

Resistivity in Contemporary Art Biennials: A Synchronic Analysis

by

Amy Bruce

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Abstract

The dominant art historical narrative of contemporary art biennials starts with the Venice Biennale. Taking the Venice Biennale as *the biennial* template, form, and medium, for universalizing biennial history is clearly problematic, and the concept of “biennials of resistance,” as proposed by curator Ranjit Hoskote, has become an important catalyst for writing non- and counter-Venetian histories of biennials. This history of counter-biennials situates “biennials of resistance” in a parallel, or a tangential anti-/postcolonial canon to the lineage established by the Venice Biennale.

Hoskote’s proposed counter narrative approach limits and ultimately maintains divisive Eurocentric biases. I argue for re-framing the geographic interpretation of global South to collapse and expand the “biennials of resistance” framework and problematize the anti-/postcolonial canon that constitutes it through, what I call, *biennial resistivity*. *Biennial resistivity* utilises the qualifiers of the “biennial of resistance” to become a conceptual rather than geographical framework. As this dissertation demonstrates, *biennial resistivity* amplifies the post/decolonial resistive potential of a biennial given its local specificities and complicates the global South dichotomy and static historical interpretations of the anti-/postcolonial biennial.

Moreover, I propose to study biennial historiography not by focusing on the “waves” biennial historiography, and instead to utilize a synchronic analysis according to host years. Synchronic analysis mobilises the temporal biennial model (of every two years) using a horizontal, relational, and comparative approach to elucidate (art)

historical, political, social, and cultural complexities that constitute biennials at across locales, while attending to their specific histories.

The time frame between 2017-2018 situates my study, where I examine three different biennials as comparative case studies: #00Bienal de La Habana in Havana, Cuba; the 15th Istanbul Biennial in Istanbul, Turkey; and documenta 14, in Kassel, Germany. I argue each of these biennials are “biennials of resistance” by way of their *resistivity*. Moreover, I demonstrate a new conceptualization of “biennials of resistance” through a synchronic methodological paradigm to shift the study of biennials to move past entrenched Eurocentric historiographic epistemologies.

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Introduction

Biennial Resistivity

In their introduction to *The Biennial Reader* (2009), editors Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø pose the question: “Can one even speak of a singular origin or history of ‘the biennial’ when the various examples that would seem to fit the category are spread all over the world and when the cultural, financial, and ideological differences between them are so vast?”¹ The question is indicative of a more significant problem concerning the history and history writing of biennials. The conventional biennial histories, presently, are written as narratives starting with the Venice Biennale because it is historically the oldest – formally established in 1895 for a wedding anniversary celebration for the then Italian King and Queen. Firmly rooted in the idea of historical progress, a narrative such as this privileges a particular institutional and local biennial history as universal. It constitutes the status and meaning of biennial editions, and to what extent and under what premises biennials are acknowledged as coeval participants in the contemporary art world, according to a specific Western-centric temporal, spatial and in consequence, geo-political order.²

The idea of “biennials of resistance,” as proposed by co-curator of the Gwangju Biennale in 2008, Ranjit Hoskote, is a catalyst for writing non- and counter-Venetian history of biennials. However, even in its infancy, this scholarship continues to be rooted in a historicist model of history writing. It preserves a linear history parallel or tangential to that of the Venice Biennale

¹ Elena Filipovic, et al., “Biennialology,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 18.

² Aleida Assmann, “Five Aspects of the Modern Temporal Regime,” in *Is Time Out of Joint? Five Aspects of the Modern Temporal Regime*, trans. Sarah Clift (Cornell University Press, 2020), 92–147.

by focusing on canonizing anti- and postcolonial biennials in the global South. While it is undeniably important to critique the Venice Biennale as a universal template, and, moreover, to acknowledge the contributions of biennials in the “periphery” or global South, Hoskote’s framework of biennials of resistance limits the emancipatory potential of localities outside of his geographic rather than conceptual understanding, which ultimately maintains Eurocentric frameworks. Since biennials are in dialogue with each other within contemporary art worlds, they are not isolated geographically. Thus, to collapse the North-South divide, the concept of the South needs to be mobilised relationally, rather than exclusively geographically, to explore ongoing processes of decolonization and transculturalization.

Since the Venice Biennale and other biennials in the global North emerged as part of a modernizing, civilizing, or colonizing project, many scholars argue that biennials cannot avoid this legacy and demonstrate how biennials replicate homogenizing patterns of neoliberal globalization because of the replication of the white cube display format. Art historian Elena Filipovic argues that while biennials claim to offer a counter-model to the modern, Western museum, they, in fact, often end up replicating the problematic white cube frame/structure.³ As art historian Thierry de Duve writes, the Venice Biennale, in particular, plays a prominent role in reproducing the cultural hegemony of the West or global North.⁴ Art historian Marian Pastor Rocas is also sceptical that biennials originating in the nineteenth-century for the colonial spread of capital power could be “converted into spaces for social justice.”⁵

³ Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, edited by Elena Filipovi et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010,) 322-345.

⁴ Thierry de Duve, “The Glocal and the Singuniversal,” *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (November 1, 2007): 681.

⁵ Pastor Rocas, “Crystal Palace Exhibitions,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 53-54.

Similarly, art historian Valerie Kabov argues that the Venice Biennale works as a mechanism for countries to seek validation from the global North.⁶ Although some editions of the Venice Biennale have adopted postcolonial curatorial rhetoric, such as Okwui Enwezor's 2015 edition, overall, the Venice Biennale often supports and reproduces existing global power relations and inequalities because of the limited national representation in the central Giardini and because of funding structures that privilege artists with European and American gallery representation. Because the global North economically and politically holds more power, global recognition is dictated by its terms. Kabov asserts that the Venice Biennale presents a "northern version of the seeing and representing the world."⁷

The notion of "biennials of resistance" functions as a framework for understanding biennials that work towards diversifying biennial historiography. Origin stories of individual biennials are unique to their local contexts and concerns, taking into account cultural, financial, and ideological differences that surround each biennial and/or edition. However, relying on editions to construct a comprehensive biennial history, in turn, negates longer institutional histories or less successful editions in between editions deemed historically insignificant. I argue for thinking about *biennial resistivity* to collapse and expand the concept and historiography of biennials of resistance, thereby amplifying a biennial's post/decolonial emancipatory potential and complicating the global South framework and static historical interpretations of the anti- and postcolonial biennial. By restructuring diachronic biennial

⁶ Valerie Kabov, "The Role of the Venice Biennale Partnership with the Art Market in Real and Perceived Democratization of the Art World – African Contemporary Art Case-Study in the Context of the Global South," in *The Venice Biennale and the Art Market, the Venice Biennale as an Art Market: Anatomy of a Complex Relationship* (IESA Conference, Institute of Historical Research, Senate house, London, 2016), 1–5.

⁷ Kabov, 1.

historiography to consider a synchronic model according to hosting years, I argue the case studies of three different biennials that took place between 2017-2018 – #00Bial de La Habana (#00BH) in Havana, Cuba; the 15th Istanbul Biennial in Istanbul, Turkey; and documenta 14 (d14), in Kassel, Germany – demonstrate this urgent need for a new conceptualization of the biennial of resistance.

Moving away from teleological constructions of history and the canonization of editions into a conventional biennial narrative means focusing on the shared contemporary present. As *The Biennial Reader* editors' note, "it is the *biennial exhibition* that has arguably since proved to be *the* means through which most contemporary art becomes known."⁸ As reliably scheduled events, biennials "concentrate," according to art historian Terry Smith, contemporary art's relevance to contemporary circumstances.⁹ As a modality for situating biennials in their contemporary moment, I suggest *biennial resistivity* is a vital paradigm shift because it conceives of a biennial as a site-specific event and frames it in a non-hierarchical, nonlinear, and particular historiography. In conceptually utilizing the category of biennials of resistance, biennial resistivity becomes a distinguishable condition, status, or quality rather than a definitive category. A biennial's resistivity is comparable to electrical circuits, where particular materials are more or less conductive or resistant to an electrical current based on their material composition. For example, gold and copper are less resistant than wood and glass to electrical current. Electrical resistance depends on resistivity, where materials allow or impede the flow of electricity. As such, a biennial's resistance is relative to its resistivity and the

⁸ Filipovic, "Biennialogy," 15.

⁹ Terry Smith, "Biennials Within the Contemporary Composition," *Liverpool Biennial, Biennials within the Contemporary Composition | Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Stage 6 (April 2017): 2–17.

degree to which a biennial is resistive or demonstrates resistivity qualifies a biennial as a biennial of resistance.

The objective is that biennial resistivity focuses on a biennial's historical and current political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances as its material composition and, therefore, its resistive objectives within the production of *its contemporary context*. When concerned with resistivity, regional or local contexts transform the definition of resistance, where the meaning of resistance is discrete. Inevitably the outcome is a scaled understanding of resistance, where what is evaluated as resistance is qualified in relation to what a biennial edition is resisting. Artistic agency has the potential to resist curatorial agency, and certainly there are examples of such in the discussion of the case studies, specifically in Havana and d14, yet emphasis is placed on the curatorial aim of the biennial edition. Furthermore, since resistivity risks being absorbed or neutralized as a rhetorical gesture within biennial institutions, the case studies in this dissertation are understood with respect to their post/decolonial resistivity to hegemonic structures.

Institutional parameters of a biennial inform its biennial complex (that includes the historically constituted exhibition goals, such as curating South-South or South Pacific networks or postcolonial frameworks). Even though longer institutional histories of biennials should be considered, I am not advocating for considerations of the push and pull between a biennial's particular editions. Philosopher Oliver Marchart highlights how biennials are curated in response to previous editions in his analysis of documenta. As he outlines, "hegemonic shifts" occur between the 10th, 11th, and 12th editions of documenta, with the curators engaging with

and against postcolonial theory in accordance with the previous edition.¹⁰ The intention for evaluating a biennial's resistivity is not necessarily the swinging back and forth of curatorial ideology in a biennial's institutional history, or the recuperation of resistivity by seemingly liberal yet conservative institutions. The goal of resistivity is to offer a scaled framework to reconsider restrictive assumptions or pretexts that negate the evaluation and confluence of circumstances that have brought a certain biennial into being. This is not to say that resistivity is a formula for bad opportunism that advocates for equivalents, and that any and every biennial is a biennial of resistance. I suggest that biennial resistivity proposes thinking about the extent to which a biennial resists its specific national and transnational history, context, and/or Eurocentric hegemonic systems, rather than positioning biennials within a falsely universalized system of biennial canonization. This means each biennial is examined within and in accordance with its own institutional histories, yet it is not an attempt to flatten resistance and or suggest that all forms of resistance possess resistive capabilities.

By refocusing biennials of resistance on resistivity, theoretical limitations to the category of biennials of resistance are challenged, and biennials are evaluated comparatively for their individual contributions to exhibition and biennial studies. The aspiration is for resistivity to mobilise the framework established by Hoskote to allow for the potential to evaluate a biennial in its contemporary contextual reality and the uniqueness of its creation to determine if it is a biennial of resistance. It is, therefore, within this understanding of biennial resistivity, an edition becomes a biennial of resistance by its resistivity.

¹⁰ Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization: The Case of Documenta," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 466–91.

Biennial Historiography

Crucially, there is an implicit Anglo-Eurocentrism to the project of current biennial historiography and the waves model proposed by biennial scholars. A common presumption about biennials situates their origin in international industrial exhibitions and trade fairs of nineteenth-century Europe, which maintains the importance of the Venice Biennale. Art historians Lawrence Alloway, Marian Pastor Roces, and Caroline A. Jones are central scholars to this argument.¹¹ The project of writing a more extensive biennial history has been dictated by edited histories, as with exhibition and curatorial studies. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner's text *Biennials, Triennials and documenta* (2016) and Jones's book *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (2016) are examples of such histories. Green, Gardner, and Jones, along with art historian Rebecca Coates, outline biennial history as progressing in a dissemination model, described in "waves." In the waves historical model, a clear lineage from nineteenth-century expositions and world fairs to the Venice Biennale and every subsequent biennial is drawn. Jones argues explicitly that the biennial is an enduring form indebted to universal expositions and world fairs, which I would suggest, alternatively appears to be arguing that these exhibitions and fairs were the enduring forms.¹² The legacy of universal expositions and worlds' fairs is secured by the legacy of the Venice Biennale in the first wave model.

¹¹ Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber, 1969); Roces, 66–87.

¹² Caroline A. Jones makes this argument most recently in her 2016 publication *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetic of Experience*. Other scholars in this discourse include Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1968) and Bruce Altshuler, ed. *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that made Art History, 1962-2002* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2013).

The *first* of these waves of biennials emerged in the 1890s (the Venice Biennale and the Carnegie International), but debates remain over which biennial, either the São Paulo Biennial or the Havana Biennial, constitutes the beginning of the *second* wave.¹³ This *first* wave was the inauguration of the biennial as primarily a representational mode of display, rooted in competitive, national presentations at European international expositions of industrial manufactures and commercial goods. Jones posits the beginning of the *second* wave, or the “post-Venice” biennials, earlier than Coates, Green and Gardner, who sketch a second wave from the 1950s onwards (the São Paulo Biennale, documenta [1955] and the Biennale of Sydney [1973]). The *second* wave “unleashed” the biennial as a global exhibitionary form, where the biennial model was “redeveloped for local and modernizing purposes.”¹⁴

The *third* wave emerges with biennials in the late 1980s and 1990s (the Havana Bienal (1984), the Istanbul Biennial (1987), the Dakar Biennale (1989) (which was reborn as Dak’Art, the Biennial of Contemporary African Art in 1992), Australia’s Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (1993), and the short-lived Johannesburg Biennale (1995)) remodelling the Venice Biennale format, in turn. Importantly the *third* wave was concerned with “reimagining the regional,’ and in turn, challenging perceptions of cultural and economic significance at a local and international level.”¹⁵ In an addendum to the three waves model, Coates insists on an emerging *fourth* wave where biennials can be understood as platforms for globalizing artist-led local

¹³ See Rebecca Coates, “From the Margins to the Center: The São Paulo Biennial, the Biennale of Sydney, and the Istanbul Biennial,” *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research 2* (2014): 113-132.; Green and Gardner; and Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetic of Experience* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, 1st ed. (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2016), 10.

¹⁵ Coates, 114.

politics, given the 31st edition of the São Paulo Biennial, the 19th edition of the Biennale of Sydney and the 14th edition of the Istanbul Biennial (all having taken place in 2014). While it has yet to be determined how biennials in the *fourth* wave contribute to biennial historiography, biennials in *second* and *third* waves are considered the basis for the anti- and post-colonial canon and biennials of resistance.

Despite the overview that the waves model provides, it is imperfect and problematic. Coates notes that even though the São Paulo Biennial's date of inception situates it within the *second* wave, "its [postcolonial curatorial] evolution in the 1990s" groups it with the *third* wave of biennials. This is also the case with the Biennale of Sydney, which would be chronologically located in the *second* wave, but its subsequent editions would shift it to the time of the *third* wave. This raises the question of how productive it is to canonize an already flawed historiographic model with frequent timeline exceptions. It is worth mentioning that curator René Block's biennial framework also suggests a categorization of three biennial models that, in some ways, parallels the waves. Block sparingly identifies Venice, Sydney, and Gwangju, respectively, as classic biennial models.¹⁶ Notably, the biennials align chronologically and geographically, beginning with the "West" before moving outward to Gwangju. Unlike the fluidity of the waves metaphor, the characteristics of Block's models have shifted over time, making his model's framework less reliable. However, and equally, the waves model and Block's framework maintain a centre of innovation, bulwarking Eurocentric dominance, despite

¹⁶ René Block, "We Hop on, We Hop off: The Ever-Faster Spinning Carousel of Biennials," in *Shifting Gravity: World Biennial Forum No 1*, ed. Ute Meta Bauer (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 106–8.

praising postcolonial curatorial innovation in the *third* wave because it evolved from the *first* wave.

Biennial scholarship is informed by poststructuralism and postcolonialism has begun to remedy these concerns and question Eurocentric teleology as scholars and curators recognize the contributions biennials of the global South have made to disrupt Eurocentric contemporary art discourse. By recognizing the work of biennials of the global South, art historians are historically crediting their innovations and simultaneously complicating continued Eurocentric art historical narratives. Jones, Green, and Gardner are interested in developing the second wave and recognizing the critical contributions of biennials of the global South, or *periphery*, to biennial history; however, this still problematically stabilizes/maintains the canonised position of the Venice Biennale in biennial history.

Jones discusses the Bienal de São Paulo as the marking of the “turn from modern internationalism into the present epoch of art’s workings.”¹⁷ Unlike the Venice Biennale, which required artists from the margins to participate in the “international artistic language” to speak of difference, the Bienal de São Paulo “eradicate[d] signs of difference” by using geometric non-objective art, aggravating “the voice of the hegemon.”¹⁸ Similarly, Green and Gardner implicitly accept the *first* wave when they write their history, beginning with the *second* wave. They initially discuss the 1972 documenta, curated by Harold Szeemann, to discuss the biennial turn in curating. Upon this, Green and Gardner chart the construction of post-Venice biennials outside of Europe and North America, highlighting their “rejection of the cultural pretensions –

¹⁷ Jones, 114.

¹⁸ Jones, 114.

and certainly the cultural hegemony – of the North Atlantic.”¹⁹ Specifically, they discuss the development of Bienal de São Paulo, the Biennial of Sydney, and the Havana Bienal in relation to this rejection of hegemony. The historical constructions detailed by Jones, Gardner, and Green regarding biennials of the *second* wave, while significant for acknowledging their contributions, may appear in allegiance with the postcolonial turn in biennial discourse; however, they do not attempt to deconstruct or challenge the role of the Venice Biennale in a significant way, but rather secure its position and designation within the *first* wave.

Recognizing postcolonial contributions in biennials in the *second* wave, art historian Thomas McEvelley in his article “Arrivederci, Venice: The Third World Biennials” (1993), was among the first texts to assert “Third World Biennials” as new local centres for curatorial and creative efforts. Although he believes many biennials embodied classical modernisms, they also include admixtures of regional points of view. Building on postcolonial perspectives and historical revisionism brought about by the idea that biennials were culturally productive sites of subversion, art historian and curator Carlos Basualdo’s essay, “Unstable Institution,” was among the first to argue biennials as subversive tools in the display of contemporary art. Art history and its canons often give the impression of a totality, yet according to Basualdo, artistic creation is an unstable constellation of international practices. In his view, because biennials are different from museums, typically without collecting mandates,²⁰ it enables them to dispute internationalism by highlighting local art worlds and networks. Therefore, biennials can

¹⁹ Green and Gardner, 36.

²⁰ The National Gallery of Canada’s contemporary biennial exhibitions are curated from permanent acquisitions within a two-year cycle. This was also the case for the now defunct Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal biennial. Other biennials such as the Asian Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art is a platform for acquisitions for its hosting institution, the Queensland Art. Similarly, the Whitney Museum of American Art established its biennial as part of its acquisitions program.

mobilize the symbolic capital of art to operate revisionist efforts. This optimism sees biennials as sites that offer dynamic responses to changing art production, circulation, and consumption. Basualdo's enthusiasm is shared by Cuban art historian and critic Gerardo Mosquera, who describes biennials as "concrete utopias." According to Mosquera, biennials have the ability to function as agents for positive transformation, and he concludes that biennials have latent potential to operate in utopic ambivalence of a "good place" and "no place."²¹

However, the optimism around the possibilities of biennials to highlight local art contexts is not without its critics. Literary scholar Timothy Brennan argues that support of pluralisms and multiculturalism through contemporary critical analyses of globalization, postcolonialism, and cosmopolitanism clears the way for global capitalism. Furthermore, he argues that pro-imperialist forces of globalization suppress local claims of national sovereignty.²² The worldwide reproduction of biennials in what has become an international biennial circuit leads art historian George Baker to insist that the "container is more important than the contained."²³ Baker's concern is in response to Okwui Enwezor, who states that biennials build on the foundation of a multitude of artworks, which respond to local conditions and challenge the homogenizing tendency of a dominant cultural industry. Enwezor also states that the risks of homogenization due to global capitalism are undermined by biennials' ability to propagate a new global reality by exposing "Western" epistemological limits and

²¹ Gerardo Mosquera, "The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 198-209.

²² Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²³ Baker, 449.

contradictions.²⁴ However, Baker argues that globalization is a process of “Westernization,” where biennials preserve and serve “Western” imperialism rather than challenge it.

Eurocentric epistemological limits and contradictions are discursively confronted by scholars like Rafal Niemojewski, who argues for a new genesis of the biennial. Niemojewski credits the Havana Bienal as “a new breed of contemporary biennials born of a global context and the start of their proliferation.”²⁵ Where the Venetian model for Niemojewski was founded in celebration of the nineteenth-century idea of the nation-state, in contrast, the Havana Bienal emerged in the advent of accelerated processes of globalization. The Havana Bienal model reflected “new transnational, multicultural, and diasporic identities,” thereby ignoring the decisive change in the biennial format that manufactures a contrived Western biennial teleology.²⁶ In a way, then, the histories outlined by Jones, Green, and Gardner attempt to acknowledge Niemojewski’s proposal by including and highlighting biennials of the global South or periphery; however, they are not presenting these biennials in a way that reassesses the historical value and *evolutionary* position that starts with the Venice Biennale.

A Synchronous Temporal Framework

²⁴ Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 426-445.

²⁵ Rafal Niemojewski, “Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 100.

²⁶ Niemojewski, 100.

Despite poststructuralist and postcolonial imperatives influencing biennial historiography, even the anti- and postcolonial narrative, situated within the *second* wave, perpetuates a system of otherness. This is because biennial historiography has adopted art history's historicist temporal structure. As art historian Piotr Piotrowski outlines in his advocacy for, what he calls, "horizontal art history," which is a geohistorical relativization of "Western" art history, "the task [of writing global art history] is not to present the 'other' voice of art history, but to establish another paradigm for the writing of art history."²⁷ Piotrowski argues that the traditional art historical narrative is "vertical," where "the centre provides the canons, the hierarchy of values and the stylistic norms; it is the role of the periphery to adopt them in the process of reception."²⁸ To separate the association between "Western modern art" and "universal art," Piotrowski argues that horizontal paradigm is "relativized and placed," for an outcome that reverses the "traditional view of the relationship between the history of art of the Other and the history of 'our' (read: Western) art."²⁹ No longer ignoring individual identities and subjectivizes of localities through "relational geography," as developed by cultural theorist Irit Rogoff, horizontal geography critiques the "Western" centred art historical narrative by offering a plurality of transregional narratives.³⁰ As part of this horizontal paradigm shift, I propose rethinking the diachronic temporal structure of biennial historiography in conjunction with synchronic analysis because biennials are sites that do not hold the permanence of museums and galleries.

