

Charles Green and  
Anthony Gardner

# **Biennials, Triennials, and documenta**

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THE EXHIBITIONS  
THAT CREATED  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART

WILEY Blackwell



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Queue of Yokohama Triennale visitors waiting to see a video installation at *Yokohama Triennale 2014, ART Fahrenheit 451: Sailing into the sea of oblivion*. Photograph Charles Green

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*The Exhibitions That Created  
Contemporary Art*

Charles Green and Anthony Gardner

**WILEY** Blackwell

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# Preface

All books owe profound thanks to their editors. For this book we thank the team at Wiley Blackwell and especially Jayne Fagnoli, whose vision elicited this book in the first place and whose patient forbearance kept the volume, somewhat surprisingly to us given the illness and other life changes that intervened, on track. Equally, we thank and acknowledge our universities for their support. Both of us are grateful to the University of Melbourne, where Charles Green is Professor of Contemporary Art History and where Anthony Gardner was, in the initial period of writing, an Australian Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellow. Anthony Gardner also thanks the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford, where he is now Associate Professor. We have received several grants and fellowships in the course of writing this book, and in particular we acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council. Many friends and close colleagues have read chapters in progress, or have facilitated seminars and conferences where we have tested out ideas. We are deeply grateful for their support, in particular that of Terry Smith, Amelia Barikin, and Rebecca Coates. We particularly acknowledge John Clark for sharing his extraordinary archive and knowledge. Charlotte Bydler, Sean Cubitt, Peter Nagy, Vivan Sundaram, Geeta Kapur, Doug Hall, Caroline Turner, Karin Stengel, and many others in different cities advised and assisted us at different points of our research, as did patient librarians and archivists in libraries and art museums around the world. Green has been fortunate to be assisted by indefatigable research assistants at the University of Melbourne who are brilliant emerging scholars; these include Anna Parlane and Helen Hughes. He is also grateful to the graduate students who took the curatorial studies seminar, with the same name as this book, which prompted Wiley Blackwell's interest in our project. Our greatest vote of thanks, of course, must go to our respective

partners, Lyndell Green and Huw Hallam, for their generosity and unequivocal, unstinting support.

As is almost always the case with scholarly books, *Biennials* draws on the vestiges of essays that we previously published in journals and books. These are now completely rewritten but, nevertheless, they did road-test our arguments, even if little if any resemblance remains in the present volume. These essays included: “Mega-Exhibitions, New Publics, and Asian Art Biennials,” in Larissa Hjorth, Mami Kataoka, and Natalie King (eds.), *Art in the Asia-Pacific: Intimate Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 23–36; “Cultural Translation or Cultural Exclusion? The Biennale of Sydney and Contemporary Art in the South,” in Charlotte Bydler and Cecilia Sjöholm (eds.), *Regionality/Mondiality: Perspectives on Art, Aesthetics and Globalization* (Stockholm: Södertörn University Press, 2014), pp. 269–298; “When Art Migrates: Biennales and Itinerancy,” in Juliet Steyn and Nadja Stamselberg (eds.), *Breaching Borders: Art, Migrants and the Metaphor of Waste* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), pp. 139–163; “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” *Third Text*, vol. 27, no. 4 (September 2013), pp. 442–455; “The Third Biennale of Sydney: “White Elephant or Red Herring,” *Humanities Review*, vol. 19, no. 2 (March 2013), pp. 99–116. We are grateful to the editors of these journals and books for their encouragement.

Finally, it would be miraculous if a book of this length about such a variety of exhibitions and people did not contain errors, no matter how hard we have tried to eliminate them. We hope the reader will be patient with these and, even more, tolerant of any accidental omissions of people and places.



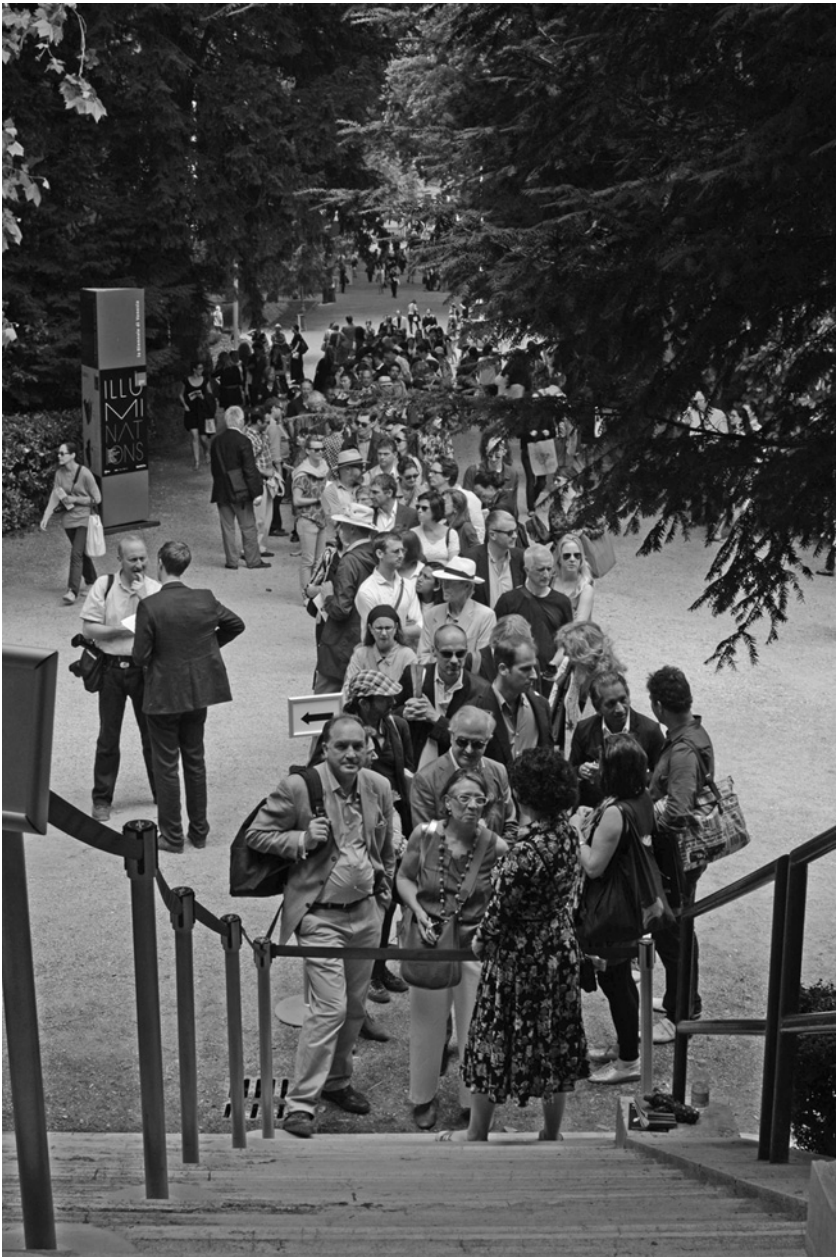


Figure 0.1 Queue of art-world guests waiting patiently on the first morning of vernissage week to visit artist Mike Nelson's installation in the British Pavilion at the 54th Biennale of Venice, 2011. Photograph Charles Green.

# Introduction

## Why Biennials?

This book examines the history, display, and transformation of art by one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary global culture: landmark survey shows of international contemporary art or, as they are also known, “biennials.” The term is used inexactly and sometimes inappropriately, encompassing not just biennials but also triennials and even the quinquennial survey exhibition, *documenta*.<sup>1</sup> These regularly recurring exhibitions have come, since the early 1990s, to define contemporary art. For decades now, biennials have been one of the most ubiquitous and celebrated exhibition formats across the globe, appearing in countries as different as Senegal, Albania, and China. Many visitors encounter contemporary art solely within their frames, while their mix of artists and art from diverse cultures and places has ensured that vital intercultural dialogues have emerged. This has brought clear benefits to art history and art-making. Biennials have drawn local practitioners into ostensibly globalized networks of art-world attention and financial support, publicizing regions or cities previously deemed “peripheral” to the metropolitan centers of London and New York. However, on another level, all this equally suggests that these exhibitions may have served as mirrors, even handmaidens, to the spread of transnational capital and imperialist politics associated with globalized neoliberalism. Biennials may be little more than a spectacle of “festivalism,” as critic Peter Schjeldahl has argued, with art replicating and reinforcing the neocolonial flows of international commerce, politics and power.<sup>2</sup>

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The primary aim of this book is to uncover, map, and analyze the global history of biennials since the early 1950s. In particular, we intend to examine the remarkable development of these exhibitions – a cultural phenomenon that, following critics Julian Stallabrass, Paul O'Neill, and others, we call “biennialization” – and their relation to both transcultural potentials and international politics.<sup>3</sup> For some critics, the connections between politics and biennials are deeply problematic. Biennialization may, truly, be irrevocably tied to the spectacle culture of neoliberalism, with exhibitions sponsored through a potent mix of state and corporate support designed to lure international tourism to sites struggling on the edges of global trade.<sup>4</sup> This has certainly been true of the “biennial boom” in postcommunist Europe since the mid-1990s. The diversion of state funds from many small-scale cultural projects into the single, short-term event of the biennial can cripple local cultural production, as occurred when Slovenia’s capital Ljubljana hosted the Manifesta biennial in 2000, while the corporate sponsorship of some biennials has suggested that biennialization may be a potent way for funders to penetrate new commercial or cultural markets. As George Yúdice has argued of biennialization in the Americas, biennials and contemporary culture may thereby become expedient means to support the political and corporate interests of their sponsors.<sup>5</sup>

Such accusations are common in contemporary art discourse and need to be considered in any study of the function and influence of biennials. Where this book differs from the general demonization of biennials is in our contention that biennialization can offer profound, critical insights into art’s nexus with globalized commerce and political interests, both after 1989 and, surprisingly, long before it. We are, of course, not alone in this. Back in 2003, with his short essay, “The Unstable Institution,” Carlos Basualdo argued that biennials have the potential for cultural and social subversion.<sup>6</sup> The drive to understand the genealogies of biennials is slowly gaining force in art history, following such esteemed commentators as Lawrence Alloway and Caroline Jones, who recognized biennialization’s roots in nineteenth-century World Fairs and Parisian Salons.<sup>7</sup> But a full account is required of the histories of innovation and influence that led to biennials becoming one of the most popular – perhaps even dominant – formats for presenting and promoting culture today.

Indeed, given the public popularity of biennials, their sustained scholarly analysis has been surprisingly piecemeal. We must emphasize this, for it is at odds with many people’s intuitions that surely they have already digested a considerable quantity of scholarship on the subject of biennials. This lack is

not due to the subject's relative newness; in-depth research on other aspects of global politics and culture has long circulated in the humanities.<sup>8</sup> Rather, it is the rapid turnover of biennials and their curators, as well as the diversity of their themes and forms of infrastructure, that has resulted in analyses that are either necessarily introductory in scope, such as Charlotte Bydler's published doctoral dissertation in 2004, and Bruce Altshuler's two source-books of 2008 and 2013 on famous modern and contemporary exhibitions in general, or limited to anthologies of anecdotes about specific exhibitions, such as Robert Storr's 2006 edited collection about the Venice Biennale, or else focused on the effects of biennialization on particular exhibitions, as with Rachel Weiss's comprehensive 2011 collection of essays on the Third Bienal de La Habana (1989).<sup>9</sup> It is as if the features, purpose, and effects of biennials are self-evident. More prevalent still are the journalistic and populist accounts of biennials and contemporary art markets such as Sarah Thornton's 2008 and 2014 profiles of the contemporary art world, within which the biennial plays one part.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, there are exceptions to this trend – John Clark's fine research on biennials and contemporary Asian art, for example, concentrates on the history of Asian biennials and ranks among the first scholarly examinations of the subject – and what these exceptions reveal is that charting and analyzing the histories of these shows is both possible and necessary. This is reinforced by the number of very well-attended conferences on biennials that have been held abroad in recent years: this includes, most notably, "Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows since 1968" at London's Tate Modern, and "The Bergen Biennial Conference" in Norway's Bergen Kunsthall, held in 2008 and 2009 respectively (the latter of which resulted in a landmark anthology about biennials, *The Biennial Reader*).<sup>11</sup>

The mounting international importance of biennials and their historical study has opened up a research gap that scholars are just beginning to address. But as we noted before, the surprise is the sheer scarcity of scholarly research so far published, and on occasion the inaccessibility of the relevant exhibition catalogues. There were calls to redress this all through the first decade of the twenty-first century: renowned German scholar Hans Belting convened a substantial research project in which biennials were meshed with the global transformation of contemporary art. In Belting's words, "the art market, with its global strategies, invites a serious study that has hardly begun."<sup>12</sup> James Meyer, at a major 2005 conference on biennials, similarly claimed that "what we lack are studies of the contemporary international show as a *form* [Meyer's emphasis]."<sup>13</sup> It is past time for a critical overview

of the phenomenon. It is precisely this that we have set out to offer in this volume, as we seek to redress these substantial oversights in the study of contemporary art. And contemporary art is a research field that is particularly significant, given it is one of the main growth areas in art history enrolments, dissertation topics, and curatorial studies courses.

This book is a historical survey of contemporary art and globalization, through an analysis of the biennials of international art that evolved in tandem with both (and so we will not cover biennials that have a national focus, such as the Whitney Biennial). Such a study is especially necessary given that, as Wu Chin-tao writes, “globalization has been the buzzword of the last two decades but the precise ways in which the process of globalization has impacted on the production and reception of art works and their institutional support systems are far from clear.”<sup>14</sup> Contemporary art has boomed since the late 1980s. The period’s key art productions have clustered around spectacular, expensive new art such as video installation and large color photography, implying venues able to provide the resources, scale, and public prominence required by these works. Biennials met these demands, offering newcomers to the global scene a stage on which to participate in the contemporary art industry, while enabling a dramatically expanded audience the chance to see recent art. Now, contemporary art is almost indistinguishable from its exhibitions, especially at these spectacles. These, the topic of this book, are taken to be indicative of the situation of art production and also revelatory of new developments and trends. Both assumptions need, of course, to be critically examined, as they will be in this book, but we need to flag clearly the emergent discourses that map the huge transition into a mode of art-making called the contemporary. This is distinct in theory and practice from the modern and the postmodern.

Discerning what is distinct and what is shared in the shift from the modern to the contemporary is a key challenge that not only scholars but also artists have been answering. For theorists of the art of the contemporary, debates about postmodernism, which scholars across almost all disciplines encountered during the 1980s, were symptomatic of one of postmodernism’s own premises: that progress was no longer inevitable, that no one big story was going to dominate any sphere of human activity. The ideas of modernism and postmodernism did not explain or communicate the changes that ensued from the end of the Cold War in 1989: the era of globalization, the spread of integrated electronic culture, the dominance of neoliberal economics (and politics), the appearance of new types of armed and terrorist conflict, and the change in each nation’s place in the world. All of this suggested the emergence of a new cultural period, and not necessarily a



better one. From this proceeded the contention that the new and controversial terms that locate art as contemporary – terms that include place making, connectivity and, most crucial, for our purposes, world picturing – overrode older distinctions based on style, medium, and ideology that dominated art and art theory during the modernist period. This is, more or less, the argument that has been developed most influentially by Terry Smith and Peter Osborne, each framing the contention slightly differently.<sup>15</sup> Our contention in this book is that art during the contemporary period has been indelibly marked by the biennials that were held around the globe, and this situation stretches back to the start of the Cold War.

This emphasis on exhibitions is a very different situation from more traditional art discourse. For previous generations of researchers, permanent collections and books were the chief means through which they apprehended art. Furthermore, the expansion of the contemporary art world involved the apparently dramatic appearance of new curators, museums, artists, and markets, all of which have been key protagonists in the recent spread of biennialization as well. Indeed, in the early 2000s, the frenzied movement of such art world players across the globe to new centers (Singapore, Berlin, Shanghai, Delhi) seemed to be identical with globalization. Yet, as noted above, art-historical and museum studies have so far resulted in very little sustained research on this radical shift in art and curatorial practice, despite the proliferation of public events ancillary to biennials and the sheer wealth of vested professional interests in biennialization. The transformation of contemporary art and curatorship in biennials demands more than the essay-length papers, lectures, and short catalogue texts that have peppered the discourse to date.

Our analysis of biennialization also tackles the second, broader issue of understanding the globalization of contemporary art. Many of the world's metropolises – New York, Istanbul, Bucharest, São Paulo, Taipei, Shanghai, and a long list of other cities – stage biennials. The announcements for new biennials grow exponentially in promotional e-alerts such as e-flux. Many exhibitions are beginning to work together as well, coordinating schedules and openings so that international visitors travel from one biennial to another in a twenty-first-century version of the Grand Tour. Such coordination has spurred increased public attendances: 2007's *documenta 12* attracted a record 750,000 visitors and *dOCUMENTA (13)* was attended by 860,000 visitors, while the 2008 Gwangju Biennale drew more than a million visitors. It has also revealed a turning point in the history of biennials: biennials work with each other to consolidate the power of regional (rather than strictly local) cultures within the global. As American

art historian Pamela Lee noted presciently in 2003, “our most urgent challenge is to account more critically for the way the art world has internalised the conditions of the global and its institutional, political, and economic imperatives.”<sup>16</sup> The transformations within biennialization offer a powerful new impetus to reflect back on the history of biennialization, with the significance of exhibition histories central to that analysis.

Biennials appeared in close, and sometimes symbiotic dialogue with temporary exhibitions of contemporary art in museums. Sometimes, the two were almost identical, with many theme-based exhibitions indistinguishable from biennials and many biennials, particularly in the second decade of the twenty-first century, closely resembling art museum exhibitions, excavating forgotten historical works and revising art history. Some art museum exhibitions have exerted considerable influence on the development of biennials. The most famous case was *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), held between Paris’s Musée nationale d’art moderne at the Centre Georges Pompidou, and the sprawling exhibition halls at the outer-suburban Parc de la Villette. *Magiciens* had an enormous impact on the curatorship of contemporary art and on the future of biennials, as we will see, and biennial directors have constantly acknowledged its influence ever since 1989. But as well, we shall discuss biennials that were hosted by art museums, and in these instances the art museums often systematically collected works from their biennials. Other biennials operated in more ambiguous spaces, partly housed in local art museums and partly in a changing roster of alternative, artist-run, and even commercial exhibition venues.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, this book focuses attention on earlier, relatively neglected periods in art biennials. Central here is the period between 1951 and 1989 – between the nineteenth-century origins of biennialization and the “biennial boom” from the 1990s onwards – during which a spate of biennials was launched worldwide. Some of these exhibitions concentrated on introducing audiences to young or relatively inexperienced artists, as with the Biennale de Paris (also known as the Biennale des jeunes, or Biennial of the Young), which ran from 1959 to 1985. However, certain other biennials sought more complex regional and transcultural exchanges, drawing together artists from across the globe rather than from a particular locale, so as to spark new artistic dialogues between practitioners from hitherto disparate or even isolated contexts. In 1974 in Baghdad and 1976 in Rabat, the first installments of the Arab Art Biennale attempted to forge long-term networks among artists from across North Africa and the Middle East, using art practice and display as the tools for pan-Arab cultural relations. In a similar vein, the inaugural Triennale-India in Delhi in 1968 was advertised as the

first triennial of “contemporary world art,” promoting an alignment of cultures outside the usual binary axis of Cold War politics. Exhibition histories from around the globe enable us to address the task that the 1968 Triennale-India already sought to confront – namely, the emergence of a “world art history,” a history inclusive of art around the world that will slowly replace the North Atlantic canon that still dominates art-historical discourse.<sup>18</sup>

During this book, it will sometimes seem as if we are avoiding works of art in favor of curators and art museums, and that works of art appear merely to explain curators’ intentions. This is partly true, we admit, but there is a reason. A counterweight to artist-centered art history is needed. Landmark biennials offer clear, provocative insights into the structure and changes underlying the development of contemporary art and globalization since the Second World War. Art is imbricated with contemporary geopolitics and politics of display, and context informs the chronological development of biennialization.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, we want to ask three main questions. Firstly, how have postwar biennial cultures functioned, and to what uses have they been put within broader social politics? Secondly, how have art and exhibition histories been changed by the conditions of “peripheralism,” and the sly, subversive politics they can engender? And thirdly, how have artists, curators, and other key figures within postwar art potentially exceeded our usual understandings of biennialization, so as to generate new modes and genealogies of transcultural exchange through the exhibition as a medium and as a context for dialogue?

## Part 1. The Second Wave

Chapter 1 will focus on the great exhibition *documenta 5* (1972), through which one of the first star-curators, Harald Szeemann, established still-dominant curatorial methodologies for understanding and exhibiting contemporary art. His exhibition was a *statement*, akin to a work of art in itself. It was the precursor of what Maria Lind has called “the curatorial.”<sup>20</sup> Harald Szeemann’s *documenta 5* and, in a wider sense from this point on, biennials in general presented themselves as neither “the enemy” nor “the system.” They were now to become the spectacular sites where cultural and political change would be described and debated, as if biennials were social laboratories.

Chapter 2 looks at the post-Venice biennials that emerged along the supposed “edges” of twentieth-century art history, yet which sought to bring modern North Atlantic art to the South: the Biennale of Sydney (1973–) and

the very important Bienal de São Paulo (1951–). Both examples pinpoint the processes and problems associated with importing traditional biennial models to “peripheral” locations, and the means by which those models were redeveloped for local and modernizing purposes. In São Paulo, this was the Venice Biennale’s model of a central exhibition framed by national pavilions. Sydney, on the other hand, chose a theme-driven showcase of international art interspersed with a scattering of local artists. This chapter charts, therefore, the highly contested construction of large-scale exhibition infrastructures outside Europe and North America.

Chapter 3 draws us to the Bienal de La Habana, which was founded in 1984 but remodeled in 1986 and 1989 to include art from Africa and Asia alongside works from Latin America and the Caribbean. However, we also address the serious underplaying of the emergence of biennials around the world in the years prior to 1989. We therefore arrive at the Bienal only after sketching in the very substantial history of pre-Havana biennials of the South that led up to, and presaged, the Bienal in Havana. For Bienal co-curator Gerardo Mosquera, Havana’s remodelings during the 1980s were meant to create an international axis of exchange among cultures that were not aligned to First or Second World political states. But this was simply the penultimate stage of biennialization’s semi-forgotten second wave of biennials of the South, which developed across the global South in the 1950s and 1960s, in the wake of the Venice Biennale’s and the Carnegie International’s establishment in the 1890s. The Bienal de La Habana was one of the later attempts by a cultural institution to challenge the US–USSR binary of Cold War power, to create so-called “South–South” exchanges and an alignment of “non-aligned” cultures as an alternative model of global cultural networks.<sup>21</sup> Biennials like those in Havana or across the South sought to develop ties between “non-aligned” cultures through inclusive surveys of “contemporary world art.” In both instances, networks developed in collaborative practices, in art works, in their curatorial framing, or through opportunities for informal gatherings such as the bars that dotted the Bienal de La Habana and that were designed precisely for inter-collegial networking.

## **Part 2. The Politics of Legitimacy**

Chapter 4 concerns the rise of biennials across Asia, beginning in the 1980s with Fukuoka’s Asian Art Show, then with the First Asia-Pacific Triennial (*APT1*) in Brisbane in 1993, followed by Gwangju (1995), Shanghai (1996),

Taipei (1998), and a proliferation of other Asian cities after that.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the Shanghai Biennale was restricted to traditional Chinese art- and craft-making until 2000, and the first Gwangju Biennale was divided according to the continents of artists' births, both the Asian Art Show and the Asia-Pacific Triennial, hosted by city- and state-funded art museums and conceived in a spirit of regional boosterism, were designed to soft-pedal the divisions between artists' nationalities and to showcase the correlations between art practices across Asia and the Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

Chapter 5 deals with the wave of biennials across Europe and beyond after the Cold War, and in particular in South Africa, that might be said to have unfolded out of the end of the Cold War and its proxy battlefields. The chapter examines the use of biennials to address the divides between Eastern and Western Europe, as well as between Europe and Africa. First, biennials navigating the "edges" of the European Union were used to promote political agendas. Manifesta is naturally central to this chapter. It was established in the mid-1990s to epitomize "European values." It was a mobile biennial, staged in different (but strategically important) European cities, so as to "bridge" East and West, center and periphery.<sup>24</sup> But how did curators actually negotiate this territory? Did artists do so too? And to what extent did these priorities condition artistic selection, or was Manifesta's rhetoric actually peripheral to the art exhibited? At stake is the need to reevaluate how biennials engaged with, and challenged, the many stereotypes of postcommunist cultures – stereotypes that included Eastern European poverty and cultural instability, and which equally included the stereotype of Western European charity. Both mythologies beleaguered more than one biennial, and not only Ljubljana's *Manifesta 3*, in 2000. This chapter's second focus is further afield: on *Trade Routes: The 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (1997), and its attempt to widen art's canon by including art drawn from around the globe. *Trade Routes* sought to connect the exceptional local political context – the recent end of apartheid – to the trajectory of cosmopolitanism in contemporary art.

### Part 3. Hegemony or a New Canon

In Chapter 6, the focus is on *Documenta11* (2002), which was based on a postcolonial, geographic redistribution of the exhibition format. Director Okwui Enwezor dispersed *Documenta11* in two ways: by staging it across five connected "platforms" in different locations worldwide

rather than just in its usual home in Kassel; and by sharing curatorial responsibility between himself and a panel of invited co-curators. We will examine the tensions between Enwezor's postcolonial destabilization of one intellectual or artistic authority – what he described as a “postcolonial constellation” – and managerial discourses of delegated duties.<sup>25</sup> *Documenta 11* had finally rejected the trajectory of biennials presented at the outset of this book, definitively dispersing the still-authoritative biennial model (and by implication its still-current, still-roving über-curator).

Chapter 7 shows that similar approaches quickly developed in other, contemporaneous biennials as a result and as a reaction, most notably at *The 50th Venice Biennale: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, directed by Francesco Bonami in 2003. A second tension thus ultimately needs to be addressed, between Enwezor's desire to destabilize the curator's authorial power or hegemony, and the return of that authority through his subsequent influence on others. But to understand Venice in 2003 we must look further east and slightly earlier, to Tirana in 2001, where Edi Rama (the city's mayor and, later, Albania's prime minister) and curator Edi Muka worked with the Milan-based magazine and publisher *Flash Art* to create the Tirana Biennale. Biennials in what had been communist Europe responded, as had other biennials, to the political, aesthetic, and cultural predicaments that underpinned the end of the Cold War. They needed to produce new models for exhibiting art and politics after the demise of two of the main forms of cultural infrastructure (the communist state before the period 1989–1991 and, from 1991 to 1999, the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art). So, new state and non-governmental organizations created and supported biennials as a sign of national progress. More particularly, Western European companies, including commercial art publications, invested in Eastern European biennials, not least *Flash Art*'s sponsorship of Tirana's and Prague's Biennials in the early 2000s.

Chapter 8 traces the later arc of globalized biennials, with biennials scheduling their openings within days of each other, coordinated to lure increased international tourism and the global curatorium to visit otherwise scattered networks of exhibitions. The reasoning and challenges behind the coordination of biennials were significant. The historical precedent was the Romantic-era paradigm of the Grand Tour, updated for an age of so-called “global nomadism” and computer connectivity. Across both North and South, the biennial format returned, after the Global Recession of 2007–2008, to its nineteenth-century roots of Romantic travel. In Asia, biennial curators responded to – even criticized – the colonial implications of this

heritage but the allure of privileged itinerancy's intersection with aspiring Creative Cities remained, and the biennials were also occasions for local museums to import experimental artists and to transform that experiment into touristic spectacle, into Great Exhibition marvel – to visitors and political masters alike. But the turn to the idea of a Grand Tour was clearly a dubious conceptual strategy as biennials locked themselves firmly within the staging of spectacles for both non-local, nomadic audiences (as occurred with the 2008 Beijing Olympics, with which most Asia-Pacific biennials coincided that year) and large local audiences, with all the educational and touristic responsibilities that implies. Biennials both incited and catered to two audiences, two artistic groupings, and two art worlds: the local or regional on the one hand, and the “international” (though, in reality, still primarily Euro-American) on the other. How these worlds intersected, and whether they could still be considered stable entities in contemporary art, remained at issue because, after the Global Recession, these biennial networks presented an image of contemporary art's globalization that was unstable: spectacular and critical at the same time.

## **The Cultural Geography of Biennials**

In Chapter 9, we will reflect on what this narrative has shown. Biennials were, first of all, an exhibition medium of great power and flexibility. Second, they were continually perceived as (and turned out to be) a context in which dialogue took place, both artistic and social. Therefore, with regard to the former, we will explain the new methods of biennial-making that appeared after 1972, and identify not just the emergence of a new cadre of biennial curators but also a typology of modes of biennial-curating that appeared in answer to successive artistic, political, and exhibition problems. With regard to the latter, we trace the new genealogies of transcultural exchange that appeared through biennials. We show that the emergence of biennials around the world in the decades prior to 1989 has been underplayed until now. Our book locates the cultural geography of biennials during this transition to contemporaneity: in the world at large, not inside one of its zones, looking out. We replace the usual, reductive, and immobilizing question – do biennials promote or subvert globalization? – with the far more interesting question that others have also raised: are they the artistic playgrounds of neoliberal capitalism or do they enable the forging and testing of alternative, critical, even subtly subversive perspectives? We show that each

biennial's success was completely dependent on real and pressing contingencies, but also on understanding that neoliberalism and criticality were not mutually exclusive pathways. And from that, we show that biennials would still face a further question that artists themselves knew was far from trivial and which would remain unresolved: would biennials serve, lead, or be passive spectators to the new "world orders" around them?

## Notes

1. documenta has traditionally used a lower-case "d" at the start of its name, with the only exception being *Documenta11* in 2002. We follow documenta's general convention in this book and use the lower-case where appropriate throughout.
2. Peter Schjeldahl, "The Global Salon," *New Yorker*, July 1, 2002. [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw\\_artworld](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw_artworld). Accessed September 6, 2015.
3. Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007); Marieke van Hal, "Rethinking the Biennial," MPhil dissertation, Royal College of Art, London, 2010.
4. See George Baker, "The Globalization of the False," *Documents*, no. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 20–25; Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization" (2008), reprinted in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 466–490.
5. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); also see Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage, 2002).
6. Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter–Spring 2003–2004), pp. 50–61.
7. Lawrence Alloway, *Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969); Caroline Jones, "Biennial Culture: A Longer History," in Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 66–87.
8. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
9. Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2004); Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History. 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon,



- 2008); Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History. 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013); Robert Storr (ed.), *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006); Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011); the Afterall series of exhibition histories, cited throughout this book, are an invaluable resource; as well, we see the production of exhibitions, sometimes with associated books or exhibition catalogs, that reconstruct whole exhibitions, or else create alternative versions of them as ways of revising art history.
10. Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Sarah Thornton, *33 Artists in 3 Acts* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).
  11. The Bergen Biennial Conference was held at Norway's Bergen Kunsthall in 2009; see Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader*; also see James Elkins (ed.), *Art and Globalization* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011).
  12. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (eds.), *The Global Art World* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).
  13. James Meyer, in Storr, *Where Art Worlds Meet*, p. 139.
  14. Chin-tao Wu, "Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalised Art," *Third Text*, vol. 21, no. 6 (November 2007), pp. 719–731.
  15. See Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013).
  16. Pamela Lee, "Boundary Issues: The Art World under the Sign of Globalism," *Artforum* vol. 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp. 152–165, p. 206, p. 212, esp. p. 165.
  17. See Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd edn (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012).
  18. James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 41.
  19. An excellent counter example, of a scholar focusing on an art work's agency within biennial, can be found in Lucy Steeds, "Biennial Exhibition Histories, Against the Grain: Juraci Dórea's *Projeto Terra* in São Paulo, Venice and Havana," in Galit Eilat, Nuria Enguita Mayo, Charles Esche, Pablo Lafuente, Luiza Proença, Oren Sagiv, and Benjamin Seroussi (eds.), *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2* (Amsterdam: Biennial Foundation, 2015), pp. 37–45.
  20. Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction," in Maria Lind (ed.), *Performing the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press: 2012), pp. 9–20.
  21. See Geraldo Mosquera, "The Third Havana Biennial in Its Global and Local Contexts," paper presented at *Exhibitions and the World at Large*, symposium,

- Tate Britain, London, April 3, 2009, authors' notes; Dermis P. Léon, "Havana, Biennial, Tourism: The Spectacle of Utopia," *Art Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 68–73.
22. Readers should note that, since its 6th edition in 2009, the APT has referred to itself as the Asia Pacific Triennial, rather than the Asia-Pacific Triennial. We have maintained the hyphenated title in this book, given our focus centers on the pre-2009 editions, as well as to indicate the triennial's historical roots.
  23. See Charles Green, "Beyond the Future," *Art Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 81–87.
  24. See Elena Filipović and Barbara Vanderlinden (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
  25. Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation," *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003), pp. 57–82.

Part 1

The Second Wave



Figure 1.1 City view, Kassel, during documenta, with at left the Museum Fridericianum, documenta's main venue. Photograph Charles Green.

## 1972: The Rise of the Star-Curator

Exhibitions in this chapter: *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (*documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today*) (1972, Kassel, Germany)

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (*Questioning reality: Image worlds today*), the landmark 1972 edition of *documenta*. Founded in 1955 by veteran art historian Arnold Bode and now held every five years in the German city of Kassel, *documenta* was from the outset intended to be a survey exhibition of modern art. Although it initially played a secondary role to a monster-sized flower show in this small provincial city – located closer to the East German border than to Cologne or Düsseldorf, West Germany's principal art centers – *documenta* is now widely regarded as the most important mega-exhibition of all.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion in *documenta* is an even surer marker of an artist's importance than selection into Venice, São Paulo, or any of the other biennials described in this book.

*documenta 5* was directed by the immensely influential Swiss curator Harald Szeemann. Even at the start of the 1970s, the charismatic Szeemann already had a reputation for adventurous, large-scale survey shows. This was largely the result of the notoriety and excitement surrounding his exhibition at the Bern Kunsthalle, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* (1969). *When Attitudes Become Form* was in part Szeemann's reaction to the conservative, abstract painting-dominated 4. *documenta* (1968), which was the last *documenta* to be directed by Bode. The civic controversy surrounding *When Attitudes Become Form* became a cause of his departure from the Bern

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Kunsthalle, the exhibition space of which he had been director and in and around which the controversial exhibition was held.<sup>2</sup> Extreme reactions from conservative municipal authorities and parochial local artists on the Kunsthalle board of management notwithstanding, *When Attitudes Become Form* signaled that a wide generational shift amongst artists into utterly nontraditional art forms had taken place. But as a now unemployed freelancer, Szeemann founded his own curatorial agency and immediately embarked on a furious agenda of equally unconventional exhibitions, in particular *Happenings & Fluxus* (1970), which he curated for the Cologne Kunstverein.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the documenta board in Kassel, deliberating about the next documenta, cleverly appointed the maverick Szeemann as its director. By 1970, then, he was already an auteur and an entrepreneur upon whose alternately idiosyncratic and prescient curatorial choices, and controversial display methods, much attention was inevitably focused. Szeemann was not yet the mega-star curator that he was to become by the 1990s, and much about his overwhelming directorial vision was controversial, for he was to now situate art within a wider field of visual culture and iconology, almost relegating artists to secondary importance. But “his” documenta was to immediately change the course of biennials, triennials, and other documentas, and of the ambition that their directors have for them.

His exhibition was a definitive statement, a work of art in itself. It was the precursor to what Maria Lind has called “the curatorial.”<sup>4</sup> According to her useful concept, works of art can be building blocks or signs pointing to a clear curatorial statement, a higher concept or, in this documenta’s case, to a phenomenological state: *documenta 5* was generously offering to guide viewers in their seeing of contemporary pictorial worlds.<sup>5</sup>

The backdrop to *documenta 5* must be sketched in: by the start of the 1970s, the liberalization (or as it is more usually called, the dematerialization) of artistic form was well underway. Equally important, contemporary art production was considerably more dispersed around the globe than is usually understood and this was not the result of the simple diffusion of influence from one or two centers of artistic production. Both liberalization and dispersal meant the rejection of American art critic Clement Greenberg’s media-centric, North Atlantic-dominated modernist narrative that culminated in abstract painting, then still influential but on the wane. It had dominated the first four documentas. Even so, the dispersal of innovation across the globe rather than its concentration in Western Europe and the American East Coast remained almost unacknowledged at *documenta 5*.

Los Angeles was as far afield geographically as Szeemann's choices went, even though he himself had already traveled much further afield.<sup>6</sup>

### Preparation for a Walk-Through Event Structure

In an early press statement released in May 1970, Szeemann proposed that *documenta 5* would be “a place for programmed events, as spaces of interaction, as a walk-through event structure with shifting centers of activity.”<sup>7</sup> *documenta*'s title was to be “The Hundred-Day Event.” Not unexpectedly and under considerable financial pressure, as planning for *documenta 5* progressed, Szeemann gradually retreated from this grand recapitulation of the anti-form and the appropriately unpredictable chaos of *Happenings & Fluxus* towards a far more choreographed, static exhibition design that could cleanly incorporate artist actions. Even putative protests, such as Daniel Buren's outdoor, signature-stripe, poster paste-ups, fitted neatly inside the exhibition and its anything-goes publication. Szeemann had not allocated each artist a simple, neatly demarcated space, but blurred the boundaries of each artist's contribution. Though Szeemann remembered that the sixty-nine artists in *Attitudes* “took over the institution,” by contrast *documenta 5* took over the art works. Sound spill, light spill, and the blurry-edged boundaries of installations and sight-lines were (and remain) a real challenge in large survey exhibitions of contemporary art.<sup>8</sup>

Szeemann had been appointed the General Secretary of *documenta 5*. The new job title reflected weighty expectations about the role. But each *documenta* director had thus far been like a United Nations Secretary General, embedded in a small bureaucracy but juggling for a pathway upon which great international expectation was focused, amidst more powerful players amongst whom were potent American art dealers and artists. This was, more or less, the Venice Biennale model. Szeemann, however, was gradually given wider latitude over the administration and the selection of the works. This turned out to be as much a rethinking of the way such exhibitions were administered as of what was selected. Szeemann quickly moved *documenta* to a different, much more director-focused managerial model. He ingenuously characterized this more presidential role as one that would allow for more transparency and experimentation during the organization of *documenta 5*: “I am convinced that, the more authority I have, the less I will have to play safe and be secretive during the preparations, and the more I will be able to be open on all sides.”<sup>9</sup> *documenta*'s previous committee

structures and voting systems all but disappeared by mid-1971, replaced by a small “Working Group,” consisting at its core of Szeemann as well as the documenta founder Arnold Bode, plus two very sympathetic writer-curators, Jean-Christophe Ammann and Bazon Brock. (Brock had been responsible for 4. *documenta*’s proposal for an eccentric Visitor’s School that, like the multi-media festival planned by Wolf Vostell, was cancelled before the opening, and shelved once again during *documenta 5*’s preparation.)<sup>10</sup> The four were supplemented by a list of freelance advisers and guests, including young Kasper König. Szeemann, as director, retained most power and responsibility. This was quite different from the more consultative committees of earlier documentas. Whilst the idea of a biennial as a project dominated by the sensibilities of a charismatic, independent director who does not have a permanent curatorial position in any institution is now so familiar as to seem normal, we should point out just how different this was from the organization of older biennials, including Venice. More unexpectedly, we should understand that later models of diffused curatorial responsibility that seemed so radical at the time and which we will examine later in this book – not least the first Asia-Pacific Triennial (1993) and the 2003 Venice Biennale a couple of decades after *documenta 5* – represented a return to the past as much as a leap into a more collaborative future. But Szeemann’s autocratic auteurism did not mean that he was not interested in his exhibition’s reception nor in its impact: Szeemann’s network was wide, reflecting his internationalist perspective, restless travel in the lead-up to the opening, and the deep affection and profound admiration that he inspired. From the start, it was clear that this was a pioneering, landmark exhibition in which to be included was an accolade.

Szeemann was less interested in representing emerging art according to the artists’ and their promoters’ own terms for radically different new practices – conceptual art, arte povera, earth art, minimal art, or post-minimal art – and more concerned with evoking an immersive, “structured chaos,” identifying the works with “great intensity and freedom” and with the ecstatic liberation of the counter-culture.<sup>11</sup> He now replaced the already solidifying critical labels for contemporary art with his own thematic conceits, “Questioning Reality, Pictorial Worlds Today” (the exhibition’s subtitle) and “Individual Mythologies” (its widely publicized slogan), all of which were clearly announced in press releases and the literature distributed to the public at the exhibition. “Individual Mythologies” was a phrase borrowed from French artist Étienne Martin’s idea that his own sculptures represented a personal mythology understood by him alone; Szeemann had



staged an exhibition of Martin's *Demeures* (Dwellings) in 1963. With such concepts, Szeemann seemed on the one hand to stand back from art history and art theory, privileging the viewer's encounter with the artists' personal visions – their “individual mythologies” – above art critical mediation. On the other hand, the impression of immersion and freedom was actually the result of bypassing the artists' interpretive frameworks with his own elastic labels of individual mythologies and image worlds. Szeemann had veiled the artists' intentions. As Hans Ulrich Obrist observed, in the process he was formulating the concept of the curator as an *Austellungsmacher*, a maker of exhibitions.<sup>12</sup> Szeemann called himself an “inventor.”<sup>13</sup>

*documenta 5*'s title, *Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute*, was a clear allusion not just to nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel but also to the modish new discipline of semiotics (no matter that Szeemann disavowed any academic predilections in interviews or in the characteristically brief, two-page curatorial statement that opened the catalogue). The title was a development of the premise of Szeemann's previous exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*. The curator was announcing that he would select works in order to trace a set of distinctions between reality, images, and art rather than simply survey the field of contemporary art or identify emerging trends. So, as contemporary critic Georg Jappe wrote before *documenta 5*'s opening, “For the first time *documenta* is not a judgement day, establishing world ratings, but a value-free, thematic exhibition.”<sup>14</sup> There would be three sections: firstly, according to the exhibition's media release, “The Reality of Representation” (which would include flags, postage stamps, and socialist realist posters); secondly, “The Reality of the Represented” (which would include Joseph Beuys and Bruce Nauman); and thirdly, “The Identity or Non-Identity of Representation and the Thing Represented” (which would include conceptual art, post-minimalism but also, confusingly, outsider art).<sup>15</sup> This was all, despite Szeemann's denials, a very dialectical and slightly belated, late-1960s mode of thinking. Indeed, Szeemann retrospectively claimed that “I wanted to trace a trajectory of mimesis, borrowing from Hegel's discussion about the reality of the image (*Abbildung*) versus the reality of the imaged (*Abgebildetes*).”<sup>16</sup> Szeemann was also, to be sure, reflecting many artists' interest at the time in phenomenological affect as well as their skepticism about ideologically driven, socially committed art that assumed the reality of what was depicted. Moreover, his title captured the skepticism, often mingled with nostalgia, about a realist or an activist view of the world that presumed that a depiction and that which is depicted are the same thing.<sup>17</sup> But 1972 was a late moment for

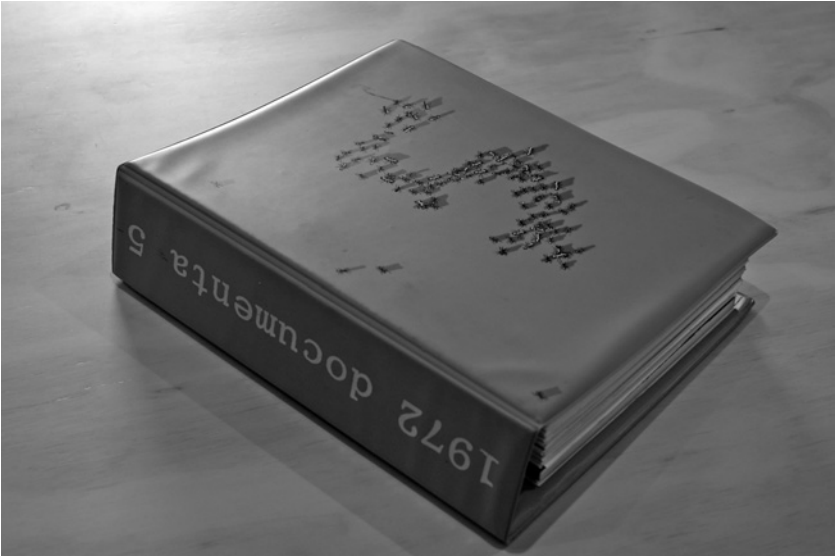


Figure 1.2 Cover of *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (*documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today*), exhibition catalogue, curator Harald Szeemann (Kassel: *documenta*, 1972). Courtesy *documenta*.

revolutionary praxis: artists and filmmakers had already been in a decade-long struggle to balance their desire to represent left-leaning politics (often embodied in collective authorship), but also to understand the politics of representation. 1972 was also the year that Jean-Luc Godard's two films, *Tout va bien* and *Letter to Jane*, appeared. Both encapsulate almost a decade during which the Swiss film director – along with a host of other film-makers – had already struggled for years to embody social commitment in a self-critical work of art. Szeemann's own approach was therefore surprisingly late to the game.

The thick book accompanying *documenta 5* looked like the packaging for office files appropriate to recording such a scientific-sounding investigation. This packaging, the crude-looking fonts and the grainy black and white were typical of many so-called exhibition catalogues of the time but, like them, the publication aspired to be far more than a simple exhibition catalogue. It was monumental in size and complexity, and included an almost unprecedented quantity of writings, floor plans, artist profiles, and lists. It marks the beginning of the phenomenon of the curator-as-editor as well

as the curator-as-star. It captured the exhibition's premise as effectively as any work in the show itself, exemplifying in its design the shift from the conventional, aesthetically pleasing art object to the documentation and indexing of quirky artistic process: Ed Ruscha's bright line of crawling ants meandered across the orange, plastic cover; the pseudo-corporate packaging and the trompe l'oeil cover embodied the idea of art as research and art as weird. Furthermore, *documenta 5*'s catalogue essays sought to do more than simply explain the works in the exhibition. Just as the publication looked like an instructional office folder, so the essays taken together represented a manual. Szeemann observed that, "the work of art can be experienced in various ways: as information for its connections, or as the way to a more concentrated statement."<sup>18</sup> The reader encountered ostensibly useful essays included to assist the visitor in navigating *documenta*. Among them were Hans Heinz Holz's essay on art as commodity; Seth Siegelaub's *The Artist's Reserved Rights Agreement*, which codified artists' rights to a reasonable share in the resale value of their work; and even an indictment of the exhibition itself, Robert Smithson's essay, "Cultural Confinement," which identified Szeemann with a prison warden whose cultural contribution was to position artists like chess-pieces across white cubes.<sup>19</sup> Smithson was one of a few invitees – the others were Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Fred Sandback – who chose to boycott *documenta 5* in order to register a protest against the curator's power and his apparent predilection to reframe or reform the artists' intentions, but even so Smithson was present, if only through his writing. "Cultural Confinement" is among the artist's most important essays and opens thus: "Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits."<sup>20</sup> Szeemann made it clear that this exhibition was a powerful enough concept that it would absorb anything, even the direct criticism and artist boycotts that gathered before the opening. A declaration of artist independence by Andre, Judd, Morris, Sandback, and Smithson, as well as Hans Haacke, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockburne, and Richard Serra, aimed directly at Szeemann, appeared in the June 1972 issue of *Artforum*. It began:

The undersigned affirm the following points, prompted primarily in response to *documenta 5*, but pertaining to all exhibition conditions. 1. It is the right of an artist to determine whether his art will be exhibited. It is the right of an artist to determine what and where he exhibits. 2. A work of art should not be exhibited in a classification without the artist's consent. 3. An artist must

have the right to do what he wants without censorship in the space allotted in the catalogue.<sup>21</sup>

Haacke, LeWitt, Le Va, Rockburne, and Serra did exhibit their works; the others withdrew or, as with Smithson, appeared only in the exhibition's monumental publication.

### **“Therapy Has Changed and No Longer Encourages Copious Art Production”**

When the exhibition opened in June 1972, it was clear that *documenta 5* was first of all, like *Attitudes*, a highly personal and at the same time deeply scholastic atlas of the late phase of dematerialized, conceptualist, and post-minimalist art from Europe and North America. Szeemann gathered a maze of different, eccentrically named sections under the rubric of Étienne Martin's two words, “Individual Mythologies,” explaining that the purpose of foregrounding the idea was to point to the subjective creation of myths through artists' creation of presentations and objects.<sup>22</sup> Joseph Beuys, along with his often-repeated pronouncement that everyone is an artist, was the perfect exemplar of this, and he was in fact very prominent with his 100-day action, *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum, 1972), as were Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Michael Asher, and Franz Erhard Walther, the latter with his alternately rolled and unrolled swathes of canvas.<sup>23</sup> These artists were turning rules and plans into something altogether more casual, process-oriented, and open-ended than the first generation of conceptual art a mere five years before: their work was often apparently provisional, like a diary instead of art. For instance, the sheer number and variety of exchanges between artist, assistants, and audience during the tenure of Beuys's *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* meant that everything that happened in his office space immediately became part of the archive of the work, a process memorialized by the massive quantity of highly accomplished documentation – both photographic and film – surrounding this and all Beuys's works. If artistic form seemed to be in complete flux, it was no surprise that a considerable quantity of the art within *documenta* was that of dematerialized art and of an emerging art of institutional critique –

for instance Michael Asher's *Environment* (1972), a claustrophobic, perceptually confounding room, half-painted in black and half in white. Of course, that self-consciously critical trajectory was by then clear and codified. Its antecedents were already obvious, not least through the reassessment of alternative modernist grand master Marcel Duchamp, whose vast importance came into focus only in the mid-1960s. His rediscovery had been confirmed by a major Tate retrospective in 1966, and was now signaled by his inclusion in *documenta 5*. But also echoing Duchamp, artists were making their own museums in disguise, now converting conceptualist art into curatorial projects. At the Neue Galerie, a sub-section of the exhibition was titled "Museums by Artists." Here, in Szeemann's words, "an increasing number of artists created their own museums as works of art," a tendency anointed by Duchamp who was represented by his miniaturized, editioned, self-curated retrospective, *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935–1941).<sup>24</sup> Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* (1965–1977) was a museum of found or sculpted scruffy objects, all loosely linked to cartoon character Mickey Mouse. It came with its own curator, Kasper König. Herbert Distel's *Museums of Drawers* (1970–1977) was a cabinet with identical-sized drawers divided into spaces containing 500 artists' works, an organization parodying, according to Szeemann, the depreciation of value in favor of standardization. Marcel Broodthaers presented the fictional "closing exhibition" of his soon-to-be-seminal *Musée d'art moderne, département des aigles* (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles, 1972). Ben Vautier's *Cupboard* (1972), Szeemann recalled, was stuffed with the "essence of all his fluxus actions as well as his written pictures as a reflection on the triviality and glory of life as an artist and on his signature of all aspects of everyday life."<sup>25</sup>

A critical and suspicious attitude towards the so-called "system" and to a similar degree the "art system" had defined a considerable portion of artistic practice in the 1960s to the extent that conceptualist and dematerialized art was usually, but over-easily and incuriously, identified with an anti-establishment, politically self-conscious rejection of the confinement and control of the museum. This is the impression of *documenta 5* that survived quite prominently. However, the quantity of art made by artists who did not conform to this anti-conformity – the photorealism, the collections of consumer culture, the outsider art – has been less frequently recalled, even though *documenta 5* featured a bewildering combination of more traditional ways of making art. It included a substantial representation of photorealist paintings (selected by Ammann) impressive for their

extraordinary hyperrealism, notably Swiss painter Franz Gertsch's gargantuan portrait of his louche hippy friends in Lucerne, *Medici* (1971) and the highly finished, glossy photorealism of Californian painter Robert Bechtle's '64 *Valiant* (1971). The presence of this contingent – so apparently unlike works like those of Richard Serra or Hans Haacke – bemused many critics, who could only see in them a “third-rate naturalism.”<sup>26</sup>

The exhibition's subtitle, *Image Worlds Today*, had insinuated that the vast field of visual culture, constituting world after world of disparate images, both high and low, would be inserted into the show. *documenta 5* contained plaster garden dwarves and gnomes, Coca-Cola trays, odd kitsch objects, consumer goods, art by psychiatric patients and outsider artists, advertising posters, comics, political propaganda, and science fiction illustrations in combinations that alternately recalled supermarket displays or cabinets of curiosities. This aestheticization of the objects and images of everyday life, as if they were high art, had been practiced by pop artists and pop art theorists for a decade or more. Contemporary critics correctly understood these inclusions as the recognition of “everyday sign systems,” in which art, for instance Jasper Johns' exemplary *Flag* (1958), and objects that were not “art” at all but cultural artifacts instead, such as the garden gnomes, were linked by their shared semiotic status.<sup>27</sup> Early 1970s artists and curators were fascinated by semiotics and structural anthropology; art became a sub-set of the far wider field of cultural signs. Already skeptical American critic Hilton Kramer thus described *documenta 5* as the “oddest assortment of objects, images, environments and, yes, even live human bodies, that has ever had to bear the burden of being considered an artistic event.”<sup>28</sup> He correctly understood that both objects and works of art were being exhibited as cultural artifacts rather than as “advanced art”; this choice was to be immediately contested by those advanced artists, as we shall see shortly. Veteran British critic (by then based in New York) Lawrence Alloway commented, “Szeemann and his team do reveal a weakness for the visionary. This is betrayed, for example, by the inclusion of a large group of (marvellous) works by Wolfli, the classic schizophrenic artist,” but then wondered, “Why is he present in a show devoted to ‘Today's Imagery’? The fact is that therapy has changed and no longer encourages copious art production.”<sup>29</sup> This choreographed collage of high and low cultures appealed to Alloway's London pop art past (though representatives of that movement were absent from the exhibition). Yet *documenta 5* was insisting that contemporary art was neither autonomous from the wider field of art nor from culture in general. The exhibition thus recuperated the apparently hostile, anti-art

and anti-museum trajectory of 1960s art and relocated it inside a particular curatorial form, the high-profile international exhibition that might even temporarily occupy normally staid art museums. Szeemann anticipated artists' queasiness about this in early press conferences ahead of the opening.<sup>30</sup> He knew this would be controversial amongst artists.

The very contrasting responses of Daniel Buren and Joseph Beuys to Szeemann's invitation exemplified the artists' polarization accompanying the exhibition. Beuys chose to take advantage of the spectacle and public reach of the new exhibition form that Szeemann was pioneering, while Buren adamantly chose to preserve an adversarial relationship not just to art museums but even to this relatively new exhibition method – biennials and other large-scale, perennial, international group shows – in its apparently least conservative moment of transition. Szeemann knew that “he [Buren] would put me on the spot by choosing the most problematic locations for his striped paper.”<sup>31</sup> For his part, according to Szeemann, Buren thought that curators were becoming super-artists who used art works “like so many brushstrokes in a huge painting.”<sup>32</sup> Buren was deeply critical of Szeemann's exhibition for what he saw as its curatorial narcissism. In his essay, “Exhibition of an Exhibition” (1972), written for the show, he pinpointed the presumption that underlay Szeemann's *documenta 5*: the exhibition had become a work of art: “more and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Buren's objections did not block his participation in the show nor the publication in the exhibition catalogue of his deeply hostile essay.

Three decades later, still furious but now well inside the canonical fold, Buren recapitulated his argument in “Where Are the Artists?” (2004).<sup>34</sup> According to Buren, curators exercise hegemony over artists, who passively accept the domination of the “author of exhibitions.”<sup>35</sup> Buren's distinction between art work and exhibition is important; the difference had in the intervening decades become blurred enough for the identification to seem both natural and the outcome of each artist's take-up of what seemed simply the artistic freedom putatively offered by biennial participation. He was explaining the opportunism that lies underneath what we now call “biennial art,” arguing that the corollary was that a work of art's meaning – the intention of the artist – was replaced within the ideological space of an exhibition when that intention was reframed by a curator. Buren had always been deeply suspicious of curators, seeing them as a self-interested professional cadre. The result of their control, according to Buren, was that art's

historical meaning was deteriorating to nothing more than a decorative gimmick, ensuring the survival of the museum's own creative, economic, and political agendas.<sup>36</sup> This was more than a little disingenuous, for artists would not be willing to organize exhibitions with the degree of professionalism, focus, and finish that curators must achieve, nor acquire the skills and experience to enable this, and it should be clear that we outline the argument without endorsing it. By 2004, Buren, ironically, had already become an angry art historical institution himself yet he still, as he had in 1972, imagined that it was possible to exist as an artist outside that system and to launch an assault on it.<sup>37</sup> Buren's rhetoric and his actions, even the renegade wall-posters that had appeared uninvited on Bern's streets during *When Attitudes Become Form*, counter-intuitively and certainly inadvertently reinforced the very art system he sought to criticize: whatever he did ultimately would demonstrate his targets' durability and adaptability. He simply could not stand outside curators' desires to co-opt dissidence, nor did he choose to in the long-term.<sup>38</sup> To use an old-fashioned and gendered term, Buren's muse was the institution. If Buren's posters were the birth of institutional critique in art, they were also the art institution's decoration and hence its celebration. Like it or not, anti-art's existence was to henceforth rely upon the dreaded system and its curators, even though the rhetoric remained that of rejection and exclusion.<sup>39</sup>

Joseph Beuys's contribution to *documenta 5*, on the other hand, embodied a very different rhetoric. Beuys presented himself as an artist who made the choice to work within the art system in order to change much vaster systems of economics and politics. Here and in later exhibitions, Beuys imagined biennials and *documenta* to be safe houses, or laboratories in which wider and larger issues than art could be explored. On June 1, 1971, Beuys had founded the Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung, locating it in an office at Andreasstrasse 25, Düsseldorf. Invited to participate in *documenta 5*, Beuys relocated the office (the Büro) to a room on the ground floor at the Fridericianum, *documenta's* main venue.

Dirk Schwarze described *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* in an article, "Zehn Stunden Beuys" ("Ten Hours Beuys"), which was published in the *Kasseler Stadtausgabe* on July 26, 1972:

10.00am. The *documenta* opens. Beuys, in a red fishing vest and felt hat, is in his office. He has two co-workers. On the desk is a long-stemmed rose, next to it are piles of handbills. On the wall with the window is a blue neon sign



that says: "Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum." Besides this, there are several blackboards on the walls. On each is written the word "man" ... 11.45am: Up to 130 visitors now. The discussion continues, with eight listeners. A young Swiss asks whether Beuys wants the nationalization of industry. The answer: "No, I have no use for nationalization, but I do want socialization."<sup>40</sup>

Beuys staffed the improvised office with volunteers from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. for 100 days, talking to visitors about his ideas with Schwarze and simultaneously producing innumerable blackboard drawings. On *documenta 5*'s last day on October 8, 1972, in an improvised boxing ring in front of a packed audience in the room occupied by the work of French artist Ben Vautier, Beuys and an assistant fought. This was an action, *Boxkampf für direkte Demokratie* (1972). A few short days later, after *documenta 5* and the *Büro* closed, Beuys was fired from his Düsseldorf professorship.<sup>41</sup> Beuys's *Büro* was a forum for the charismatic artist to present daily lectures, preserved by eloquent photographs, even though the *Büro* could never be experienced as a single fixed work. Everything that occurred in the space became part of the art. Beuys was already notorious for installations and videos that incorporated messy, decaying, disintegrating natural materials such as fat and felt. Here, his highly informal office – a collection of blackboards, desks, and chairs – was at the same time an installation resembling a hastily assembled campaign office and an action in which the studio of an egocentric artist was converted into collectivist politics. The *Büro* was propagating the ideas of his Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung and was a simulacrum of his office at the Düsseldorf Academy of Arts, with the difference that he would reach vastly more people in Kassel than in Düsseldorf. He humanized the *Büro*, decorating it with a single, spectacularly long-stemmed, fresh red rose "for direct democracy," replaced each day, in a tall measuring beaker, and two photographs: one of the rose, which he titled *Rose für direkte Demokratie* (1972); the other of Beuys in conversation with a visitor, *Ohne die Rose tun wir's nicht* (Without the rose we cannot do it) (1972). His familiar, scrawled-upon school blackboards set out Beuys's accumulating, didactic propositions, talking points from his lectures and discussions, according to his by-then familiar formula that explanation was an art form. Almost everything was potentially collectible, most obviously the give-away plastic bags printed with a diagram depicting the difference between party democracy and direct democracy. These had been printed the previous year and used

in a 1971 street action in Cologne. The bags are also, oddly, the precursors of later biennials' ubiquitous branded bags, all given out freely at vernissages and pavilions. Beuys's *Büro* became an indelible and unavoidable reference point for *documenta 5* visitors and in the wider reception of the show itself.

Several propositions about the conditions for a utopian *documenta* or biennial underlay both Beuys's *Büro* and *documenta 5*. Neither Szeemann nor Beuys had denied the complex networks of power and patronage that supported and underlay *documenta*. They had indexed them instead, representing them through metonymy. Beuys sold many of the blackboards from his *documenta 5* action to raise money for the Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung. Several residues from the *Büro* were soon used in later works, all of which are now in collections. The work *Stripes from the House of Shaman 1964–72* (1984), held in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, includes the coat Beuys wore in *Büro*. Even the rose in the office at *documenta 5* was used in several later works, notably a version of *Rose für direkte Demokratie* from 1973.

### **“The Most Important Exhibition of Recent Years”**

Homages to *documenta 5*'s legacy are ubiquitous. Indeed, it is now almost universally regarded as one of the most important and exemplary exhibitions of the last fifty years, even more than other potential candidates such as Seth Siegelaub's New York-based but itinerant exhibitions-as-catalogues or Lucy Lippard's nomadic numbered surveys. Siegelaub's famous exhibitions were available by mail order from his office in New York; they included the “first” exhibition catalogue-cum-book of conceptual art, titled *January 5–31, 1969*, which included “works” by Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Robert Barry.<sup>42</sup> Lippard had “compiled” several portable exhibitions, traveling with artist instructions and cheaply printed books, mounting exhibitions that were named after the number of inhabitants of the host city: *557,087* (Seattle, 1969) and *955,000* (Vancouver, 1970), *2,972,453* (Buenos Aires, 1970) and *c.7,500* (Valencia, California, 1973).

So the first reason for *documenta 5*'s great impact is that it was instrumental in the wider art museum acceptance of conceptualist and post-minimalist art into the emerging canon of contemporary art, as opposed to the very same artists own frequent rejection of art museums in favor of itinerant projects such as Lippard's or Siegelaub's. *documenta 5*'s far greater

historiographic durability was a partial by-product of documenta's recurring institutional nature (every four to five years), and the great financial and infrastructure resources thus able to be poured into it. *documenta 5* was always far more likely to be regarded as foundational simply on account of its durability and the preservation of its memory in archives, including in the form of the many striking photographs.

Second, it is remembered as a key moment in the creation of the canon of contemporary art simply because it stood right at the start of the period we now denote by the name "contemporary art."<sup>43</sup> *documenta 5* occurred at a critical juncture. Critics and artists were intensely aware of this: reporting on a *documenta 5* press conference a year out from the exhibition's opening, Georg Jappe wrote, "In New York the art scene is disintegrating; in Europe the museums and art galleries are suffering from a malaise which gives rise to an increasingly heated debate among curators, museum organizers and students on the social value of art."<sup>44</sup> At a lecture during *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung's* staging, Joseph Beuys declared, "Art is experiencing a crisis. All fields are in a state of crisis."<sup>45</sup> This strong sense of emergency meant that *documenta 5* would almost inevitably be remembered as a radical statement, almost by association, even though many artists were intensely doubtful that Szeemann was a radical figure, as we shall see. At the time, *Studio International's* reviewer, René Denizot, wrote, "In retrospect, the first thing that stood out at *documenta 5* was the exhibition's seriousness. First, because one had to regard it as the most important exhibition of recent years, and no opportunity had been spared to make it just that."<sup>46</sup>

But underneath all this, underneath the programmatic, metaphysical, and literary dimension of Szeemann's synchronic, ahistorical approach, the emergent curators' art of the "curatorial" had been amplified by the spectacular documenta platform and was now easily adopted by other biennial directors. Its impact was unambiguously clear on the 1979 Biennale of Sydney (the subject of the next chapter). Its longer-term and most carefully considered influence was clearest not in another documenta or biennial but in an exhibition that was originally conceived as a stand-in for a biennial, in place of the continuation of the by-then defunct Biennale de Paris. This exhibition was curator and museum director Jean-Hubert Martin's seminal global art survey, *Magiciens de la terre* (1989). Entrusted in 1985 with the task of relaunching the Paris Biennale, Martin, then director of the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, produced *Magiciens de la terre* instead in the exhibition spaces left vacant after the Biennale's unfortunate

cancellation due to budget overruns. The dark clouds of parochial Parisian press notices and art-world chatter during and after *Magiciens de la terre* contributed significantly to Martin's departure from the directorship of the Musée national d'art moderne.<sup>47</sup> But like it or not, *Magiciens de la terre* was to become the model for the next wave of 1990s biennials organized by themes that inevitably recalled "Individual Mythologies," and which invariably in its wake sought out a global selection of artists, no matter that *Magiciens de la terre* had been widely if unfairly criticized in Paris newspaper reviews and by art historians for its supposed cultural imperialism and obliviousness to then-ascendant theories of the marginal Other.

The prescient aura with which this epochal documenta was retrospectively enveloped overshadows the fact that Szeemann's show – and in particular the extra-artistic inclusions – also, like Martin's exhibition, drew enraged responses, notably from Buren and Smithson, though at the same time other artists, including Joseph Beuys, embraced Szeemann's dispersal of objects, categories, and events. Claes Oldenburg thought the exhibition was the ideal venue for his museum, commenting, "I doubt that I would have pulled the museum together if this occasion had not presented itself."<sup>48</sup> Even those who refused to exhibit participated through very public protests. The most obvious example, as we noted earlier, was Smithson's essay protest against the "warden-curator" who directs a "cultural prison" and "imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits."<sup>49</sup>

Even if the form of many of the works in *documenta 5* was open-ended, artists like Haacke et al. – the signatories of the artist petition against curatorial hegemony – wished to return the artist's intentions to the center of attention, and definitely align and stabilize a viewer's experiences in relation to these intentions. This hostility was generated by the emergence of the star-curator, a phenomenon that potentially relegated the artist to secondary importance in the now rapidly evolving biennial form. René Denizot wrote, "Thus, the artist and his works were supplanted by the gallery and its guardians as the custodians of artistic truth."<sup>50</sup> Artists were well aware of this, many seeing a danger. Smithson's comments still carry the acid aura of brittle fury. But Szeemann was easily able to incorporate such dissent within his very broad atlas of signs and freedom, forestalling, absorbing, and ultimately replacing criticism.

These reactions, and Szeemann's infuriating cultural combinations, reflected the Cold War raging at its height at the time, and so here it is worth backtracking into *documenta's* history. As we noted in this chapter's

introduction, documenta itself had been initiated in 1955 by art historian and first documenta director Arnold Bode. The legacy of the Second World War and especially the Cold War were central to its mission. With impressive but always ultimately inadequate funding, documenta was to compensate for Nazism's cultural scorched earth policy, for the division of Germany into East and West, and for Kassel's backwater location close to the East German border. Bode's aim had been to stimulate German culture, to definitively move beyond the National Socialist past, to remedy its erasure of modern art, and to align West German art firmly inside the democratic ideals of the West.<sup>51</sup> Szeemann's original intentions, evident in his early correspondence around the show, ultimately challenged Bode's in that Szeemann wanted to bring together different "realisms" by seeing both advertising and socialist realism – and thus both West and East – as equivalent utopian fantasies. The exhibition unfolded like a scholarly argument, from publicity and propaganda (both communist and capitalist kitsch; in Szeemann's words, "images that lie") proceeding past religious, cultic images and utopian projects, past Beuys's *Büro*, to post-minimalist art such as Richard Serra's assemblage of steel plates, *Circuit* (1972).<sup>52</sup> West Germany's post-World War Two economic miracle had been intensely consumerist in character. Many artists, not least Wolf Vostell, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter, had already tartly described West Germany's consumerist utopia, but without any Marxist sympathies either, and Szeemann's sympathetic inclusion of a substantial collection of American and European photorealist paintings, along with his less complimentary bracketing of socialist realism alongside commercial advertising, signaled the equivalence of both sides of the Cold War as well as his complete lack of interest in the previous libertarian connotations of abstract art. What must have truly perturbed Szeemann's critics, beyond his usurping of artist voices, were the subtle correspondences that a truly spectacular and thematically organized documenta of "advanced" art now revealed: that the emerging, increasingly dematerialized and performative contemporary art, for all its subtexts of critique, and consumerism had much in common. Minimalism and conceptual art essentially staged impassive objects for individual consumption in much the same way that consumer goods were mass-produced, indifferent commodities, even if advertising and packaging seemed to tailor them to the individual's desires. Robert Smithson understood that when Szeemann thematized contemporary art as "Individual Mythologies" the Swiss curator was anchoring his art within the forest of cultural dreams. So Smithson wrote, "So these dream worlds start proliferating... You have to cut your hair before you

go in. It's the incipient fascism of all dream worlds."<sup>53</sup> That, however, was to be the condition of art from this point on. The exceptions, like Beuys's *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, would stand in an unstable and contested relation to what was rapidly evolving into the now-familiar neo-avant-garde canon. And exemplars of the new canon, such as Richard Serra and Michael Asher, contributed works that implacably occupied rather than merely filled the exhibition spaces at *documenta 5*, in their resistance confirming the drift of Szeemann's dramaturgy.<sup>54</sup>

American artists, critics, and collectors therefore took *documenta 5* far more seriously than its predecessors. *Artforum* devoted much of its October 1972 issue to multiple reviews and features on the exhibition by major US-based critics Carter Ratcliff, Lizzie Borden, and Lawrence Alloway; it was the most attention that a single European exhibition had received in the journal's history, although all *Artforum's* reviewers more or less dismissed Szeemann's idea of individual mythologies in favor of the exceptionalism of the individual works.<sup>55</sup> Ratcliff praised those art works whose "challenge to *documenta* is complete."<sup>56</sup> The best works, he thought, stood apart from Szeemann.<sup>57</sup> He thought that the four steel plates of Richard Serra's *Circuit* (1972) divided its room in such a way that it created a space that was "self-sufficient enough to stand independent of *documenta*."<sup>58</sup> But in a Cold War context, if the curator's unsettling redefinitions of art as a part of larger image cultures was not a neutral action, neither was obdurateness.

