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THE EXHIBITIONIST



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The Exhibitionist

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Transcript from the grand entrance, Souvenir of the Great Exhibition, 1851
J. McNeven (draughtsman), William Simpson (lithographer), Ackermann & Co. (publisher)
Lithograph
12 3/8 x 18 1/2 in. (31.5 x 46.9 cm)
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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OVERTURE



Jens Hoffmann

No matter what field one might be operating in, a process of habitual self-reflection and analysis is necessary for intellectual and professional development. Time and space for self-reflection is something curators generally have very little room for in our event-driven, peripatetic lives. Since the first issue of *The Exhibitionist* we have aimed at fostering curatorial self-analysis and self-reflexivity to establish a frame in which we can discuss the current debates and shifts in exhibition making while revealing the broader historical arc in which curating is situated. This issue of *The Exhibitionist* inaugurates **Missing in Action**, a new section of the journal dedicated to republishing little-known or hard-to-find texts written by curators at the very moments they were organizing some of the seminal exhibitions of the 20th century, establishing conversations and ideas that would lay the groundwork for the curatorial field in which we operate today. **Missing in Action** is an attempt to contextualize the ideas and practices articulated in this journal within a solid historical framework. The reprinting of these little-read primary documents is particularly germane at the current moment, when a history of exhibitions is being compiled and canonized.

The rest of this issue is structured in the departments with which our readers are by now familiar. Magali Arriola is our first contributor to write on an artist's retrospective for **Curator's Favorites**. Her subject is *Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves* (Giorgio de Chirico: The Dream Factory) which was presented at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2009. The deceptively simple decision by curator Jacqueline Munck to install the show chronologically was a refusal to pass the usual judgments on this unorthodox artist, whose output after 1918 is often considered retrograde and embarrassing. Sarah Rifky recollects *Al Nitag*, a multi-venue festival in Cairo in 2000 and 2001, through the affective lens of the imperfection of personal memory, reconstructing a project widely considered to have been crucial to the growth of the Cairo art community. Tumelo Mosaka reconsiders *Places with a Past*, the seminal exhibition curated by Mary Jane Jacob for the 1991 Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina. For Mosaka, the insistence in *Places with a Past* on "bringing the past closer to the present reality" resonates with his own history and continues to shape his curatorial practice. In **Back in the Day**, Dan Cameron argues that the collision of the historical and the contemporary was the most compelling aspect of *America: Bride of the Sun*, a 1992 exhibition at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp that looked back at 500 years of mutual influence between the Americas and Flemish art.

Assessments in this issue looks at La Triennale 2012, curated by Okwui Enwezor and titled *Intense Proximity*. Nicolas Bourriaud, Stéphanie Moisdon, Vivian Sky Rehberg, and Cristina Ricupero assess the project and its argument that the traditional notion of “distance” has collapsed in the current moment. All of them stress the importance of the fact that the triennial opened in the midst of the French presidential elections, and that it dialogues with this context in an especially vivid way. In concert with this sustained analysis of La Triennale 2012, we have chosen the biennial as the topic of this issue’s **Typologies** section. Much has been written on this belabored subject, but as a format the biennial remains unassailable in its importance. This summer is the occasion of the openings of not only La Triennale 2012, but also the Berlin Biennale, Manifesta, and, of course, Documenta. In these pages, Nancy Adajania, Hou Hanru, and Adriano Pedrosa argue for the possibilities and the limitations of this exhibitionary form at the current moment.

To balance this attention on the biennial and its expansive forms, for **Rear Mirror** we asked Glenn Adamson and Nato Thompson to reflect on thematic exhibitions they recently organized for their respective institutions. Adamson examines the pleasures and pitfalls of curating *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 to 1990* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, while Thompson recounts his attempt to survey 20 years of politically and socially engaged art with his exhibition *Living as Form*, presented by Creative Time in 2011 in New York, in the midst of the emergence of the Occupy movement. In **Attitude**, Paul O’Neill interrogates the “paracuratorial,” a term coined by *The Exhibitionist* in our fourth issue to describe curatorial activities supplementary to, or produced in parallel with, exhibition making.

What emerges from many of the texts in this issue is the necessity for curators to consider the role of exhibition making beyond the display of autonomous works of art and more as a foray into the realms of the social and the political. These curators care deeply about presenting art in gallery spaces, but they also embrace a much wider interdisciplinary arena in their professional practices, and they do not consider their pursuits as confined to a single, definable discipline. Contemporary curating is for them almost like anthropology, in the sense that the anthropologist and the curator are both self-reflexive and self-conscious producers of culture. They are aware that they are not just showing or displaying an object or idea, but that they themselves are operating within a dynamic that actively creates new understandings of what is being shown, seen, or represented.

CURATORS’ FAVORITES



Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves installation view, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2009

BACKWARD GLANCING

Magali Arriola

Assessing the relevance of an exhibition today involves considering a whole set of issues related to temporality—specifically, how numerous motivations and concerns converge at a specific moment in time. Group shows and large-format exhibitions are taken for granted as barometers of the art world, in that they are assumed to be more ambitious than solo shows, truer “snapshots” of a historical or contemporary moment, and more thematically exhaustive (this last aspect is sometimes valued more than being strategically assertive). But the presumption that group shows are necessarily illustrative of the state of the arts has begun, rightly, to be debated. And along with it, the importance of the curator’s authorial position over the relevance of the critic—or even the artist(s) in question—in terms of pinpointing and articulating key practices and discourses. The monographic retrospective *Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves* (*Giorgio de Chirico: The Dream Factory*), curated in 2009 by Jacqueline Munck for the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, managed to defy

many of these assumptions regarding the primacy of group shows. It also made great strides in redeeming the subject’s reputation; for decades de Chirico’s oeuvre has been dismissed as a brief flash of creative genius followed by several decades of uncreative mediocrity. *La fabrique des rêves* recuperated the artist’s career for new critical interpretation while productively reflecting on the broader conditions that shape exhibition making, and art making, today.

The exhibition seemed at first glance to be a traditional display of the work of a historical artist, arranged in a predictable chronological sequence. But the sequence slowly revealed itself as not a default decision, but rather a very conscious approach on the part of Munck to disclose the many stylistic meanderings of de Chirico’s long career, framing the work from a perspective that was radically different from both of de Chirico’s previous major retrospectives. As one strolled through the galleries, moving forward along the timeline, the paintings moved stylistically backward as de Chirico revisited the Old



Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves installation view,
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2009

Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves
installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne
de la Ville de Paris, 2009



Masters, copied his first works, and even sometimes dated his canvases much earlier than their actual dates of execution. Paintings that had previously been dismissed by critics and art historians as retrograde and kitsch mostly continued to give that impression, but now in a surprising and intelligent manner that revealed de Chirico's conceptual vision as far ahead of its time. These same works began to call into question our assumptions about uniqueness, authenticity, and originality in avant-garde painting (and, with this, our entire understanding of modern art history).

How much of the charm and relevance of the show was attributable to de Chirico's enlightened and entangled practice, and how much to the curator's decision to follow a strictly chronological display that covered his entire career? Credit is due to both. De Chirico's *pittura metafisica*, spanning from 1911 to 1918, has traditionally been his only celebrated period. Considering that he died in 1978, that is a very small fraction of his total output. His fate at the hands of the critics is intimately linked to his relation with Surrealism and particularly with André Breton. Breton saw in de Chirico's early metaphysical paintings the origins of the Surrealist movement and aesthetics, but felt betrayed by the fact that, as early as 1919, de Chirico had deliberately deviated from what was to become the Surrealist roadmap. Before Breton ever discovered the metaphysical paintings, de Chirico had already started copying works by Raphael, Titian, and Rubens, among others, as a way of improving his painting technique, and soon found in antiquity a source of further inspiration. Since he no longer conformed to Breton's dictates regarding the avant-garde, the Surrealists dismissed his current work as anachronistic and retrograde.

Their scorn for his latest paintings did not

prevent them, however, from continuing to buy and resell his older works at a profit, in part to finance their publication *La Révolution surréaliste*. The definitive rupture came when, in 1925, tired of seeing the Surrealists speculate with his early paintings, de Chirico responded to an acquisition request from Breton by offering to paint a replica of his own 1916–18 canvas *Les muses inquiétantes* (The Disquieting Muses). Breton publicly denounced him as a self-forger, an episode that would mark a turning point in de Chirico's career. From then on he not only persisted in copying Old Master paintings in museums, but also began reproducing his works and emulating his own early style. His actions could be read in part as a retaliation against Breton, as he was obviously aware that duplicating his paintings would diminish their value. De Chirico was irritated by the Surrealists' insistence on enclosing his artistic production in a rigid interpretive frame, and by the idea that he had to conform to the laws of the nascent market for avant-garde works.

In 1928, Breton and Louis Aragon went so far as to declare de Chirico dead in an epitaph published in *La Révolution surréaliste*.¹ When Alfred H. Barr Jr. organized the show *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1936, he decided to include 16 de Chirico paintings—all from before 1918—and terminated the artist's biography in 1924.² In 1982, four years after the painter's actual demise, William Rubin organized de Chirico's second and last retrospective before Munck's exhibition, also for New York's Museum of Modern Art.³ He proposed to show the metaphysical period exclusively, stating that the late de Chirico was "a tragedy that turned into farce,"⁴ but was later convinced by his co-curators Jean Clair and Wieland Schmied to add 18 paintings (out of the

116 works in the show) from after 1918. Of these, none was dated later than 1934. For his part, de Chirico always rejected the idea that his work must to be inscribed in a linear reading of art history, and developed instead a series of appropriation and repetition strategies. Andy Warhol, who met de Chirico in 1974, later declared, "I loved his work and his way of repeating the same paintings again and again. I loved that idea and I thought it would be fantastic to do it."⁶ De Chirico's concepts of uniqueness and originality were clearly far ahead of their time, yet as the conceptual underpinnings of modern and postmodern art evolved and clarified over the ensuing decades, his practice was never critically redeemed as postmodern *avant la lettre*. The painterly perfection to which he aspired was less about perfecting representation than about distancing himself from *images* so that the images could turn into *things*; for him, reproduction and technique were means to deconstruct representation itself. That detachment is manifested as well in his 1945 autobiographical novel *Il Signor Dudron*, in which his alter ego asserts: "The intention of the moderns to detach themselves from reality by replacing it with something else is an effort as absurd as it is useless. Reality in painting cannot exist because it doesn't exist on Earth. The universe is only our representation."⁷

What made the 2009 retrospective of de Chirico's work particularly compelling was how the straightforwardness of its display achieved a level of complicity with the work's formal and conceptual intricacies. There was a constant feeling of *déjà vu* as one advanced in the exhibition space, as if walking backward in time and reading art history against the grain. Coming upon early styles and familiar motives again and again is precisely the opposite of what you expect in a retrospective, which usually purports to outline an arc of development that is always progressing. The more discomfort these outlandish traditional paintings produced, the more complex their unfolding in space became. The seeming effortlessness and simplicity in the chronological staging of the work had the effect of calling into question the tendency of retrospective exhibitions to enclose an artist's oeuvre in a linear reading of history. Here, a chronological display actually opened up a series of conceptual pock-ets, and very timely questionings.

Similar questionings have arisen in the last

decade, in the same institution, at the instigation of such contemporary artists as Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, and very recently by Maurizio Cattelan in his retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum.⁷ This generation of artists has attempted to deviate from the traditional retrospective format, using strategies such as restaging or narrating their own works in order to evade fetishization, or ossification within any one critical approach. Successful or not, their different attempts do call into question the possibility of finality in a monographic retrospective. They usher in a new understanding of this type of show, suggesting that no one instance can possibly be considered the self-contained, ultimate word on its subject. Rather, the monographic retrospective is an expandable, infinitely mutable process that produces its own temporalities and ratifies the idea of an exhibition as a creative, authored work in its own right.

Notes

1. *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 11, March 15, 1928.
2. Barr organized de Chirico's first monographic exhibition in 1955. For a complete analysis of the Italian painter's critical fortune, see Elisabeth Wetterwald, "Et si 'the late' était 'too early'? The late Chirico" in *Giorgio de Chirico: La fabrique des rêves* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2009).
3. This exhibition traveled to Tate Gallery in London, Haus der Kunst in Munich, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.
4. William Rubin in Elisabeth Wetterwald, "Et si 'the late' était 'too early?'," 244.
5. Ibid., 249.
6. The original French is: "La dite intension qu'ont les modernes de se détacher de la réalité, en la remplaçant par quelque chose d'autre, est un effort aussi absurde qu'inutile. La réalité ne peut exister en peinture car en général elle n'existe pas sur la terre. L'univers est uniquement notre représentation." The splitting of the artist's persona of course also became apparent in the various self-portraits he painted over the years, in which he is dressed for instance as a woman, as a toreador, or in a 17th-century theater costume. His fluid conception of his own gender seems, like his art, to have been quite ahead of his time.
7. Cattelan's recent retrospective *All* challenged traditional display methods by presenting replicas of his works hanging together in a mass in the Guggenheim's rotunda, in no chronological order or hierarchy. Cattelan has stated that after this show he will retire from the art world, thus bringing up a different set of questions than the ones that would otherwise arise from a simple retrospective.



WHAT ART DOES BEST

Tumelo Mosaka

It has been two decades since Mary Jane Jacob curated the exhibition *Places with a Past* for the 1991 Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina. To this day, the project remains a high point in discussions about public art and its broader social and political reach. Its placement of art in multiple public sites in a city not so well known for contemporary art offered both context for, and critique of, Charleston's history. Jacob commissioned projects that would be in dialogue with historical events—beginning with the arrival of enslaved Africans and the American Civil War—still evident in the memories of people and in the physical landscape. Working with established artists such as Christian Boltanski, Chris Burden, Antony Gormley, Ann Hamilton, David Hammons, Houston Conwill, Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, Cindy Sherman, Ronald Jones, James Coleman, and Lorna Simpson, among others, she established a broad framework from which to examine site and artwork as integrated elements. Whether stand-alone sculptures, installations, or traditional two-dimensional displays, all the works focused on bringing the past closer to the present reality. Questions related to what is remembered, and how those

memories relate to local conditions, can never be exhausted.

These questions resonate strongly with my own trajectory, having lived and worked in South Africa. During the apartheid era, making and viewing art there was a political act. Space was racially determined, limiting the movements of black people. Most black artists living in cities responded to this repression by producing works that depicted conflict, compromise, and pain. Space for formal exhibitions was only available to the few with access to the dominant (white male) art arena. Artists outside of this ivory tower had to find alternative ways to engage in visual dialogues on their own terms, offering their own perspectives on life in South Africa. So they began to show in already-existing spaces such as community centers, churches, and even garages. And, indeed, in addition to giving disadvantaged artists the opportunity to show, such exhibitions brought fine art to audiences who were unlikely to attend exhibitions at official institutions. During my time in South Africa working on the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995 as a trainee curator, I was determined to bring to the fore artists who had suffered racial

Houston Conwill, Estella Conwill Majozo, and Joseph De Pace
The New Charleston, 1991
Annotated floor map
Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, Charleston, South Carolina

discrimination and to make art accessible to communities by placing it in public spaces.

Most of my subsequent projects have emerged out of direct connections with specific local audiences. An example of this was the exhibition *Youth Uprising*, which I curated in 1996 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the June 16, 1976, Soweto riots. Issues surrounding commemoration, national memory, and identity took precedence. The question of whose history is being told, and what is being commemorated, were crucial given the political nature of the undertaking. I organized a photographic project examining the events of June 16 and displayed the images in the heart of Soweto, an urban area in Johannesburg. The exhibition was mounted close to a busy intersection where a plaque stands in honor of the first riot victim, Hector Pieterson, who was only 15 years old when he was killed. Displayed in shipping containers, the black and white pictures documented the brutal and violent riots that changed the course of history in South Africa. Many of these images had been banned in the media, and this was their first appearance in the country. As historical documents, they provided evidence of the brutality experienced by black citizens.

The containers were thus transformed into a temporary landmark honoring those who lost their lives in the struggle against apartheid. This limited-time “occupation” brought attention to the lack of cultural resources in black communities as well as the transitory experience of many people living in townships such as Soweto. Toward the end of its three-month scheduled showing, the project was extended for another four years due to popular demand. It drew enormous public attention and became a mobilizing force for the community to lobby the government to provide services and facilitate social transformation. Eventually the Hector Pieterson Museum was constructed on the site. Today, this museum keeps alive the memories of all those who suffered under apartheid.