²⁷ Piotr Piotrowski, "Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde," *Umění*, no. LVI (2008): 378.

²⁸ Piotrowski, 378.

²⁹ Piotrowski, 380.

³⁰ Piotrowski, 380.

Biennial history is being written much like conventional art history, which places objects in temporal containers (or periods) and for biennials, containers/waves, follow a chronological order to create a sequential narrative of influence in a “‘great chain’ of masterpieces.”³¹ Art historians Keith Moxey and Eva Kernbauer use the concepts of *anachrony* and *heterochrony* to question the assumed temporal stability of artworks, and I would argue their framework is applicable for biennials. According to Moxey and Kernbauer, “artworks are ideally suited to producing temporal incongruities and heterogeneities and observing them in other domains of life.”³² Their terms are comparable, allowing for the reception of art to change depending on the time it is encountered. More specifically, Moxey defines *anachronic time* as a power “inherent in objects” to go beyond the parameters of a stable temporal horizon.³³ Heterochrony, Moxey asserts, means “there is no single ‘now,’ for multiple manifestations and temporal belongings available.”³⁴ Kernbauer sees the anachronic as capable to defend incongruities of ideas, events, and actions in temporal timelines, as it “sets history in motion” because it “sharpens historiographical thinking, as well as socio-political interpretations of artworks.”³⁵ As such, moving away from a wave historicist model and looking at biennials relationally and temporally, has the potential to upset traditional modes of Eurocentric thinking that are implicit in the emerging biennial historiography.

³¹ Eva Kernbauer, “Anachronic Concepts, Art Historical Containers and Historiographical Practices in Contemporary Art,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 16, no. 16 (June 1, 2017): 9.

³² Kernbauer, 9.

³³ Keith Moxey, “What Time Is It in the History of Art?,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, ed. Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey, First issued in paperback 2020, Studies in Art Historiography (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 27.

³⁴ Moxey, 27.

³⁵ Kernbauer, 9–10.

Shifting the temporal model of analysis of biennial historiography to include synchronicity, highlights the biennial model's shared contemporary condition. A synchronous temporal framework prioritizes how biennials are contemporary and contemporaneous with each other; however, I am not referring to the periodization or a universal understanding of what is contemporary art. Since biennials exhibit contemporary art, they arguably are periodized by it. As detailed by philosopher Peter Osborne, contemporary art has three periods mediated by different historical elements. The first periodization is post-Second World War, that is, after 1945. This periodization marks the distinction between the categories of modernity and modernism with the international hegemony of American art institutions. Secondly, in the 1960s, contemporary was considered the successor to modern. Contemporary art's post-conceptual ambitions took hold in American art during this time, which applies a historicist demarcation of time in the Western canon of art history. Lastly, there is the periodization of post-1989 and the end of historical communism. The end of communism signals the end of avant-garde, where art blurred with cultural industry, globalization, and the transnationalization of the biennial as *the* exhibition form. While biennials are indelibly rooted in the present, that is, the here and now, the contemporary as a periodization stabilises the modern to the contemporary in linearity.³⁶ The contemporary is not merely a periodization or qualification; his determination of the contemporary is a critical category with a historical dimension constructed with critical judgments. Osborne is relevant because he argues for contemporaneity as a coming together in and of times, in a "disjunctive unity of equally present

³⁶ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, First edition, paperback (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 17.

times.”³⁷ Osborne’s model offers co-presence and the interrelation of unique social conditions of art production and reception.³⁸ With this framework in mind, there are simultaneous yet separate imperatives of the “perception” of the contemporary and the “fact” of the contemporary,³⁹ where analyzing biennials from a shared temporal framework offers a geohistorical starting point to decentered biennial history. A synchronous framework puts editions in dialogue with each other, in a horizontal analysis, in conjunction with interpretations of socio-political context, thereby confronting denials of co-evalness. A synchronous temporal model for analysis of biennials utilises the temporal logic that defines the biennial itself, yet does not neglect their larger diachronic histories. It conceives of biennial editions as historically constituted and examines them in relation to each other. The temporal logic and historical permanence of Eurocentric modes of historiography are thereby replaced in favour of a new synchronicity every two years.

Biennials of Resistance as Biennial Resistivity

To date, the analyses and debates regarding contemporary art biennials appear polarised. On the one hand, as a global phenomenon, the proliferation of biennials around the world, or biennialization, has some academics arguing that biennials are indicative of growing neoliberal globalization. Scholars such as art historian Marcus Verhagen and George Baker argue that contemporary art’s (presumed) autonomy is subjugated to the demands of political

³⁷ Osborne, 17.

³⁸ Sarah Dornhof et al., eds., *Situating Global Art: Topologies, Temporalities, Trajectories*, Image, volume 89 (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2018), 15–16.

³⁹ Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2016), 18.

and economic convenience as part of processes of standardization/Americanization/globalization. On the other hand, scholars such as curators Okwui Enwezor and Gerardo Mosquera argue that biennials can generate new spaces of resistance, diversity, and reflection; while at the same time promoting a cross-fertilization of ideas, decentering Western/Eurocentric ways of knowing, leading to a more democratic redistribution of cultural power. This second body of criticism understands biennials as part of a decolonization struggle, which Hoskote frames within the concept of “biennials of resistance.”⁴⁰ For Hoskote, biennials of resistance claim the importance of solidarity in the global South and that these biennials mark a substantial alternative to the Venetian history of the biennial, although as noted, anti- and postcolonial biennial histories still rely on a history evolving out of the Venice Biennale.

What biennials of resistance are resisting is not explicitly articulated by Hoskote, but as scholar Michel Oren notes, biennials of resistance are certainly not resisting global capital. Without providing examples, Oren asserts that this is “because some of these peripheral biennials are working hand in glove with it.”⁴¹ Despite being conceptually elusive, the crux of biennials of resistance as described by Hoskote can be summarised into three points, which I will discuss in detail to think about biennial resistivity: (i) they are located in the global South; (ii) they engage with exhibition-making processes; and (iii) they are engaged in emancipatory politics/discursive rhetoric within a post-/de-colonial directive. These points are informed by

⁴⁰ Ranjit Hoskote, “Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 306-321.

⁴¹ Michel Oren, “Biennials That Promote an ‘Emancipatory Politics,’” *World Art* 4, no. 2 (July 3, 2014): 282.

and understood within the percept of postcolonial theory, thereby situating biennials of resistance and biennial resistivity within a discourse of anti- and postcolonial biennial history.

Although the respective case studies are discussed in greater detail in each chapter, they are linked by each challenging and complicating the terms of Hoskote's current framework for biennials of resistance. The case studies abide by and align with Hoskote's criteria, and by identifying these case studies as biennials of resistance as outlined by Hoskote's criteria, I argue for their respective biennial resistivity. This is to say, within their contexts, historical and present, and in light of their curatorial ambitions (including exhibition-making processes), these biennial editions demonstrate resistivity.

The first case study is #00BH. This edition is relative to the cancelled and postponed 2017 edition of the Havana Bienal. #00BH seized the opportunity to host a local biennial edition in order to question the elite and exclusive status reserved for the Havana Bienal. As will be discussed, #00BH demonstrates that for local Cuban artists, the Havana Bienal is no longer a biennial of resistance and subsequently takes the Havana Bienal's place as such. Subsequently, the Istanbul Biennial was ignored by Hoskote completely, despite qualifying as a biennial of resistance based on Hoskote's aforementioned criteria. The 15th edition notably demonstrated itself as a biennial of resistance, positioned against the growing totalitarian Turkish government. Lastly, and most importantly, documenta has been excluded from being considered as a biennial of resistance, because it is outside of Hoskote's geographic determinants. Despite its position in the global North, documenta established discursive significance regarding post and decolonial biennials, and d14 follows in earlier documenta's

institutional imperatives of post- and decolonial exhibition-making practices. What follows is a more elaborate discussion of Hoskote's criteria for biennials of resistance.

Biennials of Resistance and The Global South

As noted, Hoskote does not offer a concrete definition of biennials of resistance as part of his in-depth discussion of the seventh Gwangju Biennial (2008), which he co-curated with Enwezor and Hyun-jin Kim. Hoskote's most straightforward statement, and presumably, therefore, the most significant consideration, is that biennials of resistance emerge in "transitional societies that mark the stake of these societies in the global scenario."⁴² He provides examples such as the Bienal de São Paulo, the India Triennale, the Havana Bienal, the Asia-Pacific Triennial, the Johannesburg Biennial, the never-realized Delhi Biennial, and of course, the Gwangju Biennial, which are all located in the global South. While culturally, financially, and ideologically unique, the founding stories are grouped because they occurred in countries that had yet to come to terms with national traumas, such as wars, civil distress, or dictatorships. To briefly note, the development of these biennials are: the Bienal de São Paulo (established in 1951) was established as part of the effort of Brazil's national construction project, separate from colonial emulation and modernism; similarly, the India Triennale was ideologically premised to develop an Indian cultural and national identity (inaugurated in 1968); the Havana Bienal (launched in 1984) was politically motivated by dictator Fidel Castro to establish an alternative position to Western/American domination of the art world, where Cuba

⁴² Hoskote, 310.

would be its leader.⁴³ The Asia-Pacific Triennial, launched in 1993, just two years before the government passed the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act, recognizing colonial injustices committed against Indigenous communities and promoting reconciliation between these communities and the broader Australian community. The Johannesburg Biennial, of which there were only two editions due to financial difficulties, one in 1995 and the other in 1997, was a means for cultivating international exposure for South African artists after the end of the Apartheid. The Gwangju Biennial was inaugurated in 1995 to honour the Gwangju Democratization Movement, culminating with the May 18-27, 1980, civil uprising against the repressive military dictatorship, led by president Chun Doo-hwan. Government troops confronted protesters during the Gwangju Uprising, resulting in over 2000 deaths.

These biennials are located in the global South, and are primarily considered within a framework of an anti- and postcolonial biennial. Thus far, the discourse on biennials of resistance has been situated within a trajectory of anti- and postcolonial biennials, or in what is considered the *second* wave of biennials, highlighting the previously ignored innovations generated by biennials of the South and not recognizing their substantial contributions to disrupting contemporary art discourse in the global North. Although the goal of biennials of resistance is to create a biennial history that does not rely on or begin with the Venice Biennale and a European lineage, the Venice Biennale's position remains secure within the anti- and postcolonial biennial canon as a foundational moment in biennial development. Furthermore, reconceptualizing biennials of resistance as a conceptual category rather than a geographic one removes the limits of the biennial's emancipatory potential, thereby pluralizing biennial history.

⁴³ Hoskote, 310.

Problematically, the axis of interpretation of anti- and postcolonial biennials does not necessarily intersect with biennials of resistance, as noted by Marchart, because the Gwangju Biennial and the now-defunct Johannesburg Biennial may “seem comparable” with documenta “along one axis of interpretation, they appear worlds apart on another.”⁴⁴ This is because *geography prevents* documenta from being considered a biennial of resistance despite its postcolonial editions. Aside from its geography, documenta’s conception adheres to Hoskote’s tenet as a biennial conceived to help overcome national trauma: documenta was initiated in Germany as part of reconstruction projects after the Second World War and the events of the Holocaust. This is also the case with regards to the Istanbul Biennial, where democracy was restored in 1983, four years before the inauguration of the Istanbul Biennial, after the 1980 Turkish coup d’état against president Fahri Korutürk and rule by the Turkish armed forces through the National Security Council. Both of these biennials are overlooked by Hoskote’s theorization, presumably because they are part of the global North, although Turkey’s economic position is arguably part of the global South. Hoskote’s geography is strictly hemispheric, however, because he includes the Asia-Pacific Triennial, which is geographically South but arguably socio-economically and politically part of the global North. These biennials, Hoskote argues, took their “stand on the ground of newly evolving regionalities” but were most valuable because they geographically mark a counterpoint to the Venice Biennale.⁴⁵ While highlighting the importance of alternative biennial models and formats and acknowledging the

⁴⁴ Oliver Marchart, “Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization: The Case of Documenta,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 479-480.

⁴⁵ Hoskote, 312.

contributions of biennials from south of the equator, Hoskote's typology sustains a geographic dichotomy, rather than trying to understand biennials of resistances' "will to globality."⁴⁶

Conceiving biennials of resistance as bound to geographic determinations overlooks Hoskote's own advocacy of "critical transregionality." Critical transregionality offers a performative mode for an intercultural selfhood, acknowledging that "[t]he traditional and somewhat developmentalist centre-periphery model was gradually displaced by a model of the world where individuals, communities and nations are connected by surprising webs of information and unexpected alliances across borders."⁴⁷ Specifically, for Hoskote, cultural practitioners exercise critical transregionality by linking regions "on the basis of elective affinities arising from common cultural predicaments, jointly faced crises, and shared choices of practice – against the determinism of territorial contiguities dictated by military and economic cartography."⁴⁸ Cultural practitioners move across geographies to "configure new continents of affinity," where Hoskote ponders, how biennials may also "propose such new continents of affinities."⁴⁹

Although Hoskote frames biennials of resistance as characterized by geography, he offers latitude for the global South as an analytical position to extend the typology beyond hemispheric restrictions. He states, "Perhaps it is time for us to address our global present in this spirit of critical transregionality, to configure new continents of affinity that correspond more genuinely to our desires and aspirations than geographer's superseded, merely physical

⁴⁶ Hoskote, 313.

⁴⁷ Hoskote, 313.

⁴⁸ Hoskote, 313.

⁴⁹ Hoskote, 314.

fictions.”⁵⁰ While the question, “What is the global South?” does not have a single, universal answer, Anthony Gardner states that in his introduction to *Mapping South: Journeys in South-South Cultural Relations*, “if anything, the South is itself a mode of questioning that, while it draws on these entanglements between history, geography, movement and desire, seeks new ways of perceiving transcultural relations today.”⁵¹ He continues to frame “the South” as being both “analytic and catalytic” because it “provokes new ways of thinking about global cultural currents.”⁵² The South, thus, is “a question always open to debate and discussion – including, it has to be said, debate about whether ‘South’ is in fact an adequate frame for such discussions, or a category that still limits the actual complexities of transcultural relations, setting them in overly simplistic opposition to the ‘North,’ to the canonical and to the ‘normal’ narratives through which globalization is often understood today.”⁵³ Cultural studies scholar Nikos Papastergiadis elaborates on the nebulous quality of the South by stating that “the concept of South not only asserts a more affirmative tone for cultural identifications, but it helps to suggest that the movement of ideas can be multidirectional as well as bi-polar.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, Papastergiadis continues to argue for situating “the concept of the South along a jump/cut spectrum of conceptual elongations and mutations that extend these preceding categories [of regional location, socio-economic development and geo-political histories].”⁵⁵ Papastergiadis

⁵⁰ Hoskote, 314.

⁵¹ Anthony Gardner, and Beatriz Bustos Oyanedel, eds., “Mapping South: Journeys, Arrivals and Gatherings,” in *Mapping South: Journeys in South-South Cultural Relations*, 2013, 3.

⁵² Gardner, and Oyanedel, 3.

⁵³ Gardner, and Oyanedel, 3–4. Also see Lydia H. Liu, “The Geopolitics of Translation in the ‘Global South’” (ICI Berlin, Berlin, Germany, June 22, 2018), accessed September 20, 2021, <https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/lydia-h-liu/>

⁵⁴ Nikos Papastergiadis, “What Is the South?,” in *Mapping South: Journeys, Arrivals and Gatherings*, ed. Anthony Gardner and Beatriz Bustos Oyanedel, 2013, 32.

⁵⁵ Papastergiadis, 32.

builds on sociologist Raewyn Connell's definition of "Southern theory," where she argues for connecting "different formations of knowledge in the periphery with each other' and with knowledge from the metropole."⁵⁶ Connell uses "southern" in her conceptualization to call attention to the centre-periphery relationship in the realm of knowledge and to emphasize, "authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony, partnership, sponsorship, appropriation – between intellectuals and institutions in the metropole and those in the world periphery."⁵⁷ This is not unlike film theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha's leveled interpretation that "in every third world there is a first world and vice versa."⁵⁸ This understanding of the (global) South is not strictly resigned to hemispheric determination, but it can hold an analytical position to address imbalances in the global system and develop collaborative frameworks that promote forums for exchanges.

The North-South dialectic of postcolonialism is not over. Instead, "South," as a concept, should be mobilised in order to explore the lingering legacies of colonial and neo-colonial violence and struggles for decolonization and de-imperialization, relationally. The South is inherently relational because it belongs to a system of North-South. The current historical and ongoing relationship between the hemispheric positions overlooks and ignores non-Northern forms of knowledge. Legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that epistemologies of the North are premised on an invisible "abyssal line," as a result of "the uneven development of capitalism and the persistence of Western-centric colonialism."⁵⁹ Epistemologies of the North

⁵⁶ Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in the Social Science* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 213.

⁵⁷ Connell, viii-ix.

⁵⁸ Papastergiadis, 32-33.

⁵⁹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

are conceived “as the only valid knowledge, no matter where, in geographic terms, that knowledge is produced,” where “South is the problem; the North is the solution.”⁶⁰ Santos’ project of global social injustice is characterised by his call for “cognitive justice,” which is where he argues for validation of “epistemologies of the South” – which he defines as “an epistemological, nongeographical South, composed of many epistemological souths having in common the fact that they are all knowledges born in struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy” – overcomes “existing normative dualism[s].”⁶¹

Affirming difference means not solely evaluating the South in terms of its geographic borders, and merely hoisting the South as a generative concept to challenge Northern hemispheric hegemony. In order to provide complicated histories and analyses of the relationships between countries around the world, the global South and Southern theory should not focus on dichotomic and geographic differences between “North” and “South.” The global South can be used as a model for staging geopolitical struggles over universal templates,⁶² where “South” is regarded with a geopolitical focus that relates to a particular history tied to the struggle against colonization and the necessity for decolonization to create counter-discourses that engage with geopolitical dynamics. Framing the global South in these terms offers wider horizons for understanding biennials of resistance and their potential for broadening biennial historiography.

⁶⁰ Santos, 6.

⁶¹ Santos, 7.

⁶² Lydia H. Liu makes this argument in her talk on Afro-Asian intellectuals during the Cold War. See my comment above for the reference.

Analyzing biennial history in this way does not suppress contributions made by biennials in the global South but rather puts them in dialogue with the global biennial phenomena. By focusing on an axis of interpretation (biennials of resistance in relation to anti- and postcolonial biennials) across latitudes and considering biennials of resistance organized in the global North alongside, and in dialogue with, biennials in the global South, the aim is not to revert academic attention back to centres or undermine minor transnationalisms⁶³ and the curatorial work of biennials of resistance in the periphery.⁶⁴ Rather, I acknowledge that biennials are in a global dialogue with each other and are not events isolated by academic discourse or geographic location. As such, I propose examining how locality is used/engaged with to determine whether or not a biennial edition is a biennial of resistance, in conjunction with Hoskote's remaining criteria (of being engaged with exhibition-making processes and emancipatory politics) – as with the case studies presented.

Biennials of Resistance and Engagement in Exhibition-Making Processes

The second consideration to qualify as a biennial of resistance is curatorial engagement with exhibition-making processes. In his reflection on the seventh Gwangju Biennial, Hoskote notes that he is interested in biennials' conceptual lineage in exhibition-making: seeing the

⁶³ Lionnet & Shih, 1-23.

⁶⁴ Thomas McEvelley, and Roger Denson. *Capacity: History, the World, and the Self in Contemporary Art and Criticism* (Amsterdam: OPA, 1996); Geeta Kapur, "Apropos Southern Biennales," paper delivered at "Biennial City," Sharjah Biennial 7, Sharjah, UAE, accessed March 2016, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionitem/3010>; John Clark, "Biennials as Structures for Writing Art History: An Asian Perspective," *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 164-183; Niemojewski, 2010; and Gardner and Green, 2015.

biennial format as a “testing ground for artistic innovations, a laboratory in which to experiment with new ways of activating the relationship between viewers and artworks, between artworks and their site, and between artworks and their architecture of display.”⁶⁵ Within a precept of curatorial practice, curatorial ambitions become institutional legacies that guide biennial histories. Curatorial ambition is intrinsically tied to discursive biennial outcomes, and, undoubtedly as a curator, Hoskote envisions biennials as sites to enact art historical change through curation. Art historians Jones, Green, and Gardner are among the scholars who argue that biennials have expanded the role and responsibilities of the curator. Specifically, Green and Gardner cite the curatorial work by Harold Szeemann at the fifth documenta (1972) as pivotal for solidifying the relationship of art-star curators to biennials.⁶⁶

Exploring exhibition practices and their imperial lineage, the seventh Gwangju Biennial was comprised of a series of several travelling exhibitions, where the Gwangju Biennial was a destination. “Travel,” Hoskote outlines, “can lead to the insight of direct encounter.”⁶⁷ More specifically, travel can produce “a schism between mobile publics, which constantly travel from one transnational venue to another, and anchored publics, which embrace a notion of the local that can be defensive at its best and parochial at its worst.”⁶⁸ For Hoskote, biennials are *the* “key zones” in this schism because they can address the “tight weave of the local while texturing the blandly global with greater intricacy and specificity.”⁶⁹ Mindful of Gerardo Mosquera’s critique of metropolitan curators mining the cultural content of the global South in

⁶⁵ Hoskote, 308.

⁶⁶ Jones; Green and Gardner, 9-33.

⁶⁷ Hoskote, 309.

⁶⁸ Hoskote, 309.

