UNDER PRESSURE RESPONSE & RESPONSIBILITY OF A BIENNALE A SELECTION OF ARTICLES AND ESSAYS PLATFORM BK

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Statement Hedwig Fijen Director of Manifesta 10

Hedwig Fijen

I want to first thank Prof. M. Piotrovsky, director of the State Hermitage museum, for all his personal courageous support in this undertaking from November 2012 up to this date.

As Director of International Foundation Manifesta and Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, I wish to share my reflections and our position on the current escalating crisis. Despite the reactions in the media, Manifesta thinks that there are other ways forward than for calling for a boycott. We are open to all critical statements at large. We would like to offer opportunities for debating the different positions in an open discussion, now and during the Biennial in St. Petersburg. This we offer to artists, art critics, and opinion makers, of both Russian origin or international background, who, like we, struggle with the dilemma of how a contemporary art biennial with an artistic message should engage openly in contested areas where human rights are scattered and so-called criticism is not allowed.

Twenty years ago, I began researching and speaking with others about a model of a biennial that would move to different parts of Europe. Twenty years is a long time. It is of course twenty-five years since the fall of the iron curtain that separated Europe. Manifesta was born out of a historical moment that shifted the geo-political plates that reunited Europe. The 'cold war' era created a gap within Europe which held wider political implications globally. It created skepticism, suspicion, and for others, curiosity.

As someone who has witnessed and directed nine different Biennials in nine different European geo-political and socio-economic contexts, I can say that the organization often finds itself in a place of political non-alignment. The 'dilemma of being engaged or disengaged' is not only present in the current context of the Russian Federation but our critical engagement should also be proved in West European locations such as Zurich where Manifesta is hosted in 2016, and possibly in future host cities of Manifesta. We fight for artistic freedom, and we support curators and artists to investigate the sites of the Biennial and discuss the importance, sensitivities, and relevance of the proposed projects. We challenge the dialogue with the public and we discuss the relevance of the Biennial not only for the artistic community but also in relation to how it affects the daily lives of the general public. We offer training opportunities for those who are enthusiastic to be involved in a project like Manifesta so that the legacy of our work continues after the Biennial has gone. We are engaged with those communities that are stigmatized and need solidarity.

In regard to the complex situation in Ukraine and Crimea, Manifesta supports all those groups that fight for peaceful and non-violent solutions, whether in Europe or in the Russian Federation. Manifesta cannot and will not accept censor and self-censorship or unlawful intervention from any government in our activities. Our work is one of debate, negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy, that does not shy away from the conflicts of our time. We are not a political party nor an NGO, and do not operate under the aegis of any governmental authori-

ty. We operate autonomously and critically every two years in the complexities of each host city and our intentions should not be manipulated to legitimize the ruling powers. Manifesta supports ethical, curatorial, and artistic independence and tries to strengthen those forces and communities in society who are fighting for freedom of expression against any government that bases its power on censorship.

I appeal to those in power to find peaceful resolutions to any contested and conflicting situation; the current situation in Ukraine in particular, as well as in any country suffering conflict. Manifesta has chosen to operate within contested areas. We choose to do this because we believe art provides an ultimate perspective and reflection on society. The biennial format offers a chorus of many voices. We choose to engage with a critical, pluralistic view, within a specific context. Manifesta has a responsibility to art and artists and to those who wish to engage with the context in which we situate ourselves. We hope that Manifesta 10 will offer the opportunity for local and international people to come to St. Petersburg, to engage with the program, to have discussions and for these discussions to reverberate within their daily lives.

Biennials like Manifesta should play a vital role in helping us better understand our place in this complex world. Biennials need to prove their relevance to today's issues in society, and to involve an audience in a critical dialogue that is not just about what they do, but why they do it.

Source: http://manifesta.org/2014/03/statement-hedwig-fijen-director-of-manifesta-10/

Chto Delat? withdraws from Manifesta 10

Chto Delat?

In solidarity with the Peace March in Moscow today Chto Delat announces its decision to withdraw from Manifesta 10.

On March 11th, Manifesta Foundation responded to recent calls for boycotts, cancelation and postponement of Manifesta 10, planned to open at the State Hermitage Museum in early summer.

In this long-awaited statement, the foundation announced that it will not cancel under the present circumstances. Also, presumably responding to calls for the exhibition's radicalization, curator Kasper König reaffirmed his commitment to a group show demonstrating the broadest possible spectrum of art's possibilities, emphasizing that his contract allows artistic freedom - within the limits of the Russian law - and that he will (try) to keep the show free of censorship. But at the same time, he also restated his dislike for "cheap provocations" in topical political references, warning that Manifesta 10 at Hermitage could be "misused by political actors as a platform for their own self-righteous representation," and insisting that "it is [his] hope to present far more than just commentary on the present political circumstances." (http://manifesta.org/2014/03/manifesta-10-will-stay-in-st-petersburg/). It is clearly art over politics. Kaspar König's most recent statement denigrates any attempts to address the present situation in Russia by artistic means, demoting them to "self-righteous representation" and "cheap provocation" and thus effectively preemptively censoring them. We see now from this official reaction that neither curator nor institution are capable of rising to the challenge of a dramatically evolving political situation, and we cannot be held hostage by its corporate policies, however reasonable they would sound under different circumstance. For this reason, we, the artists of Chto delat, have decided to withdraw our participation from the exhibition at Hermitage.