Given this experience, I feel a close affinity with Jacob’s engagement with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. I never actually saw *Places with a Past*, but thanks to its afterlife in literature and personal accounts, I have been able to engage with the participants and hear their memories; many of them continue to seek out ways of including art in their personal lives. Of

the 18 works created for *Places with a Past*, three endured after the exhibition, even though they were not necessarily intended to be permanent. The reason for their continued existence is in part attributable to the engagement of the community as stakeholders and participants. I feel very drawn to these projects today. One is *The New Charleston* by Houston Conwill, Estella Conwill Majozo, and Joseph De Pace, which illustrates via an annotated floor map the historical journey traveled by enslaved Africans, blending history, folklore, and political perspectives. Laid out at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, the work continues to serve educational purposes and remains a cultural force in the community.

Another is David Hammons’s *America Street* and *House of the Future*, which occupy two vacant lots in Charleston’s East Side, a predominantly African American neighborhood. Rather than working with existing civic institutions, Hammons immersed himself directly in the community and ended up collaborating with a local contractor named Albert Alston. Together they built a narrow, two-story house structure on one corner, and developed a park across from it with a 40-foot flagpole flying the Black Nationalist flag. Over the years, this work came to represent collective solidarity and turned into a popular gathering point for East Side residents. The house stands as a symbol of shelter and security, even while its fragile and repurposed parts seemingly attempt to hold onto memories of times past and traditions lost. Alston continues to be the advocate for and caretaker of the properties, working collaboratively with the city to maintain them. His exposure to art inspired him to create his own work a decade later called *AI’s Door*. Situated near a sidewalk along a vacant lot across from the Hammons house, a lonely door stands on a brick threshold. Alston has said that this work is a meditation on gentrification.

To achieve this kind of impact in a community requires time, dedication, and public participation. Jacob has applied this method in other projects such as *Culture in Action* (1991–93) in Chicago, *Conversations at the Castle* (1996) in Atlanta, and *Evoking History* (2001) in Charleston. I had the honor of collaborating with her on *Evoking History* and on *Memory of Water* (2002), a multiyear project in Charleston. All of these projects invested in a process through which art-



Youth Uprising installation view, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1996



David Hammons
America Street, 1991
Permanent public project at the corner of America and Reid Streets, Charleston, South Carolina

works unfolded over time and would continue to exist under a more open-ended designation, not always "art." Artists had to negotiate with communities and in some cases give up authorship. They had to extend their practices beyond the museum walls and engage audiences as part of the creation and meaning of the work.

In my current capacity as the curator at the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I've implemented some of these artistic strategies aimed at opening up the function of the museum. I have transformed the museum into a learning laboratory, reconceiving its gallery spaces as active zones for creative viewing, discussion, and experimentation. The aim is to introduce museum visitors to

a variety of activities and performances outside conventional experiences of art viewing. At any given time, the space can change to reflect the program currently being realized. *OPENSTUDIO* (2011) involved a residency program where artists shared and reflected with students and the public in ways that encouraged critical thinking about the role of art in today's society. Questions about what art is and what it does best remained intentionally ambiguous. What matters most is creating an experience of art, where reality is suspended and new possibilities are imagined. This approach to art and exhibition making is a mode of thinking collaboratively with others about where we are and how we might envision past and future realities.

Al Nitaq installation view,
Viennnoise Hotel, Cairo, 2001,
showing Lara Baladi, *Sandouq el-Donia*, 2001



HAVE YOU MET MARIO?

Sarah Rifky

When William Wells approached the existing galleries of downtown Cairo in 1998, which then included Mashrabiya, Karim Francis, and Cairo-Berlin, he gave them little maps of the surrounding neighborhood in the hopes of prompting them to think of their spaces as a circuit. Wells had just founded Townhouse, which he called a gallery *of*, rather than *for*, contemporary art: an important distinction. Townhouse quickly became part of the constellation of art spaces, although local responses to the initiative vacil-

lated between welcome and skepticism. But this is not how we want to start.

Memory is imagination backward, for the future. Future, like time, is not an accurate condition, but one invented by culture. I remember Mario, vaguely. I remember him as part of *Al Nitaq*, an independent art festival that took place in 2000 and 2001 in Cairo. *Al Nitaq* was initiated by the circuit of art spaces downtown, and what remains are fragments of memory and stories of little accord. As I recall, Mario starred as two

different characters: one a masked manga hero amid other fantastic personages in a monumental photo collage by Lara Baladi in Cairo's dilapidated, somewhat haunted, gorgeous Viennnoise Hotel, and the other a homoerotic figure in a photograph by Youssef Nabil. Mario, an artist himself, was also Italy's diplomatic consul in Egypt at that time, and for the second iteration of *Al Nitaq* he "loaned" Italy's consulate to a group exhibition curated by Stefania Angarano of Mashrabiya Gallery. The night of the opening he drove his "diplomatic envoy," which was a roster of artists, up Nabrawy Street toward Townhouse, the up-and-coming gallery of rising stars.

There were other characters like Mario in Cairo at that time. Yasmina, whose real name is Francesca Sullivan, is a cultural critic by day and a professional belly dancer by night. She wrote "Art Attack," one of only two remaining written reviews of *Al Nitaq*.¹ Every story of art has a beginning. Some stories persist, others don't, and not all translate poetically. *Al Nitaq* loosely translates as *The Surrounding*. Although it never appeared in translation, let's use *The Surrounding* as shorthand for this short-lived phenomenon, of which most of what remains is myth.

The opening night of the second *Al Nitaq* transformed all of downtown Cairo into a set. Tilting away from the concurrent Cairo Biennale, *The Surrounding* was carefully planned to contrast with that exemplary state event for art at the Palace of Art, part of the Opera House cultural complex. Sprawling across art and non-art venues, from real galleries to decrepit cafés in the old, cosmopolitan downtown, *Al Nitaq* made the separation of art from life unnecessary, demonstrating that art does not need moneyed, luxurious territory, the state's support, or complex architecture.

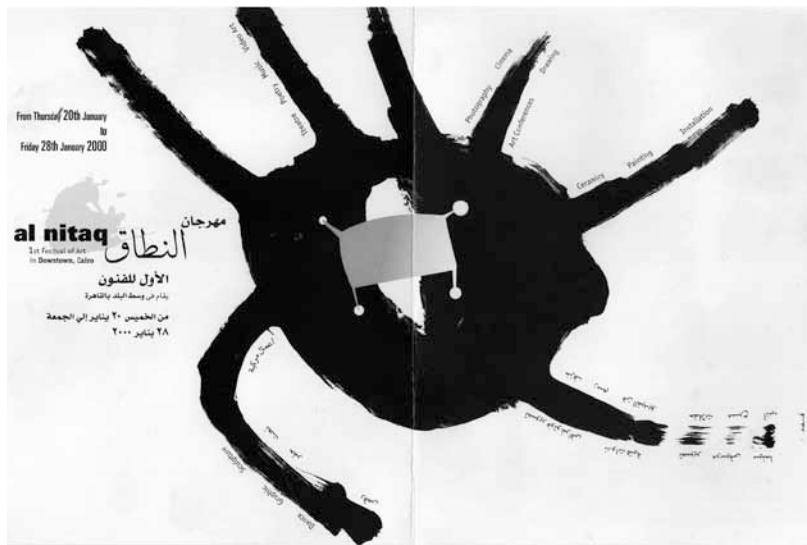
The Surrounding, largely undocumented and conceived as a critical yet celebratory occasion of coming together, continues to influence ideas of what art can be in a place like Cairo. To many it remains the single most generative moment in Cairo's affair with contemporary art. There are rumors that *Al Nitaq* took place more than twice, an inaccuracy that doesn't really matter. It led directly to other projects, festivals, initiatives, and practices, in Egypt and elsewhere.

The entire set, surroundings, and characters that rendered this event possible, artworks and people alike, seemed largely unaware in

the moment of the paradigmatic shift that was occurring, the epochal joining together of the exhibition-event, its surroundings, and its public participants. Its magnitude in terms of works, talks, lectures, interventions, and art, which filled entire restaurants, old hotels, dusty apartments, dense alleys, walkways, streets, in-between spaces, and, of course, galleries, made it impossible for anyone to regard it from an "outside," external vantage point. The subsequent evolution of the art world in and around downtown Cairo has continually evoked traces of *Al Nitaq*. Verbal anecdotes draw basic, sketchy descriptions: what was next to what, who showed where, who slept with whom, anxieties over showing work, all the things that went wrong. As artists, as makers, as participants, how carefully did we look at the actual exhibition? Why can't we remember the works more clearly?

Although the celebratory cacophony seems to have overshadowed the individual works, some continue to resonate in retrospect. I remember most clearly the group exhibition at Townhouse curated by Mai Abu ElDahab. Curating, at Townhouse, was often the result of thinking-with-artists rather than its own vocation per se. On the first floor one wandered between Mona Marzouk's pastel silhouettes, large plywood model structures and a painted minaret, and Amina Lela Mansour's *The Twin's Domain*, which was composed of cotton, loofah sponges, fibers, silk thread, and a sink carved out of oak whose taps, when turned, remained dry.

A floor above, Hassan Khan's *Reading the Surface: 100 faces, 6 locations, 25 questions* (2001), a series of simultaneously projected videos, showed portraits imposed on gray buildings and aerial shots of the city, remnants of Cairo's urban metamorphoses. The videos asked: Do you know how to move through the city? Do you know how to control people? It was a collapse of identity and geography, an exploration of centers that generate discourse: a football stadium, a mosque, a Mercedes showroom. Each individual featured in Khan's film states where they make their home in the "hyperstratified" urban space (to borrow a term from Negar Azimi). Shady El Noshokaty's *The tree of my grandmother's house* (2001) is a (physical and psychological) transference of the home setting in which the artist's grandmother died. Wael Shawky's video *Sidi El Asphalt's Moulid* (2001) offers up an entire world:



Al Nitaq poster, 2001

View of Groppi on Talaat Harb Square,
one of the *Al Nitaq* venues, Cairo, 2001

a constructed city covered in asphalt, tar, and bitumen. A hip-hop soundtrack playing Cypress Hill is perfectly synced to a video of Sufi dancers.

I think of Mario as like the works in *The Surrounding*. He embodied the double position of both object and subject. He was a character in works of art, an artist, a patron, a host, and part of a support structure. In the second *Al Nitaq*, Sherif El-Azma showed *Interview with a Housewife* (2001), a short video in which he interviews his mother in her kitchen. She talks about watching television. Toward the end of the seven-minute work, he explains to her that he will have to borrow the very same TV set she speaks of with such attachment and display it for the duration of the exhibition. (I must admit I cannot remember the actual presentation of the video and TV set.) Like Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), El-Azma's work, and also the exhibition, was an apparatus, a manifestation of the very conditions that bring it about. The interview, as "artwork," and the surroundings, as "exhibition," were not *about* anything; rather they were the very things they spoke of.

In myth, according to Roland Barthes, there is nothing that separates the object and the subject: I speak the tree, I do not speak *about* the tree. Acting the object is the meaning of one's action, and as such language is operational, political.² *Al Nitaq* was not for or about art, but of art, as echoed by Townhouse's choice of preposition. It was made of art, and annexed everything that came into contact with it. It was never conceived as an exhibition that could be seen critically, with distance. Perhaps this is what is most significant about it. It demonstrated that art could not be located "outside" or "elsewhere," and that some art cannot be collected, or even completely remembered, but lives on only as myth.

Notes

1. Francesca Sullivan, "Art Attack," Egypt's *Insight* magazine (April 2001): 54–58. The other was Nigel Ryan, "Skating on Ice," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 22–April 8, 2001.

2. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973): 145–46.



America: Bride of the Sun installation view, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, Belgium, 1992

BACK IN THE DAY



THE CONQUEST, REVISITED: AMERICA: BRIDE OF THE SUN TWENTY YEARS ON

Dan Cameron

Pity the conquistadors. After centuries of European and American whitewashing of the historic narrative about how the West was won, by the time the long-awaited sesquicentennial of Columbus's achievements finally rolled around back in 1992, relatively few were in the mood to celebrate. A wave of revisionist history, begun in the 1970s and crystallized in such popular works as Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980)—in which the Spanish and subsequent European arrivals are represented as fundamentally conscienceless marauders who plundered the wealth of the New World and wreaked genocide upon its inhabitants—Western educational and cultural institutions found themselves gripped with postcolonial fever. In that era before “politically correct” had become a damning rhetorical slur, a collective, albeit tacit, recognition of symbolic acts of resistance taking place throughout Spanish-speaking America seemed to offer the best explanation for why celebrations north of the border also tended to be muted. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the biggest parties took place in Spain itself, with Fernando and Isabella’s home base of Seville presenting a World’s Fair in 1992, the same year that Barcelona hosted the summer Olympic Games. Needless to say, there was little revisionism or historical soul searching on display at either event.

In my estimation, the most interesting art exhibition about the colonization of the Americas took place that year in Antwerp, at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts. On the one hand, while it’s probably safe to say that *America: Bride of the Sun* would not have been organized at any other moment in history, it is equally true that the final product was considerably more enlightened and engaged than anybody could have expected it to be, considering that its studiously non-provocative subtitle was “500 Years of Latin America and the Low Countries.”

The starting premise was to provide an in-depth exploration of how the image of America found its way into the iconography of Flemish art, along

with an equally vigorous examination of the impact that Flemish paintings and furniture and the (mostly) men who produced them had on the development of art in the New World. While this might sound like an especially narrow focus, the historical backdrop is a rich one. At one end of this exchange is Flanders, then part of Spain's global empire, which had attained its economic stability in part through the production of luxury goods such as the religious paintings that were deployed in considerable numbers during the 17th century in the Christianization of the New World. At the other end is the former silver mining capital of Potosí, Bolivia, which for centuries was an immensely lucrative investment for the Spanish crown, and which in turn developed its own school of indigenous painters, who used the imported European paintings as a stylistic jumping-off point for their increasingly inventive, detailed creations.

To better articulate the tensions not only between the Old and New Worlds, but also between past and present, the project's main author, Dr. Paul Vandenbroeck, decided at an early stage to bring in as his primary collaborator the contemporary art curator Catherine de Zegher (who would later go on to direct the Drawing Center in New York, among other accomplishments). It may not have been the easiest partnership for either side, but to the engaged public it made for a fascinating exhibition. De Zegher undertook what was at the time a relatively groundbreaking research trip through Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay, and subsequently invited more than 20 Latin American artists to act as full participants in the exhibition's composition and layout. Also featured were a sprinkling of essential modern figures such as Frida Kahlo, Hélio Oiticica, and Joaquín Torres-García. In other words, rather than being delegated to a coda-like "contemporary update" section, the works of living artists such



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as José Bedia, Waltercio Caldas, Luis Camnitzer, Lygia Clark, Juan Davila, Eugenio Dittborn, Jimmie Durham, Juan Francisco Elso, Victor Grippo, David Lamelas, Cildo Meireles, Ana Mendieta, Oscar Muñoz, Gabriel Orozco, and Cecilia Vicuña were installed (and sometimes even created) in close dialogue with the historical areas of investigation that were most pertinent to the subjects the artists were addressing, and at a scale that, while not comparable to that of the historical section, comprised about a third of the overall exhibition.

Curatorially, this was a masterstroke. Viewers encountered Mendieta's documentation of a live burial in the desert, or Kahlo's self-portrait as an infant nursed by an indigenous nanny, as part of the section dealing with historical images of women and the inscription of land and body in colonial art. As de Zegher explained in a written exchange with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh that served as a catalogue text, "The insistence on the historical development of colonization functions as a socioeconomic context for the contemporary work." This strategy was no doubt carefully calibrated as a means of distancing her own approach from that of Jean-Hubert Martin, the Parisian curator whose encyclopedic exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* had declared itself the first-ever global art exhibition only three years before (it was later ascertained that the 1st Havana Biennial of 1984 had beaten them by a half-decade), and came under criticism at the time for imposing a heavily Eurocentric framework of museum practice on non-European artistic creations that had emerged from radically different sociocultural matrices. Given the rapid developments in communication, shipping, and display technologies that had only recently transformed the elusive goal of a comprehensive exhibition of global contemporary art into a tantalizing possibility, and given Martin's evident failure to sufficiently insure himself against charges of neocolonialism,



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it is no surprise that de Zegher steered *America: Bride of the Sun* in such a way as to make as explicit as possible the presence of colonial history in the daily reality of artists in Latin America.