⁶⁹ Hoskote, 309.

order to extend their imperial outreach, biennials, and specifically biennials of resistance, become sites to sharpen relational and experiential thinking.⁷⁰

Situating biennials of resistance within the context of curating the Gwangju Biennial, Hoskote emphasizes the curatorial importance of local sites. For the seventh edition of the Gwangju Biennial, the curators “retained the Biennial Hall as a symbolic center that was important to many in Gwangju...extend[ing] ourselves into the breathing fabric of the city, distributing the biennial, interweaving it into the civic domain.”⁷¹ The city and the specific site of the biennial were inscribed with symbolism by way of various platforms and initiatives. These included: inviting people into the galleries of the Biennial Hall and the Gwangju Museum of Art; “entering into a dialogue with Gwangju’s history of democratic resistance through the processional media of ‘Spring’” (the uprising was initiated by university students, coining the creation of the mood “Spring of Democracy,” replacing the “Winter Republic” of the Yushin system); “referencing Gwangju’s lineage of spiritual questors and nationalist literati through the use of the hermitage-like spaces of the Uijae Museum of Korean Art”; forming a connection with film constituency; by hosting sessions of the Global Institute portion of the Biennial at the Daein Traditional market.⁷² These platforms and initiatives were regional to the history of Gwangju as a city, its public spheres, the May 1980 uprising, and the historical significance imbued with inaugurating the biennial. The importance of engaging with Gwangju’s public spheres was to activate conversations regarding contemporary cultural practices between

⁷⁰ Gerardo Mosquera, “Alien-Own/Own-Alien: Globalization and Cultural Difference,” *Boundary 2* 29, no. 3 (August 1, 2002): 163–73.

⁷¹ Hoskote, 317.

⁷² Hoskote, 317.

“mobile publics,” the foreign visitors to the city, and “anchored publics,” residents of the city for “convocations.”⁷³

Curator Paul O’Neill argues that the assembling of people in a biennial, as a forum for discourse, reflects “contemporary forms of rhetoric, complex expressions of persuasion whose strategies aim to produce a prescribed set of values and social relations for audiences.”⁷⁴ While not all biennials activate the potential space for critiquing the form of the biennial itself and/or the underlying conditions that generate them, these manifestations of discourse, and the circumventing of “self-fulfilling ambitions of mutual power brokering and circular leveraging,” are avoided by the “discursive biennial.”⁷⁵ The discursive biennial is designed to produce economic, cultural, or philosophical alternatives within “the equally imprecisely defined genre known as the ‘biennial’.” The biennial as a site for discourse is part of the “educational turn,” where the exhibition space is not only for the display of art but where art is part of “knowledge production.”⁷⁶ Central to the exhibition, rather than auxiliary, are lectures, seminars, publications, tour guides, and discussion platforms, which have become essential to the contemporary biennial.

Art historians Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg surmise that the discursive biennial represents a shift in focus towards local contexts, taking place in locations where they become “genuine alternative[s], a platform for disseminating existing local practices and ideas

⁷³ Hoskote, 317.

⁷⁴ Paul O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse,” in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol, UK; Chicago: Intellect, 2007), 15–16, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781841502151>.

⁷⁵ Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, “Talking and Thinking about Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 365–366.

⁷⁶ Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 366.

that may not be discussed elsewhere.”⁷⁷ InSite in San Diego/Tijuana; documenta 10 and 11; the sixth Mercusol Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil; the 2007 International Encounter of Medellín, in Medellín, Columbia; the fifth Berlin Biennial in 2008; Manifesta 6; and U-TURN Quadrennial for Contemporary Art in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2008, are some of Ferguson and Hoegsberg’s examples of discursive biennials. They maintain that the discursive biennial’s prerogative is knowledge production, involving theory, practice, “and the inevitable gap between them.”⁷⁸ To them the gap may lead to disconnections between rhetoric, expressed curatorial agendas in catalogue material, and how those ideas were visually and spatially expressed in the actual exhibition. The recurring and repetitive model of the biennial encourages meaningful engagements when specific contexts and locations are embedded into the curatorial proposal. Supplanting standard exhibition practices and presenting alternative exhibition modes is a means to challenge entrenched Eurocentric exhibition practices, simultaneously proposing scales of emancipatory rhetoric against social and political inequity.

Biennials of Resistance as Sites for Emancipatory Rhetoric

Lastly, and perhaps more importantly to the term itself, is that biennials of resistance demonstrate post-/de-colonial emancipatory rhetoric against local social and political inequity and/or, more broadly, for biennial historiography. The emancipatory potential of biennials is part of a parallel trend, which has politicised a growing dissatisfaction with the expressed anti-

⁷⁷ Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 366.

⁷⁸ Ferguson and Hoegsberg, 366.

globalization movement in postcolonial studies after the publication of political philosophers Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000).⁷⁹ The emancipatory potential of the biennial is part of an emphasis on biennials and their ability to generate "new" or "alternative" forms of intellectual exchange or sites for disruptive insights, often in opposition to museums, which typically reinforce culture, where biennials are a kind of heterotopian field. While there are no guidelines from Ferguson, Hoegsberg, and Hoskote as to if discursive biennials and biennials of resistance typologies intersect, converge, or conflict, it does seem that biennials of resistance are also discursive by offering examinations of conjunctions of knowledge and power in a given context, by way of the biennial's attention to exhibition-making practices.

Reflective exhibition-making processes as part of the biennial developed as part of a trend post-1990s. According to sociologist Panos Kompatsiaris during this time, biennials sought to be "educational laboratories and sites where the discursive and dialogical model are connected with political utterances most usually articulated in opposition to the dominant neoliberal hegemonic orders."⁸⁰ Kompatsiaris' examples include d11 in 2002, which critically examined postcolonialism and the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009, which aimed to mobilise the process of exhibition-making politically. I would suggest that what distinguishes biennials of resistance from discursive biennials, if they are separate categories, is the convergence of political activations with evolving movements in educational knowledge production, be it with regard to institutionality, artistic or social interests. Kompatsiaris distinguishes this overlap but

⁷⁹ Panos Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials," *Communication, Culture and Critique* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 76–91.

⁸⁰ Kompatsiaris, 80.

does not speak of biennials of resistance and instead focuses on “curating resistances” at biennials in the political-economic context.

Political activations result from biennials of resistance positioning themselves to perform an “interrogative and transgressive rather than merely ornamental function.”⁸¹ Biennials of resistance do this, Hoskote states, by asking, “What do we call normality here?” The 7th Gwangju Biennale’s political ambition outlined by Enwezor in an essay on the politics of spectacle recounts and compares the Paris Spring of May 1968 with the Gwangju uprising, after which the biennial was inaugurated to commemorate. He uses these two historical events to demonstrate a contrast in the uses and politics of spectacle. The Paris Spring, he recounts, has become a watershed moment of the global cry against oppression and an attack on the legitimacy of prevailing political orders, social norms, and aesthetic logic.⁸² Comparatively, the Gwangju uprising, he argues, “was motivated by a tradition of postcolonial cultural resistances, and the collectivized vision of a common politics.”⁸³ The “operative symbols of resistance and triumph” of these events are, for May ’68, in the past, compared with May 18, which are still marked in the present.⁸⁴ The inauguration of the biennial two years after May 18 demonstrates the forces of civil assembly in Gwangju had critical purchase (vis-à-vis the biennial) in relation to cultural production. The significance of using the biennial model for historical reflection, Enwezor asserts, is important given Korea’s postcolonial status and Gwangju’s marginalised

⁸¹ Hoskote, 318.

⁸² Enwezor, 27.

⁸³ Okwui Enwezor, “The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century,” ed. Godfre Leung and Sohl Lee, *Invisible Culture*, Spectacle East Asia, no. 15 (Fall 2010): 28.

⁸⁴ Enwezor, “The Politics of Spectacle,” 28.

economic status in South Korea's industrialization. He wonders if it is because of Gwangju's marginalised status that the biennial has been able to explore outmoded artistic systems.

Evaluating the political implications of May '68 and May 18 relationally, Enwezor uses these events as a platform to read locality as the necessary antidote to universalism. He writes:

May 18, in Gwangju and, by extension, in South Korea as a whole, is justifiably commemorated as a specific localised and national event founded on Korean experience and responses against oppression. It did not aim for anything so grandiose and pompous as the liberation of humanity or overthrowing the bourgeoisie. It in no way assumed any overarching or universal meaning that is not supported by the Korean experience and experimentation with democratic and popular mobilization of social will. May '68, on the other hand, was as grandiose as it was inflated in its assumptions of changing the world order. That this event is often narrated under universal rather than local, or even continental principles.⁸⁵

Unlike May '68, May 18 in Gwangju is not viewed in South Korean history as an *exception* on the path to democracy and thus not infused with universal qualities. Grounded in postcolonial theory, Enwezor utilises these examples to articulate how art historical universalism can be democratised by locality, ultimately pluralizing biennial histories. This is despite the fact that inevitably the proliferation of the biennial model makes them "giant ideology machines" of the "dominant: (read: bourgeois, nation-state, Occidental, European) culture," and therefore able to be analytical on the level of cultural symbolic production.⁸⁶ Yet, as Marchart notes, there is an irony here because "such exhibitions will never succeed in completely controlling the effects they produce."⁸⁷ In other words, "the dominant culture's apparatus for cultural reproduction

⁸⁵ Enwezor, 28.

⁸⁶ Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization: The Case of Documenta," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 468.

⁸⁷ Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts," 468.

can be at least partially appropriated, taken apart, and rebuilt in a different way.”⁸⁸ documenta, in particular, engaged with exhibition analytical strategies to decentre the West through postcolonial theory. Marchart’s analysis demonstrates by examining the 10th, 11th, and 12th editions of documenta, as previously noted, are that “antihegemonic breaks are smoothed over and integrated into the hegemonic formation.”⁸⁹ He describes this process using Antonio Gramsci’s *transformism*. He explains that the 10th edition legitimised political art and exhibition practices at the “centre” that had already been ongoing in more marginal areas of the art field. The 11th edition was premised on postcolonial theory, integrating further political works and art by non-Western artists, embedding these principles into the documenta biennial complex. documenta 12, not ignoring these postcolonial imperatives per se, included political artworks, only then to depoliticise them through aestheticism, formalism, and mysticism, effectively recentering the Western art world. Even if hegemonic powers react to antihegemonic attacks, however, no antihegemonic territorial gain is futile since it “always impels the dominant discourses to work on their own hegemony, and it forces them to redefine themselves to maintain this hegemony and shore it against further attacks.”⁹⁰ Marchart’s examination of documenta demonstrates the unique characteristics of editions within the institutional framework and how individual editions enact alternative modalities from previous editions. The emancipatory rhetoric for each edition is particular to each host city’s local context. However, biennial resistivity is premised and localized on post-/de-colonial emancipatory rhetoric as situated in a post-/de-colonial theory by Hoskote.

⁸⁸ Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts," 468.

⁸⁹ Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts," 471.

⁹⁰ Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts," 489.

Looking at Editions: Case Studies and Methodology

Biennials lend themselves to analysis under a shared temporal model, a model dictated by a set interval of time. The rare alignment presented in 2017, where many notable contemporary art biennials coincided,⁹¹ presented an opportunity to study them relationally and in conjunction with current biennial discourse. Examining #00BH, the Istanbul Biennial, and documenta, side-by-side, given their shared temporality in the global context – all having occurred within a few months – presents a model for biennial historiography that situates them in a relational and shared moment. Each of the editions coincided within a relatively short time frame of each other, thereby presenting a comparative temporal platform of analysis. The contemporaneous “operative fiction,” that is, the disjunctive spatio-temporal unity of the present, as Osborne theorises contemporaneity, situates these case studies in a way to engage with and analyse them, in conjunction with what is particular to them. Contemporaneity, as a critical category, is the control variable for these case studies, where the institutional history of each biennial contextualizes each edition.

Examining editions within a shared temporal moment and across the hemispheres is an attempt to confront the prevailing research on biennials thus far. For the most part, the study of biennials has taken the approach of either revisionism and/or area studies. The goal of revisionism is to rewrite history to include previously excluded biennials, focusing on historical research that brings to light, and resurrects previously overlooked innovations, curatorial

⁹¹ Some other notable editions of 2017 include: Desert X Desert Exhibition of Art (February 25-April 20), the first edition of the Honolulu Biennial (March 8–May 8, 2017), the first edition of the Russian Art Triennial (March 10–May 14), the Sharjah Biennial (March 12–June 12), the Whitney Biennial (March 17–June 11), the Antarctic Biennial (March 27–April 6), the Yokohama Biennial (August 4–November 5), Biennale de Lyon (September 20–December 31), the first edition of the Karachi Biennale (October 21–November 5), Perform 17 (November 1–19), and Prospect 4 (November 11, 2017–February 25, 2018).

insights, or artworks produced by biennials outside of the canon in order to include them into the existing universal and canonised history. An example of this is Niemojewski's previously mentioned conceptualization of the Havana Bienal as the first contemporary biennial. A second strategy of counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge and subvert Eurocentric hegemony is the centre-periphery model. The centre-periphery model, when studying biennials, is part of the shift to studying and valuing biennials of the global South or periphery biennials. As part of the revisionist project, the move to dividing the global geographically groups together new and alternative histories. Both these approaches, while offering corrections to omissions and promote visibility, fail to problematize biases and underpinning power structures. Revisionism and the centre-periphery approach segregate certain biennials and certain biennial editions against universalist narratives.

As a mode of relational analysis and as a format for restructuring historiography, comparison offers "analysis of world systems, transcontinental connections and interculturalism."⁹² Singular authority is questioned through comparison because inequalities are realised, or perspective complacencies are jolted into awareness of their construction. While some scholars are less optimistic, such R. Radhakrishnan, who fears that behind comparison lies the will to judge and evaluate, distinguishing inevitably uneven relationships within a comparison, literary scholar Susan Stanford Friedman responds by proffering a methodology of "juxtaposition" that gives attention to the gaps between what is compared and "in/commensurabilities." The dynamic space of "in/commensurabilities" recognises tensions

⁹² Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, eds. *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 2.

and avoids political and epistemological problems of dominance. “In/commensurabilities” should be valued as relational and understood in the framework of relational comparison, which recognises that entanglements occur in uneven power dynamics. Relational comparison, for Shu-mei Shih, draws on the relational poetics of French poet Édouard Glissant to identify global networks at the level of world history and individual texts, where a relational comparison is an act and a description.

Similarly, art historian Reiko Tomii proposes a transnational comparison by historicizing contemporaneity to examine linkable global-local “contact points” as “similar yet dissimilar” “connections” and “resonances.” Tomii’s conceptualization of “international contemporaneity” has geohistorical implications that recognise global “facts” and local “lived experience/perception.” Tomii asserts that her approach destabilises Eurocentric presumption through comparisons of similar yet different. Rather than situating Euro-American arts in binary opposition to non-Euro-American arts, similarities, as a starting point, offers multcentred entry points for historical study. Narrative rigidity loosens as connections and resonances reflect intersecting and multiple perspectives. For the purposes of this project, the contemporary biennial format offers a similar global platform that connects with local case studies. The investigation of local and singular biennial editions situates historical geopolitical implications into a global relational conversation with a locally adopted biennial exhibition-event format.

Comparison is an ideal mode of analysis for studying biennials because the term biennial itself is imprecise. To quote René Block, it “is not protected by copyright,” so it is consequently

“open to abuse.”⁹³ It refers less to a specific periodicity than a generic reference to a large-scale perennial exhibition format, event, and institution. Niemojewski provides the contemporary biennial with an encompassing definition, even if vague, as “a large-scale international survey show of contemporary art that recurs at regular intervals but not necessarily biannually.”⁹⁴ It includes encountered circumstances of postponements, cancellations or discontinuations, making the definition of what a contemporary biennial is functional. Since the term biennial is imprecise, local contexts constitute unique biennials, informing and informed by other biennial exhibitions, enabling specificity. Bearing in mind that localities are not merely their physical, geographical, or spatial parameters, but also contextual and relational, and built up over time, recognising that local contexts are simultaneously situated within asymmetrical geo-historical and global geopolitical networks.⁹⁵

It is of note that despite occurring the same year, the 57th edition of the Venice Biennale operated with apoliticism and levity compared with #00BH, the Istanbul Biennial, and d14. Critics considered the Venice Biennale of 2017 unimpressive, partly due to the art’s representations of and engagement with whimsy and fantasy. It was conveyed to be a “return to ‘tradition’” and out of sync with the Brexit and Trump political moment.⁹⁶ Ratifying these critiques, the Venice Biennale edition, titled *Viva Arte Viva* and curated by Christine Macel, was

⁹³ Rafal Niemojewski, “Venice of Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, Elena Filipovic, et al. eds. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 90.

⁹⁴ Niemojewski, 90-91.

⁹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1996), 178-181.

⁹⁶ Ben Davis, “The 2017 Venice Biennale’s Neo-Shamanism,” *Artnet News*, May 12, 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/venice-biennale-2017-viva-art-viva-review-958238>; Holland Cotter, “Venice Biennale: Whose Reflection Do You See?,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2017, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/arts/design/venice-biennale-whose-reflection-do-you-see.html>.

premised to celebrate the existence of art and artists and their dreamy and magical capabilities of transforming life into art. Notably, the main pavilion exhibition in the Giardini began with the photographic series *The Artist at Work* (1977) by Mladen Stilinović and later a series by Franz West of the same title, where the artists are each depicted sleeping or in bed. There was also an installation by artist duo Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev, *The Artist is Asleep* (1996), of an unmade bed, all to reflect on the idea of mediation and the power of dreaming for creativity.

In some senses, then, *Viva Arte Viva* presented one position of the perceived polarised biennial debate. The biennial exhibition adopted a heterogeneous rhetoric by exhibiting various artists with a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and a balance of gender representation. *Viva Arte Viva*, therefore, reflects an institutionalization of diversity that preserves and serves the Eurocentric model of art history with its lack of curatorial and art historical theorization. There is no intention of furthering or widening the discursive divide on biennials because, as curator Simon Sheikh asserts, *all* biennials are heterotopic. In other words, as a kind of heterotopia,⁹⁷ biennials are “capable of maintaining several contradictory representations within a single space.”⁹⁸ As such, they are part of hegemonies and are mechanisms of city branding, but they also do not necessarily perpetuate those hegemonies

⁹⁷ In his work, “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault theorized heterotopia as “real places – places that do not exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enact utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” The principles of heterotopias are that they take varied forms, the function can change over time, they are capable of juxtaposing several incompatible spaces in one space, and that they are linked to a slice in time. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24–27.

⁹⁸ Simon Sheikh, “Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility: Questions for the Biennial (2009),” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 163.

and can even contest them.⁹⁹ Sheikh posits that while biennials are “spaces of capital,” they are simultaneously “spaces of hope.” Moreover, art historians Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas suggest that recognizing the heterotopic character of biennials is a means to conceptualise them beyond their polarised interpretations. In favour of this position, I anchor my synchronic analysis in 2017 to argue that it is necessary to understand how #00BH, the Istanbul Biennial, and d14 demonstrate resistivity to be biennials of resistance. Each edition’s respective biennial resistivity is a catalyst for conceptualising a history of biennials that does not begin with or depend upon the canonization of the Venice Biennale or anti- or postcolonial biennials. Alternatively, synchronic biennial histories privilege each biennial’s particular historical and current goals, and individual economic, political, and social roles.

My dissertation relies primarily on the English exhibition catalogues, journal articles, newspaper, reviews, and online social media produced by and around each biennial case study. However, I did work with Turkish translators and Spanish language sources. Consulting with translators and working with texts in their original language facilitated a more nuanced, and arguably accurate understanding of the artists’ work, motivations, and objectives. Studying

⁹⁹ Specific explanations of hegemony are generally overlooked in biennial scholarship, with a few exceptions referring to Antonio Gramsci. Political theorist Oliver Marchart has termed biennials “hegemonic machines,” building on Gramsci’s theorisation of hegemony. Similarly building on Gramsci, sociologist Panos Kompatsiaris examines biennials in relation to neoliberal hegemonic orders. Art historians Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink advocate for Gramsci’s theorisation, while simultaneously criticizing Marchart’s use of Gramsci. Meeteren and Wissink quote Nancy Fraser’s understanding of Gramsci’s hegemony, which concentrates on domination of the ruling class by worldview holding mechanisms, sustained by a coalition of leading social forces. The ruling class created and re-created a web of institutions, social relations, and ideas as a “fabric of hegemony,” which goes beyond the sole notion of the “state as the instrument of class.” See Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, “Biennials and Hegemony: Experiences from the Thai Laboratory,” *OnCurating.Org*, no. 46 (June 2020), <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/biennials-and-hegemony-experiences-from-the-thai-laboratory.html>. It might be worth noting that Raymond Williams’s definition of hegemony could be more useful for thinking about the structures of contemporary art because of his focus on how embodied practices in life are shaped by and shape the cultural realm, which highlights residual, dominant, and emergent processes. See Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.” *New Left review*, no. 82 (1973): 3-16.

contemporary art history lends itself to scrutiny for producing and studying art criticism. In tracing a history of contemporary art, art historian Richard Meyer regards the study of contemporary art as a hybrid between history and criticism.¹⁰⁰ A more considered and encompassing art history should include critical attention, which is to say that art history and criticism practices are “mutually inclusive.”¹⁰¹ However, art criticism in relation to art history is presumed less valid because value judgements are attached to aesthetic preferences not informed by theoretical or chronological discourses and lack historical distance. To achieve clarity on the past vis-à-vis historical distance neglects that history holds subjective topographical and temporal perspectives.¹⁰² That is, the locality and its inhabitants shape contemporary values and inevitably influence the way an event is perceived and documented. Thus, contemporary art history includes the dual work of contextually informed research from a historian drawing on contemporary perspectives.

Contextually informed research accompanies experiential accounts since I was able to visit each biennial case study. This meant that I was able to see the artworks in their spatial displays, photographing and documenting the relationship between the works. I was able to conduct interviews with artists, curators, and program organisers, while also attend auxiliary programming events. Even though I was able to physically experience the biennial and their programmed events, I inevitably missed some events, or would have to attend one event over another.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁰¹ Meyer, 7.

¹⁰² Mark Salber Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2013).

There also is an inevitable loss of spatial nuance with the study of exhibitions from documentary material and exhibition catalogues. With the loss of spatial nuance in written and pictorial form (which could potentially alter or narrow critical analysis)¹⁰³ and to better contextualise my own experiences of art history, it is crucial to see the ephemeral event of the exhibition in relation to conversations about it regardless of aesthetic successes or failures. “The exhibition as a discursive event,” as scholar Reesa Greenberg advocates, “is a mode of exhibition assessment that considers who is saying what and for how long.”¹⁰⁴ This means considering the biennial as an exhibition model and as an institution. As art historian Anne Szefer Karlsen argues, the biennial is generally thought of as “homeless and chained.”¹⁰⁵ Unlike museum or gallery exhibitions, biennials are generally detached from a collecting mandate yet preserve exhibition histories and organizational bodies and power. The biennial exhibition as a discursive event does not negate a biennial’s institutional structures nor designate relevance to only one edition. It highlights nuances of a specific biennial edition for scrutiny. In this light, this dissertation focuses on single biennial editions as case studies, positioning them to bear unique curatorial ambitions that have made institutional legacies.