As we have said before, we are generally against boycotts and especially as far as international cultural projects in Russia are concerned. A cultural blockade will only strengthen the position of reactionary forces at a time when the marginalized anti-war movement in Russia so desperately needs solidarity. But our aim at least should be to turn every cultural project into a manifestation of dissent against the Russian government's policy of violence, repressions, and lies. Even if you are staging Shakespeare or exhibiting Matisse, the task of culture today is to find the artistic language to bring home that simple message.

Sadly, Manifesta cannot rise to this challenge. Had the situation remained as it was, with a soft authoritarianism continuing to stagnate in Russia, the project might have been a positive factor for the further development of a fledgling public sphere. But as conditions worsen and reactionary forces grow stronger by the day, Manifesta has shown that it can respond with little more than bureaucratic injunctions to respect law and order in a situation where any and all law has gone to the wind. For that reason, any participation in the Manifesta 10 exhibition loses its initial meaning.

We have sympathy for the views expressed in the personal statement by Joanna Warsza *, curator of Manifesta 10's public program, and we would only be too happy to continue supporting her efforts. Nevertheless, her statement has a private quality, and the dangers to the project - censorship, manipulations of meaning, and intimidation, which she describes so accurately, are inevitable under current political escalation. Warsza precisely describes the choice between engagement and the desire to stay on the sidelines. Our own choice also lies with engagement, but in forms of action and artistic expression for which we can take responsibility in this new situation. As the only "living" local participants of Kaspar König's project, our withdrawal comes with the responsibility to address the local context and make an artistic statement independently of Manifesta, aiming for resonance both in Russia and internationally.

We are now beginning work on such a new project: a solidarity exhibition of Ukrainian and Russian artists, poets, intellectuals and cultural figures. At this terrible moment in our society's history, we are ready to demonstrate our unity and the possibility of taking action against the war together, rising above the flood of hate, lies, manipulation, and direct violence, and not above politics.

We do not know how, when, or where this project will take place, but we are sure that working toward its realization, and not self-representation at Manifesta-Hermitage exhibition, is the only responsible way to proceed.

Chto Delat collective

*In her statement published on Facebook, Joanna Warsza stated that:

"In this very tense situation with the calls for boycott of the project, while working with the artists, we are confronted with the old political dilemma: engagement or disengagement? As much as we of course clearly and without doubt oppose the Russian military intervention in Crimea and the position of the Russian government, we also oppose the tone of westocentric superiority and many European double standards, waging a moral struggle of values. This is in fact one of those moments when art really is especially needed if it wants to engage in a critical way with the complexities and conflicts of our time. The projects will obviously not represent the position of the Russian government. I believe that as long as we can work in the complex manner and in the context-responsive way, as long as we – curator, artists, team – are not exposed to the self-censorship, not being intimidated or restricted, we will do so. Especially in this contested time, when one should not set people, and our audiences, equal to their governments and glow with schadenfreude. "

Source: http://art-leaks.org/2014/03/15/chto-delat-withdraws-from-manifesta-10-st-peters-burg-russia/

Introduction to De Cvratoribvs. The Dialectics of Care and Confinement

Vesna Madzoski

INTRODUCTION

n the domain we call art, there seems to be a permanent dialectical struggle between two poles: poiesis (production, composition, magical procedure) and oikonomia (handling, disposition, management, housekeeping). While artists are the ones assumed to be preoccupied with poiesis, there is an empty seat for the profession to take care of the other pole of this pair. In the following pages, you will find an attempt to elaborate on a profession that has become one of the main "agents" in the art field in the past fifty years - the curators. As we shall see, they have become an active part in both of these poles, or, in other words, their duty has become to curate both domains. With a help of a historical perspective, we shall try to formulate the domain of curating before landing in the field of arts in the last century. Numerous symposiums about and publications in contemporary arts have already been dedicated to demystifying the figure of the curator, but what they have mainly succeeded in doing was to describe field of the activities without putting it in relation to other fields where curators work. That is why the following analysis has the ambition to strip curating down to its essence, by comparing three main domains in which we find this profession active: the Roman Empire, contemporary arts, and contemporary zoos.

What is clear from the beginning is that this profession seems to be a solution that is employed whenever there is a need to control something but also be accompanied by a pedagogical lesson. Curators are not mere policemen, as they still operate in the field where mistakes are allowed, even expected, and not-yet criminalized, and where the subjects (and objects) in question need pedagogical guidance rather than severe punishment. It is exactly in this space of tolerated excess where we also find contemporary art, a domain that seems to have become obsessed by (imitating) poetic creation for economic gain.

