
Oliver Marchart

Hegemony Machines

documenta X to fifteen

and the Politics of Biennialization

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This publication is a translated and extended version
of *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld. Die documenta-Ausstellungen dX, D11, d12
und die Politik der Biennialisierung*
by Oliver Marchart, published by Marius Babias, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.),
as volume 2 of the series n.b.k. Diskurs,
© 2008 Oliver Marchart // Neuer Berliner Kunstverein // OnCurating.org

**Oliver Marchart, HEGEMONY MACHINES, documenta X to fifteen
and the Politics of Biennialization**
Published by OnCurating.org (Dorothee Richter)
and Marius Babias, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.)
Zurich, Berlin 2022

Proofreading: Stephanie Carwin
Set and design: Biotop 3000

Translation by Judith Rosenthal, with the exception of the chapter on theory,
which was based on the article Oliver Marchart, *Curating Theory (Away)*
the Case of the Last Three Documenta Shows, in OnCurating Issue 8,
translated by Benjamin Marius Schmid

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein
Chausseestr. 128/129
10115 Berlin
www.nbk.org

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein n.b.k. gGmbH is funded by the LOTTO-Stiftung Berlin
and the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe.

ONCURATING.org
Pfungstweidstraße 96, 8005 Zurich, Switzerland
www.on-curating.org

ONCURATING.org is an independent international journal supported
by the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK.

ISBN: 9798839575660

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The Politics of Biennialization

(Introduction)

Why waste our breath on the biennialization of the art world, which scarcely a city seems capable of escaping? Why analyze a large-scale exhibition such as documenta, which—not unlike a dwarf planet travelling its orbit—enters the art field every five years, only to vanish again afterwards into the darkness of the universe? Or the Venice Biennale, which defends its rank as an art Olympiad with a stultifying routine and presumably has as little to do with the twenty-first century as the rest of Venice? Are Potemkin villages of this kind, assembled and immediately disassembled again every two, three, or five years, really so important as to make in-depth analysis worthwhile?

What Adorno said about philosophy—that it is the most serious thing, but then again, not all *that* serious—can also be attributed to biennials and other branches of the art field, but the other way around: they are the most unserious thing, but then again not all that unserious. Because along with the policies of other art institutions, for example, the exhibition and collection policies of museums and foundations, the policy of biennialization plays directly into the policies of politics. To begin with, of course, there is local politics, in which context biennials and similar large-scale events—for instance, European Capitals of Culture—contribute to more efficient municipal and regional marketing.¹ But above and beyond the creation of economic value on the local level, there is also the politics of the nation state. The policy of biennialization contributes not least of all to the construction of local, national, and continental identity. Its format is thus a direct descendant of the world fairs that supported the inner nation-building of colonial and industrial nations of the nineteenth century. World fairs achieved this by catering above all to two aspects of national pride. They demonstrated the latest accomplishments of technology and progress on the one hand, and the most exotic accomplish-

1 ——— The biennial boom can be explained to a large extent by the convergence of globality and locality, of a globalized art field and local city/site marketing.

ments of colonialist marauding on the other. At world fairs, progress and racism were inseparably linked. At the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, the construction of the Eiffel Tower testified to the achievements of French engineering, while at the same time African villages, complete with their inhabitants, were presented to the European public.²

Many Western biennials, museums, and exhibition institutions have yet to bid farewell to the legacy of exoticism and nationalism. And however great the differences, the continuities are conspicuous—even where we’ve left off tinkering with the ideology of the nation and turned our attention to that of “European identity” instead, for example, with the aid of a European biennial like Manifesta. But are institutions like biennials capable of possessing positive political functions, in the stricter sense, above and beyond their ideological function? Is a politics of biennialization conceivable that is capable of changing something for the better in the world—and not just in the art world, which fancies itself the world? Or, more specifically, is there a chance that thematically focused large-scale exhibitions radiate something to society, for example, by channeling political themes that would otherwise be overlooked in the public debate? One such political function of art publics would run contrary to the more current forms of ideological nation-building by museums and biennials, just as they would run contrary to the economic function of the art world as a marketplace in which goods and services are traded.

This possibility is in fact by no means out of the question. We must remember that precisely the so-called peripheral biennials form their own networks and create communication and translation channels that can prove valuable locally. Biennials offer an “exemplary venue of cultural translation and transnational encounter.”³ This applies only for the elite of the art field functionaries and a few biennial hoppers, one might argue, but biennials and similar large-scale events have also always served as magnets for political movements, which carried out their political activities under the protection and in the shadow of the spectacle, and, indeed, proved adept at tapping into its prestige. Already Walter Benjamin, for example, pointed out that world fairs were “places of pilgrimage to the

2 ——— Sandy Nairne, “Exhibitions of contemporary art,” Emma Barker, ed., *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (London: Open University Press, 1999), 106.

3 ——— See Okwui Enwezor, *Großausstellungen und die Antinomien einer transnationalen globalen Form* (Munich: Fink, 2002), 20 (trans. JR). Enwezor adds “that the emergence in the global periphery should not simply be lamented as the standard signal of a biennial syndrome. Instead, in the phenomenon of the biennials, there is a discernible possibility of a paradigm shift that enables us spectators to encounter a multiplicity of experimental cultures without possessing them in their entirety.” *Ibid.*, 30.

commodity fetish” that glorified the exchange value of the commodity and offered people phantasmagoria for purposes of distraction,⁴ while at the same time being “politicizable” from the outside in certain places, or at least utilizable for political purposes:

For the Paris world exhibition of 1867, Victor Hugo issues a manifesto: “To the Peoples of Europe.” Earlier, and more unequivocally, their interests had been championed by delegations of French workers, of which the first had been sent to the London world exhibition of 1851 and the second, numbering 750 delegates, to that of 1862. The latter delegation was of indirect importance for Marx’s founding of the International Workingmen’s Association.⁵

Intentionally or unintentionally, already by virtue of the sudden concentration of infrastructure and the availability of various forms of media representation, large-scale exhibitions can become facilitators of political—that is, art-field-external—articulations. To this day, already on account of the media attention it generates, documenta in Kassel attracts political groups, whether or not they are invited. In 1997, for example, almost like a distant echo of the nineteenth-century workingmen’s delegations, an anti-deportation activist network called *No Human Being Is Illegal* was founded in the “hybrid workspace” of *dX* and exists to this day. In other words, the term “biennial” has to an extent become a trademark that lends itself to appropriation for political purposes, even if the result has virtually nothing to do with biennials. Within the framework of the 2005 Moscow Biennial, the so-called Emergency Biennale in Chechnya was founded, which has meanwhile—literally working from a suitcase—taken its works to Paris, Brussels, Riga, Vancouver, Milan, and Istanbul to call attention to the situation in Chechnya, a political mission worth remembering after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁶

The Irony of the Political

Thus, there is a certain irony inherent to the politics of biennialization. Irony not in the humoristic, but the materialist sense—an objective irony.

Because on the one hand, major Western exhibitions serving the purpose of nation-building (and with it, implicitly, that of subject-build-

4 ——— Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Belknap, 1999), 7.

5 ——— Ibid., 8.

6 ——— This does not mean that the phenomenon opposite to the political misappropriation of biennial labels cannot also be observed: its “privatization,” as in the case of Tirana.

ing) bring tremendous symbolic, prestige-related, and infrastructural resources into play. In a sense, this makes of them giant ideology machines, or, more aptly, hegemony machines of the civil, national, occidental, or Europeanist dominant culture, as the case may be. Their political significance is therefore vast, although in an age in which large-scale events usually come to us by way of the mass media, it is difficult to understand that world fairs used to function like the televisions of the nineteenth century. Already the visitor numbers alone—of which any documenta can only dream—offer an impression of the multiplication factor of such events: the “mother” of all world fairs, the London Expo of 1851, counted six million visitors. Towards the end of the century, this number rose to thirty million for the 1889 and 1893 world fairs in Paris and Chicago, and fifty million for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900.⁷

On the other hand, however—and herein lies the irony—major exhibitions of this kind will never succeed in keeping the effects they produce completely under control. Wherever resources are available, they will also be tapped by unauthorized persons. The prevailing discourses reproduced and kept in circulation by these hegemony machines can be interpreted differently from how they are intended. Worse still, the apparatus itself can fall into the hands of the enemy. Successor factions (like the 1968 generation) can press their claims and demand changes, or even alter the apparatus and place it at the disposal of other purposes. As in the case of new institutionalism (to be discussed in the next chapter), institution-hijacking can lead, at least in part, to the misappropriation of the dominant culture’s cultural reproduction apparatus, its disassembly, and reassembly as something different. What is more, the apparatus can be utilized for a progressive canon shift in the field. When that happens, a lot of previously unsayable things become sayable and depictable, while other things appear no longer sayable or require hegemonic reformulation to remain sayable. This doesn’t have to happen suddenly: the dominant culture’s loss of hegemony can take place gradually and inconspicuously. In that case, it takes on the form of successive shifts of canon of the kind observable in *documenta X* and *Documenta 11*.

There is one analytical approach particularly suitable for describing such convoluted processes: the theory of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci and expanded by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to encompass discourse analysis. The Marxist Gramsci can be said to have developed historical materialism into an “ironic materialism.” The structure of hegemony is always objectively ironic. The term hegemony refers to an unstable balance between social forces struggling for dominance. This

7 ——— Maurice Roche, “Mega-Events, Culture and Modernity: Expos and the Origins of Public Culture,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 1, no. 5 (1999): 1–31.

unstable balance of forces, in which there are always dominant and subordinate forces, is consolidated by the civil society's institutional network in favor of one side.

"Hegemony" denotes not so much the flowerpot already won by the dominant side in a shooting contest as the power relationship between competing forces. One does not "own" hegemony but rather struggles constantly for primacy. And hegemony can in fact never be completely achieved, as there will always be other forces seeking to come into play. As a metaphor for this constitutively messy situation, Gramsci proposes the "war of position" of the kind conducted in World War I. The war of position, for instance at Verdun, is based on a complex trench system which often made the front lines difficult to discern at all. The objective irony of hegemony is that as soon as the front—that is, the balance of power—shifts, one's own fortifications can fall into the hands of the opponent, where they can serve to expand the opposing hegemony. In other words, as apparatuses, institutions are, of course, not neutral and to a certain extent tend to live a life of their own, but there is nothing about formats such as large-scale exhibitions to determine that they—like their world fair ancestors— will forever spread nationalist and racist ideologies.

Tectonic Shifts in the Art Field

On the contrary, we are presently witnessing an anti-hegemonic shift that has taken firm hold in the institutions of the civil dominant culture, or at least some of them. Starting with Catherine David's *dX* of 1997 and Okwui Enwezor's *D11* of 2002, the following will take a closer look at how counter-canonization and hegemonic shifts can be advanced using the appropriated institutional means of the apparatus itself. The *dX* and *D11* symbolically condensed an already latent shift of canons into a rupture in the art field, by all means with progressive effects. In the following chapters, we will retrace these shifts that reverberate up to today, along several break lines: they can be referred to as axes of politics, of the postcolonial constellation,⁸ of theory, and of education. Particularly *D11* represented this multiple radicalization of exhibition strategies in the form of an

8 ——— Okwui Enwezor outlines the concept of the postcolonial constellation as follows: "It is a name, which reverberates in a series of structural, political, and cultural entanglements, from the decolonialization movements of the post-war era to civil rights movements and feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-essentialist, contra-hegemonic politics of a new global community." Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," in *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, eds. Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), 77.

intensified politicization, a decentering of the West, an uncompromising theorization, and a targeted emphasis on education work—strategies that were re-deployed, in various ways and with changing emphasis (as much as with advances and setbacks), in subsequent documenta shows. The two shows, I claim, both expressed and co-constituted a major shift within the art field—a shift towards what today is envisaged as “the contemporary” in art.

By politicization, we do not mean merely that *D11* conceived of itself as a political intervention on the level of cultural symbol production, but above all that it gave center stage to analytical-political art practices. What is more, the exhibition itself became an arsenal of political tools for analysis that at the same time continued and triggered certain canon shifts in the art field. The decentering of the West refers not only to the light shone on European art’s complicity with colonial history, but also to the ousting of the West itself from the center (through a number of documenta-associated platforms taking place in New Delhi, St. Lucia, Lagos, and elsewhere), to be replaced there by the “non-West.”⁹ By the same token, theorization did not simply mean more in-depth reflection on the true history and function of exhibitions, but also that the interface between art and theory was promoted in the art field more forcefully than ever before. And finally, the importance of education was recalibrated, because the pedagogical function of the national “education” or “formation” of subjects in accordance with the principles of dominant culture is one of the core functions of museums and large-scale exhibitions.¹⁰ *D11* was distinguished by a shift along this axis as well, which I will verify by introducing the show’s educational concept from the close-up view of a person actively involved. I will moreover endeavor to show how the concept took into account the three other axial shifts in the art field brought about by *D11*, and how it differed from the educational strategy of *documenta 12* and subsequent documenta shows.

The canonical shift initiated by *dX* and radicalized by *D11* took place along four axes and culminated in a rupture that would become a yardstick for later biennials and exhibitions in the field. In the following chapters, we will demonstrate this by citing various examples. In addition to other documenta shows, not least of all the Venice Biennale lends itself

9 ——— In the following I use the term “non-Western” in the sense of non-North Atlantic art, if we understand it to mean those art practices that are located and situated in the imaginary space David Morley and Kevin Robins once called EurAm. The term “non-Western” in relation to the art system nevertheless remains problematic, precisely because the art system itself is profoundly Western and reasonably successful “non-Western” artists often live and work “in the West.”

10 ——— In the following chapter, we will go into this function in somewhat more detail in connection with the concept of the educational apparatus.

well to this purpose, as it can be regarded in many respects as a discourse partner of documenta.¹¹ A comparison between the Venice Biennale curated by Harald Szeemann in 2001 and that of 2003 overseen by Francesco Bonami, for example, will shed light—through a “before and after” kind of analysis—on the influence of *D11*—especially with regard to how all three exhibitions devoted themselves to the aspect of the “global” in very different ways. As we will see, it was no longer possible for Bonami to adopt the same approach Szeemann had two years earlier. He was compelled to respond to the shift in the approach to the “global,” but also, I believe, in the approach to the political mapped out in the art field by *D11*. With Roger Buergel as the artistic director, *d12* faced an even greater problem than its two predecessor exhibitions. With its depoliticizing aestheticism, it demonstrated that no politicization goes unchallenged forever. In polemic terms, one might say that *d12* sought to help the educated lower middle class back to its right to art enjoyment, as can be demonstrated along the abovementioned axes. *d12* set out to return the ruptures and shifts emanating from *dX* and *D11* back to dominant culture—that is, to neutralize them—by means of strategies such as the formalization, ornamentalization, decontextualization, detheorization, and Occidentalization of the works presented. In relation to *dX* and *D11*, these *d12* strategies added up to a pan-strategy Antonio Gramsci would have referred to as transformism. Here, the irony of the political once again surfaces: the institutional means previously appropriated for the purpose of shifting the canon were now employed in the service of the dominant culture as a way of softening everything intractable and unpopular. Anti-hegemonic ruptures were smoothed over and integrated into the hegemonic formation. In this respect, *DOCUMENTA (13)*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in 2012, while returning in other respects to the examples of *dX* and *D11*, continued Buergel’s transformative project. Only that, now, the aesthetic, if not aestheticist approach of *d12* was expanded into the commercial and the spectacular. A somewhat “populist” approach that turned out to please the crowds as much as the critics. Despite its achievements, especially evident when directly compared with *d12*, *DOCUMENTA (13)*

11 ——— One could object that this approach—with its focus on documenta and the Venice Biennale—would only encourage the Eurocentrism that it claims to combat. To which the reply would be that Eurocentrism must be fought at the margins, but also at the “imaginary center.” A hegemony-theoretical approach will be particularly interested in who tries to fill the center, even if the power of that center remains purely imaginary. That is because the fiction of the paramount importance of the Venice Biennale and documenta remains powerful even if it is a fiction, and indeed would remain powerful even if no one believed in it but everyone nevertheless behaved as if the Venice Biennale and documenta were of such importance.

managed to hit the *Zeitgeist* rather than shifting it. The latter was certainly the intention of the two subsequent documenta shows. The 2017 *documenta 14*, with Adam Szymczyk as artistic director, was in many respects the absolute antidote to *dOCUMENTA (13)*. There was no attempt to please the public or the critics. Politics was again moved center stage, starting with the decision to partially move documenta to Athens at the moment of what used to be euphemistically called the Greek “debt crisis” (which was to a large extent the crisis of German banks, endangered by credit defaults, which needed to be saved by funneling German money to Greece, from where it would be refueled back to the German banks). But, to the annoyance of many mainstream art critics, the whole curatorial philosophy as well as many artworks and performances, did have an unapologetically political edge. The philosophy of *documenta 14* could not have been further away from Buerger’s *l’art pour l’art* revival or Christov-Bakargiev’s speculative spectacularism. In this respect, *documenta fifteen*, curated by the art collective ruangrupa in 2022, continued this political trend, yet gave it a more collectivized and practical spin by inviting mostly other collectives and by focusing on the re-distribution of resources. While at the moment of writing, media reactions to *documenta fifteen* cannot be foreseen, I would not be surprised if critics will again complain about the absence of “aesthetically” pleasing or spectacular works by artists with big names. But while ideas about what is political have changed in *documenta fifteen*, it does stand in the tradition of a clearly political show. A tradition, within the cosmos of documenta, reaching back to *dX* and *D11*, not to speak of other axes of the “contemporary,” such as a global outlook and an emphasis on education.¹²

Looking back at this trajectory, *d12*, with its curious aestheticism, appears as an anomaly: a curatorial aberration on some accounts. But, the transformative strategies of *d12* and, to a lesser extent, *dOCUMENTA (13)*, which catered to the mainstream, did not take place by way of a head-on attack in the form of a blanket revocation and reversal of all changes instigated by the predecessor exhibitions; after all, hegemonic shifts necessitate compromise and tactical retreats. In the field of hegemony, terms such as rollback or backlash are accordingly misleading. Even for the most backward-looking exhibition, there is, strictly speaking, no going back, because what is past is past. Every “back” is thus ultimately a “forwards,” if perhaps a forwards into reactionism: a forwards back! A hegemonic power accordingly reacts to anti-hegemonic attacks, where they have achieved temporary partial success, not by simply returning to the status quo ante. Rather, it develops further by trying to make productive use of the criticism—indeed, by using it as an argument for its own posi-

12 ——— Interestingly, though, the art-theory nexus, still functional even in *d12* and *dOCUMENTA (13)*, seems to be cut off by ruangrupa.



Catherine David, artistic director *documenta 10* (1997). Copyright: documenta archiv. Photograph by: Benjamin Katz.



Carlos Basualdo, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Okwui Enwezor, Ute Meta Bauer, Octavio Zaya, Mark Nash, curatorial team *Documenta 11*. Copyright: documenta archiv. Photograph by: Werner Maschmann.



Still image, color, digital recording, Roger Martin Buerger, artistic director of *documenta 12*, and Ruth Noack, curator of *documenta 12*. Copyright: documenta Archiv. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.



Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, artistic director of *dOKUMENTA (13)*. Copyright: documenta archiv. Photograph by: Ryszard Kasiewicz.



Adam Szymczyk, with co-curators in the front row: Pierre Bal-Blanc, Hendrik Folkerts, Candice Hopkins, Hila Peleg, Paul B. Preciado, Dieter Roelstraete, Monika Szewczyk, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (Curator at Large) and head of art education Sepake Angiama, *documenta 14*, in Athens, Photograph by: Harry Soremski.



ruangrupa, curatorial team *documenta fifteen*. Reza Afisina, Indra Ameng, Farid Rakun, Daniella Fitria Praptono, Iswanto Hartono, Ajeng Nurul Aini, Julia Sarisetiati, Mirwan Andan. Photograph by: Gudskul Jin Panji, 2019.

tion. From the discourse-analytical perspective, this is evident in the example of *d12*. In short, once the field has shifted, you cannot simply make the shift unhappen, but merely offset, downplay, or whitewash it by way of a further shift. Even here, like everywhere in politics, no counter-hegemonic territory gain, no matter how small or temporary, is for naught. It forces the dominant discourses to keep working on their own hegemony, to redefine it in order to maintain it and shield it from further attacks. All this makes politics an objectively ironic business with an uncertain outcome. One sees how dramatically this ironic materialism approach differs from the tragic materialism of, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry theory and Debord's spectacle society theory, for which the outcome is always already clear and in which the enemy has always already prevailed.

On the other hand, the hegemony-theoretical analysis of the art field to be endeavored in the following based on the example of the biennials, and particularly documenta, is intended to show how a progressive canon shift is by all means possible at the "center" of the art field, and how the dominant culture immediately attempts to neutralize it. To this end, hegemony theory will be employed for a more detailed analysis of the art field in comparison with competing approaches, above all Bourdieu's field theory and the Foucauldian disciplinary model (see theoretical appendix). In keeping with the motto that the art field is the most unserious thing, but then again not all that unserious, we will conceive of it as an important terrain on which ideological alliances are created and constantly altered, on which powerful general social discourse formations compete with each other and, figuratively speaking, try to outsmart one another. On this terrain, we will draw up mental maps and experiment with shifting them around to arrive at new patterns for the interpretation of the world or rearticulate old ones. The institutions of the art field are not the only hegemony machines, but they are important ones, which on the one hand reproduce bourgeois dominant culture while on the other hand making them vulnerable to attack. If there is a rationale for examining the present-day tendency toward biennialization from a political perspective, then it is to be sought precisely there.

The Italian Journey (An Exposition on Hegemony Theory)

Biennials as Seen from the Dungeon

In 2004 and 2005, Alfredo Jaar dedicated a series of works to Antonio Gramsci, one of the twentieth century's most important political thinkers and a co-founder of the Italian Communist Party. Jaar's *Gramsci Trilogy* has a prologue. In the course of his work on this prologue, Jaar set out with a camera in search of traces of Gramsci—*Alla ricerca di Gramsci*—which took him to peace demonstrations in Rome, to Antonio Negri (as a political activist and philosopher virtually a descendant of Gramsci's), and ultimately to the Cimitero Acattolico in Rome, where Gramsci lies buried. He died in 1937 from the long-term consequences of his imprisonment and the denial of adequate medical care. To avoid creating a martyr, the Italian fascists opted to remove him from the dungeon after ten years and let him die somewhere else. Before the fascist court had him thrown in prison, the state prosecutor had said Gramsci's brain had to be prevented from functioning for the next twenty years. The plan did not pan out, because although he was isolated from the outside world for the most part and lacked the necessary literature, Gramsci filled thirty-three notebooks with 2,848 pages in all—the so-called *Quaderni del carcere*. In those writings, he developed a historically profound analysis of the situation in Italy that had eventually led to fascism. He also constructed a political theory intended to point a way out of the misery the Western European left wing had stumbled into after its revolutions had failed and fascism had triumphed. Gramsci saw this escape concealed not least of all in the field of culture, if a thoroughly political one.

Here, I shall neglect the later parts of Jaar's *Gramsci Trilogy* project and devote myself briefly to the first. In the work entitled *Cella Infinita*, Jaar moved Gramsci's cell to the Galerie Lia Rumma in Milan. Rather than a reconstruction of the actual cell, however, he created a metaphorical cell. At the end of a corridor, the visitors encounter a wall of bars. Through a narrow door, they can squeeze into the room beyond, which is lined entirely with mirrors. What they find in Gramsci's cell is thus the infinite reflection of the cell on the one hand, and of themselves on the other. How

are we to interpret this infinite cell? We are reminded of the use of mirrors by other politically oriented artists (for example Ken Lum), but comparison with those works would lead us astray. We might forget that what we are concerned with here is a prison, and moreover with Gramsci's prison cell. The fact that this hall of mirrors represents a prison immediately brings to mind Foucault's famous analysis of the carceral archipelago from *Discipline and Punish*. Although today people concentrate on the somewhat later Foucault of the governmentality studies and biopolitics,¹³ his genealogical study of the carceral archipelago seems to me to be of unbroken relevance for examining the institutions of the art field. In it, he describes how, since the eighteenth century, life has been gridded increasingly by disciplinary apparatuses (the military, schools, prisons). In these institutions, life is subjected to around-the-clock time management and surveillance—for example, in the form of lesson plans and precisely regulated exercises directed at the body. This system is based on the strategy of parcellation, because, according to Foucault, the space of discipline is “always, basically, cellular.”¹⁴ Thus it is not surprising that the dungeon, which is celliform in and of itself, takes on an emblematic function for this disciplinary regime. At the same time, its function expands and transforms; indeed, the obscuration function of the dungeon turns into the principle of the panopticon, which permits the guards to see all the prisoners without being seen themselves: “Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected.”¹⁵ This distinguishes the modern form of punishment-by-surveillance from the pre-modern form of the public performance of punishment. Whereas in the Ancien Régime, the punishment was celebrated as a public spectacle, the disciplinary and surveillance regime is diametrically opposed to the spectacle: “We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.” In the daily methods of surveillance, the “pomp of sovereignty,” the “spectacular manifestations of power”¹⁶ are extinguished: “Power disappears, it no longer manifests itself, but it exists; it evaporates into the infinite multiplicity of its single gaze.”¹⁷

13 ——— Incidentally, Foucault's “pastoral model” of benevolent leadership exhibits a strong similarity to Gramsci's hegemony theory.

14 ——— Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 143.

15 ——— Ibid., 200. According to Foucault, the panopticon—which is ultimately an architectural form proposed by Bentham whose central tower allows insight into the cells arranged in a circle around it—is therefore “a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the periph-eric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing.” Ibid., 202.

16 ——— Ibid., 217.

17 ——— Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits: Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), 899 (trans. JR).

One is tempted to interpret Jaar's cell as an exemplification of Foucault's panoptical gaze, but that interpretation is probably too simplistic. The gaze regime installed by Jaar is not a panoptical one, because it obviously does not stage the single gaze that sees all without being seen itself, but rather casts the viewers' gaze back on the viewers themselves. It could perhaps most aptly be said that, in this strange prison, the guard and the prisoner—the seeing and the seen—appear as one and the same person. It is as if Jaar were folding the panoptical prison regime back on the public character of the spectacle, a spectacle in which, to quote Guy Debord, “The commodity contemplates itself in a world it has created.”¹⁸ Let us not lose sight of the fact that this mirrored dungeon was installed in an exhibition space, a gallery. The prison becomes an exhibition, but an exhibition in which the visitors appear as the only exhibition objects. Is it conceivable that Jaar's work points to an inner connection between the exhibition institution and the institution of the prison—that is, the spectacle of infinite reflections alludes to a form of confinement or isolation related to that of the prison? In other words, could Jaar perhaps have created a kind of sequel to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in the medium of the exhibition itself, which might be entitled *Discipline and Exhibit*?

The Exhibition Archipelago

In a text that would prove important for the new museology, the sociologist Tony Bennett in fact pointed to precisely this connection. In the manner of Foucault, who had spoken of the system of disciplinary and surveillance institutions spanning society as a dungeon “complex,”¹⁹ Bennett speaks of an “exhibitionary complex.” It encompasses all those exhibition-producing institutions through which objects and bodies found their way from the private obscurity of cabinets of curiosity into the light of the public sphere: among them institutions such as museums, world fairs, and finally biennials. Historically, the exhibitionary complex developed in the same period as the carceral complex, but was guided by a different principle, which Foucault—according to Bennett—did not take sufficiently into account. According to Foucault, power had retreated to a position of seeing (of surveillance) and simultaneous invisibility. Bennett

18 ——— Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2017), §53.

19 ——— Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 271: “It is this complex ensemble that constitutes the ‘carceral system’, not only the institution of the prison, with its walls, its staff, its regulations and its violence. The carceral system combines in a single figure discourses and architectures, coercive regulations and scientific propositions, real social effects and invincible utopias, programmes for correcting delinquents and mechanisms that reinforce delinquency.”

explains, however, that with the emergence of the surveillance society, the spectacle of power by no means disappeared, as Foucault claims. On the contrary, power no longer shows itself only in episodic spectacles—coronation spectacles, wedding spectacles, execution spectacles, et cetera—but creates a network of exhibition institutions that permits it to show itself permanently, and in the process to present a certain order of the world and to assign the human being a place in relation to that order.²⁰

Let us consider the sector of the exhibitionary complex that can be referred to as the biennial complex. The world fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a certain order of things and, in it, an order of the world. Technological progress and the realm of commodities were placed on display in the form of machines, new inventions, and consumer goods. At the same time, in the final analysis the principle of order obeyed the discourses of nationalism and imperialism. The Venice Biennale adopted the principle of national pavilions from the world fairs and translated it into the art field, and it was not until 2006 that the São Paulo biennial—the second oldest show of its kind, organized in the manner of the Venice model—would depart from this principle. Bennett points out that, after the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, national units were combined in larger units of order adhering to a racist logic of classification. The pavilions were now brought together in groups of Romance, German, Anglo-American, and “Oriental” countries, while colonized groups that enjoyed the dubious privilege of being admitted—if not themselves placed on display—were naturally assigned to the respective colonial power.²¹ At the same time, this mode of organization served as a means of distinguishing between subjects and objects of power, between the body of the nation and the bodies of the “non-civilized” others, on whom the spectacle continued to be tested in seemingly unbroken manner.

The order of the world was thus spatially and architecturally “exhibited.” It was ultimately a political order, and the exhibition was designed to place the visitors in a certain relationship to it (we will endeavor below to define the nature of that relationship more precisely). The concept of surveillance, of the panopticon or the disciplinary regime—this much appears evident—is not capable of capturing this form of the self-representation of power and its principles of order in its entirety. Yet, that does not mean that the exhibitionary complex simply turned the principles of the panopticon upside down. Rather, the prison and the exhibition, being seen and showing, surveillance and spectacle entered into an

20 ——— Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in David Boswell, Jessica Evans, eds., *Representing the Nation—A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 339.

21 ——— Ibid., 353.

alliance; the panoptical principle was combined with the principle of the panorama and the exhibitions. Bennett considers the Crystal Palace of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 the architectural symbol of this interleaving of spectacle and visibility. Unlike the principle of the panopticon, that of the crystal palace is distinguished by everything being visible to everyone. At the same time, observation decks were constructed (the Eiffel Tower built for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889 being the most spectacular example), offering individual visitors a means of seeing all the others, and thus combining the function of the panopticon with that of the spectacle.²²

Although Bennett puts his ideas forward as criticism of Foucault, he seems to overlook that, in one passage in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault himself alludes to the possibility of the panopticon mutating into an exhibition, even citing the model of the crystal palace in the process. Foucault explicitly stresses that the presence of the outside world is not ruled out for the panopticon, that the prison cells themselves could be transformed into exhibition spaces at any time by admitting the public to the central surveillance tower. And he adds that this applies to all panoptical apparatuses:

Any panoptic institution, even if it is as rigorously closed as a penitentiary, may without difficulty be subjected to such irregular and constant inspections: and not only by the appointed inspectors, but also by the public; any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function. There is no risk, therefore, that the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny; the disciplinary mechanism will be democratically controlled, since it will be constantly accessible “to the great tribunal committee of the world”. This Panopticon, subtly arranged so that an observer may observe, at a glance, so many different individuals, also enables everyone to come and observe any of the observers. The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.²³

²² ——— Ibid., 337.