¹⁰³ Madeleine Kennedy, “The Risks and Rewards of Relying on Installation Photographs in the Writing of Exhibition History,” accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/documenting-the-marvelous-the-risks-and-rewards-of-relying-on-installation-photographs-in-the-writing-of-exhibition-history/#_edn3.

¹⁰⁴ Reesa Greenberg, “The Exhibition as Discursive Event,” accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.yorku.ca/reerden/Publications/EXHIBITION/exhibition_discursive_event.html. originally published in Edward O. Wilson. ed., *Longing and Belonging: From the Faraway Nearby*, 118-125 (Site, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Anne Szefer Karlsen, “An Institution Already First Time Around,” in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum no2 São Paulo, 2014*, eds. Galit Eilat, et al. (Amsterdam, 2015), 77.

#00Bienal de La Habana (#00BH)

The Havana Bienal has a prominent position in biennial historiography as an anti- and postcolonial biennial and in the waves model. Foregrounding its role, Niemojewski asserts that it was the first contemporary biennial. The Havana Bienal was established in 1984, marking a turning point, according to Niemojewski, in biennial history. The Havana Bienal, he argues, launched a new platform for the critique of modernity because it proposed a postcolonial agenda and questioned Eurocentric categories of contemporary art. Feeling excluded from the global art world, the early editions of the Havana Bienal focused on creating horizontal connections among countries considered part of the so-called Third World. Fostering South-South relationships, the Havana Bienal was a catalyst for framing the importance of multilateral engagement that is prevalent in current biennial discourse.

It is also an interesting case study because the Biennial was inaugurated by its former president Fidel Castro, aligning political and national goals with what would become an artistic institution. Even though the Havana Bienal was established as a homage to the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, who died in 1982, the Bienal launched an ambitious international cultural event with a focus on Latin America and the Third World, aspiring to position Cuba as its cultural leader. Former Havana Bienal curator Gerardo Mosquera details Cuba's precarious political position as part of the Third World and its relationship to the Soviet Bloc. Although a self-appointed former president established the official Havana Biennial, the curators used the international platform to probe traditional Eurocentric aesthetic divisions between material culture and contemporary art. For instance, the third edition in 1989 focused on popular cultural interpretations of local histories. Within the central exhibition, a collection of wire toys

made by children in six sub-Saharan African countries, wooden effigies of Simón Bolívar, a nineteenth-century Latin American revolutionary leader opposing the Spanish Empire, and Mexican dolls (Muñecas Mexicanas) by renowned Mexican artists and artisans were exhibited together (fig. 4-6).

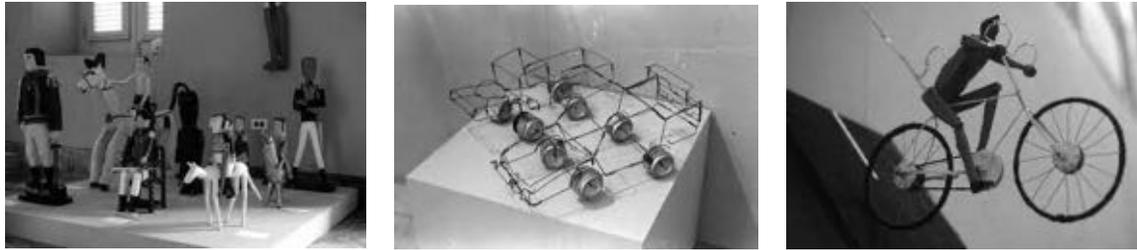


Figure 1. Bolívar in Wood Carvings (Bolívar en tallas de madera). Núcleo 2 Installation view. Museo de Artes Decorativas, Havana, Cuba. 1989. (Photo: reproduced with permission from *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*. Rachel Weiss et al, London: Afterall Books, 2011. fig. 71).

Figure 2. African Wire Toys (Juguetes de alambre africanos). Núcleo 2 Installation view. Museo de Artes Decorativas, Havana, Cuba. 1989. (Photo: reproduced with permission from *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*. Rachel Weiss et al, London: Afterall Books, 2011. fig. 78).

Figure 3. African Wire Toys (Juguetes de alambre africanos). Núcleo 2 Installation view. Museo de Artes Decorativas, Havana, Cuba. 1989. (Photo: reproduced with permission from *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*. Rachel Weiss et al, London: Afterall Books, 2011. fig. 80).

Proffering utopian intentions, the Bienal was to be a site for encounter and dialogue “beyond questions of ideology or pure politics.”¹⁰⁶ An “open structure,” which contrasted the prevailing European biennial structure included “a set of group and individual shows,

¹⁰⁶ Gerardo Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” in *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Bergen, Norway: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 200.

conferences, panels, workshops, meetings, publications, and outreach programs, all organised at the Centro Wifredo Lam, and included a network of independent activities coordinated by many museums, galleries, houses of culture, universities, and so on.”¹⁰⁷ Admission was free, and perhaps due to Cuba’s socialist allegiance, there was also the elimination of prizes. The lack of prizes established a free mix of different cultural understandings of high art and low art and allowed countries that did not have established contemporary art programs to participate proportionately and humbly. The Havana Bienal enabled an interplay of international contemporaneities rather than a static display of art by resonant or contemporaneous artists.

Due to the current artistic registration system in Cuba, artist creativity is restricted. Additionally, Decree 349, established in 2018, is a law requiring pre-approval for artistic presentation. As a result, given that the Havana Bienal is an armature of the government and artistic production in Cuba is highly regulated and controlled, it lost its utopic freedoms. Organizing officials cancelled, then postponed the scheduled 13th edition until 2019 due to the financial strain from Hurricane Irma. The cancellation and eventual postponement alarmed many artists inside and outside Cuba, who anticipated its discursive potential and public interaction with the global art world. Artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and his co-organizers took to Facebook and social media to demand the Biennial still take place and called for the participation and collaboration of other interested artists to create their own biennial, #00BH. The organisers of #00BH assert that the Havana Bienal is cultural heritage, and that the government could not take away the decision to host an edition. Their resistive initiative,

¹⁰⁷ Mosquera, “Havana Biennial,” 183.

Alcántara explains, is about “questioning the system.”¹⁰⁸ Having briefly arrested Alcántara on several occasions in an effort to deter the events, the Cuban government made it clear that they do not appreciate the crowd-sourced artist-led initiative.¹⁰⁹ It is a reality for the organisers of the #00BH that they are hijacking and challenging the institution and “the dominant culture’s apparatus for cultural reproduction” in an attempt to question, take apart, or rebuild it in another way.¹¹⁰

Despite its appearance of subversive endeavours to the art world within Cuba, the Havana Bienal has become a mechanism of institutional exclusion. Thus, I argue through a comparison of the curatorial intentions between the official 13th edition of the Havana Bienal and the first edition of #00BH, discussing their differing ideologies and visions of the global, argues that #00BH’s curatorial principles of political activism and inclusivity question the ongoing and stable historiographic position of the Havana Bienal as a biennial of resistance, despite its achievements of supporting Southern networks because it is a closed system to local artists. I argue #00BH is a biennial of resistance, by way of its resistive position against the lack of institutional support by the Cuban government through the curatorial principles of political activity and inclusivity. As a biennial of resistance, #00BH, therefore complicates the official Havana Bienal’s canonical historiographic position as a biennial of resistance. By problematizing the Havana Bienal’s static historical position and its biennial transformation, #00BH petitions are to be historiographically considered alongside the Havana Bienal. Furthermore, I explore

¹⁰⁸ HavanaTimes.org, “Alternative Havana Biennial May 5-15, 2018,” *Havana Times.org* September 28, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.havanatimes.org/?p=127562>.

¹⁰⁹ Havana Times.org.

¹¹⁰ Marchart, 468.

how #00BH utilises the curatorial component of walking, which physically embodies political activism and promotion of inclusivity, and where walking's collective rhythm proposes an alternative strategy to Cuba's national *mestizaje* identity and, more broadly, to biennial historiography's current historicist structure.

The 15th Istanbul Biennial

My second case study is the Istanbul Biennial. The Istanbul Biennial hosted its 15th edition, with the title and theme, *a good neighbour*, in the fall of 2017. Curated by the Danish-Norwegian, artist-duo, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, the small exhibition of only 56 artists was primarily held in a district fractured by migrant, religious, and secular groups. The variety of buildings and outdoor spaces used for the exhibition is partly due to the lack of exhibition venues available since the time of the Istanbul Biennial's inception. Constituting the biennial within the Istanbul neighbourhood of Beyoğlu, which has a rich and diverse history, its curators propose an edition that is resistive to the ruling populist values of the Turkish government, rather than to broader Western hegemonic cultural forms.

As previously mentioned, it was excluded by Hoskote as a biennial of resistance, not even being mentioned, despite its position in the global South. The Istanbul Biennial was inaugurated by and is still overseen by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art (IKSV). The IKSV was founded in 1973 by Dr Nejat F. Eczacıbasi for organizing an annual international art festival (music, film, theatre, visual arts). However, the first Istanbul Biennial was not initiated until 1987. The biennial was inaugurated a few years after democracy was restored following three years under the rule of the Turkish Armed Forces. The belligerents were against the

advent of processes of globalization and “leftist” agendas. The first festival was in honour of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, implicitly gesturing to overcome the antagonisms between the Left and the Alevis (the mostly Turkish and Kurdish Islamic community) and to honour democratic restoration. The Istanbul Biennial was part of private sector interest in rebuilding economic and cultural agendas. Art historians Angela Harutyunyan, Aras Özgün, and Eric Goodfield assert that private sponsorship coincided with national representation in a seemingly autonomous aesthetic exchange.¹¹¹ It was partly the ambition of the organisers to educate the Turkish people about Turkish contemporary art and partly to bring the international art world to Turkey.

At the same time in the 1980s, Istanbul city managers began to plan and reconstruct the city to attract foreign visitors and capital, requiring communications and transportation infrastructure to become a financial centre for the eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, and the Black Sea regions.¹¹² The plan was foiled by swelling population growth due to agricultural mechanization, Iranian refugees, and Kurdish evacuees, melding Istanbul’s urban problems to globalization and the Biennial’s use of non-gallery spaces in the city. The Istanbul Biennial model is unique in that the city lacked exhibition venues. As such, from its inception, historical buildings began to be included conceptually, complicating arguments of the biennial as a global white cube. Contrary to Harutyunyan, Özgün, and Goodfield, Elena Filipovic considers the Istanbul Biennial model an exception to the homogenizing and globally replicated “white cube”

¹¹¹ Harutyunyan, Angela, Aras Özgün, and Eric Goodfield. “Event and Counter-Event: The Political Economy of the Istanbul Biennial and Its Excesses.” *Rethinking Marxism* 23, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 480-481.

¹¹² Michel Oren, “Beyond Ambivalence: Turkish Artists at the Istanbul Biennial,” *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 6 (November 2008): 825.

biennial. Vasif Kortun, the curator of the 3rd edition in 1992, decided to exhibit in old industrial buildings as “commentary in the wake of the increasing dominance of the neo-liberal economy.”¹¹³ Deploying the experience of art throughout urban facilities, as in Istanbul’s case, Caroline Jones argues that the infusion of “biennial culture” in urban spaces offers “a potential future for these buildings (most often military-industrial in origin), exorcizing a sometimes painful past by de-localizing sites and introducing nonlocal visitors.”¹¹⁴

Moreover, the use of historic buildings as exhibition spaces highlights Istanbul’s and Turkey’s, more broadly, unique relationship between Asian and European continents and cultural influences. In the wake of ongoing polarizing politics, the Istanbul Biennial manifests itself as what art historian Charlotte Bydler calls “an east-west merger” or “semiperipheral biennial.”¹¹⁵ The Istanbul Biennial is discussed in terms of global contemporary art’s cultural capital being advantageous not only for invited European and American curators but also for Turkish economic and political interest and to gain Euro-American appeal. Turkey’s geographic and cultural history has given the country a unique subject position: Ottoman Turkey was never a colony but rather a dominant imperial power, yet it had an interest in the eighteenth-century in emulating “the West” and gaining acceptance because of similarities. The legacy of the Ottoman Empire is ongoing, according to scholar Omer Taspiner, who asserts that Neo-Ottomanism, that is, the political engagement in regions formerly under the rule of the

¹¹³ Danila Mayer, “Anthropological Approaches to the Istanbul Biennial of Contemporary Art,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 8, no. 1 (2013): 12.

¹¹⁴ Jones, 75.

¹¹⁵ Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld Inc.*, 129.

Ottoman Empire, motivates the foreign policy of Turkey's AKP party.¹¹⁶ As art historian Michael Oren notes, "that strategy did not prove viable because, for its own psychosocial reasons, the West needed the East to represent otherness."¹¹⁷ In this scenario, there are two options – "either contest the legitimacy of western fantasy projections or to accept and play with them" – which has resulted in curatorial investigative editions.¹¹⁸ The 15th edition does not contest historical projections, and alternatively, it advocates against othering mechanisms and the monocultural agenda of the Turkish government through the use of site-specific exhibition venues and artworks to be a biennial of resistance.

documenta 14 (d14)

documenta assumes the status of standard-bearer, showcasing what is artistically innovative and valid according to its selected curatorial team.¹¹⁹ documenta was inaugurated in Kassel, Germany, in 1955 by artists including Arnold Bode. It was part of Germany's rehabilitation in the Western democratic world, reconnecting it to modern art previously considered degenerate by the ruling Nazi Party. Initially, the exhibitions were concerned with artistic, social, and political viability and survival, surveying past major art historical movements.

documenta's art historical significance is partly due to biennial discourse's focus on the curatorial and postcolonial exhibition strategies. With regard to the curatorial, Green and

¹¹⁶ Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2008/10/07/turkey-s-middle-east-policies-between-neo-ottomanism-and-kemalism-pub-22209>.

¹¹⁷ Oren, "Beyond Ambivalence," 828.

¹¹⁸ Oren, 828.

¹¹⁹ Nadine Siegert, "A Summer of Art?," *African Arts* Vol 51, No 1 (Spring 2018): 1.

Gardner argue that when Swiss curator Harold Szeemann was appointed the artistic director of documenta 5 (1972), the course of biennial curating changed and the ambition its directors had for them. When Szeemann was appointed director, he already had an established reputation for “adventurous, large-scale survey shows,” having curated the notorious exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* in 1969 at the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland. Although Szeeman would not achieve mega-star curator status until the 1990s, documenta 5 and its conceptualist and post-minimalist art theme were canon-forming, despite Szeemann’s own lack of interest in master narratives.

After documenta 5, documenta 11, curated by Enwezor, is considered one of the most significant exhibitions for its postcolonial project of decentering the West. In the art world geographic coordinate system, Kassel is not a significant centre.¹²⁰ Marchart believes this makes documenta a particularly interesting case study because in previous documenta editions, 10 and 11, it engaged in decentering its position as an “imaginary centre of the art field.”¹²¹ It is disadvantageous for marginalised discourses to remain at the margins, and documenta’s ability to make excursions into marginal zones is a “luxury that can only be enjoyed by those who have already found their regular place in the centre.”¹²² documenta 11’s postcolonial politics, curatorial and exhibition strategies, as well as its constellation of education platforms, are indicative of an effort to resist Eurocentric art history, and established a precedent for documenta’s postcolonialism, as well as editions which function as biennial of resistance.

¹²⁰ Marchart, “The Globalization of Art and ‘Biennials of Resistance’,” *Cumma Papers #7* (2013): 9, <https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cumma-papers-7.pdf>.

¹²¹ Marchart, “Hegemonic Shifts,” 472.

¹²² Marchart, “Hegemonic Shifts,” 473.

Arguably also situating itself as a biennial of resistance, documenta 11 proclaimed that the idea of the avant-garde did not belong to the North Atlantic, thus positioning documenta against North Atlantic hegemony. Curated by Enwezor, the catalogue essay states, “Today’s avant-garde is so thoroughly disciplined and domesticated within the scheme of Empire that a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found to counterbalance Empire’s attempts at totalization. Hardt and Negri call this resistance force, opposed to the power of Empire, ‘the multitude.’”¹²³ Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire* explains how an Empire (specifically, globalised corporations) “internalized and entangled Others,” rather than simply exploiting them, in “an open system of ever-enlarging networks without a centre.”¹²⁴ Marginal artistic players who Enwezor positioned as having been ignored, and entangled with dominant artistic narratives, could “repopulate familiar, foundational artistic narratives,” thereby reconstituting a global canon of art.¹²⁵ Enwezor’s approach was theoretically and structurally implemented by minimizing his role as curator, collaborating with a team of curators, including Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. Moreover, the biennial edition decentred Kassel with collateral events and exhibitions in five additional cities, called “platforms,” and widely exhibited non-Western artists. As a result of the physical reorganization of documenta, visitors were required to think about the space and time of the exhibition connected on a global scale.

¹²³ Okwui Enwezor, “The Black Box,” in *Documenta 11, Platform 5: Exhibition: Catalogue*, ed. Documenta et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 45.

¹²⁴ Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the ‘Global’ Exhibition - ONCURATING,” *On-Curating*, June 2017, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html#_edn11.

¹²⁵ Gardner and Green.

The 14th edition of documenta (d14) (April 8, 2017-September 17, 2017) builds on the biennial complex established by its earlier editions. Curated by Adam Szymczyk and his team of co-curators, d14's working title demonstrated its attempt to decentre documenta by *Learning from Athens*. Building on its title, d14 was hosted in Athens and Kassel in equal parts in an effort to decentralise and decolonise the traditional Euro-American art historical canon. This edition built on documenta 11 and other previous editions that propose to challenge Eurocentric modes of knowledge production (specifically the 10th, 11th, and 13th editions), prominently critiquing the dominance of European political power structures, using the relationship between Germany and Greece, symbolically and literally, to argue for mutual reciprocity. The curatorial premise was to "unlearn" former modes of knowledge production, doing the work of biennials of resistance by resisting global art historical hierarchies and narratives, even though d14 is a biennial not in the global South.

Thus far, documenta has been read through the lens of similar large-scale exhibitions, much like the Venice Biennale, and beginning with world exhibitions. While large-scale exhibitions are rooted in representational modes of display, which are interested in "Northern" modes of knowledge production, documenta has a history of striving to complicate traditional epistemologies through postcolonial curatorial strategies. Of course, it is important to think about alternative modes of analysis that constitute knowledge, art, and constituting subjects, and communities. In pursuit of "alternate modes of analysis," I propose examining d14 through the lens of post-internet contemporaneity rather than through historical frameworks of encyclopedic or (post-) representational curating. The temporal and spatial structures of the internet exist within and as a by-product of processes of globalization of which also constitute

biennials, providing critical value for reading d14 as unstable and fractured, signalling processes of fragmentation that unhinge totalizing notions. Therefore, I argue d14 is a biennial of resistance because its curation “hacked” institutional exhibition conventions, advocated for entanglements, by complicating political entanglements between the global North and global South and offering a fragmented temporal structure, and lastly, highlighted processes of fragmentation through subjective spectatorship, thereby challenging traditional modalities of Western/Eurocentric art history.

Conclusion

The project of writing biennial history is still ongoing and in development. While the framework of biennials of resistance pushes to create an alternative biennial history that decentres the Venice Biennale and the European legacy of world fairs and exhibitions, Hoskote’s definition and the anti- and postcolonial trajectory that situates biennials of resistance maintains the canon it seeks to critique. Biennial resistivity, alternatively, as this dissertation demonstrates, collapses, and expands the concept and historiography of biennials of resistance while still engaged with the criteria of biennials of resistance. Focusing on a biennial’s resistivity re-frames biennials of resistance conceptually, rather than geographically, altering the emancipatory potential of biennial localities. Mobilizing the “South” as a method complicates the global South framework and static historical interpretations of the anti- and postcolonial biennial for the potential of de-canonizing biennial history away from Eurocentric epistemologies.

In an attempt to critique and expand the framework of the biennials of resistance, this dissertation strives to disassemble potentially entrenched and/or established Eurocentric biases in biennial historiography and emerging canonizations. The goal of looking at these case studies relationally is to diversify biennial historical and canonical hierarchies by replacing the singular and linear wave history with non-linear narratives that exist alongside each other, historically, spatially, and temporally – that is, in a synchronic snapshot, rather than a chronological approach. Evaluating these editions relationally explores their plurality, complicating a singular historical narrative of biennials in a genealogy from world fairs exhibitions. While previous books and articles examine single editions of different biennials from the perspective of revisionism or area studies, specifically Green, Gardner, and Jones, yet striving for a complete historiography, these texts acknowledge that it is complicated and difficult to identify a unified historiography because biennials are often tied to decisive “local” events. Jones even states that “The founding of a biennial pledges to renew knowledge perpetually, stakes a claim for the cosmopolitan urban centre to rejoin a wider international community (the common phrase is ‘put our city [back] on the map’), and makes a pedagogical promise to visitors to bring them the world (in the form of an encyclopedic and renewing art exhibition).”¹²⁶ Worldwide replication of the contemporary biennial by cities has critics suggesting the biennial has become a “brand name” used for marketing international spectacle and relevance.¹²⁷ The concern becomes that editions not deemed noteworthy or innovative are ignored within the framework of institutional histories written by “significant” editions to appeal to a totalizing version of history

¹²⁶ Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” 77.

¹²⁷ Baker, “The Globalization of the False,” 449.

that does not illustrate complicating or inconsistent (or more nuanced) narratives. It is urgent to re-frame the project of writing biennial history to continue acknowledging the contribution of biennials that would otherwise be exterior, overlooked, or excluded from the current conventional understanding of biennials and biennials of resistance. In nuancing biennial complexes, through this study I suggest a cumulative counterpoint to the Venice Biennale as the universal template will appear, ultimately provincializing the biennial form and medium.