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The spotlight was suddenly turned on curators in the mid-1990s, at the moment of neo-liberal expansion, or of the capitalist need to expand the field from which it collects its fetishist objects. The fear of demand exceeding production has been prevented by producing new armies of educated curators, experts who will give a stamp of approval to what is to be included in this global fetishist collection. Nevertheless, it would be too easy to simply dismiss this as part of the global frenzy of tourist pilgrimages to new and renovated temples of object fetishism; the following analysis attempts to underline the problem of the internalized need of present-day democratic subjects to be guided, to be permanently pedagogically instructed, curated, or, to use a pun based on a German word for exhibition guides, to be fürrered. Both life and art are perceived to be chaotic, and there seems to be nothing more frightening. Hence, we shall devote all our attention to these "housekeepers" of art, and their historical transformation from being in charge of the preservation of valuable objects to becoming an active part in art production. As it seems, when the chaos threatened to destroy the "house" in the late 1960s, a sudden need for curators was reintroduced.

In one of the earliest attempts to see exhibitions in all their complexity and as objects for theoretical reflection and analysis, in the study entitled *The Story of Exhibitions* written half a century ago, Kenneth Luckhurst constructed a historical framework in order to examine different modes of using exhibitions as cultural forms since their birth in the late XVII century. Luckhurst's analysis offers a wide scope of potential functions that exhibitions were created to perform, from aesthetic to economic, social, cultural, political, ideological, and educational ones. The most important point of his analysis is summarized in the statement that the purposes and functions of exhibitions are constantly being transformed and negotiated according to specific circumstances, hence a need for a critical eye to keep a close look on this cultural form in order to examine ongoing processes of shifts and modi-

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fications. These shifts are culturally and historically embedded, which makes it possible to get a specific insight into the context that produces exhibitions in the first place. Exhibitions of (contemporary) art are specific sites that are permanently "underconstruction", where new narratives and meanings are produced with every next show, every next exposure. Or at least that is what we are made to believe.

The Western art world is still embedded in the modernist construction of a "white cube" as a guarantee of its separation and independence from the outside world(s). This white and sterile form of exposure also came to be considered a guarantee for an objective gaze in a neutral space out of time, and, as Brian O' Doherty argues in his influential essay from 1976, a space that functions as a "stabilizing social construct" and a guarantee of social stability (O' Doherty 1999:74)1. Nevertheless, this notion

For a detailed analysis of the survival of the paradigm of the "white cube" please see: Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube" (2005).

of independence and neutrality becomes complicated with the entrance of the main agents of the relationship that is constructed within the exhibition space: of art objects, on one hand, and the viewers on the other. Through them, the outside world enters: art objects are not part of some Immaculate Conception, but rather are products of specific circumstances, loaded with different meanings through the act of exhibiting; from their side, the viewers bring into this space the complex networks of relations and visual regimes of perceiving the exposed objects. Therefore, the aim of the following analysis is to show how the "neutral" space of exhibitions comes to be influenced by the surrounding social, economic and political system, an influence that is performed by various and dispersed agents and means.

This investigation started from the need to analyze power relations in the system of contemporary art today, or the presumably non-existing censorship in this free and democratic domain. As we have been trained to think, censorship is something that

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does not exist in Europe, and instead is only to be found under totalitarian regimes. On another level, contemporary art as a genre and as a discourse has become a sign of progress, freedom, democracy, and a "healthy" economy. If a certain country does not have museums of contemporary art, it is to be considered backward, uneducated, and outside of this world. Bearing this in mind, it becomes nearly impossible to investigate the procedure of censorship in this "open" space, where everything is allowed; just like with capitalism itself, it is hard to pinpoint the responsibility for actions to a single agent. As it seems this skillful creature always finds a way to escape whenever we try to perform criticism. How, then, can we even begin to grasp the processes that we are confronted with?

The important event that struck the system of contemporary art in the last century was the appearance of a new agent on the scene of art production: that of a curator, and this is also the main focus of this study. Two large-scale manifestations served as platforms for the promotion and recognition of this profession, interestingly enough, both with a clear political mandate as well: documenta in Kassel, Germany, and Manifesta—European Biennial of Contemporary Art, which travels to a different host city every time. In the case of documenta, the task was to bring Germany back to the international scene after its demise in World War II, while Manifesta was a Western European response to the political shifts after the fall of Berlin wall. As we shall see, documenta instituted curators as authors, while Manifesta promoted a new type that has more in common with traditional anthropologists than with art historians, as used to be the case. In my investigation, I was interested in the "skeletons" of those art manifestations, and in the logic sustaining their powerful rhetorical apparatuses, which is why I focused on the elements usually considered peripheral: the visual traces in the archives, catalogues, films, and books. The choice of the third case-study, the Hollywood blockbuster film AVATAR, might seem unusual at first

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glance, following the presumption that this was to be a research on exhibitions and curators only. Nevertheless, the idea was to continue with the discussion where the analysis of Manifesta brought us and, as we shall see, following the unusual details of this perfect 3D cinematic image will bring us back to curators.

On another level, these case studies all reflect on processes in two dominant visual domains where our senses are being disciplined today: exhibitions as the domain of the presumed elite, and Hollywood blockbusters as the domain of the masses. Both being the invention of what we call Western culture, they are supposed to manifest the principles of democracy and individual freedoms. Nevertheless, we will pose the question of whether this was really the case. Our aim will be to look behind representations, behind those perfect images to which we are supposed to give the status of truth. What we find behind each of them is the same sensory training: division, exclusion and mastery, or a clear attempt to preserve the dominant discourses of the Western procedures of the visual.

