organisational structure [the biennial would] maintain the maximum independence from political, commercial and sectarian influences."[5] As I shall further explain, this ambition was not always attainable.

Significantly, Manifesta came into existence at a central moment in the history of Europe as a geopolitical region, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of the Cold War, as well as the formation of the EU from the former European Community, in 1993. A year before, Jacques Derrida, a pivotal voice in the discourse around *Europeanness*, had published *The Other Heading*. This text articulated a definition of European identity as located at the crossroad of political unification and the upholding of differences among those countries that constitute Europe.[6] In other words, and in usual Derridean style, this balancing act would translate into an *aporia*, i.e., "the experience and experiment of the impossible." Unity did not delay in its arrival, first, politically, and later monetarily as well. What remained incompatible, though, were the cultural and economic disparities that still fracture the region up to the present. The question of what Europe is three decades after *unification* must, as Benedict Anderson would put it, be framed by the disclaimer that its identity was always imaginary and provisional rather than fixed and solid—though it was no more real at an ideological level.[7] More importantly for this paper, how does Manifesta relate to the crisis that is challenging this imaginary of European unity today?

In 2018, the travelling biennial landed in Sicily, my very first home. From June to November, *The Planetary Garden, Cultivating Coexistence* took over the streets, parks, and historical buildings of the capital city, and other centers, coinciding with the nomination of Palermo as *Capitale Italiana della Cultura* 2018 (2018 Italian Capital of Culture). The curatorial strategy borrowed from a notion formulated in 1997 by landscape architect Gilles Clément, which questions the responsibility of human beings in managing the ecology of the planet, a pertinent and on-point matter in the

climate emergency. The team of creative mediators, aka curators, included Dutch journalist and filmmaker Bregtje van der Haak, Spanish architect and researcher Andrés Jaque, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)'s partner Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, and Swiss curator at Kunsthaus Zurich Mirjam Varadinis. Their planning was the consequence of a six-month urban study of Palermo conducted by OMA architects, which examined social, historical, and archaeological features to guide the development of the events. This investigation generated an Atlas, a word plus image publication, acting as the biennial's manifesto. Many historical buildings, whose access was otherwise forbidden to the general public, were employed as exhibition venues.[8]

Manifesta 12 revealed itself as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, with regards to the visual arts, Sicily gained a dose of global attention, with artists, art experts, and art lovers congregating on its shores. On the other, as often occurs with such international exhibitions, Manifesta brought the region only a temporary wave of change. Much criticism questioned the relevance of the curatorial vision, the management of the event's venues, and the nature of the funding. "The best thing about Manifesta 12 is the city," claimed, for instance, *The Guardian*.[9] Indeed, for some, the biennial adopted unimpressive and conventional approaches to the display of art, failing to address and relate to Sicily's most pressing issues.[10]

I will avoid the temptation to analyze the list of the forty-four participants, among them artists, architects, and collectives invited to exhibit within the official program, on the basis of country of origin or location, because it would prove unproductive. However, when looking at it in geopolitical terms, EU members outnumbered the countries of the wider European region if, nonetheless, flanked by a selection of *other* interlocutors.[11] In fact, this argument has been brought forward in relation to previous editions of the biennial—with curator Okwui Enwezor standing on top of the discussion.[12] A counterpoint to this argument is to set regionalism aside and look at contemporary art from a global perspective, in which the location and provenance of an artist should not be of the outmost importance, though I believe that we are far from a stage where origins, backgrounds, and geography can be ignored. In the case of Europe alone, identity is still a wounded concept—socially, culturally, and economically—and the European Union is perhaps one of main sites of this wound, an entity that often divides and is divided. The EU's internal struggle to manage the current health crisis is but the tip of an iceberg, which moves through the most recent episode of Brexit to the earlier establishment of the Eurozone, all the way down to the Treaty of Maastricht and its very formation—and to well before that, if we consider the two World Wars and the totalitarian projects of both Nazism and Fascism.

Yet, since its inception, the rationale of Manifesta seems to be located in the European Union before Europe. The organizers themselves have noted this issue and attributed it to the difficulty of involving certain countries of the European region as hosts, due to financial constraints, i.e., the high costs that receiving Manifesta infers.[13] If a city aspires to hold the biennial, it has to be able to source and provide majority of the required funds. Then what about the artists? For an event that takes place in Sicily, it is unfortunate to fail to draw attention to the local artistic community. Does the search for pan-*Europeanness* mean the local should be neglected?

A perhaps more constructive and, in turn, complex way of looking at the artistic representations and choices of Manifesta 12 requires a reflection on the configuration and structure of the local art scene. Sicily lists only a handful of commercial galleries, among which the players at a larger national or international scale can be reduced to a

fig. 1 Giuseppe Lana, *Square*, 2018. Manifesta 12 (*Politics of Dissonance*), Palermo 2018. Photograph by: Lisa Wade. Image courtesy of the artist.

couple, and where local artistic representation is scarce. Nonetheless, alongside the commercial sector, there is also the field of independent curatorial research and practice. I reached out to art critic, journalist, and curator Giusi Diana, whose work on contemporary Sicilian art has a solid legacy. Giusi was involved, like other local practitioners, in the biennial's collateral events. She pinpointed that, despite their urban-oriented fieldwork, the Manifesta team did not succeed in infiltrating the artistic fabric of the city of Palermo, or of Sicily at large, in a thorough way.[14] "Cultivating co-existence" is not a *new* theme in a context like Sicily. There is a lineage of projects, involving local artists and curators alike, that was already exploring the nature of migration across the Mediterranean when the deaths at sea of refugees in transit from Africa were not yet a European *problem*. Perhaps it would have been useful to look at these pre-existing practices and generate an archive to utilize as a point of departure. The Sicilian edition only reinforced what Charles Green and Anthony Gardner had already concluded in their genealogy of the biennial's phenomenon, i.e., that Manifesta's approach towards European representation and nomadism is soft, liberal, and lyrical at its best.[15]

What is more—and to go back to what the biennial's first statement had propelled—a complex aspect of *The Planetary Garden* was the nature of the funding. Of the seven-million-euro budget, almost €3.5 million came from Palermo's municipality, and the rest from private sponsors with the largest contribution offered by Sisal, the leading company to support gambling in Italy. Unfortunately, such a choice is not surprising when compared to a global scenario where funding for the arts often derives from ethically questionable sources and capital. Though, when evaluated against the economic strain of the island and the strong link between poverty and gambling, the selection of Sisal as main funding partner was extremely alarming.

In the same month of the biennial's opening, the media were full to bursting with the news of the Italian government's attempted rejection of a boat filled with over 600 refugees from Africa who were attempting to reach the Sicilian harbor. Palermo's mayor, Leoluca Orlando, condemned the event and its initiator, the country's then deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini, proclaiming Palermo an open seaport for all in need. These features irremediably ended up setting the biennial's context and adding

fig. 2 Giuseppe Lana, *Square*, 2018. Manifesta 12 (*Politics of Dissonance*), Palermo 2018. Photograph by: Lisa Wade. Image courtesy of the artist.

weight to its mission for the next ten years: "Focus[ing] on evolving from an art exhibition into an interdisciplinary platform for social change, introducing holistic urban research and legacy-oriented programming as the core of its model."[16] This is exactly where the problem lies: grand statements of intention call for equally grand results, which are often impossible to realize if the weapon is art on its own. Contemporary art can in fact be political, in the sense of taking clear positions and exploring alternatives in order to potentially instigate change, but it cannot substitute itself for politics, merely because art does not make policies. People and governments do. Hence, on their part, art institutions like biennials should restrain themselves from pretending to transform the mechanisms that lead world's politics and rather focus on what contemporary art *can* do, i.e., offering challenging perspectives and questioning otherwise normative assumptions.

An example of an eloquent artwork in this regard was the contribution to the collateral program of the biennial by Sicilian artist Giuseppe Lana[17]: *Square* (2018) [figs. 1-2] featured a series of billboards where Lana printed a famous quote by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, i.e., "*Un popolo di poeti, di artisti, di eroi, di santi, di pensatori, di scienziati, di navigatori, di trasmigratori*,"[18] translated into four languages among the ones spoken in the Mediterranean: Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, and Greek. The original quote is inscribed on the roof of the Square Coliseum, a fascist-era building in Southeast Rome, used as a slogan by Mussolini to emphasize Italian nationalist ideals and an intention towards colonialism. Lana's gesture aimed to reflect on the political climate of intolerance and growing nationalism in Italy, strongly supported by Matteo Salvini's open fight against refugees and non-citizens of any sorts. His act of translation prompted exclusion, for people who cannot read the language could not understand the content of the sentence. Concurrently, it aspired towards the inclusion of those migrants who, native speakers of one of the four languages, could appreciate the meaning of the quote and, perhaps, without knowing its original context, find a positive form of identification with it. Undoubtedly, Mussolini would have not predicted, or certainly hoped, that by now Italy would be populated with many other poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, navigators, and travellers of non-Italian origins. The proposal of this work was especially effective if we consider that the installation was located in Sicily, the multiethnic arrival point *par excellence* of the

Mediterranean Sea, and that the billboards were placed outside of historical palazzos and in busy streets of the capital city, mingled with other forms of political and economic propaganda.

Nevertheless, the provocation and energy raised in a work like *Square* was only momentary. Once Manifesta left Sicily to relocate in France, reviews and critiques went back to highlight Palermo's return to a condition of sleep, pointing a finger at the city's administration as much as at the biennial itself.[19] The blessing of Manifesta therefore turns out to be its greatest burden: that of being one guest event amongst ever-rotating other host cities. As a guest, the biennial plays an unusual role because, despite its genuine intention of uniting, it has historically exacerbated gaps, holding greater influence over the household (and the art on display) than the hosts themselves. I am here specifically thinking of its third iteration in Slovenia or the fifth one in the Basque region of Spain. Palermo can be taken as the latest case within a larger sample in which hosting cities have merely functioned as containers, i.e., where local artistic communities have not been given appropriate importance and space.

If we follow Derrida's steps once again, we will recall that host and guest are crucial players in the hospitality game.[20] The complexity of their relationship is evident from the etymology of the words. The Latin *hospitem* denotes both "guest, stranger, sojourner, visitor (hence also 'foreigner')" and "host, one bound by ties of hospitality,"[21] while the Proto-Indo-European roots **ghos-pot-*, i.e., "guest-master, someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality," and **poti-*, "powerful, lord,"[22] further suggest that hospitality is not a charitable doing. Quite the opposite, host and guest are involved in a competition for power, whereby hospitality can potentially turn into *hostipitality*, i.e., when hostility prevails over a mutually empowering form of exchange.[23] Fatefully, the act of looking at Manifesta through the lens of hospitality brings to light an issue that confronts Europe at its very core: the reception of and interaction with those who attempt to come in from outside the region, or those who move across it from within its borders. I shall also admit that pointing at Manifesta as the only culpable party, an entirely hegemonic guest, would not be fair, if not another (colonial) way of approaching the host-guest relationship. Hosting cities have agency in this exchange as well, and perhaps this is the truly innovative perspective one should adopt to look at the biennial. How are both sides playing their role in a trade that takes art as its currency? What concrete prospect of international (shall I call it European) conversation does the biennial propose to its hosts? And how much are the local hosts willing to give and take to support the stake of their own artistic communities? The artists are the fatalities or, perhaps, the site, of this gift exchange. The biennial is a political machine trying to enact a strategy of cultural diplomacy and, in turn, serving as window dressing to the local governments of artistically overlooked areas of Europe, who aspire to make their own territories more appealing to international tourists.

The key to tackling the issues of a southern territory like Sicily—which are closer to those of the Global South rather than to the geopolitical north that contains it—is not to contrast globally oriented initiatives. However, to move forward is to be mindful that the act of hosting should not foment expectations for such initiatives to abruptly *improve* the conditions of a region. A place like Sicily evolves at its own speed, one that will be deemed inadequate only when compared to a system of development that is exclusively oriented towards homogenization or, to remain within the framework of this paper, supposed European standards. When attempting to marry global projects with local contexts, it is indeed necessary to acknowledge, respect, and foster both the historical and contemporary specificities of a place, its stories and trajectories of

evolution. In Sicily, for instance, these features are those of a multicultural, hybrid, and southern territory that is congenitally welcoming to otherness whilst suffering from a legacy of exploitation and marginalization. When the biennial visits a new host, its urgency should be to pay significant attention to the artists and regional enterprises that are rooted in the territory. Small-scale public and private institutions, grassroots projects, independent curators and researchers, artist-studios and artist-run spaces are in fact playing within the strengths and weaknesses of the hosting contexts and with different ways of experiencing identity and belonging. Conversely, and from the host's perspective, without an incentive that looks at the local needs with a critical eye, and that engages different layers of society, any attempt to promote internationally driven projects will prove itself unproductive.

A possible avenue towards change could be to associate the urban studies the biennial is already conducting in the host cities with locally invested research from an artistic and curatorial viewpoint as well. In other words, to consult, ask for help, and support at a micro level. In parallel, it could be useful to encourage an interaction between such local experts with their international, visiting peers, and to take the biennial as an opportunity to not only initiate a dialogue but to also find ways to sustain it over time. I am now thinking of how Pierpaolo Pasolini distinguished between *sviluppo* (development) and *progresso* (progress), the former based on financial increment, hence on the satisfaction of immediate interests, and the latter being an ideology with social and political implications.[24] Can we aim for progressing instead of developing? After all, if we endorse the fact that the binary center-periphery is no longer applicable to describe the contemporary art field, all places can equally be central and peripheral, depending on the perspective with which one chooses to look at them. The target should not be to *become like* a hub but to exist through idiosyncrasies, *independently from* the hub. Only then could artistic objects and projects symbolize a more profound form of trade, where those who host and those who are hosted consciously cooperate to seek mutual empowerment and growth, rather than compromise. This approach, of course, admits a responsibility towards the arts that goes beyond mere appreciation and towards a form of invested prioritization and support.

Bringing this paper towards a conclusion, my feelings head in multiple directions. The skeptical side of me is disillusioned by what Europe (and Manifesta with it?) has long appeared from its southern edge or flank, Sicily, that is, as an idea and ideology in which cultural identities, histories, and differences are flattened to favor a project where unity feels like a threatening hegemony. An equally scary scenario, though, emerges if we consider that Europe is in danger of splitting into the nationalisms that formerly destroyed it in the World Wars that are still fresh in cultural memory, promoting xenophobia, racism, and cultural protectionism as a reaction to the shortcomings of unity. The crystallization into one position (pan-Europeanism) or the other (nationalism) leads back to the *aporia* that Derrida anticipated, and that cannot be resolved but only continually negotiated. In the end, I choose to be optimistic. Can art play a role this negotiation? Manifesta 13 has declared an intention to evolve the legacy of the Sicilian iteration to "not only co-exist, but actually come together to create new forms of care and ties of solidarity."[25] Will *Traits d'union.s* confirm the assertion of its title and finally offer us a different case in point? I truly hope that the global crisis we are facing is not only postponing the scheduled events but also providing an expanded and creative space in which to stimulate innovative approaches to the difficult practice of unity and solidarity in the wider European context.

3. Concluding Remarks for a Post- Time

I am aware that this paper has raised many questions and contributed only a few answers. Yet, how could it be otherwise? Words do not solve problems; actions do. As a person who was born and raised in a place called an island, incessantly floating between the eagerness of Europe and the heritage of Africa, and who left its southern shores to chase the nebulous shadow of a European identity, I am very much aware of the difference between words and actions. However, the former is the very first step towards the latter and a viable methodology to begin deconstructing the world and its contradictions. I do not endorse a prospect where institutions like biennials set goals for themselves that resemble the agenda of a politician. But once again, it is not fruitful to demonize an institution alone, when the problem is the world of contemporary art as a whole. From the funds it pursues to the dynamics it enacts and the language it uses, it is evident that our contemporary art field is still largely attached to, or at least affected by, the legacy of the imperial project of modernity, which has found a perfect partner in the society of the spectacle of our century. Biennials are only one of the most visible symptoms emerging at the surface. Hence, going back to the point of the map we departed from, if we would admit that a shared European market does not have to be imagined as a monolithic identity, we could finally employ our energies to search for ways to get together and cooperate—and not to isolate and divide—which thrive on difference, and constructive chaos, rather than controlled harmony. As for Manifesta: can the biennial ever be a true guest when, in fact, it is more a host in disguise? And can hosts take on responsibility for their own artistic communities when they apply for the guest biennial to join their households? In fact, an art institution like a biennial is not a traveller looking for refuge, whose access should be granted on the basis of a fundamental right, but a privileged visitor who carries an established political influence and, as such, a secular power that cannot be underestimated. With these concluding question marks, I look forward to a time after the virus—or a different time with it?—with the wish that the shaking of certainties will involve some of the stagnant facets of the art world as well.

Notes

1 "Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by COVID-19" General Assembly of the United Nations, 30 March 2020, accessed 12 April 2020, https://www.un.org/pga/74/2020/03/30/declaration-of-solidarity-of-the-united-nations-in-the-face-of-the-challenges-posed-by-covid-19/

2 ""Solidarity" clinical trial for COVID-19 treatments" World Health Organization, accessed 12 April 2020, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/solidarity-clinical-trial-for-covid-19-treatments

3 The history of Manifesta has been thoroughly reconstructed and analysed by Charles Green and Anthony Gardner in their genealogy of biennials, triennials and documenta. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art* (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2016). Previous references include: Renee et.al. Block, "How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began," in *The Manifesta Decade : Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. Barbara and Elena Filipovic Vanderlinden (MIT Press, 2005). Charlotte Bydler, "Manifesta - the European Biennial," in *The Global Artworld Inc. : On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala University, 2004).

4 Bydler, "Manifesta - the European Biennial." 144.

5 "Manifesta 1. Foundation of European Art Manifestation" Manifesta Biennial, accessed 12 April 2020, http://m1.manifesta.org/statement.htm

6 Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading : Reflections on Today's Europe / Jacques Derrida ; Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas ; Introduction by Michael B. Naas.*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006; 1983).
8 Examples are Palazzo Ajutamicristo, partly own by the Sicilian regional government, Palazzo Costantino or Palazzo Butera, labelled *la reggia dei gattopardi* for its baroque splendour, re-opened during Manifesta after the Valsecchi family purchased it in 2016 for restoration.
9 Adrian Searle, "Manifesta 12 Review - Plant Sex, Puppets and a Dial-a-Spy Booth," *The Guardian* 2018.
10 Arseny Zhilyaev, "Revisiting Manifesta 12, Palermo," *Art Agenda* (2018).
11 The selected artists were either originating from or based in one the following countries: Italy, Belgium, Croatia, The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Ireland, France, Greece, United Kingdom, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Kurdistan / Turkey, Algeria, Russia, China, United States, Colombia, Brazil, Cuba, Nigeria and South Africa. Italian artists represented approximately one quarter of the participants – with very few Sicilian, e.g. artist Renato Leotta and architect Roberto Collovà as well as the Fare Ala collective, involved by Wu Ming 2 + Wu Ming Foundation within the project *Viva Menilicchi!* The full list can be found on the biennial's website: "Participants" Manifesta 12, accessed 12 April 2020, http://m12.manifesta.org/participants/
12 Enwezor also referred to Manifesta as a simulation of the European Cultural Capital, another mobile initiative that would move from one European city to another every year.
13 Block, "How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began."
14 I spoke with Giusi Diana on a phone conversation on 19 April 2020.
15 Green and Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*. 144-179
16 "What is Manifesta?" Manifesta 12, accessed 12 April 2020, http://m12.manifesta.org/agen-domino99-online-yg-mudah-menang/
17 The installation was part of *Politics of Dissonance* curated by Mike Watson.
18 A nation of poets, of artists, of heroes, of saints, of thinkers, of scientists, of navigators, of trans-migrants. (Author's translation).
19 In Italian: "Ricordate Manifesta? Palermo, un anno dopo: i numeri, i soldi (spesi) e cosa resta" Balarm, accessed 12 April 2020, https://www.balarm.it/blog/ricordate-manifesta-palermo-un-anno-dopo-i-numeri-i-soldi-spesi-e-cosa-resta-106944; "Palermo, Teatro Garibaldi: dopo Manifesta resta il vuoto di una città apatica" ilSicilia.it, accessed 12 April 2020, https://www.ilsicilia.it/palermo-teatro-garibaldi-dopo-manifesta-resta-il-vuoto-di-una-citta-apatica/.
20 Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000., 2000). Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Thinking in Action (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001., 2001).
21 "Host" Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed 12 April 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/word/host
22 "It is the hypothetical source of/evidence for its existence is provided by: Sanskrit *patih* "master, husband;" Greek *posis*, Lithuanian *patis* "husband;" Latin *potis* "powerful, able, capable; possible."" Ibid.
23 Jacques Derrida, Barry Stocker, and Forbes Morlock, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no. 3 (2000).
24 Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Sviluppo E Progresso," in *Saggi sulla politica e società, Scritti Corsari*, ed. Walter Siti (Milano1999).
25 "The Concept" Manifesta 13, accessed 12 April 2020, https://manifesta13.org/traits-dunion-s/concept/

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A Planetary Garden in Palermo: Manifesta 12 as Ambassador for the New Politics of Aesthetics?

Nathalie Zonnenberg

Introduction: Politics and Art, Art and Politics

A few days before the 12th edition of Manifesta, Europe's roaming biennial, opened in Palermo on June 15, 2018, the Italian government put an end to illegal immigration. Interior minister Matteo Salvini denied the rescue ship Aquarius, packed with 629 refugees, entrance to all Italian ports. This tough stance against migration was meant as to signal all EU countries that the ongoing stream of migrants coming from Africa to Europe through Italy is in fact a shared European problem. The response of the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, opposed to Salvini's decision, was to emphatically welcome the Aquarius into his city. It is Orlando's contention that there are no migrants in Palermo; everybody living in the city is principally a Palermitan—notwithstanding the legal status of citizenship. Although mayors do not have the mandate to provide immigrants the legal status of citizenship, they do have the capacity to create the inviting environs, hence Orlando's decision.[1] In various ways, this assertion was realized. In 2013, Orlando founded the "Council of Cultures," a delegation of the city council representing all cultures that the city has to offer. Two years later, in 2015, the "Charter of Palermo" was signed by lawyers, representatives of NGOs, and civil servants, a document which made it a prerequisite that every migrant is a person, and as such possessing human rights.

Manifesta 12, entitled *The Planetary Garden: Cultivating Coexistence*, was prominently marked by the rhetoric of Mayor Orlando, who already since 2012 aimed to call the biennial to his city. It was actually not Orlando who commissioned Manifesta 12's curatorial team, but there are several noticeable parallels between his positioning as the city administrator and the statement that the curators of this biennial wanted to make. The starting point for the 2018 edition was the constant redefinition of Palermo in form and dynamics, as a "laboratory of diversity and cross-pollination, continuous migration—from the Ancient Greeks, the Arabs and the Normans, to the recent arrivals from Northern Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East."[2] The curators, or "creative mediators" as they were called in the *Manifesta 12 Guidebook*, Bregtje van der Haak, Andrès Jaque, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, and Mirjam Varadinis, developed three program sections out of this starting point, i.e., *The Garden of Flows*, *Out of Control Room*, and *City on Stage*, that each consisted of a series of presentations and events in various public spaces and historical buildings throughout the city of Palermo.

An important theoretical underpinning of Manifesta 12, ultimately also providing the title, came from the French botanist Gilles Clément. In 1997, he defined the world as a "planetary garden," which man needs to take care of like a gardener. This view was particularly made visible in the program section *The Garden of Flows*, for which the historical Orto Botanico (founded in 1789) was the main venue. The diversity of the Palermitan flora, allegedly not including any plant indigenous to Sicily, was presented here as a metaphor of the social-cultural relationships in Palermo. Besides this metaphorical approach to migration, the curators also chose to reflect upon migration

Khalil Rabah, *Relocation Among Other Things,* 2018. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

from a documentary or even journalistic angle. In the program section *Out of Control Room*, taking place in the once glorious Palazzo Forcella de Seta as well as other venues, the controlling political systems that define our globalizing world were examined. *City on Stage* more specifically focused upon collaboration and exchange with diverse social and cultural groups in Palermo, which led to a variety of performances and projects in public spaces.

The topic of migration, as an overall theme of Manifesta 12, also being the key manifesto of Mayor Orlando's city policy, raises the question as to what extent this biennial can be regarded a political instrument. Rather than the adoption of art as a tool for political propaganda—which is according to the Russian philosopher Boris Groys beside the commodity the only way an artwork can be produced and brought to the public—, the potential of contemporary art as a stimulus to create public awareness of complex social issues (e.g. migration) is at stake here.[3] The American art historian T.J. Demos claims that the number of artistic practices related and referring to different aspects of migration and its humanitarian and sociological crises is growing. In his book, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (2013), he analyzes the relationship between art and politics in the work of various contemporary artists. According to Demos, "Our time of disaster and emergency [...] has placed post-Enlightenment paradigms of truth in crisis, and in turn brought new investments in the potential political use-value of the documentary since the 1970s."[4] This generation of socio-politically engaged artists/activists aims to intervene in the world and has progressively found institutional support in "documentary-heavy exhibitions like the paradigm-shifting *Documenta 11*."[5]

In his book, Demos analyzes the work of these artists from three points of departure: 1. How have artists invented new artistic strategies? 2. How is it possible to represent artistically life severed from representation politically? 3. How has the creative reconfiguration of art's connection to politics constituted an oppositional force

Khalil Rabah, *Relocation Among Other Things,* 2018. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

directed against the disenfranchising division of human life from political identity, which defines the status of the refugee?[6] Following the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Demos considers the figure of the refugee within the present situation of massive demographic shifts in the world as a representation of "the paradigm of a new historical consciousness."[7] According to Agamben, we can perceive a future political community in the refugee, going beyond the nation state and the destructive exclusion of non-citizens. In the "'diasporic public space" of international biennial exhibitions, as Demos argues after Okwui Enwezor, this notion is represented in "forms of sociability that remain open to foreignness, mobility and flux."[8] Starting from this notion, the analysis of the curatorial strategies of Manifesta 12 might reveal to what extent this biennial enabled art to intervene in today's society.

The Migrant as Manifesta 12's *Leitmotiv*

The *Manifesta 12 Reader,* a collection of texts on migration and thematically categorized in the sections "gardens," "borders," and "networks" reverberates Agamben's proposition to regard the refugee as a model for a new political ideology. Included in the reader is his text "We Refugees," an early version of his seminal text "Beyond Human Rights."[9] It could generally be considered the *leitmotiv* of *The Planetary Garden*; the various works selected for this edition of the biennial were permeated with discourse on, as well as representations of, the figure of the refugee. They represent possible new life forms that could stimulate "faith and hope in a better world to come," as Demos characterizes the artistic practices that he describes in *The Migrant Image*.[10] Many of the works and projects that were on show at Manifesta 12 comprised both socio-political motivation and new documentary imagery. In this respect, they adhere to the new "politics of aesthetics" as described by Demos. In order to determine whether the exchange between art and politics—raising awareness of societal or humanitarian issues—was effectively applied in this edition of the nomadic biennial, I will hereafter reflect on a selection of representative projects that took place at the different venues of *The Planetary Garden*. These will then be compared along the program lines of Orlando's city politics in regard to Manifesta's biennial model as to disclose the curatorial strategy of Manifesta 12.

Starting at the Orto Botanico—the "heart" of this biennial—the idea of a planetary garden most concretely became visible in the program section *The Garden of Flows*. Here, the metaphor of the imported Sicilian plants was almost literally illustrated in the work *Foreign Farmers* (2018) by the Palermitan anthropologist and artist Leone

Contini. The experimental vegetable garden that he built in the botanical garden was the outcome of a ten-year-project. Contini collected vegetable seeds through various communities of migrants that mutually exchange these in order to produce the food of their homeland. Although principally optimistic, the provisional vegetable garden did not make much of an impression being part of the luscious Orto Botanico. The work *Lituation* (2018), installed in a glasshouse right next to Contini's garden by the South African Lungiswa Gqunta, in this respect delivered a more lucid message. Gqunta regarded the botanical garden as a "contested landscape, one we water with liquid that will ignite the masses because the revolution is lit," and illustrated this by pelting the glasshouse's historical papaya trees with Molotov cocktails.[11] With her contribution, according to the caption, she wanted to lay bare the complex (colonial) history of the botanical garden. The taxonomical ordering principles on which the garden is founded not only symbolize birth and development, but also destruction and oppression.

In the Tineo Pavilion at the entrance of the Orto Botanico, the Palestinian artist Khalil Rabah presented his own taxonomy of objects and artifacts in and around the glass cases that usually display the various plant and seed collections. In his work, *Relocation, Among Other Things* (2018), these objects and artifacts were assembled in homogeneous collections, which is explained in the accompanying catalogue as a "portrait of resilient bodies that traverse oceans and lands, travelling from everywhere; objects floating out of history, gatherings and assemblages on tables, in markets and shop windows, displaced and displayed: goods that want to find a home."[12] The subversion of the use of the orderly exhibition display to a sort of flea market was endearing. The significantly unequivocal relationship with the theme of migration provided by the curators, however, placed Rabah's work within the general discourse of conventional migration theory related to illegality and victimhood, rather than positioning it as a contribution to "a growing discourse and widening social movement that situate migration as bearing positive transformative potential in the current

Lungiswa Gqunta, *Lituation – The Gardner's Revenge,* 2018. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

Filippo Minelli, *Across the Border,* 2018. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

neoliberal world of control, repression, and inequality," as Demos imputes contemporary aesthetico-political expressions of artists.[13]

The representation of migrant issues was continued in Palazzo Butera, a 16th-century palace that was bought by the collector-couple Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi in 2016, after which it was restored to display their private collection. Also in this venue of *The Garden of Flows* section, works that represented the migrant/refugee through botanical metaphors were brought together—often in a quite unambiguous manner. The video-installation *Wishing Trees* (2018) by the Swiss artist Uriel Orlow was one of the most successful exceptions to this kind because it envisaged the figure of the refugee on various levels (historical, but also symbolic). In the video-installation, three Sicilian trees with a long history of human interaction play a central part. On the outskirts of Palermo grows an ancient cypress that was allegedly planted by the first black saint Benedictus, a chef and the son of African slaves in Sicily. In the center of the city, a giant rubber tree grows over the former residency of the investigating judge Giovanni Falcone and his wife Francesca Morvillo, who were killed by the mafia in 1992. In the southeast of the Sicilian island, the remains of an old olive tree mark the location where in 1943 the armistice of WWII was signed. Recordings of these trees on location are juxtaposed by video-narratives of current inhabitants of Palermo, such as the anti-mafia activist Simona Mafai and an African migrant chef. With his multifaceted installation, Orlow provided the audience with an opportunity to contemplate the theoretical complexities and ambiguous implications of migration without explicitly illustrating the curatorial statement of *The Planetary Garden*.

The Palazzo Forcella de Seta – an impressive palace on the seaside once owned by the princes of Cattolica and originally built as a bastion—was the main venue of *Out of Control Room*. Various video works with an activist inflection were displayed here as to inform the public about the fact that Sicily is the major crossroads in the worldwide military communications and American drone operations. The multi-screen installa-

tion *Liquid Violence* (2018) by Forensic Oceanography presented three research projects that the collective had conducted since 2011. These critically depict the spatial and aesthetic conditions that have transformed the Mediterranean sea district in a military border zone in which large numbers of migrants were killed. The reconstructions of various military interventions in the Mediterranean sea between Italy and Libya offer insight into the political decision-making and its consequences for the life of migrants (that are invisible for many). The American documentary film director Laura Poitras collaborated with Sicilian citizens/ activists as well as with local artists who protested and battled for over thirty years to put a halt to the ever-growing construction of military infrastructure. This resulted in the video-installation *Signal Flow* (2018). The project critically reflects on the land-use of the Mediterranean landscape of Sicily, revealing delicate US military information.

In the Palazzo Ajutamicristo, a former 15th-century noble palace in the historical Kalsa district, which was also part of the section *Out of Control Room*, several collaborative projects were presented. Next to *Article 11* (2018), a series of activities that also questioned the American "intervention" in Sicily developed by the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera together with the local inhabitants of the small town Niscemi, Filippo Minelli's project *Across the Border* (2010-ongoing) was the most prominent. After entering the exhibition on the upper floor of the palace, visitors faced some thirty colorful flags, which were hung throughout the entire space on a clothesline, on which words such as "hope," "belief," "autonomy," but also less universal or elevating concepts such as "hormones" or "bananas" could be read. The Italian artist commissioned a variety of people, living in countries that are mutually connected through the migration of people, to design a flag/banner with their surrounding community containing a representative word that connects them and enables them to share similarities with other locations in the world. Like many works in the *Out of Control Room* section Minelli's project leaned heavily on the concept of social sculpture but did not really go beyond the practice of community work.

The various projects in the program section *City on Stage* were more specifically meant to give a voice to the diverse communities in Palermo. Some of the collaborative projects that resulted from this, such as the colorful procession of the Palermitan Marinella Senatore, had a socio-performative character, but there were also projects that lacked an artistic stance and commenced from a particular societal assignment, such as *Becoming Garden* (2018) by the architecture collective Coloco in collaboration with Gilles Clément. In 1969, the IACP (a Palermitan social housing agency) commissioned a new housing estate project in the outskirts of Palermo through an open contest. The successive construction of a suburb that was named ZEN (Zona Espansione Nord) was stopped between 1975-1980 because of political administrative interruptions. As a result of this, the houses lacked infrastructure, but were nevertheless inhabited by people due to a shortage of housing. Coloco planted a community garden on a former dumping ground in the presently challenging neighborhood, which was meant to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants through taking care of their environs. In this respect, the project relates to the original mission of the historical gardens project allotment rather than it generating the syntheses of politics and artistic practice that Demos differentiates—in which the political does not steer the artistic.

Palermo: A Unique Case Study

A considerate amount of principles that lay at the foundation of the Manifesta biennial come together in the selection of Palermo as the location of its twelfth edition.

Inherent to the nomadic character of the biennial is its Pan-European mission: the intention to explore the geographical and psychological region of Europe, in which establishing dialogues between specific cultural and artistic contexts and the broader international field of contemporary art, theory, and politics in a changing society are paramount.[14] Focused on Europe after the fall of the Wall, one of the most important objectives of the biennial is the mobility of people, both within and outside the EU. Palermo is an exemplary case, according to general director Hedwig Fijen: a place where the crisis of migration, currently faced by the whole of Europe, is put under a magnifying glass.[15] At the crossroads between Africa and Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America, Sicily has long been subject to the colonization of various people. The Phoenicians, Arabs, Greeks, and Normans have all left their mark on the culture and impressive historical architecture of the city. Furthermore, after a long period with a mafia regime, the social structures and DNA of the Palermitan people were heavily damaged. Conversely, the inhabitants of the Sicilian capital are remarkably tolerant, and Muslims, Christians, and Jews have harmoniously lived together here for hundreds of years.

Every European city, city conglomerate, or region can in principle apply to host the biennial. The board and the general director of the Manifesta Foundation subsequently decide which location will become the hosting city, taking into consideration the artistic and intellectual context, the infrastructure and institutional stability, as well as the socio-political and financial situation. Ultimately decisive for the selection of Palermo as the hosting city for the twelfth edition of the Manifesta biennial was the appeal of Mayor Orlando to be more than a manifestation of contemporary visual art, but use the potential of art to convince the inhabitants of Palermo to combat the social problems in their city.[16] Palermo in this sense was the perfect location for Manifesta to organize a biennial. The existing circumstances offered the possibility to engage with, in collaboration with local institutions and experts, the various crises

Palazzo Forcella de Seta. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

Forensic Oceanography, *Liquid Violence,* 2018. Photo: Nathalie Zonnenberg

that determine the daily practices in Palermo. Such an approach comes very near to the principal intentions of Manifesta. Moreover, Orlando's ongoing efforts to diminish the dominating power of the mafia—for over twenty years now—transformed Palermo into a city where inhabitants, tourists, and migrants have found an open and safe haven.

Due to these opportune circumstances concerning the location, it almost seems that this Manifesta edition could not fail to positively influence the image of migration from the very start. To return to Demos, it should however be questioned to what extent the potential of the biennial is to effectively contribute to the transformation of (political) ideas that regard the refugee or migrant as threatening for national stability or even identity. It is only in retrospect that a possible answer to this question can be formulated. In a speech by Mayor Orlando, held during the closing days of Manifesta 12, he referenced to the global impact of the biennial, and emphasized that Palermo's contribution to *The Planetary Garden* has been the openness that the city has shown in regard to migrants.[17] Orlando stated that Palermo is definitely too small to accommodate all the migrants in the world, but he questioned whether the European Union, with its twenty-seven States and hundreds of millions of residents, is yet too small. According to him, international mobility is a human right, and every person has the same inviolable rights. The humanitarian-political ideology that is strived for by Orlando takes an extraordinary position in the Italian, or even European, landscape—where nationalism and populism increasingly predominate. It responds to Agamben's motion to separate the concept of the refugee from that of civil rights and the right to asylum, and in doing so to strengthen the position of the refugee. However, that is not to say that this political stance was envisioned in an innovative, creative, and socially stimulating manner in the artistic and curatorial projects of Manifesta 12.

The reception of *The Planetary Garden* by the international (art) press praised the ideological and provocative political viewpoints of this edition as well as the radically

different approach of the model of the biennial.[18] But it also questioned whether the interesting information that was shared with the public in this biennial beside good political statements also showed good art.[19] In addition, the national and primarily local reception expressed the criticism that due to lack of time and preparation the interaction with the city was only superficial and did not really have a social impact. The reflection on Manifesta 12 thus on the one hand seems to focus on the socio-political promise of the biennial, but on the other side it also questioned its artistic or even aesthetic value. In conclusion, it should be maintained that these two principles do not by definition come together in *The Planetary Garden*. Demos argues that a "creative arrangement of sensible forms and their engendering modes of social equality" can only come about while "resisting the simplistic distinctions between the artistic and the political, whether they emanate from the separatist perspective of activists intent on politicizing visual culture and discounting art, or those of artists desirous of reaestheticizing art at the expense of politics."[20] Many of the works in *The Planetary Garden*, however, depart from an explicitly socio-political intention and often have an explicit, unambiguous relation to the figure of the refugee. This places "reified sloganeering or artistic welfare" above "subtle aesthetic construction," which is according to Demos rather the opposite of the essence of the new politics of aesthetics.[21] The influence of Manifesta 12 should therefore particularly be regarded from the symbolic value that the biennial has for Palermo. Local voices say that this biennial would have been unthinkable twenty years ago.[22] According to them, Manifesta, together with the support of Europe's cultural capital organization, has changed the traditional idea of artistic production, which generated a new circuit of contemporary art in the city and which also contributed to a positive cultural climate in the city. This achievement seems to be predominantly credited to Mayor Orlando, who perhaps should be considered the true "creative mediator" of this biennial. It was he who positioned Manifesta consciously and effectively to promote his city, in which socio-humanitarian values and the improvement of social conditions have always been the main focus of his political program. Although Manifesta 12 could not be regarded a textbook example of the Demosian politics of aesthetics, it was also not a limited event. As Orlando already proclaimed at the start of *The Planetary Garden*, it functioned as a reflection on an imagined Palermo, a future Palermo, a Palermo to which he will continue to commit himself long after the end of this biennial.

Notes

1 Leoluca Orlando, "On Migration: Palermo's Perspective," *Climate 2020* (Sept. 11, 2018), accessed May 1, 2019, https://www.climate2020.org.uk/on-migration-palermos-perspective/.
2 See Paola Nicolin, ed., *Manifesta 12 Planetary Garden Guidebook* (Milan: Editoriale Domus, 2018), 16.
3 Boris Groys, Introduction to *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 4-5.
4 T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), xvi.
5 Ibid., xvii. Demos specifically recalls Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11*, but I would argue that Catherine David's *Documenta X*, or even Harald Szeemann's *documenta 5* already anticipated this progression.
6 Ibid., xv.
7 Ibid., 4
8 Ibid., 18.
9 Andrès Jacque et al., *Manifesta 12: The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence. Reader* (Amsterdam/ Rotterdam, Manifesta Foundation/Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2018).

10 Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xxii.
11 Nicolin, *Manifesta 12 Planetary Garden Guidebook*, 34.
12 Ibid., 38.
13 Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p. 246.
14 See also the Manifesta website: https://manifesta.org/biennials/about-the-biennials/, accessed May 6 2019.
15 Hedwig Fijen, Manifesta 12 website, accessed May 6, 2019, http://m12.manifesta.org/why-palermo/.
16 Heinz-Norbert Jocks, "Warum Palermo? Ein Gespräch mit Hedwig Fijen, Direktorin der Manifesta," *Kunstforum International* 255 (August 2018): 144.
17 Gianluca Orlando, *Cities in the Planetary Garden*, unpublished and undated speech provided by Manifesta Foundation Amsterdam, 2018.
18 See, for example, Adrian Searle, "Manifesta 12 Review: Plant Sex, Puppets, and a Dial-a-Spy Booth," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2018.
19 See, for example, Evin Moffitt, "Manifesta 12: The Dark Heart of the Biennial Shows Human Suffering Out of Control," *Frieze*, June 19, 2018.
20 Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 247.
21 Ibid., 91.
22 Barbara Casavecchia, "Manifesta 12: Palermo from a Local's Perspective," *Frieze*, June 14, 2018.

Nathalie Zonnenberg is an art historian and curator based in Amsterdam. Currently she is interim course director of Curatorial Studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK) in Ghent, and assistant professor in Modern and Contemporary art at the Open University (NL). Prior to this (2007-2017) she was lecturer in the department of History and Art History at Utrecht University and the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, where she received her PhD in art history. The PhD publication *Conceptual Art in a Curatorial Perspective: Between Dematerialization and Documentation* came out in 2019 (Valiz Amsterdam). As a curator she worked for several art institutions, including Witte de With center of contemporary art in Rotterdam, the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (NL), and Beyond, a public art program in the public sphere of Leidscherijn Utrecht. Zonnenberg was senior editor of *Manifesta Journal* (2009-2011), and author of many publications and reviews on contemporary art in catalogues, artists' books and magazines such as *Metropolis M, De Witte Raaf* and *Afterall Journal.*

The Planetary Garden. Cultivating Coexistence.

By Manifesta 12 Creative Mediators: Bregtje van der Haak, Andrés Jaque, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, Mirjam Varadinis

Francesco Lojacono, *View of Palermo*, 1875 (with added name tags of the plants)

Throughout history, the city of Palermo has been a laboratory for diversity and cross-pollination. Continuous migration – from the Ancient Greeks, the Arabs and the Normans to the recent arrival from Northern Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East – has constantly redefined the city and its people. Palermo's streets, architecture, parks, cultural legacy and personal histories are the result of a long-lasting syncretism of cultures across the Mediterranean and beyond.

In the 1875 painting *View of Palermo* by Francesco Lojacono – in the collection of the GAM Museum in Palermo – nothing is indigenous. Olive trees came from Asia, aspen from the Middle East, eucalyptus from Australia, prickly pear from Mexico, loquat from Japan. Citrus trees – a symbol of Sicily – were introduced under Arab sovereignty. The botanical garden of Palermo, Orto Botanico, was founded in 1789 as a laboratory to nurture, study, test, mix and gather diverse species. Palermo's Orto Botanico inspired Manifesta 12 to look at the idea of the "garden", exploring its capacity to aggregate difference and to compose life out of movement and migration.

Gardens are places where diverse forms of life mix and adapt to co-exist. They allow for cross-pollination based on encounter. In 1997, French botanist Gilles Clément described the world as a "planetary garden" with humanity in charge of being its gardener. But how to tend to a world that is moved by invisible informational networks, transnational private interests, algorithmic intelligence, environmental processes and ever-increasing inequalities? Twenty years later, the metaphor of the planet as a manageable garden is still attractive, not as a space for humans to take control, but rather as a site where "gardeners" recognise their dependency on other species, and respond to climate, time, or an array of social factors, in a shared responsibility.

Palermo Atlas, the urban study by OMA, reveals Palermo as a node in an expanded geography of movements – of people, capital, goods, data, seeds, germs – that are often invisible, untouchable and beyond our control. Palermo is shaped by these flows and journeys, from Somalia to Scandinavia, from Indonesia to Gibraltar and the Americas. Palermo is a global city, but one of the problematic-global, a place where key transnational issues converge – from climate change and illegal trafficking to the simultaneous impact of tourism and migration.

Palermo's position at the crossroads of three continents makes it an ideal location for Manifesta 12 to investigate some of the key changes of our time. But it is also a place where the current model of globalisation is contested with new perspectives on civic engagement. In the 1990s, the *Primavera di Palermo* social movement against the mafia helped the city emerge from decades of criminal control, with a determination to establish new forms of civic agency. Similar ambitions arise in Palermo today, as it embraces migration and proposes new models of citizenship (the ambition to abolish the residence permit) and human rights (Mayor of Palermo Leoluca Orlando's proposal to establish mobility as a human right).

Collaborating closely with Palermitan partners, Manifesta 12 is co-inhabiting Palermo as a laboratory for the challenges of our time, looking for traces of possible futures. In the context of globalisation, Manifesta 12 chooses to be radically local in engaging with the city in all of its diverse components. The Planetary Garden is hosting 3 main sections, each touching on key topics of the concept:

Garden of Flows explores toxicity, plant life and the culture of gardening in relation to the transnational commons in Orto Botanico.

Out of Control Room investigates power in today's regime of global flows.

City on Stage builds on existing opportunities in the centre and the outskirts of Palermo to further develop the existing plans that are stuck somehow and have not been fully realised. Productive collaborations can act as a catalyst and possibly extend into future and long-term initiatives in Palermo.

Teatro Garibaldi hosts a library, café and program of public events, including debates, workshops and film screenings (presentation of films shot in Palermo with introduction and/or Q&A).

Manifesta 12 is also dialoguing with the ephemeral components of Palermo's life. Honouring the city's long tradition of storytelling – or *canta storie* – through a series of new narrative productions about the city's hidden networks. Recognising Santa Rosalia procession as a territory of contemporary syncretism, dialogue and celebration. Supporting existing initiatives to provide spaces for public hospitality.

Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli is an architect and curator based in Milan. He is the founder of the interdisciplinary agency 2050+. Currently he teaches at the Royal College of Arts in London. Between 2007 and 2020 he has worked as architect and partner at OMA where his work focused on research and curation, scenography and preservation.

Andrés Jaque is an architect, writer, and curator. He is the founder of the Office for Political Innovation, a New York/Madrid-based agency working at the intersection of research, critical environmental practices and design. Andrés Jaque is the Director of Columbia University, Advanced Architectural Design Progam. He has has been appointed Chief Curator of the 13th Shanghai Biennale.

Bregtje van der Haak is a documentary filmmaker and journalist. Since 1997, she has been directing international documentaries on social change with a focus on urban life. Her documentaries have been shown on television, in film festivals and in art exhibitions around the world.

Mirjam Varadinis (CH) is a curator and writer based in Zurich, Switzerland. She is a curator for Kunsthaus Zürich, where she has curated many exhibitions and published various catalogues on contemporary art. In 2013 she curated *0 Performance – The Fragile Beauty of Crisis*, a special project for the 5th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art and in 2012 she was co-curator of TRACK, a largescale city-wide international exhibition in Ghent, Belgium.

Curating the Revolution: Meeting Points 7[1]

WHW in conversation with Omar Kholeif

Operating since 2000, the Young Arab Theatre Fund (YATF) is an organization that, despite its name, largely supports visual artists who hold a connection to the Arab world. One of YATF's most significant projects is Meeting Points – a biennial platform that roves from city to city. Historically, the event has sought to elicit dialogue around shared themes but from different contexts. It was started, according to its director Tarek Abou El Fetouh, from a desire to exchange ideas around Arab visual culture at a time when mass communication and exchange were more limited. The seventh edition was curated by the curatorial collective WHW (What, How and for Whom?). The second stop on their tour was at MuKHA in Antwerp, where the collective presented an expansive exhibition entitled, *Ten Thousand Wiles & A Hundred Thousand Tricks* – a name adopted from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The exhibition brought together new commissions, works from MuHKA's collection and a launch programme that sought to consider contemporary social and political 'change' in both Europe and the Arab world. Here, Ibraaz's Senior Editor Omar Kholeif discusses the second stop of their exhibition tour in Antwerp before Meeting Points 7 continues onto Hong Kong, Cairo, and Beirut, among other cities.

Omar Kholeif: This iteration of Meeting Points has arguably shifted its focus from the Arab World. Perhaps one can argue that this is an attempt to de-regionalize or de terrirotialize. With this in mind, can you give me a sense ofhow you might define the notion of territory?

WHW: Territory is a mental terrain that initially departs from geopolitical and geo-cultural delineations, understood as imposed and often interiorized barriers or obstacles, even traps, from which it abandons geographies and temporal linearity. It looks for nodes, or sets of problems or challenges that are in some way condensed in those barriers and that exist – or could exist – in different times and places. As such, it is definitely a very provisionary terrain, constructed so as to be useful in addressing present situations and questions that we try to look at with a particular project in mind. In the particular instance of Meeting Points, it was about the Arab world and also about the Arab world of today, in the moment after the momentum of the Arab revolutions was contained and its process presented as 'over'. It was also about how these movements of revolution and counter-revolution reverberated in other collective struggles across the world, but also through the time, recalling anti-colonial liberation struggles, ideas of socialism and just societies, and their results, victories, failures and visions.

OK: You mentioned that the research began in the context of Arab world as a kind of jumping off point to think about broader concerns and intersections in the global art scene. Can you give me a sense of how these associations developed? Was it artists leading you to other artists? How did you map out the terrain that you would explore?

WHW: It was more about broader concerns and the intersections of different protest movements that question legitimacy and try to influence the changes of the global capitalist system than about art scenes in particular. We started by looking into how political mobilizations and collective movements influenced political and social changes, how hopes were raised, optimism sustained, betrayals and frustrations negotiated, and how lives of people operating within the art world were affected. By trying to understand the life cycles of the Arab revolutions, we also looked into emancipative protest movements that sprung up across the world as a reaction to how the financial crisis was handled, and thought about what we could learn by looking at them now, a few short years after, when such movements exhausted as the capitalist crisis was normalized.We tried to understand those cycles from a perspective that considers the trajectories of the twentieth century's great revolutions, always keeping in mind the liberation struggles against the colonial powers and postcolonial normalization. This approach very much delineated terrain that we wanted to explore, but at the same time our work is always governed by an attempt to situate and understand our own experiences, both collective and individual, of the collapse of

socialism, of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, of war and postwar normalization in the 1990s, and the simplified interpretation of these events that reflected post-'89 western ideological hegemony. With this in mind, we were receptive and respective to a kind of resistance in these constellations in terms of what is expected from artists; what they are expected to expose and explain, for instance, as well as to the time lag necessary to artistically deal with experiences of great political drama. We tried to make a puzzle of associations and clues that leave some things blank and unspoken, or point to them in an oblique way, hoping that the exhibition as a whole would convey a sense of urgency, compassion, solidarity and a need to persist and resist forces trying to shut down multiple voices of dissent.

OK: Meeting Points is unique. It is not really a biennial but a platform or 'manifestation' as you and Tarek Abou El Fetouh, its director, have both called it. Obviously, the forms the event takes in each location changes.It roves and roams across multiple cities. Thinking about this, I am curious about how you negotiate the concerns of different sites and how you consider the works will speak to audiences in different contexts.

WHW: This approach has to do with what is possible in certain places, not only in terms of material conditions and realization where of course there are huge discrepancies, but also in terms of urgencies and agendas of certain places, and political pressures and needs. We opened Meeting Points in Zagreb, in Gallery Nova, a small non-profit space that we have been running since 2003, with a modest exhibition of seven women artists and collectives: Filipa César, Iman Issa, Sanja Iveković, Rajkamal Kahlon, *Kayfata*, Maha Maamoun and Jumana Manna, in which the feminist agenda, in multiple ways, underlined the project as the whole, though it was not explicitly feminist. Rather, we looked into the question of representation, be it national, ethnic, or racial, and took gender representation as something that cuts through these concerns and that framed the perspective the exhibition tried to offer. Next to this, we also organized a panel discussion, *Sketches for New Feminist Activism,* with local participants, where feminist movements in post- socialist contexts were discussed. Sanja Iveković, an artist who, since the 1970s, has explored and politicized regimes of representations and ideological positions underlying them from the perspective of feminist critique, presented a performance with the title *Why an Artist Cannot Represent a Nation*.

Installation view, *Meeting Points 7*, 2013-2014. Courtesy of MuKHA.

In this particular constellation of artists, theorists and activists, artworks, discussions, talks and performances, what was addressed was the local context in which culture is still understood as the realm of identity representation, especially national identity, and in which feminism, long reduced to identity politics, in the practice of younger generations powerfully reaches out to emancipatory activist movements that put class struggle at the core of its praxis. We understood the project as addressing local context by not delivering on what was expected. Feminism was not **proposed** as something concerning the plight of women in the Arab world, but as something central to understanding a reconfigured class struggle within geo-cultural power relations.

For the Antwerp, Belgium, edition of Meeting Points in 2013, we were of course more interested in the postcolonial context. Thinking about Belgium's involvement in the Congo played a huge role, but we also thought of Antwerp as one of the historical cradles of capitalism, whose fate was closely linked to the religious wars in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is also a city with a tradition of labour organization and labour struggles. With these general thoughts in the background, we developed the exhibition for the MuHKA, a museum inscribed in Antwerp'stourist itinerary, like its cathedral, the Rubenshuis and the Fashion Museum. As such, the exhibition considered the city's new economy in which culture plays a huge role. In this broader context, we found it important to undermine the expectations of a timely and polite presentation of artists from the Arab world, and rather, we worked on the themes, questions, proposals, observations, obsessions or concerns addressed through their works, reflected and worked out by artists from other places and other generations. This approach was also accentuated by our decision to include works from

Installation view, *Meeting Points 7*, 2013-2014. Courtesy of MuKHA.

Installation view, *Meeting Points 7*, 2013-2014. Courtesy of MuKHA.

the MuHKA (Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp) collection, which grew parallel to the so-called internationalization of the art world, with all the contradictions entailed in this process,

where power relations are certainly smoothed over and political correctness is a norm, but they are there nevertheless. General concerns delineated from these projects in Zagreb and Antwerp will be retained for other cities, with shifts more towards, for example, a closer look into The Arab Uprisings in Moscow, or the role of middle class in Hong Kong. In 1935, in his famous text *Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth,* Bertolt Brecht wrote that many things that could not be said about Germany in Germany could be said about Austria. This is a strategy we adopted in many of our previous projects, and we will try to pursue it for the future stations of Meeting Points.

OK: The Meeting Points exhibition at MuKHA, *Ten Thousand Whiles and a Hundred Thousand Tricks* (2013) evokes Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The exhibition considers the postcolonial body as part of its centre and it seems to develop a thesis about the state of things, here and now. Here, we have a world agitated by the rush of anguish and enthusiasm, the dissidence associated with uprising and the potential for imagination. This is obviously a challenging position to speak to or from; almost an impossible one. What were your motivations? You said you wanted to make a 'statement' – what is this statement and how do you want the public to respond to it?

WHW: There is no predetermined response from the public we want to instigate. We simply want to offer the clues for the audience to make their own conclusions. And as the project it is very much about the notion of revolution and how to think about revolutions historically and politically, from their life cycles to the effects they have on the lives of people actively involved or exposed to them, we really did not try to elicit one definitive response. But the statement that we are putting forward is exactly the need to think about the revolutions, not to interpret them, but to understand them, to know them. This certainly means to look beyond any romantic idea of elevated moments of collective movements, as revolutions are commonly perceived in post '68 popular imagination, but also to resist conservative impulses disguised as a common sense interested only in keeping changes at bay. In Antwerp, we tried to make an exhibition that affects bodies through images but also sounds; an exhibition that we hope functions on several layers. The aim was to enable viewers to delve deeper into the works (of which many are films, and as such durational experiences) if they so choose, to walk through images and sounds so as to collect fleeting impressions that hopefully still compose a meaningful whole. The intention was not to offer answers or prescriptions, but invoke feelings that affect people differently. (And feelings are facts, as Raymond Williams argued).

OK: It is difficult for me to imagine how the curatorial process develops from this standpoint. Is it ongoing? Is the project still forming for the various iterations of the project?

WHW: Yes, it is ongoing, and it keeps changing in relation to shifting circumstances in the cities where it will take place. Partners for each city are decided, but in some cases we are still looking for venues and are also looking for people to work more closely with on different aspects of the project. We are still in the process of researching: at the moment we are planning

Installation view, *Meeting Points 7*, 2013-2014. Courtesy of MuKHA.

Installation view, *Meeting Points 7*, 2013-2014. Courtesy of MuKHA.

a trip to Latin America, with the hope of bringing these experiences, and of course artists, into the project. Here, we are thinking about the the kind of social changes towards more just societies taking place there, which from our European perspective, certainly looks optimistic, and could be put into fruitful dialogue with the constellation we started in Zagreb and Antwerp. Also in a broader sense, we don't want to close the process and just tour the exhibition in different cities, but also look for ways to respond to local situations and how to keep the process open.

OK: You've mentioned that this project developed from your research for the 11th Istanbul Biennial, which you curated according to a quote from Brecht that essentially asks what keeps mankind alive**.** How has this developed theoretically in Meeting Points? Are you more hopeful or is the puzzle even more complicated now in terms of its construction?

WHW: Brecht's approach to art and its relation to politics informed our work before we evoked him as the starting point for the 11th Istanbul Biennial, and it stayed with us. What at the moment seems to be the most important for us is Brecht's pedagogy, directed not only to viewers, but also to participants in the process, and of course his dialectic that governed his artistic production as learning by teaching and teaching by learning. Today, the puzzle indeed seems to be even more complicated. The contradictions of capitalism obviously have not resulted in capitalism's collapse from its own top-heaviness, but on the contrary, in a kind of consolidation of the capitalist mode of production. This situation of consolidated capitalism asks for an effort to sustain that old Gramscian adage about the pessimism of reason and the optimism of will.

OK: Can you talk me through which artists you decided to commission to make new works and why?

WHW: We primarily tried to provide new productions for the artists from the Arab world, since part of the mission of Meeting Points is to foster artistic production in the region. We felt it was important to keep a modest counter-balance to the production coming from the western world and increasingly from the Gulf States. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, DAAR, Marwa Arsanios, Maha Maamoun, *Kayfata* and Haytham El-Wardany were invited to develop new works or reassess existing works. We also invited some other artists, whose works we thought add an important dimension to the overall ambition of the exhibition in Antwerp and to the project as a whole. For example, Tom Nicholson, an Australian artist who, together with Andrew Byrne, developed a sound piece as a companion to his work *Comparative Monument (Palestine)* that deals with monuments to Australian soldiers fallen in Palestine in WW1, which he first showed in *The Jerusalem Show* in Palestine in 2012.

The new commissions in Antwerp often focus on the notion of 'listening' – something that is elaborated in the audio essay *Language Gulf In the Shouting Valley* by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, which looks into the politics of language and voice in the specific conditions of the Druze community living between Palestine, Israel and Syria, or in Maha Maamoun's explorations of the act of listening and the status of the listener in her new video piece *Shooting Stars Remind Me of Eavesdroppers*. For us, the sound piece by Nicholson and Byrne also digs deeper into these ideas. Obviously, there was not one principle that governed our choices, but many elements came together in answering the 'what, how and for whom', which is of course the title our collective and what motivates everything we do.

Omar Kholeif is Senior Editor of *Ibraaz.* He is an Egyptian-born, UK curator, writer and editor. Most recently, he was Curator at FACT, Liverpool, the UK's national centre for film and new media, and carries on as senior curatorial associate. He is also a Visiting Curator at Cornerhouse, Manchester, Curator at the Arab British Centre, London and founding Director of the UK's Arab Film Festival – a touring programme, which occurs annually. He is a Curator for the Abandon Normal Devices Festival, formerly a Curator for the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, Impakt Festival in the Netherlands, and Werkleitz Festival, among others. Kholeif has curated projects and events, which have occurred at the Whitechapel Gallery, London; ICA, London; The International Film Festival Rotterdam; 'Beirut' in Cairo, Rhizome, New York, and Art Dubai, to name but a few.
He is an alumnus of the PhD in Practice in Curating programme, Zurich University of the Arts, University of Reading.

Interview with Vasif Kortun and Charles Esche
Resmi Görüş

Question: Charles, you recently stated in Frieze that the most interesting thing about the present boost of new "non-western" biennials, is the fact that the latest ones (Kwangju, Havana, Tirana, Johannesburg) present a new tendency: a relative distance from a purely commercial system and an engagament with local political conditions. Is that what you both strive for in the Istanbul Biennial too? How is this put into practice?

Charles Esche: I was describing a condition that can be used by artists and curators to create a different space for the work to be seen. In general, I am not sure we want or can really imagine to have a full distance from a 'purely commercial system' in the sense that commerce makes things possible that would not be otherwise. Anyway, Istanbul is more integrated than Tirana. Our project is more to emphasise the specific and singular within a work of art by relating it to the time and place where the work is done. In that sense, some of the work in Istanbul will not be so portable and easily consumed because it emerges following a residency and therefore out of a specific set of conditions. Those conditions are not only geographic but also about personal identity and economic possibility. What we have tried to do is to frame these conditions in a certain way and then support the response of the artists in whichever direction they went. What comes out may well be sellable and we have nothing against that. It's just not very interesting for us, except if it brings money into the biennial itself.

Q: What are the main characteristics of this biennial?

CE/VK: Modesty, access, difference and ingenuity. The aim is to form a relationship between the Biennial as a whole and as a composition of many works, people, events and perspectives with its lived context and audience of Istanbul. The city should itself be a part of the experience of the biennial in the sense that around half the works are made here and will reference the surrounding environment in different ways. The other half will reference other sites and places in the world, mostly from the regions around Istanbul, from the Balkans to Central Asia and the Middle East.

Q: Much emphasis is given to the fact that you don´t want to use monumental historical places as exhibion site, but sites that have a more common reference to the everyday and are linked more directly to the urban, economic reality of the city. Next to that you both stated explicitly that in this biennial you prefer to work with site-specific commisions, residencies and educational models, i.e. more intimate forms of exchange which react on the particularities of a place. Is this working model them only solution to meet the demands of being more concerned with a local historical and political context?

CE/VK: There is no solution in art, we are more interested in a proposal for the very specific situation of Istanbul at this time of the radical transformation of the city. In part the reason to disappear the exhibition into the city fabric came as a result of the transformation where spaces of scale that we first selected were absorbed into privatization and such. We realligned the exhibition to slow the speed of the exhibition in relation to the speed of the city, connecting the various sites with passages through the city itself. We also wanted to locate the project outside pure event culture, hoping that some of the initiatives will have longer term resonance. The exhibition presents a departure from its predecessors because it is not indexed to the previous models. For instance, it was important for us to avoid a touristic reading of the city and its relation to contemporary art by avoiding the old Byzantine and Ottoman sites. Istanbul is interesting in that it is both an extremely old European imperial capital and a city that has experienced growth rates in the last 50 years that are unimaginable in the rest of Europe.

Q: You started with selecting artist from the Istanbul area and then worked outwards to Asia, Europe and beyond. Could you explain the mutual relations between artists in your selection? Where there specific selection criteria involved?

