

The Global White Cube

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The history still to be made will take into consideration the place (the architecture) in which a work comes to rest (develops) as an integral part of the work in question and all the consequences such a link implies. It is not a question of ornamenting (disfiguring or embellishing) the place (the architecture) in which the work is installed, but of indicating as precisely as possible the way the work belongs in the place and vice versa, as soon as the latter is shown. – Daniel Buren, "Function of Architecture"

First, the Museum

New York, 1929. A sparse, singular row of artworks lined the palest of walls in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, a display strategy that Alfred Barr Jr. imagined after a visit to the Folkwang Museum in Essen two years earlier.¹ The walls became somewhat lighter upon arriving on American shores and even whiter over the years, moving from beige-colored monk's cloth to stark white paint by the time the MoMA moved into its new permanent home on West 53rd Street.² But the essence of the museum's aesthetic project was there from the start. With it, other details followed: Windows were banished so that the semblance of an outside world—daily life, the passage of time, in short, *context*—disappeared; overhead lights were recessed and emitted a uniform, any-given-moment-in-the-middle-of-the-day glow; noise and clutter were suppressed; a general sobriety reigned. A bit like its cinematic black-box pendant, the museum's galleries unequivocally aimed to extract the viewer from "the world." For this and other reasons, the minimal frame of white was thought to be "neutral" and "pure," an ideal support for the presentation of an art unencumbered by architectural, decorative, or other distractions. The underlying fiction of this whitewashed space is not only that ideology is held at bay, but also that the autonomous works of art inside convey their meaning in uniquely aesthetic terms.³ The form for this fiction quickly became a standard, a universal signifier of modernity, and eventually was designated the "white cube."⁴

No *tabula rasa*, the white cube is an indelibly inscribed container. Far more than a physical, tectonic space (monochromatic walls delimiting a certain geometrical shape), the art world's white cube circumscribes an attitude toward art, a mode of presentation, and an aura that confers a halo of inevitability, of fate, on whatever is displayed inside it. The legibility of the artwork as work is contingent upon the structuring of that legibility by its surroundings—Marcel Duchamp taught us that. From the MoMA's whitewash forward, the white cube became a cipher for institutional officiousness, fortifying the ultimate tautology: An artwork belongs there because it is there. (The fact that the artwork is bracketed off from the world also undermines the impression that it might be related to, or the same as, the stuff of everyday life.) In that space of encounter, the ideal viewer (white, middle-class) is also constructed—well behaved, solemn, disembodied, and able to focus on the singularity of the work of art with an uninterrupted gaze.⁵ Particular to the white cube is that it operates under the pretense that its seeming invisibility allows the artwork best to speak; it seems blank, innocent, unspecific, insignificant. Ultimately, what makes a white cube a white cube is that, in our experience of it, ideology and form meet, and all without our noticing it.⁶ Years after Barr invoked the white cube as the hallmark of the MoMA's exhibition spaces, Hitler approved of its use for the

interior of the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1937, the Nazis' first architectural project after coming to power. That monumental new building with its interior of vast well-lit gallery spaces, all white and windowless, opened with the exhibition *Grosse deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition). The white container and sober display served to make the painted idyllic landscapes and bronze Aryan bodies on view seem natural and innocuous, despite the belligerent motives that underlay their selection and presentation. Driving home the point, the demonstration was doubly staged; *Grosse deutsche Kunstausstellung* was the "acceptable," positive pendant to the somber, densely cluttered, and apparently disorganized show *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) that opened in a nearby archeological institute the following day.⁷ Thanks to such a contrast, the artworks in the former seemed all the more righteous and those in the latter all the more abhorrent. There is no denying the coincidence: When the aestheticization of politics reached terrifying proportions, the white cube was called in. New York and Munich, 1929 and 1937. The larger architectural frames for these white cubes are not comparable, and their respective regimes, it goes without saying, were worlds apart. Conflating them is not my purpose. Rather, I wish to highlight the usefulness, efficacy, and versatility of an exhibition format that has become a standard. If the white cube managed to be both the ideal display format for the MoMA's and the Third Reich's respective visions of modern art, despite their extremely different ideological and aesthetic positions, it is because the display conceit embodied qualities that were meaningful to both, including neutrality, order, rationalism, progress, extraction from a larger context, and, not least of all, universality and (Western) modernity.⁸ Their examples are relevant today not only because they laid the foundations for how the white cube came to signify over time, but also because the subtle and not so subtle political ambitions of their exhibitions remind us of the degree to which pristine architectonics, immaculate backdrops, general sparseness, and the strict organization of artworks on the walls *matter*. The subjugation of artistic production to a frame at once "universal," neutral, ordered, rational, and ultimately problematic for what that so-called universality implies and hides, points to a predicament with which artists and curators have grappled ever since: Exhibitions, by their forms, entangle the viewer in a space at once physical and intellectual, but also ideological.

Now, Biennials and Other Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions

Fast forward, virtually everywhere, sometime here and now. Like modernity, the white cube is a tremendously successful Western export. Its putative neutrality makes it a ubiquitous architectural surround (an "architectural inevitability," Rem Koolhaas would say) for artworks in museums, but also for galleries and art fairs that transform commercial environs into what look more and more like mini museal spaces. Given that galleries and art fairs have a financial interest in making goods for sale appear as if they have already been legitimized by museum-like spaces, not to mention their frequent desire to keep the poetry or violence of everyday life out of the realm of becalmed shopping, this is hardly surprising. It makes less sense, however, within the context of the recurrent, large-scale international exhibitions that have proliferated around the world. Sometimes referred to in shorthand as "mega exhibitions" or "biennials" (even those that do not, strictly speaking, occur biannually), these various large-scale international exhibitions distinguish themselves from typical group shows staged in museums, art centers, or *Kunsthallen* in large part through their lineage to the Venice Biennial, the first perennial international salon of contemporary art inaugurated in 1895. This parentage implies a temporality and spectacularity that is their own: These punctual manifestations recurring every two or three or even every five years, as is the case with Documenta, lack real visibility beyond the duration of their exhibitions; they have an explicit ambition both to represent their region, host city, or nation and to dis-

play a decidedly international panorama of contemporary production, an ambition that influences the scale and general circumstance attached to the event; and they often are dispersed over multiple public spaces and institutional sites. If these relatively basic features unite large-scale international exhibitions and biennials, an ocean of differences can separate their tenants and histories. A number of them find their origins in contexts of profound political and cultural transition, for example, the globally disparate Documenta and German post-war reconstruction, the Gwangju Biennial and the democratization of South Korea, the short-lived Johannesburg Biennial and the end of apartheid, or Manifesta, European Biennial of Contemporary Art and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These and others have used the particularity of their historic, cultural, and geographic situation to define an institutional focus, a striking example being the Havana Biennial's ongoing engagement to offer a platform for artists from the "Third World." Whatever their individual histories, however, the ambition to be a counter model to the museum and its traditional exhibitions is a significant defining feature of such events.