Chapter 1: #00Bial de La Habana Resisting the Havana Bial

Introduction

In early September 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall on the northern coast of Cuba. The sustained wind speeds were recorded up to 270km/h. The substantial rainfall resulted in severe flooding, affecting over a hundred and fifty thousand buildings with ten reported deaths.¹²⁸ According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Cross Societies' (IFRC) emergency appeal report, 90% of the island was affected by the hurricane. The cost of the emergency operation budget provided by the IFRC was over 13 million Canadian dollars.¹²⁹ In light of the damage and the financial strain of the destruction, the Cuban government decided to cancel the upcoming 13th edition of the Havana Bial. The unilateral government decision to annul and defer the official 13th edition was cause for concern for several local artists and curators, who anticipated its potential interaction with the global art world. Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and curator Yanelys Nuñez Leyva with the help of artists José Ernesto Alonso Fernández, Iris Ruiz, Yuri Obregon, and Amaury Pacheco took to Facebook and social media to demand that the biennial still take place and called for the participation and collaboration of other interested artists. When other international festivals and events in Havana were not cancelled or postponed, such as the International Book Fair, the International Ballet Festival, and the International Poetry Festival, to name a few, the group of artists and curators decided to take action and organise their own biennial without the government's

¹²⁸ "Reliefweb," Cuba: Hurricane Irma - Emergency Appeal Final Report (MDRCU004), December 13, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/cuba/cuba-hurricane-irma-emergency-appeal-final-report-mdrcu004>.

¹²⁹ "Reliefweb."

support or help. Their initiative, according to Alcántara, was about “questioning the system” since they believe the Bienal to be part of Cuba’s national heritage.¹³⁰ As a point of clarification, however, the #00Bienal de La Habana (#00BH) organisers were not against institutions or the official Havana Bienal, rather they saw the official Bienal as too restrictive and exclusive; much like how art historian Charlotte Bydler notes that the Istanbul Biennial has been locally critiqued for its appeals to an international audience and poor treatment of local artists, the #00BH organisers believe a local biennial should support local artists.¹³¹ To the #00BH organizers the Havana Bienal has disassociated/detached from local artistic and cultural emancipatory action in favour of a global emancipatory rhetoric.

Havana’s biennial makes an interesting case study because of the recent “alternative” biennial edition, #00BH. In response to the cancellation of the 13th Havana Bienal upset local artists and curators. #00BH, in lieu of waiting for the postponed official edition, which was later hosted in April-May 2019. Through a comparison of the curatorial intentions between the first edition of #00BH and the official 13th edition of the Havana Bienal, discussing their differing ideologies and visions of the global, this chapter argues that #00BH’s curatorial principles of political activism and inclusivity problematize the official Havana Bienal’s canonical historiographic position as a biennial of resistance (as asserted by Hoskote’s framework). This does not deny the official Havana Bienal’s achievements in supporting Southern networks but asserts that the artistic system in Havana is a closed system to local artists. In confronting the official Havana Bienal’s postponement, the Cuban government’s restrictive artistic production

¹³⁰ Circles Robinson, “Alternative Havana Biennial May 5-15, 2018,” *Havana Times* (blog), September 28, 2017, <https://havanatimes.org/news/alternative-havana-biennial-may-5-15-2018/>.

¹³¹ Luis Manual Otero Alcántara, Interview with #00BH, May 5, 2019.

policies, and Cuba's national *mestizaje* identity, I argue that #00BH supersedes the official Bienal as a biennial of resistance by way of its resistivity against the official government artistic strictures imposed on local artists. #00BH's resistivity is furthermore demonstrated by the curatorial component of walking, reiterating the post-/de-colonial emancipatory potential of local Cuban artists, by physically opening spaces and embodying #00BH's political activism and inclusivity.

In this chapter, I discuss the historical context of the Havana Bienal, its founding, and how the Havana Bienal's institutionalization influenced the formation of #00BH. I analyse the curatorial ambitions of both #00BH and the Havana Bienal, in particular addressing the artwork *72 (Virgins) in Motion and Aria* (2019) by Mehdi-Georges Lahlou at the Museo de Arte Colonial, David Beltrán's *Arqueología del Color (The Archeology of Color)* (2019) at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, and installations along the Malecón, the oceanfront promenade of Havana. After theorizing the #00BH's curatorial concept of walking in relation to Cuba's *mestizaje* national identity, I examine the artwork *Sinfin sin fin* by Mariam Abrajim Quiroga (2018), Francisco Mendez's *Ya me cansé*, an intervention by Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability (PA:CS) at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in relation to #00BH's political curatorial outcome. With regards to #00BH's curatorial logic of inclusivity, I examine Armando Cuspínera's installation *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody)* (2018-ongoing) and an untitled performance by Nonardo Perea.

#00BH and the Havana Bienal

During the heightened geopolitical tensions at the end of the Cold War, Cuba aimed to leverage itself as a “Third World” cultural leader. Since Soviet-Cuban ties were strained due to Soviet economic and political reforms, Cuba allied itself with Latin American, Asian, and African countries to become a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement during the 1970s and 1980s to fight against imperialism and colonialism of bloc politics. Utilizing cultural policy, which coincided with a softening of previously repressive state artistic control, resulted in a “golden age” of Cuban artistic production and the establishment of the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam (CAC Wifredo Lam). The CAC Wifredo Lam was established as a homage to the recently deceased Cuban artist, Wifredo Lam, and to host the Havana Bienal, which inaugurated its first edition in 1984. Former curator of the Havana Bienal, Gerardo Mosquera, declares that “the Havana Bienal was born in the utopian context of the Cuban Revolution out of the desire to transform international power relations connected to the circulation and legitimation of art.”¹³² The expediency of culture, or as Mosquera positions, cultural utopianism vis-à-vis a biennial, aligns with but is not exclusive to promoting socialism and a positive image of Cuba and confronting Cuban-US isolation by co-opting Cuban and Third World intellectuals.¹³³ Although Cuba had an expansive world vision, the inclination to be a Third World leader was also supported by the Soviet Bloc, which heavily subsidised the Cuban economy at the time. Political motivation, however, impeded the Biennial’s utopian conception, according to Mosquera, as an open space for marginalised agents in the Euro-American art world.

¹³² Gerardo Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 199.

¹³³ Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” 200.

Confronting exclusion and a lack of communication, artists, curators and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and accompanying diasporic communities were able to circulate their local contexts to Havana, outside of dominating global networks. “Thus,” Mosquera declares, “the Havana Bienal created a new, truly international “other” space while acting at the same time as a gigantic ‘Salon des Refusés’ that involved most of the world.”¹³⁴

The Havana Bienal was inaugurated in 1984. Its third edition was actualised in 1989, despite being planned for 1988, institutionalizing the Bienal as a triennial. Its tri-annual format is among its several innovative components and strategies, which include instituting postcolonial perspectives, discursive content, and decentralised exhibition venues, making the Havana Bienal discursively significant to the project of writing a more extensive biennial history. The Havana Bienal is art historically notable for its early editions’ ideological reconsiderations and curatorial innovations in opposition to the Venice Biennale. It was conceived to offer an alternative perspective to the Euro-American positions that dominated the art world, providing networks for artists unable to work within the established and exclusionary art world system. This chapter does not refute this ambition, nor the ongoing opportunities the Havana Bienal provides artists and art world elites, especially those unable to work in non-Euro-American networks. However, the overarching concern of this chapter is the consideration of how contemporary biennial editions impact institutional biennial historiographies, given that biennials are an exhibition format that is continually negotiated in the present and within their local contexts.

¹³⁴ Gerardo Mosquera, “The Havana Biennial: A Concrete Utopia,” 203.

The Havana Bienal has previously experienced postponements and delays throughout its history due to political and economic strain. Notably, there were privatizations following the end of Soviet Union economic subsidies, in conjunction with the United States implementation of the Cuban Democracy Act, which banned the sale to Cuban subsidiaries of US corporations abroad.¹³⁵ As a direct result, the cost of imported food and medicine drastically increased, causing shortages throughout the country. Then-president Fidel Castro coined the economic crisis at this time as the “Special Period in Time of Peace” in 1992, and it lasted until 2010. The special period necessitated national survival now that Cuba no longer had external support and had to participate in a competitive and exclusive international economy while, as Cuban sociologist and historian Haroldo Dilla Alfonso asserts, being politically conditioned by hostility from North America.¹³⁶ Cuban economic strategists attempted to overcome Cuba’s economic separation by focusing on import substitution and food self-sufficiency incentives and implementing the necessary constitutional amendments for foreign investment and Cuban economic factors of production. Increased foreign investment decentralised government control over labour, and despite high labour incentives, unemployment rose to become economically and socially structural.¹³⁷ Political scientist Philip Brenner details the realities of the special period when he states that up to 50,000 Cubans temporarily lost their eyesight because of vitamin deficiencies and recounts that gasoline shortages were so severe that

¹³⁵ Philip Brenner et al., eds., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: The Revolution Under Raúl Castro*, Second edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 32–33.

¹³⁶ Haroldo Dilla Alfonso and John F. Uggen, “Cuba Between Utopia and the World Market: Notes for a Socialist Debate,” *Latin American Perspectives*, June 30, 2016, 48.

¹³⁷ Alfonso and Uggen, 48–51.

driving was often impossible. Over the years, the utopia of the revolution has continued to dissolve into a deprived and harsh reality.

Despite these hardships, the Havana Bienal persevered. As an alternative to Euro-American positions that dominated the art world, providing networks for artists unable to work within those art world systems. Mosquera writes about his early participation in the biennial, whose early editions continue to receive discursive attention and praise. The initiative and spirit of the earlier editions suggested similarities for Mosquera with #00BH, who aligned himself with the project in a video of support.¹³⁸ In some ways, Mosquera is a figure who bridges the past early editions and #00BH, inviting the question of how does #00BH, organised in reaction to the globally and art historically significant Havana Bienal, inform or influence previous global discourse on biennials of resistance. What becomes clear with the Havana Bienal and #00BH is a scalar perspective of what counts as resistance and why it matters who is resisting, when and where. This is because, for local Cuban artists, the perception of the Havana Bienal is not that of a biennial of resistance, but of complacency, since as a government institution it is a platform of the Cuban government and its policies of artistic censorship. #00BH reveals how the Havana Bienal's emancipatory potential is limited for the local Cuban art world by resisting the official Havana Bienal.

#00BH took place in May 2018 for ten days (fig. 1.1). As briefly mentioned, the biennial was organised in response to the Cuban government cancelling, then postponing, the 13th edition of the official Havana Bienal. As a grassroots project, #00BH operated on a different

¹³⁸ *#Mosquera en #00Bienal de La Habana*, accessed October 27, 2020, <https://he-il.facebook.com/00Bienalevento/videos/mosquera-en-00bienal-de-la-habana/997919630362913/>.

scale from the Havana Bienal and other Euro-American contemporary biennials. This smaller scale was embraced as a central characteristic of the event in order to complicate the question of necessary influences between biennials and global neoliberalism. Contrary to common proponents of neoliberalism and in line with Cuba's socialist roots, the curatorial theme of #00BH is more of a philosophical strategy, that is, to be "an inclusive and free civic space."¹³⁹ The organisers are interested in a "plurality of thought," which is something that they feel is detached from the cultural policies implemented by the new president Mr. Miguel Díaz Canel.¹⁴⁰ Cuban artists recognise the value, economic and symbolic, of participating in the Biennial, like the "Venice effect," where showing in Venice advances an artist's career. The critical surplus was as present and important for the organisers of #00BH, yet not as crucial as refuting the institutional gatekeeping where artists feel unsupported by biennials. As co-organiser Fernandez states:

It was the most important thing of the event. Remember that the idea of making the biennial #00 arises because the official institution suspended the biennial of Havana. In principle, for lack of resources (that was the justification they gave), and our reaction was that we can make the biennial among us. That is, if the artists unite with our own resources, we can make it. That is to say that from its very beginnings, it was thought to be an inclusive and open event. With the intention of having the greatest social reach possible.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Yanelys Núñez Leyva et al., "Fragments of an Open Letter," in *La Habana: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, by Schools of Architecture, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts Design and Conservation and Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability (IBK), trans. Olympia Nouska (København: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation, 2018), 107.

¹⁴⁰ Leyva et al., 107.

¹⁴¹ Original text: "era lo mas importante del evento. recuerda que la idea de hacer la bienal #00 surge por que la institución oficial suspende la bienal de la habana. en principio, por falta de recursos (esa fue la justificación que dieron) y la reacción nuestra fue puede vamos a hacer la bienal entre nosotros. o sea, si los artistas nos unimos, con nuestros propios recursos podemos hacerla. es decir que desde sus mismos inicios fue pensada para se un evento inclusivo y abierto. con la intención de tener el mayor alcance social que fuera posible."

Challenging the government’s decision to withhold the Bienal due to resources was partly the ambition of #00BH. However, by mobilizing the event on social media and the internet, the organisers were able to call for participants, accepting every artist who desired to participate. Inclusivity was embraced fully by the organisers, even across geographies, North and South. While this could arguably be a negation of the curatorial or a lack of curation, I understand their complete acceptance in response to the intimidation and threatening action the organisers experienced after, during and since they announced the event. #00BH was accused by the Cuban government of “distorting Cuban cultural policies” in an artistic climate where artists and cultural producers are frequently jailed for critical positions towards politics.



Figure 1.1: #00BH flag outside the studio Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce

As of April 2018, and in effect as of the following December (2018), Decree 349 legislated new censorship on artistic freedom in Cuba. The decree granted the Cuban government complete control over any independent artistic production, banning the “use of national symbols that contravene current legislation; pornography; violence; sexist, vulgar and obscene language; discrimination due to skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability and any other harm to human dignity; attempts against the development of childhood and adolescence; any other that violates the legal provisions that regulate the normal development of our [Cuban] society in cultural matters.”¹⁴² The organisers of #00BH have been outspoken against this new decree resulting in their multiple arrests. In conjunction with the 2019 Havana Bienal, Alcántara planned a performance that he was prevented from completing and was arrested by the Cuban government. Alcántara’s arrest demonstrates art historian Coco Fusco’s assertion that the aesthetic principles of Cuban art align with conduct because formalist arguments about the artistic quality are integral to political demands. To quote Fusco’s plain conclusion, “for art to be ‘good’ in Cuba, artists also have to ‘be good.’”¹⁴³

The artist registration system in Cuba regulates artistic production in correlation with behaviour. A Cuban art historian understands the system of regulation imposed on artists working in Cuba as such: “artists belong to the Registry of the Creator (Registro del Creador). Once you are registered there, artists are granted a card with which they can participate in exhibitions within state spaces...the vast majority of galleries and art centers belong to the

¹⁴² Jasmine Weber, “As Criminalization of the Arts Intensifies in Cuba, Activists Organize,” *Hyperallergic*, August 15, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/453423/cuba-decree-349-censorship-arts/>.

¹⁴³ Coco Fusco, *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), 40.

State.”¹⁴⁴ What is outlined is that for formally trained artists, “it is a natural process of inertia to obtain a card and you are registered by the Ministry of Culture upon graduation.” Alternatively, there are other organizations such as the AHS (Asociación Hermanos Saíz) that collaborate with amateur artists who can validate artists and obtain licenses.¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, only artists that have “totally counterrevolutionary or activist work in a crude sense” are denied licencing. While the artist licensing system perhaps is not complicated, it is a state-controlled system that regulates national agendas by prohibiting opportunities to artists resistant to Cuba’s institutional artistic vision.

For example, artists outspokenly critical of the Cuban state, its politics and history, such as Cuban artists Reynier Leyva Novo (el Chino) or Tania Bruguera, have faced difficulties. Novo and Bruguera were both publicly and financially supported #00BH. Notably, Novo made news headlines when he donated the full amount of the sale of his work *No me guardes si me muero, La transaccion (Do Not Keep Me if I Die, the Transaction)* to #00BH. The state-run National Council of Visual Arts purchased the work for 3800 CUC (USD), and with the transfer, the state symbolically funded the unsanctioned event. Despite not being part of the official Havana Bienal, Novo participated in an unofficial collateral event to the 2019 Havana Bienal, *Un día feliz*, (translated to a happy day) (fig. 1.2), an exhibition of work by Novo, curated by Jorge Peré was at the Oficio Gallery. The works depict famous photographs of Fidel Castro, well known by the Cuban public but with Castro’s likeness removed. What remains is the emptiness of Castro’s presence in the images.

¹⁴⁴ “Cuban Artists Licensing,” May 6, 2019. Name redacted to protect the antiminority of the individual

¹⁴⁵ “Cuban Artists Licensing.”



Figure 1.2: Installation view of *Un día feliz* by Reynier Leyva Novo (el Chino) at Oficio Gallery, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Bruguera publicly announced she would not be in attendance at the 13th Havana Bienal, citing its “contradictory politics” among her reasons.¹⁴⁶ Supporting #00BH with a video on Facebook, Bruguera has had an onerous relationship with the Cuban government. She has been arrested numerous times, most notably for her public performance of *Tatlin’s Whisper* in Havana’s Revolution Square, December 2014, and has been declared a criminal by the Cuban government.¹⁴⁷ The performance, which was previously performed during the 10th edition of the Havana Bienal, consists of a podium, stage, and microphone. People are invited to speak for

¹⁴⁶ Jasmine Weber, “Why I Will Not Go to This Year’s Havana Biennial,” *Hyperallergic*, April 15, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/495007/why-i-will-not-go-to-this-years-havana-biennial/>.

¹⁴⁷ The state-run National Council of Visual Arts purchased the work for 3800 CUC (=USD), and with the transfer, the state symbolically funded the unsanctioned event. 00Bienal de La Habana, *Tania Bruguera En #00Bienal de La Habana - YouTube*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ugRaTNAzHs&feature=youtu.be>.

one minute free of censorship. A dove was placed on their shoulder, a reference to an iconic image of Fidel Castro delivering a speech in Havana after the Triumph of the Revolution. Speakers were then removed from the stage by two people dressed in military attire, who would release the dove, and walk them off the stage. Previously when the work was performed, 39 people spoke at a microphone, offering “reasons to continue the path of Fidel Castro’s Revolution”; others asked for elections where no one in the Castro family was a candidate; “some demanded those who were part of the secret police to come to the mike”; and “others asked for a day when freedom of speech did not have to be a performance.”¹⁴⁸ Bruguera, obviously interested in testing the limits of state censorship for the purposes of change, permitted her home, the Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt (INSTAR) (fig. 1.3), to be used as the central hub and exhibition venue for #00BH. INSTAR’s exhibition and planning space provided room for artists who are not and cannot be validated within the current Cuban artistic system.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ “Tania Bruguera’s Tatlin’s Whisper #6 (Havana Version),” Tania Bruguera, July 17, 2021, <https://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/112-0-Tatlins+Whisper+6+Havana+version.htm>.

¹⁴⁹ To my knowledge, none of the Cuban artists who participated in #00BH hold artist licenses. Moreover, the state’s control over artistic production has increased even more since #00BH.



Figure 1.3: INSTAR, April 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Moreover, it was necessary for #00BH to have dedicated space because, for local Cubans, public space in Cuba is where Cubans are expected to “demonstrate their identification with the revolution.”¹⁵⁰ Cuba employs, as artist and art historian Coco Fusco outlines, an “elaborate system of citizen surveillance,”¹⁵¹ comparable to Turkey’s surveillance culture by its government, discussed in the next chapter. As a result of Cuba’s system of surveillance, public space is “closely monitored and recorded, forming a catalogue of signs of political allegiance

¹⁵⁰ Fusco, 34.

¹⁵¹ Fusco, 34.

from school years onwards that determines eligibility for higher education, employment, promotion and other privileges dispensed by the state.”¹⁵² Conduct in public space is currency, Fusco deduces, inevitably generating public space as an arena to entrenched hegemonic values. Yet, she cautions that it would be careless to accept performance as only a genre of political contestation because the state has also utilised the medium to demonstrate its generosity and “the island’s legendary exuberance.”¹⁵³ Fusco adds that major art events since the 1990s, presumably including editions of the Havana Bienal, have showcased performances informed by popular traditions in Cuba, such as performances by Manuel Mendive (included with a solo exhibition in the 13th Havana Bienal edition) and Los Carpinteros. Fusco states that these performances serve a dual function, aesthetic and political, in order to draw foreign attention away from visible hardship and repression.¹⁵⁴

#00BH Walks the Art Historical Line

#00BH and its curators created an edition that was a moving, shifting, roaming entity by way of the host city, with fluid event planning, and visitors’ passage in, through and with them.¹⁵⁵ If dimensions of *walking with*/decolonial walking could be used as strategies to “transform the spaces and subjects fashioned in and through knowledge production practices

¹⁵² I can attest to the surveillance system in Havana, having had my own activity in the city monitored after interacting with organizers of #00BH. Despite no means of knowing where I was staying, immigration services arrived at my housing to question and intimidate me regarding my affiliation with the members, intentions, and credentials. See Coco Fusco, *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), 34.

¹⁵³ Fusco, 34.

¹⁵⁴ Fusco, 34.

¹⁵⁵ Psychogeography refers to the walking of a shape, symbol, or word as a practice of what is called a “constrained walk.” What I am proposing is similar in that there would be restrictions imposed from the exhibition, however, it does not necessarily relate to the exercise of design.

by fostering ‘multiepistemic literacy’ and political engagement,” as proposed by Geographer Juanita Sundberg, their implementation as a curatorial strategy equally enacts decolonizing measures to the biennial format. Decolonizing the biennial format does not mean that other facets of the biennial exhibition model are negated or absent, but rather, there is the adaptation and inclusion of decolonizing strategies to the biennial platform.

#00BH was an unsanctioned event by the Cuban government, making it essential for the organisers to withhold logistical information. There were often last-minute changes and notifications to scheduled visits, performances, and exhibitions, as well as language barriers and a lack of familiarity with a foreign country. As a result, #00BH necessitated pedestrian and group travel. Moreover, given the biennial’s budget, walking was an affordable mode of transportation. Walking as a group was, therefore, logistically, economically, and strategically necessary, in addition to being subversive. A collective pace that was slow and contemplative provided sequences of communication, connection, and reflection in a biennial working with participants and artists to pronounce their collective presence in the art world and ultimately effect change to be a part of it (fig. 1.4-1.6). I would like to propose the idea of walking as an approach to mobilise on-the-ground discussions about tensions between local and global narratives for constructing biennial historiographies. #00BH demonstrates how the changing economic, social, and political circumstances have resulted in tensions for independent Cuban artists and an institutionalization of local artistic exclusion, which can be overlooked in global discourses regarding biennial history.