CE/VK: The exhibition inevitably builds up along a process of research that shapes itself as scattered parts

of a puzzle that comes together as a biennial. It is not only about geography but about building a specific and intimate relation to the city, for the residency artists at first and hopefully for viewers afterwards. The second element of the biennial, the 'Not-Istanbul' if you like, are artists whose work reflects a particular and different urban or even rural context, to show what is absent in Istanbul as well as reveal something of what is there by default. The relations between artists come together around these twin poles of Istanbul Not Istanbul, to misquote Rene Daniels but will remain individual resonses. Some simple criteria for us were not to have long videos to try and prevent exhibition fatigue, and largely working with artists with whom we had a relationship, rather than try to grab celebrities or create new stars.

Q: How do the artists that you both invited react to the local conditions of Istanbul with their projects? Can you tell allready something about some core projections which you regard as most important in the process of the exhibition taking its form?

CE/VK: A number of artists were invited following their own longstanding connections with the city through residency experiences, deep personal interest and research. For example Karl-Heinz Klopf has been visiting Istanbul on and off for years and his extremely site specific proposal reflects this extended period of observation. During the Biennial a number of spotlights will fall on specifically selected broken, uneven, misleading and adapted steps in the hilly area leading from the Bosphorus water-side to Istiklal Caddesi. Under the spots invited street musicians, shoe cleaning boys and street sellers will continue their daytime activities after dark.

Other artists that have spent time in Istanbul include Wael Shawky, Phil Collins, Solmaz Shahbazi and Erik Gongrich, all of whom are making new workbased on their individual experiences. Someone even more familiar with the city, Serkan Ozkaya will reflect on the lack of a continuous art structure in Istanbul that has left its artists and art lovers to rely on reproductions as their only source material. His work,a double height Statue of David painted in gold, will stand on a roundabout in Beyoglu a marker of his own desire to see this sculpture in the flesh and to make it available to others.

An equal proportion of artists have been invited to present work that deals with very different urban and rural situations. Together these two approaches will create a dialectic from which the reality of Istanbul as a lived experience will emerge.

Q: This is the first time the Istanbul Biennial is being organized under the direction of two artistic directors, which by accident corresponds with the dual direction of the Venice Biennial by Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez. They each made separate exhibitions, is this going to be the case too at the Istanbul Biennial? Or to put it in other words, how is your collaboration being put into practice? Do you have different responsibilities?

CE/VK: We worked with the assistant curators Esra Sarigedik and November Paynter, in an organic manner, and the hierarchies dissolved along the way. The two of us have known each other for longer than the biennial and we share certain interests and confidences that would probably be essential to working like this. It's important to remember that the selection process is but only one of the many aspects of organising the exhibition. We test each other's decisions, choices and preferences at all stages and seek to strengthen them through discussion. Any collective action of course implies degree of compromise but the project itself is not compromised because there are some fundamental agreements. Ours was not a conflictual or selfish process, or a territorial one. That one of us is positioned in Istanbul helps a lot.

http://vasif-kortun-eng.blogspot.com/2005/10/interview-with-vasif-kortun-abd-charles.html

Chronosites
Henk Slager

1. Today's interest in biennials seems to be particularly focused on manifestations in imagination-triggering metropolitan environments such as Berlin, Shanghai, São Paulo, and Dakar. That does not mean, though, that contributions to the artistic discourse provided by perennials on locations elsewhere on the world map would be less important or even irrelevant. Quite the reverse, I would like to claim: events and manifestations in a geographically far-off corner of the world seem to create a critical distance, enabling artistic reflection to be more authentic and palpable. Outside the blazing spotlights of the international art scene, a peripheral biennial or triennial is able to make sharp and sometimes even risky choices, because of which radical and complex perspectives can be articulated in a subtle and intellectual way. Precisely these biennials provide a cumulative counterpoint to the Venice Biennale's universal template for the biennial as form and medium. They can therefore be seen as a potential space for the generation of a counter-discourse against the system of presumptive universality, which is globalized, but above all hegemonized. Because of this, these platforms make a structural contribution to the deconstruction of the contemporary visual arts exhibitionary complex: an apparatus that understands biennials as signs of the event-based nature of the art world with a focus on the temporary and occasional. A similar, and profoundly striking, description can be found in Okwui Enwezor's seminal essay "Mega-Exhibitions: The Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form" (1): such non-centric biennials contrast the totalizing logic of spectacular capitalism with the potential of "multitude" as a resistance force.

2. Another problem many mega-biennials currently struggle with is the requirement for productive and interesting collaborations involving local partners and institutions. For the peripherally located biennials and their often natural form of being embedded in regional infrastructures, such an issue is entirely out of order. Just because of that embedded quality, small-scale biennials will meet the axiom once articulated by René Block: "Rather than a perfect exhibition, a biennial should become a workshop for contemporary art, something that could provide an opportunity for encounters between local and international artists that would encourage work and exchange. Beyond a spectacular, large-scale, international exhibition festival, making themselves the producers, educators, and hosts of discursive programs." (2) And with that, the question, "To Biennial or not To Biennial," which was asked ten years ago by the preliminary Bergen Assembly (3), should be strategically reformulated as "What a Biennial yet can Be?" This question can be understood both institutionally and speculatively. How can we prevent, after a period of a "Biennial Decade" (4) where the biennial was decisive in the presentation and reception of contemporary art, that these experimental formats and platforms are being absorbed back into a traditional museum show and thus become part of the general exhibitionary complex. Such institutionalization means that biennials become less and less able to engage with the challenges thrown up by the present and emerging realities. Thus, a more speculative dimension emerges: How can a biennial contribute to the political imaginary? How and in what format can a biennial contribute to articulating the following three questions: what is possible and impossible, visible and invisible, to be done and not to be done?

Presentation Sara Sejin Chang (Sara van der Heide), Contour Biennale, 2019.

3. The model proposed by René Block seems to be based on the experimental practice introduced in Havana in the 1980s: making Cuba the fourth location in the world to host a biennial. It was a biennial that no longer focused on the Eurocentric model of the Venice Biennale, but which set itself another programmatic goal: to develop a different mode of exchange, namely to present the Global South. Hence, a discourse was developed that gave the first impetus to a postcolonial consciousness: the south as a zone of agency and creation that did not fit in the linear perspective of art historical thinking. Moreover, it was no longer thought in the centrist terms of a main exhibition. An organic whole of shows, events, meetings, workshops, panel discussions, publications, and outreach programs was placed opposite the provincialism of the center. By taking what was once just an exhibition, and unraveling this format into an array of various subexhibitions, venues, and event formats, a biennial model was created that is still distinctive of today's thinking about biennials.

The focal point of the first editions of the Havana Biennale was not placed on the spectacle as such, but rather on investigative and discursive interests. For example, the Biennale introduced a range of urgent issues and vocabularies at an early stage: nomadism, displacement, marginalization, cultural hybridization, ecology, and the periphery of postmodernity. And with that, the Havana Biennale was the beginning of what would later be described as the discursive turn in curating: a decisive step towards conceiving biennials as discursive environments, where the display of artworks is part of a much broader project of research and knowledge production.

4. Could a contemporary biennial form be regenerated to capture the innovative energy and the inspiring impact that it had throughout the world during the 1990s, or will our understanding of biennials drift into the repetititions of institutionalization, the taming of difference, and the merge with other art world structures? To answer that question it is necessary to invent a different, more topical exhibitionary structure, one that manifests more acutely the antinomies and predicaments of our present situation: its multiplicity, its layered contemporalities, and its proliferation of differences. The most important and most urgent challenge is: How could a biennial

Metahaven, *What is Art,* 7th Bucharest Biennale, 2016

question the hegemonic world system that globalization has created and, as Steven Madoff has argued (5), contrast this with new forms of contemplation? How could a biennial put an end to the instrumentalizing culture of festivalism and spectacularization and, despite today's continuous acceleration (a direct consequence of the quantitative overload that characterizes the current mega-exhibitions), demand specific attention for slowing down and meaningful engagements?

In the recent Contour Biennale – *Coltan as Cotton* (2019) (6), a curatorial strategy was developed that articulates both questions. Concentrating on three moments of three days spread over a year (containing an intensive program of screenings, installations, presentations, workshops, performances, reading groups, and discussions) seems to enable a different awareness of duration, sustainability, and discursivity. In fact, the Contour Biennale has shown that a peripheral biennial has the potential power to be a committed meeting point for experimentation, philosophical deliberation, and other modes of imagination. Moreover, it emphasized once again that such biennials as critical sites for thinking and production mainly engage in exhibiting our contemporaneity, whereby they will also invite us to think about a different understanding and perception of time.

5. In light of the topical question about the consciousness of time—and likewise how time appears to be a politicized concept—we currently see a deliberate refusal or disclosure of time in many committed exhibition practices, for example, by pointing out that exhibition is a verb. Thus, opposition seems to be raised against a narrowed concept of time: a regulated time, a synchronized time, an allegedly objective physical clock time, which ultimately equates to a global measurement that temporalizes everything else, and denies any form of coevalness: any form of anachronism is excluded for the sake of producing history and acceleration. Such a reducing strategy—today referred to as "chronopolitics" (7)—therefore asks for critical, alternative approaches, like being open to different temporal imaginaries and allochronisms. We will have to free ourselves from the yoke of abstract time, and once again draw attention to liveable time: the time in which we still can intervene and shape the condition of human life. It currently seems that liveable time is exhausted, especially now that the perspective and promise of the future has decreased. What remains is the linear perspective of an irreversible destruction. (8)

However, what we know for sure is that there still is an understanding of limits—limits of dignity, limits of the intolerable, and the limits that we can discern and therefore indicate—and that here still lies our fundamental critical capacity: the art of making the limits apparent and of drawing from the moral, aesthetic, and political consequences of this possibility. And with that, a clear assignment arises for experimental biennials to develop investigative display systems and discursive formats that stimulate the generation of new values from a critical perception of the intolerable. (9)

6. An illustrative example of such a think-tank-type, discourse production-oriented biennial can be encountered in the Bucharest Biennale—a medium-sized biennial on various locations and art spaces in town and since its erection engaging in strategic cooperation with local art partners. (10) This biennial is characterized by an incessant interest in artistic thinking processes, by the capacity to articulate that form of thinking in a multiplicity of modes and models, and most of all by the quest for display possibilities to address the other. Departing from such a focus on various forms of differential thought, the recent editions of the Bucharest Biennale have incorporated distinct and topical visions on the situation of the political, i.e., a recognition that politics cannot fully account for the conditions we live in; rather it requires a far broader range of modes and models allowing us to account for their effects at various registers.

For example, the 2012 edition—*Tactics for the Here and Now*—posited issues that have not lost any of their relevance in the current research-based discussion: the presentation of works of art that express a kind of resistance to both the speed and the changing nature of things, the reworking of histories, and the production of a different kind of knowledge through a consciously constructed perspective on the contemporary: a perspective that curator Anne Barlow would describe as developing imaginative spaces. Similar perspectives on new modes of political imaginaries would follow in the subsequent editions. In the 2014 edition—*Apprehension*—the question was directed to fear as an epistemic method that can be used to avoid governance. In 2016—*What are we building down there?*—the situation of public space was central: the search for different modes of engaged address and publicness in a post-socialist city that goes through processes of privatization. Finally, in 2018, *Edit Your Future* approached a renewed interpretation of speculation: analyzing the current social, political, and economic imaginaries, and providing a platform for future scenarios.

7. In this method of working, the Bucharest Biennale provides—in spite of or perhaps thanks to its peripheral position—a significant contribution to the topical biennial discourse. It demonstrates that it is possible to think a biennial beyond the capitalist logic of the spectacle by understanding a biennial as an evolving, more inclusive event program focused on (thinking) processes and new forms of engagement and display. The ambition of the 2020 edition was to articulate this curatorial logic even more explicitly. The starting point of its narrative was the topic of how the hegemony of the current discourse on research could have had such a devastating effect on the critical potential of contemporary art. After all, doesn't speaking in terms of knowledge production and methodology ultimately lead to academization and stereotyping? And doesn't such a method of presenting fit seamlessly into the calculating frame of thinking a globalizing worldview?

These questions indicate that we urgently need to say farewell to models based on economic primacy. According to the curatorial narrative of the 9th Bucharest Biennale—*Farewell to Research*—artistic research must be conceived as a complexity of

Tiong Ang & Company. *The 2nd Hands.* A project in process for the 9th Bucharest Biennale, 2020

creative practices, artistic thought processes, and curatorial strategies. Because of the required concentration and contemplation, this edition of the biennale opted for different forms of perception of time and attention: performative conferences, unfolding research exhibitions (where production and dissemination coincide), research seminars, and research screenings.

8. However, the current Covid-19 crisis has also direct consequences for the overall logistics, i.e., the display format of the 9th Bucharest Biennale will have to be rethought and restructured. Therefore, we will look for sustainable online options and publication platforms. Moreover, further consideration will have to be given to what such an extremity means for—the future of—exhibitionary forms as biennials. It is, of course, clear that today's global pandemic is setting all things on edge. Right now, we can only create a platform for topical discussions and speculations about transformations of the status quo and the "not yet known" horizon of the future.

Notes

1 Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," 2004 (Reprinted in *The Biennial Reader*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 426-445.
2 René Block, *Foreword*, Catalogue 8th Sydney Biennale, 1990.
3 Prior to the first Bergen Assembly 2012, an international conference took place in 2009 asking the following question: *How to Biennial*? This led to the following outline: "Bergen Assembly has the ambition of working prognostically, allowing newly emerging initiatives to be investigated in light of their future potential."
4 Ten years ago, the 4th Bucharest Biennale (*Handlung. On Producing Possibilities*, 2010), organized, also in collaboration with the Zurich University of the Arts, the symposium: *The Biennial Principle*, which contains various elements that highlight the globalizing debate of the past biennial decade.
5 Steven Madoff, ed., *What about Activism?* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019).
6 9th Contour Biennale, curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Mechelen, January 11-October 20, 2019.

7 Cf. Renate Lorenz, ed., *Now, Now, Now: Chronopolitics, Art & Research* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).
8 Marina Garcés, "Conditio Posthuma," Barcelona, 2017.
9 For example, Brian Massumi's *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
10 More information about the previous editions can be found on the Biennial Foundation website: www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/bucharest-biennale/.

As Professor of Artistic Research (Finnish Academy of Fine Art 2010-2015) and as Dean of MaHKU Utrecht, **Henk Slager** has made significant contributions to the debate on the role of research in visual art. In 2004, Henk Slager – together with Jan Kaila and Gertrud Sandqvist – initiated the European Artistic Research Network (EARN), a network that investigates the impacts of artistic research on current art education through symposia, expert meetings, and presentations. Departing from a similar focus on research, he has also (co-) produced various curatorial projects, a.o. *Flash Cube* (Leeum, Seoul, 2007), *Translocalmotion* (7th Shanghai Biennale 2008), *Nameless Science* (Apex Art, New York, 2009), *As the Academy Turns* (Collaborative project Manifesta, 2010), *Any-Medium Whatever* (Georgian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2011), *TAR – Temporary Autonomous Research* (Amsterdam Pavilion, Shanghai Biennale 2012), *Doing Research* (dOCUMENTA 13, 2012), *Offside Effect* (1st Tbilisi Triennial, 2012), *Joyful Wisdom* (Parallel Project, Istanbul Biennial, 2013), *Modernity 3.0* (80 WSE Gallery NYU New York, 2014), *Aesthetic Jam* (Parallel Project Taipei Biennial) and *Experimentality* (1st Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2015), Asia Time (5th Guanzhou Triennial 2015-16), *To Seminar* (BAK, Utrecht, 2017), *The Utopia of Access* (2nd Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2017), *Freedom, What was that all about?* (7th Kuandu Biennale, Taipei 2018), *Research Ecologies* (3rd Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2019), and 9th Bucharest Biennale (2020). He recently published *The Pleasure of Research* (an overview of educational and curatorial research projects 2007-2014), Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2015.

Edit Your Future: Perspectives on Biennials as Civil Society Initiatives

Răzvan Ion

The morality of the citizen resides in the awareness that our collective security is more important than any survival whatsoever. If morality would be considered a mere individual pleasure then survival becomes questionable indeed. A society of spectators without any moral feedback is a frozen society devoided of any chance to progress further. The riot, the screaming voice, with or without immediate responses of authorities is necessary in the process of building up a democracy, a powerful community supported by the practice of solidarity. Similarly, what would the world we are living in be without academic frictions at a theoretical level because of different antagonistic conceptions of concepts?

Biennales should be seen as independent civil society initiatives, consciously distanced from the calculating powers of the global art scene. Many biennials have been realized through ongoing conflicts and crises that produced conceptual, visual, and functional knowledge providing us with many viewpoints in our quest for evocative and effectual biennales in any part of the world.

When deciding to make a biennale in the age of Post-truth – which is now the popular term for the description of the global crisis – there is no doubt that artists and curators believe that contemporary art productions and exhibition are the most crucial means of dealing with sociopolitical-cultural problems and concerns, and the most challenging way of communicating with the society of spectacle.

In the age of Post-truth, it is believed that truth is not only fabricated or manipulated, but also of minor importance. The purpose of political power and its networks seems to have become to create a untruthful view of the world, without the necessity to convince elites or voters, but rather to blur judgments, fortify prejudices, and provoke emotions. The news sources manipulated by political powers also create a confusing world of information where deceptions, false stories and gossip circulate with disturbing speed. Lies shared online within a network easily transform into truth manifestations. Consequently, as biennale curators or organizers we believe that contemporary art works, with their truth-seeking, inquisitive, cutting-edge quality have the power to enter into this Post-truth turnmoil without any reservation and spoil the game.

For similar reasons, cities rather than capitals and megalopolis had the ambition of making biennales during the two recent decades. Setting aside the economic-touristic benefits, we should concentrate on the provocative meaning of "exhibition" i.e. submitting critical thinking through art works for inspection or examination by the public; putting a verbal, visual, or tangible production on the scene; challenging a confrontation with public opinion, and creating a complex agora to provoke the participation of the passive public into the debate. Exhibitions are willingly exposed to the gaze of the public and to the manipulating powers of the political or social order.

If art is the answer, the question is how capitalism can be made more beautiful. Yet, modern art is not just about beauty. It is also about function. What is the function of art in disastrous capitalism? Contemporary art feeds on the crumbs of the massive wealth redistribution "on a large scale from the poor to the wealthy, made through an ongoing downward battle between the classes" (David Harvey). The production of traditional art could serve as a model for the nouveau riche, a model designed by privatization, expropriation, and speculation. For sure there is exploitation within the art system, there are exploited workers (artists) as well. However, through its institutions, political art can focus on a new model of social order, since it has already generated an exploited and practised model (Boris Groys). As Hannah Arendt noted, we need not create a new class, but rather reject all classes. We should understand the artistic space as a political one instead of representing political situations from other areas. Art is not detached from politics; its politics reside in its production, its distribution, and its perception. If we consider this a fact, perhaps we will surpass the flatness

of the representation policy and launch a new kind of policy that is already there, right in front of our eyes, ready to be embraced.

An exhibition, being online, VR or augumented reality, is also a power in itself. It is this seduction of the power-game that makes biennales so desirable. The role of the artist and the curator in a biennale at a time of social polarization, political upheaval, ecological catastrophe and all kinds of pressure is to respond by introducing, through the selected artworks, multifarious ways able to provoke new possibilities of critical thinking.

I believe that the power of the exhibition is located in the collaborative and collective attitude and supervision of artists, curators and organizers, even when under tense working conditions there can be plausible disputes or conflicts between them. If the people are expecting to restore, heal and re-balance their appreciation, sensibility and knowledge through artworks, the updated collective and collaborative planning, the conceptual, sensible and functional unity of a biennale guarantees the longstanding influence of the exhibition into the subconscious of the people.

The transition of institutional critics from the academic environment to autonomous structures is more than welcome for the conversion that already began in critical artistic communication. There we find the necessary resources to overcome the moment of contemplating the situation, the possibility to construct situations and for functional public structures to bring their own critical input into play, which can function as an alternative institution for the classic forms of regulation. We have the resources to contemplate our future; we live in a time where the artistic act can legitimize best the kind of positioning a holistic, hegemonic entity needs.

When we acknowledge that a revolution is not a form of resistance, but rather a catalyst in the social process, then innocent victims will no longer be necessary, and neither will be collateral damage. As the hegemony assimilates all our means of expression, we could identify in its structure the possibility to relocate the multi-culturalism of governmental politics into civic communication, diverging the false globalisation focused on market economy and the generation of the virtual policentralised capital into a globalization of critical communication beneficial to all micro-societies.

The implications of art are unfathomable indeed and, up to a certain extent, art can be safeguarded in terms of other values, such as its utility, its sovereignty, its aesthetic, and its message. However, when art itself would conflict with such values, some of the most shattering questions will emerge.

What do we need today? A basic-state? A state-of-equalities? A post-state? How does the role and methodology of art intercede? Could art be a tool for struggle, progress, and debate?

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East Europe Biennial Alliance
Vasyl Cherepanyn

The newly established East Europe Biennial Alliance is comprised of Biennale Matter of Art in Prague, Biennale Warszawa, Kyiv Biennial, and OFF-Biennale Budapest. As contemporary biennials have become an important vehicle placing art in new contexts and reaching new audiences, the Alliance is designed to enhance the role of biennials in shaping new forms of international solidarity, expanding socio-political imagination, and developing alternative cultural solutions. Through connecting aesthetics and politics in a partisan manner, the Biennial Alliance aims at proposing a different narrative of the East European region and redefining the way cultural institutions collaborate.

The creation of such an international inter-biennial Alliance sets an important institutional precedent as a contraposition in the realm of culture to the ideological trends that define, in particular, the political conjuncture of Europe's East. Over the last decade, this region has become a battleground for proxy wars and an authoritarian avant-garde championing right-wing populism as a general upcoming prospect. In the political context characterized by growing nationalistic tendencies, hardening of borders, narrowed public space, and institutional weakness, the conglomerate of biennial organizations presents the generative power of a self-critical institution that enacts the biennial format as an artistic tool in the political framework.

East European biennials have emerged as a new phenomenon related to the biennalization of contemporary art. At the same time, they differ from the established biennials in Western Europe, in the U.S., or in Asia. They operate under precarious conditions with limited possibilities, oftentimes without city or state support, though speaking explicitly on the political situation in which they find themselves. They are grassroots endeavors conducted by local collectives with curatorial strategies deeply grounded in the current socio-political realm. The Biennial Alliance supports each other's curatorial work and exchange through sharing experience and know-how related to ways of communication with city/state representatives, relationship with the audience, and strategies to reach it through socially critical and committed projects as well as experience with art projects in public space.

The Alliance is the world's first network of its kind that brings together biennials to develop a shared vision and regional collaboration producing cross-border meetings, public events, and working on the common agenda for upcoming years. It attempts to rethink the biennial format as a curatorial platform that works with contemporary art practitioners from around the world through translating the political constellations and institutional practices of the new biennials into its foundations. The Alliance's program will be conceived and co-produced by the respective biennial institutions. The general administration, communications, and curating will be carried out on a joint basis by the inter-biennial organization. Possible expanding of the organization's membership through including other biennials in the region as well as similar cultural initiatives presupposes, in particular, the conception of a migrating transregional meta-biennial based on the Alliance's structure and held in different cities.

The East Europe Biennial Alliance in its activities complies with the vision of politics, society, and culture beyond the nation-state. Through a number of artistic events, exhibitions, public programs, and the creation of a long-term, permanent collaboration mechanism, the Alliance attempts to discover the potential of cities in creating non-authoritarian cultural policies and finding ways to oppose the visions of culture based on a narrowly understood national identity. Preparing conditions and establishing infrastructure for such international cooperation, solidarity, and inter-metropolitan friendship is of crucial political importance today.

Further development of the East Europe Biennial Alliance will help structure a platform for cultural collaboration, producing common practices and discourse, providing multilateral activity in the region and beyond, and bringing urgent topics from single agency to the international level. The creation of translocal knowledge within the Alliance through interconnecting the experiences and prospects of East Europe after the disillusionment of neoliberal transformation would contribute to imagining an alternative European project for the future.

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We're Off
Ksenija Orelj

The 3rd Industrial Art Biennial (IAB),[1] with more than forty artworks created by Croatian and foreign artists, was supposed to occupy galleries and public spaces in Istria, Raša, Labin, Pula, Rijeka, and Opatija, titled after the well-known Velvet Underground's song "Ride into the Sun": "Looking for another place / Someone else to be / Looking for another chance / To ride into the sun…." And while it is still uncertain what will happen to the Biennial as a whole, the Rijeka episode, which should have taken place at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, is now just an imaginary exhibition. One among many art projects abandoned in the ongoing recession, amidst the layoffs and terminations of service contracts. Culture is bound to go down, as the title of the Rijeka episode of IAB *We're Off* seems to suggest. From the standpoint of artists as the main victims of precarious work, the MMSU episode wanted to thematize the crisis aspects of labor system, only to also be washed away by the same crisis. With a combination of older works and works commissioned for this event, it was meant to serve as an alternative guide through the unknown roads of working practices: in what ways does work hurt us? And, likewise, how can we enjoy the work?

This exhibition, which encompassed the works of seventeen artists, wanted to explore the in-between zone of work and refusal to work. More precisely, in an attempt to contradict the contemporary pressures of hyperproduction, it sought to present different visions of work and pastime, both of which favor different forms of inaction. These works therefore symbolize an act of rebellion against the crazy demands of the competitive work culture: they seem to negate the artistic work that focuses on aestheticized artefacts and a constant accumulation of art products, but they also reverse the work-related processes. Created from the 1970s onwards, they focus on the topics of rest and inactivity. The goal is to counterbalance the present working rhythms, which, tailored to the needs of the market and hyperproduction, inevitably lead to the demise of the entire system. However, the ongoing race between work and free time is not going to end any time soon. The stakes will only be higher, which means that both the concepts will soon become rare privileges. As artistic attempts of escape from the harsh working conditions seem to suggest here, the struggle continues.

Work as a Form of Reward?

> Of course, there is a humanitarian side of the shorter day and the shorter week, but dwelling on that subject is likely to get one in trouble, for then leisure may be put before work rather than after work – where it belongs.[2]
> — Henry Ford

Whether we still have the eight-hour workday or we are now working flextime, without a clear beginning or end to our working days, work has a central spot in our everyday lives, and this is what the 3rd Industrial Art Biennale wanted to explore. The locations where the Biennale was supposed to take place have also influenced the selection of this topic—the Biennale mostly occupies former industrial sites, such as the Rikard Benčić factory, where the MMSU has recently moved in. However, instead of lamenting the destiny of closed factories, we wanted to present these sleeping giants as the places where our predecessors fought for better working conditions, conditions

traditionally known as "Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will." "The struggle for the eight-hour workday took some time. It started with the demands for cutting the working day from 14, 16 and 18 hours to 10 hours for women and children, but afterwards, slowly and gradually, people began voicing their requests for a normal 8-hour working day. Of course, years had to pass before the demands were finally accepted. In some countries, the eight-hour law was not passed until the 20th century."[3] Nowadays, however, amidst the economic collapse, it seems that the main issue in the history of labor, the question of working hours, is turning into a struggle for preservation of the eight-hour workday, even though it should have been reduced as an effect of the intense technological progress.

The 1970s and 1980s gave rise to **amateur films** that mocked the idealized image of progress. These films were usually made by photography and film clubs formed at the time in Yugoslavia by worker organizations. They depicted the monotony of work, but they also criticized the prescribed ways of spending free time. The works of Croatian and foreign artists, Petar Trinajstić, Nikola Velčić, Antoni Kreis, Danusz Skubel, and Zdislaw Zincznik, instead of offering the propaganda-based pictures of a working man's elation, describe the unofficial strategies of coping with a working day, such as moments of leisure that seem to defy the official politics. The work of **Bojan Mucko,** made in collaboration with pensioners Ajka Koščina and Boris Turčić, is along similar lines. The conversations about fulfillment and exhaustion, about comfortable and uncomfortable tasks, result in a hip-hop song. The participant's voices, accompanied with sounds produced with different items, recreate the memory of work, with its sorrows and joys that make it man's biggest obsession and central paradox: we cannot live without it, yet it makes us sick. If we take a look at the span of human life, we can see that we devote all our time to work, from the cradle to the grave—we learn our first words, educate ourselves, look for a job, fulfill the job-related tasks, acquire new qualifications, all the way to retirement. And then, even in retirement, at least in the home environment, we continue to be active. It seems that the endless list of phrases and sayings about work could be expanded with a few more, like *work is endurance, and free time is a perk*. Or, *the one who controls work is also the one who controls free time.* The Rijeka episode of the Biennale wanted to explore, among other things, the ways of gaining more control over one's own work time and free time.

In the economy of spectacle, free time has already been commodified, partly erased by ever more popular flexible working hours and partly "consumed" in consumer activities. Seldom does it include relaxation and contemplation. In the hyper-accelerated society, there is not much room for inner reflection and inertia because, among other things, we are constantly in the "ON" mode, connected to a computer, mobile phone, or some other gadget. In this context, the work of **Dragana Sapanjoš** is particularly interesting as it thematizes the attempt of escape from this state of being constantly networked.[4] The work is envisaged as a ride in rented automobiles. Visitors are invited to sit in the back and go for a ride, but they are not allowed to use mobile phones or talk to the driver. The ride is accompanied by music that, with its progressive increase in intensity which is then followed by a decrescendo, mimics life itself. However, the music also mimics the ride, as the route slowly moves away from the city bustle, meanders through the peaceful periphery, to finally return to the beginning. What seems as a spectacular procession of dark automobiles soon reveals itself as a subtle satire on human habits. Each passenger is immersed in their own time capsule, for a full 45 minutes, which is an optimal duration before we start losing concentration. Even with the sounds of music in the background, it turns out that doing nothing, and being with one's own emotions, is not that easy.[5] Perhaps we need to work more

on our free time? Can music and humming help us in that? In the past, folk poetry often accompanied everyday activities, capturing the people's wisdom. It helped people get through the day more easily, but it also mocked human need to be work-efficient, like in a poem from an old calendar: "On Sunday I drink wine, on Monday I don't work. On Tuesday I like to lie down, on Wednesday I get up again, on Thursday I recuperate, on Friday I think a bit, on Saturday I ask myself: 'What am I to do?'"[6]

From the Rhythm of Cogwheels to the Speed of Algorithms

> A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds its sway. [...] This delusion is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny.[7]
> — Paul Lafargue

The works of **Pilvi Takala** and **Antal Lakner** explore the modern obsession with action and speculate on different ways of spending free time. Both artists present us with funny violations of working norms and parodies of the body's "purposeful" movements. Pilvi Takala's intervention examines social rules at a workplace. Instead of the expected work efficiency, it describes the practices of doing nothing and relaxing at work, which the artist uses to mock the ever-present systems of monitoring people's work. In order to realize her work, *The Trainee*, Takala took up a job at a private firm where only a few people knew the true reason of her employment. Once there, she behaved untypically for a workplace—she spent time in contemplation, refused to use computers, took frequent rides in the elevator... Soon, she provoked different reactions in her coworkers, some of whom were confused, and some were paranoid. Everyone started avoiding her and talking behind her back, even though such behaviors, too, should be categorized as unacceptable. In any case, *The Trainee* avoids any moralizing and uses humor to encourage us to ask ourselves: How satisfied are we with our work? Are we willing to express our frustrations in front of our colleagues? Is there an approved form of leisure, and what kind of mental relaxation is the most acceptable?

Antal Lakner examines the pains of work and the exhaustion of our bodies, from which we recover in different ways—for instance, by taking an afternoon nap, escaping into nature, or spending time in the gym—which have been described both by holy books and popular self-help manuals. Lakner's INERS series encompasses interactive works that recall workout and anti-stress equipment, which the visitors can try out in the exhibition space. Some of the works function as offline tools that relax your painful muscles, strained from the overuse of computer technology, while other works transform the tiresome stages of work into entertaining and purposeless physical effort. So, what exactly are we doing when we are trying out these surrogates? Are we returning to manual activities, which are increasingly forgotten amidst technological progress and automatization?[8] Or are we working on our own selves, optimizing our bodies to make them more sustainable and efficient? Many philosophers, sociologists, and artists have dealt with the contradictory idea of rest as the prerequisite for better work readiness. Lakner also reflects on it, and he does it in a humorous way. INERS converts the gallery space into a "fitness club," but not without an ironic commentary on the inevitable transformation of labor system where it is hard to draw a line between work time and free time, and differentiate automatized gestures from spontaneous activities and true relaxation. And while we are sweating away on Lakner's gear, we cannot but wonder: do we relax even when we work and, vice versa, can we work and relax at the same time?

Silvio Lorusso's work also thematizes the troubles of modern society, where people are constantly "ON." Presented in the form of the question, *Shouldn't You Be Working?*, it occupies places where you least expect it, such as the MMSU façade. The line is taken from "StayFocusd", an extension for Google Chrome that pops up on your screen when you spend too much time browsing the web, helping you stay focused on your work. And just like the pop-up that appears on your screen, warning you that the time for surfing social media has run out, Lorusso's intervention surprises us by being placed in public space. What would you do when you spot it—laugh it off or be triggered back into productive mode?[9] Particularly in the context of museum workers, who are often believed to do nothing, Lorusso's question offers us an opportunity to make jokes at our own expense and to laugh at our own image. It also makes us think more about the disparagement of culture, the sector that cannot keep up with economically measurable activities anyway. This inability of culture to measure up is often used in populistic speeches to provoke antagonism towards it, thus distracting people from serious economic problems and inequality between workers and political elites.

"To sit on one's hands" is a well-known expression that may be correlated to the one used by Lorusso in his work. In the cynical twist of late capitalism, this funny phrase has become the stigma of those who have free time against their own will, i.e., people who can't find work. In other words, it has been turned into an alibi for labeling jobless people as lazy and socially undesirable. "The division of people into those who work and those who don't work—the diligent and the do-nothings, the hardworking and the layabouts, the eager-beavers and the sinecurists—is not new; yet, over the past years it has become the main ideological matrix that permeates people's opinions. The category of idlers and bums have been joined by armies of the unemployed (whom the employed label as useless and incompetent), the misérables, the indignados and various groups of nationally, geographically and ethnically tagged people [...] Refuges and migrants sit on their hands, too. They have nothing better to do than knocking at the doors of rich countries, which are supposed to give them life of leisure at taxpayer expense [...]."[10]

Time as Artistic Material: The Aesthetics of Silence and Absence

> One day you might just explode. Thousands of tiny particles in the air. [...] Embark on a fresh new start. Never look back.[11]
> — Ioana Nemeş

Time for work and time for break, and the thin line between them, especially in artistic professions, were the motifs of several works planned for this exhibition. They address time as an invisible but constant life phenomenon. "The different ways in which we use the word should be enough to show that we don't have a precise definition for it. The most elusive of the seven fundamental physical quantities in the International System of Units, we don't really know 'what' we think time is. [...] Will it only ever move forward? Toward what? Could it slow down? [...] Would we notice? Why does it fly for those having fun but drag on and on for the bored [...]?"[12] The logic of the clock and its punctuality that keeps surging forward is contrasted with a personal experience of time, sometimes meditative, sometimes wearisome and depressing. These intimate and metaphysical aspects of time are what **Ioana Nemeş** explores in her work *Monthly Evaluations*. The artist, who died suddenly at a young age, started her career in art in her twenties, after leaving professional sports. In her work, she often investigated the logic of competing and the fear of failure and stress that come with it. The

moments of creation of a work of art, crises and anxieties that are usually hidden from spectators' eyes are now revealed, becoming part of her enigmatic daily notes such as *Dreams Do Dream Us, Don't They?* We see Ioana's changeable metaphysical states "catalogued" according to different parameters of physical and emotional energy, intellect, financial aspects, and happiness, with positive and negative signs and specific colors. In her obsessive attempt of self-evaluation, the artist ironizes managerial standards that tend to be used even for evaluations of subjective experience, such as our feeling for time or our creative outputs.

The characteristic of **Tehching Hsieh**'s work is the affirmation of artistic practice based on self-renunciation and negation of one's own productivity. Best known for his marathon performances, Hsieh presents himself with a documentation of works performed between 1978 and 1999. In his one-year-long performances, Hsieh questions the limits of psychophysical endurance. He completely interweaves the sphere of art and life, making the usual division between work time and free time more complex. All of this comes under the motto *Life is a life sentence; life is passing time; life is freethinking.* The first four performances feature restrictive actions in private, intimate, and public spaces. Whether he locks himself in a cage without any contact with the outer world (*Cage Piece),* subjects his biological rhythm to the length of one hour with a clock that marks the expiry of the set time (*Time Clock Piece),* spends a whole year outdoors with scant supplies and no shelter (*Outdoor Piece*), or ties himself with a rope to Linda Montano, his partner, in a confined space with no physical contact (*Rope Piece)*, Hsieh's performances play with the idea of the creator, the self-confident *homo faber*, suggesting absurdity and renunciation as integral parts of life, and possibly, a form of freedom. The last two works, of meagre aesthetics as well, reflect the artist's intention to become invisible. These are *No Art Piece (*1985 –1986), where Hsieh decides to quit doing art, and *Thirteen Year Plan* (1986 – 1999), with which he terminates public display of his works.

Hsieh is one of those ultimate authors who have decided to discontinue exhibiting art and withdraw from the public eye entirely or for some time, like Marcel Duchamp, Ivo Gattin, Gustav Metzger, and Ida Biard. The unusual case of **Bas Jan Ader** is along similar lines. *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975) presents Ader's attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a small sailboat, which ended in his disappearance on the open sea. It had been devised as a trilogy, whose central part directly deals with the artist's last voyage. It was filmed at the start of Ader's crossing and shows the farewell performance with the artist and the choir dressed in black singing sea shanties. The circumstances of Ader's disappearance led to various theories. Some romanticized the artist as an uncompromising hero, while others saw *In Search of the Miraculous* as a tragic accident. There were also speculations that the work was meant to be the last farewell to the world, a part of a planned suicide. In any case, this grandiosely envisaged endeavor seems like an act of utter renunciation more than anything else, and it is precisely because of its utmost extremity that it has become anthological.

Fatigue is a caring guardian of our health... Don't exhaust yourself and harm your health, but refrain from work, rest and relax. Also, mind how you rest!

FLOS MEDICINAE / CVIT LIKARIJE, BUDAPEST, 1768

To hell with the rush!

PROVERB

Nerves need rest and that is sleep. Whoever steals from sleep steals from life.

PUČKI LIJEČNIK, A BOOK OF MEDICINE FROM THE 19TH CENTURY

I work for peanuts, but I'll go on strike for even less than that. / Death to the state and capitalism.

A WORKER AT 3. MAJ SHIPYARD, 2018

Progress Frenzy and Termination of Action—What Kind of Work Can We Celebrate?

> Work-centred visions of social progress continue to be promoted, even though there are not enough paid jobs to go around, and people's lives become dominated by the struggle to find and keep work.[13]
> — David Frayne

The marathon-like pace of progress described in the saying *bigger, stronger, faster*, which demands constant effectiveness and competition, without reflecting on its negative sides, is what several works here have in common. Instead of speed, a seemingly positive prefix for progress, some art pieces propose its counterpart—slowness. They show how with a minimum of energy we can achieve an effect of high intensity while at the same time turn the original state of lethargy and resignation into a form of silent protest. A fitting example of this is the night intervention of **Goran Petercol**, planned on the Korzo, the main city promenade. This minimalist action is based on the medium of light being a precondition of any visibility. It plays with the meaning of illumination in its narrow and broad sense: *to shed light on something, to illumine from all sides so that everything is well-lit, that is, to explain or elucidate a certain issue.* However, Petercol goes on to research the excess of light, the intensified light effect, pointing to the absence of content and lack of transparency in what is being illuminated in this way. The street action is planned to take place in front of the Mali Salon, the MMSU exhibition venue for seventy years, and one of the rare cultural facilities in the city center that was converted into a TV studio in 2019, for the purpose of covering programs of the European Capital of Culture—Rijeka 2020. The Mali Salon, with its glass façade facing the street does not show much activity anyway. Apart from the filming equipment and the set, there is nothing substantial going on inside. What kind of work is truly visible on Korzo Street, and which of these activities only simulate employment?

Non-invasive interventions in the present state of affairs are characteristic of another artist who is known as "one of those who produce ideas, instead of consuming work materials."[14] Postconceptualist **Mladen Stilinović** often examines the work-nonwork conflict, as well as the stereotypical visions of artists as constantly active creators. *Subtraction of Zeros* is based on a transformation of action into nonaction. In this work, the author does not seem to create anything. More precisely, he creates zeros and then subtracts them, until he reaches a zero-like state on an empty canvas. The artist's mathematical operations with zeros indicate doubt in the unconditional progress based on commercial profit that slowly but surely pushes us to the edge of sustainability. They deal with nonproductive values, which is accentuated with emptiness and monochromacy of the "paintings." Like in his parodies of ideological phrases, laziness and inactivity are defined as important factors of creativity. However, moments of anxiety and dullness and are also present here, as vital elements of creativity and suppressed forms of communication. In Stilinović's own words, "Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time—total amnesia. It is also indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is mere stupidity, a time of pain, futile concentration. Those virtues of laziness are important factors in art. Knowing about laziness is not enough. It must be practiced and perfected."[15]

The idealized images of labor and the society of prosperity, with endless production that makes moments of rest and recuperation impossible, are also thematized by **Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla**. In *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on Ode to Joy for a Prepared Piano, No.1.,* the artists perform, upside down and backwards, a

part of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony known today as the official anthem of the European Union. The musician plays the piano while standing in a hole carved in the instrument's center, leaning out over the keyboard. Walking while playing, he moves the instrument, which is mounted on wheels, slowly across the floor. Because of the hole in the piano, part of the keyboard is not working, so the visitors hear a structurally incomplete version. The reversed melody emphasizes the contradictions of the legendary composition that has become as a symbol of humanist values and national pride in ideologically disparate contexts, from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to the Third Reich.[16] Its preapocalyptic sound anticipates the need for creating a renewable world, also addressing the idea of progress that proves to be an unstable fiction, subjected to variable sociopolitical circumstances.

The works of **Alicja Rogalska** and art collective **Apparatus 22** explore the ways of creating more benevolent conditions of labor. The installation by Apparatus 22, *Art is Work*, is a work-in-progress. One part of the work consists of workers' overalls, which recall Rikard Benčić's past, when the building was a factory. Contradictory statements written on the overalls, about the career and position of artists, such as "I've got an artist fee in this exhibition" or "I didn't get paid for my work in this exhibition, do you really think artists feed on glory?" spark discussions on the precarious work of artists as well as the evaluation of such work, which often excludes fees. The second part of the work consists of videos that show conversations with artists from different parts of the world. The artists respond to questions "Why do you think art is work?" or "Why is contemporary art vital for society?" By participating in these conversations, the artists are virally spreading the discussion on the precarity of artists' work. Instead of insisting on individualism, *Art is Work* promotes ideas of teamwork, based on the principles of free exchange and creation with available means.

While *Art is Work* primarily deals with the role of artists in society, the video of Alicja Rogalska, which was supposed to be filmed at MMSU-u, is preoccupied with the health of cultural workers and the possibility of their "healing" with nonconventional methods. Rogalska even intended to invite a local medium to assist her in her assessment of physical and mental state of "culture. This is an interesting move, because both professions are in a vulnerable situation in terms of status—they are seen as irrelevant in comparison to "meaningful" professions. Moreover, in times of recession, the cultural sector is the first to undergo cuts, like its "health" isn't bad enough as it is. Alicja's collaboration with the medium, which was meant to take place in the form of treatment and conversation with MMSU employees, relies on alternative visions of healthy life, including bioenergetics and nonverbal communication. By doing so, Alicja shakes our confidence in the "normalcy" of labor conditions. And while we rationally fulfill our daily tasks, the question is: How rational is the labor system itself? Why don't we adopt "irrational" methods in its transformation then?

The Return to "Normalcy"

> I would also suggest that we use the annual leave twice a year, for six months. You never know, this could be a way to achieve the annual target. Because for now, the annual target is classified in our company books as 'wishful thinking'.[17]
> —Zezavko Kinezić

The idea of work as a source of meaning is as complicated as the idea of free time. The crisis of one is related to the crisis of the other; depending on circumstances, they can

be both a reward and a curse. In this imaginary exhibition, work occupies us on a conceptual level, as an unrestricted, creative time that is not subjected to profit earning. Rather, we see it as the time for contemplation, relaxation, and the creation of alternative scenarios, which also includes moments of doubt, discomfort, pain… And we are using it to counterbalance the competitiveness that marginalizes inactivity and defines moments of rest as something undesirable. The current slowdown or cessation in production and consumption makes us suspicious of economic growth as the only driver of prosperity, but it also calls work as the primary source of self-identification into question.

We're Off is envisioned as an experimental lab that investigates the above-described topics. In contrast to the traditional definitions of work as an undoubtedly purposeful activity, it depicts human activity as an interplay of free choice and resignation with the pressures of competitiveness, as a fulfillment and denial of roles that are given to us. Combining cultural, anthropological, and artistic perspectives, it advocates an arbitrary approach to social rules about work. Unlike the (self-)exhausting work practices and burnout that have been affecting the modern world, it promotes different modes of inactivity—not as a form of shirking from duties, but as a rebellion against the idealization of work. In its examination of work ethics and propositions of different models, it relies on the practices of non-work, leisure, recuperation, meditation… *We're Off* encourages us to imagine an equal distribution of work time and free time and to laugh at the ideology of progress. It inspires us to resist the need to be constantly productive. There is a Slavic folk poem that says: "If you are as busy as a bee, as perseverant as an ant, as strong as a bear; if you carry loads like an ox, and in the evening you feel like a beaten dog, you must go to the vet immediately, because you might have already turned into a jackass."

I would like to thank all the artists and lenders of the works planned for this exhibition, the designers of the visuals that accompany this text, Marino Krstačić Furić & Ana Tomić, and the translator Lidija Toman.

Notes

1 For more information on the Biennale, which was envisaged as part of the European Capital of Culture – Rijeka 2020, please visit http://www.industrialartbiennale.eu/home-page/.
2 David Frayne, *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 95. An examination of the relationship between work and free time is being revisited in the so-called *post-work* discussions that call for a reduction in the number of working hours, division of labor among a larger number of workers, and the introduction of a guaranteed minimum wage, which in turn leads to a redefinition of work as the basis of fulfillment of human needs.
3 Anja Grgurinović, "Devetosatno radno vrijeme?," https://www.radnicki.org/devetosatno-radno-vrijeme.
4 *How many times a day do you check your phone?* Research shows that we check our mobile phones every six and a half minutes, https://wall.hr/lifestyle/tech/mobitel-u-prosjeku-provjeravamo-150-puta-dnevno/.
5 Many books have been written about leisure and its meanings (leisure as a necessity, leisure as a form of silent rebellion, leisure as a meaningful way of spending free time…). A praise to leisure can be seen in the works of Oscar Wilde, Henry David Thoreau, William Burroughs, Bob Black, and Emily Dickinson, among others.
6 *Nedjeljom vino pijem, Ponedjeljkom ne radim. Utorkom je prileći dobro, Srijedom ustati*

ponovno, Četvrtkom se oporaviti, Petkom promisliti, Hej! Subotom se zapitati, Što nam je činiti? Similar caricatural poems of Slavic origin are described in: Tea Mayhew, "Images of Work and Pastimes in South-Slavic Folk Poetry (16th-19th Centuries)," in *Rhetorics of Work*, eds. Yannis Yannitsiotis, Dimitra Lampropoulou, Carla Salvatera (Pisa: Edizioni Plus, Pisa University Press, 2008), 187-209.

7 Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, 21.
8 Agnes Berecz, http://www.ladaproject.com/artists/antallakner/.
9 Nicola Bozzi, https://silviolorusso.com/work/shouldnt-you-be-working/.
10 Dubravka Ugrešić, *Doba kože* (Zaprešić: Fraktura, 2019), 33. Ugrešić also cites Rexecode's research about working time in Europe, which showed that "lazy" Romanians, Greeks, and Bulgarians worked the longest hours. The "hard-working" Finns work least, while the "diligent" Germans are somewhere in the middle.
11 From *Vanishing Points* series, 2008.
12 Amelia Groom, ed., *Time – Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 12.
13 Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, 41.
14 Sonja Briski Uzelac, "Mladen Stilinović : Kako manipulirati onim što te manipulira ili o strategiji konceptualne umjetnosti," http://sveske.ba/en/content/mladen-stilinovic-kako-manipulirati-onim-sto-te-manipulira-ili-o-strategiji-konceptualne-umj.
15 Mladen Stilinović, "Praise of Laziness," in *The Misfits, Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art*, ed. Tihomir Milovac (Zagreb: MSU, 2002), 93. https://monoskop.org/images/8/89/The_Misfits_Neprilagodeni_2002.pdf.
16 See: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/128473.
17 In the factory's newspaper *Zbivanja*, ed. Vlasta Hrvatin (Rijeka: The Trade Union of Rikard Benčić factory, 1981), 33.

Ksenija Orelj (Rijeka, 1979) studied art history and German language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb and took a master's degree in curatorial cultures at the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts in 2013. In 2011, she took part in the Intensive Curatorial Course, ICI, NY and in 2018 she was a curator-in residency at the Museumsquartier in Vienna, Q21. Orelj is a member of Croatian Section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). She is currently working as a senior curator at the Rijeka Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art / MMSU (mmsu.hr).

5
documenta

documenta X
Catherine David

Introduction / Vorwort

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Cantz Verlag, 1997.
Courtesy documenta archiv

What can be the meaning and purpose of a documenta today, at the close of this century, when similar large-scale exhibitions have been called into question, and often for very good reasons? It may seem paradoxical – or deliberately outrageous – to envision a critical confrontation with the present in the framework of an institution that over the past twenty years has become a mecca for tourism and cultural consumption. Yet the pressing issues of today make it equally presumptuous to abandon all ethical and political demands.

In the age of globalization and of the sometimes violent social, economic, and cultural transformations it entails, contemporary artistic practices, condemned for their supposed meaninglessness or "nullity" by the likes of Jean Baudrillard, are in fact a vital source of imaginary and symbolic representations whose diversity is irreducible to the (near) total economic domination of the real. The stakes here are no less political than aesthetic – at least if one can avoid reinforcing the mounting spectacularization and instrumentalization of "contemporary art" by the culture industry, where art is used for social regulation or indeed control, through the aestheticization of information and forms of debate that paralyze any act of judgment in the immediacy of raw seduction or emotion (what might be called "the Benetton effect").

Overcoming the obstacle means seeking out the current manifestations and underlying conditions of a critical art which does not fall into a precut academic mold or let itself be summed up in a facile label. Such a project cannot ignore the upheavals that have occurred both in documenta's institutional and geopolitical situation since the inaugural exhibition in 1955 and in the recent developments of aesthetic forms and practices. Nor can it shirk the necessary ruptures and changes in the structure of the event itself.

Given...

In many respects, the history and the political and cultural project of documenta belong to the now-vanished era of postwar Europe, shaped by the Cold War and the world's division into two power blocs, and brought to a close by the fall of the Berlin wall and German reunification. The specific project of documenta also resulted from the progressive ideas of a local artist, Arnold Bode, and from the "exemplary" situation of Kassel, a city close to the eastern border, and almost entirely reconstructed after the 1943 bombing. 1955 was a time for reconciliation, indeed for expiation and redemption by means of modern art, which may explain the close association of the work and personality of Joseph Beuys with the history of the exhibition,

Welchen Sinn und Zweck kann heute, am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts, eine *documenta* haben, zu einer Zeit, in der die großen Ausstellungen, und zwar aus oft sehr berechtigten Gründen, in Frage stehen? Will man im Rahmen einer Institution, die sich im Laufe der letzten zwanzig Jahre zu einer Hochburg des Kulturtourismus und des Kunstkonsums entwickelt hat, eine Veranstaltung durchführen, die sich als kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der Gegenwart versteht, kann das leicht nicht nur als paradox erscheinen, sondern auch wie eine gezielte Provokation wirken. Doch angesichts der drängenden Fragen der Zeit wäre es mehr als inkonsequent, auf jeden ethischen und politischen Anspruch zu verzichten.

In einer Zeit der Globalisierung und der sie begleitenden, manchmal gewaltsamen wirtschaftlichen, gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Veränderungen repräsentieren die heute wegen ihrer angeblichen Bedeutungslosigkeit oder »nullité« (Jean Baudrillard) unterschiedslos verdammten zeitgenössischen Praktiken eine Vielfalt symbolischer und imaginärer Darstellungsweisen, die nicht auf eine (fast) gänzlich der Ökonomie und ihren Bedingungen gehorchende Wirklichkeit reduzierbar sind, sie besitzen damit eine ebenso ästhetische wie politische Potenz. Diese Potenz vermag allerdings nur dann fruchtbar zu werden, wenn sie nicht dazu mißbraucht wird, die im Rahmen der Kulturindustrie ständig zunehmende Instrumentalisierung und Vermarktung der »zeitgenössischen Kunst« und ihre darauf abgestimmte Zurichtung zum Spektakel noch zu verstärken und auch nicht einer »gesellschaftlichen« Regulierung oder gar Kontrolle dient (durch die Ästhetisierung von Information oder durch Pseudodebatten, die jegliche Urteilskraft in der Unmittelbarkeit von Verführung oder undifferenzierten Gefühlen ersticken – das, was man den »Benetton-Effekt« nennen könnte). Eine weitere Voraussetzung dafür ist die Erkenntnis der Formen und der aktuellen Bedingungen der Möglichkeit einer kritischen Kunst, die nicht auf akademische und mit einem Etikett versehene Formen reduzierbar ist.

Das Projekt einer unter diesen Voraussetzungen veranstalteten zehnten *documenta* kann weder die seit der ersten Ausstellung 1955 eingetretenen institutionellen und geopolitischen Umwälzungen ignorieren noch die jüngsten Entwicklungen, Veränderungen und unvermeidlichen Brüche in den ästhetischen Formen und Praktiken, in der Struktur der Veranstaltung selbst.

Etant donnés – Voraussetzungen

Das politische und kulturelle Projekt »documenta« ist in mancher Hinsicht insofern Geschichte, als es zur europäischen Nachkriegszeit gehört, zur Zeit des Kalten Krieges und der Teilung der Welt in zwei Blöcke, die mit

from the third edition in 1963 all the way to Beuys' death at the time of documenta 8 *in 1987.* Documenta *also provided an occasion for the necessary reconstruction of the modern tradition and the history of the vanguards, condemned by the Nazi regime with the exhibition of* Degenerate Art *in Munich in 1937. But this reconstruction remained incomplete, skipping over dada and the radical forms that emerged in the Weimar period to concentrate on the most recent developments of abstraction, which had reached their apogee in America. Thus the early versions of* documenta *appeared as a cultural showcase for the Marshall Plan in the country that had become the privileged centerpiece of the newly forged alliance between northern Europe and the United States. In the 1960s* documenta *became the largest international show of contemporary art. Harald Szeeman transformed the exhibition into a hundred-day event attending to the aesthetic "forms" and "attitudes" of the period; but his striking synthesis of the major proposals of the 1970s did not succeed in reversing the directions that documenta had taken. The versions that followed struggled to conciliate an aesthetic demand with the imperatives of the culture industry, and, soon enough, with the new economic and geopolitical situation of Germany and of Europe in the context of globalization.*

In reality, the "new world disorder" commenced in the 1970s with the oil shock and the transition to what the geographer David Harvey describes as an economy of "flexible accumulation." Nonetheless, it is 1989 that symbolically marks the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era of "hot wars," in Günter Grass's phrase. The visible division of the world into two blocs has been replaced by a complex network of exchanges in which American hegemony is relativized by the European Union and the rising power of East Asia, while the future remains uncertain for the former USSR, China, and most of the Arab, Muslim, and African countries. In Europe, the globalization of markets exacerbates the economic and social dysfunctions brought on by the crisis of what Etienne Balibar calls "the national social state" that developed after the war; the result is an upsurge of nationalism and identity fixations. In this new context, the city of Kassel, now located in the center of reunified Germany and seriously affected by the current recession, can appear as the "exemplary" site of an entire range of rifts and displacements, and as the focus of a political and aesthetic inquiry that we have attempted to inscribe in the very structures of documenta X.

dem Fall der Mauer und der deutschen Wiedervereinigung zu Ende ging. In der Nachkriegszeit kamen in Kassel zwei Dinge zusammen, die die Verwirklichung des Projekts begünstigten: einerseits die fortschrittlichen Ideen und Ziele eines ortsansässigen Künstlers, Arnold Bode, und andererseits die »exemplarische« Situation der nun fast an der Grenze zwischen den beiden Blöcken liegenden Stadt, die nach ihrer weitgehenden Zerstörung durch die Bombenangriffe 1943–1945 fast vollständig neu wiederaufgebaut wurde. Die erste *documenta* 1955 stand unter dem Zeichen der Versöhnung durch die und mit der modernen Kunst und der Wiedergutmachung an ihr (und von daher ist es nicht überraschend, daß das Werk und die Person von Joseph Beuys mit der Geschichte der *documenta* seit 1963, *documenta* 3, bis zu seinem Tod 1986, vor der *documenta* 8, so eng verbunden ist). Diese erste *documenta* hatte die Aufgabe, die moderne Tradition und die Geschichte der Avantgarde zu rekonstruieren, die vom Naziregime (exemplarisch mit der 1937 in München organisierten Ausstellung »entarteter Kunst«) abgeurteilt und systematisch verfolgt worden war. Es wurde eine unvollständige Rekonstruktion, die den Dadaismus und die in der Weimarer Zeit entwickelten radikalen Formen überging, um sich direkt den neueren Entwicklungen auf dem Gebiet der Abstraktion zuzuwenden, vor allem in ihren amerikanischen Spielarten. Die *documenta* machte daher bei den ersten Veranstaltungen eher den Eindruck, als fände sie in einem Deutschland statt, das sich im Zuge seines Wiederaufbaus allmählich zur bevorzugten Stütze der Amerikaner in Europa entwickelte, als wäre sie ein »Kulturschaufenster« des Marshallplanes. In den sechziger Jahren wurde sie zur größten der zeitgenössischer Kunst gewidmeten internationalen Veranstaltungen. 1972 wurde Harald Szeemans Ausstellung ein hundert Tage dauerndes Ereignis, das sich stärker mit den aktuellen ästhetischen »Formen« und »Einstellungen« der Zeit auseinandersetzte. Seine *documenta* machte mit ihrem Überblick über die Hauptideen der siebziger Jahre Epoche, doch es gelang ihm nicht, der Entwicklung, die die Veranstaltung einmal genommen hatte, wirklich nachhaltig eine neue Richtung zu geben. Die folgenden Ausstellungen versuchten, einerseits einem ästhetischen Anspruch und andererseits den Forderungen der Kulturindustrie gerecht zu werden, und sie standen auch schon bald vor dem Problem, der neuen wirtschaftlichen und geopolitischen Situation Deutschlands und Europas im Kontext der Globalisierung Rechnung zu tragen.

Die »neue globale Unordnung« begann zwar bereits mit der Ölkrise und dem Übergang zu einer »flexiblen Akkumulation« des Kapitals (David Harvey) in den siebziger Jahren, doch symbolisch markiert das Jahr 1989 das Ende des Kalten Krieges und den Beginn einer

8

Retroperspectives

While making no concessions to the commemorative trend, the last documenta of this century can hardly evade the task of elaborating a historical and critical gaze on its own history, on the recent past of the post-war period, and on everything from this now-vanished age that remains in ferment within contemporary art and culture: memory, historical reflection, decolonization and what Wolf Lepenies calls the "de-Europeanization" of the world, but also the complex processes of postarchaic, post-traditional, postnational identification at work in the "fractal societies" (Serge Gruzinski) born from the collapse of communism and the brutal imposition of the laws of the market. Facing these problems also means reconsidering, from a timely and even programmatic perspective, certain major proposals that appeared in the 1960s in the work of artists who were born before, during, or immediately after the war, some of whom died prematurely (Marcel Broodthaers, Öyvind Fahlström, Gordon Matta-Clark, Hélio Oiticica), and almost all of whom began their work around the time of the first documenta (Gerhard Richter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Richard Hamilton, Aldo van Eyck). For most of these figures, the critical dimension appears in a radical questioning of the categories of the "fine arts" and of the anthropological foundations of Western culture, through a subversion of the traditional hierarchies and divisions of knowledge: a critique of the primacy of the visual and a projection of language and its games into three-dimensional space with Broodthaers; an exposure of the economic perversion of spatial operations with Matta-Clark; an inversion of center and periphery through the emergence of "marginal" values with Oiticica; an extraordinarily playful dramatization of political and economic power relations with Fahlström; a poetic transformation of dogmatic, reductive modernism through the critical reactivation of the formal and spatial solutions of non-Western architecture with Aldo van Eyck. At a time when advertising, television, the new media, and the digital sophistication of virtual worlds are "swallowing the real in its spectacular representation" (Gruzinski), it seems particularly appropriate to foreground the processes of analysis and distancing at work in the practices of drawing and of documentary photography since the 1960s and sometimes even before (Maria Lassnig, Nancy Spero, Walker Evans, Garry Winogrand, Helen Levitt, Robert Adams, Ed van der Elsken). These practices find significant (if indirect) developments in the works of Martin Walde, William Kentridge, Jeff Wall, Craigie Horsfield, James Coleman, Johan Grimonprez, and Anne-Marie Schneider, who have been able to discover contemporary forms of non-spectacular dramatization.

neuen Ära der »heißen Kriege« (Günter Grass). Die deutlich erkennbare Aufteilung der Welt in zwei Blöcke ist durch ein komplexes Kräftefeld und ein globales Netz internationalen Austauschs ersetzt worden. Die Vormachtstellung der USA in diesem Kräftefeld wird durch die europäische Einigung und die neue Machtstellung Ostasiens relativiert, während sich andererseits eine ungewisse Zukunft der ehemaligen UdSSR, Chinas, eines großen Teils der arabischen und moslemischen Länder sowie Afrikas abzeichnet. In Europa verstärkt die Globalisierung der Märkte die wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Dysfunktionen, die mit der Krise des in der Nachkriegszeit entwickelten Modells vom »sozialen Nationalstaat« (Etienne Balibar) verbunden sind und die den Aufstieg des Nationalismus und die damit zusammenhängende krampfhafte Identitätssuche förderten. In diesem neuen Kontext vermag Kassel, das nun im Zentrum des wiedervereinten Deutschland liegt und ernsthaft von der Rezession betroffen ist, wiederum als »exemplarischer« Ort zu dienen – als Ort, der die vielfältigen Verschiebungen und die politischen und ästhetischen Auseinandersetzungen repräsentiert, die wir in die Strukturen der Veranstaltung hineinzutragen versucht haben, wenn wir sie schon nicht in sie übersetzen konnten.