Most biennials and large-scale international exhibitions in fact were founded in reaction to nonexistent or weak local art institutions unwilling or unable to support the most experimental contemporary cultural production. These perennial exhibitions, therefore, perceive themselves as temporally punctual infrastructures that remain forever contemporary and unburdened by collecting and preserving what the vagaries of time render simply modern. The aim to be the paradigmatic alternative to the museum cuts both ways, however, with positive and negative distinctions. The proliferation of biennials in the 1990s rendered them new privileged sites for cultural tourism and introduced a category of art, the bombastic proportions and hollow premises of which earned it the name "biennial art," a situation that knotted the increasingly spectacular events to market interests. That mega exhibitions can be compromised is a frequent lament, but in their best moments, they offer a counterproposal to the regular programming of the museum as well as occasions for artists to trespass institutional walls and defy the neat perimeter to which the traditional institution often strictly adheres when it organizes exhibitions (although museums, it must be said, are increasingly challenging their own once-staid protocols). Moreover, mega exhibitions have also been platforms for challenging and heterogeneous artistic forms from around the world, often addressing some of the most politically charged issues of the period. Just as importantly, they have been known to elicit some of the most intense questioning of artistic practices through the expanded idea of where such an event's borders lie. Interdisciplinary discussions, conferences, and lectures that take place on or near the premises of exhibitions or, as was the case with Documenta 11, in several locations around the world are increasingly integral to these events. This striking expansion goes in tandem with curatorial discourses that increasingly distinguish the biennial or mega exhibition as larger than the mere presentation of artworks; they are understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate. As Carlos Basualdo suggests, "the configuration of interests at the core of institutions like biennials clearly differs from that which gave rise to the institutional circuit traditionally linked to modernity (museums, art criticism, and galleries)."⁹ In many ways, he is correct. If, however, "museums are, first and foremost, Western institutions," then biennials, as Basualdo reasons, avoid being so almost by definition because "the global expansion of large-scale exhibitions performs an insistent de-centering of both the canon and artistic modernity," rendering the two qualitatively different.¹⁰ While such an optimistic position champions the positive effects of the increasing number of biennials worldwide, it tends to overlook some of the ways they perpetuate the museum's most questionable paradigms.¹¹ Despite the numerous reasons to extol mega exhibitions, it is necessary to examine the

curious discrepancy between their accompanying discourses as well as the extraordinary promises they seem to offer and the conventions through which they frame the artworks on view.

Globally Replicated

Is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched?
– Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

No one seems to want to speak about it, but no matter how fervently biennials and large-scale exhibitions insist on their radical distinction from the idea of the museum, they overwhelmingly show artworks in specially constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometries, white partitions, and windowless spaces of the museum's classical exhibitions, that is, when biennials are not simply bringing artworks into existing museums without altering their white cubes. Timeless, hermetic, and always the same despite its location or context, this globally replicated white cube has become almost categorically fixed, a private "non-place" for the world of contemporary art biennials, one of those uncannily familiar sites, like the department stores, airports, and freeways of our period of supermodernity described by anthropologist Marc Augé.¹² One of the crucial particularities of biennials and large-scale exhibitions, however, is that they are meant to represent *some place*. Their specificity is precisely their potential to be specific-site-specific, if you will, and time-specific as well. The fact that the main exhibition format used in a recent biennial in Dakar looked like that used in Taipei a short time ago or like that used in Venice twenty years ago seems to contradict such an idea. Forays beyond the box and into the city or its environs are part of what visitors expect from biennials, but such "special projects" held outside museal spaces often make up a relatively small percentage of the whole event and, in some cases, don't figure at all. Instead, the requisite mixing of "local" and "global" artists, recurrent themes generalizing the contemporary condition (their titles say it all: *Everyday*, *Looking for a Place*, *Art Together with Life*), and a singular, age-old display strategy diminish the distinctions between geographically distant events. The paradox, of course, is that the neoliberal model of globalization against which many of these biennials position themselves thrives on and itself produces just such homogenization.

There are exceptions to this rule. Biennials such as those in Havana, Istanbul, Johannesburg (while it lasted), and Tirana, all of which happen to represent the so-called margins of the art world, historically have often reflected the particular economic, political, and geographic conditions of their localities through their inventive and often hesitant exhibition forms. Rare editions of other biennials, like Paulo Herkenhoff's edition of São Paulo in 1998 or Francesco Bonami's edition of Venice in 2003, stand out for the ways in which they revised typical biennial norms and forms. Still, the list of cities that have hosted large-scale exhibitions in the last decade using and reusing white cubes to display large portions of the artworks selected for inclusion is seemingly endless: Berlin, Dakar, Pittsburgh, Luxemburg City, New Delhi, Taipei, São Paulo, Sharjah, Frankfurt, New York City, Kassel, Sydney, Prague, Seville, etc. Their reliance on traditional museum exhibition formats is questionable for numerous reasons, including, as Catherine David suggests, the fact that many contemporary aesthetic practices no longer correspond to the conditions for which the white cube was built.¹³ Just as troubling is the presumption that the profound diversity of histories and cultures that these biennials aim to represent should be equally legible in such a space. Determined to present themselves as an alternative to the museum, these large-scale exhibitions attempt to give voice to cultures, histories, and politics underrepresented within that institu-

tion. The fact that the most seemingly progressive biennials and their curators, vaunting the most heterogeneous of art forms, so often adopt a unique and now ossified exhibition format suggests that some of the most pernicious tenants of the museum and the history of modernism it embodies remain fundamental to their functioning. As Brian O'Doherty, one of the white cube's most perceptive theorists, notes, "the history of modernism is intimately framed by that space; or rather the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and how we see it." More than "any single picture," he further states, "that white ideal space...may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains."¹⁴ The white cube, therefore, often supports the modern museum's other historiographic devices, including a linear, evolutionary history of art (think Alfred Barr's famous "torpedo" of modern art) with its decidedly Western perspective, limited temporal schemas, and unidirectional notions of influence. Given this, one wonders why this most dutiful spatial accomplice has continued to proliferate almost without question when we have become more conscious in recent decades that "modernity" is a construct that has suppressed, obscured, or transformed whole cultural histories and their producers. If globalization, as is so often maintained, problematizes the binary opposition of the national and the international, defying national borders and unhinging dominant cultural paradigms to allow the entry of histories, temporalities, and conditions of production from beyond the West, then why do so many conventional structures remain at exactly those sites that seek to undermine the epistemological and institutional bases of these structures? The white cube is, to cite O'Doherty again, "one of modernism's triumphs," a Western conceit constructed to uphold some of its most cherished values, including what Igor Zabel called the common presumption that "Western modern art is...modern art, that modernization (in the visual arts as well as in other areas of cultural and social life) is Westernization."¹⁵ While it may not be surprising that the museum has been slow to dismantle these paradigms, why have biennials not done so? To question Basualdo's notion of decentering: Can a true decentering of traditional notions of modernity be fully accomplished so long as the Western museum's frame is exported as the unquestioned context by which to legitimize an apparently expanding canon? To Lefebvre's queries about whether space can be innocent and whether hegemonies might leave space untouched, the answer—as he knew well—is "no."¹⁶ And so it is for the space of the exhibition. There are diverse ways an exhibition can resist, asserting its social and political relevance in our contemporaneity. To focus on select aspects, therefore, is admittedly to hold in suspense a reading of the others. Still, the "ideology of an exhibition," as theorist Miš contends, is not "an aggregate of oriented and entirely rationalized intentions of its organizers," nor is it the "messages that the authors of an exhibition are projecting and proclaiming in their introductory or accompanying texts."¹⁷ Instead, he concludes, it lies "between the intended and the unintended." Or, to put it slightly differently, the ideology of an exhibition lies between the discursive statements of purpose and the aesthetic-spatial result that manage more or less effectively to translate the intentions of its makers. An examination of several editions of Manifesta, Documenta, and the Gwangju Biennial thus will focus on the discursive and structural armatures supporting these exemplary recent projects and, inevitably, on the ways in which the white cube still continues to haunt them.