The results, both critically and aesthetically, were remarkably engaging, at points dizzyingly so. Twenty years ago in Europe, there was not much firsthand experience of contemporary art from South America, Mexico, or the Caribbean. Works that today are near-canonical, such as Gabriel Orozco's *My Hand Is the Memory of Space* (1991), with its vast fanlike arrangement of wooden ice cream spoons, and Cildo Meireles's *Missao/Missoes (How to Build Cathedrals)* (1987), its vertical chain of coins rising to a canopy of bones, were nothing short of revelatory for a large segment of the exhibition's public. These installations, with their familial echoes of Arte Povera, Informalism, and Conceptual Art, were also fully connected to a wealth of historical documents, artifacts, and works of art associated with the history of the region from which they emerged. Some artists, such as the Chileans Juan Davila and Eugenio Dittborn, had long been working to develop artistic strategies that circumvented both the Pinochet military dictatorship and the international cultural boycott it had inspired. Others, including the late Cuban sculptor Juan Francisco Elso and the Arkansas-born Cherokee Jimmie Durham, trafficked in a tightly wound pseudo-primitivism that retained the essence of the colonized Other. Durham's vanquished everywoman *Ama* (1992) and the pierced warrior of Elso's *Por America* (1986) packed an added forensic punch bestowed by the proximity of historical artifacts that had been used in the same, often coercive, process of colonization.

The prominence of many of the included artists lent the undertaking a strong street credibility, but the greatest surprise in *America: Bride of the Sun* may have been the sheer beauty, formal ingenuity, and deep pathos of the

historical works imported from South American museums. For those who had not yet experienced firsthand the masterworks of indigenous art in the Museo Pedro de Osma and the Barbosa Stern Collection in Lima, the Museo Arqueológico in Cuzco, Peru, or the Museo de la Catedral in La Paz, Bolivia—or for anybody who finds it difficult to envision overwhelmingly native 17th- and 18th-century painters creating powerful images of Saint George and the Dragon, or the sublimely incandescent Virgin of Potosí—such unsuspected treasures of colonial art made an extremely powerful impression.

Leaving the exhibition reluctantly the day I visited, I still remember wondering why so much of the art of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking America, new and old, was still terra incognita for viewers of the industrialized world. My next thought was a moment of insight about the globalized media playing much the same role today as the Catholic Church did across the long, tortured timeline of colonization. The reason why certain cultural legacies aren't accessible to us is not because they don't exist or lack significance. It's because all too often we fail to acknowledge that the power to dictate terms for marketing good taste and artistic consumption is tantamount to one side setting all the terms for the "exchange." This exhibition helped bolster my own belief that curatorial practice should not be a subterfuge for uncritically rewarding the winners every time, because for one brief, shining moment, it was possible to envision a world in which those who lost the conquest had nonetheless won the war.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Wrapped Kunsthalle, 1967–68
16,156 square feet (2,430 square meters) of
reinforced polyethylene secured with 1.9 miles
(3 kilometers) of nylon rope

MISSING IN ACTION



EXCHANGE OF VIEWS OF A GROUP OF EXPERTS

Harald Szeemann
Introduced by Chelsea Haines

“Exchange of Views of a Group of Experts,” originated as a series of conversations that took place in 1969 and 1970 among a number of museum practitioners and theorists. The conversations were eventually edited and interpreted by Harald Szeemann and published in 1972 in Unesco’s *Museum* journal in a special issue surveying museums of contemporary art. That issue also featured a series of profiles of contemporary museums written by Michael Kustow and a questionnaire on policies and procedures sent to museums exhibiting contemporary art. “Exchange of Views of a Group of Experts” synthesizes a dialogue on museum practices that was ongoing at that time among directors of leading institutions in Europe.

The text is actually not so much an exchange of views, but rather a streamlined statement authored by a collective “we.” While today we cannot know Szeemann’s precise degree of fidelity in interpreting his colleagues’ conversations and opinions, it is assumed that his cohort signed off on his treatment of their conversations. The excerpt republished here is part of a much longer and more complex piece concerned with taking stock of what museums of contemporary art stood for at that particular juncture in time, and what was thought to be in store for the future.

Artistic practice had expanded into dramatically new forms in the 1960s, and exhibition making was clearly transforming in radical ways as a result. Szeemann himself was a chief protagonist in this now well-documented shift. The focus of the discussion, however, is not new art but rather the broader political moment of 1968 and the need to expand the museum beyond its hallowed territories into the realm of everyday life. The text calls for a deliberate shift away from the museum as a mausoleum for cultural objects and toward the museum as a site of information, experimentation, and democratic public access to art and ideas. This shift was being driven both by the evolving practices of artists and by social change, exemplified by the widespread international protests of 1968 and what intellectuals and cultural producers regarded as their ethical responsibility to respond to changing conditions and demands. These curators saw the museum as a potential broadcasting station, a point of access to unmediated, unregulated information.

The group’s concerns (which are even more apparent in the full text) are clearly relevant to anyone working in museums today. These include questions regarding the relationship between the curator and the artist, the rise of the museum director or curator as a kind of “super-artist,” conflicts of interest between museums and artists versus dealers, sponsors, and governments, and public access through free admission and educational programs.

The crux of this excerpt focuses on the weighty relationships between art, museums, and politics, and the curator’s situation within that dynamic, especially at a time of high political and social tensions when reform, if not revolution, was being called for by all sorts of edu-

tional and cultural institutions. Szeemann describes this situation as a contradiction and yet the only possible path forward for the museum.

Importantly, seven of the eight people involved in this exchange were museum directors or curators (one, Georges Henri Rivière, was a museologist and the first director of the International Council of Museums / ICOM). They strongly felt that the museum was in a moment of crisis, and they argue here for the necessity of defining it as a democratic space in the face of its potential instrumentalization by the establishment. (“Establishment” is a word Szeemann uses several times, sometimes with a capital “E,” to mean structures of support for museums through government, patrons, and corporations rather than, or even in opposition to, the interests of the people.) Szeemann declares, “To put it bluntly, the ideal museum would be the one that was closed by the authorities.” The museum in its ideal state would be politically active, a site of political contestation far removed from its more traditional role as a repository of cultural artifacts.

While the proposition was clearly informed by contemporaneous political realities, this impetus toward resistance remains timely today, as curators still struggle to find relevant ways to address political issues, and conflicts of interest still arise between museums, curators, the communities museums profess to serve, and the individuals, corporations, and governments that fund them.

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS OF A GROUP OF EXPERTS

This text originally appeared in 1972 in Unesco's *Museum* journal. It has been translated from German into English. The eight participants and their institutional affiliations at the time were Pierre Gaudibert, director of l'ARC (Animation-Recherche-Confrontation), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Pontus Hultén, director, Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Michael Kustow, artistic director, Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; Jean Leymarie, director, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; François Mathey, chief conservator, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Georges Henri Rivière, museologist and permanent advisor, International Council of Museums / ICOM; Harald Szeemann, freelance curator, artistic director of Documenta 5; and Eduard de Wilde, director, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

The Principle and Function of the Museum

The function of the museum is the function of art itself. It shows how art changes with time. After World War II, the museum catered to a small elite. Its function was almost exclusively aesthetic, and it operated in a highly eclectic fashion, although it was already taking account of the artist and not only of art. But the structure of the museum remained that of the 19th century: In the eyes of the public, it was still functioning as though the war had never taken place.

Today the emphasis is on information. The artistic scene is illuminated by a judicious selection of works of art from all over the world. The museums have also undertaken the task of making visitors aware of the inhuman world in which they live. Today the museum has an artistic and social message to convey. This has brought about a democratization that has put a question mark on the old museum structures, based on the principle of artistic performance. Nowadays, while the artist is still taken as the starting point, attention is more and more focused on the community. It is difficult to tell how the structure of the museum will develop in the future, on account of the present system of museum organization. The artistic function is easier to define because it can to a large extent be derived intuitively. We judge past works of art by present-day standards and act accordingly. Many people today consider for instance that the *papiers découpés* of Matisse are much more important than Braque's entire output. These “preferences” we derive from our preoccupation with the most recent trends in art, about which we can often only give information, knowing that what is shown as the most recent is not really the most recent, and often guessing by intuition rather than actually knowing what is most important in contemporary art production. In this respect, a great deal

has been achieved by museums since 1945. But this function is not the only one valid today. We must no longer regard the museum as just an instrument for offering art to the public. The museum has become more critical both of art and of itself, because it has become aware of its function outside daily life. It does indeed function outside the system, sets itself up in opposition to the Establishment, yet continually shows itself to be an instrument of the system. Like art it is a place of freedom, but of freedom which stops at the museum door; and like art it is a cosmetic medium, not absolutely essential. This inner contradiction in the role of the museum—that it is the epitome of the system, but at the same time relatively free to criticize it—is important for the museum of today and for its immediate future. To put it bluntly, the ideal museum would be the one that was closed by the authorities. The museum can only function toward promoting artistic interests provided it is outside the restraints of society. Because it is nonetheless subject to the rules of society, it falls into a position of conflict, which is aggravated by the fact that the authorities like to see highly controversial subjects discussed within an art context, because they are thereby rendered harmless.

On the other hand, the museum is also the sanctuary—at once the place of confinement and the antechamber to freedom—wherein are represented tableaux, prefigurations, visions, utopias, personal experiences that communicate to all. From this point of view it is important that the museum should be preserved and that it should make an effort to bring an ever-wider public into touch with the conceptions it presents; all this is equivalent, if not physically at least spiritually, to widening the museum's field of action beyond the actual museum walls.

Insight into this new function of the museum eventually enables us to live with the contradiction that is inherent in every anticipatory activity, every prefiguration of a future way of life. Utopia holds an ever-more-important place in present-day society.

Applied to the museum, it enables each individual to take part in the reality of life, and is therefore a social rather than an artistic function. Many museums have taken this democratization of culture into account. They have, however, been forced to the conclusion that it is particularly difficult to do without the original work of art, which alone conveys to the visitor something of the artist's personal experience and creative activity, although of course nothing more than a single work of art can be imagined. This is also true of the presentation of art to the public, which operates more on the artistic level than on the social level and all too often assumes the character of a laboratory of the imagination or a utopian wonderland. Ideally, the museum must break through existing social discourse in order to recover the freedom and spontaneity of personal experience and enable part of the social discourse to occur within a democratic context.

One of the main problems of museums today is to succeed in avoiding the influence of an authoritative museum culture, determined solely by one man. The need to replace the one-man system by a team is obvious everywhere, although all dynamic museums of modern art have so far been due to individual initiative. In order to break with 18th- and 19th-century structures, even the team system should also be replaced by a participation of the public.

This text reproduces the discussion on a crisis, or rather on the beginning of a functional and structural reevaluation. If one asks at what date the conditions for the present discussion occurred, and consequently the date of the postwar acceleration in the exchange of information and the move toward democratization, the answer, as regards museums, would be the 1960s, a period of the expansion of “object art,” during which museums placed themselves unconditionally in the service of artistic production, and again since 1968, the summit of the moral and ethical crisis among intellectuals and artists.

New Art Forms and the “Museum Explosion”

The 1960s saw a dynamic expansion in the arts that was paralleled, and to some extent influenced, by a new industrial revolution. The creative activity of artists forced museums to be receptive to new work, while the moral crisis in art forced museums to reconsider what they

stood for. Thus it was in fact practical and ethical rather than aesthetic considerations that led to the “museum explosion.” The new dimension was the entry of the human element into a hitherto closed perspective: First came the artist with his or her claims on behalf of the totality of art, secondly the museumgoers, preponderantly young with their perceptions noticeably quickened from 1968 on. The living museum relies on a well-adjusted relationship among artists, intermediaries, and public. Before 1968 the image of the museum based on this accepted view was questioned not so much by artists and public as by the middlemen (curators and exhibition organizers). It is the intermediary who is the most liable to suffer from local conditions, such as the limitations imposed by local politics and the availability of premises and finances. One way of removing or breaking through such constraints was to cooperate closely with the representatives of avant-garde art before their work fetched high commercial prices. The artist’s pleasure in setting up his or her work in a museum, showing it for approval by the public, and seeing it on show, meant that the museum was transformed into a studio rather than a temple. With limited resources, exhibitions were mounted that were the joint productions of enthusiastic artists, museum staff, and workers.

The professional incentive of the middlemen then became the wish to discover new artists, and they found it easier to overlook what were frequently unfavorable local conditions.

In the 1960s, museums were presented with a wealth of production as never before and, what is more to the point, many of them responded to the offer. A new development of art in the 1960s was the gradual appearance of groups and teams of artists, which led directors of museums to sense, and reflect, a new trend or movement almost every year. [...] For the first time, making all things possible, museums ushered in the explosion, the effects of which have made themselves felt more or less throughout the world. Taking what was being produced, museums assumed the almost amoral attitude of claiming the prerogative to decide what was or was not art. The obvious result was that museum directors found their functions transformed by publicity into those of “super-artists” forced to outbid each other for productions. [...]

It was thanks to, and in cooperation with, artists that museums surpassed themselves throughout the 1960s in espousing the artist’s cause. Museums took part in the positivistic expansion of object-art and played a decisive part in promoting it. At the same time they also assimilated “works” that virtually refused to be considered as such and so joined forces with representatives of the trend toward rejecting the object and demanding in its place processes, concepts, the characterization of techniques.

The flexibility of museums in adapting themselves to each new development held out, in many quarters, a promise of freedom that has already been denounced as illusory above, and detected as such by many of those concerned with museums. The many resignations by museum staff in the last two years speak for themselves, and may be regarded as a warning that the function of the middleman is not the same as that of the producer of art. [...]

Information Center

A new conception of the museum would entail a new approach to the purpose of a museum. The museum should of course be the place where one comes closest to the artist’s sensibility and intentions, but instead of always aiming at working outward from an item displayed up against the wall, one might also include in the museum of the future art that does not express itself in material form.

A cross-section of a spherical museum of this type would be roughly as follows:

First-circle activity. Primary information, i.e., all information, even before it is processed by television, radio, and the press; in other words material from press agencies, wire services, live discussions, news comments, fashion reports, etc.

Second circle. Studios and technical facilities for processing information for the public, artists, and the museum.

Third circle. The processed information, which is currently available in the form of exhibitions, concerts, plays, and films.

In the center. The collection as memory bank. The memory bank and what is stored in it together make up the collection as a place for contemplation (not necessarily in the same building).

Purpose. Protection against predigested information. Resistance to monopolies. A stimulus to the public to ask why it is so difficult to receive television programs from such-and-such a country when it appears that technically it would be very easy to achieve, whereas weather forecasts are excellent . . .

In this way the museum would become a transmitting center instead of being as usual a repository of consecrated material.

A world information museum of this kind, which is a technical possibility, raises the question of leadership, quite apart from the likelihood that it would come up against political difficulties. Very few individuals would have the “openness” of spirit not so much to direct such an enterprise as to hold it together. Involving as it would continuous discussion of primary information, it would be an experience that would have to be lived, lived with, on a plane outside time; in other words, the museum would have to transcend all that at present characterizes it as such.

Thus we return to the art system and its future trends. Here the problem is still that of the choice of information. Whether we wish it or not, the role of art has always been not only to develop individual sensitivity and give rein to his personal experience, but also to imbue him with the feeling of being a man in a given society.

Awareness is hampered because information is constantly distorted. Each of us finds themselves, and the public itself, in an increasingly confused situation. All need information, and the question is: What method should be used to obtain it? We advocate for the creation of a model system in the form of a vast experimental laboratory, which could stimulate and test every kind of information situation; in other words, the museum as a center of information, as a television broadcasting station.

ASSESSMENTS

*

INTENSE PROXIMITY

LA TRIENNALE 2012

FRANCE MEETS THE WORLD

Stéphanie Moisdon

La Triennale 2012 was inaugurated with a spectacular scene: an enormous collation of humble soup for everyone, provided by Rirkrit Tiravanija and the Emmaüs charitable community under the empty dome of the Grand Palais in Paris. It was an “inalienable gift,” as Marcel Mauss would have put it, excluding no one (there is no pork in *tom kha gai* soup). This opening gesture of the program bearing the title *Intense Proximity* immediately situated the stakes on the side of sharing, a notion rather severely battered during the Nicolas Sarkozy era, and tackled head-on a historic moment of change, anxiety, and the radicalization of power relationships. Originally conceived in the early 1990s as a kind of exchange, Tiravanija’s project took on a completely different cast under the roof of a state-owned building. It became the echo chamber of an unprecedented crisis, a pre-revolutionary moment in which the people take back their own image and voice.