Retroperspektiven

Die letzte *documenta* des Jahrhunderts mußte sich – ohne dem modischen Trend zur Jubiläumsfeier zu verfallen – die Aufgabe stellen, einen kritischen Blick auf die Geschichte, auf die jüngste Nachkriegsvergangenheit zu werfen und auf das, was davon die Kultur und die zeitgenössische Kunst umtreibt: die geschichtlichen Ereignisse, das Gedächtnis, die Dekolonisierungsbewegungen, die »Enteuropäisierung« der Welt (Wolf Lepenies), aber auch die komplexen – postarchaischen, posttraditionellen und postnationalen – Identifikationsbemühungen in den »fraktalen Gesellschaften« (Serge Gruzinski), die aus dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus und der Brutalisierung des Marktes entstanden sind. Das heißt, daß wir die Aufgabe hatten, unter einer kritischen, wenn nicht gar programmatischen, aktuellen Perspektive die wichtigen Positionen zu sichten und neu zu durchdenken, die in den sechziger Jahren aufkamen. Diese Positionen sind in den Werken unterschiedlich renommierter Künstler abzulesen, die während oder kurz nach dem Krieg geboren wurden (und zum Teil, wie Marcel Broodthaers, Öyvind Fahlström, Gordon Matta-Clark, Hélio Oiticica und Lygia Clark, viel zu früh verstarben) und die alle oder doch fast alle ihre Arbeit zur Zeit der ersten *documenta* begannen (Gerhard Richter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Richard Hamilton, Aldo van Eyck). Bei den meisten von ihnen äußert sich ihre kritische Haltung in einer radikalen Infragestellung der

Parcours

Since 1955, documenta has always unfolded in a spatial relation to the city of Kassel, contributing greatly to the spread of the model of the exhibition-promenade developed in the late sixties as an acceptable compromise between traditional museum presentation and the extension to a mass public of the idea, the practice, and the consumption of the artistic vanguards. Today, while we witness the (final?) dissolution of the museum and of public space into the "society of the spectacle," the strategies that attempt to contrast institutional space with an "outside" appear naive or ridiculous, as do "in situ" interventions which turn their backs not only to the current transformation of the Habermasian model of public space, but also to the new modes of imaginary and symbolic investment of places by contemporary subjects. To combat the promenade or "rummage sale" effect, it seemed necessary to articulate the heterogeneous works and exhibition spaces – the old sites of the Fridericianum and the Orangerie and the new sites of the Kulturbahnhof, the Ottoneum, and the documenta Halle – with the "here and now" context of Kassel in 1997, by establishing a historical and urban parcours or itinerary, attentive to history as it is embedded in the city itself. From the Kulturbahnhof to the Orangerie and the banks of the Fulda, this itinerary lays the accent not only on the spectacularly restored tokens of the baroque era (the Friedrichsplatz and the Fridericianum, the Orangerie and the Auepark), but also on the recent past of postwar reconstruction: the old station, partially unused and currently being remodeled for commercial and cultural purposes, the underground passageways deserted by the public and destined for closure in the not-too-distant future, and the Treppenstraße or "stairway street," a model of the pedestrian street conceived in the fifties to conjugate promenade and consumption (the first of its kind to be built in Germany, and as such, an official "monument"). In the era of globalization, with all its local repercussions – including the highly visible recession in the city of Kassel – the marks of reconstruction and the failure of the political, economic, social, and urban project that they reveal can appear as "recent ruins." We have not sought to make these artifacts into museum pieces (not even for the time of an exhibition) but rather to identify and specify them through confrontations with recent and somewhat less recent works by artists such as Lois Weinberger, Jeff Wall, Peter Friedl, Dan Graham, and Suzanne Lafont. This parcours is also a real and symbolic itinerary through Kassel in relation to its possible "elsewheres," the cultural and urban realities of a "Whole-World" (Edouard Glissant) that documenta cannot claim to convoke or even to "represent" in Kassel.

Kategorie der »Schönen Künste« und der anthropologischen Grundlagen der westlichen Zivilisation wie auch in einer Infragestellung der Hierarchien und der traditionellen Abgrenzung von Wissenszweigen: Broodthaers' Kritik der Vorherrschaft des Visuellen und sein Übertragen von Sprache und Sprachspielen in den dreidimensionalen Raum, das Sichtbarmachen der Pervertierung räumlicher Operationen durch die Wirtschaft bei Matta-Clark, die Umkehrung von Zentrum und Peripherie durch »marginale Werte« bei Oiticica, Fahlströms spielerische Dramatisierung des Verhältnisses von ökonomischen und politischen Kräften sowie die Durchbrechung der Zwänge eines dogmatischen und reduzierenden Modernismus durch das kritische Aufgreifen von poetischen formalen und räumlichen Lösungen aus den Beständen der klassischen und der nicht westlichen Architektur bei Aldo van Eyck. In einer Zeit, in der die Werbung, das Fernsehen, die Medien und die virtuellen digitalen Wunderwelten das »Versinken des Wirklichen in seiner Repräsentation als Spektakel« (Serge Gruzinski) noch beschleunigen, schien es angebracht zu sein, besonders auf die Verfahren der Analyse und der Verfremdung einzugehen, die in den Praktiken der Zeichnung und der Dokumentarphotographie seit den sechziger Jahren und manchmal auch noch früher entwickelt wurden (Maria Lassnig, Nancy Spero, Walker Evans, Garry Winogrand, Helen Levitt, Robert Adams, Ed van der Elsken). Diese Praktiken finden einen zwar sicherlich indirekten, aber dennoch sehr starken Widerhall in Werken von Martin Walde, William Kentridge, Jeff Wall, Craigie Horsfield, Suzanne Lafont, in denen eine zeitgenössische Form der nicht spektakulären Dramatisierung gefunden wurde.

Parcours

Veranstaltungsort der *documenta* war seit 1955 stets Kassel – und sie war von Anfang an ein Ereignis, das sich in der Stadt abspielte und sich zum richtungsweisenden Modell eines Ausstellungs-Spaziergangs entwickelte, was gegen Ende der sechziger Jahre einen akzeptablen Weg zu eröffnen schien, sich mit der massiven Verbreitung der Idee und der Praxis der Avantgarde und ihrer Vermarktung als Konsumartikel zu arrangieren. Heute, wo wir erleben, daß Museum und öffentlicher Raum (vielleicht endgültig?) unterschiedslos in einer »Gesellschaft des Spektakels« aufgehen, müssen alle Strategien als naiv oder lächerlich erscheinen, die sich gegen irgendeine Festlegung im Rahmen des institutionellen Raumes wenden, was als »draußen« oder »drinnen« zu gelten hat. Naiv und lächerlich sind auch die Arbeiten in situ, die die aktuellen Veränderungen des Habermasschen Modells des öffentlichen Raums ignorieren wie die Veränderung der komplexen symbolischen und ima-

That said, the city and urban space in general – its circumstances, its failures, its architectural, economic, political, and human projects, its conflicts, and the new cultural attitude and practices to which it gives rise and which it spreads throughout the world – now clearly appears as the privileged site of contemporary experience. In these respects, Kassel today, at its own scale, in its singularity as well as its archetypes, can be regarded as "exemplary."

Limits

The extreme heterogeneity of contemporary aesthetic practices and mediums – matched by the plurality of contemporary exhibition spaces (the wall, the page, the poster, the television screen, the internet) and the very different, even irreconcilable experiences of space and time they imply – necessarily oversteps the limits of an exhibition held "entirely" in Kassel, just as art now oversteps the spatial and temporal but also ideological limits of the "white cube" which constituted the supposedly universal model of aesthetic experience, a model of which documenta, even in its "open" version, is a willing or unwilling offshoot. The universalist model is limited and limiting with respect to the (re)presentation of contemporary aesthetic forms and practices in all their diversity, and also with respect to the local fulfillments of a complex and now "globalized" modernity, which henceforth lacks the "exteriority" of the authentic, the traditional, and the pre- or antimodern – despite a lingering nostalgia for exoticism, at best, and colonialism, at worst. Indeed, the object for which the white cube was constructed is now in many cases no more than one of the aspects or moments of the work, or better yet, merely the support and the vector of highly diverse artistic activities. At the same time, the problem of universalism also arises with respect to non-Western cultural zones where the object of "contemporary art" is often a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon, linked, in the best cases, to an acceleration of the processes of acculturation and cultural syncretism in the new urban agglomerations, and in the worst cases, to the demand for rapid renewal of market products in the West. For reasons which have partially to do with interrupted or violently destroyed traditions, as well as the diversity of the cultural formations that have sprung from colonization and decolonization and the indirect and unequal access these formations have been given to Western modernity, it seems that the pertinence, excellence, and radicality of contemporary non-Western expressions often finds its privileged avenues in music, oral and written language (literature, theater), and cinema – forms which have traditionally contributed to strate-

ginären Konstruktionen, mit denen Menschen heute Orte besetzen. Um die Rezeptionshaltung des Spaziergangs und den »Kirmeseffekt« in Grenzen zu halten oder ihm entgegenzuwirken, schien es erforderlich zu sein, die Heterogenität der Ausstellungsorte, ihre Mischung aus »alten« (Fridericianum, Orangerie) und »neuen« (Kulturbahnhof, Ottoneum, documenta-Halle), und die Heterogenität der Werke im Kasseler »Hier und Jetzt«, im Kontext Kassel 1997, in einem historischen und urbanen Parcours zu artikulieren, um so die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Zeichen der Geschichte zu lenken, die sich in das Antlitz der Stadt eingeschrieben haben. Dieser Parcours, vom Kulturbahnhof bis zur Orangerie und zur Fulda, akzentuiert einerseits die jüngste Vergangenheit des Wiederaufbaus (der alte Bahnhof, der umgebaut wird, um kommerziellen und kulturellen Zwecken zu dienen, die als öffentlicher Raum aufgegebenen und zur Schließung verurteilten Fußgängerunterführungen wie auch die Treppenstraße, jenem in den fünfziger Jahren konzipierten Modellfall des Spaziergang und Konsum vereinenden Projekts »Fußgängerzone« der ersten in Deutschland und daher heute unter »Denkmalschutz« stehend) und andererseits die spektakulär restaurierten »Erinnerungen« an die Blütezeit des Barock (Friedrichsplatz und Fridericianum, Orangerie und Auepark). In einer Zeit, in der sich die Globalisierung lokal in einer deutlich sichtbaren Rezession manifestiert, müssen die Zeichen des Wiederaufbaus und die Zeichen des Scheiterns eines politischen, ökonomischen, sozialen und urbanen Projekts als »moderne Ruinen« erscheinen, bei denen es nicht darum gehen kann, noch nicht mal für die Dauer einer Ausstellung, sie zu musealisieren, sondern darum, sie durch die paradoxe Konfrontation mit neuen und älteren Arbeiten von Künstlern zuallererst als solche zu identifizieren (Lois Weinberger, Jeff Wall, Peter Friedl, Dan Graham, Suzanne Lafont). Dieser Parcours ist ein ebenso realer wie symbolischer Weg, er führt durch Kassel und zugleich durch das mögliche Anderswo, durch die urbanen und kulturellen Realitäten eines »Tout-Monde« (Edouard Glissant), von dem die *documenta* nicht behaupten kann, sie könne ihn in Kassel versammeln oder »repräsentieren«. Der städtische Raum erscheint so mit seinen Gegebenheiten, seinen Fehlschlägen, seinen (architektonischen, wirtschaftlichen, politischen und menschlichen) Errungenschaften und Risiken, mit den Konflikten und den neuen kulturellen Einstellungen und Lebensformen, die er weltweit hervorbringt und verbreitet, als privilegierter Ort zeitgenössischer ästhetischer Erfahrung. In dieser Hinsicht kann Kassel sowohl in seinen einzigartigen wie auch in seinen archetypischen Zügen als »exemplarisch« erscheinen.

gies of emancipation. This observation is pragmatic rather than programmatic; it makes no claim to anticipate the course of developments in the future or the possible evolution that can already be glimpsed in the works and attitudes of younger generations, but it does lay the accent on certain strong alterities of contemporary culture, particularly the Arab, Muslim, and African worlds, which are very much present during the "100 Days – 100 Guests" lecture program.

In full awareness of these inherent limits, we have sought to provide a multiplicity of spaces and a broadened platform of discussion and debate, in and outside Kassel, for highly diverse cultural expressions and publics whose horizons and expectations are vastly different. To complement the exhibition in the city we have published a book which situates artistic productions from 1945 to today in their political, economic, and cultural context of appearance and in light of the multiple shifts and redefinitions that have now become manifest with the process of globalization. In the framework of the "100 Days – 100 Guests" program we have invited artists and cultural figures from the world over – architects, urbanists, economists, philosophers, scientists, writers, filmmakers, stage directors, musicians – to Kassel in order to debate, according to their fields of specialization and their orders of urgency, the great ethical and aesthetic questions of the century's close: the urban realm, territory, identity, new forms of citizenship, the national social state and its disappearance, racism and the state, the globalization of markets and national policy, universalism and culturalism, poetics and politics. These daily interventions will take place in the documenta Halle, specially reconfigured as a space of information and debate, and will be recorded and transmitted live on the Internet by Bundmedia. In addition, each of the evening events will be available on Internet as a Video On Demand, *and the* documenta *will be present in three-minute clips broadcast daily by arte.*

The "100 Days – 100 Guests" program also encompasses cinema and theater. Seven films, produced jointly by the documenta, *Sony, and a number of European television stations, will be premiered. And beginning on September 5, a three-night theatrical marathon will present the sketches proposed by ten directors who have been invited to explore the space and conditions of contemporary situations and develop them as works for the stage.*

Other artistic productions will also be accessible far beyond the Kassel city limits: in addition to works on Internet, the medium offering the greatest possible range of circulation, three artists' projects will be displayed on billboard spaces of the Deutsche Städte-Reklame in a number of German cities. In a program

Limites – Grenzen

Die extreme Heterogenität der ästhetischen Praktiken und ihrer heutigen Medien (Wand, Seite, Plakat, Bildschirm, Internet) sowie die unterschiedlichen oder gar nicht miteinander zu vereinbarenden Erfahrungen von Raum und Zeit, die damit verbunden sind, sprengen zwangsläufig die Grenzen einer Ausstellung, die »ganz« in Kassel stattfinden wollte. Sie sprengen auch die (räumlichen, zeitlichen und ideologischen) Grenzen des »white cube«, eines Modells mit universalistischem Anspruch, das die *documenta* selbst in ihrer »offenen« Form, nolens volens, auch reproduziert. Ein begrenztes und einengendes Modell angesichts der Vielfältigkeit der zeitgenössischen ästhetischen Formen und Praktiken wie auch der lokalen Ausprägungen einer komplexen und »globalen« Modernität, die nichts außen vor läßt, die alles tangiert, selbst das Traditionelle, das Authentische, das Vor- oder Antimoderne – entgegen bestimmten nostalgischen Haltungen, die einem Exotismus huldigen, der im besten Fall romantisch, im schlechtesten aber neo-kolonialistisch ist. Oft ist heute ein »Objekt« nur einer von vielen Aspekten oder Momenten, in seinen besten Formen der Träger oder Vektor von sehr unterschiedlichen künstlerischen Aktivitäten. Ein gleichfalls zu beobachtendes, aber damit nicht in einem Kausalverhältnis stehendes paralleles Phänomen ist die Tatsache, daß es »zeitgenössische Kunst« in den nicht-westlichen Kulturen zumeist erst seit kurzer Zeit gibt und sie lediglich eine Begleiterscheinung ist – im günstigsten Fall eine Begleiterscheinung der beschleunigten Akkulturation und des kulturellen Synkretismus in den Großstädten und Riesenmetropolen, im schlimmsten Fall eine des Zwangs zur Marktbelebung und zur Umsatzsteigerung im Westen. Zur Zeit bedient sich die nicht-westliche zeitgenössische Kunst, will sie relevant, aussagekräftig und radikal sein, vornehmlich der Musik, der gesprochenen und geschriebenen Sprache (Literatur und Theater), des Films – alles Formen, die Emanzipationsstrategien entsprechen. Die Gründe dafür sind vielschichtig, unterbrochene oder brutal ausgelöschte Traditionen spielen hier ebenso eine Rolle wie die aus der Geschichte der Kolonisierung und Dekolonisierung resultierende Vielfalt kultureller Formationen oder der indirekte und ungleiche Zugang, der den einzelnen Völkern während dieser Zeit zur westlichen Modernität gewährt wurde.

Diese pragmatische, aber nicht programmatische Bestandsaufnahme nimmt nichts von den zukünftigen möglichen Entwicklungen vorweg, die sich bereits in den Haltungen und den Arbeiten der neuen Generation abzeichnen, aber sie bevorzugt bestimmte »andere« Formen der zeitgenössischen Kultur – aus der arabischen und muslemischen Welt, und den afrikanischen

entitled "documenta meets radio/radio meets documenta," the Hessischer Rundfunk will broadcast the works of six artists.

In conclusion I would like to thank the many partners who accompanied us with great confidence and generosity during the often difficult work of preparation. And, of course, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all the participants of documenta X, who have contributed so much to making this project meaningful.

Catherine David

Ländern, die in der Veranstaltung »100 Tage – 100 Gäste« sehr präsent sind. Da wir uns dieser räumlichen und objektiven Grenzen bewußt waren, wollten wir in Kassel und darüber hinaus der Vielfalt kultureller Ausdrucksformen sowie den unterschiedlichen Erwartungen eines heterogenen Publikums gerecht werden: durch das Angebot unterschiedlicher »Räume« und eines breiten Diskussionszusammenhangs. Neben der Ausstellung stellt ein Buch die künstlerische Produktion von 1945 bis heute in ihre politischen, ökonomischen und kulturellen Zusammenhänge, im Licht der neuen Verschiebungen und Neudefinitionen, die sich durch die Globalisierung manifestiert haben. An der Veranstaltung »100 Tage – 100 Gäste« schließlich nehmen Künstler und »acteurs culturels« (Architekten, Stadtplaner, Wirtschaftswissenschaftler, Philosophen, Schriftsteller, Filmemacher, Regisseure und Musiker) aus der ganzen Welt teil, die, entsprechend ihrer Tätigkeitsfelder, die brennenden ethischen und ästhetischen Fragen am Ende des Jahrhunderts debattieren werden, zu Themen wie: Urbanismus, Territorium, Identität, Bürgerrechte, »sozialer Nationalstaat«, Staat und Rassismus, Globalisierung der Märkte und nationale Politik, Universalismus und Kulturalismus, Kunst und Politik. Für dieses Forum wurde die documenta-Halle als ein Raum der Information und der Debatte eingerichtet. Die Beiträge werden täglich aufgezeichnet und von Bundmedia live ins Internet übertragen. Darüber hinaus werden alle Veranstaltungen als Video On Demand im Internet zur Verfügung stehen. Jeden Tag wird die *documenta* auch in einem dreiminütigen Clip in arte präsent sein. Film und Theater sind ebenfalls Teil der Veranstaltung »100 Tage – 100 Gäste«. Sieben von *documenta*, Sony und mehreren europäischen Fernsehkanälen produzierte Filme werden dabei präsentiert. Drei Abende lang, vom 5. bis zum 7. September stellen wir in einem Theatermarathon die Theaterskizzen von Regisseuren vor, die wir dazu eingeladen haben, die Räume und Bedingungen einer zeitgenössischen Situation zu erkunden und szenisch auszuarbeiten. Mit anderen Künstlerprojekten ist die *documenta* auch außerhalb Kassels präsent: es gibt einerseits Internetprojekte, die die größtmögliche Verbreitung bieten; andererseits werden drei Künstlerprojekte auf den Werbeflächen der Deutschen Städte-Reklame in vielen deutschen Städten zu sehen sein. In documenta meets radio/radio meets documenta im Hessischen Rundfunk werden sechs von Künstlern gestaltete Radiosendungen ausgestrahlt. Abschließend möchte ich allen Partnern danken, die mit viel Vertrauen und Großzügigkeit bisweilen schwierige Projekte zu begleiten wußten. Mein Dank gilt jedoch zuallererst allen Teilnehmern der *documenta X*, die zum guten Gelingen des Projektes in erster Linie beigetragen haben.

Catherine David

The Black Box
Okwui Enwezor

Introduction

Although preparation and research began nearly four years ago, it is nonetheless permissible to say that the discursive drive of Documenta11 will never see its conclusion in the spectacular spaces filled with art projects that the exhibition offers to visitors to Kassel. The exhibition, despite its ambition, scale, and complexity, and the sheer heterogeneity of the forms, images, and position that encompass its far-reaching vision, is not to be understood as a terminus for understanding the wide-ranging disciplinary models spelled out in the first four Platforms of conferences, debates, and workshops that preceded it in five locations: in Europe (Vienna and Berlin), Asia (New Delhi), the Americas (St. Lucia), and Africa (Lagos). Built into interlocking constellations of discursive domains, circuits of artistic and knowledge production, and research modules, the parameters that have shaped the organization of this project are to be found in the complex predicaments of contemporary art in a time of profound historical change and global transformation.

The careful examination and analysis of contemporary art, visual culture, and its spectatorial regimes, as well as other material orders of representation, should also be understood in relation to those other changes taking place across disciplinary and cultural boundaries that inform today's artistic procedures. The horizon of Documenta11's project and the full scope that its five Platforms occupy are twofold: first, there is the spatial and temporal dimension; the second is historical and cultural in nature. The full measure of Documenta11's critical procedure, then, is to be sought not only within the optics and visual logic of contemporary art. Thus the entire scope to the project inverts the logic that the exhibition's centrality is what defines the proper meaning of the artistic and intellectual possibilities of its procedures.

To construct an exhibition, the curator is always confronted with the double displacement of space and time. If the function of the artwork and the story it tells in an exhibition is to be understood primarily through the nature of its presentation, or by calling upon the context of the exhibition system to restore the temporal displacement that a work is often pressed into through the empirical logic of one thing standing next to another, this would also mean to establish the artwork's limits as such. Another observation is to see an exhibition as a kind of meta-language of mediation that constructs a tautological system in which the artwork is bound up in its own self-referentiality through the relationships established between mediums, objects, and systems. This would be particularly true when calling upon the work of art to present for scrutiny all its constitutive formal, conceptual, and analytical relations to the language of the exhibition's ideology. Under such a condition there is no life for the artwork outside the system of art, no autonomy outside the framework of an *art exhibition*. The artwork—which, in any case, is understood a priori to be extraterritorial to an exhibition's logic—functions as time spatialized, but only inside the space in which it is corseted, which does not refer to an external world. However, there is another less formal route to penetrate the logic of the exhibition's viewpoint; this is through methods that are manifested in a range of social, political, and cultural networks that have incessantly marked the limit and horizon of global discourse today and that present a different context for working on a project such as Domenta11. As such, this exhibition could be read as an accumulation of passages, a collection of moments, temporal lapses that emerge into spaces that reanimate for a viewing public the endless concatenation of worlds, perspectives, models, counter-models, and thinking that constitute the artistic subject. The description offered above, however, proves inadequate to fully capture the interrogations to which Documenta11 has subjected current contexts of artistic production and reception. As an exhibition project, Documenta11 from the sheer side of extraterritoriality: firstly, by displacing its historical context in Kassel; secondly, by moving outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.

In fact, if the larger intellectual and curatorial scope of Documenta11 is to be placed in proper perspective it is in the idea that there are no overarching conclusions to be reached, no forms of closure, and that no prognosis can be derived from the critical task it set out to

examine and question, namely the idea that the means and approach taken by an exhibition is necessarily fully encrypted into the result of what it displays and the forms if recuperates for artistic posterity. What, then, is the task of this exhibition project if it is not the tacit assumption that it will show the critical orientation of all engaged contemporary forms of visual production (images, objects, architecture, non-images, etc.) as they are arrayed before us today? In the use of institutional forms of exhibition practice such as Documenta to form a narrative, and from thence to posit a unified vision of art or to draw conclusions about its formal distinctiveness from all other kinds of practice, was central to the understanding of the institutional parameters of modern and contemporary art. In other cases, a different kind of conclusion was sought through critical departures from such a unified vision: this strategy of disarticulating critical art from its institutional support for the most part resides in the history of the avant-garde.

Yet, in a sense, the avant-garde and formalist art share a common assumption in the completeness of their vision, which is to say: to secure the past and maintain tradition, or to depart vigorously from the past and renovate tradition. According to Guy Debord, institutional formalism in the name of tradition and the avant-garde through its lofty invocation of innovation are locked in "[t]he struggle between tradition and innovation, which is the basic principle of the internal development of the culture of historical societies, [and] is predicated entirely on the permanent victory of innovation. Cultural [artistic] innovation is impelled solely, however, by that total historical movement which, by becoming conscious of its totality, tends toward the transcendence of its own cultural presuppositions—and hence towards the suppression of all separations."[1]

The five Platforms that form the project of Documenta11 share in no such presupposition. If the animating intellectual and artistic quests of past Documentas have been to prove such conclusions were possible, Documenta11 places its quest within the epistemological difficulty that marks all attempts to forge one common, universal conception and interpretation of artistic and cultural modernity. We begin with a rather direct questioning of the efficacy of the institutionalized discourses that have attended the dissemination and reception of so-called radical art; especially one that insists upon and promulgates the notion that art, especially radical art, in its conflictual relationship to bourgeois society (in spite of all attempts to bring its full measure into the ethical-political space of culture), remains autonomous from all political and social demands. But this is hardly the case today. We are today confronted with a singular predicament; one in which we would ask: What could be Documenta11's "spectacular difference" if viewed from the refractory shards thrown up by the multiple artistic spaces and knowledge circuits that are the critical hallmarks of today's artistic subjectivity and cultural climate?

At the turn of an already less than promising century, Documenta is confronted by and placed in the challenging situation of declaring what its spectacular difference will be, without shielding its past triumphs and successes from the transhistorical processes that shake the ground of every ontological pronouncement about artistic uniqueness. That spectacular difference proceeds not simply from the difficult-to-sustain notion of art's eternal autonomy from all domains of socio-political life, but from the view that art's proliferating forms and methods, histories and departures, conditions of production and canons of institutionalization call strongly for a forum from which to announce its critical independence from the conservative academic thinking that has taken possession of art's place in life and thought. Therefore, one claim that can be made for Documenta11's spectacular difference is that its critical spaces are not places for the normalization or uniformization of all artistic visions on their way to institutional beatification. Rather, through the continuity and circularity of the nodes of discursivity and debate, location and translation, cultural situations and their localities that are transmitted and perceived through the five Platforms, Documenta11's spaces are to be seen as forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions.

What is an Avant-Garde Today? The Postcolonial Aftermath of Globalization and the Terrible Nearness of Distant Places

One feature of most definitions of globalization is the degree to which the term is constantly brought into the phenomenological orbits of spatiality and temporality in order to be disciplined inside the cold logic of the mathematical analysis of capital production and accumulation, and economic rationalization (a point made so deftly by Maria Eichhorn's project in the exhibition.) Another point about globalization gives rise to the thought that its cumulative effects and processes are to be understood as mediations and representations of

spatiality and temporality: globalization is said to abolish great distances, while temporality is at best experienced as uneven.

In his essay "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," Achille Mbembe makes the case clear by evoking Fernand Braudel's monumental study of capitalism and the world system. Mbembe writes:

> If at the center of the discussion on globalization we place three problems of spatiality, calculability, and temporality in their relations with representation, we find ourselves brought back to two points usually ignored in contemporary discourses, even through Fernand Braudel had called attention to them. The first of these has to do with temporal pluralities, and we might add, with the subjectivity that makes these temporalities possible and meaningful.[2]

Such temporal plurality could be understood, according to Mbembe, by the distinction Braudel drew between "temporalities of long duration, slowly evolving and less slowly evolving situations, rapid and virtually instantaneous deviations, the quickest being the easiest to detect."[3]

Whatever definition or character we invest it with, it is in the postcolonial order that we find the most critical enunciation and radicalization of spatiality and temporality. From the moment the postcolonial enters into the space/time of global calculations and the effects they impose on modern subjectivity, we are confronted not only with the asymmetry and limitations of globalism's materialist assumptions but also with the terrible nearness of distant places that global logic sought to abolish and bring into one domain of deterritorialized rule. Rather than vast distances and unfamiliar places, strange peoples and cultures, postcoloniality embodies the spectacular mediation and representation of nearness as the dominant mode of understanding the present condition of globalization. Postcoloniality, in its demand for full inclusion within the global system and by contesting existing epistemological structures, shatters the narrow focus of Western global optics and fixes its gaze on the wider sphere of the new political, social, and cultural relations that emerged after World War II. The postcolonial today is a world of proximities. It is world of nearness, not an elsewhere. Neither is it a vulgar state of endless contestations and anomie, chaos and unsustainability, but rather the very space where the tensions that govern all ethical relationships between citizen and subject converge. The postcolonial space is the site where experimental cultures emerge to articulate modalities that define the new meaning- and memory-making systems of late modernity.

In the analysis of postcoloniality we witness a double move: first through the liberatory strategy of decolonization. Decolonization—that is to say liberation from within—as the political order of the postcolonial is not only counter-normative and counter-hegemonic but also tends toward the reproduction of the universal as the sign of the rupture from imperial governance. Decolonization is also understood here by what Mbembe and Janet Roitman call a "regime of subjectivity," which they describe as:

> ...a shared ensemble of imaginary configurations of "everyday life," imaginaries which have a material basis and systems of intelligibility to which people refer in order to construct a more or less clear of the causes of phenomena and effects, to determine the domain of what is possible and feasible, as well as the logics of efficacious action. More generally a regime of subjectivity is an ensemble of ways of living, representing, and experiencing contemporaneousness, while at the same time, inscribing this experience in the mentality, understanding, and language of historical time.[4]

Postcoloniality's second lesson is that it exceeds the borders of the former colonized world to lay claim to the modernized, metropolitan world of empire by making empire's former "other" visible and present at all times, either through the media or through mediatory, spectatorial, and carnivalesque relations of language, communication, images, contact, and resistance within the everyday. Two decades ago, a number of theorists would have called this double move postmodernism's saving grace. Bur postcoloniality must at all times be distinguished from postmodernism. While postmodernism was preoccupied with relativizing historical transformations and contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives, postcoloniality does the obverse, seeking instead to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation.

In this regard, it could be said that the history of the avant-garde falls within the epistemological scheme of grand narratives. What, then, is the fate of the avant-

garde in this climate of incessant assault upon its former conclusions? Seen from this purview, all economic, social, cultural, and political questions that emerged in the last half century, and the vital relations of power that attend their negotiations, have had the distinctive historical impact of abolishing all the claims that the former European avant-gardes made for themselves. Nowhere is this historical termination more visible than in the recent drive by global capitalism to frame a new optics of spatial and temporal totality that forms the project of neo-liberalism after the demise of the crudely managed and regulated Soviet Communist systems. To understand what constitutes the avant-garde today, one must begin not in the field of contemporary art but in the field of culture and politics, as well as in the economic field governing all relations that have come under the overwhelming hegemony of capital. If the avant-gardes of the past (Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, let's say) anticipated a changing order, that of today is to make impermanence, and what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls *aterritoriality*,[5] the principal order of today's uncertainties, instability, and insecurity. With this order in place, all notions of autonomy which radical art had formerly claimed for itself are abrogated.

Calculating the effects of these uncertainties within the new imperial scheme of "Empire", Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri inform us of the features of a new type of global sovereignty which, in its deterritorialized form, is no longer defined by the conservative borders of the old nation state scheme. If this Empire is materializing, hegemonizing, and attempting to regulate all forms of social relations and cultural exchanges, strong, critical responses to this materialization are contemporary art's weakest point. In their thesis, Empire is that domain of actions and activities that have come to replace imperialism; whose scope also harbors the ambition to rule not just territories, markets, populations, but most fundamentally, social life in its entirety.[6] Today's avant-garde is so thoroughly disciplined and domesticated within the scheme of Empire that a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found to counterbalance Empire's attempt at tolalization. Hardt and Negri call this resistance force, opposed to the power of Empire, "the multitude."[7] If Empire's counter-model is to be found in the pressing, anarchic demands of the multitude, to understand what sustains it historically returns us yet again to the move by postcoloniality to define new models of subjectivity. In postcoloniality we are incessantly offered counter-models through which the displaced—those placed on the margins of the enjoyment of full global participation—fashion new worlds by producing experimental cultures. By experimental cultures I wish to define a set of practices whereby cultures evolving out of imperialism and colonialism, slavery and indenture, compose a collage of reality from the fragments of collapsing space.

Ground Zero or Tabula Rasa: From Margin to Center

> But we have precisely chosen to speak of that kind of tabula rasa which characterizes at the outset all decolonization. Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonized. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and woman who are colonized. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another "species" of men and women: the colonizers.
> – Frantz Fanon[8]

As in the early years of decolonization and the liberation struggles of the twentieth century, radical Islam has today come to define (for now) the terms of radical politics in the twenty-first century. Also, following the strategies of the liberation struggles of the last century, the program of political Islam today is based on an agonistic struggle with Westernism; that is, that sphere of global totality that manifests itself through the political, social, economic, cultural, juridical, and spiritual integration achieved via institutions devised and maintained solely to perpetuate the influence of European and North American modes of being. Two chief attributes of this integration are to be seen in the constitution of the first and second phases of modernity: firstly, in the far-reaching effects of the world system of capitalism and the state form; and secondly, in the perpetual interpretation of what a just society ought to be, pursed through the secular vision of democracy as the dominant principle of political participation. The main political rupture of today is properly caught in the resistance struggles being initialled by a host of forces (whether Islamic or secular) in order to prevent their societies from total integration into these two phase of the Western system.

If we are to have a proper analysis by which to interpret the fundamental rationale for such resistance, we must try to understand that processes of integration proper to the idea of Westernism rest somewhat on what Jurgen Habermas calls "boundary-maintaining systems,"[9] which are also systems of conceptual appropriation of socio-cultural processes schematized in his distinction between society and lifeworld. One way of touching on this distinction is communicated by a view that sees non-Western societies in evolutionary stages of movement towards integration: from tribal to modern society; feudal to technological economy; underdeveloped to developed: theocratic and authoritarian to secular democratic systems of governance. In his classic study on the colonial discourse around Africa, V. Y. Mudimbe writes about the colonial system "as a dichotomizing system [with which] a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies."[10] This evolutionary principle of integration returns us to Braudel's notion of "temporalities of long and very long duration, slowly evolving and less slowly evolving situations." In every stage of its evolutionary scheme, Westernism's insistence on the total adoption and observation of its norms and concepts comes to constitute the only viable idea of social, political, and cultural legitimacy from which all modern subjectivities are seen to emerge. As I shall argue later, the social and political struggles of today have their roots in the flaws inherent in the two concepts on which Westernism is based.

Within the field of art, the concepts of the museum and art history rest on a similar unyielding theology that founds the legitimacy of artistic autonomy, canons, and connoisseurship upon the same interpretive pursuit of modernity, which would also formulate the historical and formal understanding of all artistic production for all time. In the specific instance of large-scale international exhibitions, Gerardo Mosquera has proposed the view that Western modernism's theology of values turns into a moment from which to gauge the asymmetry in the relationship between those he calls "curating cultures" and those others who are "curated cultures."[11] In hindsight, the top-down view of curating contemporary art operates similarly within the frame of artistic and canonical integration and totalization that ground the principle of Westernism as such. The horizon of artistic discourses of the last century, regardless of claims made for the affinities between the tribal and modern, is neatly described by the cleavage that defines the separation between Western artistic universalism and tribal object particularities and peculiarities which also define their marginality. While strong revolutionary claims have been made for the avant-garde within Westernism, its vision of modernity remains surprisingly conservative and formal. On the other hand, the political and historical vision of the Western Avant–garde has remained narrow. The propagators of the avant-garde have done little to constitute a space of self-reflexivity that can understand new relations of artistic modernity not founded on Westernism. The foregoing makes tendentious the claims of radicality often imputed to exhibitions such as Documenta or similar manifestations within the exhibitionary complex of artistic practice today. What one sees, then, in Documenta's historical alliance with institutions of modernism is how immediately it is caught in a double bind in its attempt to negotiate both its radicality and normativity.

The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States have provided us with a metaphor for articulating what is at stake in the radical politics and experimental cultures of today, while opening a space from which culture, qua contemporary art, could theorize an epistemology of non-integrative discourse. The metaphor of September 11 is to be found in the stark notion of Ground Zero. But what does Ground Zero mean at that moment it is uttered? Where do we now locate the space of Ground Zero? What constitutes its effects on the nature of radical politics and cultural articulations today? Is Ground Zero the space of the kind of antagonistic politics in which the enemy always appears the same, undifferentiated, making his annihilation all the more justifiable? Or is it to be found in the terrible pile of molten steel, soot, broken lives, and scarred, ashen ground of the former World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan? In Gaza, Ramallah, or Jerusalem? In the ruins of Afghan cities? Or is Ground Zero the founding instant of the reckoning to come with Westernism after colonialism?

Let's begin again. It may be said—in the sense of the insecurity, instability, and uncertainties it inspires—that the kind of political violence we are experiencing today may well come to define what we mean when we invoke the notion of Ground Zero. Beyond the symbolic dimension of its funerary representation, the notion of Ground Zero resembles most closely Fanon's powerful evocation of the ground–clearing gesture of *tabula rasa*, as a beginning in the ethics and politics of constituting a new order of global society moving beyond colonial-

ism as a set of dichotomizing oppositions, and beyond Westernism as the force of modern integration. No contemporary thinker comes closer than Fanon to articulating with such radical accuracy and propinquity the chaos that now proliferates inside the former dead certainties of the imperial project of colonialism and Westernism. These dead certainties are still to be found in the discourses that have equally proliferated to describe the radical spatial and temporal violence of the actions of September 11. Some call it the clash of civilizations, others the axis of evil, or the battle between good and evil, between the civilized and uncivilized world; others call it jihad, intifada, liberation, etc. In all the jingoistic language that mediates this state of affairs, cultural and artistic responses could, however, posit a radical departure from the system of hegemony that fuels the present struggle. In fact, it was the Iranian president, Mohammed Khatami, who called for a dialogue between civilizations. Even if the void in downtown Manhattan constitutes a sort of apocalyptic vision of destruction, we must do well not to see its destruction as an apotheosis and the final chapter in the confrontation between the West and Islam; or in fact, the West and the rest of the world that is not doing its share in George Bush the Younger's war on terrorism. September 11, therefore, far from positing a logical end in the long series of oppositions to Westernism, should perhaps be framed as the instance of the full emergence of the margin to the center.

When Fanon was writing in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Islamic and Arab world in Algeria had risen up in bloody resistance against the brutal force and terror of French colonialism. The Algerian war of liberation, along with other decolonization processes across the southern hemisphere from the 1940s onwards, should have taught us a lesson on how to read the history of all future political struggles. Ground Zero as such is not the lacuna in downtown Manhattan out of which the symbolic pillar of blue light that illuminates its empty center is the suture that will restore it to its past. Ground Zero, as the *tabula rasa* defining global politics and culture differentiation, points toward that space where the dead certainties of colonialism's dichotomizing oppositions, and Westernism's epistemological concepts for managing and maintaining modernity, have come to a crisis. The emptiness at the center is not a ground but a founding moment for articulating the demands of the multitude that have emerged in the wake of Empire.[12] In the later stage of the Algerian liberation war, Fanon articulated this tension between the multitude and Empire so clearly, a view that completely prefigures fundamentalist Islam's radical transnational enterprise. In terms of strategy, program, and the direction of their assault on the West, the fundamentalist Islamic challenge to the global order is clearly Fanonian. Let us listen to Fanon, writing towards the end of the French/Algerian war:

> The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For *if the last shall be first* [my emphasis], this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence.
>
> You do not turn any society, however primitive it may be, upside down with such a program if you have not decided from the very beginning, that is to say from the actual formulation of that program, to overcome all the obstacles that you will come across in so doing. The native who decides to put the program into practice, and to become its moving force, is ready for violence at all times. From birth it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence.[13]

Absolute violence seen from Fanon's perspective is not an end in itself but a means for the confrontation to come with the forces of Westernism, today defined by the hegemony of industrial capitalism. In the Islamic world, the Iranian revolution led by Imam Khomeini clearly marked the opening of this confrontation. The defeat of the occupying Soviet forces by a broad coalition of Islamic mujahideen in Afghanistan in 1989 marks another point in the continuous Islamic battle with Westernism. Similarly the sanction placed on Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* was clearly a contestation of the Western epistemological avant-gardism out of which the novel emerged. From the foregoing, it seems quite clear that the West had completely underestimated the ferocity of fundamentalist Islam's hostility toward Western hegemony. On the other hand, there is also a clear recognition by forces within Islam (enlightened and fundamentalist alike) that the only force capable of challenging the global political and cultural power of the West is that of Islam

as a viable world culture.[14] As such, radical Islam must therefore be properly understood as a serious counter-hegemonic opposition, at least on the global political stage. Because radical Islam has often drawn from theories of jihad—which it narrowly interprets from a binary oppositional standpoint of believers and non-believers, infidels and good Muslims—it underwrites, through the deployment of excessive violence, a view of Islam as belligerent, warmongering, and violent. By objectifying violence as a means through which to bring about social and cultural transformation in regions where it is a majority culture, and by proposing very little innovative political model for its interaction with the rest of global society, radical Islam risks alienating other blocks of the disaffected global polity if it does not confront a longstanding perception of it as intolerant of difference and coercive and unjust in its juridical procedures. The place of women and religious minorities, the lack of transparency and corruption in its elite, and the political rights and participation of a large segment of its societies further undermine Islam's claim to universalism.

As the battle with the forces of "terrorist" elements continues apace in Afghanistan and elsewhere—as Palestinians fight Israeli hegemony in the Occupied Territories; as antiglobalization groups battle the police in Genoa, Seattle, Montreal, and other cities in Europe and North America; as protesters in Argentina, Turkey, Nigeria, and all across the developing world engage the pernicious policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—there is a view today that Ground Zero represents the clear ground from which the margin has moved to the center in order to reconceptualize the key ideological differences of the present global transition.

Courtesy documenta archiv

Notes

1 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books, 1999, pp. 130-31.
2 Achille Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and, Sovereignty in Africa," *Public Culture*, no. 30, winter 2000, p. 259.
3 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: The Fifteenth Century to the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 3, *The Perspective of the World*, trans. Siân Reynolds, New York: Harper and Row, 1984; quoted in Mbembe, "At the Edge of the World," p. 259.
4 Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman, "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crises," *Public Culture*, no. 16, winter 1995, p. 324.
5 See Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
6 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. xv.
7 Ibid.
8 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* New York: Grove Press, 1963, pp. 35-36.
9 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 2*, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, p. 151.
10 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 4.
11 See Gerardo Mosquera, "Some Problems in Transcultural Curating," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fischer, London: Kala Press, 1994, pp. 133-39.
12 See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.
13 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 37.
14 See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Ahmed has argued the point that within the "new world order" only two categories of societies exist, those that are imploding and those that are exploding. Imploding societies represent those caught up in underdevelopment, economic helotry, cultural insecurity, social malaise, political fragmentation and collapse of the state form, and are marked by crises: while exploding cultures are those segments of the industrialized world which he identifies as bubbling with optimism, and have the technological achievements which allow them to continuously expand economically, culturally, and politically. With such asymmetry in place, those societies seen to be imploding offer no alternatives to Western global hegemony, and are condemned to be ruled by the West. In the case of Islam, Ahmed makes the case that Islamic modernity is caught in the tension in which ideas of both implosion and explosion define the basis of what its societies are undergoing, but also provides it with the tools and adequately respond to Western hegemony.

Biennials and Cultural Difference: Between Critical Deconstruction and Essentialism

Rime Fetnan

Introduction

This essay intends to question the role played by some of the most emblematic biennials in recent years in terms of the recognition and promotion of cultural or racial difference. Our analysis is based on three case studies, a corpus of exhibitions that took place in Europe between 1997 and 2003[1]: Documenta X (curated by Catherine David in 1997), Documenta11 (curated in 2002 by Okwui Enwezor and six co-curators[2]), which both took place in Kassel, Germany; and the Venice Biennale in 2003, untitled Dreams and Conflicts: the Dictatorship of the Viewer (curated by Francesco Bonami, along with eleven curators[3]). We will present some of the results we obtained during our PhD research: we would first like to demonstrate how institutions, curators, and artists have participated in the deconstruction of the principles of Western modernist ideology. The latter sees the artist as evolving in a hermetic world vis-à-vis society: the creative genius must be autonomous from the issues of bourgeois society in order to access a pure and absolute state.

Since 1960, curatorial and artistic practices have shown a desire to decentralize from the masterpiece[4]: at documenta 5 (1972), for example, we can observe a reflection on the links between production of different natures: advertisements, comics, and objects from political propaganda. In many ways, Harald Szeemann's approach is similar to the one adopted by Arnold Bode[5] during the first editions of documenta, which notably enabled the integration of design and art considered at the time as "minor."

If we can find similar processes of deconstruction of the principles of differentiation and hierarchization of the arts, the exhibitions that interest us today present a novelty: the deconstruction of the autonomy of art is done through a contextual framing that highlights the cultural dimensions of any artistic production.

Curatorial framing that has broken its ties with Western modernist ideology

In both Documenta X and Documenta11, curators wanted to initiate—or at least to be part of—the deconstruction process. Firstly, both of them embodied the changes they foreshadowed: Catherine David was the first woman at the head of the event, and Okwui Enwezor the first black man. If both curators share certain points of view on cultural and racial difference in contemporary art, they take divergent paths in the way they reconsider the autonomy of the artistic field. For Catherine David, she adopted a curatorial methodology that aimed to consider the works through a historical prism which placed them in a historical, political, and cultural context. The Documenta X catalogue, entitled The Book, is completely representative of this methodology, since it "situates artistic productions from 1945 to today in their political, economic and cultural context of appearance."[6] In doing this, we can consider that Catherine David has a 'heteronomous'[7] approach to works that first came from the specific field of art. On the contrary, during Documenta11 Okwui Enwezor put the artistic and aesthetic values of the works in the background—we do not find any occurrence of these terms in the statement—and gives the artist new functions, based on citizenship and ethical values: "In the democratic system […] the demands of citizenship place strong ethical

constraints on the artist based on his or her commitment to all 'forms-of-life'. The practice of art presents the artist with the task of making such commitment."[8] Being primarily considered as a citizen, then his status as a creative genius is called into question, along with his ability to generate 'masterpieces'. Thus, the work of art no longer comes from an autonomous and closed field:"To understand what constitutes the avant-garde today, one must begin not in the field of contemporary art but in the field of culture and politics[...]."[9]

This change of approach is to be linked with the cultural openness defended in curatorial discourses ("The careful examination and analysis of contemporary art [...] should also be understood in relation to those other changes taking place across disciplinary and cultural boundaries that inform today's artistic procedures" Okwui Enwezor[10]). Thus, to the uniqueness that characterizes the universalist ideology of modernism, artistic production is now qualified as heterogeneous ("the extreme heterogeneity of contemporary aesthetic practices and mediums [...] and the very different, even irreconcilable experiences of space and time they imply" Catherine David[11]). Cultural and geographic diversity is now one of the central values of curatorial framing, and is intrinsically linked to the redefinition of modernity because it introduces pluralism, and therefore a form of decentralization, exemplified in Documenta11 by the five platforms spread over several continents[12] ("The exhibition counterposes the supposed purity and autonomy of the art object against a rethinking of modernity based on ideas of transculturality and extraterritoriality. Thus, the exhibition project of the fifth Platform is [...] a container of a plurality of voices."[13])

Calling into question the autonomous field of art through the renewal of curatorial framing is illustrated, within the exhibition space, in opposition to the principle of the white cube, which often embodies, in discourse, modernist ideology, because it aims to present the works in a closed and autonomous space, as described by Brian O'Doherty: "The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light [...] The art is free, as the saying used to go 'to take its own life' [...] Modernism's transposition of perception from life to formal value is complete."[14]

For Catherine David, the "universalizing" nature of the white cube is problematic because it excludes certain forms of artistic practices, in particular those from "non-Western cultural zones where the object of 'contemporary art' is often a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon [...]."[15] The curator considers that this Western presentation model does not correspond to "non-Western expressions" that take more the form of musical, oral, literary or theatrical productions.[16] Therefore, we can understand the "parcours"[17] established in the city of Kassel for Documenta X, as well as the discursive space of 100 days–100 Guests as a way to get around the white cube model.

What is interesting in those analyzed discourses is that the rejection of the white cube and modernist modes of presentation do not rest on the fact that they are considered unsuitable or outdated regarding any form of artistic production—including Western ones—but that they are unsuitable for a certain production: that coming from geocultural areas that are different from those where the white cube was established. The scenography set up in the exhibition Z.O.U.–Zone of Urgency as part of the Venice Biennale in 2003 is quite exemplary of this de-hierarchization process: the curator Hou Hanru called on the architect scenographer Yung Ho Chang (founder of Atelier FC3Z) who built a mezzanine in a part of the Arsenale, doubling the exhibition space originally planned for Z.O.U.

The result is an erasure of linearity, in favor of a juxtaposition and accumulation of works: the picture rail is absent, and some pieces are suspended. The same type of process is established in The Structure of Survival, another exhibition of the Venice

Biennale the same year[18]: the picture rails were absent, the works were juxtaposed in space, arranged on mobile structures, tables, or on the floor.[19]
The exhibition also included a "media space" dedicated to artists working with computers or the videographic medium. Catherine David used a similar gathering for Contemporary Arab Representations, an exhibition that follows the last two: instead of dividing the video installations as Okwui Enwezor did for Documenta11 (in particular at the Fridericianum and the Binding Brauerei), Catherine David brought them all together in the same room, the screens placed on the floor. In addition, many chronological landmarks were hung on the walls, as a sign of the importance of context in the curatorial framing.[20]
If, for some curators, the concepts of Western modernity are called into question through a reconfiguration of the exhibition's methodology, others go further by questioning the uniqueness of the institutional space itself. Taking the works out of the institutional space seems therefore to be the concretization of this desire for "decentering" that we can observe in the statements. It is as such that we can interpret the platforms of Documenta11, described by Okwui Enwezor as a "non-hierarchical model of representation."[21] Although the spaces of the fifth platform remain very conventional, adopting the white cube's principles; the curator believes that the non-hierarchy of content and the decentralization of the curatorial framing come primarily from the extraterritoriality that he established for Documenta11.
Although there is a sincere approach to integration and enhancement, this process is accompanied by phenomena of the characterization and essentialization of identities, which constitute a paradox.

Racialization of identities in curatorial statements

This part is focused on the designations of artists and works that are linked to—within the discourse—to the theme of cultural difference or otherness. The semiolinguistic analysis I have conducted shows that expressions used for the attribution of values are made in relation to a "norm" which is related to the West. The comparison between expressions used to designate non-Western artists/works and Western artists/works is useful to highlight each of their specificities.
For example, Catherine David often relates Western art and artists to historically situated artistic values ("Western modernity"[22]) unlike the "non-Western expressions"[23]that are not considered as contemporary art (understood as an artistic and aesthetic category). Rarely the reference to non-Western production is made through the terms of "art" or "artwork." In fact, the only mention of contemporary art is made with quotes, and therefore distanced:

> The object of 'contemporary art' is often a very recent phenomenon, even an epiphenomenon, linked in the best cases, to an acceleration of the processes of acculturation and cultural syncretism in the new urban agglomerations, and in the worst cases, to the demand for rapid renewal of market products in the West.[24]

This extract is almost an explicit testimony to the fact that the 'contemporary art' category, as it is imagined in this part of the world, is considered to be an artificial construct linked to the West. Which mediums are considered authentic for these "non-Western expressions"? Catherine David quotes the "music, oral and written language (literature, theatre, and cinema)" which she associates with the notion of tradition ("interrupted or violent destroyed traditions"[25]; "forms which have traditionally contributed to strategies of emancipation"[26]).
The statement by Okwui Enwezor for Documenta11 ("The Black Box") operates a rupture because it introduces the notion of "modernity" in expressions related to

otherness and cultural difference, even if this integration is still done in relation to the Western standard ("artistic modernity not founded on Westernism"[27]) and that the concept of modernity remains however principally attached to the West. In addition, if some artistic references illustrate "Western modernity" (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism), we find on the side of the theme of cultural difference and otherness only one artistic reference made to traditional forms ("tribal object particularities and peculiarities which also define their marginality"[28]).

In the statement of the exhibition Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes (curated by Gilane Tawadros during the Venice Biennale in 2003[29]), the "contemporary artist/artwork" expression is often used by the curator to designate African artists, as the title of the exhibition suggests it ("contemporary artists from Africa and the African diaspora"[30]). Gilane Tawadros also uses mediums traditionally attached to the "Western contemporary art" category to qualify their works ("15 artists working across a range of media from painting and sculpture through to architecture, photography and installation."[31]) However, if the curator uses the notion of "modernity" to qualify these works, she distinguishes it from "Modernism and modernity in Western terms," which she defines as "a decisive break or rupture with the past."[32] Indeed, the concept of modernity as it is used with reference to artists/works from African and the African diaspora results more from a negotiation between tradition and modernity ("In the work of the celebrated Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, it is the negotiation between tradition and modernity [...] that is articulated through his vision of an architecture for the poor"[33]). Thus, the category "contemporary African art" is systematically approached through this dichotomy, like the work of Frank Bowling ("Bowling not only put the political into 'Pop Art', but also put postcolonial concerns into contemporary art"[34]), which makes it possible both to characterize it and to distinguish it from Western modernity. This extract also testifies to an attempt to integrate an artist categorized into "contemporary African art" within a Western categorization (Pop Art), without this being complete, as the use of quotes shows.

Although the curators' intentions seem to be moving towards a tolerant or even politically committed approach of cultural difference, we can observe that part of the speeches highlight the "dark part"of otherness, using imagery based on the fear.[35] For example, the statement of Okwui Enwezor describes the West as an hegemonic entity at the origin of relations of domination and inequalities, but his description of Islam distinguished itself by the use of a vocabulary which emphasizes its violent and aggressive character ("ferocity of fundamentalist Islam's hostility"; "bloody resistance"; "excessive violence"[36]). The hostility shown by "Islam" towards the West is certainly considered by the curator as symptomatic of a process of emancipation from imposed domination, but it is also often associated with internal conflicts and embodied by radical movements ("radical Islam has often drawn from theories of Jihad, which it narrowly interprets from a binary oppositional standpoint"[37]).

In addition, we can observe a process of projection of this radicalism onto the image of Islamic societies: Enwezor's discourse produces a conflation between what generally relates to Islam as a religion—which is normally qualified as "Islamic"—and some radical or conservative movements of Islam, which come under the term of "Islamism." This distinction between the two notions (Islam and Islamism) is not made by the enunciator who confuses a radical political movement and societies characterized by their religious affiliation in the following excerpt:

> By objectifying violence […] and by proposing very little innovative political model for its interaction with the rest of global society, radical Islam risks alienating other blocks of the disaffected global policy[…]the place of women and religious modernities, the lack of transparency and corruption in its elite, and the lack of political rights and participation of a large segment of its societies further undermine Islam's claim to universalism.[38]

These extracts show, in our point of view, the consequences that the September 11, 2001 attacks may have had on the Arab-Muslim imaginary[39]: as Sarah Mazouz points out, Islamic societies are portrayed in constant conflict with the outside world, in line with the figure of the terrorist, which constitutes an essentialized vision of Muslims.[40]

In Enwezor's discourse, Islamic societies and Islamist movements are merged in the same imaginary with echoes of the figure of the barbarian, stemming from the myth of Orientalism. In fact, unlike the figure of the savage—who is the other figure of otherness and exoticism according to geographers Bernard Debarbieux and Jean-François Staszak[41]—the barbarian is civilized: he lives in a society, in cities, and adopts behaviors closer to those of humans than those of animals. However, if the society in which the barbarian lives is civilized, it is in a deviant way: evidenced by the relationship with women, religion, freedoms, and the law. Besides, in Enwezor's discourse, it is this deviance that prevents these societies from having any influence ("further undermine Islam's claim to universalism"). This results in the implicit legitimization of the superiority of Western societies that, even if they are considered hegemonic and dogmatic, are nonetheless considered to be civilized in a non-deviant way.

In Enwezor's statement, it is interesting to note that African societies are not related to the same imaginary: they are more often described as fragile, unstable, even chaotic, from a social, political, and economic point of view ("African cities have witnessed increased population growth, migration and the pressures of fragile urban governance, and state and economic collapse"; "fragile urban systems"; "State collapse […] civil conflict […] pernicious dictatorship"[42]).

We can make a comparison with Gilane Tawadros' statement in Fault Lines, where we find the same topos: artists and descriptions of artworks are a way for the curator to produce a general discourse on certain African societies, characterized by a climate of political unrest and instability. ("Salem Mekuria's beautiful film installation that evokes the periodic breaks in continuity and stability—the eruption of conflict, war, famine and exodus—in Ethiopia's recent history"[43]; "Political and social violence is a recurrent theme."; "ordinary Egyptians and their daily effort to survive. Everyday struggles have taken the place of the nationalist struggles in this new post-colonial world order[…]."[44])

Conclusion

These three biennials have called into question the autonomy of the artistic field, by setting up creative and alternative displays to the white cube. These methodologies, along with the selection of artists, have had an important resonance in the art world. But the analyses of discourses show that representations are still imbued with certain Orientalist or primitive imaginaries. In the light of these elements, it seems that some imaginaries conveyed through the statements are part of a process of "racialization" that comes from a process of radicalization and undervaluing of certain forms of otherness. Racialization is borrowed from Frantz Fanon[45] and has to be distinguished from the notion of racism, because it does not only concern categorization processes linked to the idea of race, but also includes notions of culture and religion. Thus, the

notion of racialization allows us to highlight the complex dimension and dynamic that underpins power relations.

Notes

1 We chose these exhibitions because they made cultural difference a central theme, and also because they have prestige among large-scale exhibitions, as well in contemporary art history.
2 Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya.
3 Carlos Basualdo, Daniel Birnbaum, Catherine David, Massimiliano Gioni, Hou Hanru, Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, RirkritTiravanija, Gabriel Orozco, Gilane Tawadros, and Igor Zabel. They were all in charge of an exhibition.
4 Jean-Marc Poinsot, "L'art et son context ou la question du culturel," in *Harald Szeemann, Méthodologieindividuelle*, ed. Florence Derieux (Grenoble: Le Magasin, 2007), 26.
5 The creator of documenta in 1955.
6 Catherine David, "Introduction," in *Documenta X – Short Guide,* ed. Françoise Joly (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1997), 12.
7 In sociology, heteronomy is opposed to the autonomy of the artistic field, that is, what is related or comes from the commercial or political field.
8 Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta11_Platform 5 : Exhibition,* eds. OkwuiEnwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: HatjeCantz Verlag, 2002) 54.
9 Ibid., 45.
10 Ibid., 42.
11 David "Introduction,"11.
12 Platform 1 took place in Berlin, Platform 2 in New Delhi, the third platform in Saint Lucia (Caribbean), the fourth in Lagos, and the fifth in Kassel.
13 Enwezor, "The Black Box,"55.
14 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986), 15.
15 David "Introduction,"11.
16 Ibid.
17 In French in the text.
18 The one curated by Carlos Basualdo.
19 "The Structure of Survival," *Universes in Universe*, accessed December 17, 2018, http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/survival/e-lab.htm.
20 "Contemporary Arab Representations," *Universes in Universe*.
21 Enwezor, "The Black Box," 48.
22 David "Introduction,"11.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 11-12.
27 Enwezor, "The Black Box," 47.
28 Ibid., 46.
29 Gilane Tawadros "Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes," in *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition*, eds. Francesco Bonami, Maria-Luisa Frisa (Venice: Marsilio, La Biennale de Venezia, 2003), 133-134.
30 Ibid., 133.
31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 For Sally Prince, this rhetoric is characteristic of the evocation of primitive artists. Sally Price, *Primitive Arts in Civilized Places*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 64.
36 Enwezor, "The Black Box," 47-48.
37 Ibid., 48.
38 Ibid.
39 In his statement, Okwui Enwezor only mentions Arabic-Muslim or Middle Eastern societies (using the examples of Algeria and Iran).
40 Sarah Mazouz, *La république et sesautres, politiques de l'altérité dans la France des années 2000* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2017), 16.
41 Bernard Debarbieux, Jean-François Staszak, "Identités collectives et altérités: la fabrique des imaginaires," radio program on *France Culture*, broadcast February 10, 2016. https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/planete-terre/identites-collectives-et-alterites-la-fabrique-des-imaginaires.
42 Enwezor, "The Black Box," 52
43 Tawadros, "Fault Lines," 133.
44 Ibid., 133-134.
45 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, Banton, 1967).

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How Photography (Re-)entered documenta

Mona Schubert

Installation of the photo-section of documenta 6 at Museum Fridericianum, including artworks of Baron Wilhelm von Glöden, *10 portraits and nude photographs*, 1881-1910, (wall left), Liselotte Strewlow, *Joseph Beuys*, 1967, (second partition wall, left) [= Direct Photography I, Fashion and Society; Portrait], David Douglas Duncan, *Paramedic in South Korea*, September 11, 1950 (wall left, floor, second picture) [= Direct Photography I, War], in Hans D. Baumann, et. Al., *Kunst und Medien. Materialien zur documenta* 6, (Kassel: Stadtzeitung und Verlag 1977), fig., p. 83.

Photography has always played a significant role at documenta. Already at its first edition in 1955, a photo wall consisting of large-format portraits of the exhibited artists welcomed visitors into the entrance hall even before they could look upon the first works of art.[1] Furthermore, visual documentations have been commissioned throughout documenta's history from photographers, some of whom—such as Ernst Haacke or Balthasar Burkhard—even became renowned artists later on.[2] However, it was not until 1977 that photography finally entered documenta as an independent art form. At *documenta 6* (*d-6*), for the first and last time in the history of the periodic exhibition format, one section was dedicated entirely to photography. This marked a new era for the reception of the medium. In the wake of the revived photographic (exhibition) practices of the 1970s, the curatorial team, Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss, who were also responsible for the painting section, devised an unorthodox concept. Instead of focusing on the recent developments in contemporary art, which was supposed to be documenta's trademark, the curators combined photographic positions form the 1970s with historic masterpieces so that they would retell 150 years of the medium's history. The reason for this highly discussed and controversial decision, which led to the resignation of several *d-6* committee members,[3] lay in the legitimization of new media entering the exhibition hegemony of documenta. Titled "Art in the Media World—Media in Art," *documenta 6* aimed to provide a far-reaching critique of media, a term used to replace the art genres, and a self-referential reflection on different concepts of mediality.[4] This so-called "media-concept," realized under the artistic direction of

Manfred Schneckenburger, integrated, for the first time, not only photography but also film and video as independent sections. The concept of *d-6* proposed that new media should be juxtaposed with more traditional art genres such as painting and sculpture. But only the photo section was underpinned by an historic narrative, while the sections of video and film focused strictly on contemporary practices, as had been documenta's agenda since its founding. The following article tries to illustrate the motives behind what might at first sight seem like an inconsistent approach.