It is about time that someone persuasively showed that the strategies and tactics of exhibiting art in large-scale international exhibitions (whether it be Manifesta, Documenta, the Gwangju Biennial, or other similar events) are no less neutral or innocent than the modernist museum or gallery. In short, the biennial's white cube is not a transhistorical, transgeographical, or apolitical

construct. Its aesthetic ideal is a specific macro- and micro-political construction that operates in relation to an art that is involved in the social machines of identification, exchange, consumption, pleasure, critical expression, and undeniably the construction of social subjectivities and objectivities. Strategies and tactics of exhibiting are devices of explicit cultural politics employed to reflect social reality in relation to the structuring of aesthetic, discursive, and political identities (both individual and collective). Thus the curator is not just a technician who arranges more or less temporary or permanent manifestations, but instead a kind of “political activist” acting in a cultural superstructure that today increasingly resembles a fastpaced and spectacular system that shows signs of what Foucault called the “biotechnological” and Marx called “class struggle.” Pushing these arguments in another direction, I would say that contemporary large-scale exhibitions no longer present finished masterpieces. Instead, they display the visible relationships between the curator-as-author, the exhibiting institution, and the artist-as-performer in the world of media and cultural traces. The artwork is thus removed from the exhibition, as Yves Michaud suggests in his book *L’Art à l’état gazeux*. Specific kinds of productive relations within society, which have historically determined every paradigm of the large-scale exhibition as well as the art world in general, cause this to occur. A high modernist fetishization of the art object determined the white cube. From the beginning, the Venice Biennial was founded on models of identity endemic to a nationalistic bourgeois society as well as the synthesis of representative “national” arts. Conversely, a system of rapid changes in the artistic and cultural fashions of late capitalism shaped Documenta from its outset. Manifesta emerged to problematize notions of the local and global in the aftermath of the cold war. Today, we could point to media spectacles, in which the so-called exhibition becomes a media and cultural net of totalizing artistic, cultural, and political events, presenting an atmosphere of art, culture, and society instead of artworks.

Mis

gradu (University of Arts in Belgrade), Belgrade

Manifesta

Manifesta, European Biennial of Contemporary Art was inaugurated in 1996 as a platform for cultural exchange between newly unified, post-Wall Europe. The paucity of dialogue between artists, institutions, and curators across Europe (despite the dramatic historic changes), the phenomenal multiplication of biennials, and their increasing concretization and inflexibility are all factors that profoundly influenced the project. As a result, the new biennial was imagined not only as an alternative to the museum, but as an alternative to the typical biennial as well. Thus Manifesta’s most unique feature was conceived— each edition was to be held in a different peripheral European city. Rejecting some of the inherent nationalism of geographically fixed events and eschewing art-world capitals in favor of locations with less established or visible infrastructures for art, Manifesta seemed to want to use its shifting locations and explicit focus on emerging European artists to rethink the form and specificity of large-scale international exhibitions.

For each edition, the selected curatorial team mounted its exhibition across a number of local institutional sites. The main venue was typically a contemporary art museum or *Kunsthalle*—the Museum Boijmans Van Beunigen for Manifesta 1, the Casino Luxembourg for Manifesta 2, the Moderna galerija Ljubljana for Manifesta 3, and the Frankfurter Kunstverein for Manifesta 4. (Manifesta 5 was an exception to this rule, with only a small portion of the show displayed in a local contemporary art space, the Koldo Mixtelena.) Exhibiting in such established ven-

ues was no doubt a pragmatic gesture: Given Manifesta's itinerant existence, it would be difficult to start from scratch each time. Moreover, the designation of local museums, contemporary art centers, and other cultural sites as exhibition spaces was a vital element, it was reasoned, in the collaboration between Manifesta and its host cities. However, in this process, the white cube seemingly had been accepted as a kind of "international-style" exhibition frame, an internationally recognized container that was deemed appropriate almost no matter where the project moved or the nature of the artwork being displayed.¹⁸ Whereas the incredible promise of such a project lay in the possibility of producing fundamental shifts in successive editions as they traversed Europe, Manifesta's exhibitions have remained relatively true to known biennial formats and standard museal display aesthetics. Although no edition of Manifesta to date has abandoned the white cube, a remarkable fragility, informality, and tentativeness did characterize several editions, distinguishing them in the face of the otherwise visual sophistication and high-gloss spectacle of most perennial events. However, the modesty and ad hoc character of the display in Manifesta's first edition in 1996 had already begun to fade somewhat with the second edition two years later and seemed to have been lost altogether by the fourth edition of 2002. The reasons for this are hardly simple and the attachment to traditional museum spaces and their formats is perhaps the symptom of the resistance that biennials like Manifesta encounter when they consider departing from established expectations for such events. An anecdote about the city of Stockholm's decision not to host the second edition of Manifesta after having seen the first in Rotterdam is telling: The dozen venues across which were dispersed predominantly subtle and small-scale or otherwise unspectacular artworks and performances hardly seemed to cater to the ambitions of a city looking to place itself on the cultural (tourist) map. For city officials shopping for a biennial, there was little that seemed likely to draw the same crowds or press as more established mega exhibitions. This story suggests that there was pressure on Manifesta to conform to the idea of what a biennial should look like—which meant not only grand artworks displayed in visible concentration, but the appropriately conventional "museum hang" and white partitioned spaces to properly enframe them.

Another theoretical problem with abandoning the white cube remained, one perhaps even more fundamentally troubling to such exhibitions: how to display works of art by as yet unknown artists, often with an aesthetic sensibility that is as yet unrecognized by most viewers, or artworks that are not easily recognizable *as art* in spaces that do not announce themselves as bastions for art? Might not the artwork be mistaken for mere "stuff"? And wasn't it desirable that artists new to the international art world avoid this confusion at the moment of their *entrée* into that world? (Not to mention that the emerging curators relatively new to the international art world might have felt they were expected to demonstrate that they too could organize a biennial that looked the part.) To imagine that the art that Manifesta showed or that the survival of such a new institution indeed *depended* on the white cube, however, would be to accept the dominance of Western modernity's structures as the ground against which everything else must be read in order to be considered legitimate at all, a highly problematic assumption and one contingent on precisely the kind of normalization that Manifesta claimed to want to question. Efforts to highlight the specificity of a Manifesta exhibition in a particular place as well as its specificity as a biennial could instead be seen in the themes that both the displaced exhibitions and the artworks on view addressed, including homelessness, hospitality, diasporas, borders, and immigration. Perhaps more than any other biennial, Manifesta's various editions can be said to have consistently probed topics crucial to intellectual, cultural, and political debates of the 1990s. The third edition in Ljubljana in 2000 underlined these debates in a programmatic way. Its large