Rarely has an exhibition of this scope (almost 1,000 works) taken on so striking a symbolic dimension, coming as it does within the fraught context of a presidential election and the paradoxical perspective of a possible shift to the left and a considerable gain in strength by the populist extreme right. It is a time that has revived the debates of the past century—those concerning foreigners, society’s outcasts, national preference (the precise term French politicians use for excluding immigrants), and race. By proposing the removal of the word “race” from the 1948 French constitution, the Socialist candidate

(and president-elect) François Hollande has reasserted the power of language (the rightist elites never cease misusing it) and a desire to reexamine the foundations of inequality. The question of the hierarchy of races, peoples, and species was addressed throughout the 20th century by epistemologists, philosophers, and anthropologists. And it is in the air again, in the strange coincidence between the ideology of a political campaign and the imagination of this triennial, and in the new spaces created in the Palais de Tokyo.

Something happened, a rupture occurred, with the appearance in 1955 of one of the greatest texts of human philosophy ever written, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques*. A poignant work, it carried within itself the remorse of the West and the difficult position of the ethnologist torn between irreconcilable worlds. Trenchant and resolute, the author did not mince words: “I hate travel and explorers.”

This statement still resonates today in the nonetheless nomadic spirit of the chief curator of the triennial, Okwui Enwezor, and his four associate curators, Mélanie Boutiloup, Abdellah Karroum, Emilie Renard, and Claire Staebler. Enwezor has brought together similarly interesting groupings of curators in the past, made up of highly divergent life trajectories. Starting with historical texts and references (from Marcel Griaule to Michel Leiris and Jean Rouch), the history of 20th-century ethnography in France serves as the basis and springboard for an exhibition that harks back to the spirit of the early 1990s. It is a show without an “author,” unattached to conventions of style, taste, or organizational theatics, in which we discover, freed from hierarchy, thinkers, scientists, artists, and every field of contemporary creativity. And in which we realize the extent to which the idea of the cross section, so in vogue in the 1990s, has since become a reality, a plane of consistency upon

which artists the world over can lean. By avoiding a reassertion of anachronistic boundaries—the usual principles of organization by identity, discipline, and generation—the triennial’s project puts on an equal level such things as Levi-Strauss’s anthropological missions and the ironic dystopias of the very young Romanian Mihut Boscu. It aims at a fertile and discordant juxtaposition between the creations of international artists (for instance Chantal Akerman, Daniel Buren, Thomas Struth, Carol Rama, Walker Evans, and Alfredo Jaar) and those of artists more marginal with respect to the official lists, such as the German painter Michael Buthe, the Polish photographer and performance artist Aneta Grzeszykowska, and the free and joyous experimental artist Ivan Kožarić.

This question of equality is the heart and the political strength of the exhibition. It allows for greater circulation of representation and individuality. And while already critics are decrying the impossibility of distinguishing the different works in this dizzying assortment, this very sort of commentary returns a mirror image of the disarray of such criticism, itself too accustomed to passing through spaces pre-coded by the market and the academy. By removing the tools of mediation and synthesis, Enwezor’s team proposes that the supposed consumer of cultural objects become a single spectator and travel through this complex history of human thought. The greatest quality of this triennial is that it consigns to failure all attempts at classification—the sort that would make it possible to assign good points and bad, from the weakest (the series of photos of map-covered bodies by Terry Adkins, the overloaded room of collages by Sarkis) to the most remarkable (the political, poetical compositions of Öyvind Fahlström, the stunning notebooks of Wilfredo Lam with their oneiric sketches).

Some works, of course, stand out

forcefully from the rest. One is *Jewel* (2010), a 35-millimeter film (transferred to video) by Hassan Khan, a pioneer of the underground Cairo scene, in which notions of culture and custom cross different levels of reality. Another is Thomas Hirschhorn's video *Touching Reality* (2012), which by means of hand gestures sends images of corpses, destroyed by war, streaming across the touch screen. At any rate, any expert claptrap tempted to dismiss the whole only serves to dodge what is essential—namely, the qualities that distinguish this risky, dangerous attempt to write history in the present tense, this sort of *pensée sauvage*, from the ennui emanating from all the great, international, perfectly domesticated exhibitions where one learns more about other people's tastes than about art.

In moving the triennial from the Grand Palais to the Palais de Tokyo and five other peripheral spaces, the curators were able to draft a larger map of international creation from a Parisian focal point. With nearly 150 artists and collectives hailing from 40 different countries, this territorial expansion also casts a critical eye on the geostrategic implications of the two prior editions of the triennial, which were called *La Force de l'Art* and aimed solely at promoting the French scene. These were unsuccessful episodes that fell victim to their own communication and political criteria (the excellence of France, its influence around the world, et cetera) and did not fail to trigger controversy and indifference in equal amounts.

Armed with this experience, the curators of this edition decided to radically redefine the stakes of the project and situate it in a much broader and more generous perspective, that of transmission and filiation. All the works gathered thus have something to do with notions of friction, contact, and heterogeneity. They call to mind the new complexity of relationships in the world, unfettered

by geographical and cultural distances and freed from myths of indigenousness and ethnocentrism, reductive notions of otherness and difference. Far from the debates over globalization and postcolonialism, this triennial has kept the promise of its title. There is indeed a real, intense proximity among all these single biographies, these travel narratives, these histories of pioneers and heirs. All are forms of speculative invention that expose the darkness to the glare of Enlightenment.

Translated from the French by Stephen Sartarelli

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

Cristina Ricupero

Having been scheduled to open at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris three days before the first round of the French presidential elections, *Intense Proximity* almost seems intended as a pointed response to the Nicolas Sarkozy campaign, with its exploitation of fear to attract votes on the far right. "Fear Eats the Soul," written in rough, gigantic graffiti on the monumental walls of the venue's entrance, brutally confronts the viewer with the general theme of the exhibition and successfully sets the tone of La Triennale 2012. This entrance proposal by Rirkrit Tiravanija was inspired by Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), one of the works on view.

Intense Proximity aims to be dramatically different from its former editions in 2006 and 2009—these were called *La Force de l'Art*—whose aim was to "promote contemporary French creations" in a nationalistic spirit that was already anachronistic at the time. This edition's chief curator, Okwui Enwezor, subverts the nationalistic approach, proposing

instead a "manifestation that is not about France but in France" at a particular moment of obsession with questions of identity.¹ *Intense Proximity* comes a bit late but still in time to France, which had so far been insulated from the postcolonial studies that demystified the colonial legacy in Great Britain and elsewhere.

Through a process of "unlearning," Enwezor aims to "create a sense of intellectual skepticism concerning any kind of systematized understanding of the different cultural spheres." "Dismantling" former premises is what he proposed to his curatorial team, composed of Mélanie Bouteloup, Abdellah Karroum, Emilie Renard, and Claire Staebler. It comes as no surprise that the departure point was the seminal work of French ethnographers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Leiris. The project recognizes ethnography's contribution in terms of research methods and models of visual production but looks at the discipline with a critical eye, questioning its unconsciously voyeuristic approach and the power relationships it engenders. It equally denies the validity of "distance" as a critical method for ethnography when there are no more unknown territories or exotic cultures left to discover. Indeed, the far has become uncomfortably near.

Intense Proximity is particularly invested in showing in how artists reappropriate and dismantle what Enwezor calls ethnographic poetics. The brightly lit museological ground floor exemplifies the guiding concept by presenting ethnographic documents side by side with artistic practices that, in most cases, borrow or reenact ethnography's methods and aesthetics. A thematic show that looks at history through the prism of the contemporary, *Intense Proximity* creates a necessary dialogue between those two poles, encompassing artists born over a century of practice, from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1980s. Material from Lévi-Strauss's fieldwork

in Brazil in the 1930s, Pierre Verger's photographs of Afro-Brazilian religious cults in the 1940s, and Timothy Asch's documentary film about the Yanomami Indians are surrounded and confronted by contemporary artistic proposals.

Some are particularly worth mentioning. Lothar Baumgarten's *Fragmento Brasil* (1997–2005) is a synchronized multi-projection of images, juxtaposing traditional Yanomami abstract drawings with paintings showing Brazilian birds in idealized European landscapes; the contrasting points of view show related subjects but are worlds apart. Not far away, the exotic is once again called into question as Thomas Struth confronts us with his ironically titled series *Paradise* (1998): grandiose photographs of some of the world's last remaining now-not-so-virgin rainforests in Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

Best known for his widely toured *Museum of African Art* (launched in 1997), Meschac Gaba has created a new room that exhibits personal memorabilia from his wedding to a white Dutch woman, all painted the same black as the artist, and functioning as both a set for the performance and an installation piece in their own right. White on black, black on white, racial and cultural identities are here overturned.

Noticing during my visit that most of the guards were black, I experienced the uneasy feeling that none of the artists had done a "special investigation" on these premises. A lost opportunity?

In the installation *Is it possible to be a revolutionary and like flowers?* (2012) by the young French artist Camille Henrot, unexpected encounters between flower arrangements and book titles, such as Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, create hilarious effects. Making Japanese ikebana aesthetics both poetic and political, her ultimate exploit is a beautiful "bouquet for springtime" that sarcastically illustrates Karl Marx's "commodity fetishism."

A favorite take is David Hammons's *Stone with Hair* (1998), a glass-encased round stone with African American hair glued to its surface—a curious object of urban reality made available for close scrutiny. A simple gesture, yet intensely powerful.

Women artists are notably prominent. One of the best surprises is Adrian

Piper, whose videos are very often mentioned but rarely available for viewing (although here they are unfortunately poorly presented in monitors on the floor). Participatory before its time, her legendary *Funk Lessons* (1983) portrays the artist teaching white people how to listen and move to the beats of genuinely "black" music. In the *Mythic Being* series (1972–75) she pretends to be a black teenager, darkening her face, putting on an Afro wig, and misbehaving in the streets. Piper is absolutely perfect and forever timely in her role as agent provocateur, persistently exposing the mechanisms of prejudice.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar also paints her body black but dances to another rhythm—that of Josephine Baker, whom she personifies in a series of black-and-white, silent video vignettes, which pop up now and then throughout the show. One sees the artist reenacting Baker's movements inside her studio amid various objects (sculptures, plaster casts of raised fists, a bust of a female figure), all painted the same black as the artist, and functioning as both a set for the performance and an installation piece in their own right. White

on black, black on white, racial and cultural identities are here overturned. Noticing during my visit that most of the guards were black, I experienced the uneasy feeling that none of the artists had done a "special investigation" on these premises. A lost opportunity?

Slowly descending into the Palais de Tokyo's cavernous, underground, minimally refurbished extra spaces, it gets dirtier and darker (but whoever told us hell would necessarily be burning?). Sounds and images collide and intermix in a cacophonic dialogue that vibrates the walls of the ruins of the former Paris Cinémathèque, bringing them to life again. Left deliberately bare, the imposing architectural foundations and traces of the building's past history haunt us. Are we actually looking at artworks, or at a monument?

Some works seem to struggle to exist in this overwhelming setting, whereas others blend into it with ease and perfection. Inside the washed-out green walls of the damp projection room, watching silent shots of winter Eastern European landscapes and crowds of people waiting in line in Chantal Akerman's *D'est* (1993) is like living a performance in a space specially made for the film.

La Triennale is an anti-spectacular but intellectually ambitious orchestration of engagements with identity politics. Generous and precise, it is an extensive and intensive survey that requires a huge amount of time to fully consume and digest. Indifferent to the typical biennial's obsession with the young and the new, many of its most relevant proposals consist of already-existing works. An experimental documentary film from 1984, Isaac Julien's *Territories*, seems like a metaphor of what the exhibition tries to achieve. The film projects discontinuous images, including archival footage, overlapping and intermixing with different types of music, from Joan Baez to dub, with a droning voiceover that constantly shifts from male to female, deconstructing the supposedly well-delimited territories of London's Notting Hill Carnival, a massive annual street festival led by the local West Indian community. The same phrases are repeated over and over: "Behind each conflict there is a history a her/story. We are struggling to tell a story, a her/story, a history of cultural forms specific to black people." Likewise, *Intense Proximity* breaks down its own narrative through change and repetition, identifying with different perspectives and emphasizing the conflicting voices that make up the world in which we live.

Notes

- From an interview with the weekly magazine *Télérama*, April 21–27, 2012. All subsequent quotes by Enwezor in this section of the journal are drawn from his writings in the triennial catalogue.

PRESENT TENSE

Vivian Sky Rehberg

I visited *Intense Proximity* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in the midst of the French presidential elections, fresh off a high-speed train from Rotterdam, where I recently moved for work. My approach to La Triennale 2012 was entirely conditioned by this context. Here, rather than struggling to produce a conventional exhibition review of a project of this scale and scope—constrained by word count to looking at just a few pieces—I want to discuss the potential political significance of this triennial at this precise moment in France.

Okwui Enwezor and his co-curators Mélanie Bouteloup, Abdellah Karoum, Emilie Renard, and Claire Staebler consider in depth the ethics and politics of curatorial practice in the invaluable accompanying anthology *Intense Proximité/y: An Anthology of the Near and the Far*. Speaking for myself as an American national (of mostly Central European descent), a French citizen, and now a Dutch resident, I feel increasingly like a spectator/critic straddling the exposed “fault lines of cultural antagonism” (in Europe, in my case) that Enwezor so eloquently describes in his catalogue essay “Intense Proximity: Concerning the Disappearance of Difference.” That cultural antagonism is most evident in what he refers to as a “rising visibility of a politics of anti-difference” in an age when boundaries between spaces, times, and subjects have become ever more permeable. The exhibition shifts our perspective on that politics by appealing, via a “poetics of observation,” to an “ethnographic imagination” whose legacy is everywhere evidenced in the selection of artists from different generations (from

the 1920s to the present) and diverse geographical locations. The spatial, visual, and temporal interactions among the works—by Carol Rama and Ivan Kožarić through Trinh T. Minh-ha and Walid Sadek to Lili Reynaud-Dewar and Wangechi Mutu—for the most part sensitively reinforce global affinities and heterogeneities.

As I write this now in Paris, talk of the French elections is everywhere, and squatting in the center of the media stage is current president Nicolas Sarkozy, who has ratcheted up his anti-immigrant, neoliberal rhetoric in order to appeal to the voters seduced by Marine Le Pen’s far-right Front National party. On this May 1, the traditional left-wing demonstration organized by the trade unions, which ceremoniously snakes from the Left Bank to the Bastille, is not countered only by Joan of Arc’s

worshiping acolytes gathered around her golden equestrian statue near the Louvre museum to participate in the Front National annual parade in her honor. Suddenly, this year, Monsieur le Président decided to invent his own May Day demonstration. He chose the highly symbolic esplanade of the Trocadéro, a short walk from the Palais de Tokyo, as the site for his commemoration of *le vrai travail*—“real” work—which surely, to his mind, cannot possibly include what artists, curators, and critics get up to.

Like countless other urban centers, Paris has been a political and ideological battleground for centuries. Today, and I mean literally today, the city is under ideological siege, and the map of political advocacy and protest exposes a four-way clash between the values of leftist syndicalism, movements against social inequality, the proponents of neoliberalism, and extreme right-wing politics. The symbolic territory occupied has strong historical resonances: The Bastille is the emblem of the Revolution; Joan of Arc, formerly associated with resistance, was recuperated as a nation-

alist symbol by Charles Maurras, the founder of Action Française, before Vichy France set its sights on her; and the Trocadéro was built for the Universal Exposition of 1878, but, more apropos, it was also the site of the ideological and political confrontation between the far right and the left in 1937. That conflict was made notoriously visible in the architectural standoff between the Soviet and Nazi pavilions built for the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, for which the Palais de Tokyo building was originally erected.

In his speech last month inaugurating the post-renovation Palais de Tokyo art center in the west wing of that historic building (which has housed ARC / Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in its east wing for decades), Sarkozy, flanked by minister of culture Frédéric Mitterrand and the Palais de Tokyo’s new director, Jean de Loisy, wondered aloud: How could such a vast and valuable parcel of real estate possibly have lain empty and dormant for so many years? In one fell swoop the French president simply (some might say ignorantly) denied the contested yet crucial place the Palais de Tokyo has occupied since 2002 as a site for the production and display of international contemporary art, not to mention its previous incarnations as the Cinémathèque Française and before that the Musée National d’Art Moderne.