When photography was thrust into the limelight at documenta, very little elaborated historical or theoretical literature on photography existed. In a special issue accompanying *d-6*, Honnef and Weiss stated: "There is no doubt that not only a lack of information but also awareness has to be overcome, which goes beyond those of other media." [5] The academic discourse on photography was still in its infancy, and most sources were only accessible through antiquarian bookshops.[6] The curatorial team thus not only felt the need to make a representative selection of photography of the 1970s, but the necessity to integrate a visual historiography as a framework to which contemporary works could be linked. In addition to providing a historical revision, the photo section of *d-6* also aimed at offering "a theoretical reappraisal of what [photography, M.S.] can achieve."[7]

Starting points for the conception of the *d-6* photo section were the historiographies of Beaumont Newhall, former director and photo enthusiast at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), from 1949, and Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, German collectors and advocates of photography, from 1955, both published in the U.S.[8] The selection of theoretical sources was even smaller: Walter Benjamin's today highly received photo-theoretical essays, "A Short History of Photography" (1931) and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), had only been attracting the interest of art and media studies for a decade at that time, after the halt of academia during WWII.[9] Apart from his writings, only photographer and theorist Gisèle Freund's dissertation, *Photography and Society,* written in 1932 and published in 1968, offered a theoretical framework for the conception of the photo section.[10] After meeting Honnef in person in June 1975, Freund was not only exhibited at *d-6* and taught a theoretical workshop in its supporting program,[11] but also became one of the most important exchange partners for Honnef and Weiss, organizing visits to galleries and institutions in France and the U.S.[12]

However, the photography section of *d-6* cannot be understood as a "rehabilitation of photography," as the curatorial team framed it.[13] It was much rather a reaction to recent shifts in the art market, institutional collections, and photographic and curatorial practices starting from the late 1960s. For more than two decades, the exhibition programs of L. Fritz Gruber and Otto Steinert had already been reviving the photography scene of postwar Germany. While Gruber founded the international trade fair photokina in 1950, which had an extensive accompanying exhibition program,[14] Steinert, teacher at Folkwang Hochschule design school in Essen, had delved into several decades of the medium's history as well as various photo-theoretical discourses in his exhibitions at Museum Folkwang in the 1950s and 1960s.[15] During the course of the 1970s, photography experienced a rise in representation and value in the art market, which led to the founding of a series of photo galleries across the Atlantic—from Light Gallery in New York (1971) to Galerie Wilde in Cologne (1972).[16] The increased interest towards photography in the art market catalyzed photographic exhibition practices, enabling galleries to contribute an immense amount of expert knowledge, which many public art institutions were unable to provide. Honnef's and

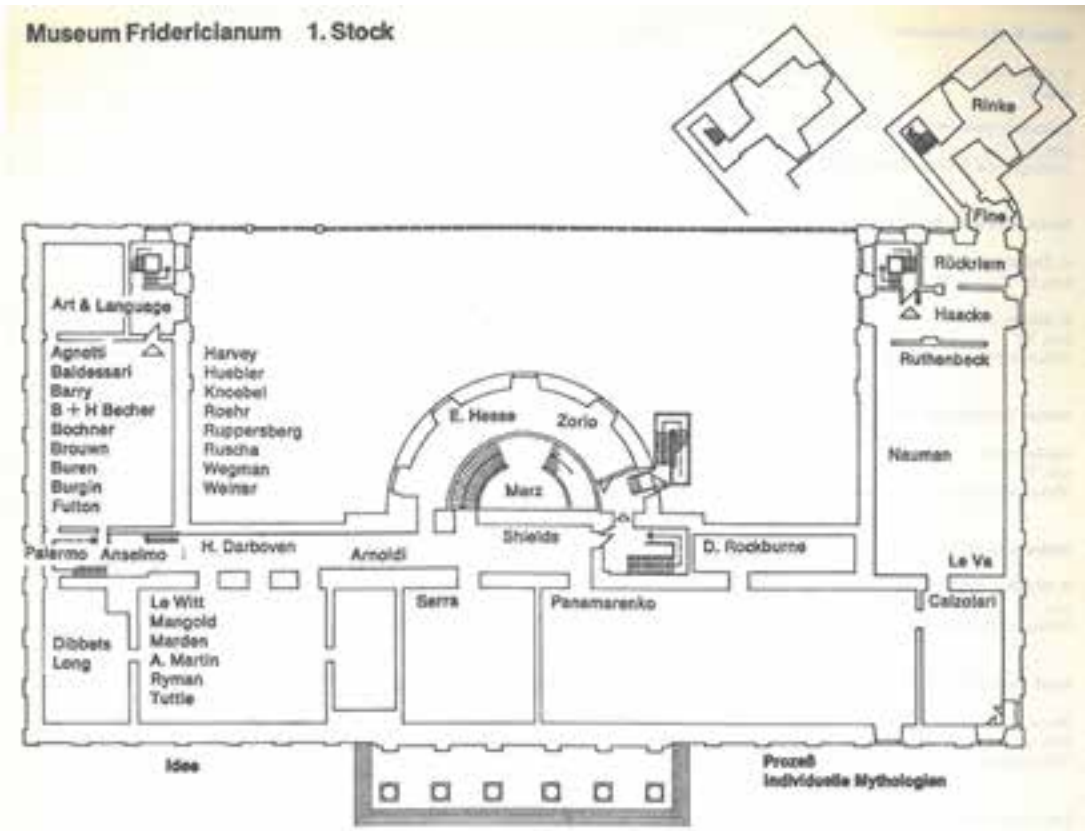
Installation shot of the photo-section of documenta 6 at Museum Fridericianum, including artworks of Liselotte Strelow, *Joseph Beuys*, 1967, (left wall), Hugo Erfurth, *Oskar Kokoschka,* 1923 (first row, corner to the left), *Konrad Adenauer, 1928* (second row, corner to the left), *Käthe Kollwitz, 1935 (first row,* corner to the right*) Max Planck, , n.d..*, (second row, corner to the right) and Gisèle Freund, *André Malreaux, André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Colette,* (first row from left to right, wall to the right), second row: *Adrienne Monnier, James Joyce, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre*, (second row from left to right, wall to the right) [= Direct Photography I, Portrait] documenta 6 (1977), Photography by Ingrid Fingerling © documenta archiv/Ingrid Fingerling, docA MS d06-10035381.

Weiss' ambitious project benefited from this new trend. For example, Galerie Wilde run by Ann and Jürgen Wilde was not only involved in *d-6* as one of the major lenders, but also provided several contacts to international artists and wrote an astonishing 46 of the 146 essays, ergo the bulk of the accompanying catalogue.[17]

At the same time, interest in photography worldwide on the part of art institutions increased. Examples include John Szarkowski's photography program at the MoMA that already progressed in the 1960s, as well as the opening of Centre Pompidou including its now renowned photography department in 1977.[18] Many museums and libraries had only just begun to readdress their collections and archives.[19] The Société française de photographie and the Bibliothèque nationale de France started to publish their first catalogues on their photographic collections starting at the end of the 1970s.[20] Honnef and Weiss themselves had been curating exhibitions including photographic positions prior to *d-6*. While Weiss was a confidante of the collector couple Peter and Irene Ludwig, who collected photography from early on,[21] and chief curator of 20th-century art at Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Honnef curated the exhibition program at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, with a special focus on photography.[22] Considering its large scale, prestigious state, and thus reach in the art world, the insertion of photography in the documenta format institutionally legitimized, on a whole new level, the medium as an independent art genre, part of the art(-historical) canon and, ultimately, academic discourses and curricula. Honnef and Weiss were well aware of the canonizing effects of documenta representation and thus of its power to shape narratives—an idea that was later elaborated by Walter Grasskamp, who labeled documenta a "model case for the production of art history" only one year after *d-6*.[23] In a letter to Rolf Lucas, director of documenta GmbH at the time, the curators stressed: "While a presentation of the medium of drawing would be linked to an exhibition complex of an earlier documenta, and from this perspective, would

Installation shot of the section *Idee + Idee / Licht* (*Idea + Idea / Light)*, documenta 5 (1972), including artwork of John Baldessari, *Ingres and Other Parables*, 1972, Photograph by Dieter Rudolph, © documenta archiv/Dieter Rudolph, docA MS d05-10009899.

Installation of the photo-section of documenta 6 at Museum Fridericianum, including artworks of Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Aufbereitungsanlagen* (*Preperation Plants)*, 1966-75, [= Direct Photography II, Photographic analyses and comparative representations], documenta 6 (1977). Photography by Peter Kleim © documenta archiv/Peter Kleim, docA MS d06-10036378.



Floorplan of the section *Idee + Idee / Licht* (*Idea + Idea / Light)*, documenta 5 (1972), in *documenta 5. Befragung der Realität, Bilderwelten heute,* (1972), fig., p. 42.

provide a kind of historiography, a ‚History of Photography' would be a completely new, but nevertheless long overdue undertaking."[24]

But what was stated here downplays the efforts of the previous edition of 1972, which paved the way for the inclusion of new media. As a result of the 1968 movement, a generation between disillusionment and new beginnings critically questioned and reexamined the canon of art, the position of traditional art institutions, and ultimately the self-image of artists. The notorious *documenta 5* (*d-5*), for which Harald Szeemann was responsible, had already reacted to these developments.[25] In addition to photographic media such as film and video installations, photographs were shown for the first time at *d-5* in the context of sequential and conceptual works in the section *Idee + Idee / Licht* (Idea + Idea/Light), for which Klaus Honnef had already been responsible in collaboration with German gallerist Konrad Fischer.[26] To give an example, John Baldessari's *Ingres and Other Parables* (1972), consisting of 20 sheets with text and photo, were on display at *d-5*.

Apart from this break from formerly fixed genres ultimately leading to the promotion of new media practices, the concept of *d-5* is regarded to this day as groundbreaking in the history of the format. Not only did it establish the now indispensable thematic exhibition format of documenta, but it also fundamentally re-defined the role of the curator. Bremer describes this momentum as a "double rupture"—first, in the history of the institution, and second, in the history of exhibition-making in general.[27] The hegemonic shift from an artistic to a curatorial authorship enabled Honnef and Weiss to achieve with *d-6* to what museums and academia had not been able to provide: implementing photography as an autonomous art in exhibition practice as well as serious consideration as an integral part of art history. On top of that, the photo section has to be received as a testimony of the specific vision and agenda of Honnef and Weiss. As Evelyn Weiss stated in the exhibition catalogue, photography was to be examined within the norms of its own particular grammar without being tied back into a painterly tradition.[28] This resulted in the intentional exclusion of important movements in the history of photography, like pictorialism, Bauhaus, and the influential figure Otto Steinert. Documentary photography, in the sense of an applied medium,[29] instead became the guiding principle of Honnef's and Weiss' conception, which they framed as "direct photography." The term mirrored Bernd und Hilla Becher's artistic approach, who were the only photographers *per definitionem* on display at *d-5*, repeatedly shown at *d-6*, and whose approach became formative for an entire generation that followed.[30]

As for the architectural and didactic concept, the curatorial team decided that the history and theory of photography should not be conveyed through long wall texts, but made "optically comprehensible" by means of an adroit, thematic arrangement of a series of images.[31] In reference to the phenomenologically oriented media concept, 128 photographic positions were selected and hung very densely according to four systems of order: first, according to their historical context and thus in a chronological order; second, split into three subsections—"Direct Photography I," "Direct Photography II," and "Reflections and Expansion of the Medium"; third, within the subsections by topic-specific aspects such as "War" or "Fashion"; and fourth, within these aspects by individual artists. To give an example, Diane Arbus, who had previously been the first photographer to be exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1972,[32] was part of "Direct Photography II" and the subsection "Photographic Analyses and Comparative Presentations." The artists were only assigned to a specific subsection in a given category. This stencil-like order is problematic, however. André Kertész, for example, was assigned

Direkte Fotografie – I

Das Spektrum des Mediums

1 Die Pioniere

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce
Louis Daguerre
William Henry Fox Talbot
Hippolyte Bayard

2 Themen der Fotografie

2.1 Porträt

Julia Margaret Cameron
Etienne Carjat
Hugo Erfurth
Gisèle Freund
Philippe Halsman
David Octavius Hill u. Robert Adamson
Robert Mapplethorpe
Alphonse Marie Mucha
Nadar
Man Ray
Alexander Rodschenko
Edward Steichen
Liselotte Strelow

2.2 Mode und Gesellschaft

Sir Cecil Beaton
E. J. Bellocq
Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden
Lady Clementine Hawarden
Horst P. Horst
George Hoyningen-Huene
George Platt Lynes
Baron Adolphe de Meyer
Heinz Schubert
Edward Steichen
Deborah Turbeville

2.3 Landschaft

Auguste u. Louis Bisson
Peter Henry Emerson
Hannah Fulton
Gustave Le Gray

2.4 Stadt und Architektur

Berenice Abbott
Anonymus, Köln, um 1880
Eduard Denis Baldus
George Hendrik Breitner
Philip Henry Delamotte
Arnold Genthe
David Hockney
André Kertesz
Stephen Shore
Alfred Stieglitz
Paul Strand

2.5 Industrie und Technik

Germaine Krull
Werner Mantz
Albert Renger-Patzsch
Charles Sheeler
Peter Weller

2.6 Krieg

Mathew B. Brady
Robert Capa
David Douglas Duncan
Roger Fenton
Alexander Gardner
Timothy H. O'Sullivan
Homar Pabel

Catalogue-index of the photo-section of documenta 6: "Direct Photography I", "Direkte Fotografie II" and „Reflections and expansions of the medium", documenta 6 (1977), in *documenta 6*, 3 Bde., Bd. 2. fotografie. film. video, (Kassel: Paul Dierichs KG & Co 1977), 29, 93, 147.

Direkte Fotografie – II

Fotografische Methoden

1 Reportage

Werner Bischof
Margaret Bourke-White
Henri Cartier-Bresson
Lewis W. Hine
Frances Benjamin Johnston
Felix H. Man
Borg Mesch
Charles Nègre
Gabriele u. Helmut Nothelfer
Tony Ray-Jones
Erich Salomon
Friedrich Seidenstücker
Wolfgang Weber
Weegee

2 Thematisch-enzyklopädische Bestandsaufnahme

Eugène Atget
Brassaï
Edward Curtis
Henri Dixon + Alfred u. John Boole
Josef Sudek
Heinrich Zille
Farm Security Administration-Programm
Jack Delano
Dorothea Lange
Russell Lee
Gordon Parks
Arthur Rothstein
Ben Shahn

3 Fotografische Analysen und vergleichende Darstellungen

Otomar Anschütz
Diane Arbus
Bernhard u. Hilla Becher
Karl Blossfeldt
Walker Evans
Lee Friedlander
Eadweard Muybridge
August Sander
Sir Benjamin Stone
Neal Slavin
Eve Sonneman

Reflexion und Ausweitung des Mediums

Vorgang – Prozeß – Zeit – Raum

Mac Adams
David Askevold
Monika Baumgartl
Bill Beckley
Bernhard J. Blume
Christian Boltanski
Heinz Breloh
James Collins
Ger Dekkers
Braco Dimitrijević
Ger van Elk
Hans-Peter Feldmann
Gilbert & George
John Hilliard
Jürgen Klauke
Christof Kohlhöfer
Joseph Kosuth
Les Krims
Jean Le Gac
Barbara u. Michael Leisgen
Levine
Urs Lüthi
Gordon Matta-Clark
Annette Messager
Duane Michals
Ugo Mulas
Giulio Paolini
Klaus Rinke
Peter Roehr
Lucas Samaras
Sarkis
Katharina Sieverding
Alan Sonfist
Roger Welch
Michele Zaza

solely to the category "City and Architecture", whereas in the same year his solo show at the Centre Pompidou and Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in 1980 presented him as a portrait photographer.[33] Just like Gisèle Freund, who fell under the category "Portraiture" at *d-6*, Kértesz had been photographing famous personalities such as the artist Piet Mondrian or the writer Tristan Tzara. On top of that, photographic positions within the same categories were not mixed, which could have made points of reference between one individual photographer and another visible.

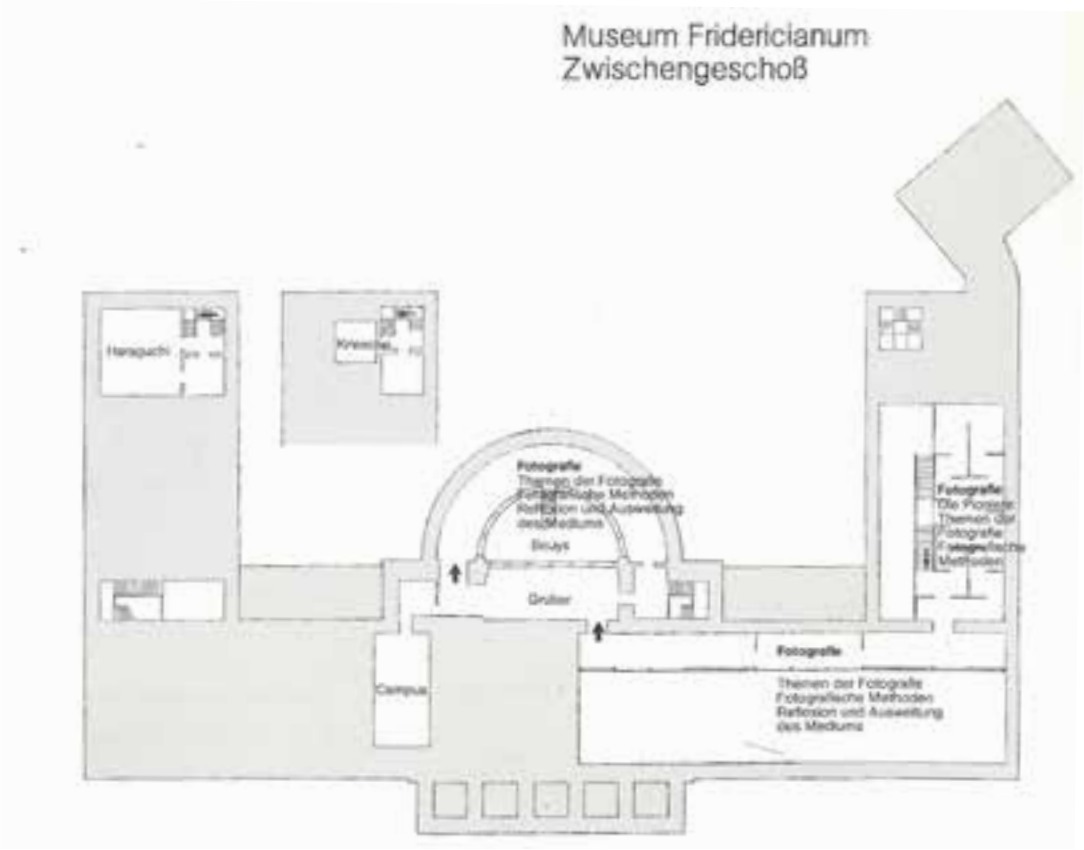
In the end, the original concept of *d-6* to juxtapose different media had to be abandoned due to limited space capacities. The curators tried to tackle this by adding an additional floor on the first level of the Fridericianum, documenta's core exhibition space, but a large part of the contemporary pieces of the photo section eventually had to be transferred to the Neue Galerie and thus excluded from documenta's main exhibition space. This unintended move, which could not be documented in the exhibition's catalogue, but which can be retraced through correspondence and installation shots,[34] interrupted the whole narrative and didactic concept of the photography section. The result was an emphasis on the historization of the medium, rather than a dialogue with contemporary practices and other media.

The final display, framing photography in the form of a visual historiography, was not received as a successful solution, also due to the limited, thus overcrowded, space.[35] Moreover, journalist Wilfried Wienand criticized the detachment of the photographs from their historical context and original displays, which he felt reflected a concession to the art market, as follows: "To exorcise the history of the photo and reduce it to the mere image may be an appropriate practice for the art market, which displays the photo like a graphic, but for the interpreter it is barbarism. Unfortunately, this was practiced in Kassel, where most photos were squeezed under egalitarian passe-partouts and in frames that seem so faceless and ahistorical that they could have been omitted."[36] What nevertheless has to be acknowledged is the fact that photography still turned out to be integrated into every level of Fridericianum—from Ger Dekkers' *Planned Landscapes* (1974–1977) on the first floor, to Braco Dimitrijeviğ's *This Could Be a Place of Historical Interest* (1976) right under the roof of the rotunda. The extensive share of photography at *d-6* also manifested in written form. Not only did the photography section have the biggest coverage in the accompanying new media catalogue, *fotografie. film. video*, but it was additionally documented in four special editions of *Kunstforum International,* edited by Honnef himself and partly published even before the opening of *d-6*.[37] The bold approach of Honnef and Weiss was a crucial moment for the institutionalization of photography. Today, the photo section of *documenta 6* is considered a milestone in the history of photographic exhibition practice and often received as a starting point that, as this article has shown, has to be corrected to the culmination of photographic practices and exhibitions in the 1970s.[38]

Notes

1 Bernhard Fulda, "*documenta 1*: Neuanfang durch Kanonisierung?, " *Historische Urteilskraft. Magazin des Deutschen Historischen Museum*, no. 2 [= *documenta. Geschichte / Kunst / Politik*] (2020): 24–29, 24f.
2 Walter Grasskamp, "Die Installationsaufnahme als Zeitmaschine," *Historische Urteilskraft. Magazin des Deutschen Historischen Museum*, no. 2 [= *documenta. Geschichte / Kunst / Politik*] (2020): 55–59; ibid., *Hans Haacke. Fotonotizen. Documenta 2 1959* (Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012). The documentation of *d-5* by Baltasar Burkhard can be viewed online as part of the estate of Harald Szeemann, Getty Archive, Los Angeles: http://hdl.handle.net/10020/2011m30_ref628_hdv.
3 *Ergebnis-Protokoll der Sitzung des documenta-Komitees am 18. März 1976 in Kassel,* documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 55. Pontus Hultén and Kynaston McShine resigned by telegram at the documenta committee meeting on March 18, 1976, only one day before the official press conference of *d-6*, expressing their difficulties with the media concept.
4 Manfred Schneckenburger and Lothar Romain, *Grundlagen der documenta 6. Vorbemerkungen* [read town hall in Kassel, March 19, 1976], documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 55.
5 Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss, "Fotografie. Eine neue Dimension, " in *Sonderheft der Informationen, documenta 6*, ed. Manfred Schneckenburger (Kassel: Bärenreiter-verlag, 1977), 8–9: 8. Original quote: "Kein Zweifel, daß hier nicht nur Informations-, sondern auch Bewußtmachungsrückstände aufzuholen sind, die über die anderer Medien hinausgehen."
6 Klaus Honnef, "Tagebuch," *Kunstforum International*, 14 (1976): 164–175, 172. Honnef states here that Freund's dissertation, published in 1968, was out of print.
7 Klaus Honnef, *Letter to Manfred Schneckenburger*, September 6, 1976, [postmarked September 7, 1976], documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 62.
8 Beaumont Newhall, *History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* (New York:

Installation shot of the photo-section of documenta 6 at Museum Fridericianum, including artworks of André Kertész, *10 photographs*, 1922-1972, (wall and partition wall left), David Hockney, o.T., *6 color photographs*, (partition left, wall on the right) [= Direct Photography I, City and Architecture], Friedrich Seidenstücker, *City*, c. 1930, (second partition left) [= Direct Photography II, reportage], Hugo Erfurth and Gisèle Freund (booth right) [= Direct Photography I, portrait], documenta 6 (1977), Photograph by Ingrid Fingerling © documenta archiv/ Ingrid Fingerling, docA MS d06-10035382.



Floor plan of Museum Fridericianum, mezzanine floor of first upper floor, photography section, documenta 6 (1972), in *documenta 6, 3 Volumes, Vol. 2. fotografie. film. video, (Kassel: Paul Dierichs KG & Co 1977),* fig., p. 4.

Museum of Modern Art, 1949); Helmut and Allison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography. From the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century Up to 1914* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1955).

9 Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*, (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1963); Thomas Küpper and Timo Skrandies, "Der Beginn der Benjamin-Rezeption, Nachkriegszeit, 68er Kontext," *Das Benjamin-Handbuch, Leben. Werk. Wirkung*, ed. Burkhardt Lindner (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2006), 22–28.
10 Gisèle Freund, *Photographie und bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Eine kunstsoziologische Studie*, (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1968). In 1974, two further editions were also published by Rogner & Bernhard and by Rowohlt-Verlag: *Photographie und Gesellschaft* [= *Photographie et société*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974], (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1974). Bear in mind that equally important incunabula of photographic theory such as Susan Sontag's collection of essays, *On Photography* (1977), or Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) had not been written yet.
11 "Rahmenprogramm der documenta 6," *Sonderheft der Informationen, documenta 6*, ed. Manfred Schneckenburger, (Kassel: Paul Dierichs GmbH KG & Co, 1977), V.
12 Grace M.Mayer [Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, New York], *Letter to Gisèle Freund*, November 4, 1975, ZADIK, Bestand G21, VIII, 784, 108; Klaus Honnef, *Letter Manfred Schneckenburger*, April 20, 1976, [postmarked April 23, 1976], documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 62; Klaus Honnef, *Letter to Rolf Lucas*, June 8, 1976, documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 62. Freund arranged visits for Honnef und Weiss, for example, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
13 Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss, "Fotografie auf der documenta 6. Rückblick und Standortbestimmung", in *Sonderheft der Informationen*, 9–11:9.
14 Ulrich Pohlmann, "Untersuchungen zur Tradition des fotografischen Ausstellungswesens am Beispiel der ‚photokina'-Bilderschauen in Köln, 1950-1980" (PhD diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 1990).
15 Ute Eskildsen, ed., *Der Fotograf Otto Steinert*, (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1999), 234f.
16 Anna Auer, "Fotogalerien in den USA"; "Etablierung von Fotogalerien in Europa, " in *Die Wiener Galerie Die Brücke. Ihr internationaler Weg zur Sammlung Fotografie. Ein Beitrag zur Sammlungsgeschichte Fotografie* (Passau: Dietmar Klinger Verlag, 1999), 66–74.
17 Ann and Jürgen Wilde, *Letter to Klaus Honnef*, February 18, 1977, ZADIK, Bestand G21, VIII, 783, 72. This letter includes the addresses of the artist Lee Friedlander, Fritz Kempe, the wife of Werner Bischof, Rosellina Burri-Bischof, and gallerist Harry Lunn of *Lunn Gallery/Graphics International Ltd*., Washington, D.C.; Ann and Jürgen Wilde, *documenta 1977. Abteilung Fotografie*, January 18, 1977, ZADIK, VIII, 783, 73, 1-6. In this file, the Wildes noted institutions and which photographers they had in their own collection.
18 For an overview of the the photography scene in postwar Germany, see: Jörn Glasenapp, "Der Einzug der Fotografie ins Museum," in *Die deutsche Nachkriegsfotografie. Eine Mentalitätsgeschichte in Bildern* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), 309-377.
19 Evelyn Weiss, "Verhältnis von Malerei und Fotografie. Ausgangspunkt des Medienkonzeptes," *Kunstforum International* 21 (1977): 104–111, 111.
20 Bibliothèque nationale de France, ed., *Regards sur la photographie en France au XIXe siècle: 180 chefs-d'œuvre du Département des estampes et de la photographie* (Paris: Berger–Levrault, 1980); Bernard Marbot, *Une invention du XIXe siècle. La photographie. Expression et technique. Collections de la Société Française de Photographie / Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1976).
21 Gerhard Bott, ed., Stiftung Ludwig Köln 1976 (Cologne: Wienand KG, 1976) [unpaginated]. Irene and Peter Ludwig`s collection included Bernd and Hilla Becher, Typology of Framework Houses, 1959-1975, 36 black-and-white-photos, fig. 21; Ger Dekkers,

Boom bij Emmeloord, 1974, 7 photos mounted on carton, fig. 51; Jan Dibbets, Black Vase Horizontal Filmpainting, 1972, 80 color photographs mounted on aluminum plates, fig. 52; Barry Le Va, Extensions, 1971, 18 photos fig. 139 a-b; Projekt '74. Aspekte internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre (Kunsthalle Köln, Kunst- und Museumsbibliothek und Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1974). Evelyn Weiss was also involved in the curation of Projekt '74 – Aspekte internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre in Cologne, alongside Manfred Schneckenburger, including conceptual artists that became part of the d-6 photo section, such as Jan Dibbets, Ger Dekkers, Klaus Rinke, Christian Boltanski, and Katharina Sieverding.

22 Alongside contemporary solo exhibitions of the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher (1975), Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager (1976), Gisèle Freund (1977), Liselotte Strelow (1977), Germaine Krull (1977), and Katharina Sieverding (1977), Honnef curated retrospectives of photography from the 1920s such as the oeuvre of Karl Blossfeldt (1976) and Albert Renger-Patzsch (1977).

23 Walter Grasskamp, "Modell documenta oder wie wird Kunstgeschichte gemacht?", in *Kunstforum International* 49 [= *Mythos documenta. Ein Bilderbuch zur Kunstgeschichte*] (1982): 15–22.

24 Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss, *Letter to Rolf Lucas*, January 29, 1975. Original quote: "Während eine Darstellung des Mediums Zeichnung einen Ausstellungskomplex einer früheren documenta anschließen würde und von dieser speziellen Warte schon eine Art Geschichtsschreibung triebe, wäre eine 'Geschichte der Fotografie' ein vollkommen neues, gleichwohl aber längst überfälliges Unterfangen."

25 Lothar Romain, "Von der Botschaft zur Kommunikation. Erläuterungen zum Medienkonzept der d-6, " in *documenta 6*, 3 Bde., Bd. 1. *malerei. plastik. performance* (Kassel: Paul Dierichs KG & Co, 1977), 19-35: 19.

26 "Abteilung *Idee + Idee / Licht*, documenta 5 (1972)," in *documenta 5. Befragung der Realität, Bilderwelten heute, Kassel, Rundgang vom 4. Juni 1972, Verzeichnis der ausgestellten Werke*, 42–43. The following photographic works were on display: Vincenzo Agnetti's *14 Proposizioni* (1972), fourteen telegrams with photographs in plastic envelopes; Bernd and Hilla Becher's *Photographic Typologies* (1966-1972) (Abb. Kat.); John Baldessari's color photo series *Choosing Green Beans* (1972) and a further twenty sheets with text and photo under the work title *Parabels* (1972) (Abb.); Jan Dibbet's individual color photos *Venetian Blinds (Vertical)*, *Panorama (Dutch Mountains) I* (1971), and "*Universe" a Construction* (1971), as well as three (photo) sets (1972) by Hamish Fulton. For more about the sections concept, see: ZADIK, ed, "Klaus Honnef: From Conceptual Art to Photography," in *sediment. Materialen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Kunstmarkts* (2019): 135–136, https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/sediment/issue/view/4403/827.

27 Maria Bremer, "Modes of Making Art History. Looking back at documenta 5 and 6, " in S*tedelijk Studies* (October 12, 2015), http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/modes-of-making-art.

28 Evelyn Weiss, "Einführung in die Abteilung Fotografie," in: *documenta 6*, 3 Volumes, Vol. 2. *fotografie. film. video* (Kassel: Paul Dierichs KG & Co, 1977), 7–10; 8.

29 Georg F. Schwarzbauer, "Fotografie auf der documenta," in *Kunstforum International* 20 (1977): 160–162, 161.

30 Glasenapp, "Der Einzug der Fotografie ins Museum," 345–351.

31 Dieter Bechtloff, "Editorial, " in *Kunstforum International* 22 (1977) (4-5, unpaginated) [= Klaus Honnef, ed., *150 Jahre Fotografie III. Fotografie auf der documenta 6*].

32 Annika Hossain, "Diane Arbus. Die Repräsentation einer Fotografin als politisches Statement, " in, idem., *Zwischen Kulturrepräsentation und Kunstmarkt. Die USA bei der Venedig Biennale 1895-2015* (Emsdetten and Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2015), 236–244: 238.

33 Pierre de Fenoyl, *André Kertesz* (Paris : Centre Pompidou, 1978) (unpaginated);

Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil 1980). Along with Robert Mapplethorpe, André Kertész is the most reviewed photographer in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.
34 Klaus Honnef, *Letter to Katharina Sieverding,* February 9, 1977*,* ZADIK, Bestand G21, 789c, 0215, 001-002: 1.
35 "Fotografie: Weniger wäre auch hier mehr. Trends und Tendenzen—auf der documenta 6 in Kassel (V)," in *Mittelbayerische Zeitung, Regensburg* (September 2, 1977), documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 28.
36 Wilfried Wiegand, "Die objektive Schwester. Ein Panorama der Fotografie auf der documenta in Kassel," in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 28, 1977, documenta archiv, Kassel, d-6, folder 28. Original quote: "Dem Foto seine Geschichte auszutreiben und es aufs bloße Bild zu reduzieren, mag für den Kunsthandel, der das Foto wie eine Grafik präsentiert, eine angemessene Praxis sein, für den Interpreten ist es Barbarei. Leider hat man sie in Kassel praktiziert und die meisten Fotos unter gleichmacherische Passepartouts sowie in Rahmen gezwängt, die so gesichts- und geschichtslos wirken, daß man sie auch hätte weglassen können."
37 Klaus Honnef and Evelyn Weiss, "fotografie," in *documenta 6*, 3 Volumes, Vol. 2. *fotografie. film. video* (Kassel: Paul Dierichs KG & Co, 1977), 5–187; Klaus Honnef, ed., "Die Arbeit des Fotografen," *Kunstforum International* 16 (1976) [= 150 Jahre Fotografie I], Klaus Honnef, ed., "Fotografie - Aspekte eines Mediums. Die Fotografie im Spiegel einer kritischen Analyse," *Kunstforum International* 18 (1976) [= 150 Jahre Fotografie II]; Klaus Honnef, ed., *Die Fotografie. 293 Bilder von Muybridge, Atget, Evans, Blossfeldt, Renger Patzsch, Freund, Becher und Friedlander, Gibson, Vink, Nothhelfer, Orlopp, Deal, Riebesehl, Michals, Krims, Schürmann, Neusüss, Radochonska, Ritterbusch, van Kempen*, (Mainz: Kunstforum international, 1976); Klaus Honnef, ed., "Fotografie auf der documenta 6, " *Kunstforum International*, no. 22, 1977 [= 150 Jahre Fotografie III], Klaus Honnef, *150 Jahre Fotografie*, (Mainz: Verlag Kunstforum 1977) [= Honnef, *Fotografie auf der documenta 6*, (revised volume 1977) [= 150 Jahre Fotografie III]].
38 This essay is based on my research that began in the Research Master program of the a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne in 2017, leading to my current PhD project, "(Re-)construction of a Medium. Photography at documenta 6," under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Herta Wolf, History and Theory of Photography, Institute for Art History, University of Cologne. My dissertation will not only be the first critical study of the photography section of *documenta 6*, but also the first reconstruction of its display on the basis of the archival materials held at the documenta archiv in Kassel and ZADIK in Cologne.

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On the Documenta 14 in Athens
Sabeth Buchmann and Ilse Lafer

Kettly Noël: *Zombification,* 2017, installation and performance, © Mathias Roelcke

The public, it seems, is as enthusiastic as ever about contemporary art. Curated mass events and the masses they draw bespeak the ongoing appeal of the art world. But what does the public expect when it travels, yet again, to Venice, Kassel, Münster (and this time Athens as well)? Is this readiness a sign that contemporary art is accessible "to all"? Or that it's in a position to address far-reaching issues of society and politics while at the same time guaranteeing pleasurable time out from the daily routine? Today, in an age when people encounter one another in the form of social media profiles, we might ask wherein the charm of physical proximity to contemporary art lies.

In the following, the art historian Sabeth Buchmann and the curator Ilse Lafer analyse the documenta 14 from this perspective and shed light on why the aim of transcending traditional conceptions of the relationship between centre and periphery in the art context is an important one.

As we know, every documenta produces its own discursive vocabulary. In the case of the d 14, which took Greece's economic and humanitarian crisis as its point of departure, it adopted the Biennale-typical rhetoric[1] of a "world-mapping". This was not intended, however, in the sense of "utopian divagations"[2] revolving around a new global order, an approach quite common in the international exhibition scene. Rather, the title *Learning from Athens/(working title)* – which refers (presumably not by coincidence) to *Learning from Las Vegas*, a classic work of post-modern urban planning – was meant to signify an endeavour "to introduce and develop possibilities for a different, *more inclusive* world"[3] from the point of view of a critical stance on hegemony. Already this circumstance alone conveys a sense of the ambiguity of the curatorial approach. After all, the division of the d 14 into two venues in two cities mirrors the ambition to endow hegemonial institutions such as the documenta with a new perspective. To a greater extent than the comparable undertakings of its predecessors (for example the temporary stationing of the d 13 in Kabul and the platforms of the d 11), the d 14 had its programmatic starting point not in Kassel but in an emblematic European capital that stands for ailing national economies within the framework of a neoliberal, EU-imposed politics of austerity.

If we take into account the fact that the documenta is a German cultural institution exemplary of the American project to re-educate post-war Western Germany, while also, by virtue of its staging in Kassel –a city located on the onetime inner-German border –, serving as a reference to the so-called reunification, the shift of perspectives proposed by Adam Szymczyk seems to make sense. As can be surmised from the handwritten memo "working title", this exercise in "learning from unlearning" was geared towards the imponderables of a geopolitical relocation of the documenta as an institution embedded in old/new hegemonial politics. According to Paul B. Preciado, one of the co-curators, the d 14's institution-critical stance consequentially laid claim to a "delinking from normative ways of thinking, specialized ways of thinking, in order to be open to something that can happen that is unknown"[4]. Yet the problematic aspects of such an endeavour are evident in precisely these words. As the widely voiced accusation of neo-colonial orientalization showed, this argumentation inevitably boomeranged: Athens as the venue of a curatorial adventure that, naturally, was not capable of solving the city's problems but, quite to the contrary, threatened to exoticize that city.

In our eyes, however, such weighty objections should not serve indiscriminately to condemn the approach – meanwhile widespread in curatorial circles – of countering the global network manager type with the

Martha Minujín, *The Parthenon of Books*, © Roman Maerz

experiment of the collective process[5]. Within this context, the reference to the principle of the "continuum" developed by the Greek composer Jani Christou is symptomatic. (The d 14 team had Christou's work *Epicycle* [1968] performed at its press conference.) According to Szymczyk, this was symbolic of a "score of activities that may occur over an undefined period of time, engaging different actors and their contributions without a prescribed scenario"[6]. This indicates a curatorial attempt to identify with Christou's "voluntary abdication" of institutionalized role hierarchies: "Since there has been such an abdication, I must accept all the negative aspects of this action, i.e. loose form, no form, repetition, non-sense, lack of synthesis, abolition of the sense of 'climax', neutralization of musical 'impact', and so on and so forth. [...] It is a dangerous game, I know [...]"[7].

And indeed, in view of the highly professionalized, hierarchically organized and neoliberal management of culture, the suggestion of an open-ended exhibition event that unites all involved in the departure from well-practised ways of thinking did not appear exactly harmless because, structurally speaking, it was entirely unfeasible. At the same time, however, the d 14 team deserves credit for opening the exhibition *form* to a more manifold new perspectivization of non-hegemonial works and practices within the framework of an institution that generally serves as a reservoir for so-called "signature works". In fact, with its focus on hegemony-critical queer and postcolonial studies, radical theories of democracy and aesthetic event philosophy, the d 14 was entirely consistent with the documenta's globalization-oriented agendas of the kind that got underway meanwhile twenty years ago with the d X (Politics–Poetics) and echoed in concepts of decolonialization (d 11) and the migration of form (d 12). Yet the formula of 'conceptlessness' intoned by the d 13 director – comparatively the most successful in the media because of its seeming innocuousness – is also distantly discernible in the slogan "learning from unlearning" with its institution-critical allusions.

Unlike Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's so-called Brain, however, which reduced the suggestion of unconditional curatorial selection to absurdity, the d 14 seemed to us to be founded in the claim – by all means worthy of discussion – to a contra-normative perception of heterogeneous exhibition objects. In contradistinction to criticism to the effect that the high art perspective (formerly) considered Western justifies a differentiation between ostensibly "good" art and ethnic folklore identified by indigenous contributions, we acknowledge the "multitudinous traditions of resistance"[8] assembled by the d 14 team as an instance of a critical stance on hegemony. This doesn't mean that obvious contradictions – for example the romantic idea of artefacts seemingly untouched by the contemporary art world – should be ignored. Yet neither should the presence of idiosyncratic work languages go unmentioned, languages that implicitly or explicitly address the institutionally internalized (hetero)normative power of the market and the media. Cases in point were Terre Thaemlitz's audio-video loop *Interstices* (2001–03), an attack on the "faith in 'aesthetics' as an exemplary model of civility and education"[9] composed as an electroacoustic negation of commercialized queerness, or Moyra Davey's *Portrait/Landscape* installation, consisting of 70 C-print collages folded up and sent to the d 14 staff as letters, or her digital video of 2017 called *Wedding Loop*, a palimpsest-like tableau of photographic/filmic images, text quotations, autobiographical notes and voiceover montages, some found and some produced by the artist herself, a work testifying to the medially fragmented overlapping of private, public, artistic and institutional (re)production. Apart from the literalist actions by artists such as Marta Minujin or Daniel Knorr or works like Piotr Uklański's "preaching-to-the-converted" Nazi criticism, the d 14 was conspicuous by virtue of its dispensation (for the most part) with "to-point-at" gestures (Mieke Bal). What appears to us to be decisive is the paracuratorial claim[10] to an anti-hegemonial orchestration of art-historical narrations – according to Szymczyk a "searching for footnotes"[11] –, which, on the level of the exhibition's structure, created surprising cross-connections, for example between the scores and archival documents of Cornelius Cardew and the post-realistic-abstract large-scale formats by the Albanian painter Edi Hila. Even if this occasionally led to a kind of morphological short-circuiting, as in the case of the adjacency of Stanley Whitney's vivid colour grids to the Sami flags,

it also opened up perspectives on historical resonances between political practices, diagrammatic depiction systems and geometric-abstract pictorial languages, as manifest, for instance, in the neighbouring *Composition (Afterimage)* (1948–49) by Władysław Strzemiński.

Another aspect of this paracuratorial logic was the substantial dissolution of the customary distinction between the exhibition and its 'by-products', while at the same time conceding the accompanying discussion and lecture series, television, film and radio programmes, performances, publications – among them the *South as a State of Mind*[12] documenta magazines of which three issues have hitherto been published, the *documenta Reader* and the *Daybook* – a status equal to that of the exhibition parkour, with which it was (chrono)logically interwoven. That and the manner in which the respective presentation formats were distributed throughout the city and the media lent them a decentralizing dynamic. Also in keeping with this approach was the replacement of pre-established 'guide lines' distinguishing between major and side arenas with a rhizomatic compound of practices based on the history of antiauthoritarian projects and movements. Christou's concept of the "continuum", for example, corresponded with Oskar Hansen's principle of the open form; Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* with *Deschooling Society* by Pauline Oliveros and Cornelius Cardew's *Scratch Orchestra*[13].

The idea of loose form that came to light in various ways on the level of the work presentations was distinguished by a quality that would prove to reside first and foremost in the artists' self-perception as co-players. Characteristically, it functioned in those places where sound- and workshop-based work forms reinforced the dialectic of reception-aesthetical and collective practices. At the School of Fine Arts (ASFA) – one of the d 14's primary exhibition venues in Athens –, this was manifest, for example, in the carefully prepared documentation of the Anna and Lawrence Halprin workshops that were of such decisive importance for the American dance, music, and art avant-gardes, Alan Sekula's *School is a Factory* (1987–90) and Bouchra Khalili's *The Tempest Society*, a film produced in 2017 after the manner of a historical theatre project and featuring the narratives of migrant performers along with a composition of individual and choral voices in the style of Pasolini's model of the Greek tragedy. Comparable passages of openly rhythmized contact points and counterpoints were also to be encountered in the Conservatoire (Odeion), for instance in the form of Hiwa K's cinematic-

documenta 14 opening press conference, 6 April 2017, Megaron, Athens, © Stathis Mamalakis

phenomenological exploration of Turkish and Greek refugee routes, Eva Stefani's film essay on urban milieus in Athens, Nevin Aladağ's hybrids of traditional bourgeois musical instruments and refugee boats, and Ulrich Wüst's conceptual fanfold entitled *Flatland*, consisting of 179 black-and-white photos documenting the transformation of the former East Germany.

The continually recurring work forms at various exhibition venues in conjunction with the reflection on their respective functions and histories – for example the "occupation" of the Athens Municipality Arts Center at Parko Eleftherias by the *Parliament of Bodies*, the ASFA's emphasis on educational experiments, or the focus on scores, notations, musical recitals and performances at the Athens conservatory – were presumably what made it possible and easy to take the hegemony-critical de-/re-institutionalization of the works presented seriously.

The concept's weaknesses revealed themselves above all in the presentation at the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) which, by virtue of a rather last-minute arrangement, was the d 14's main venue in Athens. Context-sensitive independents such as the works oscillating between painting, sculpture and drawing by Nairy Baghramian, Ashley Scheirl and Alina Szapocznikow made a somewhat forlorn impression in the issue-overfraught enfilades. It can be assumed that precisely this circumstance led to the above-addressed exoticization of ethnographically charged works and artefacts such as Beau Dick's masks. In all those places where the curating itself drowned out the lucid resonances of artists like Christou, Cardew or Oliveros on account of all-too-voluntaristic improvisation, thought patterns presumed to be obsolete once again made themselves felt in all the more stereotypical a manner.

From today's perspective, more than three months after our visit to Athens, what preponderates is the memory of an exhibition whose fulfilled ambitions – but also those that met with (self-incurred) failure – provide reasons and arguments for the necessity of continued work on the (still-unfinished) criticism of hegemony.

PS

Now, three years later, the translation of this text into English has brought back to mind our deliberations – published at the time in German in *Texte zur Kunst* – on what we consider to be the successes and failures of the d 14. And it has become clearer to us than before that the double exhibition sought to implement what the three previous documentas had already prescribed as ineluctable conditions: the transcultural perspectivization of the global art scene and the associated geocultural repositioning of the show. This made the systematic overload of the institution and its protagonists inevitable, a circumstance that, in our opinion, should have been a programmatic element of the neoliberalism-reflexive institutional criticism to which the directors of the d 14 laid claim. At the same time, it must have been clear to the responsible local politicians and the exhibition's supervisory board that a double production of the documenta would incur at least double the costs. Seen in this light, the attacks (particularly on Adam Szymczyk) citing the massive additional expenditures appear as one-sided as the dismissal of then chief executive Annette Kulenkampff appears unjustified. The responsibility seems to us to be far more systemic in nature, and it would do injustice to the d 14's qualities to remember it only from the perspective of the mud-slinging that came about in its wake.

Translation from German by Judith Rosenthal.

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Notes

1 Compare the programmatic titles of Daniel Birnbaum's "Making Worlds" and Okwui Enwezor's "All the World's Futures" biennials.
2 Quoted from: Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter", in: *South as a State of Mind*, issue 6 [Documenta 14 #1], Fall/Winter 2015: http://www.documenta14.de/de/south/12_editorial (accessed 2 May 2020).
3 Ibid.
4 "Exposed to the Unknown: Paul B. Preciado and Georgia Sagri: Paul B. Preciado and Georgia Sagri in Conversation", in: *Conversations Mousse* 58, see: http://moussemagazine.it/paul-b-preciado-georgia-sagri-exposed-to-the-unknown-documenta-14-2017/ (accessed 2 May 2020).
5 See for example Jean-Paul Martinon, "Theses in the Philosophy of Curating", in: idem, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 25–33.
6 Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness: Learning and Working from Athens", in: Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (eds.), *The documenta 14 Reader*, Munich et al.: Prestel Verlag, 2017, p. 34.
7 Jani Christou, "Epicycle 1968: Abstract from a letter dated 30 December 1968", see: http://www.janichristou.com/commentaries/commentaries.html (accessed 10 July 2017).
8 Quoted from: Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter", in: *South as a State of Mind*, issue 8 [Documenta 14 #3], Fall/Winter 2016: https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/886_editors_letter (accessed 2 May 2020).
9 Dean Inkster on Terre Thaemlitz, in: *Documenta 14: Daybook*, Munich et al. : Prestel, 2017, n. p. (31 May); also available at: https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/1944/terre-thaemlitz (accessed 2 May 2020).
10 Paul O'Neill provides a definition of the "paracuratorial" that is of interest in the context of the d 14 and, after the manner of Gérard Genette's "paratexts", encompasses all discursive formats that accompany and expand an exhibition and steer its reception: "The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox" (see: https://fdocuments.net/document/paul-oneill-the-curatorial-constellation.html, accessed 5 May 2020). In contrast to the logic that distinguishes between the "curatorial" and the "paracuratorial", between primary and secondary curatorial work – a logic generally conceived as binary and at the same time hierarchical in nature –, O'Neill argues in favour of a concept of the "curatorial" that includes paracuratorial practices: "Paracuratorial practices are part of this constellation, but could also be considered a type of practice that responds to certain irreconcilable conditions of production. They attach themselves to, intervene in, or rub up against these conditions. They might occur at the points at which the main event is critiqued from within, or when the restrictive scenarios into which art and curatorial labor are forced or sidestepped

in some way. They employ a host-and-uninvited-guest tactic of coordination and invention, enabling parasitic curatorial labor to coexist alongside, or in confrontation with, preexisting cultural forms, originating scenarios, or prescribed exhibition contexts."

11 "Insights into Curatorial Practice Vol 3", Adam Szymczyk in conversation with Okwui Enwezor, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q153cSyZ0c8 (accessed 2 May 2020).

12 In keeping with paracuratorial logic, Szymczyk described *South* magazine as a "temporary documenta 14 station of the eponymous magazine founded in Athens in 2012". The hitherto published thematic issues of *South* (the last issue is forthcoming in the autumn of 2017) on concepts such as "displacement and dispossession, silence and masks, language or hunger, violence and offering" have accordingly not so much served as guidelines for the show's conception, but were conceived of as part of the development process. See: Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness: Learning and Working from Athens" [see note 6], p. 37.

13 See ibid and http://www.documenta14.de/de/venues/868/athener-konservatorium-odeion (accessed 5 May 2020).

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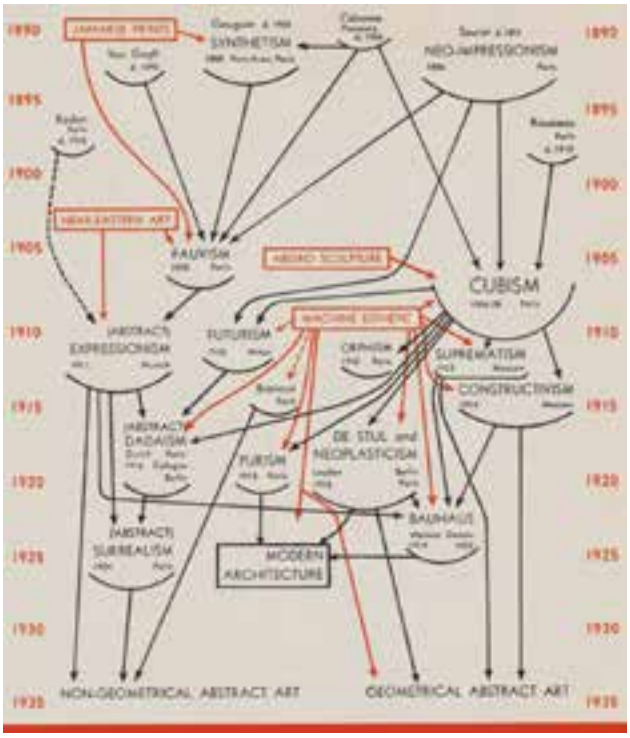
Ilse Lafer (Leipzig / Vienna) is a curator and has been directing the HGB Gallery in Leipzig since 2018. Before that she worked for eight years as curator for the Generali Foundation in Vienna. From 2014 to 2018 she lectured at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, among other institutions. She has (co-)produced numerous monographic and thematic exhibitions, most recently *1937-2017: Von Entarteter Kunst zu Entstellter Kunst*, together with Adam Szymczyk for HGB-Galerie, Leipzig, 2019/20, and *Doing Deculturalization* for Museion in Bolzano, 2019. Her publications include (selection): *Deculturalize* (will be published in July 2020), *Putting Rehearsals to the Test. Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film. Theater, Theory, and Politics*, (co-ed. with Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm, Berlin / Vienna 2016), *Ulrike Grossarth. Where I made of matter, I would colour*, (co-edited with Sabine Folie, Berlin/ Vienna 2014), *Counterproduction I-III*, print-on-demand-publication (co-edited with Diana Baldon, Vienna 2012), *unExhibit*, (co-edited with Sabine Folie, Nurnberg/ Vienna 2011), *Behind the Forth Wall. Fictitious Lives – Lived Fictions*, Nurnberg/Vienna, 2010.

6
La Biennale di Venezia

Globalization of the Periphery: The Venice Biennale Project

Beat Wyss

The Research Project



#Alfred Barr: Art chart of abstraction, 1935

Miguel Covarrubias: *El árbol de la arte,* Vanity Fair, May 1933

The historiography of art since 1900 has fostered the retrospective auctorial ideology of the avant-garde by conceiving its subject as a progressing international movement against a backdrop of local die-hards. The formative years of art historiography in the spirit of Hegelianism and Vitalism induced to the discipline this biologistic notion of an organic development in art. According to the paradigm, art geography consists in a field; ideas in art become disseminated by sowers who cultivate their acre. They come from metropolitan centers in order to fertilize peripheries which eagerly strive to conceive the major trends of a given time.

#The Venice Biennale Project
The project which I will present now is intended to quit this evolutionist, colonial notion of art history. The research, launched in 2008 by the Swiss Institute of Art Research in Zurich, literally puts the cart before the horse. The aim is to gain a plural notion of modernities. We intended to explore the way different regions and nations act and react culturally within the effects caused by industrialization, colonization, nation-building, and the emergence of global markets. For this scope, the Venice Biennale delivers a coherent field of case studies.

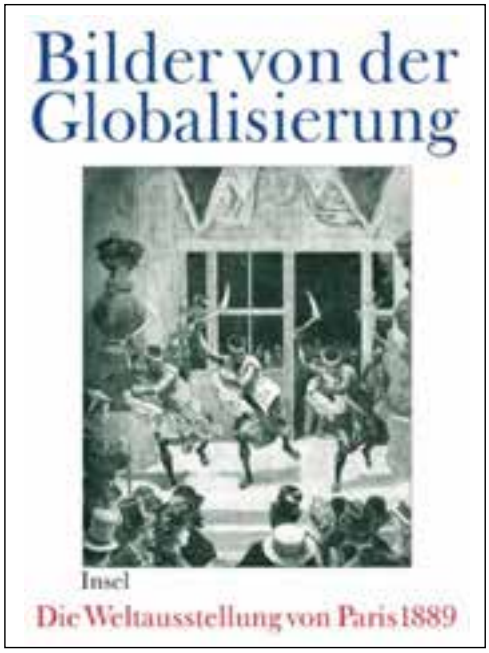
The research focus on Venice as a specific curatorial place makes it possible to gain a kaleidoscopic, simultaneous view of art since 1900. The exhibiting sites of the former Serenissima represent a world *en miniature*, a political map of alliances, animosities, and idiosyncrasies among states that underwent dramatic developments during the last 119 years. Symbolically steeped in history, the Giardini of Venice had been installed by Napoléon, the Emperor in the spirit of French Revolution, who hammered through war policy the corset of Europe towards its modern shape.

The first project was dedicated to East Central Europe: a battleground of political systems from the times of both the German and the Habsburg empires, of Fascism, Socialism, up to the today's post-Communist area. The research project happened in cooperation with an international initiative, supported by the Clark Institute and the Getty Center about art historiography in East Central Europe where I was appointed to the peer group.

Laboratories of Globalization

#Histoire des habitations humaines
The Venice Biennale type of exhibiting is a relic of 19th-century world exhibitions. The concept of pavilions, constructed in a national style, found an apogee in the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, when Charles Garnier, the architect of the Paris Opéra, laid out a world history of human housing in model buildings at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. The Venice Biennale pavilions follow the *idée fixe* of arranging architecture according to national characteristics. Whereas the mostly ephemeral buildings were normally torn down after the show or shipped back to the countries of the participants, the Venice art pavilions remained as a fossil of a national competition idea from Old Europe. The first Biennale di Venezia took place in 1895, just one year before the first Olympic Games took place in Athens. The latter's founder, Pierre de Coubertin, had originally planned to combine the sporting encounter of the world's youth through a peaceful contest with an international art exhibition.

#Columbian World Fair Chicago, 1893
The industrial world fairs of the 19th century represent an early form of supranational power structures with imperial claims in politics and economy. The leading nations outbid each other not only by the popular performance of accelerated means of transport and technical communication…



#Bilder von der Globalisierung
…but also by exhibiting to the masses of visitors, hungry for sensation, an exotic human menagerie, through the importing of subjects from the colonies, instructed to perform their so-called primitive life within artificial habitats. The World Fairs showed globalization *en miniature* whose proceeding creates a paradox: it is precisely technical progress and homogenization that provoke the claim for cultural identity. Technological internationalism and cultural regionalism are twins.

Homogenization and differentiation as a synchronous process of globalization can be observed back to the deep 19th century. This assumption relies on Roland Robertson's term of *glocality*,[1] which intertwines the "global" and the "local." As an inveterate Hegelian, I explain it through the wit of my master: "Identity is the identity of identity and non-identity," says Georg Friedrich Hegel. The sentence out of the *Science of Logic*[2] may help us understand the dialectics of globalization. Its process consists in the effect that a consciousness for cultural differences emerges just through industrial homogenization. That way, homogenization corresponds with identification: that levelling by appropriation, that use of force, by which the "non-equal" appears. So, the non-identical is fabricated by the process of identification. Identity is equal to non-identity, as it becomes identic with nothing else than with itself by identification.

#Louis-Joseph Anthonissen: L'intrus, *or* Le petit ramoneur*, 1883*
This picture shows how a black boy is identified by white people as the Other, the one who is non-identical with themselves, those who are lounging here, freshly bathed, on the riverbank.

Even the title of the picture remains *non-identically* oscillating: the catalogue of the 1889 World Fair where the Belgian painter Anthonissen had been awarded, names the painting: *L'intrus/The Intruder*, like the *sans papiers*, paperless boat people of today. More politically correct is the title I found in a current auction list: *Le petit ramoneur/ The Little Chimney Sweep*. How harmless, identification turns into a carnival joke.

#The Russian Village at the Vienna World Fair, 1873
The process of globalization and the process of identification follow the same dialectics. Let us translate it into political terms and differentiate the two reverse motions: the *hegemonic* and the *cultural identities*. The Venice Biennale offers a variety of case studies. Hegemonic identity is the *brand* of success, which marks the prerogatives of the leading nation states. Hegemonic is the self-evident claim for imperial power, the dominant influence in the global market, the military and political superiority.

#Jeff Koons in front of Palazzo Grassi
#Chen Zhen at the Artiglierie, Venice Biennale, 1999
Jeff Koons' *Dog* might work as an example of ruling hegemonic identity: the spectacular post-Pop eye-catcher matching with Venice event tourism.
The particular cultural identity, instead, doesn't compete for dominance other than for the peculiarity of being different. Cultural identity manifests itself in aesthetics: in forms of local specificity, of curiosity, of otherness. Patterns of cultural identity stem back to the aesthetic discourses of antiquity where musicians distinguished the Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, and Locrian modes: harmonies indicating a local provenance. The consciousness of cultural identity implies cultural self-determination.

#Paris World Fair, 1937: Soviet and German Pavilions
In the first wave of globalization, the right for cultural autonomy remained the privilege of nation-states and colonial powers, which also colonized the Giardini of Venice by building their pavilions. *Art* was homonymous with Euro-American art; products out of the colonies and protectorates were considered to be artisanry. The prescribed terminology on international fairs between national "arts" and colonial "crafts" kept being mandatory until mid-20th century.

#German Pavilion, 2013
Nevertheless, in the long run, the process of globalization, to put it with Hegel, performed a ruse of reason. The world exhibition constituted the laboratory of a gradual undermining of the borders between self-proclaimed high culture and primitivity. The spectacle was in fact designed as a showcase for the achievements of the leading industrial powers, but, at the same time, the culture of the European nation-states was subject to a gradual *creolization*. The Westernization of the world simultaneously brings about an Orientalization of the West.[3]

The history of this process finds its laboratory in the history of the Biennale di Venezia.

The Landmarks of Biennale History

1. *Cultural Cabinet Policy of Old Europe: 1907 – 1922*

#The Klimt exhibition at the 1910 Biennale
During the first Biennale exhibitions, the old European Entente powers indulged in their cultural and colonial sovereignty, in a style between academism, Impressionism, and Art Nouveau, by ignoring and repelling the avant-gardes. During the 1910

exhibition that showed works by Klimt, Renoir, and a retrospective of Courbet, the secretary general Fradeletto ordered the removal of a painting by Pablo Picasso from the Spanish Pavilion. The turn-of-the-century novelties were appreciated by the Venetian curators with a considerable delay, when, for instance, in 1920 a group of artists between Post-Impressionism and Die Brücke were exhibited. A show of "Negro sculpture" in 1922 gave way to turmoil.

2. The Emergence of Totalitarian Systems, 1922 – 1942

#Soviet Pavilion, 1934: interior with the portrait of Trotzky, by G. Annenkow
#Lenin in Smolsky, by Isaak Brodsky
#Peasant Woman, by Vera Mukhina
Russia entered the stage of the Biennale in 1914 still under the patronship of the Tsar, but after the First World War, the Bolsheviks hoisted the red flag with hammer and sickle above the national pavilion.

#Interior of the Aeropittura *exhibition, 1940 Biennale*
The Biennale owes, cynically spoken, a first shy opening towards contemporaneity thanks to the mistress and first biographer of *Il Duce*, Margherita Sarfatti, the so-called "vanguard muse of Fascism." Through her influence, the Venice Biennale has gained, since 1926, the function of an artistic figurehead of the regime.

By a royal decree, the control of the Biennale was passed from the city of Venice to the Italian state whose conductor, in the meantime, had ditched the semi-official education minister Sarfatti. This change was in line with the building up of an *Iron Axis* between Fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany, and Kōdō-ha militarist Japan. The Jewish origin of Margherita Sarfatti no longer matched the race ideology of these countries. Instead of fine arts, the mass media of cinema gained the favor of cultural policy. The first *Esposizione internazionale d'arte cinematografica* took place in 1932.

3. Cold War, Ideological Competition, "Peaceful Coexistence," 1947 – 1964

#Swiss Pavilion, by Bruno Giacometti, 1952
After a six-year break, the first Biennale after World War II took place in 1948. The postwar art system went through an era of rehabilitating the great masters of the European avant-gardes in retrospect. In 1952, Switzerland opened up a free-standing, functionalist exhibition pavilion by Bruno Giacometti, the brother of Alberto, in the spirit of Bauhaus.

#Romanian Pavilion, 1954, Socialist Realism
"The shadow of Yalta" (Piotr Piotrowski) separated the art field into an Eastern and a Western Hemisphere, in the realms of abstraction and of Socialist Realism.

4. American Triumph and Political Crisis in the West, 1964 – 1976

#Robert Rauschenberg: Factum 1, 1957
#American Pavilion, 1930
Already in 1958, the American artist Marc Tobey had won the Gran Premio. But it was the award of the Pop artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1964 that provided evidence of a new era of American dominance coming up, by ending the dominance of the *École de Paris*, whose exponents had almost notoriously won, seven times in a row, the Gran Premio since the end of World War II.

Kunst
und Knüppel in
Venedig

#Biennale 1968, Report by Stern
The student riots in 1968 led the Venice Biennale into a crisis. Since its foundation as a conventional trade fair, the organizers gave way to the leftist reproaches of "market slavery," and ceased the selling activities in 1970. In the same year, the first Art Basel took place, founded by art traders and gallerists, among others the great collector Ernst Beyeler. It was the Basel response to the Kunstmarkt Köln, opened already in 1967, whose leftist tendency was criticized by the Swiss organizers. By the foundation of a specific art fair, the art system practiced an institutional differentiation between exhibiting and selling.

In 1974, in order to protest against the military coup of Augusto Pinochet, it was proposed that the Venice Biennale be dedicated to Chile, then it got canceled in its entirety. The conclusion is sobering: The so-called roaring Sixties left a blank space of iconoclasm in the Biennale's history.

5. Dismantling of the Yalta Block System in the Spirit of Post Modernism, 1978 – 1997

*#Mimmo Paladino, Italian Pavilion, 1988*It would be another issue to discuss the Western leftist art policy, in general far away from contemporary tendencies, as the comrades contented themselves to recur on the debates of the 1930s by putting

emphasis on Socialist Realism. A definite turn to advanced conceptual positions occurred by 1978 when Achille Bonito Oliva, the theorist of the Italian Transavanguardia, organized the exhibition *Dalla natura all'arte, dall'arte alla natura*. It was a decade of the ruling Arte Povera.