Figure 1.4: #00BH Logo spray-painted on the street in Havana, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.5: #00BH participants sitting in the Street, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.6: #00BH participants walking together to the Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability (PA:CS) student intervention, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

While the artworks discussed do not directly demonstrate or render walking per se, I position walking was a critical curatorial component of the event guided participants and artists from one exhibition to the next, unifying the group and the event as a whole. The artworks examined build upon #00BH's gesture, to the notion of walking, as an inclusive and embodied act. More broadly, walking as an act of political resistance against the artistic constraints imposed upon Cuban artists questions the stability of the official Havana Bienal and, arguably, with its official position of *mestizaje*, functioning as what Ronald Stutzman's calls "an all-

inclusive ideology of exclusion.”¹⁵⁶ By considering the “unofficial” #00BH alongside the official 13th edition of the Havana Bienal, this chapter reconsiders Havana Bienal’s historiography as situated within a Eurocentric biennial history of exclusion and integration rather than inclusion and heterogeneity. As will be discussed and proposed, the associated notions of *walking with* and decolonized walking are central to #00BH’s resistivity to the commodification of the official Havana Bienal, by mobilising the biennial within the city, as a site fractured by belonging and by asserting a political agenda for more comprehensive artistic inclusion, and ultimately, creative freedom.

The idea of walking and the physical process of doing so are prevalent concepts in Eurocentric art history. Other than accounting for museum fatigue, an increasing reality from the growing size of various biennial editions, little concern is given to getting around to, from, and between exhibition venues, especially when a biennial may include numerous sites throughout its host city. A notable theoretical contribution to this topic comes from the Head of Research and Public History at the Science Museum in London, England, Tim Boon, who applied Michel de Certeau’s *Practices of Everyday Life* to articulate and assess museum visitor engagement.¹⁵⁷ Boon thinks about de Certeau’s “pedestrian speech acts” metaphor to think about exhibitions as producers of narratives in three-dimensional space without a “correct overall meaning” because the paths visitors take cannot be solely dictated in the exhibition

¹⁵⁶ Kristina Wirtz, “Mobilizations of Race, Place, and History in Santiago de Cuba’s Carnavalesque: Mobilizations of Race, Place, and History in Cuba,” *American Anthropologist* 119, no. 1 (March 2017): 60.

¹⁵⁷ Tim Boon, “A Walk in the Museum with Michel de Certeau: A Conceptual Helping Hand for Museum Practitioners,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54, no. 4 (2011): 419–29.

space. He asserts that when curators make an exhibition, it is imperative for curators to recognise a “profusion of possible meanings that a user may originate within it.”¹⁵⁸

In addition to the curatorial act of walking, artists and philosophers have also been interested in the topic. Walking is notably not just considered a condition of artistic creation, subject, or movement between viewing artworks but also an artistic medium or mode. While there are several traditions associated with walking, since the simple act of walking has existed as long as people have; the Euro-American art historical tradition of walking is primarily framed by the Romantics and the Naturalists. During this time, walking became associated with freeing creativity as inspired by rural landscapes. Historian Jeffrey Cane Robinson surmises that the Romantics’ walks were about coalescing and liberating the self. Visualizations are evident by German artist Caspar David Friedrich, who captures the pleasure of solitary walking in works like *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (c.1817). Further in this tradition, theorist Henry David Thoreau’s essay on walking, “Walking, or the Wild,” (1861), is an early meditation on the philosophy of pedestrianism. The text contrasts with the rise of urban walking in nineteenth-century cities, such as London and Paris. The nineteenth-century epitomised walking with the male bourgeois figure of the *flâneur*: a strolling dandy who observes the world around him as first identified by Charles Baudelaire.¹⁵⁹ The *flâneur*’s class, as art historian TJ Clark argued in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art Manet and his Followers*, structured his

¹⁵⁸ Boon, 424.

¹⁵⁹ See Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989).

engagement with the mythic markers of Parisian modernity: leisure, recreation, the pleasure of nature, and class intermingling in entertainment.¹⁶⁰

Walking was a form of anti-art, or a rejection of arts traditionally assigned to places in the city by artists in the early twentieth-century. The Dadaists, according to Francesco Careri, travelled to open country, which had for them “a dream-like, surreal aspect to walking.” Dadaists defined this walking experience as “deambulation,” similar to an automatic writing process in real space, which was “capable of revealing the unconscious zones of space, the repressed memories of the city.”¹⁶¹ From privileging the unconscious as a guide to setting travel to essentially random itineraries, the members of the Situationist International developed a theory of drifting. Not exclusive to walking, drifting, or the *dérive* was a “technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances,” combining spatial awareness and surrendering to sudden changes.¹⁶² The Situationist drifter, art historian David Evans notes, had obvious affinities with Baudelaire’s *flâneur* by confronting the commercial logic of the city, and with the Dadaists’ *déambulation* (stroll), by purposing walking out of the studio to blend art and everyday life.¹⁶³ Careri outlines that instead of a Dadaist understanding of walking and *deambulation*, Surrealist *deambulation* used “empty territory” rather than the city as its setting. For Surrealists, space was active as an “autonomous producer of affections and relations,” with its own character. The

¹⁶⁰ Clark, 1-12.

¹⁶¹ Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Ames, IA: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2017), 27.

¹⁶² Karen O’Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 9.

¹⁶³ David Evans, ed., *The Art of Walking: A Field Guide* (London: Black Dog Publ, 2012), 14.

aim was to provoke “a strong state of apprehension in the person walking, in both the senses of ‘feeling fear’ and ‘grasping’ or ‘learning’.”¹⁶⁴

Careri credits sculptors, specifically Tony Smith and the development of Land Art with reclaiming “the experience of lived space and the larger scale of the landscape,” where “walking begins to be transformed into a true autonomous artform.”¹⁶⁵ While artists such as Long and Hamish Fulton are known as “the archetypal ‘walking artists’,”¹⁶⁶ their practices are situated by art historian Karen O’Rourke in earlier developed choreography by Anna Halprin. In the 1950s, Halprin, O’Rourke outlines, was interested in the “internal sensation” of the body, which was prescribed and executed based on “improvisations based on everyday gestures.”¹⁶⁷ Simone Forti, a student of Halprin, later formed the Judson Dance Theatre in New York in the early 1960s. The group was interested in producing movements considering everyday movements, such as walking and bending and carrying objects.¹⁶⁸ As an aesthetic practice, walking merged art and everyday life. As O’Rourke states, walking is an embodied experience that “blurs the borders between representing the world and designating oneself as a piece of it, between life art and object-based art.”¹⁶⁹ Walking is a well-established “trope to examine and challenge the systems of knowledge and power that operate within city spaces.”¹⁷⁰ From nineteenth-century *flâneurs* to the *dérive* of the Situationist International and more

¹⁶⁴ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ Careri, 113–14.

¹⁶⁶ Pope.

¹⁶⁷ O’Rourke, *Walking and Mapping*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ O’Rourke, 29.

¹⁶⁹ O’Rourke, 13.

¹⁷⁰ Barbara Garrie, “Walking the Post-Quake City: (Re)Making Place in Ōtautahi Christchurch,” in *Transformations: Art and the City*, ed. Elizabeth M. Grierson, Mediated Cities Series (Bristol, UK Chicago, USA: Intellect, 2017), 237.

contemporary artists, such as Mona Hatoum's *Roadworks* (1985) or Hamish Fulton's *Slowalk (in support of Ai Wei Wei)* (2011), walking is used to disrupt "political legibility of the cityscape."¹⁷¹

As discussed so far, walking has been characterised by Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner as problematically promoting a patriarchal and male-centred ideology. Heddon and Turner assert that this particular walking genealogy generates a masculine ideology that valorises individualism, heroism, epicism, and transgression. They suggest that while walking and specifically female walkers may employ the rhetoric of Walter Benjamin or Michel de Certeau for political force, that there is also "the consistent awareness of the ways in which walking itself is framed, compromised and directed by what Rebecca Schneider refers to as 'monumentality,' the fixity of a patriarchal culture."¹⁷² Their project addresses the invisibility of women in the canon of walking, alternatively advocating for a walking that "that values the familiar, local, temporal and socio-cultural, as well as the unknown, immediate, solitary, wild – and indeed, finds them entangled with one another."¹⁷³

Identifying the potential significance of the body to the experience of walking, geographer Tim Cresswell writes, "ways of moving have quite specific characteristics depending on who is moving and the social and cultural space that is being moved through."¹⁷⁴ Human geographers in the early years of the twenty-first century proposed the "new mobilities paradigm." It advocated for considering mobilities alongside and within their "moorings."¹⁷⁵ For

¹⁷¹ Garrie, 237.

¹⁷² Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner, "Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 224–36.

¹⁷³ Heddon and Turner.

¹⁷⁴ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 198.

¹⁷⁵ Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, "Introduction: Geographies of Mobilities – Practices, Spaces, Subjects," in *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 7.

human geographers, spaces are not just contexts but are actively produced by acts of moving. And while Heddon and Turner note that psychogeography has a paralleled discursive legacy, indebted to the Situationist International, they cite Doreen Massey for rejecting geographers, specifically Iain Sinclair's notion of detachment in order to read or narrate the city individually. Alternatively, Massey calls for an entangled "relational politics of the spatial" for confronting the construction of spatial relationships. Sociologist David Turnbull builds on the idea of performative mapping, as developed by Ingold and more thoroughly later, Gartner, Crosgrrove, and Martins. The idea is that storytelling or emphasis on movement, action, event, space, and time destabilise notions of representational truth often associated with mapping.¹⁷⁶ Turnbull is interested in the "antagonistic pluralism" producing worlds by embodied and emplaced movements.

Art historian Karen O'Rourke considers participation in art and walking as an artistic technique as making "possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception."¹⁷⁷ A critic of participatory art, Mark Miessen cautions proximity does not necessarily assume the development of empathy.¹⁷⁸ Anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee are similarly hesitant to the proximity of walking to produce insights and understandings that would be otherwise hidden. They clarify that "to participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with* – where 'with' implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas, and perhaps retreating from

¹⁷⁶ David Turnbull, "Maps Narratives and Trails: Performativity, Hodology and Distributed Knowledges in Complex Adaptive Systems? An Approach to Emergent Mapping," *Geographical Research* 45, no. 2 (June 2007): 140–49.

¹⁷⁷ O'Rourke, xvii-xviii.

¹⁷⁸ "A lot of recent talk on participation assumes that the closer you get to something or someone, the more empathy you develop. This is a scary assumption." Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality* (Berlin: Sternberg Pr, 2011).

the same threats behind.”¹⁷⁹ For them, “attunement” is necessary for “walking alongside becomes a means to negotiate a flow – of conversation, of movement.”¹⁸⁰ Walking with redefines solidarity, where walking and talking take the world to be pluriversal.¹⁸¹

Building on solidarity and plurality, Juanita Sundberg argues to decolonize the notion of walking. She argues that because walking allows for collective movement, where individuals are accountable in the presence of others, it “enacts situated and contingent ontologies between land, peoples, and nonhuman others.”¹⁸² Because decolonizing, as adopted by Sundberg, “involves fostering ‘multiepistemic literacy’,” she builds on the conceptualizations of walking and mobility by the Zapatistas. This Mexican movement began in 1994 is rooted in ontologies and experiences of various Mayan communities.¹⁸³ For the Zapatistas, the movement was enacted by walking, where “the journey is destination, and the world is brought into being through everyday praxis.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, walking was an embodied principle of “preguntando caminamos,” translated to “asking we walk,” for which Sundberg surmises that “movement is enacted through a dialogic politics of walking and talking, doing and reflecting.”¹⁸⁵ From these principles, Sundberg proposes decolonizing posthumanist engagements in geography with Gayatri Spivak’s concept of homework¹⁸⁶ and scholar Rauna Kuokkanen’s notion of *learning as*

¹⁷⁹ Tim Ingold and Jo Lee, “Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing,” in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, ed. Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, ASA Monographs 42 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), 67.

¹⁸⁰ Pope.

¹⁸¹ Sundberg, 41.

¹⁸² Juanita Sundberg, “Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies,” *Cultural Geographies*, April 26, 2013, 33–47.

¹⁸³ Sundberg, 34.

¹⁸⁴ Sundberg, 39.

¹⁸⁵ Sundberg, 39.

¹⁸⁶ For Spivak, the concept of homework is related to a continuous practice linked to unlearning. For Spivak, academics have the responsibility to take to task to “not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study,” in conjunction with “historical critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize, and you will be heard. When you take the

engagement with.¹⁸⁷ Posthumanist geography, according to Sundberg, is a historical and theoretical perspective of geography that maintains a dualist conception of nature and culture that upholds Eurocentric and colonial knowledge.¹⁸⁸ Homework involves being aware of the neutralizing geopolitical and institutional power structures and relationships that constitute society and thought and *learning as engagement with* entails “participatory reciprocity.” With these concepts as Sundberg’s framework, she advocates for a decolonizing practice, where decolonized walking produces knowledge as a *social activity*. If walking is a social activity, learning is perceived and received through alternate epistemes as part of a geopolitical present.¹⁸⁹ Various protocols and methodologies typically advocated in decolonizing practices pose to challenge Eurocentric practices and expectations. A decolonial approach to walking can demonstrate how multiple intellectual traditions are able to contribute to broadening ethical, political, social, and cultural discussions.

In a reference to the carnival in Santiago de Cuba in Cuba, anthropologist Kristina Wirtz theorises transculturation and racial difference through mobility, where the carnivalesque has specific connotations. According to Wirtz, Cuba’s national identity is driven by *mestizaje* or racial mixing – that is multiracial but monocultural at the same time – after the Cuban

position of not doing your homework – “I will not criticize because of my accident of birth, the historical accident” – that is a much more pernicious position.” See Gayatri Spivak, *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, (Routledge: London, 1990) 62-3.

¹⁸⁷ Kuokkanen builds on the Zapatistas’ concept of *walking with*, which holds a “respect for the multiplicity of life worlds” to think about the difference between *learning to know* and *learning as engagement with*. For Kuokkanen, *learning to know* is an enclosed and hegemonic monologue that perpetuates colonial domination despite an appreciation of other’s difference. Comparatively, *learning as engagement with* frames knowledge as a social activity, where learning entails perceiving and receiving “Indigenous epistemes as part of the geopolitical present.” See R. Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); 118.

¹⁸⁸ Sundberg, 33.

¹⁸⁹ Sundberg, 40.

Revolution, which prioritized erasing class and racial disparity. Rather than race being strictly binary in Cuba, marked Blackness, Wirtz's focus, contrasts with Whiteness and *mestizaje*, where Blackness is simultaneously segregated and integrated to Cuban national identity as fractured belonging.¹⁹⁰ Of note, Whiteness signifies eliteness, "above race or the mesticized norm," and Blackness is associated with "folklore," being a "marker of nationalist pride and cultural resistance."¹⁹¹ Fractured belonging "perform[s] affiliations and difference across place, race, and nation" as a racialized mechanism.¹⁹² Santiago's carnival is Wirtz's example of fractured belonging because movement through the city marks some bodies and locations as Black while participating in a shared event. Carnival ensembles called *congas* play music, primarily of percussion, to which bodies move in *arrollando*, "rolling along,"¹⁹³ moving "marginalized Blackness toward *mesticized* national belonging, however partially and temporarily."¹⁹⁴ This is mainly done during what is known as "The Invasion," or the moment of "breaking carnival," a preparatory and unofficial portion of the carnival that takes place a few weeks before the official carnival, where participants later spectate official carnival events. The Invasion performs "routes of Blackness," while also serving "as a reenactment [sic] of Cuba's national 'roots.'" ¹⁹⁵ In comparison with the official carnival, which Wirtz describes as "a glitzy performances [that] play to the national myth of *mestizaje* by showcasing the transculturated mix of music and dance that is Cuba's patrimony," the Invasion involves competing *congas* emerging from their

¹⁹⁰ Wirtz, "Mobilizations of Race, Place, and History in Santiago de Cuba's Carnavalesque," 61.

¹⁹¹ Wirtz, 65.

¹⁹² Wirtz, 61.

¹⁹³ *Arrollando* is described by Wirtz as a walking step where weight is shifted from leg to leg.

¹⁹⁴ Wirtz, "Mobilizations of Race, Place, and History in Santiago de Cuba's Carnavalesque," 67.

¹⁹⁵ Wirtz, 64-65.

Santiago’s traditionally Black neighbourhoods to “defend their territory from invasion.”¹⁹⁶ In summary, Wirtz writes, “The Invasion invokes an alternate national history of pride and courage placing Black Cubans—and Blackness itself—at the centre, instead of the margins, of Cuban cultural and political movements, like the mambí army for which it was named.”¹⁹⁷

#00BH, arguably, builds on the concepts of *walking with* and a decolonial practice of walking, that is a walking that seeks *engagement with*, for a biennial curatorial practice that is social, embodied, and enacted. In doing so, belonging was not elitist or enclosed like the Cuban national *mesticized* identity. Even though the Cuban national *mesticized* identity encapsulates a multiculturalist approach, it promotes a superficial level of diversity that it serves to uphold universality.¹⁹⁸ By *walking with*/decolonized walking #00BH takes direct action as a collective and shared event to petition for pluralistic artistic inclusion, while also offering a rejoinder to the lionization of the official Havana Bienal over the last decade.

Walk This Way, Politically

Walking, or marching for a cause, political, religious, social, medical, or otherwise, empowers participants to take up physical space and make visible what is important to them. The durational practice of walking was reinforced within the #00BH’s curatorial mission and

¹⁹⁶ Wirtz, 64–66.

¹⁹⁷ Wirtz, 67.

¹⁹⁸ Kuokkanen, 111-118.

political commentary of their exclusion and exhaustion by the Cuban government. Participants were even denied entry, and local authorities closely monitored events. For instance, artist and researcher Coco Fusco was denied entry into Cuba and unable to attend. Some of the participating artists experienced detailed inspections at customs, and a few artists who were able to attend were requested at their accommodations to report to Immigration and notified they were not permitted to participate in #00BH events.¹⁹⁹ Informed by friends that one of the venues was going to be closed by officials upon #00BH's arrival, the group decided not to attend so as to not threaten other #00BH events but decided to march by in defiance. In an assertion of the event, one day, the group even travelled to raise a flag on top of a mountain to declare group solidarity. Although the outing was rained out and the group opted for a group lunch due to the treacherous travel in the rain, hoisting a flag on the top of San Cruz Mountain (fig. 1.7-8), which is typically utilized as a symbol of nations, was intended to deploy #00BH's presence and its inclusive message.

¹⁹⁹ Coco Fusco, "Why Did Cuba Deport Artists Trying to Attend Havana's First Alternative Biennial?," *Hyperallergic*, May 8, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/441963/cuba-deport-artists-00bienal-de-la-habana/>.



Figure 1.7. San Cruz Mountain, hike and flag hoisting rained out, May 2018, *Santa Cruz del Norte*, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.8. Flag to be hoisted on San Cruz Mountain, May 2018, *Santa Cruz del Norte*, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Of particular note to #00BH's political and inclusive ambition was the trek to the home and studio of local artist Nonardo Perea in the poor neighbourhood of Marianao (fig. 1.9), for several installations and performances. Walking and commuting to Marianao as an exhibition site provided equitable access to artistic expression that would otherwise be unattainable due to distance, economic, and social differences. As a reference point, Marianao is approximately 12 km from the National Capital building, which is on the edge of old Havana.



Figure 1.9. *Neighborhood of Marianao in Havana, May 2018, Havana, Cuba.* Photo: Amy Bruce.

First returning to INSTAR, on the walls of a small room, the reality of political and civil strife was rendered by Colombian artist Mariam Abrajim Quiroga. Her drawn installation *Sin fin sin fin* (2018) (fig. 1.10) depicted images of migrants walking with everything they could carry

with them from their homes in Venezuela to the promise of opportunity in Colombia. In an upper open floor second landing, Quiroga drew pencil images from photocopies of print material of Venezuelan migrants, carrying with them everything they would bring to start their new lives. Quiroga had drawn most of the figures in a circle or ring on all four walls of the room in a border in the middle of the wall, leaving figures unfinished or spaces missing figures. The seeming ephemerality of the pencil calls to the fragility or precarity experienced by migrant people. Using the images Quiroga used herself, participants were invited to reference them to keep drawing to finish figures or add more figures to fill in the spaces. Participants were also encouraged to add notes detailing how migration has impacted their life and context directly. By having participants complete the migrant figures, participants could not ignore the personal, political, and social crisis of migration experiences. Seemingly from the perspective of a Venezuelan migrant, an anonymous note reads “Por qué todas me dejan solo?” which translates to “Why does everyone abandon me?” The caption is empathetic towards the sense of loss and helplessness experienced by people fleeing political turmoil and economic collapse to arrive in a new country to be undocumented and continue to be socially unsupported.



Figure 1.10. Mariam Abrajim Quiroga, *Sinfin Sin Fin*, 2018, installation at INSTAR, Havana, Cuba, 2018. Photo: Amy Bruce.

The artwork as a circular border is reinforced by the title, a play on words, which roughly translates to “endless without an end.” The title references the ongoing and seemingly endless political and social strife in Venezuela and Colombia. The ongoing civil conflict in Colombia compounds the Venezuelan refugee crisis. The conflict worsened in the 1960s with guerrilla groups, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and National Liberation Army, giving rise to violence in conjunction with drug trafficking, displacing nearly eight million people since the 1990s.²⁰⁰ And while Colombia has recently granted legal status to Venezuelan migrants who fled since 2016, the civil conflict is ongoing despite a bilateral cease-fire

²⁰⁰ Erika Frydenlund, Jose J. Padilla, and Katherine Palacio, “Colombia Gives Nearly 1 million Venezuelan Migrants Legal Status and Right to Work,” *The Conversation*, accessed July 20, 2021, <http://theconversation.com/colombia-gives-nearly-1-million-venezuelan-migrants-legal-status-and-right-to-work-155448>.

agreement signed in 2018. Compounding political conflict, social inequality spiked during the global Covid-19 pandemic. Protests erupted in the streets of Colombia after an unpopular government tax reform was proposed in April 2021. Despite the government withdrawing the proposal, protesters fuelled by reports of police violence and increased rates of unemployment and poverty continued protesting for months.²⁰¹

Despite the empowerment of gathering for protests, people feel they are without influence or power to effect change individually and internationally. On another note, (fig. 1.11-1.12) this time signed by “Coral from Boston, USA,” she asserts her own helplessness, presumably from not knowing how to offer support internationally. She writes, “My relationship to immigration is one of powerlessness in the face of the refugee crisis for many suffering.” In comparison with the anonymous note, suggesting feeling uncared for and unseen, Coral’s note suggests she does not know how to offer care or witness to people in another place in the world. The distance between them collides at #00BH because it provides a site of inclusion and creative expression.