Let’s be honest. This latest version of the Paris triennial couldn’t help being an improvement over its previous, lamentable incarnation: the aggressively titled, and critically and rhetorically chauvinistic, *La Force de l’Art*. The two editions of this, held at the Grand Palais in 2006 and 2009, exclusively showcased French contemporary art and contemporary art “made in France” by international artists. I suppose one has to concede that they did achieve their aim, but the contrast between the previous iterations and this one could not



Intense Proximity
installation view,
Palais de Tokyo,
Paris, 2012



Intense Proximity
installation view,
Palais de Tokyo,
Paris, 2012, showing
Daniel Buren, *Rayer les
Frontières*, 2012;
and Neil Beloufa,
Untitled, 2010

Intense Proximity
installation view,
Palais de Tokyo, Paris,
2012, showing Adrian
Piper, *What It's Like*,
What It Is #2.5, 1991



Intense Proximity
installation view,
Palais de Tokyo,
Paris, 2012, showing
works by (left to right)
Carol Rama, David
Hammons, Seulgi
Lee, and Michael
Buthe



Ivan Kožarić
Shape of Space series,
1961–79; *Untitled*
(detergent), 1987; *Sphere*,
1971; and *Head*, 1966
Messing sculpture;
gold paint on card-
board readymade
sculpture, fiberglass,
wood; plaster sculp-
ture; white paint on
messing; gilt on metal
The Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Zagreb



Camille Henrot
*Is it possible to be a
revolutionary and like
flowers?*, 2012
Flowers, plants, and
ceramic vases



Sarkis
La chorégraphie des Trésors de Guerre
(The Choreography of the
Treasures of War), 2011; and
La Prise Trésors de Guerre (The
Friesland Treasures of War),
1976–2012
Sculptures, mirror glass,
photographic prints, and neon

Intense Proximity
installation view, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012,
showing Lili Reynaud-Dewar, *Some objects
blackened and a body too,*
2011



El Anatsui
Tiled flower garden, 2012
Site-specific sculpture,
bottle caps

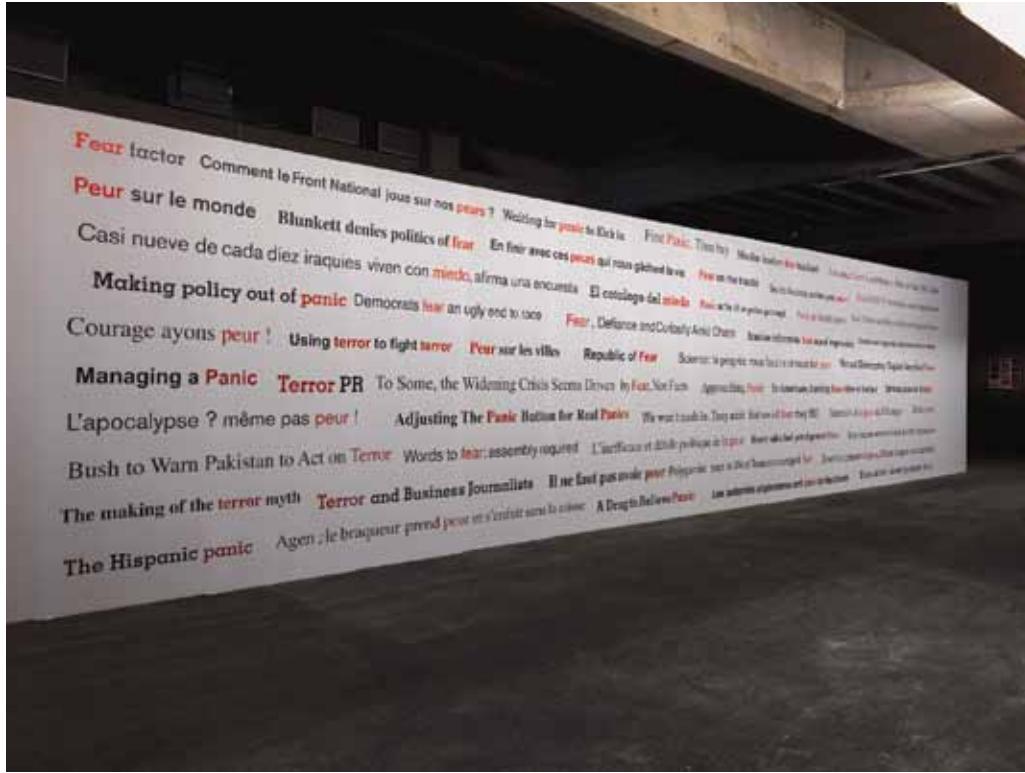


La Triennale 2012

Intense Proximity
installation view, Palais de Tokyo,
Paris, 2012, showing
Annette Messager,
Motion/Emotion, 2012



Antoni Muntadas
*On translation: the
construction of fear*,
2010–11
Installation with
video, sound, and
photographs



La Triennale 2012

Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled 2011 (no tshirt), 2011
T-shirt silkscreening factory and neon



be more striking. Along with the works themselves, Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal's "unfinished" (or, rather, "undone") architecture, as opposed to the great airs the Grand Palais puts on, plays a vital role in highlighting the distinction.

Here, there is no celebration of some universal power of art, but rather a concern with the relationship between the near and the far, the historical and the contemporary, the aesthetic and the ethnographic. It's not that I am indifferent to the features and flaws of its curatorial execution in terms of juxtaposition of artworks and hierarchies of choice and display. It just honestly seems more pressing, right this minute, to take more time to consider, with Enwezor and the curatorial team, alongside the artists and facing the artworks, "how proximity and distance are constituted in the aftermath of colonial modernity through migration, creolization, globalization, and context." Judgments can wait. Soon our votes will be cast and counted, and this text will be dated even before its publication.

THE COLLAPSE OF DISTANCE

Nicolas Bourriaud

It's been years since I last reviewed a show, and it is interesting to resume the exercise on the occasion of the present Paris Triennale. Which puts me in a strange position: I worked with Okwui Enwezor on the Tate Britain Triennial in 2009, and now I am one of the commissioners of *Intense Proximity*, under the auspices of the French Ministry of Culture. So there's the context. Since it's not neutral, best to bring it right out in the open.

When one is in the position of commissioning, the most important thing is

a project's success. Has it achieved its goals? I consider this triennial a major exhibition. And I purposely say "exhibition" in order to de-biennialize the word, since we have become accustomed to a certain indulgence in that regard. The fact is that a large, biannual exhibition bringing together a hundred or so artists around a vague, fashionable theme is, aside from being a biennial, a bad exhibition.

On a local level, *Intense Proximity* already has the merit of putting the history of colonialism right at the heart of French aesthetic debate, and forcefully so, reconnecting the country's artistic and intellectual scene with a field largely neglected since the time of the pioneers of anthropology (whom Enwezor deliberately places at the center of the show). And it establishes this reconnection on political ground, appropriating the image of the recent pork soup dinner given in Paris by a "charitable" organization on the extreme right for the purpose of excluding Muslims.

First strong point of the show: its acknowledgment that conviviality is not angelic in and of itself. It can be as exclusive as it is inclusive. This point seems, moreover, directed at those who misunderstand Relational Aesthetics, those who confuse form with content. It is here that Enwezor makes an original contribution to the Relational Aesthetics debate by raising the question of *relational form* that is at the very heart of the history of colonialism, which he reminds us was "predicated on contact." And it is likewise at the heart of a multiculturalism that "also represents a theater of exploitable consensus." *Intense Proximity* thus represents the first significant curatorial effort to reinstate, in the context of globalization, concepts that emerged from Relational Aesthetics: the thematics of near and far, the "collapse of distance" in a globalized world, the gaze of the ethnologist. These are relevant paradigms for grasping the essence of contemporary art. "When

is the proximity a form of shallow distance, and when does it become a disturbing nearness?" Enwezor asks.

The "participant observer" he evokes is connected to more than just ethnology and its ethics. The subject was subtly evoked at the very start of La Triennale 2012, in the event organized by Rirkrit Tiravanija at the Grand Palais, where the public constituted an integral part of the composition. Tiravanija served *tom kha gai* soup, which has no pork, a pointed reversal of that earlier dinner. In this triennial, the impossibility of an objective gaze thus finds itself linked with the relational sphere, just like the impossibility of pure subjectivity in the face of the documentary. Thus are the traditional categories of contemporary criticism overturned.

Which brings us to the triennial's second strong point: its acknowledgment that the documentary viewpoint is no longer by default a medium for a political message. A useful thing to remember after a decade of works whose formal neutrality aspired to radicalism through reporting. *Intense Proximity* shows that Enwezor has learned the lessons of his 2002 Documenta experience and put into perspective the significance of the documentary paradigm that came out of it. Ten years later, Google, Tumblr, and Facebook have transformed the landscape. By now the documentary paradigm is assumed by everyone, not just one. Documentation is no longer the prerogative of professionals, and its use by artists today involves a dismantling of the ideology though which it circulates. David Maljkovic, Bouchra Khalili, Guy Tillim, Neil Beloufa, and Lorraine O'Grady bear witness to this new documentary order, which goes through a formalization or systematization process more intense than simple reportage. It sometimes goes so far as to rifle through archives, as witnessed by the absurd compilations of Claude Closky or the complex displays of Georges Adéagbo. Or even the video

by Thomas Hirschhorn, which originally appeared in his exhibition at the Swiss Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, in which he introduces a new gesture into contemporary iconography: the sliding of one's finger, now familiar to us all because of the iPhone.

And here lies the show's conceptual center: the relationships between document and monument, archive and testimony. In 20th-century ethnography, photography attained an aura, at least in Walter Benjamin's definition of the term as "the unique phenomenon of a distance."¹ It used to be that the photographed or filmed document brought forward an image of distance. In a way, it constituted all by itself the system of the *distance* of which the ethnographer was the scientific guarantor; it legitimated the distance separating us from the Other. The documentary impulse, as the (more or less conscious) promoter of an authenticity or cultural essence, thus represents an ontology of distance that is now crumbling before our eyes.

As Facebook, Tumblr, and Google demonstrate, the documentary today functions from one person to another. It has, in a word, become relational. It is a tool of proximity—a personal, intimate project. And from this perspective, the presence at the triennial of works by Geta Brătescu and Ivan Kožarić, both born in the 1920s, or those of Karthik Pandian, born in 1981, buttress Enwezor's purpose. Not only has the documentary function of art dissolved into the fact of testimony, but certain works that appear formalistic also carry a tremendous documentary weight, and such interference represents an exciting path for the coming decade. The "intense proximity" whose major figures Enwezor and his associated curators present to us here could never be limited to the anthropological sphere alone. The multiple breakdowns that this proximity represents, while more discreet, nevertheless also involve aesthetics. The end of *terre incognitae* and

overproduction, but above all the collapse of the traditional strata regulating our definitions of time, space, and cultural hierarchies, have taken us today to the threshold of a new cognitive world of which Enwezor will have been one of the first to grasp the texture. The dialogue I began with him on the occasion of my exhibition *Altermodern* at Tate Britain in 2009 has found a brilliant answer in *Intense Proximity*, and on a much larger scale.

Translated from the French by Stephen Sartarelli

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): 222.

TYPOLOGIES



THE BIENNIAL

THE CENTRALITY OF THE PERIPHERAL BIENNIAL

Adriano Pedrosa

The biennial was born at the heart of Europe at the end of the 19th century, but it flourished at Europe's margins at the end of the 20th century. Venice, the mother of all biennials, has regrettably aged into a gold digger and party monster, its spectacular spaces rented out and turned into shopping vitrines by hungry, seeking agents—be them pavilion-less emerging nations or artists whose galleries must pay up for their presentation on Italian grounds—all followed by a string of palazzo parties. It is a well-known fact that sections of the Arsenale, where the exhibition curated by Venice's artistic director is held, are rented out to countries without proper quarters in the Giardini, and also that many of the artworks brought into the central exhibition are sponsored by galleries, in a crude exchange of visibility for support.

Venice is a sinking bastion of a bygone era, one in which Europe played center stage and provided mandatory filters through which to

look out at and onto the art of the Old and New Worlds. In this sense, it remains the most Eurocentric of all institutions. In the entire history of the biennale, only once was a non-European curator appointed artistic director. That was Robert Storr in 2007, who came with the high-modern credentials of New York's Museum of Modern Art. Even the itinerant, much younger, pan-European biennial Manifesta, the premise of which takes Europe as the limits of its research, has made an eloquent case against Eurocentrism in appointing Cuauhtémoc Medina, a Mexican, as a curator of its ninth edition in 2012. The time has come for an astute and hard-working Italian curator to reinvigorate the decadent Italian prima donna with new energies and spirits.

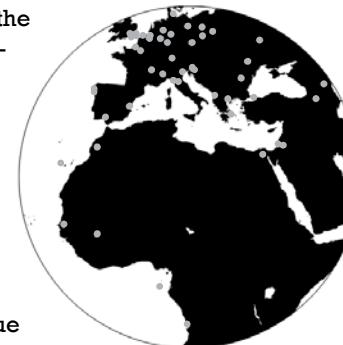
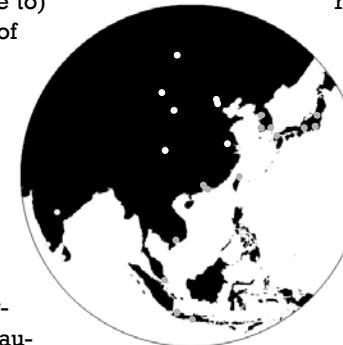
Across the North Atlantic, New York—the city that claims to be the capital of the art world—has the largest number of powerful museums, galleries, art fairs, and biennials (or perennials). Yet there is little relevance



to the Manhattan perennials, which are all quite symptomatically organized by museums. Their collections and exhibition programs will invariably outshine any biennial, triennial, or quinquennial endeavor. A biennial must be the result of a collective effort and concentrated investment poured into a single outcome, and it often emerges from (and is a response to) a context where there is a lack of mature contemporary art institutions to run high-quality programs year-round. Indeed, the most relevant biennials take place in emerging scenes such as Dakar, Havana, Istanbul, Gwangju, Porto Alegre, São Paulo, Taipei, or Sharjah, where there is a burgeoning circuit of artists and a significant audience, and funds for cultural projects are starting to become available.

How can a biennial in New York be more relevant than the outstanding exhibition programs and collections of such institutions as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the New Museum—particularly if it is organized by those museums' own curators? Ossification and institutionalization in this case go hand in hand. Still, all three organize perennials. The Whitney Biennial, the oldest one, is an incomprehensible project and has become a veritable salon. What is the use of a domestic biennial in one of the most active international art centers in the world? In this case, the biennial reveals itself as an exercise in navel gazing, or the bestowing of a seal of approval on artists who will soon be consumed by the avid New York market. Perhaps a way out for such an anachronistic project would be to reconsider the true meaning of "American," which in reality encompasses all of North, South, and Central America.

MoMA and PSL's perennial manages to be even more parochial than the Whitney's all-domestic biennial. Happening every five years, it can be considered New York's Documenta, yet it only includes artists living in the city. It is telling that the exhibition only gazes at and ag-



grandizes New York, when it could clearly profit from a more generous, diverse, open outlook. A way out for that project could be a new motto: "Greater than New York." Yet there is a glimmer of hope. While the New Museum's triennial was born in 2009 with a cheap marketing slogan—"Younger than Jesus"—it found a relevant role in its second and latest incarnation. In a city overcrowded with exhibitions and overflowing with provincial self-importance, curator Eungie Joo effectively brought a sliver of the global into the profoundly local cake. She looked beyond the North Atlantic pond and presented many artists for the first time in the United States. Only five out of 50 were U.S. natives.

Cultural capitals such as London, Paris, and New York have an affluent circuit of established, well-endowed museums and galleries with fine programs and collections. When they devise a new biennial, it is difficult not to suspect crass marketing strategies and desperation for resources, visibility, and audience in the competitive global art circuit. The truly relevant biennial today is a phenomenon of the global South, relying on independence, creativity, and ingenuity from its organizers, and drawing crucial connections between different locales and productions. There are of course no general theories, no grand plans, no golden book of rules. The rich, complex, profound biennial is an emerging city's most important contemporary art exhibition. It is organized by an institution—not a museum—that can put all of its efforts and intellectual abilities over two years into the construction of the project: giving it adequate lead time, freedom, independence, and resources; bringing new energies into being; challenging existing formats, models, and programs; resisting continuity; and remaining open and flexible all the while.

The images in this essay are selections from the Biennial Foundation's global biennial map.

