Cahier on Art and the Public Domain

open

The Art-biennial as a Global Phenomenon

Strategies in Neo-Political Times

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THE ART BIENNIAL AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

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This extra issue of *Open* is published in honour of the cahier's fifth anniversary and has come about in close collaboration with guest editor Pascal Gielen. At the time of the first Brussels Biennial, Gielen organized a programme of lectures and debates in Brussels on 19 October 2008, focussing on the art biennial as a global phenomenon. The programme was put together in cooperation with the Flemish-Dutch House deBuren in Brussels, the Flemish institute for visual, audiovisual and media art (BAM) and Gielen's own Lectorate in Arts in Society at the Fontys College for the Arts. The debates looked at the boom in international art biennials – at the moment there are hundreds of biennials active all over the world. They also considered how the art biennial, which was originally an instrument within a politics of nation-states, is increasingly deployed for developing and marketing cities and regions. In order to compensate for this, biennials often put political issues onto their artistic agenda. The recurring question is Brussels was: can biennials really represent an alternative political voice in these neo-political times?

The philosophers Chantal Mouffe, Michael Hardt and Boris Groys and the curators Molly Nesbit, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova talked about the biennial as model, concept and instrument, and about the geo-political, sociocultural and economic space in which it manifests itself. Some of the lectures formed the basis for this special edition of *Open* which this time is appearing without its regular features. Supplemented with an introductory essay by Pascal Gielen, new essays by Brian Holmes, Irit Rogoff and Simon Sheikh and with the republication of an exemplary text by Thierry De Duve, a 'reader' has been created in which the art biennial as a global phenomenon is analysed and approached not only in terms of an art theoretical discourse or curatorial practice, but also on the basis of more sociological and political-philosophical discourses. Some essays deal directly with the biennial, while other essays, such as those of Hardt and Mouffe, reveal different conditions and relationships within the social and political reality that the biennial is part of, putting forward proposals and posing questions that could be addressed by art and its scene. The result of the reflections and propo-

sitions in *Open* 16 is by no means unequivocal, but all the 'strategies in neo-political times' that are articulated express the urgency of not taking the biennial as a global phenomenon for granted. There are also signs of a shared awareness that it cannot be regarded separately from the logic of neoliberal markets.

In the context of *Open* as a series of anthologies in which the changing conditions of the public domain are examined from a cultural perspective, the subject of the biennial represents a possibility to look at the way in which this phenomenon and its legitimizing discourses relate to ideas about the city and urban politics, to new notions of publicness and to the implications of processes such as globalization and mediatization. The editors of *Open* are grateful to Pascal Gielen for his generous commitment as guest editor. Our great thanks are also extended to the co-producers of *Open* 16: Dorian van der Brempt, director of deBuren; Dirk de Wit at BAM; and Fontys College of Fine and Performing Arts. Last but not least, we are grateful to SKOR for allowing us the editorial freedom to develop *Open* as a series.

Pascal Gielen

The Biennial

A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour

By means of an analysis, sociologist Pascal Gielen attempts to get a better handle on the problematic aspects of the art biennial as a global phenomenon. Only then can new strategies be developed for escaping the worldwide competition hysteria, with all its negatives characteristics. Neoliberal city marketing as the bogeyman is too facile an explanation.

The art biennial – once born as the promoter of the nation-state and its secularized faith, nationalism – has acquired a somewhat different guise today. The political agenda has been relegated to the background and replaced by a worldwide competition among cities and other places-to-be, with a profusion of biennials as a result. This success cannot be explained without the enthusiasm with which politicians, managers and other sponsors have embraced the event. And it is precisely this heterogeneous interest that makes the biennial suspect. After all, it fits easily in a neoliberal city marketing strategy of so-called creative cities. Anyone occasionally leafing through the catalogues of art events might be surprised by such self-observations. They show that the biennial frequently regards itself as a problematic hybrid monster. At the very least, it can be concluded that some of the participating artists, curators and critics are not lacking in the required self-reflection. Yet they continue to take part, cheerfully, full of ambition, but at times physically and mentally exhausted, in this amazing world. The motivations for this are probably as numerous as the number of artistic actors currently travelling the globe. The ambition of someday making it in the art world likely plays a part. But there is certainly as much genuine interest and sincere idealism. There is no denying, however, that even the honest curator constantly comes up against an all-encompassing neoliberalism. A certain amount of cynicism and opportunism seems necessary in order to continue operating within the global art system. Because we are dealing with two emotionally charged – usually negatively charged – concepts, a little explanation seems appropriate.

The Joyful Rider

Within common parlance, cynicism and opportunism are surrounded by a miasma of negative semantics. In addition, these are usually qualities ascribed to an individual. This or that person is labelled 'cynical' or 'opportunistic', by which a negative personality trait is immediately implied. Here, however, in line with the Italian thinker Paolo Virno, cynicism and opportunism are not used as part of an ethical assessment.[1] They can also be understood as amoral categories. Furthermore they define not so much the actions of an individual, but the general mood of a collective. Cynicism and opportunism are now a structural component of our globalized society. Or, as Virno argues, they colour the 'emotional tonality of the multitude' within a post-Fordian world economy. Applied to the contemporary art world, cynicism and opportunism have become necessary modes of operation. This deserves a more detailed explanation.

1. Pablo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Colombia University, 2004).

Cynicism, Virno argues, comes from the realization that rules and the reality they supposedly regulate are miles apart, even as people still operate according to these rules. Those who know the rules of the present-day art world, for example, go in for themed exhibitions, which today prefer to embrace social responsibility – witness

the boom of new engagement, social activism, political or ecological criticism, etcetera. All of this is taking place against the backdrop of a neoliberal reality of commercial telephone providers and airlines with an excess of ecologically irresponsible flights, mass tourism and virtually inescapable global marketing strategies. If we observe the discourse presented by most globally operating curators and artists on the one hand, and their actual actions on the other, we repeatedly come up against a yawning gap between the two. As a result, operating cynically turns out to be functional within the global network of the biennials.

This conclusion allows critics to point out consequences with a certain amount of *schadenfreude*. Yet precisely because it ascribes the characteristic to the individual, this criticism often neglects to examine the institutional nature of the problem. It definitely denies the critical potential, at the very least the potentially manipulative or subversive quality, of the cynical operation. Selecting and using the marvellous resources that the neoliberal market economy puts at our disposal today also provides a chance to pervert them. All-encompassing neoliberalism already provides all the instruments with which to keep proclaiming ever-changing possibilities – if only purely discursively. The curator hopping all round the world perhaps shares the opinion of the critic we have just portrayed. The strategies to achieve their respective objectives, however, are fundamentally different. Whereas the latter, with a certain puritanical ascetism, abstains from the pleasures of capitalism (at least discursively), the former is instead a joyful rider who, with the required optimism, outlines escape routes in the heart of the neoliberal hegemony with a nice glass of wine in hand. Stoicism in one area does not preclude idealism in the other. This last attitude does indeed require a healthy dose of cynicism, something that Bertolt Brecht understood back in the 1960s. Which strategy is best, however, remains unclear. What is clear is that the second approach, in all its ambivalence, is more complex than the first. And perhaps this complexity provides a better answer, today, to an ever more complex world. It remains, however, a particularly difficult balancing act as well.

The internationally operating curator – but in fact every globally operating artistic actor – thus benefits from the pleasures afforded by today's widespread neoliberal market economy. He or she grabs every opportunity, if desired, to tell a critical, engaged or unique story. The globally functioning curator, in other words, is always a big opportunist. Let us treat this observation with the necessary amoral circumspection, however. We must understand opportunism, says Virno, literally and neutrally, as 'the ability to grab opportunities'. It therefore includes the dexterity to allude in a non-routine fashion to a constantly changing work context. It is the art of living with chronic instability, with unexpected turns and permanent innovation. There are constantly different possibilities and always new opportunities that present themselves. Well, internationally operating curators

always finds themselves in different geographic, social and political contexts, to which they must continually respond in a more or less meaningful way. They must make use of every opportunity that presents itself, convert it into a win-win situation. This presupposes, at the very least, a significant capacity for translation along with a generous dose of mental flexibility. Every time, new circumstances and always different ideas have to be transformed into a preferably controversial end product: the exhibition. Perhaps the travelling Manifesta exhibition is the best example of an organization that has incorporated this opportunistic tonality down to the meso-level. Time and time again, after every move, after all, it feels out the local economic, political and social opportunities. The travelling curator is constantly confronted by different working conditions in local, merely temporary stations that are often called biennials.

A Good Idea

Yet what does this curator have to offer the station at which he or she alights for a while? Or conversely, why is this particular curator engaged to do his or her 'thing' in this particular spot in the world? Is it to do with his or her organizational capacities? Or it is simply about fame and a name? These things probably play a role, but the core of the transaction is even more ephemeral and yet more risky than that. Those who shop in the curator market and do so with integrity, therefore without ulterior economic or political motives, are, after all, primarily looking for a good and appropriate idea. Yet what is a good idea? A good idea, in today's art world, should still be understood, according to the adage of modernity, as a new or innovative thought. Even the veteran curator, well-established in the world with his or her concept, can hardly afford to become repetitive. That might have been permissible, to a certain extent, for the 'first crop' of independent curators whose names were frequently linked to a monolithic concept (although even here a certain malleability was desired). Today this rigid attitude works far less effectively. This is why the adjective 'appropriate' is of equal importance for the idea produced. A good idea, after all, constantly renews itself, and that can mean, among other things, that it responds to the geographic or social context, the client, the artistic setting, etcetera. Simply copying an exhibition concept from New York to Istanbul would miss the ball completely. Just like the artist who repeats himself, the recidivist curator would soon be taken to task for his mouldy ideas.

It should therefore come as no surprise that young curators are frequently hired. There is a lesser likelihood, after all, that sclerosis would have set in among this category, but that is not the point. The point is that today a good idea has to be primarily appropriate as well as innovative. The executed idea, in the context of the preceding argument, takes into account the local artistic, economic and/or political circumstances that present themselves. A good idea, in other words, is an opportunistic idea, whereby 'opportunistic' should thus be

interpreted in the neutral sense of the word, and therefore without moralistic connotations. The smart curator, in other words, delivers his or her idea with the necessary adaptability and flexibility. It should therefore come as no surprise either that the interview, or at least the dialogue, has cropped up multiple times over the last decade as the favourite working method of the exhibition organizer. It is precisely this format, after all, that offers the opportunity to test the potential exhibition concept against the new context.

But how does one know that the engaged curator will deliver a good idea? Well, the answer is as simple as it is disturbing. It simply cannot be predicted. Investing in a hoped-for good idea, a show that works or an exhibition concept that functions within the given context, is always a risky undertaking. When the curator is engaged, the good idea or the interesting, appropriate concept is only potentially present. It still belongs to the unreal world of the promise. Of course there are means of assessing the risk of the investment as well as possible. As in the oeuvre of an artist, the 'retro-prospective principle' also applies to the exhibition career of the curator.[2] Previously produced work is used as a touchstone to gauge the quality of work yet to be produced. Yet this hoped-for realization remains largely speculative. The organizer of a biennial, in the contract or the agreement with the curator, therefore, is not capitalizing on a finished product, but on a potential or a promise. This, says Virno, is precisely the core of the post-Fordian work environment, or – to paraphrase – the crux of immaterial labour.

2. Pascal Gielen, 'Art and Social Value Regimes', *Current Sociology*, 53 (5) (2005), 789-806; and Pascal Gielen, *Kunst in netwerken. Artistieke selecties in de hedendaagse dans en de beeldende kunst* (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2004).

According to many labour sociologists and political philosophers, this post-Fordism – with its individualization, de-routinization, flexible working hours, mental labour, and so forth – underwent a general expansion with the student revolts of 1968 and the Fiat strikes of the 1970s. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt even argue that immaterial labour began to constitute the hegemony for all forms of production, even for material labour and agricultural labour.[3] This does not mean, of course, that material labour or routine factory labour simply vanished. It usually moved, after all, to low-wage countries. Even this labour, however, became coded within the social logic of post-Fordism. The 1970s are often identified as the period in which this process of immaterialization took place. It is probably not a coincidence that it is also the period in which one of the first internationally operating curators began to attract attention. Harald Szeemann, after all, escaped the museum in the same period with his material artefacts. An object history was replaced by a conceptual approach. Or, with the preceding in mind, the emphasis on displaying material works shifted towards immaterial labour. As in other work environments, this does not mean that the material – in this case the work of art – simply vanished, but it became

3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

staged within a performance of ideas. Even the ins and outs of the art world, in other words, cannot escape the new machinery of post-Fordism.

Intermezzo: The White Cube or Neoliberal Denial

We have just briefly reflected on the ambivalent operation of the curator within an omnipresent post-Fordism. This requires, among other things, an opportunistic attitude, which succeeds in responding to ever-changing artistic, economic and political working conditions. At the same time, art historian and curator Elena Filipovic points out that the majority of biennials, paradoxically, still make use of their historical antipode, namely the museum.[4] This is even true of the previously mentioned nomadic Manifesta. This mainly involves the repeated use of the classic white cube, which Alfred Baar turned into the hallmark of the MoMA back in the late 1920s. Filipovic acutely remarks that the Nazis opted for the same interior, less than ten years later, for the Haus der Kunst in Munich, whereupon she openly wonders what makes this white space appealing to these two totally divergent ideological worlds. The answer is somewhat predictable: 'order', 'rationality', 'universality' and '(Western) modernity'. Two other ascribed qualities, however, deserve particular attention within this narrative, namely 'neutrality' and particularly 'disconnection from the context'. The white cube cherished by biennials and curators thus cuts itself off from the variable environment in which it finds itself. This sometimes results in rather hallucinating displays, as Filipovic writes, among other things, about Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11: 'The exhibition brought, as one critic noted, "issues of genocide, poverty, political incarceration, industrial pollution, earthquake wreckage, strip-mine devastation, and news of fresh disasters *into the inviolable white cube*".'[5]

4. Elena Filipovic, 'The Global White Cube', in: Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

5. Ibid.

The white cube is so widespread as an institution around the world because its staging of autonomy denies any political, economic or religious entanglement. The integration of these spheres in the museum also threatens to neutralize any problem or social conflict within the safe zone of fiction. Perhaps that is what makes the white cube so beloved, and very exceptionally even by totalitarian regimes. Within an all-encompassing neoliberalism, the ideological silence of the white space is a godsend. Every dominant paradigm of faith, after all, is served by the denial of its own ideological character. That way it can easily masquerade as an insurmountable realism.

The Post-Institution and Flirting with Deleuze

'Rhizomes', 'networks', 'nomadism', 'escape routes', 'non-hierarchical forms of organization', etcetera – these are the words with which biennials have increasingly presented their own operations over the last ten years.

Documenta 12 may have represented the saturation point of this Deleuzian discourse. Who can say? The question, however, is whether today's biennials genuinely incorporate these characteristics. The intermezzo above suggests otherwise. The equivocal relationship between biennial and white cube, event and museum demonstrates at the very least a certain ambivalence. The classical museum, in particular, is one of the institutionalized entities that is facing increasing pressure. Yet the institution has not yet vanished beyond the horizon. That is probably what frequently makes it the black sheep, certainly where large institutions are concerned.[6] But what is it about this institution that supposedly hinders the biennial or is such a problem for the nomadic curator?

6. See for instance Nina Möntmann, 'Playing the Wild Child: Art Institutions in a New Public Sphere', *Open* 14 (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/SKOR, 2008), 16-27.

The institution is probably one of the most examined subjects in sociology.[7] What is relevant to this argument is that this science interprets the notion in two ways. On the one hand the institution refers to concrete organizations of people, buildings and things. On the other hand the concept of the institution is extended to the whole system of values, norms and customs considered significant in a society. This is why they are institutionalized, set down in a more or less rigid fashion, watched over and sanctioned. The most well-known institution is probably the family, which regulates procreation within a specific cultural context. Yet in this context the institution of the 'church' is perhaps a more relevant example. Within the sociology of religion, a distinction is made between the Church with a capital C and the church with a small c. The first refers to the whole system of norms and values it installs and continues, the second to the 'organizational infrastructure' of people, buildings, relics, and so forth that materialize the institution and keep it alive. Well, the art institution also represents this dual meaning. On the one hand, after all, it consists of galleries, biennials, art centres, museums, and the people and artworks that populate them; on the other hand it also represents the whole system of artistic and cultural values (for instance authenticity, creativity, idiosyncrasy) it expresses within a society – in the past usually the nation-state. In essence, all artistic organizations are part of the art institution, but major institutions like museums occupy a special place in this. More than the others, after all, they are expected to be well-oiled organizations and to simultaneously take on the role of the 'guardian' and 'facilitator' of specific artistic values and practices. This might sound pompous, but it is an accepted idea in sociology that cultural practices keep in step with a powerful societal hierarchization of values and norms. The institution, according to classical sociology, features a number of essential characteristics, a few of which are highlighted here as a reminder. Such an exercise, it is hoped, will help to clarify what the problem is for biennials and for nomadic curators.

7. Pascal Gielen, *De Kunstinstitutie. De Artistieke Identiteit en de Maatschappelijke Positie van de Instellingen van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap* (Antwerp: OIV, 2007).

The institution is primarily experi-

enced as an external reality and objectivity. This means that it stands above individual manufacturability, which is moreover considered relatively evident. We therefore immediately come up against an important point of criticism in the art world. Within it, the individual regime of values is after all the central principle around which everything revolves, at least according to the French art sociologist Nathalie Heinich.[8] It is a fact that both the artist and the curator jealously defends his or her individuality, his or her authenticity. He or she probably shudders at the idea of a supra-individual machine.

8. Nathalie Heinich, *La Gloire de Van Gogh. Essai d'anthropologie de l'admiration* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

What is more significant within this argument, however, is that the institution incorporates historicity. This characteristic alludes to two things. First, the institution has its own history and often relies on this history to preserve or even to legitimize its existence and activities within contemporary society. But the institution also constantly, actively engages with the past, by selecting from it, by activating and perhaps re-articulating some historical issues. Or, as American anthropologist Mary Douglas once put it, 'institutions remember and forget'.[9] We immediately come up against the important heritage function of the art institution. It is, after all, responsible for what is remembered and forgotten. In the case of museums, we can hardly ignore this conservation function. Even their current artistic activities take place, preferably, not in a historical vacuum, but instead with a strong awareness of what used to be. At its best, this produces an interesting tension between innovation and conservation. Ideally, as crucial platforms of the art institution, institutions represent its historical conscience. In the process they also generate the necessary 'inertia' to which everything experimental or innovative should, or at least can, relate. Museums, therefore, in part control the temporal logic or artistic conjuncture of the whole art institution. When they let in innovation, they immediately proclaim a new era for the whole local, national or international art world. Large institutions usually do this only sparsely. It is, after all, their societal task to constantly weigh the present against the past. This admittedly also entails the risk that they might become too sluggish and hold back innovation for too long, losing their 'grandeur' in the process. It is precisely biennials and internationally operating curators who have fought against this 'grandeur' over the last 30 years (and certainly in the initial phase), among other things because it was felt that the museum hindered innovation. As previously stated, a good idea in today's art world is still, according to modernist doctrine, a new idea. Such an ethos constantly wrestles with the past and the cultural heritage. This is not only because of the braking effect of art traditions, but also because history might well suggest that a new idea is not so new after all.

9. Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

The characteristics of the art institution listed above, however, are aspects at a macrosociological level with which both the biennial and the nomadic cura-

tor struggle. It is his or her fight against 'the institution' as a societal phenomenon. At the mesosociological level, but at the level of the organization as well, other factors come into play. The classically institutionalized organization, after all, stands for a rigid hierarchy with fixed positions in a not very flexible work environment. This highly simplified picture perhaps reflects an outdated cliché. In observing the majority of art museums (certainly in Europe), however, one still comes across ingredients that confirm this picture. To name only four: fixed working hours (and opening hours), fixed appointments, a rigid differentiation between functional units (artistic staff, educational department, public relations, maintenance and management) and a strong focus on the material (the collection or at least artworks). The second characteristic certainly impedes the post-Fordian requirement of flexibility within a globally operating art world. It is precisely the biennial that partly fulfils these immaterial working conditions. On that level the biennial certainly displays the hallmarks of a post-institution. Its periodic and event-based character in itself makes it easy to work with temporary contracts. This is a basic observation of labour sociology, which in today's art world is rather romantically translated into an uncritical cultivation of a nomadic existence within constantly moving networks. However, this Deleuzian flirting with the post-institution (not that Deleuze, incidentally, ever pointed in this direction; what is at issue here is rather the way the art world uses the jargon) – with the contemporary biennial as protagonist – significantly suppresses the wealth of the classical art institution. Occasional visitors to biennials are regularly confronted, for example, by structural amnesia, the negation of the local context and superficiality, usually with a lack of concentration. The biennial, or to put it a better way, the excessive boom in biennials, offers little room anymore for historicity; even less does it generate the necessary time for thorough research, and furthermore it often ignores the locality – see the previously outlined story of the white cube. These are precisely the things that a museum, as a classical art institution, did stand for. That museum, however, has also been significantly transformed in recent decades, with, among other things, an increase in temporary exhibitions and an inversely proportional decrease in research into and attention to the collection. Even the museum – certainly if it is a contemporary art museum – has been infected by the biennial virus. Even the museum is displaying post-institutional characteristics, for it too has become a post-Fordian enterprise.

Schizophrenic Longing

The structural amnesia mentioned above, the lack of concentration and the development of a globally floating art world are gradually eliciting questions about the direction in which the art biennial has evolved over the past decade. Indeed we are seeing early attempts toward rearticulation and even reorganization within the art world. The curator, for example, is once again seek-

ing out the locality, or to put it a better way, tries to link international flows with local artistic and cultural practices at a 'glocal' level (witness for instance the Gwangju Biennale of 2002, but also the effect of the MaCBA in Barcelona). At the very least we can observe today a schizophrenic longing, in which on the one hand the mobility, horizontal openness, curiosity and innovative drive of the post-institution are endorsed, but in which, on the other hand, a predilection is emerging for the local imbedding, for the collective memory and for the durability once offered by the institution. This schizophrenia between the post-institution and the 'classical' modern art institution can now also be linked back to the internal tension within a good idea previously outlined.