The scroll of the Berlin Wall seals the dismantlement of the Bloc borders in Eastern Europe by 1989. A new cultural geography emerged.

State of the Art: Global Peripheries

#documenta, 1955, Jackson Pollock
A reputation for backwardness clings to the Venice Biennale, challenged since 1955 by Kassel's documenta. Instead of a swarm of national contributors, a single curator decides about the works of art worthy of being included in the canon of contemporariness.

#Haacke, German Pavilion
The curatorial mainstream relinquished the old-fashioned concept of the Venice Biennale as an international art contest among nation states. The pavilions were disputed. The questioning of national representation reached a peak in the post-colonial

decade of the Nineties. Under commissioner Klaus Bussmann in 1993, Hans Haacke smashed up the floor of the German Pavilion and, with a photograph of Hitler's Venice visit at the entrance, recalled the construction date in 1938, on the eve of Second World War.[4]

#Huang Yong Ping, French Pavilion

For their part, the French had already allowed the plaster to be knocked into stripes by Daniel Buren in 1986. In 1999, Jean-Pierre Bertrand extended the building's right to hospitality so far that he invited Huang Yong Ping to administer a monumental acupuncture to the French pavilion: it was perforated with nine tree trunks on which mythical Chinese creatures were enthroned. The fact that the sculptor lived in Paris softened the culture shock. The self-portrayal of cultural grandeur by exhibiting the *Other* has, moreover, a solid tradition in the French Métropole, the scene of world fairs and colonial exhibitions.

#White Cube with Frank Stella

#Corderie
The use of urban space and post-industrial locations in the context of the Venice Biennale was initiated by architects like Vittorio Gregotti. Since 1975, the former salt storage facility, the *Saloni alle Zattere*, has been used for exhibitions. In 1980, Paolo Portoghesi organized the first *Biennale of Architecture* in the *Corderie* of the *Arsenale*, the old shipyard of *La Serenissima*. Since 1999, the *Arsenale* has regularly been used as a gallery space, initiated by commissioner Harald Szeemann who created by *dAPERtutto* in 1999 und *Plateau of Humankind* in 2001, two Venice Biennali. The pace-setting director crossed the border from transatlantic postmodernism to global art. The Western art system was rivalled by artists from beyond the Euro-American era.

#Wang Xingwei: Poor Old Hamilton, 1996

At the 1999 show, Szeemann surprised the public with a large selection of Korean and Chinese artists, hitherto scarcely represented in exhibitions and certainly not yet in Western galleries. One of his favorite paintings was Wang Xingwei's *Poor Old Hamilton*, because it deals with the work of one of the chief curator's great heroes: Marcel Duchamp. Dressed up in a uniform shirt out of Mao's Cultural Revolution, a little boy has dared to damage the *Large Glass* and gets told off now by a female museum educator in a trouser suit typical for the emancipated Westernized businesswoman. On the wall hangs another programmatic icon by Duchamp: the ready-made L.H.O.O.Q., a print of Leonardo's *La Gioconda*, distorted by a moustache. In the background, we recognize Richard Hamilton, the doyen of English Pop Art, playing a museum guardian, unable to prevent the iconoclastic act of the young Maoist campaigner.

The picture brings up the crucial question about the relation between universals in art and the local conditions of art-making. To what extent is the Western canon of modernism authoritative in the age of global art? Is the *Duchamp effect* indeed a prerogative to be observed by every contemporary artist in the world? Do the rules of Pop strategies belong to the universals in today's art system? These are the questions that the Szeemann legacy had raised but not answered yet. It has been the basic theoretical and practical problem of the art system since it entered its global extension.

Against a fuzzy comprehension of *Global Art*, I assume the art system to be a historically unique cultural achievement, based on the ideas of European Enlightenment and the process of decolonization. I call them the four virtues or *politics of art*:

1. The humanist concept of the self-determined individual.
2. The civic estimation of work.
3. The economic practice of open markets.
4. The freedom of public opinion.

The possibility of art relies on these four socio-political conditions. Art is an essentially modern phenomenon. If only one of these four qualities is lacking, art is in danger or even non-existent. These achievements have developed over centuries from the philosophy of humanism via civic and republican social ethics to democratic achievements in Europe and liberation movements in the colonies. To borrow a term from Michel Foucault, these four policies constitute the *historical a priori* of art.

Conclusion: Diasporic Art in the Center

The impulse of globalization after the Second World War was supported by decolonization, but at the same time slowed down by the construction of the Bloc, installed by the Yalta Conference that divided the globe into two, later into three, zones of influence. Art as Western art survived under the protection of the Iron Curtain. The well-arranged world of meanwhile the "Former West" was "international" in the old-fashioned way. A less differentiated system shows less variety. Within the Former West, the artist's provenance had little importance. Artistic positions didn't mark cultural localization but strategies of production: *Abstraction, New Realism, Concept Art* worked as stylistic universals that neglected political borders.

#Hung Tung-Lu, Taiwan, Biennale, 1999

So, there is a direct relation between the end of stylistic universals. By the dissolution of the political bloc system, a completely different art geography emerged. Only now, the postcolonial order was aesthetically activated. Under global conditions, the local becomes the leading motive. That's the dialectics of Globalization: it localizes cultural identity and globalizes the aesthetic principle of distinction.

By the dissolution of Western art, the habitual distinction between center and periphery becomes obsolete. The hierarchy of the poles is inverted: the peripheral as an aesthetic phenomenon constitutes the discourse. The local idiolect of an artistic position, the fact of a specific ethnic provenance is the message.

But attention: provinciality itself hasn't paid off yet. The artist has to act peripherally on the platform of a center. Peripheral aesthetics needs the center as a contrast agent. Only here does he or she find efficient public and institutional attention. There might be powerful emerging economies in China, India and Brazil; nevertheless, despite of all the ethno-folkloristic touch they provide, the good old West is still managing the economy of attention and the market. The emerging countries instead are involved with contradictions in cultural policy. Hegemonic Western capitalism adorns itself tolerantly with a manifold of cultural identities. This sort of Machiavellianism lacks the political powers like China or Russia. They export their artists by political backslash: that's the way the old Western centers are still flourishing: staging periphery in the diaspora. They don't dictate their own styles anymore like the good old École de Paris. Amsterdam, New York, London, Barcelona, and Berlin offer a multicultural network of metropolitan Urbanity.

Let's have a last look at Hung Tung-Lu, a Taiwanese artist, discovered by Harald Szeemann for the 1999 Biennale: A globalized, hybrid Manga figure in front of *Holy Mary's Coronation* in Venetian Trecento-style *alla bizantina*: the artist's homage to the hosting Serenissima. The iconography refers to the history of the native country of Hung Tung-Lu, stemming from Taiwan, the former Formosa island, baptized by Portuguese seafarers, colonized by the Dutch East India Company, driven away by Han Chinese settlers and actual colonizers. The Manga figure recalls Japan, a more recent and violent colonialist power that seized the island in 1894.

Hung Tung-Lu tells the history of a *non-identitary* cultural identity.

La Biennale di Venezia is a temporary center of the global art field. The exhibition space acts as a hub of peripheries in the diaspora of metropolises, called the art field. The aesthetics of contemporary art is migratory; its semantics evokes a specific provenance. So, any work of art exhibited in the international context of a Biennale, testifies to the paradox of logic stated by Hegel. In its singularity, it shows evidence of the formula regarding the identity of identity and non-identity. Identity is equal to non-identity, as it becomes identic with nothing else than itself through the gaze of any arbitrary, identifying beholder.

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Notes

1 Roland Robertson, Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture (London u. a. O.: Sage, 1992).
2 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II, Erster Teil* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 349.
3 The concept of "creolization" goes back to Ulf Hannerz. He aligns himself critically against the idea of the "global village," which plays down the inequality between center and periphery that has an effect in real terms. cf. Hannerz, "Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures," in *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 107-128. The concept was discussed on the occasion of Platform 3 of *Documenta11*, see: Okwui Enwezor, et al., eds., *Créolité and Creolization*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).
4 See Ursula Zeller, ed., *Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig, 1895-2007* (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Cologne: DuMont, 2007).

Venice or Havana: A polemic on the genesis of the contemporary Biennial

Rafal Niemojewski

In December 2005, the Venice Biennial organized an international symposium to celebrate its 110th anniversary and to reflect upon its future. Entitled *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon,* the event was programmed and presented by Robert Storr, artistic director of the 2007 edition of the Biennial. While there was much constructive critique presented at the symposium about the archaic structure of the Venice institution, its mission, and the demographics of its public, no attempts were made to analyze the position of the Venice Biennial among the other large-scale exhibitions taking place today in different parts of the globe. Perhaps this was because its place had already been defined and stated in the symposium program as central and hegemonic. According to Storr, the conference represented

> *La Biennale's contribution to the widening discourse surrounding the proliferation and transformation of a phenomenon it in effect created … Once La Biennale di Venezia was the only exhibition of its kind. Now there are over a hundred exhibitions deploying variants of the model on which the original Biennale was based.*[1]

Storr's comment requires closer examination, since it promulgates the assumption that the Venice Biennial, as inaugurated in 1895, is both responsible for and has given rise to the vast proliferation of biennials that has taken place almost a century later.

This assumption is not isolated; indeed, it is a commonplace so prevalent that few even question it.[2] Yet one wonders why Robert Storr, following many curators, critics, and art historians before him, would assume that all of the large-scale shows subsequent to the Venice Biennial were clearly and necessarily based on its model. It is indisputable that the Venice Biennial must be acknowledged as the first art exhibition to recur on a regular basis and as a model institution of modernity. Some of the most convincing voices highlighting the centrality of Venice's biennial in the discussions surrounding the current proliferation of biennials often leverage its presumed importance by depicting it against the background of the international industrial exhibitions and trade fairs of the nineteenth century (see, for example, Caroline A. Jones's essay in this volume). Such readings draw parallels between the nonartistic agendas structurally indebted to recurring large-scale international exhibitions of the past and present: the presumptive universality, ties to tourism, implications for urban development, openings for foreign/multinational capital investment, and ambitions for an improved visibility in the global arena. Indeed, the emergence of a new biennial is never fortuitous; rather, it is always part of a larger and often very elaborate agenda.

Biennials can and do serve as a vehicle for civic aspirations far beyond the art world, and with few exceptions they are founded on the basis of ideological and economic considerations rather than artistic ones. The introduction of a new biennial is meant to incite civic pride among the local population and provide it with a sense of belonging to the club of civilized and cultured communities, of which such ventures are traditionally indicative. What is at stake here is the recognition, or the prestige, that might be employed in the production of further wealth, or, as Pierre Bourdieu called it, symbolic capital.[3] The biennial thus functions as a generator of symbolic capital and can indirectly generate real capital via its ties, which are duly listed by Caroline A. Jones. I would argue, however, that none of these elements is specific or exclusive to the Venice Biennial or the more recent biennials. These very same agendas can be found behind the establishment of a new museum, library, theater, opera house, or any other major cultural institution, for that matter. What distinguishes a contemporary art biennial from all these ventures is that it is an art exhibition as much as it is a cultural institution or event. An analysis from the perspective of exhibition/curatorial history should thus be given an equal if not greater importance when considering the role of the Venice Biennial in relation to the other biennials currently proliferating around the world. Furthermore, it seems peculiar to give the Venice Biennial sole credit for a type of exhibition whose emergence depends equally on the developments of the

large-scale exhibition format throughout the twentieth century and, perhaps more importantly, on a unique set of circumstances that gave rise to its spread.

The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to argue a different genesis of the contemporary biennial than is typically presumed and, more specifically, to reassess the relevance of the Venice Biennial as the main point of reference for the biennials proliferating around the world today. I will do so by retracing major evolutions of the recurring large-scale international exhibition format from the inception of the Venice Biennial in 1895 to the beginning of its spread in the mid-eighties with the inception of events like the Havana Biennial.

This assumes, of course, that we can comprehensively define the "contemporary biennial." It would seem that, given the multilayered, complex character of the majority of biennials of contemporary art and their number, diversity, and dynamic institutional structures, any subgrouping based on a single typology would be quite perilous. Despite this, however, by examining a wide cross-section of proliferating exhibitions and institutional frameworks and applying the rules of normal distribution, it is possible to delineate within a larger mass of biennials the prevalent curatorial and institutional models, which I designate as the contemporary biennial and the contemporary biennial organization. This selection process requires looking at biennials while taking into account their overall complexity—from the ideological and political agendas behind their creation to their physical products, such as exhibitions, catalogues, or commissioned works. It also necessitates a consideration of their contributions towards redrawing the map of the contemporary art world and rewriting contemporary art discourse, and towards the development of the new models of artistic, exhibitionary, and curatorial practices that have emerged during the period of their proliferation. The contemporary biennial can be distinguished by a strong will to negotiate its peripheral condition, to represent the ambitions of its host city, and to form infrastructures for contemporary art and the public sphere. The self-reflexivity, time- and site-specificity, rhetorical armature (increasingly interdisciplinary discourse that incorporates postcolonialism and non-Western positions), and support it provided to new forms of discursive and socially conscious art and to the new type of curator are equally distinctive features.[4]

The fact is, the number of new large-scale international shows of contemporary art introduced during the so-called period of proliferation of the biennial form has been open to debate, for the available literature provides no consensus with regard to the time frame of the phenomenon or the use and exact meaning of the imprecise term "biennial" (or its Italian equivalent *biennale*). "The term biennial is not protected by copyright and consequently is open to abuse," asserted Rene Block in 2000.[5] It is often used to signify any biannual art exhibition or art project, regardless of its scale, focus, content, or framework, rather than just the more specific format of the recurring large-scale international survey show of contemporary art with a particular set of goals and characteristics whose proliferation has taken place in the context of a major reshaping of the contemporary art world's topography over the past twenty-five years. The latter, more specific reading is used in most of the relevant literature, but without arriving at a precise definition of it. Block, for example, describes the proliferating format as "a new type of global exhibition established under the generic term biennial, which had a major impact upon the contemporary art scene," while Okwui Enwezor refers to it as a "mega-exhibition," and Tim Griffin as a "large-scale, transnational exhibition." Others continue to use the term biennial generically, defining its exact meaning through the range of arguments and examples they put forward.[6] In this essay, I have focused on the subject matching the more specific format described by Block, Enwezor, and Griffin and designated it as *the contemporary biennial:* the large-scale international survey show of contemporary art that recurs at regular intervals but not necessarily biannually.[7]

The model of the first Venice Biennial in 1895 was set out by a list of regulations very specific to its time and somehow similar to those governing the majority of today's commercial art fairs; any attempt to compare or apply them directly to today's biennials must keep this in mind.[8] It is also important to note that from the early days all the artworks presented at the Venice Biennial were on sale, and a percentage levied from their purchase formed a significant contribution to the biennial's budget until 1968. Nevertheless, several facts are worth highlighting to provide a context for the subsequent developments that would eventually lead to the emergence of the large-scale international exhibition as we know it today. First and foremost were its scale and international profile: the 1895 Venice exhibition featured 516 works, and nearly three-fifths of these were by non-Italians. The artworks were displayed

according to the artist's country of origin and with a conspicuous attachment to the nineteenth-century notion of national schools and styles. This arrangement later developed into a system of national representation and, in terms of infrastructure, into national pavilions constructed in the Giardini at the beginning of the twentieth century. While claiming to be "international," the Venice Biennial was, in actual fact, an exhibition nearly exclusively focused on European art and thus was hardly what we might consider fully or properly international today. It wasn't until 1964, for instance, that a non-European artist, the American Robert Rauschenberg, won its main prize.

From the text published in the catalogue of the first Venice Biennial one may also learn that the exhibition's aim was to show "the most noble activities of the modern spirit" and to survey the "art of our time."[9] In practice this vanguard position was never actually assumed, beginning with the significant absence of any non-Salon art until the early twenties and continuing with a resistance toward abstract art (with the exception of Fascist-oriented Futurism) until the first postwar edition in 1948. This delay was later transformed into a particular interest in art history: the 1948 edition featured an exhibition of Impressionist paintings, and the following one, Fauvism, Cubism, and Metaphysical Paintings. At the same time visible attempts were made to make up for earlier omissions: in 1948 the main prize went to Georges Braque, and in subsequent editions it went to Henri Matisse (1950), Raoul Dufy (1952), and Max Ernst and Jean Arp (1954). Another symptom of the noticeably conservative attitudes of the Venice Biennial's selection committee was the absence of any media other than painting and sculpture until 1976, when the first photograph was exhibited. In this period the artists, whose works were selected for display by state committees, were only arriving on site for the opening and therefore didn't have any influence on how their pictures and sculptures were showcased, a fact which gradually increased the frustration of some: after the 1950 edition, for example, Giorgio di Chirico sued the Biennial for showing a group of his early Metaphysical Paintings against his wishes.

At the same time that the first edition of the Venice Biennial was presented to the public, in the U.S. the Pittsburgh industrialist Andrew Carnegie founded an art institute with the ambition of creating a museum of modern art. The exhibition series entitled the Carnegie International that was established in the following year and meant to recur annually, aimed to assemble works for that institute's collection as well as to educate audiences and attract the art world to the city.[10] Compared to the Venetian exhibition, the Carnegie International seems to have represented a model closer to today's biennials from the start in terms of its peripheral location and its form as a single large-scale international exhibition prepared by a curator after a period of extensive travel and studio visits. However, as with Venice's exhibition, relatively few avant-garde works appeared in its early editions, and it was not until Henri Matisse's work won first prize in 1927 that modern art-that period's "contemporary" art-was recognized. Similar aspirations were evoked when, more than half a century later, a wealthy industrialist of Italian descent, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, established the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1951. Based on the original Venetian model of an exhibition comprised of national representations, the early editions of the Brazilian biennial presented a remarkably large and progressive survey of current art marked by the importation to Brazil of many works of European modernism (the retrospective show of Picasso in 1953 may serve as an example).

In many respects, these early biennials can be seen as the direct descendants of the nineteenth-century salon, now institutionalized with its own venue (the Palazzo dell'Arte in Venice, the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, the complex of pavilions and exhibition halls designed by Oscar Niemeyer for the second edition of the Sao Paulo Biennial), expanded many times over in size, and updated with a new spirit of internationalism, yet still strongly attached to the conservative taste of the bourgeois public. In 1955, however, the first Documenta introduced a different model of a single, large-scale, perennial international exhibition.[11] This initially encompassed a broader spectrum of the *Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Art of the Twentieth Century), but after its second edition Documenta evolved toward a survey of current art production. By 1972, with the fifth edition, director Harald Szeemann aspired to turn Documenta's initial idea of representing itself as a *Museum der 100 Tage* (Museum of 100 Days) into one hundred days of events. Defined as "a process of mutually interrelated events" rather than "a static collection of objects," and as "a concentrated version of life in the form of an exhibition," it expanded the traditional limits of an art exhibition and became a lively forum for discussions, performances, experiments, and social action.[12] Joseph Beuys's *Office for Direct Democracy* and Hans Haacke's sociological survey of visitors were perhaps the most contemporary in feel. This expanded discursive format

is echoed in the innumerable instances of discussions and "live" art projects that accompany many international large-scale exhibitions today. The show was also, in all respects, a reflection of recent artistic exploration, which was marked by the presence of Conceptual Art (Hans Haacke, Lawrence Weiner), Body Art (Viennese Actionists), Performance Art (Vito Acconci, Gilbert & George, Ben Vautier), Hyper-Realism, and recent experiments in urban development (Archigram, Peter Cook, Yona Friedman).

In the meantime, the Venice Biennial experienced some important developments informed by the changes in its status, which had been thoroughly revised after the thirty-fifth edition was struck by the protests of 1968. This included bringing an end to the sale of artworks and introducing a new focus on the exhibition and involvement of the artists.[13] In 1970 some of the national presentations were conceived for the first time through the close collaboration of commissioners and selected artists. The U.S. Pavilion displayed a survey of American printmaking that included an on-site working space for the artists arranged by the commissioner, Henry Hopkins. As a result, the American exhibition featured several artworks made in situ, including Ed Ruscha's *Chocolate Room,* an installation consisting of 360 sheets of paper silk-screened with chocolate that entirely covered the interior walls of one of the rooms. In the German Pavilion (then West German), Dieter Honish, the director of the New National Gallery in Berlin, together with artists Heinz Mack and Gunter Uecker (Zero Group), Karl Georg Pfahler, and Kaspar-Thomas Lenk (Op Art) established the precedent of artistically intervening in the pavilion's architecture by rearranging the appearance of the building on the inside as well as on the outside.[14] Two years later the same German commissioner entrusted the configuration of an entire pavilion to a single artist, Gerhard Richter, thereby setting the precedent for today's prevailing model of a pavilion presenting a newly commissioned work (or ensemble of works) by a single artist or group.[15] These new models of display helped bring about an important updating of the Venice Biennial. They opened doors to curatorial and artistic projects that were increasingly in sync with the latest developments in practice at that time. However, they did not solve the persistent problems that prevented the Venice Biennials of the seventies from contending with the concurrent editions of Documenta, namely, the lack of a strong, single curatorial direction that could be played out on a large scale independently from the nation-based system of funding and its political implications, and the lack of a systematic inclusion of emerging artists and practices, instead of just the already well established. The avant-garde projects at the American and German pavilions also revealed the increasing inequality between different national representations, some of which were slowly adopting more experimental methodologies while others continued to endorse the more traditional museum-like displays of modern art.

In 1980, Harald Szeemann and Achille Bonito Oliva overhauled the Venice Biennial in a radical fashion by introducing *Aperto,* a new section created as a response to the rigidity of the Biennial's structure and to the conservatism of the majority of selectors. Opening its doors to young, emerging artists without any restrictions regarding nationality, it constituted perhaps the single most important shift to have taken place in the history of the Venice Biennial since its inception in 1895. *Aperto* inaugurated changes on a structural and aesthetic level that have subsequently enabled independently curated and financed exhibitions to take place in the Arsenale during each edition of the Biennial.[16]

The four main biennials of the preglobalized twentieth century-those of Venice and Sao Paulo, the Carnegie International, and Documenta-should thus be regarded as the most important evolutions of the Venetian model. However, none provide a true blueprint for the contemporary biennial as experienced since the mid-eighties, which is to say, since the period of the format's proliferation. The crucial event for the history of the contemporary biennial arguably came only in 1984, when the first recurring large-scale exhibition was established in the Third World, the Havana Biennial. *La Bienal de La Habana* was groundbreaking in many ways. For the first time the focus was clearly on art coming from the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa-that is, from outside the traditional centers of the contemporary art world. This unprecedented strategy of promoting peripheral art scenes as part of the global circuit-later to become one of the principal raisons d'etre of the contemporary biennial-was plainly stated in the Havana Biennial's "Regulation for Participation," a trilingual brochure published and distributed during its first edition:

> *The Wifredo Lam Center convenes the 1st Havana Biennial in order to promote the development of plastic arts in Latin America and the Caribbean in the belief they must be recognized as a part of universal culture. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, many artists involved*

> *in the quest for a genuine and contemporary form of expression do not have access to the contact and confrontation necessary to achieve international recognition of their talents. Thus, one of the main objectives of the biennial is to promote the work of participating artists on the international scene.*

In consequence, the participating artists were required to be citizens of a Latin American or Caribbean country, or at least have lived in one of these two regions for a minimum of five years. The second edition was additionally opened to artists from Asia, and the third, to artists from Africa. These restrictions were relaxed a little in the fifth edition, which featured diasporic artists of Caribbean descent, such as the British artist Keith Piper.

Unlike in Venice or Sao Paulo, the works in the main exhibition of the first edition of the Havana Biennial, which was located in the Pabellon de Cuba, were displayed according to formal criteria rather than national origin. The Biennial stemmed from the assumption that Latin American artists were a heterogeneous group of individuals rather than mere representatives of particular countries or cultures. This perspective was also conspicuous in the layout of the catalogue, which arranged the artists alphabetically rather than by nationality. The exhibition at the Pabellon was also remarkable for its unique manner of display. Over 5,000 square meters of openair space covered by a concrete roof was used to create a temporary multilevel maze with wooden bridges connecting the various exhibition spaces. All works were uniformly framed with raw, unfinished wooden strips, regardless of their format. Meanwhile, in the second main venue, the Museum of Fine Arts, a more traditionally hung exhibition was divided into sections according to technique, and then each of these sections was suborganized according to country. The selection of works featured in the first edition may seem a little conservative from today's perspective, for the official "Regulation for Participation" only allowed two-dimensional works-painting, drawings, photography, and prints. It is, however, important to note that from a local perspective there was nothing particularly reactionary about this focus: due to the duty-free nature of mailed printed matter as well as the affordability of its production and shipping, printed works have always been a favorite item in Latin American contemporary art exhibitions and were preponderant in several other smaller, short-lived biennials preceding Havana's, such as the biennials in Medellin and Cali (both in Colombia), with the latter being entirely devoted to the graphic arts.

With a total of 2,200 works by 835 artists, the first Havana Biennial ended up presenting one of the most important overviews of contemporary Latin American art in history.[17] Beginning with the second edition, the biennial focused predominantly on works by emerging artists by introducing a new paragraph into the regulations that allowed only works created during the five years preceding the exhibition to be displayed. This unprecedented annotation is most likely the earliest formulation of the tacit rule of contemporary biennials to privilege new work, that is, their function as surveys of the latest tendencies in art.[18] The second Havana Biennial was also the first truly global exhibition, gathering 690 artists from 57 countries and pioneering the extraordinary internationalization of art that we witness today. From early on, it was also the priority of the organizers to invite artists to Havana to install their works. In the fifth edition, 104 of the 171 participants were involved during the installation.[19] Today, many participants recall the early Havana Biennials as a unique place for dialogue among artists grappling with the restrictive costs of artistic production.[20] In having an important number of artists on site and a favorable political climate, the organizers saw the event as a space for creative encounters between artists, theoreticians, cultural workers, and the local population.[21] The biennial engaged the entire city as the exhibition venues were spread across different neighborhoods; for some of the early editions over thirty venues were used, including artists' studios and private apartments.

The Havana Biennial's innovative nature was also manifest in several other aspects. Since its inception in 1984, it has expanded the traditional model of one central exhibition into an assortment of shows, panel discussions, lectures, performances, and workshops led by artists. Although Documenta 5 (1972) already contained elements of this expanded character, this was confined to the level of artists' projects and did not concern a self-reflexive enquiry into the exhibition and the institution's own raison d'etre. However, it is when looking at the themes addressed by the earliest Havana exhibitions and their parallel events that we are struck by the contemporaneity of these topics, for they continue to play a central role in the discourse of today's biennials. The second biennial (1986) focused on Caribbean cultures, while the next edition (1989) was accompanied by a conference entitled "Tradition and Contemporaneity in the Arts of the Third World."

These questions were elaborated further in the fourth edition of the biennial (1991) through an exploration of the theme of "Cultural Domination and Alternatives to Colonization." The 1991 edition of the Havana Biennial marked an important turn in discussions surrounding globalization and, concurrently, in the ways the following wave of emerging biennials articulated their rhetoric. In fact, this edition was the first contemporary biennial to deal explicitly with postcolonialism before the readings of globalization through the lens of postcolonial critique began to be systematically appropriated by the discourses and frameworks of preexisting and newly established biennial exhibitions. The new variant of the Havana Biennial's rhetoric relied to a lesser extent on the "Three Worlds" model and instead shifted towards questions of the global versus the local and the center/core-periphery dialectic. In parallel, the Biennial featured from the beginning exhibitions designed to address a range of current issues, such as nomadism, displacement and marginalization, cultural hybridizations and diasporic identities, ecology, and the periphery of postmodernity—all of which now belong to the vocabulary of the current generation of biennials. The organizers privileged works expressing ethnic, religious, and cultural particularisms, thereby accentuating "difference" and a polyphony of discourse rather than seeking to communicate a universal message imposed by a single curatorial gesture.

Bringing together a selection of local and international artists, curators, critics, historians, and philosophers as well as social activists, theoreticians, and practitioners from various fields, the Havana Biennial was one of the early instances of a new type of heterogeneous discursive sphere capable of addressing current art practice while simultaneously exploring some of the most complex predicaments of our time.[22] Such generated rhetorical armature was therefore much broader than the art historical discourse accompanying the majority of museum shows at the time, which made it capable of expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that had constituted and defined artistic knowledge production up until the eighties.[23]

With the proliferation of variations of the new model established by the Havana Biennial (an international, large-scale, theme-driven survey of recent art with an extensive program of parallel events and discursive platforms that increasingly incorporated nonartistic disciplines), which was swiftly applied in places that have traditionally been marginalized (e.g., Istanbul, Johannesburg, Dakar) and later recuperated by second-tier cities in Europe (e.g., Lyon, Tirana, Seville) and the Far East (e.g., Gwangju, Fukuoka), the Cuban biennial itself began to lose its singularity around the time of its sixth edition in 1997. At that point, first regrets were expressed about the softening of the Havana Biennial's radical rhetoric, for it had begun to engage with the politics of the contemporary art world. As critic Rachel Weiss observed in 1997, the organizers of the Havana Biennial had "proved that a convincing global position can be developed from outside the usual circles of power; their task now, one fears, is to defend their achievement from its own success well enough to preserve its voice and distinctness—a problem of middle age."[24] However, the Havana Biennial remains the symbolic model for the majority of biennials created in the past twenty-five years. Paradoxically, it is thanks to the economic isolation of Cuba that Havana's biennial still represents a peripheral context in its purest form today.

The arguments listed above suggest that the Havana Biennial (as evidenced by its first five editions) represents a more accurate point of reference for the contemporary large-scale exhibition than the Venice Biennial in either its original or its current form. The arguments supporting the location of the genesis of the contemporary biennial in the Havana Biennial can be summarized and grouped into the three main areas of inquiry: its relevance from the perspective of exhibition and curatorial history, the conjuncture of historical circumstances in which it came into being, and its distinctly different reading of modernity.

While Venice had been resistant to avant-garde and non-Western art for almost a century, Havana's biennial was the first to focus strictly on recent work and prioritize art production from outside the Western core.[25] Artworks featured in the Havana Biennial were displayed according to formal criteria in a centrally curated exhibition rather than in a series of displays of works arranged according to the country of their origin, as was the case-and to some extent still is-in Venice.[26] Beginning with its second edition, the Havana Biennial was designed not only as an exhibition but as an entire constellation of events (main exhibitions, assorted group and solo shows, conferences, talks, lectures, workshops, publications, film programs, etc.) revolving around a specific thematic, artistic, and cultural focus, which thus provided it with a strong rhetorical armature and unprecedented discursive capacities.[27]

Another major difference between the two institutions in question was primarily informed less by their artistic profiles and choices than by the historical circumstances in which they came to being. The Venice Biennial was founded as a celebration of the nineteenth-century idea of the nation-state, while the Havana Biennial, in contrast, emerged with the advent of major historical transformations concurrent with the unprecedented acceleration of the processes of globalization, and thus reflected the new transnational, multicultural, and diasporic identities. To ignore these dealings and focus only on the elements of the early Venice Biennial that already contained within them a grain of the ensuing phenomenon of biennial proliferation in order to contrive a neat teleology would be a mistake.[28] Instead, one might also articulate the conditions of possibility for the appearance of what seems self-evident, conditions that are contingent in that they are products of historically unrepeatable circumstances yet are also conjecturally determined. The acceleration of processes of globalization and the passage from a polarized political situation in the world (during the Cold War) to the far more complex arrangement that Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt describe as the "Empire" provided the conditions of possibility for the proliferation of today's contemporary biennials. These historical circumstances are, in this context, far more decisive than the sway of the predecessors.[29] Therefore, the importance that I am assigning to the Havana Biennial lies in the fact that it captured and marked the period of the major transitions in the (art) world that determined the course of the proliferation.[30]

The first edition of the Havana Biennial in 1984 thus marked a turn in biennial history: the birth of a new breed of contemporary biennials born of a global context and the start of their proliferation. While many of the new biennials may, in some respects, be read as continual expressions of modernity (notably through their association with the accumulation of symbolic capital), it was the Havana Biennial that established the contemporary biennial as a platform for the critique of this same modernity. By focusing on creating horizontal connections (South-South) that provide alternatives to the art routes inherited from modernity, the Havana Biennial enabled a new type of global exhibition that debunks the myths of teleological modernity and explores the plurality of modernism. The inception of the Havana Biennial coincides precisely with (and in the process is informed by) the theorization of postmodernism, which the Havana Biennial advanced in its own way against the modernity-making machine of the Venice Biennial. It was in 1984 that American literary critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson presented his seminal essay on the cultural logic of late capitalism, a text that continues to be a resource for discussions surrounding cultural aspects of globalization today.[31] It is precisely the ways in which the Havana Biennial mirrored the new readings of globalization and modernity-in which it captured the historical, political, and geographic transitions of the eighties, and in which it introduced (and in some cases anticipated) the shifts in exhibitions-making and the discourse surrounding contemporary art—that allow us to identify the Cuban biennial as the most important point of reference for the contemporary biennial.

Situated at the juncture where global capitalism and culture intersect, where the yields of modernity can be used to critique it, the contemporary biennial is a highly fractured and fragmented entity that only acquires its full meaning once sited within a given context (whether that is Havana, Istanbul, or Singapore). The contemporary biennial can generate the public sphere necessary for discussion, articulating inherent contradictions of cultural globalization. With its ambitious and often utopian aspirations of changing the (art) world, which were first articulated by the Havana Biennial, it should be seen today as a largely unachieved project. As long as the outcome of cultural and economic globalization is still a clouded mirror, the fate of the contemporary biennial remains unpredictable with respect to both its survival (with possible transformations and adjustments) and its capacity to produce a viable and important alternative to existing institutional frameworks within the contemporary art world.

This essay is a revised version of a lecture given at the Bergen Biennial Conference, September 17–20, 2009.

Notes

1 Taken from Robert Storr's text published in the program of the symposium "Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon," December 9–12, 2005, Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.
2 This centrality of the Venice Biennial in the discussions surrounding the current proliferation of biennials is indeed commonplace among many art historians, critics, and curators (including Caroline A. Jones, Tim Griffin, Daniel Birnbaum, Charlotte Bydler, and Carlos Basualdo, to name a few). Conspicuously, those representing, or subscribing to, non-Western perspectives

tend to be considerably more skeptical about its presumed relevance (for instance, Geeta Kapur, Thomas McEvilley, and Gerardo Mosquera). Other commentators who questioned Venice's position in regards to "younger" biennials include René Block and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. The general prominence of the Venetian exhibition is due the fact that it is one of the most popular, publicized, and discussed events punctuating the art-world calendar, and the relative lack of first-hand knowledge about biennials outside the West does not help the discussions. Even today relatively few critics and curators (and hardly any art historians) travel to see exhibitions outside the EU and the U.S. while the Venice Biennial continues to be visited and referenced by thousands.

3 The employment of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital (see his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [London, 1984]) in this context is designed to point to alternative sources of wealth other than economic (financial and industrial) capital whose value may nevertheless be redeemable and reconvertible back into economic value through a whole series of direct and indirect routes, a fact that explains the willingness of city administrators to encourage and seek investment in contemporary biennials and their sensitivity to the importance of enhancing their city's image under conditions of intensified competition.

4 Rafal Niemojewski, *The Rise of the Contemporary Biennial 1984–2009*, doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2009.

5 Martin Glaser, "Interview with René Block," in *Das Leid von der Erde / Songs of the Earth*, ed. Barbara Heinrich, exh. cat. Kassel, Documenta and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, 2000, p. 5.

6 Ibid., p. 5; Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," in Marieke van Hal, Viktor Misiano, and Igor Zabel (eds.), "Biennials," special issue, *MJ–Manifesta Journal* 2 (Winter 2003–Spring 2004), p. 8; Tim Griffin, "Global Tendencies: Globalism and Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum,* no. 42 (November 2003), pp. 153–207.

7 According to my findings, around fifty new instances of the contemporary biennial were introduced from 1984 to 2009. Less than half of these exhibitions can declare a perfect record of recurrence, while others at some point(s) encountered circumstances that led to the postponement or cancellation of one or more editions, or, in the most severe cases, to their discontinuation. Some of the most emblematic "biennials," including those of Havana and Berlin, should in fact call themselves triennials, as three-year intervals between consecutive editions have been more frequent than two-year intervals. Similarly, the span of time between the first and second editions of the Yokohama Triennial (2001, 2005) was four years, thereby technically making it a quadrennial. The frequency of such irregularities suggests that classifying perennial exhibitions according to the pace of recurrence can be arbitrary.

8 An official selection committee consisting of prominent artists and citizens born or resident in Venice set out these regulations in the first catalogue published in 1895. The committee had the authority to issue invitations to participating artists and to decide on the inclusion of works after an open call for submissions had been made. In his study of the early Venice Biennial, Lawrence Alloway asserted that the Venetian regulations were largely modeled on those of the nineteenth-century salons, in particular the ones that took place in Munich in 1886 and 1888. This connection, along with the committee's conspicuous inclination toward Salon art, led him to depict the early editions of the Venice Biennial as a "Super-Salon." See Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London, 1968), pp. 33–35.

9 Riccardo Selvatico, Syndic of Venice and a member of the original Venice Biennial Commission, quoted in ibid., p. 32.

10 In 1896, the show was established as a yearly survey and presented as the Annual Exhibition. In 1950 the exhibition was renamed the Pittsburgh International and became biannual, and then in 1955 it became triannual. During the nineteen-seventies its name was changed to the International Series and it broke with the tradition of the survey show to present solo exhibitions. The show returned to its original 1896 survey-exhibition format in 1982 and was renamed the Carnegie International.

11 Until its fifth edition in 1972, Documenta recurred at four-year intervals (excepting the five-year interval between the second and third editions of 1959 and 1964), but from then on at intervals of five years. The considerably longer period of preparation (matched by a considerably bigger budget) reinforced Documenta's reputation as one of the leading surveys of contemporary art. Despite its specific pace of recurrence, many other characteristics of the post-1972 editions of Documenta (the artistic direction, selection of curators, curatorial strategies, shared lexicon, and discursive frameworks, as well as selection of works) suggest that Documenta should not be discussed separately from other recurring exhibitions.

12 Harald Szeemann quoted in Gabriele Mackert, "At Home in Contradictions: Harald Szeemann's Documenta," in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.),

Archive in Motion: 50 Years of Documenta 1955–2005 (Göttingen, 2005), pp. 253–61.

13 One of the earliest commentators of contemporary biennials, Carlos Basualdo, has asserted that the way they acquired symbolic capital was paradoxically linked to their presumed independence from market logic. While Basualdo argues that the current connections of the biennial industry with the art market are often overstated, the Venice Biennial, until 1968, was a marketplace in which nearly every work bore a price tag. It is perhaps not by total coincidence that 1970 marked both the end of the sale of art at the Venice Biennial and the opening of the art fair in Basel, which was founded by the art dealers and gallerists Trudl Bruckner, Balz Hilt, and Ernst Beyeler. The rapid rise of Art Basel to the rank of one of the world's most important art events was likely due to the fact that the art fair, held in June, coincided every two years with the opening of the Venice Biennial. It could therefore cater to the community of collectors, in particular those coming from across the Atlantic looking for new marketplaces in Europe after the end of commercial activities in Venice.

14 Similar efforts took place during the Architecture Biennial in 1970 at the French Pavilion, where architects Claude Parent and Paul Virilio installed the first experimental and site-specific environment.

15 Gerhard Richter displayed his series of forty-eight grayscale paintings of identical size based on photographic portraits taken out of the encyclopedia.

16 *Aperto* continued to present works by emerging artists throughout the eighties. However, without curatorial direction strong enough to respect Szeemann's initial vision, its relevance and visibility gradually waned. The section was given a particularly important focus during the forty-fifth edition of the Biennial under the artistic direction of Achille Bonito Oliva, but then it disappeared from view once more. As the artistic director of the forty-eighth edition in 1999, Szeemann revived the concept of *Aperto* on a much larger scale with *dAPERTutto* (APERTO Everywhere), which featured works from over a hundred artists presented in the newly restored Corderie in the Arsenale. Throughout the eighties Szeemann's and Oliva's initiatives can be therefore seen as exceptions rather than as a sign of actual structural change, which only truly arrived in the nineties.

17 That is, at least in terms of quantity, even if, as several critics have noted, "it was far from an exquisite selection." Like the first edition of Documenta, the first edition of the Havana Biennial featured many historical works before shifting its focus entirely to recent art production. See Luis Camnitzer, "Report from Havana: The First Biennial of Latin American Art," *Art in America* (December 1984), p. 43.

18 As mentioned earlier, the short-lived *Aperto* section of the Venice Biennial introduced in 1980 was dedicated to emerging artists and not necessarily to new works (although these two often came hand in hand). The works displayed in that section represented only a small percentage of the total number of works presented at the Biennial, while the more systematic presentation of recent artistic production only began in Venice in the nineties (notably in 1993 and 1999).

19 This represented the highest ratio of artists involved during the installation to date. See Luis Camnitzer, "The V Havana Biennial," *Art Nexus,* no. 14 (October–December 1994), pp. 48–55.

20 See Valerie Cassel, "The Havana Biennale," *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art,* no. 15 (Fall/Winter 2001), pp. 14–17.

21 The eighties in Cuba were a period marked by more liberal cultural policies and a considerably more open approach on the part of the Cuban government to cultural and international exchange.

22 For example, the fourth edition of the Havana Biennial (1991) featured an extensive program of parallel events including the international conference "Cultural Domination and Alternatives to Colonisation," whose list of speakers included the editors of *Third Text* Rasheed Araeen and Guy Brett, artist and critic Luis Camnitzer, historian Iván de la Nuez, cultural theorist Nelly Richard, philosopher Eduardo Subirats, and critic and scholar Jorge Glusberg among many others.

23 The areas of thought incorporated into the general lexicon of contemporary biennials via theories of globalization and postcolonialism include sociology, architectural theory, anthropology, philosophy, feminist theory, queer theory, urban studies, cultural studies, film studies, and literary criticism. While the Havana Biennial (or any other contemporary biennial, for that matter) cannot under any circumstances be given exclusive credit for the entry of extra-artistic discourses into the realm of contemporary art, it is nonetheless significant that its early editions and the beginning of the proliferation of the new model coincided with this shift. The contribution of a new breed of globalized biennials to the hybridization of the discourse surrounding contemporary art and exhibitions should be seen as significant, particularly with regard to the progressive absorption and dissemination of postcolonial thought (or, more broadly, discourses giving prominence to the concept of alterity) and to the new voices and theories (re)articulated outside Western academia.

24 Rachel Weiss, "The Sixth Havana Biennial," *Art Nexus,* no. 26 (October– December 1997), p. 77.
25 At this writing, the contemporary art of African countries and the African diaspora still haven't found a satisfying platform of presentation in Venice.
26 As mentioned earlier, the changes announced by *Aperto* in 1980 and then subsequently applied in 1993 and 1999 can be seen as milestones in the history of the Venice Biennial. However, the archaic and questionable system of national representations continues to be this biennial's defining feature.
27 This early instance of a biennial serving as a discursive platform can be discussed in relation to broader shifts in curatorial practice and discourse and in developments in art practice, which required the establishment of new frameworks for the production, mediation, and dissemination of art. For details on this, see Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse," in Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol, 2008), pp. 13–28. This essay has also been reprinted in the present volume.
28 I would, however, like to acknowledge that the periodization I put forward in this paper, just like Robert Storr's genealogy, or, as a matter of fact, any other similar procedure, is to some extent a teleological construct and as such it can be criticized and disputed. In order to further assess it, I suggest comparing it to two other periodizations presented in the available literature, those of René Block and Charlotte Bydler. Block's panorama of biennials conspicuously excludes the Venice Biennial. Explaining this deliberate omission in the catalogue, Block said that he saw the Venice Biennial at that time, with its impermeable structure of individually funded and curated national representations, as the antithesis of the younger biennials he was interested in. See Block's remarks in Glaser 2000 (see note 5), p. 4; see also Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala, 2004), p. 151. An abridged version of the latter appears in the present volume.
29 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge [MA], 2000).
30 At this writing, the proliferation of the contemporary biennial had acquired a time-bound niche in recent exhibition history. The analysis of the dynamic of proliferation (with a significant shift occurring around 1995) allows us to pinpoint the association of the contemporary biennial and the processes of globalization to appear as truth and eventually something self-evident. The early stage of the proliferation of the contemporary biennial (1984–95) was marked by the appearance of new instances in territories largely peripheral to and disconnected from the core of the contemporary art world, which at that time was still centralized and revolved around the few Western art capitals that had been empowered throughout the modern era. The earliest contemporary biennial organizations (those of Havana and Cairo) emerged in territories then designated as being part of the Third World, which could be translated as geographically remote, and politically and economically incompatible with the centers of Western art. Others materialized in the peripheries and semiperipheries with an analogous agenda of correcting and decentralizing the cartography of the art world inherited from modernity. One thing that these various places had in common was that they were localized on the margins of dominant culture, within the regions of the so-called social, cultural, and/or geographical periphery, or of the "Other." The vast majority of the contemporary biennials established during the second stage of biennial proliferation (roughly 1995 to the present), on the other hand, were localized in the territories that could now be best described as emerging economies or developed countries in Europe, Asia, South America, and the Middle East. With the new world order in place after the end of the Cold War, the preceding rationale based on political alliances, the theory of development, and the notion of periphery defined either geographically or symbolically could no longer be used to comprehend the second stage of biennial proliferation. Instead, it was necessary to privilege a different approach, using the nomenclature and division into strategic alliances defined by the system of the global economy and economic deregulation: the single market of the European Union including its new members from Eastern and Central Europe, the highly developed economies of the Asian Tigers, the emerging markets of BRIC and Mercosul countries, countries united by NAFTA, and the Gulf oil states. The shift in the geopolitical and economic identity of the contemporary biennial was concurrent with a change in ideological perspectives. Most of the biennials that emerged during the first phase were characterized by a strong desire to challenge the status quo of unequal power relations within the art world and the world at large. In contrast, the majority of contemporary biennials established after 1995, according to the interpretation presented by Negri and Hardt, can be read as "projects from within" that articulate their agendas according to a new world order in which ideological opposition and political blocks can no longer be easily drawn on a world map.

31 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review,* no. 146 (July–August 1984), pp. 59–92. This controversial article, which would later be expanded to a full-length book in 1991, was part of a series of analyses of postmodernism from the dialectical point of view Jameson had developed in his earlier work on narrative. Other dates—associated perhaps with seminal works by Baudrillard, Foucault, Derrida, Perry Anderson, Richard Rorty, or others—could be quoted here as markers of the postmodernist critique of modernity, but Jameson's pronouncement seems as useful as any to me with regard to the contemporary biennial.

The Evolution of an Exhibitory Model: Venice Biennale as an Entity in Time

Vittoria Martini

Foreword

Vittoria Martini, Italy, April 19, 2020

When *OnCurating* contacted me to ask if I would agree to republish the following text, it was precisely at a moment when I was (and I still am) elaborating reflections on the future of biennials in light of the current global upheaval. Obviously, I was happy to have the opportunity to offer my text again, but the instinctive reaction was the necessity for a foreword. The following text was written in 2011, so not very long ago; it is a historical text, therefore a kind of evergreen text, but it is clear in my mind that for any piece of writing that we will consider studying from now on, we will check the publication date, as a sort of BC/AD COVID-19 to assess its relevance.

This is particularly the case if we are talking about biennials, "one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary global culture" in the definition recently given by Charles Green and Anthony Gardner[1]: the exhibition format, which is the symbol par excellence of globalization, whose main features are precisely a high level of connectivity and high level of circulation.[2] Green and Gardner argue that biennials have brought benefits to art history and artistic production, giving the local communities of the art system the opportunity to encounter contemporary art and related places the ability to emerge in the global network. This has led to a "networked semi-coordination of biennials"[3] in which openings are scheduled within a few days of each other, to ensure international movement from one biennial to another, in what at the beginning of the 21st century we called "global nomadism."

In 2009, Boris Groys analyzed the biennial in the metaphor of the art installation, as "a model for a new world political order, because each biennial tries to negotiate between national identities, cultural and global trends, economic success and the politically relevant."[4] This is because, according to Groys, the biennials build a "community of spectators" and, therefore, are the ideal basis for initiating a *politeia* for the establishment of a new order.

Biennials as a powerful mass media for the production of discourses, a place for political experimentation, dynamic, resilient, resistant, in a global cultural flow that produces "locality" and "local subjectivities"[5].
We now have to think about the inevitable transformation of the biennial format in light of the fact that "global nomadism" will probably remain a feature of the first period of the global era, while we are about to enter the second. It is therefore necessary to start thinking about the sustainability of biennials in an ecological perspective, both culturally and ethically. More than ever, we need to look at history, in a *longue durée* vision of the phenomenon. This is because it is history that builds geographies and not the other way around[6], and geographies have never been as crucial and as physically unbridgeable as today, in what we used to call the "global village," for us who used to take several flights a year to go to biennials and for art tourism.

In our hyper-connected world, if an exhibition is relevant and produces discourses, it generates debate wherever it is. So, it is useful to pick up a text that has become a classic, such as "The Global White Cube" in which, in 2005, Elena Filipovic first posed the question of the relevance of the "location," i.e., the geographical identity of the place where a biennial is held.[7] It seems obvious, but it is not the same thing to visit the biennial in Venice, in Gwangju, or in Havana, because the context is different, the public is different, the culture is different. But it is within the space of the exhibition that a sort of homogenization of discourses has been created, a homogenization of the checklists of the artists, of the curators, and therefore it is the same inner structure of the biennial that has weakened its own potential.
And this is how leaving behind the "location" you are experiencing, after having traveled thousands of kilometers by plane, you enter the biennial space to experience any other "global white cube": in Venice as in Gwangju, you will find more or less the same selection of artists—no surprise, because in the meantime there has been a homogenization of curatorial discourses that in most cases make artworks silent, and are the heart of what should be an "ideological dramaturgy" in the space. The power of a biennials lies, in Filipovic's words, in

"the articulation of a particular physical space through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged."[8]

The space, intended here as a specific *located location*, and the viewer are at the center. In order for biennials to function at their full potential as a model and a free space for experimenting with a new political order, they must be rooted in the place where they are geographically located; they must act as institutions of cultural production, working from the geographical, historical, social, and political contexts in which they are located. A connection between the context and the artworks is necessary, as Filipovic writes, it is necessary to "locate a project," to "use" the location; it is necessary that we begin to think that the primary viewer is the local one, not more and not mainly the one that travels thousands of miles by plane. That's why I believe that the "Southern" biennials, which have proliferated in recent decades and which until yesterday were a model of resistance with respect to the globalization of the art system, may set the course for the future.[9]

For this reason, I found it particularly fitting, in this moment of transition, to look at history by proposing this text in which I described how, at a time when Western society was transforming following the social upheaval in 1968, the Venice Biennale questioned "the same social function as those institutions which produce culture, that is, to penetrate and restore significance to locations in the city and to the territory."[10]

History produces geography, and the richness of this second phase of the global era sees biennials as protagonists, if they can become local platforms for critical experimentation in a global world that can resist cultural homogenization thanks to the building of a global *politeia*.

Notes

1 Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 3.
2 Arjun Appadurai, "How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective," in *Transcultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 8.
3 Green, Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta,* 241.
4 Boris Groys, "From Medium to Message: The Art Exhibition as a Model of a New World Order," in *Open* 16 (2009): 65.
5 In this very short text, it is necessary to stress Appadurai's explanation concerning the cultural flows in "the relationship between the forms of circulation and the circulation of forms." Appadurai, "How Histories Make Geographies," 7.
6 Ibid., 9.
7 Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," in *Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, eds. B. Vanderlinden, E. Filipovic (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 80.
8 Ibid., 79.
9 Charles Esche, "Making Art Global: a Good Place or a No Place?," in *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, ed. Rachel Weiss (London: Afterall Books, 2011).
10 Visual Arts and Architecture Program in *Biennale di Venezia. Yearbook 1975 Events 1974* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1975), 259. In this short text, I can't go into details concerning documenta's role as a territorial institution of culture.

The evolution of an exhibitory model. Venice Biennale as an entity in time

In 1968 the English art critic Lawrence Alloway concluded his journey through the history of the Venice Biennale, with these words:

> The Venice Biennale (...) has reduced our ignorance about twentieth-century art. Thus, in future, anthologies or compilations based on the past model will not be sufficient to hold neither specialists, nor the wider public. Greater control of exhibitions, so that relevant themes can be cogently displayed, may be necessary, though obviously this will present difficulties, given the Biennale's cellular structure... The problem for the Biennale now is to work out a control system to replace *laissez-faire,* without losing the cooperation of the thirty-seven nations that participated in 1966 (1).

The Venice Biennale 1895-1968 from Salon to Goldfish Bowl was one of the first books to present history of art from the viewpoint of its distribution and for years, it was the only existing critical account of the most celebrated and long-lived of the biennials. By analyzing the Venice Biennale as a system, Alloway presented a history of the institution in connection with art in society, looking at works of art not as artistic objects in

themselves but as part of a system of communication. Conceived as "an entity in time", the Biennale was able to adapt itself to political and social changes without ever losing "the spirit of its institutional identity" (2).

The book covered the period up to the beginning of the dispute, ending with the words from the quotation above: an urging that was the inevitable destiny of the major perennial Venetian exhibition, which would have otherwise died as a cultural fact. The English critic understood how urgent it was for the Biennale to devise a "control system" of its exhibitions that would solve the complex "cellular" structure. Such a structure had to exist over the years, and had established itself on the basis of the incommunicability between the main exhibition and the autarchy of the participating nations. Indeed, the Biennale had no say regarding the art-related choices of those countries that participated in their national pavilions. Towards the end of the sixties, the situation had resulted in a large international exhibition which was heterogeneous, incoherent and no longer competitive in terms of its critical approach. At the same time, the "*laissez-faire"* approach, the consequence of its old normative structure that prevented any type of managerial planning, resulted in the loss of the Biennale's cultural role and specificity. At the end of the sixties, the Venice Biennale as a public institution did not seem to perform its role of producing culture, but it had more of a merely commercial function.

This story is inserted, chronologically, at the very point where Alloway's ends, this is when the Biennale's institutional and functional crisis had reached its peak, thus causing it to be the objective of the 1968 protests. The Venice Biennale can be seen here as an archetype, as a "source" to examine and as the centre of that art communication system represented by biennials. As an archetype, the Venice Biennale is an "area of condensation, place of memory, map, network, space of modernazation" (3), cointaining within itself, at the same time, all the features which distinguish contemporary biennials.

The seat of the exhibition, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, was originally conceived as a place for welcoming Italian and foreign artists invited by the International Committee. Italy had recently been united and an Italian cultural and linguistic identity did not yet exist. The International Art Exhibition (NOTA), which was conceived as an "educator and initiator of a new, modern culture for 'giovane Italia'", immediately became ground for dispute (4). This was because the international aspect of the exhibition, sanctioned by the statute of 1894, had already been called into question in 1901, when the General Secretary of the Biennale, Antonio Fradeletto, established the "sale regionali" (Regional Halls) to be used for hosting the Italian artists divided by schools. The progressive Italianization of the exhibition resulted in a growing need for exhibition space for hosting foreign artists (5).

In 1907, with the excuse "of guaranteeing the most favorable international solidarity", Antonio Fradeletto conceived the national pavilions as allowing Italian artists to show divided according to their region, and foreign artists to have an independent exhibition space(6). The proposal was so successful that by 1914, seven large international powers had already erected pavilions, bringing "art from all over the world" to Venice (7). By statute, the national pavilions were (and still are) completely independent from the administration of the Biennale, operating as embassies to which the principle of extraterritoriality applies (8). Consequently, over time, a "cellular" structure, that is a non-uniform, but rather, dispersed exhibition came into being; one that was not international, but made up of the "autonomous participation of single countries", amongst which no cultural interdependency existed (9). This situation did not create problems until the end of World War II, when the world, and particularly Europe, found itself transformed both geographically and politically and the very concept of state-nation fell into crisis.

At the end of World War II, after more than fifty years since its foundation, the Biennale had to find a cultural role in order to reintegrate itself into the international art scene. According to the Secretary General Rodolfo Pallucchini, the "new climate of liberty" could only be reached by turning back to the origins of the exhibition. By this he meant following, almost literally, the declaration found on the catalogue of the first edition of the International Art Exhibition: "attracting more public by the notoriety of the illustrious foreign artists who would be competing". The new approach would offer those who were unable to travel so far, and in particular young Italian artists, the chance to "get to know and compare" the different international art movements (10).

Through a series of exhibitions which presented the most recent movements in international art without ever disengaging from historical analysis, the exhibition formula for the first post war editions of the Biennale was met with great success (11). But in the introduction to the 1956 catalogue, Rodolfo Pallucchini declared that

the cycle of historical exhibitions had ended and that "it would be idealistic to think that a complete picture of the arts can be given every two years to the Biennale" (12). According to the General Secretary, the historical-informative activity of the Biennale was brought to completion and it was now time for another phase, that of "current art" shows (13). Meanwhile, Pallucchini's term had come to an end and the cycle of historical exhibitions was exhausted, thus intensifying the debate concerning the function of the Biennale on the international exhibition scenario.

The discussion regarding the renewal of the Venice Biennale structures, initiated just after the end of the Second World War, proceeded in diferent directions. Who did the Biennale address? What kind of public? What goal should the two exhibitions have: an informative, educative or critical one? How was the Biennale placed on the international contemporary art scene? These were the questions asked at the 1957 *Conference of studies on the Biennale*, which brought together, for the first time, different Italian specialists from the art and museum-related fields to consider the problems of the Venetian institution. On this occasion it was decided that the renewal of the Biennale's cultural function and its exhibition system had to proceed hand in hand with the renewal of its regulatory system. This is how the question of the Biennale's cultural function came to be inserted into the larger context of contemporary art exhibitions in Italy (14). Indeed, due to its periodicity and the lack of other specific institutions, the Biennale had acquired a role similar to that of a museum: its exhibitions were created and managed with a museum-like approach (15). As a consequence, the debate of the conference addressed the issue concerning the exhibition spaces, in particular that of the seat of the exhibition at the Giardini. The main pavilion had continually been rearranged without a coherent plan, and over the decades it had become a labyrinth which was both unsuitable and rigid (16). The Biennale had to overcome and free itself from "museum aesthetics", in order to renew and readjust its needs to the character of contemporary art and culture. Hence, it was evident that the functional renewal of the Biennale should be subordinate to the renewal of its exhibition space. What became evident on that occasion was how the exhibition spaces of the Biennale should have been open, "timed", so as to create a structural conformity between the location and the role of the exhibition as a "culturally alive instrument" (20).
By the early sixties, the Venice Biennale was no longer one of a kind. Based on the Venetian model, while at the same time updating it, the São Paulo Biennial (1951) was established, followed by documenta in Kassel (1955), and the Paris Biennale (1959) brought to light the obvious backwardness of the Biennale in terms of its exhibition system. To renew itself the Biennale had to appear younger than its new competitors did, although its history seemed to have become more of a burden than an asset. By the end of the fifties, there were numerous obstacles to the project of renewal. There was mainly the age-old question of Italian participation denounced on more than one occasion by Pallucchini who defined it as "collection of samples" and not "an exhibition open to dialogue and exchange" (18).

The main pavilion had become, especially after being managed by the fascist government, like a large *salon* for Italian artists who were members of the unions, while the national pavilions, for reasons of space, could present few artists. For this reason, the International Art Exhibition as a whole was obviously imbalanced. In 1969 the "Studio International" emphasized the unfeasibility of the Biennale system, which presented art divided by nation, when it was already taken for granted that contemporary art was supranational (19). "Studio International" claimed that the Biennale put all its faith in its geographical position and in the over-abundance of works, without taking into consideration where the works originated. In such a situation, any special exhibition organized by a committee appointed by the Biennale would be unable to harmonize the exhibition as a whole, resulting in a disjointed exhibition with no critical direction. The "excessive broadness" of the Italian section debased any innovative direction the entire exhibition might have had.

As a result of being hostage to the Italian artists who had colonized the main pavilion, it was left powerless when faced by the countries it hosted. Despite this, from the early fifties, and throughout the sixties, all forms of international art were presented at the Biennale, from Informal to Pop Art. Venice was the centre of the cultural-political debate on Abstract and Figurative art, the stage for the decline of Paris and the emergence of NewYork as capital of contemporary art, for the U.S. market and for American art. Its role was mainly celebrative. At the end of the 1950s, Venice was the most exclusive and delightful place for doing business and meeting the art world, a place above all others for international social life. In Lawrence Alloway's own words, "the Biennale as a party" (20).
But at the end of the 1960s, the *laissez-faire* approach could no longer work. Entreched in a ghetto for experts

and the élite, the Biennale had not been able to update its exhibition model. Consequently, it had lost its hold on reality in a rapidly changing world.

The need for a new statute for the Biennale, to replace the existing 1938 one, had been discussed since 1945. In succession, all governments between 1945 and 1968 recognized that Italian cultural authorities, among which the Biennale was the most obvious example, should be completely re-formed. However, over five legislations and twenty-three years, the Italian ruling class was not able to formulate a new law.

The debate, which had never been placated, arouse with new vitality with the events of 1968 involving all cultural institutions at international level.

As a consequence, in 1968, caught in the tidal wave of "global dispute", the Bienniale was overwhelmed by student protest because it encapsulated all the contradictions that-more than twenty years of debate and controversy had not been able to solve. The Biennale was attacked especially because of its failure to take responsibility as a public institution. Instead of promoting independent culture, open to criticism and knowledge, it seemed to be irremediably linked to politics and spoilt by seemingly casual organisational criteria. This system presented exhibitions that were more interested in subcultures and the market than in research and critical and scientific in-depth analysis. Secondly, the Biennale was being disputed both for its structural and cultural backwardness, and for its being frozen into an exhibition model that no longer had the cultural role of informing and bringing up to date. Its avulsion to any type of updated cultural production, and its persistent isolation from the life of the city in which it was located, was also under attack. Students had noticed that the Biennale had died as a cultural event and they voiced their opinion provoking violent clashes with the police (21). News of the police repression at the Biennale caused a stir all over the world, thus discrediting both Venice, in relation to its tourist industry, and the Biennale in terms of culture. It was this very dispute, however, that drove politics to quicken the pace and ultimately reach tangible results for the formulation of the new statute.

On the occasion of its 20th anniversary of the first post-war Biennale edition, having recognized the institutional crisis and the need for a deep renovation strategy, the Biennale had conceived its 1968 edition as conclusive to a cycle (22). The wish to structure the edition in an innovative way compared to the past was mainly evident in the drastic reduction of the number of artists invited to participate in the Italian section. There were twenty-three, while only four years previously there had been seventy-two. The Biennale's "innovatory intentions" of 1968 were achieved in its main exhibition entitled *Lines of Contemporary Research: from Informal Art to the New Structures*. It was the first time that the Biennale had organized an exhibition, which placed all the current tendencies in international art side by side. Even Lawrence Alloway pointed out how the "thematic exhibition" appeared to be an opening, albeit moderate, towards another exhibitory form (23). The title itself established that the aim of the exhibition was not to gain results, but rather to formulate an intention and establish a working method that could renew the exhibition-review model, one which, in 1968, was still the formula used by the Biennale. However, although innovative and full of good intentions, the title of the main exhibition was not in itself sufficient to present a coherent show in line with the current state of the arts, which would provide the key to interpreting the entire International Art Exhibition.