REINVENTING THE SOCIAL

Hou Hanru

These last three decades of "biennial boom" have expanded the international art world from Venice and Kassel to Havana and Istanbul, Sydney and Gwangju, Shanghai and Dakar. Biennial culture, I would argue, has become the most vital condition for the conception and production of contemporary art. Specifically conceived to reflect recent developments in art scenes and contexts, biennials provide freedom for artists to engage with changing social, political, and cultural realities, beyond the constraints of traditional museum and gallery exhibition models. Biennials are also opening up new public spaces for artistic production outside the dominant market. And, most importantly, they have been initiated and developed in non-Western countries where new infrastructures for artistic production and representation are needed. These rising non-Western art worlds are often much more diverse, dynamic, and innovative than the established "centers," and even end up exerting major influences on the art scenes of the Western capitals. They manifest profound

changes in the significance of the term "global art world," and they foreground debates on what is truly artistically relevant in the age of globalization.

Going forward, one of the key questions regarding the necessity and relevance of biennials is how they can navigate the tension between the universal/global model of exhibition making versus emphasis on local diversity as resistance to the domination of the global. Or perhaps this is the wrong question. Maybe the point is not to go hunting for new forms, but to look into how encounters between art and the public produce meaning. And from there, to investigate what kinds of institutions, including biennials as institutions, must be created to generate momentum linking artistic creativity to the public.

Certain institutional and infrastructural models loom larger than others in the creation of the dynamic between art and public. The biennial, with its immediate interactions with the contemporary scene in a given city—which necessarily make it open to diversity, difference, and



Bik Van der Pol
Sous les pavés, la plage (Under the Paving Stones, the Beach), 2009
Temporary public sculpture in the Grand Parc Miribel Jonage, Lyon, France



Laura Genz + Collective Sans Papiers 75
Sans papiers, sans droits—Les journées de la Bourse occupée (Without Papers, Without Rights—The Days of the Bourse Occupation), 2008
 Drawing installation at La Fondation Bullukian, Lyon, France

complexity—has the potential to be experimental and visionary. The most significant biennials have all emphasized extending the exhibition into the domain of social reality. For example, the São Paulo Biennial is free for all visitors and integrates public education as a key curatorial element. Havana, Gwangju, and Shanghai have helped their local communities and governments to make significant changes in cultural policy, and even influenced specific political reforms.

My approach to curating the 10th Biennale de Lyon in 2009 emerged directly from earlier experiments with bringing special projects to public spaces, for instance in the 2005 Guangzhou Triennial and the 2007 Istanbul Biennial. The projects under the banner of *Veduta*, the biennial's art program, were particularly meaningful examples. Eko Nugroho spent months working with young inhabitants of one of Lyon's poorest and most diverse suburbs to create a multimedia theater that recounted stories of immigrant families. Robert Milin from France worked with people living in government-subsidized housing to develop light boxes with messages revealing their dreams, which were then installed in public entrances to the buildings. Bik Van der Pol from the Netherlands produced a floating platform in a lake, carrying messages inciting local youths to reflect on the possibility of social emancipation, or revolution. In an even more radical move, we invited the non-documented immigration collective CSP 75 (Collective Sans Papiers 75) to launch public discussions on their dire situation, while Laura Genz's drawings recorded their everyday struggle toward the legalization of their existence in French society. With more time and money we would have loved to have included artists from Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere.

In Lyon, the extension of the biennial space into social realities moved beyond simple participation by local communities in art projects. The mission was to turn the communities into essential components. For instance at one of the exhibition sites, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Sarkis's project *L'Ouverture* (2002), a ventilation system bringing in air and light from outside (which was already part of the museum's collection) became an open space for public gatherings and exchanges. Also at the museum, Lee Mingwei's *The Moving Garden* (2009) enabled the public to participate in the giving of flowers

to unknown others in acts of sharing that superseded conventional economic systems.

What are the mechanisms that change societies? Our everyday reality is significantly influenced by contributions from individuals and cultures from elsewhere. Globalization is not merely a model imposed on people; on the contrary, it is a momentum in which dialogue, conflict, confrontation, and intermingling effect mutual transformation. What results from this is actually an imaginary projection that produces new social and global realities. "Creativity" here extends beyond the traditional art historical definition. We are witnessing a change in the definition of the artwork from static to what we might call *shifting*. We are becoming part of a relationship between spectacle on the one hand and participation on the other. The production of the spectacle is becoming the spectacle. This is where everyday life becomes part of cultural life. Artists, curators, organizers, et cetera must constantly reinvent their roles. Artists learn not only about "exotic" things, but also about how people from different cultures and contexts achieve new identities via dialogue with others. People migrating through economic, social, and cultural contexts are not, because of their nomadism, isolated from the world. They reinvent society with the traces that they leave and the things they are compelled to create. The artist, perhaps, has more to learn from the nomad than from art history. The inclusion of Collective Sans Papiers 75 shows the possibility and even the necessity of such a process.

The relationship between the biennial and the public constitutes the dynamism that should be central to the production of an artwork: the collective imagination. Given that absolute individuality and unique subjectivity do not actually exist as such, artistic singularity will be born of the dialogue between individual experience and the collective experience of a society. Like the immigrant, the artist shapes our vision of a society with an individual contribution that is part of a back-and-forth movement between an urge to singularity and the collective reality of which he or she is a tiny part.

At a time when everything is increasingly privatized, how does a notion of the public sphere come about in which the components of artistic creativity are contributing to the produc-



Sarkis
L'ouverture (The Opening), 2009
Blower motors, pipe, international newspapers, street signs,
neon, and stained glass windows
Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, France

tion of social space? The public sphere is not clearly defined, but rather a process, a movement, ceaselessly generating times and spaces in which people can share their intellectual and spiritual interests—in which they can, most importantly, contribute to a process of redefinition of the society in which we want to live. Migration phenomena all over the world, whether active or passive, chosen or imposed, are increasingly a fundamental factor in the construction of the public sphere. This is something that the so-called democratic political systems, especially in the West, refuse to accept. The biennial becomes a laboratory for experiments that crystallize the public sphere, partaking at once of metaphor, the symbolic, and the tactile.

Artistic production is producing aesthetic forms and objects. But what is more important is that new social relationships between individuals and collectives are being reshaped and reinvented through a transformation of artistic languages. This transformation transgresses the social hierarchy between the artist and the

public, while the definition of creative activities continuously expands to embrace direct social practice with a certain articulation in terms of both its representational model and its contextual conditions.

The “displacement” of social and political actions in an artistic event such as a biennial—in the form of artist-public interaction and public participation—signifies not only the inclusion of political content in the arts, but the transformation of the art context into a real battlefield of social and political reality. This reality always implies a utopian perspective that brings our visions and reflections beyond immediate power struggles to the possibility of participating in the making of a certain idealistic politics. We are in the process of inventing an approach that falls between two traditionally separate categories: an area for action that also functions as a symbolic system. This is where we achieve quality in political discourse, by producing an intellectual and political project for society.

KNOWLEDGE EMBEDDED IN A REPLENISHED SOCIALITY: THE DISCURSIVE BIENNIAL

Nancy Adajania

When every edition of a biennial claims to make a fresh wager on the new and the experimental—indeed, on the contemporary—what is specific to the mandate of curating a biennial in 2012? I asked myself this question when I was appointed joint artistic director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, which opens in September.¹ This self-questioning comes at a time when the form of the biennial, which we regard as the legitimate site for the production of the contemporary, finds the ground of history shaking beneath its feet. During the last few years, the triumphalist neoliberal economic system has experienced a series of fundamental shocks. We have confronted ecological disasters, and stood at the edge of nuclear catastrophe. We have witnessed an upsurge of democratic movements in North Africa

and west Asia as well as prolonged episodes of street violence in Paris and London. We have lived through agitations for reform in India and Iran as well as debates over a residual cultural nationhood in Germany, France, and Switzerland, as these societies engage with global Islam and Islamism.

Political power, formerly held within a tight grid, is now leaking unpredictably across classes in many societies. The privilege of making art and producing culture is, likewise, being distributed democratically among the citizenry at large, beyond what were formerly hegemonic producers and institutions of culture. What sort of bridge can the figure thus far known as the artist build between the domain of symbolic action, institutionalized as culture, and the arena of prac-



Noh Suntag
Hope Bus Campaign, South Korea, 2011
Police using water cannons and tear gas to keep the people of Hope Bus off Crane 85

tical, productive politics? That is one of the most urgent questions facing us in the sphere of art today. It is the kind of question the versatile form of the biennial is well suited to address, since it works at the intersection of diverse disciplines and retains the freedom to deploy a variety of methodologies.

I do not make a facile distinction between theory and practice. Rather, I believe strongly in their conjuncture as praxis, and thus the first event I conceived for the 9th Gwangju Biennale was a gathering I called a Workstation. A series of Workstations have been planned in the run-up to the exhibition, treating the exhibition not as the final destination but as one of many concurrent journeys. Within the biennial typology, I subscribe most to the discursively oriented biennial, a form whose lineage may be traced to Catherine David's *100 Days, 100 Guests* (Documenta 10, in 1997), Okwui Enwezor's *Platforms* (Documenta 11, in 2002), and before these the 1989 edition of the Havana Biennial, which brought together knowledges from the global South that were, as Arthur Danto might have said, not part of the conversation of biennial culture. This typology has the potential to counter what Elena Filipovic has justly critiqued as the "global white cube" dimension of the biennial.² Against such a bulwark of generic global art production, the discursively oriented biennial embodies the hope that the discourse generated can leak outward from the art world to form communicative engagements with the arenas of civil activism and political protest.

David's 100 days of cogitation at Documenta

10 acknowledged the importance of foregrounding voices from outside generally acknowledged global cultural centers, but the exhibition proper included few such artistic practices. In Documenta 11, on the other hand, Enwezor integrated his postcolonial preoccupations into his curatorial praxis by producing five discursive platforms, of which the exhibition was only one. The platforms accomplished their mandate not by making a token inclusion of African, Asian, and Arab artistic and theoretical positions, but by exposing to view a post-Cold War landscape in which the countries of the hegemonic North were as susceptible to sharing the fate of "transitional" societies—and their incomplete projects of equality and democracy—as those of the former third world.

Today, when the biennial form aspires (justifiably) to supplant the academy and the museum, it would be useful to recall the originary moment when the insertion of discourse into the warp and weft of biennial-making changed the rules of exhibitionary engagement forever. The organization of a major international conference as part of the 1989 edition of the Havana Biennial represented, according to the critic Rachel Weiss, "a decisive step toward conceiving of biennials as discursive environments, in which the actual display of artworks is part of a much broader project of research and knowledge production."³ At the conference, the notions of internationalism and contemporaneity were reformulated and interrogated from very diverse starting points, puncturing the ersatz solidarity that "third world" countries were purported to



Noh Suntag
Hope Bus Campaign, South Korea, 2011
Hanjin Heavy Industry & Construction Ltd. workers delivering water and food to Kim Jinsook, chairman of the Korean Confederation Trade Union, on Crane 85



Noh Suntag
Hope Bus Campaign, South Korea, 2011
Priest Moon Jung Hyun, Paik Ki-wan, and Park Jung-ki breaking through police barricades to make public speeches

share uniformly under the banner of resistance to global capitalism, or U.S. neo-imperialist ambitions.

In my curatorial practice, I find it very important to embed the production of discourse in a replenished sociality, rather than treating discourse as a narrowly academic activity set at a remove from everyday life. This is why I chose the term “Workstation” to name this form of thinking, speaking, and working together, which descends from a genealogy of prior forms of discoursing together, including the academy, the symposium, the workshop, and the platform. None of these words originally had an academic connotation—not even the word “academy.” The Academia was the garden in Athens where the philosophers of antiquity, Plato and his disciples, took their walks. The symposium, originally, was a drinking party. The workshop, of course, was the place where artisans made things. And the platform was either an improvised stage, a speaker’s corner in a park, or a place where you waited for trains. Or where you waited for history’s nightmares to come to an end, or for the last call to resistance or freedom.

In all these cases, a site of anticipation is denoted. My concept of the Workstation continues the dynamic play of conceptual activity that characterizes the intellectual sphere while also acknowledging and including its Benjaminian opposite—“felt knowledge”—as well as physical effort and social interaction.⁴ Above all, the Workstation does not endorse the recirculation of pompous zeitgeists or the reproduction of triumphalist worldviews. Rather, it carries the resonance of Walter Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit*, or “now-time.” I refer to Benjamin’s conception of a Messianic time of renovation and redemption that lies within and beneath the rhythms of normal, everyday temporality and can be disclosed in times of crisis. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” he writes that the observer of the *Jetztzeit* “recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.”⁵

The first Workstation of the 9th Gwangju Biennale generated a hospitable space for the enactment of various artistic and political en-

tanglements.⁶ It also had an immediate, palpable resonance in the Korean cultural context. By directly addressing the question of contemporary politics and its impact on Korean culture, the Workstation went beyond performing a ceremonial homage to the Gwangju Biennale’s history of uprising and resistance, and instead took its transformative potential forward. This was its modest proposal and its promise of self-renewal.

Notes

1. The other co-artistic directors are Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Mami Kataoka, Sunjung Kim, Carol Yinghua Lu, and Alia Swastika.

2. Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube,” in *art e-economy: Theoretical Reader* (Belgrade: Marko Stamenkovic, 2007): 188–206.

3. Rachel Weiss, “A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de La Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition” in *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011): 14.

4. Benjamin explains “felt knowledge” as “that anamnestic intoxication in which the flaneur goes about the city,” which “not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but can very well possess itself of abstract knowledge—indeed, of dead facts—as something experienced and lived through. This felt knowledge, as is obvious, travels above all by word of mouth from one person to another [but can also be] deposited in an immense literature.” See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 880.

5. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1985): 263.

6. The speakers at this Workstation were Charles Esche, Gerardo Mosquera, Maria Hlavajova, WHW (Natasa Ilic), Markus Miessen, Dmitry Vilensky (Chto delat), Minouk Lim, Nikolaus Hirsch, Taek-Gwang Lee, Bassam El Baroni, Alia Swastika, Heejin Kim, and Nancy Adajania. The Workstation proposed to reexamine various forms of artistic and political resistance premised on self-organization, collectivity, and contingency against the backdrop of recent upheavals such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movements, and the Hope Bus Campaign in South Korea. The Workstation made two interrelated moves: It retrieved lost or unacknowledged histories of the biennial form (for instance the 1989 edition of the Havana Biennial and 2002 edition of the Gwangju Biennale), and it analyzed the vexed relationship between art and participatory politics.

ATTITUDE



THE CURATORIAL CONSTELLATION AND THE PARACURATORIAL PARADOX

Paul O'Neill

After more than 20 years of increasingly intense curatorial production and debate, we appear to be witnessing a contestation of the existence, and legitimacy, of a specifically curatorial field of praxis. In this moment of consolidation in the discursive field around curating, many protagonists are attempting to inscribe certain constructions, limitations, and definitions of what curating should be, or should seek to be, and to determine which bodies of knowledge will have enduring consequences for the practice of curating and its parallel discourses and histories. This tendency is particularly apparent in recent attempts to distinguish the concepts of the curatorial and the “paracuratorial,” with the *para* conceived of as operating away from, alongside, or supplementary to the main curatorial work of exhibition making.¹ Instead of taking sides in the debate by celebrating or rejecting so-called paracuratorial activities, I wish to problematize the term, and to argue for the paracuratorial as a terrain of praxis that both operates within the curatorial paradigm and retains a destabilizing relationship with it via (para-)texts, sites, works, and institutes.

The *para* concept—an understanding of something “other than,” “beside,” “outside,” or “auxiliary,” operating at a distance from the main act—assumes a binary between primary and secondary curatorial labor. The divisive logic of such thinking suggests that something is in need of hierarchization. In turn, this could be perceived as a conservative urge to return to the more

1. *The Exhibitionist* formalized the term “paracuratorial” in issue 4 (June 2011) and prompted three writers—Vanessa Joan Müller, Lívia Páldi, and Emily Pethick—to develop and elaborate on its implications for curatorial practice.