We have said that a good idea, in the contemporary art world, is still a new idea. That also means that it is authentic and that it is defended and established with the required resolve. Furthermore, a new idea is only a good idea if it can be weighed against history, and the art institution, with the classic museum, used to provide an answer for this. Within today's network world embraced by the nomadic curator, however, the emphasis is being placed instead on the appropriate idea. Loyalty to an originally authentic concept can quickly come to be interpreted as inflexibility and a lack of openness. The authentic idea, in other words, lacks the infinite variability and adaptability required within networks that are always unstable. Or as Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue: 'In a network world, the question of authenticity can no longer be formally posed.'[10]

10. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006).

The internal tension of an authentic artistic idea or a new and appropriate exhibition concept, in other words, is in step with the fluctuating relationship between the classical art institution and the post-institution. Even the design of the last Brussels biennial, for example, was marked by the same schizophrenic longing. This can be deduced, among other things, by the endeavour to rearticulate the locality of the biennial. The focus is no longer on the nation-state; the worldwide promotion of the city was at the very least parried with attention paid to the 'Eurocore' – if only by allowing art organizations from Flanders (and thus not just from Brussels), Germany and the Netherlands to play a part in setting the programme. In addition, there was an attempt to counter the historical deficit of the hectic global flow by working closely with institutions that should still have a memory, especially museums. Authenticity defended with rigidity can thus be balanced with the infinite variability and diversity demanded by the global neoliberal network system. Such undertakings are probably a sign of still early and therefore fragile practice runs for new strategies with which well-intentioned biennials and curators will experiment in the future. It is to be hoped that they will someday generate the necessary 'inertia' and 'glocality' as a counterpoint to the all-encompassing global competition hysteria in which today's biennials increasingly find themselves.

Michael Hardt

Production and Distribution of the Common

A Few Questions for the Artist

According to Michael Hardt, the production of the common is the most important economic mainspring in a time in which immaterial and biopolitical production are dominant. By connecting economics, politics and aesthetics and analysing their relations, Hardt arrives at questions concerning the role of the artist and the meaning of his or her work in the distribution of the common.

The relation between aesthetics and politics is most often conceived in terms of their intersection or, rather, the intervention of one into the domain of the other: political action in art or aesthetic practices in politics. This relation poses no great conceptual difficulty, although, of course, at least since Plato, such intersections have raised for many serious practical concerns, about the stability of the political, for example, or the integrity of aesthetic practices. Jacques Rancière poses the relation between aesthetics and politics instead as a conceptual problem. He is not primarily concerned with political art or aestheticized politics, but rather the ways in which in parallel at an abstract level activity in the two separate domains operates a distribution or sharing of the common. Rancière's approach becomes even more powerful once we add to it a recognition that the production of the common is becoming increasingly central in today's biopolitical order. Exploring these conceptual connections allow us to pose some challenging questions for artists and perhaps open up new avenues for the politics of art.

For Rancière the link between aesthetics and politics resides specifically in what he calls 'the distribution of the sensible' (*le partage du sensible*). 'I call the distribution of the sensible,' he explains, 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of the common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.'[1] The common (*le commun*) is a technical term for Rancière that is foundational for his conception of both the political and the aesthetic, although this fact is unfortunately somewhat obscured in the English translations of his work.[2] It is relatively easy to recognize in terms of the distribution of the sensible a precise, formalist definition of aesthetics that is very close to the standard practices of artistic production: artistic practices are ways of doing and making that both reveal what we share in common and divide or distribute its elements in the realm of the sensible. In the case of the visual arts, for example, artistic practices simultaneously disclose in the visual fields what we share (such as our ways of seeing) and operate divisions within the visual and partitions between the visible and invisible. Note how the two meanings of *partage* – sharing and dividing – operate simultaneously here.

It may be less obvious how Rancière's definition applies equally to politics. The distribution of the sensible, he explains, reveals who has a share or a part in the common.[3] For politics, in other words, the sharing and dividing refers to a community's common wealth, goods, resources, knowledges, as

1. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12, translation modified.

2. Gabriel Rockhill offers a helpful footnote to explain that since 'the common' is awkward in English he substitutes for it various noun phrases, such as 'something in common' and 'what is common to the community', and adjectives such as 'shared' and 'communal' (Ibid., 102-103, note 5).

3. Ibid. See also Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, translated by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 26-27, original: *La mésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 48-49. Note that Rose translates '*partage du sensible*' here as 'partition of the perceptible'.

well as its offices and powers. Politics, we might say in more conventional terms, involves the decisions over our rights or entitlements to (and hence the distribution of) what we potentially share in common. 'Politics begins,' Rancière writes, 'precisely when one stops balancing profits and losses and worries instead about dividing the parts of the *common*, and evening out according to a geometrical proportion the parts of the community and the titles to obtain those parts, the *axiaï* that give one right to community.'[4] Rancière's notion of politics resides in the relation between 'the part' and 'the common,' which is mediated by the operation of *partage*, simultaneously dividing and sharing. The common, of course, is not the realm of sameness or indifference. It is the scene of encounter of social and political differences, at times characterized by agreement and at others antagonism, at times composing political bodies and at others decomposing them. Rancière thus establishes not an immediate link between politics and aesthetics, but a parallel operation they both enact on the common.

4. Rancière, *Disagreement*, op. cit. (note 3), 5, translation modified, emphasis in the original (*La mésentente*, 24).

The Production of the Common

Before articulating some of the questions raised by Ranicère's conception, I must focus briefly on the production of the common. In recent years many theorists in different fields have revived notions of the common (often in English with an 's' as 'the commons') in order to analyse and challenge economic doctrines of privatization. The historical analogy that such uses of the commons generally draw on is the process of enclosure at the dawn of the capitalist era when first in England and then throughout Europe the common lands and the common woods, which were used for animal grazing and gathering wood, were transformed into private property and fenced off. The defenders of the commons in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England often relied on Christian arguments that God gave the earth and its bounty to humans that they should use it in common. Nature should never cease to be common, they insisted; its parts may be distributed but must always remain shared. In some contexts today the discourse on the common engages situations very consistent with those in the earlier period, when contesting, for example, the privatization and sale of common or national resources such as water, gas, diamonds, or oil. All must have access, such arguments go, to land, water, fuel and other necessary resources; and the profits from other resources, such as oil or diamonds, must be shared in common, most often through the authority of the nation-state. The analogy is also used in the realm of cybertechnologies and immaterial property, bolstering arguments, for example, to preserve the 'information commons' or 'cultural commons'. The notion of the common functions similarly in these cases as a critique of how assigning property rights to immaterial goods prevents them from being shared. The difference here is that

the common goods in question, such as information, cultural products and code, are not natural. Most of these discourses, in any case, focus on not their artificiality and the processes of their production, but rather access and distribution, treating 'the commons', even when the historical analogy is not invoked, as something quasi-natural or at least given.[5]

5. On the historical analogy, see Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Rancière's notion of the common, although he develops it primarily through ancient Greek political thought rather than via this English historical analogy, functions in a very similar way. When politics and aesthetics begin, according to his notion, the common already exists and thus the central question is how its parts are to be shared, divided and distributed. No longer today, however, can we consider the common as quasi-natural or given. The common is dynamic and artificial, produced through a wide variety of social circuits and encounters. This recognition does not negate the importance of Rancière's notion of *partage* and the common, but rather extends it further to account also for the production of the common. In addition, this perspective allows us, or forces us, to consider the economic realm along with the political and the aesthetic. There we can recognize how the production of the common is emerging today as the dominant economic mode.

The Dominant Form of Production

Explaining the hypothesis that the production of the common is becoming central to the contemporary economy requires taking a step back to recount some well-known trends in economic history.[6] The hypothesis rests on a claim that we are in the midst of a shift of the dominant or hegemonic form of economic production from the industrial to the immaterial or biopolitical. It is not controversial to say that for at least the last 150 years industrial production has been dominant over all other forms of economic production. This dominance was not expressed in quantitative terms. When Marx proposed the dominance of industrial capital, for instance, in the mid-nineteenth century most workers, even in England, the most developed capitalist nation, were not in the factories but in the fields. Industrial production was dominant instead in qualitative terms, that is, insofar as its qualities were imposed over other forms of production. Mining and agriculture, for instance, had to industrialize by adopting industry's methods of mechanization, its divisions of labour, its wage relations, its discipline, its time precision, its working day, and so forth. All forms of production throughout the world and social relations themselves gradually were forced to adopt the characteristic qualities of industrial production.

6. For more detailed exploration of the hypothesis of a passage of the dominant economic form from industrial to immaterial or biopolitical production, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 107-115; and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press, forthcoming).

It is not particularly controversial either to propose that, at least for the last few decades, industrial production no longer plays this hegemonic role within the economy. Remember that this is not a quantitative claim: there may be equal or even larger numbers of workers in the factories considered worldwide, even though their location is shifting dramatically from the dominant to the subordinated parts of the world. The claim instead is quantitative: that the qualities of industry are no longer imposed over other forms of production.

The potential controversial element of the hypothesis that Toni Negri and I put forward is that industry is gradually being replaced in the dominant position by what we call immaterial or biopolitical production. With these terms we group together various sectors of the economy in which are produced goods that are in large portion immaterial, including information, ideas, knowledge, languages, communication, images, codes and affects. Immaterial production thus includes not only a series of symbolic and analytical tasks at the high end of the economy, such as software programmers and financial analysts, but also a variety of occupations at the low end, such as healthcare workers, flight attendants, legal secretaries, fast-food workers, and call centre workers. Note that the term immaterial here refers primarily to the products rather than to the labour processes – labour in these as other cases is still characterized by mixtures of manual and intellectual, corporeal and cognitive practices. Note too that the products in question are most often not entirely immaterial. Information, ideas and code, for instance, always have some material aspect. Instances of affective production too involve material products – healthcare workers stitch wounds and fast-food workers serve hamburgers – but they include also and even primarily a large affective component, creating a sense of well-being, being friendly, and the like.

Our hypothesis, then, is that we are living through a period of transition in which these forms of immaterial production are becoming hegemonic in the economy, which means, to repeat, not that they will become most numerous, but that their qualities will be progressively imposed over other forms of production. Industry is becoming increasingly informationalized and image-oriented; information in the form of the germplasm of seeds is becoming increasingly central in agriculture; and, in a general way, the temporalities of industry, with the strict division posed by its working day, are being replaced by temporalities that characterize these forms of immaterial production, which increasingly blur the division between work time and non-work time, undermining the boundary between work and life often through precarious forms of labour relations. These newly dominant forms of production bring with them sometimes new and often severe modes of suffering, alienation and exploitation, which all require fresh analyses and organized strategies of resistance.

The Generating Effect of the Common

For the purposes of my argument here the central element of this hypothesis is that it posits as central to the economy the production of the common. The immaterial products in question, first of all, do not generally operate according to a logic of scarcity as do material commodities. If I use an automobile or a house you are prevented from using it, but my using an idea or an image does not imply any such exclusion. In fact, sharing ideas and images is required for them to be productive so that we can create more ideas and more images in an expanding spiral. The production of scientific knowledge, for example, requires open access to a wide range of scientific ideas and methods. Advances in scientific knowledge are produced on that common basis and, in turn, the new knowledge must be made common through conferences and journals. That dual relation to the common – as basis and result – also characterizes the production of other forms of knowledge as well as that of images and various immaterial goods. The centrality of the common is perhaps even more explicit in affective and linguistic production, which cannot take place without social relations. These are immediately and necessarily *social* forms of production, which constantly rely on and generate the common. In all of these cases, making the products private, and thus taking them out of the common, undermines their productivity.

In the most general terms, these forms of production are aimed at the reproduction or generation of forms of life. Instead of thinking of the endpoint of capitalist production in terms of commodities, in other words, and considering capital as a thing, this forces us to consider capital as a social relation, as Marx suggested, and to recognize capitalist production as the (re)production of social relations. Commodity production seen in this light is really just a midpoint in the production of social relations and forms of life. It would be essential at this point to investigate how capital interacts with the common, finding ways to command the production of the common and to expropriate the common wealth produced. For my argument here, though, I simply want to emphasize the reason for calling this *bio*political production, since the production of the common is immediately the production of forms of life.

Biopolitics

The reason for calling this bio*political* production is that, in the context of the production of the common, the characteristics that are conventionally thought to isolate economic production from political action tend to break down. Hannah Arendt, for instance, conceives of work or economic production as an instrumental activity typical of the commodity production of the factory. Work is thus exhausted in the utility of its product. Political action, in contrast, which for Arendt is typified by speaking in the presence of others, is not exhausted in its ends but

rather is a continually open sphere of communication and cooperation. The division for Arendt relies, in part, on the relation to the common: whereas political action and political speech animate the common world we share, economic production is excluded from the common or, rather, only has access to a distorted version of the common through the reified sphere of market exchanges.[7] Even if we are to accept Arendt's division in the context of industrial production, clearly the terms shift in the case of immaterial production, where the economic takes on the qualities that she identifies with the political. Even though capital continues to impose instrumentality, immaterial products are not exhausted in their use. The affects created in a service relationship, for example, or the images and ideas created in an advertising campaign always exceed the instrumental goal capital sets for them. Furthermore, such production is characterized by language and speech, which Arendt identifies as central to the political.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

Recognizing the biopolitical nature of contemporary economic production does not imply that the economic and the political have merged but rather, similar to the way Rancière poses the relation between aesthetics and politics, the two domains are linked in the way they are both oriented towards the production of the common, that is, the creation of social relations and forms of life. In addition, our brief analysis suggests that the talents and skills generated and employed in biopolitical economic production tend to be the same as those required for political action. This does not mean, of course, that those engaged in biopolitical production are immediately acting politically but rather that they *can* act politically, that they have the necessary capacities. This claim has great significance for the possibilities of democratic participation, which will have to be explored elsewhere.

After this long detour to establish the centrality of the production of the common in economic terms, I am in position to return to Rancière's insights and add a further link to the connection he proposes, creating parallel relations among the aesthetic, the political and the economic, all of which are oriented towards the common. When he poses the connection between aesthetics and politics in the way they both operate a *partage* of the sensible and thus a sharing and division or distribution of the common, Rancière treats the common as if it were a given or relatively fixed element. When we emphasize the fact that the common is not natural but made and thus shift our focus to its production, these definitions shift slightly. Politics involves not only the distribution but also the production of the common, that is, the production and reproduction of social relations and forms of life, which highlights its correspondence with biopolitical production in the economic realm. This conception emphasizes the creative nature of not only artistic practice but also economic production and political action, emphasizing the capacities, skills, and talents required

for creation.[8] All three domains – art, politics and economics – are thus linked via the common and oriented towards the production of social relations and forms of life.

8. The characterization of art as not only the distribution but also the production of the common resonates Deleuze and Guattari's notion of art as the creation of percepts and affects. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163-200.

Questions for the Artist

One consequence of posing the relation in this way is that it casts in a new light the role of art and artists in relation to economic production. City and regional governments throughout Europe, for example, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, recognizing the decline of their industrial base and the increasing dominance of biopolitical production, are seeking to brand themselves as 'creative cities' and court artists as key elements to constructing a 'creative class.'[9] Along the same line, art biennials, which have proliferated in recent years, serve as a mode of city branding in the effort to capture some of the profits of the creative economy. Art promotion and patronage, of course, has long served as an emblem of prestige for state power, but now artistic practice is gaining a much stronger relation to economic production. The existence of artists in a city or region and the demonstration of social conditions that facilitate artistic production are not only seen as symbols to attract the development of biopolitical production, but also thought to function in that development, cultivating circuits of biopolitical production. Parallel to my claim that the talents and skills of biopolitical economic production are the same as those required for political action, here we can see that the capitalist planners recognize that the skills and talents for artistic practice are increasingly the same ones required for economic production. This increasing economic centrality of art and artistic practice can be beneficial to artists, of course, but can also involve them in unintended ways in capitalist development projects.

9. The writings of Richard Florida have been a central inspiration for many of the governmental efforts to make creative cities. See, for example, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Some artists are developing this relation to economic production in very different ways, based on the fact that they increasingly share labour conditions with a wide range of workers in the biopolitical economy. In France, for example, the *Coordinations* of the '*intermittents du spectacle*' (organized workers in the entertainments industries, such as television, film, dance and theatre), who conducted widespread protests from 2003 to 2007 to maintain their right to a continuous income even though they sporadically work on short contracts, recognized that an increasing portion of the labour force in France works under similar precarious labour conditions. The *Coordinations* thus expanded their demands and called for a continuous, basic income for all French workers, linking their struggle with that of other precarious workers.[10] This seems to me an exciting avenue for

10. See Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Intermittent et précaires* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008).

developing the increasingly parallel relation between artistic practice and economic production.

These parallel analyses bring me back once again to the relation between art and politics and raise a series of questions. What possibilities are opened in the biopolitical context by the recognition that artistic practice and political action are both engaged in the production and distribution of the common? Does this relation provide a means for artists to participate, through their artistic practice, in the many contemporary political struggles around the world in defence of the common, for an equitable distribution of the common, and for autonomy in the production of the common? If, as I claimed earlier, the skills and talents required for biopolitical economic production also apply to political action and the creative capacities of artistic practice are the same needed for economic production, then is it similarly true, to complete my set of three parallel relations, that increasingly today abilities developed in artistic practice are those required for political action? How can such artistic skills and talents be deployed in a democratic project of the defence, production and distribution of the common? My brief analysis of the parallel relations among the aesthetic, the political and the economic allows me to pose these questions but does not yet arrive at any responses. I suspect that artists are more qualified than I to respond and I imagine that in their work they are already discovering answers to these questions.

Chantal Mouffe

Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism

Political philosopher Chantal Mouffe shows how the existing hegemonic structures in current political systems can best be opposed by the development of counter-hegemonic practices. Specifically, cultural and artistic practices can play a major role in this because they are pre-eminently the terrain on which new subjectivities can be developed.

In recent years we have witnessed an incredible acceleration in the process of commodification in the field of culture. With the development of the culture industries, the worst nightmares of Horkeimer and Adorno seem to have been realized. Indeed, some theorists claim that, through our dependence on the entertainments corporations, we have become totally subjugated to the control of capital and that we cannot even imagine modes of resistances. Aesthetics, they say, has been so completely harnessed towards the development of a hedonistic culture that there is no space left for a subversive experience – not even in art.

Were this to be true, we would have to conclude that there is no alternative to the present post-political world. The current hegemonic form of neoliberal globalization would constitute our only horizon and we would have to abandon the hope of fostering the agonistic democracy that I have been advocating in my work. To be sure, they are those who would rejoice at such a prospect because they see the present situation as a cause for celebration. In their view, the post-political consensus indicates that, with the disappearance of the adversarial model of politics, democracy has become more mature and that antagonisms have been overcome.

I disagree with such a view and I consider that a well-functioning democracy requires a confrontation of democratic political positions. If passions cannot be mobilized by traditional democratic parties because they privilege a 'consensus at the centre', those passions tend to find other outlets, in diverse fundamentalist movements, around particularistic demands or non-negotiable moral issues. When a society lacks a dynamic democratic life with a real confrontation among a diversity of real alternatives, the terrain is laid for other forms of identifications of an ethnic, religious or nationalist nature and this leads to the emergence of antagonisms that cannot be managed by the democratic process. In my recent work I have, for instance, tried to show how the post-political consensus which characterizes most advanced liberal-democratic societies is at the origin of the growing success of rightwing populist parties. They are often the only ones who challenge the 'there is no alternative' dogma proclaimed by the traditional parties and attempt to mobilize passions against what they present as the uncaring 'establishment', composed of elitist bureaucrats who do not listen to the voice of the people and ignore its real concerns.

Such an evolution clearly represents a threat for democracy and a central aim of my reflection has been to bring to the fore the dangers of post-politics and the urgency of revitalizing democracy thanks to the proliferation of a variety of agonistic public spaces. To visualize how an agonistic democracy can be brought about, it is necessary to grasp the challenge facing democratic politics and this requires an adequate under-

standing of the terrain in which we have to act. We need, for instance, to understand the nature of the transition that advanced industrial societies have undergone since the last decades of the twentieth century. This transition has had important consequences in the field of artistic and cultural practices, which is why I have decided to centre my intervention on this topic.

A great number of theorists coming from a variety of theoretical perspectives agree that advanced industrial societies have, at the end of the last century, witnessed a transition which they present, either as move from industrial to post-industrial society, from Fordism to post-Fordism, or from a disciplinary society to a society of control. I have chosen to concentrate on the Fordism to post-Fordism approach because it is the most influential one. However I would like to note that those approaches are not necessarily incompatible and might even be combined. Each is inscribed in a specific intellectual tradition and it emphasizes a particular aspect of the transition.

From Fordism to Post-Fordism

To apprehend what is at stake in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, it is useful to examine the differences between the approaches influenced by the critical theory of Adorno and Horkeimer and those who are influenced by the Italian autonomist tradition. Their main disagreement lies in the role that the culture industry has played in the transformations of capitalism. It is well known that Adorno and Horkeimer saw the development of the culture industry as the moment when the Fordist mode of production finally managed to enter the field of culture. They see this evolution as a further stage in the process of commodification and subjugation of society to the requisites of capitalist production. For Paolo Virno and some other post-Operaist theorists, on the contrary, the culture industry played an important role in the process of transition between Fordism and post-Fordism because it is there that new practices of production emerged which led to the overcoming of Fordism. The space granted to the informal, the unexpected and the unplanned, which for Horkeimer and Adorno were uninfluential remnants of the past, are for Virno anticipatory omens. With the development of immaterial labour they began to play an increasingly important role and that opened the way for new forms of social relations. In advanced capitalism, says Virno, the labour process has become performative and it mobilizes the most universal requisites of the species: perception, language, memory and feelings. Contemporary production is virtuosic and productive labour in its totality appropriates the special characteristics of the performing artist. According to him the culture industry is in fact the matrix of post-Fordism.