²⁰¹ Christina Noriega, “Protesters in Colombia Turn to Town Hall Meetings for Solutions,” accessed July 20, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/protesters-in-colombia-turn-to-town-hall-meetings-for>.



Figure 1.11. Mariam Abrajim Quiroga, *Sinfin Sin Fin*, 2018, installation at INSTAR, Havana, Cuba, 2018. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.12. Mariam Abrajim Quiroga, *Sinfin Sin Fin*, 2018, installation at INSTAR, Havana, Cuba, 2018. Photo: Amy Bruce.

The physical embodiment of political exclusion and fatigue were reinforced in work by Mexican artist Francisco Mendez.²⁰² Artist Judy Chicago once said that “performance can be fuelled by rage in a way painting or sculpture cannot.”²⁰³ Mendez conceived of his performance, *Ya me cansé* (2017) (fig. 1.13), from the shocking dismissive words by the former Mexican Attorney General Jesus Murillo Karam spoken at a press conference. This conference was regarding the disappearance and murder of 43 students near Iguala, Mexico, at the orders of a drug cartel. During the press conference, which confirmed the deaths of the students with new evidence of incinerated remains, Karam signalled the end of questions by turning away from reporters and saying “Ya me cansé” – a phrase meaning “Enough, I’m tired.” Within hours the phrase became a hashtag, emerged in city graffiti, was satirized in political cartoons and later, people used it in protests to express fatigue with political corruption.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Mendez is a working artist and PhD candidate Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain. He has a degree in Visual Arts for Photographic Expression with Outstanding Academic Performance by the University of Guadalajara (UDG) and a Bachelor of Architecture with Honorable Mention the Michoacán University of San Nicolás de Hidalgo (UMSNH).

²⁰³ Tate, “Performance Art: The Angry Space, Politics and Activism – Essay,” Tate, accessed October 31, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/performance-art/angry-space-politics-and-activism>.

²⁰⁴ Associated Press, “‘I’ve Had Enough,’ Says Mexican Attorney General in Missing Students Gaffe,” *The Guardian*, November 9, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/09/protests-flare-in-mexico-after-attorney-generals-enough-im-tired-remarks>.



Figure 1.13: Francisco Mendez, *Ya me cansé*, May 2018, performance, Marianao, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Putting one foot in front of the other, walking requires physical labour and exertion. Mendez exerted and exhausted his body for his performance, repeating the phrase “ya me cansé” until he physically could no longer speak. Where Karam shrugged, Mendez shouted, and in doing so, Mendez gave voices to the murdered students, offering presence to the absent.²⁰⁵ Like the demonstrations of public outrage in Mexico outside government offices, Mendez’s performance was conceived for the streets but in the streets of old Havana. However, due to

²⁰⁵ Franciso Mendez, “Ya Me Canse,” accessed October 31, 2020, <https://www.franciscomendez.info/yamecanse>.

the increasing pressure from police regarding the events of #00BH and previous arrests and immigration notices to participating #00BH artists and the arrests of Bruguera, Mendez felt it was necessary to perform *Ya me cansé* elsewhere. He decided that local artist Nonardo Perea's home offered a new context, and in response to the fear of censorship, Mendez locked himself in the bathroom of the house. By moving his performance to the bathroom, the public could no longer attend the performance nor witness it in its full capacity. Not only were participants not able to completely engage with the performance, literally locked out, but they were also distracted and invited by the artist to keep enjoying the happenings of a party outside. In doing so, Mendez highlighted the persistent ability of people to ignore tragedy or political turmoil when it does not directly affect them – until it does. *Ya me cansé* demonstrated the tireless and physical demands from those who continually and relentlessly challenge strictures for change.

From Mendez's performance in the poor neighbourhood of Marianao, an equal trip in distance, walking to a former baseball field, was an installation by a small group of students from the master's program, Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability (PA:CS) at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. The students performed what they called an "architectural intervention" (fig. 1.14). Despite not being from the global South, as will be discussed more thoroughly in the chapter on documenta 14, the participating students conducted fieldwork in October 2017 in Havana. The small group of students who returned to participate in #00BH sought to demonstrate how political architecture could be used as a tool to question authority – much like the overall ambition of #00BH. According to the participant, Ann Kristin Entson, "The aim of our installation was to create a place for discussions around the

legal and the a-legal; the local and the foreign; habits and temporality.”²⁰⁶ Participate and student Levke Maria Danker, in the student publication, states that the group was able to “take responsibility for what we imagined and designed, communicate our ideas and take the outspoken and unspoken criticism in the Here and Now made by the Others of Havana, Cuba.”²⁰⁷ Danker continues that “The #00 Bienal de la Habana was an opportunity to get closest to the current events in a distant City within a system far away from Copenhagen and our everyday life,”²⁰⁸ by living in a country with different daily freedoms and less/different systems of control.



Figure 1.14. Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability (PA:CS) at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, *Intervention*, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

²⁰⁶ Ann Kristiin Enston, “Choosing Tactics for Installations in Cuba,” in *La Habana: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, ed. Thomas Lodge et al (København: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation, 2018), 118.

²⁰⁷ Levke Maria Danker, “City Sessions: Rescriptions,” in *La Habana: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, ed. Thomas Lodge et al. (København: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation, 2018), 117.

²⁰⁸ Danker, 117.

Regarding the intervention, Entson considers that “While a loud action can incite a strong reaction, a quiet one might get a lot further,”²⁰⁹ which is perhaps partly influenced by the site location and building materials (travel was also a consideration with regards to the building materials). The intervention was comprised of an elaborate hexagon made of metal tent poles with nylon triangles tied on the corners and together in the centre to create shade and was erected in a former baseball field. Not knowing what the installation process would be like or how far they would be permitted by authorities to build before the interruption, the students devised a precautionary construction plan to ensure they had as much control over the installation. The purpose of the structure was not defined, as to not impose limitations and future possible or unforeseeable uses by the students. After completing the construction of the installation, the students decided to leave the structure behind for it to create “further actions or reactions.”²¹⁰ However, local authorities insisted they remove the structure, imposing limits on their intervention.

Although the class were from the global North, they called for equal artistic freedom for Cuban artists by walking with #00BH. According to their instructor Runa Johannessen, the class’ presence was a “rescription,” that is, the “active disarrangement of an established order of instructions.”²¹¹ By participating in #00BH, the class became “actants in the political struggle of Cuban artists who call for the freedom to expose their work without government

²⁰⁹ Entson, 118.

²¹⁰ Entson, 118.

²¹¹ Runa Johannessen, “Recriptions,” in *La Habana: Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, ed. Thomas Lodge et al (København: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation, 2018),122.

ensorship.”²¹² As foreigners, the students felt they had been perhaps permitted to more liberties than the locals, even though they were doing something uncommon by foreigners.

Walk this Way, Inclusively

While injury and disability can limit and even prevent mobility, which may make walking difficult or impossible for many, however, for most people, walking is typically accessible and affordable – and in Cuba, often a necessity. Walking is an inclusive activity. The curatorial ambition of #00BH was that of inclusivity. Their aim was “of letting every interested artist, curator and intellectual from the world over participate.”²¹³ Every participant, artist, and visitor was given a #00BH tote bag, the quintessential biennial accessory, which became a unifying item of inclusion for #00BH. Even impromptu performances were welcomed; most memorably, a Deaf female friend of artist Alejandro Barreras stood on a couch to melodically recite a poem (fig. 1.15) at the home and studio of artist Italo René Exposito Lo Giudice. In striving for inclusivity and creative freedom, #00BH accepted every artist submission. #00BH, while not against institutions, made particular use of independent and alternative exhibition spaces.

²¹² Johannessen, 123.

²¹³ HavanaTimes.org, “Alternative Havana Biennial May 5-15, 2018,” *Havana Times*, September 28, 2017, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://havanatimes.org/news/alternative-havana-biennial-may-5-15-2018/>.



Figure 1.15. Artist unknown, performance, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Returning to Marianao, the installation, *Un Archivo de Común, Territorios de Nadie* (2017-ongoing) by Armando Cuspinera²¹⁴ (figure 1.16-1.18) and an untitled performance by Perea were conceived of as inclusive artworks and demonstrated inclusive values, while also not separate from political objectives. Primarily a conceptual work, *Un Archive de Común*,

²¹⁴ Cuspinera is a fine arts graduate of Universidad de las Américas Puebla.

Territorios de Nadie is comprised of three components: justifications by contributors adhered to a wall, digital files on USB ports containing texts, information, and justifications as well as the information existing in the cloud. The artist compiled the text and information from a network of friends, colleagues, and other contributors who were asked to share books, texts, and additional digital information that people believed to be important. Contributors were requested to accompany their artefacts with a reflection on why they felt the information or books were important to share to create a dialogue in conjunction with information. While deeming what information is “important” is inevitably relative, creating a network is important in Mexico.



Figure 1.16. Armando Cuspina introducing his work *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie* (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody), May 2018. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.17. (left) Installation view of *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody)*, May 2018. Photo: Casandra Romero Torres.

Figure 1.18. (right) Installation view of *Un Archivo En Común. Territorios de Nadie (A Common Archive. Territories of Nobody)*, May 2018. Photo: Casandra Romero Torres.

Cuspinera’s work, when thought about less symbolically regarding creative expression and more about transparency and freedom of information in Mexico, transferring the importance of people’s rights to know about state action and the state’s obligation to facilitate their knowledge. A 2015 study on Mexico’s transparency system concluded that, for the most part, the system reaches full compliance. However, the study uncovered differential treatment based on “perceived influence” and typically charged a fee in these cases in exchange for printed information. Moreover, technical information often went unanswered, and requests for

primary documents were ignored. Additionally, the quality of the information provided has not improved since earlier studies, providing either information that is challenging to understand or not relevant, leading the study to conclude improvement to the information access system was needed.²¹⁵ The availability of information is imperative since it fosters participation and active citizenship, contributing to openness and accountability, preventing and combating corruption, which ultimately supports economic growth and development.

For *Un Archivo de Común, Territorios de Nadie*, providing information and other media to anyone interested was instant and accessed since it only involved a digital file transfer. Making information just a click away, Cuspinera's intellectual aim in this project was and is (project is ongoing) to extrapolate information to communities where knowledge is not necessarily easily accessible. As a tool of inclusion, the project aspires to provide equal access to resources for people who might be otherwise excluded or marginalised from the information. There is an aspirational result for greater active citizenry involvement and, thus, more inclusion with greater access to information.²¹⁶

The last performance discussed here and at Marianao was by Perea. Not only was Perea's artwork included in the events, but #00BH scheduled travel to walk to see this artist and other exhibition venues that would have been difficult to access with limited exposure and knowledge for foreign visitors. Perea is an artist who would not typically be invited to participate in official events because of the art they create.²¹⁷ Perea is interested in issues of

²¹⁵ Paul Lagunes and Oscar Pocasangre, "Dynamic Transparency: An Audit of Mexico's Freedom of Information Act," *Public Administration* 97, no. 1 (March 2019): 162–76.

²¹⁶ Armando Cuspinera, email to author, January 29, 2020.

²¹⁷ Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, Interview with #00BH, May 5-10, 2019.

gender and sexuality, which has, in the artists' and organisers' opinion, prohibited Perea's potential participation in the official biennial. Regarding the decision to participate in #00BH, Perea shares:

It goes without saying that this was a unique opportunity for me as a gay and independent artist who deals with homoerotic subjects, who has created works independently and is completely self-taught and has never studied at a school like San Alejandro, for example, one of the most prestigious in the country. Maybe that's why I would have never been considered to take part in one of the extremely prestigious Havana Biennials, and therefore, I took the risk of being questioned and seen as a dissident and ventured to take part in the #00 Havana Biennial.²¹⁸

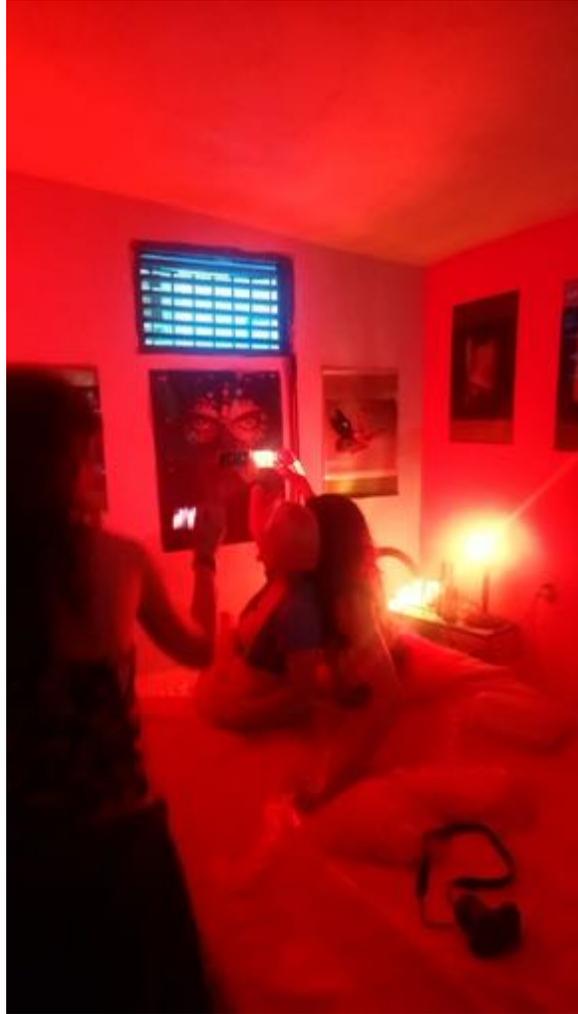
As Perea states, participating in #00BH, an unsanctioned event, involved risks, but it was worth being part of an artistic community. Perea's artistic content prevents them from creating, as Fusco describes, art considered to be good. Perea's participation as a gay artist, working with homoerotic material, demonstrates #00BH goal to be inclusive since attitudes towards LGBT rights are progressing but are, however, still strained. LGBT communities face discrimination and social exclusion in Cuba since public feelings were primarily shaped in the 1960s when the Cuban government imprisoned gay men in labour camps. Shortly after, in 1979, homosexuality became legalised; however, greater acceptance materialized with the development of the "rainbow revolution" in the early 2000s. Support has encouraged legal change, and in 2018, a widely supported (even the Cuban president Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez expressed his support) new draft constitution was proposed to address same-sex marriage, although the

²¹⁸ Nonardo Perea, "Taking Part in the Alternative #00 Havana Biennial," *Havana Times* (blog), May 17, 2018, <https://havanatimes.org/diaries/nonardo-ps-diary/taking-part-in-the-alternative-00-havana-biennial/>.

proposal was withdrawn later in the same year.²¹⁹ Precarious government support did not deter #00BH from the curatorial position of inclusivity by walking to Perea's neighbourhood and home for the performance.

The planned performance by Perea was in their home, alongside exhibited videos and photographs (fig. 1.19-1.21). In the spirit of #00BH spontaneity and improvisation, Perea experienced problems coordinating the original performance, which resulted in an extemporized performance. After entering the home, where there were newspapers on the floor, posters on the walls, non-functioning TVs duct-taped together, precariously propositioned on a chair, the aroma of incense and the warmth of candles was apparent. From this entryway to the bedroom, the bedroom was lit with a red light, with several posters on all the walls and even more candles burning in the corners of the room. Perea was laying on an unmade bed in the centre of the room, wearing women's lingerie with stockings. In full makeup and rolling around on the bed, Perea took alluring selfies in various poses, allowing anyone who wanted to join them in the photograph.

²¹⁹ Kaitlyn Budion, "Cuba's 'rainbow Revolution' Changes Attitudes toward LGBT Community," *The GroundTruth Project* (blog), July 31, 2018, <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/cubas-rainbow-revolution-changes-attitudes-toward-lgbt/>.



Figures 1.19. (left): Nonardo Perea, performance, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce
Figure 1.20. (right): Nonardo Perea with Ana Olema, performance, May 2018, Havana, Cuba.
Photos: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.21. Nonardo Perea's studio and home, May 2018, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Perea's performance intended to critique society's need to overexpose themselves on social media, especially in light of Perea's position as a gay artist who is not necessarily permitted the same social access as other artists and community members. Outspoken against decree 349 and its prohibition of Perea's artistic production and exhibition inside their own

home,²²⁰ Perea has since emigrated from Cuba because life in Cuba became too hostile.²²¹

While Perea's participation in #00BH may have had problematic repercussions for Perea, the opportunity to participate in an international event was not available by any other means. In the face of the selective power of biennials such as the Venice Biennale and more locally for Cuban artists, the Havana Bienal anoints an exclusive global elite. #00BH's curatorial imperative of inclusivity contests this by travelling to Perea's home for the performance.

Walking with the #00BH organizers in Havana conveyed how they know Havana; walking with as curatorial practice imparted to participants their contemporary reality. From walking along the famed Malecón in Havana, or from the exhibition venue to the next, walking, much like biennials, is an ephemeral practice, bound in time and space. Since biennials are designating exhibition sites throughout the city, they are producing or curating visitor experiences of the city. Walking as an art form brings together participation, dialogue, and encounter. Conceived as a gesture, the goals for #00BH were "born to question the management of the Cuban state for the official Havana Bienal and cultural events. But at the same time, we are questioning the Biennial events at the international level."²²² What #00BH was contesting/challenging will be discussed by way of the 13th edition of the official Havana Bienal.

²²⁰ Nonardo Perea, "That Damn Decree-Law 349 (Video)," *Havana Times* (blog), September 11, 2018, <https://havanatimes.org/diaries/nonardo-ps-diary/that-damn-decree-law-349/>.

²²¹ Nonardo Perea, "They Threaten Me with Death," *Havana Times* (blog), May 24, 2020, <https://havanatimes.org/diaries/nonardo-ps-diary/they-threaten-me-with-death/>.

²²² Alcántara, Interview with #00BH. "las #00BH es un gesto que nace para cuestionar la gestion del estado cubano para con la Bienal de la Habana oficial y los eventos culturales. Pero a al mismo tiempo planteamos un cuestionamiento a los eventos Bienales a nivel internacional."

The Official Havana Bienal: Constructing the Possible

“Nothing in Cuba can be taken for granted,” art journalist Federica Bueti writes, “and what seems possible one moment becomes impossible in another,”²²³ given the tense and challenging artistic climate. After being postponed in 2017, rescheduled for November 2018, and cancelled again, the 13th edition of the official Havana Bienal was held from 12 April – 12 May 2019, despite a tornado devastating Havana in early January 2019. Premised on the title and theme *The Construction of the Possible*, the curatorial team comprised of Margarita González Lorente, Nelson Herrera Ysla, Margarita Sánchez Prieto, José Manuel Noceda Fernández, José Fernández Portal, Ibis Hernández Abascal, and Lisset Alonso Compte. Broadly, their theme addressed artistic confrontations with violence, injustice, social inequality, and environmental precarity. However, a curatorial statement written by Ysla speaks directly to the Bienal’s own precarity and its survival in the face of economic and “climatic reasons and arguments which threatened the continuity and permanence.”²²⁴ Ysla laments the Bienal as an “insurmountable” task with its disadvantages encountered by its geographic distance, unclear budgeting, and bureaucracy, yet achieved despite this and in the “lush jungle of aesthetic productions existing” in Cuba.²²⁵

As if speaking directly to #00BH, Ysla makes a point to address “the difficulties to differentiate the authentic from the false, the real from the awesome, the sincere from the deceitful.”²²⁶ Sympathetically he praises the agency of many “new young artists, ignored or

²²³ Federica Bueti, “Havana Biennial 2019: Constructing the Possible,” *Ocula*, April 17, 2019, <https://ocula.com/magazine/features/havana-biennial-2019-constructing-the-possible/>.

²²⁴ Nelson Herrera Ysla, “The Multiple Constructions of the (Im)Possible,” in *Bienal de La Habana 2019: La Construcción de Lo Posible* (Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam y ArteCubano Ediciones, 2019), 29.

²²⁵ Ysla, 31.

²²⁶ Ysla, 31.

unknown,” who have “learned to surmount the limitations of their respective impoverished geographic and cultural surroundings and have appeared all of a sudden in the international art circuits.”²²⁷ It is as if, however, Ysla is wary of independent and potentially competing ambitions, cautioning that “there are too many events either with similar objectives or with more commercial interests struggling in the same scenario that could be highly desirable for less favoured artists.”²²⁸ Yet standing in defence of the 13th edition, Ysla contends that national critics of the Bienal do not understand the limitations imposed on its curation, premise, structural components, and implementation, including artist selection. The curation was realistic in the face of “new realities and complex social and political scenarios,” according to Ysla, as he pleads for others to understand what they believe is achievable for a “small Caribbean island, subject to multiple adverse circumstances.”²²⁹ Ysla’s discouragement culminates from his experience as part of the curatorial team from the first editions of the Havana Bienal. He laments the likely impact on the art world and the biennial format around the world. It would be naïve for the Bienal, Ysla states, “to hang to transcendent changing ideas and processes that bring about new realities and complex social and political scenarios in our cultures and countries.”²³⁰ Ysla is aware of the Bienal’s lack of emancipatory potential since the Bienal is situated within “new realities and complex social and political scenarios.” He argues that this is the result of waning resources, yet with fewer resources, #00BH challenged the institutionalisation of the official Havana Bienal as a biennial of resistance.

²²⁷ Fusco, 34.

²²⁸ Ysla, 31.

²²⁹ Ysla, 33.

²³⁰ Ysla, 33.

It is worth mentioning the expansiveness of the 13th edition. Exhibitions took place in over 44 event locations throughout the city as well as for the first-time independent sites in other Cuban cities: Cienfuegos (233km from Havana), Pinar del Río (163km from Havana), and Matanzas (104km from Havana). Having written about his experience as an artist part of the satellite exhibition in Matanzas, Iftikhar Dadi explains that “part of the motivation for hosting the Havana Biennial in Matanzas was to develop its cultural infrastructure and to build capacity in the city for mounting large-scale exhibitions, which in turn might bring international attention to the city.”²³¹ Additionally, the Havana Bienal absorbed several other events, including an art fair at the Gran Teatro in Habana Vieja and the International Festival of Video Art in Camagüey. These additional independent sites and the sublation of other events could seem simultaneously prudent and imprudent given the financial inducements for the Bienal’s previous cancellation and postponement. Nonetheless, because of the size of the biennial, I have chosen to address the main venue, CAC Wifredo Lam in order to assess the official Havana Bienal’s curatorial aims as a restrictive institution. I will also address some of the artworks along the Malecón boardwalk because of their accessibility to local and tourist audiences in contrast with #00BH’s proposition to *walk with*/decolonize walking by way of organizer José Ernesto Alonso Fernández’s artistic intervention on the Malecón.