number of politically engaged works, rejection of slick display strategies, active discussion program initiated by local thinkers, and collaboration with the RTV Slovenia to use local television broadcasts as a fifth venue were uniquely appropriate given the region's war-torn history. Relatively little was done, however, to engage in more than a thematic way the show's concerns with what it called Europe's "borderline syndrome." Thus, in the end, the significant distinctions between the exhibition formats of the editions themselves arguably were hard to discern. Manifesta 5, held in Donostia–San Sebastián in the politically troubled Basque region of northern Spain, might be seen as an exception since it took urbanism as a theme at the same time it incorporated actual urban rehabilitation into the exhibition as a constitutive element. In collaboration with the Rotterdam-based Berlage Institute, the curators instigated theoretical reflection on the revitalization of one of the region's poorest districts, the Pasaia Bay area, and had two of the area's disaffected factories, Casa Ciriza and Ondartxo, restored with the intention that they would serve the community after the run of the show. The largest portion of the exhibition, shown in the Casa Ciriza and thus framed by the defunct fish warehouse's post-industrial ruin and larger impoverished context, avoided the physical accouterments of the white cube, as did the portion held in the sixteenth-century former monastery Museo San Telmo; yet, what was staged in these venues and those others that did resort to white cubes amounted to a rather conventional show. While the urban renewal project was an important step towards asserting that biennials could be the motors for lasting local change, in the eyes of a number of critics, the exhibition missed an opportunity to render the historic, political, and cultural specificity of the location more integral to its form or to the artworks selected. As one reviewer concluded, it "could have been mounted almost anywhere."¹⁹

Ultimately, Manifesta's past exhibitions as well as its symposia, discussion forums, and parallel events have attempted to encourage curators and institutions to think about the limits, transformations, and particularities of Europe as an idea as much as a physical place but never productively incited the connection between this thinking and the reinvention of the project's structural form. After all, given Manifesta's concerns, why demand that it take the form or occupy the space of a conventional museum exhibition? Why not imagine truly experimental exhibition forms that emerge from both the specific sites in which Manifesta finds itself and the issues that make holding a biennial there and then relevant or even urgent? And why not imagine that even those cities less able to replicate Western European museum standards and lacking the same level of financial commitment might actually host a Manifesta edition, inventing new idiosyncratic forms for the event. As experimental platforms that define new models for exhibiting, the peripatetic editions could thus better reflect Manifesta's stated ambitions. If questions such as these have beset the project from the start, the sixth edition seems to have used them as a point of departure. The curators of Manifesta 6, still in the planning stages, have announced that this upcoming edition in Nicosia, a geographically isolated, culturally and politically divided site with only minimal resources for the production and presentation of art, not to mention a historically fraught relationship to Europe, will exchange Manifesta's punctual, traditional exhibition in favor of the extended duration and pedagogical process of an art school. It appears that the biennial's newly envisaged form and temporality emanate from an attempt to respond to Cyprus' multiple historic overdeterminations, including its locus between Europe and the Middle East (a first foray outside of Europe for Manifesta) and its role as paradigm of the conditions and consequences of globalization today. For what sense could another mega exhibition have in such a location today? If goods can traverse its international borders with relative ease, people still cannot,

caught as they are in the political instrumentalization of ethnic and national identities. In place of a biennial as showcase for contemporary cultural goods, the sixth edition purports to use the increased facility of movement across borders made possible by student visas to construct a bi-communal, international forum for process, experimentation, and exchange built from the artists' extended presence at the site in order to respond to the realities of its ethnically divided host city. What the visiting spectator will be able to experience, how such things as process and cultural translation can be rendered visible in an exhibition-as-school, and whether some of the complexity of what has for so long been the "Cypriot problem" will be adequately addressed in the result remain to be seen, but this shift for Manifesta suggests that the specificities of its site have come to serve as the foundation for imagining a new formal model for this biennial.

Documenta

Documenta began in 1955 in the hope of rehabilitating the image of postwar Germany, transforming the bombed-out town of Kassel and its most iconic extant structure, the neoclassical Museum Fridericianum, into the center of the art world every five years. The one-hundred-day quinquennial quickly came to be considered the most serious and among the most prestigious mega exhibition of its kind. One can hardly say that for the tenth edition of Documenta in 1997 artistic director Catherine David devised radical, new display strategies to recast the physical appearance of the white cube. While the artworks on display were largely political in content, their presentation in the Museum Fridericianum bore little evidence that the traditional museum format or the Western avant-garde canon were under attack. The highly problematic role of the white cube was, however, an essential tension underlying Documenta 10. A reflection on what David called its "spatial and temporal but also ideological limits" was central to the conception of her project.²⁰ The seeming inability of the museum's "universalist model" to accommodate some of the most experimental and exemplary contemporary cultural production determined her objective to conceive an exhibition that included the program 100 Days–100 Guests, a mammoth series of daily public lectures, theater performances, film screenings, poetry readings, discussions, and other events in Kassel.

Conceptually, 100 Days–100 Guests began with the premise that presenting a panorama of recent visual art was not a priori the best means of representing contemporaneity. As David suggested in the short guide to the exhibition, "the object for which the white cube was constructed is now in many cases no more than one of the aspects or moments of the work, or better yet, merely the support and the vector of highly diverse artistic activities."²¹ Nor was the *exhibitible object* the most representative of every culture. She further explained:

For reasons which have partially to do with interrupted or violently destroyed traditions, as well as the diversity of the cultural formations that have sprung from colonization and decolonization and the indirect and unequal access these formation have been given to the forms of Western modernity, it seems that in many cases the pertinence, excellence, and radicality of contemporary non-Western expressions finds its privileged avenues in music, oral and written language (literature, theatre), and cinema forms which have traditionally contributed to strategies of emancipation.²²

All cultures, she thus contended, are not equally served by the white cube. David's resulting project, with predominantly Western figures featured in the show's historical "retro-perspectives," more recent but still largely American and European artwork on view in the exhibition spaces, and the work of non-Westerners overwhelmingly relegated to the lecture and events program, admittedly

offered a Eurocentric perspective of *visual* art. But, instead of imagining yet another “Museum of 100 Days,” as Documenta had been nicknamed at its founding, she aimed to present more heterogeneous works – and through more heterogeneous means – during 100 Days–100 Guests. Both conceptually and physically central to the exhibition (its stage stood in the middle of the Documenta-Halle), the events program could also be experienced live on the radio and via the Internet, or consulted as recordings in the exhibition, constituting a growing archive both in and, potentially, beyond Kassel.²³ David thus effectively transformed Documenta from a spectacular visual arts exhibition to a hybrid site for the representation of diverse cultural production. The result opened Documenta to the kind of political engagement and diversity of mediums and cultures that no other such exhibition in the West had seen—what many critics in turn lamented as an overly political, theory-driven, and aesthetically impoverished show. In fact, David’s move to counter the mega exhibition’s usual spectacle was consistent with the audacious assertion that it is impossible to continue to innocently perpetuate the museal exhibition format as the legitimate frame for all works of art from all places. The exhibition and events program thus staged the very limitations of the white cube. And in critically reflecting on the way hegemonic forms operate, Documenta 10 used the conceptual and discursive structure of the last edition of the millennium to encourage others to do so as well, a role that was, as David suggested, no less political than aesthetic. For the eleventh edition of Documenta in 2002, artistic director Okwui Enwezor and his co-curators aimed to transform the geographic, conceptual, and temporal constitution of the event, conceiving a series of five “platforms,” the first four of which were themed conferences (in one case including a workshop and film screenings) held in Lagos, Saint Lucia, New Delhi, Vienna, and Berlin over the course of eighteen months.²⁴ The discussions deliberated such issues as the recent impact of globalization on the world or the violent legacy of colonialism. Although far from a literal rehearsal of the exhibition, they also mapped out the concerns at the heart of the fifth exhibition platform.