Theorists influenced by the autonomist tradition concord on the fact that the transition from Fordism

to post-Fordism needs to be understood, not as dictated by the logic of the development of capitalist forces of production, but as reaction to the new practices of resistances of the workers. Disagreements exist, however, among them concerning the political consequences of this transition. Although many of them use the notion of 'multitude' to refer to the new type of political agent characteristic of the current period, they do not envisage its future in the same way. Some like Hardt and Negri celebrate in the multitude the emergence of a new revolutionary subject which will necessarily bring down the new form of domination embodied in empire. Incorporating, although not always in a faithful way, some of the analyses of Foucault and Deleuze, they assert that the end of the disciplinary regime that was exercised over bodies in enclosed spaces like schools, factories and asylums, and its replacement by the procedures of control linked to the growth of networks, is leading to a new type of governance which opens the way to more autonomous and independent forms of subjectivity. With the expansion of new forms of cooperative communication and the invention of new communicative forms of life, those subjectivities can express themselves freely and they will contribute to the formation of a new set of social relations that will finally replace the capitalist system.

Paolo Virno, while agreeing on the potential for new forms of life, is not so sanguine about the future. He sees the growth of the multitude as an ambivalent phenomenon and he also acknowledges the new forms of subjection and precarization which are typical of the post-Fordist stage.[1] It is true that people are not as passive as before, but it is because they have now become active actors of their own precarization. So instead of seeing in the generalization of immaterial labour a type of spontaneous communism like Hardt and Negri, Virno tends to see post-Fordism as 'a manifestation of the communism of capital'.

1. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotex(e), 2004).

Despite their differences, there is something, however, that all those thinkers have in common: their conviction that it is necessary to relinquish the conception of radical politics aimed at 'taking power' in order to control the institutions of the state. They claim that one should ignore the existing power structures, and dedicate oneself to constructing alternative social forms outside the state power network as well as the existing institutions. Virno asserts that it is in the refusal to work and the different forms of exodus and disobedience that one should locate any possibility of emancipation. Any majoritarian model of society, organized around a state has to be rejected and replaced by another model of organization of the multitude which is deemed to be more universal. It has the form of a unity provided by common places of the mind, cognitive- linguistic habits and the general intellect.

A Hegemonic Approach

While agreeing on the necessity to acknowledge the fundamental transformations in the mode of regulation of capitalism represented by the transition to post-Fordism, I think that we should envisage this transition from the point of view of the theory of hegemony. I recognize the importance of not seeing the transformations undergone by our societies as the mere consequence of technological progresses and on bringing to the fore their political dimension. As social philosopher Andre Gorz, among others, has pointed out, they should be understood as a move by capital to provide what was a fundamentally political answer to the crisis of governability of the 1970s. Many factors have contributed to this transition and it is important to grasp the complexity of its dynamics.

My problem with Operaist and post-Operaist views is that, by putting the emphasis on the workers' struggles, they tend see this transition as if it was exclusively moved by one single logic, the workers' resistances to the process of exploitation forcing the capitalists to reorganize the process of production, and to move to the post-Fordist era of immaterial labour. According to them capitalism can only be reactive and, contrary to Deleuze and Guattari, they refuse to accept the creative role played by both capital and the working class. What they deny is in fact the role played in this transition by the hegemonic struggle.

To clarify what I understand by hegemonic struggle, let me introduce some basic tenets of my theoretical framework. According to the approach that I am advocating and which has been developed in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* written jointly with Ernesto Laclau, two key concepts are necessary to grasp the nature of the political: 'antagonism' and 'hegemony'.[2] On one side it is necessary to acknowledge the dimension of the political as the ever present possibility of antagonism and this requires, on the other side, coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the indecisiveness that pervades every order. This means recognizing the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and envisaging society as the product of a series of practices whose aim is to establish order in a context of contingency. The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions fixed are what we call 'hegemonic practices'. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always have been otherwise and every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is always the expression of a particular structure of power relations. What is at a given moment accepted as the 'natural order', with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifesta-

2. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London/New York: Verso, 2001).

tion of a deeper objectivity outside of the practices that bring it into being. Every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it to install another form of hegemony.

I would like to suggest that in order to introduce the hegemonic dimension in the transition between Fordism and post-Fordism, we can find interesting insights in the interpretation of this transition put forward by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello. In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* they bring to light the role played by what they call 'artistic critique' in the transformation undergone by capitalism in the last decades of the twentieth century.[3] They show how the demands of autonomy of the new movements of the 1960s have been harnessed in the development of the post-Fordist networked economy and transformed into new forms of control. The aesthetic strategies of the counterculture: the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical exigency, are now used to promote the conditions required by the current mode of capitalist regulation, replacing the disciplinary framework characteristic of the Fordist period. Today, artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorisation and artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist productivity through 'neo-management'.

3. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006).

From my point of view what is interesting in this approach is that it reveals that a crucial dimension of the transition was a process of discursive rearticulation of existing elements. This is what makes it possible to understand it in terms of a hegemonic struggle. To be sure, Boltanski and Chiapello do not use this vocabulary but theirs is a clear example of what Gramsci calls 'hegemony through neutralization' or 'passive revolution' to refer to situations where demands which challenge an established hegemonic order are recuperated by the existing system, by satisfying them in a way that neutralizes their subversive potential. To envisage the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism in such a mode helps us to understand it as a hegemonic move by capital to re-establish its leading role and to reassert its legitimacy.

By adding to the analysis offered by *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, the undeniable role played in this transition by workers' resistances, we can arrive at a more complex understanding of the forces at play in the emergence of the current neoliberal hegemony. This hegemony is the result of a set of political interventions in a complex field of economic, legal and ideological forces. It is a discursive construction that articulates in a very specific manner a manifold of practices, discourses and languages-games of very different nature. Through a process of sedimentation the political origin of those contingent practices has been erased and they have become naturalized. Neoliberal practices and institutions

appear as the outcome of natural processes and the forms of identification that they have produced have crystallized into identities which are taken for granted. This is how the 'common sense' which constitutes the framework for what is considered as possible and desirable has been established.

To challenge neoliberalism it is therefore vital to transform this framework and this requires the production of new subjectivities capable of subverting the existing hegemony. Today's capitalism relies increasingly on semiotic techniques in order to create the modes of subjectivation which are necessary for its reproduction. In modern production, the control of the souls (Foucault) plays a strategic role in governing affects and passions. The forms of exploitation characteristic of the times when manual labour was dominant have been replaced by new ones which require the constantly creation of new needs and an incessant desire for the acquisition of goods. Hence the crucial role played by advertising in our consumer societies. It is the construction of the very identity of the consumer which is at stake in the techniques of advertising. Those techniques are not limited to promoting specific products, but aim at producing fantasy worlds with which the consumers of goods will identify. Indeed, nowadays to buy something is to enter into a specific world, to become part of an imagined community. To maintain its hegemony, the neoliberal system needs to permanently mobilize people's desires and shape their identities. This is why the cultural terrain now occupies such a strategic place. To be sure, the realm of culture has always played an important role in hegemonic politics but in the times of post-Fordist production this role has become absolutely crucial. A counter-hegemonic politics should therefore engage with this terrain, so as to foster other forms of identification.

Counter-Hegemonic Struggle and Agonistic Practices

Now that I have presented the main lines of the hegemonic approach to the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, I would like to make some considerations concerning the construction of counter-hegemonic practices. It is clear that, once social reality is envisaged in terms of hegemonic practices, the process of social critique characteristic of radical politics cannot consist, as in the view advocated by the post-Operaist theorists to whom I referred earlier, in withdrawing from the existing institutions but, on the contrary, must engage with them so as to disarticulate the existing discourses and practices through which the current hegemony is established and reproduced. Such a counter-hegemonic struggle cannot merely consist of separating the different elements whose discursive articulation is at the origin of those practices and institutions. The second moment, the moment of re-articulation, is crucial. Other-

wise we would encounter a chaotic situation of pure dissemination, leaving the door open for attempts of re-articulation by non-progressive forces. Indeed, we have many historical examples of situations in which the crisis of the dominant order led to rightwing solutions.

It is also important not to envisage this struggle as the displacement of a supposedly false consciousness that would reveal the true reality. Such a perspective is completely at odds with the anti-essentialist premises of the theory of hegemony which rejects the very idea of a 'true consciousness' and asserts that identities are always the result of processes of identification. It is through insertion in a manifold of practices, discourses and languages games that specific forms of individualities are constructed. According to the hegemonic approach, social reality is discursively constructed and the political has a primary structuring role because social relations are ultimately contingent; any prevailing articulation results from an antagonistic confrontation whose outcome is not decided in advance. What is therefore needed is a strategy whose objective is, through a set of counter-hegemonic interventions, to disarticulate the existing hegemony and to establish a more democratic one thanks to a process of re-articulation of new and old elements into different configurations of power. This is why the transformation of political identities cannot consist of a rationalist appeal to the true interest of the subject, but of its insertion in practices that will mobilize its affects towards the disarticulation of the framework in which the process of identification is taking place, thereby opening the way for other forms of identification.

I would like to stress that to construct oppositional identities it is not enough to simply foster a process of 'de-identification' or 'de-individualization'. The second move, the moment of 're-identification', of 're-individualization' is decisive. To insist only on the first move is in fact to remain trapped in a problematic which postulates that the negative moment is sufficient, on its own, to bring about something positive, as if new subjectivities were already there, ready to emerge when the weight of the dominant ideology is lifted. Such a view, which unfortunately informs many forms of critical art, fails to come to terms with the nature of the hegemonic struggle and the complex process of construction of identities.

That the critique and disarticulation of the existing hegemony needs to be accompanied by a process of re-articulation is something that is missed by all approaches in terms of reification or false consciousness that think that the critique of ideology is sufficient to bring about a new order, free from oppression and power. It is also missed, albeit in a different way, by the theorists of the multitude who believe that its oppositional consciousness does not require political articulation. This leads them to evacuate what I take to be the crucial

question for a radical democratic politics: how to establish a 'chain of equivalence' among the different democratic struggles. Those struggles do not automatically converge and they might often conflict with each other. The aim of a radical democratic politics should be to provide surfaces of inscription where their diverse demands can be articulated around a 'collective will' (Gramsci). I am convinced that cultural and artistic practices could play an important role in the agonistic struggle because they are a privileged terrain for the construction of new subjectivities. Think, for instance, of the success of feminist artistic practices in undermining the hegemonic order by revealing how the construction of images contributed to construction and reproduction of oppressive social norms and by offering alternative views. To revitalize democracy in our post-political societies, what is urgently needed is to foster the multiplication of agonistic public spaces where everything that the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate can be brought to light and challenged. This can be done in a multiplicity of ways but the thought that I want to share with you is that radical politics can only be successful when it is envisaged on the mode of a 'war of position' aimed at transforming the existing institutions and the creation of a new hegemony.

Thierry de Duve

The Glocal and the Singuniversal

Reflections on Art and Culture in the Global World

According to Belgian philosopher Thierry de Duve, the criticism of the art biennial as a global phenomenon from the perspective of economic and amusement value is too limited. By allowing the aesthetic value of art to again be part of art criticism, a different type of opposition against the hegemonic centres that are dominant in today's global culture becomes possible. To achieve this, De Duve lays claim to the Kantian idea of *sensus communis* – the human ability to share feelings.

In alphabetical order, so as to make nobody jealous: Athens, Berlin, Brisbane, Bucharest, Buenos Aires, Busan, Cairo, Dakar, Dhaka, Goteborg, Gwangju, Havana, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Liverpool, Luanda, Lyon, Montréal, Moscow, Perth, Prague, Quebec City, Santiago de Chili, São Paulo, Shanghai, Sharjah, Sydney, Taipei, Tijuana, Tirana, Valencia, Venice, Vilnius, Yokohama, Zagreb. This list of cities is a bit too long to figure beneath the name of a fashion designer on a shopping bag or a perfume bottle, but it might as well. Pardon my bad taste for adding Bhopal to the list. My excuse is that chemical catastrophes are the flipside of the same global economy that sends perfume bottles to every airport duty-free store in the world. I abstained at first, for fear of conjuring up bad memories of the Union Carbide gas leak, but also because I didn't want to give it away too soon and have you think of the Bharat Bhavan Biennial of Contemporary Indian Art in Bhopal. But you probably guessed already: the list refers to some of the cities where biennials, at times triennials, of contemporary art are being held these days. Their number is increasing at a crazy pace, and though Europe still houses the majority of them, the so-called periphery, with Asia in the lead, is quickly catching up; as of today, estimates oscillate between 80 and 140 art biennials scattered around the world.

Interpretation of the phenomenon also oscillates between the optimistic embracing of a democratic redistribution of cultural power among established and 'emergent' regions of the world, and the pessimistic recognition of a new form of cultural hegemony and re-colonization on the part of the West. Either the phenomenon is hailed for substituting a horizontal network of dispersed local art tribes for the vertical hierarchies dictated by those local art tribes that happen to live in the so-called centres; or it is demonized for generating a new kind of nomadic art tribe that still imposes its hierarchies the world over because it masters the art of networking and can afford to jet around the globe from one biennial to the next. As one critic expressing the optimistic view said: 'A success of a biennial also has to do with the changing of the balance of power in the international art world by focusing critical attention away from the dominant cultural centres and towards the periphery. . . . It is at the biennials that an art marginalized from the hegemonic centres may appear.' I lifted this excerpt from an article by Christine Wang found on a website appropriately called *The Gathering of the Tribes*. The pessimistic and critical view was expressed, for example, by the French critic Paul Ardenne in *Art Press*, in June 2003: 'Doesn't the West make an abusive usage of art biennials as a mode of externalization of its production or of its aesthetic options, the way it does with its economic action, by delocalizing and exploiting for its own profit today's globalization of the world?' I myself have mixed feelings about this

state of affairs, no doubt. But the purpose of my paper is not so much to sort out their ambiguous motivations, as it is to raise a philosophical question made urgent by the proliferation of art biennials everywhere.

Before we can broach this philosophical question, we must pay the economy its due. There is no question that the reasons for the proliferation of art biennials are mainly, if not exclusively, economic. Culture sells, attracts tourists, generates economic activity and is an integral part of the entertainment industry. *Pace* Adorno, I see no reason why we should regret this. His critique of the culture industry is vain, now that nobody seriously entertains the hope any longer that capitalism will be superseded in the foreseeable future. At best capitalism can and must learn to behave more ethically and more equitably, which it does when it is in its own interest. Militants of what is now currently called the *glocal* – a conflation of the global and the local – are pressing for such ethical behaviour. Although most often agriculture rather than culture has priority on their agenda, we might be wise to observe the current transformations in the culture industry as a significant testing ground for the glocalization of the economy. Placing this testing ground under the umbrella of art has enormous advantages. For art, identified as contemporary visual art, is the one sector within the culture industry that is the most dynamic and enjoys the greatest freedom. It is not necessarily visual in the sense of painting and sculpture. It houses experiments of all sorts ranging from the performing arts to documentary cinema to music and sound. It allows political statements of all kinds, anti-social behaviour, eccentric sexual practices and outrageous opinions to find forms of expression that would not be tolerated elsewhere. It thrives on cultural differences and confrontations and on individual and group idiosyncrasies to the point where dissent, not consensus, is the norm. Last but not least, it still enjoys the highbrow aura it has inherited from the museum art of the past, all the while having the pungent flavour of the avant-garde and tapping into popular culture for its inspiration, codes and styles. Even the opera (the proliferation of opera houses easily matches that of art biennials) cannot pretend to such a catholic reunion of conflicting features and remains a bourgeois art, in comparison with the visual art scene.

So, rather than simply signalling either successful integration of the local into the global (the optimist's view) or hegemonic appropriation of the local by the global (the pessimist's view), I think that art biennials are, quite typically, cultural experiments in the *glocal* economy. The list of city names with which I began is a sign. Promoters of glocalization often emphasize that the appropriate scale where the global economy can be reconciled with the pursuit of local interests is the city rather than the nation-state. On the scale of the city, abstract capital and international

finance cannot so easily retreat into the 'ice-cold waters of egotistic calculation' and are bound to meet the needs, desires and protests of a real and concrete community of people marked as city-dwellers and citizens. With the proliferation of art biennials, all bearing the names of their hosting cities, the art community – by which I mean both the local art tribes living in the said cities and the sophisticated nomadic art tribe that hops from one biennial to the next – has seemingly turned glocal. As expressed by Christine Wang, already quoted: 'The biennials allow the cities to enter into the global economy.' Now that all grand narratives, whether classical or avant-garde, have lost their currency, the art community seems to have found a new legitimation in *glocal* ethics, based on the free and fair trade of cultural goods under the umbrella of art.

Art, so it seems, is now no more and no less than the name of a certain category of cultural commodities capable of catering to an art community defined in glocal terms. All you need is indeed to hop from one biennial to the next to see this amply confirmed, taste-wise. My mixed feelings notwithstanding, I tend to see this state of affairs as a fact, no more to be applauded than deplored. It is simply the empirical context from which my philosophical question arises, a question first of all prompted from within political philosophy, where its intellectual context is concerned. There is an interesting symptom in the conflation of global and local by the neologism *glocal*, a symptom that suggests that the name of art may be more than an umbrella under which to conduct experimentation in glocal ethics. The word glocal implies the bridging of a hiatus from the particular to the general, a conceptual jump across a discontinuity formulated in geopolitical terms: the city, the world. In its own way, classical political theory registered this conflation, or an eighteenth-century avatar of it, with the word cosmopolitanism (from *cosmos*, world, and *polis*, city). The glocal ethos, we might argue, adapts cosmopolitanism to the needs of our time: it acknowledges the 'insocial sociability' of which Kant spoke in the fourth proposition of his *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*. Economic competition under capitalism represents the natural tendency of humans to compete with each other and egotistically pursue their own individual interests, while democracy and the hope that it can be better implemented at the level of a network of cities engaged in commerce with each other than at the level of nation-states, makes an appeal to what Kant called 'a regular process of betterment of the civil constitution in our part of the world (as it is likely to give some day laws to all the others)'. We read in this sentence an echo of both the optimist's and the pessimist's views on the proliferation of biennials, as it is clear that Kant's optimism can all too easily be denounced as rampant imperialism. In invoking Kant to discuss the glo-

cal, I am wearing my European biases and prejudices on my sleeve. 'There is something Eurocentric about assuming that imperialism began with Europe,' Gayatri Spivak writes at the end of the section of a chapter devoted to Kant in her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Can it not be said, with a similarly ironic twist, that there is something Eurocentric in assuming that cosmopolitanism, indeed born in Europe, therefore remains foreign to other cultures? Glocalization demonstrates that this is not the case, though not without casting doubt on the validity of invoking Kant.

Although it arises from within political theory, the philosophical question raised by the glocalization of the art world via the proliferation of art biennials is mainly aesthetic. It has to do with the difference we make between works of art and cultural goods produced and/or presented under the umbrella of art – I mean, the difference we ought to make *if* we attach a value to the word art other than its economic or its entertainment value. We may, of course, refuse to make this difference, and conventionally use the word art as mere registration of cultural products called art for convenience's sake. The point of my paper is to claim that we would lose something essential in doing that – something essential not to art, but to the human condition. We have a responsibility in drawing a line between the things we judge as deserving the name of art and the things sheltering under the name of art as if under an umbrella. This entails that it is our aesthetic judgement, expressed liminally by the sentence 'this is art', that draws the line and makes the difference (I'm not saying accounts for the difference) between works of art and mere cultural goods. Works of art are the outcome of aesthetic judgements – the artist's, in the first place, then ours, members of the art community – whereas cultural goods are not, or not necessarily.

Granted that glocal citizenship can be construed as the present-day version of cosmopolitanism, the question, then, where the art community is concerned, is how to conceive of *aesthetic* cosmopolitanism. The neologism glocal, as I said, is a symptom, a sign. It bridges a certain geographical hiatus by jumping from the particular to the general. When transferred to the aesthetic realm, however, the word glocal will not do. For aesthetic judgements imply the bridging of a far greater hiatus; they conflate two extremes much further apart: they are at once singular and universal. If you allow me to forge a neologism of my own: they are *singuniversal*. By singular, I mean more – or less, if you prefer – than that they are uttered by individuals before individual works of art in individual circumstances. The same work of art repeatedly experienced by the same person renews rather than repeats the experience, and may yield quite different aesthetic appreciations. We need not suppose the work of art to

be a stable entity, or the subject of the aesthetic experience to maintain itself unchanged. We are dealing with singularities: one-time events lived through by one-time subjectivities. Thus by singular, I mean something more unique and less extensive, more local, if you want, than individuality. And by universal, I also mean more – or less – than the extrapolation of a generality from a particularity to the level of the global. I mean that although aesthetic judgements are in no way actually shared by the globality of the world's inhabitants, they claim to be valid for all.