²³ ——— Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 207. In a footnote, Foucault points out that Bentham’s Panopticon may well have been inspired by the panorama—and thus by the model of the exhibition. “Imagining this continuous flow of visitors entering the central tower by an underground passage and then observing the circular landscape of the Panopticon, was Bentham aware of the Panoramas that Barker was constructing at exactly the same period (the first seems to have dated from 1787) and in which the visitors, occupying the central place, saw unfolding

So already in Foucault, there is an allusion to the carceral archipelago's mutation into an exhibitionary complex; already there, the dungeon and the palace appear as twins. Bennett will later remark: "The museum and the penitentiary thus represented the Janus face of power."²⁴ However important this insight would prove to be for new museology, Bennett's more fundamental finding is to be sought elsewhere. He realized that what constitutes the ultimate spectacle is the masses themselves—for themselves: "A society watching over itself."²⁵ The masses thus do not merely occupy the place of the (national) sovereign, which contemplates the excluded and the included (the others), but, as an audience, they also contemplate themselves. Much as in Alfredo Jaar's *cella infinita*, the audience is mirrored in the exhibition *dispositif* in the form of an endless series. Yet, by ultimately contemplating themselves, the masses are not merely transformed into a spectacle of themselves; they are not merely the masses looking at themselves—like for Debord, where the commodity is looking at itself. What happens is something else.

In this process, which, if the concern here were not with Foucault, could be compared to the Lacanian mirror stage, the masses recognize themselves in the mirror—not as "the masses," however, but as the civilized population. A change in the identity of the masses comes about in that, in view of their own spectacle, they subjugate themselves to their new subjectification form as "citizens" and thus regulate themselves. The exhibition complex perfects a system in which the masses internalize their ideal image by adopting the perspective of power, by beginning to regulate and discipline themselves in order to correspond to the ordered image of themselves that will be reflected back on them by the apparatus.

Cella infinita

Let us draw the consequences from this insight: what the exhibition complex ultimately exhibits is the audience looking at itself. Every exhibition, every museum, and every biennial is a *cella infinita*. But why had this regulation of the masses in the form of their self-regulation become historically necessary? It is obvious that it was only with the expansion of democracy into the determining horizon of society that the masses could take the place of the "sovereign" and consequently had to prove themselves worthy of this place in their behavior. The masses (plebs) could only become sovereigns or "a people" (*populus*) by being made—as Foucault described—into a properly regulated and governmentally manageable

around them a landscape, a city or a battle. The visitors occupied exactly the place of the sovereign gaze." *Ibid.*, 317.

24 ——— Bennett, *The Exhibitionary Complex*, 359.

25 ——— *Ibid.*, 341.

population on the one hand, while on the other hand recognizing themselves as state or “civil” citizens. According to Bennett, the masses had to be rhetorically incorporated into the state system in order to fulfill their role as sovereign. Naturally, this does not mean that they never performed that role in a substantial sense. Bennett would presumably say that, in the end, they never managed to become the sovereign (the “people”), but always only the population. The apparatuses of the exhibition complex nevertheless fulfilled an essential pedagogical function by instilling in the masses an orderly and civil behavior while at the same time discouraging “uncivilized” behavior in exhibition spaces—for example, breaking them of the disagreeable “spitting habit” (a topic we shall return to in the chapter on educational strategies). The exhibition apparatuses Bennett speaks of are thus also educational apparatuses. Only when this public pedagogy was not effective did the punishment of the prison apparatus kick in.

Bennett thus expanded on Foucault’s approach. For Foucault, it is the technologies of individualization and normalization defining the surveillance society that create social order. They reduce potential disorder (conflicts, uprisings, et cetera) by making the newly constructed object “population” administrable through a series of government technologies. Yet, the function of the exhibition complex goes further. It not only subjects the bodies of the population to processes of surveillance, regulation, and (self-)discipline, but also produces an identification of the masses with themselves as citizens. Not only must the bodies of the masses be trained and disciplined, but the masses must also be won over by integrating them into the state and its apparatuses. To that end, however, they must recognize themselves in the mirror of those apparatuses.²⁶ As Bennett points out, this identity work cannot be performed by disciplines alone but must also be accomplished in the medium of culture. The values of a society—of the bourgeoisie, the nation, the empire, et cetera—that were and are reproduced by exhibition apparatuses are not accepted simply because a population has been made governable through administrative and disciplinary procedures. Active support for these values must be generated, the population must be won over, consent must be obtained. To describe this aspect, Bennett proposes putting alongside Foucault a theorist whose “cell” we are already familiar with: Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci’s chief contribution to political analysis is the concept of hegemony. In its traditional meaning, this is understood as the domination of one nation over others, but Gramsci applies this meaning to the relationships between social forces within nations. For Gramsci, these forces are always alliances of classes and class fractions that seek to secure their dominance over subaltern classes. In this process, a domi-

26 ——— Ibid., 334 et seq.

nant class and its allies exercise power over other classes by pursuing a dual strategy of coercion and “persuasion.” For a particular group or class to secure its rule, it therefore does not suffice for that class to gain power over the coercive apparatuses of the state (the police, the military, and the carceral archipelago with its associated judicial apparatus, of which Gramsci himself was a victim). It must also win “cultural hegemony”—that is, domination over the minds of the people. It must shape their “common sense” (*senso comune*) and redefine it in its own sense. It must succeed in generating general consensus and voluntary consent to its own rule, even if its rule is not secured solely by this consent of the ruled but must also be “armored” by the coercion and violence of the repressive state apparatuses, as Gramsci has it. This armor alone, however, is not enough; the level of hegemony—of common sense, of culture (in the broadest sense)—remains indispensable.

If hegemony is the name of the organization of consensus and voluntary consent, then the question immediately arises as to where that consent is constituted, or with what. This is where the exhibitionary complex comes into play. The “exhibitionary apparatuses” Bennett speaks of are part of those private, or ostensibly private, institutions that together make up the network of civil society. Civil society, as Gramsci understands it, includes institutions such as schools and universities, associations, churches, the media, but also political parties and trade unions. Most of these organizations—including museums, art halls, biennials, et cetera—have an “educational” function: they guide and educate the population to consent to the hegemony of the leading groups or classes. For Gramsci, this civil society is by no means separated from the coercive state apparatuses, which he also refers to as “political society.” The two spheres are “interwedged,” as it were, and together make up what Gramsci calls the “integral state.” Gramsci thus arrives at the formula: “State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armor of coercion.”²⁷

This civil society, the network of all organizations whose task it is to organize hegemony, can certainly be imagined as an “archipelago” in the Foucauldian sense.²⁸ Gramsci himself prefers a different metaphor for

27 ——— Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 263.

28 ——— In Foucault’s work we find definitions of the prison archipelago that encompass institutions Gramsci would most certainly classify as civil society. Referring to the prison complex, for example, Foucault says: “And then, still farther, there was a whole series of mechanisms that did not adopt the ‘compact’ prison model, but used some of the carceral methods: charitable societies, moral improvement associations, organizations that handed out assistance and also practised surveil-

civil society: he compares it to the intricate trench systems of the battlefields of World War I. In the developed states of the West, civil society is a very complex structure that consists of interlocking institutions. Hegemonic struggles take place within and around these institutions because they are the actual consensus machines. Long before Foucault, Gramsci's view departs from the classical idea of sovereign power. According to Gramsci, power in developed societies is not located in a particular state apparatus (such as the government) or in a particular place in society (such as the Winter Palace in the Russian Revolution) but scattered throughout civil society. As in the "war of movement" model, it is therefore not enough to storm the Winter Palace in order to "take power." Rather, the achievement of hegemony is preceded by a protracted struggle often lasting decades, if not centuries. (Let us recall the centuries it took to establish bourgeois hegemony). Gramsci uses the metaphor of "trench warfare" for this struggle. As in the trench warfare of World War I, minimal shifts in the course of the front come about only slowly, and often it is not even clear where exactly the front line runs. In the same way, hegemonic gains in territory are always contested, possibly short-lived, and threatened on other fronts.

However martial it may appear, this metaphor is far removed from any militarism. The real crux of this model is that, in struggles over the institutions of civil society, and thus over the definition of the consensus generally considered valid, no blood flows. To stick to the metaphor, the military is always in its barracks and ready to intervene if necessary, but once a coercive regime has lost its legitimacy among the population, even the state apparatus of coercion—whose personnel is also recruited from the population—will not be able to help it in the long run. In the final analysis, civil society is therefore the truly decisive place of conflict.

Discourse and Canon

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe brings Gramsci's theory of hegemony—which also plays such an important role in Bennett's critique of Foucault—up to date in the form of a political discourse theory.²⁹ To begin with, Laclau/Mouffe radicalize Gramsci's insight that hegemony

lance, workers' estates and lodging houses—the most primitive of which still bear the all too visible marks of the penitentiary system. And, lastly, this great carceral network reaches all the disciplinary mechanisms that function throughout society." Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 298.

29 ——— See above all Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London and New York: Verso, 1985), and Simon Critchley, Oliver Marchart, eds., *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

is not a “thing” one simply possesses, but something relational. Already for Gramsci, certain alliances of class and class fractions are hegemonic only in relation to one another (as an alliance) and to the subordinate sub-altern classes. Secondly, Laclau/Mouffe abandon the idea that hegemonic alliances must always be structured around a class core ultimately defined in economic terms, let alone around one of the two main classes. The experience of the new social movements of the 1970s and ‘80s—from the women’s to the ecology movement—has shown that hegemonic shifts can also be accomplished along other axes. Thirdly, this experience will help us to arrive at a different understanding of the nature of the subjects involved in hegemonic conflicts. Laclau/Mouffe reject the idea that these subjects—“workers,” “women,” et cetera—already exist as discrete social entities and that their existence precedes the hegemonic struggle. Rather, it takes the hegemonic struggle to produce them in the first place, because until the field of the entire culture or civil society has come up with a definition of what we are to understand by the “worker,” his “existence”—that is, his social visibility as a worker—remains vague.

This latest update of Gramsci’s work contradicts our common sense the most, as we are accustomed to understanding discourses as acts of expression by certain subjects, whether as individuals or as a collective. For Laclau/Mouffe, however, both discourses and subjects are determined solely in and through hegemonic disputation. In the following chapters, we will encounter a whole series of discourses: aesthetic, humanist, Eurocentric, bourgeois, et cetera. Yet, behind these discourses, there is no social subject in the substantive sense: no “art,” no “human being,” no “Europe,” no “bourgeoisie.” All these terms only point in turn to discursive positions, to hegemonic condensations in discourse. So, when we speak of bourgeois hegemony, we are not referring to a “bourgeoisie” as a class subject one could shake hands with somewhere out there, but rather to a discursive ensemble of certain values and ideas that, as Laclau/Mouffe point out, have been articulated as a hegemonic formation for which one can introduce the abbreviation “bourgeois.” A hegemonic formation is an alliance of social forces discursively fixed for a certain time (see theoretical appendix), which is exclusively relational in nature. This discursive formation does not have a purely linguistic essence, but also includes non-linguistic practices, such as those described by Pierre Bourdieu with the concept of “habitus,” as well as organizational condensations into “bourgeois” institutions—from political parties to art associations.

A discourse-analytical approach of the kind developed by Laclau/Mouffe allows us to describe the art field in a very different way from what is usually the case. As part of what Gramsci called “civil society,” the art field can be understood as a terrain on which hegemonic struggles for consensus and approval are fought out—for example, struggles over the “canon”—which is produced and reproduced primarily by educational

apparatuses such as schools, universities, museums, and other cultural institutions. The canon consists of nothing other than those hegemonic discourses that are accepted, for the most part unquestioningly, as authoritative for a given society, and are encapsulated, for example, in curricula, catalogues, and exhibitions texts, or in exhibition objects, architecture, and public sculptures. No canon shift in the art field is insignificant—and in the following chapters, four such shifts will be examined in more detail along the axes of politicization, theory, postcolonialism, and education. This does not mean that the course of world history already depends on each individual shift of canons. As we have seen, not only the institutions of the art field, but the institutions of civil society as a whole are interconnected and form a complex trench system. Canon shifts can accordingly never occur in just one institution; they always imply a shift in the entire course of the front, if you will, even if it is only by millimeters.

This points to a peculiarity of hegemonic disputes. They know no boundaries, nor can they be confined to any specific sub-area of society. Today, we tend to regard the art system as a functional one neatly separated from other social subsystems such as politics. If we ask society about its functional distinctions, we will find that the art system performs functions different from those of the political system, the scientific system, or the economic system. A discourse-analytical or hegemony-theoretically oriented observer, however, would be interested in other questions. From a discourse-analytical perspective, one would have to ask how a hegemonic formation succeeds in overriding functionally defined system boundaries insofar as hegemonic discourses traverse and encompass these institutions, fields, and even actors. At the end of the day, even Gramsci's basic distinction between the coercive apparatuses of the state on the one hand and the institutions of civil society on the other becomes untenable—at least if taken too literally—because if the terrain of our analysis is ultimately discourses, then these discourses will not stop at the door of the police station. Even less will hegemonic or counter-hegemonic political discourses stop at the gates of the local art association, even if that art association should devise a program conceived of as “apolitical.” The fact that an exhibition is far less tightly bound than is usually assumed, and indeed that the idea of an “exhibition as such” makes no sense at all, was stated unequivocally by Okwui Enwezor for *D11*:

As far as the exhibition concept is concerned, I expressed very clearly from the beginning that our job is not to make an art exhibition as such, but an art exhibition as part of the broader discursive system that we had to construct.³⁰

30 ——— “Art as part of a comprehensive system or: the expanded horizon of the deterritorialized action space,” Amine Haase in conversation with Okwui Enwezor, *Kunstforum International* 161 (August–October 2002): 85 (trans. JR).

To cite an example we will encounter frequently in the following chapters: the hegemonic discourses of the Western colonial countries as they were and are reproduced in world exhibitions, “ethnological museums,” and not least of all art exhibitions are obviously not a mere museological problem. Colonialism was a hegemonic formation with economic, political, military, cultural, and aesthetic implications that left hardly any area of society untouched (including the societies of those Western states that did not have colonies themselves). The Western nations ultimately had to requisition the political approval of colonialism in all these areas, which, conversely, were also impacted by the decolonization process that got underway in the colonized countries after World War II. The hegemonic formation of colonialism was challenged and undermined on a broad front, but without that leading to its being completely overcome today. Canon struggles over what are often still racist practices of representation in ethnological museums, for instance, bear witness to the longevity of colonialism. As “struggles,” however, they also testify to the fact that colonialism no longer reigns unchallenged. The point is that these postcolonial canon shifts did not emerge from the institutions themselves but were carried into those institutions—which were founded to serve as cultural legitimations of Western dominance and today themselves face a legitimacy problem—by postcolonial and antiracist struggles.

Molecular Politics

Hegemonic struggles, to the extent that they are struggles over the power of interpretation and thus struggles in discourse, thus evolve across fields. The goings-on in the art field are linked with other social fields and political struggles via the network of hegemonic formations. Emancipatory conflicts in feminism or postcolonialism, for example, leave their mark on the art field and its institutions. Conversely, shifts of canon in the art field—even the slightest ones—are of significance beyond the art field. Gramsci sensitized us to the function of a “civil society” in which consensus and consent are generated. The art field—or what Tony Bennett calls the exhibition complex—represents this function in an exemplary way and is already worth analyzing for that reason alone. Naturally, it does not simply serve to reproduce a hegemonic consensus. On the contrary, in the art field (as elsewhere), that consensus is challenged as well as defended and must therefore constantly be reproduced, adjusted, or revised. Hegemony is by its very constitution an unstable process in which any balance of power can only ever be established temporarily and is always threatened. Hegemony therefore requires constant work on the canon. After all, every canon is always under attack from social and political forces that care nothing about ostensibly autonomous field or system log-

ics and seek to impose their own view of things, their own values and definitions of social reality—that is, ultimately, to have them become consensus. To endure, canons require constant patching and repatching, because the attacks never stop.³¹

If we apply this theory to the field of art, we can say goodbye to the pessimism defining, for example, Horkheimer's and Adorno's culture industry theory. If there is reason for pessimism, then it is because of a historically specific hegemonic state of affairs that has put emancipatory discourses on the defensive (which can change again, a circumstance that prompted Gramsci to introduce an optimism of the will alongside the pessimism of the intellect), and not due to an automatism that would necessarily neutralize and incorporate every critical utterance in the art world. For the same reason, Bennett's approach ultimately remains politically unsatisfactory, as it never advances to Gramsci's ironic materialism. In Bennett's work, the exhibition apparatuses make the impression of being forever destined to consolidate the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and summon the masses to become consensual citizens. Behind this lies a secret formalism, or better: "apparatism," for why should exhibition apparatuses not be able to take on other, possibly more progressive functions under changed hegemonic conditions? Why should other identifications not be possible, and other social and political identities not be produced by these apparatuses? In short, why should exhibition apparatuses not be able to reproduce counter-hegemonic discourses under certain changed power constellations? In other words, why should they not, if need, be turn from hegemonic machines into counter-hegemonic machines?³²

If we abandon the idea that hegemonic shifts proceed according to the pattern of the "war of movement" and instead understand civil society as a confusing system of trenches, as proposed by Gramsci, then a counter-hegemonic effort would not have to bring the entire field of art under control anyway. Even the defense and takeover of a few institutional

31 ——— Of course, this is by no means to say that all attacks on, say, the bourgeois canon are automatically emancipatory and that every defense of the same canon is always already reactionary. In each case it depends on the broader social and political alliances engaged in fighting the respective canon wars. It is not the art field itself that determines whether a counter-hegemonic canon shift in the art field is critically emancipatory, but the discursive alliances it enters into with political-emancipatory discourses and movements outside the art field (for example, feminist and postcolonialist ones). As I will show in the excursus on anti-Zionism as the spontaneous ideology of an ostensibly critical art field, stereotypes ranging from reactionary to anti-Semitic can certainly be reproduced under the cloak of an apparently progressive criticism of Israel.

32 ——— Bennett himself would be more likely to suggest a different path and put his policy research at the service of political advice.

redoubts and trenches, or, as Gramsci also says, “fortresses and casemates,” will not leave the hegemonic formation unaffected. After all, one must never forget that hegemonic struggles are an extremely protracted and ultimately inconclusive process, because changes in in our common sense do only occur through “successive combinations.” In hegemonic conflicts, there are rarely isolated explosions. Rather, hegemony—as Gramsci also contends—is a molecular process consisting in the successive combination of ideological molecules to create larger formations.

The New Transformism

In recent years, talk of a new institutionalism has been making the rounds in the art field, having apparently already advanced quite far in the direction of building new molecular connections.³³ In contrast to earlier waves of art institution critique, this one is not about individual interventions in the exhibition apparatus, but about the organizational and curatorial takeover of that apparatus itself. The aim of the takeover is to open up the respective art institution, make it a space of critique, enable experimental formats, and question institutional hierarchies, working conditions, and, in general, the institution’s production conditions. At best, the apparatus is taken apart and reassembled but never destroyed as such. That is, one does not retreat solely to criticizing the institution while keeping one’s own hands clean but sets aside any fear of engaging with the institution—as arduous as that engagement may be.

Art institutions in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries were often cited as examples of new institutionalism, including above all the Rooseum, Malmö, under the direction of Charles Esche; the Office for Contemporary Art Norway; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; the Contemporary Art Center Vilnius; the Kunsthalle Helsinki; x-room, Copenhagen; and the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA). The Munich Kunstverein with Maria Lind as director, the MACBA, Barcelona, and the Paris Palais de Tokyo under the direction of Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans were also mentioned in this context, but the work of somewhat less visible art associations could likewise be subsumed under the term new institutionalism. Many of these experiments, however, were later discontinued:

Rooseum is becoming an offshoot of the expanding Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo has been merged with other national museums in Oslo under the umbrella of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design,

33 ——— On new institutionalism, see, among others, Nina Möntmann, ed., *Art and its Institutions* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

Vilnius is suffering severe budget cuts, curators and directors have been replaced in many cases, with major consequences for the institutions' programmatic approach, and in the case of NIFCA itself, the institution has even been closed down altogether. Most of these institutions seem to have been reprimanded like rebellious adolescents.³⁴

Nina Möntmann attributes this outcome to a lack of appreciation for the ability to take criticism and the fact that the corporatization of art institutions is taking its course regardless. However, this raises the question of whether or why the ability to take criticism was valued in the past, and how all this became possible in the first place. Just as the corporatization of art institutions is the product of a hegemonic project—ultimately the project of the neoliberalism advanced since the 1970s—new institutionalism emerged from the search for critical and self-organized practices that goes back to the 1960s and '70s and was articulated with the politics of the new social movements. The fact that the forces are asymmetrically distributed is obvious. But if, from a purely internal perspective, the impression arises that a few isolated progressive institutions in the art field are confronted with a hostile and invincible juggernaut “state” or “capitalism,” then that impression is highly deceptive.

Neither is “the state” a monolith, nor does “capitalism” consist of inescapable economic laws of coercion. From Gramsci, we can learn that the front lines, far from being clear-cut, crisscross their way, multiplying through all institutions and actors.³⁵ Neither can the “fortresses and casemates” of the exhibition complex be conquered overnight, nor are shifts of canon reversible from one day to the next. Strictly speaking, nothing can simply be undone; every hegemonic shift leaves behind a changed terrain from which every opponent must proceed. This terrain is constantly shift-

34 ——— Nina Möntmann, “Aufstieg und Fall des new institutionalism: Perspektiven einer möglichen Zukunft,” accessed October 6, 2008, <http://transform.eicpc.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/de>.

35 ——— This implies not only that “the state” or the politics of corporatization are themselves riddled with fault lines and stand on much weaker legs than they might appear. (After all, even such an apparently invincible juggernaut as the Soviet Union, indeed the entire Eastern Bloc, collapsed unexpectedly overnight—hegemonic formations usually appear more stable than they actually are.) It also implies that neo-institutionalist practices in the art field are never free of the ideology of their opponents and sometimes collaborate with it. The classic example would be self-organized practices that in some respects reproduce the subjectivation form of a team-oriented New Economy and may even have anticipated it experimentally. In the trench warfare Gramsci describes, there is ultimately no politics of clean hands: one is always already partly one's own enemy.

ing, and since history cannot be turned back, any project, no matter how backward-looking, will have to work towards the future and try to neutralize the potential “futures” of other hegemonic projects if it wants to be or become hegemonic itself.

In the biennial complex, we can cite the last three documenta exhibitions as illustrations of what we are proposing here. For example, *dX* succeeded in legitimizing, at the “center” of the art field (even if it was only an imaginary center), a certain politicization of art and exhibition practices that had already been going on for some time here and there in the field’s margins. Much the same can be said of *D11* and its visualization of the postcolonial issue. Both exhibitions brought about (or reinforced) an—accumulative—canon shift that, for future documenta curators, reshuffled the terrain in a way that could not simply be ignored. The decision in favor of a rollback could therefore not obliterate everything that had happened before and pretend that *dX* and *D11* had never taken place. Both the integration of political works and the integration of non-Western artists had become an imperative in the biennial complex, and at any rate for documenta. A backward-looking documenta like *d12* could thus not simply ignore this imperative but had to develop strategies to integrate political works on the one hand, while depoliticizing them on the other, making their contents and intentions invisible behind a veil of aestheticization, formalization, and mystification. After the decentering process carried out by *D11*, it had to develop strategies for re-centering that center of the Western art scene marked by Kassel every five years—strategies for re-provincializing, re-Germanizing, and ultimately re-Kasselizing Kassel.

Gramsci has a name for the attempt to reinscribe counter-hegemonic shifts and ruptures into the hegemonic bloc: transformism. This is a term he adopted from the historiographical debate on the Italian Risorgimento. Like the analogous concept of the “passive revolution,” it refers to certain molecular changes that in fact increasingly alter the previous constellation and hence become a matrix of new changes. In the case of the various attempts to unify Italy after 1848, the Moderate Party under Cavour absorbed more and more elements of its rival, the Action Party, even if these elements had appeared irreconcilable. The absorption of, in particular, the elites of the opposing groups weakened them on the one hand, while on the other hand it served to change the composition of the moderate forces themselves, which in turn became a premise for new changes. If we apply this concept to the more current discourse-analytical version of hegemony theory, transformism can be understood as the attempt of a hegemonic formation to integrate counter-hegemonic discourses and thus to neutralize their disruptive effects. In this generalized sense, *d12* as well as, partially, *dOCUMENTA (13)* were thoroughly transformist with regard to the breaks and canon shifts *dX* and *D11* had stood

for. And yet, this transformist shift proved to be effective only temporarily, with significant sectors of the art field moving forward—a process mirrored by *documenta 14* and *documenta fifteen*.

In Favor of a New New Institutionalism

So, and this is the good news, no rupture can be fully cemented, nor can anything be entirely absorbed. Once it has taken place, a counter-hegemonic canon shift inscribes itself into the hegemonic formation of the art field (and thus also into the hegemonic formation in its entirety). That is because, once the coordinates of the field have shifted, that shift cannot be reversed but only absorbed and transformed by a further shift. As everywhere in the order of the political, no gain of territory, however minimal, is in vain, because it makes the dominant society work on its hegemony, which it must defend against attack.

The canon shifts, which—according to the argument to be developed in the following chapters—were particularly concentrated in *dX* and *DII*, could not be absorbed without further ado. That was primarily because they took place in the imaginary center of the art field and that center was used by *DII* as a center while at the same time being decentered by that exhibition. Once again, we can detect here one of those aspects of objective irony evidently intrinsic to struggles over the canon: marginalized discourses usually have no interest in remaining relegated to the margins (the only ones that can afford that luxury are those that have carved out a firm place for themselves in the center and merely undertake brief excursions to the margins). Counter-canonization also aims at representation in the center. The decentralization of the center is therefore not to be confused with its elimination. On the contrary, the central apparatuses of the art field—and here again: the more central apparatuses in the field, which for the most part include biennials and *documenta*—are invaluable for the reproduction of the hegemonic formation and, ironically, can for the same reason also be put at the service of counter-hegemonic projects. The curators of *DII* in particular took advantage of the financial and organizational resources of the exhibition machine and the tremendous media attention an edition of *documenta* generates.

The central apparatus of the biennial complex is capable, above all, of endowing marginalized discourses with symbolic legitimacy. The show exploited the luminosity of the center, while at the same time it expelled the hegemonic West, at least partially, from that center. Any other strategy would inevitably have failed: in a perhaps somewhat more anarchistic spirit, which perhaps applies to the makers of *documenta fifteen*, one could have destroyed the legitimizing power of the institution and even

let documenta fail, but in so doing one would have deprived oneself of an apparatus endowed with the power of re-canonization. Or one could have ignored the center of the exhibition complex from the beginning, but then one would have surrendered it to the hegemonic culture of dominance. Neither option would have been a hegemonic—or counter-hegemonic—strategy, but simply an expression of political capitulation. Hegemony theory teaches that one must not be afraid of occupying the center, even if one allows oneself the luxury of ultimately wanting to oppose all centers. Perhaps it is telling that *D11* of 2002 coincided with the heyday of New Institutionalism, though usually without being ascribed to it because, apart from the establishment of a collective curatorial structure, the structures of documenta enterprise remained essentially untouched. Yet, *D11* had at its disposal something that does not exactly distinguish the discourse of new institutionalism: in terms of content, it had a clear “program” of re-canonization. Debates over new institutionalism, in contrast, are all too often limited to questions of structure and thus fall prey to a certain “apparatism,” if not to say a certain inward-directed tunnel vision in the art field. However, it makes little sense to analyze institutional structures without examining which hegemonic discourses reproduce them, which social forces use them, and for what purpose. In other words, although the matters of structural organization, hierarchies, working conditions, et cetera, in art institutions are all of enormous importance, one must not limit oneself to these matters—unless one’s aim is to call for the founding of an art field labor union. The concern is not only the “how” and “with what means” of a neo-institutionalist project, but also and above all the “why.” This question of the “why” can be answered only by a counter-hegemonic project that far exceeds the field of art. Yet, without an answer to this ultimately political question of the “why,” even the most wonderful institutional reform makes only limited sense. In an age when transformist strategies seem to be gaining the upper hand again and the “old new institutionalism” is on the retreat, what is needed is the return of the question of the “why”—and in this sense a “new new institutionalism.” Perhaps we can draw a few impulses from an analysis of the ruptures and shifts both *dX* and *D11* taught the hegemonic canon—ruptures and shifts subsequent documenta exhibitions needed to take into account.

Politicization and Depoliticization (First Shift)

In the previous chapter, taking Alfredo Jaar's *Gramsci Trilogy* as a point of departure, we applied the outlines of Gramsci's and Laclau/Mouffe's theory of hegemony to the field of art. It became apparent that the hegemonic struggle in the cultural field does not affect only the cultural field, because in its institutions—as in the other institutions of civil society—the (bourgeois) hegemonic formation reproduces itself as a whole. In other words, the ideologies and discourses reproduced by the institutions of the art field radiate out and break through the boundaries of the art field. The art world is not a prison, however chained to it many of its protagonists it might appear. Discursive hegemonic formations transcend the boundaries of social fields and systems. The institutions of the art field thus become the open flank of dominant culture precisely because there the latter can be encountered in the place of its ideological reproduction. So let us turn now to the hegemonic shifts that were symptomatically reflected in the center of the field—in *dX* curated by Catherine David and *D11* curated by Okwui Enwezor—and expanded from there.

Along with *dX*, *D11* is considered the most “political” of all documenta exhibitions until then. This is not to say that political works, in the narrower sense, did not have a place in many of the earlier documenta exhibitions. In the case of *dX* and *D11*, however, such works were inscribed in a political curatorial program that pointed far beyond the individual works, while *d12*, for its part, again took the opposite route and consistently depoliticized political works. But what exactly was political about *dX* and *D11*, or, to put the question differently, in what respect were these exhibitions political? Let us tackle this question indirectly by considering, first of all, both Okwui Enwezor's and Catherine David's fundamental point of reference: Harald Szeemann's legendary *documenta 5* of 1972. This will help us gain a clearer view of the paradigm shift signaled in particular by *D11*. Because the break *D11* constituted was not least of all a break with the curatorial paradigm that had been incarnated by Harald Szeemann from *d5* to the 49th Venice Biennale and that still echoed in the

grand and embarrassingly misplaced curatorial gestures of Roger M. Buergel or Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.

The myth of *d5* arises from hindsight. As we know, the immediate reactions testified to a certain disappointment. There may have been different reasons for this, depending on the expectations of those disappointed. From a political perspective, however—the politicized perspective of the time as well as that of the present—, this disappointment is understandable if one measures the *d5* that actually took place against Szeemann’s initial concept. In the original concept of May 1970, Szeemann contrasted documenta founder Arnold Bode’s idea of a “museum of 100 days” with that of a “100-day event.” His aim was to launch a critique of “the notion of object selection, material ownership, property transport, affirmation of ownership, and insurance of property” associated with museums and art exhibitions. The organization was to focus on programming the events “rather than on jurying and transporting objects.” Documenta would then no longer consist of a collection of objects, but of a process of interrelated events and centers of action; it would become an “interaction space.” Exhibitions would revolve around questions of the social role of the artist, around new media and technologies and the question of conveying art to the public, as well as around the problem of “the social space of action outside the usual studio/gallery/museum/collection quadrangle.” As a logical consequence, documenta’s sphere of action was also to be physically extended. The stage on which the action played out would no longer be merely the space of the art institutions, but the entire urban area of Kassel from Königstrasse to Auepark and the Staatstheater to the university. Within the context of the “event structure,” Szeemann cited the public space of the street as an example of a thematic event: “the street, 2 km in the Auepark. Aspects: typology, criticism, and new models, sociological and artistic references (the street as a gathering place, as a place of action and demonstration, as an aesthetic situation).”³⁶ The protest movement of 1968 echoes loud and clear in Szeemann’s example of the street. One major concern of his first concept was—in continuation of his earlier curatorial work—to replace the museum with an event structure and the object with a process. Even more significantly, however, he wanted to shift the perspective towards the institution, the city, and the public sphere as spaces of social action. The concept approached these spaces with not only an aesthetic, but also an analytical-critical interest. The reverberations of ‘68 exist not least in the awareness that these social spaces of action are, potentially, politically re-articulable: The street is—Situationistically speaking—an aesthetic situation while at the same time possessing a social function (as a meeting place) and a political potential

36 ——— Harald Szeemann, quoted in Manfred Schneckenburger, ed., *documenta: Ideen und Institution* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983), 113 (trans. JR).

as a field of action and demonstration. The question of the art public shifts to the question of the political public, provided we understand the latter not as the institutionalized and fixed space of conventional politics, but as a space that only comes into existence through conflict and antagonization, but whose existence is never guaranteed in advance.³⁷

But then Szeemann backed out. A reduction in the available financial resources was cited by way of explanation, but in reality Szeemann was discouraged after the failure of the prototype for *d5*, his exhibition *Happening & Fluxus* at the Cologne Kunstverein in 1970. In many respects, the second *d5* concept by Klaus Ammann, Bazon Brock, and Szeemann took a 180-degree turn in a depoliticizing direction. For the most part, the talk of general social conditions became empty rhetoric because the subject of discussion was no longer the structures of social and political reality, but the imagery of that reality: the “interrogation of reality” was whittled down to that of “image worlds today.” The expansion of the concept of imagery beyond the avant-garde notion of art to include areas of everyday imagery may have been innovative, but it can also be seen as an early example of what today would be described as the culturalization of the social: power structures reproduced in culture are themselves in turn “exhibited” in a traditional manner.³⁸ The exhibition—and this is one source of its current fame—thus expanded beyond the art image into general cultural visual worlds. Yet, with this concentration on imagery and even, in some places, on the psychology of perception, documents regressed from a projected event structure to a “100-day museum.” That, in turn, had implications for its concept of public space, which was once again diminished to the space of the institution. We find an illustration of this not least of all in the second source of Szeemann’s fame, the invention of the concept of “individual mythologies”: the point of this term was, likewise, not to reveal the collective and thus the political (the collective production of myths) in which the individual artist participates, but rather precisely the opposite: to overwrite this dimension of the collective with the topos of the artistic “private mythology.” This did not tend to weaken the topos of the individual artist, as in the event concept, but, quite to the contrary, to refresh and strengthen it.