Reiterating the terms of the larger project’s postcolonial critique, the stridently political artworks and accompanying curatorial statements rendered explicit the need to question Western imperialism, including its perpetuation through such notions as modernity, the avant-garde, universality, and democracy.²⁵ The first four platforms were, by most accounts, thought provoking if academic affairs, at once dislocating the singular site of Documenta and situating critical research and theoretical reflection at its heart. Despite the fact that, relatively few visitors and participants actually attended the conferences, these proceedings were integral to the form of Documenta 11, which expanded the boundaries of this art event traditionally held in a provincial European town and transformed it into a transnational, interdisciplinary, multilayered manifestation. While these events overturned the strictures of Documenta’s hallmark one-hundred-day exhibition in Kassel, the fifth platform appeared to be a decided *return to order*. Impeccable arrangements of white cubes and black boxes recurred throughout most all of the show’s multiple sites. Even though the exhibition largely occupied the stately Museum Fridericianum, keeping with Documenta’s typical practice, here as well as in the massive, newly inaugurated Binding Braueri and the Kulturbahnhof one encountered a display even more museal, conservative, and rarefied than in previous editions.²⁶ Exceptionally, a few of the exhibition projects extended outside the museum, seeming all the more to confine that platform to neatly delineated display spaces.²⁷ It was as if, in creating four other platforms out there in the world, the curators decided that the fifth in Kassel would replicate even more closely a museum space cut off from that world. The exhibition brought, as one critic noted, “issues of genocide, poverty, political incarceration, industrial pollution, earthquake wreck-

age, strip-mine devastation, and news of fresh disasters *into the inviolable white cube*.”²⁸ This is not to suggest that the means through which display strategies structure perception and art history were simply overlooked. As one of the curators attests in his catalogue essay:

Art exhibitions also frequently adopt linear models to represent historical flux and the relationship between past art and recent production. To be sure, there is a correspondence between the linearity of these narratives and their tacit—or implicit—totalizing will....The ideological effects of these types of exhibition strategies are well known: the consolidation of an artistic canon, and therefore the staging of a series of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that assures its permanency.²⁹

He and the other curators of Documenta 11, therefore, tried to imagine a “structure that would allow the works to co-exist in a heterogeneous and nonlinear temporality.”³⁰ Indeed, as such an effort suggests, an exhibition’s politics are inevitably a politics of (identity) representation, articulated in the selection of works and in the ways their strategic display rethink certain established ideals. Once the works were selected, however, Documenta 11, being largely composed of recent art, did not seem to fully question the ideological legerdemain of traditional museum shows, except insofar as it dispersed historical works from the 1970s throughout the exhibition. If Documenta 11’s notable breadth of representation (with significantly more visual artists from non-Western nations than any previous edition) and the displacement of the four platforms sought to challenge occidental paradigms and champion instead “those circuits of knowledge produced outside the predetermined institutional domain of Westernism,” then corseting the exhibition portion in exactly that predetermined institutional paradigm most intimately connected with the development and historicization of occidental modernism effectively undermined many of the very objectives of the project.³¹ Examining the fifth platform in this way inevitably simplifies the breadth and theoretical complexity of a much larger project, but it also underlines the silence which allows the white cube to function, even in those projects most consciously and explicitly positioned against the hegemony of modern Western forms. Why, one might ask, expand Documenta into different parts of the world through the four discussion platforms only to encase most of the over four hundred works from five continents in Kassel within the West’s least questioned framing devices? A hasty response might be that bringing works of art from vastly different cultures requires using a uniformly prestigious or valid frame through which they can be experienced—the necessary fiction sustaining this being that the white cube is that neutral, legitimate frame. The issue is undeniably complex, but it was rehearsed, one might say, in one of the essential queries of *Democracy Unrealized*, the first platform of Documenta 11: Can democracy, a fundamentally Western concept and hegemonic political form, serve as a legitimate benchmark for the constitution of society in the postwar period, even in nations with vastly distinct histories and cultures? One could also ask the same of the white cube in relation to large-scale exhibitions. Of course, the underlying stakes of these two questions might seem, on the surface, wildly different, but both suggest that there is an imperative need to problematize (Western) models that quietly perpetuate themselves as unquestioned universals.

If the proliferation of biennials can be said to mark a break in the global cultural politics of modernity and modern art, it is because they affect art history writing and contemporary art’s relationships to the specificity of location, which ultimately hinge on the revision of the aesthetics so dominant in the art of the 20th century. However, a biennial’s role in fashioning

alternative art histories and aesthetics needs to take in account of their other concerns as well. As periodic events, they also aspire to showcase the new and the very contemporary as a response to and echo of local and global transformations in economy, politics, and culture. This limits their ability to incorporate historical depth but it contributes to their contest with the museum, which tends to be less sensitive to what is most contemporary. This conflict in the functioning of biennials has to be examined carefully, particularly in non-western countries where “contemporary art” only arrived in the 1980s (at the same moment that biennials began to proliferate) and still needs time to develop significant histories. Thus, instead of taking aim at how biennials attempt to write histories, we should talk about the “effects” of biennials on art history writing. On the aesthetic level, it is hard to measure how far biennials can depart from the traditional white cube.

Every biennial tackles this issue differently, and each edition also provides different approaches, articulated in more or less conscious ways. But, in general, it would not be fair to say that as long as biennials present themselves in museums, they will not be able to depart from the white cube or a linear art history based on Western modern art. On the one hand, museums all over the world are revising their relationship to the traditional white cube. On the other, the museum, with the protection and the flexibility of framing it can offer for art works, will still be an important venue for biennials, at times for reasons that are context-sensitive: A biennial can be created because of the lack of a museum, or because existing museums do not feature contemporary art, or because the contemporary art featured by the museum is outdated.

Manray Hsu, independent curator and critic based in Taipei and Berlin.

The Gwangju Biennial

The Gwangju Biennial, East Asia’s first large-scale contemporary art event, was founded in 1995 at a high point in the biennial boom. With memories of nearly two decades of political oppression still present, including the 1980 massacres that accompanied a citizen uprising for democracy, the new biennial was imagined as a bandage for old wounds and a means by which to provide the city a positive, forward-looking profile. Critics decried the overly Western focus of the first two editions as well as their seeming inability to draw attention to the specificity of the emerging Asian art scene or, for that matter, those of other cultures less well-represented in Asia. As a result, the biennial’s third edition in 2000 was revamped, initiating a strong Asian focus accompanied by a declaration of commitment to becoming a forum for artistic practices outside the West. Broadcasting that the biennial would “pursue globalization rather than westernization, diversity instead of uniformity,” officials marked their seriousness and new focus by building a multistory, convention center-like exhibition complex, which was inaugurated with the 2000 edition.³² Ironically, at precisely the moment that Gwangju and its biennial hoped to demonstrate their entry into a globalized art world, this new permanent exhibition structure incorporated generic Western display tropes in the form of a series of flexible but neatly arranged white cubes. For biennial officials, to be globally relevant meant replicating the “universal” exhibition backdrop. The fourth edition in 2002 opposed this strategy. Entitled P.A.U.S.E. and directed by Wan-kyung Sung, the biennial was composed of four curated exhibitions or “projects” that in different ways engaged the vestiges of Gwangju’s uneasy past and contemporary condition, including a series of site-specific installations in a former military prison, a project to reconstruct the area around the city’s abandoned railroad tracks, and an exhibition concentrating on the Korean diaspora. Project 1: Pause, curated by Hou