In saying this, I am clearly wearing my European biases, to wit, my Kantianism, on my sleeve again. It is indeed my conviction that when it comes to understanding what is at stake for the human condition when we utter aesthetic judgements, Kant basically got it right. Whether aesthetic judgements express themselves by phrases such as 'this rose is beautiful' (Kant's favourite example) or 'this cultural product is art', is irrelevant on that level. Kant restricted what he called pure aesthetic judgements to the realm of nature. For complex historical reasons (the 'death of God' not the least among them), a transfer has occurred from the natural to the cultural and from beauty to art, so that 'this is art' has become the paradigmatic formula for the liminal modern aesthetic judgement. But Kant's lesson remains unaltered when you read the *Critique of Judgement* mentally replacing the word beauty with the word art. What the phrase 'this rose is beautiful' (or ugly) actually does is not ascribe objective beauty (or ugliness) to the rose; rather, it imputes to the other – all others – the same feeling of pleasure (or pain) that one feels in oneself. Similarly, what the phrase 'this cultural product is art' (or not art) actually does is not ascribe the objective status of art (or of non-art) to the cultural product in question; rather, it imputes to the other – all others – the same feeling of dealing with art (or of not dealing with art) that one feels in oneself. Whether it is A claiming that this rose is beautiful or this cultural product is art, or B claiming that the rose is ugly or that the cultural product in question doesn't deserve to be called art, their disagreement amounts to addressing each other thusly: *you ought to feel the way I feel. You ought to agree with me.* Kant understood better than anyone before or since that this call on the other's capacity for agreeing by dint of feeling was legitimate. What is ultimately at stake in an aesthetic judgement is neither the rose's beauty nor the feeling it arouses; it is neither the cultural product's art status nor the feeling that it is art; it is the agreement. The faculty of taste is not important in itself. It is important inasmuch as it testifies to and identifies with a universally shared faculty of agreeing, which Kant called *sensus communis*.

Kant's *sensus communis* is not ordinary common sense; it is common sentiment. Shared or shareable

feeling, and the faculty thereof. A common ability for having feelings in common. A communality or communicability of sentiment, implying a definition of humankind as a community united by a universally shared ability for sharing feelings. A cosmopolitanism that is not founded politically, but aesthetically, and on which it would be illegitimate to actually found the cosmopolitan state, because an actual aesthetic community extending to all would be a monster. For there is no proof that *sensus communis* exists as a fact, no proof at all. We cannot rely on the faculty of agreeing in order to construct civil society. What exists as a fact is that we say such things as 'this rose is beautiful', or 'this cultural product is art'; that we say such things by dint of feeling; and that we claim universal assent for these feelings, whether we know it or not.

Of course, humanity as a whole will never agree on such judgements. But that's not required for the phrase 'this is beautiful' or 'this is art' to be legitimate (I'm not saying true, I'm saying legitimate). All I need is to make the supposition that my feeling is shareable by all. And that's what I do suppose. That's what we all suppose, you and me, everyone, when we make aesthetic judgements. The implied 'you ought to feel the way I feel' is what justifies me in my claim, you in yours, and all our fellow human beings in theirs, even though there is not a hope in the world for universal agreement among us. War is the rule, peace and love are the exception. But Kant felt it was his duty as a philosopher to grant all humans the faculty of agreeing, whose Kantian names are taste and *sensus communis*. Regardless of whether *sensus communis* exists as a fact, we ought to suppose that it does. Regardless of whether taste is a natural endowment of the human species – say, an instinct – or whether it is merely an idea, a mere idea, it is an idea we cannot do without. In Kant's vocabulary, a mere idea we cannot do without is called a transcendental idea. From what he said in his *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, we gather that for him *sensus communis* was no more than a transcendental idea, indeed. Where instincts are concerned, we'd better assume that humans are wolves to each other: their wars are waged on every terrain, the aesthetic included. For it is clear that even on this terrain we don't agree, neither on the beauty of roses nor on the art status of cultural goods. Kant has once and for all fathomed the depth of aesthetic disagreements among humans: they amount to nothing less than denying the other his or her humanity, all the while appealing to it. Hence his scepticism about *sensus communis*, and his conviction that it nevertheless ought to be postulated, even in the absence of theoretically demonstrable empathy in the human species.

The Kantian idea of *sensus communis* offers a transcendental – by all means not an empirical – solution to the antinomy of man's 'insociable

sociability' in postulating that what constitutes humans in their common humanity is the idea that they are able to live in peace with each other. The amazing thing is that he grasped that an issue of such magnitude as peace on earth was at stake in a statement as anodyne as 'this rose is beautiful'. When replaced by 'this cultural product is art', the real depth of his thinking on aesthetics comes to the fore.

The philosophical question raised by the glocalization of the art world via the proliferation of art biennials, as I said before, has to do with the difference we *ought* to make between works of art and cultural goods presented under the umbrella of art, *if* we attach a value to the word art other than its economic or its entertainment value. Kant teaches us that we *ought* to attach such a value to the word art. This *ought* is the quasi-moral obligation that makes us 'require from everyone *as a duty*, as it were, the feeling contained in a judgement of taste' (*Critique of Judgement*, § 40). It is a very strange *ought*, for we do make aesthetic judgements all the time. We cannot help it: feelings of beauty or ugliness, etcetera, are involuntary, automatic and, one might say, irresponsible. But what we are dealing with, here, is not feelings of beauty or ugliness, although they may intervene; it is the resulting feeling that a given cultural product deserves to be called art. We would lose something essential to the human condition were we to take for granted that the exhibitions we visit contain art simply because they are announced as exhibitions of art. What we would lose is a certain idea of universality that defines the human condition by the supposition, the mere supposition, that all human beings are endowed with the faculty of living in peace. We have a responsibility in drawing a line between the things we judge as deserving the name of art and the things sheltering under the name of art as if under an umbrella. Admittedly, this responsibility is mostly symbolic: it won't change your life much if you are an occasional visitor to one or the other biennial of contemporary art. It may mean a lot, however, if you are among the organizers, if you are a critic writing reviews, and more, still, if you are a curator or an artist.

The mixed feelings I have about the proliferation of art biennials have little to do with the phenomenon as such, they have to do with the way some of the works shown at art biennials confuse the aesthetic cosmopolitanism art stands for with some cultural glocalism or other, and deliberately use art as an umbrella under which to advance well intentioned critical or political agendas with, however, sometimes poor aesthetic results. I need not draw you the whole picture. You know that this is the trend in today's art world, and that it has many supporters in the art establishment as well as in academia. The re-baptizing of art schools as visual culture departments, and the erasure of the word *art* from their

curriculum in favour of *cultural practice* are symptoms. But there are also symptoms or signs of resistance to this trend, sometimes even in the head and in the actual practice of their best proponents. It is the archetypical double bind of today's artists, art teachers and theorists alike, to be torn between the wilful denial of the aesthetic and its return through the back door as uneasy feelings – most often, alas, of guilt. The discourse of the anti-aesthetic has been dominant for 30 years now, at least in the West. It has never succeeded in suppressing aesthetic feelings, but it has gone a long way to forbid their expression. Kant-bashing is its favourite strategy (along with Greenberg-bashing, anti-formalism, and so on).

I am nevertheless convinced that anybody seriously interested in art has a sense that whereas all works of art are definitely cultural goods, some are not reducible to cultural goods, and that these are the ones that matter, the ones I would call, with an old-fashioned word, authentic works of art. Art and culture are not the same thing. The line is drawn case by case by the singular aesthetic judgement in its claim to universality. Cultures, in their variety, are a subject of comparative analysis for the anthropologist, but our global world has turned us all into amateur anthropologists of our own culture, in its global uniformity. *Glocalism* is in that respect a manner of resistance to the hegemonic world culture, which is of course controlled by and exported from the hegemonic centres.

The *singuniversal* of the aesthetic judgment is a different kind of resistance, which supposes two things: an actual, committed practice of the faculty of aesthetic judgement in pursuit of the best quality in art, and some sceptical, definitely non-utopian but nevertheless firm attachment to the realm of ideas. The *singuniversality* of our aesthetic judgements not only jumps from the singular to the universal, it also bridges the hiatus between the empirical and the transcendental – something the *glocal* does not do. The *glocal* is entirely an empirical concept. Struggles done in its name are important because as citizens we live in the empirical world and must learn to manage the 'insociable sociability' of our fellow human beings and ourselves. Without the *singuniversal*, however, the *glocal* remains devoid of purposiveness. Beyond freedom and justice, peace on earth is the ultimate purpose of political action. Violence and aggressiveness are among the instincts our nature has equipped us with to achieve the purpose of peace via devious ways. This is Kant's thesis in *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*. I find it realistic, politically. Art is ridiculously powerless on the political level. Its domain is the purposiveness without the purpose. It places its bets on *sensus communis*, the faculty of agreeing by dint of feeling, as if it were an instinct, knowing well that the chances are great that it is merely an idea. My talk, I realize, is a plea for empirical pessimism combined with

transcendental optimism, which is why I embraced neither the optimistic nor the pessimistic view of today's glocal art world. I am the observer who reflects on the situation. But I am a militant when I claim that there is a difference between the expanding *glocal* communities involved by the various art biennials and the *singuniversal* community demanded by the aesthetic judgement when it is uttered as 'this is art'. The latter community is humanity itself, all of us.

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Boris Groys

From Medium to Message

The Art Exhibition as Model of a New World Order

Art philosopher Boris Groys sees the art installation as a way of making hidden reality visible. The ambiguous meaning of the notion of freedom that Groys observes in our democratic order is also present in the contemporary art installation. This can be exposed by examining it and analysing the role of the artist and the curator. The public space created by the installation, and by the biennial, is the model for a new political world order.

Today, art is frequently equated with the art market, and the artwork is primarily identified as a commodity. That art functions in the context of the art market and that every work of art is a commodity is beyond doubt. But art is also made and exhibited for those who do not want to be art collectors – and they are the majority of the art public. The typical exhibition visitor rarely sees the exhibited art as a commodity. At the same time the number of large-scale exhibitions, of biennials and triennials, documentas and manifestas, is constantly growing. All these big exhibitions, in which so much money and energy is invested, are not made primarily for art buyers, but for the large mass, for the anonymous visitor who will perhaps never buy an artwork. Also, art fairs which, on the face of it, are meant to serve the art buyers are now being increasingly transformed into events in public space which also attract people who have no interest or not enough money to buy art. The art system thus is on the way to becoming part of that mass culture that art has long been out to watch and analyse from a distance. It is becoming a part of mass culture not as a production of individual pieces traded on the art market, but as an exhibition practice that combines with architecture, design and fashion – as it was envisaged by the pioneering minds of the avant-garde, by the artists of the Bauhaus, the Vkhutemas, and others as early as in the 1920s. Thus, contemporary art can be understood primarily as an exhibition practice. That means, among many other things, that it is becoming increasingly difficult today to differentiate between the two main figures of the contemporary art world – the artist and the curator.

The traditional division of labour inside the art system was clear enough. The artworks were produced by artists and then selected and exhibited by curators. But at least since Duchamp this division of labour has collapsed. Today there is no longer an 'ontological' difference between making art and displaying art. In the context of contemporary art, to make art means to show things as art. So the question arises: is it possible and, if yes, how is it possible to differentiate between the roles of artist and curator when there is no difference between art production and art exhibition? Now I would argue that such a differentiation is still possible. And I would like to do so by analysing the difference between the standard exhibition and the art installation. A conventional exhibition is conceived as an accumulation of art objects which are placed next to one another in the exhibition space to be viewed one after the other. The exhibition space works in this case as an extension of the neutral, public urban space – like a side alley, in fact, that the passer-by may turn into if he or she has paid the admission fee. The movement of the visitors through the exhibition space remains similar to that of a passer-by walking down a street and watching the architecture of the houses left and right. It is by no means accidental that Walter Benjamin should construct

his 'Arcades Project' around the analogy between an urban stroller and an exhibition visitor. The body of the viewer in this case remains outside art: art takes place in front of the viewer's eyes – as an art object, a performance, or a film. Accordingly, in this case the exhibition space is understood as being an empty, neutral, public space. The exhibition space is here a symbolic property of the public. The only function of such an exhibition space is to make the art objects that are placed in it easily accessible to the gaze of the visitors.

The curator administers this space in the name of the public – and as a representative of the public. Accordingly, the curator's role is to safeguard the public character of the exhibition space – and at the same time to bring the individual artworks into this public space, to make them accessible to the public, to publicize them. It is obvious that an individual artwork cannot assert its presence by itself, forcing the viewer to take a look at it. It lacks the vitality, energy, and health to do so. The work of art, it seems, is originally sick, helpless – in order to see it, viewers have to be taken to it just like hospital staff takes visitors to see a bed-ridden patient. It is no coincidence that the word 'curator' is etymologically related to 'cure'. To curate is to cure. Curating cures the powerlessness of the image, its inability to show itself by itself. Exhibition practice thus is the cure that heals the originally ailing image, that is, gives it presence, visibility – brings it to the public view and turns it into the object of the public's judgment. However, one can say that curating works like a supplement, like a *pharmakon* in the sense of Derrida in that it both cures the image and further contributes to its illness.[1] This iconoclastic potential of curating was initially directed against the sacral objects of the past by presenting them as mere art objects in the neutral, empty exhibition spaces of the modern art museum or *Kunsthalle*. In fact, it is curators, including museum curators, who originally produced art in the modern sense of this word. For the first art museums – founded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and expanded in the course of the nineteenth century due to imperial conquests and the pillaging of non-European cultures – collected all sorts of 'beautiful' functional objects that were previously used for religious rites, interior decoration, or the manifestation of personal wealth, exhibiting them as works of art, that is, as defunctionalized autonomous objects put up for the mere purpose of being viewed. All art originally is design – be it religious design or design of power. In the modern period, too, design precedes art. Looking for modern art in today's museums, we have to realize that what is to be seen there as art is, above all, defunctionalized design fragments, be it mass-culture design – from Duchamp's urinal to Warhol's Brillo box – or utopian design which – from Jugendstil to Bauhaus and the Russian avant-garde,

1. Jacques Derrida *Force de loi (*Paris: Editions Galilée, 1994 [1990])

and on to Donald Judd – sought to give shape to the 'new life' of the future. Art is design that has become dysfunctional because the society that provided its basis suffered a historical collapse, like the Inca Empire or Soviet Russia.

Autonomous Art

In the course of the modern era, however, artists began to assert the autonomy of their art – understood in the first place as autonomy from the public opinion, from the public taste. The artists have required the right to make sovereign decisions regarding the content and form of their art – beyond any explanation and justification vis-à-vis the public. And they were given this right – but only to a certain degree. The freedom to create art according to one's own sovereign will does not automatically guarantee the artist that his or her art will be also exhibited in public space. The inclusion of any artwork into a publicly accessible exhibition must be – at least potentially – publicly explained and justified. Of course, artist, curator and art critic are free to argue for the inclusion of some artworks or against such an inclusion. However, every such explanation and justification undermines the autonomous, sovereign character of artistic freedom that modernist art has aspired to win. Every discourse legitimizing an artwork can be seen as an insult to this artwork. Every inclusion of an artwork in a public exhibition as only one among other artworks displayed in the same public space can be seen as a denigration of this artwork. That is why in the course of modernity the curator was considered mostly to be somebody who keeps pushing himself between the artwork and the viewer – and disempowering the artist and the viewer at the same time. Hence the art market appears more favourable to modernist, autonomous art than the museum or *Kunsthalle*. On the art market, works of art circulate singularized, decontextualized, uncurated, which apparently gives them a chance for an unmediated demonstration of their sovereign origin. The art market functions according the rules of the potlatch as it was described by Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille. The sovereign decision of an artist to make an artwork beyond any justification is trumped by the sovereign decision of a private buyer to pay for this artwork an amount of money beyond any comprehension.

An art installation, however, does not circulate. Rather, it installs everything that usually circulates in our civilization: objects, texts, films, etcetera. At the same time it changes in a very radical way the role and function of the exhibition space. This is because the installation operates by symbolic privatization of the public space of exhibition. It may look like a standard, curated exhibition, but its space is designed according the sovereign will of an individual artist who is not supposed to publicly justify his or her selection of the included objects or organization of the installation space as a whole. The installation is

frequently denied the status of a specific art form, because the question arises what the medium of an installation is. The traditional art media are all defined by a specific material support: canvas, stone, or film. Now, the material support of the medium of the installation is the space itself. That does not mean, however, that the installation is somehow 'immaterial.' On the contrary, the installation is material *par excellence*, since it is spatial – and being in the space is the most general definition of being material. The installation transforms the empty, neutral, public space into an individual artwork – and invites the visitor to experience this space as a holistic, totalizing space of this artwork. Anything included in such a space becomes a part of the artwork only because it is placed inside this space. The distinction between art object and simple object becomes insignificant here. Instead, what becomes crucial is the distinction between marked installation space, and unmarked, public space. When Marcel Broodthaers presented his installation entitled *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle in 1973, he put up a sign next to each exhibit saying: 'This is not a work of art.' As a whole, however, his installation has been considered to be a work of art, and not without reason. The installation demonstrates a certain selection, a certain chain of choices, a certain logic of inclusions and exclusions. Here one can see an analogy to a curated exhibition. But it is precisely the point: the selection and the mode of representation is here a sovereign prerogative of the artist alone. It is based exclusively on his or her personal sovereign decision that is in no need of any further explanation or justification. The art installation is a way to expand the domain of the sovereign rights of the artist from the individual art object to the exhibition space itself.

And that means: the art installation is a space in which the difference between the sovereign freedom of the artist and the institutional freedom of the curator becomes visible, immediately able to be experienced. The regime under which art operates in our contemporary Western culture is generally understood as freedom of art. But the freedom of art means different things to a curator and to an artist. As it was already said, the curator – including the so-called independent curator – makes his or her choices ultimately in the name of the democratic public. Actually, to be responsible towards the public a curator does not need to be part of any fixed institution: the curator is already an institution by definition. Accordingly, the curator has the obligation to publicly justify his or her choices – and it can happen that the curator fails to do so. Of course, the curator is supposed to have the freedom to present his or her argument to the public. But this freedom of the public discussion has nothing to do with the freedom of art understood as freedom of private, individual, subjective, sovereign artistic decisions – beyond any argumentation, explanation and justi-

fication. The sovereign decision of an artist to make art in this or that way is generally accepted by the Western liberal society as a sufficient reason to perceive this artist's practice as legitimate. Of course, an artwork can also be criticized and rejected. But an artwork can be rejected only as a whole. It makes no sense to criticize any particular choices, inclusions or exclusions made by an artist. In this sense the total space of an art installation can be also rejected only as a whole. To use the same example: nobody would criticize Broodthaers for having overlooked this or that particular image of this or that particular eagle in his installation.

The Installation as a Testing Ground

So one can say that in our Western society the notion of freedom is deeply ambiguous – and, of course, not only in the field of art but also in the political field. In many domains of social practice – such as private consumption, investment of one's own capital, or choice of one's own religion – freedom is understood in the West as freedom to take private, sovereign decisions. But in some other domains, especially in the political field, freedom is understood primarily as the freedom of public discussion guaranteed by law – and thus non-sovereign, conditional, institutional freedom. But, of course, the private, sovereign decisions are controlled in our societies to a certain degree by public opinion and political institutions. (We all know the famous slogan: private is political). And on the other hand the open political discussion is time and again interrupted by private, sovereign decisions of the political actors and manipulated by the private interests (here, on the contrary, the political becomes privatized).

The artist and the curator embody these two different kinds of freedom in a very conspicuous manner: the sovereign, unconditional, publicly irresponsible freedom of art making and the institutional, conditional, publicly responsible freedom of curatorship. And that means that the art installation in which the act of art production coincides with the act of art presentation becomes a perfect experimental terrain to reveal and explore the ambiguity of the Western notion of freedom – the ambiguity that lies at the core of this notion. Accordingly, in the past decades we have seen the emergence of the innovative curatorial projects that seem to empower the curator to act in an authorial, sovereign way. And we also see the emergence of artistic practices that want to be collaborative, democratic, decentralized, de-authorized.

Indeed, the art installation is often viewed today as an art form that allows the artist to democratize his or her art, to take public responsibility, to begin to act in the name of a certain community or even of society as a whole. In this sense the emergence of the art installation seems to mark the end of the modernist claim to autonomy and sovereignty. The decision of an artist to let the multitude of visitors enter the space of his or her

artwork, and to allow them to move freely inside it, is interpreted as opening the closed space of an artwork to democracy. The closed artwork's space seems to be transformed into a platform for public discussion, democratic practice, communication, networking, education, and so forth. But this analysis of the art installation practice tends to overlook the act of symbolic privatization of the public space by the artist that precedes the act of the opening of the installation space to a community of visitors. As it was already said, the space of the traditional exhibition is a symbolic public property – and the curator who manages this space acts in the name of public opinion. The visitor of a standard exhibition remains on his or her own territory – the visitor is a symbolic owner of the space where all the individual artworks are exposed, delivered to his gaze and judgment. The space of an art installation, on the contrary, is the symbolic private property of the artist. Entering the installation space, the visitor leaves the public territory of democratic legitimacy and enters the space of sovereign, authoritarian control. The visitor is here, so to say, on foreign territory, in exile. The visitor of an installation space becomes the expatriate who has to submit him- or herself to a foreign law – to a law that is given to him or her by the artist. Here the artist acts as a legislator, as a sovereign of the installation space – even and maybe especially so if the law that is given by the artist to a community of visitors is a democratic law.