2. For a broad list of examples, see Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam & London, de Appel / Open Editions: 2010). In 2007, Kristina Lee Podesva proposed that “education as a form of art making constitutes a relatively new medium. It is distinct from projects that take education and its institution, the academy, as a subject or facilitator of production.” Drawing on research undertaken at the Copenhagen Free University and elsewhere, Podesva itemized 10 characteristics and concerns across a spectrum of art and curatorial initiatives engaging with education-as-medium. These included: “A school structure that operates as a social medium”; “A tendency toward process- (versus object-) based production”; “An aleatory or open nature”; “A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants”; “A preference for exploratory, experimental, and multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge production”; and “An awareness of the instrumentalization of the academy.” See Podesva, “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art,” *Filip*, no. 6 (2007) (<http://filip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn>). It is also worth looking at Anton Vidokle’s “Incomplete Chronology of Experimental Art Schools” in *Notes for an Art School* (Amsterdam: International Foundation Manifesta, 2006): 19.

stable distinctions between the work of the artist, the curator, the educator, the public, and so forth that preceded the turn in recent years toward more discursive, or educational, forms of practice. This turn to education also resulted in a kind of curatorialization of educational formats and the cooptation of the political potentiality of the discursive. This has been evident in biennials and art fairs in particular, which often employ adjacent events as a means of falsely bolstering critique in support of their market-oriented economies.

Having said this, the trend toward diversification should be more generally welcomed within the curatorial field as a moment of expansion, a turning away from the prioritization of the gallery exhibition as the only inevitable outcome of curatorial work. But on another level, these developments in the field also highlight the need to differentiate between curating exhibitions *about* “education,” or in relation to “discourse,” versus curatorial projects that are inherently educational or discursive in their forms of production and ultimate objectives. This way of thinking allows the group exhibition to become only one among many possibilities within the accepted nexus of a curator’s professional activities.²

In considering how the paracuratorial might begin to perplex curatorial practice, I would first like to explore the ways in which recent concepts of the curatorial have themselves looked to the margins of practice, resisting categorical resolution and operating instead as a constellation of activities whose precise definitions and objectives sometimes intentionally prove elusive, with discourse not always realized in actual practice. Irit Rogoff, for example, articulates the curatorial as critical thought that does not rush to embody itself, but instead raises questions that are to be unraveled over time. Maria Lind’s notion of the curatorial involves practicing forms of political agency that try to go beyond what is already known. Beatrice von Bismarck’s understanding of the curatorial involves a continuous space of negotiation contributing to other processes of becoming. Finally, Emily Pethick’s proposition of the curatorial presupposes an unbounded framework, allowing for things, ideas, and outcomes to emerge in the process of being realized. Illustrative of the contested territory around curating, these definitions cannot be reduced to a set of positions that exist in opposition to exhibition making. Rather, they support forms of research-based, dialogical practice in which the processual and the serendipitous overlap with speculative actions and open-ended forms of production.

Certainly these varied definitions of the curatorial can be read as resisting the narrative-oriented authorial model of curation, which might be defined as commissioning or working with extant artworks for a public manifestation within an exhibitionary frame or organizing principle defined by a curator. But I would argue that this ought not to be the primary objective of the curatorial as defined by these various theorists. Instead, the curatorial at

its most productive prioritizes a type of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity to emerge in the process of doing and speaking together. However dissensual, this cohabitational time can be made public, warts and all. The discursive aspect of curatorial work should be given parity with—rather than being perceived as contingent upon—the main event of staging exhibitions. Similarly, the work of exhibition making is not only there to legitimize the *para* work in relation to it; rather, processes are set in motion in relation to other activities, actions, and events within the curatorial. Instead of conforming to the logic of inside and outside, a constellation of activities exists in which the exhibition can be one of many component parts.

Rather than forcing syntheses, this constellation (an always-emergent praxis) places together incommensurable social objects, ideas, and subject relations in order to demonstrate the structural faults and falsities inherent in the notion of the hermetic exhibition as primary curatorial work. The curatorial, conceived of as a constellation, resists the stasis of the curator-artist-spectator triumvirate and supports more semi-autonomous and self-determined aesthetic and discursive forms of practice that may overlap and intersect, rather than seeking a dialectic (image) or oppositional presentation (form). It is not about being either for or against exhibitions. As a constellation, discursively led curatorial praxis does not exclude the exhibition as one of its many productive forms. From curatorially driven spaces such as BAK, Casco, the Showroom, PiST, or FormContent to practices as diverse as those of Sarah Pierce, tranzit, Komplat, Anton Vidokle, If I Can’t Dance . . . , Ashkal Alwan, or WHW, the curatorial is a constellation of activities as main public event. Rather than being either in opposition to one another or integrated, all of these practices function in the Adornian sense of a constellation, proposing a more juxtaposed field of signification, form, content, and critique. The constellation, in this sense, is an ever-shifting and dynamic cluster of changing elements that are always resisting reduction to a single common denominator. By preserving irreconcilable differences, such praxis retains a tension between the universal and the particular, between essentialism and nominalism.

Paracuratorial practices are part of this constellation, but could also be considered a type of practice that responds to certain irreconcilable conditions of production. They attach themselves to, intervene in, or rub up against these conditions. They might occur at the points at which the main event is critiqued from within, or when the restrictive scenarios into which art and curatorial labor are forced or sidestepped in some way. They employ a host-and-uninvited-guest tactic of coordination and invention, enabling parasitic curatorial labor to coexist alongside, or in confrontation with, preexisting cultural forms, originating scenarios, or prescribed exhibition contexts.

In the first instance, artists’ zines and magazines are good examples.

From General Idea's *FILE Magazine* to *The Fox*, Stephen Willats's occasional *Control*, or North Drive Press's exhibitions in a box, the paracuratorial facilitates an extended artistic practice in which diverse activities commingle while employing an existing cultural form within which, and through which, many other ideas and propositions intersect and interrelate. Similarly, projects such as e-flux employ a parasitic economic model that latches onto extant marketing and online communication strategies as a means of funding a public program of curated events, art projects, and publications.

Exemplary paracuratorial projects have emerged from an initially limited curatorial context. *Cork Caucus*, *The Paraeducation Department*, and *The Blue House* were three semi-autonomously aligned projects that fulfilled the function of guest to their hosts. *Cork Caucus: Art, Possibility, and Democracy* (2005), co-curated by Annie Fletcher, Charles Esche, and Art/not art, was realized in the context of Cork, Ireland's year as European Capital of Culture. Exhibitions and commissioned projects were curated alongside performances and discursive events across multiple formats, from seminars and lectures to workshops and publications. Exhibitions, events, and extensive formal and informal discussions took place in and around the city of Cork, each corresponding to the others as part of a curatorial whole.

The Paraeducation Department (2005) began when Annie Fletcher was one of six curators invited to take part in a project called *Tracer* at Witte de With and TENT, two institutions occupying two separate floors of the same building in Rotterdam. The invitation was to seek art in the city, to comment on Rotterdam's cultural pulse, and to convey this through an exhibition or project that engaged with the city's art scene(s). Fletcher invited the artist Sarah Pierce to collaborate with her, and together they resisted the conventional exhibition as the default curatorial format by setting up a common discursive space in a room on the floor in between the two institutions, where the employees of both could meet informally. In the process, an informal network of individuals was established that generated a multidirectional dialogue with temporary communities, audiences, and gatherings programmed across the project, some of which (such as a reading group) continue to this day. Fletcher and Pierce enacted a response instead of responding reactively. They relocated the space of the curatorial to correspond with existing structures while performing at some distance from the institutions' expectations. In this sense, *paracuratorial* is a useful term to describe transitional temporal processes of engagement, with people taking precedence over exhibitions as the primary end product.

This is illustrative of a range of practices in which multiple participants are involved as co-creators with a view to shaping counter-public spaces, as seen in artist projects by Tania Bruguera, Pablo Helguera, Temporary Services, Oda Projesi, Annette Krauss, Skart, Ultra-Red, Hiwa K, Can Altay, Park Fiction, or Jeanne van Heeswijk. In many of these practices, the moment of

publicness is never fully revealed. The function of the curatorial proposition is to create situations of potential agency for the co-productive processes initiated by the artist, or curator, as post-autonomous producer. An understanding of the curatorial is put forward as an accumulation of interactions, with the work of art configured as a cluster of interventions and interactions gathered together over time to result in more dispersed forms of distribution.

Jeanne van Heeswijk's project *The Blue House* illustrates the ways in which such nonrepresentational processes of communication and exchange can form the content and structure of the work of art as a kind of paracuratorial practice. *The Blue House* began with van Heeswijk sidestepping the original brief of a restrictive site-responsive public art commission to instigate new fields of interaction. Situated in a newly built suburb of Amsterdam called IJburg, she collaborated with the urbanist Dennis Kaspori and the architect Hervé Paraponaris in arranging for a large villa in a housing block to be taken off the private market and redesignated as a space for reflection, artistic production, and cultural activities. Over a four-year period (2005–9), the Blue House Association of the Mind functioned as a changing group of local and international practitioners who took up residence for up to six months as part of an open-ended organizational structure. Invitees conducted research; produced works of art, films, and publications; and were involved in discussions and other activities. This resulted in numerous interventions being made by practitioners in and around *The Blue House*, which responded to the specifics of a place undergoing construction as part of an extensive urban renewal plan. Rather than producing artworks with intrinsic aesthetic values, *The Blue House* was a para-institutional model based on social relationality. The result was the culmination of associated responses to the local context and an organized network of willing participants who collectively contributed to the production, where different levels of participation highlighted the complexities of artistic coproduction within the logic of succession, continuity, and sustainability rather than discontinuity in a unitary time and place.

I do not wish to fetishize process over product, nor to see curatorial discourses superseding praxis. Rather, my intention is to problematize the recently manifested desire for more procedural, exclusive, dominant, or instrumental forms of curatorial production. This is registered by a number of curators and commentators who have called for a regression to the artwork-first model of curation: curating as selecting from an already-sanctioned art market; the disappearance of curatorial self-reflexivity; curatorial labor restricted to object-oriented exhibitions; curating reduced to working within institutions; establishing a canon or selecting from within a canon; curating associated with, or working within, a private collection or museum context as the only way forward. This tendency is often accompanied by arguments such as "curating can never be taught"—as if curating was once something that could be transposed, and curatorial teaching was only about imparting

knowledge and producing proto-exhibition curators—which often confuses the technical with the discursive requirements of curatorship. Underlying all of this is a troubling desire for a reductive field of curatorial practice within an art world based on privilege, as a place for the few: those who have access, those who are “in the know,” those who have resources or clout, those who are able to operate within a limited, fragile, reputational economy that never wishes to challenge or exceed itself out of fear of discursivity, critical theory, and the unknown. I believe that paracuratorial work is part of an ever-expanding curatorial paradigm that will continue to offer up particular forms of resistance to this kind of conservatism that is so loudly expressed within the contemporary art field as an urge to return to more stable and traditional forms of production. In the face of such a reductive scenario, the paracuratorial is part of an evolving field of operations—a destabilizing curatorial constellation—that persists in resisting the established order of things.

REAR MIRROR



TOO MANY TEAPOTS? THOUGHTS ON CURATING POSTMODERNISM

Glenn Adamson

Over the last few years, as a curator making an exhibition about postmodernism, I often felt like a cartographer trying to map a completely reflective landscape, the surface of which repelled any attempt to verify its contours. Or like Orson Welles shooting the final scene of *The Lady from Shanghai*, in which the heroine and the villain are trapped in a funhouse magic mirror maze; the scene culminates in random gunfire, and the myriad images crash in fragments to the floor.

In the same way, postmodernism has always presented onlookers with a dizzying refractory play. As the very word suggests, it is premised on uncertainty—the uncertainty of a phase in history that (we are told) has been foreclosed without necessarily knowing exactly when, or what new one has gotten under way. Even in the years of its emergence—the years prior to 1977, when the architectural theorist Charles Jencks gave a name to the insurrectionary tendencies then rife in architectural practice—the only certainties that attended postmodernism were framed in negative terms.¹ Away with rationalism, away with narratives of progress, away with objective standards of fitness. All well and good. But what replaced these hard-won modernist principles was a sense of aimless drift, in which the history of each medium became available once again for raiding and quoting. Beyond this, there was only the gesture of negation itself.

Postmodernism, then, resolves only through its own collapse, and only in hindsight. My co-curator Jane Pavitt and I assigned ourselves the task of providing that resolution in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 to 1990*, which opened

REFLECTIONS ON LIVING AS FORM

Nato Thompson

Living as Form was a short-lived, large-scale exhibition located in a vacant marketplace on the Lower East Side of New York.¹ It offered a glimpse of 20 years of socially engaged art from around the world, and featured a complex archive of 100 projects. Its overall scale seemed necessary to me, as the curator: I felt a responsibility to demonstrate for the historical record not only the complexity of this hybrid practice we roughly call socially engaged art, but also its global ubiquity. From the outset I was aware of the difficulties of exhibiting a kind of practice that is extremely site specific, and inherently resistant to conventional display methods. Thus I made sure to include some work that was embodied, present, and performative to provide a sense of what these works *felt* like in the moment they occurred.

The exhibition space was a combination social space, archive, and performative playground. It was a whirlwind starting with the first day of installation. The build-out was rather intense, as we had commissioned several new projects, including ones by Superflex, Temporary Services, Carolina Caycedo, Bik Van der Pol, Timebank, and Surasi Kusolwong, and had commissioned the architectural group Common Room to design the layout. Then, halfway through the exhibition, Occupy Wall Street roared into existence. Occupy underlined the continued relevance of many of the underlying themes of the show, such as the obvious desire to confront capital by producing spaces of dialogue in public space over time. It also forced an element of political immediacy on a project that had originally been mostly about reflection. There was definitely an interplay between the artists in the

at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in September 2011 and toured subsequently. We had no interest in providing a fixed definition of our central term. Rather, our exhibition charted a movement from initial academic experimentation (the sort of architecture that Jencks wrote about) through a proliferating subcultural phase (populated by pop stars such as Grace Jones) to an eventual commercialization and corporatization. The last gallery was chock full of shining luxury commodities, from teapots to necklaces, designed by an all-star list of designer-architects. Facing them down was the artist Jenny Holzer's baleful billboard, circa 1985, reading: PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT.

We might have approached it differently, of course. Every curator is a product of his or her own moment, and had we not been curating in the shadow of the financial crisis, perhaps the pernicious influence of money and desire might not have been so prominent. In a more innocent era, we might have been tempted to play it differently—to create a postmodern exhibition about postmodernism, perhaps, by indulging in incessant self-reference or coy in-jokes. This might have presented a less straightforward (less “grand”) narrative, one that deployed the very tactics of irony that it documented. But to us that seemed both inadvisable and unattractive. We were, after all, curating for a mass audience that was not necessarily well versed in the subject, and there seemed little to be gained by making an arch, self-regarding show that would elude most of our visitors.²



Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970–1990 installation view, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2011, showing the presentation drawing of the AT&T Building (1978) by Johnson and Burgee Associates, a trouser suit (1991) designed by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, and a quote from the novel *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) by Martin Amis

More to the point, neither Jane nor I consider ourselves postmodernists, nor even champions of the postmodern position.³ (Although, having been born in 1967 and 1972, respectively, we both listened to New Wave music as teenagers, and even dressed the part. Jane more than me, though I had my moments.) As a freshman in college, I was asked to watch and then analyze the quintessential postmodern film *Blade Runner* in no less than three different introductory courses. And in graduate school I was fed a steady diet of Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. By that time, we were being told that postmodernism was over and done with, though we were encouraged to understand it in retrospect. What new dispensation might replace it was never quite named. That experience may have instilled in us a sense of distance from the postmodern generation that came before. In the 1970s it was still possible to feel that smashing the ideals of modernism would release sufficient kinetic energy to fuel a new era. By the 1990s that fuel had been spent. Postmodernism had fallen prey to its own logic of cynical eclecticism. Its stylistic and conceptual maneuvers, once so vividly antagonistic, had come to seem like just another option in the palette of artists, designers, architects, advertisers, and executives.

This put us in the unusual position of working with material that we had no particular desire to celebrate. Though museums have become much more self-conscious in the past few decades (itself one result of the postmodern turn), it is still uncommon for curators to have profoundly mixed feelings about the objects they are displaying. In some ways we loved the content of our show, finding it by turns hilarious, exciting, and melancholy. We noted with pleasure the ways in which postmodern practice anticipated more recent design, for example in the handmade cut-and-paste graphics of the 1970s, which look for all the world as if they were made using the latest version of Photoshop. We were, of course, geekily thrilled to have the famous relics of our own adolescent era on view: David Byrne’s Big Suit, Grandmaster Flash’s turntables, original proofs for New Order record sleeves designed by Peter Saville—manifestations of postmodern exaggeration, bricolage, and appropriation, respectively. But there was also some-

exhibition and the occupation at Zuccotti Park, but more important was the manner in which Occupy changed the legibility of the exhibition itself. No need to sit back, the movement is here.

