Biennials, Triennials, and documenta

Charles Green and
Anthony Gardner

THE EXHIBITIONS THAT CREATED CONTEMPORARY ART

WILEY Blackwell

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

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Preface

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

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

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

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

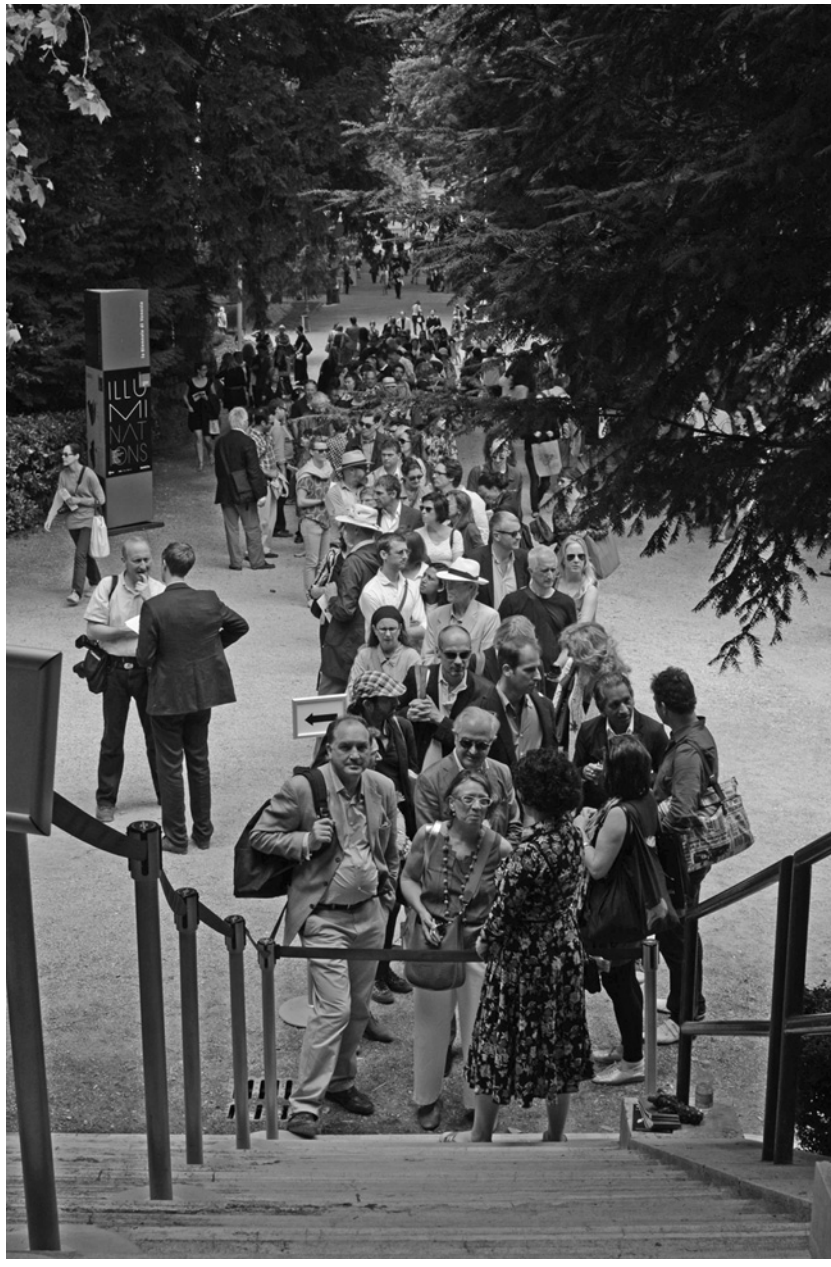

Figure 0.1 Queue of art-world guests waiting patiently on the first morning of vernissage week to visit artist Mike Nelson's installation in the British Pavilion at the 54th Biennale of Venice, 2011. Photograph Charles Green.

Introduction

Why Biennials?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 1. The Second Wave

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

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

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

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

Part 2. The Politics of Legitimacy

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

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

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

Part 3. Hegemony or a New Canon

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

rather than just in its usual home in Kassel; and by sharing curatorial responsibility between himself and a panel of invited co-curators. We will examine the tensions between Enwezor's postcolonial destabilization of one intellectual or artistic authority – what he described as a "postcolonial constellation" – and managerial discourses of delegated duties.[25] *Documenta11* had finally rejected the trajectory of biennials presented at the outset of this book, definitively dispersing the still-authoritative biennial model (and by implication its still-current, still-roving über-curator).

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

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

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

The Cultural Geography of Biennials

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

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

Notes

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

2008); Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History. 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013); Robert Storr (ed.), *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006); Rachel Weiss (ed.), *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011); the Afterall series of exhibition histories, cited throughout this book, are an invaluable resource; as well, we see the production of exhibitions, sometimes with associated books or exhibition catalogs, that reconstruct whole exhibitions, or else create alternative versions of them as ways of revising art history.

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

Tate Britain, London, April 3, 2009, authors' notes; Dermis P. Léon, "Havana, Biennial, Tourism: The Spectacle of Utopia," *Art Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 68–73.

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

Part 1

The Second Wave

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

1

1972: The Rise of the Star-Curator

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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