Politeia

One can say that the installation practice reveals the act of unconditional, sovereign violence that initially installs any democratic order. We know that: The democratic order was never brought about in a democratic fashion. Democratic order always emerges as an effect of a violent revolution. To install a law means to break one. The first legislator can never act in a legitimate manner. The legislator installs the political order but he or she does not belong to this order, remains external to this order, even if he or she decides later to submit him- or herself to this order. The author of an art installation is also such a legislator that gives to the community of visitors the space to constitute itself and defines the rules to which this community has to submit – but does not belong to this community, remains outside of it. And that remains true even if the artist decides to join the community that he or she has created. This second step should not cause us to overlook the first one – the sovereign one. And one should also not forget: after initiating a certain order, a certain *politeia*, a certain community of visitors, the installation artist has to rely on the art institutions to maintain this order, to police the fluid *politeia* of the installation's visitors. Jacques Derrida meditates in *Force de loi* on the role of the police in a state.[2] The police force is supposed to supervise the functioning of certain laws but de facto it partially creates the rules that

2. See note 1.

it should merely supervise. Derrida tries to show here that the violent, revolutionary, sovereign act of the introduction of law and order can never be fully erased afterwards. To maintain a law always also means to permanently reinvent and re-establish this law. This initial act of violence is recalled and remobilized again and again. And it is especially obvious in our times of violent export, installation and securing of democracy. One should not forget: the installation space is a movable space. The art installation is not site-specific, it can be installed everywhere and at any time. And it should be no illusion that there can be something like a completely chaotic, Dadaistic, Fluxus-like installation space free of any control. In his famous treatise 'Francais, encore un effort si vous voulez etre republicain', Marquis de Sade presents a vision of a perfectly free society that has abolished all the repressive laws and installed only one law: everybody has to do what he or she likes, including committing crimes of any kind. Now it is especially interesting that De Sade states at the same time the necessity of the law enforcement that has to prevent the reactionary attempts of traditionally thinking citizens to return to the old repressive state in which family is secured and crime forbidden. So we still need the police even if we want to defend the freedom of crime against the reactionary nostalgia of the old repressive order.

By the way, the violent act of constituting a democratically organized community should not be interpreted as contradicting its democratic nature. Sovereign freedom is obviously non-democratic – and so it seems to be also anti-democratic. However, even if it looks paradoxical at first glance, sovereign freedom is a necessary precondition of the emergence of any democratic order. And again – the practice of art installation is a good example confirming this rule. The standard art exhibition leaves an individual visitor alone – allowing him or her to confront and contemplate individually the exhibited art objects. Such an individual visitor moves from one object to another, but necessarily overlooks the totality of the exhibition's space, including his or her own positioning inside this space. On the contrary, an art installation builds a community of spectators precisely because of the holistic, unifying character of the installation space. The true visitor to the art installation is not an isolated individual but a visitor collective. The art space as such can only be perceived by a mass of visitors, a multitude, if you like, with this multitude becoming part of the exhibition for each individual visitor – and vice versa. So one can say that the installation art practice demonstrates the dependency of any democratic space on the private, sovereign decisions of a legislator – or a group of legislators. It is something that was very well known to the Greek thinkers of antiquity and also to the initiators of democratic revolutions – but somehow became suppressed by the dominant political discourse. We tend – especially after Foucault –

to detect the source of power in the impersonal agencies, structures, rules and protocols. However, this fixation on the impersonal mechanisms of power let us overlook the importance of individual, sovereign decisions and actions that taken place in private, heterotopic spaces – to use another term introduced by Foucault. Modern, democratic powers also have a meta-social, meta-public, heterotopic origin. As it was already said, the artist who has designed a certain installation space is an outsider to this space. He or she is heterotopic to this space. The artist is an outsider in relationship to the artwork. But the outsider is not necessarily somebody who has to be included to be empowered. There is also empowerment by exclusion, and especially by self-exclusion. The outsider can be powerful precisely because the outsider is not controlled by society, not limited in his sovereign actions by any public discussion, by any need of public self-justification.

Accordingly, these reflections should not be misunderstood as a critique of installation as an art form by demonstrating its fundamentally non-democratic, sovereign character. The goal of art is not to change things – they are changing themselves all the time anyway. Art's function is, rather, to show, to make visible the realities that are generally overlooked. By taking aesthetic responsibility for the design of the installation space the artist reveals the hidden sovereign dimension of the democratic order that politics mostly tries to conceal. The installation is the space where we are immediately confronted with the ambiguous character of the contemporary notion of freedom that is understood in our democracies at the same time as sovereign and institutional freedom. The art installation is a space of unconcealment (in the Heideggerian sense) of the heterotopic, sovereign power that is concealed behind the obscure transparency of the democratic order.

Biennials

Now the question arises how one can interpret the aesthetic-political phenomenon of the biennial that can be seen as an arrangement of curated exhibitions and art installations. The increasing success of the biennial as a specific form of art presentation has surely a lot to do with economical motivations and considerations. The biennial rhythm can be coordinated with the rhythm of contemporary international tourism. The necessity to come to a certain city annually would be experienced by the visitors as a burden. On the other hand, after three or four years one begins to forget why he or she found this or that city so attractive. So the biennial rhythm reflects accurately enough the time span between nostalgia and forgetting. But there is another, political reason for the biennial as an institution that is successful. It is common knowledge that the contemporary world is characterized by the asymmetry between economic and political power: the capitalist market operates globally and the politics operates regionally. The

last global political project that operated on the same level as the global market was communism. And it will be awhile before the return of such a global political project. At the same time it is obvious that the asymmetry between economy and politics is damaging not only the possibilities of emergence of a new global political order but even the economical order as it is. Capitalism is incapable of establishing and securing its own infrastructure, as the recent financial crisis has shown yet again. Capitalism needs a sovereign political power to be able to function effectively. Earlier it was an absolutist state – in the future it could be a state of a new type. But in any case, in the current situation of transition to a new global political order, the international art system is a good terrain on which to envisage and to install new projects of political sovereignty – be they utopian, dystopian or both. So every biennial can be seen as a model of such a new world order because every biennial tries to negotiate between national and international, cultural identities and global trends, the economically successful and the politically relevant. Already, the first biennial, the Venice Biennale, tried to offer the public such a model of a new global order. The results were mostly embarrassing and in some times – especially Fascist times – even frightening. But at least there were some results. And today, the biennials are again the spaces where two closely interconnected nostalgias are installed: nostalgia of universal art and nostalgia of universal political order.

Simon Sheikh

Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility

Questions for the Biennial

In order to fathom the real meaning and opportunities of biennials as a global phenomenon, Scandinavian critic and curator Simon Sheikh introduces the term a *politics of translation*. Seen in this light, the biennial is a place where new meanings, stories, histories and connections are constantly produced. This condition of permanent flux may mean that biennials can do more than generate capital.

The collective symbolic capital which attaches to names and places like Paris, Athens, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Berlin and Rome is of great import and gives such places great economic advantages relative to, say, Baltimore, Liverpool, Essen, Lille and Glasgow. The problem for these latter places is to raise their quotient of symbolic capital and to increase their marks of distinction to better ground their claims to the uniqueness that yields monopoly rent. Given the general loss of other monopoly powers through easier transport and communications and the reduction of other barriers to trade, the struggle for collective symbolic capital becomes even more important as a basis for monopoly rents.[1]

1. David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 405.

If the spectrally human is to enter into the hegemonic reformulation of universality, a language between languages will have to be found. This will be no metalanguage, nor will it be the condition from which all languages hail. It will be the labour of transaction and translation which belongs to no single site, but is the movement between languages, and has its final destination in this movement itself. Indeed, the task will be not to assimilate the unspeakable into the domain of speakability in order to house it there, within the existing norms of dominance, but to shatter the confidence of dominance, to show how equivocal its claims to universality are, and, from that equivocation, track the break-up of its regime, an opening towards alternative versions of universality that are wrought from the work of translation itself.[2]

2. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (London: Verso, 2000), 178-179.

In a dialogue on the notion of *universality*, American Philosopher Judith Butler has suggested that we understand this concept in the plural and conflictual, and that the political task thus becomes to establish what she calls *practices of translation*.[3] This is not, however, a matter of translating the particular into the universal, in order to make it politically salient or effective, but rather that the universal is always a particular, competing universal. The universal is not anterior to the particular, and commonalities and overlaps can be found within such competing notions of universality, and thus also among various political movements and groups through acts of translation without transcendence. Movement here takes on a double significance, partly in the sense of concrete social movements with political aims, and partly, and more abstractly, as the movement between moments and sites of political contestation and articulation, which can be named *a politics of translation*.[4]

3. Ibid.

4. The notion of a 'politics of translation' indicates a shift from, as well as affinity with, what Michel Foucault termed 'the politics of truth'. But where the politics of truth has to do with a questioning of authority, and a wish for being governed in a different way, politics of translation seems to confront different regimes of truth, the ways in which truth is produced.

Now, the question I would like to raise is whether the contemporary forms of the biennial can be considered one such site, and what movements can be traced through and around them? In other words, what is to be translated,

and through which method of translation? Obviously, the theory and history of translation in conjunction with culture is highly contested, and it is not my aim to reiterate these intellectual debates here, but only to point to one singular dichotomy in translation, that of the original and copy, and to suggest what it could mean in a geopolitical sense. The most widespread version of translation indicates a relation between an original text in an original language, and a copy that translates this text into a secondary language, leading to choices of fidelity, to either the original and the transfer of its meaning as accurately as possible, or to the new, secondary language and its specificity. In this theory, there is always something that is untranslatable, and which requires literary skills of equivalence on the part of the translator. It is also a theory, and practice, of translation that has colonialist implications in terms of site, privileging the originality of European culture in opposition to all the colonial copies.

The 'Originality' of the Biennial

In terms of biennials, the original to be copied and exported is the biennial in Venice, held 52 times since 1895, and based on the concept of national pavilions, that is, with national (self)representation, with each nation sending their best and brightest artist(s). The Venice Biennale exists as a sort of Olympic Games of the art world, complete with a first prize. However, it should be immediately noted that most of the biennials that have emerged all around the world since then have not followed this model, and indeed most of them do not make claims for world art, but rather for a regional, cultural particularism (with universalist elements), be it in Havana or the Whitney Museum in NYC, or the ever-shifting locale of the Manifesta in Europe. While this might be the predominant alteration of Venice, there is also the brief of bringing the world of art to a particular place, in effect translating the international to the local(s), be it in Berlin, Istanbul or São Paulo, or, specifically so, the poignantly named Peripheria biennial in Iasi. Finally, there are the biennials that make claims for a specific kind of art, for a certain medium as nation, one could say, such as the Liverpool biennial and the Berlin Transmediale, among a few others.

We are thus not exclusively dealing with a culture of the copy, but with deviation and hybridity as well as repetition and simulation, with different notions of fidelity. Biennials find themselves in an unregulated and informal system, that is, paradoxically, both rhizomatic and hierarchical. Although they are directed towards several vantage points and spheres of interests, their meaning and placement can only be seen from one place at a time. They may make up one place after another for an, again, loosely defined and organized group of art professionals, but for most regular visitors, their recurrence is time based, if not timely. In this case, they are more likely to be read in terms of the previous versions of the specific biennial and its scope, choice of artists, curators, venues and so on, rather than an international circuit and communication of exhibitions and articulations.

While the exhibition format remains the main vehicle for the presentation of contemporary art, this does not mean that the exhibition is a singular format with a given public and circulation of discourse. Rather, the notion of an exhibition is to be understood in the plural, with different types of exhibitions speaking from different locations and positions, with different audiences and circulations indicated and implicated, from the self-organized student show in a small provincial town to the larger (inter)national biennials that are the topic of this essay. What they share, and this is especially true of biennials, is a double sense of public and publicity: the local, physically present (if only potentially) audience and the imaginary constituency and professional field of the art world (if only potentially). There is, in the landscapes of biennials, not only the original and the copy, the deviant and the hybrid, but also always a here and an elsewhere.

Biennials are placed within an ecosystem as well as an economic system of exhibitions (and exhibition venues) in geopolitical terms. They do not command the same immediate attention internationally, despite the number of (local) visitors. More people visit the biennial in Mercosul in Porto Alegre than do the Documenta in Kassel, for example, but historical importance in the art world, geographical placement and media attention all play a role in the significance of a biennial's standing and influence as well. In short, a biennial builds up a brand, as well as an audience and a constituency, both locally and internationally. And with the recent growth of new biennials, especially in Southeast Asia, it is becoming an increasingly competitive environment in which to vie for international attention, which affects designated centres and peripheries as well.

Take the aforementioned Documenta, although not a biennial in the proper sense of the word, it has, since its inception in 1957, taken a different route than the Venice Biennale, rather than the Olympic model of national competition, Documenta tried to make a statement about the state of art. That is, a transnational survey of the most dominant trends within contemporary art at the given moment. Movement was understood as artistic movement, and was originally dedicated to twentieth-century avant-garde art in a re-education of the German people after the Second World War, and as part of an assessment of Western-German democratic ideals in opposition to its Eastern, communist Other. Its brief has naturally then changed since the fall of communism in Europe, and indeed the last three versions, Documenta 10 through 12, have attempted to redefine the idea of a world exhibition of art and address the idea of a globalized world by showing art from all corners of the world as opposed to focussing on Western Europe and the USA. However, Documenta's centrality and discursiveness have simultaneously been challenged by the many new biennials, both in its vicinity and around the world, and it remains to be seen if it can maintain its importance and place at the top of the hierarchy in the future, both in terms of discourse, attention and economy.

Biennials and Monopoly Rent

More and more, a biennial has to create a niche market, a specific identity, reputation and prestige that can place it on the map of the world and the art world alike. And this placement may be vastly different, and might even require speaking different languages and in two tongues. On the one hand there is the circulation of discourse of the international art world, with its system of competing universalities, as well as a competition for symbolic capital, market shares and monopolies, and on the other the local political and economic demands for cultural significance and supremacy: the uniqueness of this culture, this country, this place. The uniqueness of a particular place and culture is not only a question of nationalism and of nation building, though, but is also a means of establishing a niche market and attracting an international audience, to generate cultural capital as well as increased revenues through (art) tourism. Biennials are, in this way, part of the experience economy, with the whole experience of the city and the exhibition being the commodity rather than the singular works of art, as is, presumably, the case with art fairs.

In his book *Spaces of Capital*, social geographer David Harvey has analysed the relationship between globalization, city marketing and the commodification of culture through the Marxian category of 'monopoly rent'. Monopoly rent occurs when a producer can generate a steady increase of surplus and thus income over time through exclusivity. This is achieved either by being the only producer of a certain commodity in a regional economy, or through the uniqueness of the brand in a more global economy. The example given is the wine trade, where an exclusive vineyard can both sell its wines as commodities, but also itself; the land, resource and location. Historically, a producer of wine or beer could gain monopoly rents in its region or area by simply being the only brand available, but in a global and globalized market, the product has to have some sort of local uniqueness in order to be tradable outside its region and in order to compete over market shares with other brands being imported into its region. It has to achieve a symbolic quality besides its actual taste in order to generate revenues, therefore the wine merchants in the Bourdeaux region have copyrighted the use of the name 'Chateau' and only the producers of sparkling wine in the Champagne region can now legally call its products 'champagne'. Here we are dealing with a culturalization of commodities as much as the commodification of culture. However, there are also other factors involved in the wine market, specialist publications and international competitions give value judgments based merely on taste rather than origin, suddenly bringing wine from, say, South Africa, Chile or Australia to the fore, and then there is, naturally, a competition in terms of price, which compared to the specialist judgments of taste creates a consciousness of value for money among potential consumers in a global market.

Hopefully, the parallels to the art world, and market, are obvious. Here,

we also have historical centres, in a biennial context places such as Venice and Kassel, but also new, emergent players around the world, most lately and massively in Southeast Asia. Also, we have the judges of taste in the form of critics and magazines, as well as a competition on price and uniqueness in terms of locality. Venice obviously has the history, not only of its biennial, but also of its city, giving it an incredibly strong brand and attraction. Secondly, it has a centrality in terms of location, certainly within the art world, but also, from a European perspective, in terms of geography. All these factors clearly outweigh the fact that the city is very expensive for travellers. Other cities, like, say, São Paulo, are obviously cheaper to be in for the art tourist, but more expensive to travel to from most places, both in Europe and the USA, not to mention Asia. Indeed, the São Paulo biennial was originally based on the same principles of national pavilions as Venice, which also made each nation participating financially responsible, but has recently abandoned this model, presumably due to its decreasing symbolic value and credibility in the art world as such. Perhaps this format is a bit too crude within the global (art) economy?

Instead, biennials have to brand themselves differently and specifically in order to achieve not only cultural hegemony, but also to extract monopoly rent, in terms of both symbolic and real capital. They must be, on the one hand, recognizable as a certain format, a festival of art, and, on the other hand be specific, *this biennial*, not *that one*. With *these* specific properties and attributions, in *this* specific place, city, region and country. The branding of the biennial is thus twofold: partly the city as attraction and allure giving context and value to the biennial, and partly the glamour and prestige of the biennial branding and upgrading the otherwise non-descript or even negative image of the city, region or country. In this scenario, it is only logical that most biennials today are taking on a – at least – dual purpose, both highlighting the uniqueness of the particular place or region and its culture, as a way of cultivating the national audience and attracting an international one, *and* bringing international artists and positions to the local situation, cultivating the national citizens as international consumers and connoisseurs of culture: the lure of the local meets the glamour of the global. In other words, biennials do not only situate a place, but they also always establish a connection, and herein lies their potentiality.

Interconnectedness

Indeed, one of the most widespread complaints about contemporary biennials is their lack of connection to the 'local' audience, but this often takes the form of a positivity of the social: that social relations and identities in a specific context are given and whole, if not holy, that the local audience is a singular group with essential qualities and shared agencies. This is a residue of the myth-making of the nation state and its production of citizenry through cultural means, such as exhibitions and institutions, and hardly seems adequate

in the postmodern and post-public condition, where identities are, at least, hybrid and agencies multiple, and even contradictory and schizoid. It is, rather, a question of how a biennial produces, or attempts to produce, its public(s) that must be analysed and criticized. One must ask what assumptions of place and participation are at work, what notions of subjectivity, territoriality and citizenship are invoked. And one must ask in what way participation is valued in terms of cultural consumption and legitimation. Additionally, the 'lack of local sedimentation' argument tends to overlook the potential biennials actually offer for reflection on the above-mentioned double notion of publicness: the local audience and the international, and the art world and the world. The potential to not only address presumed existing audiences, both locally and in terms of art-world credibility and circulation, but also to create new public formations that are not bound to the nation-state or the art world. By being recurrent events, both locally placed and part of a circuit, they have the potential to create a more transnational public sphere, with both difference and repetition in the applied mode of address and implied notion of spectatorship and public participation.

Moreover, location is to be understood in the sense of *interconnectedness*: this means that we do not only connect through the public formation of the event of the biennial and the encounter with the artworks, but also that any place is always seen in relation to another place, or a series of possible places. We view other places through the prism of our own place, as subjects with history and geography. Our places of dwelling and of action are also always related to other places, whether visible or invisible, present or absent. What goes on 'here' always has effects 'there', and vice versa, even when we are not aware of these movements. This is, of course, the current global condition, and art today must reflect this double sense of place, public and non-public, presence and absence, the visible and the invisible. Any sense of locality always involves a here and an elsewhere: a constant movement between centeredness and marginality, be it in aesthetic, geographical or economic terms, and one of the characteristics of advanced art is precisely that it allows one to see more than one viewpoint: more than one story or situation, and more than one way to look at them.

Any locality, regardless of its self-image, is connected to other places in subtle and often unexpected ways: what is produced here is consumed there, what is seen there is invisible here and so on. This is also the situation for biennials: they find themselves in an art-world system of exhibitions and festivals (public formations), as well as in an international economy of desire. But how is this made visible to a local community, and how is it relevant to the experiences of the audience, both inside and outside the exhibition, as well as before and after the exhibition? The question is what our relationship is to different spaces, and, moreover, how continuity is established and made productive in a biennial setting. It is therefore not only a matter of what a biennial can give, or give *back*, to its community

and constituency, but also what kinds of community and constituency it can produce, put into play or suspension. The relationship between the artworks and the audience created by the exhibition is one of positionality, and as such the position of the speaker is something that must be made visible by the exhibition and its ways of display. The biennial is not only a container of artworks, but also a mass medium in itself, and must as such establish a social space, that is, a place where meanings, narratives, histories, conversations and encounters are actively produced and set in motion. A place where connections are made and unmade, subjectified and suspended. In other words: *politics of translation*.

Translation and Location

Translation is here to be understood in multiple ways, not only between original and copy, primary and secondary culture, also not only geographically, that is, between different places, but also as *locational*, as taking place *in-situ*. However, it would also be too limited and limiting to merely understand translation as a pedagogical exercise of explaining works and their contexts to different audiences and groups. Rather, translation must be understood within the transposition of forms of language, that is be understood in terms of exhibition display, or what I have called *modes of address*, which is the instituent practice of exhibition-making – its placing of objects and subjects within a framing and a horizon, a world and a worldview.[5]

5. Simon Sheikh (ed.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* (Berlin: b_books, 2005).

This has, then, not only to do with representation in the form of artworks and the (geopolitical) selection of artists, but also with public programming and exhibition design. One can, for instance, try to imagine and implement ways of showing and seeing within an exhibition design that do not follow the historical, apparently neutral museum display of the white cube – hiding its political positioning of the works and the viewers – and rather attempt spatializations that make such positions more visible and locational.

One of the ways to achieve this is *historization*: interconnectedness in time. Exhibition-making has certain historical forms of display, and a part of biennial enterprise could be to focus on historical forms of exhibition making, an exhibition on exhibitions. Exhibitions are, to paraphrase Walter Zanini, 'micro-cosmoses of the possible', and as such directly connected to our political imaginary: what is possible and impossible, visible and invisible, to be done and not to be done, and so on. Biennials are not only part of the present, but also always the past, in forms of the previous editions of the particular biennial itself, art history in general and, naturally, the history of the place, with its contestations of space, cultural hegemonies, forgetting and remembrance of struggles past. And by immediately inscribing itself with art history and processes of marketability and canonization of the artists included as well the institution of the biennial itself, it is always an investment in the future: a statement about art (and thus specific artists and practices) is an

attempt to achieve hegemony, not just instantly, but even more so in the short *and* long run.