In August 1968, Germano Celant defined the Biennale as a "Nineteenth-century ferry that sails indifferently on the waters of the May Revolution" (24). It was necessary to adjust the Venetian institution to the needs for "independence, representativeness, and participation", qualities that were increasingly perceived and present in the areas related to its cultural activity (25). At the same time, there was a pressing need to consider its institutional revival, "to thoroughly re-think the conventional 'exhibitional' structure itself".

In September 1968, when the 34th International Art Exhibition was still open and Venice's film festival on the Lido was under dispute, an important round table was held in Venice to deal with the crisis of the Biennale. In the Venetian headquarters of the magazine "Metro", the editor Bruno Alfieri organized *Proposals for the Biennale. A round table conference, a project*. He invited Giulio C. Argan, Gillo Dorfles, Ettore Colla and Germano Celant to discuss the project for reorganisation that he had presented in order to "stimulate reactions and ideas" (26). In this occasion, Gillo Dorfles denounced "the antiquated exhibition system" and suggested to make "a clean break with the arrangement by national pavilions" (27). He maintained that by abolishing the pavilions, the conceptual unity of the exhibition would have been assured, and the exhibition would finally be able to offer a complete outline of the

international art situation. Dorfles envisaged a "permanent unitary structure made up of extremely open and mobile elements", Germano Celant also wanted to abolish the pavilions because they were the main reason behind the dispersive nature of the exhibition. Indeed, they conditioned the space in a pre-arranged way suppressing its "fluidity", an essential prerequisite to accommodate any contemporary art practice. According to Celant, the Biennale was dead because of both "creative and spatial asphyxiation" (28). In this context, the Biennale still continued to present itself more like a universal show than an international exhibition, as, for example, documenta.

In December 1969, the Biennale convened a meeting with the commissioners of the nations who owned the pavilions, in order to jointly discuss the programme for the 1970 edition (29). To involve the foreign commissioners in the discussion was to give out an important signal to overcome the institution's structural limits. The proposal was "to experiment a totally new Biennale", and in view to tangibly convey the idea of a reorganised and "open" Biennale, the owners of the pavilions were called to take active part in the exchange of views (30). During that meeting, for the first time ever, it was suggested to give a theme to the central exhibition to which national participations could also adhere.

A general theme would allow the International Art Exhibition to overcome its dispersive structure and lend it the coherence to which it aspired. The general theme would have to be "wide and flexible" enough to ensure that the maximum number of pavilions adhere to it. Sweden, just to mention one country, was unwilling to accept, since it felt that no radical break had been made with the past. It believed that the only way to overcome the disparate nature of the exhibition was to put forward a precise theme, which all pavilions would have to follow (31). According to Sweden, this was how the Biennale could link the "specific theme" of the special exhibition to the "general" one applied to the entire exhibition. Once again, however, the Biennale was faced with the insurmountable obstacle represented by the statutory autarchy of the national pavilions, since it could only suggest they adhere to the theme rather than being able to impose it. Work by the Biennale towards a radical transformation of the exhibition structure of the international show was resumed for its 1972 edition. The general theme presented was *Work or Behaviour*, a theme that was "wide and flexible" enough. This would be the "framework of interest and research" and the focus of the Italian section. The foreign nations were invited to "refer to" or "establish a link with" the "proposed theme" (32). The "operational theme" of the Italian section would provide the "ethical and cultural values", that is the direction for the whole exhibition which, as a result, would reach "a further conceptual harmony in terms of its layout". Hence, the theme *Work or Behaviour* had become a clever compromise, inspired by a sort of "aesthetics ecumenism", one that would leave nobody unsatisfied. (41)

The 1972 Biennale fell on the same year as documenta, the periodical exhibition started in 1955 and held in Kassel every four years. In Kassel, that year, the exhibition was curated by only one commissioner, Harald Szeemann. The curator had decided to abandon the traditional criteria of selecting work based on quality and significance, in favour of one that depended on the general theme he had presented (33).

While the theme in documenta had become the real subject of research, in Venice it only seemed to have given a coherent feel to the exhibition, while any type of research was absent. Therefore, the same year, two great periodical international exhibitions showed how differently a system of structural analysis could work in an aesthetical field focused on the development of art practices. The theme *Work or Behaviour* was very significant at a time when artistic practice was gradually moving towards a "dematerialization" (34). Works of art had become concepts, processes, situations, information, a fact which was also contained in the subheading of the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, organized by Szeemann himself in 1969, and based on the duality between behaviour and work of art. Hence, the experimentation of new exhibition practices was a consequence of the birth, in the same years, of new *art* practices.

The 1972 Biennale proved to be still far removed from international current issues because it presented the problem in an unfocused way without contributing critically to the debate. On the pages of "Art International", the critic Henry Martin expressed his disappointment in noting that the size of the exhibitions in Venice in 1972, was so large as to cause admiration, but at the same time generate discouragement for the enormous potential that the institution had been unable to exploit. The unsolved problem remained the same: the Biennale had to make clear what type of large perennial exhibition it wanted to be. Was a different formula possible, one that was not the usual incoherent ensemble that continued to turn the Biennale into the

"show of shows"? According to the English critic, "work or behaviour" was not a theme, rather a *mélange* that failed to put forward any questions but a bitter observation: "And one ends up with the total waste of what might have been a truly important experience if structured in some other way" (35).

On 25th July 1973, the President of the Italian Republic passed law no. 438, named "New Regulations of the autonomous Body 'La Biennale di Venezia'". This fully reformed law replaced the 1938 one. Its first article ruled that the Biennale was a "democratically organised institution of culture", which aimed at guaranteeing "full freedom of ideas and forms of expression" and at organising "international shows regarding the documentation, knowledge, criticism, research and investigation into the field of the arts" (36). Therefore, the new Biennale had been provided with an open and project-based foundation, thus allowing for a working methodology based on experimentation, which openly acknowledged the requests of the 1968 protest.

The architect Vittorio Gregotti was appointed director of the new section of Visual Arts and Architecture. The choice to place a character like Gregotti in charge of the oldest section of the Biennale, clearly expressed a true desire to break with the past, starting from the very core of the institution. From the beginning Gregotti expressed the need to transform the dispersive organisational system of the Biennale exhibitions, divided between the autonomy of the national pavilions, the special exhibitions, and the outdated system of selecting Italian participating artists through a committee. Gregotti wanted to change the working methodology by focusing on the preparatory stage of the exhibition, on research and elaboration of those "fundamental themes, in order to critically cover the entire production system of visual arts" (37). Working by defined projects was the way to turn the Biennale from an anthological review of the most recent artistic output, into an organisation promoting the type of "research that expressed itself by means of the exhibition itself" (38). Gregotti intended to set up the Biennale exhibitions as events focused on prominent issues, and consequently work by projects. The new director immediately stated his conviction that the history of the institution should not be cancelled from the reform, but should become instead the legacy and the basis on which to build. Only by following this working procedure could the Biennale become "a little more productive and a little less receptive", less of a reporter and more of a protagonist , that true place of research and experimentation provided for in the new law (39).

According to Gregotti, the new procedure should consist of three stages. Firstly, it was necessary to establish a system of general principles, then, having outlined the programmatic choices, place the exhibitions directly in charge of single experts. In this perspective, the exhibitions of the Biennale would "question the same social function as those institutions which produce culture, that is to penetrate and restore significance to locations in the city and to the territory" (40).

A new way had been paved for the Biennale. If the role of informing and updating had already been performed by other institutions, the Biennale had the unique chance to "present itself as a critically polycentric workshop", owing to, or due to its distinctive exhibition structure.

In 1974, it had been impossible to organize the traditional exhibition with the foreign nations, because of the change in legislation of 1973, the nomination of the new Board of Directors and the tardy appointment of the directors of the single sections. Therefore, it was the 1976 edition that was first officially held under the new reform. The general regulation of the International Art Exhibition decreed that foreign countries "invited to set up their respective sections in the pavilions" were allowed to participate, along with those who had applied directly to the Biennale presidency, as they did not have their own pavilion (43). Over time, it had become standard procedure for the Biennale to invite those nations with a national pavilion in the Giardini to participate, because the entry "Biennale di Venezia" was part of the state budget of nearly all the proprietors of the pavilions. In many cases there existed officials working in the overseas Ministries for Foreign Affairs or Culture who were in charge of permanently overseeing the affairs regarding the participation of their country in the Venetian exhibition. The Biennale would send the official invitation addressed to the governments of the countries proprietors of the pavilions, through the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, to the embassies existing in Rome. Once the country had accepted the invitation, it was completely independent from the Biennale; it only had to communicate the chosen artist to be inserted in the catalogue within the set time.

According to the standard procedure established after the war, the organisation of the exhibition started more or less a year before the opening, that is between "June and September of the odd years" (44). The 1973 reform

caused such a complete upheaval to a well-consolidated equilibrium that it no longer appeared to be debatable. Article 10 of the new law decreed that, as from that moment, participation in the Biennale would be conditioned by a direct and personal invitation addressed to the artists by the board of directors of the Biennale (45). With article 10, not only did the countries proprietors of a pavilion at the Giardini lose their traditional independence from the Biennale, but, substantially, they were also deprived of any authority whatsoever. During the 1969 international meeting, several commissioners had voiced their perplexity as to why their representation could not be included long-term in the Board of Directors (46). Voices were circulating in the art world that in the wake of the 1968 protests, the Biennale was planning to demolish its pavilions. The truth was that the issue of international dealings was so relevant that on 31st July 1974, the new Biennale began its life with a meeting with the representatives of the foreign nations. Indeed, on the contrary to what had been established by the law, the Biennale aimed at collaborating "more widely, continuously and extensively than in the past", in order to overcome "the sectorial, provincial and diplomatic character of the old Biennale".

The reformed Biennale and its new Board of Directors thought it inevitable to revive the exhibition at international level by being able to "critically participate in the artistic and civil ongoing debate" (47). So, in a series of meetings held with the foreign nations before consultants of administrative law, the Biennale dealt with the issue of the changed dealings with the pavilions imposed by the new regulations. The commissioners of the countries maintained that they would no longer be able to participate unless the Biennale guaranteed that they would have "a decisive role in choosing what should be exhibited in their national pavilions". The issue at hand was simply of not only an artistic nature, but it referred to the ownership, administration and public financial support involved in funding their participation. "We have discovered we are fossils in a system that is destined to be abolished with the new regulations", objected the German commissioner Klaus Gallwitz. On the other hand, Gerald Forty, the British commissioner, suggested a solution that had already been adopted by the Paris Biennial, where a completely autonomous central international committee, nominated by participants, was in charge of the selection of artists (48). Had an international central committee been formed in Venice, one that was able to choose freely without undergoing political pressure, the countries would probably be more motivated to collaborate financially. In order to follow the article no.10 of the new law, it was decided that the selection of artists for the International Art Exhibition would have been made through the nomination of "widely known experts per each of the single countries chosen, acting on the basis of every potential confidential arrangement with the countries involved". Legal advice provided by experts, clarified that the new law allowed the Biennale to work with each country on the basis of agreements that should be of a "unitary, global and unbiased nature, excluding any type of discrimination and expropriation" (49). According to the Biennale, the Giardini area was both an Italian and international asset: it was impelling to achieve coordination in order to use the location to its best. The institution suggested that a "moral public domain" be established in agreement with the foreign countries (50). This arrangement would change nothing in the traditional dealings besides reserving the director of the Visual Art Section the right to invite the artists as provided for in the new law (51). Therefore, the "moral public domain" implied a pre-arranged use of common spaces on the basis of a programme drawn up with unanimous approval. The objective was to reach "an authentically international expression", in order to present artists who also worked in different countries other than the ones who had a pavilion at the Giardini, thus lending a wider vision to the Biennale's cultural scope. Both the board of the Biennale and the director of Visual Arts, together with the foreign commissioners would therefore nominate the national experts and select the artists to invite. In case of refusal of a country to accept the selected artist in its own pavilion, he or she would be invited to show at another location. The commissioners of the foreign pavilions would engage directly with the Visual Arts Section, and had power of veto. In so doing, the director became the sole person in charge of the entire exhibition. This procedure seemed to be the only plausible one, which would keep the proceedings within the law and, at the same time, establish more direct, productive, and collaborative dealings between institution and national pavilions.

"Contemporary culture has this key characteristic: it is an international culture", maintained Gregotti. He was convinced that the core objective of the open debate with other countries was not to defend locations or representation; instead, it was far more productive to try to jointly re-establish an objective for the Biennale, in order to overcome its national character (52). The request for independence of the various countries lay primarily in the selection of the artists, and was placed

in this framework of overall selection. Gregotti believed that the issues on article 10 and the selection of artists could be overcome through collective work. This, he intended to carry out in collaboration with the foreign commissioners in order to single out "several fundamental themes significant to all countries", and try to reach an agreement on the criteria for selection. The procedure would provide the chance to initiate a debate on a "common issue" (53); the specificity and the act of sharing the theme would make the difference and pave the way for a new exhibition formula, thus transforming the exhibition. Only by adopting this working strategy, a new function could be found for the Biennale, one that no longer caused it to be a superfluous institution, but rather facilitated its specific use by establishing continuity with its own history.

The 1975 Biennale opened on 30 and 31 May with the *International Convention on the New Biennale*. If the two previous meetings had favored a fruitful exchange amongst countries, one, which had allowed the new regulations to be examined and had established a new exhibition formula, the objective of this third seminar was to present a theme for the following year's exhibition. According to Gregotti, the "collective produce" of the renewed Biennale had to be founded on tradition. This did not yet allow for a radical alternative to the complete renewal and the international participation structure.

The proposals presented by the Commission were discussed and eventually the theme of the "participation" was chosen by the foreign participants. Since it was still considered too broad, and he did not want to repeat the same mistake of vagueness as in 1972, Gregotti decided to overlap the theme with the notion of "environment", one which was "general enough and is sufficiently precise to constitute the basis for a series of specific enunciations and projects by the different nations" (54).

Thus, the "wide and flexible" theme suggested in 1969 and applied in 1972 became, in 1976, "broad and precise", a nuance of adjectives which radically changed the theory behind the Biennale. The theme "environment and participation", therefore, was not perceived as a compromise, but as "a real action, a real work condition" in which the two notions had originated from their political, other than creative, clash. *Environment, participation and cultural structure* was the theme-cum-title which set a broad ground for discussion and addressed all activities of the Visual Arts and Architecture section and the international participants, thus becoming a common basis for dialogue. The "environment" was intended as a notion both purely related to space and to a social context. The joint work carried out by the Biennale and all the participating countries, lent a new angle to the theme, thus opening the debate on an international scale, allowing those involved to take stock of the situation underway, and offering a coherent exhibition to the public.

The working strategy devised with the participating countries led to an edition in which all the exhibitions were variations on the general theme of the "environment". Moreover, it became even more concrete because it was linked to, and was confronted with, a complicated historical and jurisdictional context: the seat of the Biennale. However, which was the new role that the Biennale had presented in order to differentiate itself from all the other large-scale perennial international exhibitions? Gregotti had no doubts: it was primarily the "common platform for public funding" that distinguished the Biennale and its participating countries (55). This distinctive characteristic would become productive if exploited so as to guarantee the autonomy it aspired to, or rather the possibility to develop themes that were of a "non-commercial" interest, ones which were crucial for the universal social, political, and cultural debate. According to Gregotti, the Venice Biennale had to become the international platform for critical debate on current issues which, starting from the visual arts, would invest the other fields of knowledge.

The first official edition of the reformed International Art Exhibition made its debut by invading the whole of Venice with eight exhibitions set up in six different areas of the city, and presenting the national participations in their pavilions, at the Giardini, after four years of absence. The new formula would be tested in the traditional seat of the Giardini, in order to start afresh, symbolically, in the place where the structural problems first arose: old structures, new formula.

The entire 1976 edition radiated from the historical-critical exhibition set up in the central pavilion. The latter aimed at providing the public with the "general interpretative picture" of the theme (56). *Ambient/Art. From Futurism to Body Art* was curated by the critic Germano Celant, and set up by architect Gino Valle. The exhibition presented a historical reading of the relationship between artist and space. It analysed, in particular, the rapport between audience and artists in relation to physical locations over a period of time that covered the

whole century, from 1912 through to 1976. *Ambient/Art* re-examined the notion of context in relation to visual arts, in the light of the "tradition of the new".

The exhibition was divided in two parts. The first presented a series of "documents" which were the physical reconstruction of the most representative environments created by artists in the first half of the 20th century. For the second part, Celant had invited thirteen artists to create a site-specific environmental work in the space assigned to them inside the pavilion. The entire exhibition was supported by a considerable amount of documentation, which included archival material and photographs, following the curator's specific educational-lead approach. The peculiarity of *Ambient/Art* which should be highlighted is the dual nature of the environmental theme given to the entire exhibition.

> "Since we need to operate in a structure (Pavilion), the external architectural and environmental values of which have already been established, the only possibility that remains is to modify and organize its internal space. The exhibition concept is therefore based on the analysis, condition and modality of the inside interaction between the art and environment. By the latter, we intend the space limited by 6 floors (floor, ceiling, and four walls) that can also be defined as "brickwork box on a human scale". The physical limits on which the historical research of the rapport between art and environment is based is, therefore a contained space (57)"

Germano Celant's historical-introductive exhibition did not only intend to turn over a new leaf compared to the past, but it dictated the beginning of a new era. Indeed, in order to develop the concept of "environment", Celant analysed the context itself in which the exhibition would be developed, that is the central pavilion with its historical stratification caused by its different uses throughout the years: first as a ballroom, then as a riding school and for the previous seventy years, as the seat of the Biennale art exhibition (58). The original space had always been hidden because it was covered by the superstructure of exhibition layout. According to Celant, any exhibition concerning the history of the rapport between environment and art should develop in a context that is "aware" of its limits, a real context. So he decided to strip the space down completely, eliminating all the additional structures in order to reveal the original structures: the brickwork of the wall, the wooden beams, the skylights on the ceiling. "Cleansing the space to take history back in time", was his theory, once he had realised that the only elements which remained of the original building were the floor, four walls and the ceiling (59). Having reflected on which movement first used the walls not only as a pictorial support, but as an integral part of the work of art, Celant decided to reconstruct the environments designed by 20th century artists in Venice, in the Biennale, in order to take history of art back in time. The simple and "sincere" space with its flaking walls showing the brickwork, its visible wooden beams, and its ceilings revealing all the precariousness that so far had been the "temple of the arts", allowed the public to immerse itself into the history of art, not through art objects but rather through space (60).

Ambient/Art was an "active" exhibition where the very concept of "space" took on a precise meaning. This was achieved by comparing the environment of the exhibition, the Biennale's original space, that empty area, with its reconstructed space that contained the history of art and artworks (61). In *Ambient/Art* space and spectators were the absolute protagonists. Celant had perfectly grasped the concept behind the Biennale's new thematic formula. His exhibition possessed all its characteristics: it was international and provided only one critical vision, the curator's, giving an excursus which went from history to the current times. Moreover, the exhibition offered a critical reading of the Biennale space itself, which became the core of the international exhibition because it allowed light to be shed on how, in art practices of recent years, the interest in the rapport between the work of art and its surrounding space was growing, along with attention to the passage from closed project to circuit in which the location itself became both an element and a significant part of the project.

Despite presenting itself as a historical exhibition that followed a chronological order, *Ambient/Art* finally broke all links with the Biennale's exhibition tradition of the past. There was no longer any difference between works of art and documents, between genres, masters and living artists. At the centre of things lay the curator's point of view and his or her will to take the public on a journey into a non-conventional history of art.

The 1976 Biennale was criticized because it only offered one solution which seemed to be *ad abundatiam*, that is too many exhibitions all together, in the apparent attempt to please everybody. Moreover, the distribution of the exhibition forced the public to move from one

part of the city to another, and therefore to have a lot of spare time, as if the exhibition were more for residents. However, *Environment Participation and Cultural Structures* set a record of number of visitors, one that to this day has yet to be broken. The new formula not only worked, but it was also a resounding success (62). The equilibrium between historical, informative and updating exhibitions had multiplied the levels of interpretation and led to proposals which prompted communication with the spectators, who were also able to participate in debates, meetings and seminars based on discussion and exchange of ideas.

Ambient/Art was the backbone of the entire exhibition which visitors could decide how to visit on the basis of their interests, while keeping in line with the single main theme. With its new exhibition formula, the Biennale had recovered a specificity and a cultural use at an international level. It needed to be based on the event, "on focusing each time on a central point of contemporary creativity"; only in this way could it acquire a precise role in the overdeveloped international exhibition panorama (63). The objective was to trigger off a critical discussion in the attempt to reach the widest possible audience, without however imposing passwords or being prey of easy populism, but simply by producing culture. The goal was to transform the post-reform Biennale in an archetype and laboratory of a new way of planning large international exhibitions.

Independent research work conducted outside the market regulations allowed for free investigation, without ulterior motives, if not the ones of a genuine cultural and specific nature assigned to each edition. The selection of current and tangible social, political, cultural and artistic international pressing issues, and their in-depth analysis in various shows in collaboration with the participating countries, allowed the Biennale to present important and coherent exhibitions that were internationally relevant.

The "new" Biennale had now become a strength to be used to present and discuss current inconvenient social or political themes, thus turning the Biennale into the specific location for carrying out international debates on current cultural issues.

The thematic exhibition formula, tested for the first time in 1976, marked the birth of the contemporary Biennale and the end of the exhibition era based on reviews and a *laissez-faire* approach. However, 1976 was the first trial; it was re-presented in 1978 in a perfected way, but after that, the debate ended. Indeed, in 1980, the theme had already become a "pillar", therefore more of a suggestion than a truly structured research theme. The difference is substantial and it lies between the 1972 edition of the Biennale and the 1976 one. It lies between a misleading general theme which was so broad as to hold all, and a well targeted collective project work; between a label that can be applied everywhere and a specific research theme that can be placed among the critical international issues or is a tangible or pressing current debate. The 1976 formula was then adopted without provoking any more discussions and thus emptied of all its content. The attempt to put forward new proposals, in order to overcome the "multicellular" nature of the structure of the seat of the Biennale, was never made again. The few times sporadic artistic directors have seriously applied a thematic formula with its charge of content and complexity, the exhibition has always proven to work (64).

While in 1968, in order to overcome the structural problem, it was suggested to adopt a Futurist type approach and destroy the national pavilions in the Giardini to create single open and flexible exhibitory space, in 1973, it was thought to be sufficient to insert an article in the new law reform to solve the problem. Instead, in 1998, the issue has been cleared up by imposing the restrictions of the Monuments and Fine Arts Office on the majority of buildings located in the Giardini area of the Biennale (65). Originally temporary buildings, the national pavilions have today become monuments of nations fossilized in an era of splendour. Since 1995, all countries who wish to, can participate in the International Art Exhibition outside the Giardini, in the city itself. This situation has transformed the "cellular" structure described fifty years ago by Alloway, in a unique "multicellular" structure fullof new potential.

By analysing the context in which *Ambient/Art* was to be inserted in 1976, Germano Celant understood that "Since we need to operate in a structure … the external architectural and environmental values of which have already been established, the only remaining possibility is to modify and organize its inside space". These words can be applied to the overall exhibition structure of the Biennale, if we also bear in mind Celant's conviction of the need to develop interaction between art and context only in a "conscious" environment. From this stance, a new path of research could be paved for the Biennale. The institution would, once again, call into play its structural limitation, it would however, re-gain a unique cultural specificity. The number of participating

nations is not important, what is important is their relevance in the debates and discussions that the Biennale can create along with them and owing to them. That very "awareness" of its structural layout, if taken beyond the folklore of the Giardini and of Venice as theme parks of contemporary art, could give life to a new "control system" of the Biennale exhibition, which as a result, would be renewed once again, without losing the "heart of its institutional identity".

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Notes

Given the historical moment, it was impossible to return to ASAC - Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts to update the reference to documents which therefore dates back to the indication of 2011.

1 Alloway, Lawrence, "The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl", Greenwich (CT), New York Graphic Society 1968, p. 153.
2 Alloway, op. cit. p. 14.
3 Cfr. F. Martini, *One Biennale, Many Biennials*, in F. Martini and V. Martini eds. "Just Another Exhibition. Histories and Politics of Biennials", Postmediabooks 2011, p. 99
4 West, Shearer, "National desires and regional realities in the Venice Biennale, 1895-1914", "Art History", No.3, September 1995, p. 413.
5 West, Shearer, op. cit., p. 417. The percentage of Italian artists in 1895 was 45.26% of the total of artists exhibiting; in 1905, it was 54.7%.
6 Ibid., p. 415.
7 Belgium (1907), Hungary (1909), Germany (1909), Great Britain France (1912), Holland (1912), Russia (1914).
8 The document to refer to as the example of the agreement between the Municipality of Venice and the foreign countries is Municipio di Venezia, 1905/09 – III/4/22, Venice Municipal Archive, Venice.
9 Alfieri, Bruno, *Editorial*, "Metro: An International Review of Contemporary Art", No. 12, 1966, p. 5.
10 Pallucchini, Rodolfo, *Introduction*, "Catalogo XXIV Esposizione Biennale internazionale d'arte", Venice, Edizioni Serenissima 1948, p. XII.
11 Roberto Longhi, a member of the subcommittee, believed that past history was repainted by "present history" and that "the past was the one to offer us not an already formulated rule, but the freedom of mind needed to well interpret the present". The first post-war Biennals help develop a taste for contemporary art, by informing the public and consecrating the artists from a didactives perspective of didactics.
Pallucchini's intent was to "develop contrition and recognition in the face of modern figurative culture, from which Italy had obtusely excluded itself for nearly a century", Bandera, Maria Cristina, "Le prime Biennali del dopoguerra. Il carteggio Longhi-Pallucchini (1948-1956)", Charta, Milan 2000.
12 Pallucchini, Rodolfo, *Introduction* cit., p. XVII.
13 Alloway, op.cit., p. 139.
14 "The legislative choices to make ... not only referred to the obvious need for a re-formulation of the outdated regulatory system on which the 'Biennale' was based, but also the expectation of a thorough critical review of its structure and objectives, in view of regaining competitivity with other great international art events and the adaptation to the recent acquisitions of aesthetical research", in Foreword, 1° Ordinamento Della 'Biennale' di Venezia, Indagine conoscitiva, Raccolta di Atti e documenti, Ufficio di Segreteria della 7° Commissione permanente, Senato della Repubblica 1972, p.XI.
15 "The mistake that lies at the foundation of the decadence ... of contemporary art exhibitions, is especially ... the desire to continue to exhibit our work as if it were 'old' like in a Museum", comment by Sergio Bettini, Comune di Venezia e Provincia di Venezia, Proceedings of the Conference of studies on the Biennale, Cà Loredan, Venice 13 October 1957, p. 25.
16 Zevi, Bruno, "Una camera mortuaria per i quadri italiani", "L'Espresso", 1 July 1962.
17 Comment by Sergio Bettini, in Comune di Venezia e Provincia di Venezia, Proceedings of the Conference… cit., p. 31.
18 Pallucchini, Rodolfo, *Introduction*, "Catalogo della XXV Esposizione Biennale internazionale d'arte", Venice, Edizioni Alfieri 1950, p. XI.
19 Russel, John, "Ciao, with Friendship", "Studio International", No. 913, July-August 1969.
20 "It is the four days of the official opening that lend a special value to the Biennale", Alloway, op. cit., p. 23
21 "The worst danger for the Biennale at the moment is to die as a cultural event, and to disappear from Venice, Italy and the world as a cultural event", comment by councillor Gianni De Michelis, Venice council, report in shorthand of the meeting held on 10 June, 1968, page eg-4/b, Venice Municipal Archive.
22 As the Secretary General, Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, wrote in the introduction to the catalogue, in two decades "the aspect and the terms of contemporary artistic output [had] radically changed … traditional

technical categories were going through a difficult situation" and the world had undergone a rapid transformation. In this climate of profound changes, the 34th Biennale was conceived with "innovatory intent" compared to the past. Dell'Acqua, Gian Alberto, "Introduction", "Catalogo della XXXIV Esposizione Biennale internazionale d'arte Venezia", Venice, Fantoni 1968, p. 23.
23 Alloway, op.cit, p. 26. Alloway's book was being printed at the same time as the opening of the 1968 exhibition.
24 Celant, Germano, "Una Biennale in grigio-verde", "Casabella", August 1968.
25 Foreword, 1st Code of 'Biennale' di Venezia, Survey, Collection of Acts and documents, Secretary Office of 7th Permanent Commission, Senate of the Republic 1972, 1st shorthand minutes 21 September 1972, Foreword , p.XII.
26 Alfieri, Bruno, "Biennale portfolio", "Metro: An International Review of Contemporary Art", No. 15, 1968, p. 55.
27 Ibid., p. 41.
28 Ibid., p. 43.
29 Biennale's activities in 1970 and the XXXV International Art Exhibition, unit 226, A new Biennale, Historical Fund, Visual Arts Series, Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (from now on FS, AV, ASAC), and Working Committee of the meeting of the Employees for the Venice Biennale activities in 1970, unit 227, Working Committee, FS, AV, ASAC.
30 Meeting of Foreign Commissioners for the Organisation of the 1970 Art Biennale, tape recording of text, fully transcribed, unit 225, Foreign pavilions conference, FS, AV, ASAC.
31 Ibid. Sweden wondered if the Biennale had paid any attention to the proposals for a radical changed presented at the round table conference organised by Metro. The theme could not be mandatory for those pavilions that were completely autonomous in terms of selection. In 1972, some countries adhered to the theme presented by the Biennale with interesting results, thus proving how it could be possible to overcome the disjointed structure of the exhibition. Austria presented work by Hans Hollein, Belgium a homage to the Cobra group and a performance by the Mass Moving group, France exhibited Le Gac and Boltanski and Germany Gerard Richter. Japan adhered to the theme while Holland presented Jan Dibbets. Finally, the U.S. showed many artists, among which Diane Arbus.
32 36th International Art Exhibition, Subcommittee meeting, summary minutes, 15 November 1972, unit 273, Italian Subcommission, FS, AV, ASAC.
33 The general title of the 5th edition of documenta was "Questioning Reality - images of worlds today". For an in-depth study of the curatorial issue related to large-scale international perennial exhibitions, please refer to Martini Federica, Martini Vittoria "Questions of authorship in Biennial Curating, Filipovic E., Van Hal M., Ovstebo S. (edited by), "The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art", Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz 2010.
34 The terms relates to the title of Lucy Lippard's famous book "Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object", published in 1973.
35 According to the British critic, the 1972 Biennale was like entering Borges' "Library of Babel", where everyone could follow their own itinerary by choosing random books on the shelves, without being given a direction, Martin, Henry, "Venice 1972: The Show of the Shows", "Art International", Summer 1972, p. 91.
36 Law 26, July 1973, no. 438. New Regulation for the Autonomous Body 'la Biennale di Venezia'.
37 Remark by Vittorio Gregotti, IX Board of Directors' meeting, 26th July, 1974, ASAC.
38 Remark by Vittorio Gregotti, Meeting at the "Saloni" 28th–29th October, Cinema City Vanguard Seminar", unit 288, October -November 1974, FS, AV, ASAC.
39 Remark by Vittorio Gregotti in the interview "La Biennale dei partiti", in "Bolaffiarte", October 1974.
40 IX Board of Directors' meeting, op. cit., p. 4.
41 Visual arts and Architecture Program, in "Biennale di Venezia. Yearbook 1975 Events 1974, Venice, La Biennale di Venezia 1975", p. 259.
42 "Delle arti", Spettacoli&Società, September 1975.
43 General rules, "Catalogue XXXIV Esposizione Biennale internazionale d'arte", pp. LXIV-LXV.
44 General notes, unit 291, 30 October 1974, FS, AV, ASAC. In 1974, for example, the traditional organisational mechanism of International participations had triggered off automatically. Despite not receiving an official invitation from the Italian ministry, some countries nominated their commissioners and some even chose their artists. The Biennale had to ask the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to communicate that the 1974 exhibition could not go ahead because of the issue of organisational precariousness that the recent reform had generated.
45 Article no. 10 of Law of 26 July 1973, no.438, New Regulations for the Autonomous Body 'La Biennale di Venezia'. "The participation to the events organised by the autonomous body 'la Biennale di Venezia' is conditioned by the direct and personal invitation addressed to the authors of the board of directors". Article no. 10 will be amended on 13th June 1977, with law 13 June 1977, no. 324, Amendments to the law 26 July 1973, no.

438 regarding the 'New regulations for the autonomous body La Biennale di Venezia'.
46 Meeting of foreign commissioners to organize the 1970 Biennale, unit 225, Foreign Pavillions Conference, FS, AV, ASAC.
47 "4-year general plan of activities and events (1974-1977), in Biennale di Venezia. 1975 Yearbook" cit., p. 62.
48 Proposal from Norway, unit 294, Laboratory Code, FS, AV, ASAC.
49 Meeting of Foreign Commissioners 30 October 1974, unit 292, Commissioners Meeting, FS, AV, ASAC.
50 1st Meeting of the foreign pavilion representatives at the Giardini on 31 July 1974, unit 290, 31 July 1974, FS, AV, ASAC. The lawyer, Mr Ghidini, an expert of administrative law attending the meeting, pointed out that "the term 'moral public domain' is ideological and not technical; it should therefore not be taken literally in relation to the word property, which instead brings to mind the concept of expropriation". From the very first meeting, the director's explicit intent was to find "a way out" of the limit imposed by Article 10 of the law "which was shared by everybody". The aim of the Biennale was to reach an "authentically international expression".
51 Ibid. Law 13th July 1977, no. 324. Amendments to law 26 July1973, no. 438, decreed that "Participation to the events (…) occurs by invitation only, addressed to the authors of the Board of Directors. Should the latter consider it appropriate, they will agree with the competent bodies of the foreign countries on the type of cooperation to be adopted both regarding programmes and regulations".
52 IX Board of Directors' meeting , 26 July 1974, ASAC.
53 1st Meeting of the Representatives of the Pavilions at the Giardini held on 31st July 1974, unit 290, 31st July 1974, FS, AV, ASAC.
54 International Conference on the New Biennale, 30-31st May 1975, unit 296, Conference transcript, FS, AV, ASAC, p. 32. On that occasion Gregotti said, "we realize that a single theme is the best we can obtain from an exhibition that will deal with a sole common theme from different viewpoints and presenting different contributions".
55 Ibid., p. 17.
56 Contribution by Vittorio Gregotti, International Conference of the Representatives of the Countries Participating in the Biennale, 9-10 January 1976, unit 337, Preparatory Conference 37 Biennale, FS, AV, ASAC.
57 Literature presented by Germano Celant to the Board of Directors 5-7th December 1975, unit 303, 1975 Meeting of the Visual Arts and Architecture committees, FS, AV, ASAC.
58 To read about the history of the central pavilion, the historical seat of the Biennale at the Giardini, please refer to Romanelli, G.D., "Il Padiglione 'Italia' ai Giardini di Castello (già Palazzo dell'Esposizione)", in "Biennale di Venezia. 1975 Yearbook" cit., p. 645 and Martini Vittoria, "A Brief History of of how an exhibition took shape", in Starting from venice: Studies on the Biennale, Ricci, Clarissa ed., et.al 2010.
59 "Arte Povera IM Spazio and Ambiente Arte", conference held by Germano Celant on 2 November 2009, within "The History of Exhibitions: Beyond the Ideology of the White Cube (part one) Course in art and contemporary culture", Barcelona, Museu d'art contemporanei.
60 "The organisers, however, rather intent on sealing the 'temple of the arts' with unambiguous enunciations (and as a temple, nothing more than a Greek, Apollonian one)", Romanelli, op.cit. p 650.
61 Visual Arts, unit 303, Meeting of Visual Arts and Architecture Commissioners 8 November1975, FS, AV, ASAC. In the course of this meeting, the project Ambient/Art is agreed to. On 30 January, Celant had written up the precise project of the exhibition, arranging "two months of work in situ" for setting it up. *Art in/as Ambient* curated by Germano Celant, unit 324, Environment, FS, AV, ASAC.
62 According to the official records, the 1976 edition of the Biennale totalled a record of 692,000 visitors, cf. Di Martino, Enzo, "La Biennale di Venezia 1895-1995. Cento anni di arte e cultura", Milan, Mondadori 1995, p. 86. In the moral and political review on the 1976 events, the director writes of the "mass of people visiting the events (...), which is possible to estimate at over a million (...) from 20 July to the end of October", Ibid., page 126. ASAC does not possess any calculation, or specific statistics on the influx of visitors to the Biennale, therefore it is impossible to know whether, for example like in documenta, the majority of visitors came from the surrounding areas.
63 Gregotti Vittorio, "Report by the director of the Visual Arts and Architecture section", unit 356 Literature from the international conference, 3-4 June 1977, FS, AV, ASAC.
64 Here I'm referring to the most evident example of a perfectly functioning original thematic formula, that is the 43rd edition of the 1993 Venice Biennale curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, "Cardinal points of art".
65 Ministry for Arts and Culture and Environment Heritage, central office, decree of obligation 19 September 1998, venice Superintendency 19 settembre 1998.

"The Evolution of an Exhibition Model. Venice Biennale as an Entity in Time", in *Just Another Exhibition. Histories*

and Politics of Biennials, F. Martini, V. Martini eds., Postmediabooks 2011, pp. 119-138

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The Paradoxes of the Biennale

Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas

Abstract

Biennials are characterized by paradoxes. In this article, we focus in particular on the paradoxes of the Russian Pavilion in the Venice Biennale during the years 2011–2015. We identify and detail four different kinds of paradoxes. These are the paradox of the many and the few; the paradox of money; the paradox of power; and the paradox of scale. We suggest that analyzing paradoxes is a necessary part of any attempt to understand the politics of biennials. As biennials attract not only artists and art world actors but also people in positions of political and economic power, it is important to pay attention to the kinds of actions that paradoxes enable or disable in the context of these mega-events of contemporary art.

* * *

Contemporary art biennials are shot through with paradoxes. We argue in this article that paradoxality is a constitutive feature of biennials, not a veil covering their true nature.[1] Appreciating paradoxes is thus a necessary part of any attempt to understand the politics of biennials. In this article, we detail and discuss four paradoxes that we have identified on the basis of our analysis of the Venice Biennale, focusing on its Russian Pavilion in particular: these are the paradox of the many and the few; the paradox of money; the paradox of power; and the paradox of scale. In the following sections, we describe the paradoxical features of the contemporary art biennials and illustrate our argument in the context of the Russian National Pavilion in Venice. The focus is on the Russian Pavilion in 2011, 2013 and 2015, when the pavilion's commissioner was Stella Kesaeva.

Paradoxes are about "both–and" thinking. This distinguishes them from contradictions and the logic of "either–or." Zeno's arrow is a well-known paradox: while the arrow is flying, it is at rest at every moment of its flight. Both "sides" of a contradiction cannot be true but both sides of a paradox can. "A paradox" as Martin Müller notes, "requires both sides of the opposing statements to be valid and current."[2] However, research and paradoxes seem to fit badly together. The paradoxality of a phenomenon may feel disturbing, prompting attempts to solve or mitigate the paradox. We have chosen, instead, to dwell on the paradoxicality of biennials. There are at least three reasons for doing this: first, we argue that biennials are powerful because they are paradoxical. Second, paradoxicality can be argued to be a characteristic feature of late modernity more broadly. Third, paradoxes can sensitize us to the inescapable complexity of the social world.[3]

The Paradox of the Many and the Few

Biennials move the art crowd. The 2019 edition of the Biennale was frequented by nearly 600,000 visitors.[4] At the same time, elitism and exclusivity is a significant part of its appeal: "It's Saturday, June 9th. The Venice Biennale will not open to the public until tomorrow. But for the art world, it's already over," writes Sarah Thornton in her book *Seven Days in the Art World*.[5] Indeed, the possibility of being granted access to pre-openings, after-parties on fancy yachts or receiving other kinds of VIP treatment attracts high-ranking gallerists, patrons, sponsors, and state representatives to Venice in early June

of odd-numbered years. The more exclusive the venue, the more status is produced by access to it. The paradox here is that such "status-driven" character of the Biennale is highly dependent on the masses, on the appeal and visibility of its "finely tuned tools"—tools that include some, while excluding many others, among the art crowd.[6]

Our argument here is that the very power and appeal of the Biennale derives from its paradoxes—such as the paradox of the many and the few. We also see this paradox being quite successfully mobilized by Stella Kesaeva whose figure provides an entry point to our analysis of the paradoxicality of biennials. Kesaeva is an interesting figure not only as a transnationally connected member of the Russian elite but also as the first commissioner of the Russian Pavilion who was not a representative of a state institution[7]. In 2008, a few years before she was nominated as the commissioner, Kesaeva discussed the role of the Venice Biennale and its parties in making an artist "fashionable to own."[8] Once an artist is well-known, she suggested, the financialized art market will make sure that only a few can actually own their works.

You have to make a noise that draws attention. In business circles, many important artists who don't have an immediate visual and aesthetic impact are largely unknown. When you hold a party and the artist appears in the glamour press, he or she becomes known and fashionable to own.[9]

The Biennale's opening parties draw attention. Already before becoming the commissioner of the Russian Pavilion, Kesaeva was well-known for throwing exclusive parties that were also able to attract the attention of large audiences. For example, in 2007, the opening of the *Ruin Russia* exhibition, a parallel event of the Biennale, was held at one of the world's most famous luxury hotels, the Hotel Cipriani. This "caviar-accented party"[10] received considerable media coverage—not only because of the exclusive venue but also because of the large number of well-known celebrities from outside of the art world.

However, such "celebrity capital"[11] did not open the doors of the Russian Pavilion for Kesaeva. As many commentators have noted, major political figures and state representatives chose not to attend her parties. According to the *New York Times*, Kesaeva's name was not on the guest list of the opening ceremony of the Russian Pavilion in 2007.[12] While able to activate the paradox of the many and the few, her actions still lacked the symbolic capital[13] that the state is able to endow. This had changed in 2009 when Kesaeva's parallel exhibition *The Obscure Object of Art* was opened by the Russian Minister of Culture, Alexander Avdeev.[14] The media also reported that at the opening ceremony of the exhibition, minister Avdeev was sitting at the same dinner table with Kesaeva.[15] The following year, in 2010, the gates to the more prestigious and exclusive venues of the Venice Biennale—its national pavilions in the Giardini—were opened to Kesaeva as minister Avdeev appointed her as the commissioner of the Russian Pavilion.

As the commissioner of the national pavilion, Kesaeva continued to throw lavish parties. And the glamour press that she had alluded to years earlier was mobilized to ensure the visibility of these exclusive events. In 2011, Kesaeva chose the relatively widely read lifestyle magazine *Tatler* as the media partner of the Russian Pavilion. As if to highlight the non-accessibility of these events to the masses reading about them in the media, the opening party of the 2015 Biennale was organized on an island where the guests were taken by boats from the Giardini. The sponsor of the event was PoderNuovo, a vineyard owned by the luxury brand Bulgari. By contrast, after Kesaeva's term, the vernissage of the Russian Pavilion in 2017 was organized in the Rialto fish

market. Access to the urban discotheque did require an invitation, but only velvet ropes separated the area with Beluga vodka bars and a DJ table from outsiders.

The Paradox of Money

The paradox of money describes the tension between art and the market. Biennials are, in many ways, intertwined with the capitalist pursuit of profit. However, purity—or at least a certain distance—from economic interests is considered a quality signal in the field of art. Art's symbolic value is constituted by autonomy—art's immunity against attempts of instrumentalization by actors from other fields. Art should respond independently to social conditions.[16] If art is seen as a market commodity, its perceived value in the field of art suffers.

Although one of the initial goals of the Venice Biennale was to create a market for contemporary art, the ban on sales was established in 1968 as a response to charges against the commodification of culture.[17] Despite this, it is quite impossible to distinguish contemporary art from various economic circuits. The Venice Biennale is a foundation charging collateral events €20,000 for participation, which includes the use of the Biennale logo.[18] The economic logic on the basis of which the Biennale operates has also made rental prices of potential exhibition spaces in the city of Venice inaccessible to many less privileged artists or art world actors. According to *Artnet News*, the rent of an exhibition space during the Biennale could reach half a million euros.[19]

The Venice Biennale is also known to build momentum for art as an investment. It is a powerful value-creating system in the global art market.[20] "Showing in Venice speeds up sales, gets artistic careers going, cranks up price levels and helps artists land a dealer ranked higher in the market's hierarchy," as Olav Velthuis argues.[21] This "Venice effect" is built on a paradox: due to its noncommercial nature, the Venice Biennale is a setting that enables demonstrating one's independence from the market and autonomous interest in art. However, this symbolic capital can be easily converted into economic capital: "So the paradox is that the curator's resistance to commerce and Venice's official status as a non-selling event is exactly what makes its quality signals influential in the art market."[22]

Kesaeva dances around the paradox of money in Venice. According to her critics, access to wealth was the reason Kesaeva gained access to the Russian national pavilion in Venice.[23] In Venice-related articles, she is referred to as "the wife of a billionaire,"[24] "a designer-clad collector," and "oligarchette."[25] In 2013, *Financial Times* characterized Kesaeva as "the wife of tobacco tycoon Igor Kesaev (whose net worth Forbes puts at $2bn)" and as "independently wealthy."[26] Indeed, during the years 2011–2015, most of the funding for the Russian National Pavilion was channeled through the commercial connections to Igor Kesaev who, among other things, controls a large share of Russia's cigarette market. In 2011, for example, the sponsors—Igor Kesaev's Mercury Group together with Japan Tobacco International—funded the Russian National Pavilion with 30 million rubles while the funding from the Russian Ministry of Culture was 10 million rubles.[27]

Curiously, having gained access to the Biennale through the wealth available to her, Kesaeva utilized the Biennale to take distance from market dynamics. The first exhibition Kesaeva commissioned for the Russian Pavilion in 2011 was *Empty Zones* of Andrei Monastyrski, a key figure of Moscow Conceptualism. In various interviews, Kesaeva emphasizes the non-commercial character of Conceptualism and Monastyrski's art. She argues that whereas "in the West," it is the market that defines art, Monastyr-

ski's art is "fundamentally disconnected from the market economy."[28] Showing Monastyrski is "not about business," she argues, "this is about something else, something far more important."[29] This argument makes sense vis-à-vis the perception of the Biennale as more or less independent from the art market.[30] However, the collection of the Stella Art Foundation consists mostly of the works of Moscow Conceptualists.[31] Eventually, all three editions that Kesaeva commissioned in the Russian National Pavilion in Venice were also devoted to this artistic movement. The paradox here is that exhibiting these artists in the Venice Biennale enabled taking distance from commercial interpretations, which became a quality signal in the art market and also increased the appreciation and economic value of Kesaeva's collection.[32]

The Paradox of Power

The paradox of power touches upon the fact that in the biennial context, criticism of the state increases its symbolic capital. From the perspective of cultural diplomacy or soft power, the national pavilions of the Biennale are expected to boost state power, to increase their attractiveness.[33] Artists may be characterized as "cultural ambassadors."[34] In the Russian press, echoes of this way of thinking are found in discussions over whether biennial participation can change the international community's views on Russia.[35] Paradoxically, however, biennials are also discursive sites where the existing structures are questioned and hegemonies challenged. They typically merge elements of political and social activism into their agendas and try to involve actors such as "activist groups and marginalized communities."[36]

In 2013, the Russian Pavilion exhibited Vadim Zakharov's *Danaë.* In Lanfranco Aceti's interpretation, the exhibition with its showers of golden semen—"an orgy of innuendos and a constant flirtatious betrothal with money"—exposed the "patriarchal structures, which are blatantly and vulgarly exhibited in Russia."[37] According to *The Guardian,* the 2013 edition of the Russian Pavilion was "courageous" as it presented "a pointed version of the Danaë myth in which an insouciant dictator (of whom it is hard not to think: Putin) sits on a high beam on a saddle, shelling nuts all day while gold coins rain down from a vast shower-head only to be hoisted in buckets by faceless thuggish men in suits."[38] In the midst of this paradox, the editor of the Russian *Kommersant* magazine ruminated over whether the streams of money falling from the sky should be regarded as self-irony or as a flurry: "Whatever the artist's intention is, any art displayed on a wall that reads 'Russia' is interpreted as a self-portrait of the state."[39]

At issue in the paradox of power is the belief that critique towards the state—when performed at Venice—can boost state power. An illustration of this is provided by the events of May 8, 2015 when a group of artists and activists occupied the Russian Pavilion and staged a protest against the Russian invasion of Crimea. The #onvacation performance was a carefully designed media spectacle that managed to break through the small circles of the contemporary art world. The performance received a lot of media attention in social and traditional media, where it was framed as "a middle finger to Russia's occupation of Ukraine."[40] However, a representative of the Russian National Pavilion drew a different conclusion, suggesting that the protest enriched Irina Nakhova's installation *The Green Pavilion*.[41] The paradoxality of a situation where criticism toward the state is seen to boost its power is highlighted by the fact that Igor Kesaev is alleged to own a weapons factory supplying arms to eastern Ukrainian separatists.[42]

The Paradox of Scale

With its national pavilions, the Venice Biennale is firmly embedded into the Westphalian imaginary of the world divided into nation-states. It is often framed as the

"Olympic Games of the Art World."[43] At the same time, however, artists and other art world actors see the Biennale as a platform for taking distance from national framings. The concept of national representation is problematized in practices and discussions surrounding biennials and in arguments in favor of an "aesthetic cosmopolitanism."[44]

Kesaeva justifies presentation of Moscow Conceptualism in Venice three times in a row by stating that the Biennale is a competition arena for nation-states, and Moscow Conceptualism is a "strong representative of Russia" in this competition.[45] She presents Moscow Conceptualism as a resource that Russia should use to develop into a "superpower of art": "We want the isolation of Russian art to end and it to be taken seriously at the highest international level."[46]

Paradoxically, however, succeeding in this national mission involves distinguishing oneself from forms of (perceived) Russianness. This means, for example, utilizing cultural capital accumulated in the "West." Nikolai Molok writes that in the Russian Pavilion in 2011, commissioned by Kesaeva, participatory practices and minimalistic aesthetics were emphasized, which made it understandable for a "Western viewer."[47] In interviews, Stella Kesaeva often highlights experiences of living abroad and establishes a symbolic distinction to the practices of the Russian art world. For example, she says that at vernissages in Russia, wine was served from plastic cups. According to Kesaeva, this approach was surprising to someone who had learned in the "West" that gallerists should present their artists in a "professional and appreciative manner."[48]

The paradox of scale also applies to the curators and artists that Kesaeva chose to work with during her commissionership. The 2011 exhibition was curated by Boris Groys, a Russian-born but New York-based well-known art critic and academic. According to Kesaeva, Groys was chosen as the curator for the reason that he was at the same time "Russian and non-Russian."[49] Similarly, the works of Vadim Zakharov, the artist of 2013, are argued to carry a transnational nature: "Zakharov ploughed a particular furrow for himself that was not only independent and solitary, but also strikingly transnational in its imperatives and aesthetics."[50] When asked whether his *Danaë* represents a Russian problematic, Zakharov's response straddles the paradox of scale:

> I don't think that a national pavilion has to present something specifically national or something that is specific to that country alone. I don't show Russian dolls, ballet, or vodka. What is important to me is the universal view. A universal approach to culture has always been characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia. I have known the Danaë myth since I was at school, and I suppose I relate it as something that belongs to me, somebody Russian, and to the history of culture. The project touches on many questions (including unpleasant questions) about Russia and about all other countries.[51]

The paradox of scale also means that an actor should not be perceived as "too foreign." When Udo Kittelmann, the then director of the National Gallery in Berlin, was selected to be the curator of the Russian Pavilion in 2013, the selection was considered "radical" and "eyebrow-raising."[52] Kesaeva had to justify the appointment of a foreign curator in reference to the fact that as the Venice Biennale is an "international platform," it was important to choose a curator who knew the audience's expectations.[53] Kittelmann's high position in *ArtReview*'s curatorial rankings (37th in 2012) was "reterritorialized" by suggesting that by tapping into this symbolic capital, Russia would be able to increase the international visibility of its art.[54]

Conclusions

Arguably, the valuation principles (*nomoi*) of different fields intersect at the Biennale, due to which paradoxes are an integral part of it. Similar to Zeno's arrow, they make the Biennale fly. For this reason, we did not want to solve the paradoxicality of the Biennale in our analysis. Instead, we threw ourselves into exploring it. We were prompted to do this as exposing the paradoxicality of the art world's mega-events is not an end in itself. It should rather lead to attentiveness with regard to the kinds of actions that paradoxes enable or disable.[55] What does a capacity or capability to mobilize paradoxes enable the actors involved with these events to achieve? Here, we focused on how Stella Kesaeva, the president of a private art foundation, mobilized paradoxes in her role as the commissioner of the Russian Pavilion in the Venice Biennale and how this enabled her to practice what Bourdieu[56] refers to as "social alchemy"—to, for example, convert economic to symbolic capital and symbolic capital to economic capital.

Posing such questions is important, as the contemporary art biennial has a continuing appeal for people occupying positions of economic or political power. The case of the Russian Pavilion demonstrates this well. In 2017, the pavilion was taken over by an actor close to the state, as Semyon Mikhailovsky, rector of Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts, was appointed as the pavilion's commissioner until 2021. However, Mikhailovsky's term was interrupted prematurely at the end of 2019. The Russian Ministry of Culture suddenly appointed the director of the V-A-C art foundation, Teresa Mavica—formerly titled as "Kesaeva's right hand"[57]—as the commissioner for the years 2020 and 2021.[58] The V-A-C Foundation, funded by oligarch Leonid Mikhelson, has a strong presence in Venice, having opened their Venetian headquarters in 2017. Another change occurred in the management of the pavilion. It was announced that for ten years, Smart Art Consultancy will be responsible for the pavilion's strategic management, including funding and infrastructure.[59] The consultancy is run by Ekaterina Vinokurova and Anastasia Karneeva, former employees of Christie's. Vinokurova's and Karneeva's family ties situate them close to the Russian state. Vinokurova's father is Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, while Karneeva is a daughter of Rostec's deputy CEO Nikolai Volobuev, who has a decades-long background of working in the KGB and FSB.[60] The pavilion will be funded by V-A-C's Mikhelson, one of the richest people in Russia.

Notes

1 cf. Martin Müller, "Approaching Paradox: Loving and Hating Mega-Events," *Tourism Management* 63 (2017): 234–241; Olav Velthuis, "The Venice Effect," *The Art Newspaper* (June 2011): 21–24.
2 Müller, "Approaching Paradox: Loving and Hating Mega-Events," 236.
3 Ibid., 234–241, see also Marshall Scott Poole & Andrew H. van de Ven, "Using Paradox to Build Management and Organization Theories," *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4 (1989): 562–578.
4 "The Biennale Arte 2019 Came to a Close, Confirming the Expected 600,000 Visitors," La Biennale di Venezia, accessed April 20, 2019, https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/biennale-arte-2019-came-close-confirming-expected-600000-visitors.
5 Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 182.
6 cf. Olav Velthuis, "The Venice Effect."
7 See also Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas, "Parties, Pavilions and Protests: The Heteronomous World Politics of the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," *New Perspectives* 27, no. 2 (2019); Anni Kangas and Julia Bethwaite, "Venäjän Venetsian-paviljongin paradoksaalinen valta," *Idäntutkimus* 1 (2019): 23-44.

8 cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 76–77.
9 Stella Kesaeva in Margaret Studer, "Russia's Contemporary Stars," *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2008, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122600981153606177.
10 Mark Ellwood, "The Oligarchettes," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/style/tmagazine/02oligarchettes.html.
11 Olivier Driessens, "Celebrity Capital: Redefining Celebrity Using Field Theory," *Theory and Society* 42, no. 5 (2013): 543–560, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-013-9202-3.
12 Ellwood, "The Oligarchettes."
13 Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," *Sociological Theory* 12, No. 1 (1994): 8-9.
14 Veronika Chernysheva, "Uroki russkogo [Russian Classes]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 18, 2009; Bozhena Rynska, "Venetsianskie vytrebenki [Venetian Quirks]," *Izvestiya*, August 6, 2009; Svetlana Yankina, "Avdeev i Gergiev otkryli vystavsku Stella Art Foundation v Venetsii [Avdeev and Gergiev Opened the Exhibition of the Stella Art Foundation in Venice]," *RIA Novosti*, June 4, 2009.
15 e.g. Veronika Chernysheva, "Uroki russkogo [Russian Classes]."
16 e.g. Dorothee Richter, "New Markets and Forms of Capital in Art," *OnCurating* 20 (2013): 51.
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One Biennale, Many Biennials[1]

Federica Martini

Metaphorai and Condensation Zones

In the chapter "Spatial Stories" from *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau points out a specificity of the modern Greek language, where means of transportation are called *metaphorai*.[2] Vehicles, just like narratives, continues de Certeau, traverse and organize places every day; they differentiate and connect them, giving life to phrases, stories, itineraries, and routes. Metaphors also traverse the contemporary art system and connect places that are drawn nearer by the notion of globalization.[3] Among them, the most widespread is the notion of a large-scale exhibition, often defined "biennial" regardless of its periodicity, in honor of the Venice Biennale that started in 1895, amidst the early nineteenth-century national debates.[4] The Venice show is therefore considered the oldest perennial exhibition, as well as the one that defines the interplay between the international and local art scenes as an institutional feature of biennials.

Since the beginning, large-scale periodical exhibitions aimed at showcasing the art of the present in conjunction with narratives about the places and cultural contexts where the works were produced. The biennial exhibition context condenses places and works of art, as well as diverse ideas about nations and cultural identity, and seems to follow the romantic ambition of Jules Verne's fictional character Phileas Fogg to compress the complexity of the world and the spirit of a time, in an 80-day journey. This nineteenth-century matrix informs the Biennale's custom of bringing together artists from a wide range of geographical regions and cultural positions that are documented through a local and international "exploration journey." There is a formal inherent vice in this approach, which Claude Lévi-Strauss uncovers when he defines research journeys not as the means "to discover unknown facts after long and thorough study, but in covering a considerable number of kilometres while collecting fixed and animated images, preferably in colour."[5] Such images, continues Lévi-Strauss, "can help keep a room full of listeners attentive for days, miraculously transforming the most obvious and banal things into revelations. This, solely on the grounds that the author, instead of having compiled the images from one fixed place, has sanctified them over a journey of 20,000 kilometres."[6]

The criticality and sensationalism attached to journeys and displacements that prepare the exhibition raise several questions for both World Fairs and biennials. This criticality appears mainly in the light of the 1990s' increased visibility of large-scale exhibitions both in art histories and the media, and the consequent consolidation of the biennials' institutional role to support cultural creation in an international context.[7] What is their status in the exhibition process? "Unknown facts discovered after long study," or the confirmation of "revelations" and practices already underway? In other words, how has the diffusion of biennials throughout the world contributed to creating new models of representing the international art scene? Furthermore, the spectacular nature of contemporary art biennials reveals their vocation to produce exhibitions and conceptual representations. As Timothy Mitchell points out, in the World Fair, "The reduction of the world to a system of objects is a consequence of their careful [spatial] organization, capable of evoking broader meanings such as History, Empire, and Progress."[8] This system of objects, resulting from the classifying eagerness of the World Fairs, introduces into Western city centers "a reduced, yet still accurate, reproduction of the European vision of the world 'inside the metropolis centre', and presents it to a large, local, national, and international public of visitors, spectators, and tourists."[9]

Along these lines, in the transition from World Fairs to the present-day, large-scale exhibitions seem to "reflect" a globalized construction of the art system while they feed into the construction of the art scene of which they are part.[10] In addition to producing exhibitions, they generate concepts and question theoretical positions concerning geographies and ideas of national and transnational space, confronting the dialectics of center/margin and inclusion/exclusion.[11] The problem of such a polarized cultural system, writes Russell Ferguson, lies in its binary articulation of the center/periphery vision.[12] In other words, on what basis (with respect to whom/to what) do art scenes get represented in biennials, and how are they designed as subordinate or central? How is invisibility produced, and what is the institutions' role in this?

At the time of its inception in 1895, the Venice Biennale provided a privileged site for debate on regionalism and the recent unification of Italy. In its spatial and conceptual organization, the detailed articulation of the Northern Italian art scenes and the merging of all Southern production in a shared room bore witness to the ongoing internal colonialism. Within this context, the Venice Biennale also provided an extremely fertile situation for producing the new national symbols (paintings, sculptures) that would later feed public art collections across the country. Parallel to that, the Venice Biennale immediately presented the ambition of bringing together contemporary artworks and artists from different nations for the benefit of a broad audience. Later, in 1968, the desire to recount a "world [that] was shrinking" while "cosmopolitan sensibility expanded" was still an essential element in the exoticism implied in the Venice show: "A big exhibition is a compressed journey, writes Lawrence Alloway, the journey to the Orient or Africa, taken by the exhibition visitor in a day."[13]

The world compressed into the regional and national halls of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni began to expand, in 1907, into the Giardini area of the city's Castello district. It took on the appearance of a micro-theme park, defined by its number of national pavilions. Near the end of the 1960s, it expanded into other public spaces and buildings in the city. Alongside its historical expansion from the Palazzo delle Esposizioni to the Giardini and, beyond, into the city, the Biennale witnesses not only the emergence of different exhibition models but also a change in aesthetic position. If, in the beginning, the aim was to represent the world through art, throughout the twentieth-century biennials gradually became the seats for critical reflection on how artists address contemporary reality in a globalized context. Along these lines, more and more frequently large-scale exhibitions participated in performing, more or less voluntarily, crucial elements of contemporary culture, of the construction of difference and off-center subjects within and outside the art system. As diverse exhibition concepts followed one after the other, different questions on cultural identity and its representation in art arose. In this sense, the Venice Biennale may be seen as an "area of condensation" of concepts and of ideas regarding nations and the ways in which exhibitions are designed.

Secessions, Laboratories, Delays and Revolutions

In *Roman des origines et origines du roman*, Marthe Robert defined the novel as a sort of Frankenstein, which combines the legacy of the epic novel, of poetry, and of the short story to create a new kind of writing, born from a mixture of different traditions and literary models.[14] Similarly to novels, biennials also join and condense different exhibition models and concepts. Historically, large-scale exhibitions kept track of the experiences of World Fairs and the Germanic Secessions; they encompassed elements and metaphors of contemporary exhibitions like fairs, cultural festivals, and the notion of the laboratory museum while remaining open to curatorial experimentation. As the role of curators evolved, different metaphors of exhibitions intertwined.

The commemoration of the past intersected the celebration of the present; the logic of the network was grafted, according to the epoch, onto the spatial organization of the map that the national pavilions in the Giardini of Castello evoked; the need for modernization that arose in Venice at the end of the nineteenth century was reinterpreted and updated, a century later, in the Shanghai Biennale. The perennial exhibition's talent at condensing disparate temporal and spatial elements is also due to its gigantic size. Different forms of exhibitions are combined in biennials, which are both focusing on the past (retrospectives, personal, or collective shows dedicated to movements and tendencies), or on the present (shows on a single artist or a local setting), or, still yet, inquiries tied to a theme or an art scene. The subtext accompanying the statement "the elaboration of modern forms of representation and knowledge" involves cultural identities and national representations, as well as their juxtaposition in a large-scale event. Again, as Timothy Mitchell underlines, remnants from World Fairs play a significant role in fostering an Orientalist, Eurocentric vision of the art system. The assembling of these options lets us challenge how exhibitions contribute to producing the consciousness of an era, and to reflecting—writes Yves Michaud—the vision that an intellectual, economic, and ruling class of that period wishes to offer.[15]

Places of Memory: documenta, the Johannesburg Biennale, and the Gwangju Biennale

Artistic director Germano Celant titled the 1997 Venice Biennale *Past, Present, Future*. In biennials, the most visible of these three temporal dimensions is that of the present in contemporary art: the exhibition's synchro-

nous approach that represents the globalized situation of the art system. Their global-scale presence transformed perennial exhibitions into a sort of "cyclical historical spectacle" that is affected by a feeling of experiencing a ubiquitous and simultaneous exhibition that is multi-sited.