Measured against the earlier concept, then, *d5* that saw realization must indeed be described as a backlash—as a form of self-transformism.

37 ——— In connection with the public space, I have endeavored to develop the concept of opening qua antagonization in more detail in several texts. See Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2019).

38 ——— At the same time as *d5*, completely different, more political approaches to everyday culture were being developed at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies by way of a Gramscian approach; see Oliver Marchart, *Cultural Studies* (Constance: UVK, 2008).

And, in fact, Szeemann himself defiantly admitted the depoliticization of his own original concept to critics at the time, ultimately even going so far as to speak out in favor of art's freedom from purpose:

Szeemann: I think the whole political discussion about art has reduced itself to absurdity. There are many people who accuse documenta of once again being an affirmative exhibition and not a critical one. But we've had some experience of our own with "critical" exhibitions. Apart from a lot of paper, such exhibitions don't have much to offer. After all, art obeys its own laws, and only with art can a documenta be carried out— and above all guaranteed—as an event. The d5 is as political or apolitical as the viewers want to see it. ...

WELT: So, it's back to the l'art-pour-l'art standpoint after all?

Szeemann: Yes, I believe this attitude is once again becoming very important.... Art is not capable of changing something directly, because art's purposelessness is its only chance of survival.³⁹

Such was the result of Szeemann's conceptual about-face. In this quotation, his "invention of the artist-curator" betrays its origins in the purposelessness-oriented occidental genius art tradition. Whereas even *documenta 4* of 1968, directed by the show's original founder Bode, was still characterized by a relatively democratic-collective management through various committees and working groups, in 1972 Szeemann evidently no longer felt compelled to take that zeitgeist into account. And whereas in the "failed" prototype for *d5* at the Cologne Kunstverein, the figure of the curator was deliberately supposed to disappear behind a democratic, self-determined community of artists, the second *d5* concept heralded the turnaround that was to make the name Szeemann a "trademark" and a synonym for "the curator" as the artist's true heir. The curator was established as a new subject, and the selection of artworks consequently became a matter of subjective assessment whose further criteria cannot be specified. This is how Szeemann explained his selection principles:

For me it is largely a spontaneous decision made on the basis of an intensity I sense in the work. And because of the fact that these days we all know the artists ourselves, the encounter is usually a further confirmation of my intuitive feeling. I think it's simply a subjective matter.⁴⁰

³⁹ ——— Quoted in Schneckenburger, *documenta*, 122 et seq. (trans. JR).

⁴⁰ ——— Ibid., 124.

When asked in 2001, in the context of the Venice Biennale he curated, whether large-scale exhibitions still made sense, Szeemann self-confidently answered: “It depends solely on who organizes them.”⁴¹ From which we can conclude: they make sense when organized by Harald Szeemann, or curatorial geniuses of comparable format.

We have recalled the well-known background of the *d5* conception because the myth persists—and was elected as a point of reference by the two “political” documenta exhibitions *dX* and *D11*. Yet, their reference was to a radical political exhibition that never existed in reality. It was not until the depoliticizing *d12* that documenta finally returned to a pre-*d5* stage and referred openly to the very first documenta, even to the federal horticultural show held at the same time (hence the flowers on the official *d12* posters), thus leaving even the political myth of *d5* behind in favor of a floristic understanding of documenta. On closer inspection, it turns out that this perception was subject to a certain temporal distortion. That is because, contrary to how it was generally perceived, the real *d5* actually marked the beginning of the paradigm that *dX* and *D11* were to break with in many respects—not least with regard to the role of the curator and the political responsibility of art. David took leave of the “imago”-centric approach of her predecessor Jan Hoet, who was responsible for *documenta 9* of 1992, and had the urban space play out precisely in places of transition, to say nothing of communication spaces such as (for the first time) the Internet and the hybrid workspace in the Orangerie. Some critics regarded the integration of politically minded works as a scandal, even as a kind of oppression, if not censorship, of non-political artists. Thomas Wagner, for example, wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

But art that refuses such an obviously emancipatory and anticapitalist task can easily be denounced as bourgeois or a mere product of a spectacle culture in the service of the culture industry. Eat the best and stew the rest.⁴²

And that was one of the more polite reviews.

Despite its reference to politics and the public urban space, *dX* was not simply aiming for a resumption of the first *d5* concept, i.e., the event concept. True, as in a faint echo of that failed initial concept, Catherine David had explicitly opposed the bazaar model of publicity and tried to

41 ——— Harald Szeemann, “The Timeless, Grand Narration of Human Existence in its Time,” *La Biennale di Venezia: Platea dell’umanità*, vol. 1 (Venice: Biennale di Venezia, 2001), xvii (trans. OM).

42 ——— See Thomas Wagner, *Licht im Schacht von Babel* (collection of Wagner’s documenta reviews in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) (Berlin: Merve, 2007), 118.

keep documenta from becoming a marketplace by withholding the list of artists and commissioning site-specific works in the public space. As far as the list was concerned, later artistic directors of documenta would pursue the same strategy until it was abandoned by ruangrupa, the curatorial collective in charge of *documenta fifteen*, and the number of commissioned works rose to hitherto unimagined heights: the vast majority of the works shown at Plattform5, *D11*'s exhibition platform, were produced especially for *D11*. Nevertheless, both differed fundamentally from the first Szeemann concept. This could itself be understood as a political event (or as an institutional condition enabling the emergence of a political event). By promising the radical destruction of documenta's institutional framework, it simultaneously promised to create conditions of the possibility of publicness without being able to anticipate whether publicness would actually come about. Because publicness is not something you simply find lying on the street. It only happens at the moment of conflict, which turns the space of street traffic, for example, into the political space of publicness. Only on the basis of this criterion of conflictuality can publicness as a political space be distinguished from the market-like placebo publicness of the bazaar or the lobbyist one of the outer or back room. This intrusion of the political, of antagonism, cannot be institutionally prejudiced, for which reason the first Szeemann concept could only fail. The logic of the institution and the logic of the political are diametrically opposed.

Where publicness was created in this antagonistic sense, it occurred only outside the institution, also at *D11*. For example, the unannounced performance by the VolxTheaterKarawane group in front of the Fridericianum, where they protested against the threatened deportation of Roma families, among other things, almost led to their arrest by the police and brought about various upheavals within the documenta institution.⁴³

43 ——— The street theatre group VolxTheaterKarawane, known to the public through its arrest by the Italian police in the course of the G8 protests in Genoa, had already been invited to Plattform1 *Democracy Unrealized* in Vienna, but not to Plattform5 in Kassel, which did not stop them, however, from carrying out an action in front of the Museum Fridericianum. Political-activist projects of this kind were not originally part of the exhibition concept. The following is the description of the action by the VolxTheaterKarawane itself: "After the VolxTheaterKarawane failed in its first attempt to occupy the Friedrichsplatz temporarily as a noborderZONE and was treated as a danger by the security spokesperson and the police and expelled from the square, it succeeded, with support from the co-curator Ute Meta Bauer and in intensive three-day cooperation with various groups (from Kassel, the Romakarawane Düsseldorf and noborder activists from Italy, Ireland, and France), in setting up a 24-hour noborder camp installation on the main square of Kassel, in front of the Fridericianum, and proclaiming the Documenta11

The criticism according to which these and similar activist art practices had no place in *D11* is factually correct, but the question remains as to whether the political, in the strict sense, can be programmed at all, or is not inevitably neutralized by the logic of such a huge institution.⁴⁴ In the strict sense of the political, of antagonism, *dX*, like *D11*, was arguably less political than it was analytical in terms of politics and social/cultural conflicts. In essence, these exhibitions conceived of themselves as instruments of knowledge, as cognitive weapons rather than directly political ones. Thus, it was above all globalization and the postcolonial constellation that were both examined politically, if in different ways. To quote Enwezor, *D11* was accordingly concerned with “an attempt to expand the dimension of documenta in terms of what is conceived as public space” only in a qualified sense.⁴⁵ It was the temporal and spatial deterritorialization of the exhibition on a total of five platforms, of which four were “theoretical” platforms, that at least expanded the scope for confrontation and controversy between documenta and its audience:

The platforms are meant to pick up on the idea of public space and push it a bit further. To make something visible means to make our own intellectual intentions transparent. It doesn't simply mean that we want to bring socio-political issues into documenta, because they have always played a role there, but that we want to make the controversies of the platforms an essential part of the confrontation between ourselves and our audience.⁴⁶

Platform6—noborderZONE. The main theme was the threat of the deportation of Roma families from Germany. A Roma delegation from Düsseldorf had come to Kassel, set up a small exhibition, informed many interested visitors waiting in the queue to see the largest contemporary exhibition about their living conditions in Germany and the threat of deportation, and engaged in discussion with them. ‘Realizing freedom of movement’ was the discussion motto announced on the flyers for visitors, which copied the Documenta11 layout. The camp participants’ passes looked like documenta staff and press passes. The cooperation and effect were satisfactory for all participants, and in the institution ‘Documenta11’ the project sparked an internal discussion about the conception of art and politics.” Gini Müller, “Transversal oder Terror? Bewegte Bilder der VolxTheaterKarawane,” in *Transversal: Kunst und Globalisierungskritik*, ed. Gerald Raunig (Vienna: Turia+Kant, 2003), 137 et seq. (trans. JR).

44 ——— In most cases, the “programming” of an event seems to lead to spectacle, a circumstance to which Jan Hoet’s *d9* testified.

45 ——— Okwui Enwezor, “Reflexionen zur d5—Eine neue Auffassung kuratorischer Praxis,” in *Wiedervorlage d5—Eine Befragung des Archivs zur documenta 1972*, eds. Roland Nachtigäller, Friedhelm Scharf, Karin Stengel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 43 (trans. JR).

46 ——— Ibid.

Ultimately, however, the antagonism that can be generated by institutions such as documenta must be located elsewhere—namely in its actual institutional practice, which I call counter-canonization. In this case, the defining power of the institution is used and—not without a certain amount of irony—directed against its former hegemonic purpose. This strategy aims at creating a conflict not so much with the institution as with the dominant culture from which an institution has been wrested and with whose help the canon is now being shifted. In fact, the defining and canonizing power of the institution is not attacked, but is downright welcome, because it provides the intended canon shift with the necessary symbolic capital as well as the operational infrastructure. The prime example of such a strategy of politicizing an institution is *D11*, for which Okwui Enwezor and his co-curators were responsible, and which used the Kassel exhibition to shift the canon in precisely that manner. This was essentially achieved by lengthening the break lines extending from *D11* into the center of the art field, or at least deepening them where they were already latent. What came about was a radicalization of various exhibition strategies that can be summarily described as politicization, the decentering of the West, theorization, and the strengthening of the educational aspect. To stay with the first break, the work presented was political to an even greater extent than that at *dX*, whereby “politics” was conceived of primarily in a documentary and conceptual manner. Report, documentation, and cognitive analysis governed the art practices on the *D11* exhibition platform.

Of course, *D11* neither discovered these political art practices nor did it exhibit them for the first time. Rather, in struggles over legitimacy, it intervened in their favor by giving them a place in the limelight. It goes without saying that this approach caused problems of its own. Even in biennials with progressive curatorships, a kind of “genrefication” of the political can occur. James Meyer already warned against political art’s “genrefication” into identity art on the occasion of the 1993 Whitney Biennial—also known as the “politically correct biennial”: “For all its good intentions, the ‘multicultural’ ‘grunge’ biennial sanctions the emergence of the political as a style, as the latest trend in the consumption of established culture.”⁴⁷ Meyer himself argued in favor of a combined strategy of institutional critique and activism, but was skeptical of the merely metaphorical exhibition of political content. If we take a look at an example of the post-*D11* phase—the 10th Istanbul Biennial of 2007, curated by Hou Hanru—we find that this “genrefication” of political art was even reflected in a spatial separation: the explicitly political works were exhibited in Istanbul’s somewhat ramshackle textile market, while the central exhibi-

47 ——— James Meyer, “Was geschah mit der institutionellen Kritik?,” in *Kontext Kunst*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cologne: Dumont, 1993), 240 (trans. JR).

tion venue, Antrepo, presented the marketable works.⁴⁸ To be sure, Hou Hanru was continuing the strategy of the 9th Istanbul Biennial of 2005 that, curated by Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, reached out into urban space under the motto “Art, City, and Politics in an Expanding World.” But the 10th Istanbul Biennial involuntarily cemented the marginal status of political art practices by banishing marginalized art to peripheral locations, while the center, Antrepo, remained reserved for the mainstream. To make a truly political exhibition, it would have been necessary to do exactly the opposite and put the marginalized art practices at the center—as *D11* attempted to do with its strategy of decentering documenta.

The example illustrates that at least some of the problems of representing political art practices disappear as soon as political art is not understood as a genre and the exhibition concept as a whole is taken into account. What is relevant is not only whether individual included works are political, but also to what extent the exhibition as such, in its conception and implementation, gives space to art as a form of political analysis—or, conversely, depoliticizes political works through a neutralizing or mitigating exhibition *dispositif*. That is precisely what happened at *d12*, for which Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack were responsible, in that it re-transformed the political into the bourgeois discourse of dominance that characterizes the art field—and not only that field. In the process, it turned out that, with *d12*, Buergel and Noack were pursuing a curatorial strategy of depoliticizing even those political works that had found their way into the exhibition. Analytically, the *d12* depoliticization strategy can be broken down into at least three sub-strategies which we will examine in more detail below. Strategies of the decontextualization, formalization, and aestheticization of the selected works at *d12* thus brought about a domestication of all politics. By way of this triple domestication, Buergel and Noack provided proof that a completely non-political exhibition can be curated with quite a significant number of political works. It suffices entirely to tear the works out of their original political context, formalize their contents (while suppressing all information that could be provided, for example, by room texts or an inexpensive exhibition guide), and aestheticize them by means of arrangement and exhibition display.⁴⁹

48 ——— To a lesser extent, already *D11* fell into the trap of spatially separating the more activist-process-oriented works, which were housed solely in documenta hall, from, for example, documentary works in the Museum Fridericianum or the Binding-Brauerei.

49 ——— This strategy naturally did not go unnoticed. Brian Holmes and Sureyyya Evren—to cite just one of myriad reviews in a similar vein—pointed out that while *dX* and *D11* had proven to be exceptionally complex, risky, and productive shows, *d12* was characterized by the complete absence of any critical curatorial discourse (the catalogue, for instance, lacked any explication of the curatorial guidelines). We

Shortly after Roger M. Buergel was appointed the new artistic director of documenta, he announced in a press release that documenta would now return the “beautiful” to its rightful place. Not only did he not have any problem with the concept of beauty, but beauty would also dominate the new documenta, Buergel said in an interview.⁵⁰ The press correctly identified this proclaimed return of beauty in art as a paradigm shift in documenta philosophy: as a return, after two explicitly political exhibitions, to one that would offer less theory, less politics, less criticism—and more beauty instead. This artistic beauty was to be revealed, as Buergel postulated, in silent “contemplation” in front of the artwork, and only then would the actual political potential of art be revealed.⁵¹ Even if few had wanted to believe that he would actually go that far, the exhibition opening made it clear that Buergel practiced what he had preached. Politics and beauty finally joined hands again. The bourgeois German newspaper culture section was delighted and defended the curator against many a representative of a specialized press who could not believe their eyes.⁵² It became evident that the aestheticization of the political had long since ceased to be an exclusive attribute of fascism, as Walter Benjamin still thought, but that, on the contrary, bourgeois hegemony itself had taken on the political under the caveat of its aestheticization. In other words, the aestheticization of the political contents of artistic works—that is, their epicurean incorporation and commodification—had itself become one of the main strategies of the bourgeois hegemonic project.

Of course, this circumstance does not in itself speak against political art, since the art field is an important venue of the reproduction of Western, bourgeois dominance culture that should neither be ignored nor written off. It does, however, argue against the “aestheticization” of political art for purposes of decoration: at *d12*, it became wallpaper. To this end, of course, it had to be robbed of its original meaning and context by

were mollified with a few vague allusions, while the arrangement of the works followed a “language of mere association.” As a result, unintended meanings of non-political works spilled over into political works, resulting in political works becoming mere decoration.

50 ——— “Genuss wie im Restaurant,” interview with Roger M. Buergel, *Der Spiegel*, April 26, 2004, 168–172 (trans. JR).

51 ——— Ibid.

52 ——— A case in point is Hanno Rauterberg’s review “Kasseler Sprengkraft” *Die Zeit*, September 20, 2007, 49, in which the author praises *d12* for having “placed new trust in art, in its aesthetic autonomy” and for allowing itself to be guided “by a deep delight in form.” It is no wonder that the anti-political art and culture sections took great pleasure in such a documenta, while Buergel himself—hardly in the manner of a sophisticated aesthete—insulted his critics from the specialist press as a “lynch mob” (*Der Spiegel*) and referred to criticism of his majesty as a “burping contest” (*Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*).

way of radical de-(con)textualization. In the very brief foreword to the catalogue, Buergel and Noack state that art always has a local history, of course, but that “exhibitions are only worth looking at if we manage to dispense with preordained categories and arrive at a plateau where art communicates itself and on its own terms.”⁵³ They thus postulate that text and context are superfluous since things speak for themselves if you are only open to the effect they have on you. This explains the extreme formalism that surprised most observers of *d12*.

Buergel’s catchphrase of the “migration of form” was used to legitimize the fact that, in place of the critical-political approach that had distinguished both *dX* and *D11*, superficial formal analogies were now drawn between artworks far apart in both temporal and geographic terms. These formal analogies were quite in keeping with the conservative art-historical discourse (whose imaginary underlying principle of representation is the principle of double projection), without giving any scholarly reasons for the curatorial comparisons of form. At *d12*, in other words, the curator’s own purely voluntaristic dictate of taste—a process of baseless decisionistic decision-making as to what “[went] well together” formally and what did not, according to his taste—took the place of a scholarly justification of formal comparisons of the kind one might have expected from the art-historical discourse Buergel took as his model.⁵⁴ The result was rarely comprehensible to the thinking public, as he himself admitted, nor was it comprehensible to the artistic director. One of the few coherent texts in which Buergel spoke about his understanding of form reveals that the exhibition was based on pure association. His self-narrated audio guide of the Fridericianum, which holds a special status not least of all because it replaced the initially non-existent room texts, was formalistic to the point of self-parody. Roger M. Buergel led the tour through Room 1 of the Museum Fridericianum with the following words:

Like all four large rooms here in the building, this room is structured thematically, in other words formally. This means that you see works

53 ——— Roger M. Buergel, Ruth Noack, Preface to *documenta 12 Catalogue* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 11–12.

54 ——— At the same time, defenders of Buergel claimed (also in contrast to an earlier formulation of my critique in *Texte zur Kunst* 67 (September 2007) that politics is somehow sedimented in every “form,” which is why the critique of Buergel’s interest in forms had been misled by an outdated form/content dualism. This is complete nonsense, because if the claim is that politics is sedimented in the formal (which may well be the case), then it would be precisely up to *d12* to excavate and reveal this politics, and that is precisely what was not done. On the contrary, politics, where present in certain works, was formalized by the Buergelian concept.

by different artists between which we—Ruth Noack, the curator of the exhibition, and my humble self—discovered correspondences or family resemblances. Family resemblances of a formal nature, although the artists may have nothing to do with each other. Look, for example, at the three photographs by Ahlam Shibli on the left front wall. They are two interior views of Palestinian houses and one courtyard view where a piece of washing conceals a person. I won't go into the details of the work at all, but just ask you to contemplate the suspended piece of laundry in relation to the suspended cloths of the sculpture just to the right of the entrance—Cosima von Bonin's *Lion in the Bonsai Forest*—and to relate the suspended bamboo poles of the bonsai forest to the hair hanging down from Hu Xiaoyuan's fragile embroidery frame.⁵⁵

What do we learn here about the selection and ordering principle in Room 1? First of all, we learn that for Buerger “thematic” means “formal” and that Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buerger's “humble self” discovered correspondences between the works. And what are these correspondences and family resemblances in Room 1? They consist in the fact that something hangs down in all the works. That is what connects them to one another. What an amazing curatorial achievement to find works in which something is hanging down! As we move on, we eventually learn that the artistic director himself does not know what this is actually supposed to mean, or whether it is supposed to mean anything at all:

With all these correspondences, of which we do not know exactly what they actually mean—indeed, of which it is not at all clear whether they mean anything at all—, we approach the large painting on the partition wall in the rear section of the room.⁵⁶

This self-revelation in the form of an audio guide was unfortunately far too little appreciated by critics, probably because most of the representatives of the trade press are above using audio guides and therefore did not come across it in the first place. It illustrates the gulf that separates *d12* from *dX* and *D11*. *d12* functioned as a depoliticizing machine that reduced even the political works, which were definitely present, to objects of formal aesthetic contemplation. Political truisms scattered here and there could not disguise the fact: what this aestheticization of politics amounted to was nothing other than the conversion and transformation of the political critique propagated by *dX* and *D11* into a mere affirmation of the formal.

55 ——— See Roger M. Buerger, “Ist die Moderne unsere Antike?,” audio guide text (2007), <http://documenta12.de> (no longer retrievable) (trans. JR).

56 ——— Ibid.

DOCUMENTA (13) continued this work of depoliticization, yet in less obvious ways. A curatorial discourse was employed that mimicked political discourse, but gave the latter, at the time, a fashionable post-humanist spin. Inspired by Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, Christov-Bakargiev gained quite some attention when in an interview with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* she ruminated, when reflecting on a post-humanist democracy, the political intention of strawberries.⁵⁷ The learned public was quite puzzled when confronted with such watered-down version of a Latourian “parliament of things.” The case illustrates the danger of banalization that is always looming whenever the art field imports forms of knowledge and theory produced in other fields. An import that, in the case of *DOCUMENTA (13)*, often bordered on esotericism. In her programmatic statement in the catalogue, the artistic director explained her holistic worldview: “*DOCUMENTA (13)* is driven by a holistic and non-logocentric vision that is shared with, and that recognizes, the knowledges of animate and inanimate makers of the world.”⁵⁸ To achieve this, forms of trust needed to be “established among all the life-forms on the planet”—how this is to be done was kept by Christov-Bakargiev as her secret.⁵⁹ In the concluding seminar of the public program, entitled *On Seeds and Multispecies Intra-Action*, a collective consciousness encompassing human, animal, mineral, and vegetable life is conjured up: “The development of a collective consciousness that allows us to think and feel in sympathy with all types of mineral, vegetal and animal life is allowing a new narrative to emerge—one that shifts the position of humans in the constellation of the natural world, placing us in a more balanced scenario in relation to other beings.”⁶⁰ This idea of a lost balance that needs to be re-established is one of the archetypes of ideological, not of critical discourse. I will return to the question of the esoteric, whose presence was already observable at *d12*, as a replacement of the political. But let me just add that, paradoxically, it was precisely this banalized post-humanist esotericism and moralistic, if not quasi-religious, discourse on cosmic balance and “trust” between all creatures that, by displacing the political, contributed to the huge success of *DOCUMENTA (13)*. It played into the hands of a professional audience that did not want to be molested by all-too explicitly political works. On other accounts, to be fair, *DOCUMENTA (13)*, did make an important polit-

57 ——— “Über die politische Intention der Erdbeere,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 8, 2012, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/documenta-leiterin-carolyn-christov-bakargiev-ueber-die-politische-intention-der-erdbeere-1.1370514>.

58 ——— *DOCUMENTA (13), Catalog 1/3: The Book of Books* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 31.

59 ——— *Ibid.*, 34.

60 ——— *What When: A Guide to the Maybe Education and Public Programs of DOCUMENTA (13)* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 37.

ical statement by including Kabul as a venue, but, again, we will have to somewhat postpone the discussion of this move.

With *documenta 14*, however, politics—much to the discomfort of the professional audience—returned with a vengeance, and the mainstreaming of documenta was put to an end. Artistic formats were radically expanded, with a strong emphasis on time-based practices with a social and critical edge. As in the subsequent *documenta fifteen*, critics were searching in vain for the “rich and famous” artists. But precisely the expansion of practices, and the concurring absence of the “beautiful” à la Buergerl or the spectacular à la Christov-Bakargiev, was turned against *documenta 14*—as in the case of this quite typical specimen of art criticism:

This documenta has, almost like a European ministry, a comprehensive concept of culture, there is a documenta-own radio program, in Athens every Monday a television program, plus books and magazines, a kind of newspaper, as well as concerts and many sound works, theater, dance and performance, lectures, discussions, workshops, work with children and young people, social-therapeutic and other low-threshold participation offers on site, also a space of silence to decelerate [...] but documenta 14 has no concept of art in the narrow sense.⁶¹

What, in this passage, escapes the author is that such expanded concept of practices *is* the contemporary concept of art. And because it is the contemporary concept, there was no need for a “narrow” one – except one was to please a scene of mainstream gallerists and art-dealers. However, the artistic director of *documenta 14* did a very bad job in transmitting the main curatorial ideas of this edition of documenta. He bought too much into an “artistic” understanding of curatorship and so largely refrained from explaining to the public what he was about to do and what he wanted to achieve. And yet, his contribution to the *documenta 14 Reader* in fact delivered a strong programmatic statement—arguably the most political curatorial statement since *D11*. The aim of the curatorial team, Szymczyk writes, was “in turning documenta 14 into a continuum of aesthetic, economic, political, and social experimentation.”⁶² The historical

61 ——— Hajo Schiff, “Kaum eine begehbare Brücke oder Der fehlende Schlüssel,” *Kunstforum International* 248/249 (August-September 2017): 74. It is not surprising that the author was, on the other hand, particularly impressed by Christov-Bakargiev’s documenta.

62 ——— Adam Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness-Learning and Working from Athens,” in *The documenta 14 Reader* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2017), 22.

background of *documenta* as a field of experimentation was the so-called debt crisis, the war in Syria, but also the neoliberal onslaught against the welfare state and the rise of right-wing populism, if not fascism. Szymczyk leaves no doubt that the political system is in crisis:

The will to power of politicians who have no vision to offer, and no means to implement it, has upset people's belief in democracy based on the idea of elected representation of the people. The old political parties around the globe—whether “social democratic”, “liberal”, or “conservative”—have let down their voters by abandoning most of what were once believed to be their founding principles, in order to, by tacit agreement, continue naturalizing the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, the educated and uneducated, the citizen and the stateless, whites and people of color, men and women, the heteronormative and the LGBTQ communities.⁶³

In terms of political diagnosis, we couldn't be further away from a “parliament of strawberries.” Instead, *documenta* is seen as a “starting point for reflection on the contemporary condition of actually existing neoliberalism,”⁶⁴ on the possibility of an anti-identitarian emancipatory politics, and a democracy that remains to be reinvented. Art, it is claimed, can be of help because it “can produce and inhabit space, enable discourses beyond what is known to all, and act to challenge the predictable, gloomy course of current political and social global events that keep us sleepless and suspended.”⁶⁵ The idea of a democracy to be re-invented, pronounced in Szymczyk's programmatic statement, inexplicitly harked back to the first platform of *D11*, entitled “Democracy Unrealized,” but the general mood had changed since 2001.⁶⁶ In 2017, after a longstanding financial crisis, the war in Syria, and the election of Donald Trump, it had become much more apocalyptic. The general shift in mood was also clearly present in Okwui Enwezor's exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennial of 2015 entitled *All the World's Futures*. These futures, one had the impression, were dark. Yet, as in *D11*, the means by which the invited artists approached our contemporary condition remained largely analytical in 2015, while in *documenta 14* artistic as much as curatorial experimentation was given much leeway to forge a path out of the gloomy and depressing state of things.

63 ——— Ibid., 30.

64 ——— Ibid., 24.

65 ——— Ibid., 32.

66 ——— Okwui Enwezor et al., eds., *Democracy Unrealized. Documenta11_Platform1* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

The edition of *documenta fifteen*—which is no less political than *documenta 14*—is characterized by yet another change of mood. The world has not changed for the better, to be sure, but in *documenta fifteen*, politics is understood in a strikingly different way from previous editions. Already the pop-ish design portrays a more joyous and playful approach deeply submerged in global popular culture. The political is now envisaged as the common and the communal. The curatorial philosophy behind this idea of politics is condensed in the vocabulary of *ruangrupa* as it is explained in a glossary: the most important term is *lumbung*, the Indonesian word for a collectively used rice barn. The modality of sharing, which underlies the *lumbung* community, is supposed to be guided by values such as generosity, humor, local rootedness, independence, regeneration, transparency, and frugality.⁶⁷ This is certainly not the anti-identitarian politics conjured up in *documenta 14*, nor should it be confused, on the other hand, with a simple kind of identity politics. The invited artists and activists (and often archivists) do work politically in locally specific contexts, and most of them also work collectively. For instance, the *Archive des luttes des femmes en Algérie*, which emerged from the “Hirak” popular uprising in 2019, collects documents about feminist collectives and struggles in Algeria; the *Off-Biennale Budapest* seeks to defend artistic and political freedom under Orban’s authoritarian rule; the **foundation-Class** collective was founded at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin to allow for refugees to enter art school. It seems as if the curatorial collective *ruangrupa* tried to bring together groups and initiatives at the art-community-politics nexus similar to *ruangrupa* itself.⁶⁸ Never before was *documenta* taken over by such a large number of artist-activist groups. The political axis of *documenta* is thus fostered, yet at the same time it is also displaced, for the curatorial philosophy of *ruangrupa* politics has an inflection different from before.

For Enwezor and his team, politics was largely analytical and documentary—hence the surprisingly “classical” exhibition design of *D11*. Szymczyk and his team made some steps into the practical, but now, with *ruangrupa*, *documenta* became practical through and through. And it very much turns around the question of infrastructure, for the main curatorial focus is on the distribution of resources. *documenta* itself, as an institution, is seen as a huge repository of resources to be redistributed. Take, for example, the way in which the list of participating artists was publicized. Since David, the artist list had been seen as a resource to be

67 ——— “Glossary,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed May 22, 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/glossary/>.