This connection with history, or with the making and unmaking of history and its relation to our view of the world, our horizon of possibilities and impossibilities, connects to an important nodal point, *the sense of place* and *the situation of exile*. These terms may seem to be strange bedfellows, especially within the context of art and culture, and its privileging of place, location, site and specificity. Today, our sense of place has as much to do with that place's connection to other places, be they possible or impossible, permeable or incommensurable, perceivable or invisible, as with the originality of the place. Places exist through connections, within the global flows of objects and subjects, rules and (de)regulations. We can thus only sense a place through other places, albeit only from one place at the time. But we also move from place to place, geographically and politically, within larger global flows of migration. So, how exactly does one belong to a place, a culture and a language, both as a cultural producer *and* consumer? Who can speak for a place, or even *speak the place*? Is it the 'local' artist and/or community, for instance, or is it, conversely, the specialist cultural producer dealing in intervention and/or site-specific strategies?

These questions have both concrete and abstract answers, but always in terms of time rather than space. Politically, citizenship is either something you are born with, or something that is acquired after living legally in a given country for a certain number of years. The option of getting a new citizenship obviously varies greatly depending on the country. However, as we know from the nationalist debates that have swept Europe for the last decade, citizenship in legal terms does not equate citizenship in cultural terms. And even though cultural terms of national identity are arguably of a symbolic nature, they are perceived and discussed – culturalized – as *real*. To have Danish citizenship, for example, does not necessarily make you a 'real' Dane, thus the distinction in media reports and debates between 'Dane' and 'Danish Citizen', with the former being the real Dane. This can, of course, be even more fine-tuned when talking about a specific region or city: there may be several different people, even of the same colour and creed, living in a place, but the 'real' _____ (insert your place/identity of choice here) are the ones who were born here. A sense of place known as roots, indicating an organic relationship to the place. However, as mentioned before, we are, regardless of origin and current location, rarely in a position of full coherence and identity, but rather selves in the making, and on the move.

Ways of Travelling, Ways of Seeing

To be on the move is, naturally, one of the characteristics of the much-maligned star curators and artists of the international biennial circuit. But expertise is also implied through method, and through commitment over time: how long has a curator or artist spent in a place? How deep is their work? Even though this can be measured in terms

of time, such a measure is ultimately meaningless in terms of assessment and judgment, obviously, but also in terms of critique and potentiality. Rather, we should look at what connections are made and unmade: what sense of place is analysed through the prism of which other places? Hence, the situation of exile, both inside and outside of one's given nation or society. Exile is not just a matter of leaving a nation geographically, be it voluntarily or involuntarily, but also leaving it conceptually and politically, that is, an exodus from the current state of affairs, from the state of the state, as it were, again both voluntarily and involuntarily. It is no coincident, I believe, that Giorgio Agamben titled his Italian diary of 1992-1994 *In This Exile*, writing as an Italian in Italy, but somehow outside of the current hegemony, both politically and culturally.[6] Everybody is, surely, involved in some sort of movement – even when staying still geographically, one might be moving ahead, or up or down, socially and economically. But we do not all travel in the same class and according to the same itinerary, nor even with similar destinations, or, for that matter, destinies. Some are sidelined to the margins, others exiled on main street, but everybody is in some sense displaced: where one comes from and where one is, or is going, is no longer the same place, neither in terms of time nor geography, and one can never go home again. Our sense of belonging and place are, in this way, becoming more and more conceptual and relational. It is therefore obvious why a major theme in contemporary art production should be an *uncertainty of place*, not only geographically, but also socially: who has access to which spaces, both generally and locally? Access should not only be understood in terms of physicality, but also symbolically and culturally. When thinking about the politics of translation implied in the contemporary biennials, one must think in relations of difference and contextuality, and the fragmentation of the public sphere (including a fragmentation of the art world), and what this means transnationally. One must look at connections and lines of flight between different points of departure and arrival. Such theorizing could perhaps be employed as a form of actualization; realizing, imagining, representing and communicating that which is possible, but has not yet been implemented.

6. Giorgio Agamben, 'In This Exile (Italian Diary 1992-94)', in: *Means Without Ends* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 121-142.

This also applies to the discussion of a decentralization and/or globalization of the art world and its biennials. Rather than viewing biennials and mega-exhibitions as essential categories having fixed representations and implications, I would suggest this contextual and relational view on them. They offer a stage, surely, but one does not have to follow the script. That is, we can look at their specific placement and relation to their surroundings, each other and the general circulation of discourse through the art world. What is, for instance, the relationship between site-specific art projects and the notion of the local, the relationship between site-specific projects and tourism, and, finally, between tourism and migration? Often site-specific projects not only bring a

cultural value to remote areas, and interact with the local in a displacement of art from the centres to the margins, but they also bring financial rewards to the site in terms of increased tourism. And the same can of course be stated about international biennials and other recurrent mega-exhibitions. But the notion of tourism should not be separated from another form of travel that brings about cultural exchange and interaction, that is, migration. The differentiation between these two kinds of travel not only indicates the content of these forms of travel, but also their contexts; tourism indicates legalized travel and spending, usually from richer countries to other rich countries and/or poor countries. Tourism equals income and enlightenment, consumption and information – just like in a biennial. Migration, on the other hand, is nowadays mostly illegal, and usually viewed as unwelcome as it is unprofitable and culturally alien. One only has to watch the literal fence on the US side of the US-Mexican border, or the establishment of an internal open market in Europe while its external borders, especially against North Africa and the Middle East, are increasingly guarded and closed, turning the European Union into a *European Fortress*.

Global flows are not only voluntary, as art tourism supposedly is, but also brought about by the same structures and strictures of global capitalism that produce the demand for city-branding and the surge towards monopoly rent. The art world, for instance, is not so much multicultural, as it is multicentred, hence the global spread of the biennial phenomena, but also the seeming interchangeability of participating artists without any shifts of signification. Perhaps, then, interconnectedness should be foregrounded over the uniqueness of place? Perhaps we should think in what Sathya Rao, a network scientist from India, has called 'Non-Colonial translation', and its non-homogeneous and even chaotic space without residues of the colonial original, and without any unifying textual-ontological plane of reference?[7] In this way art and its institutions can become public platforms that relate not only to a more or less centralized art world, but also to other fields of knowledge and modes of production in a society that seems more and more specialized and fragmented, thus creating several public, semi-public and even counter-public spheres within the existing ones. From such formulated platforms we can relate to other spaces and spheres, indicating that biennials are not predominantly to be seen as utopias, but rather as heterotopias, capable of maintaining several contradictory representations within a single space. Obviously, biennials are part of (inter)national cultural hegemonies as well as city-branding and the creation of monopoly rents, but that does not mean that they can only represent these features, or that they can only affirm them. Indeed, they can question them by highlighting them, as well as by creating other possible connections, other ways of concepts for stranger sociability and senses of place and placement. It is improbable that a biennial can exist

7. Sathya Rao, 'From a Post-colonial to a Non-colonial Theory of Translation', in: Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (eds.), *Translation, Biopolitcs, Colonial Difference* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 73-94.

without taking part in such processes of capital accumulation (both symbolic and real, of course), so the question is rather, can they do something else simultaneously? That is, can they produce something other than merely more symbolic-turned-real capital for the involved cultural producers, curators and artists alike, something else in terms of interconnected global political transaction and translation? While biennials remain spaces of capital, they are also spaces of hope.

Brian Holmes

The Interscale

Art after Neoliberalism

Now that neoliberalism seems to be in decline, Brian Holms wonders what this will mean for the emergence of Asian biennials. In reference to the concept of the sixth Taipei Biennial – undeniably a neoliberal stronghold – and a few of the works of art presented there, he discovers possibilities to imbue this transcontinental exchange with new meaning on various scale levels.

You enter a typical white cube, with four evenly spaced rectangles on the wall in front of you. One is an ordinary window looking at the world outside. Another is a video monitor with a recording of the view. The two remaining screens oscillate between bright colours – pink, blue, yellow – and scenes of a woman's hands with polished red fingernails, deliberately cutting out pieces of some black plastic material. There is a soundtrack: ambient bustle, as though you were waiting for an office worker to pick up a dangling phone. Words appear on the screen: *So, I just want to know about uncertainty . . . and knowledge . . . and if everything can be calculated and known?* And now you begin to hear a voice, speaking about mathematical models and what insurance agents do for a living. 'The less we know, the higher the risk. Risk always has a price, of course,' explains a specialist. The work, *Estimations* (2008) by Katya Sander, is a series of disembodied conversations with anonymous interlocutors, about the calculability of disaster and its uncertainties.[1]

1. Documentation of this work, and of all those successively mentioned, can be found along with complete information about the Sixth Taipei Biennial at http://www.taipeibiennial.org.

Outside the window, a typhoon lashes the distant trees. The woman's hands assemble a black box with four rectangular windows: a scale model of the room you're in. Halfway around the world, on Wall Street, a financial maelstrom topples a huge investment bank, then threatens the insurance giant AIG. Its derivatives unit, located in the City of London, had specialized in credit-default swaps: sophisticated mathematical models assembled in the black box of a computer, to hedge against the risks of equally sophisticated mathematical models.

The Sixth Taipei Biennial, curated by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, was a show of political art from around the world, including a core group of directly activist works. The exhibition focused on 'a constellation of related issues arising from neo-liberal capitalist globalization as seen in Taipei and internationally'. I arrived on 12 September, amid the first gales of the typhoon. The following day all the public buildings in the city were closed for the storm, and the panel on the present situation of international biennials was cancelled. The Internet was full of stories about Lehman Brothers, which collapsed that weekend, and AIG, which went into government receivership just a few days later. Our cancelled panel was held that evening in the lobby of the hotel, with the artists and the curators, plenty of free-flowing drink and gusts of rain that kept blowing through the swinging glass door. 'We came here for an exhibition about neoliberalism,' I said as an opener. 'But that Utopia is over! Neoliberalism is dead. Now we have to wake up to the world of regions.' Controversy ensued until late in the night, a fantastic discussion in the eye of the storm. What I'd like to do here is to revisit that glimpse of the past and the future.

Gilded Era

What exactly *was* neoliberalism? Projected on an entire wall, Mieke Gerritzen's typographic film *Beautiful World* (2006) served as a manifesto for the Taipei Biennial. It's a hilarious piece of graphic nihilism. One scene shows the

continents merging into a compact mass, what the geographers call 'Pangaea'. For the Dutch designer, neoliberalism is the Transcendent Blender that makes the world one. In another sequence the theme of *Jesus Christ, Superstar!* rings out against rows of famous faces, spinning around like fruits in a slot machine: King Tut, John Wayne, George Bush, Bin Laden, Hu Jintao, the Dalai Lama, Grace Jones, the Mona Lisa . . . It all lines up on Mickey in the end. Elsewhere in the film, a block of text displays these shifting statements: 'Religion: In God We Trust / Politics: In Formation We Trust / Economics: Information We Trust.' But that last holy dogma has finally come into question.

Neoliberalism was a reformulation of classical economic liberalism after the Great Depression and the Second World War. The keywords were global currencies, free trade, direct foreign investment and financial markets. What it was *not* about was sovereign nations. In a brilliant study, David Westbrook shows how the architects of the Bretton-Woods accords in 1944, then of the European Economic Community in the 1950s, set out to establish a system of purely financial governance that would make the peoples of the world interdependent, thus rendering the national rivalries of the two World Wars obsolete. It was supposed to be the end of history. The tools of the transformation were complex monetary treaties, deliberately impenetrable to all but specialists. The result, after 30 years of work in the shadows, would be a far-flung community of bankers, brokers, corporations, regulators and private investors, equipped with the latest communications devices and able to determine the outcome of world affairs by decisions that always made them money. Westbrook calls this transnational polity the 'City of Gold'.[2]

2. David Westbrook, *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

The constitution of the City accelerated in the 1970s, when post-war investment barriers were broken down and floating exchange rates were introduced between major currencies. The deregulation affected America itself, though it remained at the centre of the system. Around this time two significant things occurred. One was that Western bankers began to recycle excess capital – particularly petrodollars – into Third World loans for gigantic modernization projects that very often failed. The International Monetary Fund stepped in to impose its austerity plans, effectively taking over governments in exchange for more lending. Meanwhile in Latin America, dictatorships arose to destroy socialist development programs, in order to open the borders for capital investment from the USA. When the governance of the City emerged in broad daylight, it did not appear as a glittering tower on a hill, but instead as poverty from the barrel of a gun. Neoliberalism was first perceived as a nightmare.

After 1989, the City of Gold provoked some very different changes. The end of the Communist system opened borders, not just to money and goods but to vast flows of people. Free trade and foreign direct investment became the drivers of development, alleviating poverty for hundreds of millions. At the same time the Internet emerged, extending to the

global middle classes the kind of communications that had formerly been reserved for denizens of the City. Travel costs dropped, migrant workers were hired everywhere, tourism became commonplace and millions of people began dreaming of a better life in a brand new world. The violence of the early years – which hadn't necessarily ceased – merged together with its dreamlike opposite, producing the postmodern paradoxes of Mieke Gerritzen's film. Neoliberalism had become a kind of Utopia. Its happy isles were the global cities. And this is where the biennials came in.

Single Language

The perfect image of the global biennial was developed decades ago by the British group Archigram, in the comic-strip *Instant City* (1970).[3] A link is made between a sleepy Town Hall and the local IC headquarters. Together they call for a specially outfitted airborne zeppelin. Equipment and people pour out of the heavens, the central square becomes a theatre, the sky becomes an open-air cinema. The event reaches its peak with the artistic and commercial saturation of the town. When the zeppelin leaves and the hubbub subsides, the town has been turned into a permanent media spectacle and the Info-Center sports an immense new antenna, connecting it to an urban network. Of course this same networking procedure applies to a football championship, a trade fair, an IMF summit or – as Archigram would have it – a rodeo.

3. The work, not included in the show, is reproduced in most retrospective catalogues of Archigram.

The naked opportunism of urban promoters using art to put themselves on the world map has brought serious critique, accusing global biennials of cultural imperialism. In a memorable text, Elena Filipovic claimed that despite their mandate to represent a specific place, and despite their inherent differences from museums in terms of funding, organization and temporality, biennials have not created a new context for artistic practice in the processual life of culturally specific urban environments, as the curator Carlos Basualdo had hoped. Instead, what they have done is to 'show artworks in specially constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometries, white partitions, and windowless spaces of classical museum exhibitions'. In short, the globalization of the Western white cube.[4] This is the kind of frankly polemical critique that makes you immediately want to disagree. But first let's translate it into the grammar of neoliberalism.

4. Elena Filipovic, 'The Global White Cube', in: Filipovic and Barbera Vanderlinden (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Roomade/MIT Press, 2005).

David Westbrook points out that across the world, the inhabitants of the City of Gold speak a single language, which is the language of money. Unlike Chinese, English or Swahili it has only a few words, one for each asset you can invest in. And unlike the vocabulary of a common tongue, these asset-words are in necessarily short supply: you can't just freely exchange them with your neighbour. What's more, the only thing these words can 'say' is that they are fractions or multiples of each other. Yet their owner can exchange them for anything that a market can offer. Under the laws of the City, the language of money is of strictly private

significance: it means nothing for society at large, but for the individual it means everything. Is there not some resemblance to the abstracted artwork, open to infinite interpretations within the neutral environment of the white cube? Has contemporary art not been the perfect vector of accession to the neoliberal economic system, precisely because of its undecidability of meaning and its freedom from traditional authority?

The condition of the work in the global biennial should also be seen from the viewpoint of the artist. It partakes of the scalar relationship between black box and white cube, as in *Estimations* by Katya Sander. This is a relation between the global and the local, or more precisely, between computerized abstraction and the intimacy of experience. The work commissioned by the biennial is projected from elsewhere, beamed down from worldwide circulation into the actual space of exhibition. The location is a black box for the artist, whose real conditions she must estimate: the only thing she knows is a set of measurements, an abstract model. This void must be filled with a calculus of possible meanings. As Westbrook points out, to ease their anxieties about the possibility of future earnings, investors require legal and institutional conditions as close as possible to their environments of origin. Thus, in art, the demand for the security of the white cube. But another scalar relationship continually threatens this contract, which is the collapse of the global into irremediable intimacy. What if the situation proves incalculable? What if the model breaks down? What if the risk of the real intrudes through an open window?

Cracks in Pangaea

One way to understand the ambiguities of art in the global biennials is to consider an installation like *We Are All Errorists* (2008) by the Internacional Errorista. The work is composed of over three dozen standing figures made from photocopies of media images pasted onto hinged black backings and held up by thin wooden struts: you see artists, intellectuals, journalists, politicians and above all protesters, most of them with a flag or a word-balloon expressing a reflection, joke or slogan. There is much self-satire in this artistic representation of a demonstration in a museum: the original Spanish title, *Gente Armada*, refers not only to the arms that some figures carry, but also to their condition as fakes or set-ups. But the real question is this: would any visitor recognize these figures as references to the Argentinian insurrection of 19-20 December 2001 – the first popular revolt against neoliberal globalization?

Of course, Taiwan also has its own political culture, marked in recent times by massive protests. On opening night the president had to offer a humorous remark about the need for revolt in a good exhibition – a touchy subject for an incoming leader who has already seen so many people in the streets. One could conclude that the image of protest, neutralized in a museum, is more comforting to politicians than the real thing. In an interview with Jacques Rancière, the artist Fulvia Carnevale suggests exactly that: 'As soon as there are political subjects that disappear from the field of actual politics, that become obsolete through a number of historical processes,

they are recuperated in iconic form in contemporary art.'[5] But one could also radicalize the interesting series of answers that Rancière gives to this line of questioning, by saying: these iconic images condense memories of historical experiences, which are latent in societies and can always suddenly spring back into reality, as living inspirations for new political forms. The question then becomes: how can such latencies travel over the immense cultural gaps separating Taiwan and Argentina?

5. Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, 'Art of the Possible', interview with Jacques Rancière, *Artforum* XLV, no. 7 (March 2007).

The *Errorist* figures are self-consciously two-dimensional representations of the popular response to an immense crisis which closed all the banks and halted most economic activity in Argentina for a period of a year, in 2002. Similar crises have torn the fabric of daily life in countries scattered across the earth, with increasing frequency since the global implementation of neoliberal policies after 1989. The largest and most significant for the countries of Asia – but also for Russia, the former Eastern Europe and Brazil – came in 1997-1998 in the form of a currency and stock-market crisis that devastated economies and led to a change of regime in Indonesia, with ongoing consequences of poverty and seething revolt. With each of these crises, the utopian image of neoliberal globalization is shattered for millions of people, and elements of the historical past – the 'nightmare' to which I referred earlier – filter back into waking awareness in the form of intense scepticism, anger and desire for another life. It is under these conditions that global biennials, particularly from 1998 onwards (but much earlier in some places) became hybrid social vehicles, dominated by the standardized trappings of the world-class cultural event, but also traversed by artists, curators, critics and visitors seeking some other reality than the City of Gold. Each of these people – consciousness, sensibility and expression – embodies a break in the 'one world network' of the transcontinental financial order. Cracks in Pangaea.

The particularity of the Sixth Taipei Biennial was to exemplify this ambiguous status of political desire within one of the showcase institutions of the neoliberal city. Consider, for example, a performance-based work on the borderline of activism such as *Backpacks* (2006-2008) by Nasan Tur. These are portable kits of materials for public speaking, demonstrating, cooking, sabotage and fan-worship, to be appropriated by interested people in each place of exhibition. We know that such works are primarily performance concepts, used at each site by artist-friends under relatively controlled conditions for the production of the videos that accompany the work. Yet these pieces also express a subversive youth and student culture, constructed around casual mobility within a far-flung support network and open to quick politicization, which has worried authorities since the 1960s. What is the message: neutralization in the museum, or the continuing spread of a culture of disobedience?

Consider *Welfare State | Smashing the Ghetto* (2006) by the group Democracia: a more spectacular and disturbing work of political art, which consists of a four-screen video projection showing the real

destruction of a Roma settlement on the edge of Madrid by men in bulldozers backed up by the police, while cell-phone sporting yuppies stand applauding and cheering on bleachers built specially for the occasion. The piece can be read as the ultimate cynicism, since you, the spectator, are also invited to watch this event on specially built bleachers, where you can enjoy the thrill of other people's pain and gaze with fascination each time the camera zooms in on a glitter-trash graffiti tag reading 'Democracia'. What is the message: the social insignificance of the artistic signifier, or a forceful restatement of the critique of capitalist democracy by a philosopher like Alain Badiou?

Open questions like those above typically define the limits of acceptability for political art in public exhibitions. This is why it was a relief, in Taipei, to see a special section entitled 'A World Where Many Worlds Fit', curated by videomaker Oliver Ressler and including 14 artist-activists who formed part, in one way or the other, of the counter-globalization movement. They were able to help create a very different kind of 'Instant City': carnivalesque protests and critical counter-summits at the sites of international meetings where global policy is set. The shared experience of engaged cultural producers gave rise to a museum presentation that did not pretend to be a 'direct action kit', but instead offered a wealth of insights, techniques, images, knowledge and reflection to any visitor involved in radical social activism, or simply curious to know how it's done. There was an interesting atmosphere of self-questioning among this group – to which I belong, in reality – due to the feeling that our movement passed its peak a few years ago. Yet even as these doubts were expressed, events in the financial markets were vindicating every criticism that had ever been voiced in the chaos of the carnivalesque protests. Outside the museum door, the City of Gold seemed to be dissolving into its own empty equations.

Towards the World of Regions

What happened in the weeks that followed the bankruptcy of Lehman and the bailout of AIG? The keyword is panic: a sudden retreat to private self-interest, when world-spanning networks of confidence collapse to the scale of frightened individuals. Rather than global institutions with a robust rationality and an embodied sense of history, banks, insurance brokers and hedge-funds revealed their incapacity to admit basic realities, such as precarious workers who cannot pay their debts or housing markets that fall instead of rising. Apparently there were no words for such events in their impoverished vocabularies.