The next factor behind *documenta 5's* impact was the force and originality of Szeemann's auteurism. This was manifest both in his chaotic, eclectic, and highly literary – but absolutely timely – exhibition rationale and in his creation of a centralized, short-term, project-based organizational structure centered upon the figure of the director-curator. The long-term result, given that biennials, triennials, and *documenta* would rapidly become the largest, most prominent contemporary art events, was that their curators inevitably became very influential figures in the art world system. This visibility was double-edged. Despite the enormous attention it garnered and its huge visitor numbers, *documenta 5* generated a very large financial deficit. Aware of his own personal liability for this, Szeemann had alerted his board to the funding shortfall quite early and even offered to resign (this was refused); after the exhibition closed, however, he was presented with an invoice by the board and the state government for a sum so huge that he would never have been able to begin to pay it back. In the decades after *documenta 5*, he alternated between taking on the quick turn-around

directorships of high-visibility biennials (principally, the Venice Biennale in 1980, 1999, and 2001) with far more left-of-field, eccentric, densely researched exhibitions held in isolated locations, focusing on non-artists and utopian communities. The most famous of these was his exhibition of artist utopias at the mountain community of Monte Verità, near Ascona in Italy, which took years of research and an extraordinarily sustained personal commitment. Such loyalty to a single idea and single site was to be rarely seen in the curatorship of biennials. They were, after Szeemann's time, often directed by itinerant freelancers like Szeemann himself. Such cultural nomads did not necessarily have any long-term relationship with either host institution or city, nor did they perform the tasks that traditional curators in museums are occupied by, such as collecting and acquiring works of art, or arranging for their conservation (at Monte Verità, Szeemann involved himself in the preservation of the disintegrating buildings where generations of northern European artists and intellectuals had sought their own utopias). Of course, freelance directors needed to keep good relations with a biennial's non-executive board members, to whom they ultimately answered, as much as any art museum director or curator cultivates a board of trustees. Szeemann, though, was not shy of institutions but wanted to convert them into utopian sites and above all, utopian experiences.<sup>59</sup>

In short, Szeemann's *documenta 5* and its many theme-driven followers, including most of the exhibitions in this book, took the job of canon formation away from art historians, from art books, from art museum departments of painting and sculpture, and from art critics. Veteran art historian Werner Haftmann had been deeply involved in previous *documentas*, but *documenta 5* resulted in a new expectation: that curators, rather than artists or critics, would assume the roles of the primary decision makers in the art world as well as become its – henceforth usually utopian – theorists through curatorship, through the curatorial, and through editorship of comprehensive, wide-ranging exhibition catalogues. This editorial role, though not as obvious as the authorial role (the star-curator function), was to be vastly important and to displace art historians and critics from their positions in the eco-systems of contemporary art. Szeemann's impact was that great (and yet he did still hammer in nails, as contemporary photographs attest).

Curators would determine the content of biennials through their own more or less arbitrary nomination of themes that might – or might not – explain a zeitgeist and, further, interpret the theme both through selections and juxtapositions and, further still, through their own catalogue essays or

160E 44117B	Kritische Theorie des ästhetischen Gegenstandes	1
	Audiovisuelles Vorwort	2
	Trivialrealismus & Trivialembematik	3
	Bilderwelt und Frömmigkeit	4
	Gesellschaftliche Ikonographie an zwei Beispielen	5
	Werbung	6
	Politische Propaganda	7
	Science Fiction / Heute von gestern gesehen	8
	Utopie / Morgen von heute gesehen	9
	Spiel und Wirklichkeit	10
	Bildnerei der Geisteskranken	11
	Film	12
	Museen von Künstlern	13
	Sozialistischer Realismus	14
	Realismus	15
	Individuelle Mythologien – Selbstdarstellung – Prozesse	16
	Idee + Idee / Licht	17
	Information	18
	Verzeichnis der ausgestellten Werke	19
	Allgemeine Bibliographie	20
	Während: Ereigniskalender	21
	Nachher 1: Text	22
	Nachher 2: Bild	23
	Nachher 3: Presse	24
	Fotonachweis	25

Figure 1.3 Page from *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (*documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today*), exhibition catalogue, curator Harald Szeemann (Kassel: documenta, 1972). Courtesy documenta.

those of other curator friends. Curators would usurp the role of art critics in the process and, rather than trace trends and delineate art movements, they would often eliminate the historicizing function altogether and thus obliterate the role of art historians. Though art historians might occasionally (very occasionally) write short essays for biennial catalogues or, more often, contribute the mandatory but even shorter, cursory artist profiles for these publications, the connection between art curator and art historian was surprisingly tenuous. There would be exceptions. From the late 1990s onwards, particular biennial curators – most substantially Okwui Enwezor – would



launch ambitious projects to rethink art's history and its relation to wider world histories through the biennial platform. Even then, however, these projects were very substantially curator-driven rather than the products of collaborations with art historians, as opposed to much more desired collaborations with cultural theorists, economists, poets, and political scientists.

But meanwhile, along with Szeemann's dynamism and his lack of interest in art history's modernist master-narratives (which had dominated the first four documentas), came a decisive shift in cultural authority and in the public mediation of art. With an expanding art market, a growing international audience, and museums and collectors in search of new styles of art, the authority to validate and frame contemporary art became more and more important. Artists, critics, and curators were, in fact, in competition to maintain whatever control they had previously exercised or were fighting to gain by way of influence. Conceptualist artists, in particular, were attempting to police the institutional framing of their works much as they had earlier attempted to police the dissemination and interpretation of their texts.<sup>60</sup> Despite their quite self-conscious efforts, by *documenta 5*, the battle for authorial certainty was over. Daniel Buren's striped posters appearing by invitation at *documenta 5* were a belated reiteration of his uninvited Bern poster paste-ups that had resulted in his arrest during *When Attitudes Become Form*, in 1969, rather than a real challenge to Szeemann or the art system. This was not even the first time that *documenta* witnessed abrasive radicalism and protest. The more conservative *4. documenta* had been the scene for Wolf Vostell's, Jorg Immendorff's, Friedrich Heubach's, and Chris Reinecke's far blunter, equally uninvited, satirical intervention at the exhibition's press conference, with their notorious Honey Blind action, during which Immendorff smeared honey over the microphones, Reinecke hugged everyone in sight, including the agitated director Arnold Bode, and Heubach raised a banner thanking Bode for such a pretty show. As Walter Grasskamp commented, even artist protests reified the mythology of *documenta*.<sup>61</sup>

So *documenta 5* was, oddly enough, an act of domestication: the art of the 1960s – marked by an anti-institutional trajectory which had reached its apogee in the couple of years immediately preceding *documenta 5* – had been moved mostly indoors. The museum had won. This was the moment when the avant-garde moved into the art museum and fully into the public domain, integrating itself into spectacular culture, with long-term effects that we will see right to the end of this book.

At a deeper level, this development affected the nature of art production itself. First, art was increasingly shaped and slanted by the opportunities of the biennial system that supported it, as opposed to other exhibition opportunities that had previously dominated the emergence of modern and now contemporary art, principally the one-person exhibition in dealer galleries or the art museum project show. From this point, as we observed earlier, a type of art appears that can be called – we intend no pejorative subtext – “biennial art.” The result was that the division between studio, gallery, and museum became increasingly blurred at biennials; Szeemann and other biennial directors systematically encouraged artists to contribute “projects,” such as *documenta 5*’s five artist museums, that artists would not have realized at their dealers’ galleries and that were only made with the encouragement and infrastructure offered by biennial directors. Second, though it was not obvious at the time, *documenta 5* continued an unlikely partnership: that between the adventurous end of the art market and apparently uncommodifiable art. Even if in retrospect this seems unlikely, private dealers, especially German dealers, rather than museum curators, were promoting and often curating conceptualist artists into not-for-profit and museum shows. Konrad Fischer’s entrepreneurial representation of American artists included in *documenta 5*, such as Bruce Nauman, was merely the important example of this (Fischer was part of Szeemann’s wider curatorium at *documenta 5*; he had first shown Nauman in 1968), for the phenomenon occurred globally, for instance at Australian dealer Bruce Pollard’s Pinacotheca, in Melbourne.<sup>62</sup> Szeemann tapped into these networks right across the world during his peripatetic travels, from Sydney and Melbourne (where he assembled a survey exhibition, *I want to leave a nice well-done child here* (1971) in a fortnight), to New York, in preparation for *documenta 5*. Szeemann’s *documenta* was not made in opposition to dealers, but neither was he at their behest.

## Conclusion

At *documenta 5*, Joseph Beuys had made the art system and the vast, recurring survey exhibition work to his advantage just as Szeemann performed for the press like a Fluxus emperor reigning over his exhibition, as is evident in the many famous press photographs showing him cavorting and hamming it up for the photographers. This spectacular hubris and machismo grated with many artists – not least Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren,

as we saw – and with feminist curators and writers including the furious Lucy Lippard. But Szeemann’s cultivation of projects like Beuys’s *Büro* and artists’ mini-museums such as Oldenburg’s *Mouse Museum* demonstrated the flexibility and symbiosis of the emerging genre of “biennial art,” which managed to combine site specificity with spectacle. Beuys was developing a now-familiar attitude that sounded like the Andy Warhol of a few years before, observing coolly, “Everyone who lives in the system participates in it. I make use of it through the sale of my work.”<sup>63</sup>

*documenta 5* itself had become director Harald Szeemann’s *Büro* and the most dramatic sign of an emerging curatorial ascendancy. The juxtaposition of “high” art alongside “low” mass culture, though familiar to London-based audiences who had seen the Independent Group’s exhibitions through the 1950s, was almost unprecedented in a biennial or *documenta*. It was not even to be taken up by his successors, though the insertion of older works of art alongside the new was. Experiments of the latter kind were exemplified at Paolo Herkenhoff’s 1998 Bienal de São Paulo, then less coherently and more arbitrarily at Roger Buerger and Ruth Noack’s quasi-Warburgian *documenta 12* (2007), and finally at Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s revisionist reincarnation of past *documentas* (including *documenta 5* and 1959’s *II.documenta*), at her *dOCUMENTA (13)* (2012). Szeemann’s iconological, genuinely Warburgian attitude had also presaged the rise of visual studies in the academy a decade or two later but it was not an intellectually isolated event for, as we noted before, many artists and critics of the later 1960s were fascinated by semiotics and by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s then modish structural anthropology.

In fact, *documenta 5* was one of the first instances of what we might call not only a mega-exhibition but also a meta-exhibition. This was not just because of its five-yearly rarity relative to the more constant churn of biennials or even triennials, and not just because of its huge funding and prestige, relative even to the Venice Biennale, but because both rarity and funding would encourage *documenta*’s artistic directors to juxtapose many kinds of exhibition under the one roof. That complex, meta-exhibition model would be taken up by future biennial directors, not least by curator Okwui Enwezor at *Documenta11* (2002), and then at the 2008 Gwangju Biennale. If Beuys’s *Büro* had turned *documenta* into a symbol for the utopian potential of art, then Harald Szeemann’s *documenta 5* and, in a wider sense from this point on, biennials, triennials, and *documentas* in general, presented themselves as neither the enemy of “the system” nor as part of this “system.” They were to become – or so it seemed – the sites where cultural and political change

would be described and debated, as if these enormous exhibitions were cultural laboratories. This was a momentous change.

## Notes

1. For an overview of documenta's foundation, see Walter Grasskamp, "For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?," in Sandy Nairne, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Reesa Greenberg (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 67–78; Walter Grasskamp, "Degenerate Art and *documenta 1*: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses and Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 163–190.
2. The exhibition itinerary was as follows: Harald Szeemann (curator), *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*, Kunsthalle Bern, March 22–April 27, 1969; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, May 9–June 15, 1969; Institute of Contemporary Art, London, August 28–September 27, 1969; also see Harald Szeemann, Tobia Bezzola, and Roman Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite; Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957–2005* (Zürich: Edition Voldemeer, 2007), pp. 225–265; also see the definitive account, Teresa Gleadowe, Christian Rattemeyer, Claudia Di Lecce, Steven ten Thije, Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Piero Gilardi, and Richard Serra, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* (London: Afterall Books, 2011); for an overview of his impact, see Roberta Smith "Harald Szeemann, 71, Curator of Groundbreaking Shows, Dies," *New York Times*, February 25, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/25/arts/design/harald-szeemann-71-curator-of-groundbreaking-shows-dies.html> Accessed October 9, 2015.
3. The exhibition itinerary was as follows: *Happening & Fluxus*, Cologne Kunstverein, November 6, 1970–January 6, 1971; Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin; for an account of this exhibition see Szeemann, Bezzola, and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, pp. 284–303.
4. Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction," in Maria Lind (ed.) *Performing the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 9–20.
5. Gabriele Mackert, "At Home in Contradictions: Harald Szeemann's *documenta*," in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.), *Archive in Motion: 50 Years of documenta, 1955–2005* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 253–262.
6. To be fair, Szeemann had visited Australia in 1971 at charismatic collector John Kaldor's invitation, assembling at breakneck speed a survey exhibition of Australian art from Melbourne and Sydney as the second of John

- Kaldor's Art Projects; the visit did not result in the selection of any artists for *documenta 5*, nor any subsequent interest by Szeemann in those artists. By contrast, Szeemann's 1999 Venice Biennale was marked, late in his career, with the timely acknowledgment of Chinese artists, though 1999 was later than many other globetrotting curators' patronage of the burgeoning Chinese art scene.
7. Media release, *documenta 5*, May 1970, reproduced in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.), *Archive in Motion*, p. 252.
  8. Szeemann, in Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Mind over Matter: Hans-Ulrich Obrist Talks with Harald Szeemann," *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 3 (November 1996), pp. 74–79 and 111–112, 119, 125, esp. p. 111.
  9. Harald Szeemann, in Hans-Joachim Muller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006), p. 157.
  10. The title that *dOCUMENTA (13)* gave to its docents – the Worldly Companions – echoed Brock's concept of a Visitor's School.
  11. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 111. As Birnbaum, Altshuler, and many others have noted, New York conceptual art dealer and curator Seth Siegel was exploring even more radical curatorial forms, creating exhibitions where artists might make their contributions from anywhere; his famous exhibition catalogue in place of an exhibition, *January 5–31, 1969*, consisted of photocopies of texts and photographs by the exhibiting artists who included Joseph Kosuth; see Daniel Birnbaum, "When Attitudes Become Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann," *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005), pp. 55–58 and p. 346, esp. p. 58; also see Jean-Marc Poinot, "Large Exhibitions: A Sketch of a Typology," in Sandy Nairne, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Reesa Greenberg (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 39–66, esp. p. 48.
  12. Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 75.
  13. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 125; in this and many other interviews, Szeemann used the word "inventor" to encompass his new role as biennial curator.
  14. Georg Jappe, "What Is Reality? The Theme of *documenta 5*," *Studio International*, no. 182 (July 1971), pp. 2–3, esp. p. 2.
  15. Media release, *documenta 5* (March 1971), reproduced in Glasmeier and Stengel, *Archive in Motion*, p. 252.
  16. Szeeman, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112.
  17. See Muller, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 42; also see Szeemann, Bezzola, and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 314.
  18. See Denise Frimer, "Pedagogical Paradigms: *documenta's* Reinvention," *Art and Education*, (2010). <http://www.artandeducation.net>. Accessed April 1, 2011.
  19. The enormous volume begins with the mammoth essay by Hans Heinz Holz, titled "Kritische Theorie des ästhetischen Zeichens," in Harald Szeemann (curator and ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute*

- (documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today), exh. cat. (Kassel: documenta, 1972), section 1, pp. 1–86.
20. Robert Smithson, “Cultural Confinement,” *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), p. 39; this was the essay that Szeemann included in *documenta 5*’s exhibition catalogue in place of an image by Smithson, and translated into German as “Kulturbeschränkung,” in Harald Szeemann (ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, section 17, pp. 74–75.
  21. All ten artists signed the declaration; see Lawrence Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 30–36; and Mackert, “At Home in Contradictions,” p. 259.
  22. Daniel Birnbaum, “When Attitudes Become Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann,” *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005), pp. 55, 59, 346, esp. p. 59.
  23. Beuys had been prominent at 4. *documenta*, in 1968, and was to be again prominent at *documenta 6*. At 4. *documenta* (June 27–October 6, 1968), Beuys contributed a sprawling installation *Sculpture room* (1968); the *documenta* Archive at Kassel has extensive holdings of documentation of all of Beuys’s works at the different *documentas*. Beuys constantly repeated his message about creativity: for instance, he stated, “Creativity is no longer specific to people who are working with colors, to painters; it’s no longer specific to people who are working with form, to sculptors. Everybody’s formulation and environments – let’s also say social relationships – have to be seen from the point of view of creativity, of art, and the principles of form. In German we have this fantastic word, *gestalt*; it exists also in some sense in English” (Joseph Beuys, interviewed Dusseldorf, June 18, 1984, in Bernice Rose, “Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys,” in *MOMA Magazine*, no. 13 (Winter–Spring 1993), p. 17); for photographs of Beuys at *documenta 5* see Brigitte Hellgoth, *Untitled Photograph from Joseph Beuys, Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (1972), black and white photograph from Beuys’ 100-day action *Büro der Organisation für Direkt Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, June to October 1972, Kassel. Photograph taken from the original image in the *documenta* Archiv, Kassel (DA 2633/12A).
  24. Szeemann, in Szeemann, Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 316.
  25. Szeemann, in Szeemann, Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 316.
  26. Jappe, “What Is Reality?,” p. 2.
  27. Lawrence Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” p. 32.
  28. Hilton Kramer, “Art: German *documenta*; Exhibition Is a Melange That Assumes Culture Is an Outworn Fiction,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1972, Leisure, p. 11.
  29. Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” p. 34.
  30. See Jappe, “What Is Reality?,” p. 2.
  31. Szeemann, in Obrist, “Mind over Matter,” p. 112.

32. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112; also see Mackert, "At Home in Contradictions," p. 259.
33. Daniel Buren, "Exposition d'une exposition," in Harald Szeemann (ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, section 17, p. 29; the statement is reprinted in translation in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 210–211; Buren continued, "And the artist throws her- or himself and her or his work into this trap, because the artist and her work, which are powerless from the force of habit of art, have no choice but to allow another to be exhibited: the organizer."
34. Daniel Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," in Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2004), pp. 26–31, esp. p. 27; *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist* was an *e-flux* publication, one of a group of texts in a project curated by Jens Hoffmann for Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11*; Buren's essay is reprinted in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 212–221.
35. Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," p. 30.
36. Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," p. 27.
37. See Andrea Fraser's discussion in "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 1 (September 2005), pp. 278–283 and p. 332, esp. p. 282.
38. See Benjamin Buchloh's skeptical discussion of Buren's politics in "The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT," *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 9 (May 2008), pp. 310–313.
39. Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 2–19, esp. p. 4.
40. Dirk Schwarze, "Zehn Stunden Beuys," *Kasseler Stadtausgabe*, July 26, 1972, trans. Tom Nicholson, in Tom Nicholson, "Actions towards the Image: On Traces, Images and Memory in the Work of Joseph Beuys," PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, April 2007, p. 118.
41. We draw here and throughout this chapter on the detailed account of Beuys's *Büro* presented in Nicholson, "Actions towards the Image."
42. For a contemporary interview with Siegelau see Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large," *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 202–203. See also Jack Burnham's comments on Siegelau's role as conceptual "gallery director" in Jack Burnham, "Real Time Systems," *Artforum*, vol. 8, no. 1 (September 1969), pp. 49–55, esp. p. 54.
43. On the surface, this is a circular argument; however, it should be increasingly clear that we are arguing for the agency and influence of an exhibition such as this, even on artistic practice. For an increasingly accepted definition of the

- term, contemporary art, see Terry Smith's chapter 13, "What Is Contemporary Art?," in *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 241–271; also see Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (New York: Lawrence King, 2011).
44. Jappe, "What Is Reality?," p. 2.
  45. Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze, "Report on a Day's Proceedings at the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*" (1972), in Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 120–124, esp. p. 122.
  46. René Denizot, "Exposition of an Exhibition: A Backward Look at documenta 5," *Studio International*, vol. 185, no. 953 (March 1973), pp. 98–99, esp. p. 98.
  47. For a full account of *Magiciens de la terre* and its reception, see Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (Part 2): "Magiciens de la terre" 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013); the response in Paris was not unanimously malicious; a young Nicolas Bourriaud wrote a perceptive review of *Magiciens de la terre* in *Flash Art*, no. 168 (1990).
  48. Angela Westwater Reaves, "Claes Oldenburg: An Interview," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 36–39, esp. p. 37.
  49. Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," p. 39.
  50. Denizot, "Exposition of an Exhibition," p. 99.
  51. Grasskamp says, "The first documenta, in 1955, measured even by its own claims, is to be understood as an answer to the trauma that resulted from that original antimodernist smear campaign [the 1937 Degenerate Art exhibition]," in Grasskamp, "Degenerate Art and *documenta 1*," p. 165; also see Grasskamp, "For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?," p. 67.
  52. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112.
  53. Robert Smithson in Bruce Kurtz, "Documenta 5: A Critical Preview," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 46, no. 8 (Summer 1972), pp. 30–43, esp. p. 31.
  54. Carter Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 40–44, p. 40.
  55. See Eric Banks, "October 1972," *Artforum*, vol. 41, no. 2 (October 2002), p. 56; Lizzie Borden, "Cosmologies," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 45–50, esp. p. 45 (Borden is less hostile than the other reviewers but still cautiously disapproving of Szeemann).
  56. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 40.
  57. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 40.
  58. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 43; Szeemann was aware of this objection but disagreed; according to Jappe, "Two points were emphasized repeatedly at the (1971) press conference: any work of art that lays claim to autonomy will be shown on its own." (Jappe, "What Is Reality?," p. 2).
  59. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 125.
  60. This desire to police the audience now seems quite distant and odd, but conceptual artists and their spokesmen, notably Seth Siegelaub, were determined to



avoid “misinterpretation.” American artist Douglas Huebler, for example, said: “What I say is part of the art work. I don’t look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it’s about” (Douglas Huebler, in Charles Harrison, “On Exhibitions and the World at Large: Seth Siegelau in Conversation with Charles Harrison,” *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 202–203, note 1, p. 203). There was no space in their minds for anything else.

61. Grasskamp, “For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?” p. 72.
62. See Sophie Richard’s fascinating book, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists, 1967–77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009).
63. Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze, “Report of a Day’s Proceedings at the *Bureau of Direct Democracy*” (1972), p. 121.

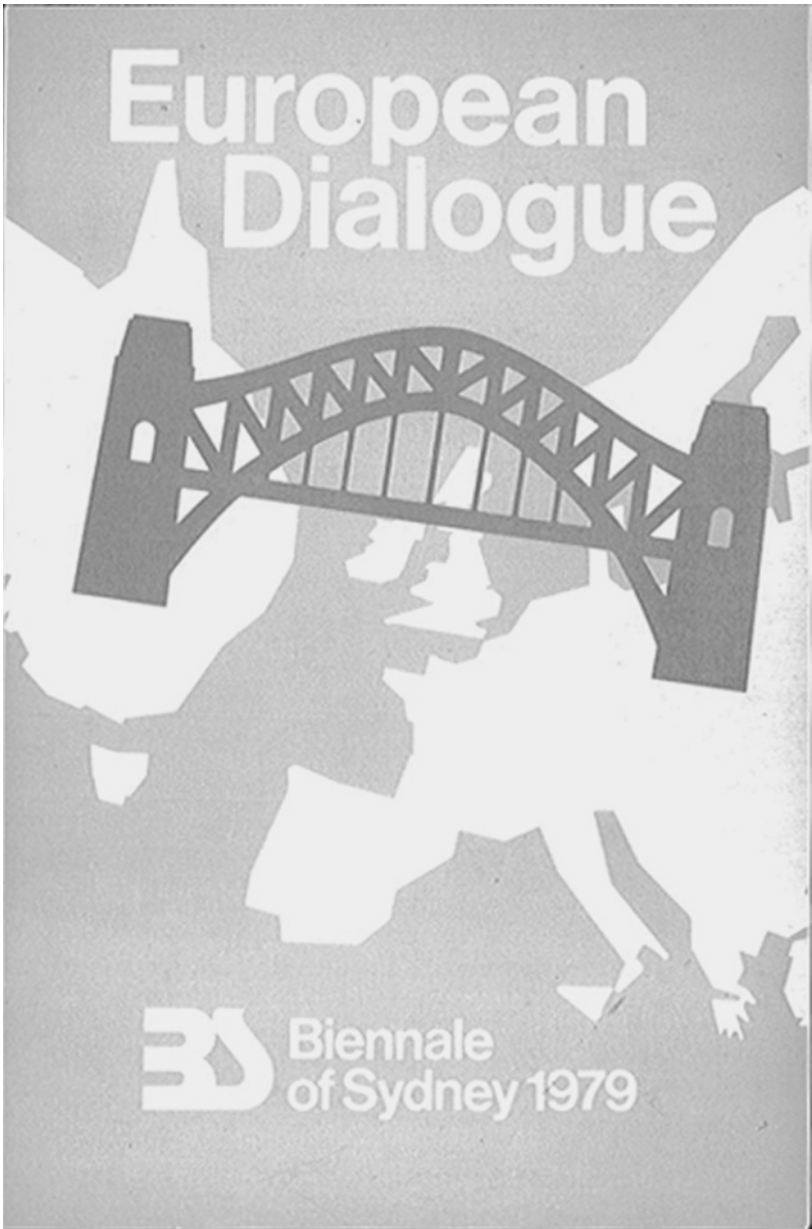


Figure 2.1 Cover of *European Dialogue: The Third Biennale of Sydney 1979*, exhibition catalogue, curator Nick Waterlow (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1979). Courtesy Biennale of Sydney.

# 1979: Cultural Translation, Cultural Exclusion, and the Second Wave

Exhibitions in this chapter: *The Third Biennale of Sydney: European Dialogue* (1979, Sydney, Australia); *XV Bienal de São Paulo* (1979, São Paulo, Brazil)

## Introduction: Biennials as Models for Cultural Encounters

In the burgeoning discipline of curatorial studies, biennials play a central if complicated role, as the increasing importance of exhibition histories constructed from fragile and ephemeral archives shows.<sup>1</sup> But more specifically, biennials have come to exemplify the significance of cultural translation for contemporary art, a situation relevant to the biennials in this chapter. Biennials bring artists and works from one culture or region to another, ideally to establish dialogues, tensions, and resonances between different cultural products, and all through an exhibition medium transposed from its nationalist foundations at the Venice Biennale in 1895 into a leviathan of international proportions and inflated profiles today. Yet, this globalized over-reach can reveal the less salubrious aspect to these exhibitions: their reduction to an easily identifiable trope, an already ossified readymade enabling a struggling locality (often, though not always, a second- or third-tier post-industrial city like Liverpool or Gwangju) to aspire to the attention of international art audiences, markets, and magazines. In each city's yearning for new-found global relevance, notions of cultural translation have thus come to function in two directions at once. By absorbing the structures and methods most indicative of globalized exhibition making, a local art scene can project its practices and discursive debates into a much broader canon of contemporary art – or, rather, *believe* it can project the local into global legitimacy.<sup>2</sup>

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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That, at least, was the narrative that dominated the perception of biennials and their international proliferation from the mid-to-late 1990s to the present, and which subtends this chapter. Biennials are almost invariably presumed to be a cultural symptom of globalized neoliberalism, such that the openness of North Atlantic art to those worlds beyond its shores becomes another strategy of colonization and self-promotion.<sup>3</sup> However, such views forget that biennials are not simply a phenomenon imported worldwide from the capitalist West in recent years. During the nearly four decades of the Cold War, especially from the early-to-mid 1950s to the end of the 1980s, biennials were among the foremost models for bringing together artists and exhibiting art works from myriad cultures *outside* the West, and thus for establishing the exhibition as a paramount venue for cultural encounters.

This was especially true of what we call in this book the “second wave” of biennials, which emerged along the art world’s so-called “peripheries” – in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1951, for instance, and in Alexandria, Egypt and Ljubljana, Yugoslavia in 1955 – long after the inauguration of the Venice Biennale and the Carnegie International in the mid-1890s. A number of these biennials sought an often self-conscious rejection of the cultural pretensions – and certainly the cultural hegemony – of the North Atlantic. Others linked their biennials to the civic project of cultural modernization and internationalization.

The Bienal de São Paulo, which was founded in 1951, and the Biennale of Sydney, which began in 1973, stand as the most durable and prominent of the biennials established during this second wave, and fit the latter description. However, the Sydney Biennale did not follow São Paulo’s adoption of the Venice model (that is, a biennial dividing its artists by national representation, while granting awards to individual artists). It was not the first biennial to dispense with this template. The Bienal de Arte Coltejer (which began in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968) had been presenting sprawling group shows, with international and local artists’ works placed alongside each other regardless of nation or medium, since its founding. But the format invented by Sydney and Coltejer was to become the path taken by most newer biennials, in part because it was empowered by a ready and increasing cadre of freelance auteur curators who were to a great extent modeling themselves on personalities such as the influential chief curator of *documenta 5* in 1972, Harald Szeemann.<sup>4</sup>

Szeemann had helped shape the expectations of the Biennale of Sydney’s early organizers about what an ambitious survey of contemporary art might

be, for he had visited Australia, just before the first Biennale in 1973, to curate a survey of local art, *I want to leave a nice well-done child here* (staged at the Bonython Gallery in Sydney and then at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne) in 1971, in the lead-up to *documenta 5*. His thematically organized, not survey-based, model for *documenta 5* (and specifically his organizing conceit of “Individual Mythologies,” that exhibition’s slogan) would prove especially important for the 1979 Biennale of Sydney, as would the figure of the roving, itinerant biennial director exemplified by Szeemann.

Most studies of biennials posit 1989 as Year Zero in the formation of a global complex of exhibition making – including all the near-pathological competitiveness, paranoia, and desire for recognition that came with that complex – but the Biennale of Sydney and the Bienal de São Paulo remind us that we need to look much earlier than 1989 to find the roots of both globalization and biennialization in contemporary art. The Cold War period was not a dead-zone for major international group shows like biennials. Instead, we can pinpoint the decades just after the Second World War for the birth pangs of a new internationalism – perhaps even an emergent globalism, and the desire to be recognizably, expansively global – interwoven with civic self-doubt. To be more precise, the dialectics of contemporaneity and provincialism, the ambitions to be “contemporary” and the fear of being “provincial,” lie at the heart of such cultural globalism and in the minds of local artists, wherever biennials are staged, as we shall see throughout both this chapter and this book.<sup>5</sup>

There is a second reason to focus on these biennials. At stake in this early phase of globalism was the struggle to articulate modes of world-making very different from the antinomies of capitalism and communism, East and West, that still dominate Cold War cultural histories. Instead, both São Paulo and Sydney provide concrete evidence of a more complicated set of aspirations between the local, the regional, and the international – part of a broader desire for culture to function in an “age of three worlds,” as historian Michael Denning has argued, rather than two.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that we should forget Cold War adversarial hostilities altogether. We clearly cannot, for the production and reception of biennials outside the North Atlantic was still very much informed by the broader political and social contexts of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, worldwide anti-American feeling of the 1960s and 1970s, and the use of culture as a weapon of soft power by governments of all stripes during this time. Both Brazil and Australia, like many other countries outside the North Atlantic, were targets of the US cultural

sponsorship program aimed at projecting the prestige and power of American art in international group exhibitions and biennials. This was the program of soft power promoted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) through the US International Service and the Museum of Modern Art's International Council, and thoroughly analyzed by Serge Guilbaut, Frances Stonor Saunders, and others.<sup>7</sup> Exhibitions including *The Family of Man* and *Two Decades of American Painting* anchored briefly in Melbourne and Sydney on their international, CIA-sponsored world tours.<sup>8</sup> However, this patronage had trailed off by the time of the 1979 Biennale of Sydney, and the USIS had little involvement with art by then. By contrast, the 15th Bienal de São Paulo, which was presented from October 3 to December 9, 1979, occurred very much in the Cold War shadow of the United States's interventions in South America and its conflicted sponsorship of brutal, authoritarian, military régimes.

The 1970s marked a period of significant cultural, economic, and geopolitical change, and biennials were potent bellwethers of these transitions because they lay at the very nexus of local ambition, regional traction, and new internationalism that were the cornerstones of cultural politics at the time. The development of São Paulo's and Sydney's biennials thus provide us with crucial examples of artistic, curatorial, and bureaucratic responses to these politics. How did an art scene and a biennial as geographically distant from the "center" as theirs engage with international cultural and political transformation? How did they translate, or even endogenize, the models of cultural encounter promoted by the structure of large group exhibitions? And how did the local and the international entwine? As this chapter shows, while notions of encounter and translation were very much central to both cities' ambitions, it was ultimately difficult to separate them from worries about exclusivity, and especially the exclusion of the local at the expense of international prestige.

### Founding the Sydney Biennale

By the end of the 1970s, the arrival of relatively affordable international flights had pushed Australian artists, along with their peers from Brazil, Argentina, Japan, Korea, and other long-established "peripheries" of art, into closer contact with North Atlantic art centers. The result was the beginning of a fracturing and opening up of art circles beyond New York and Western Europe and within each art center, a division into two

overlapping art worlds: a provincial ghetto represented by one set of art galleries or an international art world enclave represented by another, usually smaller and more exclusive, number of galleries and, increasingly, some artist-run spaces.

This was as true in Tokyo and Seoul as it was in Sydney or São Paulo. The two art worlds did not overlap but the latter world – that which saw itself as part of an international contemporary art community – did not at that time or later necessarily renew itself from the former's talent-pool of the best and brightest. When it did, it did so only reluctantly or in such a way as to reinforce North Atlantic primacy over the image of what was contemporary art. Many scholars' recent work, particularly that of John Clark, has shown that this remained true even of the huge Asian biennials that flourished from the 1990s onwards though, increasingly, many younger artists moved easily from international artist residency to residency and from biennial to biennial.<sup>9</sup> But as well, by the late 1970s, Sydney's art world seemed to have reached a respectable if small critical mass in terms of self-sustaining size. This shift coincided with the third Biennale of Sydney, held in 1979, that launched the Australian city's biennial as an international event seeking to be an image of the world of contemporary art as it then stood.

Both the São Paulo and Sydney Biennales were founded by immigrants from postwar Europe – in São Paulo, Francisco “Ciccillo” Matarazzo Sobrinho; in Sydney, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis.<sup>10</sup> Their motivations were similar, and they shared the stark life-experiences of the post-World War Two diaspora. They were European migrants who established themselves as important industrialists, proudly participating in their chosen city's civic and national desires for international recognition as nascent global cities and as nodes of business and capital in their respective regions in the Southern Hemisphere. Needless to say, civic and national aspirations were never identical nor necessarily in harmony, nor was the balance between the two always equal. Australia's new, government-sponsored arts funding organization, the Australia Council for the Arts (which had been established by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1973, the same year that Belgiorno-Nettis established the Biennale of Sydney), wished primarily to support art-making nationwide and far less to project Australian art internationally. Its aim was to maximize direct support to Australian artists in the form of grants. Belgiorno-Nettis, on the other hand, wanted to replicate and import the cultural institutions of his homeland to his beloved Sydney, and in particular the venerable institution of the Venice Biennale:

My love affair with Venice, where I have been a frequent visitor for years, is the source of inspiration for the Biennale. How do you break the isolation of Australia, which I felt strongly myself in the early 50s? How do you inject that flavor of international extravaganza, originality and explosive vision that you see at gatherings in Venice, in the Giardini, in the Corderia, in the Arsenale, with their centuries of tradition?<sup>11</sup>

Other biennial models than that of Venice were already available, principally the idea of a biennial of the South, current from 1955 onwards, that we will encounter in the next chapter. These ideas might just as easily have been adopted but there is no evidence that they were discussed and Belgiorno-Nettis's civic-minded boosterism, nostalgia, and philanthropy prevailed. He invented, developed, and financially supported the new biennial with the organizational and curatorial resources provided by his family conglomerate, the powerful Transfield Corporation, which built bridges, railways, and major infrastructure projects throughout the Sydney region. Belgiorno-Nettis wanted to move beyond his previous sponsorship of a major national competition of contemporary art, the Transfield Prize, which he had started in 1961. But the prize relied on an exhibition model that, focused on traditional media such as paintings or sculptures, was on the wane by the early 1970s.

The first, humble 1973 Biennale of Sydney was selected by the curator of the University of Sydney's Power Institute collection, Elwyn Lynn, and then organized by staff from Belgiorno-Nettis's corporation. It was a simple survey exhibition. In fact, it was not much more than part of the opening celebrations at the spectacular, new, Jørn Utzon-designed Sydney Opera House (the foyer of which was the Biennale's main venue). Most of the artists were Australian and the selection was insular and conservative, especially considering the number of local exhibitions and artists already working in conceptualist or new, post-object forms and the exhibitions of relatively recent international art that had already been seen in Australia. Instead, a much larger and far more innovative exhibition, *Recent Australian Art 1973*, a Biennale satellite event held simultaneously in the newly upgraded Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney's state art museum, presented those new forms – installation, performance, film, and video – to the Sydney public. Many of the Australian artists working in the new art forms had already established international connections through survey exhibitions or biennials. For instance, minimalist Robert Hunter represented Australia in the 1970 Triennale-India of "Contemporary World Art" in New Delhi, with



austere, stenciled wall drawings. In Delhi, Hunter met Carl Andre, with whom he became good friends and who facilitated Hunter's participation in other international exhibitions including an early exhibition of minimalist and conceptualist art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The Biennale of Sydney had been founded with the mission of engaging two separate groups – on the one hand, local artists, students, and intellectuals; on the other, the general public – with the latest forms of contemporary art. But it was now faced with the contradictions inherent in taking on that self-appointed mission in a relatively small art center. For its founders, the Biennale initially appeared to be Australia's lifeline to the outside art world, just as the Bienal de São Paulo seemed in Brazil, two decades earlier. But even at that time, for many artists, it was simply one forum amongst many. For some – even in 1979 for the local artists who were most likely to be invited into these biennials – Australia, like Brazil and Argentina, possessed a more complex and cosmopolitan art scene than simply that of a collection of small, parochial, provincial cities. These nations' own art scenes had already been enmeshed for a decade or more in the very real 1970s global appearance of contemporary art – or at least conceptualist art – which had from the start flourished beyond New York or London in several far-flung cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Vancouver, Sydney, and Melbourne. But this was not on display in the 1973 Biennale of Sydney. For visiting artists and curators, all of these cities boasted respectable venues for avant-garde art as it touched down by mail delivery or in curators' suitcases. Just as Lucy Lippard in 1969 easily transported to Seattle her major conceptualist survey, *557,087* (titled after the population of Seattle at the time, it included John Baldessari, Eva Hesse, Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Daniel Buren, Walter De Maria, and Adrian Piper), so, also in 1969, conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth had commissioned adventurous Melbourne gallerist and patron, Bruce Pollard, to place advertisements in Melbourne newspapers as part of his work, *The Second Investigation*, 1969, coinciding with similar appearances in London and New York papers.<sup>12</sup> Pollard paid for the advertisements (even though one newspaper, Melbourne's weekly tabloid, the trashy, prurient *Truth*, refused to accept them, on the grounds that they were so mysterious that they might somehow be subversive), enabling Kosuth to create a work by remote control at long distance.<sup>13</sup>

The second Biennale of Sydney, staged in 1976, saw the synthesis of two different models of support. The Biennale received an even greater, and now dominant, portion of its sponsorship through the Australia Council and

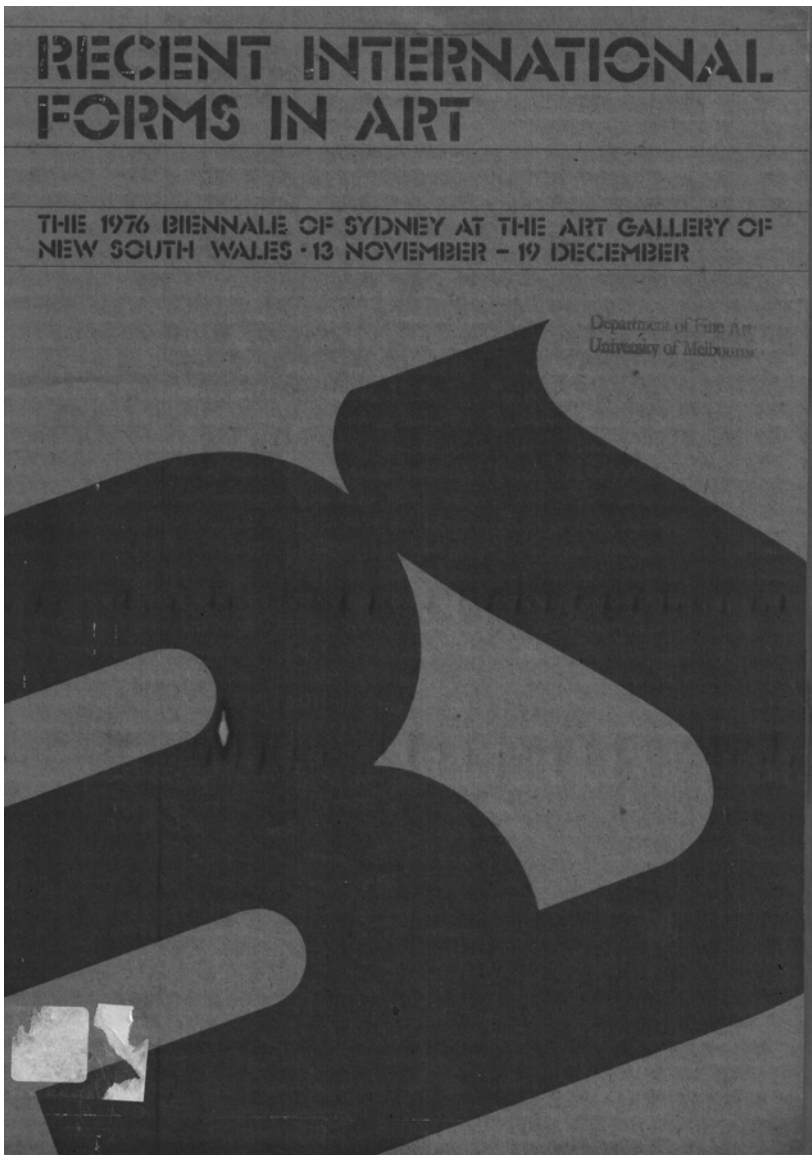


Figure 2.2 Cover of *Recent International Forms in Art: The Second Biennale of Sydney*, exhibition catalogue, curator Thomas G. McCullough (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1976). Courtesy Biennale of Sydney.

less from the continuing but smaller support of private donors of whom Transfield was by far the largest. With the clout provided by its substantial funding, the Australia Council steered the Biennale into a new, mega-exhibition structure. This time, though, instead of participating directly in artist selection as it had in 1973, the Council delegated the task to a director who it knew would seek out new types of art. In effect, this was an early phase in the evolution of a preference for what only partly in jest became known as “biennial art.” The Biennale was to be governed by a powerful, quasi-autonomous board and curated by a director whose position was independent of host venues. It was to be exhibited in the city’s largest and most venerable art museum, the recently refurbished Art Gallery of New South Wales, offering the Biennale temporary access to the museum-quality, climate-controlled spaces and experienced technical staff that a large-scale exhibition with international loans needed. Without doubt, the cosmopolitan, outward-looking members of the Australian federal government agency that channeled money to the visual arts, led by curator Leon Paroissien (who was later to direct the 1984 Biennale of Sydney and then become inaugural director of Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art) wished to set in course a new format: the carefully orchestrated narrative of center/periphery relations and artist choices that would draw supportive international responses and interest in Australia. However, it would also create negative, frustrated Australian criticism.

The Biennale’s organizers had taken careful account of the initiative of one of their close friends, Sydney-based collector and philanthropist John Kaldor’s series of Art Projects. In 1969, Kaldor had commenced a biennial series of invitations to artists to realize a major artistic project in Sydney, beginning with Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia*, 1969. He followed this with an invitation to auteur curator Harald Szeemann, as we noted in chapter 1, to assemble a survey exhibition of contemporary Australian art during his lightning-fast visit in 1971 (this did not result in the inclusion of any Australian artists in *documenta 5*, however), and then to Gilbert & George to present their *Singing Sculpture* in 1973. Veteran curator Daniel Thomas remembered that the grandeur of *Wrapped Coast* shifted contemporary art sympathetically into the minds of Australians and, just as important, suggested to a new generation of local artists that they were not geoculturally isolated. Thomas, then an adventurous young curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, wrote the key, urbane catalogue essay

for the first Sydney Biennale; it was to be his vision of the 1979 Biennale that eventually prevailed over others. *Wrapped Coast's* supporters, who included Belgiorno-Nettis, were also, later, board members of the Biennale of Sydney. Kaldor had demonstrated two things: that there was considerable public interest in contemporary art that moved outside the boundaries of paintings on museum walls; and that the international art world's attention could be focused on a distant event given the right, adventurous programming.

To achieve this double ambition, in 1975 the Sydney Biennale Board poached maverick curator Tom McCullough from his position as director of the Mildura Sculpturescape – a dramatically successful, spectacular triennial survey in a distant, rural township in arid inland Australia on the Murray River – to direct the 1976 Biennale of Sydney.<sup>14</sup> Despite Mildura's huge distance from anywhere – it is nominally located between the three major population centers of Adelaide, Sydney, and Melbourne, but only in the sense that Santa Fe is between New York and Los Angeles – McCullough had established the Mildura Sculpturescape as the key exhibition of advanced art in Australia through an astute combination of insider word-of-mouth, inveterate travel, sheer energy, a close-knit group of artist advisers who talent spotted for him, and a core group of dedicated assistants. His 1976 Biennale of Sydney, titled *Recent International Forms in Art*, was curated according to a capacious theme rather than a national typology and, further, it largely focused its rhetoric, though not in fact any genuine critical focus, on artists from the Pacific Rim (Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Japan, and the Bay Area of the United States). This was dictated as much by the small budget for the inventive curator's travel as by his ambition; biennial artist selection was, and often remains, opportunistic and dictated by the limitations of time and money, even if the results might be sometimes revelatory. McCullough recalled that, "In 1976 I visited only two countries while preparing for the Biennale, as we didn't have much money. I was only allowed two weeks overseas so I decided to focus on a Pacific triangle."<sup>15</sup>

More recent directors of biennials have, by contrast, become famous for their itinerancy, but the cash-strapped McCullough relied on a small group of advisers from each region, including expatriate curator John Stringer, based in New York, and Tommaso Trini from the Italian art magazine, *Data*, to help select the inclusions.<sup>16</sup> Such curatorial delegation was also common in later biennials and large-scale exhibitions (most notably, *Magiciens de la terre* in Paris in 1989). The exhibition catalogue was equally frugal: the

cheapest, one-color printing on the cardboard cover, spiral-bound, brown paper pages, and dull monochrome illustrations. It looked like a down-market instruction manual. The conceptualist look was partly deliberate, not unmodish (it very consciously recalled the bureaucratic appearance of Szeemann's *documenta 5* catalogue) and partly unavoidable, but the austere publication was, as with the absence of curatorial travel, a contrast with the future direction of biennials. For McCullough at the time, the poor publication seemed adequate, looked appropriately austere, and saved a lot of scant money.

### **White Elephant or Red Herring? Selecting the 1979 Biennale of Sydney**

The Third Biennale of Sydney in 1979 preserved the innovations of 1976, in particular the notion of a biennial shaped by a director, and it was in reality the first Sydney Biennale to grab any degree of international attention. At the same time, its audience numbers – almost exclusively local – also grew considerably. Both successes were the result of considerable calculation; the double-guessing was typical of this phase of regional biennials, and followed a series of symposia, meetings, and public consultations that began at the conclusion of the 1976 Biennale and continued over the next year or so, in part as a way of road-testing the way forward, in part as an opportunity to audition the shortlist of prospective directors for 1979, and in part in conformity to the 1970s penchant for consultation and collective processes and consensus, even if (as turned out) this was window-dressing. Englishman Nick Waterlow was one of those who presented a proposal for the next Biennale at a public meeting at Paddington Town Hall, in inner-city Sydney. A candidate for the Biennale directorship, he gave the impression that his Biennale would involve a substantial amount of community consultation and local artist selection: “it is important the coordinator is in a real position to respond to ideas and suggestions and to ensure they are implemented where feasible. Unlike Venice or Sao Paulo [sic], this could then make for a Creative Peoples Biennale.”<sup>17</sup> In effect, Waterlow wanted to create a Biennale that would be a popular exhibition for a regional public as well as the expression of local artists groups’ wishes for a fuller representation of Australians and women artists. It was to be a dialogue with living artists.<sup>18</sup> This intention was potentially far more exclusive and expensive than local art activists realized at that moment.

Waterlow had curated no major exhibitions before his appointment as artistic director of the Third Sydney Biennale. He had been resident in Australia for a period in the 1960s, had moved back to London, where he worked with community arts organizations and their art spaces in Milton Keynes, a postwar project city outside London, before returning to Australia to teach curatorial studies in Paddington at one of Sydney's three major art schools (a position he was to hold until his death in 2009). His directorship of the Biennale was shadowed by an often-intense hostility felt by many local artists towards the Biennale's organization and its directorship. The surprisingly cursory inclusion of Australian artists in McCullough's previous Biennale, given his almost unique rapport with adventurous local artists with whom he had closely consulted whilst at the same time steering his own course through the minefield of artist selection, had resulted in vocal public claims of an international bias against Australian artists. It slowly became evident, as Waterlow's selections and Biennale press releases gradually became public, that the under-representation of women had continued. As Biennale director, Waterlow was soon negotiating a maze of meetings and angry letters. Two groups of well-organized, vocal Sydney and Melbourne artists and critics threatened an artist boycott if demands for a 50 percent representation of women, and a substantial representation of local artists and community arts, were not met.<sup>19</sup> The artist groups convened public meetings, lobbied funding bodies, and frenetically agitated amongst and often against their interstate peers, publishing an illustrated, book-length manifesto against the biennial, *Sydney Biennale: White Elephant or Red Herring. Comments from the Art Community 1979*.<sup>20</sup> This strongly resembled earlier Art & Language publications, which was no surprise since a key member of the New York chapter of Art & Language, Ian Burn, had returned to Australia a few years before and created a publishing collective with other artist-activists including Ian Milliss. Burn and Milliss contributed an essay, "Don't Moan, Organize! (with apologies to Joe Hill)," writing, "Because artists are powerless, structures like that of the Biennale, which assume to define the situation in which we all work, can be imposed on us."<sup>21</sup> They wrote to Waterlow, "We cannot stress too strongly our concern that while a major international exhibition is to be held in Sydney, Australian artists are to appear in an ancillary, complementary way to an exhibition that should be highlighting and not downgrading their talents."<sup>22</sup> The activist groups felt that the significant amount of public money spent – by Australian standards at the time the Biennale was a lavish event – underscored the lack of an Australian version of a Whitney Biennial,

a national survey of artists. The Biennale Board disingenuously agreed. In a prompt reply to the Melbourne artist group, board chairman, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, urged the group to lobby for an Australian biennial that, he suggested, might be held in Australia's other large city and artistic hub, Melbourne, in alternate years to the Sydney Biennale.<sup>23</sup>

In the end, after discussions, remonstrations, and reassurance, of the sixty-two individual artists that the activists counted in the 1979 Sydney Biennale, there were only nineteen Australians. Of the nineteen Australians, only five were women. There were only five women amongst the international artists. In all, as the Sydney activists angrily noted, there were only ten women included in the list of sixty-two artists received from the Biennale Board. The focus was now firmly on ephemeral and easily transported or assembled new art forms: on performances and installations rather than paintings. Significantly, the Australian representation included artists from regional and rural locations including, for the first time in a major survey exhibition of contemporary art, paintings by Aboriginal artists from north-east Arnhem Land in Australia's distant "Top End." *European Dialogue* was thus, despite its myriad problems, a watershed exhibition not only for its series of hitherto-unexpected meetings, but for its inclusion of Aboriginal artists' paintings as *contemporary* rather than so-called "primitive" or "traditional" art (the first time this happened in a major international exhibition like a biennial).

The Biennale's vain struggle to mediate between local and international spheres was almost invisible to the audiences who arrived at the exhibition itself. They saw a continuum of new art forms, local and international: Marina Abramović and Ulay's collaborative action, *The Brink* (1979), appeared in the company of Mike Parr's installation that incorporated performance documentation and photographs involving his whole extended family.<sup>24</sup> Parr's own, widely read commentary on the exhibition, "Parallel Fictions," appeared in the country's leading art magazine, *Art and Australia*. He focused on the emergence of a new, global language of post-studio contemporary art rather than on the statistics of artists' inclusions and exclusions. The exhibition catalogue that accompanied the 1979 Biennale was not nearly as spartan as that of 1976, since biennial curators and artists alike were coming to feel that biennials deserved commemorating and that artists deserved better representation. Just as important were the other two publications launched alongside the Biennale, documenting and debating its lifespan, from the initial competition to curate the exhibition through to reflections on the Biennale after its closure.<sup>25</sup> These

documents included installation shots, all of the exhibition's press clippings, audience commentaries (both critical and supportive), as well as transcripts of the numerous town hall meetings held between incoming Biennale director Nick Waterlow and Sydney audiences in the year before the Biennale opened – meetings which were intended to provide open engagement with, and commentary from, local artists about the Biennale's focus, context, and direction, but which often resulted in a hostile reception from an art scene that felt excluded from the Biennale's pro-European agenda.

Waterlow pointedly titled his biennial *European Dialogue*, including almost no American artists and focusing on Europe. He was introducing Australians to a messier, more political, definitively post-1960s Europe, rather than the neat Parisian modernism and *tachiste* abstraction of post-war French painting, a large exhibition of which had toured Australia in 1953. In effect, *European Dialogue* recycled Harald Szeemann's curatorial rhetoric of "individual mythologies" from the 1972 *documenta 5*. But both this new biennial and the large survey shows now appearing in Europe, such as the 1980 Venice Biennale, the 1981 London Royal Academy survey, *A New Spirit in Painting*, and the 1982 Berlin mega-exhibition, *Zeitgeist*, all excluded the outsider artists and the atlases of objects culled from mass culture that the maverick Swiss curator had included in *documenta 5*. *European Dialogue* was no different. Szeemann's capacious, catch-all, curatorial label, "individual mythologies," was now beginning to be repackaged by biennial curators, especially in Europe, as a new direction in painting – as hyper-expressive, allegorical paintings that were about to be labeled neo-expressionist or transavantgarde. This label occluded the degree to which the new painting had grown out of the second generation of conceptualist art, just beginning to appear in Szeemann's *documenta 5* and much of which was now shown in Sydney in 1979. But there was relatively little of the so-called new painting in the 1979 Biennale apart from the scrawled symbols of German artist A.R. Penck: instead, much diaristic, semi-fictional, and narrative photo-documentation was on view, alongside other works such as the Australian Aboriginal paintings. Waterlow did include, though, several of the European transavantgarde's putative grandfather figures, including School of London survivor Howard Hodgkin, and German painter Gerhard Richter, active since the mid-1950s and already claimed by many art movements as a precursor.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of a "European Dialogue" reflected more than the conceit of a surfeit of American art. In his catalogue essay, Waterlow was reflecting the widespread doubt that New York remained the center of the international



contemporary art world, for this was the deepest period of the Cold War, a phase in which American economic and political power seemed both ascendant yet in decline. Jimmy Carter's presidency and the Iranian Revolution were the backdrop to the 1979 Biennale. A few months later, the Iran Hostage Crisis unfolded. This was a period of pervasive anti-Americanism in the largely left-leaning worlds of both European and Australian contemporary art. Waterlow referred in his catalogue essay and in later recollections to the sequence of American exhibitions that had arrived in Sydney, Melbourne, and other cities around the world and to his sense that a shift had occurred, one that Australia should take account of.<sup>27</sup> Exhibitions of recent American painting had, by now, toured Australia in 1958, 1964 and, most memorably, in 1967, courtesy of the Circulating Exhibitions Program of the quasi-autonomous International Council of the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibitions included *Two Decades of American Painting* (1967), *Some Recent American Art* (1974), and *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* (1975). *Some Recent American Art* focused on American minimalist and conceptualist sculptures and installations. Despite the relative contemporaneity of the latter exhibition, it was time, felt Waterlow, to shift attention away from America. He wrote, "The most persuasive argument in favor of a European Dialogue is that it does at this time represent a genuine shift in creative emphasis. It is now accepted that remarkable work is likely to arise in Cracow [sic], Turin, Düsseldorf, Vienna, Paris, London or Amsterdam as in New York."<sup>28</sup> He was, in effect, attempting to revise art history much as many of his Sydney and Melbourne critics would have liked, though his version was stripped of their Marxism and, more surprisingly, his own egalitarian, community arts, non-curatorial background. He was reflecting the surprisingly generous take-up of conceptualist art forms in Europe. After all, many American artists were finding more interest and recognition in their work in Europe than in the United States. After a couple of decades of intense American influence upon Australian art, Waterlow wished to revalue the direct links between Europe and Australia.<sup>29</sup>

This was evident in the show's installation rather than in its catalogue, for its essays were very cursory: no longer than three pages in length (though this brevity also, in part, replicated Szeemann's short text introducing the *documenta 5* catalogue). Waterlow's own, well-intentioned but very hasty one-page essay was no exception, and his claims about the overweening shadow of American art were not completely true, nor did a turn from the United States to Europe exactly capture the wave of the future or correctly encapsulate the recent past. An important solo exhibition of art by

Marcel Duchamp, the grandfather of conceptualism, had toured Australia's art museums in 1967–1968; this had been initiated in New Zealand. Australian expatriate conceptual artists such as Ian Burn had long argued that a wider and more inclusive perspective should inflect the understanding of influence. And for the 1988 Biennale of Sydney – actually titled the Australian Biennale, to celebrate the bicentenary of Australia's settlement/invasion by the British – that Nick Waterlow curated a mere decade later, Burn (who had been one of the ringleaders of the agitation against Waterlow in the lead-up to the 1979 Biennale) contributed a new major essay on internationalism as determined from “peripheral” perspectives. Here Burn set out a different and highly significant geocultural theory – different both to the Museum of Modern Art's and Harald Szeemann's atlases of international art – for imagining Australian art's participation in a global history of art, and thus that of any art center of the South, whether that be Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, or Brazil.<sup>30</sup>

The 1979 Biennale, in effect, began the process of self-consciously garnering to itself the role of international gatekeeper, a process initiated by its important predecessor of 1976. This intention – as much as showing local audiences a smaller simulacrum of the Venice Biennale or documenta – was to underpin many regional biennials from this time on. The Sydney Biennale's board was self-consciously setting its biennial and its curator up as the meet-and-greet mediator between the international and national art worlds, as the point where the very different and separate international and national art worlds intersected. This was significant. The aim was to actually intervene in both international and Australian art: to represent each to the other; and to push to be part of a nascent network of globalized artist movements in which international artists would create new work in a “peripheral” location (the concept that John Kaldor's Art Projects had fostered) and to create the networks that would allow Australian artists to participate in European biennials as something other than national exemplars. By 1979, the Sydney Biennale sought a more ambitious transcultural exchange than simply a curatorial selection of artists from around the world (familiar from the Venice model). Drawing together artists from across the globe (rather than from a particular idea of the central metropolis) was meant to spark new artistic dialogues between practitioners from hitherto disparate or even isolated contexts, rather than just to represent what was happening elsewhere to local audiences. Waterlow emphasized this in his short curatorial statement and, later, in retrospective interviews. He wrote, “It is to be hoped various artists and exhibitions exchange programmes [sic], as



Figure 2.3 Biennale of Sydney staff photographer, Meeting between David Malangi and Pierre Restany in Sydney, 1979, during *European Dialogue: The Third Biennale of Sydney*, 1979. Courtesy Biennale of Sydney.

well as other avenues of interaction, will become more complex, as indeed they should,” and concluded his essay by reemphasizing the idea of artists’ “intercontinental dialogue.”<sup>31</sup> It is in this context that we can approach one of the starkest and most complex images from *European Dialogue* which is not of art works or their installation in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It is instead an informal meeting between two respected elders of art, the cosmopolitan French critic Pierre Restany and the Aboriginal artist and activist David Malangi, engaged in a conversation that would most likely not have been possible without the opportunities offered by the Biennale and which were not at that time possible in most other parts of the world, whether that be New York or São Paulo, as we will see.

Waterlow invited many artists to Australia – including Jürgen Klauke, Klaus Rinke, Anne and Patrick Poirier, and Marina Abramović/Ulay – hoping they would make new works for the occasion. The Biennale flew the artists into Sydney, connected them with local hosts – with curators, artists, or writers – and to local institutions such as art schools and their eager

students. Abramović and Ulay, for instance, made a tantalizing but frustrating tour to the Outback as well as to Melbourne, returning for a much longer stay in 1981 with an Outback visit that changed the course of their art. The meditative work that resulted, *Nightsea Crossing: Gold Found by the Artists* (1981), featured the pair sitting opposite each other for eight hours each day at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, staring at each other. Two years later, in 1983, in a later iteration of *Nightsea Crossing* (subtitled *Conjunction*), at Amsterdam's Sonesta Koepelzaal, the artists sat for seven hours over four days with two friends: one a Tibetan lama, Ngawang Soepa Lueyar; the other a Pintupi elder and artist, Charlie Tararu Tjungurrayi, with whom Abramović and Ulay had become very close during their second visit to the Australian desert and who flew willingly to Amsterdam for the performance.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond the aspiration that artists would make important works in Australia, the Biennale's international visitor program predicated a substantial dialogue with local artists, students, and curators that extended beyond Sydney. With Biennale-supplied air tickets that routinely specified one Australian destination in addition to Sydney, artists often made at least one extra stop in another Australian city, speaking in local studio art schools or universities. Later Sydney Biennales continued to prioritize flying the participating international artists to art schools and universities beyond Sydney. Other visiting artists took time out to sun themselves on white, sandy beaches, at least until the arrival of more harassed schedules during the 1990s, from which point it became normal for artists to fly in, install their works, and quickly fly out for the install at the next biennial. But at this point, and amidst the financial uncertainty that afflicted the Sydney Biennale during the mid-1990s, such highly organized expectations of substantial artist dialogue petered out and visits to other art centers – if they occurred, which were less and less – were not organized or funded by the Biennale.

### **Import/Export: Sydney and São Paulo**

The situation in Sydney by the late 1970s bears substantial contrasts and surprising parallels with other city-hosts of biennials in the Southern Hemisphere, perhaps most notably São Paulo. This was not least because both of these second-wave biennials were founded by recent and ambitious Italian migrants, yearning for ongoing international connection and the prospects



Figure 2.4 Installation view of the famous Cicillo Matarazzo Pavilion (designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer and his team) in the Parque do Ibirapuera, São Paulo, during the 2014 Bienal de São Paulo. Photo Anthony Gardner. Courtesy Bienal de São Paulo.

of importing the Venice Biennale model to the entrepreneurs' new homes. Yet the São Paulo Bienal's powerful founder, Francisco "Cicillo" Matarazzo Sobrinho, died in 1977. The Bienal's 15th edition, the XV Bienal de São Paulo (1979), which opened a few months after *The Third Biennale of Sydney: European Dialogue*, was the first after his death. At the Bienal's inaugural ceremonies, São Paulo state governor Paulo Maluf gave a speech that paid heartfelt and effusive homage to the recently deceased and much celebrated industrialist.<sup>33</sup>

The XV Bienal was the last of the so-called "invisible" Bienals, for it occurred at the end of more than a decade of isolation caused by international revulsion at the brutal military dictatorships of Artur da Costa e Silva (1967–1969) and Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–1974), which censored, arbitrarily arrested, and tortured their citizens.<sup>34</sup> During this period, with international boycotts and protests that commenced with its 1969 edition, Sobrinho's Bienal had itself become identified with the repressive state, which had insisted on a censor's approval of all works in the 1967 Bienal. The autocratic Sobrinho did not welcome curatorial advice, nor changes in the Bienal's exhibition methods and displays, nor questions about his links with the state.

The 10th Bienal de São Paulo of 1969 had been the occasion for a boycott by Brazilian artists and writers that then expanded to United States and European artists, with French critic Pierre Restany (a frequent visitor to many of the new biennials in the 1960s and 1970s, including that in Sydney) publicizing on behalf of the agitation. But the boycott had started at another Brazilian Bienal, the 2nd Bienal da Bahia, of December 1968, where the organizers unilaterally removed works of art from the exhibition and burned at least one. Censorship had now become standard government practice: an exhibition of Brazilian artists selected for the Biennale de Paris, which was to be held at Rio's Museum of Modern Art, was closed down. Renowned critic Aracy Amaral recounts the growing protests and boycotts by artists that, nevertheless, remained more or less invisible to the general public in Brazil.<sup>35</sup> In quick succession, she writes, 321 artists and intellectuals signed a petition, "Non à la Biennale," at a famous public protest at the Musée d'art moderne in Paris. Brazilian artists living abroad, including Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, refused to participate in the Bienal. Despite government pressure, the majority of Brazilian artists withdrew. In response, Ciccillo Matarazzo Sobrinho convened a meeting to work out what could be done in response, but the event was crippled.<sup>36</sup> By 1971, as Isobel Whitelegg has written, "the boycott had successfully appropriated the exhibition's international prestige, or, rather, participating in the Bienal, co-sponsored by Brazil's right-wing military régime, had come to be seen as a dubious ambition for any politically engaged artists."<sup>37</sup> As a result, the Bienals of the 1970s received little international press and an increasing number of nations withdrew their representation in the face of the régime's threats to imprison protestors and critics. The reputation of the Bienal only recovered during the early 1980s, once there was real political change.

But the year of Sobrinho's death was also the beginning of change, for in that 1977 edition the Bienal began for the first time to be (tentatively) ordered with a theme, even though it retained the familiar organization by geography as well, with a committee of organizers responsible for coordinating the artists selected by participating nations, rather than an artistic director or chief curator in charge of the selection. Over the following two years, President Ernesto Beckmann Geisel began to relax the régime's heavy-handed censorship laws. Geisel left office in December 1979, which was also the month that the XV Bienal closed. Even so, the 1979 edition was, in effect, an interim Bienal, suspended between two very different cultural moments and two very different stages of curatorial development. It

showcased works presented at previous Bienals. The attendance was slight. Critic Walmir Ayala wrote that the “Bienal appears with a bobbled administration and a visible crisis.”<sup>38</sup> The need for change, and disgust with the régime’s crude, self-interested nationalism, was as clear as it was obvious that the Bienal had lost any vanguard mission it had once aspired to, and was merely well-behaved. Several of the international visiting artists, who were beginning to return, entered that fray. During the XV Bienal, Joseph Beuys gave a speech, tellingly titled “Re-Public: Appeal for a Global Alternative.” And, as Erin Denise Aldana and others have recounted, an association of artist and theater collectives, including 3Nós3, Viajou Sem Passaporte, Taller de Investigaciones Teatrales (Theatrical Investigations Workshop), and Gextu, created “pre-events” to clash with the official events of the Bienal.<sup>39</sup> On October 3, 1979, one group gate-crashed the opening ceremonies of the XV Bienal. An artist led a blindfolded band of artist-performers through the Bienal at the end of a long rope that tied them all together. As the group shuffled past the works of art, which included a retrospective of older works that had been acquired from the prizewinners of previous Bienals, they sarcastically remarked, “How marvellous!” and “Brilliant!” As Aldana and Whitelegg separately explain, it is important to understand that these pre-events and the *Evento Fim de Década*, which occurred at the end of the Bienal, were part of a considerable Brazilian artistic narrative of political interventions and actions throughout the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>40</sup>

According to Claire Bishop, these late-1970s collectives – emerging in Brazil and other parts of South America, such as Argentina – presaged later forms of social participation and public intervention that were to be bracketed under Nicolas Bourriaud’s notion of relational aesthetics, and they predated much similar activity in Europe and North America.<sup>41</sup> The key point for us to note, though, is that Brazil, like Australia and Argentina, was not in fact ever dependant on any single biennial for cosmopolitan contacts with other artists. Artistic action was dispersed across several locations – including dealer spaces – rather than situated singularly in a Bienal, or a Biennale of Sydney. Thus Whitelegg describes the diminished status of the São Paulo Bienal during the 1970s, which could be attributed not just to boycotts and censorship. The Bienal was becoming, as in Sydney, merely “one exhibition amongst others ... It had local competition.”<sup>42</sup> The competitors included annual exhibitions like the *Salão de Arte Contemporânea* (1966–1975) at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea Campinas and *Jovem Arte Contemporânea* (1963–1974) at the University of São Paulo Museum of

Contemporary Art (MAC-USP), which had been founded by Walter Zanini in 1963. His exhibitions there were far more experimental in nature than the Bienals. MAC-USP's location, right next to the Niemeyer-designed Bialal pavilion in the Parque do Ibirapuera, could not but highlight the Bialal's waning significance.<sup>43</sup>

The following 16th Bialal de São Paulo, in 1981, directed by Zanini, marked a definitive break with the past and was therefore, perhaps not unsurprisingly, highly acclaimed. Zanini removed the nationality-based structure of the Bialal's main exhibition altogether, replacing it with themed sections and an open-invitation exhibition of mail art. Zanini's Bialal, like his exhibitions at MAC-USP, involved the same new art forms – mail art, videos, artists' books, installations, and actions – that Nick Waterlow had emphasized in the 1979 Biennale of Sydney. Along with those new forms went artists' mobility and many works' relative portability, all of which, both in Sydney and São Paulo, conjured a world-picture of global interconnectivity, rather than the biennial lifeline to the outside world that both São Paulo's and Sydney's founders had imagined.

Inherent in the aspiration to international dialogue was the presumption that biennials have an affective, transformational power, not just for the careers of the invited artists, but also in the imagining, in the world picture, of what is both global art and national art. The 1979 Biennale of Sydney and the 1981 Bialal de São Paulo, like almost all important biennials from the mid-1970s onwards, sought to intervene in as well as to reflect on this national–global dialectic. The key to the success of a gatekeeper event would increasingly be the invited, auteur curator who owed little or nothing to the local host art museum or *Kunsthalle*, and who in fact was probably a complete outsider to local art museums but who would have access to international networks of artists, or who would know precisely who to ask for that advice. In other words, Tom McCullough in 1976 and now Nick Waterlow in 1979 and Walter Zanini in 1981 had thoroughly internalized the auteur curator model of Harald Szeemann, even if they were hindered by a lack of comparable resources. All three, however, had created their reputations outside the mainstream public art museums of their respective cities. All had successfully adapted Szeemann's improvisatory but highly centralized *documenta 5* method, with a dedicated group of talent scouts and committed advisers rather than a team of professionals backed by proper resources. McCullough had recalled, "I had virtually no staff. It was Tom McCullough, full stop, for most of 1976 and one really had to get on with the professional staff of the gallery."<sup>44</sup>



Waterlow was forced to accept the same approach as McCullough to short-staffing and scant resources but, like McCullough, he was able to rely on the spaces – the white cubes – and the highly professional installation and security staff of a major art museum, the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This was crucial, if in the future sometimes very reluctantly offered. For the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Biennale meant ceding control of its exhibition spaces during a peak period of the calendar to an external curator working beyond the museum's control. São Paulo's Bienal, by contrast, was almost from its outset housed in an expansive, late modernist Oscar Niemeyer-designed building adequate to its great ambitions and marked by vast sight-lines. The Biennale of Sydney's venues were, quite simply, less suitable for the often outsized, unconventional works that artists were increasingly planning and which biennial directors around the world wished to include. In this regard, São Paulo was clearly ahead of the game, anticipating the need for flexible space and other resources as art shifted from modernist traditions to the post-object flux of the contemporary.