68 ——— It is thus only logical that Gudskul, the self-organized space run by *ruangrupa* and two other groups—*Serrum* and *Grafis Huru Hara*—in Jakarta, is also a participating *lumbung* member.

kept secret in order to gain maximum attention when published. Not only was it published by ruangrupa early on, but this resource was also rechanneled to the street journal *Asphalt*, sold by homeless people, which was chosen as the outlet for the artist list. In this way, attention was shared between documenta, artists, and *Asphalt*. In an interview, ruangrupa explained that they “consider documenta a bank or resources, and we are looking for ways to share it with others: those we see as being in the same boat with us and who can utilize documenta to sustain their practice.”⁶⁹ What is more, invited collectives are also teamed up to share resources among themselves. documenta is seen as huge platform for sharing and redistributing resources. The political in *documenta fifteen*, it seems, is not so much a matter of conflict; it is a matter of the commons. But this impression should not deceive us. Many of the participating artist-activist groups are deeply involved in political conflicts back at home, and the communal, in the absence of other resources, is the main resource that allows them to sustain their struggle. There is nothing apolitical to this idea of “sharing”; rather, sharing is a precondition, in locally specific situations, for emancipatory political action, and documenta has been made a tool by ruangrupa to support these actions.

69 ——— “Das Teilen des Mehrwerts als eine Form von Kollektivität; ruangrupa im Gespräch mit Nora Sternfeld,” *Texte zur Kunst* 124 (December 2021): 74.

A Short Note on Collective Curatorship

With *ruangrupa*, an artistic/curatorial collective was appointed for the first time to the position of “artistic director” of *documenta*. Of course, in the same way in which a Hollywood movie is not the product of the director alone, a huge endeavor such as *documenta* is always the outcome of a collective effort. This has always been the case, even with the early *documenta* shows, and it was recognized in these early shows with the institution of the “*documenta-council*” (*documenta-Rat*). The 4th *documenta* of 1968—in the spirit of the time—even had a *documenta* council of twenty-six people who had to decide democratically on the artists to be invited. But then came Szeemann, and with him the idea of the lonely but outstanding male genius-curator. Szeemann shaped the ideological view according to which the curatorial selection principles had to derive from the immediate instinct of a curatorial genius, a notion that was to determine his fundamental curatorial approach up to the 2001 Venice Biennale. In some ways this view persists until today. David’s *documenta*, for example, would have been a different one without Benjamin Buchloh, yet it was not framed as a collective curatorial enterprise. In a much more discomfoting way, the “lonely wolf” paradigm of Szemannian curating returned with Buerger’s and Christov-Bakargiev’s grand curatorial gestures. It seems that in a neoliberal world of self-marketing there will always be space for pretentiousness.

However, Okwui Enwezor had decided to involve six co-curators: Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. By doing so, he was proceeding on the assumption that a mammoth project like *documenta* could no longer be managed any other way than collectively, and that this curatorial division of labor must also be made transparent. While the distribution of a major curatorship among several minor curators does not abolish the institution of the curator *per se*, it does mark the end of the all-knowing, all-seeing curatorial *uomo universale*. One could say that collective forms of production that have emerged in the more recent and more progressive segments of the

art field (and which, we should add, have their counterpart in collective organizational strategies in the economy) have now arrived, albeit distorted, at the level of the major biennials. Adam Szymczyk did not pretend to curate documenta on his own either. He worked with Andrea Linnenkohl and Katerina Tsalou as curatorial advisors and with a team of curators: Pierre Bal-Blanc, Hendrik Folkerts, Candice Hopkins, Hila Peleg, Dieter Roelstraete, Monika Szewczyk, and, as “curator at large,” Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung as well as Paul B. Preciado as the curator of public programs. Obviously, the role of these people was not simply to assist the main curator; they acted as individual and largely autonomous curators within a collective structure—and this role was publicly acknowledged.

No doubt, to curate an exhibition of the enormity of documenta always makes a collective effort inevitable, whether this is acknowledged or not. Yet, the greater global biennials become in reach, the more unthinkable it gets for an individual to curate them on his or her own. The hubris that lies buried in the idea of being able, as an individual, to survey the entire planetary art production is now largely delegitimized in the progressive segment of the art field—even if it celebrated a comeback in *d12* and the *DOCUMENTA (13)*. This hubris is particularly untenable where it appears with a colonizing gesture and the curator travels around the globe with his vasculum to collect manifestations of foreignness and put them on display at home. That was ultimately the gesture exposed in the main pavilion of the 49th Venice Biennale, whose “plateau of mankind,” to which we will return in minute, knew many objects and only one subject: its curator Harald Szeemann. And it also characterizes the reactionary concept of *d12*—namely, to pretend that global artistic production could be comprehended by a single curatorial couple. The hard-won emancipatory realization that every exhibition is subject to a collective production process was thus suppressed. In fact, *d12* was the first major international exhibition to be curated neither by a single person, nor by a tandem (as occasionally used at Manifesta), nor by a team (as in the case of *D11*), but by a bourgeois nuclear family. The only subjects with proper names in the catalogue preface, apart from the authors Buerger and Noack themselves, are their children Charlotte and Kasimir. A truly innovative form of collective practice in the art field, which, despite the feminist gesture that characterized *d12*, is deeply reactionary and has implications beyond that. As Christian Kravagna noted in *Texte zur Kunst*:

Despite, or precisely because of the fact that Enwezor was undoubtedly the more internationally experienced curator before his documenta assignment, he operated with a six-member co-curatorial team that was able to contribute a broad range of knowledge informed by different worlds of art and life. Buerger/Noack, on the other hand,

operated as a family, which brought with it a shift in emphasis from the political to the personal, manifest in, among other things, the joy of discovering beautiful and interesting things that can be found in foreign countries and then presented as isolated *trouvailles*.⁷⁰

Compare this idea of curating, understood as a family affair, to ruangrupa's collectivizing strategy of concentric circles. As they explained their *modus operandi*:

First, we invited Documenta to become our ecosystem at the beginning of our journey. Once we had its willingness to embark on this journey with us, we extended invitations: first, to the people who we imagined could work with us closely from the get-go—they are what we call the artistic team. Next, we invited practices, initiatives, and collectives that we want to learn from. We announced 14 of them as “lambung inter-lokal” to the public. Right after that, and continuously learning from the processes we had gone through, we thought about other collaborators that would enrich the celebration we understood as Documenta 15—artists, educators, designers, economists, radio stations, the list goes on.⁷¹

Politics is always a collective enterprise, and a political way of curating should therefore also be collective. But there are many ways of acting collectively, from the documenta-council of early documenta shows via the team structures of *D11* and *documenta 14* to ruangrupa, the first collective to be named artistic director of documenta. But what is the specific kind of collectivity ruangrupa engages with? Their curatorial work, as it becomes evident from the above quote, should be understood as first and foremost a practice of invitation: an invitation to enter one of these concentric circles and share a common space of solidarity and shared resources. This is a curatorial practice by which collectives are mutually enriched and expanded without losing their local specificity. And it is a curatorial practice that allows for a global outlook, by way of cascading invitations and pluri-directional connections, without presuming a bird's eye-view on the planet. Some curators may still pretend otherwise, but there is no way to organize a non-Western centric show other than collectively. Which leads us to the second axis of the canon shift in the art field: the decentering of the West.

70 ——— Christian Kravagna, “Betrachter- und Formschicksale in Kassel—Berichte von der documenta 12,” *Texte zur Kunst* 67 (September 2007): 205 (trans. JR).

71 ——— “Das Teilen des Mehrwerts,” 76.

The Decentering and Recentering of the West (Second Shift)

That *documenta fifteen* is a truly global show, or rather, a global network of collectives, is evident. Yet, the shift away from the artistic and cultural Cold War narrative and its focus on the West was originally embodied by *D11*. With its strategy of decentering the West, *D11* moved non-Western art into the center of the art field and institutionally decentered Kassel as a venue; it propagated the “de-Kasselization” of Kassel, as it were.

Let us start with the second aspect. The platform structure of *D11* was intended to serve nothing less than the temporal, spatial, and thematic expansion and deterritorialization of the institution of *documenta*: *D11* began long before the summer of 2002 and moved far away from Kassel. In chronological terms, it started all the way back in March/April 2001 in Vienna with the first platform, *Democracy Unrealized*, which continued in Berlin at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in October of the same year. The second platform, located in New Delhi and entitled *Experiments with Truth*, was dedicated to the question of truth, justice, and reconciliation in states that had just escaped genocide or civil war. The third platform in St. Lucia addressed the issues of créolité and creolization, while the fourth in Lagos dealt with the urban and social problems of the African mega-cities of Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos.

Only the fifth and last platform—the only one actually taking place in Kassel—corresponded to what is usually understood as the Kassel *documenta*. By means of this strategy, Enwezor succeeded in decentering *documenta* not only in terms of “content” but also geographically and temporally. It is perhaps the most impressive achievement of *documenta* as an exhibition format that it remained faithful to this curatorial gesture of institutionally decentering the West. Not in the case of *d12*, of course, which simply ignored Enwezor’s bold decision to physically dislocate Kassel. But Christov-Bakargiev, in a politically impressive way, took up *D11* legacy and moved parts of *documenta* away from Kassel. *Documenta*, as it is programmatically stated in the catalogue, did not have one, but four venues: Kassel, June 9-September 16, 2012; Kabul June 20-July 19, 2012;

Alexandria-Cairo July 1-8, 2012; and Banff August 2-15, 2012. With Kabul, documenta moved to a place of latent civil war and offered workshops for Afghan artists in a collaborative effort with Rahraw Omarzad, the founding director of the Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan (CCAA) and the art magazine *Gahnama-e-Hunar*. This could have been interpreted as a paternalizing gesture, yet Afghan artists were provided exhibition space not only in Kabul's Queen's Palace, but also in Kassel at documenta venue Oberste Gasse 4, the former Elisabeth Hospital.

documenta 14—with its working title “Learning from Athens”—explicitly related to this tradition when Szymczyk decided, faithful to his anti-identitarian stance, “to turn documenta 14 into a “divided self”⁷² and move half of it to Athens where it actually opened on April 8, 2017 (two months before it re-opened in documenta's native town of Kassel). What Szymczyk created was a curatorial chiasm between Kassel and Athens. All participating artists showed in both cities. And, on the top of it, the collection of the Athens National Museum of Contemporary Art EMST was presented at the Fridericianum in Kassel, while its newly opened building in Athens became a venue for documenta. To open the traditional institutional “heart” of documenta, the Fridericianum, to a foreign intruder was a brave curatorial statement that was mostly greeted with disregard by mainstream art critics who had expected the next speculative spectacle à la Christov-Bakargiev, not a Greek museum collection. But obviously, this was not meant to be a statement about the EMST collection. Changing places, creating a chiasm between Germany and Greece, was first and foremost a political statement at a time when Germany's unscrupulous austerity dictate created havoc in Greece. And, as was to be expected, the decision to split and re-assemble documenta was met with a barrage of criticism from both sides. While for the Germans the dislocation of their national sanctum documenta was regarded as a case of un-German desecration by a Polish curator, the artistic scene of Athens, for much better reasons, was seeing their funds being re-channeled to a visiting mega-exhibition in which the local artists were not even represented in, from their perspective, sufficient numbers. Experiencing the catastrophic economic and social consequences of the German austerity dictate, Szymczyk's gesture was not so much perceived as a gesture of solidarity than one of just another form of colonialism. If, for the Germans, Szymczyk was an anti-German Polish curator, for the Greeks he was an anti-Greek German curator.

The dislocation of Kassel, and—to the extent that one really wants to subsume Greece under the “Global South,” which is debatable—the de-centering of the West came to its apogee with *documenta 14*. The canon shift took place on the level of infrastructure, i.e., the geographical split-

72 ——— Szymczyk, “14: Iterability,” 21.

ting of the exhibition but, as mentioned above, also indicated a new take on representation that was initiated by *D11*. It would be ludicrous for a curator to claim that the world could be represented, via its art production, from a single vantage point. As Szymczyk explained:

The decision to conceive of documenta 14 as a “theater and its double” (per Antonin Artaud) in Athens and Kassel—thereby moving its geographic and ideological center from its home in Germany—was a consequence of the feeling of necessity to act in real time and in the real world. The world cannot be explained, commented on and narrated from Kassel exclusively—a vantage point that is singularly located in Northern and Western Europe—or from any one particular place at all.⁷³

Let us take a moment to disentangle what is at stake here. The strategy of dislocating Kassel—from *D11* via *dOCUMENTA (13)* to *documenta 14* and beyond—can by all means be described as a tangible deconstruction of an institution that, historically, had worked towards Eurocentrism and Occidentalism. Since its foundation, documenta had been committed to the double project of Europe and the West. As Werner Haftmann, the chief art historical ideologist of documenta exhibitions 1–4, wrote in the *documenta 1* catalogue:

For us in Germany, the first encounter of younger German art with the artists of the other European countries is here taking place. It is a great and wonderful event for us. Now, for the first time, we can compare how the European countries relate to one another in terms of their contemporary artistic expressions. In the process, we will see how all of young European art lives from the same impulses and nevertheless preserves the character of its countries and its peoples, how Jean Jaurès’s dream—that the peoples of Europe want to be like a bouquet of flowers in which each flower retains its own fragrance and color and harmonizes in a greater whole—has already become reality in art.⁷⁴

One of documenta founders’ chief aims, as it is often said, was to bring ostracized abstract modernism back to Germany. But they were also concerned with the imaginary unity and unification of Europe in the spirit of art: Europe as a bouquet of flowers. In that context, the distribution of nationalities—to which a list of artists in the first documenta catalogue

73 ——— Ibid., 26–27.

74 ——— Werner Haftmann, “Einleitung,” *documenta. Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Prestel, 1995, reprint of the original 1955 edition), 25 (trans. JR).

testifies—is revealing: Germany tops the list by a wide margin with 58 artists; then comes France with 42, followed by Italy (28), England (8), and Switzerland (6). The USA is represented by a mere three artists, and only Holland, with two, has fewer. Two things are remarkable about this list of artists. Firstly, it shows that, even in those days, national classification was often fictitious, as was indicated by the following cautionary words:

Due to political emigration from Russia and Germany, the national affiliation of a number of artists became uncertain; they were assigned to their home or host countries according to the degree of their impact.⁷⁵

From the very beginning, then, the logic of the national and identitarian allocation of artists at documenta was unstable inasmuch as it was infiltrated by migration and political emigration movements. On the other hand, it is striking that the USA's representation at the first documenta was still deceptively weak. It was not until *d2* that this changed fundamentally, and *d4*—"Americana"—finally reversed it. The clearly European dimension of documenta's ideology was increasingly overlaid by the ideology of the West and a discourse about the Occident that had its roots in the Cold War. This double coding as (EC) European and (NATO) transatlantic, as Eurocentric and Occidental, would persist in actual history until the fall of the Iron Curtain at the latest, and in institutional history until *D11*.

documenta was thus always a German, a European, and a North-Atlantic exhibition in one. This is already evident in the programmatic use of such terms as "Occident" and "freedom" by the early documenta ideologues. For Haftmann and documenta exhibitions 1–3, abstraction represented a "world language" whereby, due to the specific universalism of the West, it is obvious that world art meant nothing other than Western art. The peripheral location close to the intra-German border contributed to the understanding of documenta as an outpost of the systemic competition fought out on the level of art. The decisive antagonism ran between Western modernist abstraction on the one hand and socialist realism on the other. As documenta historiographer Harald Kimpel writes:

It is this role—of demonstrating the effectiveness of Western pluralist art as visible proof of its superiority over any officially controlled and politically motivated aesthetic practice—that documenta is regularly obliged to play, albeit with diminishing enthusiasm.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ ——— Ibid., 27.

⁷⁶ ——— Harald Kimpel, *documenta: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 132 (trans. JR).



Oladélé Ajiboyé, *Paradigm Shift-African Stories*, 1997. Video, *documenta X*, Kassel 1997. Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

This is essentially where it would remain, despite all attempts to break out (for example, Manfred Schneckenburger's integration of GDR art into *d6*). Even Catherine David's *dX* still inscribed itself in the institution's Eurocentric line of tradition. In fact, the rarely heeded ideological subtext of *dX* was compatible with Haftmann's first catalogue contribution and—with regard to the contributions from Germany and France—even with the artist statistics of the very first *documenta*. With David, the focus would, for the last time, be on Franco-German reconciliation and thus on the European project in the spirit of modernism, as indicated not least by the strong presence of French artists, but also by the central strategic position of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's contribution and the sudden appearance of Ernst Jünger at *documenta*. If one wanted to be spiteful, one could say that *documenta* was out to re-enact the historical handshake between Kohl and Mitterrand in the field of art, with Jünger and Syberberg as the artistic go-betweens of a Francophile-Germanophile modernity.

In hindsight, even the claim that geographically "peripheral" positions were especially prominent in the *dX* exhibition turns out—upon closer examination of the list of participants—to be a deception. In this respect, the word and deed of *dX* actually diverged quite significantly in this respect, or, to put it in kinder terms: David subverted the expectations placed on it. With works by Michal Heiman, Sigalit Landau, AYA & GAL MIDDLE EAST, David Reeb, Uri Tzaig, and Penny Yassour, there was a decidedly strong focus on Israel, whereas from what was once called the



William Kentridge, *History of the Main Complaint*, 1996. Video, *documenta X*, Kassel 1997. Copyright: *documenta* archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

“Tricont,” the show featured only a few isolated (if not to say lonely) examples. The contribution of African artists to *dX* was limited to the works of Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé of Nigeria and William Kentridge of South Africa. Only one artist was invited from the Asian region, Matthew Ngui of Singapore. Latin America, at least, was represented by the classics Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, as well as the contemporary work of Tunga and Gabriel Orozco. This is by no means to say that only the West was present at *dX*, because the accompanying 100 Days—100 Guests program had the broad theme of globalization. Non-Western as well as postcolonial approaches were represented not so much in the exhibition as in the “100 Days” theory program as well as in the book *Politics/Poetics* accompanying *dX*. Whereas *D11* would adopt a counter-Occidentalist stance on theoretical and artistic practices, at *dX* theory assumed the function of representing the non-West supplementarily.

So, it could be said that, on the postcolonial axis, the decisive break in the history of *documenta* exhibitions—for all the merits of *dX*—is to be sought between *dX* and *D11*. This is particularly true with regard to the issue we defined as the decentering of the West. The process is quite contradictory in and of itself, a circumstance that poses a multitude of problems for any curatorial attempt in this context. On the one hand, the West is everywhere, which is why one cannot simply speak of the West’s relentless domination over the rest of the world. Globalization means, if anything, the transformation of every local culture, including Western cul-



Lygia Clark, *Máscaras sensoriais* (*Máscara cereja, Máscara branca, Máscara de cor verde, Máscara cor-de-abóbora, Máscara azul, Máscara preta, Máscara vermelha*), 1967. Installation, *documenta X*, Kassel 1997. Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.



Matthew Ngui, *You can order and eat delicious poh-piah" among other things*, 1997. Installation and Performance, *documenta X*, Kassel 1997. Copyright: documenta Archiv. Photograph by: Werner Maschmann.



Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolés*, 1964–1979. Installation, *documenta X*, Kassel 1997. Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

tures, into a hybrid by way of contact with a multitude of other local cultures. The Western industrialized nations are just as strongly exposed to this process as the supposedly traditional cultures. But that is not the end of the matter, because, on the other hand, the hegemony of the West by no means prevails unchallenged. There are clear relationships of dominance between different regions, there are forms of political, economic, and military neo-colonialism as well as forms of resistance, and there is still the dialectic of the colonial—that is, exoticizing—view, which is difficult to escape. Okwui Enwezor consistently sought to avoid identitarian determinations, which was probably the only practicable strategy: never at any point did *D11* want to exhibit “the foreign” or “the other,” which would only have demonstrated complicity with the Occidentalist slant. And nevertheless, the declared aim of *D11* was to decenter the West and recenter what it excluded (in other words, what I call a canon shift).

In this respect, it decisively differed from most major exhibitions that set out to give non-Western art a central place. Although the interest of the Western art world in “non-Western” art had been growing since the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Pompidou—that is, thirteen years before *D11*—with all the pitfalls of Orientalism, exoticization, or a new primitivism,⁷⁷ the “postcolonial”

77 ——— Simon Njami pinpointed the problem with *Magiciens de la terre* as follows: “In the late ‘80s, the art scene found itself divided into two categories of actors: magicians, descended from the non-Western

D11 of 2002 symbolically marked a rupture in the art field. Of course, it was not *D11* alone that caused this break; the emergence of peripheral biennials in Havana, Dakar, Johannesburg, Istanbul, and elsewhere had played a role, as had the Western art system's thirst for newly exploitable input. But *D11* vaulted the canon shift already beginning to take hold on the field's periphery right to the (imaginary) center of the Western art world. To gauge the extent of this rupture, it is instructive to take a closer look at the two Venice Biennales that framed *D11* to see how *D11* had left its mark on the field.

The 49th Venice Biennale of 2001, curated by Harald Szeemann, immediately preceded *D11*.⁷⁸ It was characterized by a relationship to European universalism that was anything but broken. And this in the form of one of its seemingly more harmless, but in fact decidedly problematic versions of humanism. For Szeemann had chosen a major theme for the second Venice Biennale under his direction: humankind. However, already the precise "phrasing" of the title—reflecting, as it did, the specific perspective of the European art biennial—belied the universality of the theme: Szeemann quadrupled the title of his exhibition to create a monster: *Platea dell'umanità*. *Plateau der Menschheit*. *Plateau of Humankind*. *Plateau de l'humanité*. What was supposed to signal richness and diversity here turns out to be a mere variation on sameness: humanity is named and addressed in four European languages. This paradoxical relationship between universalism (art as a universal language) and particularism (art as a European language) has been inscribed in the Venice Biennale ever since it was launched in 1895 at the height of the colonial age. Under Szeemann, art still spoke the "great European cultural languages."

Already for Szeemann, it would have been advisable to understand and reveal the complicity of the museum and exhibition institutions with European colonial history. Historically, this complicity always oscillated between the exhibition of the Self and the exhibition of the Other or the Foreign, whereby the ostensible universality of one's own (European) position—which in reality is an altogether particular one—comes about solely through the exclusion of other positions from the category of universality. Today, Europe, or rather the transatlantic West, still believes that it not only invented universalism, but is also entitled to proselytize it

world, and men." Simon Njami, "The Curator as a Naked King: Contextualisation and Decontextualisation," *South Meets West*, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Bern and National Museum of Ghana, Accra (Bern: Kunsthalle, 2000), 54.

78 ————— For the sake of brevity, reference is made in the following to curators of the Venice Biennale in general, even though it goes without saying that the focus is only on a few specific exhibition spaces, including above all the Italian Pavilion and the Arsenale.

in other parts of the world.⁷⁹ And since art has always been one of the West's favorite universalizing machines, it is not surprising to find all kinds of exoticisms in art history: from the various Japan crazes to the reception of "primitive" art by classical modernism. Contemporary art is by no means free of this phenomenon. The current exhibition trend of offering a platform to non-European art continues to labor under the undesirable possibility of prolonging Occidental practices of exhibiting the Other. One major problem here is the colonial gesture of the exhibition itself: that is, the objectification of the Other while at the same time denying it subject status. In the history of European exhibition institutions, the Other becomes a display object. Word of this has spread in museological debates, which is why it was ultimately surprising when, in the closing words of his programmatic catalogue contribution in 2001, Szeemann abruptly adopts the exoticizing language of the funfair: "Welcome onto, into, under, next to the Plateau! Discover the wonders as you walk from surprise to surprise!"⁸⁰

Szeemann's exotic wonders are localized in a space of timelessness, of existential human truths that apparently affect everyone on the globe equally. The title of his contribution reads, accordingly: "The timeless, grand narration of human existence in its time." As common threads through his "humanity plateau," Szeemann proposed such criteria of order as the course of human life, man and his behavior, man's relationship to his environment. The exhibition was structured according to principles based on good old existentialia: health, illness, and death, but also old age and love. Clichéd statements about the human being as such allowed the exhibition to subsume works of art from the most diverse geographical, cultural, and political contexts under a seemingly universal *condition humaine*. Thus, we read allegedly eternal truths such as: "Man is a social animal, and therefore group pictures are well-loved subjects"; "Man is an obsessive being"; "After Thanatos, Eros"; and, summing up the course of life: "Mother, nourishment, life, death." The result: the cultural-political specificity of the individual works was subordinated to a humanist-existentialist grand narrative. All that remained as a measure of the works' social reality were platitudes such as: "The Ukraine is a poor country, life is miserable; The population is growing old; Society punishes the law-breaker with prison or death." Lucinda Devlin's documentary photographs of U.S. execution sites, for example, were not illuminated in their political dimension but in their abstract generality: according to

79 ——— Inasmuch as it is the general ideology of the West, it can be called Occidentalism. Its necessary correlates (and products) are exoticism, primitivism, and Orientalism.

80 ——— Szeemann, "The Timeless, Grand Narration," xxv.

Szeemann, they showed “what [people] do to each other.”⁸¹ The fact that people are not even visible in the photos, where one could therefore perhaps delve a bit deeper, did not give the humanist discourse a moment’s pause. The concrete execution policy of the USA was universalized into the abstract problem of human cruelty. Similar neutralizing effects can be achieved by thematically or spatially combining political works with non-political ones—a depoliticizing strategy *d12* would take to perfection. In collaboration with the women’s rights group Women on Waves, which performs abortions on a ship outside the territorial waters of states where abortion is banned, Joep van Lieshout developed a mobile container with medical abortion devices. Szeemann’s comparison of that project with the globe-trotting helicopter trip of cosmetic dentist Michael Schmitz, who raises money worldwide for a children’s home in Africa, serves to equalize the political character of van Lieshout’s collaboration with Women on Waves. The distinction between a political/social intervention and a philanthropic spectacle goes by the wayside. By applying the standard of general humanity, the differences become blurred in the common category of “helping,” whose instruments can ultimately be placed on display: “In both of these cases the instrument of help is presented: the hospital container and the helicopter.”⁸²

Szeemann thus presented the global from a Eurocentric perspective in the unbroken guise of an exoticized “humanity” and without a nod to the history of imperialism, colonialism, decolonization, and recolonization. His successor, Francesco Bonami, on the other hand, could no longer wash his hands of these topics in such childlike innocence, as his Biennale immediately followed *D11*.

The only legitimate approach for a curator who cannot be a specialist for the entire world is to invite others who bring their specific expertise with them. Interestingly, following Enwezor’s example, Francesco Bonami did just that by inviting eleven other curators: Carlos Basualdo, Daniel Birnbaum, Catherine David, Massimiliano Gioni, Hou Hanru, Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Gabriel Orozco, Gilane Tawadros, Rikrit Tiravanija, and Igor Zabel. Co-curator Gilane Tawadros commented:

I think Francesco Bonami wanted to build on Documenta11, at least he conveyed to me that Documenta11 could signify a starting point. After that show, it had become more difficult for a single artistic director to present such a large exhibition.⁸³

81 ——— Ibid., xxii.

82 ——— Ibid., xx.

83 ——— “Erdrutsche können die Landschaft verändern,” interview with Gilane Tawadros, *Kunstforum International* 166 (August–October 2003): 41–43 (trans. JR).

Nevertheless, the Bonami model differed from that of *D11* because it was ultimately a kind of curatorial outsourcing. Not only was the totality of curators not understood as a team, as in the case of *D11*, but they operated in the manner of franchise entrepreneurs. What is more, it was as if the areas of responsibility obeyed geographical criteria, with sub-exhibitions on Africa by Tawadros, on the former Eastern Bloc by Zabel, on Latin America by Basualdo, on the “Middle East” by David, and on Asia by Hou Hanru.⁸⁴ By contrast, *D11* had avoided precisely that: the arrangement of the works according to geographical criteria and the delegation of geographical areas of responsibility to individual curators—not to mention taking their respective origins into account—since one of its consistent principles was to counteract overly hasty identitarian attributions.⁸⁵ Interestingly, ruangrupa’s decision to present artists in their artist list not according to the criteria of nationality or geographical location, but to that of time zones, stood in this tradition.

84 ——— This did not detract from the intrinsic political quality of some of these partial exhibitions. The political aspect peddled by the biennial directors was fulfilled particularly by David (*Contemporary Arab Representations*) and Basualdo (*The Structure of Survival*). The sections by Hou (*Zone of Urgency*) and Obrist/Nesbit/Tiravanija (*Utopia Station*), on the other hand, pursued the concept of (conscious or unconscious) conceptlessness, while Zabel (*Individual Systems*) adopted an approach based on relatively apolitical conceptual art: this resulted in an interesting tension between conceptual art and the concept of conceptlessness, but the analytical-political perspective—which is in need of a focus—fell by the wayside. (In *Utopia Station*, the political tended to appear in the guise of such ultimately ridiculous late-hippie works as Yoko Ono’s *Imagine Peace*.) The rather unspectacular *Everyday Altered* curated by Gabriel Orozco with Mexican artists and artists living in Mexico, was unfortunately marginalized by the dominant presence of *Utopia Station*.

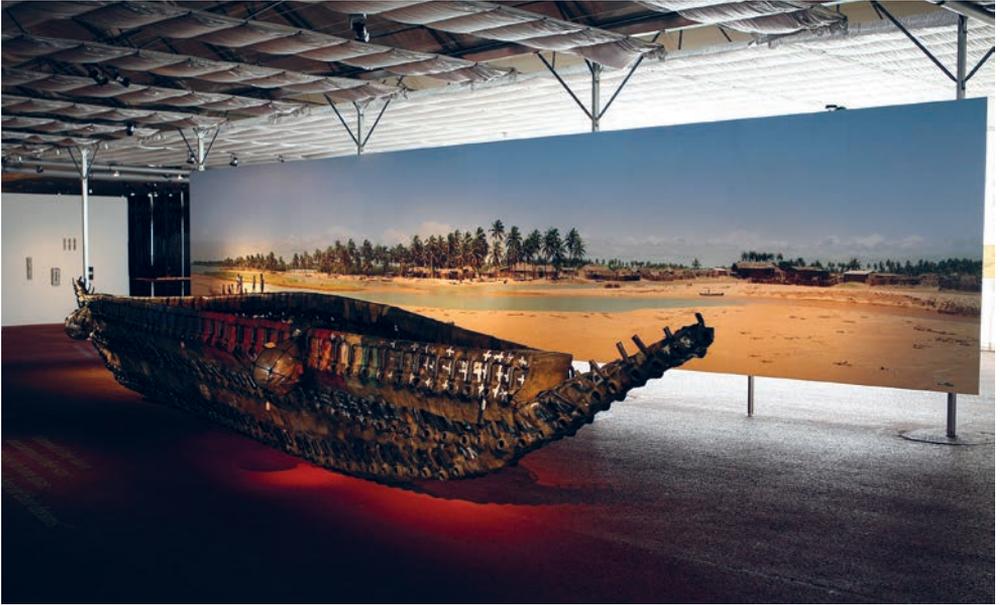
85 ——— If reflection on the postcolonial constellation was promoted at all under the overall conditions of the 50th Biennale, it was in the sub-exhibitions—for example, *Fault Lines* curated by Gilane Tawadros. Thus, in strident contrast to the large biennale catalogue, the *Fault Lines* catalogue featured not only contributions by such critical theorists as Stuart Hall and Achille Mbembe (in addition to the two *D11* curators Okwui Enwezor and Sarat Maharaj), but also excerpts from speeches by the African politicians Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdel-Nasser. This decision situated the artworks not only in a broader theoretical context such as that of cultural and postcolonial studies, but also in the explicitly political context of African liberation and emancipation movements—incidentally, in a manner not unrelated to that chosen by Enwezor for his exhibition *The Short Century*. In a sense, the sub-exhibitions of Tawadros, David, and Basualdo thus constituted a kind of post-*D11 en miniature* within the Biennale.