No one knows what the geopolitical consequences of this meltdown will be. But since the crisis was largely due to the overinvestment of Asian funds in corrupted American markets, the global claims of US-centred capital networks will undoubtedly decline, and humiliating retreats from both Iraq and Afghanistan could even trigger a new period of American isolationism. Chinese self-assertion and a stronger pattern of regional exchanges is likely to emerge in East Asia, following on the construction of the Eurozone and the more recent

Latin American convergence (UNASUR). If the continents tended to merge together over the last 30 years, they may now start drifting apart again. The question in our circles is what will art – and 'global biennials' – be able to achieve at the regional scale?

It was surprising to see such a small number of Asian artists at the Taipei Biennial (which in that respect was very much a 'global' exhibition). Yet there was some striking work from the region, for example a series of lightbox photographs entitled *Maid in Malaysia* (2008) by Wong Hoy-Cheong, installed in a busy subway station. These staged images evoke a social phenomenon that is also common to Taiwan and Hong Kong, namely the massive presence of Filipino and Indonesian women as in-person servants, clean-up workers and 'massage girls'. 'For US$200 a month,' reads the faux-advertisement introducing the series, 'you will never have to worry about your family and home again.' The prejudices of Western and perhaps also Chinese viewers are overturned as dark-skinned, upper-class Malaysian children are shown in the company of fair-skinned Filipino maids, transformed into extravagant superheros! At last the artworks had left the white cube, to directly engage with the urban territory.

What was really missing in Taipei, however, was a self-organized group of Asian activist-artists to dialogue with the constellation of counter-globalists who had come together around the street demonstrations. The powerful social movements of Indonesia and Thailand were invisible in the show, undoubtedly because the kinds of mediation between militancy and aesthetic practice that exist in Europe and Latin America have not yet been recognized in the corporate boom-towns of Asia. How can critical artistic production develop in a fragmented region, still deeply in thrall to Anglo-American models and now influenced by the trends of authoritarian Chinese society, with all its subtle and explicit prohibitions? Yet there is a potential here for entirely original activist art forms, as witnessed in the film *Promised Paradise* (2006) by Dutch-Indonesian director Leonard Retel Helmrich, which follows the shadow-puppeteer Agus Nur Amal as he interpellates startled passers-by with *dalang*-style chanted speech, asking them piercing questions about incidents of terrorist bombing in the archipelago.[6] These kinds of productions require serious cultural translation. But only when people have intensely local stakes to lay on the table can there be any real communication between the historical languages, which, unlike money and its mathematical derivatives, convey a typically human excess of meaning.

6. The film was not included in the show and has not yet been distributed in English. It can be viewed with Dutch subtitles at http://www.hollanddoc.nl/dossiers/34452838.

In addition to regional articulations, the question of transcontinental exchange outside neoliberal frameworks could take on a whole new importance in the future. When one recalls that the Bretton-Woods construction was forged against the dangers of bellicose nationalism as it had emerged in the crisis years of the 1930s, the cultural responsibility implied by this prospect becomes clear. What is needed, if we are to be precise and also bold, is a keen artistic awareness of the multiplicity of scales: from the intimate

to the global, by way of the urban, the national and the regional, each of which has its own codes and contradictions, yet all of which continually intertwine under current conditions. Art can explore the relations between these scales, as a way of learning to live with their intersections and clashes. The multipolar world that seems likely to emerge is surely preferable to the neoliberal regime of continuous crisis, and to the collapse of abstract globalism into panic and self-interest. But the retreat from the global order could also lead to dangerous intra- and inter-regional conflicts. If transcontinental biennials have any *raison d'être* in the present, it may lie in a subtle apprenticeship of the interscale.

Inspiration comes from the Slovenian group IRWIN. Years ago, their *East Art Map* pointed beyond the non-places of the City of Gold, by way of a large-scale, long-term participatory project that aims to reveal the artistic latencies of the phantom region of former Eastern Europe.[7] IRWIN is part of the Neue Slowenische Kunst movement and is the founder of a transnational state, the *NSK State in Time*. The exhibition in Taipei provided an occasion to install an NSK passport office and to ask Taiwanese applicants what such a document could mean to them. Their responses and similar interviews were exhibited in a video archive about NSK state citizenship, with a particular focus on the tremendous boom in passport requests from Nigeria. Was it a simple misunderstanding, or an aspiration to a new state of transnationality in the twenty-first century? The activities of IRWIN offer the example of an intimate circle of long-term friends, maintaining a territorial inscription in the city of Ljubljana while exploring national, regional and global destinies through the languages of art and the careful practice of cultural translation.

7. IRWIN, *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (Afterall Books, 2006), as well as http://www.eastartmap.org.

When the typhoon subsided, Manray Hsu and I went out to see the project by Lara Almárcegui, *Removing the Wall of a Ruined House. Qidong Street. Tapei 2008*. The single-story Japanese colonial dwelling, forgotten behind its mouldering wall, had been exposed for a few days to the gaze of passing neighbours. By the time we arrived, it had collapsed into a chaotic jumble of stones and broken planks, utterly destroyed by the storm. The question that arises before such a historical ruin is this: Do you rebuild it as a monument to its own terminal decay – or imagine something better?

Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova

The Making of 'Once is Nothing'

How to Say No while Still Saying Yes?

Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova were invited, as representatives of Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and BAK in Utrecht respectively, to contribute to the Brussels Biennial. With 'Once is Nothing'[1] they tried, from their position of institutional responsibility, to find an answer to the fleeting character of many biennials and their economically motivated quest for modernization.

1. 'Once is Nothing' was the joint contribution of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, NL and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, NL to the Brussels Biennial 1, 19 October 2008-4 January 2009.

'Just say yes . . .' Isn't this rubric the motto of our post-1989 age? The 1990s generation grew up to say 'yes', or at least 'yes, but . . .' because it seemed there was no alternative. With no possibility of an effective oppositional movement, how could anyone know what, if anything, to refuse, and why? If you were to say a defiant 'no', it would appear self-serving and fanatical – an empty gesture or inexplicable failure to try to make use of what might always be a real opportunity. In the past, refusal seems to have been easier. At least when combined with a more general resistance to submit to the forces of state or market that occupied much of the political and economic time before 1989, refusal appeared to have more justification and purpose – it could even be heroic. After the neoconservative declaration of the end of history, the angry young dogs didn't have the same bite; it just seemed easier to agree and try to make the system work in the best way for those with whom it engaged. Yet along with the myriad 'yes's' that punctuated the 1990s and continue up to today, there were also a multitude of small-scale, modest resistances to specific exploitations and attempts to turn an empty invitation to participate into an agonistic expression of what might be (better).

Suddenly in autumn 2008, political economy burst back onto the world stage as if it had never really been away. The downturn had arrived, proving that the pattern of free market boom and bust was not broken but just dormant for a while, only to return with a more aggressive vengeance than we thought possible. Amid the rapid deflation of bank credit and overblown management egos, we could suddenly perceive with a new clarity the manoeuvring of our democratic representatives busy holding up a system they told us obeyed the laws of natural selection. Just at this moment, purely coincidentally, a new biennial opened in Brussels. It was the umpteenth international contemporary art festival designed to occupy our cultured leisure time to emerge in the non-historical years 1989-2008. However, alongside the rather pedestrian if still intelligent references to urbanism, modernity and the complexity of twenty-first-century regionalism, there was a twist to the Brussels Biennial's construction. In addition to inviting relatively high-profile individual curators to participate, the organizers of the Biennial invited public, state-funded art institutions to select and produce different chapters of the exhibition. Given the fact that half the world's financial system is now in public hands, this move could be seen as remarkably prescient.[2]

2. Even one of the Biennial sponsors, Fortis Bank, was itself briefly nationalized by what remains of the Belgian state before 75 per cent was resold to BNP Paribas with 25 per cent remaining in public hands.

At the time of the invitation, however, it already called upon us as institutional curators from BAK, basis voor actuele kunst and Van Abbemuseum to think about our contributions in very different ways from the traditional roles of selecting, commissioning, building and presenting that provide the basic structure for most large-scale curatorial endeavours. Individuals and institutions are different organisms

with different priorities, and both of us felt an overwhelming need to recognize this in our actions. The project 'Once is Nothing' – which we developed as a joint contribution to the Brussels Biennial – was therefore conceived as a direct response to the challenging and original invitation that we had been given. It is, in a hopefully layered and not overly directed way, also a reaction to what we saw around us. In early 2008, the globalized contemporary art context in which we were working as institutions was one of a successful art market and active commercial gallery scene that saw little value in public institutional approval or support beyond a few key global institutions. The commodification of art objects had reached an unprecedented level of effectiveness, with biennials often being the test sites for developing new market products. It was, however, also a context in which the general public's appreciation of modern and contemporary art was at an all-time high. Critical discourse and social engagement had appeared as omnipresent tools for understanding art's role and made people more sophisticated viewers of art, not to mention that these very tools had been developed together and shared across both public and private initiatives.

It was thus with this broad and somewhat paradoxical situation on our minds that we approached the task of making a project for the first Brussels Biennial. Although BAK and Van Abbemuseum work in their own distinct ways and with different mandates – that of a contemporary art centre and a modern art museum – both institutions share an interest in exploring art's agency in our time and place. We are also both concerned with the question of memory and the preservation of what has existed, whether we refer to the objects in an art collection, the archives, the discourse or the forms of knowledge that we each seek to produce. Without the survival of such projects and products, our activities make little more sense than every other phenomenon of our transient spectacular event culture, where each production tries to outdo or erase its predecessor. Beyond our own activities, these questions span further concerns about the value of exhibition making in general – its rapidity, continuity and often pseudo-originality. The way we allow projects of significance to be subscribed to memory, and the modes in which the discourse develops around exhibitions that we consider of key consequence are also ongoing considerations. The publication of Bruce Altshuler's new book on the history of exhibitions up to 1959 and the forthcoming Afterall *Exhibition Histories* series both point to the fact that there is increasing agreement that the history of art itself is to a large extent written by exhibitions.[3] Yet what survives of these exhibitions is often little more than shards or trophies, to use archaeological or ethnographic terms.

3. Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial, Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. 1, 1863-1959* (Londen: Phaidon 2008); the series *Exhibition Histories* (Afterall Books, MIT Press), will be published in late 2009. See also: Walter Grasskamp, 'For Example, *Documenta*, Or, How is Art History Produced?' in: Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Feruson, and Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (Londen/New York: Routledge, 1996), 67-78.

The phenomenon of the exhibition is dissected by traditional art historians who subscribe certain activities under the names of individual artists while excluding others to the archive and the margin – a process that is of enormous aid to the varied agents of commodification that have consolidated power over the last decades. As we already know, the majority of art museum collections consist largely of objects that have been through this process and are already detached from the circumstances in which they were realized and contextualized. They are often removed from their own archival setting as well, which is housed elsewhere in the documentation centre of the museum or sold independently as part of an artist's estate, destined for organizations such as the Getty Museum.

Yet, in contrast to this at least partial inscribing of histories, global biennials – exhibition machines, as it were – are by their very definition geared towards the event logic, erasing their own past in order to frame the incomparable newness of the next project in line. This state of affairs is even worse if we remember that many biennials provide one of the few access points for contemporary visual culture to states outside the former West. Here, the biennial is largely confirmed as an event spectacle *pur sang* in the expectations of its publics and this only serves to reinforce the transitory (and therefore manipulable) nature of contemporary culture in general. If you cannot access the records of the past, you cannot rewrite the fictions of a particular self-interested history and cultural expression is restricted to the service of those who write its first accounts. In light of this, it is encouraging to see that the oldest biennial of all, Venice, is just waking up to the value of its own archive, but the fact that it has taken more than 100 years to do so points again to the gaps between the functions of fixed art institutions and the protocols of festivals.

Our joint response to our perception of the current conditions and to the parameters of the Brussels Biennial had to be uncompromising. 'Once is Nothing', an exhibition based upon another exhibition from another biennial, was the (logical) result. Early on in our deliberations, the exhibition 'Individual Systems' curated by Igor Zabel came to our minds as one of the most precise curatorial statements on the issue of modernity in recent years. It was articulated from the perspective of the beginning of the twenty-first century and took into consideration the major shifts in the world's global political (and thus cultural) geography that 1989 had brought about. The show was also part of a Biennale[4] project – the 2003 Venice Biennale – which was conceived as a patchwork of relatively unrelated exhibitions put together by the multiple voices and visions of a number of curators. In this innovative context, Zabel's unpretentious exhibition was somewhat lost in the cacophony of the spectacles that surrounded it; those who visited Venice that year will likely remember the volume of works and the formal differ-

4. 50th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, 2003, entitled 'Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer', artistic director: Francesco Bonami.

ences between the exhibition installations better than the works of art (or exhibition narratives) themselves. In contrast, 'Individual Systems' insisted on an older set of exhibition-making conventions that, in the name of the works of art it encompassed, required time, space and concentration of the viewer. Our project, 'Once is Nothing', attempted to reconstruct the effect of the exhibition 'Individual Systems' by reproducing aspects of its physical and informational structure. Or perhaps we rather tried to capture the very qualities of time, space, concentration and even dry wit that it represented. While based upon the show's embodiment in 2003, 'Individual Systems' appeared in Brussels as an interpretation of the exhibition's architecture without the physical works themselves, letting the voids on the walls speak for the art that is absent in a physical sense but hopefully very present in its absence. A reference catalogue that visitors were free to take with them contained information about both exhibitions and the individual works, as well as a new project by Belgian artist Patrick Corillon, helped us to construct a space and time for reflection, for the art and the audience alike, where one could pause to consider the questions of exhibition making, institutional responsibility, continuity and memory, and engage with the key element of individual empowerment that art has on offer: the subjective imagination.

From 'Individual Systems' to 'Once is Nothing'

'Individual Systems' brought together fifteen artists and artists' collectives to reflect on the concept of modernity, and that to which it is essentially connected – the idea of artistic and cultural autonomy – today: Victor Alimpiev & Marian Zhunin, Paweł Althamer, Art & Language, Josef Dabernig, IRWIN (Dusan Mandi, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek, Borut Vogelnik), Luisa Lambri, Yuri Leiderman, Andrei Monastirsky, Pavel Mrkus, Roman Opalka, Marko Peljhan, Florian Pumhösl, Simon Starling, Mladen Stilinovi and Nahum Tevet. Zabel wrote: 'Actually, modernity in art is often understood as the confirmation of its autonomy. And as it seems that we have to ask ourselves again about the potentials of the autonomous art and art as an autonomous system, it also seems that we have to return to the idea of modernity and the variety of concepts of which it is constructed.'[5] We need to return to these ideas in order to, if only fragmentarily, address the dilemma of how art is still possible and meaningful in relation to the major social and political conflicts we witness in the world today: 'What role or meaning can art have at all, compared to such events and processes?'[6]

5. Igor Zabel, 'Individual Systems', in 50th International Art Exhibition, *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer* (ex. cat.), ed. Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2003), 152.

6. Ibid., 151.

With Adorno's dictum that 'politics has migrated into autonomous art' in mind, Zabel turned to the 'ideas of ordered systems – in technology, knowl-

edge, society and culture – [which] make an essential part of modernity'.[7] With the motif of 'individual systems' read through multiple artistic positions in the exhibition, he presented artists who 'have developed their own, often strictly defined, but nevertheless quite individual or personal systems, constructed new conceptual frameworks and paradigms, or used the existing systems in an individual, uncommon way. Artistic autonomy is an essential determination of their work. Even when [it] seems that they are dealing with social and other 'external' realities in a direct way, they remain essentially distanced from them. External elements that enter the artists' systems are transformed and adapted to a new, different context. But this makes it possible for them to reflect upon the issues of modernity, modernization, systematization, as well as dissent, resistance, and search for freedom, dialectically connecting the compulsory and freedom, the general and the personal.'[8]

7. Ibid., 152.

8. Ibid., 153.

With the understanding of autonomy not as an absolute disassociation of art from society, but rather the autonomous *as* political in art, we can think of modernity as 'not merely a utopia, project, and rational organization, it is also tension, struggle and conflict',[9] and acknowledge it as an unfinished project in the context of the global reality in which we find ourselves. If Zabel suggested that it is useful to reoccupy the position of autonomy in this sense – or perhaps a version of 'engaged autonomy' that we have written about elsewhere – it is precisely to assign to art the task of continuity, if not perseverance, in addressing the urgencies in the tensions and conflicts of today's world. And this notwithstanding the palpable proofs that the possibility of a controlled, better future has slipped out of our hands in the same way as did the option of reconstructing in full the optimism of the era in which these ideas were born.

9. Ibid., 152.

The architecture of the exhibition 'Individual Systems', while respectfully accommodating the art works, can itself be seen as an 'individual system' of sorts, provoking a sensation of forced perspective in viewers as they walked in a corridor formed by five 'cubes' distributed at intervals between the columns of the Arsenale in Venice. Developed by artist Josef Dabernig, the structure consisted of: 'Five more or less communicating exhibition spaces [that] are arranged longitudinally on both sides [of the corridor-like space]. The dimensions of these were conceived in proportion to the linear arrangement of the windows, pilasters and main pillars: on the side at the end of the area, the length of the spaces, made with plasterboard walls, reduces progressively by half a unit in synchrony with the gaps between the pillars, while the entrance side remains constant. The height of the spaces, however, changes in both aisles as you gradually proceed towards the main corridor. As you move through the area, the correspondence between the left and right sections of the exhibition area moves by one column, so that the overall number of spaces is uneven.'[10]

10. Josef Dabernig, in: ibid., 160.

The structure clearly borrowed some modernist clarity in the way it envisioned and enclosed its world, yet the diminishing height and shifting coordinates of the architectural units introduced disturbance that suggested the need for reconsideration and even reorientation. It is an adaptation of this structure to the venue of the Brussels Biennial 1 that we chose to present in 'Once is Nothing'.

'Once is Nothing' was therefore relatively blank at first sight. In this sense, it confronted the expectation that visitors going to an exhibition require a form of site seeing. There was not so much in the way of a visceral encounter with material or, at least, that is how things appeared. This superficial refusal – this 'saying no' while still taking action – had a very clear intention. It was in part a way to signal resistance to the demands of the spectacle, but it must be much more than that if it is to be useful. For what was placed in the space – walls, labels, texts as artworks, light – was the infrastructure of exhibition-making that the work of art as commodity or visual symbol often seeks to mask. Yet it is this very infrastructure and its conventions, drawing on the familiar spaces of art whether museum, art centre or biennial, that are crucial to any consideration of the institutionalized status of art and the beginning of an address to other forms of production and presentation. 'Once is Nothing' should ideally be seen, at second glance no doubt, not as an empty space but rather as a series of white cubes inside a raw, unaltered industrial space looking out on a modernist cityscape of transportation through windows that are located near Corillon's additional narrative of art's failed shipment through space. This work was commissioned by us in order to provide an extra contemporary and yet historically responsive artistic contribution that would highlight anew the deliberate absence of the other works. This turn that we made from work to base was already apparent in Zabel's original intentions as he battled with the tolerated autonomy of modernism. Rotating it further required a more overt foregrounding of the conventions of that toleration in order to put them into the field of discussion, and not just as a theoretical game. Instead, the building of these spaces was an attempt to provide a lived, tangible experience of relative refusal, in order to deliver something else than what is awaited – a detour for the attention that lands on what literally supports and lies behind the works of art themselves.

Einmal is Keinmal[11]

The questions that Zabel posed with 'Individual Systems', and the way he asked them together with the artists in the show, resonate powerfully with some of our key concerns beyond the immediate opportunity of the exhibition. As institutions we seek to advocate continuously for the meaning of art in the public sphere, while at the same time we defend a meaningful autonomy for artis-

11. The title of our exhibition, 'Once is Nothing', comes from a German adage *einmal ist keinmal*, an expression that describes an imagined condition of life in which any decision is of no consequence because it can never be repeated and therefore judgment of its effectiveness or otherwise is impossible. This troubling unaccountability was thematized in Milan Kundera's seminal 1984 novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

tic practice – meaningful in the sense that it is circulated, contested and disapproved. Unlike in other fields of artistic expression – theatre, music, or even literature – the possibility of repetition is not naturally built into the practice of exhibitions. The exhibition happens once; its afterlife depends on related ephemera, on how well it is archived, catalogued, written about or how it is spread through the personal memories, informal anecdotes, rumours and fantasies of those involved in one way or another. If we believe the adage *einmal is keinmal*, thematized by the novelist Milan Kundera, that the lightness of the one off decision renders it meaningless in any wider scheme of values – that if an exhibition happened only one time it is as if it never happened, to put it simply – then repetition is crucial to any sense in which the autonomy of art can become a agonistic sphere, a place where symbols are fought over and not just fleetingly presented. This has to be true for all exhibitions and appearances of art, and that is why we determined to try to reconstruct an exhibition of inspirational power; to make it happen another time. Yet, we know from the work of Gilles Deleuze[12] that time forms neither a cycle nor a straight line, two models that would arguably allow us to fulfil the ambition of bringing back the identical, or a faithful copy, of what already was. In fact, in Deleuze's view repetition is intimately bound to difference, and thus only when an exhibition is 'repeated as something other' can its distinct qualities be revealed.

12. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 [1968]).

Here is the dilemma at the heart of any possible political project (or 'neo-political' project) that might be available to the biennial as a form. Only by recognizing the need to repeat as something other could a potential political charge be effectively actualized. Yet this fights against the economic imperative of innovation to which the funders and viewers of biennials generally respond. New commissions, new countries, new venues, new audiences are the governing mantras and they have proved effective in delivering a broader and more geographically distributed discussion about contemporary cultural expressions than ever before. We do not want to lose the possibility of newness; indeed societies, especially in the former West, are in rather desperate need of new political imagination, especially given the economic events of this autumn. How to resolve this paradox, or perhaps more usefully how to live within its tensions, is the field on which the strategies for our times need to be built. 'Once is Nothing' was our singular and context-determined attempt to provide a way of addressing the issue. Neither affirming the values of new exhibition production nor cynically turning away to declare that we know better, the exhibition sought to politicize the occasional visitor through a mix of understandable frustration and the sparking of curiosity. We are saying no while still saying yes here, as probably we all have had to do since 1989, although the blankness and whiteness of this intervention is intended to balance the positive and negative and visualize them in the three dimensions of the exhibition space.