The Biennale of Sydney's problems arose from its origins. Its chronic disorganization, sometimes erratic timing (in the 1970s, the Biennale was more often a triennial), lack of money, and a consistent record of secrecy and rationing of information to the public were the unintended results of a tiny, idealistic, semi-private operation operating in an ambiguous zone between public and private. Apart from Transfield Corporation's continuing sponsorship, the Biennale of Sydney was hindered by inadequate philanthropic and government funding as well as a precarious hold on its exhibition spaces. The former was alleviated by a dramatic increase in Federal Government funding in time for the 2006 Biennale; the latter was ameliorated by the Biennale's consolidation in the harbor-side Museum of Contemporary Art and the colonization from 2008 onwards of a spectacular and immensely popular new site, a derelict shipyard on Cockatoo Island in the middle of Sydney Harbor itself. Freight costs also perpetually restricted the movement of large exhibitions into the Southern Hemisphere. For years, participating countries contributed a large part of the Biennale's operating costs by underwriting individual artists, usually without the control that national pavilions would have given them. 1982 Sydney Biennale director William Wright observed that Sydney's problem had always been that, "apart from more enlightened and courageous art critics in the public media, it needs money," remembering that foreign government arts agencies' support often amounted to up to 60 percent of the Biennale's budget. He guessed that Sydney survived on between 5–10 percent of the operating budget of the

Venice Biennale.<sup>45</sup> So, an exhibition of international impact and representation was put together on a very small budget, though that budget, as we have seen, seemed large and even recklessly spent to many local artists.

Waterlow went on to be sole artistic director of the Sydney Biennale two more times, in 1986 and 1988, as a co-director in 2000, and to serve on the Biennale's powerful board for decades. He was murdered in tragic circumstances in 2009. From the early 1990s on, the Biennale of Sydney was to move into a confusing and more contradictory place in both Australian and international art as an under-funded but spectacular event focused on the North Atlantic with a smattering of Australian artists, whereas the first Biennales of Sydney, two decades before, had aspired to a more generous Asian focus than their successors. The 1992 Biennale of Sydney – *The Boundary Rider*, directed by Anthony Bond, a chief curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales – was the last Biennale of Sydney of any artistic significance to North Atlantic audiences until the substantial injection of government money that we noted before enabled more generous and serious exhibitions. Curator Charles Merewether's 2006 Biennale of Sydney, *Zones of Contact*, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's 2008 Biennale, *Revolutions: Forms That Turn*, were once again major biennials shaped by well-connected directors who could leverage important loans from European and North American collectors and the artists' galleries in order to mirror a world picture based decisively on the emerging contemporaneity that had come to define contemporary art.

## Conclusion

By 1979, the Sydney Biennale had become Australia's principal (but far from only) mediator with the global – or more accurately the “global” art world of Europe and North America. There were no more extraordinary exhibitions from the Museum of Modern Art's International Council, nor would they have been received as such. But there was a certain lack of reciprocity in this development. The global did not actually need to come to Australia, even if the compensation was a trip to a balmy, subtropical, Southern Hemisphere city by the water, to a site as visually spectacular as Rio or the Biennale's original referent, Venice. Conspiratorial though it sounds, the Euro-American center just did not need to conduct a dialogue with the provincial even after the former's initially grudging but by 1979 increasingly avid admission of the international and the global. A biennial would never be an agent of change itself, for no clear consensus about political or community art in a

period of change and upheaval such as 1979 was possible anyway, if biennials were dependent upon peak art museums such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which for better or worse were the bastions of entrenched local privilege as well as professionalism, or dependent upon local elites bound to government, as had been the Bienal de São Paulo. Art museums in relatively small art worlds were, it seemed to radical critics, bound to infantilize their audiences, shoe-horning them into one of two categories: either the capacious strait-jackets of the few, cosseted insiders at exclusive, invitation-only events in which global visitors encountered their peers; or else into the constricting, conservative demands of the imaginary common man or woman posited by populist and provincial newspaper reviewers, who obdurately refused the world picture of contemporaneity.

But artists in Sydney and São Paulo, at least aspired to escape this double bind through the developing image of a globalized artistic contemporaneity – manifest in the emergent concept of dialogue, in Waterlow's hope that invited artists would realize new works on the ground in Sydney in cooperation with locals. The third Bienal de La Habana, of 1989, is widely taken within the critical and rapidly-emerging area of exhibition histories to have inaugurated a new mode of exhibition-making in which the concept of artist dialogue was paramount.<sup>46</sup> We suggest that the Third Biennale of Sydney, in 1979, which pre-dated the Third Bienal de La Habana by a decade, deserves similar acknowledgment for its understanding that two of the images of contemporaneity which a biennial would henceforth embody – and which would become key tropes of global contemporary art – would be dialogue and collaboration in place of the image of a combative vanguard. Artist collaborations inevitably foreground the overarching field of world memory, and post-studio, cross-cultural artist collaborations have become a special – and symptomatic – case of this in the field of contemporary art. Regional dialogue is the third term that can mediate between the global/international and the provincial/local, although differentials of power and tension still saturated those dialogues, as we have traced in Sydney but also in São Paulo.

At a time when many artists were working in a cultural geography of destabilized but still crushingly hegemonic center/periphery relationships, the two main biennials of 1979 – in Sydney and São Paulo – offered a disruptive, contested, confusing, sometimes inspirational, and apparently contradictory place for local artists. For parochial art scenes, these exhibitions brought welcome news in the form of recent, major works by international artists. But the number of local artists was a small percentage of the

exhibitors and the visitors were often carefully chaperoned or had set themselves over-optimistically tight schedules, oblivious to the long flight times from Europe or New York. The issue of artists and audiences for biennials in the South went further than artists' concerns about exclusion and lack of representation to the deeper question of whether something other than a token link between local and international art was possible. Local artist organizations and activist collectives had wondered in 1979, in both Sydney and São Paulo, if the picture of a globally focused biennial that avoided real change was worthwhile. If the Sydney Biennale continued to occupy its particular import/export niche, importing North Atlantic art and attempting to host a dialogue with that military-industrial complex, they had argued, such a small, under-funded Sydney Biennale was not going to do anything else other than passively conduct international fame, style, and art-world glamour. The Sydney Biennale's problems in 1979 were to be replicated in numerous other biennials and international group shows in subsequent decades (most infamously, the short-lived Johannesburg Biennale during the mid-1990s), because the struggles and uncertainties of international exhibitions in the 1970s were surprisingly little different from those apparent in the 1990s. The difficulties that the curators of biennials had in negotiating local relevance and international prestige hinged on the question of who, in truth, was a provincial biennial's real audience. The global and regional art economies, both of which each biennial of the South must cater to, have often proved to be intractably and mutually exclusive.

## Notes

1. At this point it is worth noting the fragmentary nature of the archives that preserve exhibition histories. For this chapter, we are fortunate: the Art Gallery of New South Wales and its extraordinarily resourceful image library archivist, Eric Riddler, provided us with access to the museum's newly digitized image files that recorded sections of the Biennale of Sydney at the AGNSW from 1976 onwards; it's also worth noting that we mention websites throughout this book to signpost art history's newly accessible digital archive as opposed to its fragile existence as transcripts or pamphlets in archives.
2. Here, we refer once again to the idea that biennials have a subversive potential; this proposition has been put forward by several writers including, as we noted in the Introduction, by Carlos Basualdo; see his "The Unstable Institution," *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 2003-2004), pp. 50-61.

3. The most notable and provocative exception is Okwui Enwezor's essay "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *Documents*, no. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 2–19. Another important example can be found in Nikos Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin, "Art Biennales and Cities as Platforms for Global Dialogue," in Liana Giorgi, Monica Sassatelli, and Gerard Delanty (eds.), *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 45–62.
4. Another key figure in this emergence of the "auteur curator" model is Yusuke Nakahara, one of Japan's most influential critics during the 1960s and curator of the renowned Tokyo Biennial of 1970, called "Between Man and Matter." See Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, "South as Method? Biennials Past and Present," in Galit Eilat, Nuria Enguita Mayo, Charles Esche, Pablo Lafuente, Luiza Proença, Oren Sagiv, and Benjamin Seroussi (eds.), *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2* (Amsterdam: Biennial Foundation, 2015), pp. 32–33.
5. Though it is beyond our ambit in this chapter, it is important to note that this is precisely the trajectory that underpins the current fascination with "contemporaneity" in recent art history and criticism. Terry Smith's significant work on "contemporaneity" cannot, ultimately, be separated from his writings in the 1970s on provincialism that transformed art discourse in Australasia and elsewhere. The continuum from provincialism to contemporaneity is an art historiography that still awaits its proper articulation. See, among many other influential texts, Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 1 (September 1974), pp. 54–59; and Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
6. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004).
7. See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War" (*Artforum*, May 1973) reprinted in his *Cultivated Impasses: Writings on Modern Art* (New York: Marsilio, 2000), pp. 220–249; this was a revised version of the introduction to the following exhibition catalogue: James T. Demetrian (ed. and curator), *Twenty-Five Years of American Painting 1948–1973* (Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center, 1973); Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, vol. 15, no. 10 (June 1974), pp. 39–41; Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
8. See Charles Green and Heather Barker, "The Watershed: *Two Decades of American Painting* at the National Gallery of Victoria," *Art Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria*, no. 50 (May 2011), pp. 64–77 and 4 pp. notes.
9. For Asian art and biennials, see John Clark, forthcoming, *Biennales and Contemporary Asian Art: Histories of the Asian "New,"* courtesy of the author; see

- also John Clark, "Biennales as Structures for the Writing of Art History: The Asian Perspective," in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 164–183.
10. Caroline Jones provides a strong account of the foundation of the São Paulo Bienal in her essay "Anthropophagy in São Paulo's Cold War," *ARTMargins*, vol. 2, no. 1 (February 2013), pp. 3–36.
  11. Franco Belgiorno-Nettis (2002), "Inaugural Biennale of Sydney (1973)," interview with Paula Latos-Valier. <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1973-2/>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
  12. Lucy Lippard, Connie Butler, Peter Plagens, and Griselda Pollock, *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (London: Afterall Books, 2012).
  13. See chapter 1 of Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Artist Collaborations from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
  14. For a detailed and illuminating account of the second Biennale of Sydney see Anne Sanders, "The Mildura Sculpture Triennials 1961–1978: An Interpretive History," PhD dissertation, Canberra, Australian National University, 2010.
  15. Tom McCullough (2002), "2nd Biennale of Sydney (1976)," interview with Paula Latos-Valier. <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1976-2/>. Accessed October 10, 2015. Also see Thomas G McCullough (ed.), *Second Biennale of Sydney: Recent International Forms in Art*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1976).
  16. Conversation with John Stringer, Perth, March 2004. Authors' notes.
  17. Nick Waterlow, presentation at Paddington Town Hall, Sydney, July 21, 1977, quoted in Vivienne Binns, Ian Burn, Tim Burns, Nigel Lendon, Ian Milliss, and Terry Reid, *Sydney Biennale: White Elephant or Red Herring? Comments from the Art Community* (Sydney: Everywoman Press and Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, 1979), p. 2; this essay is reprinted in *Ian Milliss Retrospective Documents* (Sydney: Ian Milliss, 2010); see <http://www.ianmilliss.com/documents/historyherstory.htm>. Accessed April 14, 2010.
  18. Conversation with Nick Waterlow, Sydney, May 2000. Authors' notes.
  19. Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*, p. 7.
  20. Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*, p. 7.
  21. Ian Burn and Ian Milliss, "Don't Moan, Organise! (with apologies to Joe Hill)," in Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*, p. 10.
  22. Janine Burke, John Davis, Lesley Dumbrell, Robert Jacks, Peter Kennedy, Robert Lindsay, John Nixon, and Jenny Watson, letter to Nick Waterlow, September 11,

- 1977, quoted in Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*, p. 6; this letter was from the group of Melbourne-based activist artists and writers.
23. Franco Belgiorno-Nettis letter to Janine Burke, John Davis, Lesley Dumbrell, Robert Jacks, Peter Kennedy, Robert Lindsay, John Nixon, and Jenny Watson, September 26, 1977, quoted in Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*, p. 6.
  24. For a contemporary review of Abramović/Ulay's Sydney performance see Mike Parr, "Parallel Fictions: The Third Biennale of Sydney, 1979," *Art and Australia*, vol. 17, no. 2 (December 1979), pp. 172–183, esp. p. 183; see also Jennifer Phipps, "Marina Abramovic/Ulay/Ulay/Marina Abramovic," *Art & Text*, no. 3 (Spring 1981), pp. 43–50. The pair were already shifting the focus of their work from violent actions to passive immobility, though both types of art-making involved obliviousness of the audience.
  25. The three publications are Nick Waterlow (ed. and curator), *European Dialogue: The Third Biennale of Sydney 1979* (Biennale of Sydney: Sydney, 1979); this was held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from April 12 to May 27, 1979; *European Dialogue: The Third Biennale of Sydney. A Commentary* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1979); and Vivienne Binns et al., *Sydney Biennale*.
  26. Nick Waterlow (2002), "3rd Biennale of Sydney," interview with Paula Latos-Valier. <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1979-2/>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
  27. Conversation with Nick Waterlow, Sydney, May 2000. Authors' notes.
  28. Waterlow, "European Dialogue," in Waterlow, *European Dialogue*, not paginated, 1 page.
  29. Conversation with Nick Waterlow, Sydney, May 2000. Authors' notes.
  30. Ian Burn, "The Re-Appropriation of Influence," in Nick Waterlow (ed. and curator), *Australian Biennale 1988. From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c.1940–1988*, exh. cat. (Sydney, Biennale of Sydney, 1988), pp. 41–48.
  31. Waterlow, "European Dialogue," in Waterlow, *European Dialogue*, not paginated, 1 page.
  32. The work had been commissioned by the Museum Foder (a branch of the Stedelijk Museum); for a detailed description of this and a critical analysis of the ethics of cross-cultural collaboration within contemporary art, see Charles Green, "Group Soul: Who Owns the Artist Fusion?," *Third Text*, vol. 18, no. 71 (November 2004), pp. 595–608.
  33. For the opening ceremonies in 1979, see: "15a Bienal já está aberta ao public; Maluf impressionado com evolução da arte," *Diário Popular*, October 4, 1979, p. 3; "Maluf inaugura Bienal e lembra Ciccilo," *Folha de São Paulo*, October 4, 1979, p. 37; "Maluf inaugura XV Bienal Internacional em S. Paulo," *O Globo*, October 4, 1979, p. 11. Overall, see Agnaldo Farias (ed.), *Bienal de São*

- Paulo, 50 anos: 1951–2001: homenagem a Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Fundação* (São Paulo: Bienal São Paulo, 2001).
34. An excellent account of this history can be found in Vinicius Spricigo, *Modes of Representation of the São Paulo Biennial: The Passage from Artistic Internationalism to Cultural Globalisation* (São Paulo: Editora Hedra, 2011).
  35. Aracy Amaral, “E a sala do Brazil?” (“The boycott of the 10th Bienal: Scope and meaning”), *Brazil-Urgente*, April 7, 1963, reprinted in Paulo Venancio Filho (curator and ed.), *30 X bienal: transformações na arte brasileira da 1 à 30 edição* (São Paulo: Bienal São Paulo, 2014), pp. 234–236; also see Claudia Calirman’s fascinating study, *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), in particular chapter 1, “Non à la Biennale de São Paulo,” pp. 10–36.
  36. See Erin Denise Aldana, “Interventions into Urban and Art Historical Spaces: The Work of the Artist Group 3Nós3 in Context, 1979–1982,” PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2008, p. 236; also see her chapter 2 and, in particular, the section, “Our Museums Are Empty’: The Brazilian Art World in Crisis,” pp. 144–147.
  37. Isobel Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone, 1969–1981,” *Afterall*, no. 22 (Autumn/Winter 2009). <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.so.paulo.unseenundone.19691981>. Accessed June 29, 2014.
  38. Walmir Ayala, “Uma Bienal bem-comportada” (“A well-behaved Bienal”), *O Dia*, October 14, 1979, reprinted in Paulo Venancio Filho (curator and ed.), *30 X bienal: transformações na arte brasileira da 1 à 30 edição* (São Paulo: Bienal São Paulo, 2014), pp. 243–244.
  39. The exhibiting international artists at the XV Bienal were much more straightforward in nature: the British Pavilion housed a fairly conservative exhibition, titled “Cratylus.” The curators were Tom Phillips and Henry Meyric Hughes and the exhibition included six artists (all men): Ian Breakwell, John Furnival, Dom Sylvester Houedard, David Leverett, Jeff Instone, and Tom Phillips; see Margaret Garlake, *Britain and the São Paulo Bienal, 1951–1991* (London: The British Council, 1991).
  40. Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo.” Also see Claudia Calirman, *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship*.
  41. See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); in particular see pp. 122–126 for her section on Augusto Boal’s Invisible Theatre; also see Mário Ramiro, “Grupo 3Nós3: The Outside Expands,” *Parachute*, no. 116 (October–December 2004), p. 37; and Daniel R. Quiles, “Between Code and Message: Argentine Conceptual Art, 1966–1976,” PhD Dissertation, CUNY, 2010.
  42. Whitelegg, “The Bienal de São Paulo.”



43. Whitelegg, "The Bienal de São Paulo."
44. Tom McCullough (2002), "2nd Biennale of Sydney (1976)", interview with Paula Latos-Valier. <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1976-2/>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
45. Terence Maloon, "The Sydney Biennale: Notes towards a Post-Mortem," *Art Network*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1979), pp. 9–13, esp. p. 10; William Wright (2002), "4th Biennale of Sydney," interview with Paula Latos-Valier. <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1982-2/>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
46. Rachel Weiss, Luis Camnitzer, Coco Fusco, and Geeta Kapur, *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011).

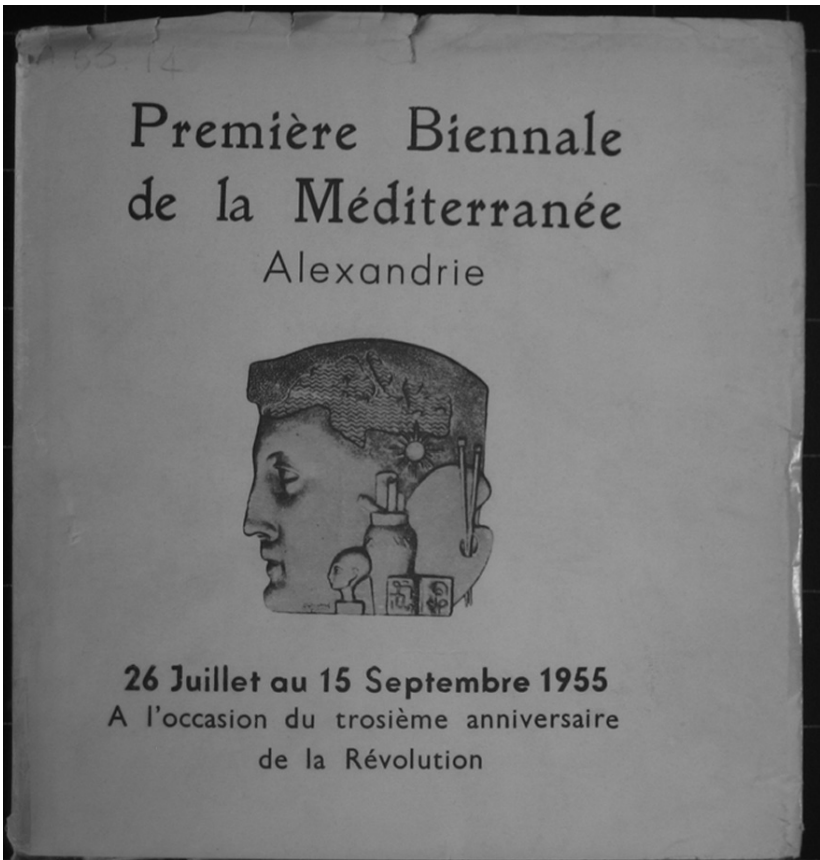


Figure 3.1 Cover of *Première Biennale de la Méditerranée Alexandrie*, exhibition catalogue, curators Hussein Sobhi et al. (Alexandria: Museum of Fine Arts, 1955). Photo Anthony Gardner.

# 1986: The South and the Edges of the Global

Exhibitions in this chapter: The Second Bienal de La Habana  
(Havana, Cuba, 1986)

## Introduction: Origin Stories

The Bienal de La Habana was founded in 1984 as a survey of art from Latin America and the Caribbean. But in 1986 and then again in 1989 its remit was progressively broadened to include artists from further afield, from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. For Gerardo Mosquera, one of the Bienal's curatorial leaders, the remodelings created a new, international axis of artistic exchange among cultures that were not aligned to the First or the Second Worlds.<sup>1</sup> But, as we shall show in this chapter, this was not exactly new. The Bienal de La Habana was the latest in a long series of concerted attempts by cultural institutions to challenge the US–USSR binary of Cold War antipathy that froze other regions out. These exhibitions for the most part refused to align with that binary, instead seeking other modes of exchange along South–South artistic axes. The focus of this chapter is therefore on the South–South history of biennials preceding those in Havana in the decades prior to the 1980s.

Such alliances of the “non-aligned” were endeavors to generate an alternative global cultural network to that of the long-established exhibitions of Venice, documenta, and even São Paulo. Indeed, the Bienal de La Habana sought to develop ties between non-aligned cultures of the Third World and the South. Its curators consciously chose not to exhibit art made in Europe and North America in favor of exclusively selecting art from other regions of the world, thereby framing the Bienal with a distinctive, postcolonial rhetoric and refusing the long-established model, inherited from the

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Venice Biennale, of representation by nation. The Bienal developed the ties between its participating artists by encouraging short-term, celebratory art collaborations and emphasizing a dialogue and debate that was actualized in the proliferations of forums, residencies, and carefully encouraged, convivial, informal gatherings, especially at the Bienal bars – or officially designated “meeting places” – that dotted Havana by the end of the 1980s, which had been designed precisely for such inter-collegial networking. (And they were necessary, given the overcrowded, under-catered nature of Havana’s few cafes accessible to international visitors at the time.) The Havana Bienals were landmark exhibitions.

Despite this clear status as landmark, though, we should recognize that biennials based on South–South dialogue had been held since at least 1955 around the world; the 1979 Biennale of Sydney had previously completely dispensed with representing nations by artists and it had actively immersed its artist visitors in dialogues, encounters, and convivial networking as well. The Bienals de La Habana were not the first biennials to make these innovations, but they managed all of this at once and, unlike Sydney and São Paulo, did not aspire to represent nor be ambassadors for the avant-gardes of Europe and North America. And why is Havana remembered as a breakthrough, while Delhi’s Triennale-India is more or less forgotten? Because the third Bienal de La Habana in 1989 opened at a crucial moment, as the Cold War that had so shaped the biennials of the South quickly wound down amidst conservative claims such as Francis Fukuyama’s about the “end of history,” the end of ideological conflict, following the collapse of European communism and the supposed triumph of Western capitalist democracy.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the slow-gathering rise of cultural globalization, empowered by a matrix of intellectual, technological, and business innovations, was still only grudgingly shifting its spotlight away from the North Atlantic region. Even the term, Third World, so central during earlier decades, now faded away in favor of the less loaded word, South.

What we want to suggest in this chapter is that another view of exhibitions and their histories emerges if we approach the subject of biennials differently. To be more specific, the lineage of biennials shifts when seen not from the perpetually insistent demands of the North, but from the viewpoints and aspirations of the South.<sup>3</sup> And by “South,” we mean something more than either the geographical mappings of the Southern Hemisphere or the geoeconomic contours of the “global South” as a category of economic deprivation. While the notion of “South” can certainly encompass these terrains, it also asserts the histories of colonialism that coexist and are shared throughout the world: what Santiago-based curator Beatriz Bustos

Oyanedel called “these dark periods ... embodied in absences and suffering” that ties the settler to the indigenous in ways distinct from the heavy hand of distant imperial headquarters, and which is not limited to early modern colonialism or its settler migrations but equally pertains to the more recent colonial incursions of neoliberal economics and its international relations.<sup>4</sup> And while historical reflection is central to the South, it does not exclude the significance of constructive initiatives generated out of and in defiance of these histories: that is, the web of potentialities that can connect and be coordinated across the cultures of the South, emphasizing “South” as “a direction as well as a place,” to cite historian Kevin Murray, and as a zone of agency and creation, not simply poverty and exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Pan-Arabism and Négritude are amongst the powerful terms that have sought to encompass these directions, but there are numerous others as well, with culture playing a significant role in defining and entrenching these new social relations.

This chapter is thus guided by a series of questions that opens up a much-needed reimagining of the histories of exhibitions across the globe in recent decades. What might a *Southern* perspective of biennials look like? What agitations or alternatives might that perspective pose for the histories of these exhibitions as we have come to know them thus far? Or does the narrative remain in effect the same no matter which direction it faces? We do not presume to address all the nuances in these questions: given its sheer eclecticism, a Southern history of biennials may prove impossible to conscript into a linear narrative. It is nonetheless clear that these still largely occluded histories do not quite fit the habitual framings of biennials as beginning with a first wave at the close of the nineteenth century and segueing neatly into the neo-imperial tidal force of the 1990s and 2000s. They instead coincide with what we consider to be a second wave of biennialization that developed from the 1950s into the 1980s, and which insisted upon a self-conscious, critical regionalism as the means for realigning cultural networks across geopolitical divides. This is a very different story to that of the rise of the biennial star-curator, which we described in chapter 1, and the work of directing and assembling these biennials often as not occurred in teams.

### **A Brief History of Southern Biennials**

Where might these histories begin? If the usual narratives find their origins in the 1890s, or in the 1955 debut of documenta and its aim to rehabilitate the art and urban development of postwar West Germany, then perhaps we,

too, will start in 1955: but on the southern edges of the Mediterranean Sea, in Alexandria, and the development of one of the first regionally oriented biennials, the Biennale de la Méditerranée. This narrative would still sustain the reassuring sensation of familiarity for biennial aficionados for, much like the exhibitions in Venice or São Paulo, Alexandria's biennial divided its participants and presentations according to national origin, with selections determined by (for the most part, consular) officials from each of the nations involved. Moreover – and, again, like its Venetian or Kassel counterparts – this biennial sought to use the display of recent art as the means to loop back to a glorious era of local art production so as to resurrect the city's international and cultural status. In this case, that was the third century BCE when Alexandria was “the beacon of the Arts, the center of thinking, the homeland of Philosophy,” according to the preface by the biennial's General Commissioner, Hussein Sobhi.<sup>6</sup>

Politics were central to this vision, too, for the Biennale de la Méditerranée was also designed to commemorate the third anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution that eventually swept Gamal Abdel Nasser – the biennial's chief patron – to the country's presidency. Yet while Nasser would later promote a pan-Arab agenda as the cornerstone of his political philosophies, it was a *Mediterranean* regionalism that was the force driving the first Alexandrian biennial. Such a Mediterraneanist focus was, of course, not new to the region itself (given the histories of the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman empires), but it *was* a different model for presenting a biennial. Rather than foreground competition between artists from different countries and cultures – most obviously through the awarding of prizes to specific artists, which in Venice, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere had often resulted in bitter and jealous rivalries as much as arbitrary determinations of “quality” – Alexandria's biennial sought (at least rhetorically) “a certain provision for artistic co-operation” among its participants, who came from the full circumference of the Mediterranean Sea: from Egypt, Spain, Greece, France, Italy, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, and Syria, with artists from Albania, Morocco, and Tunisia joining the roster in 1957.<sup>7</sup> On one level, this “artistic co-operation” would (or so the biennial's organizers hoped) reveal a “common denominator [that] is properly Mediterranean,” an aesthetic rapprochement that could cross different cultural traditions.<sup>8</sup> But we should also remember that 1955 was the very height of the Cold War. Bringing together artists from both sides of the Iron Curtain, as well as from countries subject to post-fascist dictatorships, isolationism, and despair, was no small feat. For Sobhi, in particular, regionalism would be a way to break through

those geopolitical divisions, ensuring that “the biennial will re-establish friendly relations between Mediterranean countries.”<sup>9</sup> And while it would be easy to perceive the biennial and its regionalist ambitions as little more than a pawn in Nasser’s identity politics, such a view tends to ignore the significance that regionalism has played in the development and wake of liberation and independence movements. Indeed, if the catalogue for the second Biennale de la Méditerranée is anything to go by, with its frequent references to liberation and new nationalisms along the Mediterranean’s shores, it was precisely the cultural development of decolonizing states – of how to develop new regional identities that challenged old colonial and new Cold War decrees – that was a primary concern.<sup>10</sup> And it was the medium of the large-scale, international biennial that was considered one of the best ways to manifest that regional amicability and transcultural potential.

This might be one starting point for rethinking the histories of biennials. Another might emerge if we venture to the other side of the globe, to the Indonesian city of Bandung, which – again, auspiciously, in April 1955 – held the conference at which Asian and African countries that were not explicitly aligned with either the US-led capitalist First World or the Soviet-backed communist Second World sought an alternative, transversal community of so-called “non-aligned” nations. This was the birth of the Third World not as a racialized category of poverty or under-development, as it would become in the First World’s hierarchical imagination, but as a critical geopolitical entity, one based less on explicit ties of solidarity than on shared experiences of decolonization and an insistence on independence from the Russian–American binary of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> The following year, at a 1956 UNESCO conference in New Delhi, the Bandung accords took root in international *cultural* relations as well, for it was during this conference that the newly described Third World dedicated itself to promoting alternative routes of cultural as well as commercial exchange from those focused on the First and Second Worlds.<sup>12</sup> By 1961, these routes would be formalized in Yugoslavia in two significant ways: in the official creation of the movement of Non-Aligned Countries in the 1961 conference in Belgrade; and in the new waves of biennials in the country’s west that gathered works by artists from across the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and in spite of ideological difference. This occurred in music, with the first Muzički Biennale Zagreb (or Zagreb Music Biennial, subtitled an “international festival of contemporary music”) taking place for a week in May 1961. During the first editions of the Muzički Biennale, Zagreb hosted Igor Stravinsky, John Cage, Pierre Schaeffer, and other significant composers and musicians from

across Europe and North America, many performing with the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra as well as with students in the Workers' University in the city center. But it is the visual arts we want to focus on here, given the significance by the early 1960s of Ljubljana's Mednarodni Grafični Bienale (or International Graphics Biennial). It was an exhibition that, to a surprising extent, anticipated calls for an alignment of non-aligned cultures, for the 1961 Grafični Bienale was already the fourth edition in its history.

As with the Biennale de la Méditerranée, the first Grafični Bienale was also staged in 1955, with artists from both sides of the Iron Curtain receiving the exhibition's highest awards. Armin Landeck from the United States was the winner of the grand prize, the Prize of the Executive Council of the National Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Other awards were given to artists from Yugoslavia, Great Britain, Poland, and, in a curious deviation from nation-based assignments, to sculptor Germaine Richier who was listed as coming not from France but from the École de Paris. Subsequent editions of the Grafični Bienale through the 1960s would extend the embrace further, including artists from Asia (Japan, China, Thailand, Malaysia), South America (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay), Africa (Sudan, South Africa), as well as Australasia, Eastern and Western Europe, and the United Arab Republic, Nasser's short-lived dream-state of Arab unity between Egypt and Syria. The purpose of the Grafični Bienale, as its officials would later recount, hinged directly on contemporary political developments. Its *mélange* of artists and cultural affiliations had as its primary task the "linking of east and west by the bridge of art," such that it would "underline the same active non-engagement that coincides entirely with our conception of international relations."<sup>13</sup> This, in turn, would empower cultural engagements "without violence ... and which give hope for the future."<sup>14</sup> These were horizontal rather than vertical connections, the ambitions of which were (according to Zoran Kržišnik, the Bienale's founder and long-term director of Ljubljana's Moderna Galerija) the "democratization and dynamization" of cultural and exhibition practices.<sup>15</sup>

There were obvious complications with these arguments. On the one hand, prizes were retained at the Grafični Bienale; their persistence meant that supposedly "objective" assertions of quality remained, contradicting the egalitarianism and transversality underpinning the biennial's politics of democratization and its "active non-engagement" in geopolitical partitions.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, by replicating the political agenda and discourse of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Grafični Bienale risked being little more than promotional fodder for Tito's ambitions to become the movement's



leader, or secretary general (a position he would indeed hold between 1961 and 1964).<sup>17</sup> This was an ambition also harbored by Egyptian President Nasser – who in turn succeeded Tito as secretary general – such that the Grafični Bienale and the Biennale de la Méditerranée stood as markers in the respective leaders’ struggle for hegemony among non-aligned nations. Nonetheless, and as was also the case with the Alexandrian biennial, the Grafični Bienale’s history reveals how these exhibitions offered a significant way “to pursue politics by other means,” as Caroline Jones has observed of biennials at their best.<sup>18</sup> What they could create was an arena for experimenting with alternative modes of cultural exchange than those demanded by more dominant models of international relations.

It would not be overstating things to suggest that what these biennials of the non-aligned, of the Third World, of the South, were trying to do was to give form to *cultural* independence in the aftermath of *national* independence – or, to be more precise, in that tumultuous time between decolonization and absorption back into the tectonic undertow of North Atlantic modernity and the Cold War. What new modes of connection could emerge from the interstice between national independence and Cold War diktats? The answer, for the most part, was neither neo-nationalist retreat nor hubristic drives towards globalization but an insistence on *reimagining the regional*. In Latin and South America from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, for instance, a spate of biennials opened. In large part, these biennials sought to redirect the axis of cultural and economic influence away from the North (whether that be the United States or Iberia) so as to concentrate on exchange with neighbors in the Caribbean and other parts of South and Central America. In 1968, the Colombian city of Medellín held the first Bienal de Arte Coltejer (its first, full title was actually the Bienal Iberoamerica de Pintura Coltejer, before it branched out to include other media). Named after the city’s textile business, the largest at the time in South America, and organized by local dentist and artist Leonel Estrada, the Bienal consisted of hundreds of works shown by artists from across the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as some from Canada, the United States, and Spain. Masks from Haiti, kinetic art from Venezuela and Argentina, mail art from Peru, paintings, engravings, and installations intermingled to emphasize the diversity of Ibero-American practices, all the while dispensing with the separation of art works according to their makers’ nationality. A similarly regional focus also developed in the first Bienal del Grabado Latinoamericano in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1970 (albeit with a strict focus on graphic arts rather than the expansive range of practices shown in Medellín), as well

as the Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas in Cali, Colombia, in 1971, and the Bienal Internacional de Arte in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1973.

At the same time, biennials across Asia and in Australia were also seeking to integrate the local within the regional. Again, these exhibitions sought viable modes of internationalism that departed from the Cold War binary. The Triennale-India from the late 1960s sought to develop ties between “non-aligned” cultures through its inclusive surveys of “contemporary world art.” The inaugural Triennale-India at the Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi in 1968 was presciently advertised as the “first triennale of contemporary world art,” promoting an alignment of cultures outside the binary axis of Cold War politics even though artists were still selected by nations, along the Venice model. Large First World nations such as the United States participated with substantial contingents of surprisingly progressive artists. At that triennial, Georgia O’Keefe, Stuart Davis, Joseph Cornell, Jackson Pollock, Claes Oldenberg, Robert Morris, and Donald Judd had represented the United States. At the 1971 Triennale-India, Waldo Rasmussen, Executive Director of Circulating Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, selected works by Carl Andre, Sam Gilliam, Eva Hesse, Robert Rohn, Robert Ryman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, and Keith Sonnier. Rasmussen had long been instrumental in sending mega-exhibitions of American art to far-flung global destinations. In 1966, he had organized an enormous exhibition of postwar New York School painting, *Two Decades of American Painting*, for the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. It toured to Tokyo and Kyoto, in Japan, then to New Delhi, before finishing in 1967 at Melbourne and Sydney, Australia.<sup>19</sup>

Another of these regional biennials, the Asian Art Biennale in Dhaka, Bangladesh, concentrated primarily but not exclusively on painting, sculpture, and works on paper from across the breadth of Asia (but especially post-independence South Asia) for its first installment in 1981. And as we have already seen, after its launch to commemorate the opening of the Sydney Opera House in Australia in 1973, the Biennale of Sydney’s second edition, in 1976, gathered together sculpture and performance from the Pacific Rim, bringing Australian land art and modernist sculpture into dialogue with similar works by Japanese and Korean artists, as well as with installations from the San Francisco Bay Area (most notably a “Mother’s Day” time capsule and three-channel video installation by the Ant Farm collective). The goal, according to director Tom McCullough, was to encourage “a ‘Pacific Triangle’ of exchange and mutual influence, with Australia



Figure 3.2 Installation view of *The First Arab Art Biennale*, held in Baghdad in 1974, published in *Intégrale: Revue de création plastique et littéraire*, December 1974, p. 4.

and New Zealand forming a third angle” in conjunction with Asia and the American West Coast.<sup>20</sup> In 1974, meanwhile, the Baghdad-based Union of Arab Artists established the Arab Art Biennale, an exhibition designed to unite and showcase “all the plastic arts in a contemporary approach, inspired by Arab heritage and world cultural developments for the purpose of formulating, through interaction of Arab art ... a convenient atmosphere for the strengthening of artistic and social ties among the Arab artists, and the creation of distinct Arab art.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, while the first edition of the Arab Art Biennale would be held in the Union’s home-city of Baghdad, it was also intended to migrate to “every other Arab capital” as the first of the world’s itinerant biennials. The feat was only achieved once, with the Arab Art Biennale concluding in Rabat, Morocco, in 1976; it nonetheless pre-empted by nearly twenty years the similarly roving *Manifesta* (the subject of chapter 5) and the intended mobility of Robert Filliou and René Block’s *Art of Peace Biennale* by more than a decade.<sup>22</sup>

As the catalogues for these biennials make clear, the selections hinged on an artistic conservatism, at least during the exhibitions’ tentative early years. With the possible exception of the *Bienal de Arte Coltejer* and, to an extent, the second *Biennale* of Sydney, these biennials of the South turned to

traditional mediums of painting, paper, and sculpture as the support for new modes of contemporary practice. Disparate artists were frequently linked by the unifying patina of modernist mannerism and its attendant sentimentalities. Even when emphasizing a specific cultural heritage – as with the Arab Art Biennale – much of the work shown was comfortably figurative, often made by artists trained in Western Europe’s art schools or, at their most radical, attempting to link École de Paris abstraction to “Islamic civilization,” as Hussein Sobhi from the Alexandria biennial argued, “in which abstract, geometric and stripped-back art comes close to pure poetry.”<sup>23</sup> This does not mean, of course, that we should seek to recognize or predicate a “belatedness” to these selections or displays. We have to beware of perceiving each aesthetic judgment through North Atlantic vanguard blinkers. Iraqi artist Dia al-Azzawi, who exhibited at the first Triennale-India of “World Art” in 1968 and the fourth and fifth editions of the Grafični Bienale, might until the twenty-first century have been categorized as a mere adapter of Picasso, like hundreds of now-forgotten artists across the world; with the wisdom of distance from New York hegemony, however, the eclecticism of al-Azzawi’s great paintings of contemporary history, such as *Sabra and Shatila Massacre* (1982–1983), as well as his earlier works of the 1950s and 1960s, looks as deliberate, abrasive, and edgy as many renowned paintings of the same decades, such as Leon Golub’s, and not belated at all.

Nonetheless, as students of biennial histories would no doubt assert, and as is often the case with contemporary biennials as well, the strengths and weaknesses of specific art works are sometimes secondary to the significance of the exhibition as a whole, or at least to those aspects of an exhibition that are supplementary to the art works presented. This was certainly the case with these Southern biennials, the importance of which often lay less in the assemblage of art works than in the gatherings of artists, commissioners, writers, and publics from within and outside a given region. In some instances – and this was especially true with Ljubljana, which became a vital meeting-point for artists, curators, and diplomats from the United States, Britain, Romania, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere – biennials allowed people to acquire visas and cross frontiers that would have been extremely difficult, if not necessarily impossible, to cross without the justification of attending the exhibition.<sup>24</sup> Whether other, durable opportunities eventuated from such meetings is open to speculation, yet it is precisely this drive for both formal and informal models of regional and transcultural dialogue, and the frequency with which those meetings were documented, that sets the biennials of the South apart from their earlier, more celebrated counterparts.

Other biennials similarly complemented the display of art works with an emphasis on commentary, analysis, and informal reflection about the exhibitions as they took place, transforming the model of exhibition display into an expanded field of discourse. The emphasis on discussion and the biennial as a discursive site presages *Documenta11* (2002), which we will describe later in this book, but we should emphasize that this so-called “discursive turn” is not a recent phenomenon. At the Arab Art Biennale, for instance, critic Keith Albarn particularly noted the activities staged “at the end of each day when all men [presumably the artists] became poets, philosophers and musicians, sitting in large circles entertaining each other through to the early hours of the morning.”<sup>25</sup> This was clearly not a closed-off activity – the presence of a white Anglo reviewer showed that, at least in relation to race, it was neither exclusive nor exclusionary – but instead an open means for asserting what Albarn called “a common ethos” among the male participants, one that could subtend and extend the Baghdad biennial’s pursuit of pan-Arab commonality through the art works themselves.<sup>26</sup> In Medellín, the second Bienal de Arte Coltejer became a venue in which participating artists and audiences could discuss and sign petitions against the alleged political fraud and potential coup that struck the Colombian presidential elections just before the Bienal’s launch in 1970. These open acts of critique and defiance subsequently spread to other subjects, including the rise of dictatorship and torture in other parts of South America as well as US influence and imperialism in the region. In the process, the Bienal de Arte Coltejer emerged as a rare platform for the dissemination of knowledge about fraudulent politics in the region, for debate among participants, and ultimately for protest against the new impositions of power in South America.<sup>27</sup> The discursive format of the biennial would culminate in Havana where, as has become well-known, small makeshift bars were established alongside the exhibition venues that dotted the city during the Bienal’s second and third editions, a strategy designed to bring residents and visitors together during the course of the Bienal’s existence. In this way, informal debate – or what co-curator Gerardo Mosquera tellingly described as “a ‘horizontal’ South-South platform very much based on personal contact between people from different art worlds” – would complement the Bienal’s more formal symposium and its analyses among artists and scholars about the Bienal’s themes.<sup>28</sup> (In 1989, this was “tradition and contemporaneity,” and the symposium line-up included Geeta Kapur, Charles Merewether, and other critics from across the belt of non-aligned nations and the region of the South more broadly.)

This is only a glimpse at the history of the biennials of the South during the second wave of biennialization from the 1950s onwards. Nonetheless, that brevity does not prevent us from stressing two particular points. The first is that the insistence on regionalism found contemporaneously in many different parts of the world was both a critical and a reconstructive project: critical in the sense that it sought to complicate, and in some instances repudiate, the Cold War binaries of East and West, capitalism and communism, and the trepidations and antagonisms associated with them both; and reconstructive in that what this signaled was a shift from vertical axes of influence from one (economically developed) region to another (less developed), towards more horizontal axes of dialogue and engagement *across* a region. In this way, the internationalism of the regional could be promoted as transcultural, even egalitarian, and driven by attempts at commonality rather than a will to geopolitical authority and its attendant hierarchies of power. This leads to a second point: it was through informal modes of discourse and discussion that such commonality was emphasized, as much as (or even more than) through the formal presentation and official structures of the relevant biennials. The horizontality of localized exchange – by which we mean the face-to-face discussions, informal philosophizing, song, and so forth – was thus inseparable from the horizontality of regional exchange, the one pivotal to the possibility of the other.

That the biennial should be the medium of choice for this informal, critical regionalism may strike us as odd today, given the current ubiquity (and, on occasion, uncanny similarity) of these mega-exhibitions worldwide. Yet biennials also opened up opportunities for the South that were arguably not afforded by other cultural forms. Their recurrent timing could allow a steady and relatively stable base from which to generate new cultural ties – or what the Union of Arab Artists, for one, called a chance for “getting Arab artists to know each other through regular and periodical gatherings” – during a period notable for profound instabilities and threats of hostility and war.<sup>29</sup> That recurrence might also catalyze new cultural infrastructure within each biennial’s host city: infrastructure that was both conceptual (through access to and the generation of new theories, practices, and politics of art) and material (through new exhibition venues, audiences, and sponsors), and which could stimulate new manifestations of “locality” during the struggles for decolonization throughout many of these regions of the South.

This produced a paradox, however, for the format of the biennial had a significant colonial heritage, as we noted earlier, one that could potentially hinder or undermine such attempts to use biennials as a way to give form to

cultural independence. What the wide-ranging turn to biennials from the 1950s on suggests, though, is that the South's attempts at regionalism were not a radical withdrawal from all forms or histories of colonialism; this was not a struggle for absolute autonomy from either the recent past or other regions and cultures (or what Walter D. Mignolo, among others, has championed as a process of radical "delinking" from coloniality).<sup>30</sup> Nor did biennials highlight a willingness to replicate or be easily assimilated within the cultural forms and debates of the "center" (especially given the insistence on pan-Arab or Ibero-American identity politics, and the frequent exclusion of artists from the United States or Spain). The reality was more complex than either of these two positions. What these exhibitions suggested instead was that the colonial-era format of the biennial could be transformed from within, redirected so as to regenerate local cultural infrastructure, and used as a platform for debating the existing state of "center-periphery" exchange and developing new practices of international relations in their place. These biennials thus epitomized how the deep histories of colonialism could not be disavowed in the South's new spirit of regionalism; rather, they were central to connecting the cultures of the South through "the link of our tragedies," to borrow Beatriz Bustos Oyanedel's resonant phrase, and more importantly to finding ways to overcome them.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Second Bienal de La Habana**

The argument is often made that the Bienal de La Habana is the first properly global art biennial, importantly inaugurated before the post-1990, post-Cold War proliferation of new biennials worldwide (and thus potentially separable from art's neoliberal globalization). The early editions of the Bienal certainly set a significant foundation for that scholarly ambition, but they were neither the first nor an isolated example of such new ways of thinking international and global cultural exchange by the end of the Cold War. As we have suggested so far, the Bienal appeared late in the second wave of biennials, but its impressively tenacious durability has retrospectively endowed it with the aura of the progenitor. In an important article about the 1989 Bienal de La Habana, Rachel Weiss sensibly asks the following questions, which would equally be faced by the curators of the Asian biennials that we will examine in the next chapter.<sup>32</sup> She wondered if the Bienal could outline a Third World theme, without falling into the trap of a single, flattened conception of its subject? What might be the relative uses

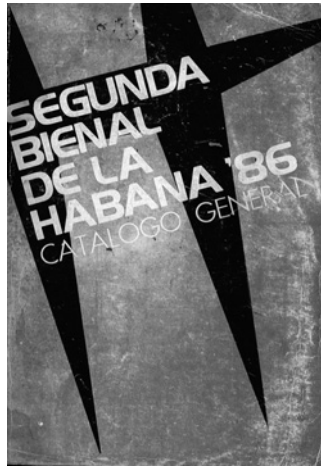


Figure 3.3 Cover of *Segunda Bienal de La Habana '86*, exhibition catalogue, curators Lillian Llanes Godoy et al. (Havana: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam and Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986). Courtesy Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam.

of the summoning of similarities, or of the elaboration of differences? How could the Bienal formulate a Third Worldist cultural proposition not based in fictions of solidarity? And, she wondered, how could it, following the protagonist role that it envisioned for itself, create a space that was more than just a counterproposal that reproduced the logic and form of the original in reverse?

We know that the curators of all these exhibitions were aware of these questions with greater or lesser clarity, but we might suggest that they were not adequately answered *in exhibition form* until *Documenta11*. In returning to the Bienals de La Habana, about which much has been written, we instead stress the need to reconceive the prior histories, predicaments, and potentialities of biennialization, especially given its (and the Cuban state's) claims to struggle against the reduction of the world to two political ideologies.<sup>33</sup> The aim of the Bienal was to create artistic exchanges that were not aligned to either, but this was of course a contradiction.<sup>34</sup> Cuba's status as a non-aligned nation blurred quickly into its anti-First World position, for Cuba was a communist state that had relatively recently experienced a revolution and was the client of the Soviet Union. The overthrow of corrupt,



pro-US dictatorships and the entrenchment of rapidly institutionalized revolutionary ideals had also resulted in considerable cultural repression during the notorious *quinquenio gris* (Five Grey Years) of 1971–1976. The Bienal's very important co-curator, Geraldo Mosquera, located the Bienal within Cuba's support during the 1980s for revolutionary movements and leftist insurrections around the world, reminding us that:

The Cuban Revolution has always had an expansionist agenda and has been involved in revolutionary warfare and subversion throughout the world. Apart from some obvious differences, Cuba's approach to the arts has been similarly aggressive.<sup>35</sup>

In the early 1960s, Cuba was fighting in Algeria on the side of the National Liberation Front and assisting the Simba Rebellion in the Congo. From the early 1970s, Cuban troops and advisers were fighting or actively contributing training and supplies in Nicaragua, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, and Angola, only withdrawing from the latter in 1991.<sup>36</sup> Such adventurism in support of its ally, the Soviet Union, masked Cuba's own fragile economy, its financial dependence on its benefactor, and its increasingly straitened circumstances from the mid-1980s on. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Cuban state's impoverishment, future editions of the impecunious Bienal were to struggle and eventually retreat from South–South purity, just as certain Cuban artists in later Bienals braved the Party's disapproval to express their disenchantment with the régime. The most famous example of the latter was performance artist Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* (2009), staged for the Bienal at the Wifredo Lam Center, in which audience members were invited to stand on a dais before a microphone and exercise freedom of expression by publicly declaring support or dissent towards the regime of President Fidel Castro. Two people in military dress regulated the space and placed a dove on the speaker's shoulder, in what Bruguera called "an allusion to the emblematic image of Fidel Castro when delivering his first speech on January 8th [1959] in Havana after the Triumph of the Revolution."<sup>37</sup> However, as Weiss and others point out, despite the harsh political and economic climate, the 1980s was also a period of intense cultural activity, especially amongst Cuban painters.<sup>38</sup> In the period after veteran politician and minister of education Armando Hart Dávalos's appointment as minister for the arts in 1976 (his tenure in this job lasted until 1997), the cultural repression of the so-called Grey Years eased,<sup>39</sup> and by the mid-1980s a new

generation of Cuban artists was emerging who made performances, installations, and who covered walls with graffiti. Their art, contrary to the rhetoric of the Bienal, showed a professionalization within these newer genres that was little different to (and, we must insist, no less sophisticated than) art in the same genres that was at this time emerging from new public art funds in the North, such as Public Art Fund and Creative Time.

The Cuban Communist Party leadership had seen it as natural that Havana would be a prominent Third World cultural identity and a hub for other decolonizing nations. It was not surprising, therefore, that Castro would decree, during one of his famous, inspirational interventions, that a survey of the art of the non-aligned, along with cinema, jazz, and other festivals that still prosper today, be created. Nor was such an idea at all unprecedented amongst Third World revolutionary leaders, as we have also seen. It was a short step from celebrating a great Cuban artist – internationally celebrated surrealist painter Wifredo Lam – to creating the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam and entrusting it with the organization of such a biennial in Havana.<sup>40</sup> The Cubans were well aware of Medellín's Bienal de Arte Coltejer, the Bienal Americana de Artes Gráficas in Cali, and other biennials held in Latin America during the preceding decade. The emergent Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, located in Old Havana near the Plaza de la Catedral and opposite the cathedral itself, now had to quickly negotiate the gap between the Communist Party leadership's expectation of revolutionary ardor, which had rapidly solidified into doctrinaire control over culture during the Grey Years, and the genuine but unpredictable idealism of artists from around the world who were almost naturally and enthusiastically anti-American and were drawn to Cuba by the romantic aura created by solidarity with revolutionary freedom.

The second Bienal, in 1986, was an event of prodigious scale. It was curated by a team chaired by the long-term director of the Centro Wifredo Lam, Lillian Llanes Godoy. The team included Nelson Herrera Ysla, Ibis Hernández, and Gerardo Mosquera. The exhibition catalogue and contemporary reviews record that the Bienal featured an astonishing 2451 art works by 690 artists from fifty-eight countries across scores of exhibitions, the largest at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, where many works by the invited African artists were installed.<sup>41</sup> There was a special exhibition of more than 200 works by senior Latin American artists, *Latin American Masters*. It included works by Luis Camnitzer, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Fernell Franco, Antonio Frasconi, Julio Girona, Pedro Meyer, Alejandro Otero, and Antonio Seguí, among others. Scores of other, smaller

exhibitions were dotted across the city. At the Casa de Africa, there was a partial retrospective of the famous Mozambican painter and poet Malangatana Ngwenya, who had long been associated with the revolutionary FRELIMO movement. The Bienal featured Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer with a large retrospective across both the Castillo de La Fuerza and the Museo de Armas. At the Casa de las Américas was the Haitian painter Hervé Télémaque, whose work was identified not only with Parisian surrealism, but also with the Black Pride and Négritude movements. The only country seemingly excluded from the Bienal's embrace of art's global margins was the People's Republic of China; as Cuba was not on friendly terms with Russia's communist competitor, no Chinese artists exhibited at the second Bienal.

Despite this pointed exclusion, the Bienal was notable as both a huge, carnivalesque exhibition but also a meeting point for artists, curators, critics, and scholars from across the South. Organizers and audiences alike felt that these artists would share strong values that were different to the art markets, curators, art museums, and biennials of the North.<sup>42</sup> The Bienal's organizers wrote that "The Wifredo Lam Center convened the Second Bienal de La Habana, with the purpose of encouraging the development of visual arts in the countries of the Third World in the defense of and search for their most authentic methods of expression."<sup>43</sup> By 1989, as Lillian Llanes Godoy wrote that year, the Bienal "already stands as the most important international event for artists from Asia, Africa and Latin America ... where they can show the development of their artistic expression, and set up relationships that will foster the understanding and the importance of its true values," for as much as possible, artists were invited to install their works themselves.<sup>44</sup> Gerardo Mosquera even went so far as to say – albeit not completely accurately, given the existence of "horizontal" biennials as far back as 1955 – that,

Never before had artists, curators, critics, and scholars from Buenos Aires to Kingston, and from Brazzaville to Beirut and Jakarta, met "horizontally." What made this biennial historic was not its curating but its curatorial perspective.<sup>45</sup>

This perspective was more than geographic. It included a density of public programs, lectures, and school events that were later to become standard. A conference on Caribbean art presaged the dilemmas, contradictions, and hard choices that biennial curators and observers across Asia were also to

grapple with over successive decades.<sup>46</sup> Admission to the many public and school events, as well as to the exhibition, was free, courtesy of the Cuban state during the quickly closing window of economic viability. Mosquera described early editions of the Bienal as a *pachanga*, a true urban festival that stopped the whole city, referring to evening fashion shows outdoors, to Argentinian Kinetic artist Julio Le Parc's workshop with young artists at a park in the El Vedado neighborhood, and to Marta Palau's workshop with young artists that transformed the Museum of Decorative Arts.<sup>47</sup> There were open-air concerts featuring charismatic singers such as Mercedes Sosa, Chico Buarque, and Pablo Milanés, while artists painted an impromptu multi-part mural as the musicians performed.<sup>48</sup> Havana was thus clearly distinct from the elite and market festivals that characterized many other biennials by the 1980s, such as Venice and São Paulo; it instead was deliberately aligned with the education and community programs and the grass-roots rhetoric that were the hallmarks of other Southern biennials (from the children's education workshops at Coltejer, to the songs and discussions in Baghdad, and the communitarian "town hall" meetings in Sydney, all of which took shape in the 1970s).

The 1986 Bienal de La Habana was just able to afford a now-familiar model of collective curatorial investigation and frugal country-by-country consultation with peer curators and critics. This was often carried out by mail (of course, today, research carried out by snail mail is so much diminished as to be almost nonexistent). Although now common practice, the elaborate process of study, even though carried out in an almost chaotic rush with few resources, biased the Bienal towards a self-consciousness that would only increase at the next edition in 1989. Artist and writer Luis Camnitzer reported that the Bienal invited five Argentinean art critics to each prepare a list of potential artists; the Bienal then selected those artists who appeared on everyone's list. In Uruguay, an art museum director made the selections for the Bienal; his choices were later added to by a Montevideo artist union and by a printmakers' club.<sup>49</sup> We will see these complicated consultative networks – so far from most contemporary biennials' dependence on the curators' own extensive networks and research – surface once again, belatedly, at the Fukuoka Asian Art Show in 1989 and the Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1993. The emphasis on research dovetailed with the emphasis on education and on public events, presaging the idea of an expanded role for curatorship into curating discourse as well as art. As Weiss notes, Llanes even used the word "researcher" to refer to her team.<sup>50</sup>

The Bienal de La Habana acquired cultural capital precisely because of its indifference to market logic, which was linked to such processes but which also, of course, reflected the socialist Cuban bureaucracy, with its predilection for pseudo-scientific, quasi-military rhetoric. The Centro was embedded within this egalitarian discourse, but Llanes also hinted at her view that the role of curators was administrative rather than authorial, that there should be no Cuban Harald Szeemann (and no imported, external curator on the team). The charismatic Mosquera, who was intimately involved in the first three Bienals but who resigned in the aftermath of the 1989 edition, recognized in retrospect that the Bienal's intensely bureaucratic organization persisted even as it was drawn more into the embrace of the global art-world.<sup>51</sup> While that recuperation has largely but not completely taken place, its early editions insisted on focusing on new works by predominantly younger artists (by regulation, only art created during the preceding five years would be displayed), and it is this insistence on supporting emerging artists and nascent cultural exchange for which the early Bienals were to be remembered. Yet at the time, as Camnitzer shrewdly observed, the novelty, along with what we have come to term the problematic, of the "peripheral," within which we would now include the supposed exoticism of syncretic, multicultural minglings of tradition in the much-noted performances by Cuban artist Manuel Mendive, were less the moral to be drawn than the long-evident embedding of traditional indigenous representations and crafts within contemporary art forms.<sup>52</sup> Indian artist Mrinalini Mukherjee's *Pari* (1986), for instance, was a figure made from knitted hemp fiber, made using traditional weaving practices, while the symbols and characters that Mendive painted on the bodies of his performers incorporated Santeria ritual, Catholic iconography, and the artist's own invented script. The moral, according to Camnitzer, was that Mendive's performance set up different classifications of the exotic and the peripheral than if the work had been staged in Paris (and, three years later, similar works were, at *Magiciens de la terre*).

### **Conclusion: The Stakes of Southern Histories**

The legacies of these biennials are definitely precarious. It can be tempting to seek solace or inspiration in historical exhibitions so as to reformat and recontextualize contemporary biennials whose ubiquity threatens to topple over into homogeneity. Yet, just as the return to a supposedly

better past risks fetishizing the obsolete, it may also valorize exhibition models that have stagnated since the period of Southern regionalism. As critic and curator Bassam El Baroni astutely points out, this has been the fate of the Alexandria Biennale, which continues to promote the same agenda of Mediterraneanism through the lens of Egyptian nationalism as it did in the 1950s. For Baroni, not only has this become “an ailing ideology with little effect on regional or international politics” but it has doomed the Biennale de la Méditerranée to one solitary, enervated theme throughout its fifty-plus years.<sup>53</sup> Other second-wave biennials have either changed focus entirely – as we saw in an earlier chapter, the Biennale of Sydney quickly shed its interest in the Pacific Rim after 1976 – or become defunct through lack of interest, stability, or funding. Other biennials insisted on preserving their exclusively African or Asian – which is to say their continental – identities.

There are, nonetheless, clear stakes in taking a Southern perspective of biennials, not least because of their art historical significance. One of the frustrations with the development of curatorial and exhibition histories in recent years, even at their best, has been their tendency towards inaccuracy and lacunae informed by a Northern bias. Recent claims by Charles Esche and Rachel Weiss, for instance, that the Bienal de La Habana was “only the fourth international two-yearly contemporary art event on the planet” when it opened in 1984, or that its 1989 edition was the first to conceive of biennials as discursive platforms as well as formal exhibitions, are not quite correct, as a broader understanding of Southern biennials reveals.<sup>54</sup> If anything, the Bienal de La Habana’s importance lies not in its status as beginning, but in many ways as *culminating*, nearly three decades of steady transformations in exhibition making. Biennials did not reject organization by nationality only in the early 1990s, as biennialization began to enter its third wave. Biennials of the South had done so well before, defining themselves, as Esche wrote, “in terms of the political and social mix of the cities that host them.”<sup>55</sup> These phenomena were already present and highly valued by locals in Sydney, in Medellín, and in other so-called but often intensely cosmopolitan “peripheral” cities seeking to transform the international scope of biennials in the 1960s and 1970s.

What is perhaps most stark about these “peripheral” exhibitions, though, is that they do not sit comfortably within the stereotype of biennials as neoliberal symptom with which this chapter started. While they were certainly internationalist in ambition, it was often a *socialist*, or at least socialist-inspired, internationalism that subtended their rhetoric and objects. This was as true for the itinerant Arab Art Biennale, created by

the Union of Arab Artists to redistribute attention, funds, and education towards and throughout the Arab world, as it was for those biennials promoting the socialist agenda of Tito's presidency in Yugoslavia and Nasser's in Egypt, or even the grounding of many second-wave biennials in the ideologies of socialist solidarity among non-aligned nations. These socialist-inspired internationalisms, and not the radial trajectory of North Atlantic capitalism, must be the primary reference points for revisiting the biennials of the South. That lesson is made especially clear by remembering the protests in Medellín against right-wing dictatorships and American neocolonialism in South America at the start of the 1970s. Whether these biennials could be successful in their endeavors or were simply pawns in the ideological battles of the Cold War – or, in the case of Alexandria, even risked championing the deeply problematic politics and persecution of intellectual and cultural figures by Nasser – is, however, a question that remains very much open.

Regardless of the answer, we need the perspectives of the South to complement – and even more, to challenge – those of the North, and to staunch the relegation of these major exhibitions and cultural histories to the outer edges of supposedly “global” art histories. Given the renewed urgency of reimagining the “global,” it is no surprise that critical notions of regionalism, and of cultural and other connections between regions, have once again become a core sociocultural concern in North Africa and West Asia, across Central and South America, and throughout the South more generally. Indeed, with the legacy of Southern biennials uncovered, the durable vitality of what theorists Ranjit Hoskote and Nancy Adajania term “critical transregionality” becomes clear.<sup>56</sup> It is a world picture that the biennials of the South present as double-sided. They had grasped their place in the postwar arc of neocolonial globalism. But, even more importantly, they then converted that place into the resistant image of cultural, art-historical, and international reconstruction. That ongoing work is one in which the biennials of the South still have a significant and creative role to play.

## Notes

1. This, more or less, is the argument in the influential *Biennial Reader*: see Gerardo Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 198–207;

- see also Rachel Weiss, "A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition," in Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall, 2011), pp. 14–69.
2. See Francis Fukuyama's notorious book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. xi; Fukuyama wrote, "a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism. More than that, however, I argued that liberal democracy may constitute the 'end point' of mankind's ideological evolution and 'the final form of human government,' and as such constituted the 'end of history.'"
  3. Carlos Basualdo has argued that the lack of decent writing about biennials "is nothing more than a symptom of the expiration of its traditional function in this specific stage of the development of the culture industry"; see Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution," *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter–Spring 2003–2004), pp. 50–61, esp. p. 52. According to Lara Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig, a statistical survey of artist representation in biennials reveals the blatant exclusion of artists from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Australia, Africa, and Asia from the so-called global art-world; remedial action has remained very modest and the chances of an artist outside the North Atlantic gaining a position in the global art history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries remains strongly and systematically linked to residence in Western Europe or the United States; see Lara Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig, "Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality: The Case of the Contemporary Visual Arts," *ART-E-FACT*, no. 4 (December 2005). [http://artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a04/lang\\_en/theory\\_buchholz\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm). Accessed July 6, 2013. They conclude by noting, "What appears as the emergence of a global art field turns out to be the business of dyadic regionalization – associated with the worldwide establishment of some institutional satellites and restricted slots for non-occidental artists. The talk about the globalization of art in important respects seems to refer to no more than a myth."
  4. Beatriz Bustos Oyanel, "Our Site: South American Artists," in Anthony Gardner (ed.), *Mapping South: Journeys in South–South Cultural Relations* (Melbourne: The South Project, 2013), pp. 193–195, esp. p. 194; see also Nikos Papastergiadis, "What Is the South?," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 100 (February 2010), pp. 141–156.
  5. Kevin Murray, "Keys to the South," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 44 (March 2008), p. 26. A similar insistence upon the South's generative capacities can be found in Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007), and such journals as *Revista del sur* and *Nepantla: Views from South*. We should also note, though, that "there is no single answer to the question,



- ‘What is the South?’” as Anthony Gardner argues in the Introduction to *Mapping South: Journeys in South–South Cultural Relations* (Melbourne: The South Project, 2013), pp. 2–8, esp. p. 3 and p. 4: “If anything, the South is itself a mode of questioning . . . . As it sparks new links between artists and audiences from different regions, it provokes new ways of thinking about global cultural currents. It is thus a question always open to debate and discussion – including, it has to be said, debate about whether ‘South’ is in fact an adequate frame for such discussions, or a category that still limits the actual complexities of trans-cultural relations, setting them in overly simplistic opposition to the ‘North’, to the canonical and to the ‘normal’ narratives through which globalisation is often understood today.”
6. Hussein Sobhi, untitled preface, in *Première Biennale de la Méditerranée Alexandrie* (Alexandria: Museum of Fine Arts, 1955), p. vii. All translations are by the authors.
  7. This was the argument made by Abdel Latif el Baghdadi in the *Biennale* catalogue at p. v.
  8. This claim belongs to Hanna Simaika, the Director of Alexandria’s Musée des Beaux-Arts and Cultural Center, in another untitled preface in the catalogue, p. 8.
  9. Sobhi, *Première Biennale de la Méditerranée Alexandrie*, p. vii.
  10. See the frequent references made by the commissioning consuls-general to post-liberation cultural development, too numerous to list, in *Deuxième Biennale de la Méditerranée* (Alexandria: Museum of Fine Arts, 1957).
  11. The Bandung Asia-Africa Conference has recently become a focus again in biennials (most notably through the Bandung Pavilion curated by Defne Ayas, Charles Esche, Davide Quadrio, and Agung Hujatnikajennong for the 2012 Shanghai Biennale), albeit in terms that threaten to conflate decolonization and postcolonialism, displacing the subtle distinctions between these terms and the significance of those distinctions for reimagining globality and neocolonialism today. See Defne Ayas, Charles Esche, Davide Quadrio, and Agung Hujatnikajennong, “Bandung Pavilion Featured At The 9th Shanghai Biennale: Exquisite Corpses and Other Memories of the Twentieth Century,” press release for the Bandung Pavilion, 2012 Shanghai Biennale, available at <http://arthubasia.org/archives/9th-shanghai-biennale-bandung-pavilion/>. Accessed November 11, 2012.
  12. This was led chiefly by the Major Project on the “Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values,” a precursor of such projects as “Dialogue among Civilizations” (New Delhi, 2003) that rank among UNESCO’s central means for promoting transcultural development and exchange today. See Laura Wong, “Relocating East and West: UNESCO’s Major Project on the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values,” *Journal of World History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (September 2008), pp. 349–374.

13. Miha Košak, "Avant-Propos," in *Moderna Galerija, 10. Bienale Grafike Moderna Galerija Ljubljana Jugoslavija* (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1973), not paginated. Košak was the President of the Ljubljana City Assembly, the state sponsors of the Grafični Bienale. Significantly, Košak's claims would pre-empt the very similar rhetoric espoused by the itinerant European biennial, *Manifesta*, by more than 20 years.
14. Košak, "Avant-Propos."
15. Zoran Kržišnik, "Introduction," *10. Bienale Grafike*, not paginated. Kržišnik was also the secretary general of the Grafični Bienale and ran the Moderna Galerija from 1957 to 1986.
16. This was, in fact, a major concern for Kržišnik as well. He devoted a great deal of his introduction to the 1973 exhibition to deflecting any criticism about awarding prizes (especially in the wake of the Venice Biennale's withdrawal of prizes after the artist- and student-led protests at the Biennale in 1968), instead emphasizing the need for prizes to guarantee quality and "a constructive spirit of competition": see Kržišnik, "Introduction," not paginated.
17. Kržišnik later argued that the Grafični Bienale was an explicit materialization of Tito's politics, claiming that "the idea of non-alignment arose and at that time [in the mid-1950s] I proved to Marshal Tito ... that the biennial of graphic arts was actually a materialization of what was being referred to as openness, which was then seen as non-alignment" (interview with Beti Žerovc (2007), available at <http://29gbljubljana.wordpress.com/history/interview-with-zoran-krzisnik/>. Accessed September 4, 2012).
18. Caroline Jones, "Biennial Culture: A Longer History," in Clarissa Ricci (ed.), *Starting from Venice: Studies on the Biennale* (Milan: Et Al Edizioni, 2010), pp. 28–49, esp. p. 46.
19. See Charles Green and Heather Barker, "The Watershed: *Two Decades of American Painting* at the National Gallery of Victoria," *Art Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria*, no. 50 (May 2011), pp. 64–77 and 4 pp. notes.
20. Thomas G. McCullough, "Preface to Essays," in Thomas G. McCullough (ed. and curator), *Second Biennale of Sydney: Recent International Forms in Art*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1976), not paginated. In 1979, as we saw, this curatorial focus had been redirected dramatically in the Third Biennale of Sydney, with curator Nick Waterlow presenting a "European dialogue" that excluded almost all artists from Asia and the United States in an attempt to sever the domineering influence of the United States, and especially of New York, on Australian art. Despite this reactionary gesture, *European Dialogue* remains a landmark for being the first international biennial to exhibit Aboriginal painting as contemporary art, with Yolngu bark paintings showcased as forms of contemporary abstraction.
21. The Higher Committee of the Arab Art Biennale, "Foreword," in *First Biennale of Arab Art* (Baghdad: Union of Arab Artists, 1974), not paginated.