Hanru and Charles Esche and held in the biennial hall, was the largest part of the biennial, and the curators conceived it as a “context specific event” rather than a panorama of recent art. Asia’s transformed urban reality provided the context for questioning art’s “global-local negotiation” and imagining possible alternatives to the homogenization and acceleration of late capitalism.³³ The conditions of art production in contemporary Asia and beyond the Western world more generally, where structures to support experimental artistic practice are rare or nonexistent, determined the curators’ decision to show dynamic recent cultural production by artists who had self-organized outside the occidental art world’s capitals.³⁴ As a result, they conceived an exhibition that included some twenty-five independent collectives and artist-run organizations from around the globe, mostly from Asia and Europe but also from the Americas and India. These groups were invited essentially to self-curate their participation in the biennial, retaining incredible autonomy and shifting the role of the biennial curator. The result was less a presentation of discrete artworks than a biennial as the workshop for artistic experimentation, since bringing together artist collectives from around the world was meant to empower and mobilize, acting as “a first step towards a global network of independent, self-organizational, and resistant structures for creation.”³⁵ By highlighting the possibilities of collective self-organization in the face of institutional inertia, the biennial engaged in a real dialogue with its local context, offering artists multiple models of self-sustainable cultural production. “Hou and Esche seemed to want to subvert both Eurocentrism—with its fellow traveler, a certain patronizing exoticism—and ‘the museum’ as an institution,” one critic noted, adding that “in much of Asia, these two issues are deeply intertwined.”³⁶ Project 1: Pause translated its conceptual ambitions into an equally remarkable form: In collaboration with architects, the artist groups were asked to conceive display pavilions or reconstruct the actual spaces in which they typically worked and exhibited. A sprawling frame of steel and plywood delimited these pavilions, the ensemble redressing the biennial hall’s exhibition spaces with evocations of a frenzied global metropolis. The resulting makeshift structures connecting the different parts of the exhibition rendered tangible the physical qualities of various international art spaces and conceptualized something about the practices seen within them. The pavilions and reconstructed independent art spaces varied wildly, from a Bedouin tent printed with images of Western cities overlaid with Muslim iconography (AES Group from Moscow) and a carpet-lined photocopying facility for Xeroxing reduced-priced copies of the catalogue during the exhibition (Kurimanzutto from Mexico City) to reconstructions of an apartment interior (IT Park from Taipei) or a meeting room (Project 304 from Bangkok). They also implied, as did the urban evocations of the larger exhibition frame, that the particularities of artistic practices were connected to and imbricated in the actual structures that allowed for their experimentation. Suggesting that colonialism insinuates itself through the appropriation of the Other’s monuments, demonstrating how capitalism’s means could be used against itself, or illustrating that the most apparently quotidian gathering spot could be the site of intense cultural exchange, these structures within the larger exhibition refused the white-cube form but also demonstrated that the aesthetics of a display space are not separable from the ethics of an art practice.

The End(s) of the White Cube

To have begun to question the use of the white cube in recent large-scale perennial exhibitions by addressing the foundation of the modern museum and the historical and political implications of certain exhibition spaces, extreme as those examples may be, was not merely for rhetorical effect. By so doing, I intended to underscore that the framing of art, no less than the selection of artworks, is fundamental to the ideological dramaturgy that we call an exhibition. A curious silence

regarding this phenomenon remains in discussions of biennials and related large-scale exhibitions. Yet, one could say that the “crisis of biennials” that so many critics have decried lies not so much in the proliferation of these events as in the proliferation of a *form*, which, more often than not, remains the same over time and across space despite the vast differences in the issues such exhibitions are meant to illustrate, their relationships to their individual local contexts, the works they present, the institutions that sponsor them, and the institutional and other histories they interrogate along the way. At a moment when art remains one of the few modes of critically resisting hegemonic global transformations and when the engagement and experimentation of many artists remains a source of incredible promise for the future, exhibition forms need all the more urgently to be intelligent, sensitive, and appropriate means for rendering art public. To insist here on the ways in which some of the politics of an exhibition inheres in its form is not, however, to advocate the promotion of a cult of the curator or the conflation of his or her role with that of the artist. Nor does it mean to suggest that curators, institutions, or their exhibition spaces generate the meanings of contemporary artistic production. Artworks, however much they are elements in the construction of the meaning of an exhibition and, dialectically, also subjected to its staging, in fact also articulate aesthetic and intellectual positions and define modes of experience that resist the thematic or structural frames they are put in.³⁷ Yet, as any number of examples can amply testify, an exhibition is no mere sequence of artworks, good or bad, thematically unified or formally disparate. Nor is an exhibition’s worth and meaning the sum (if one could measure them in this way) of the combined worth and meaning of the various works of art on display. Instead, the manner by which a selection of artworks, a tectonic context, and thematic or other discursive accompaniments coalesce into a particular form is at the heart of *how an exhibition exhibits*. This, after all, is what distinguishes an exhibition from, say, an illustrated essay: The articulation of a particular physical space through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged. What then is the role of biennials and large-scale exhibitions today? How might they be more self-reflective about how meaning is expressed in the very structures they provide visitors for thinking, acting, and viewing a show? How can the postcolonial project of cultural translation prevent itself from being betrayed by the frame through which art is shown in order to allow these large-scale exhibitions to live up to their potential as sites from which to question the consequences of global modernity? How too might they register some of the hesitancy and instability that their discourse would have us believe is integral to their projects? There are perhaps no easy answers to these questions nor is the issue without its own contradictions. But a change lies above all in the recognition that the aesthetic and intellectual premises on which an exhibition is based—the issues its curators and artists wish to defend, the positions they seek to express—need to be more fully articulated in the forms exhibitions take.

How is an exhibition articulated? What new grammar of space should we invent for international shows, which claim to represent a globalizing art production, in order to transcend the Eurocentric confinements of the white cube? These are relevant questions, but let’s push them one step further. What sort of new spatial language are we looking for? Is it a language that universalizes its meanings through the subsequent inclusion of new forms, contents, audiences, producers, processes? Does it consist of more and more different spaces combined together? This erosion of the white cube’s boundaries works both ways. We are faced with an increasingly rapid demand for new raw materials of art production: social contexts, local specificities, cultural differences, even new models of resistance. The white cube is only

partly dismantled in the search for new stages and forums for art. This is because its mechanisms are also extended into the new areas it aims to include. We have seen the most curious examples of this dynamic: Due to instrumental policies of multiculturalism, reluctant marginal groups are dragged into museums about which they couldn't care less. The call for another form of exhibiting remains, nevertheless, urgent. But what if an exhibition is not a means to an end? What if it is not meant to transmit, to communicate, to translate, or even to reform, but to bewilder, alienate, dazzle, or suspend the instrumentality of meanings? Isn't the consequence of the call for a politics of form to liberate form from the instrumentality of the relationship of means and ends? The ends of the white cube thus consist precisely of getting rid of ends that mistake policies for politics because a politics of form knows no ends, just means, and it knows no end either, just endless contestation.