Once more, also regarding the postcolonial condition, *d12* with its romantic aesthetics, proved to be the outlier. That does not mean, however, that *d12* had now simply returned to *Magiciens de la terre* without further ado, because there is never a “back to square one” in hegemonic confrontations, only an institutional reintegration of the ruptures. Reintegration does not mean complete absorption. The ruptures continue to make themselves felt, even where their meaning is to be reversed. After *D11*, *d12* therefore also had to integrate non-Western art, and it did so with, among other things, the gesture of omitting the contributing artists’ native cities and countries from the exhibition labels for the first time. While this move anticipated *ruangrupa*’s decision to revert to time zones, the anti-national strategy was counteracted elsewhere, however, by a precise inversion of *D11*’s postcolonial strategy. For Okwui Enwezor, the colonialist explorer posed in relation to non-Western art was to be avoided at all costs. Indeed, the idea of a “non-Western artist” was almost a *contradictio in adjecto* for Enwezor—or at least a Western projection, given that a significant number of such supposedly “non-Western artists” actually live in New York and other Western metropolises. The Western search for an ostensibly authentic non-Western art beyond the bounds of the Western art market’s circulation system runs the risk of imagining an autochthonous “Other” equally ostensible in nature. For this reason, one of the main aims of *D11* was to avoid the traps of a new primitivism of the kind that had characterized *Magiciens de la terre*. The two Europeans Buerger and Noack, on the other hand, joyfully embarked again on the old search for the supposedly authentic, non-Western art: many names unknown in the West (if not in their own countries) had been discovered, they said.

This return to the colonial explorer gesture continues in many of the catalogue texts, which abound with discursive figures of ethnology, culturalism, and authenticity. One of these figures is that of the immemorably distant, millennia-old civilization. Thus we are informed that, in the case of Sakarin Krue-On’s terraced rice fields at Wilhelmshöhe Castle, European architecture meets the “millennia old practice of wet rice cultivation,” as if there were no rice fields to be found in Italy just a few hundred kilometers south of Kassel.⁸⁶ Similarly, it says of Romuald Hazoumè’s work: “If you’re part of a four-thousand-year-old African culture, you don’t need Western art history.”⁸⁷ This is not only an insult to Hazoumè, whose work is thus localized in the Stone Age, but also symptomatic of *d12*’s treatment of so-called non-Western art. *d12* culturalized, exoticized, and authenticized such works by way of dissociation from the Western art discourse. J.D. ‘Okhai Ojeikere’s photos of Nigerian hairstyles, to cite another example, are introduced in the catalogue as follows:

86 ——— *documenta 12 Catalogue*, 274.

87 ——— *Ibid.*, 142.



Romuald Hazoumé, *Dream*, 2007. Installation, *documenta 12*, Kassel 2007.
Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

Hairstyling was long considered an incomparable form of artistic expression. When wigs were introduced in the 1950s and '60s it seemed this cultural heritage would be lost [...]. Thanks to his personal passion and insight, 'Okhai Ojeikere's work provide a testament to a culture that is constantly changing.

And the author does not forget to note that it is a “unique work of great beauty.”⁸⁸ What such texts present us with is the nostalgic lament of the Western ethnologist who searches for a “four-thousand-year-old culture” in Africa, only to realize with regret that times change, even in Africa. And whereas—true to the curators' de-textualization strategy—most of the political works in the exhibition had to go without texts, even where artists would have liked texts; 'Okhai Ojeikere's is accompanied by a wall text containing detailed ethnographic descriptions. From this we can only conclude that, while political, historical, or social contextualization was undesirable at *d12*, culturalist and exoticist contextualization was always welcome.

But those who preach meditative “immediacy” in dealing with non-Western works while at the same time withholding information only create projection surfaces for the primitivist, perhaps even racist fanta-

88 ——— Ibid., 96.

sies of the visitors. In the absence of any critical discursivation of the works (let alone of the exhibition as a whole), there is nothing left to stop visitors from indulging in such projections—thanks to Buerger’s decontextualization strategy. Where the artwork is simply permitted to speak for itself, there is no unbiased conversation between the work and the viewer because there is no neutrality in the hegemonic field. Letting things speak for themselves always means allowing the hegemonic formation to speak. A Western, Eurocentric, and occasionally racist dispositive is thus invoked and constructed not only in the exhibition, but also in the minds of the visitors. If the “aesthetic education” held so sacrosanct by Buerger means that people should feel the art sensorily, it is to be feared that, in the absence of any critical framing, the German or European audience will merely feel their own culturalized racism.

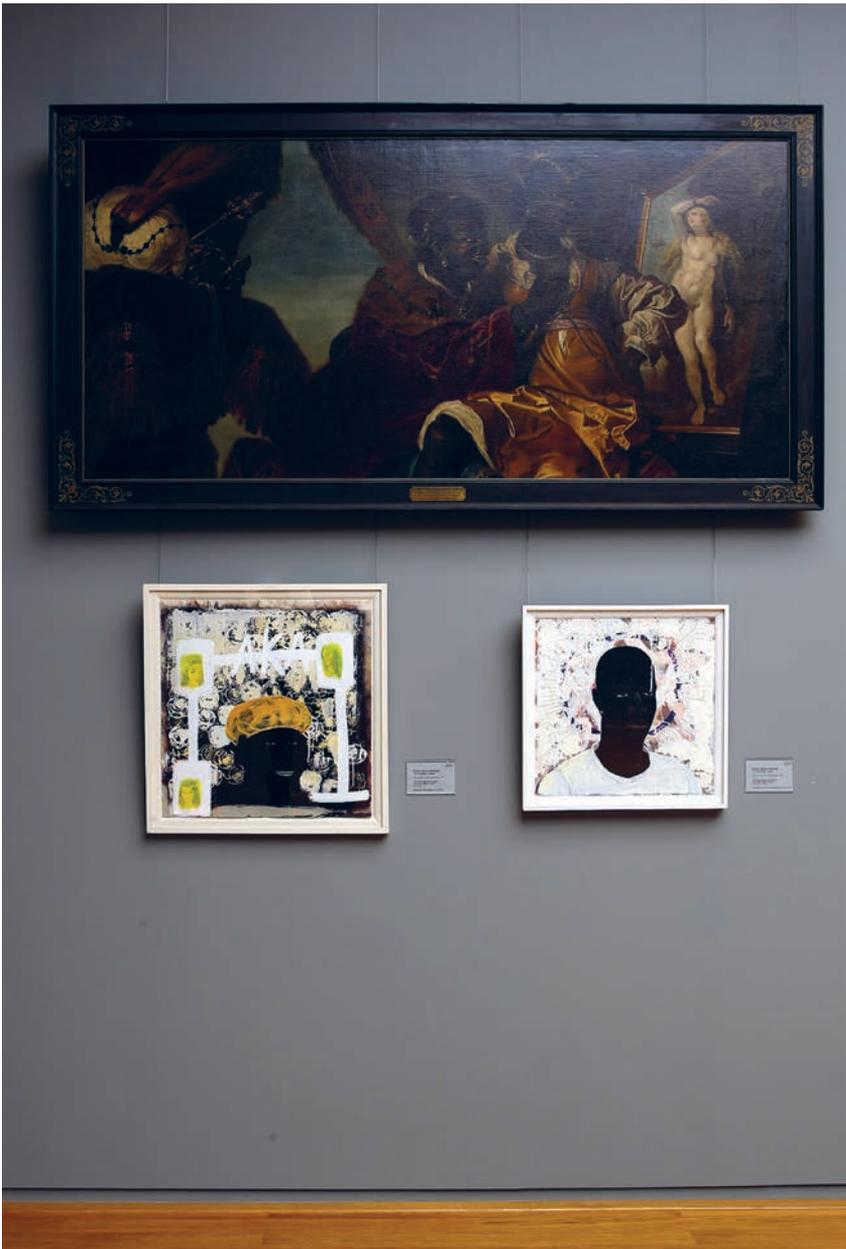
d12 was thus marked by the return of primitivism under new hegemonic circumstances. Whereas it integrated non-Western art in a seemingly progressive, egalitarian way, it believed it could afford to ignore post-colonial theory’s (and museology’s) critique of the Western perspective. This is most obvious in the treatment of the works of Kerry James Marshall, which de-contextualization reduced to quasi-primitivist representations of “black faces” and “black bodies” and thus primitivized.⁸⁹ There is no mention of how Marshall’s works relate to the civil rights movement; instead, in his catalogue entry on the artist, Buerger provides only formal analyses of the “promiscuous patchwork” of this “great painter.”⁹⁰

This primitivization of the works on view went hand in hand with the reproduction of exoticist and Orientalist fantasy worlds. The exhibition was haunted, for example, by the imagery of the world fairs. The newly built Aue Pavilion was said to have originally been inspired by London’s Crystal Palace (until someone realized that a structure made of pure glass was not necessarily conducive to the preservation of artworks in the middle of summer). Manet’s painting, *Vue de l’Exposition Universelle de Paris 1867*, which was presented as a postcard reproduction in the Neue Galerie, must also be understood as a programmatic statement with which *d12* situated itself in the tradition of world exhibitions.⁹¹ And finally, at the re-

89 ——— In the case of the so-called intervention in the art-historical collection of Wilhelmshöhe Castle, Marshall’s works were also hung below two paintings by Karel van Mander III. Owing to the complete absence of any discursivation, this resulted in a simple mimetic doubling of “black faces”—and by no means in a serious commentary on the colonial disposition of European art.

90 ——— *Ibid.*, 134.

91 ——— Terms derived from exoticist and Orientalist traditions were no problem anyway, so the German name for the circles of chairs reserved for discussions with the educational staff was “palm groves.” Orientalist metaphors return where there is a conscious departure from the post-colonial theorizing of recent decades.



Kerry James Marshall, *The Lost Boys: A.K.A. Baby Brother* (left) and *The Lost Boys: A.K.A. Black Johnny* (right), 1993. Collage, *documenta 12*, Kassel 2007.
 Karl van Mander III, *Hydaspes und Persina vor dem Bild der Andromeda*, ca. 1640. Painting, Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel 2007.
 Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.



Luis Camnitzer, *The Uruguayan Torture Series*, 1983. Photography (detail), *Documenta 11*, Kassel 2002. Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.



Cildo Meireles, *Disappearing/Disappeared Element*, 2002. Intervention, *Documenta 11*, Kassel 2002. Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

quest of the artist Ai Weiwei 1,001 people were flown in from China under the condition that they not cross the Kassel city limits. The artist's motivations aside, the question arises as to whether it occurred to anyone on the documenta team that it was longstanding colonial practice to transport people from the colonies to world exhibitions to serve as a spectacle for the European public. Considering the media's delight in exoticism, it is hardly surprising that this "cross-cultural understanding" project, as the artist himself put it, was one of the most successful of *d12*. For what we had here was a peaceful exoticized "Other" that had the great advantage of being exposed to general observation in an extended exhibition space—the city of Kassel—, only to be transported back home after some time.

Against this background, Buerger's leitmotif of the "migration of form" also appears in a different light. In fact, *d12* was not so much about a "migration of forms" as about a formalization of migration. Buerger's guiding principle—that every content and every context must be overlaid with the "sensuous experience" of superficial formal analogies—has disastrous effects here: migration was formalized, aestheticized, depoliti-

cized, and ultimately transformed into a spectacle. A comparison with the diametrically opposed strategy of *D11* makes this all the clearer: where Buerger celebrated a formalism that turned into primitivism, Enwezor relied on conceptualism precisely to escape primitivism. The work of Hanne Darboven and Bernd and Hilla Becher, the conceptual art of Maria Eichhorn, etc., appeared side by side with examples by political conceptual artists of Latin America such as Luis Camnitzer, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles as well as the works of African artists like Frédéric Bruly Bouabré. This served to undermine the primitivist, if not racist, cliché that art elsewhere is less conceptual and more “emotional” in favor of positioning African art as conceptual art.⁹² The formalism of *d12*, on the other hand, led to the exact opposite by formalizing and primitivizing non-formalist African art:

After all the discussions of the last twenty years about who represents what, the retreat to private interest in the comparison of forms takes on a different significance. The Buergerian highlighting of “aesthetic experience” ... becomes problematic in a curatorial habitus that culinarizes cultural and artistic productions of diverse regions and contexts from a meta perspective like a creative kitchen serving us mozzarella with black pudding because their forms have similar curves.⁹³

92 ——— See Eriberto Eulisse, ed., *Afriche, Diaspore, Ibridi: Il concettualismo come strategia dell'arte africana contemporanea* (San Marino: AIEP, 2003).

93 ——— Kravagna, “Betrachter- und Formschicksale in Kassel,” 205 et seq. (trans. JR). And he adds the observation “that here all the pre-modern works of art and all the cultural artefacts come from Asia and Africa, but—as in every ethnological museum—not from Europe. By way of complement, the numerous retrospectives on the history of the avant-garde concentrate exclusively on Europe and America.” *Ibid.*, 206.

The Art-Theory Interface (Third Shift)

The Venice Biennale that followed *D11* continued the political rupture marked by *dX* and *D11* above all on the rhetorical level. And yet something had “stuck,” if you will; *D11* had lent expression to a canon shift that could not be ignored. So, the art field had to absorb this shift in some way, which often means: hegemonically *transform* it in the Gramscian sense of the term. The Bonami Biennale, immediately following *D11*, transformed the shift into a kind of Alice-in-Wonderland version of politics and global conflicts—and thus neutralized it (if not completely). The Bonami Biennale was characterized by a constant dichotomy between assertion and denial. A political concern or theme was asserted one moment, and precisely its political aspect denied the next.⁹⁴ Although it felt bound by the imperative of political relevance symbolized by *D11*, the Biennale nevertheless tried to escape it. The transformation work—or territorial gains—of the guardians of the humanist art canon is evident not least in the fact that the imperative of political relevance remained present in the background in the further Biennales but became increasingly easy to defuse. Even a relatively political curator such as Rosa Martínez, who curated the 51st Biennale of 2005 with María de Corral, welcomed the poetic at the Arsenale and flirted, albeit critically, with the leading figure of the “romantic traveller.”⁹⁵ And in the Italian Pavilion, art was reduced (as is so often

94 ——— This structure is evident in the programmatic texts and statements as well as in many of the “political” works themselves. A good example is the work of Colin Darke in Bonami’s sub-exhibition *Clandestine*. Darke printed illegible text fragments from Marx’s *Capital* on all kinds of flyers, beer mats, etc. This not only robs the text of *Capital* of its meaning but also turns it into an empty but conspicuous signal of “politics”—albeit a “politics” without politics.

95 ——— Martínez remarked self-critically: “The biennale model offers a wonderful chance to analyze the new concept of internationality and to redraw topographies of alterity. However, the illusion of creating a temporary global *agora* cannot hide the existence of a new cultural and technological apartheid in which the poor are rendered ever more

the case in the bourgeois art *dispositif*), to a matter of experience: “The Experience of Art.” Robert Storr adopted a similar approach for the 52nd Biennale in 2007. Even if many rightly saw this Biennale as having reached a curatorial nadir (which coincided with the nadir of *documenta*), the exhibition in the Arsenale surprised its visitors in the frontmost rooms with a whole series of political works. Up to the 2022 Venice Biennale exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani, who made of point of showing ninety percent female artists, it seems as if the Biennale experiences a constant back and forth between politicizing gestures and depoliticizing ones. While the integration of political art is regularly seen as imperative, at the same time—and this is where the work of transformism comes in—it is often times genrefied and existentialized. An anti-intellectual discourse of experience and sensory perception of the kind that has always been formative for the dominant-cultural bourgeois conception of art takes care of the rest. It is in this idea, that art is above all a matter of “sensory experience”, that we can discern the greatest programmatic continuities in the attempts at gentrifying the political. “Think with the senses, feel with the mind” was Storr’s motto—and it was one that picked up where the previous biennials had left off and could thus have applied to Buerger’s *d12* and Christov-Bakargiev’s *dOCUMENTA (13)* as well. Loosely translated, it means: think with your gut and feel with your head.

This not only represents a revival of the arch-bourgeois idea of art as a means of edification. Such mottos also testify to an anti-intellectualism typical of the art field. Whereas *dX*, *D11* and *documenta 14* were branded by the critics as being hyper-intellectual, at *d12* and, to a lesser degree, the *dOCUMENTA (13)*, anti-intellectualism sprouted new buds. The cognitive exploration of theory is apparently not supposed to get in the way of the “aesthetic experience.” As early as *dX*, for example, Thomas Wagner had declared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

Here, however, catharsis can only be attained by those who are prepared to read Foucault and Lacan and who, moreover, are willing to adopt the interpretation the chief ideologists of *documenta X* untiringly ram down their throats. Critical thinking that arrives at conclusions different from these is proscribed to the same degree as artistic works that do not fit into the prepared mold, which dictates heterogeneity, political relevance, and an anti-commercial demeanor.⁹⁶

dependent.” Rosa Martínez, *Always a Little Further*, exh. cat., 51st International Art Exhibition (Venice: Marsilio, 2005).

96 ————— Thomas Wagner, *Licht im Schacht von Babel*, 92.

We ask ourselves what art the art critic was advocating here when he claims that David demanded heterogeneity, political relevance and anti-commercialism. Was he advocating homogeneous, politically irrelevant, and purely commercial art? To say nothing of the fact that the resentment targeting well-known French theorists here can also apply to other forms of theory. The same *FAZ* critic later described D11 as a “travelling advanced seminar in which a small troop of experts politically correctly tutor everyone who wasn’t paying attention when ‘cultural studies’ was on the curriculum, or who simply refuse to submit to this omnipresent paradigm’s claim to power.”⁹⁷ The concern, therefore, is not so much with the question as to which theory is seeping into the art field; theory in and of itself is already suspect because, in the art field—to return to Storr’s motto—you have to use your senses to think and surrender the mind to feeling and intuition.

A symptomatologic reading of such critiques, however, would detect strong signs of a hegemonic shift, to which conservative critics respond with a feeling of unease and a certain helplessness, concealed behind aggression. Here, the anti-hegemonic forces are accused of having long been omnipotent (while the accusers portray themselves as being ostracized and persecuted). The critic cited above, for example, claimed that, with his approach, Enwezor was following “the present-day mainstream, purely and simply. And the only art he considers contemporaneous is that which lends itself to being interlinked with topics circulating in certain milieus and their debates.”⁹⁸ He goes on to say that “the outcome is a new form of hegemony.”⁹⁹ It never ceases to be amazing how precisely these mainstream discussions—even where they do nothing but reproduce the organic ideology of the art field—pick up on hegemonic shifts and, in this case, even use the correct vocabulary to denote them.¹⁰⁰ The problem, however, is that *D11* did not represent a new form of hegemony, but rather gave expression to a break in the hegemonic formation of the dominating culture, while at the same time continuing unerringly to work on the shift of that formation.

This break—or one of the breaks—was very evident on the theory axis. Naturally, documenta exhibitions were never entirely devoid of theory, even if someone like Rudi Fuchs made a great effort to purify docu-

97 ——— Ibid., 122.

98 ——— Ibid., 125.

99 ——— Ibid., 126.

100 ——— The blithe use of the term “ideology” may be confusing. Let us define ideology here as all praxes and discourses which repudiate the power-based, contingent, and nevertheless (or for that very reason) in the broadest sense political structuring of the space of society, thus at the same time denying their own positions within and perspectives on that space.

menta of all theory (as well as politics). Even Haftmann's Occidental­ist conception of a universal language of the West is a kind of theory. And, of course, *DII* did not represent the first integration of theory and scholarship into the art field; after all, the "accompanying symposium" has meanwhile become a ubiquitous element in the exhibition context. Nevertheless, *DII* was more strongly discourse-oriented than all other comparable events in the art field, even more strongly than Catherine David's "theory documenta." To prove that claim, however, we must first understand what constituted the measures by which David heightened the emphasis on theory.

Three formats were used: a series of magazines, a series of daily lectures, and a theoretical publication accompanying the exhibition. The magazine series, entitled *documents*, was concerned among other things with issues of identity in the age of "mondialization." As a kind of preparatory instruction, it anticipated the actual *dX* exhibition, providing insight into David's documenta philosophy and manner of working, which was based on the montage concept. This "cinematic" concept created documenta virtually as though at an editing table:

Like the film medium, documenta is to be conceived as a slow and patient montage job: on the basis of a relatively rough script, individual sequences are processed, the final montage ultimately emerging from an internal logic.¹⁰¹

The publication of these working papers in advance was intended as a means of recording documenta's collage process as it evolved. Once the exhibition got underway, a similar forum for theory—more intense than virtually anything that had preceded it—unfolded in the *100 Days—100 Guests* program.¹⁰² Finally, on more than 800 pages, the accompanying book *Politics/Poetics* extended the montage principle to cover the entire postwar period. According to the editors, the book represented the endeavor "to stake out a political context for the interpretation of artistic activity at the end of the twentieth century."¹⁰³ The assembled material was not conceived of "as encyclopaedic, but rather is a polemic reading of historical and cultural interrelationships: certain lines of aesthetic production and political aspirations are pursued which are capable of serving in the necessary contemporary debate as an instrument of productive

101 ——— Catherine David, "Editorial," *documenta X documents 1*, ed. documenta GmbH (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1996), 1.

102 ——— A further module of *dX* as a space gradually developing and taking shape over the course of the 100 days was the hybrid workspace in the Orangerie.

103 ——— documenta GmbH, ed., *Politics/Poetics* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1997), 24.

analysis.”¹⁰⁴ Within this framework, the postwar period was accentuated by four significant dates: 1945 as the year of the founding of Europe’s postwar democracies; 1967 as the one in which the wave of protests and antiimperialist struggles in the “third world” began to rise; 1978 as that in which the restructuring and flexibilization of global capitalism got underway; and 1989 as that marking the end of actually existing Socialism. Materials in a wide range of genres and formats were assembled in keeping with the cinematic principle of the montage, and the result was a product resembling a large video clip.¹⁰⁵ This theoretical/journalistic stream of consciousness was interrupted at certain key points—for example 1967 and 1978—by “picture books” produced by *dX* artists.

The break, on the art/theory-axis, with the previous *documenta IX*, curated by Jan Hoet, is obvious. As Panos Kompatsiaris observed, the catalogue of *dIX* was conventional in descriptively referencing the artworks.

In contrast, 5 years later, the book of *dX*, a weighty volume of 830 pages titled ‘Politics and Poetics’, transgressed from its usual role as an illustrative supplement to become a literary performance in itself. Texts that referred to variations of Marxism and critical discourses other than art literally skyrocketed. The publication included a ground-breaking selection of politically engaged texts from authors of diverse social, scholarly and cultural backgrounds.¹⁰⁶

The *Politics/Poetics* book of *dX* functioned “as an object that performs a political statement.”¹⁰⁷ While this observation is correct, in comparison and contrast to the *D11* approach, David’s genre-transcending montage principle is nonetheless fraught with a number of decisive strategic disadvantages, as seen, for example, in its treatment of theory. In addition to various original texts (and interviews conducted specifically for this purpose) appearing integrally, the book contains above all a myriad of theoretical “sound bites”—or “theory bites”—ranging in length from one paragraph to several pages. Theoretical texts by such authors as Édouard Glis-

104 ——— Ibid.

105 ——— It was explained as follows: “To do justice to the complex relationships between specific art practices and socio-political situations which are both local and global at once, the form favoured for this book is that of the montage, which permits a productive confrontation between literature and journalistic essays, artworks and documentary photographs, and between critical commentaries on specific historical, philosophical or social themes.” *Politics/Poetics*, 25.

106 ——— Panos Kompatsiaris, *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 50.

107 ——— Ibid.

sant, Jürgen Habermas, Edward Said, Claude Lefort, and James Clifford were included only in excerpt form, thus essentially being subordinated to the underlying logic of the art field, while their own specific logic—that of theoretical knowledge production—was not accepted as such. At best, these text fragments can be understood as extended footnotes referring the reader to the integral works. Somewhat less benevolently, they could be measured against the yardstick of their purely iconic quality, which corresponds to the logic of the art field in that the symbolic impact of the famous theorist's name has always tended to outshine what the theory was actually saying.¹⁰⁸

DII took an entirely different approach in its treatment of theory. It granted the specific format of scholarly or theoretical knowledge production its own birthright and integrally printed the texts by the authors invited to the symposia. The results of the first four platforms were not collaged but published in their entirety in four clearly structured theory/discussion volumes. What led to this decision is presumably the fact that the chief aim *DII* had set itself was to offer a set of diagnostic tools. Despite a certain voluntarist bias, the instruments of theory do not work if they are arbitrarily disassembled—to say nothing of being literally smashed to bits. When that is the case, they have a warped impact, or none at all. *DII*, on the contrary, was conceived as an instrument of cognition which accepted various forms of knowledge production—philosophical, scholarly, artistic—in their heterogeneity. The apparently rigid segregation of the first four platforms from the fifth was therefore in no way illogical.¹⁰⁹ It testified to a recognition of the fact that an exhibition in

108 ——— With regard to the very different strategic handling of theory cultivated by *dX* and *DII*, Amina Haase got to the heart of the matter in *Kunstforum*, when she wrote: “David’s theoretical tendencies may have paved the way for Enwezor’s platforms 1 to 4, but it is almost as if *DII*’s platform 5 turned all of *dX*-based theories topsy turvy. Five years ago, the philosophers and theorists—primarily of French origin, from Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze to Levi Strauss [sic!] and Godard plus Marx and Freud—remained on paper, as theory suppliers, so to speak. Now, art is revealing itself as a concrete extension of ideas—also the ideas of very different thinkers, for example Frantz Fanon, Antonio Gramsci, Guy Debord, Giorgio Agamben, Henri Bergson, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.” Amine Haase, “Keine Zukunft ohne Vergangenheit,” in *Kunstforum* 161 (August–October 2002): 60 (trans. xx – hier bitte den Namen oder die Initiale des Übersetzers des Beitrags in OnCurating Nr. 8 einsetzen).

109 ——— While it is true that a few isolated workshops were offered over the course of the documenta summer—for example with Fareed Armaly, Walid Raad, Joan Jonas and Andreja Kulunčić—as well as discussions with Okwui Enwezor and a few individual artists, the *DII* theory program was constituted primarily by the first four platforms.

Kassel was not capable of the same accomplishments as a political convention in New Delhi or one on the theory of democracy in Vienna or Berlin. Yet precisely such events were all to be integral parts of a single project—*D11*.

The first four platforms accordingly offered lecture, conference, and workshop formats in which various aspects of the postcolonial constellation could be investigated and debated. In this context, various perspectives—general as well as specialized—were taken. We can cite the Vienna/Berlin *Democracy Unrealized* platform as an example. This platform hosted guests from such areas as philosophy, political theory, legal theory, economics, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and art theory—among them Stuart Hall, Bhikhu Parek, Immanuel Wallerstein, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Enrique Dussel, Homi Bhabha, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri.

At the same time, activist and artistic-activist praxes, for example *kein mensch ist illegal*, *Arquitectos Sin Fronteras*, the Roma gypsy activist Sean Nazerali, or the U.S. American human rights advocate Mark Potok, were also given a forum. In Vienna, in conjunction with the immediately preceding protests against the participation of the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria in that country's government, the decision was made to invite the anti-right-wing *Demokratische Offensive* group.¹¹⁰

These meetings can accordingly only be referred to as *theory* platforms if the term theory is very broadly defined. Actually, platforms 1–4 were to be understood less as traditional theory events than as platforms for political debate and controversy over a certain pre-established theme and in various media, among others that of scholarship and theory. The fact that the classical formats of the lecture, the symposium and, finally, the symposium publication were chosen to this end, was brought about in my opinion by the fact that an avant-gardist breaking of institutional molds was not a key aspect of the *D11* strategy (as it had been in the first Szeemann concept or, as an unintentional parody of the latter, at the 50th Biennale's *Utopia Station*), but rather institutional decentralization. Just as the exhibition platform deliberately granted the individual artworks their own space, the theory platforms granted their guests a certain degree of respect (to use an old-fashioned word)—namely, respect for the specific nature of knowledge formation each of them represented. Indeed, the recognition of heterogeneity and specific individual characteristics and qualities—whether the specificity of the artworks or the specific thematic competence of the guests from the area of scholarship and theory—was a major distinguishing factor of *D11*. The adherence to “classical” for-

110 ——— All of these contributions are to be found in Okwui Enwezor et al., eds., *Demokratie als unvollendeter Prozeß. Documenta11_Plattform1* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

mats, for example, the relatively classical design of the Kassel exhibition or the classical symposium structure, should therefore not be misunderstood as a simple affirmation of institutional conventions. On the contrary, the classical institutional form was used deliberately to furnish the content-related shift of canon with symbolic legitimacy. The likewise necessary deconstruction of institutional form, on the other hand, was not achieved by breaking through institutional boundaries with a huge “happening” (which would have led only to the sensationalization of *documenta* and, ultimately, to a devaluation of the non-Western works included in it—a danger that *documenta fifteen* has to face), but by deterritorializing the institution temporally, spatially, and thematically.¹¹¹

On the theory axis, *d12*—for its part—provided a good example of what I call the strategy of transformism in the art field. A transformist strategy does not roundly reject certain anti-hegemonic shifts, but transforms them in such a way as to no longer stand in the way of a hegemonic consensus—which we had also termed the “organic ideology” of the art field. Despite the anti-intellectualism of an artistic director who was looking for “aesthetic experience,” who prized immediacy, wanted to rehabilitate “beauty,” and put out a so-called “picture book” without any text whatsoever, after *dX* and *D11*, no curator could afford to stage a *documenta* without at least a minimal degree of intellectual or theoretical engagement. Certain leitmotifs were decided on, of which many—such as the decline of the middle classes—were quickly abandoned again. What remained until the end were three questions of a markedly vague nature: *Is modernity our antiquity? What is bare life? and What is to be done?*

To the extent that the process of responding to these questions was to take place in the medium of theory, an international magazine consortium—linked with the preceding *D11* and at the same time not linked with it—was entrusted with that process. The idea itself—of forming a transnational network of magazines in the art/theory/politics nexus—was undoubtedly the most interesting to come out of *d12*, and it carried the philosophy of *D11* forward, though this continuation was not openly

111 ——— The comparison with other exhibition strategies is also worthwhile in terms of how they handled theory. With the 49th Biennale, for example, Szeemann had no intention of concerning himself with theory. Theory, rather, like everything else, was universalized into something common to all mankind: it became “thought.” That didn’t mean that there were philosophers there, “thinking” in public, but rather “thought”—again like everything else—was *exhibited* in objectified form: at a central location, Szeemann staged what he referred to as the “platform of thought.” He assembled a number of sculptures, both secular and religious, of different periods and regions of the world, and placed them around Rodin’s *Thinker*. Once again, Szeemann’s plateau inadvertently became a “plateau of exoticism” on which the objects from faraway places circled around the figure of the European “thinker.”



John McCracken, *Tantric*, 1971. Painting, *documenta 12*, Kassel 2007.
Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

acknowledged. In its realization, however, the project proved problematic, since it legitimized the wholesale “outsourcing” of theory—indeed, of intellectuality. The interconnections *DII* had set out to create between art, theory, and politics were stunted, and the theoretical preoccupation with political issues was assigned to subcontractors all over the world. They were put in charge of text, theory, and program production, which the artistic director and curator were either unwilling or unable to handle. The director’s team was relieved of the work of furnishing its vague leitmotifs with contents that went beyond mere associations and analogies. They had thus succeeded in involving intellectuals from all over the world to compensate for the lack of intelligence at the site of the exhibition, without having to provide anything—money, resources, et cetera—at all in return, even if they had been able to, which they weren’t. It is accordingly no wonder that many of the participating magazines were reminded of neoliberal outsourcing models and ultimately felt they had been given the run-around.¹¹² The result was three *documenta* magazine editions which made an honest endeavor to squeeze something relevant and meaningful out of the curators’ ambiguous ideas, and nevertheless ended up merely supplying the intellectual fig leaf for a thoroughly anti-intellectual exhibition.