More and more, curating has become a concept used to describe different activities in various professions and disciplines. Recently, we could even hear that our perception and the use of the digital world were being "curated" by the large search engines. Therefore, with this in mind, I have chosen to focus my research on understanding what curating actually means today. In other words, why do we suddenly need to have reality curated for us?

In the first part, my main aim was to look for the origins of curating as a profession and, through a historical overview, to define the role it has been given since its beginnings. We had to go back to the Roman Empire, when curators were instituted for the first time, and served as the guardians of particular human beings, objects, and institutions. Through a short Medieval ecclesiastical modification as caretakers of human souls, we were taken to their

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modern revival in the guise of museum professionals. In their last manifestation, we will meet curators as co-producers of contemporary art, at the same historical moment that they are being employed in zoos as guardians of wild animals. What this historical overview ultimately made clear was, that what all those various agents have in common is a duty to protect those considered to be in need of protection, which further opened up the questions of who decides this, and how and when they decide this, as well as where the threshold is when care becomes confinement.

The second part introduces the first case-study, the analysis of documenta as one of the main platforms where the most recent transformation in curatorship took place, namely that of turning curators into exhibition authors. Our investigation tries to cut through the dominant discourse that celebrates this event, problematizing the politics and aesthetics influenced by this turn. We will take a closer look at the particular interpretation of modernism as well, as a part of post-war cultural memorization in Germany, the exclusion of women, and the spectacularization of capitalism, which are all part of documenta's unwritten history.

The third part examines the Manifesta biennial, and looks through the processes of deletion that took place in its archive as a way of defining the logic behind its creation and assumed function. Being created with a clear political agenda to "welcome" the Others from the former Eastern Europe, those processes can be further interpreted not as isolated practices of the art world, but rather as manifestations of the logic sustaining the European project as well. Thanks to the visual traces left by the photographs produced by Manifesta, we are given a particular insight into what happens behind the level of official representation.

Being part of what can be called the anthropologization of curating, Manifesta has opened questions that are not only related to the visual representation of Others today, but also to the use of rejected anthropological methodologies by other disciplines. Therefore, in order to better understand this problematic

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dark area, our last study brings us to the analysis of the cloning of anthropological "dead" bodies in one of the most popular movies of all times, James Cameron's AVATAR (2009). By examining the cracks in the official narrative of this cultural object, we will encounter a particular practice of procedures that "official" anthropology had rejected due to their problematic effects on our political and social reality. In an interesting turn, the examination of these details will bring us back to the discussion on curators, this time through their embodiment in modern zoos.

Somehow, whichever path I decided to take, I ultimately arrived at the discussions on Otherness, its control, and the economy. As it turned out, what these case studies all have in common is the problematizing of the basic procedure whereby curators are trained to perform on the threshold between care and confinement. As we shall see, the existence of curating shows us, in Foucauldian terms, the persistent survival of the fear of proliferation: in this case, it is the fear of the proliferation of experience, of the multiplicity of the sensual, and the ideas evoked by it. According to the way this logic works, our modern man is defined as a creature that cannot survive the horrors of reality without protection by his (or her) curators.

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Source: Madzoski, Vesna. De Cvratoribvs. The Dialectics of Care and Confinement. Atropos Press: 2013. The book can be ordered on: http://www.amazon.com/Cvratoribvs-The-Dialectics-Care-Confinement/dp/1940813034)

Making Decisions With Heart in Times of Crisis

Ahmet Ögüt

Maintaining ethical standards in the art world is the responsibility not only of artists, but also cultural institutions and those who support them. Any decision taken by an institution should be made with respect for its public, the people who work for it and the artists who collaborate with it.

The most important criteria to safeguard are trust, sincerity and respect. I always saw biennales as a unique autonomous pedagogic site to explore ideas freely, to define the level of ethics in the art world without the need to prioritise profit, and to emphatically shape the zeitgeist of art in relation to life and society. Now I see that this position is in danger. Biennales cannot avoid their social and ethical responsibilities towards their public, their collaborators and artists when it comes to the source their finances.

The case of the Biennale of Sydney is not about asking individual artists to make decisions according to their own understanding and beliefs. This is misleading. If everyone is truly sincere, we cannot abandon one another. I don't want to address a single target – not the Biennale itself, the sponsor, the artists, nor Australian Citizens in general. All I know is that we should unite in demanding a change to unethical policies.

I believe artists can have the most powerful impact, if- and when- they come together and share collective creative ideas in this moment of crisis. Even if only a few artists out of 94 participate, there is still an exhibition. But there would be no exhibition without all 94 artists. It is our responsibility to prioritize collective, progressive, constructive and creative ideas in a moment of crisis such as this. It is time to give up our personal concerns as priorities and examine the real, sincere meaning behind what we all do and what we can achieve.

What I see here is a lack of ethical transparency; a last-minute call from an Australian citizen to boycott; a Biennale team and board that has known of its sponsor's engagements for a very long time; invited artists left uninformed; as sponsor, Transfield Holdings without a clear distinction from Transfield Services, who is very well aware that their business decision as a major contractor on the highly criticized refugee detention camps at Manus Island and in Nauru is ethically indefensible; and the implications of this both on the cultural scene, and on the broader discussion of Australian citizens demanding an urgent change of policy from the Australian Government.