22. The Higher Committee of the Arab Art Biennale, "Foreword." Within a decade, however, another pan-Arab biennial, the Cairo International Biennial of Arab Art, emerged to replace the defunct, roaming Arab Art Biennale. The Cairo Biennial opened in 1984, only to remove the focus on specifically Arab art in later editions. It should be noted that our list of exhibitions here is not exhaustive; other regional biennials emerged in other parts of the world as well. The Baltic region, for instance, had two large-scale exhibitions concentrate on artists from around the Baltic Sea, including artists from Russia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and East Germany, as well as Finland, West Germany, and Sweden: the Baltic Triennial of Young Contemporary Arts in Vilnius, Lithuania in 1979 (later renamed the Baltic Triennial); and the Rauma Biennale Balticum in Finland from 1985, which continued the Gulf of Bothnia Biennial, which began in 1977. For more on the Baltic Triennial, see Charlotte Bydler, "Global Contemporary? The Global Horizon of Art Events," in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 464–478.
23. Sobhi, untitled preface to *Deuxième Biennale de la Méditerranée*, p. ix.
24. Zoran Kržišnik provides a remarkably open account of this, and the significance of the Grafični Biennale for bringing curators, artists, and politicians together from both the Eastern and Western blocs of Europe, in the interview with Beti Žerovc (2007).
25. See Keith Albarn, "The First Arab Biennale," *Studio International*, vol. 187, no. 966 (May 1974), Review, p. 5.
26. Albarn, "The First Arab Biennale," p. 5.
27. On the petitions and protests at the second Bienal de Arte Coltejer (which were criticized by the reviewer as "a somewhat empty and safe gesture"), see Charles Spencer, "No Revolution in Colombia," *Art and Artists*, vol. 5 (August 1970), pp. 60–62, esp. p. 62.
28. Gerardo Mosquera, "The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia," in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 198–207, esp. p. 205.
29. Cited in Albarn, "The First Arab Biennale," p. 257.
30. See, for instance, Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 2–3 (March–May 2007), pp. 449–514.
31. Beatriz Bustos Oyanedel, conversation with the authors, Melbourne, 2012.
32. Rachel Weiss, "A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition," p. 18.
33. See the succession of publications by Rachel Weiss on the 1989 Bienal de La Habana, principally in the definitive, densely researched collection edited by her that includes her long essay, "A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition," in Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennale 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011), pp. 14–69; but also see her "Performing Revolution," in

- Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (eds.), *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 115–164; also see Geraldo Mosquera, “The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts,” in Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1)*, pp. 70–79.
34. Cuban Culture Minister Armando Hart Dávalos wrote, “We often know more about what is exhibited in the great metropolitan museums than about what is created in the countries which are geographically and culturally close to us,” Armando Hart Dávalos, “Presentacion,” in *Segunda Bienal de La Habana*, exh. cat. (Havana: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam and Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), pp. 13–15, esp. p. 14; also quoted in Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time,” p. 22.
  35. Mosquera, “A Concrete Utopia,” p. 200.
  36. See H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba’s International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 31–32; for an outline of Cuba’s logistical, training, and actual military support across many theaters of conflict, from Sierra Leone and South Yemen to Syria, see Jaime Suchlicki, *The Cuban Military Under Castro* (Miami: University of Miami, 1989).
  37. See Tania Bruguera’s website describing *Tatlin’s Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* at <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/112-0-Tatlin+Whisper+6+Havana+version.htm>. Accessed July 25, 2015. See also Rachel Weiss, “Visions, Valves, and Vestiges: The Curdled Victories of the Bienal de La Habana,” *Art Journal*, vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 10–26, esp. p. 15.
  38. Weiss discusses this in “A Certain Place and a Certain Time”; for the difficult circumstances of Cuban art during the 1970s, see Coco Fusco and Robert Knafo, “Interviews with Cuban Artists,” *Social Text*, no. 15 (Autumn 1986), pp. 41–53. Together, these interviews describe the complexity of the Cuban art scene in the years prior to the 1986 Bienal though, fascinatingly, the Bienal is not mentioned: Manuel Mendive, Arturo Cuenca, and Flavio Garcianda insisted their practices were hybrid, Mendive highlighting the mystical Afro-Cuban cult, Santería; the artists mentioned New Cuban Art and the considerable impact of the exhibition *Volumen 1* (1980), which opened a window on international contemporary art, given Cuban artists’ relative isolation from first-hand contact with international art. *Volumen 1* was the Bienal’s antecedent (and had been curated by Mosquera); for retrospective views see Gerardo Mosquera, “The New Cuban Art,” in Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 208–46; also see Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); and see Luis Camnitzer, *On Art, Artists, Latin America and Other Utopias*, ed. Rachel Weiss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).
  39. Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture* (New York: Berg, 2005), p. 155.

40. For the first Bienal, see Luis Camnitzer, "Report from Havana: The First Biennial of Latin America," *Art in America*, vol. 72, no. 11 (December 1984), pp. 41–49; for a detailed overview of the Bienals, see Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, "Cultural Maps, Networks and Flows: The History and Impact of the Havana Biennale, 1984 to the Present," PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2009. <http://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/5675765/cultural-maps-networks-and-flows-university-of-pittsburgh-etc/514>. Accessed July 14, 2013. See also Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, "The Other Network: The Havana Biennale and the Global South," *Global South*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 153–174. Here, Rojas-Sotelo draws on his dissertation, outlining the development of the Wifredo Lam Center for Contemporary Art, the shifting nature of Cuban cultural policy, and the development of critical theories that shifted from an emphasis on the term, Third World, to the idea of the Global South.
41. See *Segunda Bienal de La Habana*, exh. cat. (Havana: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam and Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986); see John Povey, "Segunda Bienal de La Habana," *African Arts*, vol. 20, no. 3 (May 1987), pp. 82–84.
42. Povey, "Segunda Bienal de La Habana."
43. Bienal de La Habana, "Rules for Participation," in *Segunda Bienal de La Habana*, p. 19.
44. Lillian Llanes Godoy, "Introduction," *Tercera Bienal de La Habana '89*, exh. cat. (Havana: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam and Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1989), pp. 13–18; this essay is reprinted in Weiss, *Making Art Global (Part 1)*, pp. 178–183, see esp. p. 183. Looking back, Lillian Llanes Godoy was far less sanguine about the emancipatory impact of biennials; in 2004, for a conference presentation in Melbourne, Australia, delivered in absentia after she was denied entry to the country, she observed, "It seems that those who once believed that the participation of our artists and curators in some main events within the international art circles had resolved our issues, were, unfortunately, too optimistic and perhaps we are still in the same position as we were all those years ago"; see Lillian Llanes Godoy, "South–South Dialogue," paper presented at the conference, "South," Melbourne, September 19–23, 2004, p. 2.
45. Gerardo Mosquera, "The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia," in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 198–207, p. 203; on this note also see Gerardo Mosquera, "The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts," in Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 1)*, pp. 70–79; both essays are versions of a paper presented at "Exhibitions and the World at Large," a symposium organized in London by Afterall Books and the Research Center for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN) on April 3, 2009, authors' notes. For reviews of the second Bienal, see Luis Camnitzer, "La Segunda Bienal de La Habana," *Arte en Colombia*, no. 33 (May 1987), pp. 79–85; Dore Ashton, "Havana, 1986," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 61 (Feb. 1987), pp. 38–39; Mike Alewitz,

- “The Havana Biennial: A Partisan Review,” *New Art Examiner*, vol. 14 (Jun. 1987), pp. 24–25.
46. In her essay for the 1989 Bienal catalog, Lillian Llanes Godoy refuted the charge that the works on display in the Bienals were belated and not truly contemporary, “as if in this day and age our peoples were incapable of creating a culture based both on our traditions and on a dialectical relationship with the present.” Lillian Llanes Godoy, “Introduction,” *Tercera Bienal de La Habana '89*, reprinted in Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1)*, p. 178.
  47. All of this is conjured in detail in Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” p. 203, and note 6, p. 207.
  48. Rudolf Baranik, Luis Camnitzer, Eva Cockcroft, Douglas Crimp, and Lucy Lippard, “Report from Havana: Cuba Conversation,” *Art in America*, vol. 75, no. 3 (March 1987), pp. 21–29, esp. p. 21; also see Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2004), p. 115.
  49. Luis Camnitzer, in Rudolf Baranik, et al., “Report from Havana: Cuba Conversation,” p. 27.
  50. Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time,” p. 24.
  51. Mosquera, “The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts,” p. 74.
  52. Camnitzer, in Rudolf Baranik et al., “Report from Havana,” p. 22.
  53. Bassam El Baroni, “Remodeling Required: Official Biennales in Egypt and International Biennale Culture,” paper presented at “Art Criticism and Curatorial Practices in Marginal Contexts: AICA Conference, Addis Ababa, January 26–28, 2006.” <http://aicainternational.org/en/art-criticism-curatorial-practices-in-marginal-contexts-addis-ababa-26-28-january-2006/>. Accessed October 10, 2015. Also see <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/30895881/bassam-el-baroni-remodeling-required-aica-international>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
  54. See respectively Charles Esche, “Making Art Global: A Good Place or a No Place?,” in Weiss et al., *The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, pp. 8–13, esp. p. 11; and Rachel Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time,” in Weiss et al., *The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, p. 14; this error is repeated in Bruce Altshuler’s *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 241.
  55. Esche, “Making Art Global: A Good Place or a No Place?,” p. 11.
  56. Nancy Adajania and Ranjit Hoskote, “Notes Towards a Lexicon of Urgencies; DISPATCH: Mumbai,” in Independent Curators International (eds.), *Research* (October 1, 2010). <http://curatorsintl.org/research/notes-towards-a-lexicon-of-urgencies>. Accessed September 4, 2012.

## Part 2

# The Politics of Legitimacy

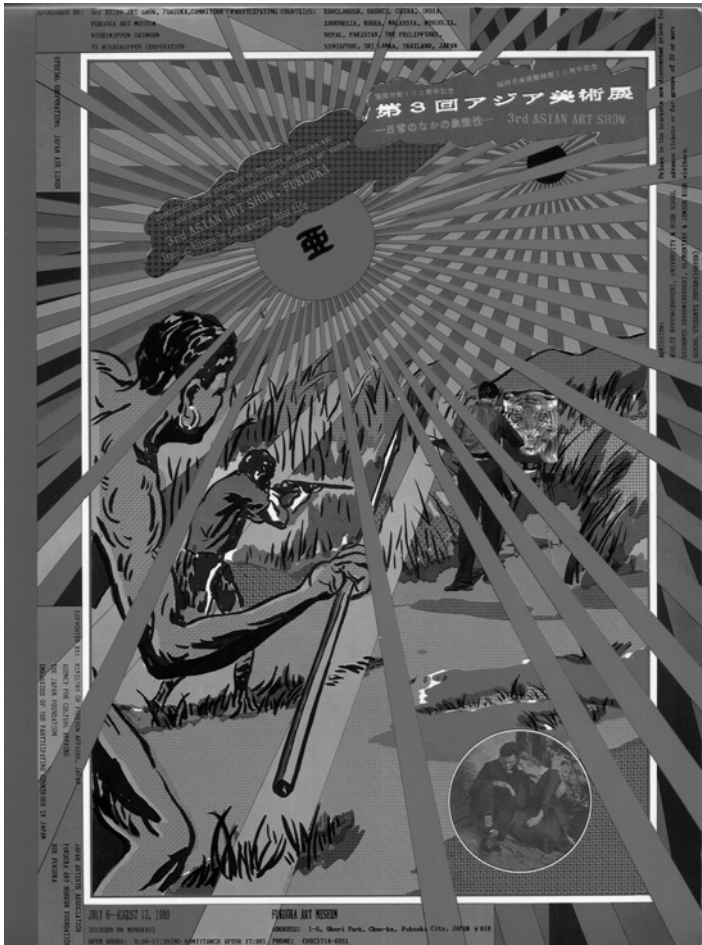


Figure 4.1 Cover of Fukuoka Art Museum, 3rd Asian Art Show, Fukuoka, exhibition catalogue (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1989). Courtesy The Fukuoka Art Museum Collection.



## 1989: Asian Biennialization

Exhibitions in this chapter: Asian Art Show (1979, Fukuoka, Japan); Asia-Pacific Triennial (1993, Brisbane, Australia); Gwangju Biennale (1995, Gwangju, South Korea); Shanghai Biennale (2000, Shanghai, China)

### Introduction

By the 1990s, new large, recurring survey exhibitions were springing up across the Asia-Pacific region. Brisbane, Fukuoka, Taipei, Gwangju, and other cities began important international biennials or triennials that garnered international attention. The rise of such biennials over the decade, it might have been presumed, was yet another symptom of global power stretching out from colonial-era centers, with the Venice Biennale and *documenta* at the apex of a pyramid. The reality was much less simple.

For a start, the rise of Asia was often touted as exemplifying the triumph of neoliberalization. The call was along the lines of “look at the biennials, triennials, and art fairs in China alone these days, all cannibalizing the western biennial model!”<sup>1</sup> But by contrast, as we have emphasized in previous chapters, the idea of biennials generating international cultural exchange was definitely not just a post-1989 phenomenon, nor did it arise from a desire to join the European and North American art world, as recapitulating a few key dates demonstrates. The Tokyo Biennale had already begun in 1952, focused largely on the arts of Northeast Asia. In 1962, Vietnam War-era Saigon hosted an international biennial featuring artists from India, Australia, South Korea, and other countries “friendly to [South] Viet-Nam” during the War.<sup>2</sup> The Triennale-India began in New Delhi in 1968, followed by the Arab Art Biennale in 1974, Fukuoka’s Asian Art Show in 1979, the Asian Art Biennale in Dhaka in 1981, and a biennial that ultimately became one

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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of the most significant of all, the Istanbul Biennial in 1987.<sup>3</sup> Other, long-running though simply national biennials across the region included the first Indian biennial, called the Bharat Bhavan Biennial of Contemporary Indian Art, in 1986 in Bhopal, a city still recovering from a toxic gas leak that was one of the world's greatest environmental catastrophes, the Jakarta Biennale (which dated back all the way to 1974 as *The Indonesian Painting Exhibition*, which showed little interest in experimental art beyond painting), and the Yogyakarta Biennale in Indonesia. This latter exhibition commenced in 1988, starting with a very local focus and also restricting itself to painting; in 1992, it was challenged by younger Indonesian artists in a dramatic series of protests, before broadening its focus later still to practices along the Equator and throughout the South. And, as we saw in chapter 2, the Biennale of Sydney was already promoting itself as a meeting point between artists, curators, and writers around the Pacific Rim in its second edition in 1976 (the first had been in 1973, but was focused mainly on painting and sculpture from Australia). Exhibitions such as the Second Johannesburg Biennale, *Trade Routes* (1997) or *2000 Shanghai Biennale* (also known as the Third Shanghai Biennale, 2000), both of which foregrounded the globalization and connectivity of the international art world (and which we will analyze presently), had not yet appeared. In Europe, Catherine David's otherwise admirable, "political" *documenta X* (1997) would cover the Asia-Pacific completely inadequately and so would even its epochal successor, Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11* (2002). The early and mid-1990s Venice Biennales were almost completely, perhaps naively, unselfconscious in their North Atlantic-focused selections, even though a limited number of artists from China were included.

The relationship between nascent understandings of "globality" and biennials in Asia-Pacific clearly requires more precision than that offered by a broad-brushstroke approach if justice is to be done to the complex histories of cultural connection across the region. We need to shift from the general so as to emphasize the particular – and to focus on specific biennials, even specific editions of specific biennials – in order to understand the dramatic transformation of biennials in Asia during the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> With that in mind, this chapter considers the Fukuoka Asian Art Show in Fukuoka, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific Triennial (or APT) in Brisbane, Australia, to show the entwined nature of two key narratives in contemporary art. First, we note the ascending arc of biennial cultures in Asia during the 1990s, which was also the decade of neoliberal expansionism. Second, as this arc ascended, Asian biennial curators replaced the previous

division of tradition versus modernity with a focus on the transformation of tradition by globalization and thus on the emergence of contemporary art that, because of the degree of its independence from North America and Western Europe, was now not to be described by terms like hybrid or postcolonial but by the idea of Asian contemporary art (or, with its perhaps slightly different connotations, contemporary Asian art). By this we mean that a regional and not a local orientation was created in the Asian biennials of the 1990s, in order to suggest a coherent notion and display of “Asian art” today. This was true even though the artistic situations in South Korea, Japan, India, China, Australia, and the other nations across the region were significantly different. Each had, on the surface, very different exhibition histories. Korean biennials such as Gwangju took advantage of Korea’s huge economic boom by the early 1990s to signal the end of authoritarian rule. Bangladesh created a biennial in the same grassroots, ecumenical spirit, albeit with the same slightly authoritarian undertones, as the Bienal de La Habana. In China, the priority that curators and artists felt was the imperative to align local with global forces in order to legitimate so-called experimental art; we shall trace that in more detail in chapter 8. The differences were vast, nation to nation, and it is possible for outsiders to argue that by using the umbrella term, *Asian* art, many specificities were lost. That may be the case. However, this objection completely misses the point that it was Asian artists and curators who built biennials that self-consciously defined Asian art, not art historians like us.

The Fukuoka Asian Art Show and the Asia-Pacific Triennial sought, even more self-consciously than other new Asian biennials, to define contemporary art *across the region* and to generate a very substantial cross-cultural dialogue between artists, curators, and academics. To this end, in Brisbane, the Queensland Art Gallery (or QAG) and the Queensland State Government poured significant resources into the event. By its third incarnation in 1999, the APT was beset by expectations created by its own success: the limitations of highly complex, unwieldy consultative structures had become clear – not least of which, as we will see, was its ratio of one curator for every two artists involved – while the consequent tensions in the Triennial’s intellectual underpinning and future direction were more apparent than earlier in the decade. This was because the APT was pulled in two quite different directions from the start: the desire to ecumenically celebrate cultural difference; and the desire to arbitrate in the critical rather than celebratory formation of a revised art historical canon. The same stresses were visible at Fukuoka. They existed less in other biennials across the region,

no matter how ambitious they were in their yearnings for global and especially North Atlantic approbation. The Gwangju Biennale was the most lavishly resourced of all these biennials (its budget and attendance were vastly greater than that of South Korea's other major biennial, the Busan Biennale, even though Busan is a far larger city with a lavish cultural infrastructure) and the one most thoroughly integrated into the North Atlantic art world through its selection of curators and artists.

The very inclusion and explicit celebration of micro-cultural difference that initially distinguished the APT and Fukuoka sat increasingly uneasily with the shifting critical interrogation and analysis (both by artists and academics) of that same difference, as well as with the intractable persistence of nationality as the apparently unavoidable key to artist classification. Under what conditions should tradition and difference be celebrated (especially given the gender and class inequalities embedded in many traditional cultural practices)? What should be singled out and exhibited? Is tradition sustainable? What about cosmopolitanism? Is the politics of difference always or ever progressive? And does staging difference in an exhibition convert it into enervated spectacle? Such curatorial questions and their dilemmas were evident to Fukuoka's and the APT's early teams of curators even at the time, back in the 1980s and at the start of the 1990s. In 1989, the director of the Fukuoka Art Museum, Mikio Soejima, recounted the debates during the conference that had accompanied the *2nd Asian Art Show* of 1985, writing as if it was natural (which it was not; many modernist artists would have stressed the reverse) that "the debate naturally focused on the question of where the uniqueness of Asian art lay, as this is what Asian artists have always been asking themselves."<sup>5</sup>

There was another phenomenon at work at the beginning of the 1990s: the frenzied selection of a new global artistic canon with all the art world pressures (the same as those at each frenetic opening week of a Venice Biennale) that this entailed. So, as familiar yearnings for international attention increased, so did bloated artist lists and increasingly loose themes that covered all bases. This elicited the charge that we have mentioned before, that biennials were little more than handmaidens to neoliberal globalization.<sup>6</sup> It seems to us that most of the new Asian biennials of the 1990s intended from the start to introduce new artists, new curators, and new parts of the world to a globalizing international contemporary art world whereas other, earlier biennials had not prioritized the direction of this trajectory to the same degree at all. They instead deliberately created (as had the *Bienal de La Habana*) the South-South model that we saw in the last chapter,

sometimes but not always combined with a more familiar, centripetal direction (as at Sydney), bringing the so-called contemporary art world and its artists out to the host city for its betterment.

In short, biennials now offered newcomers to the global scene a stage on which to participate in the contemporary art and upmarket tourist industries, while enabling a dramatically expanded audience the chance to see recent art. This was on the surface no different to the biennials described in previous chapters. But during the 1990s, the number of progressive conurbations outside the North Atlantic that had previously not successfully hosted an international art biennial, including Brisbane, Gwangju, and Fukuoka, increased each year. The itinerary necessary to follow contemporary art was expanding far beyond the journey between the first-established and now elderly biennials, such as Venice, and now also beyond the network of established, even middle-aged biennials such as Sydney. Despite these logistical successes, there remained little to read beyond simple exhibition catalogues (consisting usually of a succession of abridged résumés, a small black and white photograph, and a short artist statement for each contributing artist), glossy picture books or trade journals with superficial texts, and not much else that was substantial or searching.<sup>7</sup> Modern or contemporary Asian art was still a long way from becoming a basic part of most students' study of twentieth- or twenty-first-century art.

### **Experimental Versus Traditional Art: "Traditions/Tensions"**

We will start with a question. If one of the core markers of contemporary art, of art that embodies the condition of contemporaneity, is its stress on the experimental at both the points of its production and the points of its reception, then how, when, and why did this contemporary art become synonymous with globalized art practice? Today, the division between production and reception (like that between theory and practice, or between globalization and colonization) seems so blurred as to be virtually non-existent. This is precisely what marks contemporary art's clear distinction from both the self-consciously experimental, late modern arts of the 1960s and 1970s and, equally emphatically, from postmodern art with its régime of the original and the copy. So when and how did this distinction develop?

The answer begins at the end of the 1980s, when it became both possible and desirable for biennial curators in Asia and other so-called

“peripheral” regions to argue that tradition had become contemporary, and then increasingly demand that traditional art had to demonstrate an adaptation to the conditions of contemporaneity if it was to be selected for the emerging biennials. These adaptations had previously been faced by profound indifference. Witness, for instance, the remarkable lack of interest or understanding (at least by most critics and historians from around the North Atlantic) about the ground-breaking Third Bienal de La Habana in Cuba, with its focus on “Tradition and Contemporaneity,” until roughly twenty years after its staging back in 1989, and the almost complete lack of awareness about the many Asian art biennials until the mid-1990s.<sup>8</sup> Awareness of that indifference also informed the title that one of the most acute and sensitive curators of contemporary Asian art, Apinan Poshyananda, gave his landmark Asia Society exhibition in New York in 1996: “Traditions/Tensions.” That title was especially telling given Apinan was also a member of the second Asia-Pacific Triennial’s curatorial collective that year, in 1996, selecting the Australian artists who were included: At *APT2*, the accommodation between the traditional and the triennial was seemingly all too apparent, as attested by a variety of semi-hostile reviews by commentators who actually did perceive a tension rather than a reconciliation between tradition and contemporaneity.<sup>9</sup>

A simple, open, all-inclusive definition of contemporary art would have meant that Asian art biennials (including the Asian Art Show and the Asia-Pacific Triennial) would have featured the selection of locally celebrated, contemporary exponents of heritage arts and crafts. In the lead-up to their 1979 Asian Art Show, Fukuoka’s curators witnessed fierce hostility and antipathy between traditional and contemporary artists: Yasunaga Koichi remembered a meeting in Sri Lanka where artists almost came to blows over the question of what type of art should represent their country.<sup>10</sup> The *APT*’s first curators were often urged to select traditional, heritage art: for instance, senior Yogyakarta batik artists fully expected to be considered for the first Triennial but the Brisbane curators, as their journals and working notes show, were far from eager to include heritage art in the Triennial.<sup>11</sup> They were reluctant because heritage cultures were often associated with conservative state bureaucracies or cliques, and with highly regulated guilds and associations that resisted change or encroachment upon their privileges, as opposed to the internationalizing universities and art schools across Asia whose professors, students, and curricula were not at all dissimilar to their North Atlantic peers. It was these university-based or freelance professional intellectuals – including Jim Supangkat in Jakarta,

Geeta Kapur in New Delhi, T.K. Sabapathy in Singapore, and Somporn Rod-boon in Bangkok, with their international and emerging regional networks and their knowledge of the cosmopolitan local artists whose works would be most “legible” to roving global curators – who were most often consulted by those international curators hunting for contemporary art. They were the gate-keepers. And their artists did not observe the proprieties that went with heritage forms but often did take pre-contemporary production methods as a part but not the whole of their artistic methods. The reverse – that the so-called (Western) experimental, new media tradition was part of their artistic methods – was true as well. Both the Fukuoka and the Brisbane curators were intensely aware of the difference between exactly these very contradictory definitions of contemporaneity. At Fukuoka, Mikio Soejima wrote that:

“contemporary art” in the Japanese context refers to works essentially different from those regularly seen in open or competitive exhibitions sponsored by art organizations, and more particularly to works embodying avant-garde, experimental and radical forms of expression, but it is inconceivable for this working definition to prove universally applicable in Asia.<sup>12</sup>

He lamented that there was, therefore, little recourse except to a weak definition of contemporaneity, which would mean simply that all art made today by Asians was contemporary art. And at the same time, his text is worth noting for how embattled the idea of either modern or contemporary art then seemed, so different to the triumphal acceptance that contemporary art now finds in new art museums across Asia. The backdrop to this was the deep conservatism and regional populism that had been the forces dominating most institutional art history and patronage across the Asia-Pacific region. This era was only just passing in 1989, when the *3rd Asian Art Show* opened in Fukuoka. The exhibition received much more government and municipal support than ever before (touring to the Yokohama Museum of Art), and its curators remembered a strong sense that the idea of contemporary Asian art was now respectable; in turn, this was the first Asian Art Show to be organized around a theme rather than simply to be a survey of whatever each nation chose to send.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, exhibitions of modern and contemporary Asian art were appearing in Europe and the United States. Kazu Kaidō curated *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan, 1945–1965* at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in 1985, while in late

1986, the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris presented *Japon des avant-gardes: 1910–1970*.

But episodes when a deeply conservative vision of art had not ruled state-run or national art museums across Asia itself (the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia included) had been alarmingly few. A biennial survey exhibition of Asian and Australian art, the Artists Regional Exchange (always known more simply as ARX), had been held in Perth from 1987. It migrated from location to location with later editions but its existence was finally curtailed by a tiny budget. ARX was small in scale and many of its international visitors, including Thai curator Apinan Poshyananda (one of the key advisors, as we have observed, to the initial Asia-Pacific Triennials), had remarked on ARX's DIY disorganization.<sup>14</sup> Inversely and instructively, the reason that particular Asian and Australian provincial governments chose to reverse this conservatism by embracing biennial culture was that they recognized that something more real than homespun pride was at stake in the way provincial nation-states, or provincial cities like Brisbane or Fukuoka, presented themselves to the world in a period of increasing globalization.<sup>15</sup> If Brisbane and Fukuoka identified as contemporary, progressive, and open to change – much as Cold War America had projected itself as progressive through the Museum of Modern Art's International Program in exhibitions such as *Two Decades of American Painting* (which toured to Tokyo and Kyoto, as well as Delhi, Melbourne, and Sydney, during 1966–1967) – then they were able to participate in the equivalent of a rolling circuit of cultural Olympics.

This brings us back to the emerging networks of globalized Asian biennials. If the development of biennials in parts of Asia from the 1960s to the 1980s (in New Delhi, in Sydney, in Dhaka) signaled a first wave of the region's biennials, then a second wave appeared in earnest in 1993 with the first APT at the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) in Brisbane. This was followed in quick succession by new biennials in the South Korean city of Gwangju (1995), in Shanghai (1996), Busan (1998), Taipei (starting in 1992 but adopting its present form in 1998), and then in numerous other cities after that. But it was the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 1100 kilometers west of Tokyo, that must be credited as an even greater influence on the region's biennials and their dedication to contemporary Asian art. In 1979 and 1980, the city of Fukuoka staged a massive survey of Asian art, which appeared in two sections. These were the inaugural exhibitions of the new Fukuoka Art Museum. The first part of the exhibition, in 1979, was historical, showcasing Chinese, Indian, and Japanese early modernist artists, including Amrita



Sher-Gil and Qi Baishi. The second half, the *Contemporary Asian Art Show*, in 1980, was a gigantic survey of contemporary art across Asia, featuring 470 works by artists from thirteen Asian nations. The Asian Art Show appeared at five-yearly intervals (this, as an index of significant ambition, was the same interval as Kassel's documenta), before it was rebadged in 1999 with a new name by a new museum, separate from the Fukuoka Art Museum and called the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (or FAAM). FAAM was located in a generic office building in downtown Fukuoka, and is now fully distinct from the Fukuoka Art Museum, which nestles next to a famous lake in Ōhori Park, a couple of kilometers west from downtown. By 1999, the Asian Art Show was to take place every three years and would henceforth be called the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale.

QAG's new director, Doug Hall, was well aware of the Asian Art Show's long and important history. One of his first overseas trips after his appointment to QAG's directorship in 1987 was to Fukuoka. He saw first-hand Fukuoka's policy of acquiring works from its exhibition so as to generate an important collection of contemporary Asian art, a policy that he then adopted with great success in Brisbane. As we have seen, the Fukuoka Art Museum was actively promoting the idea of distinctively Asian contemporary art rather than art centered on the United States or Europe, even if the rejection of Europe-centered explanations resulted instead in clunky, awkward-sounding frameworks like the Fukuoka Art Museum's idea that Asian art was distinguished by "symbolic visions in contemporary Asian life."<sup>16</sup> But the Fukuoka Art Museum backed its ideas with active curatorial research rather than simply issuing invitations to exhibiting nations to send works that they would choose. Art historian Joan Kee recounts, for instance, that a team of Japanese curators visited Seoul for a week in mid-1979, ahead of the Asian Art Show, meeting *tansaekhwa*-style, minimalist artists such as Lee Ufan.<sup>17</sup> But at the same time, the Fukuoka Art Museum's curators saw their museum as fragile, accepted only grudgingly in Japan.<sup>18</sup> Japanese audiences did not accept the importance of pan-Asian art, imagining, like Australians, that the term, "Asia," did not include their own nation. Cultural edifices and large, expensive complexes had, Fukuoka curator Kuroda Raiji asserted, been opportunistically erected by politicians eager for monuments based on European museums. Moreover (and in an implicit jibe at the Fukuoka Art Museum's permanent collection, once the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum had been detached), he claimed that all they housed were second-rate European and American art and pale imitations.

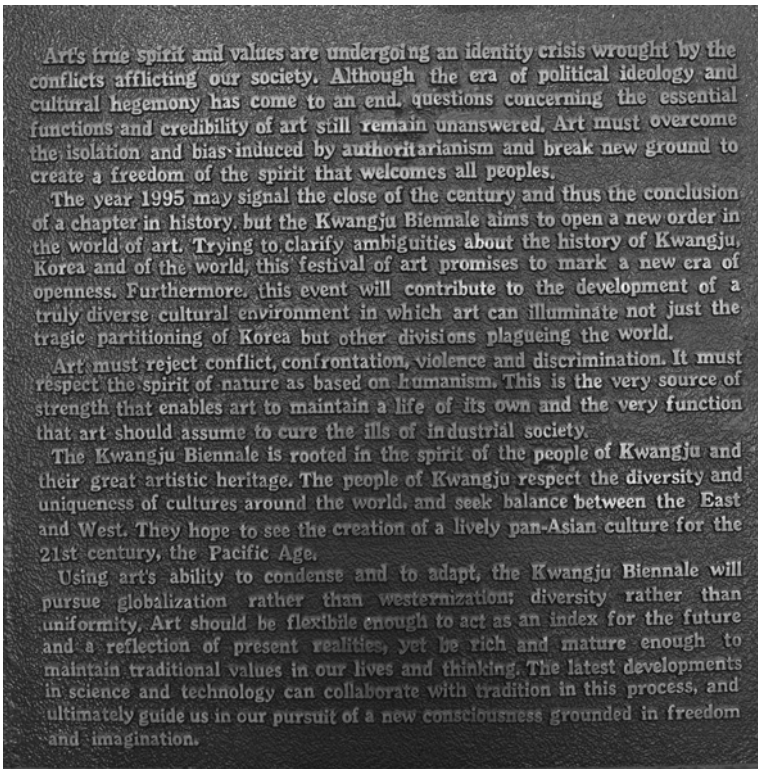


Figure 4.2 “The Kwangju Biennale Declaration,” Kwangju Biennale Hall foyer, Kwangju, 1995. Courtesy Kwangju Biennale Foundation. Photo Charles Green.

Other East Asian biennials relied on different exhibition models. For its first two installments, the Shanghai Biennale restricted itself to traditional Chinese art and craft, rebranding itself only in 2000 with international artists making enormous installations and video projections. The Kwangju Biennale began in 1995 in a spirit of regional boosterism but also of profound historical commemoration, memorializing the Kwangju Uprising and the large-scale massacres carried out by the military on May 18–27, 1980. In the entrance hall of the huge Biennale building is a somber memorial plaque, “The Kwangju Declaration.” Its preamble reads:

Art's true spirit and values are undergoing an identity crisis wrought by the conflicts afflicting our society. Although the era of political ideology and

cultural hegemony has come to an end, questions concerning the essential functions and credibility of art still remain unanswered. Art must overcome the isolation and bias induced by authoritarianism and break new ground to create a freedom of the spirit that welcomes all peoples. The year 1995 may signal the close of the century and thus the conclusion of a chapter in history but the Kwangju Biennale aims to open a new order in the world of art. Trying to clarify ambiguities about the history of Kwangju, Korea and of the world, this festival of art promises to mark a new era of openness.<sup>19</sup>

The Uprising was the outcome of widespread indignation at the repressive military government that had succeeded the dictatorial President Park Chung Hee, and was instrumental in helping to bring down South Korea's authoritarian government.<sup>20</sup> The Kwangju Declaration shows that the creation of the Biennale was intended to be a very serious memorial to the protestors in a city that had a long history of protest and, especially, of *Madang* (Open Square) theater, which combined traditional folk drama and western agit-prop.<sup>21</sup> This highly political theater pre-dated 1980 across the main cities of South Korea. So, when the first Gwangju Biennale director, Lee Yongwoo, wrote in 1995, "The objective of the Kwangju International Biennale is to encourage independent cultural behavior," then his call had a context in a long Korean tradition of radical and experimental art and in a very serious commitment to the place of contemporary art.<sup>22</sup> That first Gwangju Biennale was distinct in other ways too. It eccentrically insisted on dividing artists according to the continents of their births (a seldom-used division in large-scale exhibitions of any kind). Subsequent iterations continued to experiment with very unusual and often highly idiosyncratic curatorial methods in ways that – due to the extraordinarily large funding, amongst the largest budget in the world for any biennial, given to the exhibition by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation – were quite unlike most other large biennials, concentrating on inventing new curatorial processes and innovations rather than seeing the biennial as a resource for creating a permanent collection. With a strong but local attendance base assured by proud, enthusiastic locals and large school groups (1,630,000 visitors for the first edition, 900,000 for the second, 610,000 for the third, and 550,000 for the fourth), Gwangju then strategically cultivated select international audiences by hiring globally renowned curators based in Europe and the United States, such as Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Massimiliano Gioni, Hou Hanru, Harald Szeemann, Jessica Morgan, and Maria Lind.

By contrast, the APT was conceived to shepherd Australia's predominantly Western culture back into the fold of Asia-Pacific regionalism. As

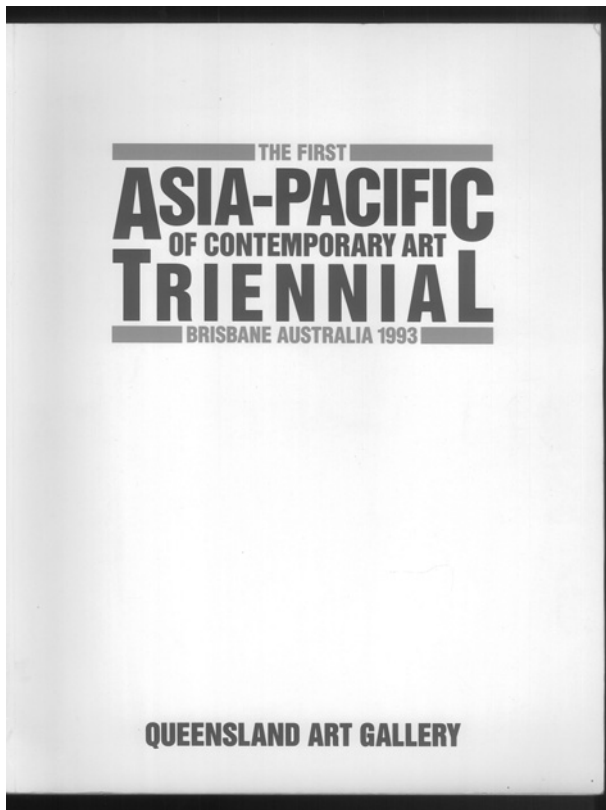


Figure 4.3 Cover of *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, curators Caroline Turner et al. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1993). Courtesy Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art.

had the Bienal de La Habana, each edition refined what the edges of its regional scope might be. The first APT, in 1993, attracted an audience of 60,000 visitors, a small but remarkable number for an exhibition hosted by a city of little more than a million people, separated by one or two hours' flights from the much bigger centers of Sydney and Melbourne, and about six hours from Singapore. It included seventy-six artists from Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and Hong Kong (since this was before that city's reunification with China), but not, surprisingly, from India. The second APT in 1996 attracted 120,000 visitors and

now redressed that lack of Indian artists. The third APT in 1999 received 155,000 visitors, featuring seventy-seven artists from Asia and the Pacific, from countries including Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, India, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, and Australia, and for the first time Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Wallis and Futuna Islands, and Niue. Interestingly, the APT's fiercely supportive, local Queensland audience adopted the event with great enthusiasm despite the xenophobic rhetoric generated by chauvinist, right-wing politicians in Australia during the mid-1990s.

At this point, it is worth thinking a little more about the implications of housing a biennial inside an art museum in search of a collection, for it is important to remember that some biennials have been itinerant (as Saigon's biennial was intended to be), some have survived without the stable use of an exhibition venue from year to year, such as the Istanbul Biennial, while other biennials – there are more of this type in Asia than one might think – have been centered in art museums even if they also spread across their host cities and into temporary sites. Some biennials and triennials are loaned the use of exhibition spaces inside state art museums for the duration of their exhibitions (including the Sydney Biennale). The warehouse inside which the 8th Istanbul Biennial was housed became a new art museum, the Istanbul Modern. Next door, another vast building, Antrepo 3, which housed numerous editions of the Istanbul Biennial in the early 2000s, was to be converted immediately on the closure of the 13th Biennial into up-scale apartments. Tenancies inside established art museums, however, have often been fraught or tenuous. The exceptions, amongst which are FAAM in Fukuoka and QAG in Brisbane, show us that biennials owned by art museums have often been associated with the museum's priority to transform their collection through the acquisition opportunities presented by their biennial. Neither the Metropolitan Museum of Art nor the Museum of Modern Art in New York – both art museums with great collections – is associated with a biennial; the Tate in London acquired its triennial quite late, in 2000, coincidentally at about the time its notorious Turner Prize lost its landmark status, precisely because Tate Modern's immensely successful Turbine Hall single-artist projects and its Tate Triennial had replaced the Turner Prize's increasingly too-parochial performance of contemporaneity.

There were consequences that went with acquiring a collection from the hosting of a biennial. Not appointing a freelance artistic director with unilateral authority over artist selection meant the chance to build the authority, expertise, and networks of the museum's own curators, as well as the

collection. Back in 1990, Brisbane recognized the importance of in-house curating. No museum was willingly going to delegate its actual acquisition choices to an itinerant auteur, no matter how famous (or perhaps especially because of this). Tate Modern had no need of a triennial to boost its collection nor did the needs of a triennial mesh any better with this enormously successful institution than an increasingly enervated art prize; after the 2009 triennial, directed by celebrated French curator Nicolas Bourriaud (of relational aesthetics fame), the Tate quietly suspended plans for its successor. Yet most of the charismatic auteur curators who freelanced as biennial directors – from Harald Szeemann and Rudi Fuchs to Okwui Enwezor and Massimiliano Gioni – worked again and again with the same list of artists who produced works for which there was a far greater demand than supply. Access to these artists and their works is strictly policed by their dealer representatives, many of whom spend considerable time refusing invitations to biennials and curated exhibitions on behalf of their artists. In theory, an auteur curator like Szeemann might have provided access to collection opportunities denied to mere museum curators. And all members of the surprisingly small biennial curator cadre shared and swapped from an informal, shifting but circumscribed list of artists. But there was no need at all for most of these hundred or so artists to show in or make sales to art museums located in the cities in which most biennials are located (in other words, not New York, not London, not Basel or Cologne). Instead, the artists gained considerable cultural capital from non-retail outings of their works in shabbily glamorous settings like Istanbul or by continuing their association with much-sought-after curators, as at Gwangju (for Western collectors and curators have closely tracked the artist lists of that biennial). In this sense, auteur biennial directors have often worked like art dealers with overlapping stables of artists. The core list was fairly constant, exclusivities were demarcated, but the edges of the list were flexible enough to admit new names as older ones were dropped. A reasonable and increasing number of Chinese mainland artists appeared on this list from the early 1990s on, but in reality this flexibility extended to very few artists from anywhere else in the region except for one or two Indian artists and groups (such as Shilpa Gupta or Raqs Media Collective). For auteur biennial directors or freelance exhibition curators, the business of being actually financially involved in sales was both irrelevant and avoided. Here, we do not doubt the ethics of those involved, not least because any obvious infraction would have been fairly quickly noticed and instantly publicized. Moreover the actual conflation of dealer and innovative curator had precedents

in earlier periods. Short-term financial sacrifice went with building long-term reputations. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, as we noted in chapter 1, several famous, exceptional commercial dealers – for instance Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf and, further afield, Bruce Pollard in Melbourne – specialized in establishing the worth of a generation of notoriously difficult and apparently unsalable artists, often organizing exhibitions of their artists' work at galleries in other cities or in art museums rather than in their own private galleries. Fischer did this for many American artists, not least Sol LeWitt, all across Europe.

On the other hand, creating a biennial from scratch at a largely unknown and previously irrelevant art museum with no international reputation for innovation or patronage, using in-house curators, meant that access to such famous North Atlantic-based artists was very limited if not non-existent. For that reason almost alone, deliberately narrowing the Fukuoka and APT focus to the Asian region was wise. An informal but intensely hierarchical art world structure such as that which exists in the North Atlantic art world did not yet exist across Asia, though of course it did to different degrees within national borders. In fact, it would be more correct to say that at the start of the 1990s, there were a few centers that housed an "art world" in the Asian region but not many more than that. But this meant that Brisbane curators – none of whom then was a recognized authority on Asian art but a couple of whom had particular enthusiasms – would be involved in vast quantities of catch-up research, travel, and consultation in the Asian region. So the regionalism of APT and Fukuoka was a gamble on a subtle but undeniably epochal difference between seeking out cultural specificity and, on the other hand, on locating a so-called dialogue between artists and cultures inside the Asian region rather than on their incommensurability. This was to be the crucial gambit in terms of creating a regional version of global contemporary art. For implicit in the use of the word "dialogue" was the idea that cultural transaction would be legible in the work of art, rather than the local artist standing aloof from the sheer variety and flow of diverse types of art from many places. This formula was described elegantly by theorist Marian Pastor Roces through the term "expo art," which she used in a lecture at the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1999; we will come back to her argument at the end of this chapter. The new idea of a contemporary dialogue with the local was only possible because of the "longing for contemporaneity," as Wu Hung put it, that had overtaken the whole region, compared with the earlier, late modern, or postmodern moments of the late 1980s.<sup>23</sup>

To select artists, the APT's curators immediately and consciously set out to eschew Venice's model of nationally chosen pavilions, avoiding Venice's delegation of curatorial responsibility to national representatives. Even so, the exhibition's catalogue was to group the artists by their countries of birth, highlighting in the process the local consultants – sometimes curators, often artists or academics, but always locals with contemporary cosmopolitan sympathies – who assisted in the selection process. The practicalities of international curating put transnational ideals under great pressure, for it was difficult not to retreat into expedient nation-state divisions in the process of tapping into local informants' advice, not to mention access to the funding that national arts agencies might offer. Each artist was selected in an increasingly complicated process of consultation, meetings, and apparently endless co-curatorship.<sup>24</sup> Like the Fukuoka curators, the Brisbane team started with an extremely elaborate system of in-house curatorial responsibility, in practice reinstating national classifications even as they conscientiously and exhaustively researched artists from most nations across the region. Even in 1993, this amounted to an impressive list of selectors and advisers: ten Australians and sixty-one foreign advisers from the nations in the region, which ultimately brought together almost 200 works by seventy-six artists.<sup>25</sup> By the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial this committee structure had become even more complex.<sup>26</sup> In effect, by then, QAG Director Doug Hall, chief curator Caroline Turner, and their team were balancing a survey of recent Asia-Pacific art against a more auteurist, grand statement of themes and their obviously guilty desire to diffuse responsibility for such statements. Their notes show that they agonized over this task. It was evident in the exhibition publications' timid, endlessly reiterated mission statements and many complaints from the floor of the APT conferences about the sheer craziness of forty-eight curators selecting seventy-seven artists. The same elaborate, three-way balancing act was in place at Fukuoka and continued relatively unchanged into the twenty-first century. Rawanchaikul Toshiko, a curator at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, wrote:

The artist selection process begins with on-site research conducted by ourselves. Making full use of a network cultivated through the Museum's past exhibition and residence programs, only one or two staff carry out research each time. The staff from the museum's administrative section are involved as well. At each destination, we listen and engage in fervent discussions on the latest trend with local specialists of contemporary art such as our Commissioned Researchers and art critics. We then meet the artists recommended by



these collaborators as well as those we researched on our own, and repeat by seeing more and more works. We rely on local collaborators and Coordinators for arranging the research, thus, the preliminary research of the local coordinating institutions and various negotiations with them become important tasks in the process.<sup>27</sup>

The issue was whether biennial selectors should aim for consensus (and thus be ostensibly democratic), aiming to reflect what locals themselves judged was going on at their distant sites, as this passage from Fukuoka and those from Brisbane indicated. The curators of the 1979 Asian Art Show had allocated an identical quantity of wall space to each nation, completely leaving it to each nation to select their artists. The shape of consultation had been one of the many problems facing curators from the start of the globalization of the contemporary art world. Jean-Hubert Martin, André Magnin, Mark Francis, and Aline Luque, gathering the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, knew that their lack of knowledge about different countries' art worlds, especially those far away from the curators' European base, meant they too had to rely on local informants to generate their artist lists. And those informants also had their limitations, especially when their knowledge was bordered by culture, language and kinship, or because each had a protégé or two to promote.<sup>28</sup> There were, however, a couple of upsides to such outsourcing. By insisting on commissioning local cultural figures to help resource the exhibition, the APT curators (much like Martin and his Paris colleagues in the late 1980s) were conscientiously trying to avoid the fly-in/fly-out method that had developed, recalling (even if unfairly) European auteur-curator Harald Szeemann's example. This tended to treat unfamiliar localities as transit zones into which the curator would parachute, and to see artists as little more than symptomatic of the curators' mythologies about what that cultural context was like (depending, as we have noted, on a small group of artists used to performing, for better or worse, a dependably atavist regional identity). By contrast, the APT curators – and here they were once more influenced by the slightly earlier methods of the Fukuoka Asian Art Show – very deliberately sought to locate contemporary art that pinpointed diversity and cultural difference within each local context, rather than to find exemplars of tradition, so that the chosen artists tended to avoid straightforwardly repeating their traditional culture's chosen forms.

What, ultimately, did this mean? In 1989, the Fukuoka Art Museum had summed up this nexus of tradition and contemporaneity thus: the Museum

sought “to be actively involved in contemporary Asian art, and has concerned itself with the issue of ‘tradition and the modern age’ in Asian art.”<sup>29</sup> Guided by their informants, the 1993 APT also sought regional definitions of the contemporary that emerged from the modernizing of cultural traditions (for instance, Chinese artist Shi Hui’s sculptures woven from bamboo strips and rice paper), or else from the aftermath of the highly developed multiple modernisms that had long flourished across the region, from Chiang Mai (Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook’s monumental, dark paintings and installations) to Tokyo (and Shigeo Toyas’s chainsaw-hewn wood sculptures). In particular, the curators repeatedly insisted that they wanted to include women artists (they had largely been ignored in large international survey exhibitions and continued to be underrepresented) and artists whose images of cultural reparation distinguished them from their peers who had often absorbed international modernisms without the latter’s occasional early twentieth century activism.<sup>30</sup> Increasingly, the more modernist the artist, the more anachronistic she or he looked in comparison with contemporary artists who appropriated the forms or the images of tradition: from the 1989 Asian Art Show, for instance, we could compare Malaysian modernist painter Syed Ahmad Jamal’s modernism – his slightly brushy, geometric abstractions – with Redza Piyadasa’s postmodernism – his retouched appropriations of traditional Malaysian family groupings.

Seen in this way, contemporaneity could be understood as developing critically from local traditions rather than from modernism. Globality could be presented from the viewpoints of Asia-Pacific regionalism if carefully curated enough, but a well-chosen contiguity of art works was crucial. That was clear enough in Caroline Turner’s introductory essay for the First Asia-Pacific Triennial catalogue in 1993, when she wrote that the team had approached the exhibition through national contexts that themselves, she acknowledged, raised significant questions.<sup>31</sup> By 1996, she acknowledged that their ideas about the boundaries between traditional and contemporary art also needed reviewing:

We have learned that the distinction between fine art and craft or “tribal” art may fail to take into account the full picture of revitalised traditional art and contemporary art practice, particularly in indigenous art and the art of the Pacific.<sup>32</sup>

Her claim, that this warranted “a revolution in art history,” would not be taken up quickly or without reluctance and qualification, but the APT’s and

Fukuoka's own interest in revising art history was genuine.<sup>33</sup> The effect of the institutional ownership of APT and the particular thoroughness and generosity with which the curators proceeded – the long-term collecting and conserving intention, the collective, consultative curatorial model that rejected itinerant freelance direction, the self-conscious definition of a circumscribed geographical niche – all inevitably resulted in a historically minded point of view, a definite curatorial method that *conserved* contemporary art and thus *historicized* the contemporary period. The complex processes themselves that the Fukuoka and the Brisbane curators created led the participants to archive and historicize what they were doing from the start. The APT appeared at the beginning of what we now see was the start of the third phase of biennialization. However, after its 1990s editions, it was also evidence of the institutionalization of biennial-making towards thinking of contemporary art as a global phenomenon whilst, as a matter of biennial form, thoroughly deemphasizing separate national narratives. The consequence, not least in the sublimation of Asian traditional forms – albeit without the incorporation of traditional exemplars from outside contemporary art into the contemporary – was profound. This was a process in which both the Asian Art Show and the APT, due to their commitment to contemporaneity, their highly professionalized bureaucracy, and their researcher-curators, played a crucial and, as it turned out, prophetic early part.

The concept of “dialogue” also materialized as a commitment to an extensive array of ancillary events, publications, and conferences with a large number of invitees from across Asia, on a scale rare until then and which presaged those of *documenta X* and *Documental 1*. These events were integral to both the Fukuoka Asian Art Shows and the Asia-Pacific Triennials, as they were later to be to those documentas. In 1984, the Fukuoka Art Museum held a large conference, “Contemporary Asian Art: The Future in Perspective,” to coincide with the 2nd Asian Art Show. Large conferences coinciding with the APT openings were attended by most of the exhibiting artists and very many Asian curators in a genuinely sizeable and exhausting, marathon encounter between artists, curators, and academics from all across Asia. For instance, one session at the first Triennial featured US freelance curator Mary Jane Jacob, the Head of Yogyakarta's art school, Professor Soedarso, Sydney-based Asian art historian John Clark, Japanese curator Toshio Hara, curator Alison Carroll (one of the APT's curators), and theorist Geeta Kapur from New Delhi. All the participating artists and consultants were invited to these openings and if they attended their

expenses were paid. The size and genuine generosity of these huge, celebratory events, attended by hundreds of visitors from across Asia, was unprecedented in the region.<sup>34</sup>

With that response, it was easy for the Triennial organizers to then imagine that their exhibition had produced a series of decisive moments for Asian artists even though, at the very start of their planning for the first Triennial, they had been warned by their Thai adviser, Apinan Poshyananda, that it was very important that the Australians not be seen as “another set of whites coming in to choose Asian art.”<sup>35</sup> He was referring to the Thai experience with a visiting US curator, but the caution also applied to Japanese curators working on the Fukuoka Asian Art Show, given long memories right across Asia about Japanese expansionism, imperialism, and World War Two. Yasunaga Koichi had encountered these fears back in 1977 and 1978.<sup>36</sup> Some visitors, as well as Asian reviewers writing for their home media, immediately jumped on the Triennials as a conceit. At APT’s 1999 conference, for instance, Indian activist, dramaturg, and critic Rustom Bharucha accused the organizers of acting as the accomplices of First World cultural imperialism and Brisbane as being the “lion’s den” of Western hegemony. Even though his claim was overblown, he was right to point out that hegemony poses, as it so often does, in benevolent guise and that its cultural agents – art museums and curators – could be both willing subjects and colonizers. A triennial sprawling across a large art museum’s air-conditioned, luxurious spaces, in the embattled and unequal 1990s, framed the answers to still-open questions of contested freedoms and struggle very differently to how they were posed in humbler, less costly gatherings at smaller regional centers such as the then-new Tjibaou Cultural Center (housed in an innovative but low-tech, Renzo Piano-designed structure) in nearby New Caledonia, or in the vibrant yet more obscure and genuinely humble, low-budget, artist-pays biennials such as that in Dhaka. Could a pristine museum in comfortable, modern, subtropical Australia or high up in a corporate office building in Fukuoka offer more than elegant reification and the most tenderly teasing ideological patronage? One answer was that both the APT and Fukuoka offered a “safe house” in the spotlight, where art that would be risky or impossible to show at home found a respectful audience. This was the case for Indonesian artists such as Heri Dono, F.X. Harsono, and Dadang Christanto, while Indonesia was still a military-ruled dictatorship, which it remained until the upheavals of 1999. But back in 1991, selecting works for the 1993 Triennial, the APT curators were careful to meet at the Jakarta Institute for the Arts with their adviser, Jim Supangkat, to

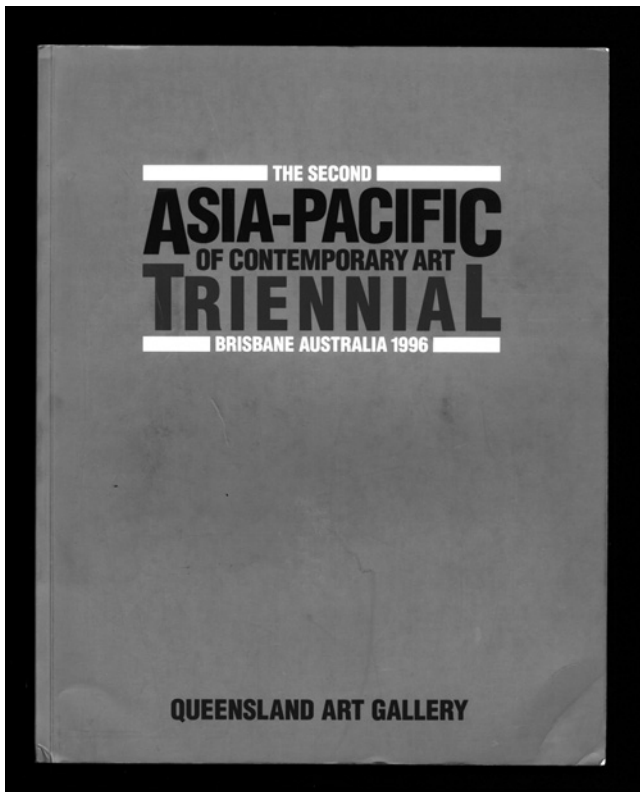


Figure 4.4 Cover of *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, curators Caroline Turner et al. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1996). Courtesy Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art.

quietly discuss whether Harsono's works would prove altogether too politically sensitive for the repressive Indonesian military government to allow him to travel or the works to leave the country.

The implication, nevertheless, was that globalized contemporaneity was deliberately selective, even when regional and respectful. We have noted Caroline Turner's observation that after *APT1*, its Queensland Art Gallery curators began to take into account the art of the Pacific.<sup>37</sup> So *APT2* in 1996 and *APT3* in 1999 expanded their focus to further art centers in Asia or across the far-flung Pacific islands, to artists in locations that were small and economically (if not always politically) inconsequential. In this

sense the Triennial, after *APT1* (in which the only Pacific nation represented other than Australia and New Zealand was Papua New Guinea), circled back to a global-South direction entrenched by Havana but with Brisbane's First World infrastructure. And *APT1*, like its successors until *APT6* in 2009, was dominated by works that connected colonization and decolonization – along with more intricate neologisms such as neo- and post-colonization – with religion and tradition. The title of the first APT conference had been “Identity, Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of the Asia-Pacific Region.” This meant that equally plausible alternative approaches to Asian art – such as the genealogy of the take-up of experimental, new media art in the region, and the late modernism that was often indistinguishable from American art – were sidelined from the start. As well, dividing artists by nationality remained irresistible apart from the convenient “other” category of diaspora. Avant-gardism resonated less than geopolitics. If the idea of an “Asian” art or even of national heritage came simultaneously to look more shaky by the later 1990s, then this was ignored and was less and less central to what the Asia-Pacific Triennial curators, like Fukuoka's curators in Japan, wanted to define. By 1996, Turner wrote almost in an elegy, “while the 1993 Triennial was essentially concerned with tradition and change, with the objective of bringing the past into the present, the second Triennial has focused on the immediate present.”<sup>38</sup> Fukuoka's curators were tracking the same shift, remembering in 1999 that,

A look backwards at previous Asian Art Shows clearly reveals that contemporary Asian art has undergone a transformation, with the end of the 1980s acting as a dividing line .... Speaking in broad generalities, the period up to 1989 was the age of modern art in Asia.<sup>39</sup>

The newer models of art-making that now began to dominate the always-expanding contemporary collections of ambitious art museums like Fukuoka's Asian Art Museum and Brisbane's QAG, and a considerable part of their other exhibition programs, intersected more and more with the direction of biennials and documentas in Europe. This meant the increased global inclusion of more works such as Chen Zhen's vast “furnace” of junked abacus beads, chamber pots, red light globes, calculators, cash registers, computers, and television sets, *Invocation of Washing Fire* (1999) at *APT3*, and other symbolic representations of recent historical conjunctions felt as pressure. This was a new “world art” that was inclusive of tradition *and* experimental practices, which had themselves fundamentally replaced the

often parochial late-modern art that still stubbornly dominated art museums in Australia and beyond as late as 1993. This “world art” would tend to produce images that deliberately refused national self-representation. By contrast, the multiple artistic modernisms of the region had often existed in tandem with progressive postcolonial nationalisms. Curators such as Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist told audiences this contemporary world art offered clear, provocative insights into the form, structure, and changes underlying the world we live in even as that art was appropriately and inextricably imbricated with – and welcoming of – large audiences. How right, in this light, to shift gear to emphasize social and political documentary, the contestation of national stories, the rewriting of histories, and most of all the absolutely and determinedly inclusive audience interaction that great art museums were now seeking with younger audiences through the contemporary. We shall see the idea and the ownership of this world art powerfully refigured across each of the remaining chapters in this book.

The point, of course, was that the connection between art, identity, and politics in the Asia-Pacific region, and much more selectively in Australia, seemed so close – as it had not necessarily been during the period of modernism, though Geeta Kapur has argued the contrary case about Indian modernism and its embrace of nationalism – that it also seemed obvious that these would be the tropes of global contemporary art practice.<sup>40</sup> It is important, then, to understand the profound defects behind not just orientalizing perspectives, which everyone in the region was quite conscious of, but also of the defects behind Orientalist critiques themselves, which had become an orthodoxy and an unreflective trope in the art writing of the early 1990s. John Clark explained in his book *Modern Asian Art* how Edward Said’s by now completely canonical arguments deformed an understanding of modern Asian art history. Xu Bing’s affectionately ironic but user-friendly classroom complete with desks, instructional videos, paper, ink, and brushes (even promotional T-shirts, the first consignment of which were snapped up by visitors and staff alike) and all of which comprised his work, *Introduction to New English Calligraphy* (1994–1996), simply sat between yet deliberately outside an identifiable, art-critical opposition between neo-Orientalism and critique. Further, as Philippines cultural theorist Marion Pastor Roces explained at *APT3*’s 1999 conference, no matter what artists said (and though the brief artist statements montaged alongside *APT3* catalogue essays were frank and illuminating), both “traditional” and “contemporary” artists deliberately and cleverly altered both their art and their explanations in order to “transact business,” in order to survive

and prosper in the international contemporary art world; she called this “expo art,” identifying the spectacle of biennials’ contemporary adaptations of tradition with exhibits at the World’s Fairs and Universal Exhibitions of the 1880s.<sup>41</sup> In an address at the Third Gwangju Biennale in 2000, Robert Morgan suggested, “internationally known artists today may be concerned less with cultural identity than with the problem of distancing oneself strategically from the origins of cultural experience.”<sup>42</sup> Few of the better-known Asian artists exhibiting at the Asian Art Show in 1989 or *APT1* in 1993 lived in the United States or Europe but a much, much larger number in later shows did. Even in 1993 a considerable number of the artists were already launched on substantial global careers with busy schedules: Gu Wenda (one of the large number of Chinese artists who went into exile just before and after the brutalities in Tiananmen Square in 1989) wrote to director Doug Hall in March 1992 outlining the extraordinary list of shows he was working on, but emphasized how interested he was in the Triennial.<sup>43</sup> Shahzia Sikander, Lee Mingwei, and Vong Phaophanit, amongst the many expatriate inclusions in 1999, had lived in North America or the United Kingdom for long periods.

So, the modern Asian art of the twentieth century that appeared less and less in Asian art biennials of the 1990s may have been regarded as having undergone profound changes, but its local histories were more and more ignored in favor of the transnational. Even the process of emphasizing indigenous identity or, later, the disjunction and transition that were taken, by the end of the 1990s, as paradigmatic figures within the landscape of international globalization, were not enough to automatically disrupt the calm of biennial networks. This view is at variance with earlier biennial curators’ presumptions, familiar to us from previous chapters and in particular from chapters 2 and 3, that biennials were, somehow, transnational safe-houses for dissent and difference. But when, as in late-twentieth century Australia or Japan, art had lost almost all its modernist role as the testing-ground for culture, then it was hard to detect biennials automatically offering anything like a challenge to authority, given their complicity with corporate and state sponsors. It was hard to even see a reflection of an evolving (and multicultural) sense of a more complex identity such as was being attempted at *Manifesta* (even though this was, as we shall see, profoundly flawed too, and moving from site to site and city to city was only possible with assured transnational funding, in this case from the European Economic Community and, later, the European Union). The impasse between art museums’ and biennials’ recuperation of politics and the actuality of



crisis was to lead later to threatened boycotts by angry activist artists, as happened at the biennials of Sydney and São Paulo in 2014. In 1993, the situation was different in politically and socially riven cultures such as authoritarian Indonesia, within which there were neither the credible art museums to house a biennial, nor the willing support from benefactors to mount a large, costly art exhibition of contemporary works that would certainly challenge social mores and the regime. (Indonesia's recent biennials have often been smaller, artist-run or similarly independent affairs.) In the Asia-Pacific Triennials, the prominence and success of art by First Nations peoples was in stark contrast with the wider societal and governmental intolerance of those peoples, since other nations in the region – India, Malaysia, Burma, and Indonesia, most obviously – were far from tolerant of minorities and infinitely more repressive. The third APT in 1999 opened exactly as the post-referendum vote for independence in Timor-Leste (East Timor) resulted in Indonesian army-inspired campaigns of mass terror and murder. The exceptional nature of each biennial experience has to be stressed – in time and at each location, as we noted at the start of this chapter. It was in part because the genuinely idealistic determination of curators in the Asian region to forge enduring regional links meant the privileging of transcultural, postcolonial, and “Asian” signifiers in spite of, or without much attention to, what they might over-simplify.

This was completely apparent by the 1999 APT conference. The outlines of a revised discussion along these lines were now finally obvious and scholars including Marion Pastor Roces, John Clark, and Sinologist Geremie Barmé were vocal. It was clear to them that “isms,” especially received ones (whether old-fashioned formalist or new-fangled theoretical, or postmodernism itself) were of little use in decoding the new or the old Asian art. A perspective on contemporary Asian art was now available across a range of new biennials, even if no reliance on their publications was possible. The task of writing this recent art history was largely still left to hard-pressed curators with fast-approaching deadlines, and the result was therefore not particularly rigorous. Even though a postcolonial perspective was relevant to all thinking that wished to inscribe a truly global approach onto the provincialism of mainstream art history, postcolonialism itself was increasingly a disputed and fading term and, by the later 1990s, an increasingly misused (even, paradoxically, neocolonial) discourse since, as is often the case with theory, it had been mobilized to support different opinions and interests. So though the writings of Homi Bhabha and Geeta Kapur, amongst others, had been enormously influential in the region – they suggested that

the deconstructive analysis of postmodernism (and implicitly modernism) reinscribed the conceptual boundaries of the West onto the periphery – even they had been transformed into something else: the progenitors of another globalizing lingo deployed as shorthand in biennial catalogue essays. Difference was now treated, in exhibitions and art magazines, as ceaseless flow and change but also as a new, exciting, and easily absorbed contemporary art style, for better or worse. It was a visual matrix of fixed cultural distinctions, of emblematic contrasts and significations that was allegorized in the Chinese art that the curators selected for the first three APTs, and in particular Xu Bing's great, suspended, ink-block scroll printed with meaningless characters, *A Book from the Sky* (1987–1991), which Queensland Art Gallery purchased in 1994. Works like this (and there were many of similar grandeur and drama at APT and Fukuoka) could only peripherally, and then unproductively, be linked to the debates that had ruled North American and European art writing and art theory over the previous twenty years. *A Book from the Sky* was neither postcolonial nor hybrid. In it, there was no relationship between center and periphery, no reclaiming of place, no time-lag or belatedness in its appearance. And this is how its reception might be understood: a scattered, mobile, globalizing art world *at long last* actually internalized the conditions of the regional as an alternative to perpetual, radial, advancing avant-gardism and, again at long last, identified these regional conditions as contemporary – as parallel contemporaneities rather than regional and parochial derivations even though, for the record, multiple Asian modernities had flourished across the region all during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That is only just now seeping into mainstream art history and it is a matter of very great importance.

## Conclusion

The downside of the history that we have been tracing was that the types of art shown at Fukuoka's Third Asian Art Show (1989) and Brisbane's First Asia-Pacific Triennial (1993) did not fit the narrative arc of "the experimental," the postcolonial, or the postmodern as they informed comparable North Atlantic exhibitions of contemporary art. By this we mean that the *types* of art that the Asia-Pacific Triennials and the Fukuoka Asian Art Shows exhibited during the 1990s were not at all as self-declaredly experimental as comparable North Atlantic exhibitions such as documenta or aspirants to that status in Gwangju, Shanghai, or Singapore. As well, in

terms of the *form* of an exhibition, these “Asia” Triennials remained quite conservative compared with, say, Europe’s roving, and nomadic biennial, Manifesta, which constantly and radically experimented with the form of a biennial itself. Manifesta, as we shall see in the next chapter, was established in 1996 to epitomize “European values”: it was a mobile biennial, staged in different (but strategically important) European cities, so as to “bridge” East and West, center and periphery, introducing ever more discursive forms and structures to the point that the 2006 Manifesta, in Nicosia, Cyprus, where the curators sought to present an art school instead of an exhibition, collapsed altogether.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial, the Fukuoka Asian Art Show, and the early editions of the Shanghai and Gwangju biennials remained just beyond the peripheral vision of North Atlantic curators who mistook their own parochialism for internationalism. The Asian biennials’ capacity to bring this aesthetics of regionalism (we might almost paradoxically say this counter-globality) to attention outside the Asia-Pacific was very far from fulfilled. But at the same time, we assert that APT and Fukuoka were no exception to the fact that increasingly it was exhibitions as well as the art works they contained – whether disjunctively experimental or resonating with heritage and its survival – that successfully changed the (contemporary) art world as well as changed the way we think about cultural experience. We have shown in some detail how, over the 1990s, the Fukuoka Asian Art Show (later, the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale) and the Asia-Pacific Triennial extrapolated regional definitions of the Asian contemporary onto the global. This was, eventually, enormously influential. Both exhibitions substantially altered regional expectations of the spectacles that constitute contemporary art as exhibitions. Finally, their success historicized contemporary Asian art almost instantly, and thus even their first editions, at the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s, were early warning signs of the end of biennialization’s link with a disruptive, anti-institutional, and experimental vision of contemporary art in favor of an ecumenical and almost populist spectacle. The chasm that resulted is now plain to see.

## Notes

1. See, for instance, the many such claims in Robert Storr (ed.), *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (Venice: Marsilio, 2005); to an extent see also Zheng Yan, “Biennials in Asia,” *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, no. 56 (2013), pp. 52–53.

2. For this exhibition, see Vũ Văn Mậu et al., *First International Exhibition of Fine Arts of Saigon 1962* (Saigon: Tao-Đàn Garden, 1962); the exhibition was subtitled “An International Exposition by Artists of Viet-Nam and Friendly Countries [*Nations Amis*] from October 26 to November 15, 1962, at the Round-Pavilion in Tao-Đàn Garden, Saigon”; lest there be any doubt that the model for such exhibitions was ambitious and intended to be a recurring biennial, page 29 reads,

Following the examples of Venice, Sao Paolo [sic] and Paris, the city of Saigon – with its choice geographical location encouraging cultural relations between the East and West to multiply and flourish over the centuries – is led to try to match the symbolic gesture of its elders by inviting artists of the world to again pay homage, this time within its walls, to Art and Beauty.

Compared to such world renowned occasions as the exhibitions of Venice, Sao Paolo or Paris, the First International Exhibition of Fine Arts of Saigon will be a modest affair, serving simply as a gathering place where Vietnamese artists and artists from countries friendly to Viet-Nam may meet in brotherly exchange.

As was the case in many biennials of the period, the organizers awarded prizes, accepted submissions, and set strict rules; the works needed to have been made in the preceding three years. The exhibiting nations included the Netherlands, West Germany, the United States, Switzerland, Malaysia, China, Australia, Japan, Morocco, Argentina, Hong Kong, Italy, Thailand, Korea, France, Great Britain, India, Turkey, Tunisia, the Philippines and, of course, South Vietnam. This list includes almost all the nations that were Cold War members of the US-sponsored South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), which was equivalent to but not nearly as durable as NATO. We explore the Saigon Biennial in more detail in Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “South as Method? Biennials Past and Present,” in Galit Eilat et al., *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times* (Amsterdam: World Biennial Forum, 2015), pp. 47–56.