From a chronological point of view, biennials regularly intersect with the histories of the countries organizing them. Through their periodicity and rituality of such events, biennials reveal a dual nature of both temporal maps and places where present creation intertwines with a celebration of national identity and the past. Indeed, many large-scale shows often emerge during transitional phases and mark as turning points in the national history of communities that host them. The silver wedding anniversary of the king and queen of Italy, Umberto and Margherita of Savoy, provided the official motive for the first Venice Biennale; the São Paulo Biennial anticipated by two years the celebration of the city's 400th anniversary (1951); the Alexandria Biennale (1955) was inaugurated on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Egyptian national revolution.

Along with Mikhail Bakhtin, biennials could be described as a "chronotope," or "time space," where "time becomes dense, compact, and artistically visible; space intensifies and flows in the movement of time, of intrigue, of history; the descriptions of time manifest themselves in space, to which time gives meaning and measure."[16] Works of art are primarily repositories of narrative events and the temporal dimension, responsible for the exhibition's process and its connection to the collective history of a given nation or city. However, there is yet another component, in some ways "monumental," that makes the biennial a place in which time and different types of narratives meet. Pierre Nora defined as *lieux de mémoire* the places of collective memory born after the dissolution of common memories.[17] The place of memory includes the most material and concrete of objects (monuments, archives, museums, persons), as well as the most abstract and intellectual (institutions, symbols, events). In both cases, places of memory are objects of the past, which become places of the present aimed at preserving collective memory.

Such elements also appear in the design of periodical exhibitions like documenta in Kassel.[18] After having regained both a militarily and politically strategic position in Nazi Germany, Kassel found itself in a marginal position following the division of Germany. After it was refused candidacy for the capital of the federal government at the end of the 1940s, the city became, in 1955, the seat of the Bundesgartenschau (Federal horticulture show). The opportunity sparked the interest of landscape architect Hermann Mattern, Professor at the Kunstakademie Kassel, who launched the idea of hosting an exhibition in the center of Friedrichsplatz. His colleague, the architect and university lecturer of painting Arnold Bode, convinced him to relocate the exhibition to the site of the ruins of the Museum Fridericianum. This museum, constructed in 1769 and the second oldest in Europe, had suffered extensive damage during the war and was left with only its supporting walls standing.

For this reason, explained Arnold Bode, documenta provided to its organizers "an ideal undertaking for portraying the idea of Europe through an art exhibition located thirty kilometres from the East German borders."[19] Bode believed that, on a symbolic level, Kassel was the ideal location for showing avant-garde art in Germany again, after the dramatic interruption provoked by the Nazi regime in 1937 with the Munich show *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art).[20]

In particular, often traumatic, times throughout history, biennials have taken possession of symbolic places, with a twofold objective of preserving their history and opening them up to the present through the organization of contemporary art exhibitions. Such is the case of Gwangju, site of the May 18, 1980 massacre, when thousands of demonstrators were killed by South Korean police during a demonstration against the expansion of martial law by dictator Chun Doo-Hwan. In 1995, Gwangju was chosen to be the seat of the first biennial of contemporary art in South Korea, making it a symbol of the country's openness towards the international art scene. During the inaugural speech at the first edition, the mayor of Gwangju expressed hope that the biennale "would help clear up misunderstandings about the history of Gwangju [...], a luminous city that uses art to shed light on the dark reality of Korean separation."[21] In the catalogue, curator Lee Yongwoo described the event as intensely different from the nostalgic salvaging of the Grand Tour carried out by the Venice Biennale: "The international biennale of Gwangju asks precise questions about Korea's contemporary history while caring for its wounds."[22] Around this first edition of the Gwangju exhibition, entitled *Beyond the Borders*, sparked some collateral events including the show *Gwangju Memory of May*, dedicated to the generation of

1979-89, and the collective show *Art as Witness*, on the relationship between contemporary art and democracy.

The Johannesburg Biennale also occurs around a historical landmark, the country's first democratic elections and the reintegration of South Africa into the United Nations. The event represented a crucial moment in the debate over the decentralization of African contemporary art, in so far as biennials, said artist Kendell Geers, performed "a new form of cultural colonialism": "Although western curators are visiting 'marginal' regions in search of new talent—continues Geers—non-western artists still had to travel towards the art system centres not only to become truly international but to be also officially recognized as marginal."[23]

Even though a triennial of contemporary art was organized in Cape Town in 1985, it was not until the early 1990s that an increasing number of periodical exhibitions and festivals across the African continent repositioned and networked local art scenes on an international level, including Doual'art in Cameroon (1991), the Bamako Encounters of Photography in Mali (1994), and the Biennale de l'art africain, later known as Dak'art, in Senegal (1989). More to the point, Dak'art's conscious refocus on contemporary African art in 1996 established a clear conjunction with 1970s non-aligned countries' art events such as the Arab Art Biennale (Baghdad 1974 and Rabat 1976) and the Havana Biennial (founded in 1984) and their claim to produce an alternative to the consensual Western model of international art.

Repositioning the art scenes on the global scale also forced responses from Western institutions, as it was the case of controversial exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The large group exhibition hosted over one hundred artists and aimed at broadening the view on global art practices with a "worldwide survey." As biennials do, the show created a platform for encounter and a theme-based approach. However, it did not manage to challenge the foundations of Western exoticism, and its vision of art/craft implied, from its very title, in the critical distinction between artists and magicians and in its consequent affinity with modernist myths of origins. Within this framework, the reading of a plural international art scene that *Magiciens* phrased through its curatorial statement did not manage to engage critical debate on the ways culture is produced or to escape colonial legacy.

Biennials, Maps, and Networks: The Venice Biennale and Manifesta

The dissemination of contemporary art biennials across the world between the nineteenth and early twentieth-century preceded the opening of the first museum of contemporary art in the U.S.A., the MoMA in New York, by nearly thirty years. In Alfred Barr's MoMA, works of art were no longer presented "as documents of national history" but preferably displayed as documents of a history of style.[24] The need for such a change also applied to contemporary art biennials. Although the first large-scale exhibitions—in particular in Venice, São Paulo, and Alexandria—preserved the national "competitive origins" of the World Fairs, the Venetian traditional way of national representation sprang from the desire to shape taste and style in art.[25] Since the mid-1970s, this desire encounters the curatorial practice of disseminating art interventions outside the architecture of the exhibition space to expand across the city. Increasingly, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, periodical exhibitions have revealed their ability to exist as an international mapping experiment that unfurls over local space. By engaging notions of creolization and constellation, Okwui Enwezor's documenta in 2002 platforms managed to facilitate a simultaneous multi-site approach for large-scale exhibitions.

Without establishing a filiation between contemporary curatorial processes and early Venice Biennales, we may nonetheless highlight some resonances linking the building of national pavilions in the Giardini and following reflections on how national identities may be represented (or unrepresented) in perennial exhibitions. When in 1907 the Belgian Pavilion became the first national pavilion in the Giardini di Castello, the Biennale's main exhibition pavilion articulated itself in a Crystal Palace fashion, as a succession of rooms, each dedicated to a precise Italian regional area or a selection of countries.

Elke Krasny reminds that within the framework of World Fairs and biennials alike pavilions combine their original function as "garden architecture" toward the mission of representing national culture and identity.[26] This structure re-emerges in Venice, where the World Fair's principle of pavilion-nation specializes in the representation of national art. In this manner, the Giardini gradually acquired the twofold appearance of a basic map of European nation-states and a site for the spectacularization of art. Artist Hans Schabus' *The Last Land* for the Austrian Pavilion in 2005 brought into question this dual front. In the project, architect Joseph

Hoffmann's 1934 architecture is used as a means to read through the history of the Austrian participation in the Biennale. The research included the pavilion's architectural history as well as the critical relations between Venice and Austria, which explain why the peripheral position of the Austrian pavilion on Sant'Elena island. For his intervention, Schabus covered the pavilion with a wooden structure and created a temporary mountain against the background of the city of Venice. The work succeeded in implanting a temporary Austrian landscape element in the Giardini di Castello and affected the view of the city. Seemingly inaccessible, the interior of the pavilion shows a labyrinthine structure of beams, walkways, and stairs that allow the visitor to reach the top of the mountain from the inside.

Developing from the official history of the site where the Austrian pavilion is located, Schabus' monumental structure holds, almost like a retina, fragments of non-official narratives. The desire to anchor a nation's history to antiquity, and to naturalize the myth of its origins, regularly resurfaces in the history of nationalism. Such an attempt may appear paradoxical considering that the idea of nation is a relatively recent invention. Connected with the "invention of tradition," a process leading to the creation of architectural symbols, monuments, and ceremonies, nations such as the French Third Republic and Germany during the Second Empire, reached a highly symbolic level close to the time of the First World War.[27] During this same period, construction of the French and German pavilions in the Giardini of the Biennale was underway.

The relationship between the geographic narration of the pavilions as a whole and the exhibition space of the Biennale provokes what Irit Rogoff calls the "many socio-cultural narrations based on geographic awareness."[28] Based on these narrations, the occupation of space unfolds at the interplay between subjective artistic interventions and power dynamics. Along these lines, the Giardini represent the material place where the exhibition's geographic, spatial, and geopolitical issues meet. When Curator Stefan Banz invited Gianni Motti to participate in the Swiss Pavilion group show in 2005, the artist's first proposal was related to the names on the facades of the national pavilions. Since the project stimulated little interest in Cultural Councils, Motti proposed renaming the street where the Swiss Pavilion is as "Viale Szeemann," thus influencing the topography (and the toponymy) of the Giardini rather than its international cartography. Motti's intervention shows that the map of the Giardini may be seen as the result of reciprocal relationships among things and events that contribute to shaping its morphology.

In the Venice Biennale Giardini, this map ensues from the ensemble of the pavilions and the temporary events of the different editions. Additional factors that contribute to shaping the Giardini maps are the in-between spaces that connect the pavilions—the streets, avenues, and micro-gardens that border the buildings. Many of these sites have been marked by temporary interventions. Some of these proposals suggested the absence of some nations in the gardens: in 1999, Rirkrit Tiravanija planted a teak tree to symbolize the absence of a Thai pavilion; in 2003, Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti conceived a scattered Palestinian pavilion of free-standing Palestinian passports in the park outside the Giardini; before officially representing Kosovo in the off-the-Giardini pavilion in 2005 and again in 2017, Sislej Xhafa performed in 1997 a clandestine and itinerant pavilion dressed as a footballer, with an Albanian flag hanging from his backpack.

As these unofficial artistic interventions show, the pavilions' proximity to one another in the Giardini emphasize a sharp geopolitical design: the prominent position of the Italian Pavilion; the triangulation of France, Great Britain, and Germany; the close vicinity of Holland and Belgium, or Denmark and Iceland; the gathering of Sweden, Norway, and Finland into the North Pavilion. The edges of the Giardini delimit an inside-outside dialectic: the pavilions located within the historical perimeter of the Venice Biennale are set apart from other national pavilions located in the city's historical buildings and from the "unofficial" participations.

The nineteenth-century idea of national representation, of which the pavilions of the Giardini in Venice are an example, was gradually modified starting from the second half of the 1950s and the gradual phasing-out of univocal notions of national identity.[29] Other forms of internationalism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s art scenes, whereas exhibitions such as documenta had already produced alternatives to the national representation system, though remaining confined within a Western art scene. The 1980s found a more radical alternative in the Havana Biennial. In 1984, the first edition centered on Latin-American and Caribbean art. In 1986, the second edition included the participation of artists from Asia and Africa. The purpose of creating an alternative map to the official layout of the "main biennials" was formalized in 1989, with *Tradition and*

Contemporaneity.[30] La Habana brings in an idea that site-specificity could be addressed in alternative transnational systems and multi-sited exhibition spaces. While the Venice Giardini and the city itself get gradually pavilionized as the show grows, other periodical exhibitions emerge in the international map of biennials. Among them, Manifesta, whose first edition took place in Rotterdam in 1996.

As the biennial exhibition format disseminated outside the traditional art capitals, Manifesta applied a decentered gaze to a post-Wall Europe and conceived an off-the-center itinerant model. While new biennials were opening in Lyon, Barcelona, Oslo, Valencia, Tirana, Liverpool, and Uppsala, Manifesta positioned itself as an heir of the post-1989 geopolitical agenda. The fall of the Berlin Wall had produced a moment of "euphoria" that made it possible to imagine a post-national representation scenario, where a network of European cities would, in turn, host the biennial. René Block recalls that the itinerant exhibition drew its inspiration from artist Robert Filliou's Towards an Art-of-Peace Biennale in 1985, which was meant to start from Hamburg and eventually itinerate across Europe.[31]

In the 1990s, the suspension of the national representation system drew many supporters. For the 1993 Venice Biennale, Achille Bonito Oliva proposed getting rid of the constraints of national representation by inviting the pavilion commissioners to select artists irrespective of their origins. That same year, the Whitney Biennial adopted the question of cultural identity as a theme—a powerful statement for a biennial that was founded in New York in 1932 and had specialized in American art. The Whitney Biennial belongs to what Paul Ardenne would define as a "national biennial" that enhances the local scene 46. "Regional" periodical shows, such the Buenos Aires Biennial and Dak'art, reunite geographic realities and artists connected by common cultural and historical experiences. Such biennials have the dual task of giving visibility and strengthening networks of exchange among the different regional entities involved and the international scene. This is the case of the Alexandria and Cairo biennials, which were founded at two very different historical moments in Egypt, the only country on the African continent to have a national pavilion in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale. The Alexandria Biennale was established at a very particular moment in the city's history, when the cultural centrality of Alexandria was declining, and the importance of Cairo rising.[32] Whereas the Alexandria Biennale looked at the Mediterranean region, the Cairo Biennale specifically addressed art production from the Arab countries first in 1984 and eventually opened its doors to artists from non-Arab countries and involved forms of national representation through the support of Cultural Councils.

More recently, in 2006 the São Paulo Biennial also renounced a national representation system. In support of her proposal, curator Lisette Lagnado explained that, "In socio-political terms, the large migrations of the twentieth-century have diluted the notion of national identity without cultural miscegenation [...] The concept of 'national representations' is, in my view, something that belittles artists, and tends to highlight richer countries while smacking of benevolence to the poorer countries."[33]

Lagnado's project was inspired by the work of Hélio Oiticica, Brazilian conceptual artist, who in the 1970s researched the aesthetic and political ties existing between social spaces and urban realities. In the same way, Lisette Lagnado's Bienal was conceived as "a spatial narration" from which "the flow among the works" ensued, or, in other words, the structure of the exhibition. As a countertrend to the international vocation of contemporary biennials, the São Paulo edition focused particularly on the local and national scene from which seventy-five percent of its visitors came. The exhibition's duration was extended through a program of workshops and conferences that preceded the opening by two years and that, again with reference to Oiticica's work, aimed at abandoning the logic of "transnational novelty" in order "[to create] history from within our own position of relevance and not inventing it from the outside."[34]

Global Crystal Palaces

In "The Global White Cube," Elena Filipovic describes the contemporary art biennial as a "timeless, hermetic, and always the same as itself" event, regardless of its geographic position and its context."[35] The fascination for otherness and the "ethnophilia" shown by many biennials influenced the formulation of its history. Alongside producing images of the world and interpretations of the geography of the art system, biennials also contributed to fostering false myths. One such example is the idea that the proliferation of biennials in cities and countries that were normally considered peripheral led to the steady enlargement of the geography of the art system. Although today's art system is undoubtedly more polycentric than in the past, still in 2009 the catalogue of the Istanbul Biennial shared specific

statistics on the "native countries" of participating artists.[36] The data showed that twenty-eight percent of the artists were originally from Western countries and seventy-two percent from non-Western countries. These results changed, however, when statistics on the countries where the artists lived and worked were examined: only fifty-five percent lived in non-Western countries.

Migrations toward art system "centers" rarely appear in the assessment of the biennials phenomenon, which is often presented as a single phenomenon, tied to the globalization of the art system. However, several attempts to classify large-scale shows have been produced since the beginning of the 2000s, when the biennialization of the art world became a prominent phenomenon for art history, curatorial studies, and exhibition history. Along these lines, René Block suggests differentiating them by the typology of organization. In this light, the Venice Biennale would, for example, be defined by its "worldwide" scale and cultural-diplomatic involvement.[37]

In 2003, Okwui Enwezor described the different biennials through the perspective of their relationship with their host city and country, with their own exhibition history, and with geopolitics.[38] From this perspective, biennials may play out as an "expression of power and progress," as is the case with the first Venice Biennales and Carnegie International. Other biennials begin in the aftermath of "post-traumatic" event and respond to a country's desire to reposition itself in the international scene.

In 2004, Charlotte Bydler proposed a classification based on what biennials have wished to present to the public through their history and methods of communication. With this view in mind, the biennials of Venice, Carnegie International, São Paulo, and Sydney fall into the category of "philanthropic-capitalistic enterprises"; whereas documenta, the Venice Biennales from 1948 onwards, graphic art biennials, the Havana Biennial, and Dak'art are seen as expressions of the postwar international political climate, dominated by the logic of "blocks" and international alliances. Others still, such as Istanbul and Gwangju, which are tied to the cultural climate of the 1990s, prove wider "flexibility."[39]

All the biennial typologies and classifications mentioned above group large-scale exhibitions by their structure, the space they represent, or the image they produce. However, the intrinsic motivation that underlies the biennial phenomenon is the constancy of its basic international principle. Although very capable of producing different metaphors and concepts, just like their nineteenth-century counterparts contemporary biennials variously combine international scope and promotion of the local scene. Similarly to Peter Sloterdijk's "Crystal Palace exhibitions," biennials metaphorically function as buildings with transparent facades that reflect and organize in their interiors a set of images and representations of the outside world.[40] Seen as such, biennials appear as a novel Frankenstein, with contemporary problems grafted onto a nineteenth-century body. This continuity shows in the persistent desire to reproduce the world on a small-scale, in the wish to convene different global voices in biennial-as-a-platform, all of which shows why the debate over national representation remains unresolved today at the Venice Biennale in particular, but also elsewhere.

The curatorial debate over biennials has generated new themes and metaphors. However, the basic conceptual structure of the exhibition, its scope, and its relationship with professional and broader audiences have remained virtually unchanged, whereas the exhibition formats have radically changed over time.[41] Where periodicity initially provided the necessary distance for writing a history of present-day art, it is today blended in the proliferation of cultural events, biennials, fairs, and festivals, which take place simultaneously in different regions of the world. Perhaps we may begin by re-examining the biennial's notion of time and its relationship to the local scenes, in order to reassess periodical exhibitions (and their scale) in a sustainable perspective.

Notes

1 A first version of this paper was published in Federica Martini, Vittoria Martini, *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials* (Milan: Postmediabooks, 2011). The text was updated in April 2020.
2 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien, vol. I, L'art de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974).
3 Mieke Bal defines metaphors as "words-as-concepts" or "words that merge their old meanings into new, concrete, visual ones, to form a concept that is rather like a theoretical object." Bal, Mieke, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002), 110.
4 Different names have been proposed for classifying this type of exhibition. Some, based on temporality, differentiate the exhibitions into biennials, triennials, and quadrennials. One exception to the principle is

documenta, in Kassel, which takes place every five years; while Skulptur Projekt, in Münster, Germany, is held every ten years. Recently, terms such as perennial exhibitions and large-scale exhibitions have arisen, with reference, in the case of the latter, to the size of the exhibition.

5 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Libraire Plon, 1955), 53.
6 Ibid.
7 See Tim Griffin, "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003): 152-163, 206, 212; and Claire Doherty, "Location, Location," *Art Monthly* 281 (November 2004): 12.
8 See Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 293.
9 Ibid.
10 Alexander Geppert, "Città brevi: storia, storiografia e teoria delle pratiche espositive europee, 1851-2000," *Memoria e ricerca. Rivista di storia contemporanea* 17 (September-December 2004): 8; Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Policies," *Art in America* 79 (September 1991): 84-91.
11 For the representation of alterity in contemporary art, see Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Public Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991); and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
12 Russell Ferguson et al., eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: The New Museum and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 9.
13 Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (New York: New York Graphic Society), 38. See also Shearer West, "National Desires and Regional Realities in the Venice Biennale, 1895—1914," *Art History* 3 (September 1995): 403.
14 Marthe Robert, *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972).
15 Yves Michaud, *L'Artiste et le commissaires. Quatre essais non pas sur l'art contemporain mais sur ceux qui s'en occupent* (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1989), 130.
16 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Le forme del tempo e del cronotopo nel romanzo. Saggi di poetica storica" (1925), *Estetica e romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 231-232.
17 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
18 Michael Glasmeier, ed., *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955-2005: Archive in Motion* (Kassel-Steidl, Göttingen: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005).
19 Ibid., 172.
20 Walter Grasskamp, "Documenta—Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts. Internationale Ausstellung im Museum Fridericianum in Kassel," in *Die Kunst der Ausstellung. Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts*, eds. Bernd Klüser, Katharina Hegewisch (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1991), 116–25. See also Anna Cestelli Guidi, *La "documenta" di Kassel. Percorsi dell'arte contemporanea* (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1997).
21 Yongwoo Lee, "Remapping the Borders," *Beyond the Borders*, Kwangju Biennale, Exh. cat., 101-19.
22 Ibid., 101.
23 Heidi Fichtner, "Global Art – Report," *Nu: The Nordic Art Review* 3 (1998): 10. See also Thomas McEvilley, "Arrivederci Venice: The 'Third World' Biennials," *Artforum* 32, no. 3 (November 1993): 114-116.
24 Yve-Alain Bois, "Exposition: esthétique de la distraction," *Le Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 29 (September 1989): 57-79.
25 Sandy Nairne, "Exhibitions of Contemporary Art," Contemporary Cultures of Display, ed. Emma Barker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 105-26.
26 Elke Krasny, "The Butterfly, the Garden, the Island, and the Mountains," *Hans Schabus: The Last Land*, Exh. cat., 51st Biennale di Venezia (2005), 72-80.
27 See Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); and Eric J.Hobsawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
28 Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 22.
29 See Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne, "Mapping International Exhibitions," *Curating: The Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond*, *Art & Design* 52, special issue (1997): 30.
30 Llilian Llanes, "The Havana Biennale," *Das Lied von der Erde: Biennalen im Dialog/Song of the Earth: Biennials in Dialogue*, ed. Barbara Heinrich, Exh. cat., Museum Fridericianum, Kassel (2000), 12.
31 Elena Filipovic, Barbara Vanderlinden, eds., *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 196.
32 Bassam El-Baroni, "Remodelling Required: Official Biennales in Egypt and International Biennale Culture," speech at the symposium *La critique d'art et ses pratiques curatoriales dans des contextes minoritaires*, January 26-28, 2005, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
33 James Trainor, "San Paulo Biennale 2006," *Frieze* 96 (January 2006): 24.

34 Ibid., 25.
35 Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," in *The Manifesta Decade*, 67.
36 WHW, eds. *What Keeps Mankind Alive? The Texts*, Exh. Cat., Istanbul Biennale, 2009, p. 19.
37 "How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began," in *The Manifesta Decade*, 189.
38 Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *MJ – Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 2, special issue "Biennials" (Winter-Spring 2003): 94-119.
39 Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).
40 Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals. Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005). See also Donald Preziosi, "The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary" (2001) and Marian Pastor Roces, "Crystal Palace Exhibitions" (2005), in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010).
41 See Filipovic, Van Hal, Øvstebø, eds. *The Biennial Reader*.

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Cyprus in Venice: Art, Politics, and Modernity at the Margins of Europe (A Case Study of National Representation in the Venice Biennale)

Louli Michaelidou

Over the last decades, the representation of the Cyprus Republic[1] in the Venice Biennale has developed a 'civilizational' discourse merging the kindred categories of modernism and nationalism. This coupling served a two-fold function. On the one hand, it reproduced the system of cultural representation that came to support the transfiguration of the new state's profile, drawing on those constituents that provided a powerful source of meaning for the modern, *Greek Cypriot* cultural identity. On the other hand, by connecting, at least up until the early 2000s, this conception of identity with the classical and universal values that were simultaneously *Hellenism*'s endorsed contributions to modern civilization, it attempted to prove the validity and relevance of Greek Cypriot artistic production to the broader international context of Western art. At the same time, it strove to assert the 'authenticity' of the 'local,' that is, a 'local' whose historical and cultural 'weight' also made it 'universal.'

The approximate fifty-year span from the late Sixties until today frames a vigorous and intense modernization process for post-colonial Cyprus, which coincides with its problematic project of liberal democracy. An extensive body of mainly social anthropological research on post- colonial Cyprus which has developed over the last decades, has demonstrated the profound impact of nationalism on the modern history of Cyprus, an ideology whose dominance and resilience throughout and beyond modernity lies in its cultural roots. A relevant sociohistorical assessment has indicated that the construction of the Greek Cypriot identity in particular has been fundamentally informed by three broader, interrelated ideological discourses—Hellenocentrism,[2] Eurocentrism, and Western Hegemony—synthesizing a condition of 'symbolic domination' of the mind that has consistently prevented Cypriots from reflecting on their own colonial and postcolonial condition.[3]

1

As part of my research on these topics, I have focused on the official participation of the Republic of Cyprus in the Venice Biennale of Art from 1968 onwards,[4] a period coinciding with the island's post-independence and postcolonial period. The history of the Cyprus Pavilion was taken as a case study of the relationships between Greek Cypriot art and the socio-political dynamics on the island during this period. I was specifically interested in how the presence of Cyprus in this major international event, calling for national representation, has been influenced by the dominant visions of Greek Cypriot identity and history, not only on an institutional and policy level, but also with respect to artistic and textual content, and whether these discourses have evolved across time; all the while, without losing sight of the problems surrounding the notion of 'national representation,' specifically for Cyprus, which is not a nation but a divided state, and more generally for the globalized art world where such political, ideological, and institutional classifications are steadily growing obsolete. This

exploration attempted to illustrate a set of interactions between the local and the global context of art: in this case, the 'global' as contextualized inside the Western institution of the Venice Biennale (where Greek Cypriots seem to primarily desire recognition); and the 'local,' reflecting the emerging picture of Cyprus as a modern, independent society, striving to 'reclaim' its European cultural membership through the paradoxes of its postcolonial subjectivity.

My broader research aimed to situate the content and politics of the Cyprus Pavilion across time, highlighting the prevailing dominant discourses on a number of levels; at the same time, by employing ideas and methods in art and social theory, postcolonial studies, and anthropology (especially social anthropological research on Cyprus), all of which critique any notions of 'the West and the Rest,' it attempted to indicate and analyze how, in the context of art, many postcolonial societies like Cyprus are still caught in positions of self-degradation vis-à-vis the West. But given that the latter is not an identity or a destination to be reached, but "a historical construct that emerged within the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism as an instrument of division and power," this becomes a "symbolic" and continuously self-defeating struggle.[5]

2

The 34th edition of the Venice Biennale echoed the social upheaval that was taking place generally in the world following the heated spring of 1968. It was at this pivotal moment for art and politics that the new Republic of Cyprus came to participate in the Venice Biennale for the first time, with six artists[6] and a small exhibition of paintings and sculptures at the back of the Giardini's Italian Pavilion.

In 1968, eight years after the Declaration of Cypriot Independence, still no public institution for culture existed in the country, apart from "Community Assemblies" for the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities, respectively. The first national participation in the Venice Biennale was thus assigned to Tony Spiteris, an influential Greek art critic and academic working internationally. Spiteris had been appointed in 1966 by the first President of the Republic, Archbishop Makarios III,[7] to be independent governmental advisor of the Cyprus Republic on cultural matters.

Makarios seemed to be well aware of culture's instrumental role in constructing a positive profile of the newly founded State abroad. Such high-profile biennials, beyond their objective value as historical artistic platforms, and structurally built on the notion of national participation, also constituted a platform on which to project an identity for the 'nation,' or in this case the young state. The politically turbulent 1960s in Cyprus, marked by intercommunal violence and the precarious links of the Greek junta with local pro-unionists, possibly made this cultural opportunity a political one, too.

Once he took office, Makarios pursued a policy of independence for Cyprus, which he saw as the way to eliminate inter-ethnic conflict and ensure more political stability on the island. To some extent, this direction was in line with Cypriotism, the de-ethnicized political ideology that emphasized the independent social, political, cultural, and economic interests of Cyprus. But even though Cypriotism contended the autonomy of Cyprus on all these levels, it rarely took the form of complete disengagement from Greece and Turkey, thus it never became a systematic movement capable of challenging the island's ideological orthodoxy; furthermore, Makarios' policy of independence was mainly supported by part of the right and the majority of the center, encompassing the clergy, the urban bourgeoisie, and the Greek-educated intelligentsia, who were the main carriers of Greek-Cypriot nationalism. It is then no surprise that the definition of

post-independence Greek Cypriot cultural identity, on an ideological level, became imbued with Hellenocentric values. In fact, since *enosis* (union with Greece) could no longer be a political goal, the Greek nation became a cultural entity, and the 'Greekness' of Cyprus was mainly articulated through only one of its many possible dimensions, the cultural.[8] The fact that the policy of independence, similarly to Cypriotist positions, did not claim the existence of a 'Cypriot nation' was also accommodating to the longstanding popular and high-level conviction that Greek-Cypriot culture undoubtedly belonged to the greater community of the Greek nation and, by extension, also to Europe and the 'modern world.'[9]

3

In this sense, the choice of a Greek curator to foster Cypriot representation in the 1968 Venice Biennale, also given the lack of Cypriot experts, would have seemed natural; so would, for example, the almost exclusive focus on Greek Cypriot artists throughout the next decades, or the enduring preoccupation with Hellenocentric ideas illustrated in the Cyprus Pavilion themes and discourses. Here are some examples from the works on show: Giorgos Kyriakou's sculptures in the 1968 exhibition carried Greek mythological and epic symbolism, with names like *Icarus, Phaedra, and Penelope,* and Giorgos Skotinos' surrealistic paintings depicted mythological creatures, summoning ancient Greek kingdoms of Cyprus; in 1986, Maria Loizidou presented her installation *The Myth of Ariadne in Three Acts*, borrowing its theme from Greek mythology and the story of the Labyrinth and the Minotaur, in the Minoan Kingdom of Crete; Angelos Makrides' sculptural installations in 1988 alluded to archaeological relics, mythical deities, or pagan rituals and made explicit references to ancient Greek history, philosophy, and mythology; in 1990, Nikos Kouroussis created an installation with video entitled *Odyssey (Odyssia)*, taking Ulysses' adventurous journey as a metaphor for personal and collective struggle, while Theodoulos Gregoriou's *Autofoto-Heterofoto* for Aperto in the same year was a geometric rendition of Aristotelian principles; in 2001, Andreas Karayan introduced a series of large-scale paintings titled *Personae*, evoking the Egyptian *Faiyum* death masks—historically, a prestigious form of art, closely connected to Greco-Roman traditions and Byzantine iconography, witnessing the lingering influence of Greek settlements in the Faiyum area since the Ptolemaic period.

It should be said that there was often a disparity between this obvious pattern and the works themselves, in that beyond their loaded nominal symbolism, many of the pavilion projects were artistically 'in tune' - all artists without exception were trained in the "main art centres" of Europe, as the catalogue texts liked to stress, and they were selected to participate precisely for the perceived contemporary qualities of their work. Insofar as these works can be considered in retrospect as representative of certain artistic traditions, history, and heritage, their critical interpretation is a legitimate objective—after all, artists are themselves products and agents of specific socio-historical spaces. Nonetheless, I was much more interested here in the ideologically motivated interpretative narratives developing around their work, as well as the responsibility of the historian, critic, and theorist towards historical, cultural, and scientific awareness. As Robert Storr[10] argued, the exhibition-maker is a mediator between the art and the audience, and has a responsibility to make the messages as transparent as possible, "by facilitating this expansion of meaning rather than by containing it." Extending, also, Edward Said's arguments in *Orientalism*, and Barthes' in *Writing Degree Zero*, beyond the realm of literature, a writer is always caught up in particular discursive and ideological orders and their historical and socially instituted traditions.

4

Spiteris' language in the official Biennale catalogue in 1968[11] unmistakably illustrated the Eurocentric positions that have dominated 20th-century art, as well as notions of Western hegemony and symbolic domination.[12] That is, Cypriot art, suffering the isolation imposed by colonialism and the conservatism of the periphery, was finally—and rightfully—tuning into progress and contemporaneity as endorsed by the Western centers of art. At the same time, and in line with the pluralistic interpretations so common to art from the periphery, he was highlighting particular characteristics of the island's culture as embodied in the artists' works. Spiteris' official assignment was evidently driven by a set of broader cultural assumptions. It is worth noting, however, that it was executed from an independent and informed perspective and, despite the force of internal contentions, establishing a set of conditions that for a long time the Cypriot participation was striving to reinstate and preserve.

The narratives of ancestry and uniformity that lie at the heart of the broader rhetoric on Greek identity are also typical of the texts on Greek Cypriot—and Greek—art, and the tautology of ideas in the excerpts is more than symptomatic. The literary language we come across in the 1986 Cyprus catalogue texts by the Cypriot commissioner/curator and a Greek art historian[13] exemplifies, in Bhabha's terms, the "romantic and excessively metaphorical" (one could add here the "metaphysical") way in which the myth of the nation emerges as a historical idea,[14] in this case being reproduced at least on three levels: the linear continuity with the Classical past, the artist as agent of historical purity and truth, and the artwork as bearer of a universal and absolute (classical) aesthetic. Such renditions are, of course, full of paradoxes, one of the greatest being that nationalist historicizing renders history itself *ahistorical*; as Fabian (1983) and Herzfeld (1989) remarked, in this type of rhetoric, history is not described as an "open cycle" but as a "finite linearity," which is predestined and exists outside time. As time is compressed, the transient nature of social realities, on which identities are constructed, also becomes suppressed.

The quintessence of a "peripheral though internationally competent" artistic production, bringing the 'local' and the 'international' to a successful synthesis—this is how artist Angelos Makrides was appraised in 1988. On a single page, the catalogue text[15] condensed many of the ideological schemata underpinning the writings on Greek Cypriot art, from the modern cult of the artist and the isolation from Western values, to notions of pure art and identity—the latter acquiring regional and national (classical) projections, through a mainly stylistic appraisal.

The 1990 theme by Kouroussis provided the opportunity to rekindle one of the most classic literary concepts in the Greek-speaking world, further popularized in modern times in Constantine Kavafy's poem *Ithaki* (*Ithaca*). The text, by a frequently contributing Greek art writer,[16] takes *Odysseus*' (Ulysses') epic journey as a poetic allusion to the artist's long and arduous creative endeavors, heightened by the parallel national struggles of his native place and its (Greek Cypriot) people for 'return' (i.e. to the north, under Turkish occupation since 1974).

The treatment of myth outside its socio-cultural context and its equation with reality and history, illustrating a fundamental premise on which the nationalist rhetoric is founded, also outlines the poetic analysis of Theodoulos' work for Aperto '90, as does the glorification of the artist as a source of "eternal," "primary light" (*autofoto*) and the agent of an absolute "truth" that "lies beyond."[17] Barolsky contextualizes these ideas in his insightful analysis of the "modern cult" of the artist that has dominated the

Western history of art, tracing its origins in imaginative literature, poetry, and fiction, and indeed in Homeric and Hellenic tradition. Far from the Hegelian-inspired, scientific investigation of artistic development, in this model—which began to form with Dante and Vasari, and blossomed with 19th-century Romanticism—the idea of the artist is rooted in the epic poet; here, art history is not treated as an academic discipline, but as a literary form, a kind of "artful storytelling about art, which aspires, however imperfectly, to ascertain the historical truth."[18]

The Commissioner's text on Glafkos Koumides in 1999 reasserts the ethno-Eurocentric narratives on the catastrophic effect of Ottoman times on Hellenic culture; the dubious infusion of Cypriot art with Eastern folk elements during the Byzantine era; the triumph of Neoclassicism through the reunification of Greece—and subsequently of Cyprus—with the European West; and, finally, the tradition-breaking postwar alignment of Cypriot art with mainstream modernism, which was subverted by the trauma of the Turkish invasion forcing artists back to their local roots.[19]

The writings of a Greek art historian[20] on Andreas Karayan in 2001 exemplify the poetic mechanisms employed in the fetishization of history[21] and the resolute adaptation of these interpretative schemes for the analysis and validation of Greek-Cypriot art, among others, as an extension of Greek art, and of Hellenic culture in the broader sense. The eulogizing, epic nature of the language, combined with the exaggerated aestheticization of form, draw a long axis that take in every possible literary stereotype of Greekness, from antiquity and the romantic love of ruins to the sacred ecstasy of Greek Orthodoxy, fixed together in a pre-modern celebration of art as divine perfection. Epitomizing the paradigms of Bourdieu on bourgeois taste, and of Barolsky on the modern artist's cult, this is the kind of oppressive, ideological discourse that has framed the evaluative codes of Greek art for much of the 20th century and beyond, filtering into the realm of Cypriot art.

Interestingly, some of the texts by non-Cypriot or Greek curators have also partaken in the discussion (and eulogies) of Greek Cypriot artists' works as exemplifying the classical Greek spirit, a notion that is otherwise in line with a long tradition of Westerners (and Greeks) treating Cyprus as part of the Greek world. [22]

5

What these examples serve to illustrate is that, up to as far as the start of the millennium, the national pavilion has tended to reflect the ideological orientations of the broader Greek-Cypriot society, promoting a peculiar mix of traditional and nationalist identity scripts alongside internationalist ideas, and progressive expressions next to archaic grand narratives.

Often in this context, it was the approaches to art—informed by Greek Cypriot bourgeois perceptions of superior Western culture—rather than the art itself, that have been more infused by unexamined ideas like the classical canon and the norms of taste.

What a broader look into Cypriot mainstream art texts and catalogue introductions of the past decades would, in fact, reveal is that they tend to oscillate between *eulogy* (i.e. of artists and works, of the spirit of the Greek nation, of Europe as civilizational destination) and *dismissal* (i.e., of Cyprus as backward, isolated, and not in touch with true, commonly Western ideals of progress). But as it has been demonstrated,[23] eulogy

and dismissal are dialectically linked (e.g., eulogizing the West means dismissing Cypriots as not Western enough, etc.).

Thus, beyond its nationalist assumptions, the mainstream rhetoric of Greek Cypriot art also remained largely preoccupied with stylistic genealogy and teleology, dictating that art must be ranked within a hierarchical system that keeps striving for Western validation. It is arguably the same civilizational presumption that feeds many of the desires and expectations of the Cypriot art community in the Venice Biennale, insisting on a senseless, Sisyphean mission that remains unfulfilled.[24]

6

What these examples serve to illustrate is how the Cypriot national representation in this event spontaneously became a vehicle for the promotion of the dominant perceptions around Greek Cypriot cultural identity, while expressing certain genuine needs in the midst of uncertain and turbulent times: on a civic and institutional level, the need to define a historical, cultural, spiritual, and politically autonomous territory, under the roof of the nation-state; on a more intimate level, to articulate a script of belongingness to a distinct particular identity, based on which individual agents could locate themselves in the world and discover their 'authentic selves,' often coming to replicate, under the specific circumstances, Greek national identity repertoires. The almost unique opportunity provided by the Venice Biennale to present autonomous *national exhibitions* of contemporary art, thus highlighting *national fulfillment* and self-determination and linking the international political and artistic society on equal footing, composed a double paradox for the Republic of Cyprus: a Republic which starkly illustrates the problematic though widely employed conjointment of 'nation-state' where at least one side claims to be a different nation with its own (unrecognized) state.[25]

7

More recent participations in particular, pursuing a closer dialogue with broader artistic debates, started to introduce to the Cyprus Pavilion an alternative range of discourses around cultural myths and absolute notions of identity, stressing the role of artists and cultural agents in challenging social realities.[26] Often, these discourses placed Cyprus in the lens of the broader center–periphery discussions, addressing the notion of the ambivalence of postcolonial modernity.

Panayiotis Michael's *I Promise, You Will Love Me Forever* was a subtle critique of the Cypriot 'present,' developed around notions of deception, heterogeneity, and illusive consciousness, nonetheless opening to the possibilities of constructing alternative worlds and trajectories for thought and action. Sharing the 2005 pavilion with Michael, Konstantia Sofokleous' short and uneasy animated films spoke of disorientation and otherness, and our need to create new worlds in order to deal with our human precariousness and vulnerability.[27]

The following show, *Old Earth, No More Lies, I've Seen You* in 2007, presented the work of Haris Epaminonda and Mustafa Hulusi—the only artist of Turkish Cypriot origin to participate thus far in the national pavilion. Again, the visual and textual topics emphasized fragments rather than wholes, uncertainties over absolute truths, and disruptions over continuities, reflecting the ambivalence that has dominated modernity, and certainly that of the Eastern Mediterranean periphery to which Cyprus belongs. Drawing on the writings of critical philosophy and literature, the show

Socratis Socratous, *Rumours*, 2009, Poster for the Cyprus Pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: Socratis Socratous.

explored the delicate semiologies perforating the artists' research, citing the critical transcript of an incomplete modernity that calls for new historical readings.[28]

The ambivalence of the Cypriot political sphere was a central feature in Socratis Socratous' *Rumours,* for the 2009 Pavilion. Through an elaborate series of installations, photographs, film, and staged performances, the work stood as a striking metaphor to illustrate the absurd politics of separation between the two ethnic Communities of Cyprus, and the cultural stereotypes these politics cater for domestically and in relation to the outside world.[29]As it negotiated notions of identity, history, culture, politics, conflict, and propaganda, it came to verify—via the great stir it caused locally—how the political space of this divided island diachronically provides fertile ground for the 'infestation' of rumors and twisted politics.

Christodoulos Panayiotou's work is best known for discursively exploring the forged narratives of history, while a substantial part of his research constitutes a critical investigation of hegemonic historiographies and dominant ideologies in his home country. In his solo exhibition *Two Days After Forever* at the 2015 Cyprus Pavilion, the artist, through an act of meticulous staging and adopting a multidisciplinary approach, articulated a critique of modernity's hyperbolic and aspirational fabric and its inconsistent notion of progress.[30]

8

Among the things these more recent approaches serve to highlight are the general and specific absurdities surrounding the notion of 'national representation' in the Venice Biennale, as well as the implausible individual and collective dreams it continues to

Christodoulos Panayiotou, *Untitled*, 2015, painting and gold on wood, 85 x 125 cm. *Two Days After Forever* – Cyprus Pavilion at the 56rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: Aurélien Mole.

Christodoulos Panayiotou, *2008*, 2008, shredded paper (Cypriot pounds), dimensions variable. *Two Days After Forever* – Cyprus Pavilion at the 56rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: Aurélien Mole.

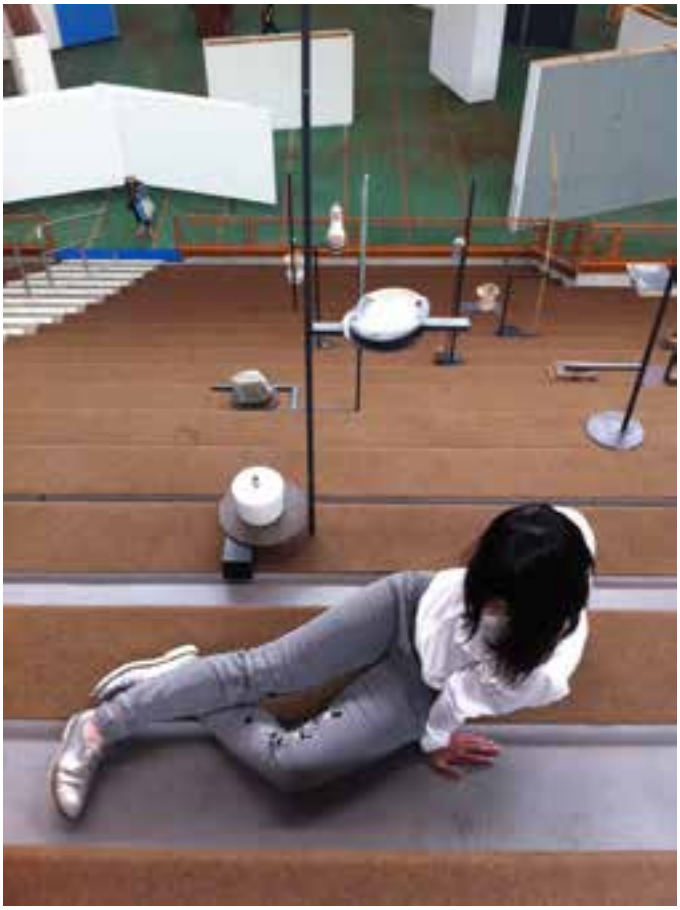
breed.[31] At the same time, Biennale directors have been tackling the notion of the 'national' as a problematic key of address in every new edition. Bice Curiger called it a "taboo" and a "great anachronism" in the globalized art world, so revealing and interesting for art at the same time.[32] Two years earlier, Daniel Birnbaum stated that while the format of national representation may seem obsolete, in reality it seems to work, providing a perfect platform to challenge notions of cultural and political identity.[33] The Venice shows, inside and outside the main exhibitions, are filled with artists who are often based outside their native countries, while national pavilions by now possess a substantial precedent of both 'native' and 'non-national' artists who critically challenge the national format itself, often in antagonism with the official positions (and histories) of the sovereign states and nations they are invited to represent. In 2013, Cyprus and Lithuania collaborated, co-commissioned and co-produced a joint pavilion, featuring a number of national and international artists of different generations.

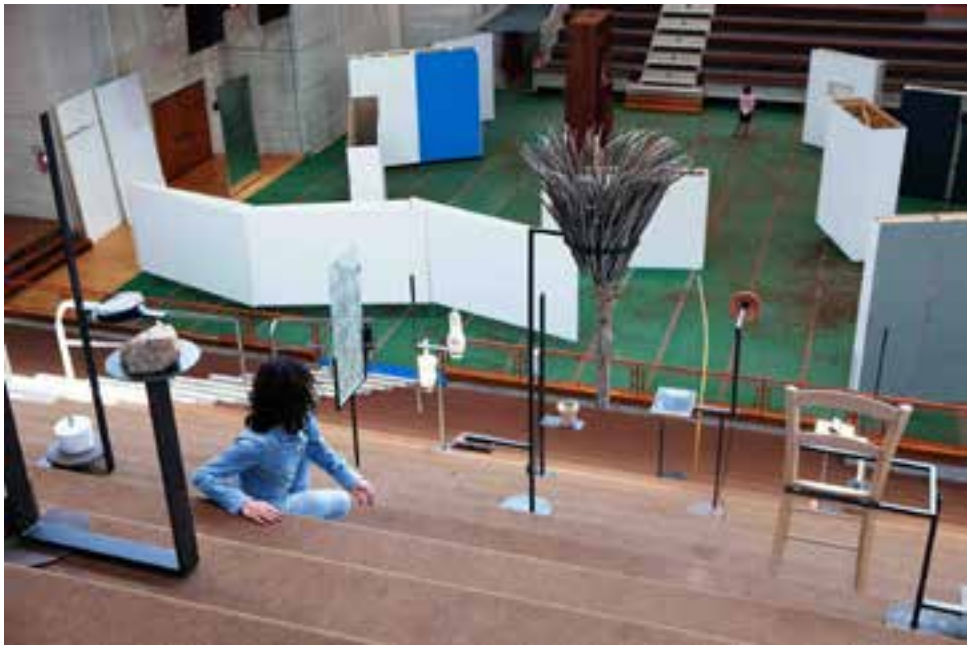
Although up to that point multinational presentations were common to the Venice Biennale, this was the first concrete example of two countries joining together to challenge the longstanding national format of the event.[34] Evidently, when it comes to tackling the polemics of national representation, it appears that such issues have so far been better articulated through the national pavilion exhibitions, rather than the official shows.

9

Indeed, the national remains substantial and relevant beyond the global centers where such debates become mainstreamed. As so many theorists have argued over the years, it may well be too soon to declare the "postnational moment." As Rebecca Bryant argued in the context of Cyprus, for instance, the postnational vision of the postmodern, globalized world did not *replace* the national but in fact *supplanted* it dialectically.[35] Within contemporary art, a biennial of this nature and scale offers something

Maria Hassabi, *Intermission*, 2013, live installation. (In the background: Phanos Kyriacou, *Eleven hosts, twenty-one guests, nine ghosts*, 2013, installation): oO -Joint Pavilion of Cyprus and Lithuania at the 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: Robertas Narkus.





Maria Hassabi, *Intermission,* 2013, live installation. (In the background: *Phanos Kyriacou, Eleven hosts, twenty-one guests, nine ghosts,* 2013, installation; and Gabriel Lester, *Cousins,* 2013, installation): oO - Joint Pavilion of Cyprus and Lithuania at the 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: ?

Untimely, Again: Christoforos Savva (1924–1968), 2019, installation view. Cyprus Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Photograph by: Rachele Maistrello.

both precious and powerful: a "social space" where "cosmopolitan, nomadic and local communities overlap," creating "new imaginaries."[36] This overlap can also create a space for the national, not as representation, but as critique.

An analysis attempting to situate the case of Cypriot art in the frame of cross-cultural survey beyond the 'West' inevitably returns to the big question of modernity as an unrealized project. It illustrates how this ambivalent space at the margins of Europe reflects the notional dichotomies between national-international, traditional-modern, East-West and local-global, asserting these paradoxical and non-linear relationships as key features of Cypriot postcolonial modernity and art. In its concluding reflections, it asserts the view that the 'contemporary problem,' in the Greek Cypriot art context, is essentially a 'problem of the modern.' Nonetheless, it is one that contains the potential for new understandings, through a multidisciplinary approach that assists the critical rethinking and reconfiguration of one's flustered history. This position raises again questions of sociopolitical agency in curatorial practice.

10

In the expanded field of production, the blurred boundaries between artist and curator force us to revisit the notion of authorship and renegotiate the distinctions between creativity and facilitation. In certain settings, both curatorial practice and the discussions around it have been exhausted to such an extent that the exhibition may no longer represent an absolute end, but merely a stage in the curatorial process. In other

cases, curatorial activity may concentrate purely on academic research. These interesting shifts are certainly symptomatic of the complex nexus of problems perforating the realm of contemporary art and culture, and the increased theoretical, historical, and analytical capacity required to deal with them effectively.
However, concentrating solely on alternative modes of curatorial activity and these broader notions of what constitutes an exhibition may weigh differently in places where fundamental discussions (aesthetic, historical, social, and political) are only just emerging. Thus, the ground to be covered by curatorial practice that delves into modernity and its *histories* remains vast; the experience of projects such as *Untimely, Again: Christoforos Savva (1924-1968)* at the Cyprus Pavilion in 2019[37]—a gesture that pointed among others to the need to understand and acknowledge the validity of Cypriot artistic modernity, as part of a multiplicity of artistic modernities, so frequently neglected in dominant narratives—serves to highlight this reality.

And while affirming the interdependence of contemporary curatorial practice and theoretical research, such surveys can also demonstrate how art, politics, nation, and modernity can be linked substantively through a curatorial project. This pairing certainly opens to a vast range of discursive and analytical potential for contemporary art, while possibly expanding the discipline's scope to cultural intervention on these and other loci of enquiry like gender, sexuality, class, and migration, consistently overlooked in peripheral sites throughout modernity. Extending the arguments of Edward Said and Stuart Hall on the need for contemporary historiography and theory to revisit the 'modern' in its cultural specificity, reconfiguring the modern moment as a historical category, the scope of curatorial practice within the convoluted dwellings of the postcolonial, postmodern periphery can entail a vision of practice with a transformative force.

Notes

1 'Republic of Cyprus' refers currently to the effectively Greek-Cypriot controlled south of the island.
2 Cyprus has been inhabited since the Stone Age, and over the centuries it was influenced by a variety of Eastern Mediterranean civilizations. However, the crucial point of reference for official Greek Cypriot historiography is the 14th century BC, when Mycenaean settlers arrived on the island. Another key period is the Byzantine era, connected to medieval Greece and the 'glorious' years of Christian Orthodoxy, and in the 19th and 20th centuries the founding of the Greek nation-state. For a thorough analysis, see Yiannis Papadakis and Mete Hatay, "A Critical Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Historiographies (1940s to the Present)," in *Cyprus and the Politics of Memory: History, Community and Conflict*, eds. R. Bryant and Y. Papadakis (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 27-50.
3 Research by social anthropologist Vassos Argyrou explores the ways in which Cypriots have become Western subjects, adding another layer to the already complex nexus of the colonial, but also the postcolonial condition. He argues that, even before the experience of British rule, a different kind of Western colonization took place on the island, whose effects were much more subtle and effective than political or economic domination; he calls it "symbolic domination," referring to a process whereby the West partly maintains its hegemony through others' recognition of its superiority. In this context, Cypriots tied themselves to a particular identity that could only be fulfilled through the objectified, superior authority of the West. See Vassos Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17; Vassos Argyrou, "Post-

script: Reflections on an Anthropology of Cyprus," in *Divided Cyprus Modernity, History, and an Island in Conflict*, eds. Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis and G. N. Welz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 216; Vassos Argyrou, "Independent Cyprus? Postcoloniality and the Spectre of Europe," *Cyprus Review* 22, no. 2 (Nicosia 2010): 43.
4 The first participation of the Republic of Cyprus took place in 1968, but it was not continuous. The country was absent from the 1970 edition, and in 1972 Cypriot artists were only accepted in one of the thematic international shows. In the aftermath of a turbulent 1974, Cyprus only resumed participation in 1986, only missing a consequent edition in 1995. From 1986, the national participation was organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture, with Eleni S. Nikita—cultural officer and art historian—holding the dual position of commissioner and curator until 2001.
5 Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity*, 177; Vassos Argyrou, "Is 'Closer and Closer' Ever Close Enough? Dereification, Diacritical Power, and the Specter of Evolutionism," *Anthropological Quarterly* 69 (1996).
6 Christoforos Savva (1924-1968), Giorgos Skotinos (b. 1937), George Kyriakou (b. 1940), Stelios Votsis (1929-2012), Costas Joachim (b. 1936), and Andreas Chrysochos (b. 1929).
7 Makarios III, one of the most iconic figures of the modern Cypriot state, was also Head of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. His dual position is an indication of the essential role the Church has had historically in the affairs of the island.
8 In the 1940s and 1950s, Makarios was actively supporting *enosis* (the Greek Cypriot idea of union with Greece), like many Greek Cypriot public figures and the majority of the Greek Cypriot population, including leftist groups. Following independence in 1960, Greek Cypriot Cypriotism became more closely associated with right-wing political elites with vested interests in independence, and immediately after 1974 it went as far as becoming the official state ideology. For extended analyses, see Caesar V. Mavratsas, "The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974–1995: Politics, social memory and identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20(4) (October 1997): 717–737; Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis, G. Welz, eds., *Divided Cyprus: Modernity, History, and an Island in Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
9 See Argyrou, "Independent Cyprus?", 43.
10 Robert Storr, "Show and Tell," in *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, ed. P. Marincola (Reaktion Books, 2007), 14–31.
11 Tony Spiteris, "Cyprus" (Commissioner's text), in *Catalogo Della XXXIV Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia [22 giugno-20 ottobre 1968]*, (Venice: Fantoni Arte grafica impr., 1968), 73–74.
12 As described in Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity*, 177; Argyrou, "Postscript: Reflections," 216; Argyrou, "Independent Cyprus?," 43.
13 Eleni S. Nikita, "Maria Loizidou: The Myth of Ariadne in Three Acts"; Efi Strouza, "The Myth of Ariadne in Three Acts," both in *Maria Loizidou: The Myth of Ariadne in Three Acts. Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 42th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art - La Biennale di Venezia*, eds. Eleni S. Nikita and Maria Loizidou (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture-Cultural Services, Pierides Museum of Modern Art, 1986).
14 Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).
15 Eleni S. Nikita, Commissioner's text in *Angelos Makrides, Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 43rd International Exhibition of Contemporary Art - La Biennale di Venezia*, eds. Eleni S. Nikita and Angelos Makrides (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture-Cultural Services 1988): 2.
16 Efi Strouza, "The Odyssey of Nikos Kouroussis", in: Nikita, E.S., Kouroussis, N. (Eds.), *Nikos Kouroussis: Odyssey*. *Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 44th International*

Exhibition of Contemporary Art - La Biennale di Venezia, (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Popular Bank, 1990a): 71.
17 Efi Strouza, "A Planetary Journey towards the Light," in *Theodoulos - Aperto '90* (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education, Cultural Services and Cyprus Popular Bank, 1990b), 25–26.
18 Paul Barolsky, *A Brief History of the Artist from God to Picasso* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2010), 45–58.
19 Eleni S. Nikita, "Post-Byzantine Imagery", in *Glavkos Koumides - Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 48th International Exhibition of Art - La Biennale di Venezia*, eds. Glavkos Koumides and Eleni S. Nikita (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, Cultural Services, 1999), 10–13.
20 Nikos Xydakis, "What was really precious—his form," in *Andreas Karayan - Personae. Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 49th International Exhibition of Contemporary Art - La Biennale di Venezia.* (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, Cultural Services, 2001).
21 Some indicative analyses in: James D. Faubion, *Modern Greek Lessons* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); Michael Herzfeld, "Transforming. Lives. Process and Person in Cypriot Modernity," in *Divided Cyprus,* 30–46; Christopher Hitchens*, Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger* (London, New York: Verso, 1997).
22 Argyrou, "Independent Cyprus?," 43; Argyrou, "Postscript: Reflections," 216.
23 Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity*, 176-177; Argyrou, *Closer and Closer*, 206.
24 Jusdanis' analysis is relevant. He argues that, especially in peripheral societies, modernization remains "incomplete," not because it deviates from the correct path, but because it can never faithfully duplicate Western prototypes: Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991, 1st ed.).
25 Following the 1974 military offensive, Turkey occupied about 37% of the island's territory and later, in 1983, established the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the north, which to this day has not gained international recognition.
26 It is worth noting that from 2003, a number of reforms were implemented by the organizing authorities (Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture), such as the establishment of an open competition for artists and the collaboration with independent curators and writers, internationally.
27 Chus Martínez, "Gravy Planet: One Can Only Think When One is Not Alone," in *Gravy Planet: A World Drawing by Panayiotis Michael and Konstantia Sofokleous. Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 51st International Exhibition of Art - La Biennale di Venezia*, eds. Chus Martínez, Louli Michaelidou, Sue Brownbridge (Berlin: Revolver, 2005), 20–24.
28 Denise Robinson, "The Risk of Art," in *Old Earth No More Lies I've Seen You: Haris Epaminonda, Mustafa Hulusi. Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 52nd International Exhibition of Art - La Biennale di Venezia*, eds. Denise Robinson, Jalal Toufic, Brian Dillon (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, Art Books International, 2007), 11–16.
29 Sophie Duplaix, Louli Michaelidou, eds., *Socratis Socratous: Rumours. Catalogue of the Cyprus Pavilion in the 53rd International Exhibition of Art - La Biennale di Venezia.* (Nicosia: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009).
30 Omar Kholeif, Christodoulos Panayiotou, eds., *Two Days After Forever - A Reader on the Choreography of Time. Christodoulos Panayiotou* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).
31 See Jan Verwoert. "Forget the National: Perform the International in the Key of the Local (and vice versa)! On the Experience of International Art Shows", in *Biennials and City-Wide Events, eds.* Dutton, S., Griffin, J., *(a-n The Artists Information Company*, Newcastle upon Tyne): 10–11.

32 Barnaby Drabble, "'We Are Working with Art Here': Bice Curiger on the Venice Biennale," *Metropolis M*, June 11, 2011, accessed April 27, 2020, http://www.metropolism.com/en/features/22642_we_are_working_with_art_here.
33 Sam Thorne, "Daniel Birnbaum talks about curating the Turin Triennial and his role as Director of the 53rd Venice Biennale," *Frieze*, January 1, 2009, 131.
34 The joint project of Cyprus and Lithuania in the 55th Venice Biennale, entitled *oO*, was conceived by curator Raimundas Malašauskas as a "sequencer"—a series of mental and physical pathways where "concepts are made, or discarded subsequently" by the visitor. The shows and events unfolded inside Palasport Arsenale, a Brutalist '70s building operating as Venice's municipal gym, and around the city. The Biennale jury conferred a special mention to Lithuania and Cyprus for "an original curatorial format that brings together two countries in a singular experience."
35 Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern: The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 5.
36 Maria Hlavajova, "How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to the Art Institution," in *The Biennial Reader*, 304.
37 Christoforos Savva (1924–1968) was a groundbreaking Cypriot artist whose wide-ranging international and local practice played a pivotal role in Cypriot society and the local artistic system that was being organized at the time. Savva died prematurely in 1968, having just represented Cyprus along with five other artists in its inaugural Pavilion at the 34th Venice Biennale. Beyond being a due homage to a major figure in Cypriot art, bringing his work back to Venice fifty years later provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the processes that have shaped the post-independence image of the new state and the course of its art. The project's first iteration was a large-scale survey show at the new State Gallery of Contemporary Art – SPEL, in Nicosia. Both shows were curated by Jacopo Crivelli Visconti, commissioned by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture and collaborating institution Point Centre for Contemporary Art, Nicosia.

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Venice Biennale: A Showcase for the American Debut in Global Art. American Storytelling Through Cultural Journals

Alessia Basilicata

In 1909, the American Federation of Art began to publish its journal, at the time called *Art Progress*. In the first publication there is a curious article: "Venice: An Example."[1] Before analyzing the text, a brief history of the American presence at the Venice Biennale: the national pavilion was constructed in 1930; previously American artists showed their artworks in the international rooms, with some exceptions, such as in 1920[2] when the USA had the opportunity to have a gallery for themselves due to the British choice to not send any artworks to Venice. The pavilion itself had a different kind of organization in comparison with the other national pavilions because it was the first one to be built by a private company; the other national pavilions were led by the government of the country that owned the pavilion. The American pavilion was the ninth to be built on the Giardini; the Grand Central Art Galleries, a nonprofit artists' cooperative, paid for the purchase of the land, design, and construction, running the pavilion until 1954 when it was sold to the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). Currently, the Guggenheim Foundation supervises the American pavilion working with the United States Information Agency, the US Department of State, and the Fund for Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions, while, in other countries, the ministry of culture chooses a curator to manage the pavilion for each edition. "Venice: An example" was not the first text where the Venice Biennale was quoted in the American cultural journal environment, but it is one of the major turning points of the American narrative about it.