What we have now is a letter to the board of the Biennale signed by a group of deeply concerned participating artists, a public petition with more than one thousand signatories, and a rather insensitive statement by the Biennale Board in response stating "Artists must make a decision according to their own understanding and beliefs." This turns the issue into an individual matter, and that is what is upsetting, instead of addressing a collective responsibility. After all this conversation I have come to the conclusion that I must withdraw from the

Biennale of Sydney. I would only rejoin the conversation if:

- 1. A majority group of participating artists decides to have a collective action challenging the current crisis.
- 2. If the BoS negotiates a transparent and ethical funding agreement with all sponsors.
- 3. If Transfield Services reconsiders its current agreements with government and the BoS is not implicated in any wealth generated from the mandatory detention policies.
- 4. If we all work together for a better future of the Biennale of Sydney, while sending a clear message to Australian Government that we will not accept the ethically indefensible policy of the mandatory detention of asylum seekers.

Source: http://xborderoperationalmatters.wordpress.com/2014/02/26/ogut-biennale/

Biennales are politics by other means - don't dismiss them

Jessica Birkett

Although some doubted the 19th Biennale of Sydney would proceed after the split from founding sponsor Transfield, the country's biggest contemporary art event opens this week in Sydney. Debate continues about the ethics of arts funding and the social responsibilities of artists, with Guido Belgiorno-Nettis (the brother of Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, the former chair of the Sydney Biennale) this week criticising the artists involved in the boycott of the event.

This year is the 19th Biennale since the event's inception in 1973; since then works by more than 1,500 artists from more than 100 countries have been exhibited.

This year, it's been a media spectacle – but large media coverage and biennales tend to go hand in hand, albeit for a variety of reasons. Why?

To answer that, we need to look at the history of biennales in the contemporary art world. An art biennale – Italian for "every other year" – was first hosted in Venice in 1985. Its aim was ambitious – to draw the aesthetic and sensory world into a solitary, didactic space. This first Venice Biennale served as a model and there are now more than 150 biennales internationally.

Although these art events do tend to take place every two years, the contemporary use of the term "biennale" is more conceptual than literal. Rather the term indicates a major, recurrent art exhibition identified with the city or state. Contemporary art historians have further distinguished the term from its initial meaning as one that includes spatial and perspectival features, or a "space-theoretic typology" to acknowledge the discursive features characteristic of contemporary biennales.

The development of the biennale in national terms has prompted a new interdisciplinary science of "bienniology". The Biennial Foundation was established in 2009 and the first World Biennial Forum took place in 2012. A journal, Seismopolite was established in 2011 and takes as its focus biennales in the developing world.

There's no biennale without politics

The art director of the Sydney Biennale's 19th installment, Juliana Engberg, has maintained a travel blog, Engberg on the Road, documenting her research for the Sydney event. In September 2013, Engberg attended the Istanbul Biennale, Mom, Am I Barbarian?, accompanying the curator Fulya Erdemci in the weeks leading up to its unveiling amid a violent crackdown of anti-government protests in Istanbul. Members of the Turkish public were demanding a dismantling of the Biennale.

Showing she is no stranger to political tumult around art, Engberg described the moments leading up to the opening:

Fulya [Erdemci] had already started to formulate her thoughts around Istanbul and its sites of territorial, political, economic and social contest. Her plan – as she described it to me at the time – was to ... interrogate the shifting status of ownership and occupation. This was extending out to questions about citizenship, language, shared futures and solutions rather than divided pasts; while of course, acknowledging differences and accepting otherness.

Both of us feel strongly that art has a purposeful language, and a role to play in providing metaphoric dreams and aspirations for a future positive, even if describing the unsettled present and the haunted, dispiriting past. The language of art might include protest, but it is often better nuanced than bluntly didactic or documentary ...

Julian Meyrick, writing on The Conversation this week about the response of federal Minister for the Arts George Brandis' response to the Biennale boycott, issued four directives to arts ministers. One of them resonates here: [w]hatever happens in politics ends up in the arts. That's because it's artists' job to be socially responsive. So no Fake Shock when art ends up a battleground for the issues of the day. This socially responsive role for artists is the one envisaged by Engberg in Istanbul. A nation's political climate ought to be mirrored in an event such as the Sydney Biennale.

Something more than an Art Olympics

The Sydney Biennale is a kind of art "superevent", akin to what New Yorker's art critic Peter Schjeldahl contemptuously termed "Festivalism". These events are often the target of scepticism both for their commercial motivations and the way that might complicate a notion of "authentic" national culture.

As theorised by Indian cultural scholar Ranjit Hoskote, a biennale is not just a set of surfaces but rather: a discursive environment: a theatre that allows for the staging of arguments, speculations, and investigations concerning the nature of our shared, diversely veined, and demanding contemporary condition.

Biennales do have shortcomings, but to dismiss the events as a whole, he argues "would be to fail to take into account a platform that has undeniably given rise to some of the most engaged debates and thought-provoking artworks of our time".

That's why the Sydney Biennale retains its relevance in the Australian cultural canon. It's also why debate about the political implications of the Biennale and scrutiny of its sponsorship arrangements are essential.