3. As with Fukuoka’s Asian Art Show, the first Istanbul Biennial was actually not called a biennial, but instead the first International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibitions, with curator Beral Madra focusing on the theme of “Contemporary Art in Historical Spaces.” It was only from the second edition on that it was officially called a biennial. See Beral Madra, *Post-Peripheral Flux: A Decade of Contemporary Art in Istanbul* (Istanbul: Literatür, 1998), pp. 17–34.
4. A few art historians, principally John Clark in Sydney, have long been identifying multiple Asian modernities across the region. Our work has benefitted greatly from Clark, not just from his published writing, though on this count see John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Sydney: Craftsman House/G+B Arts International, 1998), but also, for the record, from the generous access he offered us to his extensive archive of primary sources and to his work in progress on Asian

- biennials, and for his advice. For our early discussion of contemporary Asian art historiography that includes a survey of Clark's work, see Charles Green, "Beyond the Future," *Art Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 81–87.
5. Mikio Soejima, "In Pursuit of a Genuinely Asian World," in Fukuoka Art Museum, *3rd Asian Art Show, Fukuoka*, exh. cat. (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1989), pp. 27–32, esp. p. 27.
  6. Among the key texts in this emerging discourse are Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 12–27, and the journals *The Exhibitionist* and *Journal of Curatorial Studies*.
  7. Until the 1990s, with the appearance of books such as Apinan Poshyananda's *Modern Art in Thailand Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), then the extended catalogue essays for the Asia Society's 1996 landmark exhibition, Apinan Poshyananda (as curator and ed.), *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, exh. cat. (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996), as well as John Clark's important book, *Modern Asian Art*, scholarly writing surveying contemporary Asian art simply did not exist in any quantity. And, as *APT1*'s Caroline Turner noted acidly in 1993, "it is an irony that the West has accepted the great achievements of the art of this region of the distant past but has on the whole paid too little attention to the immediate past and the present," Caroline Turner, "From Extraregionalism to Intraregionalism?," *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1993), pp. 8–9, esp. p. 9.
  8. Terry Smith was again prescient in this regard, dedicating a chapter of *What Is Contemporary Art?* to the third Bienal de La Habana: see Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*, pp. 152–166; see also Rachel Weiss et al., *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011).
  9. See Apinan Poshyananda (curator and ed.), *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*. Curiously, Beral Madra also hinted at the dialectic of tradition and contemporaneity with the first two Istanbul Biennials dedicated, as we mentioned, to "Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces," in 1987 and 1989, revealing a truly global concern about how the past was being reconfigured at the end of and soon after the Cold War.
  10. Yasunaga Koichi, "The Beginning of the Asian Art Show," in Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, *The 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2009: LIVE and LET LIVE* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2009), pp. 215–217, esp. p. 215.
  11. For instance, see the Queensland Art Gallery's itinerary and briefing notes, "Itinerary for Dr Caroline Turner" (1991), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, not paginated; here, the gallery observed that "A social function is to be arranged with Professor Soedarso to meet with senior artists and explain the process for the Triennial and why the work of some senior artists will not be included. This is

particularly controversial in Yogyakarta with textile and batik artists. The National Committee has decided that batik artists will not be included but there are some major batik artists in Yogyakarta who expect their work to come into consideration.” It is clear that the sensitive issue was not artistic quality *per se* but contemporaneity or, here, its lack. Contemporaneity might have been performed adequately (and seen as such) had the artists been younger and trained in the local art schools that were the international curators’ allies and bases as they traveled and where they met with artists and local informants; that was to mean in later biennials and triennials across the region that the works most likely to attract curators’ attention were sometimes sub-contracted out for fabrication to the very traditional workshops that were now ignored; this delegation of manufacture was in no way a deficit for a work of contemporary art (and was to become increasingly common in art in twenty-first-century biennials and art fairs).

12. Soejima, “In Pursuit of a Genuinely Asian World,” p. 29.
13. Though not of course the first mega-exhibition to be thematized, the most pertinent of which was the 1970 Tokyo Biennale, called “Between Man and Matter” by curator Yusuke Nakahara.
14. Apinan Poshyananda, quoted in “Notes on General Discussions in Indonesia and Malaysia – November 1991” (1991), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, p. 7.
15. Doug Hall, interview with the authors, Melbourne, Sept. 2012. Authors’ notes.
16. Soejima, “In Pursuit of a Genuinely Asian World,” p. 29.
17. Joan Kee, “Points, Lines, Encounters, Worlds: Tansaekhwa and the Formation of Contemporary Korean Art,” PhD dissertation, New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 2008, p. 220; see also Joan Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
18. Kuroda Reiji, “Report, Session 3. Art Museums in the 21st Century,” in *Seminar: “Asian Art – towards the 21st Century.” The 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 1999 (The 5th Asian Art Show)* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 1999), not paginated.
19. “The Kwangju Biennale Declaration,” Gwangju Biennale Hall, Gwangju, 1995. Readers should note that the first English transliteration for the Gwangju Biennale, used in 1995, was Kwangju.
20. The best writings in English on Gwangju’s biennial as a commemorative marker include Martin Jay’s essay “Kwangju: From Massacre to Biennale,” in *Refractions of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 77–85; and Okwui Enwezor, “The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century,” *Invisible Culture*, no. 15 (Fall 2010), pp. 12–39.
21. See Eugene van Erven, *The Playful Revolution: Theatre and Liberation in Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 98.

22. Lee Yongwoo, "Remapping the Borders," in Jin Young-sun and Chung Joon-mo (eds.), *The First Kwangju International Biennale. Volume 1. International Exhibition of Contemporary Art: Beyond the Borders* (Seoul: Life & Dream Publishing, 1995), p. 17.
23. Wu Hung, Untitled commentary in Robert Storr (ed.), *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), p. 203.
24. The selection process that lists the Australian and regional selectors is explained on pages 8–9 of *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*.
25. For statistics, see Caroline Turner, *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, "Introduction," pp. 8–9.
26. According to Rhana Devenport, the curatorial manager of APT3, "By July 1997, the Gallery had established the framework of five curatorial teams. By February 1998, most of the twenty-six Australian curators, researchers and advisors (thirteen QAG staff and thirteen external curators) and twenty-seven international co-curators were appointed. One curator from each team was appointed as Chair of that team." Rhana Devenport, "The APT Curatorial Process: Negotiating Cultural Moments," in Caroline Turner and Jennifer Webb (eds.), *Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1999), pp. 25–27, esp. p. 25.
27. Rawanchaikul Toshiko, "How Were the Artists Selected?," in Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, *The 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2005: Parallel Realities; Asian Art Now* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2005), pp. 32–33.
28. This predicament is discussed at length in Colleen Ovenden, "Magiciens de la terre: The Roaring Success of a Failure," paper presented at the 2004 College Art Association Annual Conference, Seattle, Washington, February 19, 2004; see also Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (Part 2): "Magiciens de la terre" 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013).
29. Soejima, "In Pursuit of a Genuinely Asian World," p. 27.
30. The APT's organizing committee decided in 1992, ahead of the first triennial, "An equality of selection and a true gender balance in the exhibition is impossible. It was recognized that in some countries it is unlikely if any suitable female artists will be able to be chosen" ("Minutes from Asia-Pacific Triennial Meeting of National Planning Committee held in Boardroom of the Queensland Art Gallery, 29 May 1992" (1992), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, p. 12). During her first exploratory visit to Indonesia, APT curator Caroline Turner met with Kartika Affandi Koberl, who was an important but highly conventional local painter of large, bright, expressionist landscapes in oil paint and also the daughter of Affandi, a famous modernist painter, in Yogyakarta. Turner also met with Lucia Hartini in Jakarta.

31. Caroline Turner, "From Extraregionalism to Intraregionalism?," p. 8. At an early planning meeting back in 1991, their Malaysian adviser Redza Piyadasa had asked the Triennial's curators "whether the exhibition was to be seen from the perspective of the region or from New York. It had to be determined whether the Triennial would be viewed as a prestigious world class event and get over the perception that it was only a third world affair. The committee stated that we believe it would be viewed first from the region;" see Redza Piyadasa, quoted in "Minutes of the meeting held on 14 & 15 November 1991 in Kuala Lumpur of the National Advisory Committee" (1991), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, p. 4.
32. Caroline Turner, "Mirror of the Future: Shadows Before," in Caroline Turner and Rhana Devenport (eds.), *Present Encounters: Papers from the Conference of the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1997), pp. 19–22, esp. p. 21.
33. Turner, "Mirror of the Future: Shadows Before," p. 21.
34. Everything did not go without a hitch: at the opening ceremony of the First Asia-Pacific Triennial, the Queensland Art Gallery mistakenly but astonishingly displayed an old South Vietnamese flag instead of the flag of the People's Republic of Vietnam. The old flag of the anti-communist South had been out of circulation since the latter's defeat in 1975. The mistake was noted and remembered; see Lien Yeomans, President (Chairperson of Vietnam Helping Hands), "Letter to Doug Hall, Director, Queensland Art Gallery" (September 21, 1993), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, not paginated.
35. Apinan Poshyananda, quoted in "Minutes of the meeting held on 14 & 15 November 1991 in Kuala Lumpur of the National Advisory Committee" (1991), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, p. 7; Poshyananda refers the Australian curators to New Museum director Marcia Tucker's large New York survey exhibition, *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* (1990).
36. Koichi, "The Beginning of the Asian Art Show," p. 15.
37. Turner, "Mirror of the Future: Shadows Before," p. 21.
38. Caroline Turner, "Present Encounters: Mirror of the Future," in Caroline Turner and Rhana Devenport (eds.), *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1996), pp. 11–13, esp. p. 11.
39. Ushiroshoji Masahiro, "Communication/Community/Collaboration," *The First Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 1999* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1999).
40. For an anthology of Kapur's copious and important writings on this subject, see Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism? Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000).



41. Marian Pastor Roces, "Consider Post Culture," in Caroline Turner and Morris Low (eds.), *Beyond the Future: Papers from the Conference of the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 2000), pp. 34–38, esp. p. 35.
42. Robert C. Morgan, "The 'Globalized' Artist in the New Millennium," *Sculpture*, vol. 19, no. 8 (October 2000), pp. 32–37, esp. p. 34.
43. Gu Wenda, "Letter to Mr Doug Hall, Queensland Art Gallery" (March 30, 1992), unpublished papers, Asia-Pacific Triennial Archive, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, not paginated.

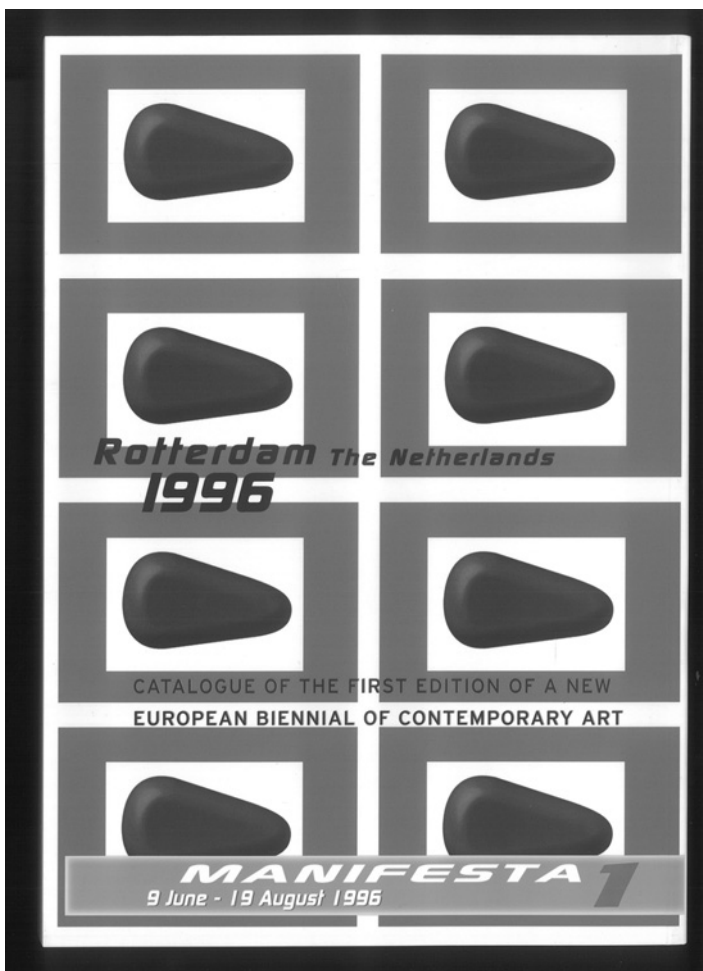


Figure 5.1 Back cover of *Manifesta 1 Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 1996*, exhibition catalogue, curators Rosa Martinez et al. (Rotterdam: Manifesta, 1996). Courtesy of International Foundation Manifesta. Reproduced by permission of International Foundation Manifesta, Amsterdam.

## 1997: Biennials, Migration, and Itinerancy

Exhibitions in this chapter: *Africus: 1st Johannesburg Biennale* (1995, Johannesburg, South Africa); *Manifesta 1* (1996, Rotterdam, Netherlands); *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (1997, Johannesburg, South Africa); *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defence: Manifesta 3* (2000, Ljubljana, Slovenia); *The Emergency Biennale in Chechnya* (2005–2008, various venues including Grozny, Chechnya)

### Introduction

This chapter addresses the history of biennials across Europe and in parts of Africa after the Cold War, in which biennials navigating the “edges” of the European Union were distinctively political in nature, either promoting particular political agendas or searching for new ones. The chapter first examines the use of biennials to bridge the divide between Eastern and Western Europe and, in certain editions of *Manifesta* – a biennial that takes place in a different European city for each edition – the split between the North and the South in Europe. From there, we will think about the place of biennials in locations in crisis, specifically the period immediately after the end of apartheid in South Africa. Finally, we will describe an itinerant biennial located beyond the boundaries of Europe and its troubled peripheries, at a site of enormous crisis: war-torn Chechnya.

If, as we have argued thus far, the ambivalent forces of globalization provide one of contemporary art’s most pressing realities, then migration and asylum-seeking emerged, at the start of the twenty-first century, as core tropes through which contemporary artists faced that reality. This was clear on the level of representation: presenting the face of the migrant was, at least from the mid-1990s onwards, a cornerstone of contemporary practice in

exhibitions. The resulting quasi-ethnographic portraits or documentary-style reportage, usually photographs or videos, aspired to breach the *cordon sanitaire* that separates art from the world around it and to counter the many negative depictions of migrants in contemporary mass media. Less common, though equally potent, were representations of people in the process of migrating, whether crossing borders, corralled in camps, or inventing other ways to take a next step on their passages from home (the works of Yto Barrada or Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen stand out here). Yet, despite the prevalence of depictions of the migrant, especially those framed in a documentary genre, art could not help but struggle to give an adequate view of the hidden barriers and pressures that confront people on the move. For how could one engage *in* representation that which was, at least politically, so often excluded *from* representation? And how could artists capture as opaque a process as migration through something as blatant or static as an image?

One important response emerged through the medium of exhibition-making – or, more precisely, the use of curatorial methods to thematize migration – to give it a fuller and more complex account than a single art work could provide. Biennials proved the greatest exponents of the trope of migration as one of contemporary art's main foci. The Venice Biennale made its first tentative steps in this direction in 1993 under the helm of director and veteran art critic Achille Bonito Oliva. Taking cultural nomadism as his theme, he pushed (with varying degrees of success) the Biennale's national pavilions to break with tradition and either exhibit artists resident in other countries or challenge the ideology of nationalism altogether (hence Hans Haacke's notorious work *Germania* that year, for which he violently jack-hammered the floor of the Nazi-era German pavilion, revealing and shattering the pavilion's ideological foundations). In 2011, Folkestone played on its location at the chalky southeast edge of England, with its growing numbers of refugees who have crossed the Channel to seek asylum, by hosting *A Million Miles from Home*, the second of Folkestone's triennials. And in the two decades after Bonito Oliva's intervention, Okwui Enwezor became arguably the most influential single curator of biennials under the sign of the global, staging a sequence of biennials self-consciously addressing the postcolonial politics of exile, migration, and anti-imperial struggle: *Trade Routes*, the second Johannesburg Biennale of 1997, his celebrated *Documenta11* in Kassel in 2002, *The Unhomely*, the second Seville Biennial of 2006, the 2012 Paris Triennale called *Intense Proximity*, and *All the World's Futures*, the 2015 Venice Biennale.

That biennials should be at the forefront of art's thematic of migration was not altogether surprising. It was, after all, an art critic's commonplace to denounce the roster of curators, artists, and other arts professionals who frequent and stage biennials, and who perpetually flit around the globe to shine at these perennial exhibitions, as belonging to a transcultural class of global nomads. According to this view, the "global curator" thematizes migration through his or her own transcultural condition, blurring the otherwise fairly clear line between the uprootedness of the traveler and that of the migrant. At the same time, as we have seen in previous chapters, biennials have a long history of instigating precisely the kinds of transcultural exchange that contemporary art's globalism is expected to inform. This was particularly true of the second wave of biennialization, which, to briefly recapitulate, dated from the mid-1950s and culminated in the Havana biennials of the 1980s. During this time, biennials became important tools for the development of critical regionalisms and cultural networks across geopolitical frontiers. We have also noted the usefulness of biennials in brokering unlikely meetings between very different cultural figures, such as Yolngu artist David Malangi and French critic Pierre Restany's encounter at the 1979 Sydney Biennale or at such satellite sites as the Bial de La Habana's bars that stayed open well into the night during its first editions, ensuring informal meetings. Biennials were thus not simply an exhibition format derived from the commodity fetishism of world fairs and great exhibitions, as many critics bemoaned, exported from North America or Western Europe as yet another example of the groping tentacles of spectacle capitalism.<sup>1</sup> That view was in reality contradicted by the transcultural legacies of biennials past and their ongoing mobilization of people, ideas, and values across geopolitical divisions. Indeed, we might even say that the one perspective was not only the specter of the other, but instead that biennials displaced such a logic of the "either/or" – that one is either for or against what biennials do – in favor of the "both/and" that, as cultural theorist Rex Butler astutely noted, lies at the heart of globalization's all-encompassing and self-contradictory reality.<sup>2</sup> Biennials were now driven by both spectacle *and* potential, comfortable exchange *and* the exploitation of displacement, exportation *and* migration, proliferation *and* localization, as the previous chapter showed. And it was precisely the complex proliferation of biennials that made them so difficult to analyze and suggests why, perhaps, so many turned to migration as their thematic trope by the mid-1990s, for the register of biennials and migration alike was the register of the "excessive": that which exceeded recognized categories

of knowledge (whether national, cultural, or historical), whose sprawling complexities could not be easily documented or contained through modes of representation, and hence as something that (to paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman) was all too often derided, rejected, or objected as the waste products of the global.<sup>3</sup>

While this line of thinking went some way to explain the strong interest shown by biennials in migration, it nonetheless remained focused on migration as a primarily thematic concern. What it failed to address was the rise within contemporary art of migration as affecting a biennial's *form*, or actual mode of presentation, as well as its discursive frames and content. That, in effect, is this chapter's concern.

Foremost within this shift was the phenomenon of the biennial that itself migrated, journeying from one locality to another each time it took place. This is not to be confused with traveling exhibitions more generally, such as a monographic or group show that begins in one city and moves to one or more others over a period of time. These exhibitions tend to, but do not always, maintain the same content – the same works, themes, or ideas – even if their layout alters because of the change in venue. Furthermore, traveling exhibitions conventionally (but, again, do not always) ignore specific characteristics of the localities in which they are restaged. They do not normally reshape themselves according to the historical, social, cultural, or political make-up of that particular city or region: the kinds of site specificity that, as Miwon Kwon stresses, may be physical or discursive, mythic or actual, but is nonetheless constantly pressing.<sup>4</sup>

Itinerant biennials, by contrast, present an important deviation from both the self-contained worlds of most traveling exhibitions and the metaphors of migration found in other recent biennials. If, as curator Clare Carolin contends, traveling shows are more akin to tourists, journeying to but only superficially engaging with the realities of the spaces in which they are relocated, then how might we understand the different modalities posed by itinerant biennials, given the stronger attention to local specificity that they are often presumed to maintain?<sup>5</sup> Moreover, have itinerant biennials engaged exploitatively or in more constructive and nuanced ways with the politics of migration and those of conflict or asymmetric relations of development that are often the catalysts for migration in the first place? In response to these questions, we want to place at the center of this chapter a biennial in Africa that took itinerancy and migration as its principal theme, but frame this chapter within a particular region of exhibition practice – Europe – where itinerant biennials have developed a strong presence. While *Manifesta* is the

most celebrated example of this format, it is another exhibition, the *Emergency Biennale in Chechnya*, right at the periphery of Europe, that is our eventual focus, due to the complex ways it highlighted the potentials, as well as some of the risks, attendant upon the itinerancy of biennials.

## Manifesta and Critical Regionalism

The geographical and political borders bisecting Europe during the Cold War were frequently subject to critical scrutiny by some of Europe's second-wave biennials. Indeed, during the 1970s, two biennials in Europe's Baltic region – the Rauma Biennale Balticum (1977–) and the Baltic Triennial of Young Contemporary Art (1979–, later named the Baltic Triennial of International Art) – explicitly sought new networks of cultural regionalism, bringing together artists, curators, and critics from around the Baltic Sea and across political divides. The Biennale Balticum, held in Rauma, Finland, was initially meant to produce collaborations between Swedish and Finnish artists only. From 1985 onwards, however, it expanded to include artists from other Baltic states: from Denmark and West Germany, but also from Poland and other Soviet satellites. This shift was largely due to the political fall-out from the crackdowns associated with the biennial's sister-exhibition, the Baltic Triennial in Vilnius, which was condemned by the Soviet state as nonconformist, even dangerously dissident, on account of its pan-Baltic scope. The emergence of regional, nonconformist networks within and between these biennials, pre- and post-1989, is worth emphasizing, as was their transformation in terms of structures, funding, and philosophies, due to the politics of postcommunist turmoil and then slow, step-by-step integration into the European Union from the 1990s onwards.

Manifesta was self-consciously part of that two-part post-1989 narrative. Established in the mid-1990s to embody and promote “European values,” it was a mobile biennial, staged in different (but often strategically important) European cities, so as to “bridge” East and West, center and periphery. But how did curators actually negotiate this territory? Did artists do so too? And to what extent did these priorities condition artistic selection, or was Manifesta's rhetoric actually peripheral to the art on exhibition? The answer is that biennials such as Manifesta engaged with, and challenged, the many stereotypes of postcommunist cultures. These stereotypes included Eastern European poverty and cultural instability, but equally encompassed the stereotype of Western European charity. All

three mythologies beleaguered more than one Manifesta, but especially the well-known case of *Manifesta 3* in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana in 2000, when the biennial ventured beyond its Benelux homeland for the first time and into postcommunist Europe. Manifesta's mobility had been a means to promote dialogue and even collectivity among participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, establishing a sense of regional togetherness that is often considered a palliative to the cultural displacements articulated by migration. Nonetheless, it is precisely this binary of localized belonging versus the dislocations of migration that Manifesta has sought to challenge.

The history of Manifesta's development is well known.<sup>6</sup> Since its conception in 1991 as an initiative of the Dutch government and its first edition in Rotterdam in 1996, the purpose of Manifesta was to replace the Cold War divides between East and West, communism and capitalism, with a pan-European sensibility driven by openness, hospitality, and integration. Indeed, from its outset, Manifesta sought to be both a metaphor and an instigator of what Hedwig Fijen, the director of Manifesta's International Foundation, called "a Europe without borders."<sup>7</sup> Its exhibiting artists were to come from all parts of Europe, including postcommunist countries outside the European Community (later the European Union). Its roll-call of curators would also come from the breadth of the continent and, again like the artists, would change with each edition of the biennial. And it was not just the line-up of curators that would change. So too would the city hosting the biennial, shifting from one part of Europe to another every two years: from Rotterdam in 1996 to Luxembourg in 1998, to Ljubljana in 2000 and then, in biennial succession, to Frankfurt, Donostia-San Sebastián, Nicosia, the Tyrol region in far northern Italy, and the Murcia region in southern Spain. In 2012, Manifesta was staged in a gargantuan, derelict coalmine at Genk, Belgium, as close to Belgium's internal border between its two fractious linguistic divisions, between Flanders and Wallonia, as to Belgium's almost unpoliced frontiers with the Netherlands and Germany. In 2014 it moved to the postcommunist East for only the second time, to St Petersburg, and to threats of cultural boycotts against Russian politics under President Vladimir Putin (especially the state's repressive struggles against border territories and homosexuals). Amidst Europe's elaborate divisions, "if there is much talk of boundaries shifting and reconstituting themselves," *Manifesta 1* curator Andrew Renton claimed in 1996, then "the ethical obligation resides in one who is on the move. . . *en route*, in transit, between terminals."<sup>8</sup> To be indicative of this new European sensibility, then, was to be mobile and flexible. In the European Union, belonging and itinerancy



were no longer disparate so much as convergent qualities, at least in desirable policy terms.

There was, of course, much movement of peoples within and around Europe even in the mid-1990s. The rise of the “Schengen Zone,” with its gradual loosening of restrictions on the passage of people and goods across many Western European borders and, from 2006, removal of strict passport control between most Schengen signatories, stood at one end of this notion of “transit.” At the other was a flood of refugees spilling out of Yugoslavia and the overcrowded boats crossing the Mediterranean from Albania to Italy, from North Africa to Spain and Sicily with the desperation of those who, in Sarat Maharaj’s eloquent words, “lie below the visa line” and for whom being “on the move” meant more than frequent flyer miles and the aesthetics of airports.<sup>9</sup> The question, then, was whether Manifesta, perpetually en route and open to new manifestations of Europe as it claimed to be, was blind to the multiple and often conflicting actualities of migration and itinerancy. Were Manifesta’s frequent nods to borders and immigration in its exhibitions – from the important subsection of *Manifesta 1* (1996) entitled “Migrations,” to the theme of “Borderline Syndrome” taken for *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana – more than rhetorical when viewed through the complex prism of migration?

For Okwui Enwezor, one of Manifesta’s staunchest critics, the answer to this question was a resounding no (and we shall come back to him at the heart of this chapter). The noticeable lack, if not total absence, of non-Caucasian curators and artists in Manifesta before 2005, when Enwezor’s reproaches were published, suggested that Manifesta’s conceptualization of Europe remained closed to the “immigrant [who] has emerged in the name of the postcolonial subject across the territories of the European Union.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Enwezor continued, Manifesta “entrenches itself as an extension of Brussels’s cultural policy,” despite the claims by Manifesta’s organizers to independence from EU sponsorship, both political and, to a lesser degree, financial.<sup>11</sup> Enwezor’s critique lost some of its charge after 2005. Manifesta’s board hired some (though admittedly not many) non-Caucasian and even non-European practitioners to its curatorium: Alexandria-based Bassam El Baroni for *Manifesta 8* in 2010, the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective in 2008, and Cairo-based Mai Abu ElDahab for the cancelled *Manifesta 6* in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 2006. Each of these later editions also invited artists from a more diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds than was evident prior to 2005. Another early critic of Manifesta, postcolonial theorist Gilane Tawadros, was even hired to chair the organization. Nevertheless,

Enwezor's argument can be pushed somewhat further, for Manifesta's relative exclusivity was determined not only by race but by a more broadly Occidentalist worldview, one that still marginalized postcommunist practitioners and their very different cultural and sociopolitical contexts despite the persistent assertions that Manifesta would provide a "bridge to 'former Eastern Europe,'" as *Manifesta 3* senior curator Francesco Bonami claimed, or that it would, in Hedwig Fijen's words, "reach out to artists from the East."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, on a rhetorical level, this marginalization occurred not just despite but *because of* such assertions, for what they imputed was a sense of helplessness and insecurity – perhaps even the infantilism that, according to critic Boris Buden, postcommunism was condemned to bear – to which the open arms of "Europe" could reach out.<sup>13</sup> This pathologization was particularly evident at *Manifesta 3*, with its title "Borderline Syndrome" and claims by Francesco Bonami that the exhibition was "a therapy in process" to counter that titular illness.<sup>14</sup> The result was that *Manifesta 3* was the only edition of the biennial to be held in postcommunist Europe for another fourteen years, when *Manifesta 10* was controversially staged in St Petersburg in 2014. Bonami, meanwhile, would shortly map the same geopolitical model onto a wider stage when he became director of the 2003 Venice Biennale, *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, which we will examine in a later chapter.

On a practical level, the situation was arguably little different than it had been when Enwezor made his accusations. Of the twenty curators hired by Manifesta for its first six editions, only five were from postcommunist Europe, skewing Manifesta's claims to challenge the historically unequal representation of cultural producers from different parts of Europe. Such Occidentalism could sometimes be seen in the exhibitions as well. This was especially true of *Manifesta 3*, with its preponderance of publicly sited art works dedicated to representing Ljubljana's cityscape as riven with borderlines, neuroses, and "energies of defense." For example, Marcus Geiger transformed a busy public pathway into a nightmarish zone of garish pink pigment, while Sislej Xhafa stood in the middle of Ljubljana's train station, screaming departure and arrival times to passers-by with the jumbled rapidity of a broker on the stock exchange floor. For Milan-based Gruppo A12, the redesign of one of Ljubljana's popular bars was an attempt to produce a "perceptive perturbation in the body of the city . . . a syndrome, a kind of sickness," while Šejla Kamerić divided one of Ljubljana's busiest pedestrian bridges into two halves designated "EU" and "OTHERS."<sup>15</sup> These works certainly presented the "borderline syndrome" as a thematic concern on which



Figure 5.2 Cover of *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defence: Manifesta 3*, exhibition catalogue, curator Francesco Bonami (Ljubljana: Manifesta, 2000). Courtesy of International Foundation Manifesta. Reproduced by permission of International Foundation Manifesta, Amsterdam.

to dwell, often with a sense of play that opened out to something more sinister. At the same time, the quantity and strategic location of such pathologizing works meant that *Manifesta 3* did something more than simply thematize the borderline; it *created* the very disorder it sought to analyze, with the public space of Ljubljana seemingly the natural habitat in which that disorder thrived.

We could even take this argument an extra step and say that what *Manifesta 3* highlighted was actually a problematic concern that has lingered throughout the history of this particular biennial. While Manifesta's board valorized their biennial's itinerancy for its flexibility, its openness, and its ability "not [to] become permanently identified with a given audience or location," it was also clear that Manifesta was engaged less in crossing borders than in *courting* them, persistently (even obsessively) fixating on how to manage border politics from a soft liberal viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> Manifesta's

self-professed aim to provide therapy for the ills induced by postcommunism and EU expansion in Slovenia was but one example of this, quickly followed as it was by the biennial's sudden interest in Basque separatism in Donostia-San Sebastián in 2004. In 2006, the presence of *Manifesta 6* in and around Nicosia broached the dispute over the division of Cyprus between Greece and Turkey. And while the decision to illustrate *Manifesta's* 2005 Christmas card with an image of the infamous "green line" dividing Cyprus may not have been the reason for *Manifesta 6's* cancellation by the Nicosia Municipal Council – despite the council's claims that exploiting the green line for the exhibition's gain would breach its contract with *Manifesta* – it nonetheless made *Manifesta's* political focus plain.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, 2010 saw *Manifesta* shift its perspective again, this time on the trafficking of people from North Africa to Spain across the Mediterranean. The exhibition itself, however, refused to relocate outside Europe – to Morocco, for instance, or Libya or Mauritania, actual sites of its migratory imaginary – instead resolutely retaining its foothold on Spanish soil.

It is hard not to see *Manifesta*, with its persistent roaming along Europe's edges and equally insistent refusal to physically cross them, as a kind of cultural border-guard, scappily aestheticizing those borders while emphasizing and attempting to absorb what was aberrant or what stood out from Europe's putative values. In this sense, *Manifesta* risked neutralizing the very politics it had long sought to spotlight. This risk was not limited to *Manifesta's* desire to "build bridges" to those marginalized by contemporary European politics (suggesting as it did that the marginalized, whether from Eastern Europe or Northern Africa, were a sociocultural "problem" to confront within *Manifesta's* still-Occidental worldview). Just as significantly, as *Manifesta* jumped from one location to another, and from one side of Europe to another, it came to posit migration as a generalizable phenomenon, equivalent across all parts of the continent. What this threatened to obscure, in particular, were the specific historical and political patterns that often informed migration: the reasons why people seek to migrate to certain countries and not others, for instance, and how, as Saskia Sassen has argued, the zone of geopolitical influence between one country and another informs specific trajectories of migration.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, *Manifesta's* constant churn of curators, artists, and locations, and its preference for flux and flexibility over cumulative knowledge production, made it especially difficult for audiences to seek, let alone analyze, patterns etched across time. *Manifesta* thus epitomized the condition described by critic James Meyer of a "lyrical" rather than "critical" nomadism, in which migration was once again reduced



Figure 5.3 View during *Manifesta 9* of the disused Waterschei mine, near the city of Genk, Belgium, which housed *The Deep of the Modern: Manifesta 9, 2012*. Photo Charles Green.

to metaphor, albeit with the important distinction, as opposed to other biennials, of presenting this metaphor through form as well as content.<sup>19</sup> In the end, the mobility of *Manifesta* found itself unshackled, or even independent, from the actualities of migration from which it sought to derive its agency. Indeed, it was precisely this lyricism that subtended the important distinction between itinerancy and migration that much exhibition discourse, and particularly that on *Manifesta*, still seems intent on conflating.

### Locality Fails: The 2nd Johannesburg Biennale

At roughly the same time as *Manifesta* was exploring themes of migration, cultural traffic, and sites of crisis, so were biennials in other parts of the

world, albeit in very different ways. This chapter now looks beyond Europe to two such biennials in Africa: *Africus: 1st Johannesburg Biennale* (1995) and *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (1997). Context is crucial here. On Tuesday, May 10, 1994, President Nelson Mandela addressed South Africans on the occasion of his inauguration after the end of the disastrous decades of apartheid and its associated crimes, declaring, “That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict.”<sup>20</sup> His powerful speech encapsulated the previous decades of injustice, oppression, and trauma under apartheid, and the isolation of South Africa as a result. He was all too aware of the vast task that awaited the country. A mere nine months later, *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale 1995* opened, marking the end of more than thirty years of cultural quarantine. *Africus* was directed by two white South African curators: activist and labor lawyer Lorna Ferguson and mercurial Johannesburg arts bureaucrat Christopher Till, a key but controversial figure in Johannesburg cultural politics. During the 1980s, Till had been director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, presenting a series of ground-breaking exhibitions of South African art, including *The Neglected Tradition* (1988), which reassessed black South African artists and their huge contribution to the history of South African art. *Africus* had been conceived during the transition to African National Congress majority government, but met immediate, vociferous, local criticism. Till and Ferguson were accused of an obsession with international cultural recognition, a detachment from local communities, and a disinterest in local artists in favor of sophisticated image-building and an overwhelming emphasis on international artists.<sup>21</sup> But at the same time, Johannesburg had long hosted serious dealer galleries that showed cutting-edge contemporary art that was far from detached from the art worlds of Europe and the United States, which further emphasizes the question: why the hostility towards the two biennials?<sup>22</sup>

We find half of the answer in a well-known essay by Marilyn Martin, “The Rainbow Nation: Identity and Transformation,” which was written in the interval between *Africus* and *Trade Routes*.<sup>23</sup> During the whole of this period, Martin was director of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. She argued that a strong definition of a nation would be integral to the new South Africa, adopting Desmond Tutu’s famous metaphor of the “rainbow nation” as her illustration of diversity within unity, reminding the reader that no hard edges separate a rainbow’s colors.<sup>24</sup> Where this

got sticky, and where the tenor of her essay suggested the storm that would shortly await Enwezor, was the nature of the links that she wondered could really be drawn between “contemporary mainstream international art” and South African artists, who, she warned the reader, remained separated from that “mainstream” by their economic and cultural experiences.<sup>25</sup> Some South African artists had altogether bypassed these dilemmas, through networks much along the lines of the Bienals de La Habana: Martin referred to a short list of Ndebele artists, including Esther Mahlangu and Isa Kabini, and to artists Jackson Hlungwani, Andries Botha, and Willie Bester, describing the rich tradition of political art that already existed in South Africa. She somberly continued that the role of art in postapartheid South Africa would remain essentially political, made by South Africans resisting external influences.<sup>26</sup> In short, the national reality of rainbow diversity was not the same, nor would it look the same as cosmopolitan trade routes.

Similar questions were pivotal to *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (1997), directed by Okwui Enwezor. He divided the Biennale into six separate sections held across two cities separated by a two-hour flight time – Johannesburg and Cape Town – in a pattern of multiple curators and separate portions spread across different sites that was to characterize his later biennials as well. In Johannesburg, Enwezor and his frequent co-curator Octavio Zaya presented the largest exhibition, *Alternating Currents*, comprising about eighty artists in an old power station. Gerardo Mosquera (familiar to us from the Bienal de La Habana) presented *Important and Exportant* in the Johannesburg Art Gallery; Enwezor’s emphasis on a South–South artistic dialogue and his preference for working in collaboration with a familiar team of other curators reflected the older curator’s (Mosquera’s) impact, drawing on Havana’s collective methods. Well-known Korean curator Yu Yeon Kim presented *Transversions* in the Museum Africa. The ubiquitous, Paris-based curator Hou Hanru presented *Hong Kong, etc.* in the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery. In Cape Town, meanwhile, South African curator Colin Richards presented *Graft* at the National Gallery of South Africa, and Kellie Jones presented *Life’s Little Necessities*. They all placed considerable significance on the existence of a globalized biennial in South Africa and, in return, unprecedented numbers of American and European curators, art dealers, and collectors flew into South Africa for the opening.

The Biennale emphasized dialogue, trade, migration, and power asymmetries between the South and the developed North. Enwezor selected international artists whose work reflected on these themes, and he arranged

for Nigerian academic-artist then resident in the UK, Olu Oguibe, to present a large conference on the issue, attended by international art-world luminaries and chaired by the renowned scholar of African art histories, Salah Hassan. However, Enwezor also attracted considerable suspicion and hostility, precisely because his worthy aims had a blind spot. For if *Trade Routes* sought to connect local social realities to the dominant trajectories of intellectual and artistic influence in contemporary art then, in the context of newly liberated South Africa's economic crisis and persisting and vast inequality, his Biennale (much like *Africus* before it) looked like an obsessive grasp at civic prestige and elitist incorporation into the international art world at the expense of more humble local projects and the improvement of even basic infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> In a parallel critique (albeit one that ultimately championed Enwezor), made in *The Star* newspaper in 1997, artist Kendall Geers argued vociferously that too many local battles were being played out in foreign contexts – in part because of South Africa's postapartheid topicality on the world stage, and in part because local cultural scenes were not sufficiently supported by South Africa's state and other resources to confront those battles.<sup>28</sup>

This, unfortunately, was a moment of financial crisis. It was the Biennale's bad luck to be founded in a period of financial difficulty, but even more so that it was caught up in, and eventually sunk as the result of, rapid cycles of decentralization and recentralization of power. As apartheid ended, temporary councils had been established to administer Johannesburg until municipal elections could be held. In the years leading up to 1997, an authoritative Princeton University study explained, "The pressure to rectify urban inequalities was enormous. The new local government that came to power in 1995 was eager to transform the lives of its poorer black constituents."<sup>29</sup> But by October 1997, massive financial uncertainty had developed. An informant from the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, told the researchers that: "The city's finances were so bad that they [the city government] couldn't pay the bulk electricity supply ... and they were three months away from not being able to pay salaries."<sup>30</sup> Large corporations and high-income residents in wealthier areas like Sandton were boycotting their rates payments. The national government's finance minister, Trevor Manuel, pushed the Gauteng provincial government (the province that includes Johannesburg) hard to resolve the crisis and then, according to Tomlinson, "In October 1997 the Gauteng Provincial Government intervened in the financial affairs of the GJMC and the MLCs because the councils were experiencing a negative cash flow of R130 million per month."<sup>31</sup>



The committee that was appointed to deal with the situation recommended administrative centralization and the abandonment of non-profitable, so-called non-core activities. This was the now-too-familiar, neoliberal prescription to cure financial crisis. Tomlinson quotes their report: "If the non-core activities do not generate a surplus then they should be discontinued."<sup>32</sup> The *Mail & Guardian's* reporter Mark Swilling compared this to "a contract management model copied directly from Thatcherite Britain."<sup>33</sup>

The 1997–1998 financial crisis had a massive impact on the Johannesburg Art Gallery, where Gerardo Mosquera's *Important and Exportant* was presented, and on all Johannesburg cultural institutions. Jillian Carman recounts that all capital projects were cut, the roof of the temporary exhibition area, which had leaked since 1986, could not be repaired, climate control systems could not be upgraded, no purchase budget was allocated, key jobs could not be filled and, at the Art Gallery, the security staff was cut in half.<sup>34</sup> *Trade Routes* was collateral damage in the tempest of local South African politics, political transition, the race to reduce poverty through huge government spending, and then in its wake the harsh constriction of fiscal restraints.<sup>35</sup> The exhibition was forced to close a month before its scheduled end, a clear symbol of a society still blighted by poverty and riven by inequity. (The Biennial was reopened soon after, following an injection of private philanthropic support – albeit support that was often missing from the broader social crises surrounding the exhibition.)<sup>36</sup> The directive to cut the Johannesburg Biennale's funding was issued during the first round of unilateral cuts, which probably explained the confusion about the fate of the Biennale at the lower levels of government and cultural administration, which were then reflected in the Johannesburg media.

There was a further problem – conceptual more than financial – affecting the Biennale, and it lay at the core of Enwezor's weighty curatorial thesis, which was that of an ambitious intellectual rather than a traditional art curator. Downplaying aesthetic priorities in his catalogue essay, he asserted that the artists in the Johannesburg Biennale "do not subordinate themselves to investigations of formal problems."<sup>37</sup> He made powerful references in his essay to apartheid and the slavery-based trade of the colonial past, asserting their parallels to contemporary trade routes and the traffic of people.<sup>38</sup> But local critics and activists did not see the after-effects of forced diaspora as identical with their own, contemporary, postapartheid predicament, especially in the face of the urgent fiscal crisis in late 1997 that tamped down the radical redistributions of wealth that would have housed and educated poor, young South Africans and built basic services for the majority, black

population in townships. Enwezor located the exhibition beyond those urgent South African problems, out into emergent discourses around economic globalization, describing a world reconfigured by an “unprecedented flurry of activities and events called globalization” and the splitting of nation and home into diaspora and displacement.<sup>39</sup> Enwezor described South Africa as a microcosm of complex postnational hybridity, infused with historical trauma, identifying all this as characteristic of globalization. Observing that the Cape of Good Hope had been charted in the fifteenth century in order to open a sea route for trade between Europe and India, he noted that such transnational commerce would test more fixed ideas of origin, ethnicity, and home, for from its earliest manifestations, colonial displacement had formed new, complex (and enduring) cultural mixes.<sup>40</sup> His hope that waves of globalization might provide moments within which to challenge Eurocentric perspectives on culture and history was to appear highly esoteric and slightly out of place to his Johannesburg audience.<sup>41</sup>

The seeds of the controversy that Enwezor was to meet lay in the mismatch between his thesis and the local cultural politics that he encountered, within which resided an understandable belief in the exceptionalism of South Africa and of its recent history.<sup>42</sup> While he acknowledged the geographic spread and diverse history of struggles against domination and colonialism, Enwezor seemed to many observers to reject such immediate struggles – and implicitly the exceptional experience of the struggle for freedom that black South Africans were just emerging from, with all the shocking after-effects of white oppression that were still blighting their lives – as a framing device for history, proffering instead a focus on “the cross-layering of discourses that describe issues of globalization.”<sup>43</sup> His disinterest in the overriding priority of this national struggle was never going to endear him to large sections of Johannesburg opinion.<sup>44</sup>

In deliberate and suggestive terms that were to shape the next generation of biennial curators more than perhaps any other single cluster of ideas, he described his Biennale as “a kind of open network of exchange” and artistic practice as a means for exploring contemporary political and social processes, with the ability to produce innovative new mappings of such processes.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in 1995 – seven years away from his enormously influential *Documenta 11* – Enwezor was already ranging way outside art’s traditionally conceived competencies. He was moving far beyond his documenta predecessor Harald Szeemann’s step back from art, art history, and art theory (as we saw in chapter 1, Szeemann had privileged the viewer’s encounter with artists’ personal visions – their “individual mythologies”).

Enwezor instead asserted that artists and thinkers could together ponder the most important questions of our contemporary period. How can globalization and its effects on individual, collective, and national identity be best described? And finally, what would the examination of what Enwezor described as “contingent” histories, and the cultural mixes resulting from colonialism, contribute to the understanding of a different globality, and what would it look like?<sup>46</sup> The answer was a remarkable list of major works by artists from William Kentridge to Hans Haacke, Vivan Sundaram to Carrie Mae Weems, Gu Wenda to Lucy Orta.

The genealogy of all this was a raft of postcolonial writers such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Enwezor’s description, for example, of the “contrary truth” of the European Age of Enlightenment as “a negative Age of Decline and Defensiveness” for Africa, Asia, and the Americas, was indebted to these writers’ descriptions of a colonial history that divided itself into a psychologically charged binary of self versus other, and original versus mimicry.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Enwezor’s strident refusal of nationalism (not least, abandoning the national pavilion arrangements that prevailed in most other biennials, including *Africus* in 1995) clearly drew from the long-emergent projects of postcolonial scholarship and recent anthropology.<sup>48</sup> In particular, he quoted directly from anthropologist James Clifford, and particularly the book that Clifford had just published a month or two earlier that same year, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.<sup>49</sup> Enwezor described his curatorial research as akin to anthropological fieldwork in its reliance on physical travel and his dependence on local informants. Acknowledging that anthropological fieldwork carries “rather problematic” connotations, he nonetheless chose the label of the observing anthropologist-outsider, reflecting on his own experiences as a traveler moving amongst foreign peoples and ideas.<sup>50</sup> His biennial almost completely ignored the just-emergent and, at least at the well-equipped academies of the United States and Europe, the increasingly ubiquitous internet (and its fast-paced, e-mail-cursed digital connectivity), with its promise that a shared global information commons would empower a different activism, one that would refuse crude nationalisms and religious bigotry. His focus was almost exclusively on physical displacement or travel, with its associated fieldwork, and on that of his selected artists.<sup>51</sup> In the Biennale’s press releases, this discrepancy had already been foreclosed as “bourgeois philistinism versus the progressive cultural politics of the [international] art establishment.”<sup>52</sup> South African newspaper reviewers were intensely aware of the gap between local and international audiences, and

the lack of local attendance was glaring to them. In the *Cape Times*, art critic Benita Munitz wrote, “Notably absent during these early days are Johannesburg’s art lovers who habitually attend openings and visit galleries.”<sup>53</sup> This was perhaps no surprise given the two-hour flight required to travel between Johannesburg and Cape Town. Yet Enwezor’s seeming ignorance of that distance – and the consequent isolation of the two Biennale exhibitions curated by South Africans, one dedicated to South African art (*Graft*), the other to art made by women (*Life’s Little Necessities*) – only reinforced perceptions that Enwezor held little interest in or awareness about the practical realities of living in South Africa.

Many international visitors also found their Johannesburg experience dislocating and discomfiting: the city’s extraordinarily high violent crime rate meant that visitors effectively confined themselves to the Biennale exhibitions or shuttled from location to location and to the conference, and from there back to their hotels. This version of Johannesburg seemed “for all purposes still segregated and white,” yet South Africans themselves noted the tough security, rough neighborhoods, and poor signage.<sup>54</sup> One of the few works in which the issues of class and race meshed with the Johannesburg setting was Lucy Orta’s *Nexus Architecture* (1997). Orta had worked with migrant laborers from the Usindiso women’s shelter at the humble but historic Worker’s Library, next to *Trade Routes*’ main venue, the Electric Workshop and a block away from Museum Africa. They made patterned jumpsuits from printed cotton and kanga, eventually displaying them in a line of umbilically joined clothes at an astonishingly gorgeous, ephemeral conga-line parade outside the Electric Workshop. Though the results of Enwezor’s fieldwork (and the experiences of unsettled international visitors) were disconcerting in their likeness to disaster tourism, where the real trauma of others is transformed into a compelling backdrop for a cultural experience, this criticism itself was too easy as well. In fact, Enwezor’s job had never included responsibility for representing South Africa and its current experiences, and he had explicitly said many times that he wanted to create an anti-national Biennale in Johannesburg.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, he was very critical of the association of cultural authority, site, and automatic authenticity that had become common in global contemporary art under the rubric of identity politics and auto-ethnography, and which may have been more acceptable in Johannesburg.<sup>56</sup> His was a complicated, self-interested but important argument. Enwezor was to come back to it some years later, in a 2001 lecture originally presented in Berlin titled “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transcultural Global Form,”

which then met with an equally intricate and furious rejoinder from George Baker, "The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor."<sup>57</sup> But Enwezor had responded to his commission and had produced a long list of very important artists from around the world. He had been able to garner their best works, and works that represented these topics would always, inevitably, be tinged with the taint of tourism (this had also, we saw, been a factor at Manifesta).

Johannesburg was, in effect, the site of intense disagreements about the role of a biennial of contemporary art and the restlessly moving international art world circuit in a time of crisis, and South Africa did not host any international biennials for more than twenty years after *Trade Routes*. The rejection was obvious to visitors. Manthia Diawara, writing for *Artforum*, observed wistfully, "Clearly, those of us who attended must feel disappointed on some level: the show failed to engage South Africans in a dialogue with contemporary art and theoretical reflections."<sup>58</sup> In hindsight, and in particular after the post-2008 experience, during which floods of money washed into the top end of the international art world, Enwezor's enthusiasm for the anti-hegemonic possibilities of globalization (and art) would come to seem optimistic, as had his disinterest in the exceptional nature of the apartheid (and now postapartheid) struggle to many South Africans; his exhibition had been rejected both on the neoliberal right as a fiscal extravagance, and on the nationalist left as an internationalist extravagance. He was already quite aware, in 1997, of the latter criticism, pointing out that new systems contain traces of the old.<sup>59</sup> His immediate method had been to make colonialism central to world history and art, allowing him to construct an artistic and intellectual framework focusing on former colonies, which remain places marginalized by Europe's and the United States' historical narratives. This was a genuine achievement. But over the next fifteen years, and especially after his *Documenta 11*, a contradiction appeared. How could globalization both be unprecedented but also so thoroughly connected to colonial histories? For it seemed then, and in retrospect the same is true almost twenty years later, that Enwezor and the majority of other biennial directors had imagined that their contemporaneity was exceptional, and that fluidity, trade, and economics, rooted in the violence and hatred of centuries before, might now soften the contours of conflict. What was really unprecedented about the contemporary, given these had been the illusions of the generation of 1914 at the height of colonialism, as well? Was nationalism and the fierce desire to demarcate borders fading? Or would it return with a vengeance both in the developed West's border policing, which concerned so many of

Manifesta's artists, or with previously unforeseen and trumped-up appeals to atavistic nationalisms? In Russia, this led to state hostility against precisely the fluid, Rainbow identities that many Manifesta artists championed and, in return, led to the threatened boycotts of the 2014 iteration of Manifesta in St Petersburg. In an essay and an exhibition apparently so concerned with trade and globalization, Enwezor and his Johannesburg artists discussed economics and money very little, positioning economic trade solely as an impetus for the social and cultural exchange that was his focus; this was not to be the case at *Documenta11*, five years later. But intense, popular suspicion of globalization and international finance received a huge boost after the Great Recession, which started in 2008, and this in turn was reflected in biennial directors' accommodations to Occupy movements at later biennials, from Berlin in 2012 (where curators Artur Żmijewski, Joanna Warsza, and the Voina art collective offered the ground-floor space at the Kunst-Werke Institute (KW) to the Berlin Occupy movement), to Kassel and Istanbul in 2013, and even Enwezor's own exhibition, *All the World's Futures*, at the Venice Biennale in 2015. All of these saw globalization and its impact on locality very differently and more darkly than *Trade Routes*, or the civic boosters and city leaders behind biennials such as that in Johannesburg.

### **By Way of Conclusion: The *Emergency Biennale* in Chechnya**

We now want to turn to a final example of biennials engaging with politics of migration and cultural movement, but a very different mode of biennial, one that took globalization's dark turn as its thematics far more than *Trade Routes* arguably did. This was the *Emergency Biennale in Chechnya*, founded in 2005 by curator Evelyne Jouanno, and which drew to a close in 2008. The *Emergency Biennale* was, as with Manifesta before it, an itinerant biennial, although its cartography was much more expansive than the European biennial's. During its three-year existence, it traced an idiosyncratic course across the Northern Hemisphere, drawn by invitations from artists, galleries, and art spaces to temporarily anchor in host cities that included Brussels, Bolzano, Tallinn, and Riga as well as, outside Europe, Vancouver, San Francisco, and the Mexican city of Puebla.<sup>60</sup> The *Biennale's* appearances were generally not long, between two and three weeks on average, with some significantly shorter (a three-day presence in

Milan in November 2005) and others significantly longer (two-month stints in Puebla during 2006 and then Istanbul in 2007). Nor was it always presented as a stand-alone event, normally the defining feature common to biennials that also showcase a host city to its visitors. On more than one occasion, the *Emergency Biennale* instead nested within other exhibitions and events. It was publicly launched when one of its artists, Jota Castro, offered the *Biennale* a space within his survey show at Paris's Palais de Tokyo in early 2005. The San Francisco edition was invited by the Global Commons Foundation as an adjunct to the World Social Forum of 2008, while Hou Hanru (also Jouanno's partner) included the *Emergency Biennale* as a special project within the much larger Istanbul Biennial that he curated in 2007.

At each stop along its trajectory, the *Biennale* would mutate, the numbers of participants swelling as the *Biennale's* temporary hosts invited an array of local artists to join its line-up. The invitation came with only one main condition attached, which was that the works submitted be small and easily portable, for the *Biennale* was not a large-scale, heavily financed extravaganza but an independent roadshow of limited means. All works had to fit within what cultural historian Irit Rogoff calls "*the* signifier of mobility, displacement, duality and the overwrought emotional climate in which these circulate": a suitcase.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence, most of the proffered works did not fit the stereotype of "biennial art" – large C-type photographs, gargantuan installations, and the like – but tended towards the compact and reproducible: a blue tarpaulin from Paris-based collaboration, A Constructed World, a poem by Pascale Marthine Tayou, a copy of *Le Monde* from Adel Abdessemed, as well as swarms of DVDs and CDs from some of contemporary art's most recognized names, including Jimmie Durham, Nedko Solakov, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

It was, of course, both self-conscious and strategic to use a suitcase to transport an exhibition, alluding as it did, first, to one of the canonical works of modernist art history, Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935–1941), a suitcase filled with miniaturized versions of the most emblematic works of Duchamp's career, and, second, to the portability of the first wave of exhibitions on conceptualist art and in particular to itinerant curator Lucy Lippard's influential *Numbers* exhibitions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which we have alluded to many times in this book. The *Boîte-en-Valise* was, in effect, a retrospective of reproductions, its portability a response to Duchamp's own flight from Paris to New York to escape the German occupation of France during the Second World War, and then on to

Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, and other cities that would host him during and after the war. As T.J. Demos in particular has noted, Duchamp's suitcase of replicas and ready-mades created a "homology between geopolitical displacement and reproductive dispersal," espousing an "aesthetics of exile" based on "mobility, compactness, and miniaturization, as well as the impulses toward nostalgic collection and portable containment."<sup>62</sup> The same was true of the *Emergency Biennale's* suitcase too, not only because of its own inclusion of reproducible works, such as mass-produced tarpaulins and digital video disks, but because the *Biennale* was designed to draw the attention of art pundits and general publics to the Chechen struggle for independence from Russia, and to the plight of the Chechen people fleeing the capital Grozny after its bombardment by Russian forces in 1999–2000. At many of its destinations, the unfurling of the *Biennale* was coupled with public forums on the Chechen conflict, as well as on the experiences and political status of refugees. Curators and artists, together with leaders of human rights NGOs and survivors from war zones, were thereby offered the chance to analyze the function that art might serve in response to those experiences, as a particular, cultural type of public sphere for communicating awareness about the emergencies in Chechnya and, according to Jouanno, "to raise in the art world the consciousness of our human responsibility as public actors of both artistic and social life."<sup>63</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss such beliefs that cultural communication could be a viable form of political action, not least because the *Emergency Biennale's* art works arguably had limited political efficacy without being contextualized through its public forums. Nonetheless, this was only one aspect of the *Biennale's* efforts to create a productive artistic engagement with Chechnya. More striking still was the fact that on three occasions during the *Biennale's* lifetime, Jouanno filled a second suitcase with reproductions of the *Biennale's* art works and, with the assistance of acquaintances in various NGOs, sent that suitcase into Chechnya across the state's heavily armed frontiers, against the tide of people fleeing hostilities in the opposite direction. One half of the *Biennale* thus journeyed around the Northern Hemisphere, charting its own, somewhat tongue-in-cheek version of a biennial circuit, contingent upon invitations to correct what Jouanno and her counterparts saw as the invisibility and the silencing of the Chechen conflicts within international media.<sup>64</sup> The second half emerged in Grozny, carried at some risk by employees of local and international human rights organizations, with two specific goals in mind: to establish a clandestine exhibition in the Chechen capital on the one hand; and, on the other, to



make that exhibition the possible foundation for a public collection of contemporary art, even a new museum, once independence had been achieved.

It was on this basis that the *Emergency Biennale* differed most notably from the art historical trajectory sparked by the *Boîte-en-Valise*. For Demos, Duchamp's precedent hinged on a mix of nostalgia and narcissism, its "aesthetics of exile" apparent through the artist's portfolio of reproductions and miniaturizations contained in a traveling salesman's suitcase. By contrast, the *Emergency Biennale* replaced nostalgia, with its negative connotations of indulgent passivity, with the more constructive altruism and agency that derived from producing a new public art collection from the exhibition as it expanded in scope and over time. We have seen similar motivations at work in other biennials, in particular at the Bienal de La Habana and the Asia-Pacific Triennial. For the latter, the Triennial was the catalyst to transform a host art museum and, at least initially, to create altruistic, transnational networks of artists and curators where they did not yet exist. Further, most works in each edition were to be acquired from the artists to form the basis of the Queensland Art Gallery's expansion of its collection. But there was something else at stake with the *Emergency Biennale*, for it also responded to a very particular and difficult situation within biennial politics – indeed, according to Jouanno, the main condition of biennials by the early 2000s, which was that biennials had become a "marketing and communication tool" for selling a city's or even a country's cultural credentials to an otherwise skeptical global audience.<sup>65</sup> More specifically still, the *Emergency Biennale* was a rejoinder to this condition as epitomized, Jouanno asserted, by the first Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, curated by veteran curator Joseph Backstein in January 2005 and which was supposed to be the launching pad for Jouanno's exhibition. Or, to be more precise, the exhibition from which the *Emergency Biennale* would evolve, a planned project called *Camouflage* that Jouanno was to coordinate with St Petersburg curator Olesya Turkina and stage at the high-profile Tretyakov Gallery as part of the Moscow Biennale. Much like the *Emergency Biennale*, *Camouflage* was an international project dedicated to drawing attention to (among other causes) Chechen independence, a subject that was clearly sensitive in Russia at the time and all the more so at the 2005 Moscow Biennale, given its direct sponsorship by President Vladimir Putin through the Russian Ministry of Culture. In fact, the launch of the Moscow Biennale was part of a multi-million-euro push by the Ministry of Culture to sponsor Russian-themed exhibitions and events for international audiences in 2005 that included the blockbuster exhibition

*Russia! Treasures from the Kremlin Museum* held at New York's Guggenheim Museum that year.<sup>66</sup> "If the role of the Moscow Biennale was to bring Russia within the network of global modernity," Jouanno later argued, "it was also to give the outside world a new and positive image of contemporary Russia," a sign that Russia and its Putin-led government were still dedicated to cultural development, openness, and inclusivity despite the wars at the edges of the old Soviet empire.<sup>67</sup> For cultural theorist George Yúdice, it is precisely this management of culture by contemporary geopolitical powers, and the legitimation of power through culture, that identifies culture as a highly useful and expedient resource for neoliberalism.<sup>68</sup> For the Moscow Biennale, this management also meant the exclusion of *Camouflage* from the biennial's advertising and communications networks – most notably from the public announcement of the Biennale's launch through the contemporary art advertising service, e-flux, as well as from the Biennale's own website – so as, arguably, not to draw too much difficult attention to the project's confrontational politics.

Rather than have *Camouflage* simultaneously included yet excluded from the Moscow Biennale, dependent on the managerialism of Putin's patronage, Jouanno elected to withdraw her project and to remount it in ways that would, in her words, "establish a critical discursive connection with the Moscow Biennale" while attracting attention to contexts that the Biennale preferred to disavow.<sup>69</sup> On the one hand, the project's claims to independence from Moscow replicated, within the context of art-world politics, the broader geopolitical import of Chechnya's similar declaration. On the other hand, calling the project a biennial ensured that a greater level of attention from the art world would be given to Jouanno's plans, creating the curious paradox of international mobilization of a clandestine intervention. And by literally mobilizing her biennial and making it itinerant across Europe and, later, North America, Jouanno's critical scope also suggested a strong counterpoint to some of the aims and problems associated with itinerancy and migration as they have been thematized in contemporary art and exhibition contexts.

The counterpoint to Manifesta, but also to Johannesburg, is important for fully understanding the ambitions of the *Emergency Biennale*. Neither Manifesta nor *Trade Routes* quite fulfilled their homeopathic promises, precisely because they remained indebted to contemporary art's lyrical sense of itinerancy. Both remained forums in which, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, the politics "of the troubled, unsettled, non-spatialized places" of migration found a metaphorical home in the all-too-familiar

spaces of the international exhibition.<sup>70</sup> Both struggled to deflect criticisms that the actual, concrete conditions in the biennials' host cities – racial representation, problems with funding, the ramifications of political stereotypes – were ignored by the exhibitions' global ambitions and intended global audiences. So what, then, might we argue of the *Emergency Biennale in Chechnya*? Did its itinerancy also threaten to disavow local actualities for global attention or, worse still, trade on borders, exclusions, and transit to promote the postnational privilege of the lyrically nomadic? Our conclusion is ultimately ambivalent. The *Emergency Biennale* clearly but humbly sought to reframe how exhibitions respond to conflict and dispossession, shedding the safety of representation, or the distancing markers of metaphor, for a more direct engagement with displacement or even exile. Rather than shine a weak and distant spotlight from a site of *immigration* on the relative security of Western Europe or North America, the *Emergency Biennale* pursued an all-too-rare strategy in biennials: a collaboration at a site of *emigration*, the result of dialogue face-to-face with NGO workers willing to risk their own safety and carry the *Biennale's* suitcases into the Chechen conflict, and negotiations by telephone with Grozny residents able to install the exhibition in public squares and private apartments. The *Biennale* thus sought not to maintain established borders, whether they were the visa-lines of nation-states or the limits of culture's response to crisis and migration. Its practice was arguably more generative, its transformations directed outwards by reframing global public awareness about Chechnya's independence and refugee crisis, as well as the construction of a contemporary art collection in Grozny from the biennial's contents. That generative potential was also, quite importantly, directed inwards, towards self-reflection and discourse, asking whether a biennial could be something other than a slick marketing tool or an instrumental, political resource. If so, how was it to be transported and what circuits might it follow to attain that alternative global awareness?

One response, as we have noted in previous chapters, is that most of the biennials we have described were deliberately evolving more and more elaborate public program and resource room models. Symposia, public programs, conferences: all have been an increasingly weighty constant in the course of our narrative to the point that, as we noted in the introduction, at least one new biennial, that of the Norwegian provincial center, Bergen, chose to inaugurate the Bergen Biennial in September 2009 with a conference on biennials attended by curators and academics (with the results then published as *The Biennial Reader*).<sup>71</sup> The only exhibition on view was that

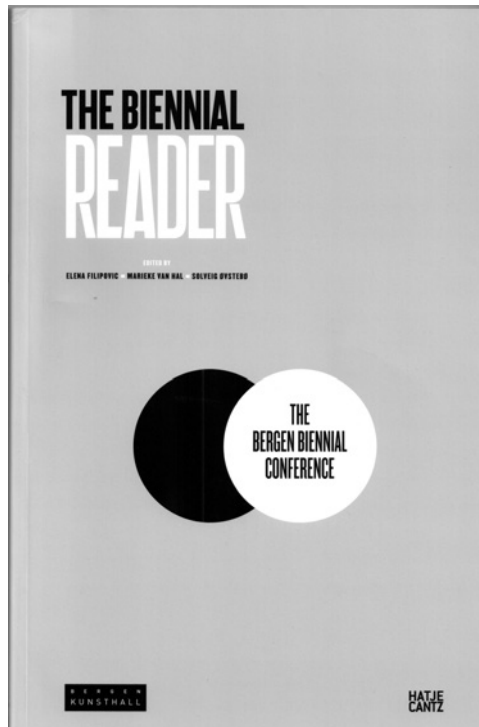


Figure 5.4 Cover of *The Biennial Reader: The Bergen Biennial Conference*, Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.) (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010). Courtesy Bergen Kunsthalle.

of an archive of biennial catalogues and documents, drawn from the Wanda Svevo Archive from the Bienal de São Paulo.

Whether such a “discursive turn” can offset the risks and pitfalls of any biennial, let alone an itinerant biennial, is another matter. In the case of the *Emergency Biennale*, the tactics of “spreading the word” about Chechnya potentially functioned inversely, reinforcing the identity of Chechens – or indeed migrants and refugees more broadly – not as active political players but as “victims” in need of recognition from audiences who, despite their apparent investment in the liberal appeal of culture, were in turn cast as ignorant of contemporary political circumstance.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, transporting the *Biennale* to Chechnya, as the end-point of its global tour, implied that the true visibility of politics and the true marker of independence would

only emerge through the displacement of struggle into the realm of culture. This is the teleology of the so-called “trauma model” applied to biennials, in which exhibitions such as the Gwangju Biennale (celebrating the city’s pro-democracy uprising in May 1980) or even Johannesburg’s two Biennales are conceived as a kind of salve for, or conduit out of, traumatic events. For critic George Baker in particular, the initially commemorative function of biennials all too easily became “manifestations of official culture that are bound up with historical trauma in a much more insidious way, as tools to cover over ruptures, to spread amnesia, to deny the magnitude of historical loss through a false euphoria of plenitude.”<sup>73</sup> He was, we can recall, responding to Enwezor’s lecture on “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transcultural Global Form,” and this irate response might have equally been leveled at Enwezor’s *Trade Routes*. For the *Emergency Biennale*, the development of amnesia and denial may actually have been faster than usual, not only given the *Emergency Biennale*’s presence within, not after, historical trauma, but because of the sheer number of DVDs, CDs, USB keys, and other media that constituted the bulk of the *Biennale*’s contents, all dependent on an infrastructure of electricity and computer technology that is always precarious in a war zone.<sup>74</sup>

This last contradiction in particular, and the surprising lack of forethought given Grozny’s constraints, could well have made Jouanno’s project yet another biennial to skeptically dismiss. Biennials may not ultimately be an ideal forum for thinking through the politics and potentials of migration, no matter that Manifesta’s cycles of eager curators or Jouanno thought they were. In fact, as the second decade of the twenty-first century began, there was a constant critical refrain that the arc of biennials may have reached its limit and that the form itself needed reimagining. Reviewers of almost every major biennial noted this situation. The frequent drive for new beginnings – new themes, new curators, and new artists for each edition and, especially in the case of itinerant biennials, new locations and audiences to target – often came at the expense of more sustained knowledge that might have been accumulated over time, including knowledge about migration patterns and histories. Biennials’ high production costs also made them vulnerable to recuperation as marketing tools for the international relations pursued by nation-states, cities, and NGOs equally. Indeed, biennials have frequently demonstrated a liberal, tolerant open-mindedness within the very mode of political governance that, from the turn of the twenty-first century onwards, were actively excluding migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from sanctuary.

But as the *Emergency Biennale* powerfully suggested, not all biennial exhibitions had to fit this frame. The more pertinent task increasingly was to reimagine what a biennial's production, content, and effects might be in relation to the discourses and practices of itinerancy and migration that biennials sought to canvass. To return to our introductory comments, such biennials may thus not have complied with an "either/or" logic – either seeking new beginnings or reflecting on the past, engaged with local specificities or more global mobilities – so much as the "both/and." Biennials sought models that could constantly evolve *and* reflect upon their historical development; that were engaged in examining specific pathways of migration, its obstacles, and communities, *and* in generating new networks of knowledge in the process; that could occupy sites of both immigration *and* emigration, as well as the relations between them. This was not an easy task for curators, of course, and it was one with which all the biennials in this chapter struggled. Yet the *Emergency Biennale* helped us to think this task through, for its evolutions and accumulations of art works and discussions from one venue to another, across the borders between localities and disciplines, took place in ways that had the potential to complicate how we usually think about biennials (from the terms of their funding to the form they take). In the case of the *Emergency Biennale*, at least, that potential emerged in the exhibition's many evolutions from site to site, including the transformation it traced between an art work, a biennial, and (in common with other exhibitions seen in this chapter and the last) the slow accumulation of a public collection.<sup>75</sup> It was a potential that emerged not only in a radically transformed type of biennial but, more precisely, in a biennial that was not, perhaps, a biennial after all.

## Notes

1. See, for example, James Meyer's and Martha Rosler's criticisms of biennials in a roundtable published in *Artforum* in 2003: Tim Griffin et al., "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp. 152–163, 206, 212; and Marion Pastor Rocas, "Crystal Palace Exhibitions," in Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (eds.), *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 234–250.
2. Rex Butler, "The World Is Not Enough," in Charles Merewether and John Potts (eds.), *After the Event: New Perspectives on Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 57–67.

3. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), esp. pp. 5–25.
4. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site Specificity and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
5. Clare Carolin, conversation with the authors, London, July 13, 2011.
6. See especially Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
7. Hedwig Fijen and Jolie van Leeuwen, “Project Officer *Manifesta 1*,” in Rosa Martinez and Viktor Misiano (eds.), *Manifesta 1, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 1996* (Rotterdam: Manifesta, 1996), p. 25.
8. Andrew Renton, “Hotel Europa and Other Diaries,” in Martinez and Misiano, *Manifesta 1*, pp. 81–83.
9. Sarat Maharaj, “Small Change of the Universal,” lecture presented at the First Former West Congress, Ottone, Utrecht, The Netherlands, November 5, 2009, authors’ notes. For further analysis of the citizenship and immigration policies of Schengen Europe, see Ruud Koopmans et al., *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
10. Okwui Enwezor, “Tebbit’s Ghost,” in Vanderlinden and Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade*, p. 176.
11. Enwezor, “Tebbit’s Ghost,” p. 184. For a similar argument, see Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2004), pp. 209–210 especially. On *Manifesta*’s claims to differentiation from EU policy, see René Block, Hedwig Fijen, Henry Meyric Hughes, and Katalin Néray, “How a European Biennial of Contemporary Art Began,” in Vanderlinden and Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade*, pp. 189–200.
12. Bonami, “The Former Land,” in Francesco Bonami et al., *Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defence: Manifesta 3* (Ljubljana: Manifesta, 2000), p. 11; Hedwig Fijen, conversation with the authors, Amsterdam, October 20, 2006.
13. Boris Buden, “Children of Postcommunism,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 159 (January–February 2010), pp. 5–7.
14. Bonami, “The Former Land,” p. 11.
15. Gruppo A12, “empty/ŠUMI,” in Bonami et al., *Borderline Syndrome*, p. 26.
16. Manifesta Board Members, “Preface,” in Bonami et al., *Borderline Syndrome*, p. 9.
17. On the use of the green line for a *Manifesta 6* Christmas card, see Michael Paraskos, untitled letter, *Cyprus Weekly*, June 16, 2006, p. 11; this is one of numerous articles published in Cypriot newspapers, and held at the International Foundation Manifesta archives in Amsterdam, that detail and explain the reasons for the collapse of *Manifesta 6*. On Manifesta’s

- contractual disputes, see Jeffrey Kastner, "School's Out," *Artforum*, vol. 45, no. 1 (September 2006), pp. 187–188, 397; and Pia Fuchs and Société Réaliste, *Manifesta 6: Department III: Abschlussball/Contract of Discord* (2007). <http://www.aestheticmanagement.com/manifesta-61-department-iii-abschlussballcontract-of-discord/>. Accessed September 14, 2015.
18. Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 71 ff.
  19. James Meyer, "Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art," in Alex Coles (ed.), *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), pp. 10–26.
  20. Nelson Mandela, "Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Nelson R. Mandela, at His Inauguration as President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa," inauguration speech, Union Buildings, Pretoria (May 10, 1994). [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS176&txtstr=inauguration](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS176&txtstr=inauguration). Accessed September 14, 2015.
  21. For a later account of *Africus* in the context of South African politics, cultural policy, and the ongoing economic and social crisis into which the first Johannesburg Biennale inserted itself, see Natasha Becker, "Africus Johannesburg 1995: *Butisi Tart*," in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 86–97. For a profile of co-director Christopher Till written just after *Africus*, see Mark Gevisser, "Christopher Till, Johannesburg Director of Culture, Homeless 'King of Culture,'" *Mail & Guardian*, September 30, 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-09-20-christopher-till-johannesburg-director-of-culture>. Accessed September 14, 2015. Here, Gevisser interviewed Till on the occasion of his replacement by Victor Modise as Johannesburg's Director of Culture, a role that Till had occupied since 1991; Gevisser claimed that Till's single-mindedness both created and lost him that job as cultural commissar, describing Till's dominance in Johannesburg's cultural scene and his unwillingness to compromise, which won him both enemies and admirers.
  22. For a contemporary description of the South African art scene see Julia Landau, "New International Artistic Directions Cause Stir," *Cape Times*, January 17, 1997. She described the mixed reaction to the recent emergence of galleries and exhibitions showing "conceptual, cerebral" art in Johannesburg and Cape Town; these newer spaces augmented long-established, important dealer galleries in both Johannesburg and Cape Town such as Goodman Gallery, which had opened in Johannesburg long before, in 1966; see Barbara Pollack, "When South Africa Joined the World, and the Art World," *New York Times*, March 9, 2003, p. 19. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/09/arts/art-architecture-when-south-africa-joined-the-world-and-the-art-world.html>. Accessed September 14, 2015.