¹¹² ——— See Kati Morawek and Beat Weber, “Die Akte *documenta*,” *malmoë* 38 (2007): 24.

The anti-intellectualism of *d12* was also manifest in another peculiarity. For behind all the talk about form and beauty, a more fundamental discourse seemed to be shaping *d12*: the return of the esoteric. Esoteric in the Buergelian sense is exemplified by Poul Gernes's psychedelic decorative art of the 1960s or John McCracken's *Mandala* paintings of the early 1970s, as well as by the latter's metaphysical sculptures. Here, art was returning to its roots in religion or, more specifically, neo-heathenism. As Buergel explained:

In his mandalas, all created in the autumn after the "summer of love", McCracken touches base with the spiritual font of artistic creation. Mandalas, with their two axes of symmetry, are representatives of holistic notions, but they are not solely images to gaze at in wonderment or when getting high but also forms stemming from an ancient religious practice found, for example, in Tibetan Buddhism: painting as meditations. Enough ink has been spilt on the subject of the esoteric currents in the anti-Vietnam movement. However, these esoteric currents, from the French Symbolists to anthroposophy, have always also been an integral part of modern abstraction. They admonish the re-enchantment of that world so thoroughly stripped of magic by the capitalist rationality of the Industrial Revolution.¹¹³

The last sentence reveals that Buergel would like to see esotericism as a form of anti-rational "critique," with which he affiliates himself curatorially with his exhibition. The quotation is therefore not to be understood as a description of esotericism in modern art in general, or of the mandala paintings in particular, but also as Buergel's and Noack's "own program." It is as though documenta provided Buergel with a stage for fantasizing about holism (thus the mere associations, since in a holistic universe everything is connected to everything else), about "ancient forms" (thus the many pre-modern exhibition objects), about magic and the quasi-religious "re-enchantment" of the world (thus the return of the [John McCracken] mandala and, as Robert Fleck pointed out, the [Churchill Madikida] cross at *d12*)—all dipped in a regressive discussion about the "beautiful." What ultimately betrays itself behind Buergel's formalism and aestheticism is a spiritualist and esoteric irrationality which permits him to shake off every text, every true criticism and every instance of politics in the art field. In the end, the transformations which were to be brought about by *d12* in the hegemonic structure of the art field—aided by strategies of decontextualization, formalization, and aestheticization (not to forget spiritualization)—add up to a project of curatorial anti-Enlightenment.

113 ——— *documenta 12 Catalogue*, 88.

In some ways, *DOCUMENTA (13)*, which admittedly is a much more ambivalent case, shared Buerger's interest in the esoteric, albeit in a more fashionable way. I have already pointed out that Christov-Bakargiev's incantation of holism and reconciliation with the universe has a quite esoteric ring to it. Introducing the assembly of texts which, with characteristic modesty, she entitled *The Book of Books*, Christov-Bakargiev displays a stark anti-intellectual sentiment. Approvingly, she quotes Rudolph Arnheim to the effect that "he went against the excess of art criticism and theory ('Art may seem to be in danger of being drowned by talk. Rarely are we presented with a new specimen of what we are willing to accept as genuine art'), adding 'We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses. Concept is divorced from percept, and thought moves among abstractions.'" And she goes on saying: "These words might well be used today, in an era of excess instrumental theory, of flows of information and immateriality."¹¹⁴ Here, the curator comes dangerously close to some of the art critics who do not even bother hiding their anti-intellectual resentment.

Contrary to the impression given by its artistic director in her programmatic statement, *DOCUMENTA (13)* was not at all devoid of theory. *The Book of Books* assembled the notebooks of the *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts* publications series that contained quite substantial theoretical contributions. The exhibition was accompanied by a lecture program and an artists' congress with contributions by, among others, Georges Didi-Huberman, and keynote lectures by luminaries such as W.J.T. Mitchell. It was even accompanied by philosophy seminars led by Christoph Menke. The canon shift toward theory, instigated by *dX* and fostered by *D11*, could not easily be ignored or reversed even. Similarly, the artistic endeavor of *documenta 14* was bound up with an intellectual and theoretical endeavor: the journal *South as a State of Mind*, founded in Athens in 2002 by Marina Fokidis, produced four special issues for *documenta 14*, and the public program, curated by Paul B. Preciado, was an intellectual endeavor in its own right.

In all these cases, the engagement with particular topics in the medium of theory played an important preparatory or accompanying role for the actual exhibition. Interestingly, this can hardly be said about *documenta fifteen*. Not that the latter is anti-theoretical; it simply does not care so much about it. Comparing its publication outlets with the ones of its forerunners, it becomes evident that the four publications that came out in June 2022—a handbook (basically the catalogue), a "family guide," a magazine that presents the core ideas of lumbung, and an anthology of

114 ——— Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," *The Book of Books*, 38.

literary texts—fulfill a different role compared to earlier editions of *documenta*. It is quite characteristic of *ruangrupa*'s focus on infrastructure and resources that, in promoting these publications, little was said about their actual content, but, comparatively, quite a lot was said about the way in which they were produced according to the principles of collectivity, sustainability (100% recycled paper with certified color), and shared resources. While *documenta fifteen* certainly has some kind of “philosophy,” sedimented in its vocabulary, it does not seem to be in need of a particular theory or theories in the plural. It remains to be seen whether *documenta fifteen* thus announces a larger and enduring shift with regard to the art/theory nexus—a break with a tradition that goes back to David's *dX* and, to stronger or lesser degree, has characterized all *documenta* shows since 1997—, or whether a *documenta* exhibition without much theory will turn out to be an anomaly.

Educational Strategies (Fourth Shift)

In attributing high importance to education, ruangrupa—who have turned the Fridericianum into a “school”—do continue a tradition that started with Catherine David’s show. As they explained in an interview:

We consider education, or knowledge production and dissemination, to be embedded within, not outside of, the collaborators we are working with to imagine and realize Documenta 15. Education should not be a plug-in to an exhibition, or an afterthought only to be taken care of after the framing of the exhibition is decided. In order to warm visitors up to this idea, we are playing with the idea of treating Fridericianum, what many consider to be the central venue of every edition of Documenta, as a school – again, for lack of a better word. We want to challenge the museum’s architecture by turning it into something more dynamic where interaction, domestic lives, and storing knowledge can be facilitated.

No doubt, turning the architectural centerpiece of documenta into something like a school was a radical move. But *dX* already showed a deep interest not only in the business as usual of unavoidable guided tours, but in a more deconstructive understanding of education or “mediation,” as it resonates in the German word “*Ver-mittlung*.”¹¹⁵ Also with Okwui Enwezor, art education was considered to be an intrinsic part of *D11* in the tradition of critical pedagogy (influenced by the work of bell hooks and Stuart Hall, among others). Education was of such central importance for *D11* that it was even referred to internally as “Platform6.”¹¹⁶ I will return to

115 ——— Gila Kolb, Nora Sternfeld: “‘Glauben Sie mir. Kein Wort.’ Die Entwicklung der Kunstvermittlung zwischen *documenta X* und *documenta 14*,” *documenta studien* #6 (May 2019), https://documenta-studien.de/media/documenta_studien_6_Gila_Kolb__Nora_Sternfeld_DE.pdf.

116 ——— The first experimental approaches to teaching the public about art can be traced back to the artist and theorist Bazou Brock—his Visitors’

it below. Roger M. Buergel's *d12* also granted education a key position, and in fact elevated it to the status of a leitmotif. Yet, from *d12* to *documenta 14*, a certain ambivalence can be detected with respect to education. It is as if artistic directors felt compelled to underline that education, as important as it is, will never manage to touch at art's secrets. Hence, in Buergel's curatorial discourse, education underwent a clear transformation in the dominant-cultural sense. The third leitmotif of *d12*—*What is to be done?*—, despite sounding like Lenin, had little to do with politics, as it referred primarily to what Roger M. Buergel called "aesthetic education." Buergel wanted to restore the latter to its rightful place by regressing to a Schillerian, profoundly bourgeois concept of education. The transformism *d12* stood for was therefore also evident on the art-education axis. *d12* did not continue the educational discussions of *D11* or *dX*, nor did it directly address issues from their education programs. Rather, the political concept of education that had distinguished the *D11 Education Project* was now ideologically re-Germanized by Buergel. In Buergel's mindscape, the concern was neither with education nor with pedagogy, but with a concept that exists only in German: *Bildung*. Rather than drawing, in the manner of *D11*, on critical pedagogy, *d12* exhumed Schiller as a hero of the educated German middle classes. Buergel accordingly announced: "Today, education seems to offer one viable alternative to the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism)"¹¹⁷—as if there were no other alternatives to the outdated educational concept of German classicism. But how exactly the twenty-first century was to understand that concept remained Buergel's secret. Again, it seems to have something to do with "experience": "Artists educate themselves by working through form and subject matter; audiences educate themselves by experiencing things aesthetically."¹¹⁸

School, which was first set up at *d4*, and the Audiovisual Preface at *d5*. However, the "Visitors' Schools" are hardly comparable to current art education strategies.

117 ——— Roger M. Buergel, quoted in: <https://www.documenta12.de/en/leitmotive.html>, accessed February 13, 2022.

118 ——— Ibid. What seeped through occasionally in the statements and texts of those responsible for the educational offering of *d12* was the typical Buergelian vagueness and the tendency to consider too much information to be harmful, but non-committal "experience" to be educational. For example, it was announced on the website that the intention was to invite people to "share in the experience and exploration of the art on show," and further: "While visitors can expect the art education programme to provide informative inspiration, it cannot establish absolute truth. Realizing that art can never be fully explained was one of the experiences that visitors to *documenta 12* were intended to make, because this is where the true power of art ultimately lies." See <https://documenta12.de/en/art-education/art-education.html>,

While stressing the importance of education, Buergerl at the same time leaves the task of (self-)education to the audiences and their immediate experience with art. Christov-Bakargiev's and Szymczyk's documenta editions again exhibited a certain suspicion with regard to education, while at the same time insisting on its importance. In *dOCUMENTA (13)* nagging doubts were already inscribed into the name of the education program: "Maybe Education Program." Again, we can see a certain anti-rationalism and skepticism with regard to the transmission of knowledge and, correspondingly, an upgrading of the unmediated "feeling" of art: "The Visit: What does it feel like to be there?"¹¹⁹ As it is explained in the *Guidebook*:

The use of the "maybe" in relation to education and public programs expresses flexibility and the many ways in which knowledge can manifest itself: in matter, in words, in experience, and in life. The "Maybe" does not indicate a lack or disenchantment, but a resistance to the growing ideology that seeks the efficient production of certainty, the management of knowledge. The Maybe Education and Public Programs hope to foster the tension needed to maintain an imaginative state capable of inhabiting the realm of the possible, a tension produced between the gravitational forces of radical affirmation and the energetic fields of not knowing. "Maybe" denotes a position of skepticism, a mode of inquiry based on the suspension of judgement, creating ways for unexpected experience to unfold as meaning.¹²⁰

To tap into the "energetic fields of not knowing," Christov-Bakargiev invited so-called "worldly companions," a term taken from Donna Haraway. For Haraway, the archetypical worldly companions are dogs; for Christov-Bakargiev, they were citizens of Kassel of all strands of life and with all sorts of occupations, who were given the task of doing guided tours, after some training, without being professional art educators. This is certainly a clever way of targeting local audiences, but whether the de-professionalization of art education is really a step forward must be doubted. But even the highly intellectual Adam Szymczyk expressed doubts with regard to education and preferred speaking about "aneducation," described as "an education that attempts to stay aware of and rid itself of its traditional pedagogical habits, and instead form a chorus of

accessed February 19, 2022. Such claims served to qualify statements intended to position art education as a critical practice at *d12*.

119 ——— *dOCUMENTA (13), Das Begleitbuch/The Guidebook. Katalog/Catalog*, 3/3 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 499.

120 ——— *Ibid.*

hosts singing together with the visitors.”¹²¹ What presents itself as an exercise in participation and “presentist democracy,” is in fact an exercise in ideological immediatism—as if there was no prior knowledge about art available, and as if transmitting such knowledge was necessarily a hierarchical undertaking, if not an attack against the democratic basic rights of the audience. As Szymczyk goes on explaining:

It is yet not clear if actual singing will take place in an education, but our hope is that no top-down teaching will be involved, no matter how often we are reminded that “many people, especially children and the elderly”, as well as others, deemed subaltern, apparently expect to be told how to understand things. Why not let them speak? We are interested in the knowledge that our audience brings with them – which might thought of as tools for further understanding. Instead of infantilizing and quantifying the audience, documenta 14 hopes to empower the visitors as the true owners of documenta [...].¹²²

Now, let us leave behind all this ideology of immediatism, the idea that art should be “felt” and “experienced” rather than understood. Let us leave behind all this anti-intellectual, if not obscurantist skepticism regarding the transmission of information about artists and their work. My claim is that there is, of course, a reason why one should be skeptical with regard to education, but the immediatist ideology of the art field does not touch on this reason. To arrive at a somewhat more realistic and nonetheless critical assessment of the function of art education, let us return to the discussion of institution and hegemony conducted in the opening chapter. From the perspective of those deliberations—which were linked to the names Tony Bennett and Michel Foucault—“art education” should not be attributed to any particular “department” of art institutions, as the latter are themselves already pedagogical institutions in and of themselves, owing to the disciplinary effects they aim at. Irrespective of the “contents” to be conveyed, pedagogical instruction always includes, to begin with, the instruction (to borrow the words of Pierre Bourdieu) of habitus and body knowledge, of knowledge about how to move in an (art) space, how to behave towards the works on display and towards one’s fellow audience members, and, not least importantly, towards the guides. This pedagogical effort to discipline is as old as the institution itself—and is particularly evident in the attempt to discipline the working class on the occasion of world fairs. The Curator in Charge, for example, wrote about his problems dealing with the “indiscipline” of the workers at the opening of the People’s Palace in Glasgow Green in 1898:

121 ——— Szymczyk, “14: Iterability,” 36.

122 ——— Ibid.

At first, the spitting habit, so characteristic of an east-end multitude, gave us a good deal of trouble; but the posting of a few bills and a little firmness on the part of the attendants soon produced a good effect, and it is now, as far as we are concerned, almost completely eradicated. A tendency to shouting among the younger part of the visitors had also to be put down, but, with few exceptions, the admonitions of the attendants were taken in good part, and we have found that the stretching of a piece of string across any portion of the room is quite sufficient to keep the people out of the part marked off.¹²³

Several aspects of this quotation are remarkable. First of all, it is striking that this specifically pedagogical discourse infantilizes the workers and places itself in an accordingly paternalistic relationship to them. Conversely, the text could today (at least at first glance) only be applied to the behavior of children's groups. For all other publics, the disciplinary measures have presumably already long been carried to successful completion. But make no mistake: in order to be successful, disciplinary efforts must be regularly reproduced vis-à-vis adults as well. The fundamental problems faced by art educators have remained remarkably constant since the introduction of "museum instructors" in Britain in the 1890s, even if the "spitting habit" has decreased among today's visitor crowds.¹²⁴ For example, they still face the problem of how to keep the group together and the attention focused on one thing—the exhibition object or themselves. The concern is still with disciplining not only the looking, but also the speaking/listening. It is still with disciplining the group vis-à-vis the object the group is supposed to see and the "instructor" the group is supposed to hear. Among other things, the arrangement of the directions of gaze and bodies in the space must ensure that the receiving subject supposed to be

123 ——— Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 1998), 208.

124 ——— The beginnings of museum education as such can be traced back even further, of course—perhaps even to the French Revolution, as Gottfried Fliedl argues, here quoted and paraphrased by Eva Sturm: "In Fliedl's view, unequivocal claim to publicness, definition of the museum as a place of education (or formation), and transformation of tradition into historical experience: these three interrelated elements [...] [characterize, E.S.] the enlightened bourgeois notion of the museum. [...] Fliedl locates the beginning of so-called 'museum education' at precisely this point, in the dawn of museums within the context of the French Revolution. At that time, art was appropriated and instrumentalized in a large-scale pillage in order to help build a national myth—in the meanwhile vacant place of the king and in the service of humanity." Eva Sturm, "Woher kommen die Kunst-VermittlerInnen? Versuch einer Positionsbestimmung," in *Dürfen die das?*, eds. Stella Rollig and Eva Sturm (Vienna: Turia+Kant, 2002), 199 (trans. JR).

ignorant, is constituted in double distinction: from the objects on the one hand and from the subject assumed to be knowledgeable on the other.

This choreography of distance relationships between the individual actors—the educator, the audience, and the object on display—is anything but a matter of course. It does not come about on its own, but has to be practiced, even learned—just as spitting had to be unlearned. Otherwise, there is a risk of chaos: uncontrolled conversations could break out, gazes could begin to wander at random. When, at the end of the day, all the institutional practices and discourses directed at the people and channeled through the exhibition have been rehearsed, it is guaranteed that the conditionalities and contingencies of the institution itself have been forgotten. A pervasive naturalization effect occurs. It is taken for granted that certain behaviors are not appropriate and may not be tolerated within the framework of the institution, and no one even thinks about the fact that these self-evident modes of action are self-evident. The disciplinary technology of the institution has become our “body and soul”; it has entered our habitus: we ourselves, as audience members, have become part of the institutional discourses and practices. They now impose themselves on us through us ourselves, through our own behavior. The awareness of the contingency of these discourses and practices, the fact that entirely different discourses/practices could be institutionalized just as well, is lost. A fundamental characteristic of every institution, and, of course, not only art institutions, is therefore its “self-naturalization.” Every institution (like every ritual in general) conveys the impression that it is eternal and has always existed in exactly this way. At the same time, it goes without saying that a rope stretched in front of display objects is neither an ancient cultural technique of humanity nor does it simply carry its meaning (as a stop sign) within itself.¹²⁵

This analysis, which focuses on the disciplinary mechanisms of the machine itself, as found, for example, in Bennett and governmentality studies, is undoubtedly correct. As argued in the first chapter, however, it undervalues the discursive level—the level, if you will, of the content conveyed. It hardly makes sense to analyze institutions without examining which hegemonic discourses they reproduce, by which social forces they are used, and to what end. After all, the network of institutions overlaying civil society is not a stable bulwark occupied by some and besieged by others. Gramsci’s metaphor of the war of position points to a much more flexible process of shifts of forces that can in part engulf institutions and

125 ——— Naturally, art itself can make these institutional conditions its subject. In the video *Goodies & Baddies* (1999) by Anne Cleary and Dennis Conolly, a hidden camera exposes the reactions of various international art institutions to transgressions of their disciplinary rules, including entry into roped-off areas.

in part be driven or prevented by them. This is the point around which our entire discussion about progressive canon shifts in the art field and their dominance-cultural transformation revolves.

Art institutions are thus also “pedagogical” institutions in this second, content-discursive sense, as they convey a certain national culture, class culture, or political culture (e.g., of the Cold War) to the population. Public art education in the narrower sense is only one small aspect of the general conveyance of national, class, and political culture provided by the institution as a whole. It is by way of such institutionalized discourses that identities and subject forms (national, gender-related, colonial, etc.) are constructed, reproduced, and kept in circulation. So, the fact that many art institutions possess their own education department only obscures the fact that the institution itself is a large education department. The work of the actual art education department presents only a small, if not unimportant, segment of the discourses materialized by institutions. Even if the art educators working in the museums and other art exhibition institutions conceive of themselves and their higher mission differently, they are still part of the institution, which in turn must be seen as a complex agglomerate of discursive practices deeply penetrating the hegemonic imaginary of society as a whole. Guided tours or creative offerings, however active, designed for implementation with children and young people in exhibitions¹²⁶ are first and foremost part of the hegemonic discourses and practices reproduced by the institution.

So, it is first and foremost the institution that speaks through the educators. This does not mean, of course, that the work of art education is superfluous. On the contrary: for the public, the educators serve as the personalized authority to whom knowledge—and institutionally authenticated knowledge at that—is attributed.¹²⁷ This knowledge attributed to them is by no means harmless, because it is always also knowledge about desired and undesired identity and the subjectivation of subjects conscious of national, gender, and class distinctions. In other words, the person who works as an educator is an important node at which the knowledge practices and discourses of the hegemonic formation reproduced by

126 ——— See Nora Sternfeld, “Der Taxispielertrick. Mediation Between Self-Regulation and Self-Empowerment,” in *Wer spricht? Authority and Authorship in Exhibitions*, eds. schnittpunkt et al. (Vienna: Turia+Kant, 2005), 23-24.

127 ——— Only the catalogue (a fully valid actor as defined by Bruno Latour) can compete with this—or perhaps also the authoritative figure of the curator, who, however, usually lacks the respective scholarly or (supposed) educational impartiality to credibly represent knowledge and not self-interest. It would therefore have to be the old-school scientific curator (the custodian), whose concern was solely with the maintenance of the collection, and not the modern, self-promoting curator type.

the institution are concentrated. As Foucault argues, this knowledge is itself already an effect of power. As soon as people enter an exhibition, they are in the clutches of a specific power-knowledge *dispositif*: they partake of a knowledge that cannot be detached from the complex relationships of power and subordination produced and reproduced by the institutionalized discourses.

At this point, we should presumably ask whether there is any way out of these multiple entanglements. If education is one of the most important technologies of domination, can there even be such a thing as progressive or emancipatory art education? And what would be the basis of “education” as a technology not of domination but of liberation? The question is crucial because there is nothing in between—there is no such thing as “neutral” education.¹²⁸ And if education cannot behave towards its object as a neutral “go-between,” what would be the basis of a non-neutral, interventional education? What might be the nature of public art education that does not engage in propaganda for art (along with its class character), but enables “self-empowerment” without becoming a higher form of social work or relying on the “immediate experience” of art? In short, what might a political and radically democratic form of art education look like?¹²⁹

From a hegemony-theoretical perspective, a fundamental distinction must be made in order to answer this question. It is essential to take the question of the discourses to be conveyed—the “contents”—into account. Suppose we had to plan means of conveying a thoroughly reactionary exhibition to the public. The standard solution would be to convey the reactionary ideology of the exhibition. Suppose, however, that we did not at all agree with this ideology. The “critical” solution would then be to act subversively, as it were, against the exhibition, to smuggle in other content, to call the audience’s attention to the ideology between the lines, et cetera. Progressive debates on art education all too often allow these

128 ——— The realization that formation can be nothing other than either a “practice of liberation” or a “practice of domination” forms the basis of Paulo Freire’s liberation pedagogy. Taking Freire as a starting point, also see bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

129 ——— The problems faced by emancipatory education seem overwhelming at first sight. If progressive pedagogy is about “empowerment”—or, more precisely, about providing the means of attaining self-empowerment—then under today’s conditions the question immediately arises: How do you “empower” a public that shows up at the exhibition with all sorts of things, just not a desire for self-empowerment? How does one undermine the image of oneself as an “authority to which knowledge is attributed,” and thus the function of the institution as an educational “ideological state apparatus”?

two alternatives to demarcate the horizon of thought. The question of “What is to be done?” would here take the form of: How do I do good and critical educational work in a bad and problematic exhibition? However honorable this question, it is asked exclusively from the position of education, and the givens (the exhibition) are ultimately accepted as that which is to be either conveyed “neutrally” or criticized “subversively.” Let us assume an art exhibition, however, that does not reproduce reactionary ideologies, but attempts to shift the canon in a progressive manner. Would one then really want to subvert the contents of this exhibition? If not, would affirmative education—*horribile dictu*—perhaps be conceivable alongside the critical approach, provided the contents of the exhibition were worthy of affirmation and thus of support?

This might lead us to the conclusion that, in the case of a progressive exhibition, education could act as an “amplifier” of a counter-hegemonic effort that has temporarily materialized in the institution in question. However ambitious this possibility pretended to be, the art educators of *d12* were robbed of it simply because *d12* was not an emancipatory exhibition. In the case of *D11*, on the other hand, it was possible—at least theoretically—to reinforce and support, on the educational level, the canon shifts *D11* was striving for. To conclude this chapter, I would like to present this endeavor—and I do not claim that it was much more than an endeavor—in the form of a report on my experiences to the extent that I myself was involved in the endeavor. To do so, we must once again recall the background. For the second Johannesburg Biennial, which he curated, Okwui Enwezor already had an education project in mind that was essentially intended as a scholarship program for a small group of non-Western art and culture workers, but it ultimately did not materialize. Enwezor revisited the idea for *D11*, and in the early summer of 2001, I was commissioned to develop a curriculum for the education project. Drawing on my experience with a workshop carried out at the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts within the framework of Platform1, and in view of the programmatic-conceptual significance of the Platform theme, I decided to base the concept for the education project on the fundamental idea of *Democracy Unrealized*, and to conceive of education as an essentially unrealizable process. This essentially meant a dissociation from pedagogy as a technology of domination and discipline in favor of pedagogy as part of a practice of liberation and self-empowerment as proposed, for example, by Paolo Freire and bell hooks, as well as by deconstructive approaches like those of Bill Readings or J. Hillis Miller, the latter of whom conceives of the educational community as a community of dissent and, in keeping with Derrida’s concept of a “democracy to come”, called it a “University of Dissensus to Come.”

At the same time, it was clear that certain conditions and contents had to be specified as a framework and starting point, as the project could not develop in a vacuum. To this end, vessels—so-called slots—were proposed with the idea that they would be filled in the process itself: Slot 1, titled “Thinking Through D11,” essentially addressed the themes and issues of the first four platforms as well as the overall philosophy of *D11*. From the start, this vessel was intended as the missing link between the debate platforms 1–4 and the exhibition platform 5. The second slot, originally titled “De/constructing the Artist” and then thematically expanded to “Mapping the Exhibition,” was devoted to the examination of artistic projects as well as the exhibition display, the exhibition architecture, et cetera. The third slot, “Documenting documenta—The Political Archeology of an Institution,” was intended to question the institutional context and the history of the exhibition from a critical perspective—that is, it served to help recipients position themselves within the framework of the institution and the art field. Slot 4 revolved around the practical work and experience of exhibition-making and was titled with a pinch of Nietzschean fatalism: “Running Against Walls (and Learning How to Embrace Your Fate).” These slots were complemented by a recurring element called “The Academy Unrealized—Developing Educational Strategies,” intended to provide scope for self-reflection on the project and to discuss issues of education and exhibition pedagogy. Following an international call for proposals, nine scholarship holders from India, Japan, Mexico, the USA, and Eastern and Western Europe were invited to Kassel to participate in the project for six months.

However, the question of how the expected streams of visitors were to be served educationally had yet to be answered. The documenta management decided to offer guided tours through a visitor service, which was carried out logistically by the Berlin office x:hibit, but to leave the training of the future educators—the so-called guides—to documenta. This approach separated the technical handling and organization of the guided tours from the content-related level of training the guides. The slot structure of the education project concept was essentially transferred to this training unit, which would soon come to be called the education program as distinct from the education project. More than a hundred guides attended five one-week training blocks in Kassel consisting of lectures and workshops during which internal and external lecturers introduced them to the institutional history of documenta, its role in the art field, the “philosophy” and institutional structure of *D11*, the participating artists, the contents of the first four platforms, and questions of art education. The involvement of the scholarship holders proved useful, so that in the end the two training units intermeshed, though without merging entirely. The art critic Christoph Blase was probably right to compare the intensity

of these blocks with the overall program of a university semester.¹³⁰ Taking both the block format and the scope of the program into account, a more apt comparison would be a summer school or summer university.

The shift on the education axis signaled by *D11* thus did not consist in the invention of new guided tour formats, as *d12* or *dOCUMENTA (13)* attempted to do in part, but in the hitherto unique scope and intensity of the guide training program, not least of all in relation to the preceding platforms in terms of content. This training was deliberately not limited to the mere presentation of the biographies and work histories of the participating artists, but also included the institutional history of documenta and the phenomenon of biennialization, problems of cultural and postcolonial studies, and questions addressed by political theory and the theory of democracy.¹³¹ Many of the guides therefore probably underwent an experience similar, at best, to that of the exhibition visitors: namely, of being confronted with a context of problems much more comprehensive than one would have expected from an art exhibition. One of the aims of the education program was thus to act as a hinge between the exhibition platform and the theoretical platforms, which were not directly present in Kassel—that is, between the Kassel art event *D11* and *D11* as an analytical-political-curatorial project whose content and geographical dimensions extended beyond Kassel.¹³² And this not least of all because *D11* signaled a canon shift and marked a rupture that would prove in time to have an impact on the art field's approach to addressing questions of politics, theory, the postcolonial constellation, and education.

Perhaps this reveals an essential difference between the educational philosophies of *D11* and *d12* and later editions. Although the individual guides of *D11* were largely given free rein in the design of their tours, education was understood primarily as an information service. The concern was neither with “activating” the audience nor with “innovative” formats. The educational activities adhered to a format that was as classical as the exhibition architecture and the agendas of the symposia. However—as

130 ——— Christoph Blase, “Diktatur, Demokratie und andere Probleme der Kunsttheorie,” *Art 6* (2002): 74 et seq.

131 ——— Was this a case of training overkill? I do not think there is any question of that. Experience has shown that, after a possible initial phase of frustration, a strategy of “productive overload” can give rise to a desire for more intensive exploration, whereas underload never gives rise to anything but boredom, disinterest, and aversion.

132 ——— From this perspective, one could certainly see the training blocks of the education program, in conjunction with the ongoing work of the education project, as a kind of fifth theory module. However great the differences, in terms of scope—that is, measured by the number of lecturers and the duration of the units—the education program corresponded to Platform1.

already noted—, this apparent classicism had the purpose of providing counter-hegemonic content with symbolic legitimacy, as opposed to conveying reactionary content with avant-garde formats, which may have been the case at *d12*. The education effort at *D11* thus supported the canon shift, the multiple rupture *D11* represented in the art field, rather than “subverting” it. This was only possible because the exhibition itself endeavored an emancipatory canon shift. The institutional apparatus of documenta was taken for what it is: a definition and canonization machine with which ideological ruptures in the hegemonic asphalt of the dominant culture can either be deepened or cemented.

Criticism of Israel as a Spontaneous Ideology of the Art Field (Excursus)

If I have thus far identified and defended a canon shift towards politicization and criticism, it is not meant to give the impression that *every* form of politicization and criticism should be welcome regardless of its ideological content. That documenta understands itself as a global exhibition does not mean it stands in an ideological, political, or historical Nirvana. It is at the same time a German exhibition. How German it is became clear when the German Historical Museum decided to devote an exhibition to documenta history. Research revealed that 10 out of 21 members of the organizational team of the first documenta were former Nazis.¹³³ Werner Haftmann, Arnold Bode's art historical mastermind and co-founder of documenta, was not only a member of the NSDAP, but also, it turned out, of the SA. In the course of its research, the museum learned that immediately after the war, Haftmann, who had been leading a squad to detect and eliminate partisans, was sought in Italy as a war criminal and was suspected to have tortured partisans. Is the Nazi background of its personnel in any way reflected in the early documenta editions? For a long time, documenta has been presented as an effort at rehabilitating the modern art ostracized by the Nazis. But did this include *Jewish* modern art? Oddly enough, there was only one Jewish artist presented in the first documenta show, Marc Chagall. Quite a meager result for a show that allegedly wanted to rehabilitate modern art. But the puzzle solves itself when we learn that, for Haftmann, as he publicly claimed, not a single German modern painter was Jewish.¹³⁴ Of course, Haftmann did know modern German Jewish painters such as Rudolf Levy or Otto Freundlich,

133 ——— Mirl Redmann, "Wer gründete die documenta? Biografische Spurensuche in die NS-Vergangenheiten der Organisatorinnen und Organisatoren der documenta 1 bis 4," in *documenta. Politik und Kunst*, ed. Deutsches Historisches Museum (Munich; London; New York: Prestel 2021), 80.