Source: http://theconversation.com/biennales-are-politics-by-other-means-dont-dismiss-them-24101

After the Biennial. Fulya Erdemci in conversation with Basak Senova

Basak Senova

Fulya Erdemci was the curator of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Anne Ben Barbar Miyim? or Mom, Am I Barbarian? (14 September - 20 October 2013). The theme for the biennial was decided well before the eruption of protests in Turkey, ignited by the planned demolition of Gezi Park on Istanbul's Taksim Square, taking as its thematic focus the idea of public space. It intended to explore the public sphere as a 'matrix', while considering 'the role of art through inquiries into current-day spatial and economic policies, forms of democracy, the concepts of civilisation and barbarianism.'[1] In this interview, Erdemci reflects on the outcomes of the biennial retrospectively, taking into account the impact of the Gezi Park protests.



Wouter Osterholt & Elke Uitentuis, Monument to Humanity - Helping Hands, 2011/2013. Copyright the artists.

Basak Senova: From your perspective, what impact did the artworks presented in the 13th Istanbul Biennial have? Did they attentively touch the issues – both locally and globally – pertaining to the public sphere?

Fulya Erdemci: Certain art works (including poetry or other forms of literature or film,) have the capacity to create a transformative experience, and open up the possibility of moments of utopia in our daily routines. Activism and art can have the same aim of social change in times of urgency, and they can learn from each other, such as the recent times we have been experiencing. Nevertheless, they have different processes, experiences and impacts, and cannot be evaluated with the same criteria. I believe that each work in the biennial had the capacity to open up the seams of the system to show the possibility of the otherwise. The biennial's power came from bringing the very personal and very public realms together to open up the possibility for collective imagination.

Although I believe that art functions in the symbolic realm, in certain times of urgency – such as those we are going through – it may have an immediate impact. For instance, the Sulukule platform, Networks of Dispossession, Serkan Taycan's Between the Two Seas (2013) (the canal Istanbul project), Wonderland (February 2013) by Halil Altindere, the Gezi drawings by Christoph Schäfer or Monument to Humanity – Helping Hands (2011/2013) by Wouter Osterholt and Elke Uitentuis were able to create heated public debates.

As I see it, art can open up a space for a transformative experience and has the capacity to foster the construction of new subjectivities, symbolized by the barbarian. Art can create a reflective experience appealing to our emotional intellect. It encourages us to halt and think about what we really need now in the midst of such turmoil (with increasing state violence, detentions and arrests) and other powerful transformations.

The reaction towards the exhibition was quite mixed. Some criticized the exhibition for not having taken place in urban public spaces, which they saw as a sign of giving up, and not reflecting Gezi more directly, also in the exhibition format. Yet for others, the exhibition articulated the questions posed by Gezi, fully deploying the power of art without undermining the resistance movement. I cannot say if people liked it or not but it certainly opened up a long-awaited debate. Although the biennial withdrew from urban public space to private venues, it was through public interest (we had 337,429 visiors in five weeks) that the biennial venues themselves became public spaces that people gathered in.

BS: Could you define the structure of the biennial taking into consideration the artists' input and the inter-dialogue that took place?

Fulya Erdemci: Following Walter Benjamin's reading of history, in that you approach the future without losing sight of the past, was a method to mark the temporality of the exhibition. In this sense, I endeavoured to crack open a historical aperture between today and the end of the 1960s and 1970s in terms of social change, urban transformation and artistic practices. The most significant common denominator between these two periods was the quest for 'another world'. These decades also witnessed artists developing new artistic practices that challenged urban transformation and gentrification processes in cities such as Paris, New York and Amsterdam. Therefore, for this exhibition, novel artistic practices from the 60s and 70s were brought together, side by side, with more recent practices, such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles with Amal Kenawy; Gordon Matta-Clark with LaToya Ruby Frazier; and Stephan Willats with Jose Antonio Vega Macotella. Furthermore, through the practices of Academia Ruchu in urban public spaces and specifically Jirí Kovanda's performance Theatre (1976), it became possible to contextualize the current performative protests like Standing Man by Erdem Gunduz within the art historical backdrop of the 1970s.

Geographically speaking, because of education and governmental policies and support, artists from the USA, England and northern Europe have more possibilities and experiences in the field of art within the public domain. However, when we look at what is problematic in the cities and in the urban public spaces, you can see that in last couple of decades, mostly the southern and the eastern parts of the world appear on the map: Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, and so on. Hence, in order to reflect the geopolitics of the globe at present and anchor time spatially, in the exhibition I privileged certain geographies such as Latin America, North Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey, where the question of the public domain and transformation of cities has been a burning issue for the last couple of decades.