23. Marilyn Martin, "The Rainbow Nation: Identity and Transformation," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1996), pp. 3–15.
24. Martin, "Rainbow Nation," p. 3.
25. Martin, "Rainbow Nation," p. 7 and p. 15, note 7.
26. Martin, "Rainbow Nation," p. 3.
27. Johannesburg's metropolitan government was engulfed in a severe financial crisis all through the lead-up to the Biennale and during its opening. Just before the Biennale opened, the Development Bank of South Africa bailed out the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council with a huge, R1 billion loan. This was the unfolding financial context in which Nicky Padayachee, CEO of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, the Biennale's principal funder, wrote the Preface in *Trade Routes'* exhibition catalogue, explaining that the Biennale had been founded to push Johannesburg into a leadership role in contemporary art, to create an international recognition of South African art, to encourage international investment, and to bring cultural tourism into Johannesburg. See Nicky Padayachee, "Preface," in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997* (Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and Thorold's Africana Books, 1997), p. 4. Susan Parnell has traced the consistent ambition of Johannesburg's leaders since the end of apartheid to position South Africa's largest city, via the City Development Strategy (CDS), as a "global city." See Susan Parnell, "Politics of Transformation: Defining the City Strategy in Johannesburg," in Klaus Segbers (ed.), *The Making of Global City Regions: Johannesburg, Mumbai/Bombay, São Paulo, and Shanghai* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 139–167. Similar unexceptional and worthy civic aspirations were behind many of the globe's emerging, tiger economy biennials during the 1990s, but they meshed less well with the realities of Johannesburg's economic and social crisis at that new, postapartheid moment. *Mail & Guardian* arts journalist Mark Gevisser had commented a year before *Trade Routes* opened that Johannesburg was unable to successfully combine "biennales and township cultural centres ... we pay our rates for the one to ride on hubris and the other to wear blinkers." Mark Gevisser, "Christopher Till, Johannesburg Director of Culture, Homeless 'King of Culture,'" *Mail & Guardian*, September 20, 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-09-20-christopher-till-johannesburg-director-of-culture>. Accessed October 10, 2015. See also Jillian Carman, "Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Urban Future," in Richard Tomlinson, Robert A. Beauregard, Lindsay Bremner, and Xolela Mangcu (eds.), *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City* (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 231–256.
28. Kendall Geers, "Dangers Inherent in Foreign Curating," *The Star, Tonight Supplement*, March 19, 1997; Geers and Enwezor were both condemning the representation of black bodies by white artists on the international stage, such

- that South African debates were being recounted more overseas than locally. That condemnation was met by an equally vociferous critique, especially from white artists, in an anthology the launch of which was planned to coincide with the opening of *Trade Routes* in October 1997: see Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz (eds.), *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press, 1999).
29. Michael Woldemariam, Jennifer Widner, and Laura Bacon, *Restructuring Service Delivery: Johannesburg, South Africa, 1996–2001* (Princeton, NJ: Innovations for Successful Societies, Princeton University, 2012), p. 2. [http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Policy\\_Note\\_ID207.pdf](http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Policy_Note_ID207.pdf). Accessed September 14, 2015.
  30. Mike Moriarty, quoted in Woldemariam et al., *Restructuring Service Delivery*, p. 1.
  31. Richard Tomlinson, “Ten Years in the Making: A History of the Evolution of Metropolitan Government in Johannesburg,” *Urban Forum*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1999), pp. 1–40, esp. p. 18.
  32. Tomlinson, “Ten Years in the Making,” p. 27.
  33. Mark Swilling, “Mismanaging Jo’burg,” *Mail & Guardian*, December 4–10, 1998, p. 41.
  34. See Jillian Carman, “Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Urban Future,” p. 231.
  35. For the outlines of the battles over cultural policy and leadership following *Africus* see Hazel Friedman, “Battle of the Chiefs,” *Mail & Guardian*, September 6, 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-09-06-battle-of-the-chiefs>. Accessed September 14, 2015. Also see Hazel Friedman, “Furore over Top Arts Appointment,” *Mail & Guardian*, September 6, 1996. <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-09-06-furore-over-top-arts-appointment>. Accessed September 14, 2015.
  36. These austere policy prescriptions were driven both by external agencies and by government. Susan Parnell explains that a powerful Lekgotla (the committee in charge of the city’s City Development Strategy (CDS)) was appointed following the 1997 fiscal crisis; it included city officials and politicians but was dominated by external, World Bank advisers such as Junaid Ahmed (the bank’s deputy resident representative and principal economist in South Africa) and central government appointments, including Ketso Gordhan (the former Johannesburg city manager who in 1995 had become director general of transport; he was to trim Johannesburg’s public sector to one-third of its original size (Parnell, “Politics of Transformation,” p. 147)).
  37. Okwui Enwezor, “Introduction. Travel Notes: Living, Working, and Travelling in a Restless World,” in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997* (Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and Thorold’s Africana Books, 1997), pp. 7–12, esp. p. 7.
  38. Enwezor, “Introduction. Travel Notes,” pp. 7–12.

39. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 8.
40. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 10.
41. See Hazel Friedman, "The Curator as God," *Mail & Guardian*, October 10, 1997. <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-10-10-the-curator-as-god>. Accessed September 14, 2015. Reporting on her interview with Enwezor just before *Trade Routes* opened, local arts writer Hazel Friedman described him as a "consummate strategist," outlining his plan to set up "new contact zones" for "dialogue, disagreement and exchange," whilst noting that such zones were the exclusive province of invited participants. Her obvious irritation at Enwezor's obduracy – during what she acknowledged was a "rushed" telephone interview just before the exhibition was opened – led her to the same conclusion that many other South African writers later reached: that *Trade Routes* had "separated itself from the imbalances that continue to afflict a country that has not yet located its own centre of gravity." We should also note here that Enwezor's thesis resurfaced, though more optimistically, the next year at the *24th Bienal de São Paulo* (1998), with director Paulo Herkenhoff hinging his curatorial concept on a similarly syncretic identity politics, that of cultural cannibalism in Brazil, and of Brazilian transformations of received cultural values. At that *24th Bienal*, in 1998, the co-director of *Africus*, Lorna Ferguson, was to curate the African section.
42. Hazel Friedman described confusion over the Biennale's leadership, the conflicts between key players and the concerns about funding in the build-up to the 1997 Biennale; see Hazel Friedman "Biennale's Rocky Road," *Mail & Guardian*, July 11, 1997. <http://mg.co.za/article/1997-07-11-biennales-rocky-road>. Accessed September 14, 2015.
43. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 8. The Robben Island Museum opened at the same time, on the harsh island prison where Nelson Mandela and other activists had been imprisoned. It featured local artists who interpreted Robben Island's history, highlighting the ultimately successful struggle for freedom in South Africa. The three exhibitions at the museum's opening included installations and prints. The Robben Island exhibition presented images that interpreted the injustice of apartheid but which were ultimately celebratory in tone. The Biennale's critics would seem to have wished for a Biennale like this, imagining that exhibitions could function as a collective, highly social, art therapy. The Robben Island Museum also attracted national government support that was lacking for the Biennale; neither Mandela nor key political figures attended *Trade Routes'* opening. It was clear, once again, that local audiences (which included popular reporters for daily newspapers and aggrieved activists) would not necessarily fall into line with the civic backers of international biennials unless there is a consensus that a biennial was important. This was not the case at Johannesburg, no matter what the quality of the exhibition. We will see in a later chapter on Chinese biennials that both dissident, "unofficial" artists and

the Chinese state saw biennials as platforms that would empower their very different objectives.

44. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 11.
45. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 7.
46. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 7.
47. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," pp. 8 and 9.
48. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 7.
49. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
50. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 9; this is particularly evident in his long section describing "ethnographic surrealism" (p. 11).
51. Jen Budney, "Who's It For? The 2nd Johannesburg Biennale," *Third Text*, vol. 12, no. 42 (1998), pp. 88–94.
52. Budney, "Who's It For?," p. 89.
53. Benita Munitz, "Medley of Works Drawn from Global Art Pool," *Cape Times*, October 24, 1997, pp. 9 and 16.
54. Budney, "Who's It For?," p. 90.
55. Carol Becker and Okwui Enwezor, "Interview with Okwui Enwezor," *Art Journal*, vol. 57, no. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 101–107, esp. p. 101.
56. Hal Foster's critique of this tendency, written in the early 1990s, remains pertinent here: see Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?," in Jean Fisher (ed.), *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1994), pp. 12–19.
57. Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transcultural Global Form," *Documents*, no. 23 (Summer 2004), pp. 2–19; George Baker: "The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor," *Documents*, no. 23 (Summer 2004), pp. 20–25.
58. Manthia Diawara, "Moving Company: The Second Johannesburg Biennale," *Artforum*, vol. 36, no. 7 (March 1998), pp. 86–89, esp. p. 89.
59. Enwezor, "Introduction. Travel Notes," p. 7.
60. Basic details about the *Emergency Biennale* can be found online at [www.emergency-biennale.org](http://www.emergency-biennale.org). Accessed September 14, 2015.
61. Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 36 (our emphasis).
62. T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 8, 17.
63. Evelyne Jouanno, email correspondence with the authors, July 22, 2011. Duchamp was not, to reiterate, the only art historical precedent for using a suitcase to transport and display an exhibition. Another important example, derived from Duchamp's work as much as Jouanno's show would later be, were the "suitcase exhibitions" that Lucy Lippard intended to tour through Latin

- America in 1968. These exhibitions, Lippard, famously claimed, would showcase “dematerialized art that would be taken from country to country by ‘idea artists’ using free airline tickets” – though whether the exhibitions were an early sign of globalized art and exhibition practices, or another sign of US culture’s soft power through the region, this time through early conceptual art and curatorship, was still open to question. We have been emphasizing the influence of Lippard’s *Numbers* throughout this book; see Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966–1972* (1973), 2nd edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. ix; also see Cornelia Butler et al., *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Numbers Shows, 1969–74* (London: Afterall Books, 2012).
64. Evelyne Jouanno, email correspondence with the authors, July 22, 2011.
  65. Evelyne Jouanno, email correspondence with the authors, July 22, 2011.
  66. Geneviève Tellier, *Europalia: Stop ou encore? Plaidoyer pour un lifting européen* (Loverval: Labor, 2005).
  67. Tellier, *Europalia*.
  68. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
  69. Evelyne Jouanno, email correspondence with the authors, July 22, 2011.
  70. Stuart Hall, “Maps of Emergency: Fault Lines and Tectonic Plates,” in Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell (eds.), *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes* (London: INIVA, 1999), p. 32.
  71. For the most complete account of the Bergen Biennial, see Marieke van Hal, “Rethinking the Biennial,” MPhil dissertation, Royal College of Art, London, 2010.
  72. For similar criticisms of the reduction of migration to victimhood, see Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp. 44ff.
  73. George Baker: “The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor” (2004), reprinted in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 446–453, esp. p. 450.
  74. The fact that Jouanno was unable or unwilling to provide information about the response to the biennale in Chechnya itself – from who the audience was, to what they thought of the *Biennale* or its longevity as a public collection – potentially reinforced this argument about the participants’ disregard for the actual situation on the ground in Grozny.
  75. That was, at least, Jouanno’s hope for the works collected and sent through to Grozny. Nearly a decade after the *Emergency Biennale* had drawn to a close, however, that public collection of art in Chechnya still had not eventuated.



## Part 3

# Hegemony or a New Canon

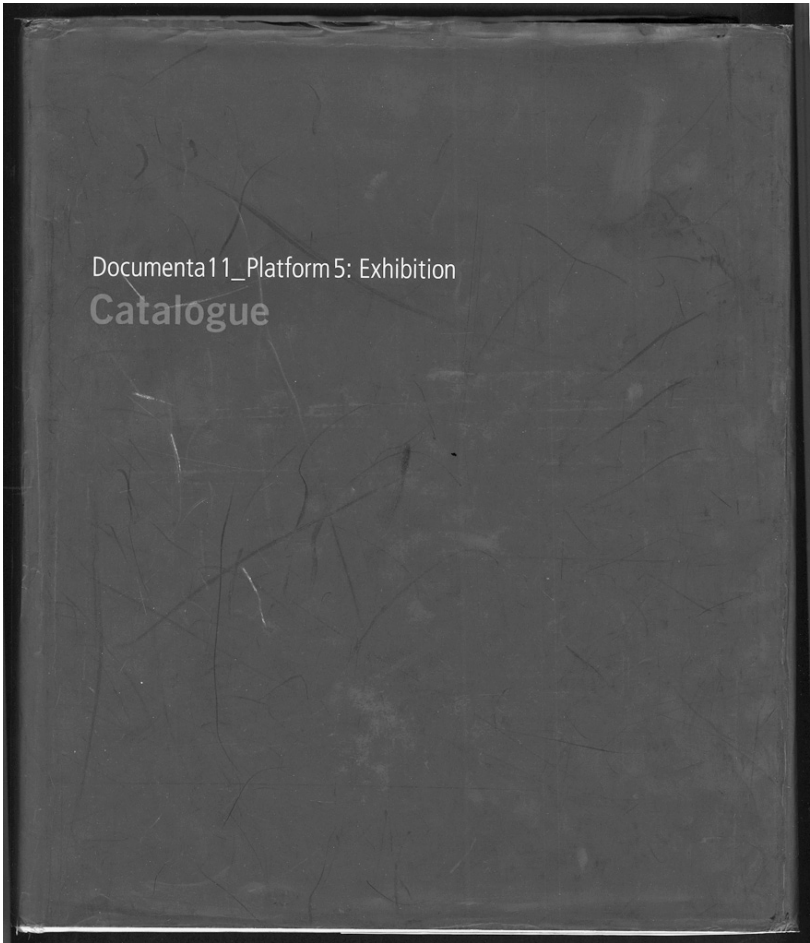


Figure 6.1 Cover of *Documenta11\_Platform 5*, exhibition catalogue, curators Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002). Courtesy documenta and Hatje Cantz.



## 2002: Cosmopolitanism

Exhibitions in this chapter: *documenta X* (1997, Kassel, Germany); *Documenta11* (2002, Kassel, Germany, with Platforms in Vienna, Austria; Berlin, Germany; New Delhi, India; St. Lucia; Lagos, Nigeria)

### Introduction

*Documenta11* (2002) is widely considered one of the most important exhibitions in recent decades, recognized for its postcolonial, geographic dispersion of art and also a radical (though not entirely unprecedented) curatorial method, that of diffused curatorship in which the exhibition's director worked closely with a team of collaborators. This chapter will concentrate primarily on two key forces underpinning this millennial mode of exhibition-making and the significant tensions between them: between chief curator Okwui Enwezor's self-conscious destabilization of centralized intellectual and artistic authority across what he described as postcolonial "constellations of discursive domains, circuits of artistic and knowledge production, and research modules," and his adroitly managerial solution of delegated duties.<sup>1</sup>

Enwezor was consciously seeking a fundamental and ambitious redefinition of the structure and meaning of art institutions according to a decolonized and, by now, globalized model of art. Rather than simply present a group show in *documenta*'s usual, comfortable Kassel home, he staged his exhibition – though this was far more than an exhibition as we usually understand the term – across five connected forums, or "Platforms" as he called them, in different locations worldwide. He shared curatorial responsibility for *Documenta11* between himself and his close-knit group of six co-curators: Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. He had worked with each previously and,

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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moreover, had done so over a long period (Zaya, for instance, co-curated the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale with Enwezor in 1997). Despite its setting in a small German town, but given its huge reputation and resources, *documenta* offered (perhaps the only) opportunity for such a group of leading curators to actively alter the art world with one exhibition. At the very least, it provided this curatorial team with the ambition to emphasize certain aspects of the historic globalization then sweeping the contemporary art world in order to advance a narrative of decolonization over other narratives about globality (including those we will see promoted in the next chapter). *Documenta11* did so thoroughly enough to have a genuinely historic impact on both art and curatorial practice. In that light, it is perhaps surprising that though there have been many references to *Documenta11* in the literature on biennials, and an extensive array of reviews and feature articles appeared in the period after 2002, there has been relatively little by way of extended writing on the exhibition.

### The Five-Year Subaltern Plan

The 1998 appointment of Enwezor as curator of *Documenta11* was in itself a radical departure from *documenta*'s exclusively West European list of previous directors (a list that as well had only consisted of men until 1997, when French curator Catherine David directed *documenta X*). *documenta X* had focused on curating art that was adamant in its links with politics, and *Documenta11* maintained that emphasis. However, *Documenta11*'s particular historical moment – five years and the 9/11 attack later – was now marked by the different issues that the Platforms were to spell out: a more intense focus on globalization; a heightened sense that racism, along with a hysteria about refugees and Islam, had returned to Europe; and, overshadowing all this, the new awareness of impending environmental catastrophe. David's own obdurately and politically engaged artist selections, along with her revival of a daily public program of famous speakers that stretched the whole hundred-day duration of *documenta X*, were clear influences on Enwezor's approach. Looking back in 2013, shortly after he was appointed director of the 2015 Venice Biennale, Enwezor remembered that he was very conscious of this:

Exactly 15 years ago, I got handed the reins of organizing *documenta*. I was 35 at the time, I had limited track record, no major institution, patron, mentor,

behind me, yet somehow that amazing jury that selected me saw beyond those deficits and focused, I hope, on the force of my ideas, and perhaps even a little wager on the symbolism of my being the first non-European, etc. My sense of it was that the jury wanted a choice that could be disruptive of the old paradigm but still not abandon the almost mythic ideal of this Mount Olympus of exhibitions. I came to documenta as I said with little track record, but with an abundance of confidence.<sup>2</sup>

Enwezor was quite accurately playing down his exhibition experience: he had curated nothing remotely on the scale of documenta with the possible, though fraught and perhaps telling exception as we saw in the previous chapter, of *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (1997). But he was perfectly positioned to take on the discursive role of the reforming, surprise outsider and his methods were already presaged in Johannesburg. There, he had presented multiple exhibitions arranged by a group of curators, a film program, and a symposium as an “open network of exchange,” capable of productively exploring the sociopolitical processes of globalization.<sup>3</sup> This was an immense claim for an exhibition and rested on the curator expropriating conceptual territory far beyond the aesthetic. Enwezor had emphasized the importance of openness in a world characterized by migration and displacement. Despite the economic focus of its title, *Trade Routes: History and Geography* presented physical displacement as the overarching unifying core of globalization, more than what he described as “economic consolidation and efficient distribution of labour and capital.”<sup>4</sup> The main thrust of Enwezor’s argument at Johannesburg was already that contemporary globalization politically and conceptually relates to historical colonialism, and that an examination of the enduring cultural *mélange* formed by colonialism “breathes new life” into thinking about globalization.<sup>5</sup> While he emphasized the colonial origin of current developments in global history, Enwezor also claimed that contemporary globalization is an unprecedented phenomenon, a period “like no other in human history.”<sup>6</sup>

Enwezor was born in 1963 in Nigeria, but had been based in New York from late 1982 on. We use “based” fairly loosely though, for at that turn-of-the-century moment in the biennial boom, in 2002, no member of the emerging, highly peripatetic curator cadre was domiciled anywhere except airport lounges. (By 2015, however, most were safely ensconced in senior art museum jobs: Hans Ulrich Obrist at the Serpentine Gallery in London, Okwui Enwezor at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, Massimiliano Gioni at

the New Museum in New York, Jessica Morgan at the Dia Art Foundation in New York, and so on.) With an undergraduate degree in political science but no academic training in art history or background in museum work, Enwezor paid insistent attention to contemporary art outside the predictable North Atlantic art circuit, knowing that his life experiences precisely embodied the peripheralism he promoted. However, his close-knit *Documenta11* curatorium, four of whom were also academics as well as curators, had strong links to London (the exception, Chicago-based curator Susanne Ghez, was the long-standing director and chief curator of the University of Chicago's respected art museum, the Renaissance Society). More particularly still, the cabal was linked to a small institution that embodied the growing intersection of academia and curatorship, the Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva), located in London's East End. Its founding director, Gilane Tawadros, was to be one of the co-curators of the 2003 Venice Biennale, which is the subject of the next chapter. This small research institute had a considerable reputation as a powerhouse for exhibitions and writing over successive phases of multicultural and postcolonial thinking; its scholars were connected with an influential, London-based journal, *Third Text*, which had been founded back in 1987 by veteran artist-theorist Rasheed Araeen. They all owed a considerable intellectual debt to pioneering Birmingham School cultural theorist and sociologist, Stuart Hall.

A link between curator and scholar was itself interesting and slightly unusual, for curators' writings on contemporary art and their methodologies for researching biennials had long since diverged from the work of art historians. The differences, as we noted before, included the semi-ritual iteration of particular rhetorical tropes and, normally, most curators' predilection to advocacy as opposed to art historians' preference for critique. The mutual incomprehension between curators and art historians was by now long-standing, dating back at least to *documenta 5* in 1972 and the rise of the charismatic auteur curator, as we saw in the earlier chapter on that exhibition.<sup>7</sup> The early twenty-first-century chasm between the two, otherwise closely aligned professional groups, has been quite thoroughly discussed by many writers but was, as we shall see, not as necessarily inevitable as it mistakenly seems. It was certainly not as definitive as the almost complete exclusion of art critics from the key forums of contemporary art. The curators of *Documenta11* were exceptional in that they crossed these borders. Certain of them, such as art historian Sarat Maharaj, then based at Goldsmiths College in London, already had very substantial reputations as scholars (in Maharaj's case, as an expert on

Marcel Duchamp and Richard Hamilton). And it was in mid-1990s New York that Enwezor co-founded *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* with Chika Okeke-Agulu and Salah Hassan, and co-presented his first exhibition that would attract wide notice, *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, at the Guggenheim Museum (1996). In retrospect, *In/sight* already announced Enwezor's methodologies for *Documenta11*. First, *In/sight* argued that powerful parallel modernities, in this case those of African art, needed to be taken into account in any postwar art history. Second, Enwezor was already choosing to work in collaboration, in this exhibition with co-curators Clare Bell (assistant curator at the Guggenheim Museum), Danielle Tilkin (project director for *Africa Hoy/Africa Now*), and Octavio Zaya (who had been a co-curator of the first Johannesburg Biennial in 1995 and was to be a co-curator with Enwezor of the imminent second Johannesburg Biennial (1997) and then of *Documenta11*).

*Documenta11* incorporated a double perspective that we might summarize in two words: postcolonialism and globalization. As the twin organizing criteria for the exhibition, these were not by any means completely novel. We saw already that a number of landmark biennials and museum exhibitions had previously foregrounded not simply identity politics, but also artists who dissected the workings of cultural hegemony. *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) and *documenta X* (1997) were *Documenta11*'s chief North Atlantic precursors, though Enwezor would have insisted instead on a genealogy of exhibitions that included several biennials of the South, including his own Johannesburg Biennial.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, just as Arnold Bode and his friends had developed the first *documenta* to connect postwar Germany with the rest of Cold War Europe via an exhibition of the newest developments in the late-modernist, international art of the time, so Enwezor was connecting the North Atlantic to the global South, like it or not, at the most important and influential recurring exhibition of all, with a notable focus on artists from Africa. This was an intensely geopolitical view of exhibition curating and one immediately recognized by visitors, even if they themselves were somewhat blind to their own metropolitan provincialism. As critic Kim Levin wrote,

Updating the founder's original intent, which was to bring to post-war Germany the latest developments in modern art from the rest of Europe, *Documenta 11* (which continues through September 15) brings to Europe the latest developments from the rest of the struggling, globalizing, postcolonial world. Jan Hoet's *Documenta IX* missed its historic chance to bring new

art from the former Soviet empire into the fold in 1992. Catherine David's Documenta X in 1997 talked the talk about inclusion, but flubbed it with exclusionist hauteur. Enwezor, with a team of six co-curators, delivers on his promise.<sup>9</sup>

The exhibition did more than this; it relentlessly challenged North Atlantic hegemony over the definition of contemporary art. Enwezor wrote,

Today's avant-garde is so thoroughly disciplined and domesticated within the scheme of Empire that a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found to counterbalance Empire's attempts at totalization. Hardt and Negri call this resistance force, opposed to the power of Empire, "the multitude."<sup>10</sup>

By Empire, he was alluding to the then-recently published and, at the time, much-quoted activist tract by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (2000).<sup>11</sup> Hardt and Negri's *Empire* had immediately become a bleak primer for the new millennium, and it was much quoted in art-critical and curatorial essays. Geography, culture, injustice, and globalization – accompanied in the wake of September 11, 2001, by a large section of the broad European and American public's reversion to social intolerance and rollback of popular left-liberal causes – had instantly periodized both postmodernity and its identity-driven early 1990s successor as privileged subcultures. The explanation, according to Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, was an Empire that internalized and entangled rather than simply exploited Others: they explained that Empire was an open system of ever-enlarging networks without a center. Hardt and Negri did not simply identify Empire with the United States. Instead, they pointed out the equivalence of globalized corporations and postmodern factories with neomedievalist, fundamentalist Others, and in all this they imagined only a weak, quasi-messianic positive agency (a "multitude" of indefinable yet potentially collective desires and drives). At the center of Empire, they placed communications industries and, at the margins of this world, a space left for art.

Curators such as Enwezor grasped the stakes in adapting to this transformation, explaining that marginal artistic players who had been there all along, ignored, could repopulate familiar, foundational artistic narratives. Entanglement, not difference, ruled Enwezor's documenta and his reconstituted global canon of art (although the dual reference to the destroyed airplanes of 9/11 and the venue for moving image projection in the title of his catalogue essay, "The Black Box," made that entanglement significantly

strained). He explained the hegemony exercised through art history's putatively disinterested judgments and the commerce of art with consummate, diplomatic plausibility: doyenne artist Louise Bourgeois, for instance, was both self-declared outsider and, by already-universal consensus, a senior, crucial figure in late twentieth-century North Atlantic art; in Kassel the room for her works was next to a suite of rooms devoted to West Coast conceptualist photographer Allan Sekula's monumental archive documenting the decline of global shipping, *Fish Story* (1987–1995), pointedly opposite a group of rooms that quite precisely mirrored this juxtaposition of hot emotional rhetoric and cool documentary. But this group of rooms consisted of works by artists of color, including Lorna Simpson, Steve McQueen, and Destiny Deacon.

Next, Enwezor was not simply altering the form of biennial directing by just delegating his curatorial role. He was, as well, expanding quite dramatically the form that a biennial would take (and of course we are using the word, as we have done throughout this book, to signify biennials, triennials, and all other recurrent exhibitions that survey contemporary art). Building on the “100 days – 100 guests” program of speakers that Catherine David had made such a prominent part of *documenta X*, Enwezor saw that a biennial could encompass the participation and the intellectual work of invitees who were not artists at all, but economists, lawyers, poets, political theorists, and other experts. Further, he would disperse *Documenta11* beyond Kassel itself, across the five “Platforms” spread across the globe, each located in a different nation.

The *Documenta11* office explained this complex process thus:

Platform1, Democracy Unrealized, took place in Vienna, Austria, from March 15 to April 20, 2001 in Vienna [sic]. It continued from October 9 to October 30, 2001, in Berlin, Germany [following the terrorist attacks of 9/11].

Platform2, Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation, took place in New Delhi, India, from May 7 to May 21, 2001, and consisted of five days of public panel discussions, lectures, and debates and a video program that included over 30 documentaries and fiction films.

Platform3, Créolité and Creolization, was held on the West Indian island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean between January 12 and January 16, 2002.

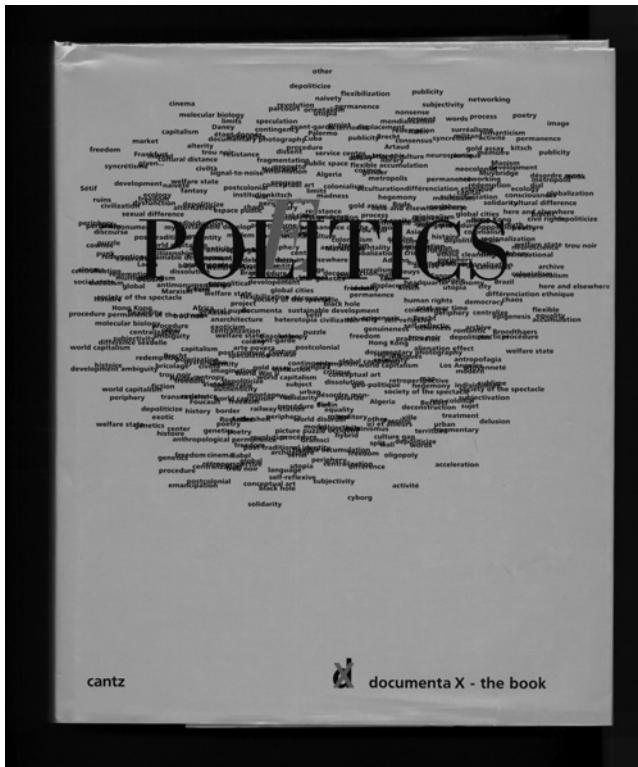


Figure 6.2 Cover of *documenta X: the book. Politics/Poetics*, exhibition catalogue, curators Catherine David et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997). Courtesy documenta and Hatje Cantz.

Platform4, Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos, was held in Lagos from March 15 to March 21, 2002, and engaged the current state of affairs of fast-growing African urban centers in a public symposium, along with a workshop, “Urban Processes in Africa,” organized in collaboration with CODESRIA. Over the course of one year, more than 80 international participants across many disciplines – philosophers, writers, artists, architects, political activists, lawyers, scholars, and other cultural practitioners – contributed to the evolving, dynamic public sphere that spelled out Documenta11’s attempt to formulate a critical model that joins heterogeneous cultural and artistic circuits of present global context.



Platform5, the final platform, is the exhibition *Documenta11* in Kassel, from June 8–September 15, 2002.<sup>12</sup>

The first four Platforms consisted of lectures, debates, and panel discussions; the fifth included these as well, during the event's one-hundred days of public events much as at *documenta X*, but it also included the expected mega-exhibition spread across the Museum Fridericianum (the stately art museum on Kassel's town square that had been the principal venue since the first *documenta* in 1955) and the close-by *documenta-Halle*, the Orangerie, the Binding Brauerei (a derelict brewery used for this *documenta* only), the Kulturbahnhof (at Kassel's central railway station, which had long been replaced by the newer Wilhelmshöhe Station, a few kilometers west of the city center, leaving the older central station to local trains and its surprisingly capacious building to galleries for *documenta*), and a few other, smaller, temporary venues, including Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's elaborate, jerry-built sculpture-cum-community-center, the famous *Bataille Monument* (2002), which was located further out of town in a poorer workers' suburb. In 2002, *Documenta11* did not use the Neue Galerie, which had long been a key *documenta* venue.

In his Introduction to *Documenta11's* exhibition catalogue, Enwezor declared,

As an exhibition project, *Documenta11* begins from the sheer side of extraterritoriality: firstly, by displacing its historical context in Kassel; secondly, by moving outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.<sup>13</sup>

The triple significance of the word, platform, helps explain why the previous symposia were so important to Enwezor and his group, even though each was either attended by audiences of insignificant size or by invitees only. First, a platform is a manifesto, a rhetorical gesture and an outline of a plan for the future. The first four Platforms were all of these. Enwezor had explicitly asserted that all the Platforms, together, were "a constellation of disciplinary models that seek to explain and interrogate ongoing historical processes and radical change, spatial and temporal dynamics, as well as fields of actions and ideas, and systems of interpretation and production."<sup>14</sup> The thoroughness of the enterprise, mapping a succession of global challenges that seemed particularly pressing at that early twenty-first-century

moment – democracy (which is overshadowed by history), reconciliation (which is tested by the search for justice), cultural hybridity (exemplified by creolization), and urbanization (the millennial stresses from which might undo or reshape civic culture) – went far beyond the normal, boilerplate curatorial rhetoric.

Second, a platform is a vantage point. Enwezor's Platforms, culminating at Kassel, were looking into the distance, both forwards and backwards. The view was prospective in that the participants described future reconciliation in the political, cultural, and social spheres, sometimes in their papers or later, in Kassel, in their works of art, in utopian or sometimes dystopian visions. Their views were, equally, retrospective in that the Platform speakers and, just as obviously, Kassel's artists were documenting and mapping the global present. They were recording contemporaneity's present shape, whether in the speakers' essays or in artists like Sekula's patient assemblage of documentary color photographs, which described the transcontinental collapse of ocean-based industries such as shipping and fishing in a long succession across rooms of modestly scaled prints. (Sekula avoided the gargantuan scale that had become a common artistic trope in photography selections for biennials.) This double vision was definitely comprehensible to documenta's knowledgeable European audience. But even then, the Kassel exhibition, as Enwezor well knew, appeared within the horizon of a powerful but apparently natural and, in fact, recalcitrant North Atlantic provincialism.

As if to prove him right, at the time, other curators were mapping an idea of international art that far more exclusively identified with the idea of a globalized world, with the idea of a global topography redeemed by the now-apparently free flow of data, information, and commodities. The director of the 2003 Venice Biennale and co-curator of *Manifesta 3*, Francesco Bonami, was one of those curators; his Biennale is the subject of our next chapter. Propelled by his rosy view of the curatorial collaborations in Ljubljana, Bonami would imagine in Venice a cultural camaraderie produced by art that depended on its viewers to complete the work. This was *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, the title of his 2003 Venice Biennale. Bonami, like many curators of the period, was identifying open-endedness with the third and then-familiar usage of the word, platform, which denoted a matrix-like assemblage of software that is so open and permeable that it permits interoperability and easy plug-ins, in turn linking this to the highly informal, relational art of the late 1990s. But this "Dictatorship" was to quickly date, as Claire Bishop observed in the

aftermath of *Documenta11* and a few months after Bonami's Biennale closed, writing that "It can be argued that the works of Hirschhorn and Sierra, as I have presented them, are no longer tied to the direct activation of the viewer, or to their literal participation in the work."<sup>15</sup> She was pointing to the limits of art's relational aesthetics, and in particular to the passive politics at the core of certain curatorial thinking.

Enwezor, on the other hand, was not at all as invested in those two particular, quickly aging signifiers of artistic contemporaneity, both of which had appeared the previous decade in *Traffic* (CAPC, Bordeaux, 1996). By 2002, curators had already been valorizing the terms associated with conviviality and sociability for about ten years and so the degree to which Enwezor avoided such art and rhetoric in his documenta, as opposed to Bonami's reliance on that in his Venice Biennale a mere year later, reflects real difference in artistic priorities despite the common network within which both curators moved. As veteran *New Yorker* art critic, Peter Schjeldahl reluctantly admitted, Okwui Enwezor "is onto something: a drastically expanded field of players and points of view in which the global spread of multiculturalism is taken for granted."<sup>16</sup> *Documenta11* painted a picture of contemporary art as a network in which New York, Lagos, London, Cape Town, and Basel were more or less equally important to a contemporary canon and similarly crucial in understanding contemporaneity, as opposed to some centers being exotic margins and others more genuinely cosmopolitan and contemporary.

### **Black Box, White Cube**

The North Atlantic was marginal in Enwezor's first four Platforms but not at the fifth, the Kassel exhibition. We know that Enwezor pitted his documenta against North Atlantic hegemony, and yet a very substantial number of the artists he selected were from Europe and the United States, so many that we must focus on this apparently contradictory aspect of his selections in order to understand what he was doing at this fifth Platform.<sup>17</sup> We will do this by focusing on one of his selections in particular, Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002), which embodied the different, ambitious notions of a platform, and which was also a work of art. We will come back to the significance of this apparently unremarkable observation shortly, for it is central to understanding both the significance of Hirschhorn in general, as Anthony Gardner has elsewhere explored in detail, but also of

Enwezor's placement of Hirschhorn's work at the heart – while at the same time at a highly visible periphery – of *Documenta 11* as well.<sup>18</sup> Hirschhorn's work figured immediately and prominently in exhibition reviews. His *Monument* was located at the Friedrich-Wöhler housing estate, in an outer suburb of Kassel called Nordstadt, a racially divided and socioeconomically disadvantaged district far away from *documenta*'s main exhibition venues such as the Museum Fridericianum, the Brewery, and the Hauptbahnhof, which were all concentrated near the city center. As we noted, *documenta* did not use the Neue Galerie in 2002 and so the Galerie's great collection of works by Joseph Beuys – including his arrangement of sleds, *The Pack* (1969), as well as the famous banner-size photograph and self portrait of Beuys, *La rivoluzione siamo Noi* (The revolution is us) (1972), which had been part of the artist's *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organisation for Direct Democracy by Referendum) at *documenta 5* – was able to be on view that year. This is worth remembering, given Hirschhorn's extensive allusions to Beuys and the *Monument*'s debt to Beuys's *Büro* and to *documenta 5* (of which more shortly). The *Bataille Monument* was really only accessible to *documenta* visitors if they waited at the main venues for garishly badged old taxis that were themselves part of the art work. These shuttled at intervals to and from Nordstadt. The *Monument* itself was constituted by a series of “departments.” These included large, merzbau-like installations made of recycled materials, silver foil, cardboard, and plastic sheeting held together with duct tape and covered with messages and aphorisms, a plastic tree-like sculpture that doubled as a meeting-place, and a free library filled with books on Bataille's key obsessions, including sections on “words,” “sex,” and “sport.” There was an *imbiss*, a snack bar run by a local Turkish family, and a website and television studio at which locals could create programs on any subject they wished. These would later be transmitted on Kassel's public access television service. There were workshops about art and philosophy at which Hirschhorn and experts on the French surrealist theorist would appear and speak. Over the course of five months, Hirschhorn and his team, which included more than twenty assistants drawn from housing estate residents and young volunteers, constructed, maintained, and eventually removed these various departments.

It is important to emphasize that Hirschhorn undertook the creation, maintenance, and monitoring of the *Bataille Monument* together with the residents at Nordstadt. However, at the same time, the *Bataille Monument* was definitely “not a question of representation, of a social project, of

democratic representation,” in Hirschhorn’s words, “but of an artistic project.”<sup>19</sup> His distinction between art and activism is important for though art-critical writing and exhibition-making connected with racial and cultural identity had marked the 1990s and its biennials, as we have seen, there was a great distinction between consciousness raising, the celebration of difference, and what Hirschhorn (and by extension Enwezor) was now proposing. Central to this distinction was Beuys’s *Büro* at *documenta 5* as the direct precursor of Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument*. The photographs and slogans that Beuys and his assistants had pinned on the *Büro*’s walls or scrawled on its blackboards reappeared now in the pages and banners that Hirschhorn taped to the walls of his sculptures. Hirschhorn had decided that he would be present at the *Bataille Monument* in Nordstadt to field questions about his politics, the work, and its placement.<sup>20</sup> His attendance and the constant routine of activities mirrored Beuys’s constant presence at *documenta 5*. But Beuys’s *Büro* was supposed to lead to direct political engagement, whereas Hirschhorn took similar social processes to different ends in a sharp demarcation of the audience’s experience with his art from democracy as an end in itself. If Hirschhorn was attracted to Beuys’s utopian social politics, he also understood that such utopian ideals risked being subsumed and dissolved within the social status quo they seemed to protest. Art needed to fight for its own interests and ambitions, according to Hirschhorn, rather than become a politicized tool used for the advantage of others (whether of a biennial and its sponsors, or of the Gastarbeiter residents of Kassel’s outer suburbs). Or to put it another way, art had to relate to, but be distinguished from, the other worlds (political, social, and so on) within which it functioned. We shall now think this through by looking at the reification and recuperation that Enwezor was risking in this *documenta*.

The Platforms that preceded Kassel, and the conference books that began to be published during the year after the exhibition, signaled that the supposed gap between politics and art was the product of a particular geographical perspective on culture, just as Hirschhorn’s *Monument* signaled that the bridge between the two was neither one of instrumental service nor allegorical lesson. So, if we remember Hirschhorn’s own emphatic resistance to seeing the *Bataille Monument* as an example of activist democracy – a resistance that seems superficially surprising, at first sight, given the works’ obvious investment in its location, in a racially divided and socioeconomically disadvantaged housing estate – then similarly we must pay careful attention to Enwezor’s claims about both the Platforms and the exhibition at Kassel. Hirschhorn dismissed descriptions of the *Bataille*

*Monument* that saw it as social work because he did not perceive it as fulfilling the social needs of Nordstadt's residents.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Enwezor resisted constraining his exhibition's politics according to a supposed social need or identity-based militancy, or claims for artistic autonomy. Rather, he evaluated (as did Hirschhorn) the imbrication of artistic projects with contemporary worlds around them. This was especially evident in Enwezor's film and speaking program that thoroughly examined the documentary form so identified with *Documenta11*'s fifth Platform. Thus, he wrote, "linked together the exhibition counterpoises the supposed purity and autonomy of the art object against a rethinking of modernity based on ideas of transculturality and extraterritoriality."<sup>22</sup> Where Szeemann was pilloried for non-artist selections, Enwezor's *Documenta11* avoided opprobrium. By comparison, the previous documenta had been a lightning rod for criticism centered on the austerity of neoconceptual political art. Without doubt, Enwezor and *documenta X*'s director, Catherine David, had approached their respective editions of documenta through similar perspectives. She also saw the curator's role as ethical, welcoming controversies and the overstepping that this produced. She wrote,

It may seem paradoxical or deliberately outrageous to envision a critical confrontation with the present in the framework of an institution [documenta] that over the past twenty years has become a Mecca for tourism and cultural consumption. Yet the pressing issues of today make it equally presumptuous to abandon all ethical and political demands.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, David avoided framing all this within the parameters of identity politics, words that she had scrupulously avoided in her introductory essay to that 1997 exhibition. She instead chose to speak to "the great ethical and aesthetic questions of the century's close," both negative and positive, including the upsurge of nationalism, racism and identity fixations, and new forms of citizenship.<sup>24</sup> And now it seemed that *Documenta11*, like the *Bataille Monument*, managed to embody the space of contested meaning that David had written about. The reason was that *Documenta11*'s Platforms had deterritorialized contemporary art, by which we mean for a start that Enwezor and his associates did not allow political art to be misconstrued as an identity art, and neither had Hirschhorn or other artists. Enwezor remembered,

The one virtue of documenta is the time allowed to organize it, which made possible the platforms. But you must remember that the platform idea, which

was fundamentally about the deterritorialization of documenta, was not initially endorsed by certain landlocked critics, but once it took off its implications about going beyond business as usual became abundantly clear.<sup>25</sup>

There are two more specific ways we can understand this idea of deterritorialization. Just as the deterritorialization of documenta most obviously implies to a general audience the movement of documenta activities off-site from Kassel and Germany, so both contemporary art and the exhibition itself were deterritorialized by being embedded in discourses far larger than those of art pure and simple. This then meant that the adjudicating competencies of art critics were removed in the face of interdisciplinarity (an emerging “incompetence,” or resistance to traditional competencies, reinforced by the many long moving image works that dotted *Documenta11*, whose collective duration, variously estimated at more than 600 hours long, would run for longer than the exhibition was open; a full viewing of all the art works was thus impossible, rendering critics doubly bereft of any omniscient authority).<sup>26</sup> This second meaning of deterritorialization as interdisciplinarity was familiar to an art world that had internalized (and often misunderstood) the term from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s deeply influential writings over the previous twenty years. It was just as important as the first, since it made the reasons for expanding the venue quite comprehensible. This was not the same thing as pluralism; if that had been the case, Enwezor would only have wanted to disperse documenta’s geography. And nor, it should be clear by now, was this the same as framing contemporary art within the terms of otherness and its associated, exoticizing politics. Under the conditions articulated by Enwezor, a consensus for real change began to emerge, starting with the documenta board and proceeding to the international art world. This in turn fed a fairly substantial shift in the artistic, which involved more than just shuffling minor figures on and off stage behind the main – American, British, Italian, German, and almost always male and white – actors.<sup>27</sup>

However, there remained skepticism about a biennial’s capacity to honestly manage a serious shift, even simply the revaluation of art from the periphery to the center, without subsuming, misrepresenting, and excluding artists in vast new spectacles, and now *Documenta11* risked the charge of festivalism. Peter Schjeldahl reproached the exhibition for this, writing,

Documenta11 brings to robust maturity a style of exhibition – I call it festivalism – that has long been developing on the planetary circuit of more than

fifty biennials and triennials, including the recent Whitney Biennial. Mixing entertainment and soft-core politics, festivalism makes an aesthetic of crowd control.<sup>28</sup>

This “festivalism,” he wrote, comprised assemblages of unsaleable installation art that exalted curators. Schjeldahl was making a point more serious than it sounds and perhaps more than he intended about the devolution of experimental art under the sign of the biennial into quasi-intimate experimental play in public situations. This trend was then quickening in pace, linked to the relative withering of an art of institutional critique. Five years before, it had underpinned Catherine David’s *documenta X* (and made it a target for bored reviewers). In that *documenta*, Swedish/Belgian artist Carsten Höller and German artist Rosemarie Trockel had presented *Haus für Schweine und Menschen* (1997), a pigsty for pedigree swine that was a literally living, partly domesticated metaphor for biennial socialization. Yet, in a very short period of time, Höller had moved away from this work, dubious in its humorous relation to dour institutional critique, to later works, such as the expensive, glitzy playground slides of *Test Site* (2006) – a shift towards mass play and social intimacy that informs the analysis in our penultimate chapter on Asian art biennials.

This shift from critique to play was the basis of the substantive criticisms of *Documenta11*, which generally emerged from a Left steeped in post-colonial theory. Festivalism, according to these writers, indicated a transformation in the nature of the biennial spectacle within which different exhibitions might locate themselves in different niches and at the same time attract really substantial audiences without dumbing down the art, or at least any more than contemporary artists wished (for the cultivation of the joke-as-art was a basic trope with biennial curators’ favorite artists, such as Höller or British artist Martin Creed). Schjeldahl’s distinction between the institutional and the commercial contemporary art worlds was already, in the light of the vast spectacles that large commercial galleries such as Gagosian Gallery would unleash in the second decade of the new century, out of date. The inclusion of (apparently) so many non-European and non-North American artists could reveal, critic Kim Levin quoted Enwezor as saying, “not an elsewhere, but a deep entanglement.”<sup>29</sup> But it might also manage to convert that same art into an Orientalist spectacle. In a fiercely adversarial, highly critical assessment made in 2005, three years after *Documenta11* closed, Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie argued that such projects are inherently and inevitably flawed and that in the process *Documenta11*



“may be constructing the conditions for a new appropriation of the ‘other’ by the West.”<sup>30</sup> Much as Kendell Geers had before him, on the eve of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, Ogbechie was cautioning that Enwezor’s exhibition would, in fact, marginalize already marginalized communities and carelessly replicate “modernism’s appropriation of African and other ‘non-Western’ arts at the beginning of the twentieth century.”<sup>31</sup> For, at the least, the European and North American art worlds and museums had not really broken from their heritage of exoticism in the display of anyone different, and behind this lay either crude or subtle nationalisms. Likewise, in his 2004 essay for *Documents* magazine, *October* editor George Baker was to argue with Enwezor thus, on the basis that the latter identified biennials with a model of resistance against global capitalism:

For the fragmentation of the institutions of art and culture enacted by biennials today is, as I have implied, another mode of these institutions’ consolidation; the perceptual sublime of the mega-exhibition seems dedicated to a fragmentation that blinds, rather than empowers, its spectators. I don’t think we can just wish away the spectacularization inherent in this mode of fusing institutions and media that all mega-exhibitions entail.<sup>32</sup>

To the degree that Enwezor’s revision of contemporary art’s rapidly solidifying canon was successful in the face of Baker’s criticism, then that reassessment would substantially be projected through a North Atlantic platform and inflected by the legitimate expectation that all large exhibitions in search of large publics are spectacles and include spectacular works of art.<sup>33</sup> The local, at *Documenta11*, was clearly altered by the global, pointing beyond the now-dated horizons of postmodernism and, further, towards the limits of representing identity. For unlike the curators of *Magiciens de la terre*, Enwezor had hardly selected any indigenous artists living in traditional communities for *Documenta11* apart from Inuit collective Iglolik Isuma Productions, though he had included a multitude of artists whose work could be considered transnational, concerned with human rights or justice, and who were members of various diaspora. We can locate this emphasis in the broader context of a hotly contested theory of cosmopolitanism emerging around then, in the writing of Kwame Anthony Appiah and especially Indian economist Amartya Sen, for whom cosmopolitanism emerged at the limit of the argument that one’s identity is a matter of “discovery,” not choice.<sup>34</sup> In a similar way, Enwezor’s group of curators was not really calling individual artists or writers to account as ambassadors and ciphers of

race even as it seemed to many that the inherently spectacular nature of a biennial always did and always would.

## Conclusion

Why did a powerful art institution in the heart of Europe such as documenta want to effect such changes? Was this at last an instance of the center with a conscience and the remedy for provincialism that art historian Terry Smith had prescribed in the pages of *Artforum* back in 1974, in his essay “The Provincialism Problem”?<sup>35</sup> Smith had defined provincialism as “an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values.”<sup>36</sup> We can recognize this as a description of hegemony in action. He had used this definition to set up a model that saw the New York art world as the metropolitan center with all other art communities, including large, often culturally semi-autonomous, rich, confident North American cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, as provincial. This “almost universally shared” construction of reality became a “problematic relevant to all of us.”<sup>37</sup> The solution? An artist-led activism might bring about change, he felt then, and most biennial curators (and artists) feel similarly optimistic now that curator-led (and artist-led) exhibitions might have the same effect on powerful art institutions. The remedy’s plausibility seemed dubious at that point, for it was never clear in 1974 why the perpetrators of this system might wish to consider its victims and make reparations, but it is far more evident today, both in the provinces and at the center. Even if, as British theorist Stewart Martin noted, “there is a persistent sense in which *Documenta 11* proposes a radical transformation of avant-garde art, while remaining deeply entwined within its traditional problems,” then this qualification (that *Documenta 11* was “deeply entwined within its traditional problems”) was inevitable for any biennial.<sup>38</sup> None would be able to escape. The suggestions implicit in the subaltern criticisms of *Documenta 11* were either a separatist trajectory (documenta would then be shifted off-shore altogether and would only include non-Western artists) or even more decentralized and dispersed exhibition models of exhibition-making. Neither would have been possible. Neither trusty, austere German auditors nor the trusting German public would have ever permitted such a use of public funds. But geographic dispersion was to be explored further in the next iterations of Manifesta, among other exhibitions, and curatorial devolution was to preoccupy curators for the rest of the decade.

For critics such as Ogbechie, although *Documenta11* might have convincingly spelt out the passing of an avant-garde idea of art, the exhibition's exploration of globalization's dystopic reality was at the same time in itself a profoundly avant-garde hangover.<sup>39</sup> In fairness, that was to miss the point and to unjustly refuse to take Enwezor at his word. First, Enwezor was showing that the idea of an avant-garde was never simply something of the center. Second, if critics believed that documenta needed to completely reevaluate its methods and operations in order to transform itself, then this is exactly what *documenta X* and *Documenta11*'s directors, Catherine David and then Enwezor, thought they were doing. Third, globalization had prompted an unparalleled specialization in which internationally focused curators such as Enwezor (or Hou Hanru, or Hans Ulrich Obrist, or Charles Esche, or Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev) now exercised an unmatched authority over contemporary art's discourse.

Other exhibitions were to take up these challenges in *Documenta11*'s wake. But many biennials – such as Dak'Art (previously the 1992 Biennale de l'art Africain contemporain) in Dakar, Senegal, which had exhibited artists from across the globe, but from 1996 onwards focused on African artists, or the Bamako Biennial in Mali (the Rencontres de Bamako, originally named the Biennale africaine de la photographie), active from 1994 onwards and dedicated to African photography – had been established long before *Documenta11*. Even then, there is no doubt that *Documenta11* focused North Atlantic attention more closely upon such biennials; reviews of these African biennials and other events, scattered far across the globe and which had been embedded, often for a generation or more, within local art eco-systems independently of external validation, now began to appear, for example, in the pages of *Artforum* or *Art in America*. Moreover, at about this time, contemporary art media that worked through aggregation – by which we mean internet bulletins such as *e-flux* or *Blouin Art-info* – began to proliferate, habituating the art world to a dispersed model of art production in tune with the flexibility and frequency of air travel rather than distilling events down to a digest, which had been the model of other art journals such as *Artforum*. That august journal in turn began to reformat itself, becoming more and more a global guide, adding a free internet edition, *artforum.com*, which increasingly diverged from the print version.

*Documenta11* was absolutely part of that broader transformation of contemporary art and audiences' access to it (or at least to its mediatization). *Documenta11* was thus always either going to be a spectacle, or else it

would have been (as *documenta X* was accused) boring and austere. Or it might have skated over the reality of such issues. These seemed to be the options that awaited biennial curators in reimagining the dominant North Atlantic version of art, but both tenth and eleventh editions of *documenta* had eschewed the model of a simple survey in favor of attempting to redefine the existing canon of contemporary art, ranging backwards and forwards rather than across the terrain of the present and, at least as important, redefining their audiences' engagement with art itself as something entangled with politics and geography. Enwezor's success had paradoxically cemented the very curatorial authority he was destabilizing and *Documenta11* was to exert a massive influence on subsequent biennials. As for the rapidly evolving profession of contemporary art curatorship, long since separate from the methodologies of art museum collection curatorship, we will next trace its impact on the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003, at which its director, Francesco Bonami, delegated most of the director's role to an even larger curatorial team.

## Notes

1. Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), *Documenta11 Platform 5*, exh. cat. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp. 42–55, esp. p. 42; see also Tim Griffin and Okwui Enwezor, "Documenta's New Dimension," *Art Press*, no. 280 (June 2002), pp. 24–32. *Documenta11* continued *documenta*'s tradition of individual typographic identities for the name of each edition of the exhibition (despite capitalizing the generic title *documenta*, hitherto spelt with a lower-case d); thus the lack of a space between the word *Documenta* and the number 11.
2. Okwui Enwezor, in Chika Okeke-Agulu and Okwui Enwezor, "Interview with Okwui Enwezor, Director of the 56th Venice Biennale," *Huffington Post*, December 7, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chika-okekeagulu/interview-with-okwui-enwe\\_b\\_4380378.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=fb&src=sp&comm\\_ref=false](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chika-okekeagulu/interview-with-okwui-enwe_b_4380378.html?utm_hp_ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false). Accessed December 7, 2013.
3. Okwui Enwezor, "Introduction: Travel Notes: Living, Working, and Travelling in a Restless World," in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Trade Routes: History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale 1997* (Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and Thorold's Africana Books, 1997), pp. 7–12, esp. 7.
4. Enwezor, "Introduction: Travel Notes," p. 12.

5. Enwezor, "Introduction: Travel Notes," p. 9.
6. Enwezor, "Introduction: Travel Notes," p. 12.
7. See Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd edn (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012) and Julian Stallabrass's review of *Thinking Contemporary Curating* in Julian Stallabrass, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Artforum*, vol. 51, no. 7 (March 2013), pp. 71–72; here, Stallabrass criticizes the unique but repetitive lingo of contemporary art curatorship. In 2011, art historian Claire Bishop and curator Kate Fowle (of Independent Curators International) organized a symposium on the topic of curatorial and art-historical discourses at CUNY, New York ("The Now Museum: Contemporary Art, Curating Histories, Alternative Models," March 10–13, 2011, conference by CUNY Graduate Center, Independent Curators International, and the New Museum, New York) which, from several accounts, demonstrated this cross-disciplinary hostility and mutual incomprehension. On the other hand, art history itself now witnesses a boom in the writing of exhibition histories of contemporary art, and we have cited many of these throughout this book.
8. See Reesa Greenberg, "Identity Exhibitions: From Magiciens de la terre to Documenta 11," *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 90–94. Three years after *Documenta 11*, Greenberg here examined three landmark exhibitions – *Magiciens de la terre*, the 1993 *Whitney Biennial*, and *Documenta 11* – each of which proposed an alternative to the standard North Atlantic canon by prompting audiences to look beyond Western Europe and East Coast American art centers, and pay attention to artists who continued to be marginalized due to class and ethnicity. On account of these differences, such artists are persistently seen as derivative, primitive, or exotic. She correctly located Enwezor's dramatic reorganization of *Documenta 11*, with its Platforms and its expanded scale, both inside the new accounts of globalization that were emerging at the time and also within many curators' reconsiderations of the ideal exhibition space, which was no longer to be a White Cube (though Enwezor's display consciously took advantage of the disconnect between the serene architectural order of his installation and chaotic video images).
9. Kim Levin, "The CNN Documenta: Art in an International State of Emergency," *Village Voice*, July 2, 2002, p. 57. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2002-07-02/art/the-cnn-documenta/full/>. Accessed September 14, 2015.
10. Enwezor, "The Black Box," p. 45.
11. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
12. "Platform5\_documenta11." <http://www.documenta11.de/data/english/index.html>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
13. Enwezor, "The Black Box," p. 42.
14. Enwezor, "The Black Box," p. 49.

15. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, no. 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 51–79, esp. p. 78.
16. Peter Schjeldahl, "The Global Salon," *New Yorker*, vol. 78, no. 17 (July 1, 2002). [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw\\_artworld](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw_artworld). Accessed September 15, 2015.
17. Wu Chin-tao also recognized the exhibition's bias towards artists based around the North Atlantic. Important though her argument certainly is, we want to push beyond the limitations of its critique by considering why Enwezor selected the artists he did given the four other Platforms and his general critique of North Atlantic hegemony. See Chin-tao Wu, "Biennials without Borders?," *New Left Review*, no. 57 (May–June 2009), pp. 107–115.
18. Anthony Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), pp. 182–186.
19. Thomas Hirschhorn, in Thomas Wülffen et al., "Beyond Mission Impossible," *Janus*, no. 14 (Summer 2003), p. 31; Thomas Hirschhorn, "Bataille Monument," in Claire Doherty (ed.), *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog, 2004), p. 137.
20. Thomas Hirschhorn, conversation with the authors, London, January 2012.
21. Hirschhorn, "Bataille Monument," in Doherty, *Contemporary Art*, p. 137.
22. Enwezor, "The Black Box," p. 55.
23. Catherine David, "Introduction," in *documenta X: Short Guide* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), pp. 6–13, esp. p. 7.
24. See David, "Introduction," and in particular note her two opening pages, esp. p. 12.
25. Chika Okeke-Agulu and Okwui Enwezor, "Interview with Okwui Enwezor, Director of the 56th Venice Biennale," *Huffington Post* (2013). [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chika-okekeagulu/interview-with-okwui-enwe\\_b\\_4380378.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chika-okekeagulu/interview-with-okwui-enwe_b_4380378.html). Accessed October 6, 2015.
26. For complaints about the impossible durations of the exhibition and its exhibits, see for instance Eleanor Heartney, "A 600-Hour Documenta," *Art in America*, vol. 90, no. 9 (September 2002), pp. 86–95.
27. Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization: The Case of Documenta" (2008), reprinted in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 466–490. Oliver Marchart's essay looked at biennials from the perspective of political science, arguing that "biennialization contributes in no small measure to the construction of local, national and continental identity," emerging from a heritage of exoticism and nationalism (p. 467). He wondered (as had Reesa Greenberg a couple of years before) if biennials could ever escape being embedded solidly within the dominant, hegemonic culture.

28. Schjeldahl, "The Global Salon" (2002); also see Michael Kimmelman, "Global Art Show with an Agenda: The Biggest Documenta Ever," *New York Times*, June 18, 2002, pp. E1–E2; Eleanor Heartney, "A 600-Hour Documenta," pp. 86–95; Kim Levin, "The CNN Documenta: Art in an International State of Emergency," *Village Voice*, July 9, 2002, p. 57.
29. Okwui Enwezor quoted in Levin, "The CNN Documenta," p. 57.
30. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "Ordering the Universe: *Documenta11* and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze," *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 80–89, esp. p. 89; for similar criticisms, see Anthony Downey, "The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI," *Third Text*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2003), pp. 85–92. Downey's essay acknowledged the institutional constraints and conventions that both support and prescribe the form that documenta can take but then criticized the spectacle of an exhibition that imagines, he asserted, that it can proceed from a position independent of established authority. For a more directly personal and sustained attack on Enwezor on Sylvester Ogbechie's own blog, see Sylvester Ogbechie, "The Curator as Culture Broker: A Critique of the Curatorial Regime of Okwui Enwezor in the Discourse of Contemporary African Art," June 17, 2010. <http://aachronym.blogspot.com.au/2010/06/curator-as-culture-broker-critique-of.html>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
31. Ogbechie, "Ordering the Universe," p. 89.
32. George Baker, "The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor," *Documents*, no. 23 (Summer 2004), pp. 20–25, esp. p. 25.
33. See Kobena Mercer, "*Documenta11*," *Frieze*, no. 69 (September 2002). [https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/documenta\\_113/](https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/documenta_113/). Accessed September 15, 2015. Mercer correctly noticed that Enwezor's exhibition was not simply a postcolonial documenta but was, he wrote, an ideas- and discourse-driven event, and one that sought to "redress the past exclusions carried out by 'Westernism.'" That last point indicated the exhibition's historiographic ambition, while the former indicated its sympathy with Catherine David's *documenta X* (an exhibition, however, that was far less spectacular than Enwezor's). Mercer noted the epochal significance of staging a "critical 'project' in a public arena," especially one of such vast size. But in fact, the list of artists showed that *Documenta11* was far more reliant than we retrospectively think on a familiar list of already-celebrated artist names to uphold what Mercer described as "a fairly conventional conception of global *mélange*." This showed, he acutely noticed, the lack of a satisfactory curatorial vocabulary for "dealing with 'difference' in contemporary culture." We might agree with him to the extent that biennials continued to present combinations of artists so that "difference" that might be relational and contingent in a different context still appeared spectacularly "other." Of course, this was because the art was still embedded in a still-dominating Western framework for imagining postcoloniality.

34. See Amartya Sen, "East and West: The Reach of Reason," *New York Review of Books*, vol. XLVII, no. 12 (July 20, 2000), pp. 33–38, esp. p. 37; Sen cited Michael Sandel, who presents this conception of community (one of several alternative conceptions he outlines): "Community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity." Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1998), p. 150; cited in Sen, "East and West," p. 37; see, just as pertinently, Kwame Anthony Appiah's introduction and his chapter 4, "Moral Disagreement," in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), pp. xi–xxi, and pp. 45–67.
35. See Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 1 (September 1974), pp. 54–59; for a re-examination of this essay, see Charles Green and Heather Barker, "The Provincialism Problem: Terry Smith and Centre–Periphery Art History," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 3 (December 2010). [http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media\\_183176\\_en.pdf](http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media_183176_en.pdf). Accessed September 15, 2015.
36. Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," p. 54.
37. Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," p. 55.
38. Stewart Martin, "A New World Art? Documenting *Documenta11*," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 122 (November–December 2003), pp. 7–19, esp. p. 10.
39. Ogbecchie, "Ordering the Universe," p. 84.





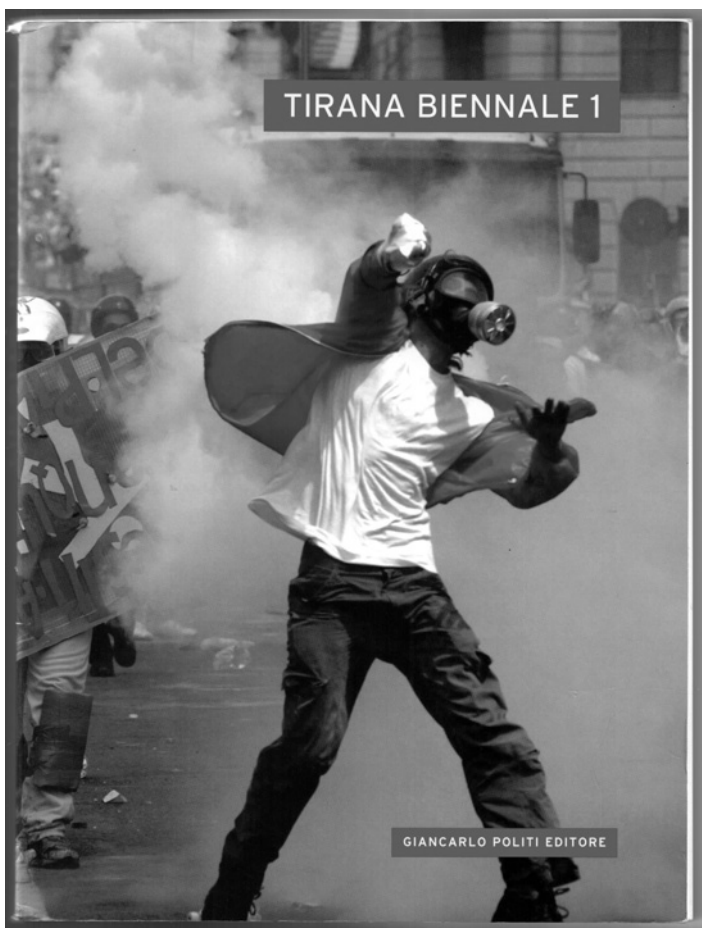


Figure 7.1 Cover of *Escape: Tirana Biennale 1*, exhibition catalogue, curators Giancarlo Politi et al. (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 2001). Courtesy Giancarlo Politi Editore.

## 2003: Delegating Authority

Exhibitions in this chapter: *Tirana Biennale 1: Escape* (2001, Tirana, Albania); *The 50th Venice Biennale. Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer* (2003, Venice, Italy)

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the conjunction of biennial directors' delegations of authority through collaborations with other curators, and the power of star-curators. The collaborative and encyclopaedic approach to exhibition-making that curator Okwui Enwezor had so definitively mapped out during his long and very public preparations for *Documenta11* at Kassel in 2002 was echoed immediately in other, contemporaneous exhibitions, most notably in *The 50th Venice Biennale. Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer* (2003).<sup>1</sup> But *Dictatorship of the Viewer* was more directly presaged by the loosely structured, multi-curator-directed *Tirana Biennale 1*, thematically titled *Escape* (2001). Veteran curator Francesco Bonami, who had been one of the many curators at Tirana, was to direct *Dictatorship of the Viewer*. His fiftieth edition of the Venice Biennale was notable for the scale of Bonami's delegation of curatorial authority to many, many other curators, as well as for the sheer, gargantuan quantity of art on display.<sup>2</sup> This was to be prophetic. It pre-figured the almost inhuman size of other exhibitions to come (culminating with the enormous *dOCUMENTA (13)*, in 2012) and also their fragmentation into many exhibitions that sought to locate or inhabit peripheries, both geographic and psychic. Delegating the artistic director or curator's authority to a team of curators was a biennial model that we already saw much earlier, at Havana's Biennials during the 1980s. There, the impact of Cuban revolutionary, collectivist ideology had meant that the Bienal de La Habana and its thousands of

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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works by hundreds of artists was curated by a tight working-group of cadres, which minimized the likelihood of a star-curator dominating the creation of the biennial. We also saw biennial direction by committee and by teams of advisers at the Fukuoka Asian Art Show and at Brisbane's Asia-Pacific Triennial in the early 1990s. So, this was not a new biennial method, but one that naturally emerged where the valorization of locality and the quick acquisition of local knowledge were at issue.

### **Tirana: "Opening Up the Conversation"**

By the start of the twenty-first century, it was hard to imagine any major European city – East or West – without a biennial of some sort. The union of Eastern and Western Europe had been ostensibly assisted by the success of these shows; this had certainly been the expectation surrounding Manifesta, as we saw in chapter 5. The European art world was as a result densely populated by biennials, triennials, quadrennials (Düsseldorf), and quinquennials (documenta).

In the year or so leading up to 2001, Edi Rama, the charismatic mayor of Tirana, Albania's capital city, worked with local curator-coordinator Edi Muka, and Milan-based art magazine *Flash Art* publisher Giancarlo Politi to create a new biennial in one of Europe's poorest postcommunist states. Albania had also been, up to the fall of its China-aligned, reclusive brand of authoritarian communism under President Enver Hoxha, Europe's most isolated nation. Mayor Edi Rama had been a basketball player and art-school professor, and was a former artist himself. In the 1990s, he had been living in Paris at the same time as his friend, video artist Anri Sala, prior to Sala's international career taking off. Rama moved back to Albania and began an unlikely but meteoric career as a reforming politician, appointed Tirana's mayor in 2000 and later becoming, in 2013, Albania's prime minister. The creation of a biennial, negotiated with Politi early in Rama's tenure as mayor, was a clear response to the predicaments that beset Eastern Europe in the wake of the demise of communism, and marked Rama's persistent belief that art and culture could have real social and political benefit.<sup>3</sup>

These predicaments included the need to replace once elaborate but now-derelect social infrastructures, and finding how to respond to the impact of neoliberal economics and global financial markets, along with the free-market restructuring that this entailed (often resulting in the looting of state-dominated economies by entrepreneurs).<sup>4</sup> The emigration

of young Albanians in large numbers, often as “boat people” fleeing in leaky vessels across the Adriatic, meant that the country was perceived as a threat to the security of its richer but increasingly xenophobic near-neighbors, in particular Italy. During the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the network of Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCAs), which hedge-fund billionaire and philanthropist George Soros had established across Central and Eastern Europe, had been instrumental in the development of contemporary art in the region and had stood almost alone in the landscape of Eastern European contemporary art.<sup>5</sup> However, the pragmatic, idealist Soros always intended his sponsorship to be temporary; ahead of European Union accession by the new states of Eastern Europe, many of the SCCAs were closed or converted into autonomous institutes of contemporary art.<sup>6</sup> As we might expect, the withdrawal of the SCCAs’ funding left a significant gap in support for contemporary art, one that non-governmental organizations and even individual artists and curators sought to fill with small-scale biennials and galleries. That shift was particularly noticeable as postcommunist states began negotiations to join the European Union by the early 2000s, when a flood of new biennials emerged in the region. Romania alone staged six biennials in the twenty months before its EU accession as a sign of its national “progress” toward EU norms, deflecting Western European concerns about government corruption with the signs of cultural renovation. Western European companies did not race to sponsor Eastern European biennials, but art publisher *Flash Art* supported first Tirana’s and then, in 2003, Prague’s Biennale, ensuring that both were widely noticed and reviewed (not least in the pages of *Flash Art* itself, which dedicated special sections to the artists, their works, and the exhibition openings).<sup>7</sup> The development of low- or no-budget biennials was now a very important element of contemporary art in Eastern Europe.