Instead of a Conclusion

As art institutions, both BAK and Van Abbemuseum have in their own ways adopted a position of criticality, questioning those occasions in the world of art that lend themselves to spectacle, entertainment and the economic demands of today's capitalism. And although this project is undeniably a contribution to yet another biennial, the Brussels Biennial 1's own initiative to rethink the basic conditions of its format, as well as the fact that we felt the need to contribute to a critical exploration of global modernity of this particular region in Europe, encouraged us to lend our voices and speak along. As a biennial exhibition, 'Once is Nothing' cannot be more than a modest attempt to contribute to the discussion about the responsibilities of curating in our time. This not least because, to invoke the words of Igor Zabel once more, 'If one is aware of this situation one cannot simply go on producing, presenting, or describing art, as if nothing has happened',[13] be it in the art world or the world at large.

13. Zabel, in: 50th International Art Exhibition, *Dreams and Conflicts*, op. cit. (note 5), 151.

This project was realized in memory of Igor Zabel.

This is a revised and expanded version of the text 'Once is Nothing', published in an insert to Artur mijewski: 'The Social Studio' in *Newsletter 2008 #1*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, October 2008.

Irit Rogoff

Geo-Cultures

Circuits of Arts and Globalizations

'Geo-Cultures', a research project conducted by Irit Rogoff, a professor at Goldsmiths College in London, investigates how the contemporary practice of art informs rather than reflects globalization processes. Seen in the framework of this study, biennials are interesting places. They have evolved into circuits of research, exchange and dialogue that combine specific local features with the illumination of conditions elsewhere in the world.

The thoughts put forward in this article are concerned with how to think about the expanded field of contemporary arts practice in this time of globalization. It is an attempt to address a particular dilemma; how can the political economies and the affective regimes and the creative practices, which together make up the field of contemporary arts, be brought into the same investigative paradigm?[1] If the arts are not exclusively a field of expressive creativity on the one hand or a set of productive economies on the other – how then can we gage the very particular way in which they are generative, able to produce new modalities and new registers, within these unique new conditions?

1. For a further discussion of affective regimes see Patricia Clough (ed.), *The Affective Turn* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

These questions also form the basis of the design of a new research centre currently under development at the University of London's Goldsmiths College. The centre will open in the autumn of 2009 under the name 'Geo-Cultures'. The 'Geo-Cultures' project begins by focusing on how art reflects the contexts and conditions of its production, a question then replaced by how cultural practices inform the processes of globalization. What is at stake here is a recognition that politics cannot fully account for the conditions that we live in, so while these conditions are political in nature, they require a far broader range of models that will allow us to account for them and their effects, at different registers.

The bulk of the work proposed by 'Geo-Cultures' is an attempt to bring together a large range of current practices in the arts including the creative process, curating and organizing exhibitions, disseminating art, and theorizing, and to understand how these are producing new and unexpected realities within circuits of globalization. These unexpected departures are not simply new subject matter or new forms, but also new and unexpected alliances on the exhibition circuit, the innovative mimicry of certain social and political institutions as artistic practice, the production of artistic arenas which enact new political conjunctions and the emergence of a conversation hosted by the art world and its infrastructures, which is not taking place anywhere else at present. Such major international exhibitions as Documenta 10 (1997) and Documenta 11 (2002) heralded substantial paradigm shifts within our understanding of the parameters of the art world. As a result we came to inhabit a far more international, far more socially attenuated, more formally adventurous and more intellectually grounded art world than ever before. Within this world the very concept of what is an art practice has been able to expand from making objects to experimenting with structures or enabling gatherings or doing substantial research. It is one of the contentions of this research project that the pressures of globalization have resulted in a greatly expanded world of artistic practices that is consequently able to play a far more substantive role in furthering the general culture.

Reflection

Conventionally, the arts are seen to represent the realities of globalization either as thematic subject matter or as increasingly hyper-mobile processes. As such, many contemporary arts practices set

up extensive analyses of the conditions and cultural effects of different aspects of globalization. A case in point would be Raqs media Collective's *A (age)/ S (sex)/ L (location)* of 2003. In this installation, workers 'living between an online and an offline world in time zones on the outer reaches of cyberia'[2] at a call centre in India are taught to sound like and be able to introduce references familiar to the inhabitants of the culture they are making calls to on behalf of some multinational company employing data outsourcing which has produced a new digital proletariat. '*A/S/L* maps the time geography of shifting identities in a new economy, where call centre employees who are physically located in India answer customers in Minneapolis in a Midwestern accent.'[3] *A/S/L* confronts us with a slippery location which can only be understood temporally. Located neither in India nor in the American Midwest, we find the production of a corporate location within a fibre-optics network which redefines many elements; the location of the work, the location of the communication and in the process confounds everyone's certainty that it is possible to know who you are talking to.

2. Ursula Biemann in: *Geography and the Politics of Mobility*, tentoonstellingscatalogus (Wenen: Generali Foundation, 2003), p. 25.

3. Ibid.

This digital proletariat, which operates these call centres around the globe, embodies a new sensibility of situatedness, being simultaneously materially located and virtually dislocated so as to produce a performative alternative to the polarity of such opposites in earlier discourses, which often confused identifiable location with understanding. And that of course is the point, the Enlightenment legacy, so central to the constitution of geography as knowledge, that to be able to name and to locate automatically leads to being able to know.

So that is one mode in which globalization is represented within contemporary artistic practice, as a direct engagement with some of the specific issues raised by its processes. Equally, many social scientists and empirical scholars see the immense proliferation of artistic practices, events, institutions such as international exhibitions, biennales, art fairs, or the ever-increasing mobility of travelling artists, works, curators, as well as the great rise in both buildings and funding structures and categories that make up the art world as effects of globalization, albeit in a form that can be distinctly located within the art world, a world that is spatiality distinctive from named geographical entities. If mobility and proliferation are the hallmarks of globalization, then the art world, it would seem, is an exceptionally good place in which to study these as leisure and entertainment economies.

New Connections and Sources of Knowledge

In addition to these representational modes of artistic practice and empirical scholarship described above, there have also been emergent new conjunctions between the arts and forms of organizing, activism, self education, gatherings, event staging and political protest. Quotidian activities such as urban walking become, in the hands of many such practices, a process of urban investigation or an embodied protest against the evacuation of different kinds of inhabitation out of

zones of regeneration or urban development. Or the expression of solidarity with indigenous populations being uprooted or disenfranchised. (STALKER, Rome). Equally the proliferation of education based practices of late; projects which have turned museums into laboratories ('Laboratorium', 1999) or into investigative projects ('Academy', 2006), exhibitions into schools ('Manifesta 6', 2005), art spaces into seminars ('Unitednationsplaza.com', 2007), political demonstrations into orchestrated performance pieces ('Disobidienti', 2003) and theatres into study gatherings ('Summit', 2007). These have been seen by said scholars as the ever-expanding field of arts practices, which in tandem with ever-greater mobility, the information society and the growing range of entertainment and leisure activities, needs to be viewed as a new political economy within globalization.

In addition to such strategies of representation, we need to think out attempts to reverse this understanding and investigate how the arts are producing both unexpected cultural phenomena and unexpected new knowledge within the circuits of globalization.

The Geo-Cultures inquiry is situated at the intersection of several vectors, both historical and contemporary. It is located in the aftermath of colonialism, diffusionism and post-colonial self-constitution on the one hand, and on the other hand their concomitant, ever-growing diasporas. The impact of cultural cross influences and of fusions born of mobility, new proximities and new struggles for recognition and for multivocal cultural self-perceptions are the ground on which the materials being worked with take place. It is important to bear in mind though, that these mobilities are not simply those from the 'Global South' or the 'Global East' towards the West, but also complex circulations within each one of these entities itself.

The relationship between stability and circulation has grown strained. The stabilities of citizenship and emplacement and their related access to rights, protections, inclusions, situated knowledge and legitimated cultural production are countered by an ever-increasing array of categories of those who cannot automatically assume such accesses; immigrants, migrant labourers, refugees, asylum seekers, diasporic communities, displaced cultural traditions, not to mention the numerous bodies on the move within the circuits of mobile capital, outsourcing and franchising or those who are on the move for the gratification of various desires such as education or tourism. Such a level of bodily circulation has impacted on the very possibility of arguing 'situated knowledge' simply as a series of direct relations between subjects, places and epistemologies.

Relational Geographies and Relations with Singularities

Having investigated the relations between location, positionality, subjectivity and arts practices in several books and various articles and exhibitions, I want to now move my thinking in two directions; in the first place towards the concept of 'relational geographies'. The relationality of this model of geography lies in two important transitions. The first is that it is no longer anchored in the cohering imperative of the nation-state. Instead we

have a map that is composed of aggregates of intensities, of national or ethnic loyalties, of insurgencies that link and empathize and spark off each other, of generational loyalties to great moments that cross boundaries, histories and languages. This relational geography does not operate, as does classical geography, from a single principle that maps everything in an outward bound motion with itself at the centre. Instead it is cumulative, it lurches sideways, it is constructed out of utopian moments of unreasonable hopes, of chance meetings in cafés, of shared reading groups at universities, of childhood deprivations that could speak to one another, of snatches of music on transistor radios, of intense rages, of glimmers of possibilities offered by ideas that enable one to imagine a better world.

Parallel to these mobilities and relational geographies, we are also witnessing a previously unimaginable set of circulations within the world of art and creative practices. The number of new exhibition forums and the way they have opened up unexplored regions to a larger world of art, the direction of their mobility – which defies the traditional paths from centre to periphery, have rewritten the global map of art.

The second concept that informs these thoughts concerns newly globalized forms of situatedness and their possible relations with singularities, or in other words, with ontological rather than externally designated, or identitarian communities. If location is by definition the site of performativity and of criticality rather than a set of naturalized relations between subjects and places, how then within this shift can we address issues of a necessary and critical cultural location; of the place from which we speak, in which we ground our positionality, from which we understand meaning and in which we might be able to foresee an effect. Do the new cultural effects of globalization produce communities which share, to paraphrase Jean Luc Nancy, a 'being in common' rather that a 'having in common'?[4] He is doing so in the name of a complex and very contemporary politics of what he calls 'the places, groups, or authorities (. . . Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Casamnce, ETA Militia, Roma of Slovenia . . .) that constitute the theatre of bloody conflicts among identities, as well as what is at stake in these conflicts. These days it is not always possible to say with any assurance whether these identities are intranational, infranational, or transnational; whether they are 'cultural' , 'religious' , 'ethnic' , or 'historical': whether they are legitimate or not – not to mention the question about which law would provide such legitimation: whether they are real, mythical, or imaginary; whether they are independent or 'instrumentalized' by other groups who wield political, economic, and ideological power . . .[5]

4. J.L.Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), xii-xx.

5. Ibid.

The predominant informing question then, is how we can read current artistic practices ranging from fine arts, architecture and spatial practices, Internet and screened media, curating and organizing, music and sonic cultures, performance and performativity, as manifestations of these mobilities and paradigm shifts in the relations of subjects, processes and institutions to places. These unexpected departures are not simply new subject

matter or new forms, but also new alliances on the exhibition circuit, a proliferation of biennials and international exhibitions, innovative mimicry of certain social and political institutions as artistic practice, the production of artistic arenas which enact new political conjunctions, the production of a vast dissemination, translation and publication project and the emergence of a conversation hosted by the art world and its infrastructures, which is not taking place anywhere else at present. Beyond questions of subjects, labour, commodities and capital investments on the move, this discussion aims to articulate how we can interrogate such a political economy of cultural circulation at the level of artistic practices.

Field Work

A critical interrogation of the manifestations of current mobilities and paradigm shifts in the relations of subjects, processes and institutions to places could involve a shift in vocabulary, one that would not allow place to settle down into any form of hardened or coherent identity. I would propose the replacement of 'place' with two contingent terms; that of 'site' and that of 'field and field work', as well as the replacement of location by a set of relational geographies.

'Field work' is obviously a borrowed term – borrowed from the reflexive debates that have been generated within cultural anthropology over the past 20 years, but it is not a borrowed term taken up here in the form of a metaphor to be dragged around across different arenas of practice in order to somehow unify them – to merge them with some semblance of coherence of either project or method. To do that would involve us in the workings of metaphor with its mechanisms of likeness and of equation, which at this stage of our activities we would probably wish to avoid altogether.

Instead, it is perhaps the conjunctions of simultaneously occupying a dual positionality of being spatially located in an inside and paradigmatically on the outside, or vice versa, that this deployment of 'field work' actually aims to capture. This disjunction and this very necessary duality, offer us not the multi-inhabitation of one space as in the discourse on space offered up by Henri Lefevre and his followers such as Edward Soja, Rosalyn Deutsche or Neil Smith, but the internal split that demands that we perceive of ourselves as both inside and outside of the field of activity and of its perception.

In critical cultural anthropology, George Marcus put this very well when he stated that the great turn in anthropological perception of 'field work' in the late twentieth century was its move from 'being annals of rapport (between subjects of discourse and objects of knowledge) to being replaced by annals of complicity – as constructing the primary field work relation'.[6] 'Rapport' was fed by an illusion of understanding, empathy and the ability to seamlessly translate between knowledges while 'complicity' stands for the stoppages and blockages of self-conscious reflection which perceive us as the producers of the very knowledge we aim to transmit through the languages, narrative structure and cultural tropes that constitute our consciousness. And the en-

6. George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Prologue

A recent exhibition named ‘Di/visions – Voices from the Contemporary Arab World’ curated by Cathrine David at the House of World Cultures in Berlin (2007), consisted of 16 vast screen interviews with artists and thinkers from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Suspended through the dark building on luminous panels, they became a temporary inhabitation of a Western sphere by a sophisticated, self-questioning, audacious set of voices that refused the identitarian simplification that Western political analysis imposes on them. Instead, both formally and substantively, a winding, conversational mode invoked other worlds in front of our eyes, without being descriptive or oppositional.

This project came to represent, for me, the possibilities inherent in arts practice for rethinking global relations and moving around global knowledge. It also exemplified an emergent mode which I am calling ‘practice-driven theory’ in which it is practice that is setting agendas for how to work in cultural theory. The project proposes a mode of framing around an issue, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the political radicalization within the Arab world, which are of shared importance to both the interviewees and the audience listening to them in another location and in other circumstances.

It sets up several parallel discourses, produces an intertextual field of subjectivities, evolves a specific visual form for its preoccupations, relies on extensive and painstaking research and links location and knowledge production in mobile forms. This project exemplifies what I am calling ‘Geo-Cultures’ in this discussion.

tire enterprise of such complicitous 'field work' is understood as a *mis en scène,* a conscious staging, obviously implying a performance and several sets of audiences at which this performance is directed. This, as Marcus states, is: 'The very basic condition that defines the altered *mis en scène* for which complicity, rather than rapport, is a more appropriate figure for an awareness of *existential doubleness* on the part of both anthropologist and subject; this derives from having a sense of being *here*, where major transformations are underway that are tied to things happening simultaneously *elsewhere*, but not having a certainty or an authoritative representation of what those connections are.'[7] In part, Marcus's distinction highlights a familiar anthropological as well as artistic dilemma between the raw materials of events and conditions and the means of representations and the interpretative structures which allow us to transport them halfway across the world for the purposes of being both informative and of making a point. We have seen many instances of artistic practice that simply import the images of the camps in Palestine or the deaths in Rwanda or the Homeless in Kiev and we have all felt the discomfort of having to somehow plot for ourselves a positioned response that would use these images within the critical trajectories we inhabit as thinking, responsible viewers. To show or to agree that something is 'horrible' is simply not enough.

7. Ibid.

Complicity

To some extent it might also be said that the distinction between 'rapport' and 'complicity' is equally applicable to various art practices and their relation to location. One of the hopes in taking up 'field work' was to be able to get away from the notion of 'site specificity', which in art practice terms has assumed the establishment of a 'rapport' with a site through an immersed investigative knowledge and the subsequent attempt to reveal and unmask some of the deep structures and unacknowledged interests and affiliations that its surface might have glossed over. In 'field work', as we might be able to see, location goes beyond digging to expose what lies beneath the surface and towards the invention of new sensibilities through which one might live out and experience them.

We can compare some the excavative nature of a serious investigation of urban spaces such as the work of Martha Rosler, for example, or that of Hans Haacke, with Francis Alys lugging around a block of melting ice or dribbling some blue-tinted water along the city streets he haphazardly happens to be walking along – from exposing and making visible the hidden structures of social and cultural existence in the case of Rosler, Haacke and others to inventing new and imaginative modes of inhabiting space. This second example is a relation which is far closer to a notion of 'complicity' in the ways in which the inarticulacy of the phantasmic is brought into play, a condition that cannot be made subject to rational, analytical discourse. I am thinking here also of such projects as that of Waalid Raad under the aegis of the Atlas Group, in which the civil war in Lebanon is explored through tales of covert gambling at horse races by respected university professors and tales

of kidnap and political captivity which resonate with the unspoken sexual frissons of capture and domination as put forward by a highly gendered, masculine in this case, imagination. To 'unframe' the conflict in Lebanon from being purely the staging ground of political forces, of colonial legacies, of ethnic conflicts, of ideological battlegrounds, of hostile and opportunistic neighbours to the south and to the east, of superpower interests that want to maintain the region in an endless state of unresolved turmoil – to allow it to speak at such oblique angles to the conflict itself, allows us to establish a whole set of alternative entry points and identifications, to inhabit it without being compelled to produce some highly moralized set of positions by which we pass declaratory judgement.

Linked Peripheries

Site and site-specificity are important spatial and artistic designations. Beginning in the 1960s when 'site-specific' artistic practices insisted on the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to its production, and culminating in our contemporary realization that site is not only a physical arena and that its stability has been shaken by a nomadic dispersal. However, if 'site' is more than context, if it enables the production of knowledge as the implementation and reciprocal influence of art and geography, how does the specificity of a site produce knowledge that is able to transcend its own conditions and languages and that can circulate beyond its location?

One of the ways in which to imagine such local transcendence is via a concept of linked peripheries – there are now 146 (known) biennial exhibitions around the world. These have become a circuit of investigation, exchange and conversation that bypass the traditional centres of art and culture such as New York, Paris, London, Moscow, Berlin, etcetera. Instead we have been witnessing an intriguing mode of exchange and investigation emerging from these combinations of detailed local specificity (*site specific* to the exhibition) and the desire to illuminate some similar set of conditions elsewhere. Perhaps the most intriguing moment came in the late 1990s when, in reading the various statements coming out of biennials on different continents and from different cultural traditions, it became evident that there was little desire to emulate older Western models of international spectacle, and that instead an attenuated attention was being paid to producing a location that was both specifically located and simultaneously diasporic. In this way a link to a variety of elsewheres and other traditions could be forged, but not through the emulation of a bland internationalism but rather through the often tough and tragic mobilities and their battles to insist on their hybrid status. (The Johannesburg Bienniale of 1997 and the 7th Cairo Biennale 1998 come to mind here). Both intentionally and unintentionally a set of links between empirically unconnected regions and arenas began to emerge; not new regions of broad identity, but platforms of shared concerns.

New Vocabulary

I would say that it is the ability to address issues not through the specificity

of a given location, but rather through the generation of a new vocabulary, that would be more hospitable to unusual and sometimes hostile conjunctions. Such an instance was the 'Territories' exhibition that took place in KW Berlin, Kunstahlee Malmo and elsewhere in 2003 – and which brought together a shared set of concerns about shifting territorial formations within the more conventionally accepted geographical designations of nation-states; occupations, demilitarized zones, privatized spaces and gated communities. By thinking about 'territory' rather than naturalized place, the curators were able to link disparate places and practices across the world as an emergent concept of a territoriality that required us to reference an alternative political and analytical language than the one by which we normally address our criticism of current states of domination, disenfranchisement or extra-territoriality.

This duality has resulted in new 'relational geographies' we do not yet know how to name. If the model of the past was for regional curators to travel towards the traditional centres of the art world such as New York, Paris, London, etcetera, and find work there that they could bring back with them to exemplify the latest shifts in the languages and pursuits of contemporary art, while curators of major international projects used to roam the world in search of local practices that would inform their audience of some supposed culture 'over there' – this has now totally inversed itself. One of the most interesting recent developments has been regional alliances; the recent Shanghai Biennale, Gwangju biennale and Guangzhou biennales have formed a regional alliance that set them up as a grand tour – emulating the language of the 2007 circuit of Documenta 12, Venice Biennale, Munster Sculture Project and Basle Art Fair. Equally Central-Asian and Middle-Eastern arts initiatives have linked themselves in similar modes, combining exhibitions and arts fairs under one label of activity. The conference and conversation programmes developed within these various projects again insisted on an encounter between a certain metalanguage of theoretical concerns and the specificity of a set of local engagements on the ground.

Perhaps most intriguing have been the emergence of a host of new regional imaginations – how do new regional formations come about and do creative practices have a part in shaping them? For example, the contemporary art world in Turkey has set itself the task of becoming the hub of a Balkan, South-Eastern European artistic sphere, (Platform Garanti, Art Centre) while in the inhospitable climates of the Eastern Mediterranean, practitioners from Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan are quietly and discretely forging joint projects that hint at a new Middle-Eastern cultural formation but very often have to take place at quite a distance from it. ('Liminal Spaces' in Israel and 'Home Works' in Lebanon are two examples of such regional initiatives that reference the local outside of the limits and boundaries set up by constraining politics.) In the aftermath of hundreds of years of colonial empires and superpower dichotomies, the arts are becoming the site of a new cultural-geographical imagining.