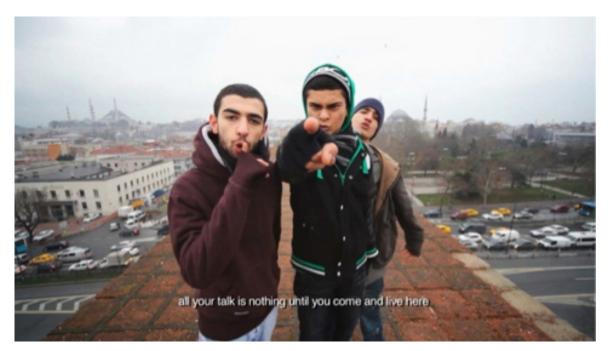
Besides, artistic practices engaged with poetry/literature as well as music and performance were also highlighted in the biennial, as experienced through works such as Castle by Jorge Mendez Blake (2013); Pivot (2013) by Shahzia Sikander; Violent Green (2013) by Lale Muldur, Kaan Karacehennem and Franz Bodelschwingh; 13 Essential Rules for Understanding the World (2011) by Basim Magdy; Co-Action Device: A Study (2013) by Inci Eviner, with the participation of 40 artists, writers, musicians and performers; or Shortening the Long Position (2013) by Goldin+Senneby.

BS: Could you reflect on some of the specific projects you showed that were closely linked with the reasons and the consequences of the Gezi Resistance?

FE: Although I deliberately didn't ask any artists to work on Gezi, a couple of projects were directly related to it, for instance, the visual narratives presented by Christoph Schäfer. He and the Right to the City activists supported the Gezi resistance from the beginning by organizing a series of initiatives in the 'Park Fiction' park, which they themselves rescued a few years ago from being appropriated by the urban regeneration of the Hamburg port area. They even renamed it as 'Gezi Park Fiction' on the night that Gezi Park was forcefully evacuated by the police.

Schäfer visited Istanbul a couple of times to meet with artists and activists much earlier than Gezi. And during the resistance, he joined some gatherings, for instance, the 'Yedikule Bostans' or the 'Earth Tables' protests. Having focused on the city as a collective production place, his drawings of the Gezi resistance, narrate the new coalitions alchemically formed amongst multiple publics such as the Muslims, atheists, anarchists, leftists, nationalists, environmentalists, gay and lesbians and so forth. This was specifically expressed in the depictions of the Earth Tables – a way of protesting just by gathering to have dinner together after the sunset on kilometre-long tables on Istanbul's streets and parks during the Ramadan.

Furthermore, although certain projects such as the Wonderland video by Halil Altindere or the I am the dog that was always here (Loop) (2013), by Annika Erikson, were conceived and realized much earlier than the massive Gezi protests this summer. But, they are very much expressing the major issues and the common sentiments related to ongoing violent urban transformation and gentrification, which triggered the Gezi resistance.



Halil Altindere, Wonderland, 2013. Copyright the artist.

Wonderland by Halil Altindere focuses on the severe displacement of 300 Roma families due to the gentrification of Sulukule, one of the oldest neighbourhoods and the earliest sites for urban transformation in Istanbul. This very special neighbourhood itself was changed into luxurious residences, constructed by Toki, the governmental organization which functions through public-private partnerships. The video is in the form of a music clip, in which 'Tahribad-i Isyan' (Destruction of Revolt), a hip hop group born and raised in Sulukule, tells the story of their neighbourhood, expressing their anger and protest against inequality. In the film, we follow them through the demolished houses and above the roofs of newly built apartments. Annika Erikson's poetic video, on the other hand, narrates the current process from the eye and experience of a street dog pushed out to the outskirts of the city.

Maider Lopez's project Making Ways (2013) subtly related to the habits of finding collective solutions to the ever-emerging situations or obstacles you often come across in Istanbul. She concentrated on the pedestrian crossing in Karaköy, which is a major transportation hub connecting the Asian side to the European side of the city. She filmed this crossing from an aerial perspective and extracted and highlighted the routes that people take. Additionally, having mined the practice of self-organization through the simple daily actions of Istanbulites, like crossing a street, she created a 'users manual', giving possible instructions on how to cross the roads, such as: 'If unsure, follow a person who appears to be doing it well', 'Taking action is easier when a group is generated', or 'Self-organization creates collective ways'.

Certainly, there were other projects directly related to urban transformation in Istanbul such as Networks of Dispossession, a project by the collective that grew out of Gezi occupation, which consists of network of maps showing the relationships between the actors of urban transformation, the major development companies, the media and the government; or the Sulukule Platform, a grassroots organization started by artists and activists in 2006 to react against the gentrification of the Sulukule neighbourhood and the displacement of the Roma families. Finally, Between the Two Seas by Serkan Taycan aims at creating an aware-

ness around the 'Canal Istanbul', a mega urban transformation project to open up a canal on whose banks two cities with one million residents were planned to be built.

BS: Following the Gezi resistance, you took the decision to withdraw the biennial from urban public spaces. Could you explain the reasons and the consequences of this decision?



Research and archive material, photograph. Design: Zozan Kotan, photo: Servet Dilber. Courtesy of iksv.

Fulya Erdemci: The Gezi resistance and the public protests exposed something about the authorities – that they suffer a strong sense of agoraphobia. Instead of listening and responding to the desperate voices on the streets, they preferred to violently repress these voices by police force (thousands of people were permanently injured and seven people died). For this reason, we began to question what it means to realize art projects in urban public spaces with the permission of the same authorities that do not respect their own citizens' freedom of speech. In two forums that we organized in a neighbourhood park at the end of July, we discussed such questions, insights, and possible further actions with artists and activists and other participants.