134 ——— Julia Voss, "Das Werner Haftmann-Modell. Wie die documenta zur Bühne der Erinnerungspolitik wurde," in *documenta. Politik und Kunst*, 69.

and Levy's name can be found on an early list of artists whose work could be shown, but this never materialized. With the exception of Mac Chagall, whose modernity is more of the picturesque kind, documenta remained an exhibition of non-Jewish artists. How could such an exhibition revert what the Nazis did with their *Entartete Kunst* exhibition?

It was the German Historical Museum which unearthed these facts, not the autonomous public organization behind the exhibition, documenta gGmbH, or the documenta archive attached to this organization. To be sure, different aspects of the German Nazi past, including the Nazi past of Kassel and its surroundings, have been a topic of many artistic contributions to documenta, but why was documenta's own history never of interest to any of its functionaries and artistic directors? Even after the exhibition on documenta at the German Historical Museum in 2021, ruangrupa did not really respond when asked about their opinion about the "biographical, discursive, and curatorial continuities with the Nazis in the Documenta exhibitions from the 1950s and 1960s,"¹³⁵ which is quite unsatisfactory for a group that always insists on local specificity. Perhaps one of the reasons why none of the previous artistic directors, not to mention documenta gGmbH, bothered to inquire into the darker sides of their institution is that they readily bought into what one may call the "documenta myth": the legend that documenta brought back light and civilization to Germany and to Kassel, whose residents presented themselves as traumatized victims of the bombardment of the Allied forces. This is the myth of "hope" and "reconciliation," as Christov-Bakargiev would have put it, in a Germany where, since the end of the war, the Allied bombing campaign is readily denounced as a war crime. While the Germans portray themselves as victims, the Allies are branded as perpetrators.

To different degrees, the documenta myth runs through many documenta statements. Brian Holmes referred to *d12* not altogether undeservedly as the "summer camp of reconciliation." In his only programmatic text, devoted primarily to the display and exhibition architecture of the first documenta, and quite in keeping with the spirit of the times, Buergel referred to the "devastating bombing raids"¹³⁶ by the Allies and the trauma of the plagued population of Kassel.¹³⁷ On the topic of the Federal Garden

135 ——— "Das Teilen des Mehrwerts," 80.

136 ——— Roger M. Buergel, "The Origins," *documenta Magazine No. 1-3, 2007, Reader* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 26.

137 ——— In their show, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack took the liberty of showing a painting by Juan Davila in which the American flag displayed a huge swastika. It went largely unnoticed by art critics that Buergel had the swastika hung over the head of one of the Allies that had to defeat German Nazism in the first place so that Bode's first documenta, which Buergel held in such high esteem, could even take place. But shouldn't *d12* perhaps have addressed itself to the swastika graffiti of German Nazi skinheads rather than exhibiting a painted



Juan Davila, *Schreber's Semblance*, 1993. Collage, documenta 12, Kassel 2007.
Copyright: documenta archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

Show, he quoted Theodor Heuss (president of Germany from 1949 to 1959) as saying that this collective undertaking might help “a damaged or endangered community” recover.¹³⁸ This lament about the suffering, traumatization, and need for recovery on the part of the Germans—the actual perpetrators’ collective— was a secret leitmotif of *d12* und was very much in line with the official second leitmotif, “What is bare life?” Based among other things on the theses of Giorgio Agamben, this leitmotif is characterized by the fact that Agamben uses what inmates of Nazi concentration camps faced as an example for a “state of exception,” but then applies it to pretty much everything and everyone.¹³⁹ In this respect, it caters to an anti-American discourse that may not recognize any qualitative difference between the Nazi extermination camps and the U.S. prison camp in Guantanamo. And it was in precisely this spirit that an official audio tour explained the second leitmotif of *d12*:

Concentration camps, the treatment of refugees, and the conditions of imprisonment in Guantanamo are just a few examples of how states trample on the human rights of those who do not fit into the system while controlling every fiber of their lives.¹⁴⁰

In Germany, of all places, people should know that concentration camps are not just “one of the examples” among many of how “human rights are trampled on.” Unsurprisingly, the tour continues with lamentations about the destruction of Kassel by the Allies, the “catastrophe” of the World War and the “disaster” of the Third Reich (metaphors taken from nature that spare one from calling the perpetrators’ collective by name), and the psychological and physical scars that all this misfortune left on the people of Kassel and in the “living space of documenta.” “Bare life” now no longer denotes the experience of the victims of Nazism in the concentration camps, but “Kassel’s collective experience”:

swastika on an American flag in the Fridericianum? The fact that no one felt provoked by the swastika possesses symptomatic value and suggests that *d12* had thus swum in the mainstream of the broad majority—not only of the public and critics but also of the “critical” segments of the art field.

138 ——— Ibid., 27.

139 ——— Similarly, Agamben extended the camp metaphor, which was derived from the Nazi extermination camps, to our present-day *condition humaine*, even the gated communities of the rich. For a critique of this analogy, see Oliver Marchart, “Zwischen Moses und Messias: Zur politischen Differenz bei Agamben,” Frank Meier and Janine Böckelmann, eds., *Die gouvernementale Maschine: Zur politischen Philosophie Giorgio Agambens* (Münster: UnrastVerlag, 2007), 10–27.

140 ——— Audio guide “What is bare life?,” 2007, <http://documenta12.de> (no longer retrievable) (trans. JR).

Let us begin with the city of Kassel as the living space (in German: *Lebensraum*) of documenta. The first documenta was, in a sense, a response to a catastrophe, the Second World War. It was part of a larger cultural project that sought to reform bourgeois society in response to the destruction of the city and the loss of thousands of lives. To weaken the Nazi war machine, the Allies had razed Kassel to the ground. An example of the state of exception Benjamin and Agamben speak of in their discussions of bare life. What is meant here is the surveillance state that, in unprecedented manner, extends its power over life and the citizens it wants to eliminate or those who defy integration into the system. The totalitarian disaster of the Third Reich and the subsequent destruction during World War II could thus be described as Kassel's collective experience of bare life, in the wake of which the city had to renew itself both physically and psychologically. And despite the modern cityscape with its wide streets and well-kept buildings, numerous scars remain.¹⁴¹

One could say, of course, that this discourse was nothing special in normalized Germany—so why should we reproach documenta for it? But that would only be another argument for the fact that political discourses of the most diverse ideological orientations do not stop at the boundaries of the art field, but that the latter can serve as a seismograph—or even an amplifier and distributor—of such discourses. It therefore matters whether an institutional amplifier like documenta joins in discourses that belittle the Shoah by generalizing it. Unfortunately, art institutions often join in. Buerger's *d12* is not alone. *documenta 14* produced an echo of *d12* discourse when a scandal broke out after the Italian author and activist Franco "Bifo" Berardi had announced his performance at documenta under the title "Auschwitz on the Beach," thus comparing in an eponymous poem the, no doubt despicable, push-back policy of the European border regime with Auschwitz and salt water with Zyklon B gas. This time, the public outcry, from the Jewish community to the mayor of Kassel, was significant, and the curator of the public program, Paul B. Preciado, was forced to pronounce that there was no intention to offend anybody. Instead of Bifo's performance, a reading of his poem and a discussion were announced.

Another echo, this time the echo of the ideological trope of German trauma and reconciliation, was produced by *dOCUMENTA (13)*, but no scandal followed. For the "healing" of German suffering was not only a leitmotif of *d12* with its reference to the reconciliation and healing enterprise of the Federal Garden Show, it was also an explicit leitmotif of *dOCUMENTA (13)*. As Christov-Bakargiev claimed in her programmatic state-

141 ——— Ibid.

ment, after World War II documenta “emerged out of trauma, and within a space where collapse and recovery are articulated.”¹⁴² And she expanded on this trope, in her programmatic “Letter to a Friend”: “It emerged at the juncture of where art is felt to be of the utmost importance as an international common language and a world of shared ideals and hopes (which implies that art has indeed a major role to play in social processes of reconstruction of civil society, practices of healing and recovery) [...]”¹⁴³ Today, after the documenta exhibition at the German Historical Museum, we all know that the early history of documenta was not so much one of healing and recovery than one of covering up, given the significant number of former Nazis among the core group organizers and an alleged war criminal as documenta’s art historical mastermind. But that the German myths of recovery and victimhood, especially in a town like Kassel, are precisely this: myths of the perpetrators, could have been evident for Christov-Bakargiev already in 2012 or for Roger Buergel in 2007.

d12 also proved symptomatic in yet another respect: the sheer numerical over-representation of the conflict between Israel and Palestinians when compared to all other conflicts in the world.¹⁴⁴ If the so-called conflict in the Middle East really was the number one conflict in the world at the time of *d12*, as Buergel claimed, the question arises as to whether the director of *d12* had ever heard of the genocide in Darfur, for example, on which *d12* remained silent. This corresponded to the Western media’s relative lack of interest in the genocide in Darfur, while at the same time every development between Israel and the Palestinians was reported on page one of all newspapers.¹⁴⁵ This discrepancy between overrepresentation in the one case and underrepresentation in all the other cases is, of course, not a particularity of *d12*. It is precisely the symptom of a hegemonic, if occasionally subtle, hostility toward Israel which is characteristic both of many mainstream media and of significant sectors of political activism. And it seems to be part and parcel of the spontaneous ideology

142 ——— Christov-Bakargiev, “The dance was very frenetic,” 31.

143 ——— Ibid., 75.

144 ——— The so-called Middle East conflict was explicitly addressed by at least six works: Ahlam Shibli’s photographs of Palestinian Bedouin tents and a Jordanian refugee camp; Abdoulaye Konaté’s more conciliatory tapestries bringing together Israeli flags and the Palestinian keffiyeh; Yael Bartana’s video of an Israeli-Palestinian summer camp to rebuild destroyed Palestinian homes; Lidwien van de Ven’s photographs of, among other things, Palestinian graffiti; Sheela Gowda’s watercolors of the famous television images of 2000 showing a Palestinian boy dying in the crossfire; and finally, Peter Friedl’s *Zoo Story*.

145 ——— On this topic, also see Nora Sternfeld, “Wie steht die Bewegung zum Antisemitismus?,” Oliver Marchart and Rupert Weinzierl, eds., *Stand der Bewegung? Protest, Globalisierung, Demokratie* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006), 61–86.



Fareed Armaly and Rashid Masharawi, *From/To (Checkpoint, Homemovie, Waiting)*, 2002. Installation, Documenta 11, Kassel 2002. Copyright: documenta Archive. Photograph by: Kasiewicz, Ryszard.

of the art field to perpetuate this anti-Israeli impulse of the broader public—hence the extent to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict pushed all others aside in the art field for many years.¹⁴⁶

In this respect, over-proportional critique of Israel was not a specialty of *d12*, and it can take rather questionable forms. Like many politically critical art exhibitions, *D11* also brought together problematic works,¹⁴⁷ No less alarming in this respect was Okwui Enwezor’s introductory article to the exhibition, which states, among other things, that “radical Islam” was to be understood “as a serious counter-hegemonic opposition” and compares the “Palestinians[’] fight [against] Israeli hegemony”, at a time when this fight included continuous suicide attacks against buses and

146 ——— See Okwui Enwezor, “The Black Box,” 48. Citing Fanon, Enwezor argues from the perspective of a postcolonial tradition whose exponents have unfortunately still not understood that Israel is not a colonial regime. The colonial power in the area was Britain.

147 ——— For example Fareed Armaly’s *From/To* on the history of Palestine and—in collaboration with Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi—the closure of a checkpoint by Israel. The original 1999 version of this work had still been readable as a reflection on the peace process. Armaly used the digitized surface of a stone as the work’s structuring guidance system. As we learn from the artist himself, the stone establishes a “connection to the architecture, but also to the worldwide media reports during the ten years of the first Intifada, when, owing to the practice of stone-throwing, the stone became an icon of resistance to life under occupation.” However, *D11* took place in 2002, at a time when Palestinians of the second Intifada had moved from stone-throwing to suicide attacks on buses and shopping centers. *Documenta11_ Platform5: Catalogue*, 550 (trans. JR).

restaurants, to the street battles of the anti-globalization groups in Genoa, Seattle, and Montreal as well as to demonstrations in Argentina and the Third World against the policies of the World Bank and the IMF.¹⁴⁸

This is by no means to argue that criticism of the state of Israel should be banned from art exhibitions. And, of course, all Israeli artists are free to criticize their government. That is not the point. What should give food for thought is why this criticism is so popular and so successful outside Israel. And in particular, we must ask what the overrepresentation of works of anti-Israelism means in the context of the most important German art exhibition. Again, this does not imply that all works on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are problematic in and of themselves. But one has to employ one's faculty of political judgment to see where they could become problematic.

In the case of the most recent edition, *documenta fifteen*, Mohammed Al Hawajiris set of paintings, exhibited by the Palestinian collective "A Question of Funding", brought together images of Israeli soldiers with art historical motives under the title "Guernica Gaza". The diverse wars between Hamas and Israel are thus equated with the erasure of a Basque city by bombers of the Nazis. Equating Israel with Nazi-Germany is a classical anti-semitic trope. The same trope, in the most explicit version, could be found on a huge banner installed on Friedrichsplatz by the Indonesian collective Taring Padi: a soldier with a pig-face, wearing a star of David and a helmet with the word "Mossad", accompanied by a vampire-like Jew carrying a hat with the runes "SS". The banner created a huge public outcry. Even politicians like the state minister for culture Claudia Roth, or the minister for culture of the state of Hessen, Angela Dorn, who before had defended *documenta* against the charge that no Jewish Israeli artists were invited to *documenta fifteen*, which might have been due to a silent BDS-, i.e. boycotting policy of the artistic directors and their co-curators (we will return to this). The banner was covered, and Taring Padi replied that their visual vocabulary was "culturally specific" – which is evidently wrong, it is part of a global visual vocabulary of anti-semitism. The irony of the event was that in the run-up to the show the general director of *documenta*, Sabine Schormann, had responded to previous charges of anti-semitism and BDS-affinity against participating artists of "The Question of Funding" and the artistic team, that they should be judged on the basis of the art eventually shown at the exhibition.

However, it would be wrong to see in the extreme case of Paring Padi an isolated incident of Israel-related anti-semitism in the art field. On the

148 ——— Enwezor, "The Black Box," 48.

contrary, in more subtle ways the demonization of Israel appears to be business as usual and is rarely turned into a scandal.

An example of a questionable work from earlier editions is Peter Friedl's stuffed giraffe, which not coincidentally became the media star of *d12*. The main reason for the success of Friedl's work is probably to be found in the fact that information was spread about the work to the effect that the Israelis had driven the poor little giraffe to cardiac death, but also, presumably, that Brownie the giraffe made a good icon of the archetypal victim of an "Israeli occupation regime" that evidently does not even shy away from murdering Palestinian zoo animals.¹⁴⁹ Works of this kind speculate on the victimization discourse that underlies Western media reports on the Palestinians, for instance, when these reports are illustrated with images of Palestinian children behind barbed wire, as if these pictures were directly taken from Hamas propaganda.¹⁵⁰ The most famous contribution to *d12* thus turned out to be one of the most problematic. What is more, in order to bring the giraffe from the Palestinian zoo in Qalqilya in the West Bank to Kassel, Friedl must have negotiated with Hamas, which governs Qalqilya. If this is the case, one could say that the "lenders" (figuratively speaking) to *d12* in Kassel included the Islamo-fascists of Hamas, whose ideological goal is a "Jew-free" Palestine.¹⁵¹

149 ——— Zoo animals that had just escaped South African apartheid fell victim to Israel's "apartheid regime." Many media reports mentioned the fact that the giraffe had been imported from South Africa, although it was an entirely unimportant piece of information, which did, however, permit an associative connection between the signifiers "Israel," "South Africa," and "apartheid."

150 ——— The website *Peter Friedl—The Zoo Story* offers an example of this victimization discourse, which exploits fondness of animals to criticize Israel: "On 19 August 2002, a giraffe named Brownie died in the Qalqilyah zoo, the only zoo in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli soldiers invaded the city of 45,000 inhabitants. There were gun-shots, tear gas, and flare grenades. Brownie, in apparent panic, rammed his head against a metal pole and fell to the ground. In the morning he was found dead in his enclosure. Ruti, the female giraffe, lost her unborn baby ten days later out of grief. The two dead animals were stuffed by veterinarian Sami Khader and later housed in a specially built 'museum' next to the zoo. Other animals that died in the zoo are also kept there, including a lion, a zebra, and a baboon. Brownie, nine years old, originally came from South Africa. He arrived via Israel in Qalqilyah in 1997 at a time when it was the agricultural center of the West Bank and the Palestinian city was not yet sealed off from the outer world by an eight-meter-high concrete wall." Cited on "Vogliamo di tutto: molte cose," accessed February 21, 2022, <http://asifwaslost.blogspot.com/2010/02/animal-stories-2.html?m=1>.

151 ——— The absence of reservations about Hamas is hardly surprising if you know that, early on in the history of Friedl's oeuvre, there was a provo-

It was Lidwien van de Ven who enjoyed the dubious privilege of spreading not only (like Friedl) implicit but also explicit propaganda against Israel at *d12*—for example, in the form of Palestinian graffiti, which the artist photographed without comment. As we learn from their translations, they make the claim that Israel had started all the wars in the Middle East without exception—a blatant distortion of history. Astonishingly, this artist was granted the textualization and contextualization others were denied. A brochure on display in the same exhibition room as van de Ven's, and moreover on sale in the documenta bookshop, featured, among other things, a commentary by the philosopher Azmi Bishara, translated from Arabic and accusing "the Zionists" of a different "type of Holocaust denial," as they had allegedly monopolized the Holocaust for their own purposes. From this, the author concludes that "any Israeli can speak and act as the victim even if he has more in common ideologically and psychologically with the offender or the 'Capo'—the Jews who cooperated with the Nazis in the concentration camps."¹⁵² That such propaganda, which casts Jews as Nazi collaborators, that is, victims as perpetrators, was distributed at *d12* in Kassel, a show curated by two Germans, is a scandal. But, of course, it did not become one, because art critics in post-Schröder Germany did not take note of such propaganda. To complete the picture, van de Ven also reprinted a manifesto by twenty-five German political scientists calling for a "normalization" of Germany's relations with Israel. They cynically claimed that the Holocaust should no longer stand in the way of "friendship" with Israel. They pointed out that, precisely because of the Holocaust—which led to the emigration of many European Jews to Israel—, Germany, being indirectly complicit in the Palestinian predicament, should come out more actively in support of the Palestinians by imposing an arms boycott on Israel.

Thus it came to pass that, in post-Schröder Germany, at a documenta for which a German artistic director and a German curator were responsible (after all, Buerger and Noack were the first German documenta directors since Manfred Schneckenburger's *d8* of 1987), Israel's alleged crimes—including an allegedly "Zionist version" of "Holocaust denial"—took up an inordinately larger amount of space than the historical crimes of the Germans against the Jews.¹⁵³

cation very much in keeping with this pseudo-critical self-staging at the expense of political content: at the Venice Biennale of 1992, Friedl came on the scene with posters displaying the slogan "I survived the German Pavilion" to attack Hans Haacke's work *Germania*, which revolved around the German pavilion's Nazi past.

152 ——— Azmi Bishara, "Ways of denial," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, December 21–27, 2006, accessed February 21, 2022, <https://www.masress.com/en/ahramweekly/11542>.

153 ——— There was only one work at *d12* that ran counter to this normalization

Two documenta editions later, at the time of *documenta fifteen*, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement had come to dominate the art field to an unprecedented extent. The movement was founded by organizations of Palestinian civil society, but its National Committee also includes the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, whose members are, among others, the terrorist organizations Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—which leaves one wondering why there is a place for these groups in a movement that is self-professedly anti-violent. In fact, the goal of BDS is to emulate the international boycott movement against apartheid in South Africa, thus the ubiquitous, but inaccurate description of Israel—a country with Palestinian judges sitting on the Supreme Court—as an “apartheid state.” The main demands of BDS include the return of all land seized by Israel in 1967 and the return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants. What at first glance appear as “moderate” demands—and the appearance of moderation in its goals and means may have contributed to the success of BDS—are not moderate at all. BDS spokespersons

discourse. Alice Creischer’s important artistic contribution, dealing with the continuity of Nazi personnel in the German postwar economy, was entirely on its own in this respect—and buried, as it were, under a lot of atrocious painting, a ridiculous guitar installation, and a bloated green cube in the Aue Pavilion. Other works making reference to the German past could have supported Creischer’s stance but were deprived of any contextualization by Buerger and Noack. In particular, the photo series by Martha Rosler in the Aue Pavilion, including works such as *slave labour site near the railroad tracks, Kassel*, comes to mind in this context. At the beginning of the exhibition, Rosler allegedly reported that the artistic director had forbidden her to add an explanatory wall text (a circumstance denied by *d12* communications department). One month after the opening, however, there was still no wall text. It is true that, in the course of the exhibition, some works, including Rosler’s, were finally granted the privilege of an accompanying text that had to fill certain obscure criteria. Visitors who travelled to Kassel too early, however, had to make do with the catalogue text on Rosler’s work written by Noack. There—following an excursus on the history of gardens as images of paradise—the focus was once again on the “traumatization” inflicted on Kassel’s population by the Allied bombing and, today, unemployment. There was not a word about forced labor and the traumatization of the victims. Owing to the absence of any further information, the visitors were left in the dark and political photography was aestheticized by Noack into landscape photography. As objects for uncontextualized sensual experience and contemplation, all that remained were pretty photographs of local gardens that harmonized well with the official *d12* poster image: slightly blurred floral motifs. Only the title of the work still made explicit reference to forced labor.

in fact deny Israel the right to exist *as Israel*, because the effective outcome of the demanded right to return for every refugee with Palestinian ancestors would be a Palestinian state with a Jewish minority—hence: Palestine, not Israel. No wonder that the movement and its supporters are regularly accused of anti-Semitism, as they tend to single out Israel among all states as the ultimate villain, as if in other countries minorities suffer no discrimination. But the problem is not only disproportionality, double standards, and the demonization of Israel, the main problem is that Israel's right to exist is put into doubt. There is no other state in the world whose very existence is—explicitly or implicitly—denied by a large supra-national coalition of activists, scientists, students, cultural workers, and artists.

Once turned into an outcast among the nations, “Israel” can easily take the place of “the Jew” in anti-Semitic projections. And that BDS might be finding fertile ground in a country that has already once denied Jews the right to exist is something that is of concern for good reason. In 2019, the German Bundestag thus passed a—legally non-binding—resolution asking German municipal governments not to fund BDS or to provide the movement with venues for public events. Because of its calls for the boycott of Israeli goods and services as well as Israeli artists and scientists, it was argued, BDS leads to the stigmatization of Jewish Israeli citizens. While this is just the minimum one can expect from a state on whose own territory Jews had been stigmatized before on their way to extermination, the resolution foreseeably produced an outcry on the part of BDS supporters. Even the Green politician Claudia Roth, who would later become the state minister for culture in the Scholz government, and in this capacity is partially responsible for documenta funding, spoke out against the resolution. The debate was heading for a climax when the directors of many public cultural institutions under the title “Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit” criticized the Bundestag, demanding their right to continue inviting proponents of BDS. One can suspect that many of these cultural functionaries did not sign the initiative because they were ardent supporters of BDS, but simply because they were encountering pragmatic problems when inviting speakers or artists from abroad. Presumably they had the impression that they had to check on every single invitee or run the danger of producing a public scandal. It is true, from a pragmatic point this might be uncomfortable, but the relativizing language of the initiative and the insinuation that, for reasons of cultural diversity, anti-Semitism, when expressed from a postcolonial position, would somehow be more readily excusable, left a rather dubious impression.

In any case, the debate about BDS had reached the German public, the art press and the cultural sections of newspapers, and it returned with a vengeance in the run-up to *documenta fifteen* when some of the Palestinian

participants, working under the group name “The Question of Funding,” were accused by a “coalition against anti-Semitism” from Kassel of being supporters of BDS. It was claimed that Yazan Khalili and Lara Khaldi, who is also part of the artistic team of *documenta fifteen*, were both former directors of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah named after a Palestinian pedagogue and writer who supported Hitler and Mussolini. In supporting BDS, Yazan Khalili, it was criticized, would even go a step beyond the official BDS rhetoric. In an article, he ruminated whether the BDS movement should make the explicit demand of “ending the very existence of the Zionist state.” His rather cynical consideration: Jews should be freed from their oppression by a Zionist national state: “In addition to emancipating the Palestinians from Israeli settler colonialism, emancipate all the Jews from Zionism!” And he continues: “So, the Palestinian can’t be emancipated without Jewish emancipation, and the Jew can’t be emancipated within the structure of the Israeli state, or the state itself, as the structures of any state can only be structures of oppression. For the boycott movement to have a radical demand, a structural one, it must call for boycotting the Israeli state until it dismantles itself as a Jewish state, meaning that the Israeli is no longer ‘the Jew.’”¹⁵⁴ According to this logic, the “continuation of the Jewish catastrophe” in Europe lied in “fixing ‘the Jew’ as a national identity”¹⁵⁵ from which Jews should be freed. Curiously, the same argument does not seem to hold for Palestinians, who for Khalili do not need to be freed from their national identity and are supposed to have a chartered right to a state.

The public accusations of the Kassel “coalition against anti-Semitism” mixed very concrete charges with some rather awkward ruminations, but they had huge resonance in the German media, and they had enough substance so that politicians as well as *documenta gGmbH* had to react. And they reacted in the most predictable way by flatly rejecting all charges. In the official *documenta* statement, the charges were described as “distorting” without saying, however, what was distorted and how. The *documenta* also underscored its “resolute rejection of antisemitism, racism, extremism, Islamophobia and any form of violent fundamentalism,”¹⁵⁶ as if anybody had criticized *documenta* for racism or Islamophobia. The question was about BDS, but in the original official reply there was not a single word about BDS. Instead, as a matter of damage control and to give the impression that one wanted to do something, a discussion

154 ——— Yazan Khalili, “The Utopian Conflict,” accessed May 2, 2022, <http://www.yazankhalili.com/index.php/writings/the-utopian-conflict/>.

155 ——— Ibid.

156 ——— “Statement on Accusations of Antisemitism Against *documenta fifteen*,” accessed May 2, 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/statement-on-accusations-of-antisemitism/>.

forum of experts on colonialism, racism, land right studies, indigenous studies, Holocaust studies and the study of anti-Semitism was announced. Three subsequent discussion fora were scheduled: the first on anti-Semitism and racism in today's Germany; the second on anti-Semitism and "anti-anti-Semitism" in postcolonial discourse; and the third on anti-Muslim and "anti-Palestinian racism."¹⁵⁷ As we know from Lacan, a sentence acquires meaning only retroactively from its last word, and the last word in what started as a discussion on BDS was a rejection of "anti-Palestinian racism." In a letter to Claudia Roth, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland), Josef Schuster, expressed his bewilderment about a biased invitation policy. He deplored that his organization was not involved in the planning, despite having asked for it. And he couldn't see any connection with the issue of "anti-Palestinian racism." Again, everything was flatly rejected by cultural politicians and documenta gGmbH.

The official reaction of most actors left the impression that the issue could not be tackled without avoiding parallelizations, tit-for-tat arguments, whataboutisms, and rhetorical reversals. For instance, while there can be of course cases of anti-Palestinian racism, in the last few years the slogan has been regularly used to discredit any critique of structural anti-Semitism related to BDS as racist. BDS activists thereby invert the well-known fantasy-claim that every criticism of Israel will be labeled as always anti-Semitic (which barely anyone has ever claimed) and, hence, one was not allowed to criticize Israel anymore (which is nonsense because Israel is the most criticized country in the world). BDS supporters now, by turning it around, weaponize this trope against their critics, thus denouncing the criticism of BDS as an act of racism against Palestinians designed to silence them.¹⁵⁸ That documenta, as Josef Schuster must have suspected, participated in such maneuvers is perhaps not conducive to the open discussion in which one purports to engage.

157 ——— "We need to talk! Art-Freedom-Solidarity," accessed May 2, 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/online-conversation-series-we-need-to-talk-may-8-15-and-22-2022/>.

158 ——— A prominent case of this maneuver unfolded in January 2022 after a talk by the highly esteemed human rights lawyer Irwin Cotler at the University of Toronto on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Cotler discussed contemporary forms of anti-Semitism, including structural anti-Semitism, without at any point insinuating that every criticism of Israel was anti-Semitic. In fact, he explicitly said that this was not the case. This did not keep forty-five faculty members from writing a protest letter where they would counter-factually claim the opposite and accused him of reinforcing "anti-Palestinian racism." See <https://nationalpost.com/news/toronto/human-rights-expert-irwin-cotler-accused-of-anti-palestinian-racism-over-speech-on-anti-semitism>

The discussion further escalated when documenta launched a public counter-attack against the media and the Central Council of Jews. In a letter internationally launched on *e-flux*, ruangrupa went on the offensive under the title “Antisemitism accusations against documenta: A Scandal about a Rumor”.¹⁵⁹ Yet the letter only confirmed the suspicion that the discussion fora were intended to legitimize BDS. Despite its tongue-in-cheek language, it was evident from the letter where the signatories themselves stood, for instance when they defended the “Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism” which had been designed to clean BDS, and the demonization of Israel, from charges of anti-semitism. This declaration countered the widely adopted working definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and refuted some of the exemplary cases to which the definition is to be applied according to the IHRA. This includes cases of denying “the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor”, or “applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation”. With these examples the IHRA acknowledged that in contemporary anti-semitism Jews are not always named as the target of Jew-hatred, but, through a rhetoric of metonymic displacement, Israel – as “the Jew” among the nations – can become a screen for anti-semitic projections, especially when it is demonized, delegitimated and subjected to double standards. The Jerusalem Declaration, recommended in the ruangrupa letter, sought to revise this definition in favor of the BDS movement and by targeting precisely the exemplary cases mentioned by the IHRA. According to the authors of the Jerusalem Declaration, who appear to be blind with regard to anti-semitic tropes of metonymic displacement, to demonize, delegitimize and apply double standards to the State of Israel is not as such anti-semitic, it may just be “unreasonable”. Nor is in their eyes the notorious call for a free Palestine “between the river and the sea” (which would leave no space for a Jewish state and is thus designed to erase Israel from the face of the earth) per se anti-semitic. Similarly, BDS – and thus the targeting and boycotting of Jewish Israeli citizens, in our case: artists – is normalized as supposedly not anti-semitic.

159 ——— See <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/467337/antisemitism-accusations-against-documenta-a-scandal-about-a-rumor>. The sub-title must sound awkward for an educated German audience that knows of Adorno’s famous definition of anti-semitism as “the rumor about the Jews”. Here, as in other statements issued by documenta, artistic directors and affiliated artists, the critical discourse against anti-semitism is reversed and weaponized against the critics (in this case the Central Council of Jews in Germany): now it is not anti-semitism which is a rumor, but the critique of anti-semitism.

In Germany, the debate around *documenta* is part of a “memory war” fought in numerous declarations and counter-declarations around the remembrance of the Holocaust whose relevance as a singular historical event is increasingly relativized and dissolved, in the liberal version, into a “multi-directional memory” or, in the radical version, attacked by tongue-in-cheek defenders of BDS. For instance, only a few days before *documenta fifteen* opened, the conference “Hijacking Memory” at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin took place where, on the face of it, the pro-Israeli stance of some right-wing parties was meant to be scrutinized. Yet there is no question that the general aim of the conference was to overcome German “memory culture” which is regularly denounced as “ritualistic”, as if survivors had not been forced to fight for decades to have the Shoah officially remembered. And again, the son of a survivor, the Polish historian Jan Grabowski, saw himself forced to protest at this conference after the Palestinian activist Tareq Baconi – invited to talk about the supposed “misuse” of Holocaust remembrance by the State of Israel – had denounced Israel as a “child murderer” (a classical anti-semitic trope) and the Jewish fixation on the Holocaust as a “Jewish psychodrama”. Not only was Grabowski shocked by this speaker, he was shocked that the speaker received the loudest and most intense acclamation of all speakers at the conference: “As a descendant of the annihilated nation of Polish Jews, three million murdered people, I felt fear that Saturday afternoon in Berlin. To see how German intellectuals unite in condemning Israel - yes, I found that not only shocking but frightening.”