Hito Steyerl, Berlin-based artist and filmmaker

Of course, it is not evident what forms might be appropriate to the vast cultural and formal heterogeneity of contemporary artistic production—supple enough to accommodate diverse practices, respectful enough to reveal the inherent, individual logic of artworks, and quiet enough to allow an intimate relationship between artwork and viewer. The answer is surely not singular. The now global white cube certainly should not be supplanted by another model that will become *the* biennial standard. Merely inserting works in crumbling industrial buildings or any number of other “exotic” locales is not the solution anymore than any single other form. Instead, the future of biennials is to be found in a sensitivity to how the coincidence of works of art and other conditions (temporal, geographic, historic, discursive, and institutional) *locate* a project and how that “location” can be used to articulate a project that is respectful of its artworks and speaks to its viewers. This requires the willingness of curators and institutions to think through more complex relationships to sites, artworks, audiences, and the theoretical propositions of an exhibition—a prospect that may require more time for exhibition research and preparation as well as greater collaboration between artists, curators, and institutions, but also the courage to risk a result perhaps more vulnerable and hesitant as it departs from an authoritative format. In the end, none of this will guarantee consistently memorable shows, but thinking through an exhibition's form will facilitate the development of more engaged and dialectical relationships between artworks and their presentation frames as well as projects and viewers more aware of the ideological entanglements of the structures and strategies they experience everyday.³⁸ Only then will biennials and mega exhibitions emerge that assert themselves fully as the “models of resistance” that they promise to be: not necessarily the end of the white cube in all cases and for all places so much as a critical relationship to its ends.³⁹

Remark of the editors: the text by Elena Filipovic was published before the cancellation of Manifesta 6, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesta#Manifesta_6.2C_Nicosia.2C_Cyprus.2C_2006

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Elena Filipovic has just been announced as director of the Kunsthalle Basel. She is Senior curator at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels. She co-curated the 5th Berlin Biennial (2008) with Adam Szymczyk, and co-edited *The Biennial Reader: Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (2010), with Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø. She has curated a number of traveling retrospectives, including *Marcel Duchamp: A Work that is not a Work "of Art"* (2008–2009), *Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Specific Objects without Specific Form* (2010–2011), and *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972*, co-curated with Joanna Mytkowska (2011–2012), in addition to organizing solo exhibitions with artists such as Petrit Halilaj, Leigh Ledare, Klara Lidén, Lorna Macintyre, Melvin Moti, Tomo Savic-Gecan, and Tris Vonna-Michell. She was guest curator of the 14th Prix Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2012) and the Satellite Program at the Jeu de Paume, Paris (2010) and has, since 2007, been tutor of theory/exhibition history at De Appel postgraduate curatorial training program and advisor at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Her writings have appeared in numerous artists' catalogues as well as in *After-All*, *Artforum*, *frieze*, *Kaleidoscope*, and *Mousse*.

Notes

1 For a discussion of Barr's strategic adaptation of the white cube based on European exhibition models, see Christoph Grunberg, "The Politics of Presentation: The Museum of Modern Art, New York," in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*, ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 192–210.

2 See also Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

3 As Grunberg ("The Politics of Presentation," 206) argues of Barr's whitewash of the MoMA: "The white, neutral and ideology-free gallery space constitutes the physical materialization of MoMA's selective amnesia. More than anything else, the 'white cube' epitomized the attempt to escape from the realities of the external world, belying modernism's original claim for the integration of art and life....The physical confinement and limitations imposed by the installation reveal MoMA's selective appropriation of modernism."

4 Artist and critic Brian O'Doherty, the white cube's earliest commentator, probably first coined the term in the mid-1970s. His series of three articles entitled "Inside the White Cube," originally published in *Artforum* in 1976, remain the most thorough and engaging study of the phenomenon. They have been collected and reprinted with later articles on the subject in his *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

5 Over the last decade, various studies have begun to make evident the manner by which the

museum, from its origins, has been both an ideologically laden and disciplining site crucial to the formation of subjectivity. The white cube is in many ways the culmination of its Enlightenment project. See, in particular, Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Donald Preziosi, *The Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

6 Indeed, the white cube is no more a tabula rasa than the white surface in architecture more generally. The seminal work on this subject is Mark Wigley's *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Whitewashed spaces, Wigley argues, were far from accidental, blank, or silent, and although his study concentrates on the beginnings of the use of white in modernist architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, the whiteness of museums, galleries, and biennial exhibitions in the decades since similarly speak volumes.

7 Numerous studies have thoroughly discussed these two exhibitions, including "Degenerate Art": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991); Neil Levi, "'Judge for Yourself!'—The Degenerate Art Exhibition as Political Spectacle," *October* 85 (1998): 41–64; and Berthold Hinz, "'Degenerate' and 'Authentic': Aspects of Art and Power in the Third Reich," in *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators, 1930–1940*, ed. Dawn Ades et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 330–34.

8 A discussion of the Third Reich's paradoxical conceptions of modernity and diverse exhibition strategies is not possible here. While the above cited

studies have brilliantly treated many of these issues, what interests me is the ways in which the white cube was indoctrinated early in the twentieth century as a vehicle for the projection of diverse, even contradictory, ideals. There is, as I have pointed out, some shared significations of the display conceit, including legitimacy, neutrality, and—albeit differently for Barr and Hitler—a modernity that is resolutely Western. This last point may sound contradictory, since what counted as “Western” was also very different for both men and their respective institutions. Moreover, one could argue that the art shown in the *Grosse deutsche Kunstausstellung* was like Albert Speer’s monumental neoclassical structure, hopelessly caught between past and present, more backward looking than “modern,” in the way we have come to think of the term. However, for Hitler, the presentation of newly made works of art at the Haus der Kunst (the only ones that could legitimately represent their time) contrasted with those of the avant-garde and everything gathered in the *Entartete Kunst* show, which were dismissible as degenerate and essentially non-Western or at times degenerate because non-Western (the discourse that accompanied the show was explicit, while the primitive “African” lettering of the posters for the *Entartete Kunst* show attempted to underscore the point).

9 Carlos Basualdo, “The Unstable Institution,” *MJ – Manifesta Journal* 2 (winter 2003–spring 2004): 57.

10 *Ibid.*, 60. For a discussion of the degree to which museums have historically been Western institutions founded on colonial imperialist principals, see Preziosi, *The Brain of the Earth’s Body*, 116–36.

11 Across various texts, from his curatorial statement for his exhibition *The Structure of Survival* at the fiftieth Venice Biennial in 2003 to his essay for the Documenta 11 catalogue, Basualdo has interestingly engaged the discursive and display strategies in large-scale international exhibitions. If I point here to what has been overlooked in his most explicit treatment of the question in “The Unstable Institution,” I do so in part because that essay is a rare example of serious consideration of the biennial phenomenon, and it is remarkable that it does not acknowledge how the endless replication of the white cube in biennials relates to the Western museum model he discusses.

12 Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).

13 That argument is a central premise of Documenta 10 and is discussed at length in David’s introduction in *Documenta X: Short Guide* (Ostfildern-

Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997) as well as in Robert Storr, “Kassel Rock: Interview with Curator Catherine David,” *Artforum* 35, no. 9 (May 1997): 77.

14 O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 14. Igor Zabel astutely discusses the ambivalent possible readings of the use of the white cube in recent exhibitions (“The Return of the White Cube,” *MJ – Manifesta Journal* 1 [spring–summer 2003]: 12–21) and I agree that meanings of the display conceit are hardly univocal over time. However, I would argue that this format that “returned” may be more historically overdetermined than most admit, and its proliferation as an ideal standard in biennials and other mega exhibitions merits questioning.