Ostensibly, biennials such as these were not as slow-moving, bureaucratic, or hemmed-in by the international art market as long-established, major-league biennials such as Venice or extremely well-financed biennials like Gwangju. The theory was that they would be independent and fearless in their artist choices, not bound by considerations of money and commerce, but as potentially important to their host cities (and nations) as the much more lavishly funded exhibitions. Yet, at the same time, the creation of new biennials was met with a great deal of skepticism. Many observers argued (oblivious to the various privileges on which their critique was based) that new biennials in distant locations meant little more than the adaptation of a late-nineteenth-century exhibition mode, namely Venice, in

the service of nationalism, corporate neoliberalism, and dollar- or prestige-driven municipal aspirations.<sup>8</sup> The reality was more complex than such a simplistic, Manichean “good-and-bad” approach to biennials allowed.

In an interview published in the preface of the Tirana Biennale’s surprisingly lavish catalogue (given the Biennale’s spartan financial constraints), co-curator Francesco Bonami was asked, “why a Biennale in Tirana?” He replied: “Do you think that in 1895 someone asked “why a Biennale in Venice? I don’t think so. Any city, country or individual can do whatever they want to open up the conversation.”<sup>9</sup> We will remember his answer later in this chapter as we look to the 2003 Venice Biennale, which Bonami was to direct only a couple of years later, working with some of the same co-curators and many of the same artists. But what did he mean? Was “the conversation” anything other than the art world’s covert system of highly stratified canon and sales formation, and would it admit new entrants?

Part of the answer would be found in the words of the Tirana Biennale’s director, *Flash Art’s* mercurial publisher and editor-in-chief Giancarlo Politi. His aspiration – that the Tirana Biennale could “give art back to the realm of ideals and creative power, away from the domain of sponsors” – ingenuously implied that bargain-priced ideals and political resistance were the province of peripheries.<sup>10</sup> Tirana was ostensibly placed to redress the lack of ideals at the Venice Biennale, which represented the center. This enervated, decaying Venice, by implication, would unfortunately always remain the center, while Tirana would discover – at the hands of Politi – the difficulties faced by a so-called peripheral location that attempted to assert itself whilst at the same time engaging in a so-called global conversation. For in one direction lay the rejection of ethnic curiosity; in the other, a trading on exoticism. Tirana’s location brought with it a certain dark, mysterious status but also predictable difficulties, not the least of which was a tiny production budget and a weakened local infrastructure. So, *Tirana Biennale 1* presented itself as a biennial that would create a dialogue between East and West, but with very modest resources that it marketed as a positive, as a sign of the can-do attitude of biennial entrepreneurialism.

In the face of frugality, *Tirana Biennale 1* was large, with works by over 200 emerging or well-established artists, from Vanessa Beecroft and Rineke Dijkstra to new stars such as Pavel Althamer and local hero, Anri Sala. Its press releases announced that it had been selected by a group of thirty-eight international curators and artists, led by director Giancarlo Politi with Tirana-based coordinators Edi Muka and Gësim Qëndro. The

guidelines within which they selected artists were very flexible. Many of these curators were already highly influential, not least Hans Ulrich Obrist, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Francesco Bonami, and their names immediately lent *Tirana Biennale 1* considerable prestige. Others were about to achieve art-world prominence, like Polish curator Adam Szymczyk and Jens Hoffmann. Another of the curators was *Flash Art* co-publisher Helena Kontova. The Biennale's organizers claimed that they were avoiding a single curatorial voice, "in order to have a global, pluralistic, realistic, and different vision," all with the miniscule \$US 30,000 provided by the City of Tirana and another \$US 40,000 scraped together during the course of the Biennale, Edi Muka reported, through constant fundraising efforts.<sup>11</sup> The Biennale artists paid for the freighting of their works to Tirana and underwrote their own costs. The prominence of video art at the Biennale indicated not only its ubiquity amongst artists at that point in time, but – as it would at the *Emergency Biennale in Chechnya*, as we saw in chapter 5 – also its editioned portability, easy shipping, and potentially small installation costs that principally consisted of cheap labor and simple carpentry (though often-scarce data projectors). Gëzim Qëndro's entire exhibition catalogue foreword was devoted to the story of the Biennale's struggle to find financial support, quoting an unnamed potential donor to the effect that "we regret to tell you that our art foundation cannot finance the Biennale of Tirana because we simply don't believe that an event of such proportions can take place in Tirana."<sup>12</sup> As Mayor Rama wrote, Tirana was situated in the "bleeding heart of Europe and the Balkans," and Albania's own history and its proximity to the wars and insurgencies that were raging in the Balkans right to that moment made it an unattractive destination for artistic philanthropy. The organizers themselves decided that, and perhaps in consequence, "art needs ideas, not only economic resources," with Politi arguing elsewhere that "Art doesn't defeat the war ... but it contributes by having faith in life."<sup>13</sup>

So it was clear from the start that the Tirana Biennale would rely almost entirely on goodwill and voluntary labor. This goodwill, in turn, was certainly the product of the star curators' leverage with artists, which persuaded them that this biennial would not just represent international art, but also occupy a space that would build Tirana's institutions and artistic life. The Biennale would, in other words, be relevant to local audiences and local artists, and also appeal to the public-minded spirit of idealistic international artists. After all, as Elena Filipovic was to write soon after, "One of the crucial particularities of biennials and large scale exhibitions, however, is that they are meant to represent *some place*."<sup>14</sup> They would capture the zeitgeist

of their host city and, as well, include famous invitees from across the globe. They would aim to be “glocal,” which was the clunky word much in use at the time in Europe and elsewhere. Or as Hou Hanru put it while preparing the Third Shanghai Biennale in 2000 amid parallel tensions between local constraints and the international art world, the aim for many curators was to “realize a biennial that is cultural and artistically significant in terms of embodying and intensifying the negotiation between the global and the local, politically transcending the established power relationship between different locales and going beyond conformist regionalism.”<sup>15</sup>

## Escape

Why create a biennial? Why not instead build local art-spaces, art museums, networks of studios, or schools, hospitals, and parks? In an interview with Amsterdam-based theorist Geert Lovink, Edi Muka replied that the organizers – himself, Rama, Politi – felt that a biennial would be the best platform for well-known, established art professionals, both curators and artists (especially those navigating the international exhibition circuit) to meet and collaborate with young, new, and above all local artists.<sup>16</sup> He believed that the Tirana Biennale would build the cultural infrastructure that would enable Albanian artists to develop, writing: “Without infrastructure, without information, without training, it’s damn hard to develop as a good artist, especially if you walk around with this totally different background because of your socialist heritage.”<sup>17</sup> This was a creative industries, nation-building approach, kept in the background for the exhibition catalogue for there, in the curators’ essays, the focus was almost entirely on the miracle of producing such a biennial from minimal funds. In his preface, Rama recounted, “With no means whatsoever we relied only on our talent for improvisation, on creativity and intelligence.”<sup>18</sup> For the Biennale team, it was ingenuity, not economics, which had produced a successful biennial. By contrast, our previous chapters have generally shown the opposite, especially about the sustainability of biennials from edition to edition, no matter how frequent the claims to infrastructural development and civic activism.

But the directors of this biennial were equally insistent that a division was now opening up in the wake of neoliberal economics and its globalization of the art market. On the one hand, there would be biennials like Venice, where Politi saw the “sacred gates” of the “temples of contemporary art” opened wide to the most commercial and wealthy



of artists, “celebrating the apotheosis of their vulgarity with the help of sponsors that have too many interests in the world of culture.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, there would be smaller, more mobile exhibitions. As we will see presently, both rhetorical aspirations would be contained inside Bonami’s own upcoming 2003 Venice Biennale, within which Damian Hirst’s overblown, high-production trophies coexisted with low-budget activist politics, in the form of a multitude of small works constituting a virtually autonomous exhibition, *Utopia Station*, contained within the main exhibition. Oblivious to the long history of biennials of the South, Politi emphatically proclaimed that, with its contained budget, Tirana was “revealing the weaknesses” of a biennial circuit dominated by Venice and documenta. Among his bugbears – paradoxically, given his editorship of a commercial, for-profit magazine – was the increasing dependence upon corporate sponsorship, which was now a “consuming and devouring” monster, creating the conditions for the festivalism that *Documenta11* would be accused of a year later, and which we saw described in the previous chapter as an aesthetic of crowd control, favoring art that invited play and passing attention more than political reflection.<sup>20</sup>

So, there were two connotations to the Tirana Biennale’s title, *Escape*. The Biennale was an escape from Albania’s isolation, and a flight from the standard biennial format, which by now required a superstar curator flown in, usually from New York or Western Europe. Muka was, in effect, appropriating, updating, and upstaging curator Francesco Bonami’s notion of the “borderline syndrome” presented so controversially at his co-curated *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana the year before. Muka and Politi even incorporated Bonami into the curatorium and Bonami would, in turn, borrow from the anti-market rhetoric and the dispersed, casual structure of *Escape* for his *Dictatorship of the Viewer* in Venice two years later. But unlike Bonami’s previous dismissal of postcommunist conditions as akin to mental illness, Muka’s intentions instead sought to bring attention to Europe’s peripheries so as to build local institutions, promote local artists, and project the emergence of a new generation of young artists in Albania.<sup>21</sup>

It was from this perspective that Bonami and many of the other curators could be considered necessary collaborators though not quite homeopathic presences. Whereas they persisted with the idea of the “margins of the art world,” the selections made by Muka and the younger members of the Tirana curatorium reflected the economic, political, and geographic conditions of their regional location in the Balkans and, more, insisted on the importance of what local artists made, regardless of the apparent

handicaps of infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> The Western European insistence on the needy margins had been predicated on the assumptions that Slavoj Žižek had earlier described, that the West assumed that the East was staring at the West, fascinated by its enjoyment of democracy and wealth.<sup>23</sup> In his *Kunstforum* interview, Muka had outlined his clear rejection of Bonami's Borderline Syndrome and its doctor-patient relationships just as, in his Biennale catalogue essay, Rama conjured a convivial image of the Biennale as a "*petit dejeneur* [sic] *sur l'herbe* – a meeting of friends, or a day in the country side," that had little to do with *Manifesta 3*'s therapeutic shock treatments of the year before or dicey trade with the exotic charm of Dark Tourism.<sup>24</sup> The Biennale did not emphasize Albania's impoverishment, crime, prostitution, cramped communist apartment blocks, and decaying streets, but the hope that Tirana would contribute to the global conversation. Muka wanted to show Albanian art in the context of international art, but not as an exotic exception or miraculous intervention. The Biennale was not dispersed out across the city, but was concentrated in two conventional (if somewhat decrepit) venues for exhibitions: one was an art museum – the National Gallery – and the other an exhibition hall – the so-called Chinese Pavilion (a legacy of communist Albania's eccentric alignment with Mao's China against the putatively revisionist Soviet Union).

The social, political, and economic benefits of a low-budget biennial seemed obvious. A biennial would rebrand the city in a sophisticated, energetic, and hopefully non-stereotypical way. Muka and Rama anticipated an obvious boost from cultural tourism. The flip side of this was the possibility that the Biennale might be little more than an enclave in a Potemkin village, a stage-set that occluded Albania's real problems, though there is no doubting Rama's fervent ambition to completely revitalize the city. He was simultaneously spearheading radical clean-ups, creating new urban parks and, literally, repainting Tirana's streets and apartment buildings in bright colors (part of what he called the "Painting Tirana" project) in order to trigger broad cultural change. A newly painted, brighter Tirana was to be part of an "avant-garde democratization," as Rama explained to Anri Sala, who had filmed Rama and the Painting Tirana project for his 2003 video *Dammi I Colori* (or "Give Me the Colors," shown at Tirana and then in Bonami's Venice Biennale that year).<sup>25</sup> Such impact sounds unusual indeed, but Rama claimed that the project began a communal dialogue about shared social space in one of Europe's poorest cities where, he recalled (though we do not know how accurately), people began to passionately discuss color and its affect.<sup>26</sup>

If Rama's motivations were fairly clear, what was *Flash Art's*? That journal was *Tirana Biennale 1's* principal, highly visible sponsor, though most of its (invaluable and indispensable) sponsorship was in-kind. The publisher was deeply involved in the Biennale's creation, from introductions to artists and curators to the production of the exhibition catalogue. A long-term commentator on the European art scene, Milan-based *Flash Art* had been prominent during the boom in the 1980s art market but never attained the prestige or the authority of flagship New York journal *Artforum*, and its European status was being eclipsed by the rise of London-based *Frieze*. For all that, Politi's list of friends, advertisers, and contributors was long and his magazine had itself always contributed, as many European observers commented, to the biennialization of art, all of which made his prominently placed Tirana catalogue essay's tirade against commercialism all the more puzzling and contradictory. Moreover, against his argument that curators would only be able to work without constraints and artists express themselves freely if sponsors were more or less banished from biennials, it is far from clear that biennial curators shared his fear of large biennial budgets. The contemporary art market boom then gathering, and contemporary art's burgeoning affiliations with the leisure-consumption industry – contemporary artists now had blockbuster art museum exhibitions devoted to them, such as Bill Viola at the Stedelijk Museum in 1998 or William Kentridge at Turin's Castello di Rivoli in 2004 – had led to a growth in corporate collecting and sponsorship of the visual arts.<sup>27</sup> Such activities were a function of the prestige value of art and also of the possibility that such prestige might be conferred on sponsors. In cultures with a long tradition of state philanthropy (in Europe) and private philanthropy (in the United States) alike, the affiliation of art and corporate sponsorship during a late phase of neoliberal capitalism was now raising significant questions regarding the idea of democratic, public culture, the role of money in national cultural life, and the ability of art to embody any surviving avant-garde notion of independence. The rise of private sponsorship coincided with the increasing reliance of biennials on such patronage, given funding instability in the so-called developed world. Certainly, the *Tirana Biennale 1* occurred at the very start of an enormous flood of wealth into the international art world, a cascade that would merely pause during the Great Recession of 2008 but which would then resume, fueled by new wealth in Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. The complex impact of money would be discussed endlessly, not least in the international art press and quite publicly in a special issue of *Artforum* on the subject of art and money in April 2008.<sup>28</sup>

Edi Muka was later to argue, more or less, that *Flash Art's* motivation had been to create a no-budget biennial template that Giancarlo Politi would then extend elsewhere. A year after the first Tirana Biennale, Politi informed Muka that he would be moving his support to Prague, and that city's new Biennale would supersede Tirana.<sup>29</sup> There then ensued a battle for the name, "Tirana Biennale," that spilled over into the courts, with Politi demanding that the city of Tirana pay him for the right to keep the now-copyrighted name. Politi argued, "As the Tirana Biennale brand belongs to me, now I would like to ask anyone who wishes to use it, to buy it from me at a reasonable cost, so as to compensate for some of the cost of the first edition."<sup>30</sup> So much for the realm of ideals. Creating new biennials was not without its problems, as Politi and Milan Knížák, director of the National Gallery in Prague and *Flash Art's* Czech collaborator, next found out. That museum parted company with *Flash Art* before the second Prague Biennale, so that separate biennials were held in Prague simultaneously in September 2005. But Muka remembered the collaboration between the publisher and Tirana as being mutually advantageous. His perspective was realistic and pragmatic. For backers such as Politi and for curators ambitious for their biennial like himself, aware that international visitors would be few outside the opening days, the biennial as a concrete exhibition did not count for everything, and "it was the catalogue that assumed all importance, almost replacing the biennial itself."<sup>31</sup> *Flash Art* was diversifying, along the lines of its competitor *Frieze's* creation of an inordinately successful art fair in London.

Regardless of what type of Escape the Biennale's title represented, the partnership would garner sufficient attention to Tirana that the Biennale would continue after the relationship with *Flash Art* foundered. The urgent but historically freighted, master-servant relationship with Italy – which *Flash Art's* Milan base also clearly invoked – as well as the attraction of an escape to a biennial in such a previously isolated venue so close to Europe's main centers, was compelling theater. Escape, expediency, and strategic quasi-Orientalism had already been combined in the 1999 *6th Caribbean Biennial*, the hoax biennial staged by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (an artist-curator at *Tirana Biennale 1*), with curators Jens Hoffman (who was at that time about to be a guest curator at *Manifesta 4* in Frankfurt) and Massimiliano Gioni (also involved with Tirana and who, a decade later, curated the 2013 Venice Biennale), complete with press notices, fake reviews, and an exhibition catalogue with essays, in the curators' own words, about the "predictable roster of star artists."<sup>32</sup> It was an invitation-only party on the island paradise of St Kitts for a select twelve of Cattelan's

artist-friends, parading the tropes familiar from other biennials' themes and curators (from global jetsetters self-consciously reflecting on art's capacity to shed new light on local conditions, to questioning whether the world needs another biennial). It was an art action and a dandyish work of pseudo-relational art, but one ruled by the irony of stylish enervation and highly accurate in its portrayal of biennial networks, which one would expect given its star roster of very experienced biennial curators:

The notion that things start to get interesting at the point that the global and the local meet, only mirrors the empty rhetoric of MTV-style sloganeering. The increasing globalization and the developments brought about by the new "peripheral" biennials such as La Habana, Johannesburg, or Istanbul, in fact run the risk of duplicating these universal stereotypes.<sup>33</sup>

Accurate this was, but also worlds apart from the disinterest in irony and the sheer urgency in the biennials of contemporary Asia, the global South, or Eastern Europe, and far from both Edi Rama's and Edi Muka's intense and genuine idealism. It foregrounded, however, the status of the exhibition catalogue, the book accompanying almost all biennials. On the one hand this book would be the document that recorded the exhibition, as increasingly elaborate catalogues had done since Harald Szeemann's extraordinary publication for *documenta 5*, which resembled an atlas more than the art-fair-like lists that had previously predominated. Some large, supplementary publications would even begin to be issued after a biennial had been installed, in the form of a second volume comprised of installation shots; *Documenta11* was to publish such an exhibition record in 2002 during the course of the exhibition but well after it had opened. This was in response to the increasingly site-specific installations that artists contributed to biennials in place of simple paintings and sculptures, which were easily photographed well before a biennial vernissage, whereas installations were not.

But even more than the power of publication, the Tirana Biennale was witness to the increasing power of the internet that intersected with the take-up of softly menacing antagonisms towards the rhetoric of emancipation and social and political amelioration.<sup>34</sup> A Polish artist shadowed Giancarlo Politi like a bodyguard during the vernissage, with the word "Politi" (Police) emblazoned on his shirt. Christoph Büchel built a military bunker directly in front of the National Gallery, within which visitors could sit inside a car listening to pop music. Meanwhile, the internet was a section of the Biennale, the means to advertise the Biennale and the art it contained,

and the medium through which curators, as in all creative industries, were transacting their business. The Biennale included a Net Art section that showcased works unique to the internet, but which omitted Albanian and Eastern European artists completely, even though Net Art was emerging almost simultaneously across Europe East and West (through the Syndicate network for media arts, for instance), despite variable internet speeds and bandwidths. But the internet was also now the prime means of communication, and bore its own particular problems for the Tirana Biennale's organizers.

Tatiana Bazzichelli has reconstructed the involvement of one of the Biennale's curators, famous photographer Oliviero Toscani, controversial for his 1990s photographs advertising Benetton with, it had been charged, exploitative images of extreme suffering, death, and misery so as to advertise the fashion label (among these was the notorious image of, possibly Albanian, refugees clambering over a rusty passenger ship coming into harbor).<sup>35</sup> He had been invited (odd though this seems) to curate a section of *Tirana Biennale 1* after a heated email correspondence with Politi. He chose works over the course of email correspondence from four highly controversial artists for the Biennale. They were named in the long list of exhibiting artists: Dimitri Bioy, Bola Ecuca, Carmelo Gavotta, and Hamid Piccardo. The first-named artist was intimately involved in paedophile videos and the last-named artist was, ostensibly, a jihadi spokesperson who had been deputed to speak on art by Osama Bin Laden. Their selection caused wide offense, of course – their images and artist statements certainly stand out as extremely odd in the catalogue – and this offense ramped up when, three days before the Biennale's vernissage, the 9/11 catastrophe occurred and Bin Laden proclaimed his responsibility for the attack on the Twin Towers. The Albanian government declared its solidarity with the United States, such that Albania – once a Cold War adversary of the United States – now emerged as a partner in the global “War on Terror.” But Piccardo and his friends were a repulsive hoax perpetrated by anonymous artists working under two further pseudonyms, Marcello Gavotta and Oliver Kamping. Their confidence trick – far more extreme than the *6th Caribbean Biennial*, but similarly mimicking contemporary biennial curators' unflappable tolerance for extreme politics and free expression – was enabled by the intensely globalized, email-saturated environment that contemporary art now inhabited. The shocked, real-life Toscani had no idea that imposters had appropriated his name. Politi's dealings with his ostensible interlocutor, “Toscani,” had been exclusively by email, without any verification by telephone or face-to-face meetings. The *Tirana Biennale 1* had not background-checked

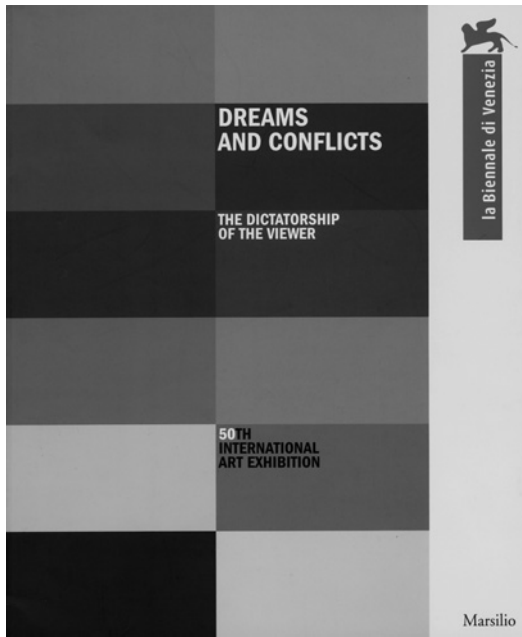


Figure 7.2 Cover of *Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, curators Francesco Bonami et al. (Venice: Marsilio, 2003). Courtesy Biennale of Venice.

the artists (trusting this to the curators) and, unlike *Artforum*, *Flash Art* had no dedicated, old-fashioned, fact-checking department. The downside to a no-budget biennial was a lack of research and the possibility of a credibility crash. International biennial curators, critics, artists, and writers had by now evolved informal networks that would soon solidify in organizations and websites devoted to biennials, but those at Tirana were weak and vulnerable to attack.

### **Curating by Delegation: The 50th Venice Biennale: *The Dictatorship of the Viewer***

In 2002, a year before the 50th Venice Biennale, Okwui Enwezor had destabilized the curatorial model – the star-curator’s authorial power, so exemplified by the complex figure of Harald Szeemann, who had directed the Venice Biennale in 1999 and again in 2001 – that was so inextricably

linked with European and American steering of the contemporary artistic canon. Enwezor did this to shift attention off that North Atlantic canon and onto other geographies. The power of Enwezor's gesture was so eloquent and convincing, amplified by the immense authority of documenta, that it not only had an enormous influence on which artists the next wave of biennials would select (and where they would come from), but also on the sheer curatorial form of large biennials. For *Documenta 11*, as we saw in chapter 6, Enwezor had selected six curators to work with him such that "there was no single author but a group of collaborators very much in tune with each other's strengths and weaknesses."<sup>36</sup> Biennial curators would henceforth often include elaborate curatorial structures and substructures, often equivalent to Enwezor's "Platforms." These went well beyond both the relatively simple curatorial co-direction and the use of curatorial advisory panels that we noted in earlier chapters (for instance the curatorial groups that advised the Asia-Pacific Triennials), into prequel, sequel, and mobile, pop-up exhibitions that would augment the main biennial, into elaborate colloquia and conferences that ranged way beyond visual art, and, third, into the directorial curating of curators, in exhibitions within exhibitions.

This was far from unprecedented. For the 1993 Venice Biennale, director and veteran critic Achille Bonito Oliva had delegated sections of the *Aperto 93* exhibition to thirteen curators, one of whom was Bonami; another was an art dealer, Jeffrey Deitch. The increasingly transnational relocation of artistic production (though neither marketing nor institutional legitimization) was so clear that Bonito Oliva named his exhibition "Cardinal Points of Art," referring to artistic nomadism as the underpinnings of his artist choices. This expanded perspective was both geographic and chronological: Paulo Herkenhoff, in the often-cited 1998 *24th Bienal de São Paulo*, had nested significant sections of art from earlier periods, in particular in his section titled "Núcleo Histórico," which included major museum pieces by Tarsila do Amaral, Albert Eckhout, and sixteenth-century printmakers, amongst the contemporary art on display at that famous Bienal.<sup>37</sup> At *Tirana Biennale 1*, as we saw, thirty-eight curators selected their own groups of artists, linked by vague and, according to the Biennale director, "very general and never intrusive" guidelines.<sup>38</sup> There was a further dimension to this delegation of authority: an increasing, jaded distrust of themed exhibitions linked by the taste of a single curator (such as Szeemann) "whose narcissism can easily turn into pure insolence," according to the clearly aggrieved Giancarlo Politi in his catalogue essay for *Tirana Biennale 1*.<sup>39</sup>



*The Dictatorship of the Viewer* was remarkable for the scale of such curatorial delegation but most of all for the fact that it happened at, of all places, the world's oldest and most famous art biennial, the so-called "mother" of art biennials. All Venice Biennales incorporate discrete national exhibitions, or so-called national pavilions. These are managed or subcontracted out by the participating nations' arts agencies. They constitute a large part of each Biennale. The word, "pavilion," aptly describes the quaintly national, World Exposition-like, small buildings managed by a select group of nations, scattered amongst the green, treed gardens of the Giardini, one of the Biennale's two main sites. The number of on-site pavilions is not great. It is a short, circumscribed list, reading like a League of Nations roll-call from the 1920s, though one assembled according to an Italian perspective on the world.<sup>40</sup> The list of pavilions includes most Central and Eastern European nations but excludes major players in contemporary art such as India, China, and Turkey; gradually, in the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century, such nations were allocated exhibition spaces at the edges of the Biennale's vast second site, the Arsenale, a cavernous complex of buildings that had once been shipyards and rope-making factories. Other, smaller nations rent exhibition spaces in deconsecrated churches or minor palazzos across the city. The heterogeneity of the national pavilions, whose contents largely escape the control of the Biennale director, exists in a tension with the two curated exhibitions, one at the so-called Central Pavilion in the Giardini and the other in the Arsenale, a kilometer or so to the west. But the core of the Venice Biennale consists of these two very large exhibitions curated by the Biennale's artistic director or, as at the 2003 Biennale, by curators directly chosen and supervised by the director. Those, more than the national interventions in the form of pavilions, are intensely scrutinized.

Francesco Bonami was very much an art-world insider. He was typical of the small corps of senior biennial directors whose oft-noted nomadism was less peripatetic and wide-ranging than the word, "nomad," implied. He, like a limited number of his well-known peers, held several overlapping curatorial and advisory appointments across public art museums and private art foundations, all at once. Much in demand, he was not so much juggling the demands of each job as reflecting a changing international curatorial ecology, but one that still preferred a fairly circumscribed orbit, mostly delimited by North America and Europe and very exclusive networks of curators and artists. Bonami had been, at the time, senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago but also served, at different overlapping points, as artistic director of Turin's Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo

per l'Arte and artistic director of Pitti Immagine Discovery in Florence. In addition to his selection of part of *Aperto* in 1993 and his co-curation of *Manifesta 3* (2000), he had curated the 1997 SITE Santa Fe International Biennial. He would later co-direct the first Turin Triennale (2005) and the Whitney Biennial in 2010. Like most prominent curators of contemporary art, he also wrote frequently for professional art magazines. From 1990 to 1997, the Italian-born Bonami had been the American editor of Giancarlo Politi's *Flash Art International*. By this time, curators had supplanted specialist art critics in influence, impact, and sheer output of words in print. Curators had come to play a dominant role in the world of contemporary art not just through the power they exercised through biennial directing but also, as we have been observing, in creating new forms of public program such as Enwezor's *Documenta11* Platforms, and also through writing art criticism.<sup>41</sup>

Bonami split the 2003 Biennale into eleven separate exhibitions, each of which was curated by one or more curators. He offered "complete autonomy to ten curators to realize their visions," just as he had been offered the same at *Tirana Biennale 1*, two years before.<sup>42</sup> Some of his curatorial team were as prominent and ubiquitous as he was, and had also co-curated Tirana (such as the extraordinarily ubiquitous and influential European curator Hans Ulrich Obrist). Others were artists, writers, or younger curators. All had previously worked with Bonami or had organized other well-known international shows in the recent past. There were few surprises. The co-curators were Obrist, Carlos Basualdo (also co-curator of *Documenta11*), Daniel Birnbaum (later to direct the 2009 Venice Biennale), Catherine David (who had curated *documenta X*, in 1997), Massimiliano Gioni (later to direct the 2013 Venice Biennale), Hou Hanru (co-curator with Obrist of the seminal touring exhibition, *Cities on the Move*), art historian Molly Nesbit, New York-based Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco, Gilane Tawadros (founding director of Iniva, which we described in the previous chapter), artist Rirkrit Tiravanija (well-known as one of the exemplars of curator Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics), and Igor Zabel, the director of Ljubljana's Moderna Galerija and an expert on Eastern European art.<sup>43</sup> This was a network rather than a simple list for, as we have noted, almost all had worked with each other many times before and all were notorious for their constant travel, mobility, and movement. In short, they were exemplars of the very contemporary trope of purposeful, professional "itinerancy" that we should more accurately label commuting rather than nomadism.

Bonami curated two of the eleven exhibitions himself: *Clandestine* and *Pittura/Painting: From Rauschenberg to Murakami, 1964–2003*. He and Birnbaum co-curated *Delays and Revolutions*. Hou curated *ZOU: Zones of Urgency*. Gioni was responsible for *The Zone*. Tawadros curated *Fault Lines*, which focused on African artists. Zabel curated *Individual Systems*, Basualdo was responsible for *The Structure of Survival*, David for *Contemporary Arab Representations*, and Orzoco for *The Everyday Altered*. Nesbit, Obrist, and Tiravanija curated the celebrated *Utopia Station*, which was “filled with objects, part-objects, paintings, images, screens. Around them a variety of benches, tables and small structures take their place. It will be possible to bathe in the Station and powder one’s nose. The Station, in other words, becomes a place to stop, to contemplate, to listen and see, to rest and refresh, to talk and exchange.”<sup>44</sup> *Utopia Station* brought together work by over sixty artists, architects, and collectives, as well as posters by another hundred artists. The works were arranged on a raised plywood platform, designed by Liam Gillick and Tiravanija, with a stage, small rooms for video projections, and seating for visitors to lounge and hang out. Nearby, eco-toilets, a communal shower, and a hut on stilts (Alicia Framis’s *Billboardthailandhouse* (2000), where visitors could take refuge from the heat and even sleep) all contributed to the overall impression that *Utopia Station* was a semi-functioning drop-in center for relaxed social activity, resembling but not precisely emulating the social connections embedded in Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument*, at *Documenta11*, the year before. It was clearly temporary, reflecting Tiravanija’s own installations, and potentially transportable (as was the case when it traveled to other venues in subsequent years, such as the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005). Moreover, there were clear links with *Tirana Biennale 1* two years before, for one of the Biennale’s most celebrated works was Anri Sala’s video, *Dammi I Colori* (Give Me the Colors), 2003. Here, Sala’s camera navigated the dark streets of Tirana at night, tracking past the brightly patterned buildings that had been repainted during Edi Rama’s now-famous project to revive the Albanian capital.

### “Counterbalance the Decadence of the Ancient City”

*The Dictatorship of the Viewer’s* sheer bigness, Bonami wrote in retrospect, was intended to “define a context where different practices can share the same skin but not the same focus.”<sup>45</sup> This stylistic de-emphasis on

curatorial unity was staged in rhetorical opposition to Harald Szeemann's Venice Biennale (titled *Plateau of Mankind*) a mere two years before. In other words, an extravagantly diverse assembly of contemporary art and a concatenation of curatorial viewpoints would, he judged, be the antidote to the hegemony of a Grand Show linked by a tight, overarching theme. This would free viewers from a single curator's subjective vision of One World (even one multicultural world), enabling them to navigate their way in a more meaningful and intimate manner through installations and sub-exhibitions than the previous Biennale.<sup>46</sup> The problem, instead, was that critics insisted on traveling through the Biennale as if it were a single show.<sup>47</sup> Jerry Saltz explained that Bonami had "transformed himself into a kind of beast with a hundred eyes, creating a sort of *monstrosity*, or gigantic Balzacian city of an exhibition with warring philosophies, methodologies and esthetics."<sup>48</sup> Complaints regarding the size of the Biennale were second only to complaints about the heat, and unfortunately for Bonami, the Biennale took place during the most severe heat wave in decades.<sup>49</sup> This, with the large crowds that descended on Venice for the Biennale's vernissage (opening) week, resulted in a difficult viewing experience, dominated by the "overwhelming amount of information,"<sup>50</sup> which left the curators "with an inability to make clear distinctions between work that [was] qualitatively better than other work, or to argue in favor of work that one feels to be more significant."<sup>51</sup>

Why try to contrive this complexity, and why then justify it by a rhetoric of inclusion? Why would the director of the Venice Biennale agree to place himself "back at the service of the artists and the public"?<sup>52</sup> Because Venice's structure – for a curator, its short turnaround, the complicated and very political relation to Italian government, the up-and-down quality of the national pavilions – had become a straitjacket. Because arriving "at terms that transform the very concept of the exhibition" was the beginning, at Western Europe's big biennials, of an uncomfortable and messy accommodation to another shift in the global art world.<sup>53</sup> The imposition of totalizing, often utterly bathetic curatorial themes delivered by a single charismatic curator at increasingly vast biennials was, in the face of globalized cohorts of artists and audiences who were not even necessarily differentiated from their European peers by easily distinguished cultural difference, no longer believable nor credible.<sup>54</sup> (And to the degree that old habits are hard to break, Bonami's own curatorial statements oscillated between a new-found skepticism and the older, sentimental romanticism, as had his contributions at *Tirana Biennale 1* and *Manifesta 3*.)<sup>55</sup> But it was now true,

partly in the wake of Enwezor's documenta, that more and more key biennials, not least Enwezor's own, were actually more like complex museum exhibitions that sought to revise art history and its canons, and these exhibitions in particular were less and less dependent upon woolly themes and more on precise historiographies.

So, from the start, Bonami was looking over his shoulder, more or less, it seems, enviously, at Enwezor and his curatorial cohort, at their aggressively interventionist, revisionist edition of documenta the year before. He was reacting, but less decisively, against Harald Szeemann's two preceding Venice Biennales (far from ignorant of coming shifts in the art world, Szeemann had also included nineteen Chinese artists amongst the ninety-nine participating artists at the 1999 Biennale). Bonami was, it seems, painfully aware of *Documenta11*'s definitive and purposeful status (and that of documenta in general, which is assisted in its ambition by being much more generously financed by distinct tiers of government than Venice; the latter relies on the generosity of a multitude of contradictory interest groups and backers). When Bonami professed the old-fashioned idea of the curator as a singular and profound thinker dead, he was pointing in the direction of the past, in the direction of Szeemann, and gesturing in the direction of the future, at Enwezor's *Documenta11* collective. This, and not simply the fact of dispersed curatorship, is the main significance of *Dictatorship of the Viewer*.

Venice's primate position had been dissipated over preceding decades by the global proliferation of other biennials such as Sydney and Gwangju that were just as clearly committed to defining new turns in contemporary art as documenta. In response, the Venice Biennale's experimentation had commenced with *Aperto*, a selection of younger artists first curated by Bonito Oliva and Szeemann, from 1980 onwards. It was only from 1984 that substantial exhibition catalogues were consistently produced. Now, in order to retain its contemporary relevance, Bonami wrote, not only must a Venice Biennale "counterbalance the decadence of the ancient city," but also address the artistic eclipse of the Biennale itself, with its "outmoded structure of national pavilions and theme exhibitions, inherited from its origins in the era of world's fairs."<sup>56</sup> However, both Venice and documenta remained, as Bonami was well aware, immensely influential. The origins of each shaped, he wrote, "the two 'mother' exhibitions because they were conceived with very specific goals in mind: Venice to counterbalance the decadence of the ancient city, and Kassel to give postwar Germany a new cultural voice," continuing, in the worst tradition of art-travel writing, "we

go to experience thinking in Kassel, and in Venice we go to think about experience.”<sup>57</sup>

Artists and critics, such as Emilio Vedova and Luigi Nono, had railed against the commercialization of the Venice Biennale since the mid-1960s, organizing a boycott in 1968, the year that manifestos thundered that the Biennale was “contaminated by the historical context of declining capitalism from which it emerged.”<sup>58</sup> By 2003, if biennials in general had long displaced art museums in defining the directions of contemporary art, then appropriating this museological role was no impediment to, nor incompatible with, the vast, accelerating influence of an ever-expanding and now global art market. For the Venice Biennale’s national pavilions and the exhibitions at the Arsenale and the Central Pavilion were shop-windows for art dealers who would subvent the exhibitions in national pavilions, participating in the huge costs of shipping complicated art works and underwriting the very substantial costs of large installations. Bonami was intensely aware of the intertwining of art market and biennial network, adding, “Before, most of the artists made it to Venice . . . after a solid gallery career. Today many artists land in good galleries only after a solid career in the biennial system.”<sup>59</sup> The Venice Biennale was part of a now transnational network of recurring temporary exhibitions of contemporary art that also included prestigious art fairs, most notably Art Basel, which was usually scheduled a short period of weeks after the Venice vernissage, when thousands of invited art-world insiders queue to enter overcrowded exhibits. This network – along with the increasing eclipse of biennials by art fairs and their own symposia, private funding, and queues of collectors – was part of the source of the self-consciousness and defensiveness that underlay Bonami’s extraordinary delegation of curatorship and expansion of the scale of the Venice Biennale, and all without the geopolitical motivation of Enwezor’s documenta.

### **“Outmoded Structure of National Pavilions and Theme Exhibitions”**

Another surprisingly central feature of Bonami’s Biennale was its reflection of the curatorial impact of Institutional Critique: that is, the displacement of theory from the realm of the artist and writer onto the realm of the curator and curatorial rhetoric, which preempted the types of criticisms that artists from Andrea Fraser and Renée Green to the Guerilla Girls had leveled at art museums. The initial wave of Institutional Critique had appeared in the

late 1960s in the works of Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, and Daniel Buren. Significantly, almost all had appeared in Szeemann's *documenta 5*. There had been a second wave in the early 1990s, in the work of artists such as Fraser and Fred Wilson. Under the withering gaze of Institutional Critique and the more convivial embrace of Relational Aesthetics, Bonami claimed that the Biennale would "not be a show about political art but a reflection on the politics of art."<sup>60</sup> This was a fuzzily defined politics of spectatorship, but one more or less evident in the Biennale's projects. In *No Names* (2003), Carsten Höller proposed that the names of the artists and curators involved with *Utopia Station* be concealed, in order to focus discussion on actual experience. The viewer, Bonami wrote, was "one of the subjects that contribute to define the structure of the show: the artist, the curator, the viewer. Along with the artist, the beholder is one of the poles that connecting [sic] produce the spark that activate the art work successfully in the social and cultural context."<sup>61</sup> Many of the individual projects in *Utopia Station* were concerned with activating convivial relationships between visitors, reflecting, as many reviewers noticed, the relational trend identified a few years before by Nicolas Bourriaud. It was not unremarked, however, that *Utopia Station's* curators did not refer to Bourriaud in their essay for the Biennale's catalogue, instead choosing to base their discussion on Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch before they proceeded to cite Jacques Rancière, who, they claimed, had been a key influence upon them.<sup>62</sup> Rancière was involved from the outset in discussions with the curators, particularly on the notions of exchange that he had outlined in a book that had been widely purchased in the art world, *Le partage du sensible* (translated as *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* in 2004).

An additional important element of *Dictatorship of the Viewer* was its expansion of the contemporary artist canon in order, it was clear to reviewers, to "answer the problem of the 'Grand Show', but more important ... as a response to the shadowy threat of globalization."<sup>63</sup> The focus on artists who were not from the United States or Western Europe had been already pre-figured with Szeemann's *Plateau of Humankind* in 2001, and his inclusion of nineteen Chinese artists, with works borrowed from the Swiss collection of Ulli Sigg; at the same time Szeemann had abandoned the concept of *Aperto* in favor of a discrete exhibition, *dAPERTutto = APERTO over ALL*. Before that, Achille Bonito Oliva had included a selection of Chinese artists in the Venice Biennale that he directed in 1993. The Venice Biennale had, perhaps, treated art made outside Europe with more respect than other biennials elsewhere, in Europe or North America. Now, inside *Zones of Urgency*

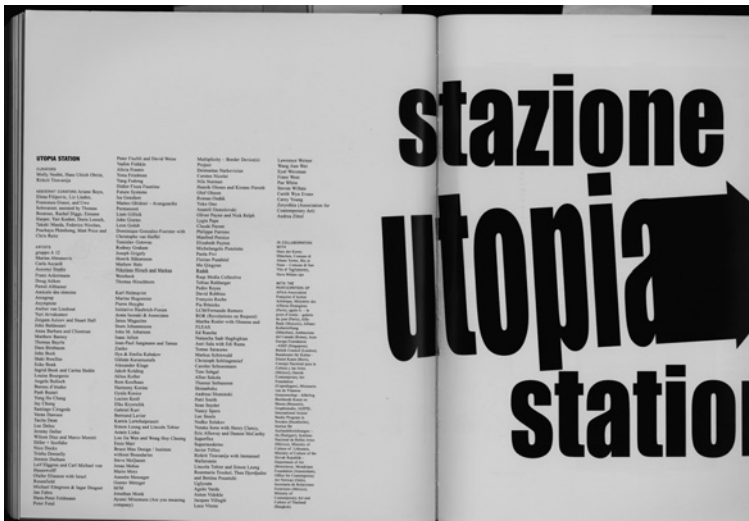


Figure 7.3 Pages from *Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, curators Francesco Bonami et al. (Venice: Marsilio, 2003). Courtesy Biennale di Venezia.

was nested yet a further exhibition, *Canton Express*, consisting of works made by artists from Guangdong in southern China, Hou Hanru's home province. *Utopia Station* contained three Chinese artists: Yang Fudong, Ma Qingyun, and Wang Jian-we. Yet, Szeemann's and Bonami's respective decisions to globalize (however partially or inadequately) the Biennale's artist selections without the underpinning politics of Enwezor's crusading exhibitions inevitably resulted in vague, pluralistic curator statements such as Szeemann's 2001 advocacy of Venice as "a place in which the public onlooker is the protagonist and the measure of things, a place of encounter between artist, work, and spectator."<sup>64</sup> The globalist acceptance of difference was a cover for the lack of its actual acceptance (and in fact the number of artists living beyond the North Atlantic did not greatly grow overall in biennials during this period). The inverse of this was the relative Chinese disinterest in participating at Venice with the same, outward-facing aims as other national pavilions. Rather than have its Chinese pavilions selected and installed by progressive curators with Western professional networks, the Chinese government had maintained fairly strict control, aided by a list of generally provincial pavilion curators. More challenging Chinese art or even



Italian art – during the second decade of Silvio Berlusconi’s Italian prime ministership, which lasted from 2001 to 2011, spanning the 2003 Biennale – was by and large to be found in Aperto or, later, the Arsenale, rather than in the national pavilions.

That is why Bonami layered the belated, already anachronistic rhetoric of Institutional Critique on top of his predecessor Harald Szeemann’s neoromanticism, attempting to present his Biennale as a “new Romantic dimension of inner awareness,” the specific role of which was to challenge “a condition of borderless information and ... a deceptive closeness with the ‘other.’”<sup>65</sup> In other words, Bonami masked an essential continuity with a rhetorical appeal to the idea of resistance through delegated curatorship, by selecting artists from around the globe as a counterweight to the Biennale’s ever-intensifying relationship with the international art market.<sup>66</sup> And when young artists from outside the North Atlantic appeared, it was with a background in independent, not government-funded art spaces, or in self-consciously globalist dealer galleries. The example had been Hou Hanru, who was the best-known Asian biennial curator of this period, but whose career had been spent outside large institutions advocating off-site biennial events and unusual public, laboratory-like reconfigurations of curatorial activity. But Bonami’s “new Romantic dimension” lacked sufficient meaning to accommodate such nuances, nor to create anything more than a purely rhetorical challenge to the mess and conflict of globalization signaled in the title and obvious to every visitor; this was, after all, the first Venice Biennale after the tragic events of 9/11. Not that this was always so apparent to the Biennale’s sponsors: free gift bags with the title *Utopia Station* carried the French fashion-house Agnès B.’s logo (in Paris, Agnès B. had for years incorporated, with considerable generosity, a very respectable project gallery for contemporary art inside its premises). As Tim Griffin slightly ungratefully observed, the Biennale thus revealed “a sponsored spin on utopia that undermined the show’s tenor of straightforward idealism.”<sup>67</sup> But what it also and more complexly revealed was that utopian tendencies in the global era would now be tempered by terror, war, and the commercial branding of nation and corporation, all at the same time.

## Conclusion

Let us finally consider what this new, ideological *globalism* – we use this word deliberately not as a substitute for economic globalization, but to

reflect the self-conscious desire to be seen as global – would mean about the art itself. There was, as there always is, a long history that shaped the present. Across the globe, as early as the 1950s, it was clear that sending locally established artists working in traditional modes to international biennials such as Venice or documenta was not going to make much impact. We know that Australian, Brazilian, and Japanese critics understood that substantial gestures towards both contemporaneity and the transcultural would be necessary to capture so-called international attention at established exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and documenta. And at Venice after 1978, the remaining residual prestige of national pavilions was further diminished by the advent of the prestigious, curated *Aperto* section. This shift was certainly understood across the globe. For, as we have explained earlier, the other response from the 1950s onwards was to establish complete alternative networks of biennials of the South, for innovative parallel modernities had rarely registered, if at all, in Western art histories.<sup>68</sup> By the time of Szeemann's and Bonami's Venice Biennales from 1999 to 2003, the increasing interest of biennial curators in locating contemporary non-Western artists (though still not, in reality, that many) intersected with those artists' own calibrations of their identity, which implied a fairly clear-eyed grasp of international art world dynamics and imbalances. Just as national pavilion organizers at Bonami's 2003 Biennale understood that their role was to nurture artists who would be *international* – which was also now to say *internationally contemporary* in their address to the viewer – so biennial directors such as Francesco Bonami in the Central Pavilion and the Arsenale had solidified their role as inventive reinterpreters of European cultural power even while collaborating with others from around the world.

## Notes

1. For standard histories of the Biennale of Venice, see Lawrence Alloway, *Venice Biennale, 1895–1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969); and, going further back to the Biennale's establishment as an autonomous body by the City of Venice in 1895, with a board consisting of representatives from each level of Italian government (national and municipal) plus the Biennale's director, see Enzo Di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale, 1895–2005* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2005). For the Biennale's own outline of its history see the Venice Biennale's website: La Biennale di Venezia, *History of the Art Biennale*. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/history/>. Accessed September 15, 2015.

2. For an intriguing overview of Bonami's career see Alessia Glaviano, "Francesco Bonami," *Vogue Italia*, May 2012. <http://www.vogue.it/en/vogue-starscelebsmodels/vogue-masters/2012/05/francesco-bonami>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
3. The cataclysmic collapse of communism immediately after 1989 forced Eastern European states into economic and cultural transitions of enormous rapidity. Even quickly managed accession into the European Union would not alleviate decades of socialist-era mismanagement and the traumatic surfacing of hitherto repressed communal and regional differences. Equally, however, previously apparent and clear-cut divisions between East and West shifted. Johannes Birringer and many others have discussed this shifting boundary, noting the relocation of the Balkan states to central European status but with the relegation and abandonment of Albania; amongst others, see Johannes Birringer, "A New Europe," *PAJ*, vol. 25, no. 3 (September 2003), pp. 26–41.
4. These predicaments are explored in further detail by Anthony Gardner in the first chapter of his book *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), pp. 17–52.
5. Lidia Varbanova, "The European Union Enlargement Process: Culture in between National Policies and European Priorities," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, no. 37 (Spring 2007), pp. 48–64, esp. p. 52. See also Octavian Esanu, "What Was Contemporary Art?," *ARTMargins*, vol. 1, no. 1 (February 2012), pp. 5–28; and Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming*, pp. 107–112.
6. Varbanova, "European Union Enlargement Process," p. 53.
7. A particular blatant example of this self-promotion can be found in the October 2003 edition of *Flash Art* and its "Prague Biennial Special" at pp. 107ff.
8. Philip Tinari was to later map the same matrix of well-meaning intentions onto a group of East Asian biennials, locating similar curatorial dilemmas and genuine regional histories that were, in the end, more important than easily aired, cleverly footnoted critiques; see Philip Tinari's excellent article, "Review: Gwangju Biennale; Singapore Biennale; 3rd Yokohama Triennale," *Artforum*, vol. 47, no. 5 (January 2009), pp. 199–201, esp. p. 199; for three samples of well-intentioned thinking, see *Artforum's* own roundtable, Tim Griffin et al., "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp. 152–163, 206, 212, as well as the *October* roundtable on contemporary art, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October*, no. 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 3–124.
9. Francesco Bonami, "The Gap between Us," in Giancarlo Politi (ed.), *Tirana Biennale 1: Escape* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 2001), pp. 14–15, esp. p. 15; also see Francesco Bonami and Charles Esche, "2005 Debate: Biennials," *Frieze*, no. 92 (June–August 2005), p. 105. [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/debate\\_biennials/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/debate_biennials/). Accessed September 15, 2015.

10. Giancarlo Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art: The Spectre of the Sponsor," in Politi, *Tirana Biennale 1*, pp. 10–11, esp. p. 11.
11. "Tirana Biennale," press release, *e-flux*, June 25, 2001. <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/tirana-biennale/>. Accessed September 15, 2015. See the exhibition catalogue: Politi, *Tirana Biennale 1*; also see Angela Rosenberg, "Tirana Biennale: The Escape," *Flash Art*, vol. 34, no. 221 (November–December 2001), p. 41 and p. 49; Edi Muka, in Susanne Boecker, "Ein Kommentar zur postkolonialen Struktur des Kunstbetriebs: Die 1. Tirana-Biennale; Susanne Boecker im Gespräch mit Edi Muka," *Kunstforum*, no. 161 (August–October 2002), pp. 434–437, p. 435.
12. Gëzim Qëndro, "Sign of Resurrection," in Politi, *Tirana Biennale 1*, p. v; the endpaper page of the catalogue specifically (and a little petulantly) lists "No Thanks" to NIFCA, the Mondrian Foundation, and AFAA, for their "constant refusal to provide any form of support"; Edi Rama, "Dejeneur [sic] Sur L'Herbe," in Politi, *Tirana Biennale 1*, p. iv; also see Rosenberg, "Tirana Biennale: The Escape," p. 41.
13. Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art," p. 10; and Politi cited in Regina Gleeson, "Dislocate, Renegotiate and Flow: Globalisation's Impact on Art Practice," *Circa*, no. 107 (Spring 2004), pp. 67–70, esp. p. 67. Politi's implicit, thinly veiled hostility to the Venice Biennale and to documenta was surprisingly explicit: according to him, in his catalogue essay for Tirana, they were "mediocre exhibitions with incredibly high budgets."
14. 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 and Roomade, 2005), pp. 63–84, see esp. p. 67.
15. Hou Hanru, "Towards a New Locality: Biennials and 'Global Art,'" in Vanderlinden and Filipovic, *The Manifesta Decade*, pp. 57–62, esp. p. 57.
16. Geert Lovink, "An Ungoing Exchange: Interview with Edi Muka," *Nettime* (Summer 2001). <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-0108/msg00134.html>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
17. Edi Muka in Susanne Boecker, "Susanne Boecker im Gespräch mit Edi Muka," p. 437; also see Edi Muka, "Albanian Socialist Realism or the Theology of Power," in IRWIN (ed.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), pp. 131–140.
18. Edi Rama, "Dejeneur Sur L'Herbe," p. iv; for a commentary on that approach, see Paul Ardenne, "From Biennale to Banal? Schmooze and Globalization," *Art Press*, no. 291 (June 2003), pp. 40–43.
19. Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art," p. 10.
20. Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art," p. 10; see Peter Schjeldahl, "The Global Salon," *New Yorker*, July 1, 2002. [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw\\_artworld](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/07/01/020701craw_artworld). Accessed September 15, 2015.

21. Edi Muka, "Tirana for Beginners: A Brief Guide to a Baby Biennial," *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003), pp. 158–165, esp. p. 159; also see Edi Muka, "Aperto Albania," *Flash Art*, vol. 34, no. 216 (January–February 2001), pp. 59–61. <http://www.undo.net/it/magazines/979933483>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
22. Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," p. 68.
23. See Slavoj Žižek's prophetic "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," *New Left Review*, no. 183 (September–October 1990), pp. 50–62.
24. Edi Rama, "Dejeneur sur l'Herbe," p. iv.
25. Edi Rama and Anri Sala in conversation, *Architecture and Art: Crossover and Collaboration* [Discussion Series], Tate Modern, London, October 19, 2009. <http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/81908423001>. Accessed September 15, 2015. On the "Painting Project," see Anca Pusca, "The Aesthetics of Change: Exploring Post-Communist Spaces," *Global Society*, vol. 22, no. 3 (June 2008), pp. 369–386.
26. Rama and Sala, *Architecture and Art*.
27. As Wu Chin-tao has elaborated, the politics of such corporate sponsorship bore a tricky history through the 1980s as well: see Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002).
28. In particular, from that dedicated *Artforum* issue, see Thomas Crow, "Historical Returns," *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 8 (April 2008), pp. 286–291; Olav Velthuis, "Accounting for Taste," *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 8 (April 2008), pp. 305–309; also see Vanity Fair (eds.), "Money on the Wall," *Vanity Fair*, no. 556 (December 2006), pp. 194–202, 292, and 293.
29. Ann Demeester, "The Idea Economy in the Former East Block: TB3 and the Battle for the Brand Name," *Metropolism*, no. 1 (February–March 2006). <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2006-no1/ideeconomie-in-het-voormalig/>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
30. Giancarlo Politi, quoted in Jennifer Higgie, "Tirana Biennale 3," *Frieze*, no. 102 (2006). [http://www.frieze.com/issue/print\\_back/tirana\\_biennale\\_3](http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/tirana_biennale_3). Accessed September 15, 2015.
31. Muka, "Tirana for Beginners," p. 160; for further regional background see Fatjon Dragoshi, "Ti-Rama, My Creative City. Case Study, Tirana," in Nada Švob-Đokić (ed.), *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe, The Creative City: Crossing Visions and New Realities in the Region* (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2007), pp. 167–171; Raluca Voinea, "Geographically Defined Exhibitions: The Balkans, between Eastern Europe and the New Europe," *Third Text*, vol. 21, no. 2 (March 2007), pp. 145–151.
32. Maurizio Cattelan, Jens Hoffman, Massimiliano Gioni, and Bettina Funcke (eds. and curators), *6th Caribbean Biennial* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2001), not paginated.
33. Maurizio Cattelan et al., *6th Caribbean Biennial*, not paginated.

34. See Anthony Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming* and its analysis of European art's challenges to the often-empty rhetoric of emancipation after the Cold War and again after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For another, very different overview of antagonism in contemporary art, see Claire Bishop's widely read essay, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, no. 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 51–79; and Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 6 (February 2006), pp. 179–185.
35. Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networking: The Net as Artwork* (Aarhus: Digital Aesthetics Research Center, Aarhus University, 2008); especially see pp. 203–213, which recounts the Toscani scandal; on p. 213, Bazzichelli lists the press articles that progressively reported on this unfolding scandal. Also see Francesco Forlani, "Quand les faux Toscani épatent la galerie," *Le Vrai*, no. 23 (July–August 2002), pp. 88–91.
36. Okwui Enwezor, in Okwui Enwezor and Paul O'Neill, "Curating beyond the Canon: Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O'Neill," in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007), pp. 109–22, esp. p. 117.
37. See Lisette Lagnado and Pablo Lafuente (eds.), *Cultural Anthropophagy: The 24th Bienal de São Paulo* (London: Afterall, 2015).
38. Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art," p. 11.
39. Politi, "A Spectre Haunts the World of Art," p. 11.
40. This perspective is evident in Shearer West, "National Desires and Regional Realities in the Venice Biennale, 1895–1914," *Art History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September 1995), pp. 404–434; and with slightly less self-awareness in Marco Mulazzani, *Guide to the Pavilions of the Venice Biennale since 1887*, trans. Richard Sadleir (Milan: Mondadori Electa Spa, 2nd edn, 2014).
41. Of course not everyone was ecstatic about this development. The editors of the flagship but too-often parochial magazine *October*, for one, underwent some very public soul-searching, hosting a roundtable discussion among the editors about the state of art criticism amid the apotheosis of the curator: see George Baker et al., "Round Table: The Present State of Art Criticism," *October*, no. 100 (Spring 2002), pp. 200–228.
42. Francesco Bonami, "I Have a Dream," in *Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. xxi–xxiii, esp. p. xxii.
43. See Igor Zabel, "The (Former) East and Its Identity" (2000), in Maria Hlavajová and Jill Winder (eds.), *Who if Not We Should at Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This?* (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), pp. 283–288.
44. Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, "What Is a Station?," in *Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, pp. 327–337, esp. p. 329.
45. Bonami in Griffin et al., "Global Tendencies," p. 157.

46. Bonami frequently asserted in pre-vernissage interviews and briefings that a “one world concept doesn’t exist”; see, for instance, “Venice Biennale to Reflect Global Conflict,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/25/arts/arts-briefing.html>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
47. Francesco Bonami, in Griffin et al., “Global Tendencies,” p. 157.
48. Jerry Saltz, “Floundering” (2005). <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/jsaltz/saltz7-6-05.asp>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
49. Carol Vogel, “Heat Upstages Art at the Venice Biennale,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/16/arts/heat-upstages-art-at-the-venice-biennale.html>. Accessed October 10, 2015.
50. Robert C. Morgan, “Biennial Delirium: A Critic in Venice Amid Dreams and Conflicts,” *Sculpture*, vol. 22, no. 8 (October 2003), pp. 45–49, esp. p. 47.
51. Morgan, “Biennial Delirium,” p. 47.
52. Franco Bernabè, “Foreword,” in *Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, pp. xix–xx, esp. p. xix.
53. Bonami in Griffin et al., “Global Tendencies,” p. 154.
54. The curatorial premise for the 50th Venice Biennale had been, according to curator Ralph Rugoff, promising: Bonami was trying to avoid “the unwieldy thematic structures and conceptual sloppiness that generally distinguish these exhibitions” by dividing the show into semi-autonomous sections and delegated much of the curatorial responsibility; however, Rugoff, too, could see that Bonami remained a prisoner of the recent curatorial past, and this was proved by the “inane and confusing exhibition title.” Ralph Rugoff, “50th Venice Biennale,” *Frieze*, no. 77 (September 2003). [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/ralph\\_rugoff/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/ralph_rugoff/). Accessed September 15, 2015.
55. Indeed, this oscillation may neatly sum up Bonami’s style through much of his writing: see Francesco Bonami, *Il bonami dell’arte: Incontri ravvicinati nella giungla contemporanea* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2015).
56. Bonami, in “Global Tendencies,” p. 156.
57. Bonami, in “Global Tendencies,” p. 156.
58. Lawrence Alloway, *Venice Biennale, 1895–1968*, p. 25. The Biennale was also, for much of its history, a place to buy and sell the works on show, a practice that was stopped (albeit fairly temporarily) in 1970 after the numerous protests during the previous edition.
59. Bonami, in “Global Tendencies,” p. 162.
60. Bonami, “Statement from the Director of the 50th Venice Biennale,” 2003. [www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/txt/e-concept.htm](http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/txt/e-concept.htm). Accessed September 15, 2015. Bonami was highly disingenuous; the titles of the sub-exhibitions alone (*Zones of Urgency*, *Fault Lines*, etc.) indicated the mapping of art onto geopolitics.
61. Bonami, “Statement from the Director of the 50th Venice Biennale,” 2003.

62. Jacob Dahl Jürgensen, "50th Venice Biennale," *Frieze*, no. 77 (September 2003), [https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jacob\\_dahl\\_juergensen/](https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jacob_dahl_juergensen/). Accessed September 15, 2015.
63. Scott Rothkopf, "In the Bag," *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 1 (September 2003), pp. 175–177 and 240, esp. p. 177.
64. Harald Szeemann, "The Timeless, Grand Narration of Human Existence in Its Time," in *La Biennale di Venezia: platea dell'umanità*, exh. cat. (Venice: Biennale di Venezia, 2001), pp. xvii–xxv, esp. p. xvii.
65. Bonami, "I Have a Dream," p. xxii; here, Bonami awkwardly explained that he was creating "a 'glomantic' exhibition defined through a series of metaphors carried forward by diverse curators with diverse voices." While the 2003 Venice Biennale continued *Documenta11*'s focus on globalization, writer Tim Griffin (who had just been named the new editor of *Artforum*) located the difference between Bonami's residual postmodernism and Enwezor's postcolonialism: "The same word typically used – as at Venice – to describe an ever-expanding circulation of communication and commercial (with all the attendant conflicts that such connection entails) was in Kassel linked to the acute value of regionality and difference" (Tim Griffin, "Introduction," in Griffin et al., "Global Tendencies," p. 153).
66. Rothkopf, "In the Bag," p. 177.
67. Tim Griffin, "Left Wanting," *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 1 (September 2003), pp. 180–181, 246, and 251, esp. p. 246.
68. In her important writings, Reiko Tomii has traced the autonomous appearance of parallel late modernisms, conceptual art, and contemporary art in Japan and theorized the wider significance of this for art history; see Reiko Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art: Conceptualism in Japan," in Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss (eds.), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950–1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), pp. 15–27; also see her "Historicizing 'Contemporary Art': Some Discursive Practices in Gendai Bijutsu in Japan," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Winter 2004), pp. 611–641.

Lara Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig have also surveyed artist representation in biennials, revealing the blatant exclusion of artists from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Australia, Africa, and Asia from the so-called global art-world; remedial action remained very modest and the chances of an artist outside the North Atlantic gaining a position in the global art history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries remained strongly and systematically linked to residence in Western Europe or the United States; see Lara Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig, "Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality: The Case of the Contemporary Visual Arts," *ART-E-FACT*, no. 4 (December 2005). [http://artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a04/lang\\_en/theory\\_buchholz\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm). Accessed September 15, 2015. They concluded,



“What appears as the emergence of a global art field turns out to be the business of dyadic regionalization – associated with the worldwide establishment of some institutional satellites and restricted slots for non-occidental artists. The talk about the globalization of art in important respects seems to refer to no more than a myth.”



Figure 8.1 City view, Gwangju, during *Burning Down the House: 10th Gwangju Biennale 2014*, with at right the Gwangju Biennale Hall, the Biennale's main venue. Photograph Charles Green.

## 2014: Global Art Circuits

Exhibitions in this chapter: Shanghai Biennale (2000, Shanghai, China); Guangzhou Triennial (2002, Guangzhou, China); Beijing Biennale (Beijing, China); Gwangju Biennale (2008 and 2014, Gwangju, South Korea); Asia-Pacific Triennial (2009, Brisbane, Australia); Istanbul Biennial (2013, Istanbul, Turkey)

### Introduction

This chapter traces the development of twenty-first-century biennials during which they scheduled their openings within days of each other, coordinating vernissage weeks that ensured international movement across whole networks of exhibitions. In Europe in 2007, then across the Asia-Pacific region in 2008, and by 2014 across the globe, these conjunctions became more and more common. The reasoning behind the networked semi-coordination of biennials was significant, as were the challenges. The historical basis for such networks was the Romantic-era paradigm of the World Exposition, as many scholars have noted, and behind that the even earlier vogue for the Grand Tour.<sup>1</sup> It was now updated for an age of global nomadism (or global commuting, as we said in the previous chapter) and internet connectivity. We then describe the shift towards the massive spectacularization of art that evolved after the Great Recession of 2008, but also the rapid emergence of a reaction against the postcritical attitude that this represented.

Across both North and South, the biennial format was returning to its nineteenth-century roots in exotic travel, despite the shock of the global

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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financial crisis that temporarily disrupted the market in contemporary art and after which the collecting boom for contemporary art in China and India dipped temporarily but sharply. In Asia and the Middle East, biennial curators responded to the colonial pleasures of this romantic heritage even while they criticized it. For each city that aspired to Creative City status, the attraction of privileged, itinerant visitors was powerful. Biennials and triennials were a chance for a city to face outwards, maximize glamour, and showcase local artists during the brief visits of museum directors, curators, artists, and collectors. Most crucially, biennials were the opportunity to import the most experimental and the most critical of artists, and to transform those experiments into *touristic* spectacle, into Great Exhibition marvels for visitors and political masters alike. They were also the occasions for local museums to purchase art, a purpose that had long underlaid (and made more conservative) the operation of acquisitive exhibitions like the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and the Asia-Pacific Triennial.

The turn across the continent after 2008, then, was away from the idea of “Asian art” as something cohesive to be displayed, and towards the dubious idea that a cumulative Grand Tour of biennials and art fairs, even if they were not marketed as such, might underpin global contemporary art. It locked biennials firmly within the staging of spectacles to both specialist and general incoming audiences, as occurred with the 2008 Beijing Olympics with which many Asia-Pacific biennials coincided that year, and simultaneously to large local audiences, with all the tension between the two that this dualism implies. New biennials with international aspirations appeared or were relaunched from previously nationally focused exhibitions: the list included the Shanghai Biennale (founded in 1996), and the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair (founded in 1992, it was revamped with the First Guangzhou Triennial in 2002). These biennials could shift gear and relaunch themselves into the international arena, as did the Shanghai Biennale from 2000 on. The Yogyakarta Biennale reestablished itself still later, first in 2005 as the Biennale Jogja and then, after 2010, with a South–South agenda that reached well beyond Indonesia but which deliberately focused each edition on an exchange between Indonesia and one other nation or narrowly defined region on the Southern latitudes: in 2011 it showcased Indonesian and Indian artists together, in 2013 it hosted artists from the Middle East alongside Indonesian artists, and for 2015 it linked itself with Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> We have seen the tension of curating biennials for both local and international constituencies played out throughout this book without it affecting the durability and the popularity of the biennial as a form.

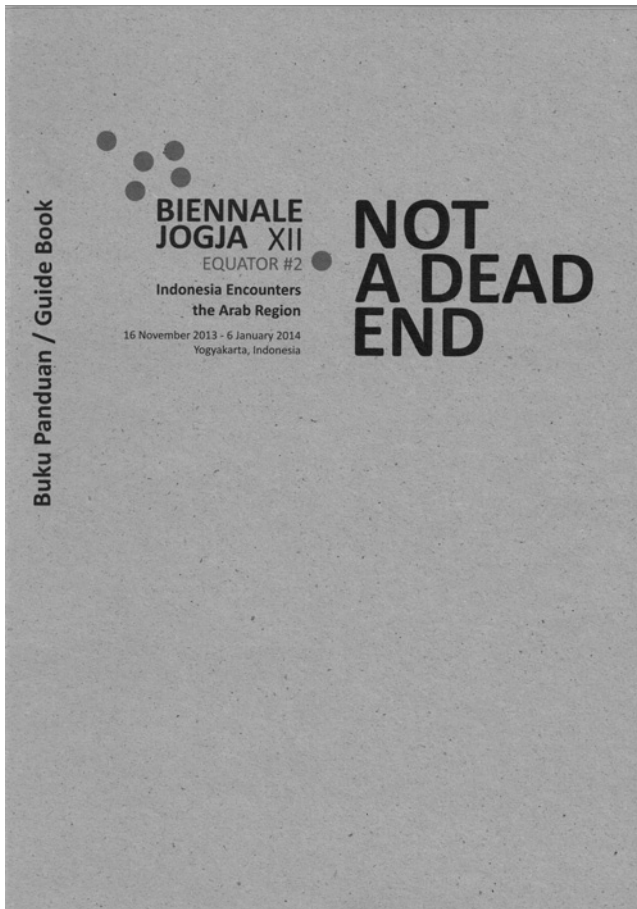


Figure 8.2 Cover of *Guide Book, Not a Dead End: Biennale Jogja XII, Equator #2* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta, 2013). Courtesy Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta.

### **The Game of Comparison and Competition**

We must now return to our earlier consideration of one of the core markers of contemporary art, of art that embodies the condition of contemporaneity with its stress on the concept of the “experimental” at the points of production and reception. This was an elastic concept that might include, at different times, avant-garde aspirations or digital technologies. But by the early

years of the twenty-first century, the idea of experimental art was highly freighted, linked closely in China to the idea of art that was excluded from officially sanctioned exhibition and dissemination, as Thomas Berghuis has explained.<sup>3</sup> For much of the new art that was likely to appear in biennials across the world, the division between production and reception (much like that, as we noted earlier, between theory and practice, or between the (neo-)colonial and the global) was now so blurred as to be virtually non-existent. This was precisely what marked contemporary art's clear evolution and differentiation from the self-consciously experimental arts of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> So, increasingly, the idea of experimental art as more or less identical with the use of technology or with new media art was less and less convincing. A more adequate description of the production of experimental contemporary art hinged instead on works of art that were shaped by the double tropes of collaboration (so evident amongst the experimental Chinese artists that we are about to discuss) and the delegation of fabrication; this opened out to the transdisciplinary as much as the transnational, and to the kinship between experimental art and neoliberal capitalism. New media were not the pivot for contemporary art's development. Rather, contemporary art became as influenced by new spaces of display – by architecture, we emphasize – as it was by new technologies. Or, to be more precise, contemporary art was in practice defined by the dual reformulation of art's modes of reception into enormous gallery spaces, whether white cubes, post-industrial warehouses or futurist architecture, as well as by cultural contexts and urgent politics that stretched beyond the North Atlantic and its own, inward-looking modes of technological production. In 2003, when artist Yinka Shonibare MBE very publicly asked, "How did we get to a point where the rise of the global curator has brought artistic practice to its knees," he was referring to this, just as ten years later Hito Steyerl, Pascal Gielen, and Geert Lovink were to separately ask similar questions about the internet, biennials, and "experimental" new media.<sup>5</sup> The two questions were linked.