As he continued in the same newspaper interview:

This point where in Germany, in Berlin, the extreme right and the extreme left unite in their condemnation of Israel. Again: I read about it, but never experienced it in this form; this shock runs deep. If you had told me three days ago that I would see a speaker at a historians’ conference in Germany who relativized the discussion about the Holocaust as “Jewish psychodrama” and received thunderous applause for it - I would have said you were crazy. (...) If, on a sunny Saturday afternoon in Berlin, I have to listen to the Holocaust being downplayed as “Jewish psychodrama” while Germans cheer it, then I have to say: For me, this is deadly serious.¹⁶⁰

160 ——— <https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus239343363/Hijacking-Memory-und-Antisemitismus-Der-Historiker-Jan-Grabowski-ueber-ein-en-Eklat.html>

Looking at an event like this may explain why the Central Council of Jews in Germany suspected that a documenta discussion forum, whose speakers' list included a number of defenders and relativizers of BDS, may turn out a propaganda platform for the normalization and legitimation of BDS. There are plenty of cases where groups, events and discussions were "hijacked" – not by right-wing parties, but by fanatic activists of BDS and their cheering crowd of Israel-hating academics, artists and cultural workers.

One can hardly denounce the Central Council's suspicion when the crisis management of the officials of documenta gGmbH was breathtakingly incompetent, when the, indeed, ritualistic denunciations of anti-semitism (together with all other evils in the world) by politicians like Claudia Roth or the general director of documenta Sabine Schormann were hardly more than dutybound and thus inauthentic, and when the public letter signed by the artistic directors appeared uncompromising and dogmatic – an extremely untypical mode of communication for *ruangrupa*. That their letter supported a definition of anti-semitism that lets BDS off the hook must have confirmed the impression of the Central Council. The Council, together with a number of other German Jewish community organizations, thus voiced their concern that Jewish Israeli artists had not been invited to *documenta fifteen*. For while the makers of *documenta fifteen* did not explicitly support BDS, they did not denounce it either. At the same time they did not invite Israeli Jewish artists or activist groups. Why not?

The spin that was immediately issued by documenta, and took hold with many in the art field, consisted in a purely sophistic reply: there were no Swiss artists invited either, or artists of many other countries, it was repeatedly pronounced.¹⁶¹ Yet no one had suspected documenta for being anti-Swiss, while many of the makers of *documenta fifteen* had previously signed public letters against Israel or against the anti-BDS resolution of the German Bundestag. The propagandistic nature of the spin became most evident when it was merged with factual ignorance in an article by Hanno Hauenstein, who directs the culture section in the weekend edition of *Berliner Zeitung*, where the author wondered "whether those who are now accusing the Documenta of the lack of Israeli artists would also

161 — Another dimension of the same spin was that such national identifications were out-moded, if not nationalist. So, if nobody knows anything about the nationality of documenta participants, why bother whether Jews from Israel were invited or not? Here one can see that silent exclusions can thrive best where the exclusionary criteria were purportedly "overcome" – but still remain effective.

apply the same standard to the Whitney Biennale”¹⁶² – without apparently having any knowledge of the fact that the Whitney Biennial is the Biennial of American art to which Israeli artists are not invited for more than obvious reasons. Hence, only idiots would apply the same standards to the Whitney Biennale – but the aim of this nonsensical reasoning was obviously not to enter a discussion but to perpetuate a spin.

The spin eventually crossed the line to propaganda after sprayers during the night broke into one of the venues – the building where also Kassel’s Lolita Bar is located – where artists prepared for their shows. Apparently this was not the first time people broke into documenta spaces, yet now the sprayers left a number of graffiti, among them the number “187” and the word “Peralta”. The number was immediately identified by documenta as a politically motivated death threat against “A Question of Funding”, who happened to work in the building among other artists, because it refers to the Californian Penal Code for murder. Yet everyone remotely familiar with the Hip Hop scene knows that the code is in wide-spread use in youth culture among self-styled “gangster rappers” like the German Hip Hop Band *187 Strassenbande*, who proudly wear the code in their name. Similarly the name “Peralta” was associated by documenta with a fascist Spanish politician named Isabelle Peralta, utterly unknown in Germany, while it could have equally, and more plausibly, been associated with a rapper of the same name or with the famous skateboarder Stacy Peralta and the Powell-Peralta label of streetwear and skateboards. And given that these were not the only tags, a youth cultural context was more likely than a political one. Among others there was a smiley right next to “187” in the stair cases as well as the tag “THC”, a ubiquitous Hip Hop tag. But these tags did not fit the documenta narrative and were not reported in the press release. Instead the incident was connected in the press release to anti-Islamic and pro-Israel stickers that were found at documenta’s *ruruhaus* a few months earlier. Arbitrarily connecting the tags with these months-old stickers, documenta announced that “the current incidents are taken very seriously” and security staffing was increased. And the artistic directors and their team issued a statement: “We consider the vandalist acts as a politically motivated threat at The Question of Funding’s and Party Office’s venue and as an attack on all of us, lumbung members and artists. We are wishing for a working atmosphere where acts of violence towards the artists’ persons, venues, and artworks cannot be tolerated”.¹⁶³

162 ——— <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/vandalismus-und-morddrohungen-gegen-kunst-kollektiv-documenta-debatte-eskaliert-li.230862>

163 ——— <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/documenta-and-mu>



Graffiti, WH22, documenta fifteen. Photography by: Oliver Marchart.

The problem with this statement is that there is no clear proof that these tags were intended as an act of violence against documenta artists in the first place. Given the diversity of these tags - from “187” to the mysterious “Peralta”, the smiley and the “THC” – it takes a lot of vested interest to interpret the tags not in a youth cultural context but as a political threat against a particular artist group. Nonetheless the incident was immediately weaponized against the critics of documenta, i.e. German media, the Central Council and other representatives of the Jewish community. These critics, it was implicitly insinuated, were responsible for a climate in which the life of documenta artists was supposedly put in danger. As the Lord Mayor of Kassel, Christian Geselle, a staunch supporter of this narrative, pronounced: “Having discussions about documenta fifteen is one thing, but intimidating artists by committing crimes goes far beyond the pale and damages the image of the city of Kassel as a place of artistic freedom and host to artists from all over the world.”¹⁶⁴ As if there was a direct causal line from criticizing BDS to committing crimes.¹⁶⁵ This highly spec-

seum-fridericianum-ggmbh-on-vandalism-in-a-documenta-fifteen-exhibition-venue/

164 ——— Ibid.

165 ——— Not surprisingly, Yazan Khalili took continued use of the incident for propaganda purposes. Asked in the *Berliner Zeitung* by the aforementioned Hanno Hauenstein whether the vandalism resulted from the “campaign” against ruangrupa and The Question of Funding, Khalili answered: “Definitely”, and “What we see here is an act of political

ulative framing of the incident was successfully propagated throughout the art field, and the question as to why no Jewish Israelis participated was off the table—until charges of anti-semitism returned with a vengeance with Taring Padi's anti-semitic banner on Friedrichsplatz.¹⁶⁶

incitement". As he continued: "That really exceeded my imagination! That we are dealing with such a threat here in Germany," just to decry, unsurprisingly, the criticism of BDS as racist. See <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/yazan-khalili-uns-palaestinen-er-nicht-mehr-einzuladen-waere-selbstzensur-li.236974>

166 ——— For a moment it returned, though, with the documenta opening speech of the German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Conclusion

One can speculate why BDS has been comparatively successful in the fields of art and science, more so than in other fields. As this book suggested, cultural institutions constitute a field of struggle over hegemony, that is, widely shared consent and consensus. They thus make a worthy target for all kinds of political projects. It goes without saying that not all of these projects are actually politically commendable. But besides this dimension of hegemonic struggle, what is the main problem with BDS, given that it has become a spontaneous ideology of the art-world? I would suggest the problem is not that all too many institutions would explicitly and openly subscribe to it. The problem is that they silently do. Israeli artists and institutions are confronted today with an invisible boycott. The effects are devastating, not for the state of Israel, but to many Jewish artists from Israel who are not invited abroad anymore, especially not to the progressive biennial complex. Not that all the functionaries of these institutions were ardent supporters of BDS, but—and to this degree, BDS was successful—it has simply become a nuisance to invite potential troublemakers from Israel or take “dirty money” from Israeli institutions or the State of Israel that would support the participation of Israeli artists. Their mere presence could, potentially, lead to aggressive open letters by BDS supporters, especially when state funding from Israel is involved. Again, the double standards are breathtaking, as next to nobody from the art-field protests against artists or scientists being funded by the Chinese state, which threw one million Uyghurs in labor camps, or by the Turkish state, which regularly bombs the Kurdish people, and the list could be continued *ad libitum*. But by not inviting Israeli artists in the first place, the directors and functionaries of art institutions save themselves a lot of potential trouble.

In the case of *documenta fifteen* there was never any explicit statement that invitation policies would follow the line of BDS. But nonetheless, and despite its integrative posture and joyous communality, not a single Jewish Israeli artist was invited. It seems there is “lumbung” for all kinds of international groups and individual artists, as well as for the inhabitants

of Kassel, but not for Jews from Israel. Everyone seems to be invited to communal “sharing,” based on the *ruangrupa* principle of generosity, but Jews from Israel had never been invited to share. It takes a lot of willful naïveté to believe that this is for the same circumstantial reasons why Swiss artists had not been invited.

What is equally discomfiting was *ruangrupa*’s refusal to truly engage with the historical and political context of Germany. Fair enough, one may say, why should an artistic group of the global South care about the involvement of former Nazis in early *documenta*-shows? But just imagine the opposite case. Imagine it had just been discovered that the founders of a Biennial in the global South were colonial racists, war criminals and torturers. Would one not expect from the artistic directors of this hypothetical Biennial to not keep silent on this, to relate to it, to perhaps make it a topic in their show in an appropriate way – rather than keeping total silence about it? Would these hypothetical curators, if they hadn’t bothered at all, not been greeted, and rightly so, with a huge public outcry? Why this blindness with regard to the recently unearthed local history of their institution by artistic directors whose main interest lies in nothing other than local histories? “Dig where you stand” could have been the motto of *documenta fifteen*. But nobody bothered to look down to their feet and to institutional ground below.

After two decades, the paradigm shift initiated by *dX* and *D11* has come to an apogee with *documenta fifteen*, but it also unearthed problematic aspects of an ongoing struggle over collective memory. To be fair, some of these problems were supposed to be addressed in the design of the *documenta fifteen* expert discussion platforms, but their well-meaning title “We need to talk!” appears to gesture at the impossible in a conjuncture where both sides have taken deeply entrenched positions. What we need today, I would venture to claim, is not a liberal “multi-directional” approach to, say, the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of colonialism. What we need to do is, without political naivety, to “divide the division” in a moment where compromise is impossible but enmity unproductive. What do I mean by this? There might be no way “to talk” because of a striking incapability on the side of most participants in the discussion to criticize two things *at once*: Western-centrism *and* Israel-related anti-Semitism. The very division of these two targets worthy of critique results from a political operation, which emerged from a long history of struggles that cannot simply be reversed or ameliorated by any moralistic injunction to talk. But it can be irritated, and the division can be divided. In the ongoing struggle over collective memory, the colonial legacy needs to be shaken off, but not to the detriment of Holocaust memorization. This cannot be achieved, under given conditions, through some sort of imaginary compromise. It would be an illusion to think that, in a situation in which

the stakeholders have no interest in compromise, we would only need some diversity training and a few more moralistic arguments to find common ground. This is not going to work out because of the political, that is, hegemonial stakes involved in the debate. But maybe it does not need to work out in this liberal way. For *even without* common ground between deeply divided stakeholders, both Western-centrism and Israel-related anti-Semitism can and must be attacked at once—which, of course, will irritate *both sides* of the aisle. If this book has somewhat contributed to such irritation, then it has fulfilled one of its tasks.

Field and Discourse (Theoretical Appendix)

In the preceding chapters, an attempt has been made to shed discourse-analytical light on hegemonic shifts in the art field from four perspectives for six documenta exhibitions. From the point of view of rigorous discourse analysis, this case study is undoubtedly impressionistic and not based on an overly extensive corpus. However, the aim was not an extensive discourse analysis in the technical sense, but rather an analytical experiment based on a limited set of discursive events (catalogue texts, interview passages, artistic works and their reception, audio tours, etc.). This experiment is by all means polemical, if one understands polemical in the sense of the *polemos*, the implicit or hidden war that, according to Foucault, rages in and underneath society and is for the most part perceptible only in as the distant roar of battle.¹⁶⁷ From Foucault's as well as Gramsci's and Laclau's point of view—as discussed in the opening chapter—the social is a space shaped by constant hegemonic struggle. The Nietzschean gist of Foucault's genealogical phase is that the battle rages on even when peace seems to have long since been concluded.¹⁶⁸

167 ——— *Discipline and Punish* closes with a reference to the “roar of battle,” 308. Also see Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macey (London: Penguin, 2020).

168 ——— If this is true, then not only is a space that, like the art field, looks apolitical at first glance the terrain of disputes over hegemony, but every analysis of this space will also be entangled in hegemonic disputes, because the field of science/scholarship is itself no less an arena of hegemonic struggles. In this sense, any analysis of the field of art, even the most scientific, is indeed polemical—for the same reason that every single exhibition review, even the most laudatory, is polemical. It is, after all, always already enmeshed in hegemonic struggles. The demonstrative display of disinterestedness is one of the most popular strategies within these struggles, which is why the illusion of complete objectifiability must be abandoned for discourse analyses. There is no neutral terrain, no disinterested scientific gaze. There is no escaping one's own bias, whether one likes it or not; in fact, the only thing one can honestly do is to reveal one's bias. This insight by no means con-

What are the implications of this Foucauldian hypothesis for our concept of the art field? A book the art field entitled *Hegemony Machines* will have to disclose not only what is meant by hegemony, but also what is meant by “art field.” The term is anything but self-explanatory, which is why this text will now undertake to delineate it a bit more sharply on the level of theory—if only on the basis of a few provisional remarks. On a theoretical level, then, the term “art field,” as it has been used so far, will be explained from the perspective of hegemony theory. In the process, it will be necessary to compare hegemony theory with the accomplishments of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological field theory, even if, in the final analysis, it does not conceive of the art field in terms of the social or even the economic, but rather the political. Nevertheless, it shares a whole series of assumptions with Bourdieu, who also views the social function of art through the prism of power and conflict analysis. Notwithstanding all the differences, we will therefore begin by pointing out some of the overlaps between *field theory* and *hegemony theory* before closing with some observations on the rift separating the two approaches.

Bourdieu and Gramsci

For Bourdieu, every field (economic, political, artistic, etc.) is characterized by, among other things, a certain “economy,” the predominance of certain types of capital (for example, economic, cultural, or social capital), and certain rules of the game and conditions of access that prevail in the respective field. Historically, according to Bourdieu, the art field is surprisingly young. In the strict sense, we can speak of the art field only since Impressionism, and it is determined by the autonomization of its own logic (as is particularly clear in the case of *l’art pour l’art*). Bourdieu locates the art field, as well as the cultural field in general, within the field of power.¹⁶⁹ To put it simply, the art field exercises dominance, but occu-

demns discourse analyses to unscientificness; it only changes our concept of science. It does not even prevent us from trying to acquire as sober and clear a picture of a given situation as possible—not based on an illusion of impartiality, however, but in order to assess the situation objectively and avoid any wishful thinking. This is also one of the shades of meaning of Gramsci’s motto “pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will.” On the level of analysis, Gramsci is not at all concerned with a “dedicated science in the banal sense (for this would fall into a kind of “optimism” or even voluntarism of the intellect, which would arrive at false, or at least distorted, results), but rather with an analysis that is as realistic as possible and purified of all optimistic transfigurations—for only such analysis is useful to a political cause.

169 ——— Bourdieu defines the field of power as follows: “Thus, a field of power is a gaming space in which these agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital (economic or cultural capital in particular) to be able

pies a dominated position within the field of power. (That is, it is dominated by the economically and politically more potent pole of the field of power.) The social field, the power field, and the art field relate to each other like Russian dolls: the power field, which must not be confused with the political field, is located at the dominant pole of the social space, while within the power field the art field is situated at the dominated pole.¹⁷⁰

This structure of social space entails certain problems from the perspective of hegemony theory, and the question arises as to whether there can be any talk of an independent field of power at all from that perspective (even as a special case, as with Bourdieu). Nevertheless, it remains to be noted that the complete subsumption of the artistic field under the field of power renders any culturally romantic or transfigured view of the art field utterly implausible. The art field is anything but a power-free space—despite the fact that it is characterized by a certain (relatively) autonomous logic of its own. In other words, according to Bourdieu, the (relative) autonomization of the art field occurring within the historical process of social differentiation did not lead to its detachment from the field of power, but only to the further internal diversification of the field of power. To analyze culture and, more narrowly, art, now meant to analyze power. Whoever enters the art field does not do so, as Bourdieu would say, out of disinterested pleasure. In Gramscian terms, it is precisely those gains in terrain within a field that would be considered an expression of power relations that consist not only in the accumulation or loss of field-specific capitals by certain actors, but especially in the shifting and recoding of what Gramsci called *senso comune*, common sense: the totality of ideas and basic convictions considered legitimate and accepted consensually.

It is fascinating to see the extent to which Bourdieu is a Gramscian in this respect, without even finding it a circumstance worth mentioning. Where Gramsci refers to *senso comune*, or common sense, Bourdieu has a whole series of technical terms (such as *illusio*, *doxa*, even *habitus*) to denote the seemingly self-evident practices and ideas that apply in a field,

to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields confront each other using strategies aimed at preserving or transforming these relations of power. The forces that can be enlisted in these struggles, and the orientation given to them, be it conservative or subversive, depend on what might be called the “exchange rate” (or “conversion rate”) that obtains among the different forms of capital, in other words, on the very thing that these strategies aim to preserve or transform (principally through the defense or criticism of representations of the different forms of capital and their legitimacy).” Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 264–265.

170 ——— Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, trans. Randal Johnson et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 34.

and thus relegate the contingent character of every social order—a character circumventable only by the use of power—to the realm of the culturally unconscious of a *sensus communis*. This consensus is unconscious not in the Freudian sense, but—insofar as it is tacitly assumed—even where partial dissent should occur within its realm. This consensual horizon that ingrains itself in a particular time and society, as described by Gramsci, is not only the consequence of social struggles (Bourdieu speaks of the struggle over the production of common sense) but is also explicitly referred to by Bourdieu using the Gramscian term *senso comune*.

Even within the individual fields, specific consensual presuppositions prevail that have been as much established through struggles as the principles of division and classification prevailing in the respective space. Social groups and classes, for example, are not predetermined in social reality, but only constructed through classification struggles that distinguish and separate these groups and classes from others. In the struggle over classifications—a dimension of class struggle—Bourdieu thus sees a phenomenon that Gramsci would also describe as an aspect of hegemonic class struggles.

The radical constructivism of this approach is to be appreciated.¹⁷¹ In contrast to Marxist objectivism, which ultimately attributes the existence of classes to their position in the production process—that is, to “objective” economic criteria—, for Bourdieu, classes (and other social actors) emerge from classification struggles over the power of definition, or precisely that which, from a Gramscian perspective, can be called hegemony. This would already give us an initial definition of the art field that would be equally plausible from a field theory and a discourse theory perspective. The art field, like every field, is the scene of a “more or less openly declared struggle for the definition of the legitimate principles of division of that field.”¹⁷² One is consequently tempted to offer a tautological definition of the field: a social (or, in Laclauian terms, discursive) field is that which has been definitively asserted as that field by the struggles of that field or around that field. It could be formulated even more pointedly: the art field is the struggle for “the art field.” What is at stake in the hegemonic disputes and canon shifts “in” the art field is thus the art field itself—the nature and constitution of its legitimate objects, rules, actors, institutions, but above all its boundaries. In its practice, the New Institutionalism on the periphery of the art field presumably understood this game very precisely. But the canon struggles in and around the center of

171 ——— Whether or not Bourdieu follows it consistently is up to debate and cannot be discussed here.

172 ——— Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Mathew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 242.

the field naturally also define both its respective boundaries and its nature. How legitimate, for example, is political art at the center of the field, or is it only considered a certain genre on its periphery?

Yet, there is even more at stake. Because from a hegemony-theoretical perspective, these boundaries do not have to do solely with the question that is of such concern to traditional aesthetics: what can (still) be called art and what cannot?¹⁷³ To a much greater extent, they have to do with questions in the vein of: What is even an “art institution,” and at what point does one take on functions that go far beyond concerns internal to the art field (such as above all functions of reproducing a hegemonic or producing a counter-hegemonic consensus)? What hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses are produced by such institutions? Is it possible—and this is a “practical” question that can only be answered concretely in each respective context—to articulate radical or emancipatory discourses that are produced by art institutions but bear a relation to and reinforce broader, extra-artistic counter-hegemonic shifts?

These questions raise the problem of field boundaries in a manner that differs somewhat from Bourdieu. The boundaries of the art field begin to blur as soon as we analyze its functions, institutions, and discourses (in the narrow sense of the term discourse) in terms of their imprint on the hegemonic formation as a whole. While there can be no doubt that, in certain respects, art institutions fulfill different functions than, for example, political party apparatuses, in other respects—in the reproduction and reinforcement of (counter-) hegemonic articulations—they fulfill quite similar ones. In both cases, such apparatuses are ultimately nothing more than institutionally condensed discourse/practice ensembles that themselves reproduce and circulate discourses and practices. And if we are interested in the hegemonic struggles that run transversely to all topographical level distinctions or topological field distinctions (inasmuch as they are or want to become truly hegemonic), they must permeate social relations in their entirety and attempt to permeate them with a particular hegemonic project. Then, scandalous as it may sound to some ears, the difference between a party apparatus and, for

173 ——— This question, though, remains hotly contested within the field, of course, as it is linked to the issue of conditions of access: “In fact, one of the major issues at stake in the struggles that occur in the literary or artistic field is the definition of the limits of the field, that is, of legitimate participation in the struggles. Saying of this or that tendency in writing that ‘it just isn’t poetry’ or ‘literature’ means refusing it a legitimate existence, excluding it from the game, excommunicating it.” Pierre Bourdieu, “The Intellectual Field: A World Apart,” *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 143.

example, an art gallery shrinks to nothingness. In the analysis of hegemonic formation structures and field-spanning discourses, these institutional differences, which may be decisive from another perspective, dissolve for the most part.

Pierre Bourdieu and Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe

In order to substantiate this point, we must return to the further discourse-analytical development of Gramsci's theory of hegemony by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In their case as well, the correspondences with Bourdieu's field theory are surprisingly strong, although we cannot go into them in detail within the scope of this text. In a special way, however, Bourdieu and Laclau/Mouffe converge in their radical relationism.¹⁷⁴ As Bourdieu states, a field—indeed, social reality *per se*—is determined by *relations* more than anything else: “The real is relational.”¹⁷⁵ Both discourse theory and field theory are theories of difference, since both ultimately come from structuralism:

In fact, the main idea is that to exist within a social space, to occupy a point or to be an individual within a social space, is to differ, to be different. According to Benveniste's formula regarding language, “to be distinctive, to be significant, is the same thing,” significant being opposed to insignificant, or to different meanings.¹⁷⁶

To give a relatively simple discourse-analytical example of this point: as a curator, the name “Roger M. Buerger” only means something in relation to names of other curators (in the double sense of “being significant” to which Bourdieu alludes in reference to Benveniste) if it differs from the names of his predecessors “Okwui Enwezor” or “Catherine David.” This is by no means as trivial as it may sound, for in order to distinguish oneself not only in name but also in terms of curatorship, a whole series of other differences must be factored in. The curator's proper name therefore functions as an abbreviation within a much broader discourse we might call “*d12* discourse,” which on the one hand is itself relational—that is, organized in differences (which is why it is by all means complex, possibly contradictory, in itself)—, and on the other hand will only be recognizable as an independent position in relation to, among others, *dX* and *D11* discourses.

174 ——— As mentioned above, already Gramsci's concept of hegemony is characterized by a certain relationalism, because hegemony is a relation (between classes or other social forces) and not a thing. On Laclau/Mouffe's relationalism, see *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

175 ——— Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 3.

176 ——— *Ibid.*, 9.

At no point in this relational web will we be dealing with an ontological substance: we will never know what *dI2* is or who Roger M. Buegel is “in truth” but will only approximate what these signifiers mean in contrast to others (for example, *dX* and *DII*).¹⁷⁷ In the previous chapters, we attempted to trace precisely these shifts in meaning by way of Buegel’s efforts at transformism. After all, discourses are not crystals; they are constantly contested and therefore unceasingly transformed: individual positions are extracted and incorporated into one’s own discourse, others are silenced, still others are openly rejected or combatted. This is why Bourdieu can speak of a field as a *field of forces* just like magnetic fields. This can be translated into the discourse theory approach as follows: discursive shifts are, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the result of dynamic power struggles in and around the field; they contribute to the *history of the field*. This means, for example, that, after *DII*, the art field was a (relatively) different one inasmuch as a (slightly) different canon was endowed with legitimacy in it than before. After *dI2*, which transformed some elements of this canon, it was again a (relatively) different one. At no time, however, does one encounter the art field as a supra-historical substance (or as a reflection of a substance, as the Marxist base/superstructure model would have postulated).

If one combines the criterion of legitimacy or consensus construction (Gramsci) with the structuralist principle of relationality and dynamizes it, then one obtains the greatest possible overlap between Laclau’s discourse and Bourdieu’s concept of the field. The dynamic of the field consists simply in the fact that each new struggle must build on the terrain of previous struggles. Anyone seeking to analyze this dynamic history of struggles within a field will only be able to take a snapshot of these struggles and, as the case may be, read developments from a series of snapshots placed one next to the other. Because the history of field developments—that is, of the definitional struggles in and around the field—cannot be halted; time remains in flux and can neither be halted nor reversed.

But what is this struggle or, more precisely, how can it be theorized? If it indeed functions as the motor of a field’s historicity, then the understanding of what a field is also seems to depend fundamentally on the

177 ——— Their radical relationism, incidentally, would allow both Bourdieu and Laclau to declare the concept of society as a totality to be obsolete. For Bourdieu, the relationships between forces in social space are primary. And the fact that the space of relations is considered the primary social reality at the same time means that, along with the idea of society as a totality, that of pre-constituted social groups becomes obsolete. Laclau has nothing but scorn for classical group sociology; see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London/New York: Verso, 2005).

answer to this question. And in fact, at this point a difference between Bourdieu's approach and that of Laclau/Mouffe comes to the fore, one that is hardly noticeable at first but on closer examination proves essential. For on the one hand, field-specific struggles follow the rules of their respective fields. On the other hand, however, Bourdieu speaks of the struggle that ultimately guarantees the historicity of each field and—related in this respect to Marx's class struggle—drives history forward. But how can this fundamental struggle, if you will, be theorized? Bourdieu does not provide an answer. His anti-philosophism, as it were, prevents him from conceiving of struggle on a more fundamental level than that of a mere nominalist plurality (similar to what Foucault did with the war hypothesis of his genealogical phase, albeit in a more metaphorical way). The question thus arises as to what then distinguishes all field-specific struggles "as struggles." Laclau/Mouffe dare to state such a logic of struggles "as struggles." In discourse theory, we find what remains in the dark in field theory and might possibly be considered problematic: a theory not of struggles but of the discursive logic of antagonism underlying all struggles.

The concept of antagonism arises from Laclau/Mouffe's effort to answer a question that is analogous to our opening question: What determines a field as a field? What makes a discourse a discourse; what guarantees a certain degree of coherence and systematicity in a discourse? For Laclau/Mouffe, this question can be answered if an answer can be found to the correlating question of how the boundaries of a discourse are constructed, because according to Laclau/Mouffe, every object is determined by its boundaries. Their answer differs from that of Bourdieu, who negotiates this question primarily as a problem of the conditions of access and entry to a particular field. For Laclau/Mouffe, the determination of the boundaries of a discursive system also bears a connection to inclusion and exclusion effects, but their explanation tries to shed light on this question exclusively from within the difference-theoretical setting of radical relationalism. For if, to begin with, every discursive system is a system of differences (and thus relations), and if, secondly (according to Laclau in a later elaboration of the argument¹⁷⁸), the boundaries of the system determine the system, then these boundaries cannot consist of another difference—because this difference, as merely another difference, would be indistinguishable from the other differences in the system and therefore incapable of functioning as their boundary. Only if this boundary marks an outside that is not differential are we dealing with a real boundary. But what would such an outside be?

At this point in the argument, Laclau/Mouffe introduce the concept of antagonism. An antagonism is not just any conflict but marks the

178 ——— Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).

actual systematicity of a differential discourse system by referring precisely to the outside of that system, which—from the point of view of the system—must be of a radically different nature. Only in relation to an outside operating purely negatively or negatorily can the differences of the system find any kind of commonality and systematicity—that is, equivalence. Only the reference to something that they themselves are not, but by which they all feel negated, can guarantee their belonging to one and the same system. In this way, namely by way of an experience of negation shared by all, the differences merge to form what Laclau/Mouffe call a chain of equivalence. This relatively abstract model immediately makes sense when applied to the construction of political alliances. The new social movements (for example the women's movement, the peace movement, the ecology movement, the lesbian/gay movement, et cetera) are not united by any substantial common ground. A concrete alliance between different groups from different movements can therefore only be temporarily stabilized in a chain of equivalence if these movements see their respective identities threatened or hindered in their development by a common enemy. This could be said of every form of political mobilization of differential positions into an equivalence chain. What unites them is not a common substance, but a common outside of a purely negative nature.

It is here that we recognize how Laclau/Mouffe's proposition differs from Bourdieu's model. Bourdieu is primarily interested in the positionality of differences within a field or the correlationality of differences between fields—that is, in their respective "order," as well as in the correlations, distributions, and homologies of different orders of difference (which in turn endow political mobilization attempts with certain chances of success). Laclau/Mouffe are primarily interested in, if you will, the transformation of difference into equivalence, or in other words in the production of equivalences along antagonistic fault lines that are indifferent to positionalities, distributions, field boundaries, or functional differentiations. This element of the political (not to be confused with politics as it is reeled off in the political field as a matter of course¹⁷⁹) is the only one in which we are actually dealing with a certain radical disinterestedness, precisely because previously existing field boundaries, and thus specific field rules, are abolished and made newly articulable. Perhaps this difference between the two approaches has to do with the fact that Laclau/Mouffe's discourse theory follows the metaphor of the political and conceives of conflict as antagonism, while Bourdieu follows the metaphor of the economic and models struggle on competition (over accu-

179 ——— On the difference between politics and the political, see Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

mulation profits). At the same time, this means that Bourdieu has a concept of the field of power and a concept of the political field, but not of antagonism, which structures and destructures all field boundaries equally. Without this concept, however, not only the matter of what is actually political about politics remains inexplicable, but also what the political could be in other fields beyond politics—for example, the political in political art practices or even the “public” in public art.¹⁸⁰

180 ——— To answer these questions, however, one would have to elaborate. See Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2019).

In his essay Oliver Marchart takes an analytical and provocative look at the last six documenta exhibitions. Based on the theories of Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Marchart describes museums and biennials as national and global hegemony machines that reproduce bourgeois dominant culture, but also make it vulnerable to attack. Along with documenta's recent history, Marchart traces a canon shift in the art field with regard to political art practices, theory, art education and the decentering of the West.

ISBN: 9798839575660

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