In the text, Anna Seaton-Schmidt stressed the developing structure of the Venice Biennale in terms of the fact that some nations started to have their own space. The question that ends the article is literally, "Belgium set the good example. When will the United States erect her own galleries?"[3]. Clearly, the author is looking for the United States to attain a relevant position in the Venice Biennale, like the one where the most important European countries already held. Most of the pieces previously written about the International Exhibition of Venice were about artists who showed on that occasion. Indeed, the fact that an artist had the opportunity to exhibit in Venice became as relevant as an award won in other shows: it started from a simple quote in a necrology[4] to be one of the most important things to say about an artist's career.[56] The increase in interest is made evident by the development of articles about it in the journal *Brush and Pencil*. The periodical *Brush and Pencil* was founded in Chicago in 1897 by Charles Francis Browne; he served as editor until 1900 and was replaced by Frederick William Morton. Charles Francis Browne immediately declares his desire to create a monthly magazine, bringing together the main news about the American art world to facilitate American students in the field. The editor's purpose was to create a space for the expression of art scholars with the ambition of communicating the occasions and trends of art, especially the contemporary one.[7] Based on the idea that the founder had in mind the *Brush and Pencil* started to talk about the Venice Biennale with the point of view of helping artists find their way in the world: at the beginning, it

was all about how to find opportunities related to the International Exhibition like the call for someone to design the medals for the winners[8] and the price of the sold artworks.[9] Hence, during the first decade of the twentieth century the journal shifted its point of view from a purely economic one, always related to money, to the artistic level, highlighting artists who showed at the Biennale and won a prize or garnered some recognition.[10] In 1906, there was another turning point with the publication of several articles about the Venice Biennale where they explained the different steps of the process of building the International Exhibition: from the arrival in Venice of the American artworks[11] to the final awards.[12] It is also useful to analyze the change of the section for this type of information: from gossip pages to the ones dedicated to the exhibitions.

Beginning with the eighth Exhibition, another relevant point started to be discussed: the choices made by the committee. Writing about it is *American Art News* which explains the list of artworks that will be sent to Venice, alluding to some omissions.[13] There is a growing interest in the American representation in Venice; previously it was not even considered publishing something like the list of chosen artworks.
"This committee [...] had a difficult task, and their selection will of course be criticized. The list which follows of the artists selected and the works chosen to represent them will be found interesting to study."[14]
To reinforce this point, the same year they published one of the first actual reviews of the Venice Biennale: at this moment, Americans wrote about the works that won awards or the American artworks shown, while in this example the discussion was about the decoration, the curation, and the quality of the works presented.

> "Mr. Whitney Warren [...] speaks of the recently closed art exposition at Venice as follows: "There was a wonderful display, in general, of all countries at this exhibition, the finest, I think, of its kind I have ever seen of contemporaneous work, both as regards the works exhibited and the manner in which they were shown. [...] As regards the American exhibit, which was in a room by itself, so that it formed a unit, as did all the other countries, it was not up to the mark."[15]

The same year the *Art and Progress* started to write about the Venice Biennale with the article written by Anna Seaton-Schmidt, presenting a complete piece about the history of the Biennale as their first publication ever while other American cultural journals had already developed a proper narration of the Italian show.

> "The most important event in the art world of Italy since the great days of the Renaissance has been the establishment of an International Biennial Exhibition in Venice. When first proposed the artists of other countries pessimistically insisted that Italy had no modern art.[...] The erection, this year, of separate pavilions by Hungary and the Secession of Munich, have added much to the individuality of their displays, and have enabled the committee to devote many of the small galleries in the Palais to "one-man exhibits.""[16]

During the following decade, in which Europe would experience the First World War, *American Art News* improved its own storytelling about the Venice Biennale through the publication of a considerable number of pieces that followed and updated the public about each step of the exhibition: from the opening ceremony,[17] to the run of the exhibition[18] to a complete review.[19]

> "The figure work of G. A. Renoir does not deserve all the praise that his admirers claim for it. His "Man and Woman on Stairs," among others, are astoundingly

> insignificant and wear very unartistic clothes; Gustave Klimt, of Vienna, has some individuality, but also much bad taste and a somewhat unsane imagination, if we judge by his "Water Snakes" and "Three Ages."[20]

The attractiveness of the Venice Biennale intensified year after year: the reviews became more and more structured, pointing out every detail regarding the arrangement, quality of works, and relevance of them, as the former example makes clear. It was not only the Americans; the critics also took a serious look at everything shown because it was not only the presence of the United States that seemed important but also that the level of the artworks exhibited was the same as, or even better than, the European proposals. In a period of growth for the States as an economic power, they were clearly looking for a cultural position with the relevant European countries: it started with the desire to have a space and ended up with the desire to prove that they were as good or better than the other countries.

It is crucial to remember that the nations could exhibit as the owner of a pavilion or through the official invitation from the municipality of Venice. Therefore, the need for a national pavilion was growing stronger, considering that Americans did not exhibit during the tenth edition of the Venice Biennale even if an etching by Joseph Pennell was chosen to illustrate the invitation for the nations.[21] The absence of the American presence at the International Exhibition corresponded to a lack of articles about it, as they did not publicly register their absence. To emphasize this point, it is sufficient to analyze the feedback to the 1920 edition where the United States had, for the first time, their own galleries thanks to the absence of England which experienced difficulties to reacquire the artworks sent to Italy for the eleventh edition due to the World War I, the entire process required years to be done. The twelfth edition of the Venice Biennale was a crucial one for the United States, as Mrs. Whitney had the opportunity to make her dream come true: exhibiting a series of artworks to explain her native country. She had the plan in mind for several years, namely, the idea of creating a show of American art pieces to exhibit in Europe, in different cities, to make Europeans aware of the status of the art environment in America. At the genesis of this project, she had in mind the cities of Paris and London, the two locations that would reach the highest number of art enthusiasts, but, in the end, the Venice Biennale turned out to be the perfect background for her objectives. Hence, this is the proof of the relevance of the Venice Biennale, which was in a position to be considered the best way to start a European tour for Americans. Concurrently, the Americans were concerned with letting everyone know about their presence in Venice, which led to an extensive number of articles and pieces about it.

> "The exposition virtually has become a national celebration in Italy. It was founded in 1895 and held biennially until the outbreak of the World War. All the important European Governments have sent exhibits to it and many of them have constructed their own pavilions on the grounds. American artists will have ample space in the main Italian building."[22]

The quote is from *American Art News*, it demonstrates the matter changed from the desire to exhibit the highest number possible of artists and artworks to the relevance of having a proper space to arrange a full narrative of the country, which meant that the Venice Biennale was no longer only a location to exhibit art but also achieved a political dimension in which having a pavilion corresponded to one's international position. Further on, in the same journal, the Venice Biennale would be described as

"this important and beautiful display of the modern art of all civilized nations where art at all flourishes."[23]
In July, the official review was published: obviously a considerable part of it concerned the American experience, full of congratulations to Mrs. Whitney for her idea and her ability to assemble everything for the exhibition. An extensive part was dedicated to Italy: the writer justified the more in-depth look into the Italian section rather than to the other countries because of the large amount of artists and artworks from the country that hosted the event. In this case, every country was addressed with a few lines: from France that was not able to express itself with its choices to some other countries like Sweden, Poland, and the Netherlands that were able to communicate the sense of the nation through the artworks.[24]

Throughout the year, the commentary continued to flourish, which probably meant that *American Art News* had someone in Italy who was following the progression of the event over the course of several months. "The exhibition as a whole, when one realized the difficulties that pertain to any such undertaking, in the present unsettled conditions in Italy, surprised the visitor by its excellence. Not only was the modern art at Italy shown in its every manifestation in all its various schools of painting and sculpture, but that of Sweden, Switzerland. Holland, France, Russia, Poland and United States, and even the new Czecho-Slovakia, was adequately represented."[25] The report is more and more detailed: from the display,[26] the description of the works,[27] and an analysis of the sales.[28] Particularly interesting is the involvement of the outside critics: the Catholic Church advised people not to enjoy the Venice Biennale due to the presence of indecent artworks; one of the *American Art News* author's sarcastic answer was that they were providing free advertising for the International Exhibition since people were probably more excited to visit it because of the idea of seeing indecent artwork, even if in the religious museums you can also see indecent artworks.[29] In addition, *The American Magazine of Art* created significant feedback that was related to the envoys in foreign countries: for example, the London correspondent wrote several pieces on the English experience during the Venice Biennale.[30]

In the following years, the American cultural journals refined their way of informing the reader about the Venice Biennale: the relevance of it was growing worldwide, and every two years people could read about it. At the top of this process were *American Art News* and *The American Magazine of Art*, where during these decades they developed a way of reporting the feedback from Venice, starting from the comments made by Leila Mechlin.

> "Placed side by side it would be hard (or so it seemed to the visitor from "the States") to tell Italian from American- to differentiate in the matter of nationality."[31]

After all, when the United States obtained a permanent position in the Venice Biennale they faced a new problem: the national style. International critics agreed that any particular feature let American artworks be distinguishable from the other ones; this matter entailed a discussion on several American cultural journals, they were aware of the problem so the issue occupied their front pages for years. The States entered a new phase: from an occasion for artists to earn some money to the controversy of what the national element that distinguished them from the other countries was. Again, the importance of the Venetian event is shown: it brought up the need for the States to be part of European cultural life and, in a second moment, their lack of reflection about how they wanted to represent themselves and what, about themselves, they wanted to put in the foreground.

In the following years, up until the Second World War, Helen Gerard took the place as the most important envoy in Venice to give feedback about the events in Italy. She developed the *impressions* given by Leila Mechlin some years before, creating a new way of discussing the International Exhibition. Gerard's aim was to talk about her experience together with the description of relevant details: she talked about the music, the order of the pavilions, the opportunity to eat there. Her articles became longer over time, expressing every detail and adding illustrations of what she was talking about allowing people to experience the Venice Biennale even if they did not have the opportunity to fly to Italy. The focus stopped being the American presence, her purpose was to write a complete summary with a long list and analysis of the artworks.[32] Her physical presence in Venice helped her to be more aware of the comments about American art; consequently, she was a witness of the Italian king's compliments to Americans.[33]

Meanwhile, Italy started to find itself in a dark political situation, with several changes to the Venice Biennale (for example, the space for Italian art was increased at the expense of the others); Helen Gerard chose to not express any opinion about that, she just reported on the changes. On the contrary, her colleague, Philippa Gerry, who took Gerard's place after her death, declared her position clearly: "If the question concerns nationalism in art the answer is that even visitors to the Biennial who praised this picture (House in the Country by Domenico Cucchiari) for its sophisticated charm diluted their praises with regrets that the derivation of its quality was French while the author is Italian."[34] She put a lot of effort into destroying the idea of Italian art built up by Mussolini, describing how the imposition on Italian artists to create monumental artworks ended up with works not of the standard of quality that the Venice Biennale was used to. The hidden understanding is that Gerry showed how the Venice Biennale became so important as to convert itself into a political discussion; it was not only a space for artists to express themselves and try to make themselves well-known in the European art market but an event where political issues displayed themselves, such as controversy between countries.
The influence of the Venice Biennale in the States was revealed by the way Americans talked about it:

> "Internationalism, whether it be in the field of politics or art, is a fertile field for discussion. And discussion is worthwhile, if from it grows anything which applies to the problem of the present day. No country can hide itself behind barriers of prejudice without hurt to itself. What Venice is doing for the cause of art in Europe by holding a Biennial International Exhibition, Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh is doing for America with her annual International Show."[35]

They legitimized and supported their own International Exhibition comparing, it with the Venetian version even if the International Show in Pittsburgh was not able, in those years, to organize itself in the same satisfactory way as Venice.
Moreover, American cultural journals at the beginning of the twentieth century provided the opportunity for several women to write about art concerning the Venice Biennale, as most of the names quoted in this article belong to female authors.
In conclusion, through the analysis of the articles from several American cultural publishers it is unquestionable how the Venice Biennale grew in international relevance while the United States exploited it to reach a consistent position in the cultural environment.

Notes

1 Anna Seaton-Schmidt, "Venice: An Example." Art and Progress 1, no.1 (Nov. 1909): 12-13.
2 "Mrs. Whitney's Venice show,", American Art News 18, no. 29 (May 8, 1920): 1.
3 Seaton-Schmidt, "Venice: An Example." 12-13.
4 "The Necrology of Art," Brush and Pencil 15, no.6 (Jun. 1905): 317.
5 Edward Brush, "The Work of Vincenzo Alfano," Brush and Pencil 16, no.1 (Jul. 1905): 2-10, 14-16.
6 "Venice Exhibition Open," American Art News 8, no. 29 (Apr.30, 1910): 1.
7 Charles Browne, "Editors," Brush and Pencil 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1897): 45-46.
8 "Art Gossip from the Old Word," Brush and Pencil 11, no.2 (Nov. 1902): 151-152.
9 "Gleanings from American Art Centers," Brush and Pencil 12, no.4 (Jul. 1903): 294-295.
10 "Art News from the Old Word," Brush and Pencil 16, no.3 (Sep. 1905): 76-77.
11 "Exhibition: Past and to Come," Brush and Pencil 18, no.4 (Oct. 1906): 43.
12 "Exhibition: Past and to Come," Brush and Pencil 18, no.5 (Nov. 1906): 51-52.
13 "Pictures chosen for Venice," American Art News 7, no.24 (Mar.27, 1909): 1.
14 "Pictures chosen for Venice," American Art News 7, no.24 (Mar.27, 1909): 1.
15 "The Venice exposition," American Art News 8, no.5 (Nov. 13, 1909): 4.
16 Seaton-Schmidt, "Venice: An Example." 12-13.
17 "Venice Exhibition Open," American Art News 8, no.29 (Apr.30, 1910): 1.
18 "Venice Art Exhibit," American Art News 8, no.31 (May 14, 1910): 2.
19 "Venice Letter," American Art News 8, no. 34 (Aug.20, 1910): 2.
20 "Venice Letter," American Art News 8, no. 34 (Aug.20, 1910): 2.
21 "Venice Art Exhibition," American Art News 10, no.25 (Mar.30, 1912): 1.
22 "Coming Venice Exhibition," American Art News 18, no.11 (Jan.3, 1920): 3.
23 "Mrs Whitney's Venice show," American Art News 18, no.29 (May 8, 1920): 1.
24 "Venice International Display," American Art News 18, no.37 (Jul.17, 1920): 1-2.
25 James Townsend, "Am'n Pictures to Venice," American Art News 19, no.1 (Oct. 16, 1920): 7.
26 Townsend, "Am'n Pictures to Venice,": 7.
27 "The Venice Exhibition," American Art News 19, no.3 (Oct. 30, 1920): 1.
28 Edgar Storer, "Italian Letter," American Art News 19, no.12 (Jan, 1, 1921): 3.
29 "The Venice Exhibition," American Art News 19, no.3 (Oct. 30, 1920): 1.
30 Selwyn Britton, "London Notes," The American Magazine of Art 11, no.9 (Jul. 1920): 301-302.
31 Leila Mechlin, "Impressions of the International Exhibition of Venice," The American Magazine of Art 13, no.11 (Nov. 1922): 464- 470.
32 Helen Gerard, "Venice International in retrospective," The American Magazine of Art 14, no.7 (Jul. 1923): 62-71.
33 Helen Gerard, "Italy's King likes our art in Venice," The Art News 22, no.33 (May 24, 1924): 1,4.
34 Philippa Gerry, "The Venice Biennial," The American Magazine of Art 29, no.8 (Aug. 1936): 507-512,553.
35 "Pictures from the Pittsburgh International Exhibition," The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art 11, no.2 (Feb. 1924): 41- 42.

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On the Biennale's Ruins? Inhabiting the void, covering the distance*

Marco Baravalle

Too much love and friendship connect me to many people working for and around Venice Biennale. Too much admiration connects me to many that thanks to La Biennale made Venice a place to come back to instead of a "once-in-a-lifetime tourist destination. Not light-heartedly these pages will go down as an exercise of speculation and critique.I am participating in the uncertainty of those people risking to lose their jobs, watching their business fail, not getting their contracts renewed, being unable to access the already miserable existing welfare measures. Considering the earnings in monetary terms: room attendants, janitors, technicians, workers, freelancers, researchers, teachers, journalists, tourist-guides, artists, architects, curators, performers, etc. will – more or less – lose something due to a possible (yet hopefully unlikely) cancellation or postponed events programmes linked to the various departments of La Biennale.

Today Venice Biennale appears as a lifeline for the whole city's financial situation. It must be acknowledged that the Venetian art Foundation did not react to this crisis as some important U.S public art institutions did, firing part of their staff or erasing their educational department. The Venice Biennale Foundation did not cancel any of its planned events: at present everything is postponed to September. Good news indeed! Yet facing Covid19 pandemic could be the chance for a radical rethinking of the social role of the arts and art institutions instead of the mere desperate attempt to hold on.

Populist neoliberal mayor of Venice Luigi Brugnaro, for his part, responds to the pandemic following the well known recipe of the shock economy: once the emergency is over, the motto will be "as before, more than before", meaning: more tourism, more hotels, more cruise ships, more cuts to public services, more events to make up for the the time lost.

I cannot predict the future, I don't know if anything will ever be as before. For sure something will definitely change. In two, three or four years – maybe once Covid19 vaccine is available – things will go back to "normal" at least for a while until "the next big one", the next global epidemic. "Normal" meaning: more than half a million visitors largely flying in to Venice from all over the world, territorial branding, real estate rents parasitizing the art sector and the collective symbolic capital of the city, blue chip art galleries influencing artistic choices with their financial firepower, frenetic networking at overcrowded poor-quality-drinks parties, crazy deadlines making it impossible for workers to meet safety standards, massive use of unpaid or underpaid labour, etc. I do not know if we'll get back to normality. Yet, if that is the normality, I hope we won't.

Reflecting on a different Venice Biennale is no easy task. La Biennale is a complex machine the International Art Exhibition together with the Cinema Film Festival being only the most visible moments of the overall activity of the Foundation organised in seven departments: Art, Architecture, Cinema, Theatre, Dance, Music and the ASAC (the historical Archive for contemporary art).

Even if my main object analysis here is Venice Biennale – specifically referring to the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions – at the time of the present crisis I want to highlight some issues that could be relevant in rethinking large scale exhibitions in general, or at least for those situated in small and medium size cities.The former not being a Eurocentric position, it is actually based on the fact that the diffusion of the format of the neoliberal art event is common to many cities in the era of rampant globalization – as largely analyzed in the last decades –[1] Venice being the first of its kind only. The last twenty years of Venice Biennale almost all under the presidency of Paolo Baratta, are considered as a kind of leftist management masterpiece. In a nutshell: Baratta and his team were able to lift La Biennale out of both a financial and positioning crisis. They did it not following blindly the classical neoliberal recipes. Actually they alternated between cuts and recruitments. For example: in 2009 La Biennale decided to outsource a few dozens of workers mostly employed as room attendants, while in recent years it developed a policy of massive recruitment bringing its full-time staff to the considerable number of 111 employees. Doing so between 2009 and 2016 La Biennale got rid of older, less

qualified, unionized workers, making space for younger, more flexible, more qualified and not unionized labor force. It did so updating the tasks of some traditional professional roles: room attendants were partly replaced by the so called "active catalogues" – workers in the function both of overseers and cultural mediators. Furthermore, to avoid the generalized use of illegal employment by many national pavilions, La Biennale invited all National Participations to meet at least Italian labor-rights standards or better.

Baratta renewed the formula of the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions: he increased the use of the Arsenale space, imposed annual alternation of International Art and Architecture Exhibitions, intensified the activities of the Foundation and reduced what were not *national participations* or *collateral events* to a single curator's exhibition. Doing so Baratta was able to dramatically improve the Foundation's financial performance. At the same time he programmatically insisted on two main strategies. First, he rejected any easy managerial rhetoric to the point of suppressing the marketing department. La Biennale, for example, defines its audience as "visitors" to convey the highly individual and unique experience of a visit as opposed to its events being reduced to mere products. This attitude though, despite presenting itself as anti-managerial, is in reality a very common marketing strategy. Second: Baratta proudly reaffirms the complete intellectual autonomy both from the State and from the commercial art circuit for the institution he represents together with the chosen curators or department directors. It could definitely be discussed to what extent this autonomy does exist. Nevertheless the main point in the hands of the Foundation remains its growing financial autonomy due essentially to La Biennale's exponential growth as an event. Like this assuming a good market performance immediately translates into intellectual autonomy. Not to be too ideological, in a country like Italy – where politicians are not shy about using the culture as an opportunity for cronyism and consensus building – such a point has its own weight. If a relatively effective independence from the state interference may be true for what concerns the curators' exhibitions – Italian participation still being often damaged by direct ministerial management – when referring to Biennale's autonomy from the market one could argue that although La Biennale is not a fair, the production money of global commercial galleries, and the millions of euros raised by the selected curators coming from different donors, do have a direct impact on what is shown in the end. The point is: if not now, then when should we try to push for a radical transformation of art institutions? If not now, then when should we try to abandon the paradigm of growth attached to the neoliberal concept of the event? I have already made the attempt to articulate a critique of the *neoliberal event* as opposed to the event conceived as a radical rupture of linear temporality.[2] The negative effects of a typical neoliberal art event – some of them briefly mentioned above questioning the "normality" of large scale exhibitions – were already evident enough before Covid19 crisis to desire something different. The pandemic simply accelerates the need for a structural challenge to this paradigm.

In the next few years, tourism, mobility, art logistics will radically change. How do we want to transform what Gregory Sholette refers to as our *bare art world?*[3] We should not leave neoliberalism free to operate its own adjustments, we should not permit it to go back and operate in favour of the business and the markets: an endless spiral of accumulation at the expenses of hyper-mobile crowds, with privilege, exploitation, precarity and poverty cohabit and overlap. Now we can think of something new!

Do we really want to move towards the nightmare of a rarefied scenario made of online auctions, where art objects prices rise together with their status of safe-haven assets; online art schools with same fees and debts yet easier discipline under the slogan of innovation + individualization; where the contemplation *dispositif* of the white cube shifts from the ritual to the medical becoming in the name of social distancing a space even more exclusive than before: the reassuring sanitized space ready to welcome the rich global elite of potential buyers.[4]

This pandemic is but the current precipitation of a larger and older crisis that makes this about capitalism as a peculiar ecological regime.

Years ago David Quammen wrote epidemics are becoming more and more frequent because of the increasing pressure on the ecosystem and the increasing violence of extractivism.[5] A violence that grew parallel to the development of neoliberal globalization. This implies several considerations. First: the need to claim for a process of global art system degrowth is not a consequence of Covid-19 outbreak, as something deeply connected to the need of putting an end to extractivism dynamics as recently expressed by millions of people marching in the streets for climate justice.[6]

Second: we are facing the uncomfortable task of embarking in a critique to globalization and art globalization that does not end up by fueling a nationalistic or neo-reactionary rhetoric together with its aesthetic companion, provincialism. At the same time we can not accept the simplistic idea of going back to local, to small homogeneous communities, to the dream of an Arcadic proximity that could not be reached if not at the expense of the vast majority of human and non-human beings.

Nonetheless, it is time to recognize that the late 90's "great leap forward" in the art world – whose advantages even some of us may have enjoyed too with its utopian image of a world as an interconnected archipelago of dialoguing differences like for example the powerful assemblage Glissant-Obrist-Utopia Station – was indeed realized. Yet this achievement was the result of a plan based on the nature of capitalism where – borrowing Maurizio Lazzarato's expression in a recent public talk and insisting on the metaphor of the archipelago – "a few Islands of abstract labor are surrounded by an ocean of exploitation" and – I my add – extractivism.

We need a social, political and financial shift.

We also need new narrations.

We need art spaces to be inhabited by new epistemologies.

La Biennale – despite being on an island – can't change for the best in absence of a complete overturn of national Italian and European answers to the present crisis. It will be almost impossible for La Biennale to engage in a serious process of degrowth and of re-imagination of its phenomenology and its relationship with the city and with the world if European institutions will once again opt for austerity measures and strict fiscal impositions. In other words if Europe *will fail again,* if it will not abandon the logic of debt to reinforce welfare measures towards a universal basic income we will have likely terrible outcomes in terms of spread of poverty and reinforcement of nationalist rhetoric. We need an overturn out of austerity measures. that could also allow La Biennale to be less dependent on the influence of private capitals. Because the revenues – especially those of the International Art Exhibition and the Cinema Festival – are too important to keep the whole machine running. Because even if the International Architecture Exhibition has considerably grown through time, its accounts are still structurally in red, and its sustainability is granted by the impressive International Art Exhibition's financial performance. Because royalties are important. Because more *national participations* and more *collateral events* imply more hype, more rent, more work, more job opportunities. In the last twenty years young labor force was able to build a life project around the big event of La Biennale: an army of freelancers, small business, cooperatives of room attendants, technicians, workers, deputy curators, location managers etc.[7] In Marxian terms this should be the time for this technical composition to turn into a political composition, time to claim for quarantine income[8] and universal basic income, to avoid a catastrophic race to lowering prices. For this reason European policies are crucial to determine if art workers will be forced to an individual competition/struggle for the survival – not having time or energies to struggle for a radical change of art institutions – or if they will be given the basic conditions to organize themselves to open up the crisis of the neoliberal apparatus and not to be doomed to sink with it.

More public investments in contemporary art is not enough. Money should also be invested in a different way.[9] If in the next few years La Biennale will have to face a forced or – less likely – chosen degrowth, in a climate of austerity the army of freelancers will be the first to pay its cost while the shameful group of Venice based space-renting agencies under disguise of a cultural institutions will probably survive through a drastic cut of the cost of labour in the wait for better times to come.

While we all should be working in the direction of a general shift outside of the neoliberal model, it is yet urgent to start a collective reflection on how La Biennale and other institutions in the global art circuit should radically be transformed.

Few years ago in one of my articles I addressed the issue of what I defined as alter-institutionalism. I divide *alter-institutions* in two main categories: *governmental alter-institutions* – often temporary and created by artists – and *autonomous alter-institutions* – founded by artists together with other people during social movements outbreaks often in occupied urban spaces, abandoned institutes or old archives. I also tried to list a series of challenges towards alter-institutionalism isolating seven key problems: capture, subjectivation, governance and juridical structure, political geography and decolonization, binarism between slowing down

and acceleration, queering, radical (imaginary) economy.[10] And even if also official art institutions – at least the public ones – with various degree of success or failure can deliberately choose to trigger processes of self alter-institutionalization (i.e L'Internationale, a confederation of European museums) it is no time to rely on those institutions' goodwill. For example: La Biennale considerably developed its educational activities (large part of the audience beeing school pupils visiting the exhibition during the fall), it created a certain temporal continuity of activities (i.e. Biennale College or the Carnival for Kids) and at the same time it invested some energies in promoting projects in Venetian mainland most of the time considered less appealing than the charming territory of the islands. We have the picture of an institution that is certainly not dogmatically for-profit or event-oriented, especially in its effort to meaningfully interact with the city and the regional school system (granting very democratic access standards). Yet, paradoxically, the same reformist nature of its governance makes it work as an important ideological function in the neoliberal Venice territory, providing to it a critical extension, a space where art is free to express its critical subjective potential in a progressive corporate environment, while at the same time avoiding any direct role and real attempt to criticize tourism extractivism. Quite a good (public) company, in a very bad city (!)

Under this perspective Venice Biennale appears as an exception in relation to its context: the city of Venice being undoubtedly socially impoverished by forty years of neoliberalism is today perceived as a mere beneficiary of Venice Biennale's presence more than its serious possible interlocutor. Nonetheless I consider Venice social impoverishment – the progressive flight of its inhabitants and their homogenization in terms of class and race – as the main reason for re-imagining a possible relationship of La Biennale within the context of the city. It would be too simplistic to reduce Venice to a city contended on the one side by a reactionary profit-oriented lower class mostly employed in commerce and tourism, and on the other side the petty bourgeoisie of the left nostalgic of its declining prestige. If it is true that – from a social point of view – the last years were marked by episodic and week social attempts to correct La Biennale's policies (i.e.in 2009 with the protest against the externalization of a few dozens of room attendants, and in the more recent years, the campaign against La Biennale monopolistic use of Arsenale); it is also true that the image of La Biennale as an oasis in the desert of the city seems to me pretty much informed by a neoliberal gaze. A gaze recognising almost total agency to corporate subjects, denying it to civil society; a gaze refusing to acknowledge what Venice is still able to express in terms of social movements, self-organization and resistant forms of life.

Only a social mobilization will be able to modify this institutional mentality. The revolution of art institutions could only be initiated by, and will only march parallel to a much wider revolution. A revolution able to make significant steps forward on different yet interconnected grounds: the achievement of a universal basic income and new housing rights; a serious commitment on climate justice towards the end of extractivism; the reconstruction of a democratic health-care system damaged by decades of privatizations; the end of gender, race, class and species asymmetries; all elements that structure and permeate the current social, financial and political order.

As art workers we must be aware that we have a role to play, yet this is not a challenge to be faced from within the short horizon of art professionalism. That being said, the question is: in what direction should we push to open up the crisis of the neoliberal art event to the point that it will turn into something different? I'd like to suggest a few points trying to start answering this question focusing on the two cases of Venice Biennale International Art and Architecture Exhibitions – with absolutely no ambition of completeness and with no illusion of universality.

1. The Context.
From the creative to the caring city

We all know how misleading the "creative city" definition is just another name for the old neoliberal city. Here the subcategory of art, in a mono-dimensional way, is understood as a booster for financial growth. Extensive literature proves that the trickle down effect does not really work and Venice is no exception. As mentioned above Venice Biennale represents an important professional opportunity for thousands of resident cultural workers, yet the ones who benefit the most from it are landlords or private foundations renting spaces to a plethora of "collateral events". Though allowing some people to resist in the historical city centre, La Biennale is actually attracting are not new residents, but new capitals and it represents much of a bigger opportunity for real estate rent than for labor. Despite its cultural character, Venice Biennale's underlying logic is no different than other tourism-based events, for example in the way it increases tourist

apartments causing the loss of houses for residents. The result is a unique marvelous city with a lot of art and a very little life: the perfect context where to base private art foundations linked to global capitals – as it usually happens.

Covid19 pandemic invites us to rethink art institutions and art practices: not more boosters for uncontrolled financial growth, but useful aesthetic/political dispositifs to turn our cities into *caring cities.* The urge is to re-imagine forms of common life and of commonality out of the techno-authoritarian turn coming along with social distancing. Art must even more embrace the challenge to place at the center of the political scene the body - human, posthuman, non-human -. It can do so by abandoning the global gatherings of networking audiences that characterize large-scale exhibitions, big museums, international fairs, etc. I do not foster a return to classical avant-garde, nor do I intend the role of art as that of a possible guide for society. What I envision is imagination and critical speculation going together with a material process of transformation of the institutional art field: a process where both autonomy – as the subjective power of the encounter with an artwork – and heteronomy – as the process of erosion of art disciplinary borders into non-art and into the social dimension – are mobilized.

2. The Event. From Exhibition to Habitation

The Biennale should not think of itself primarily as an event centered around an exhibition. I love exhibition as a form of language, and I am not suggesting that shows should be taken out of the equation – it would be an absurdity and a loss. My question is: do we really need a machine attracting tens of thousands of people for the opening, and then having to work hard to create an audience for the remaining period of the event? Do we really think it essential to have such a large number of artists invited to produce pieces for the exhibition? Could we not rather think of a *Curator's Exhibition* where the curator invites the artists – even in smaller numbers – to intervene in and outside the main venues of the Giardini and the Arsenale with projects having a longer duration, i.e. two years? The idea far from wanting La Biennale turn into a huge residency project rather intends to shift attention from *"the showing"* to *"the inhabiting"* allowing a new space-time dimension for projects that want to engage with the context and that until now too often result in paternalistic and unattended social counseling. This model could also limit the influence of directly sponsored-by-private galleries object-driven art – with no intention on my side to exalt any easy anti-object rhetoric. It could also favour the interactions between Art and Architecture participants. Following what La Biennale recently did for the International exhibition inviting the" national participations" to follow the themes proposed by the curators one could imagine inviting the Countries to think of long-term projects. The result would at least be a permanent use of the pavilions and of L'Arsenale spaces which at the moment remain closed and inaccessible for six months every year. This model, ideally, could also generate a labor force less obsessed by the frenetic deadline-fever of the neoliberal event – by its nature concentrated on *the vernissage* and *the finissage* – and it would generate professional opportunities distributed in time and open to encourage collaboration between local workers, architects, artists, curators, etc.

One could argue this proposal's contradictions. For example one may say it would favour the diffusion of La Biennale's brand through the space-time matrix of the city as a sort of deeper and larger form colonization by a powerful cultural institution. Yet sadly this already happened, an emblematic example is that during the period of the Exhibitions the red lion of La Biennale looms on almost every door in the city. Its corporate colonization will only be over if the Biennale will acquire a totally different social function. In the meantime the International Art *"Habitation"* should limit the earnings linked to the real estate rent by regulating the market of hospitality spaces for the exhibitions. Hypothetically speaking imposing a limitation i.e. 100 square meters could not be rented for more than 1.500 euros per month. This would bringing several results: on the one side the warehouse or building owners, often families, would still earn more than a standard two-years rent contract; on the other side, big private agencies and fake location managers disguised as cultural institutions would have less margin for their speculations and local activities would find more spaces to let at cheaper prices. Last but not least, cheaper location prices will allow access to the city to more independent organizations and would free resources to be directly invested in the projects. Two more points on this proposal. First point: would artists still be interested in coming to Venice? The way I see it, artists more than ever would, if La Biennale were able to lead a change of perspective to renew the intuition of its founders. After all, since we are facing a wider local-and-global crisis, wouldn't it be time to renew the criteria by which certain cities got outstanding on the

Kaya, *On the Biennale's Ruins?,* 2020

world's map of culture? Second point: Venice is a city with a small and quite homogenous population where social art experiments too often result as boring and empty rituals. Venice population is used to art and not so available to be the object of paternalistic aesthetic practices. So would the idea of an International Art Exhibition working on the more diverse and inhabited Venetian mainland be enough to save this project from long-term boredom and frustration or would it be destined to fail? This is indeed a real concern. To increase projects in Mestre and Marhgera would definitely be important but we should not miss the main point. The challenge would exactly be to create a different framework for social art and for art in general to push the Biennale – together with its artists, curators and organizations – out of its comfort zone. To push them out of the repeated schemes of social art as on-demand assistance to subaltern subjectivities, out of the idea of participation and dialogue as mediation between conflicting social actors. To push them out of the exotic search for local wonders. The challenge La Biennale should offer to the world of art could be to invite some of its members to inhabit for two years the void caused by decades of neoliberal policies. To eventually acknowledge that this void is full of resistances, instead of trying to fill it up by creating stereotypical local figures to address to. Like many other touristic cities, before Covid-19 Venice was full of people and empty of life, now the people are gone and all we are left with is life regulated by social distancing. A title – or a program – needed today could be "Inhabiting the void, covering the distance".

3. Mobility. From entrepreneurial nomadism to radical permanence

Radical permanence intends to be a critique to a certain regime of mobility. It sums together the right-to-move and the ability to collectively organize permanence, to build alter-institutions, to create autonomous cultural and democratic infrastructures in the places we live in. Today's art system is designed to incessantly move us from one place to the other and better by plane. Our ecological footprint as a community casts a shadow

over our cultural impact. The ecological un-sustainability of the art world alone should impose a change. Yet this is not the only problem. The majority of us move – or better – have no choice but to be moved. We recognize ourselves as a nomadic superficially sympathetic often ruthless international community of art workers. Besides the necessary consideration that many different art worlds exist with their different value systems, it is time to admit that our deterritorialized community model is part of the problem and not part of the solution. Some, thanks to the arts, are able to move away from countries and contexts where dictatorships and authoritarian regimes are in place, and that's a good thing. Still, as individualized entrepreneurs of ourselves while we move – to the next project, to the art school, to the residency, to that biennial or that museum – the old and new neoliberal art institutions together with policy-makers and highly-mobile financial capitals are able to design and dictate urban processes. A power capable of long-term transformations of the places we live in, capable of designing the development of physical territories permanently influencing the life of millions of people around the world through gentrification, real estate speculation, urban renewal. Despite the growing popularity and success of critical thinking, activist art and social practices, we lost – did we ever have it? – our grip on permanence. We stay for too short in far too many places. Our good intentions feed the apparatus of neoliberal governance: dialogical and relational practices accepted with enthusiasm to reduce participation to a mere mediation of the conflict. We need to participate in conflict instead, not to quell it. Things that require time, commitment, organization, care abandoning any paternalistic temptation. We do feel the tension towards society. Yet this tension is effectively realized only at the moment of the mass social movements' outbreak. We must rethink permanence, duration, mobility. We must rethink engagement with our context in political terms. Radical permanence is made of a different temporal matrix and of course it involves a different relationship to space, one that is both within and outside the borders of the protected space of the art, representing at the same time the affirmation of its autonomy and a threat to its existence.

Radical permanence does not mean absence of mobility. On the contrary, it is its essential feature: the right-to-move for everybody despite its race, class or gender. Mobility should be conceived from a totally different political point of view, an ecological one. No interest in following the art circus of privilege. Yet, in a moment where in some parts of Italy we are not allowed to cover a distance of more than 200 meters away from our homes, we feel the urge to disobey social distancing restrictions. Radical permanence aims at building safe permanent spaces for bodies of all kinds to move together starting from within the same building, to the same block, to the neighborhood, to the city and so on.

Radical permanence claims for the legitimacy of democratic forms of life, rejects the permanence of the state of exception, rejects techno-authoritarianism and a life mediated by proprietary digital-technologies and moves towards the founding of new alter-institutions.

Radical permanence does not bow to the nostalgia for the local, nor does it embody primitivism of any kind. According to its name and program, accelerationism very quickly turned towards a neo-reactionary teleology. We think that creation and the use of free digital infrastructure is a key task. While forced digital mediation of the body is a political tragedy, the coding of digital space against global capitalist platforms should be taken very seriously. The digital infrastructure for radical permanence should be a tool to break the process of individualization of people, to make them gather and come together in the physical space, it should aim to organize political common encounters as opposed to tear us apart into the depoliticized isolations of individual time.

Can a Biennale do anything about it? For sure assuming the responsibility to solve this problem would really go beyond its prerogatives. Yet a Biennale could at least incorporate the concept of sustainable mobility where the exponential growth in the number of artists, national participations, collateral events and visitors would not equate success; it could hint certain kinds of art practices that engage on longer terms with communities not to keep on feeding real estate rent and, last but not least it could allow free access to all Venetian residents.

4. The Archive. From La Biennale's history to the histories for the Future Biennale

Since the late 90s it has been impossible to resist the archival impulse. The end of socialism brought with it the end of history – a joke compared to the end of the conditions for history itself to be that comes with the current climate crisis. The archive has represented the narrative matrix to re-assert an epic of art beyond postmodern pastiche, neo-lyricism and the aesthetics of art as commodity. If history got disqualified then the archive helped artists to put back their feet on the fertile

ground of histories – in the plural – abandoning teleological violence and reflecting on the relationship between past, present and future.

The ASAC – the historical archive of contemporary art – is one of the departments structuring the Biennale's Foundation. It can count on different fonds documenting the history of La Biennale and a library. La Biennale has already affirmed its will to develop the ASAC adding a research section besides the chore archiving mission. Good news indeed, when also followed by important financial investments and the creation of a research team whose purpose goes beyond the present mere "valorization" of archived items and propaganda. During the last years the digitalization of the archive has accelerated, yet access is still regulated by rigid corporate standards. If La Biennale intends the archive to become a productive source of knowledge, new access criteria should be put into place starting with the possibility of free reproduction/use of documents in case of proven non-commercial use. The Archive being today the only department of La Biennale permanently open to the public represents the ideal interface for the Institution with both the academic world and with the city, since it preserves the precious memory of a relationship. Rich in history the Archive should become the source of counter-histories going beyond the ideological univocal narration of the neoliberal art institution: an archive as a untamed memory of an institution: no more the cornerstone of its identity, but a mutating virus mining its epistemological normality.

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1 A recent example of the neoliberal framework structuring and (at the same time) threatening large scale exhibitions, is the case of Documenta 14 (2017). Its financial difficulties brought to light a double critique. First, the critique of the curator's idea to bring the exhibition to Athens as a way to increase the institution's cultural capital by "colonising" a city hit by austerity. Second, the curator himself and the CEO accused the City and the Hessian government of trying to use the bankruptcy as an excuse to reterritorialize Documenta in Kassel. Implicitly Szymczyk denounces the stakeholders preference towards an exhibition working as a tourism promotion agency rather than as a global critical tool.
2 Marco Baravalle, *For a Critique of The Neoliberal Event. Picasso in the Dispositif of Urban Souvenir Formation*, in "Keep Reading Giving Rise. Rogelio López Cuenca", Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2019.
3 "An art world where the interweaving of art and capitalism is self-evident". See Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and resistance: Activist art and the crisis of capitalism.* London: Pluto Press, 2017.
4 See Brian O'Doherty's reading of the white cube as a ritualistic space for western bourgeoise. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside The White Cube. The Ideology Of The Gallery Space,* Lapis Press, San Francisco, 1986.
5 David Quammen, *Spillover,* W. W. Norton Company, 2013.
6 In Venice, on September the 7th 2019, the activists of the Venice Climate Camp occupied for six hours the red carpet of the Venice Film Festival. The occasion was filmed and became part of Oliver Ressler's "Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: Venice Climate Camp" (2019)
7 We don't have clear numbers concerning how many art workers live in Venice, but in an historical city where more or less 50.000 residents are overwhelmed by more or less 30.000.000 of tourists per year, even a few thousand people make a difference, especially if they are not directly employed in the tourism industry.
8 The Quarantine income is a campaign initiated in Italy by an independent union called ADL (Associazione Difesa Lavoratori) after the pandemic outbreak. It demands urgent welfare measures and has quickly gained national diffusion. Many workers from the art and entertainment business joined the campaign.
9 If a prominent figure of the art system like Hans Ulrich Obrist recently advocated for an updated New Deal program to support the arts in this difficult time of ours (on a smaller scale, the Swiss curator's appeal could be compared to the recent letter by Mario Draghi, the former president of the ECB who, strong with his status of guardian of austerity, dared to ask for drastic war-socialism-style measures), public support should be addressed in the direction of a radical rethinking of the role of culture in contemporary society. It should also be noted that even if la Biennale's activities are largely supported by the different earnings resulting from ticket sales, sponsorships, royalties, etc. (for a total of €26.107.000, according to the official budget of La Biennale 2019) the institutional balance sheet also includes €19.192.000 of public contributions for the same year. So, if it is more than likely that earnings will drastically decrease in 2020, a further public financing of the institution would be acceptable on the condition of an overall recalibration of its purposes. First of all, the Venetian foundation should not cut its labor costs, calculated in 2019 around €7.000.000. Still this would not be enough as this sum only represents a partiality of the value of labor generated around the various events,

a labor whose costs are covered by dozens of organizations landing in Venice on the occasion of the different cultural activities. The official budget of La Biennale di Venezia is available online in the section "Trasparenza", on the foundation website: https://www.labiennale.org/it/trasparenza

10 Marco Baravalle *Alteristituzioni. Tra governamentalità e autonomia.* In Opera Viva. https://operavivamagazine.org/alteristituzioni-e-arte/*

Marco Baravalle, *On the Biennale's ruins? Inhabiting the void, covering the distance,* translation by Gabriella Riccio, published online by the Institute of Radical Imagination, May 2nd 2020
https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/2020/05/02/on-the-biennales-ruins-inhabiting-the-void-covering-the-distance-by-marco-baravalle/

The Institute For Radical Imagination, is a group of curators, activists, scholars and cultural producers with a shared interest in co-producing research, knowledge, artistic and political research-interventions, aimed at implementing post-capitalist forms of life. https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/

Marco Baravalle is a member of S.a.L.E. Docks, a collective and an independent space for visual arts, activism, and experimental theater located in what had been an abandoned salt-storage facility in Dorsoduro, Venice. Founded in 2007, its programming includes activist-group meetings, formal exhibitions, screenings, and actions. In addition to managing the diverse programming at S.a.L.E. Docks, Baravalle is currently a research fellow at INCOMMON (IUAV University of Venice). His fields of research include the relationship between art, theatre and activism, creative labor, gentrification, and the positioning of art within neoliberal economics.

Venice, the Biennale and the Bees
Vittoria Martini

On March 4, 2020, the Venice Biennale had been timely in its postponement of the opening date of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, from May to August 2020. I remember—it seems like a lifetime ago—that it had been the first concrete perception of the dramatic reality we were just barely entering. Instead, a few days ago, the news came of the definitive postponement of the Biennale of Architecture to May 2021 and of the 59th International Art Exhibition to April 2022.[1] A piece of news that arrived, among others, among those of European museums that are cautiously reopening these days.

I do not think that it is currently sufficient to "postpone the exhibitions" to allow the public to move the opening date in their agenda, and postpone the trip to Venice as if nothing had happened, if not an annoyance: "I really wanted to go to Venice in September."

The news is very serious because it represents the fatal blow to a city already on its knees, news that has enormous importance for the consequences it causes. The Venice Biennale is not any other institution, but an institution that more than any other should assume its cultural responsibility and "inhabit" this temporal void of sense and production productively.
I don't know if the Biennale is already working in this direction, but I know that in any case it is not enough to liquidate things by communicating the postponement of the exhibitions.

On May 2, 2020, a crucial article by Marco Baravalle came out, emblematically titled "On the Biennale's Ruins? Inhabiting the Void, Covering the Distance."[2] I refer to that text firstly not because my vision coincides with that of the author, rather then it is a precious and precise source of critical information, and finally because it is concretely proactive, coming to propose a title that is not only desirable for a subsequent Biennale, but operational. Even if we come from different scientific backgrounds, I really agree with Baravalle position and reasoning, whose point of view for analysis is that of a researcher specialized in art and activism, my point of view is that of an art historian who for years has used the documents of the Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), to build critical stories, to make the history productive in order to complicate and question the canonical and linear narratives. For me, history is an essential tool for understanding the present and finding concrete references to imagine the future. It is history that produces geography, and I continue to work on the history of the Biennale and Venice because it is continually an example and an archetype for thinking about the function of cultural institutions and the context in which they are located.

Since February 2020, Paolo Baratta has no longer chaired the Biennale: for twenty years, he had led the Venetian institution using a managerial process that renewed it structurally and philosophically.[3] The Baratta presidency covered more or less the entire period following the 1998 reform, and its management led to a surprising increase of production value and self-generated revenues.[4] Dismissing the Biennale Board of Directors, Baratta commented with a concise expression: "Visitors have become our main private partner."[5]

It is important to underline the concrete numbers that the renovation of an institution of culture can produce, but I would like to pay attention here to the non-secondary detail that emerges from those words of departure: I have always had the impression that Paolo Baratta has always drawn inspiration from the history of the Biennale itself, and that many of his choices (or at least of the lexicon) seem to be found in the policies of the Biennale in the '70s.

So, reading history with a lens capable of stripping the facts from post-'68 ideologies, and fifty years later it is possible to do so taking the context for granted, I get to the point by proposing hints of history that I consider more productive and stimulating today than ever.

In 1974, the newly reformed Biennale was described as a "service structure in the global salvation and vivification of the city," and was conceived as the "cultural consciousness" of Venice.[6] The Biennale had become a permanent institution of cultural activities, releasing events from their "festival" and seasonal nature, therefore from the tourism industry, in favor of cultural work on the territory, whose citizens would become the primary public. The Biennale had the principal goal of being an operational and active institution, a protagonist in the re-signification and functionalization of the territory. The whole debate on the renewal of the Biennale of the time was strictly connected to the problem of the social, economic, and political conversion of Venice.

It was Vittorio Gregotti, at the time director of Visual Arts and Architecture, who reiterated how the working method for the future should be a "'study-experience' that from time to time had to be carried out around a given theme," which had a lateral approach to the arts and was composed of the disciplines connected or superimposed on it, constituting specific opportunities for experimentation, and transforming them into operational topics of debate.[7] For Gregotti, on the one hand the exhibitions had to serve to interrogate the function of cultural institutions, on the other they had to achieve the goal of "questioning the same social function of the institutions that register or produce culture, to penetrate and re-signify places of city and territory."[8]

Gregotti's belief was that it was precisely the "common public funding platform" of the Biennale and participation of different nations[9] that would become productive if used to guarantee autonomy and independence, that is, the possibility of developing themes that were not of "commercial" interest, but important for the universal social, political, and cultural debate. These research topics were carried out throughout the year, constantly shared and debated among the participating nations.

The Venice Biennale therefore became an international platform for the critical debate on current affairs that from the visual arts had to invest in other fields of knowledge. For the Biennale, it was essential to work on the crucial issues in the international debate, precisely to propose itself as a place of criticism and research. The proposal was to work on the production of "creative acts" involving artists, operators, and intellectuals at the forefront, without expecting "a new and complete artistic revolution," but activating an international debate.[10] The primary objective was the search for a different relationship with the public, through a different approach using artistic production that would transform the "passive and paying spectator-user" into an "active spectator-user, protagonist, and patron."[11] Cultural issues had taken on a mass dimension during the 1970s and required a different function and social use of institutions, and the Biennale wanted to contribute to this more general democratic perspective of participation.

The success of these Biennales is evident if you look at the increase in audience numbers that confirmed the need for participation: it seemed that, in order to function, the Biennale needed the physical presence of the actors, artists, and protagonists in constant contact with the public, like in a sort of "continuous happening."[12]

The Biennale did all of this first by leaving the gates of the historic headquarters of the Giardini, to re-signify not only symbolically, but concretely, a possible different use of the city.[13] The Biennale declared a cultural throughline that ran intertwined with a political project of civil commitment, placing at the center of its research a proposal for a new relationship between culture and society; it led to a complete re-foundation of its function and institutional identity, triggering a system of "unprecedented cultural interests and stimuli" that brought it not only to the center of international interest, but to the vanguard of it.

During those years, the Biennale became the place where politics was done through culture and vice versa. The presidency of the Biennale translated the autonomy sanctioned by the '73 reform into an "extraterritoriality" that guaranteed the institution's ability to accept any form of artistic and intellectual expression without censorship. Its international nature was used operationally to propose and discuss uncomfortable topics of political and social relevance, making it an elected place of international debate on cultural topicality.[14]

At the time, they were aware that, apart from an initial experimental period, complete exclusion from the market was not possible, but the Governing Council had understood that the Biennale could no longer be just the place for recording novelties in art, because it could never compete, for example, with documenta on one side or with the Basel art fair on the other. Not being able to compete, it became the exact opposite, that is, a large construction site, a laboratory in which to experiment with the possibilities of a different way of producing culture, of constructing discourses that eventually led to exhibitions that became devices of meaning in their specificity, triggering a more sustainable and virtuous economy.

The Biennale of the period 1974-78 is therefore a case study that is productive today for two reasons. The first is that that period of experimentation, immediately marked as a '68 legacy full of ideologies and demagogies, was removed and soon thrown into the forgotten river of the "riflusso" of the early Eighties. In the decade from 1968 to 1978, Italian society changed radically and, after years of engagement, we witnessed a progressive depoliticization of cultural and social issues, and the era began when the common good was no longer at the center but instead individualism,[15] with a return, in the early Eighties, to *history* and the *work of art*, displacing experimentation for certainty. This rapid displacement allows us today to consider that example like a diamond in the rough, thanks to our temporal distance.

This leads to the second reason. The context that led to the 1973 reform was that of a city in profound social and functional crisis, a city that has continued to depopulate since the beginning of the 1950s, becoming increasingly a museum-city. The absence of economic and social policies culminated in the flood of 1966, the "fatal blow" that reinforced the struggle to obtain the "Special Law for the Protection of Venice" (1973).[16] Fifty years later, those motivations have become hypertrophic, and apparently there is no way back. Venice arrives at the COVID emergency after an unprecedented flood (November 2019), various accidents involving large cruise ships, so far with no catastrophes, and it is experiencing an emergency situation related to the chemical

industries of Marghera and is a city that today has 50,000 scarce inhabitants in the historic center, to serve 30 million tourists a year. Venice is a city that lives on tourism that has never been regulated, a rented city that dies if the tourist is not there; it is the city that will suffer the most globally if one does not intervene with a radical rethinking of its sustainability, and as such it is more likely to die.

It is in this context that I believe that the Biennale should go back to having a "Venice consciousness," assume all its cultural responsibility, which is currently also economic and therefore social, because the mechanism, in place for twenty years now, of a widespread diffusion of its logo that brands the whole urban territory, if on the one hand it rides the contemporary neoliberal economy that fuels non-functional exploitation, on the other, it has created an important branch consisting of specialized operators, artisans, professionals, and a permanent economic fabric that cannot survive without the Biennale. And if the creation of a supply chain linked to the contemporary art market was the hope of its foundation in 1895, it was in a city that had twice the population in a diversified economy in which tourism was still a luxury for the few.

The Biennale must rethink its direct relationship with the city, starting from the place in which it is located, Venice, the city symbolic of the failure of never regulated neo-liberal economic policies that led to the functional emptying of the city, to the irreversible loss of the social fabric of the city with its millenary cosmopolitan history that today also risks losing its status as a world heritage site due to the lack of proper conditions.[17] Venice is the ideal laboratory where the Biennale can experiment with new practices and uses of cultural institutions, "using" the city as a permanent platform. The city is particularly suitable for its being a concrete utopia *par excellence*: it is an island, and when you are in Venice, "you actually are" only there; yet, it has always been an island that is not isolated because it has always been at the center of the world, historically and today, because it is connected directly with the whole world as a great capital; at the same time, it is the size of a small town, and thus is a place of proximity of bodies, where spacing cannot be implemented as in most other cities.

All this is possible only with a vision and a targeted public investment, only if the Italian government takes the dramatic situation of Venice seriously and puts it at the top of the virtuous global rethinking of cultural institutions underway, only if it "uses" Venice (and first of all its universities) and the Biennale as an international hub, symbolically and operationally. And if, in 1948, the Biennale was referred to as the "UN of the arts," perhaps it would be appropriate to also ask the participating countries, which have been a constitutional part of the Venetian institution for a century and a half, to assume some responsibility.

To enter the UNESCO blacklist and be discarded because it does not comply with heritage protection protocols is symbolic of the paradox of the total and living city-work of art *par excellence*. It is a relevant element that needs to be taken into account in order to attest the need and urgency of an *ad hoc* government intervention with a new law for the safeguard of Venice, with *ad hoc* laws that finally regulate unsustainable mass tourism and make it virtuous—*ad hoc* welfare reforms that help increase the local population through social policies, because a city without inhabitants becomes an archaeological site. I stress "*ad hoc*" because no city works like Venice and has the characteristics of Venice: Venice is exceptional, and this exceptionality must be protected to allow it not to survive as an endangered animal, but in order to continue being the living city and laboratory of the future as it has been for centuries. This path

must be taken by the Italian government convinced that the Biennale can truly be used as that institution that it "recognizes [of] pre-eminent national interest," a common good, with all that it means and follows from it and therefore that it can be put to use productively in this global crisis.[18]

On the eve of the proclamation of the reform law in 1972, the Senate promoted a fact-finding survey on the Venice Biennale,[19] "one of the most tormenting and complex problems of Italian cultural policy,"[20] on the initiative of its president: Giovanni Spadolini. The fact-finding survey made it possible to take stock of the situation after years of parliamentary debates and controversies. Browsing the pages of the fact-finding survey today, reading the words of the protagonists of Italian culture of the time, is touching. We perceive how in that delicate historical moment for Italy, the involvement in public affairs was so profound, so passionate: saving the Biennale, relaunching and transforming it was a gamble that interested everyone because it was rooted in the idea that this great public institution of culture was the patrimony of Italian citizens.[21] Saving the Biennale was saving Venice and vice versa.

Today, it is no longer problem of saving or relaunching the Biennale, which we have seen to date growing vertically. The problem today is that there is not even the shadow of a debate on the future of Venice, because the question today is really about saving Venice, with the awareness that the Biennale and Venice are symbiotic organisms.

Due to its local and international nature, the Biennale can become more aware, declaring an ethical commitment that becomes political and militant, inserting itself into an ecology of virtuous institutions that can afford to produce discourses, ideas, experiments, proposals, and all that "intangible heritage" whose essential producers are the artists, the operators, and the participation of the public that leads to the establishment of that global *politeia* described by Boris Groys.[22] More than ever, the Biennale today should be, following the thought of Homi Bhabha, a civic space *par excellence*—equidistant from the local and the international—where good use can be made of cosmopolitanism, to create new communities, to create an ideal observatory for an effective discussion globally, and for an ecology of rethinking cultural institutions in the post-COVID era.

All this before Venice becomes a parallel of the metaphor of Einstein's famous saying about what would happen if bees became extinct.

May 21, 2020

Afterword

The news that the Venice Biennale intends to propose an alternative program to compensate for the impossibility of realizing the 2020 International Architecture Exhibition comes on May 22. This program foresees the setting up of a historical exhibition, "which will see all its artistic disciplines in dialogue together" and will be organized with ASAC materials. This news brings a minimum of comfort compared to the alternative of closing its doors for a year, demonstrates the intent of a work on the territory, of a presence, of a production of culture through history, an involvement of the first public, that is the local one.

Yet I still believe that, for the reasons described above, due to the dramatic emergency in Venice, this response is a bit *rétro* compared to the times that are not "interesting" at all, but dramatic if not tragic. For years, Baratta has continued to emphasize that it is artists who "build worlds", that the Biennale must "offer artists a place of dialogue as free as possible and to offer visitors an intense encounter with art," "an open gym" where the public can "feel engaged in encounters with works and artists, in discovering directly 'the other person' that the work of art offers," and "almost give thanks to the very existence of art and artists, who offer us with their worlds an expansion of our perspective and the space of our existence."

But where are the artists?

Taking from history means not only choosing what is most convenient, but looking at the totality of the facts. In that historical period that Paolo Baratta has taken as a source of inspiration, the artists, intellectuals, and operators were all at the forefront of a permanent assembly, physically present, producers and participants. They were not an abstraction.

It seems to me that in recent decades the Biennale has been the place for the construction of narratives by curators, rather than artists. I wonder if the Biennale really has the pulse of contemporary artistic practices, if it recognizes not only abstractly and ideally that "trust" towards the effective power and fallout that contemporary artistic practices own, precisely in a vision of expansion of our perspectives; I wonder if it actually recognizes the great professionalism of contemporary artists, and I am not referring here to those "who keep us so entertained,"[23] if they exist.

I'm not going to make a list of the artists I am thinking of right now, but they all went to the central exhibition of the Biennale anyway, generally leaving a fragment of production, sending a work or even installing it, but their voice and presence has not been present in the Biennale for years, and for years it seems to me that they are more those famous "touches of color in the framework that constitutes the exhibition," as Daniel Buren commented in 1972 in another context. And this discussion does not completely concern the national participation where, it seems to me, the possibility given to artists to "create worlds" through their artistic practice is more evident. And here I am referring to visual artists because I work in the field of art, but I wonder: how many "worlds" and what a wonderful debate could be started by putting together the visions of the best international artists, architects, and creators of theater, dance, and cinema?

The visions of the artists usually come true; their job is precisely to give form to a vision, to concretize it: who more than artists can offer us concrete visions of the future? Rhetoric is not needed now, and "an exhibition" is no longer enough, or rather, it will certainly be necessary to rethink its format.
Secondly, the separation of the Biennale from Venice is reconfirmed, and I remain convinced of the symbiosis between the two and that the first will be increasingly ineffective if it doesn't become a kind of "Venice consciousness" again—the universal city that coagulates all the great challenges of contemporaneity, a productive ground for research and artistic production that can show us future utopian ways and, according to Robert Musil, "Utopia has roughly the same meaning of possibility [...] the present is nothing more than a hypothesis still not overcome."

May 23, 2020

Notes

1 All other events remain confirmed: the 77th Venice International Film Festival directed by Alberto Barbera from September 2nd to 12th; the 48th International Theatre Festival directed by Antonio Latella from September 14th to 24th; the 64th International Festival of Contemporary Music directed by Ivan Fedele, from September 25thto October 4th; the 14th International Festival of Contemporary Dance directed by Marie Chouinard from October 13th to 25th.
2 Marco Baravalle, "On the Biennale's Ruins? Inhabiting the Void, Covering the Distance," Institute of Radical Imagination, May 2, 2020, accessed May 21, 2020, https://instituteofradicalimagination.org/2020/05/02/on-the-biennales-ruins-inhabiting-the-void-covering-the-distance-by-marco-baravalle/.
3 As of February 2020, the new president is the film producer Roberto Cicutto.
4 By examining the data referring to the last three to four years, it is found that the total production value has increased by 45%. In particular, the increase in self-generated revenues contributed to this total, growing by 125% to cover a value equal to approximately 60% of total costs. If the examination is extended to the entire period following the great reform of 1998, it is found that the self-generated revenues, which in the first year after the reform did not exceed €3.5 million, increased to €27 million, see https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/comunicato-cda-del-4-febbraio-2020.
5 Ibid.
6 Cfr. "Piano quadriennale di massima delle attività e delle manifestazioni (1974-1977)," in *La Biennale di Venezia. Annuario 1975 – Eventi 1974* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1975), 61.
7 Ibid., 271.
8 Ibid.
9 Convegno internazionale sulla nuova Biennale, 30-31 maggio 1975, unità 296, Trascrizioni convegno, Fondo storico, Serie arti visive, ASAC, p. 17.
10 Ibid.
11 "Piano quadriennale di massima."
12 Umberto Eco, "Venezia continua," *Corriere della sera*, December 6, 1974. Umberto Eco was one of the protagonists of the new Biennale. Since 1974, as a member of the Commission for Information and Mass Media, Eco has followed the entire trajectory of the four-year period closely.
13 In addition to the use of the city's fields, for a concrete example I refer to an open event on the theme: "Venice and the Stucky Mill," in "Documents relating to the competition on the Stucky Mill as an urban redevelopment field in Venice," unità 300, Stucky, Fondo storico, Serie arti visive, ASAC, and the story of the rescue from the destruction of the Salt Warehouses at the Zattere, see G. D. Romanelli, "Scheda sui 'Saloni' alle Zattere," in *Biennale di Venezia. Annuario 1975*, 848-851.
14 I am referring here to the program "Libertà al Cile" (1974), to the general theme of the "environment" in 1976 and 1978, to the exhibition *Spain 1936-1976. Vanguardia artistica y realidad social* (1976), and to the program on the cultural dissent in the Eastern countries (1977). In general, the *fil rouge* was the democratic and antifascist position of the institution.
15 Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005), 566.
16 cfr. Bruno Zevi, "Gli orfani di Venezia," *L'Espresso*, October 13, 1968. "From 1951 to 1966 the population has decreased to the point that [...] jobs exceed the available workforce: in five years 55,000 have left. [...] The building fabric decays when a city is abandoned [...] Furthermore, the municipality has never planned any provision for the

renovation of the historic center [...]." Camilla Cederna, "Addio Venezia," *L'Espresso*, August 25, 1968. The flood of 1966 was a "fatal blow" for Venice, if we think that there was still no law for the protection and financing of cultural heritage (the Special Law for the Safeguard of Venice was enacted in 1973). Italy was not yet divided into regions and could not count on specific funds. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage was created in 1974, at the behest of Giovanni Spadolini.

17 See: https://www.onuitalia.com/venice-was-in-danger-but-was-saved-from-unesco-blacklist/.

18 I refer here to Mariana Mazzucato's economic theories brilliantly expressed in *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* (London:Anthem Press, 2013).

19 According to Article 48 of the Senate Regulations, the fact-finding survey allows the commissions set up to "acquire news, information and documentation" in the matters within their competence. Article 48 entitled Inquiries of the Senate Regulations. For Spadolini, the fact-finding survey was a "linking tool between culture and the political class, two worlds that do not have many connections between them," in Giovanni Spadolini, *Epilogo per la Biennale. Discorso sulla legge per lo statuto della Biennale pronunciato in Senato il 25 luglio 1973* (Rome: Bardi, 1973), 4.

20 Spadolini, *Epilogo per la Biennale*, 3.

21 Senato della Repubblica, VI Legislatura, Indagini conoscitive, 1° *Ordinamento della 'Biennale' di Venezia*, 2° Resoconto stenografico, September 22, 1972.

22 Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux* 2 (2009), last accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/.

23 Quotation from the Italian Prime Minister's speech on May 14, 2020.

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