This situation was played out in various ways. First, spectacular and usually expensive new art such as high definition video installations or hybrid-space, interactive, game-like works needed venues able to provide the resources, scale, and public prominence required by them. This led to a second consideration, for it was usually only large biennials – sprawling through large museums, repurposed buildings, or across entire cities, and often with strong private foundation, business, and city backing to help them do so – that could meet these resource demands. Hence, biennials offered contemporary experimental artists a stage on which to participate in

the global art scene while also enabling their dramatically expanded audience, far beyond the dreams of the older, utopian enclaves of second-wave biennials or new media art, the chance to see experimental art. Indeed, such was the case that by the second decade of the twenty-first century, experimental art, no matter what its genealogy and regardless of the often-resentful opinion of its technophile pioneers, had seemingly become the preserve of biennials. Net activist and theorist Geert Lovink presciently identified this now-clear trajectory in his 2007 book, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*.<sup>6</sup> In that recounting, the old spaces and practices of new media art had become obsolete; practitioners had either beached in new media departments scattered atomistically around the world or (as was the case with Raqs Media Collective, who we will discuss shortly) had shifted, for tactical and financial reasons, to using biennials as their platform to present their joint artistic and curatorial practices.<sup>7</sup> For the vast audiences and extraordinary numbers of artists around the world participating in contemporary art, then, it was the sprawling yet exclusive worlds of big- and small-budget biennials and not the fleeting carnivals of the weekend art fair, nor the relatively low budgets and conservative programs of the commercial gallery dealer, that showcased the current state of artistic experimentation. Frequent claims made about the democratization of contemporary art – whether due to the global spread of biennials and their audiences, the use of new technologies, the demand for audience participation, or for access to biennials and new technologies – were now severely tested.<sup>8</sup>

In the early years of the twenty-first century, new biennials in the Asia-Pacific region made urgent claims to attract that contemporary, global attention out of the three (often conflicting and coinciding) motivations that we have just sketched in: cultural emancipation, civic development, and, less frequently, the political legitimization of a nation or an emerging state.<sup>9</sup> But to succeed at this in authoritarian states such as China, biennial organizers had to gain official sanction for everything, for permits and visas for artists and curators to enter the country, and official sponsorship for access to exhibiting spaces in art museums that were dominated by deeply conservative cadres, for access to media coverage, and for the cooperation of institutions if the new generation of non-official curators and critics were to be able to curate these biennials and work with the artists. The impression of all this bureaucracy was of clear official interest in mounting biennials to attract contemporary global attention, but that it was to be on China's terms. There was an official as well as another, broadly shared, cultural agenda

revolving around the recognition of China, shared by government, official, and non-official artistic circles alike, and part of this informed the understanding that recognition involved working with imported, international experts. But they would need to understand the balancing act required to achieve a result in contemporary China, and thus be prepared to negotiate their way in a complex, fluid but illiberal system. Widely respected curator Hou Hanru, an expatriate regarded as a highly successful local by Chinese cultural bureaucrats, was one prime example; Fan Di'an was another. Hou's name recurred frequently in the chronicle of Asian biennials (we will shortly discuss his co-direction of the Third Shanghai Biennale in 2000, and he was to go on to direct the Gwangju Biennale in 2002, the 2nd Guangzhou Triennial (2005), and the 10th Istanbul Biennial in 2007). He would be able to work with radical but also established Chinese artists, and represented less of a gamble than appointing potentially more openly critical locals like curator Li Xianting. Reputations like Hou's, trusted on all sides but also with considerable credibility amongst artists, recur in the curatorship of biennials generally and in this chapter in particular, as reliable interlocutors and constant, cosmopolitan collaborators. Hou repeatedly worked with the peripatetic Hans Ulrich Obrist, for instance (including the influential touring exhibition, *Cities on the Move* (1997–1999)) and with charismatic architect Rem Koolhaas. Reliable interlocutors were not necessarily curators themselves, but often writers or art historians, or even artists. Art historian Wu Hung, famous for his scholarship on earlier periods of art, also curated key biennials. In India, Delhi-based writer and intellectual Geeta Kapur (herself an important exhibition curator) occupied a similar gate-keeper position to that of Hou Hanru in China.

The most important contemporary art emerging in China over the preceding two decades had come from close-knit groups of independent artists and critics. It is important to acknowledge that most of them were trained at elite art academies, so it was not a black-and-white situation as to who had been organizing exhibitions and performances privately, and who faced scandal and censorship as they entered public art spaces. So would the creation of new biennials support or stymie experimental contemporary art? The First Shanghai Biennale in 1996 had restricted itself to traditional Chinese art forms, principally ink-brush painting (brush and ink painting is the usual term; ink art is another label for the same thing), presenting a relatively small number of local artists with a large number of works. The 1998 Shanghai Biennale was once again based on parochial, even chauvinist claims for the continuing development of



ink-brush painting and calligraphy; in practice these mostly modestly scaled paintings represented either the acculturation and academization of 1950s, quasi-Tachiste abstraction or the minor tweaking of traditional landscape and flower painting.<sup>10</sup> However, it was not the case that the perpetuation of such art forms into the contemporary period would result in weak art. A more inclusive understanding of the multiple modernities from which contemporaneity had appeared was already well under way in the Asia-Pacific region, and this included many artists' adaptations of anachronism, as had already been seen in Xu Bing's apparently meaningless, traditional block-printed scrolls in *Book from the Sky* (1987–1991), a work mentioned in an earlier chapter. But in 2000, a year after Harald Szeemann invited the largest number of Chinese artists yet to a Venice Biennale, the Third Shanghai Biennale, *Shanghai – Over the Sea: A Unique Modernity*, rebranded itself as a contemporary art biennial with a global rather than local perspective.<sup>11</sup> Two of the four curators were based abroad: Hou Hanru in Paris and Japanese curator Toshio Shimizu. Here we note once again the pivotal significance of key, trusted interlocutors such as Hou, and the important role played by Japanese curators and writers such as Shimizu, for despite very real political differences that have waxed and waned over long periods, Japanese cultural figures had played a crucial role in the modernization of Chinese art and visual culture from the Meiji period onwards.

There was now a heavy injection of state funding and an equally heavy influx of big-name international artists making enormous installations (such as Paris-based Chinese artist Huang Yongping's *Bank of Sand or Sand of Bank* (2000), an enormous sandcastle model of a landmark early twentieth-century Shanghai bank building) and video installations (with well-known works by Matthew Barney and William Kentridge). The 2000 Shanghai Biennale included thirty-three international artists and thirty-four China-based artists. This was also the year that artist Ai Weiwei and critic Feng Boyi curated an infamous satellite exhibition (one of approximately twelve non-official shows) that they titled *Bu hezuo fangshi* (*An Uncooperative Approach: FUCK OFF*). As the exhibition made abundantly clear, Ai was a master at protesting against both the new cultural behemoth that his own nation represented and "the threat of assimilation and vulgarization" that the Biennale represented, while at the same time, and in a quasi-parasitic relation to that behemoth, gaining significant windfall from it. (And this despite the show being shut down after the international visitors from the vernissage departed.)<sup>12</sup> For Wu Hung, the Third Shanghai

Biennale was a compromise between the curatorial independence that simply had to be demonstrated to international audiences in order, over the few days of their visits to the exhibition and to public seminar programs during the opening week, to justify local claims that this exhibition was a landmark in the history of contemporary Chinese art, as opposed to the ubiquitous Chinese government demand to supervise, oversee, and proscribe political, sexual, or violent images.<sup>13</sup> The two views were in such unstable conflict with each other that even the two curators of *An Uncooperative Approach* had been careful not to overstep the mark. *An Uncooperative Approach's* English-language subtitle had been very different: the much more threatening – and now far better-known – *Fuck Off*. The exhibition and its title had, therefore, a dual audience. Though a visit to the Biennale and its satellites would have revealed the body of a horse, a dog's skeleton, and live performances involving surgical procedures, Shanghai-based curator Li Xu, one of the four Biennale curators for the principal exhibition, still argued publicly that, "We could not choose works that the Beijing Cultural Ministry would not approve."<sup>14</sup>

From all this and despite the controversy surrounding "peripheral" exhibitions, Wu saw the Biennale's significance in terms of experimental art being shown in a large, state-run museum, according to the same equation that we identified earlier. "Many 'experimental exhibitions,'" he wrote, "have been organized to test the public roles of contemporary art and to 'legalize' new and novel art forms."<sup>15</sup> The internationalization afforded by biennials was the key to this normalization. Openness to these novelties, and the commissioning of international and expatriate curators, would still repeatedly continue to come up against the bureaucratic determination, in Zhang Qing's words, to "promote mainstream Chinese culture." Freedom of action for curators was delicate and truly precarious to a degree simply not experienced by biennial curators in the North Atlantic. Writing about his Third Shanghai Biennale, at the time, Hou had bluntly written,

Curating such a biennale is much more than creating a good exhibition; it is a long-term exercise of strategy, negotiation and determination to achieve fundamental changes in institutional structures and the ideology behind such structures.<sup>16</sup>

This meant, in practice, accepting the continued exclusion of curators who were not officially sanctioned and, implicitly, the elimination of direct and too-cutting political and social comment.<sup>17</sup> But the Third Shanghai

Biennale had also shown that official definitions of the art that would henceforth be shown in art institutions would not be enforced as rigidly and that favored interlocutors like Hou were able to broaden the contemporary art that might be exhibited. Independent art or, more correctly, the art forms chosen by independent artists, might now be recuperated and grudgingly tolerated to a degree by the state in biennials instead of simply excluded. For “experimental” artists and curators, even grudging acceptance of the experimental was important on many levels – to reach a wide audience, to realize large-scale works, to create both a market and a public for experimental art, and to construct notoriety and celebrity – and so the establishment of biennials with an international focus had particular urgency and significance in China. Soon-to-be-famous video artist Yang Fudong made this point to a *New York Times* reporter shortly after the 2000 Shanghai Biennale,

“Now that the biennale has shown video and installation work,” said Yang Fudong, a 29-year-old artist, “the government can’t turn around and say, ‘We can show this to the public, but you can’t.’”<sup>18</sup>

The Third and Fourth Shanghai Biennales and the 2002 Guangzhou Triennial were successes in these terms, part of a complex, evolving, booming cultural situation.<sup>19</sup> But Chinese artists still faced very serious censorship and the “experimental” was still almost synonymous with the non-official, as opposed to the official, and officially sanctioned, art such as the academic paintings in the 1996 Shanghai Biennale and even Chinese biennials yet to come, such as the Chinese Artists Association-organized 2003 Beijing Biennale. This latter biennial limited itself to paintings and sculptures by its members and official academies in spite of, or perhaps because of, the flourishing unofficial, highly experimental Beijing art scene, epitomized by so-called “art villages,” from the East Village (and yet earlier art villages) to the newer art village at Dashanzi, which was often referred to as Factory 798 after its best-known art space. A retrospective view of the celebrated mid-century ink-brush painter Qi Baishi (1864–1957) was, by contrast, the feature of the first Beijing Biennale, which had been divided into two sections, one largely Chinese and another, mostly international exhibition curated by a highly conservative, little-known European curator, Vincenzo Sanfo, whose experience and kitsch selections were far outside any contemporary art mainstream.<sup>20</sup> The state and its academicians were not by any means ready to abandon their pan-Asian, neotraditionalist narrative of brush and ink painting, nor their control of patronage. But, for now in Shanghai and

shortly in Guangzhou, the state was momentarily happy to orchestrate an explicitly international biennial for its own reasons, in order to expand the cultural and economic clout of China, and despite both the incomplete artistic control that this entailed and the admission of unofficial artists.

Other biennials were appearing across China's major cities, faced with similar hurdles but trying to negotiate the shifting boundaries created by the often-bizarre conjunction of official civic opportunism and unofficial artistic license. The Guangzhou Triennial was founded in 2002. Its ambitious and large first edition, co-directed by Wu Hung, Huang Zhuan, Feng Boyi, and the host art museum's director, Wang Huangsheng, on a very tight budget by international standards, was titled *Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art, 1990–2000*. It was, effectively, a triennial that historicized contemporary art, much like the Asia-Pacific Triennials that we discussed earlier, allotting enormous spaces to the artists that Wu Hung considered seminal, such as Cai Guo-Qiang, Xu Bing, and, once again, Ai Weiwei. We note the same curator, critic, and artist names already – and justifiably – solidifying into a contemporary canon, which was precisely what unofficial artists and critics intended. It did not remain uncontested, though, and enormous auction-house sales continued to concentrate on paintings, especially traditional forms of painting.

The First Guangzhou Triennial was a Chinese affair, building upon its more parochial predecessor, the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair. But it was also a very significant, even landmark exhibition, internationalizing the south of China with no need of North Atlantic validation by imported curators, while at the same time surveying the important generation of artists who had organized exhibitions independently of state-run art museums and art-spaces since the 1980s (and met frequent censorship and official hostility as a result). Wu Hung and his co-curators had little interest in the celebratory and parochial forms that earlier, traditional media-focused Shanghai or Beijing Biennales had perpetuated. These traditionalist exhibitions had exploited the fashionably cosmopolitan connotations of the words, “triennial” and “biennial,” without experimenting either with “experimental art” or with any new exhibition form. The First Guangzhou Triennial also had to survive the need to work through an official institution, in this case, the huge, new Guangdong Museum of Art, which had been built in order to show exhibitions such as this. If these institutions with large buildings, so essential to the exhibition form of a biennial, were invariably opposed to experimental art forms, let alone independent commentary by artists about the new China or criticism of the ruling Communist Party, official

opposition was now (confusingly) inconsistent. It was individuals and timing that were important. In the case of the Guangdong Museum of Art, the important factor was the art museum's director (and co-curator of the 2002 Guangzhou Triennial), Wang Huangsheng, who was later to move to the position of director at the Art Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. If his move was an index of that institution's accommodation with the contemporary, then the Guangdong Museum of Art's subsequent aversion to risk was proof of this observation.

The result, though, was, and would continue to be, official unpredictability. Just before the opening, Huang Yongping's outdoor installation, *Bat Project 2* (2002), the partial but full-sized recreation of a downed American spy plane, was removed. At the Third Shanghai Biennale's successor, in 2002, there was no repeat of *Fuck Off*, since officials scoured the independently curated peripheral shows for overt political content. But the Second Guangzhou Triennial, *Beyond: An Extraordinary Space for Modernization* (2005), co-directed by the ubiquitous Hou Hanru, this time with Hans Ulrich Obrist (with whom, as we noted, he had co-curated *Cities on the Move*) and Guo Xiaoyan, included local and international artists and artists in the exploratory, laboratory-style, work-in-progress format for which Hou's biennials had become known, in a project-based investigation of the Pearl River Delta region that continued both the 2000 Shanghai Biennale's and the 2002 Guangzhou Triennial's elaborations of global and local.

### Negotiated Inequality

Complicated negotiations were not just a problem for biennial curators working in China. As biennials proliferated, what was permitted remained a real issue that faced biennial curators working in restrictive or authoritarian states across Asia: in China, in Singapore, in the Middle East at the Sharjah Biennial, in Cairo at its temporarily rejuvenated biennial, in Istanbul, and in many other cities. This was apparent even when, as often happened, family members of the ruling elite were the direct, founding patrons of a biennial, where biennials were more or less controlled by their corporate sponsors, or where biennials were linked to state museums. It had been the case at the 2000 Shanghai Biennale and was to be the case again in Sharjah in 2011, when director Jack Persekian was dismissed following criticism about and the removal of a work by Mustapha Benfodil. Both events showed that the creation of new, internationally networked yet regionally focused art

worlds and the young audiences for contemporary art would not necessarily be accompanied by the creation of new, tolerant institutions. Artists Qiu Zhijie (who had shown at the First Guangzhou Triennial) and Lu Jie (founder of the Long March Foundation, a highly visible, Beijing-based artist collective tapping into the global vogue for densely researched reenactment art) warned people that, “Chinese contemporary art is in the earliest stages of constructing a formal system; yet it has already begun the game of comparison and competition with the West, buying wholeheartedly into a system based on major museums and biennial exhibitions.”<sup>21</sup> They meant that participation in the new global network of contemporary art biennials also meant accepting new and different values, in particular about the validity of contemporary art in art museums and the transnational comparability of artists (even though the proportion of domestic artists was quite high in many of the new Asian biennials, especially at the Guangzhou Triennial). This rapid-fire, highly mobile process was not going to be easy to accept since it represented a definitive departure from previous national narratives, with their long-maintained traditional canons. It involved embracing art fashion and spectacle, which was easier if the host city had already chosen to architecturally, commercially, and culturally remake itself as a cosmopolitan, international center, as had Shanghai. Both Qiu Zhijie and Lu Jie had been, after all, amongst the earliest colonists of Beijing’s increasingly gentrified and fashionable Dashanzi art precinct, as well as associated with the Central Academy of Fine Arts. But more important, as we saw in the earlier chapter on Asian biennialization during the 1990s, this new mobility reflected the wider metamorphosis in regional biennials around the world away from total regulation by governments and official cultural organizations towards direction by independent curators (who were themselves more informally regulated by peer networks and shifting consensus of taste), and away from exhibiting an identifiable form of identity, which had almost certainly been produced within an art world governed and regulated by tradition, to exhibiting locality within a globalizing world. In China a lot was at stake. As Hou Hanru wrote of the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, “The global is not abstract and isolated from the local. It is a part of local life.”<sup>22</sup> Hou was thus effectively sifting and separating the idea of traditional identity away from the apparently innocuous but quite different idea of contemporary locality.<sup>23</sup>

This was one of numerous inevitable contradictions and the division between official and non-official was never fixed. International audiences may have presumed that the young artists they were now seeing in

biennials were opposed to the official academies. This was in one sense true. Many of them had identified as independent and had been creating their own networks of exhibitions and art criticism outside official channels, though they had almost all been the alumni of the academies; the division between officially accepted and unofficial was not in practice clear-cut. Cai Guo-Qiang departed early, for Japan, in 1986. Many others, including Xu Bing and Guan Wei, went into exile after the catastrophic Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989 and the People's Republic's clampdown on freedoms (except, it turned out, the freedom to be rich) after that date. But then again, these artists often began to return home in the years after 2000, sometimes even into senior and influential positions in art schools and cultural academies. The returning artists were immensely significant on many levels, not least on account of their participation in the extraordinary global art boom. All this was more important because of China's arrival as an economic superpower, mirrored in the burgeoning size of its enormous art market with all its distortions and corruption.<sup>24</sup>

The emerging Asian situation was emblemized best not by the older generation of artists, expatriate or not, who had shown in early editions of local biennials as an index of their prominence and contemporaneity within their home cities or nations, but by more recently established, younger groups of artists whose works embodied networked production, such as the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective. Raqs quickly took on board the rise and fall of contemporary art's dependence on new media, especially as new media art and theory, along with reified concepts of interactivity and participation, were becoming first doctrinaire and then anachronistic by the early 2000s. Meanwhile, large-scale, spectacular installations and moving image projections had now become the dominant modes of "biennial art," but this depended upon their status as the furnishings of sites for casual socialization, contemplation, study, and play as much as they were art works to be contemplated in themselves. Further, they could (though at some cost) be perpetually re-exhibited elsewhere around the world, thus dispensing with the constraints and the crusades attached to site-specificity. Geography, culture, diaspora, injustice, globalization: all of these forces had by the 2000s thoroughly periodized and thus (however ironically) rendered *traditional* the kinds of new media practiced by artist-experts in favor of the more discursive, skeptical, performance-based and hybrid-space art works that were increasingly common in biennials at the time. Raqs Media Collective epitomized this shift and moved into biennial spaces fast, but like invited outsider-experts rather than artists. As the number of invitations

from biennials worldwide started to grow, they started referring to themselves as “using” art exhibitions. This was perhaps nowhere more apparent than at *Documenta11* in 2002. Their installation, “28f28” N / 77f15” E :: 2001/02 (2002), juxtaposed video and still images, sound, software, and performance documentation on urban dispossession and displacement in India, bringing into their typical installation format the kinds of activist work the collective had sourced and developed at Sarai, the center for publishing and information exchange that they had founded in collaboration with a much older research center, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), in Delhi. Raqs’ rapid global renown and consequent, constant global mobility showed once and for all the errors in British new media pioneer Roy Ascott’s claims made in a series of influential essays, including “Art and Education in the Post-Biological Era” (1996), that networks tend to erase hierarchy.<sup>25</sup> Networks actually *consolidate* hierarchies, though these were now indexed more by frequent flyer miles and experts’ word of mouth than by living in London or Manhattan, and were to be mostly the province of artists whose address was, like Raqs, not to tradition or to established local institutions. In other words, this international network was regulated by intellectual capital, which was itself inevitably shaped by international taste, international nepotism, the international market (importantly, including art museums and foundations), and myriad curatorial contingencies. Each new Asian biennial gradually contributed to the emergence by the early years of the twenty-first century of a global biennial circuit, not just the sense – accurate or not – of a North Atlantic one. Raqs Media Collective was both a critical and a paradigmatic presence within this development.

Nonetheless, some biennials were still destined, by dint of difficult travel and the international art world’s conservative ideas about travel security, to remain “peripheral.” Those exclusions were compounded by the fact that extensive global travel, like new technologies and readily available postindustrial spaces in which to socialize, costs vast amounts of money. Only the top tier of curators and very few artists were actually so much in demand or else wealthy enough that they traveled around the world for biennials, though at the same time the absolute number of those frequent flyers was now significant, partly reflecting the increased speculation in contemporary art both before but particularly after the Global Recession. For many cities and their cultural minders, then, the task was not to fall off this global biennial circuit. In the last chapter, we understood *Tirana Biennale 1: Escape* in analogous ways, for it had been shaped as a response to Albania’s uncertain situation on the periphery of Europe. Such concerns were even more



apparent in Asia. Singapore's Biennale, for instance, grew out of precisely this uncertainty, as the city-state sought to self-consciously locate itself as a regional and global hub, risking the charge that its financial and state-led investment in culture produced yet another, off-the-shelf biennial. *The First Singapore Biennale: Belief* (2006) was launched by the Singapore government as part of a suite of nation-building cultural initiatives, according to a by-now well-established formula: a high-profile, international curator (Fumio Nanjō) assisted by local curators (Roger McDonald, Sharmini Pereira, Eugene Tan, and Ahmad Mashadi), a list of well-known Asian artists who were nevertheless not yet stars on the Euro-American art circuit (including Jane Alexander, Simryn Gill, Rashid Rana, and N.S. Harsha) combined with a short list of famous and established artists (including Yayoi Kusama, Barbara Kruger, and Mariko Mori), and municipal rhetoric about the "world-class" status of the host city. The Biennale opened just two weeks before a huge international conference of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and was therefore part of a carefully designed presentation of Singapore as an immaculately presented, safe, friendly destination. And as one might expect, this rhetoric was the immediate object of Biennale artist scorn: most notable here was New Zealand artist Daniel Malone, who re-enacted 1960s' activist Abbie Hoffman's team attempt to levitate the White House, gathering a line of assistants clad in happy-face vests to rip up and elevate Singapore's City Hall. Other cities, such as Fukuoka, cultivated a self-conscious distance from the Asian contemporary art boom (by and large deliberately avoiding the selection of artists who were already famous across the North Atlantic), while yet others cultivated membership of the international mainstream.<sup>26</sup> Gwangju was paradigmatic in this regard. In 2007, the Biennale's Foundation hired Okwui Enwezor, who then – unsurprisingly, given his collaborative history – appointed a select curatorial team that together transformed the 2008 Gwangju Biennale by restaging other curators' exhibitions held in different parts of the world, including the United States and Europe, during the previous twelve months.<sup>27</sup> The 2012 Gwangju Biennale, *Roundtable*, similarly sought to transform curatorial structures by inviting six relatively young curators from different parts of Asia – Nancy Adajania, Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Mami Kataoka, Sunjung Kim, Carol Yinghua Lu, and Alia Swastika – to work with each other for the first time. But though the ambitions were great, the result was both a large, sprawling exhibition comprising six, not always connected themes, and, not unexpectedly, a cavalcade of directorial disagreements.

## Contemporary Play Time

This hierarchy of “world-class” curators and events sat uneasily with the assumption that biennials, along with contemporary art installations and video projections, are open and accessible to all, and curators themselves were questioning the proliferation of biennials in forums and in the emerging journals of curatorial practice. Among the key tropes was the “behavioral economy” engineered by relational aesthetics, as French curator Nicolas Bourriaud argued in 1998, as well as the influential, safe-house experimentation of Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist’s *Cities on the Move* (which toured the globe from 1997 to 1999), and Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden’s co-curated exhibition in Antwerp, called *Laboratorium* (1999).<sup>28</sup> These curatorial discourses and practices had not shaped *Documenta 11*, which had proceeded according to a different logic, but they had been the underpinning of *Utopia Station* (inside the 2003 Venice Biennale), and subsequently of Hou’s and Obrist’s Second Guangzhou Triennial. By the early 2010s, the discourse of laboratory-like biennials as democratic, experimental, and open to all was rife, if problematic, influencing such exhibitions as the 2012 Busan Biennale (subtitled *Garden of Learning*), as well as European biennials including the 2012 Berlin Biennale. These biennials largely defined themselves as sites where social democracy would intersect with new networks and the experience of playful collaboration or even community-building. More specifically, their rhetoric reflected the emerging consensus between biennial curators that experimentation was to be self-consciously fostered and featured through active, frequently politically loaded relationships with broad audiences, but not through the experimental, new media artists’ notions of virtual reality and interactive technologies that had been popular in the earlier 1990s and which had circulated in exhibitions such as curator Jeffrey Deitch’s *Post Human* (1992).<sup>29</sup> The repeated invocation by biennial curators of relational aesthetics, the laboratory, utopias, and the like as the basis for a presumed relationship between biennials and experimentation was undoubtedly sincere. But so too was the belief that, if hosting a biennial could boost a city’s tourist profile, then the exhibition itself could also concentrate on socialized play and self-display, either as its main thematic concern or as something audiences could enact while holidaying at the biennial. Late-modern experimentalism had thus shifted from postmodern media expertise to socially responsible contemporary play time, just as relational aesthetics had shifted, as Hal Foster acidly noted, “from the Party à la Lenin to a party à la Lennon.”<sup>30</sup> Both the idea of localized modernities and the idea of an experimental art were

signatures, in other words, of a globalization underwritten by dissimulation. The two were inseparable. Moreover, though biennials increasingly took on the mantle of social and urban laboratories, the curatorial *performance* of democracy was not necessarily activist nor even particularly egalitarian (and this despite Gwangju taking South Korea's democratization as its initial point of reference). The mass "democracy" of biennials was instead driven by the popular, the populist, and inclined towards a younger visitor demographic.

This conjunction was played out on several occasions in the early 2000s, but perhaps most notably in the renewal of the "grand tour" within biennial cultures. In 2007, Europe's main perennial art events – Venice, documenta, Art Basel, and the Skulptur Projekte Münster, an exhibition founded in 1977 by curators Klaus Bussmann and Kasper König and held every ten years in the small West German city of Münster – conjoined to form a circuit that was explicitly labeled the European "Grand Tour of the Twenty-first Century."<sup>31</sup> Those aficionados sufficiently wealthy and inclined could journey from one opening to the next over the course of June 2007, giving a formal spin to the long-held practice (for well-heeled visitors, at least) to meet in Venice for the vernissage and then again a few weeks later in Art Basel or another large-scale exhibition opening. Newly advertised – as a "platform," no less, although not quite in Enwezor's sense of the word – that practice could come to replicate the elite Enlightenment traditions of venturing to Europe's south for cultural tourism. But as advertisers wryly noted, the audience for this new Grand Tour was slightly different from its eighteenth-century counterpart. It stated that,

The four partners will communicate the idea of the Grand Tour 2007 outside Europe in particular, too, in Asia, in Africa, in Latin and North America and in the Near East in order to win an international audience from all over the world for this art tour through Europe an opportunity that only arises once every ten years [sic].<sup>32</sup>

Nor was the real Grand Tour of the twenty-first century necessarily European, for the following year the Asian biennials responded more spectacularly again. They loosely coordinated themselves through their different biennial foundations under the umbrella of an Asian Grand Tour that was labeled "Art Compass," and marketed to cultural tourists, with specialist travel agents offering to create itineraries. Thus, in the latter months of 2008 (and then again in 2014), biennial audiences coordinated their flights

and hotels across Asia to a rapid-fire sequence of exhibitions that included, in a list that is not even exhaustive but is without doubt exhausting to read: the Biennale of Sydney (director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *Revolutions: Forms that Turn*, the direct precursor of her 2013 *dOCUMENTA (13)*, which was the culmination of a decade of her biennials and mega-exhibitions; Sydney ran from June 18–September 7); the Beijing Biennale (which coincided with the summer Olympic Games but which continued the conservative, official art-dominated previous Beijing Biennales, July 8–August 12); the meta-exhibition, Gwangju Biennale (director Okwui Enwezor's atlas-like compendium of the previous year's key exhibitions, *Annual Report: A Year in Exhibitions*, September 5–November 9); the Busan Biennale (directed by Won Bang Kim, Jeon Seung-bo, and Lee Jeong-hyung, September 6–November 15); the Guangzhou Triennial (the ambitious *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, directed by Gao Shiming, Sarat Maharaj, and Chang Tsongzung, September 6–November 16); the Shanghai Biennale (*Translocalmotion*, September 9–November 16); the Nanjing Triennial, *Reflective Asia*, September 10–November 10); the Singapore Biennale (*Wonder*, directed by veteran biennial curator Fumio Nanjō, with locals Joselina Cruz and Matthew Ngui, September 11–November 16); the Seoul Media Art Biennale (*Turn and Widen*, directed by Park Il-ho, September 11–November 5); the Yokohama Triennale (*Time Crevasse*, directed by Tsutomu Mizusawa with a panel of co-curators, September 13–November 30); and the Taipei Biennale (directed by Vasif Kortun and Manray Hsu, September 13–January 4).<sup>33</sup>

This crowded, almost indigestible coincidence of biennials and triennials was relatively unaffected by the Great Recession of 2008. For a start, after 2008, the Asian region bounced back fairly quickly amidst the stimulus provided by fast-growing, middle-class, consumer societies and, even more, by enormous infusions of government spending. In tune with this, the nature of the by-now capacious “democracy” of the contemporary art in the biennials above was epitomized in the viewers' experiences of spectacular stagings of interpersonality rather than politics. The 2008 Yokohama Triennale director, Tsutomu Mizusawa, was apologetic but clear about the strategies that constituted this. In an interview, he observed:

Well, when you have this many contemporary art biennales and triennales taking place around the world (one count puts it at about 120), there is a danger of them becoming homogenized. But, if you make performance the underlying theme, then the experience is of that place and that time. It naturally becomes differentiated from other events.<sup>34</sup>

A year later, in 2009, the Sixth Asia-Pacific Triennial launched that edition's extraordinary education program for young visitors, called "Kids Asia-Pacific Triennial," committing a large proportion of APT6 resources to its development. Children were able to experiment with model world building while young adults, sufficiently socially empowered by the image and experience of experimental play, mobbed the museum in order to hang out and flirt with each other. At APT7 in 2012–2013, children made their own art works to mimic the artists' works in the galleries above, or were photographed in front of Central Asian tourist attractions projected behind them as part of a work by Kazakh artist Erbossyn Meldibekov. The promotional blurb for another Kids APT work, *Paramodel Joint Factory* (2012), even read like Bourriaud's relational aesthetics for beginners: "In this spectacular installation, the walls, floor and ceiling are covered with toy rail networks. Children could try their hand at creating patterns and shapes to add to the installation."<sup>35</sup> The resultant images of adults and children of all ages and races reveling in the special Kids APT section of the gallery proved, as one might expect, to be an advertising bonanza of smiling faces and manipulable art. But the Kids APT had also, in the process, become the unruly, extraordinarily successful offspring of experimental art's absorption and transformation within contemporary art and biennial exhibition strategies.

It was by no means alone amongst biennials in this trajectory since the experiences of art on offer closely resembled the biennial curatorship so differently developed by biennial directors like Bourriaud or Obrist. The mode of spectatorship now offered at APT was far from the liminality required by a feature film in a cinema or alertness by a modernist painting. Art works situated themselves instead along the spectrum from a children's playground to an Occupy site. This was no accident: the anarchistic Occupy movement of 2009 had been quickly transformed into a curatorial methodology and a visual style, a trajectory that sat seamlessly with the transformation of experimental art into plaything, and democracy into the populism that we have described above. Moreover, it was a new development that an increasing number of artists and critics, from artist Hito Steyerl to art historian David Joselit, were now identifying as the direction that biennials and contemporary art more generally were taking in the 2010s.<sup>36</sup> Curiously enough, the image offered by this new spectatorship was uncannily like the impression of diversity and mild-mannered chaos of Asia-Pacific regionalism promoted in the first editions of Fukuoka's and Brisbane's triennials in the early 1990s. As we saw in chapter 4, this had been a self-conscious and satisfying construction that did not imply historical or cultural homogeneity,

to paraphrase Asia-Pacific Triennial curator Caroline Turner's mitigating sentiments.<sup>37</sup> Which is to say that, despite the various arcs at play in contemporary art that were in turn foregrounded at biennials across Asia, there remained a strong, surprisingly consistent, utopian idealism amongst artists and curators. It was supported rather than repressed by the accelerating globalization that many thought (and mistakenly think) produced cultural homogenization.

Nonetheless, it was also clear that, though globalization was not always a homogenizing force, it unremittingly destabilized regional art worlds. Globalization (and global curators) relentlessly insisted that artists look to their localities, the characteristic contemporaneity of which would be exaggerated, sorted through, reflected on, revised, and performed; it would be mediated by globalization and so would its appearance in art, screening the universal anonymity of capital in its unprecedented remaking of the world in which the creation of vast art museums and new biennials and art fairs in parts of Asia and in the Gulf States in the Middle East were among the most obvious examples. Locality was represented; artists were therefore able to transact their business across borders. No one was interested any more in a universal, modernist language of art, nor in any bland, corporate, transnational language of abstraction, nor even, despite the cultural orthodoxy of officialdom, in neotraditional artistic values. This was what Hou Hanru had meant ten years before in his introductory essay for the Shanghai Biennale. Instead, the ideas of access and deregulation (including but certainly not limited to those rebadged and reduced to the internet) were as important to artists as they were to global capital. So both the fragile artistic precariat and neoliberal states alternately cooperated and fought over the ownership of these ideas, with democracy, the public, and accessibility invoked as the tropes of choice by artists and curators, by civic elders and city strategists.

This "democracy" might in fact not be freedom but be play, as we saw. It might also be pushed indoors, into the relatively domesticated performance of political protest in conventional exhibition spaces, in the face of genuine repression that made art in public spaces dangerous for artists and audiences alike. Istanbul Biennial director Fulya Erdemci had given the 2013 Istanbul Biennial its title, *Anne, Ben Babar Mıyım* (Mom, am I barbarian?), intending that the Biennial would participate in the renewal of Istanbul's endangered public spaces in the face of their annexation and the appropriation of whole precincts by powerful Istanbul developers. (Halil Altındere's video *Wonderland* (2013), made just before Erdemci's Biennial would take place, took on a similar subject; its spectacular, fast-moving,

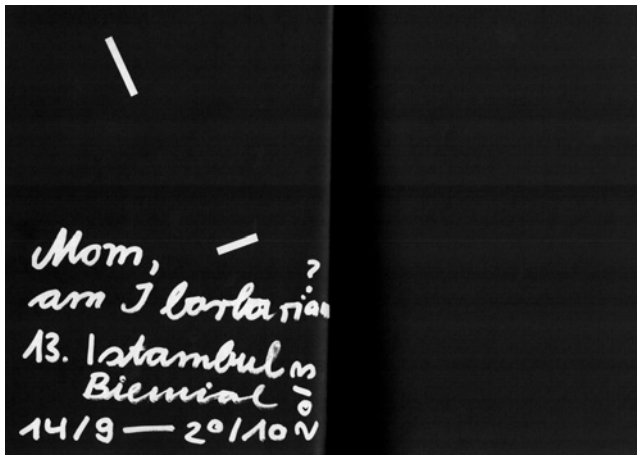


Figure 8.3 Title-page, “Mom, Am I Barbarian?,” in *Guide, 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial*. *Mom, Am I Barbarian?*, exhibition catalogue, curator Fulya Erdemci (Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2013), pp. 2–3. Courtesy Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts.

hip-hop video protest (and inner-urban travelogue) was directed against the displacement of Roma families from the historic Sulukule neighborhood and its rushed, upmarket redevelopment.) For the largest exhibition space, Antrepo 3, a vast warehouse on the Bosphorus waterfront, Erdemci had idealistically planned an exhibition of installations, videos, and the re-exhibition of earlier works by activist artists from the 1960s and 1970s. She had negotiated permissions for interventions by contemporary activist artists outdoors in public spaces and cramped inner-city parks. They would “activate” public space. This was all hijacked by real events in the immediate lead-up to the Biennial. On May 31, 2013, protesters occupied Gezi Park in a campaign against the Islamist, pro-business, but increasingly authoritarian Recep Tayyip Erdoğan government’s unilateral decision to redevelop seedy Gezi Park, on the edges of the city’s fraying, central Taksim Square, as a shopping mall inside a simulated Ottoman-era barracks. Two weeks of sit-ins by a wide and unlikely coalition of largely youthful, but also much older, demonstrators were followed by the violent removal of the activists on June 15 and 16. In the wake of escalating government violence, Erdemci relocated all the long-planned, outdoor art works into conventional, ad hoc exhibition spaces, albeit ones that were sometimes hastily improvised, ahead of

the Biennial's September opening. Elmgreen and Dragset reconfigured their contribution, *Istanbul Diaries* (2013), to incorporate the utopian character of early June, contracting out to seven locals the task of writing daily diaries inside the exhibition. All this was bravely invested in the vestige of the idea that art has social agency (rather than this being the exclusive province of capital), an idea that now persisted via curators such as Erdemci (who admired critical theorists Chantal Mouffe and Luc Boltanski) even when curators like her were forced back into conventional exhibition methods, makeshift buildings, and weary white cubes. Evidence of the post-Great Recession activist shift emerged across not just Asian biennials but also in Europe. The antagonism of this impulse was embodied in Berlin-based artist Hito Steyerl's artist lectures, played over and over on video, in which she quietly harangued the visitor. Her video documentation of a lecture-performance, *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013), was a much-discussed centerpiece of the Istanbul Biennial. In her video-lecture, she calmly traced the chain of associations from a metal bullet casing found after an ambush on Kurdish rebels in southern Turkey during which Steyerl's friend, Andrea Wolff, had been killed, all the way to Turkey's rich industrial and armaments conglomerates, who included Koç Holdings, the major sponsor of the Biennial itself.

Steyerl's address emblemized an observation we have made throughout this chapter. Namely, that the presentation and production of publics brought together the very local (through the specifically adaptive, hands-on experiences of new technologies), the regional (Asia or, more broadly still, the Asia-Pacific region), and the global (renowned artists, city boosterism, globally networked technologies, and the complicated corporate structures and activities of biennial sponsors) in ways that were not homogenizing, nor didactic, nor foreclosed. This was due precisely to the vastness of biennials and because these exhibitions paired previously unimaginable access to cultural information with the demand that national borders be opened to foreign cultural goods and with the always-tainted support of governments and corporations. Steyerl's lectures and videos were underpinned by this discomfort. Her widely circulated lecture on the contemporary state of "too much world," amid the death of the internet, elegiacally explained it:

Is the internet dead? This is not a metaphorical question. It does not suggest that the internet is dysfunctional, useless or out of fashion. It asks what happened to the internet after it stopped being a possibility. The question is very literally whether it is dead, how it died and whether anyone killed it.<sup>38</sup>



### Coda: 2014

Behind the scenes, the new “world art” of contemporary art – inclusive of art and experimental practices from around the world but structured by the somehow still-idealistic curatorial class of biennial organizers on semi-permanent safari from day jobs in the world’s major art museums – was very obviously starting to replace the North Atlantic canon that still dominated art-historical discourse and art markets across the globe. New media art and the internet had fleetingly appeared at the horizon of this discourse, as alternative film had earlier appeared as postmodernism’s liminal, experimental other. Within this conflicted context, it was biennials that could offer clear but bumpy insights into the form, structure, and changes underlying the developments of contemporary art, since they were inextricably imbricated with contemporary geopolitics and the politics of populist display. But for all that, ambitious biennial directors were also beginning to be less concerned with presenting a survey of contemporary art or illustrating a zeitgeist – through expansive themes or expanded geographies of artist selections – than with assembling a coherent historical argument through works of art. Jessica Morgan (who worked at Tate Modern but was about to take up a position as director of Dia Art Foundation in New York, illustrating the fact that previously nomadic biennial directors now held down art museum jobs) was director of the 2014 Gwangju Biennale, *Burning Down the House*. Her Biennale spanned several decades, from the Gwangju Uprising to the present. She pointedly insisted on the ability of a spectacular biennial to present a critique, writing,

The theme of the exhibition [Burning Down the House] highlights the capacity of art to critique the establishment through an exploration that includes the visual, sound, movement and dramatic performance. At the same time, it recognises the possibility and impossibility within art to deal directly and concretely with politics.<sup>39</sup>

Such a densely researched mega-exhibition would once have been the province of a team of curators in a flagship national art museum, taking years to prepare, as Morgan realized:

Unlike exhibitions staged by museums, with their often hegemonic cultural policies and interest in denoting legacies and traditions, the biennale is a mobile and flexible event that offers a spectrum of creative expressions that are immediate, contemporary, and topical.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 8.4 Cover of *Burning down the House: 10th Gwangju Biennale 2014*, exhibition catalogue, curators Jessica Morgan et al. (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2014). Courtesy Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

Such an exhibition now occurred in a purpose-built pavilion, independent of other museums, that the city had built a few years before to promote the Biennale, making it the centerpiece of the city's tourism. *Burning Down the House*, like *Anne, Ben Babar Mıyım* at Istanbul the year before and Okwui Enwezor's Venice Biennale, *All the World's Futures*, a year later, recounted how the tumultuous past arrived at the crisis-ridden present through works of art from across the globe that self-consciously narrated the history of the contemporary with a density of both obscure and canonical art works, from

Ed and Nancy Keinholz's enormous 1985 tableau of rearing horses and evil politicians, to El Arakawa and Inza Lim's vast 2014 assemblage portraying 1980s street-theater activists. Morgan assembled a historical world-picture linked by the theme of burning, incorporating spectacular works of art, even some in the service of hegemony, in a jigsaw-puzzle mapping. Her selections were determinedly global and thoroughly conscious of the reformulations of the artistic canon that biennials across the world had led, not least at Gwangju. Moreover, they showed that the domesticated playfulness of the contemporary was always haunted by political rupture and resurfaced histories – or, to be more accurate, that the one was always contemporaneous with the other. The “end of history,” with its insistence on the universal triumph of globalized capitalism and liberal democracy so beloved by conservative writers, had very clearly given way to the more complex but also more informed condition of the contemporary. Whether this would take a progressive or conservative trajectory under the directorship of curators like Morgan, with their pursuit of both the speculative and the museological, of historical depth and geographical breadth, remained open to question. Nonetheless, by 2014, biennials were well and truly both a symptom of and a cultural platform for that struggle.

## Notes

1. Two of the introductory contributions to *The Biennial Reader* sketch these origins: Caroline Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” in Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 66–87; also see Donald Preziosi, “The Crystalline Veil and the Phallogomorphic Imaginary” (2001), in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 30–49.
2. This approach found its precedents in the biennials of the South that we described in chapter 3, and also in the Perth-based but semi-nomadic Artists Regional Exchange (ARX) during the 1980s.
3. For a comprehensive explanation of the significance of “experimental” art in China at this time, see Thomas J. Berghuis, “Considering *Huanjing*: Positioning Experimental Art in China,” *positions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2004), pp. 711–731, esp. p. 717. Berghuis implied that these artists were deliberately positioning themselves against the grain, linking themselves to satellite exhibitions and alternative structures. These would (as even they predicted) eventually be recuperated, so that when the market for contemporary art in China expanded, it was focused

on avant-garde art and the artists were proved correct; experimental art became a linchpin of the emerging market.

4. For an exhaustive and influential set of definitions of what defines contemporary art, see Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), and in particular pp. 241–271.
5. Yinka Shonibare, in Tim Griffin et al., “Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition,” *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp. 152–163, esp. p. 158; Hito Steyerl, “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” *e-flux journal*, no. 49 (November 2013); [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_8974420.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8974420.pdf). Accessed September 17, 2015. Also see Geert Lovink, “What Is the Social in Social Media?” *e-flux journal*, no. 40 (December 2012); [http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article\\_8961658.pdf](http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8961658.pdf). Accessed September 17, 2015. Also see Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude. Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010).
6. Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007).
7. Alongside their co-directorship of the Sarai media network (which they co-founded in New Delhi in 2001) and exhibition of art works in many biennials, not least Okwui Enwezor’s 2002 documenta and his 2015 Venice Biennale, Raqs Media Collective were co-curators of *Manifesta 7* (2008), which was for that edition dispersed across the Tyrol region of Italy.
8. See for instance Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” *Documents*, no. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 2–19; also appearing in *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003), pp. 94–119; for a more theorized approach, also see Chantal Mouffe (and, indeed, all the contributions in this issue of *Open*), “Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism,” in Pascal Gielen (ed.), *Open*, no. 16, *Special Issue, The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon. Strategies in Neo-Political Times* (2008), pp. 32–40; Gielen was an important commentator on these issues.
9. The Taipei Biennale was an example of a biennial that inevitably became part of the political normalization of a contested nation. That biennial can be contrasted with Qalandiya International (QI), which took place for the first time in 2012 in a number of Palestinian towns and villages across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, directed by Jack Persekian. QI was enfolded in the contestation of the normalization that blocked the emerging Palestinian state along with the severe constraints surrounding the forms of artistic expression possible in such an extreme situation. See Dalia Hatuqa, “Biennale Seeks to Boost Palestinian art,” *Al Jazeera*, November 5, 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/11/201211410554507478.html>. Accessed October 10, 2015. Also see <http://www.qalandiyainternational.org/about>. Accessed October, 10, 2015.

10. See Canadian conceptualist artist Ken Lum's slightly bemused review, "Shanghai Biennale," *Art/Text*, no. 65 (1999), pp. 88–89.
11. The first large-scale presentation of art works by mainland Chinese artists at the Venice Biennale was in 1993 in a discrete exhibition, *New Chinese Painting*, organized and coordinated by Francesca Dal Lago, who was working in the cultural section of the Italian Embassy in Beijing; this exhibition, which included artists Wang Youshen, Xu Bing, Ding Yi, Yu Hong, Yu Youhan, Zhang Peili, and others, focused on Chinese avant-garde painting; see <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/SpecialCollections/Details/26>. Accessed September 17, 2015. The key on-line resource on Asian contemporary art is Hong Kong-based Asia Art Archive; see <http://www.aaa.org.hk>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
12. Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, "About 'Fuck Off'" (2000), quoted in Wu Hung, "The 2000 Shanghai Biennale: The Making of a Historical Event," *Art AsiaPacific*, no. 31 (2001), pp. 42–49, esp. p. 4; see also Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, *Fuck Off* (Beijing: private publication, 2000), and Richard Vine, "After Exoticism," *Art in America*, vol. 89, no. 7 (July 2001), pp. 30–39.
13. Wu Hung, "The 2000 Shanghai," p. 44; elsewhere, Wu wrote, "A prevailing view among advocates of experimental art during the early and mid-1990s was that this art could be legalized only when it had realized its economic potential. They subsequently launched a campaign for this purpose." Wu Hung, "A 'domestic turn': Chinese Experimental Art in the 1990s," *Yishu*, vol. 1, no. 3 (November 2002), pp. 3–17, esp. p. 6; also see John Clark, "Histories of the Asian 'New': Biennales and Contemporary Asian Art," in Vishakha Desai (ed.), *Asian Art History in the 21st Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 229–249; more generally, see Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); a few months after writing "The 2000 Shanghai Biennale: The Making of a Historical Event" (2001), Wu Hung was to co-curate the first international Guangzhou Triennial, the successor to the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair, which had opened a decade before, in 1992.
14. Li Xu, quoted by Lily Tung, "Spreading Openness with a Third Shanghai Biennale," *New York Times*, May 30, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/30/arts/30ARTS.html>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
15. For this quote and that in the next sentence, see Wu Hung, "The 2000 Shanghai Biennale," p. 45; the Shanghai Biennale contrasted with the Beijing National Art Gallery's refusal to exhibit anything except traditional art media. Hou Hanru approvingly quoted young independent critic Wang Min'an's contribution to Hou's Shanghai Biennale conference during the vernissage week; Wang had explained the precariousness of biennials in China through the idea of hybridity but not through the diasporic hybridity to which Western audiences were accustomed; he referred to the hybridity of two

indigenous Chinese “production models”: the Shanghai model, which was highly urban and globalized, and the Yan’an model, which was obdurately communist and nationalist. In turn, we might see the two as representing not progressive versus conservative, but as standing for two vastly different relationships to the contemporary. This explains the sheer difficulty of Hou’s (and other biennial curators’) situation; see Hou Hanru’s highly diplomatic apologia, “A Naked City: Curatorial Notes around the 2000 Shanghai Biennale,” *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 31 (2001), pp. 58–63, esp. p. 61; also see *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, collected and edited by Wu Hung for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which includes translations of key texts relating to the Shanghai Biennale and *Fuck Off*; see Wu Hung and Peggy Wang (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* (New York and Durham, NC: Museum of Modern Art and Duke University Press, 2010). See also <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/publication-contemporary-chinese-art-primary-documents/>. Accessed September 17, 2015.

16. Hou Hanru, “A Naked City” (2001), p. 62.
17. Zhang Qing, “Beyond Left and Right: Transformation of the Shanghai Biennale,” *Shanghai Biennale 2000* (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Publishing House, 2000), quoted in Wu Hung, “The 2000 Shanghai Biennale” (2001), p. 46.
18. Yang Fudong, quoted in Lily Tung, “Spreading Openness with a Third Shanghai Biennale,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/30/arts/30ARTS.html>. Accessed September 17, 2015. Also see Lily Tung, “Ray of Hope at Shanghai Biennale,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/13/style/13iht-tung.t.html>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
19. According to the General Secretary of the 2003 Beijing Biennale’s organizing committee, Tao Qin, “Because all other biennials focus too much on new forms of contemporary art, we want to be different from them and form our own characteristics.” Tao Qin, in curator Carol Lu’s review, “First Beijing Biennale,” *Flash Art*, vol. 36, no. 233 (November–December 2003), pp. 41 and 50, esp. p. 50. It was observed by all that this First Beijing Biennale was a conservative rebuke to unofficial artists and to China’s avant-garde; see Richard Vine, “The Academy Strikes Back,” *Art in America*, vol. 92, no. 6 (June–July 2004), pp. 134–141.
20. The Biennale’s press release stated, “The exhibits were mainly paintings and sculptures, instead of such forms as installation and video – the mainstream forms prevailing in other biennales in other countries. The First Beijing International Art Biennale on the one hand raised aloft the banner of originality and on the other hand, confined the exhibits to the categories of painting and sculpture.” (Beijing International Art Biennale, “Witness the Graceful Bearing of Chinese Contemporary Art and the Glamour of International Easel Art,” press release (2003). <http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn/lao/english/introduction.asp>. Accessed September 17, 2015.

21. Qiu Zhijie and Lu Jie, "The Long March: A Walking Visual Display," in Marie-Cécile Burnichon (ed.), *The Monk and the Demon: Contemporary Chinese Art*, curator Fei Dawei (Milan: Five Continents Editions, 2004), pp. 124–135, esp. p. 128. Amongst the many, often highly critical but little publicized and unofficial satellite events during the 2003 Beijing Biennale were the public discussions and events that The Long March collective held with curators, artists, and critics at their studio.
22. Hou Hanru, "A Naked City" (2001), p. 62.
23. We should strongly emphasize here, to avoid the charge that we are ourselves Orientalists, that we know full well that so-called local tradition everywhere had always been changing, metamorphosing, importing, and exporting. (On this point, see for example Anthony Gardner, "The Demand for Locality," in Natasha Bullock and Alexie Glass-Kantor (eds.), *Parallel Collisions: The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012), pp. 186–189.) We are, instead, observing that this same tradition was always at the same time locally policed – sometimes fiercely – in attempts to prevent change in the defense of established interests, or out of the desire to project (sometimes deeply chauvinistic) nationalisms, all unexpectedly coexisting in the case of early twenty-first-century China with a fierce desire by the state to put that nation on the map at almost no matter the cost, even if it meant accommodating itself to experimental art.
24. There is an extensive literature on this; for an overview, see David Barboza, Graham Bowley, and Amanda Cox, "A Culture of Bidding: Forging an Art Market in China," *New York Times*, October 28, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/china-art-fraud/>. Accessed September 17, 2015; David Barboza and Jonah M. Kessel, "A Culture of Bidding: The New Collectors," *New York Times*, December 17, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/the-new-collectors/>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
25. For a discussion of this and other key essays by Ascott see Edward A. Shanken, "From Cybernetics to Telematics: The Art, Pedagogy, and Theory of Roy Ascott" in Roy Ascott, *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology and Consciousness*, ed. Edward A. Shanken (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Roy Ascott's lecture, "The Planetary Collegium: Electronic Art and Education in the Post-Biological Era" was given at the *ISEA 96 Rotterdam: 7th International Symposium on Electronic Art*.
26. For Fukuoka's desire to keep its distance from the overheated art market, and in particular from the boom in Chinese art, see Kuroda Raiji, "Where Is the Tomorrow (of Asian Art)," in Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, *The 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2009: LIVE and LET LIVE* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2009), pp. 15–19; also on the same topic, from the *4th Asian Art Triennale* publication, see Endo Mizuki, "Beyond Astheno-Aesthetics: The

- Japanese Art Scene Post Mukami Takashi,” in *The 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2009*, pp. 151–152. Note that the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum chose to postpone its 2008 edition until 2009, thus deliberately avoiding participation in Art Compass.
27. See Okwui Enwezor, “The Politics of Spectacle,” in Okwui Enwezor (curator), *Annual Report: The 7th Gwangju Biennale*, exh. cat. (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2008), pp. 10–39; reproduced as “The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century,” in *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, no. 15 (2010), available at [https://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/Issue\\_15/articles/enwezor/enwezor.html](https://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_15/articles/enwezor/enwezor.html). Accessed September 17, 2015. Enwezor was intensely aware of the huge expansion of contemporary art and biennials in Asia; he wrote, “While it is premature to announce the dawn of the Asian Century, might it be possible, nevertheless, to assume that we may be in a critical moment in which a new cultural politics is about to emerge?” He answered this question with surprising optimism, observing that “judging from the shape and turn of events, the clockwork convergence of Asia’s polyglot cultures, the large and still-growing consumer society and middle class, and the rapidly changing technology that knits them together, it may not be premature to think that we are facing an Asian moment.” Enwezor’s catalogue essay was long and densely researched; though typical of his own style, this is in contrast to most other curators’ texts.
  28. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998); translated as *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), quotation at pp. 102 and 104 of the English translation; Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden (eds.), *Laboratorium*, exh. cat. (Cologne and Antwerp: DuMont, 2001); the exhibition was held in 1999.
  29. Most notably in the work of Howard Rheingold and Jaron Lanier: see, for example, Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991).
  30. Hal Foster, “Arty Party,” *London Review of Books*, vol. 25, no. 23 (December 4, 2003), pp. 21–22.
  31. As evident in the Grand Tour’s e-flux notice: <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/welcome-to-the-grand-tour-of-the-21st-century/>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
  32. <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/welcome-to-the-grand-tour-of-the-21st-century/>. Accessed September 15, 2015.
  33. This long list is not even exhaustive, but it is necessary for us to communicate the prolixity of the biennial form’s adoption. We have mentioned directors’ names to prompt the reader to glimpse the interlocking curatorial networks and commitments involved, and to remember that many of these curators’ names have already appeared in this book. The list of directors is not complete and



many of them invited still more, often very prominent, curators to select parts of their exhibitions, in the manner of Francesco Bonami's delegation of most of the 2003 Venice Biennale to other curators (as opposed to the tighter, collective method taken by Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11*). The exhibition titles, where we listed them, should immediately strike the reader as dated; they show the persistence of the vague, theme-based methodologies that had originated decades before with Harald Szeemann. The exceptions (such as Gwangju Director Okwui Enwezor's business-like, brisk *Annual Report*) betrayed those few directors' rare awareness of the exhaustion of such poetic, quasi-metaphysical tropes.

34. Tsutomu Mizusawa, in Edan Corkill, "Artistic Director Tsutomu Mizusawa Delves into His 'Time Crevasse,'" *Japan Times*, September 18, 2008. [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2008/09/18/culture/artistic-director-tsutomu-mizusawa-delves-into-his-time-crevasse/#.Uy\\_AK9y\\_ZKM](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2008/09/18/culture/artistic-director-tsutomu-mizusawa-delves-into-his-time-crevasse/#.Uy_AK9y_ZKM). Accessed September 17, 2015.
35. See the listing for *Paramodel Joint Factory* at the Kids APT website, [http://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/kids/exhibitions/exhibition\\_archive/kids\\_apt7](http://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/kids/exhibitions/exhibition_archive/kids_apt7). Accessed August 20, 2013.
36. See Hito Steyerl, "Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life," *e-flux journal*, no. 30 (December 2011), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life-12/>; see also David Joselit and Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Introduction," *October*, no. 142 (Fall 2012: Occupy Wall Street Special Issue), pp. 26–27; and, in the same issue, the discussions of Occupy as style in the "Occupy Responses" by Rosalyn Deutsche, pp. 42–43; in the same issue see Yates McKee, pp. 51–53; and Martha Rosler, pp. 59–61.
37. Caroline Turner, "Present Encounters: Mirror of the Future," in *The Second Asia Pacific Triennial*, exh. cat. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1996), pp. 11–13, esp. p. 12.
38. Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?," *e-flux journal*, no. 49, (November 2013). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
39. Jessica Morgan, "Introduction: Burning Down the House," in Jessica Morgan (ed. and curator), *Burning Down the House: Gwangju Biennale 2014* (Bologna: Damiani, 2014), pp. 10–16, esp. p. 12.
40. Jessica Morgan, "Burning Down the House," p. 12.

## Conclusion

In 2012, veteran curator and frequent biennial director René Block delivered a keynote lecture at the World Biennial Forum in Gwangju, one of the first such globally networked forums dedicated to thinking about the past, present, and future of biennials (and which, needless to say, was also intended to take place biennially).<sup>1</sup> During his presentation, Block argued that contemporary artists had escaped dependency on the ever-accelerating art market through the artistic freedoms offered by the biennial circuit. We have been arguing the contrary: that dependency on the ever-accelerating art market and the artistic freedoms offered by the biennial circuit were entwined and, at times, mutually productive while at other times bitterly divisive. The growing shift towards artistic play and education programs at biennials for children, such as the astonishingly popular Kids APT at the Asia-Pacific Triennial, was merely the tip of the iceberg in contemporary art's postcritical populism at one end of the spectrum, with political activism at the other. Biennials adopted populist and activist politics and reveled in the imperative that contemporary art be critical, cosmopolitan, experimental, networked, and memorable all at the same time. Yet this inconsistency risked uncertainty about biennials' intentions and resources, and the kinds of angry artist boycotts over corporate and state sponsorship that threatened the biennials at both São Paulo and Sydney in 2014. Biennials were in no way separate to the workings of the art market, nor to broader corporate interests and operations, and became less so over the period that this book has described. That was one of the narratives that evolved between the 1950s and today.

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*Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, First Edition. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner.

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Two main questions overlapped across the course of this book. What was the impact of biennials on contemporary art? And how did biennials change in the course of the appearance of contemporary art? At this point we will sum up the issues that we saw played out in different biennials across the period. We worked through a typology of biennial formats, noting that each appeared in turn as an answer to a set of problems and contingencies, whether these were artistic, political, or economic, but always in relation to globalization (a process that we carefully distinguished from globalism, as the desire to be recognizably global).

In chapter 1, we encountered Harald Szeemann's *documenta 5* of 1972. *documenta* is the flagship of surveys of contemporary art. *documenta 5* was the first meta-exhibition, and Szeemann perhaps the first star-curator (or auteur curator). He self-consciously re-created *documenta* not as a simple survey of art, nor as the means to link Germany to modern art once more, as it had been founded to do after the tragedies wrought by Nazism, but as a site where cultural and political change would be described and debated, so that biennials became cultural laboratories. This was a momentous shift in curatorial ambition, but one that also bracketed the place of art within a curator's field of vision, somewhat to many artists' dismay.

Chapter 2 examined the two most durable examples of the Second Wave of biennials, the biennials of São Paulo and Sydney. At the 1979 editions of each, local artists and activists wondered if a globally focused biennial that nevertheless avoided real change and substantial local connections was worthwhile. At a time when regional artists were working in a cultural geography of destabilized but still crushingly hegemonic center/periphery relationships, both biennials were conflicted in their relationships with local artists. The 1979 Biennale of Sydney, however, saw two innovations: it dispensed with organization by nationality and it experimented with the tropes of collaboration and cross-cultural exchange that were to become later so important in biennials.

In chapter 3, we focused on the important South–South history of global biennials preceding the biennials in Havana, in the decades prior to the 1980s. We located their long history in the postwar arc from decolonization to an emergent globalism from 1955 on, and understood the landmark 1986 Bienal de La Habana within that resistant stream of cultural, art-historical, and international reconstruction.

Chapter 4 looked at the institution of the regional biennial, in particular at the Asian biennials of the late 1980s and 1990s that surveyed the region for the first time, revising our understanding of the relationships between

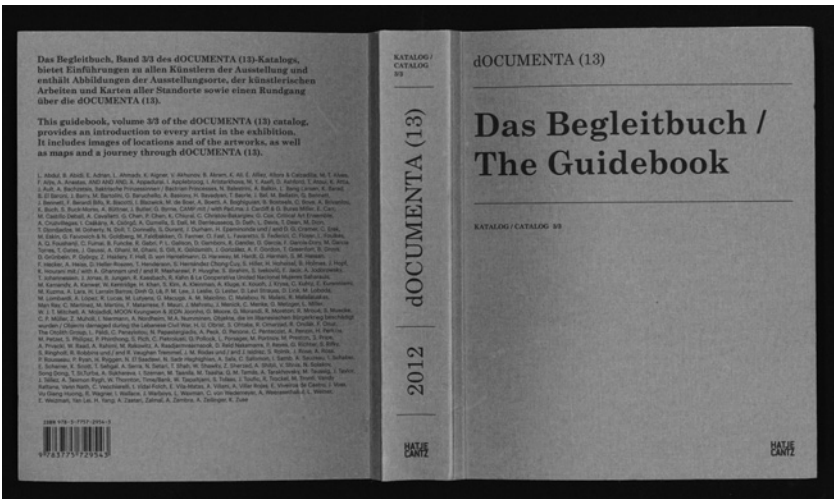


Figure 9.1 Cover of *DOCUMENTA (13): the Guidebook* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2012). Courtesy documenta and Hatje Cantz.

nascent formulations of “globality.” During those years at the end of the Cold War, the complex histories of each nation’s art, each with very different and separate modernisms, were combined to try to define an Asian contemporary art. But it was no accident that these exercises in regional self-definition were mounted in two nations – Japan and Australia – at the periphery of Asia with troubled relationships to the region. The two triennials that we focused on, at Fukuoka and Brisbane, were self-consciously historical and synthetic, melding the signifiers of both tradition and contemporary history.

Chapter 5 addressed the late-1990s appearance of biennials at sites of crisis or in their extreme aftermath, through which biennials navigating the “edges” became necessarily political in nature, either promoting political agendas or searching for new ones. We looked at the European Union creation of a nomadic biennial, Manifesta, to bridge the post-Cold War divide between Eastern and Western Europe, and equally to heal the split between Europe and North Africa. From there, we saw the fragility that attended a new international biennial in a traumatized and economically fragile location, specifically during the period immediately after the end of apartheid in South Africa, and finally described an extreme form of a small biennial, one

that was completely itinerant and which adopted an adversarial relationship to the biennial circuit: the *Emergency Biennale in Chechnya*.

In chapter 6, we looked at another, epochal documenta, at *Documenta11* (2002). Its director, Okwui Enwezor, produced a meta-exhibition across various sites, not just in Germany, in which each was called a Platform. Enwezor's exhibition had both activist and scholarly aspects: he demonstrated that the idea of an avant-garde was never simply something of the North Atlantic center. This was also an exhibition at which it became clear that globalization had prompted an unparalleled curatorial specialization in which internationally focused curators such as Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Charles Esche, or Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev now exercised an unmatched authority over contemporary art's discourse. In a stream of early twenty-first-century biennials across the globe, they, like Enwezor, attempted to redefine the existing canon of modern and contemporary art, ranging backwards and forwards rather than across the terrain of the present and, at least as important, redefining their audiences' engagement with art itself as something entangled with politics and geography through complex public programs that merged with the exhibitions themselves.

Chapter 7 returned us to the original art biennial, the Venice Biennale. But with the 2003 Biennale, we looked at how Venice, locked into its original format of national pavilions chosen by each nation and augmented by increasingly large and important survey exhibitions chosen by the director, adapted to the changes in biennials that we have been describing, in the conjunction of two modes of curating that were themes throughout this book: biennial directors' delegations of authority through collaborations with other curators, and the power of star-curators. The 2003 Biennale, self-consciously "globalist" rather than cosmopolitan in its selections, had been preceded by another biennial in Tirana that road-tested this unstable curatorial combination, with unexpected and problematic results.

In chapter 8, we described the post-Great Recession shift after 2008 towards a peripheralism, or "world art," inclusive of art and experimental practices from around the world but structured by a curatorial corps of biennial curators. The term, "experimental," was widely used, especially in China, to stand in not just for an avant-garde but also for a social laboratory. The term, "peripheralism," suggests how biennials resolved the problem of catering to two geographically differentiated audiences, two artistic groupings, and two art worlds or realms: the local, regional, and peripheral on the one hand, and the "international" (though, in reality, primarily

North Atlantic) on the other. These two types of art world intersected at each biennial that we examined, but though they remained differentiated from each other they became less and less easily distinguishable, since globalization produced and actively sought site-specific, “local” results rather than the broad-brush effect of homogenization. Moreover, after the Great Recession, we saw that biennial networks began to present an image of contemporary art’s globalization that was highly conflicted: at the same time as local images and contexts were constantly threatened in biennials with the fate of being subsumed into globalized economies, so biennials also became sites – sometimes self-consciously and self-critically, other times cynically – for the analysis of those economies’ seemingly all-consuming force, and protests against their power.

So, how had biennials functioned in the construction of contemporary art? They had created and enabled a world-picture of art that was globally networked without necessarily being a mere handmaiden to globalization (for servant status was one of the risks associated with the globalist yearnings of biennials) and which was entwined with the motifs of laboratory-like experimentation and global peripheralism.

We observed the gradual development and vast expansion of a complex, internally differentiated public for contemporary art that flocked to biennials worldwide in search of – and finding – communal, highly social experiences of experimental art that were, at the same time, spectacular and intimate. We saw that biennials began to appropriate the signs of politics, of teams, and of experimentation, matching these to a conventionalized idea of artistic imagination that was, in effect, postcritical and peculiarly spectacular, by which we mean that biennials became very public contexts for spectacular audience intimacy.

But simultaneously, and against the reign of cynicism that this might imply, biennials moved beyond the survey model that the Venice Biennale had invented, evolving into whole new modes and experimental forms. The global embrace of neoliberal capitalism had not precluded dramatic developments in the critical, self-reflexive curatorship of contemporary art. Curators, more than art historians, were now reformulating art history along global lines.<sup>2</sup>

What gave biennials their popular reach, but also their agitations and their imagining of alternatives? The answer, clearly, was located in the social realm (and in the constructed conviviality) that biennials inhabit. More specifically, it lay in the exceptional new history of curatorial innovation that answered the evolution of this environment of itinerancy and movement,

rather than in the aesthetic or the technological domains per se, though both were continually inflected with the desires of artists, curators, and even civic leaders to map a sense of regional connectedness. Ultimately, to be connected meant to be in biennials or to produce them. It was these exhibitions, rather than individual art works that successfully changed the (contemporary) art world as well as changed the way we think about cultural experience. For as we increasingly saw, the economic globalization that enabled biennials at the same time depended on extravagant conglomerations of international and local artists. This was linked to the ability of capitalism to cohabit with authoritarianism and neoliberalism, masking control with the spectacular. There was no need for political convergence towards freedom, as Ai Weiwei's experience in Shanghai, in 2000, and then later, demonstrated. As we observed early in this book, a scattered, restless, expanding, globalizing art world internalized the conditions of the experimental as an alternative to both the traditional and the perpetual avant-gardist, having re-identified and recycled these conditions as contemporary. Biennials then sublimated both provocation and intervention so that, by the early twenty-first century in some parts of the world, they now resided as the signifiers of a constructed and childlike intimacy. It was an ingenuous intimacy that substituted symbolic power for social affect and yet admitted genuinely critical art, in particular after the 2008 Great Recession, into its spectacular midst. Across the world's biennials, this had been cynical, pragmatic, and idealist, all at once.

From the 1950s onwards, it had largely been through biennials that the possibilities and problematic issues of modern and contemporary art have appeared with the most urgency. It had been through biennials, above all, that a new aspect of contemporary art, the curatorial, has appeared, together with new typologies of exhibition-making. Since 1972, it was through biennials, triennials, and documenta that contemporary art migrated from its often hermetic, often politically reconstructive, avant-garde and experimental origins into the realm of the spectacular, garnering global public attention to contemporary art. And as we are seeing now, in the early twenty-first century, biennials may also be leading the reconsideration and reconstruction of art's histories towards properly global narratives.

## Notes

1. René Block, "We Hop On, We Hop Off: The Ever-Faster, Spinning Carousel of Biennials," in Ute Meta Bauer and Hou Hanru (eds.), *Shifting Gravity: World*

*Biennial Forum No. 1* (Ostfildern: Hanje Cantz, 2013), pp. 104–109; this volume emerged from the *World Biennial Forum No. 1*, held during the 2012 Gwangju Biennale and convened by the Netherlands-based Biennial Foundation. Other forums on biennials had certainly taken place already – most notably, the symposium and publication *Das Lied von der Erde*, organized by René Block while he was director of the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel in 1999–2000, and the Bergen Biennial Conference, *To Biennial or Not to Biennial?*, held at the Bergen Kunsthall in 2009 (which then formed the basis for *The Biennial Reader*). However, these were ultimately one-off events, rather than the institutionalized, intentionally perennial and itinerant World Biennial Forums organized by the Biennial Foundation. See René Block (ed.), *Das Lied von der Erde* (Kassel: Museum Fridericianum, 2000); see also Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010). More recently, see Galit Eilat, Nuria Enguita Mayo, Charles Esche, Pablo Lafuente, Luiza Proença, Oren Sagiv, and Benjamin Seroussi (eds.), *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2* (Amsterdam and São Paulo: Biennial Foundation, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo and ICCo (Instituto de Cultura Contemporânea), 2015).

2. For this position, defining contemporary art as an “enterprise culture” see Greg Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); for an abridged historical perspective on this US activist position see his “Introduction” and in particular pp. 1–20; it should be clear by now that we do not completely disagree with the description of the global art biennial circuit that he outlines on p. 86 of *Dark Matter* but find it highly incomplete, since it excludes the more important contingencies and affects that operate worldwide; he writes that “this machine-like circuit resembles the deregulated operation of deregulated finance capital – invest in an underdeveloped region of the globe, boast that capital has made infrastructural improvements and increasing multiculturalism” (p. 86); for a more thorough, though intellectually related description of the contemporary art world’s enterprise culture of “projects,” “precariats,” networks, and employment uncertainty, see Lane Relyea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).



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