15 *Ibid.*, 79; and Igor Zabel, “We and the Others,” *Moscow Art Magazine* 22 (1998): 29.

16 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 11.

17 Miš
tion: On the Ideologies of Manifesta,” *PlatformaS-CCA*, no. 3 (January 2002), 11, available online at <http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakovi-cengp.htm>.

18 Robert Fleck (“Art after Communism?” *Manifesta 2, European Biennial of Contemporary Art* [Luxembourg City: Casino Luxembourg–Forum d’art contemporain, 1998], 195), one of the show’s curators, employed this term in the catalogue for Manifesta 2. He provocatively argued that after the Wall fell and equal access to such things as video games and Coca-Cola was established, essential differences between artistic production in the former East and West disappeared to be replaced by what he called an “international style.”

19 Jordan Kantor, “Manifesta 5,” *Artforum* 43, no. 1 (September 2004): 259. See also Susan Snodgrass, “Manifesta 5: Turning Outward,” *Art in America* 92, no. 12 (December 2004): 68–73. The show almost completely, and perhaps understandably, avoided directly addressing the deep political tensions in the region, the site’s most striking particularity. Instead, the curators opted to construct unspoken analogies to the local situation by displaying a number of artworks that pointed to such things as identity construction, geopolitical strife, and territorial borders elsewhere in the world. However, the inability of the exhibition to more actively or inventively engage with the complex specificity of its location, especially given that this “nomadic” biennial had chosen a Basque city for ostensibly those reasons, left many viewers feeling that the analogies were too few, too distant, or too abstract to resonate with the local reality.

20 David, *Documenta X*, 11.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 11–12.

23 The massive publication that accompanied Documenta 10, *Documenta X: The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), a collaborative project between David and Jean-François Chevrier, conceptually carried through this premise, but it in no way attempted to reproduce on the page the exhibition or events or otherwise represent the diverse artworks. Instead, it served as a parallel intellectual, political, historical, and cultural anthology of Europe across several key historical moments.

24 The four conference platforms—Democracy Unrealized (held in Vienna and Berlin), Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation (held in New Delhi), Créolité and Creolization (organized as a workshop that was closed to the public and held in Saint Lucia), and Under Siege: Four African Cities: Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos (held in Lagos)—are more widely known through the publication of the proceedings in four eponymous volumes by Hatje Cantz in 2002 and 2003.

25 See Okwui Enwezor, “The Black Box,” in *Documenta 11, Platform 5: Exhibition* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 42–55. For a thorough and cogent discussion of the various platforms, see Stewart Martin, “A New World Art? Documenting Documenta 11,” *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy* 122 (November–December 2003): 7–19.

26 Critics repeatedly noted that the spaces were exceptionally “elegantly proportioned” and “restrained,” what Peter Schjeldahl (“The Global Salon: European Extravaganzas,” *The New Yorker* 78, no. 17 [1 July 2002]: 94) described as a “global salon.” Another critic (Jens Hoffmann, “Reentering Art, Reentering Politics,” *Flash Art* 34, no. 231 [July–September 2002]: 106) praised it as “almost perfect, at least in terms of what a traditional art exhibition can be.” In one of the few reviews that addressed the contradictions inherent in the aesthetic of the display strategies of Documenta 11 in relation to the content of the artworks, Massimiliano Gioni (“Finding the Center,” *Flash Art* 34, no. 231 [July–September 2002]: 106–07) proclaimed: “Everything is presented in an almost clinical manner, verging on seamless slickness. Disorder is at the core of the exhibition, but the show itself speaks in a very clear, at times didactic tone....The trouble with this edition of Documenta also lies in this attitude, for it renovates themes, artists, and languages, but it does not readdress the format of the exhibition or truly question our role as

spectators.” It perhaps bears underscoring that my critical position in relation to the near-uniform format of many mega exhibitions, exemplified in Documenta 11’s ultrarefined version, does not suggest that the alternative is necessarily a chaotic, disorderly, overwhelming, or fetishized presentation, but instead, one that is uniquely appropriate to and in dialogue with the works, themes, location, moment in history, etc. of an exhibition.

27 Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument* created for Documenta 11 was one such project and a perfect example of the way in which subversive content and architectonic/display form meet. Its insistent engagement with its displaced location on the outskirts of Kassel (through its use of vernacular materials, a local Turkish workforce to install and maintain the monument, and explicit dedication to the local immigrant community) enacted its own commentary on the relationship of margin to center and political injustice advanced by the exhibition.

28 Kim Levin “The CNN Documenta: Art in an International State of Emergency,” *Village Voice*, 3–9 July 2002, 57, emphasis added. Also available online at <http://www.villagevoice.com/art/0227,levin,36174,13.html>.

29 Basualdo, “The Encyclopedia of Babel,” in *Documenta 11, Platform 5: Exhibition*, 60. See also Derek Conrad Murray, “Okwui Enwezor in Conversation with Derek Conrad Murray,” *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 18 (spring–summer 2003): 40–47.

30 Ibid.

31 Enwezor, “The Black Box,” 54.

32 Cited in Charlotte Bydler’s exceptional recent study, *The Global Artworld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2004), 131.

33 Hou Hanru, “Event City and Pandora’s Box: Curatorial Notes on the 2002 Gwangju Biennale,” *Yishu* 1, no. 2 (July 2002): 91.

34 See Hou Hanru, “Initiatives, Alternatives: Notes in a Temporary and Raw State,” in *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age*, ed. Philippe Vergne, Vasif Kortun, and Hou Hanru (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 36–39. The Gwangju Biennial demonstrated what Charles Esche (“Debate: Biennials,” *Frieze*, no. 92 [June–July–August 2005]: 105) has argued is the most pressing issue for such events: “the biennial needs above all to ask what kind of global culture it underwrites and how that support is made manifest.”

35 Hanru, “Event City and Pandora’s Box,” 91–93.

36 Jonathan Napack "Alternative Visions," *Art in America* 90, no. 11 (November 2002): 94.

37 Silly me, I actually believe in the agency of the artist as author, singular one at that. This does not preclude the exhibition from providing a context for *reading* the artwork (otherwise, I have written in vain) but it does not, to my mind, fundamentally *change* the artwork nor does it annihilate the dialectic relationship between artwork and exhibition and the potential sense constructed by their encounter.

38 Such a turn would be a positive shift for the museum as well, which has arguably also been rethinking its own exhibitions' forms, in many cases in response to and under pressure from its biennial counterpart. The museum haunts this essay even as its particularities—but also its important social contributions—remain insufficiently discussed. (This section's title nods to the brilliant 1996 exhibition and conference series, *The End(s) of the Museum*.) Museums unquestionably serve a vital role and one that will always be distinct from that of mega exhibitions. Still, neither institution is monolithic despite the need to refer here to the values of each in schematic terms; space limitations have kept me from being able to treat the issue in a more nuanced way, but one should not go away with the impression that museums/Kunsthallen (and their directors and curators) have not historically struggled with the ideological signification of the white cube, nor that these institutions have not at times been the sites for truly engaged and innovative projects. The relationship between the large-scale international exhibition and the museum—one of exchange and articulation of difference that has been important for both sides—is a subject awaiting thorough study.

39 The term is Okwui Enwezor's and is mentioned in his "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *MJ – Manifesta Journal* 2 (winter 2003–spring 2004): 31.