Sometimes, an exhibition’s press and critical commentary cannot help but be completely intertwined with the historic moment in which the exhibition happens to take place. Having planned this show years in advance, we could not possibly have anticipated that it would open to the public just as the mood in New York was suddenly so populist in spirit. Every critic was busily disparaging the excesses of the art world in a time of financial recession. As much as I had worried that critics (New York critics especially) would hate the project due to its text-heavy nature (and because many of the works resisted any sense of visual aesthetics), it was largely well received as a necessary balm to the hedonistic, sybaritic qualities of today’s art fairs and auctions. Worse things could have happened, I suppose. Yet I worry that perhaps *Living as Form* fit a little too snugly into an a-critical mode of acrimony. As much as the laudatory criticisms were appreciated, I had hoped the critics would register a sense of the true challenge the works posed to the status quo nature of much of what counts as visual art today.

I began the project with anything *but* the intent to offer a balm for the art world. Rather, I hoped it would be an opportunity to point out that something was broken—or, perhaps, in less hyperbolic words, to note that a shift was very much in the air. I believe the 21st century is headed toward a profound shift in art and culture that will exceed the one initiated by Marcel Duchamp when he questioned what could be accepted as art. As Tania Bruguera states, “We have to put Duchamp’s urinal back in the restroom.”⁴ Cultural production has truly escaped the realm



Living as Form installation view, Essex Street Market, New York, 2011

of the art world, and art increasingly relies on cheap, self-referential tricks (a work that references past art is thus art) in order to justify its existence. The language of art has become so ubiquitous in culture itself that art is constantly forced to either embrace its ubiquity or hide away in its increasingly self-referential niche. It is not that the language of art should become useful, but instead that the maneuver of showing the world as art has exhausted itself, as the world itself has become a land infused with

This kind of subtlety is rarely appreciated properly, and I am sure that many a curator and artist go insane waiting for their more pressing critiques to be discovered, perhaps in the pages of a magazine whose audience might actually care. Fortunately, a great book was made to accompany *Living as Form*, explicitly to generate a complex discussion worldwide. The desire to make it an exhibition as well lay in the fact that the projects, and in general the production of politics and meaning, remains not simply a discursive issue but a discursive issue *that must be resolved in space*. That is to say, it was critical to have this project in a physical location where people would meet, experience things together, and discuss them. Books alone cannot do this.

I want to interrogate the negative and positive responses to the show. Let’s begin with what I call the curatorial compulsion to define art. One critic/curator opined that the show was interesting because it demonstrated how art cannot go any further. In other words, the project of socially engaged art illustrates art’s own limits; because much of the work was archival and on shelves, it demonstrated that it didn’t fit well with contemporary exhibition methods and that ultimately curators must about-face and return to “the object.” Since this person is a museum curator, I think she instinctively felt compelled to draw this conclusion—felt that it would be somehow too dangerous to regard the problems of exhibiting this work as a challenge to be faced, indeed the major challenge with which art institutions must engage in the upcoming decades, as everyone else’s definition of art continues to diversify exponentially.

thing remote about these fragments. Neither Jane nor I began the project as boosters of postmodernism, and though we applied a great deal of old-fashioned connoisseurship to the topic (trying to determine the exact production date of a particular Memphis design, for example), we never did change our minds about that. A feeling pervaded the galleries that the party had ended long ago, leaving little behind but a set of difficult questions. Then, too, there was the hollowness and cynicism of much postmodernism, and (as many critics pointed out) the sheer ugliness of most of the forms it produced. Its paroxysms of self-doubt, its strenuous exaggerations, its healthy kitsch quotient: At the time, these qualities were liberating. In retrospect, despite the fascination they may exert, it's hard not to be thankful it's all over.

This ambivalence was not only the tone of the exhibition, but its intended message. I hope that visitors recognized themselves in the dilemmas posed by postmodernism. Our concluding section on money was perhaps the cardinal instance of this. Given the predatory aspects of capitalism, how should consumers navigate the shoals of their own desire? But other questions linger from the 1970s and 1980s, too. What sorts of buildings do we want, given that professional architecture tends toward the domineering, and vernacular architecture toward the banal? How should we navigate a world in which the most potent form of identity (that is, celebrity) is the one that is least authentic? Is authorship fatally compromised or, on the contrary, radically extended, by the echo chamber of the mass media? The exhibition was meant to prompt all of these questions, and the accompanying publication, which included a long curatorial essay and 40 contributions by authors from the V&A and elsewhere, was meant to take them up in earnest (though, even here, not necessarily to resolve them—hence the multiplicity of voices).

If we had to do it all over again, would we take the same approach? I think so. Although, speaking for myself, there are a few things I might do differently. One frequent leitmotif of commentary on the show (coming especially from art critics) was that there were too many teapots.⁴ That's an easy swipe to make at the V&A, of course; we are a design museum, and teapots are our business. And you can imagine the hazards of attempting to mount a defense, arguing for example that these asymmetrical, ritualistic, trophy-like objects are indeed perfect emblems of postmodern excess. All the same, I wish we had indeed wandered further afield from our usual terrain. Fine art appeared only sporadically in the show, only as it complemented the narrative we were shaping through objects, and I think that was the right approach. But having more material from the music industry—branded hip-hop attire from the 1980s, say, or a fuller representation of the innovations unleashed by sampling—might have meant more to our audience while remaining in keeping with our themes. The pop culture we included already seemed like a big step for a design museum to take, but the V&A has been considering this kind of material more



Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970–1990 installation view, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2011, showing a reconstruction of Charles Jencks's Garagia Rotunda (1976–77)

and more frequently, with recent exhibitions on Kylie Minogue and the Supremes, and another one coming up on David Bowie. In retrospect we could have gone even further, and our audience would have happily followed.

Another point often mentioned in critical writings about the exhibition was that we cut off our story very definitely in the late 1980s. This decision was greeted in some quarters (usually with approval) as a much-delayed confirmation of postmodernism's demise.⁵ There is a complexity here, though. While postmodernism—whether seen as a style, a movement, or a trend—was certainly played out by 1990, the larger condition of “postmodernity” (as described by theorists such as David Harvey and Fredric Jameson) is just getting going. As we note in the catalogue, cities like Lagos, Dubai, and Singapore today are more postmodern than London, Milan, Tokyo, or New York have ever been, in the sense that they are faster, more media-saturated, more aligned with the logic of

**REFLEC-
TIONS ON
LIVING AS
FORM**

Nato
Thompson



Living as Form installation view, Essex Street Market, New York, 2011, showing Megawords' *Outpost* project room (top) and Temporary Services' *MARKET* commission (bottom)

A different popular opinion, rampant in established art criticism, is what I call Clement Greenberg 2.0 wrapped up in an affinity for the writings of Claire Bishop, where the concern is that in terms of socially engaged art, the art is no longer around. These critics wax longingly for poetry, subtlety, ambiguity, craft, aesthetics, and other things they associate with great works of art. Not that they need beautiful paintings; their aesthetics lean a little more toward a certain punk-rock kind of refusal that they consider truly wonderful. The artist Santiago Sierra embodies this socially engaged nihilism, which is about as far as they will go with the participatory spectacle. They privilege words like “subversive” to emphasize that the negative is a more honest form of refusal in aesthetics than the soft liberalisms of do-gooder political art. Adherents to this view tell themselves that the latter is easily co-optable by state institutions and thus lacks a certain inherent resistant quality. It is this bizarre belief in inherent resistance that

I find most revealing. A commonplace (mis)understanding has swept the world today: that aesthetics in and of themselves, no matter what the subject matter, cannot be inherently resistant. It isn't a question of beauty. It is a question of positioning within power, and its complexity is often avoided or conveniently not understood.

On the more generous side, a lot of artists and activists who work in socially engaged ways enjoyed the display of the show. But they are more eager to get things done in the world than to reflect on an exhibition. In some ways, the project affirmed what they already knew. Many of them don't worry about the term “artist” anymore. They are just people on the planet who use whatever skill sets they have to think and act through the world. Questions of what makes good or bad art have been boring to them for a long time, and their impatience with the repressive political realities of the “real” world far outweighs their desire to elevate the petty criticisms of the art world. In large part, they gave up on the art world a long time ago.

I loved this show dearly. I am extremely proud of it for numerous reasons, but most of all because I think it aggressively went after something at the horizon of the present. It corralled a complex ecology of practices that typify an emerging subset of cultural production located squarely at the forefront of where we are going as a global society. These run the gamut, in my mind, from Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses in Houston to Ala Plastica in Argentina to Cemeti Art House in Indonesia. They range from research-intensive works on social justice issues to nonprofit organizations geared toward community development to what might be called discrete, socially engaged artworks.

As an exhibition it had its problems, I well know. Since there was so much participatory work (particularly the marketplace by Temporary Services and the meeting rooms designed by Common Room), it worked best when there were large crowds. In the middle of the day on a Thursday, when attendance was at a trickle, some rooms felt sort of sad. In addition, as much as the subject matter was meant to be populist, it was ultimately fairly specific and heady. Life as a form is not exactly a topic that draws huge audiences and thus the project suffered a bit from



Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970–1990 installation view, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2011, showing works by Jeff Koons, Gerald Casale, Grace Jones, David Byrne, the Talking Heads, and Laurie Anderson (top) and Jenny Holzer's *Protect me from what I want* (1985) (bottom)

commodity. From this perspective, postmodernism should be seen as an anticipation, an early warning system, for a set of transformations yet to come. The material in our exhibition predated the Internet, but much of it did seem to illustrate Harvey's concept of "time space compression." Could we have made the subtle distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity more explicit, without boring or baffling visitors? Perhaps so, but then again, perhaps such matters are better left to essays like the one you're reading now.

In any case, while I have an investment in retrospective analyses of my own projects, I'm also starting to look back at this one from a kind of remove. I began working on it all the way back in 2007, and the object list and book texts were fixed fully a year before our opening date. By now, as the exhibition heads off to its touring venues, I am ready to move on too. My next project for the V&A, entitled *The Future: A History*, is tentatively set to open in 2016 (we institutional curators do lead lives of delayed gratification). It covers a much broader chronology, from the Middle Ages to the present, and considers the myriad ways in which designers have envisioned the future in their own present. It's a show about optimism—the materialization of hope. After living for four years with radical doubt, I can't wait to get started.

Notes

1. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977).
2. The eventual attendance for the exhibition was approximately 115,000, about 15 percent above our expected target.
3. This was also true of the exhibition's designers, the architects Carmody Groarke and the graphic designers A Practice For Everyday Life (APFEL). Both firms strive for clarity and appropriateness in their work, and although they quoted liberally from the visual and material palette of the era, the galleries they created were much more modernist than postmodernist in their underlying method. For a discussion of the design process, see my blog on the V&A website: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blogs/sketch-product>.
4. For example, Adrian Searle wrote that the show might be retitled *Postmodern Teapots and Allied Goods*. "Postmodernism at the V&A . . . More Than Ironic Teapots and Ugly Chairs," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2011.
5. Ed Docx, "Postmodernism Is Dead," *Prospect Magazine* 185 (July 20, 2011).

its critical focus.

Finally, the fact that there was so much archival work made it difficult for a viewer to see everything (how much can a person read and watch?). I was aware of this problem heading in, but felt that the only way to do this project would be to take the hit on this aspect in favor of representing a true cross-section of aesthetic and political approaches from around the globe. If the exhibition (and the book, for that matter) only exacerbated the confusion surrounding this kind of politically engaged social aesthetic, perhaps the conclusion is that we need to redraw the map to encompass its tremendous ubiquity. All too often, art critics want to clean up and clarify rather than actually appreciating the real scope of international cultural production. This is a vast, worldwide phenomenon with infinite specificities. Whether or not art magazines can comprehend it in its innumerable manifestations, artists all over the world are increasingly working in this way. Art exists as an infrastructure, but socially engaged cultural production exists as a way of making meaning in the world. The scale of the output by those locked out of the doors of the arts (an infrastructure built upon the idea of aesthetic scarcity and refinement) is too vast to *not* be confusing. And as the scale of this output continues to expand, institutions that have been built upon art's scarcity are having a difficult time reorienting themselves.

Unbeknownst to many people, a large percentage of the initial organizers of Occupy Wall Street are artists. Not *all*, but many. As artists are used to being in the minority of any historic moment, this particular movement is prescient and peculiarly new. They are not simply poster makers and graphic designers, but organizers. They are critical of authorship, celebrity culture, hierarchy. They are savvy about the media, and invested in an international concept of justice. They embody the future subject who uses culture as a form, or mold, for the focused production of a new form of existence. It is this kind of language and approach that I believe *Living as Form* pointed to, and it is the new kind of language and reality that is changing the world.

Notes

1. The show was on view September 24 through October 16, 2011, and was presented by Creative Time.
2. Tania Bruguera, "Introduction on Useful Art," Immigrant Movement International, April 23, 2011, <http://www.taniabrujera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm>.



Living as Form installation view, Essex Street Market, New York, 2011, showing Temporary Services' *MARKET* (2011) and Surasi Kusolwong's *Golden Ghost (The Future Belongs To)* (2011)



ENDNOTE



Tara McDowell

Is the “post-occupational condition” the new “post-medium condition”? By post-occupational I mean the increasing reluctance to compartmentalize oneself in what used to be clearly delimited roles—artist, curator—in favor of a situational, discursive praxis responsive to community, site, or circumstance.

In this issue of *The Exhibitionist*, the post-occupational condition is invoked twice, both times positively. Paul O’Neill writes that bifurcating the curatorial and the paracuratorial “could be perceived as a conservative urge to return to the more stable distinctions between the work of the artist, the curator, the educator, the public, and so forth, that preceded the turn in recent years toward more discursive, or educational, forms of practice.” For Nato Thompson, dispensing with such definitions is not just welcome but inevitable. He writes of the artists included in *Living as Form*, “Many of them don’t worry about the term ‘artist’ anymore. They are just people on the planet who use whatever skill sets they have to think and act through the world. Questions of what makes good or bad art have been boring to them for a long time, and their impatience with the repressive political realities of the ‘real’ world far outweighs their desire to elevate the petty criticisms of the art world.” There are more urgent matters at hand than parsing outmoded definitions, is the claim. Interestingly, the most influential example of the post-occupational condition operating today,

e-flux, is called an artwork by Anton Vidokle, one of the organization’s founders and its most visible and polemical figure.¹

Individuals and collectives today feel less compelled to occupy only one role in the art world, and distinctions between inside and outside the art world are becoming increasingly muddy (for instance social work versus art work). Today’s “art worker-in-general” has its antecedent in debates of the 1960s about “art in general” and medium specificity. Faced with new artworks that were expanding beyond accepted definitions of painting or sculpture, some art critics felt a loss of firm ground upon which to make evaluations. Rosalind Krauss, one of the central protagonists in these debates, has since coined the term “post-medium condition” to describe our current landscape, and has worked to generate criteria with which to judge contemporary art, even as the art itself outpaces her terms. No one wants to be on the wrong side of history. By the same token, rather than embrace this new post-occupational condition uncritically, we would do well to interrogate it, and the reskilling it asks of artistic and curatorial labor.

Notes

1. Vidokle explains, “I would say that e-flux is not an artist-run space, it’s probably closer to a long-term artists’ project.” Hans Ulrich Obrist, Anton Vidokle, and Julieta Aranda, “Ever. Ever. Ever,” http://www.e-flux.com/files/Hans_Ulrich_Obrist_Interview.pdf.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nancy Adajania
Cultural Theorist and Independent Curator, Bombay

Glenn Adamson
Head of Research, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Magali Arriola
Curator, Colección Jumex, Mexico City

Nicolas Bourriaud
Director, Beaux-Arts de Paris

Dan Cameron
Chief Curator, Orange County Museum of Art, California

Chelsea Haines
Education and Public Programs Manager, Independent Curators International, New York

Hou Hanru
Independent Critic and Curator, San Francisco

Jens Hoffmann
Director, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco

Tara McDowell
Independent Curator and Doctoral Candidate in the History of Art, University of California, Berkeley

Stéphanie Moisdon
Associate Curator, Le Consortium, Dijon, France

Tumelo Mosaka
Curator of Contemporary Art, Krannert Art Museum, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois

Paul O'Neill
Artist, Curator, and Writer, Bristol, United Kingdom

Adriano Pedrosa
Independent Curator, São Paulo

Vivian Sky Rehberg
Program Director, Master of Fine Art, Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam

Cristina Ricupero
Independent Curator, Paris

Sarah Rifky
Director, Cairo International Resource Center for Art

Nato Thompson
Chief Curator, Creative Time, New York

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