Drawing on the political theorist Chantal Mouffe, our conceptual framework was that the raison d'être of any art project in the public domain is to open up the conflict and to make it visible and debatable. However, Gezi had already opened up the conflict and made it public. To collaborate with the authorities would have given the authorities the opportunity to regain their lost prestige and legitimacy after Gezi. This would have led to the instrumentalization of art in favour of the authorities. In order not to collaborate with these authorities, we decided to withdraw from public space and continue the discussion in the exhibition venues. In this

way, like John Cage's silent composition '4'33''', we aimed to point out presence through absence: by asking the audience to listen to the voices on the streets.

Certainly, this decision was followed by many conceptual, practical and relational complications, including a spatial one. Only at the end of the first week of August, were we able to secure the three additional venues. Thus, we had to renegotiate the projects and re-adapt the plans in a very short time. Thanks to the endless efforts and energy of the biennial team and the artists, it became possible.

However, since we decided to not collaborate with the city authorities, the biennial was not promoted on the billboards in the city (officially the foundation IKSV and the biennial have an ongoing agreement with the municipality to have billboards all around the city). Furthermore, Out of 14 projects that were planned to take place in public space, we lost three projects in total. In all other cases, artists could fit their ideas into the new situation or simply make a completely new project. That is what happened with Elmgreen & Dragset, for instance. They had another project, which was to take place in a specific urban space, however, when we decided to withdraw, they came up with a totally different project in a month, Istanbul Diaries, in which seven men were hired to write their diaries daily in the exhibition space. Tadashi Kawamata, on the other hand, presented the drawings of Gecekondu/Landed-by-night, which he planned to realize in Taksim on Tarlabasi Boulevard, Halic Dockyard and Karakoy square. The light installation Intensive Care by Rietveld Landscape, designed to point out to the obscure future of the contested Ataturk Culture Centre at Taksim Square, couldn't be realized. But it was transformed into an interior installation. Their idea was to make the building 'breathe' with certain crisis moments, to mark its precarious 'in between' situation: if the building is still alive or if it is dying. Only during the Gezi occupation, were we able to learn that the building was actually under demolition.

We radically revised the public programme and transformed it into more ground up artist-organized-events, like workshops, walks/tours, talks, performances, music sessions, screenings, and lectures by Networks of Dispossession, Sulukule Platform, Maxim Hourani, Hector Zamora, Hito Steyerl and so on. In the five-week-period of the exhibition, 39 events were realized. As the consequence of this decision along with all the obstacles and drastic developments during the preparation period, some projects were lost and some major changes were made. But if you ask me if I am content with the biennial, yes I am.

Source: http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/115/

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http://forumsztukiwspolczesnej.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/stanowisko-ofsw-w-sprawie-manifesta-10.html?m=1

Manifesta/Kasper König, Manifesta will stay in St. Petersburg. http://manifesta.org/2014/03/manifesta-10-will-stay-in-st-petersburg/

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http://creativetimereports.org/2014/04/01/editors-letter-april-2014-ahmet-ogut-biennale-of-sydney/

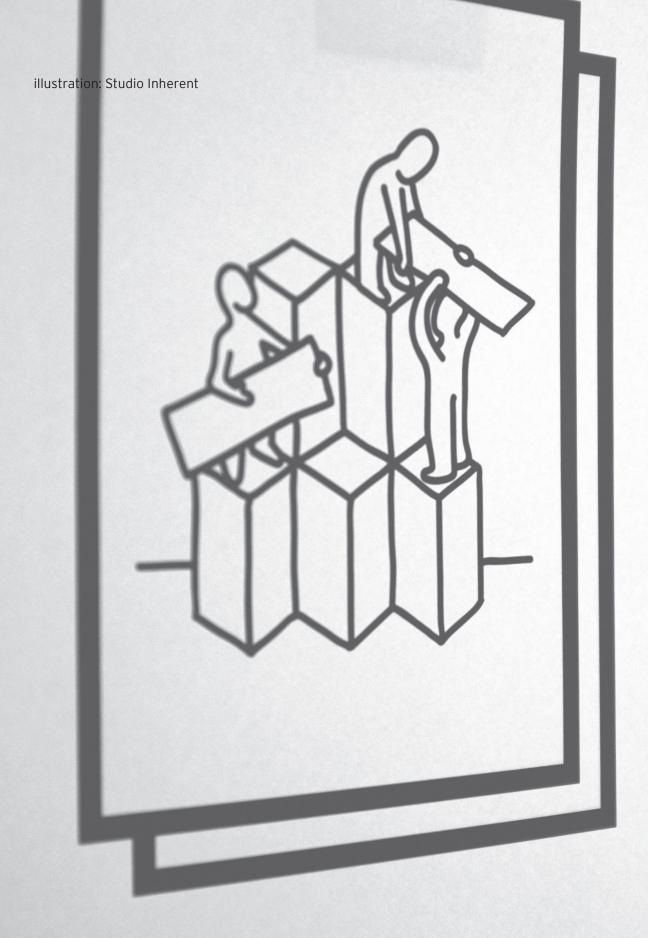
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Word ook lid: https://platformbk.banster.nl/vereniging/lid_worden