The CAC Wifredo Lam in Colonial Old Havana

²³¹ Iftikhar Dadi, “Reflections on the Havana Biennial at Matanzas (2019),” *Anthropology Now* 11, no. 3 (June 10, 2020): 74–82.

The postcolonial imperatives of the early Havana Bienal editions remain present in the exhibition sites; however, these buildings have become institutionalised and exclusive within the Bienal complex. The building that houses the CAC Wifredo Lam (fig. 1.22) was built as an eighteenth-century residence for Count Peñalver, and it is in the historic area of Old Havana, which has been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1982. Old Havana, as an area, is distinguished for maintaining a “remarkable unity of character resulting from the superimposition of different periods in its history.”²³² Cotermious architecture and fortifications dating back to the sixteenth-century provide historical authenticity to the well-sized area, where more than 900 buildings are historically significant in conjunction with the urban grid. The architecture and urban plan reminisce of Cuba’s colonial past and features of Spain’s rapid settlement.

²³² UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Old Havana and Its Fortification System,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed October 28, 2020, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/204/>.



Figure 1.22. *Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam*, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: José Ernesto Alfonso Fernández.

For the Bienal, the presence of Cuba's colonial heritage was evident in more ways than simply the urban development in Old Havana. The Museo de Arte Colonial is around the corner from the Cathedral Square, where the CAC Wifredo Lam is located (fig. 1.23). The Museo de Arte Colonial was an additional exhibition venue to the Bienal. The seventeenth-century building was the former home of Lieutenant Colonel Don Luis Chacón, and it houses several rooms, displaying colonial furniture and décor, emulating bourgeois Cuban colonial society. The ornately furnished rooms include porcelain dishes, glassware, chairs, tables, cabinets, among

other home objects, ironworks, and gates. Although not unusual in developing countries, it is worth noting that while the Havana Bienal was free to visitors, the Museo de Arte Colonial had an admission fee for non-Cuban patrons.



Figure 1.23. *Museo de Arte Colonial*, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Although Mehdi-Georges Lahlou was the only artist included in the Museo de Arte Colonial, his installation *72 (Virgins) in Motion and Aria* (2019) (fig. 1.24-1.25) engages with the hybridization of colonial processes. More specifically, *72 Virgins* addresses his cross-cultural upbringing, a Spanish Catholic mother, and a Muslim father to create a dialogue between his living “Eastern” and “Western” identity.²³³ In the first room to the right are seven busts of the

²³³ The exhibition catalogue text notes of the binary between East and West, Orient and Occident, masculine and feminine, and intelligence and sensual, highlighting inherited Enlightenment colonial systems and

artist, covered by a veil, to become androgynous virgins, with the remaining virgins suggested by white sheets. In addition to being androgynous, the virgins are also referred to as being from the Koranic paradise, according to the catalogue. With the sheets hanging from the ceiling in wide strips, the air moved the sheets, while sounds of birds and a lyrical voice singing chapters of the Koran. The aroma of cinnamon would occasionally waft from the various piles in the room.



Figure 1.24. Mehdi-Georges Lahlou, *72 (Virgins) in Motion and Aria*, 2019, Museo de Arte Colonial, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

values. See "Mehdi-Georges Lahlou," in *Bienal de La Habana 2019: La Construcción de Lo Posible*, by 13 Bienal de La Habana (Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam y ArteCubano Ediciones, 2019), 138.



Figure 1.25. Mehdi-Georges Lahlou, *72 (Virgins) in Motion and Aria*, 2019, Museo de Arte Colonial, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

The curators recall the “Third World” internationality and the paradox of colonial production by including the installation by Lahlou, which probes the cross-cultural mixing of religion in the face of colonial hegemony. Of the work, curator Simon Njami states:

On a still socialist Cuban land where God has been put on trial though there remains the powerful memory of him, whether in Catholicism or in the syncretisms of Santería, staging the Jannah of Muslims becomes, if not a joke, at least a thumbing of the nose mastered by the artist. In a colonial building that cannot erase the troubled hours of a history of man’s conquest of mankind, this artificial paradise, to borrow Baudelaire’s words, underlines all the contradictions raised by beliefs and deconstructs this image humans have of the afterlife, that is to say, the image they have of themselves.²³⁴

²³⁴ Simon Njami, “72 (Virgins) in Motion and Aria - 2019,” *Mehdi-Georges Lahlou* (blog), accessed October 28, 2020, <http://www.mehdigeorgeslahlou.com/portfolio/7199/>.

Although referring to religious contradictions, where people can carry multiple beliefs from multiple religions, there is a parallel. Contradictions are also true for the Havana Bienal, which is still active in creating and supporting south-to-south connections and artistic practices.

However, artists like Bruguera argue that within Cuba's own artistic production system, there is a periphery, where the Ministry of Culture through the Havana Biennial "whitewash[es] its international image in the midst of the campaign against decree-law 349," which suppresses unsanctioned artistic/cultural production.²³⁵

The CAC Wifredo Lam was founded in 1983 as a homage to the artist Wifredo Lam (1902-1982). Lam is a significant figure to Cuban art for embracing the influences of Cubism and Afro-Cuban mysticism. He studied in Havana, Spain, and Paris, where he learned to "take advantage of modernism as a space to affirm and communicate Afro-American meanings."²³⁶ Where European modernism is taken to be an end rather than a means in contexts considered "peripheral," Lam was a successful artist who incorporated the contradictions of heterogeneity.

Mosquera asserts that Lam's death was a trigger for the Havana Bienal's foundation. As Mosquera states, "The son of a Cuban black woman and a Cantonese immigrant, and an artist who used modernism to launch a Third World imaginary, Lam was the perfect ethnic, cultural and artistic symbol to inspire the event." As a symbolic figure, Lam encapsulated pluralism and transnationalism for which the CAC Wifredo Lam could ground its research and promotion of art from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. To Mosquera, "The Cuban government

²³⁵ Weber, "Why I Will Not Go to This Year's Havana Biennial."

²³⁶ Gerardo Mosquera, "Gerardo Mosquera: The World of Differences. The Marco Polo Syndrome," accessed October 28, 2020, <http://universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/e-mosquera-print.htm>.

rushed to appropriate his name when he passed away,”²³⁷ propelling cultural expediency that was attached to an artistic figure.

Turning to the 13th edition of the Bienal in the CAC Wifredo Lam, it began in the courtyard with sculptures by Salvadorean artist Alexia Miranda (fig. 1.26). Miranda’s sculptures consist of a combination of four large, circular, and horizontal, white woven nets hanging from the ceiling. The fabric is attached to a larger hoop at the top, from which it is suspended, becoming narrower at the bottom, and each net is woven into its own patterns. The works invited visitors to linger and move around the building for other advantageous perspectives to reflect on the work’s mediation on human cohesion.



Figure 1.26. Alexia Miranda, *Tejido Colectivo*, 2019, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

²³⁷ Gerardo Mosquera, “The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts - ONCURATING,” accessed October 28, 2020, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/the-third-bienal-de-la-habana-in-its-global-and-local-contexts.html#.X4eEdpMpDBI>.

Beyond the courtyard, it was difficult to know which spaces were open to visitors. When walking around the upper floor, there were very few people around and several closed doors, with areas seeming unavailable to visitors and creating a feeling of apprehension.²³⁸ In one room, Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté's (fig. 1.27) tapestries are strikingly vivid and used West African textiles, traditionally used as commemoration and communication tools, to address socio-political and environmental concerns, such as African poverty or postcolonial status.²³⁹ As art critic Tatiana Flores remarks in her review of the biennial, Konaté's tapestries provide a compositional counterpoint to the monochrome textile-based works by Miranda and Cuban Tamara Campo's installation of hanging white panels called *Blanco* (2019). Notably, Campo's work side-stepped political content, appealing instead to formalist abstraction.



Figure 1.27. Abdoulaye Konaté, *Papillon AK 3*, 2016, Textile, 362 x 234 cm, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

²³⁸ Feelings of restriction were later compounded by my interaction with Cuban authorities in my accommodations, who questioned me about my permission to be visiting Cuba and the Havana Biennial.

²³⁹ "Abdoulaye Konaté", 134.

Chilean artist Camilo Yáñez's triptych video, *Poética, podredumbre y polyvisión* (2018-2019) humorously reflects on the relationship between life and death and the accompanying cyclical processes of decomposition, fermentation, and regeneration. The collection of these works, while they do touch on pressing social concerns, such as environmental decay and poverty, do so as works from foreign contexts, while simultaneously including non-political Cuban artworks, addressing the limitations of the official state-controlled biennial to be a biennial of resistance.

As an institution for south-south networks, the 13th Havana Bienal highlighted alternative art canonization with part of a series by Cuban artist David Beltrán from *The Archeology of Color* (2019) (fig. 1.28-1.30). Beltrán is one of the most widely commissioned Cuban artists.²⁴⁰ In the series, he accentuates microscopic elements in other paintings to create works reminiscent of abstract expressionist paintings, where the anatomy of the paint is expanded to expose details overlooked when surveying a whole painting. In dialogue with canonical Latin American art history, the source materials were from Cuban artists, Sandú Darie (1908-1991), José Mijares (1921-2004), and El Greco, Van Gogh, and Velázquez, for the remaining three. The series is in partnership with the National Museum of Fine Art in Cuba, using some works from their collection. Beltrán physically dissects the anatomy of the paintings, opposing traditional Eurocentric grand narratives that have been used to write art history and formative artists excluded from his practice and understanding of art. The paintings become fragments of former compositions, where Beltrán illustrates the literal layers and

²⁴⁰ Ginger Danto, "'All Art in Cuba Is Political': A Havana Biennial Complicated by Local Politics Aims to Rethink the Future by Looking to the Past," *ARTnews.Com* (blog), June 7, 2019, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/havana-biennial-review-12717/>.

seepages of paint that interconnect to become the image. Beltrán's art historical references are significant to Spanish-speaking art histories and, more specifically, to Cuban art history. He demonstrates an art historical lineage that is familiar to, as well as theoretically advocated by and for, the Havana Bienal and the Cuban Ministry of Culture due to their supporting the research phase of the work.

The postcolonial critique and prioritization of art production from outside the "Western core" has not been disbanded since the early editions of the Havana Bienal. However, due to the current Cuban artistic system, local institutional concerns and, therefore, historiographic limitations newly imposed on the biennial are not addressed in this official state-sanctioned forum. Even with the practice of multiple canon formations, there is an inevitable authority – determining what is good, significant, or valuable at a particular time and in a particular place. That is to say, the exhibition of even a peripheral or alternative canon of artists at the Havana Bienal is exclusive to artists unable to be validated in the official Cuban artistic production system.



Fig 1.28. David Beltrán, *Installation View of Arqueología del Color (The Archeology of Color)*, 2019, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.29. David Beltrán, *Installation View of Arqueología del Color (The Archeology of Color)*, 2019, Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 1.30. David Beltrán, *Installation View of Arqueología del Color (The Archeology of Color)*, 2019, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, 13th Havana Bienal April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Public Space Oddity: Art along the Malecón

Resistance in Cuba largely takes place in public spaces. Public spaces in Cuba, and more specifically in Havana because the collision between socialist politics and capitalist economies is particularly evident, resemble the existing, overlapping, and duelling symbolic and economic interests established by and for local inhabitants and foreign visitors. This is especially true of the Malecón, which is a wide promenade at the northern edge of Havana. The Malecón separates the city from the Caribbean and the Florida Strait, extending over 8 kilometres from Castillo San Salvador de la Punta fortress to the Almendares River. The seafront was built during the first United States military's occupation of Cuba (1898-1902) in an attempt to protect the city from the rough sea waters and potential military attacks. The Malecón is a popular destination for locals and tourists. It rapidly expanded eastward during the nineteenth-century

“with a mishmash of eclectic architecture that mixed sturdy neoclassical with whimsical art nouveau.”²⁴¹ By the 1920s, “the road had reached the outer limits of Vedado and, by the early 1950s, it had metamorphosed into a busy six-lane traffic highway.”²⁴² The Malecón remains, accordingly, as Havana’s “most authentic open-air theatre, a place where the whole city comes to meet, greet, date and debate.”²⁴³ And since the government’s tourist (re-)engagement in the 1990s, the Malecón has figured prominently in visual imaginaries of Cuba, which romanticize values of the revolution, heritage, patrimony, and sacrifice. These imaginaries perpetuate notions of the island as the last socialist paradise sustained within a discourse of revolutionary values. It is beneficial for the government, according to Natalie Kaiser, to depoliticize the literal and symbolic Havana in order to manage contradictions created by the bifurcation of tourist spending and ideas of Havana and local opinion and economy.²⁴⁴ Tourist ideological fantasies and economies on the one hand, and local ideological forces on the other.

The exhibition along the Malecón was organized in partnership with Detrás del Muro, known as dedelmu, translating to “behind the wall.” dedelmu is described on their website as a “socio-cultural project,” that emerged in 2012, presumably in conjunction with and for the Havana Bienal.²⁴⁵ According to the website, dedelmu collaborates with other institutions such as the Office of the Historian of the City and the Malecón plan to foster artistic production and scholarships for Cuban artists. So far, dedelmu has participated in the organization of works

²⁴¹ Brendan Sainsbury, Carolyn McCarthy, and Lonely Planet Publications (Firm), *Cuba*, 2017, 86.

²⁴² Sainsbury, 86.

²⁴³ Sainsbury, 86.

²⁴⁴ Natalie Kaiser, *La Habana Es La Habana: Tourism, Heritage and Symbolic Space in Havana, Cuba*. (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada = Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2011).

²⁴⁵ dedelmu, “About Dedelmu – Dedelmu (Behind the Wall),” *History* (blog), accessed October 28, 2020, <https://dedelmu.com/dedelmu-2/>.

displayed along the Malecón for three biennial editions: the 11th (2012), the 12th (2015), and the 13th (2019). It is of note that of the artists who exhibited along the Malecón during the 13th edition of the Bienal, 24 of the 49 works were by artists identified as Cuban.²⁴⁶ The curator of the 3rd dedelmu, Juan Delgado Calzadilla, reinforces the significance of the Malecón in an interview when he states:

The Malecon as the axis for the curatorship fits perfectly well for the Biennial, as it 'is' social imagery, I think it is the most democratic place for the Cubans, not only for those living in the capital city, but also for visitors. The Malecón has witnessed many moments of happiness, sadness and disappointment. I live by the Malecón, and I confess that intervene it satisfies my vanity, my ego, in this great homage to the great goddess of the sea (Yemaya, The Virgen of Regla); it is also a homage to the past, the present and the future.²⁴⁷

Calzadilla believes the Malecón to be the most democratic place in Havana, making exhibiting along with it vital for local engagement with art, yet it is only for those who the government has verified. The democracy Calzadilla describes along the Malecón seems reminiscent of Bruguera's first performance of *Tatlin's Whisper*, where provocation is permissible only when previously approved.

Exhibiting along the Malecón was the 3rd collaboration with the Bienal, titled *Liquid Scenario*, presumably a subtle reference to the fluidity and precarity of the current artistic context, much like the Bienal's title in general (because the artistic constraints are not unknown within the Cuban art world). On their website, it states that their intention for this edition was to:

²⁴⁶ Of the 49 artists, the identified countries included, the Bermuda Islands, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Norway, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico and the United States of America.

²⁴⁷ Admin, "Talking with Juanito Delgado, Curator for the BEHIND THE WALL Project | Arte Por Excelencias," Arte por Excelencias, May 11, 2012, <https://www.arteporexcelencias.com/en/news/2012-05-11/talking-juanito-delgado-curator-behind-wall-project.html>.

convert that section of the Havana coast in a workshop where the process and the feeling that the work is made by all prevail. And where the idea of the multiple original (already evident, no longer) prevails in each work. All contemporary variants or notions of design will play a central role. Each work presented in *Detrás del Muro* will be proposing a space, a set of tools and an opportunity for the public to explore new perspectives; it will enhance the possibilities of the citizen as an efficient user of the selected urban space and will point out possible solutions to the main urban and functional problems of the urban and cultural architectural complex that this zone comprises.²⁴⁸

dedelmu's statement is aspirational, striving to "enhance the possibilities of the citizen as an efficient user."²⁴⁹ What seems simultaneously motivating seems coded as a memorandum of behaviour for Cuban citizens, where the Bienal dictates who can exhibit along the Malecón and when.

The works along the Malecón were arguably the most central and visible component of the Havana Bienal. Pedestrians and visitors may not have even known the installations were part of the Bienal and perhaps may not have visited the Bienal otherwise. It is of note that Cuban artists' installations, performances, and sculptures engaged with the current political, artistic, and social context in which they live. For example, the performance and installation by Cuban artist Jorge Otero *19:30* (2019) (fig. 1.31) arranged two hundred chairs in the form of an auditorium, facing to overlook the water. The chairs are an eclectic array collected in Havana: some upholstered, some wooden, some metal. The scenic view was enhanced by the title of the work, which suggested to visitors to return or to be present at 19:30 to watch the sunset. However, having come across the installation earlier in the day, it appeared more like the aftermath of a previous event.

²⁴⁸ dedelmu, "Liquid Scenario – Dedelmu (Behind the Wall)," accessed June 28, 2021, <https://dedelmu.com/edicion/edition-3/>.

²⁴⁹ dedelmu.



Figure 1.31. Jorge Otero, *19:30* (2019), Malacón, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Given that the installation was on a border wall and the chairs were arranged to face a wall, the text invites contemplation of the work as “an analysis about the notion of limit.”²⁵⁰ According to the description of the work, the title also created a conceptual link with the first Constitution of the Republic, which was signed in 1901 after the Spanish-American War. This Constitution was amended by the United States, who exercised military authority over Cuba at the time to reflect the United States’ limitations and control over Cuban sovereignty. The Republic’s first Constitution offered sovereignty from Spain but with American contingencies, not dissimilar to the current Cuban artistic climate between the Cuban government and artists.

²⁵⁰ dedelmu, “19:30 Jorge Otera (Cuba)– Dedelmu (Behind the Wall),” accessed October 9, 2021, <https://dedelmu.com/obra/1930/>.

The symbolism is not lost: the chairs face outward towards the water, looking across the Florida Strait towards the United States. US trade embargos began in 1958 and have intensified over the years, momentarily thawed under President Obama, then were subsequently reinstated by the Trump administration. The embargos have a long history of creating economic, food, and medicinal scarcity in Cuba. As economic strain continues, the embargos are blamed by Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, stating in a tweet that “the blockade surpasses any desire, it delays us, it does not allow us to advance at the speed we need.”²⁵¹ External conditions undeniably need to change in Cuba, however, current restrictions on artistic expression are not under external control.

As part of the official Bienal, several artists exhibited along the Malecón. One installation included was the sculpture by Cuban artist, Gabriel Cisneros, *Herald* (2019) (fig. 1.32). The sculpture was of a unicorn, looking weak and emaciated. While the material of the sculpture is reminiscent of a tradition of bronze horse sculptures, such as *The American Horse* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, it is replaced with fantasy and dystopia. There is also the direct reference to the famous Cuban folk song, “Mi unicornio azul” by Cuban singer Silvio Rodriguez, which uses the unicorn as a symbol of magic and innocents, often captured in youth and eventually dissolves over time with age and maturity. The lyrics of the song describe someone mourning the loss of their unicorn. While the unicorn was grazing, it disappeared, and its companion would pay anything for information about where the unicorn had gone. The song, however, is more broadly understood as referring to the loss of childhood imagination or magic

²⁵¹ [dedelmu](https://dedelmu.com/edicion/edition-3/). “Liquid Scenario – Dedelmu (Behind the Wall),” accessed June 28, 2021, <https://dedelmu.com/edicion/edition-3/>.

that happens over time with age. The sculpture is a life-size, emaciated unicorn styled as an equestrian statue. The unicorn's ribs are visible, and its face is wrinkled and tired. In step, it appeared as if each footstep consumed all its energy. In the description of the mythic statue, *Herald* was an "urban mirage," an imaginative creature confronting the "harshness" of reality.²⁵²



Figure 1.32. Gabriel Cisneros, *Herald* (2019), Malacón, 13th Havana Bienal, April 2019, Havana Cuba. Photo: José Ernesto Alfonso Fernández.

²⁵² Jose Ernesto Alonso Fernández, "#YoFuiabienal," September 19, 2019.

Herard was of particular interest to local pedestrians of the Malecón, and it was popularly voted as the “best artwork” of the Bienal as part of an unofficial Havana Bienal artwork by Cuban artist and #00BH co-organizer, José Ernesto Alonso Fernández. The vote initiative was part of an artwork called *Premio de la Popularidad de la XIII Bienal de La Habana* (2019) (fig. 1.33), which took place over the course of the Bienal to generate general local interest in art. The artwork comprised of posters Fernández put up around the city with a local phone number and a Facebook link for people to text a photo of their selection for a prize (fig. 1.34). The hashtag associated with the artwork, *#YoFuiALaBienal*, became so popular that local media began advertising the project as social media for the official Havana Bienal. Subsequently, the Bienal had to announce that it was not affiliated with the project, much to Fernández’s pleasure. The confusion by the local media and the denouncement of their participation by the Havana Bienal was the ultimate sign of success to Fernández because it acknowledged the lack of local involvement by the official Bienal and a lack of concern with local interest or local opinion by the Bienal. This is because, for Fernández, the hashtag was a way for the local people to become part of the art world and engage in dialogue about art and the Bienal, where he feels this dialogue in Cuba is typically reserved for artistic elites. *Premio de la Popularidad de la XIII Bienal de La Habana* is an example of how Fernández approaches his artistic practice, which primarily occurs in the streets of Havana. He asserts that he is “doing the institution’s work” because he feels that the government does not adequately address the biennial or art to Cuban people other than for tourism.²⁵³

²⁵³ Personal communication with Fernández, May 2018-2019.

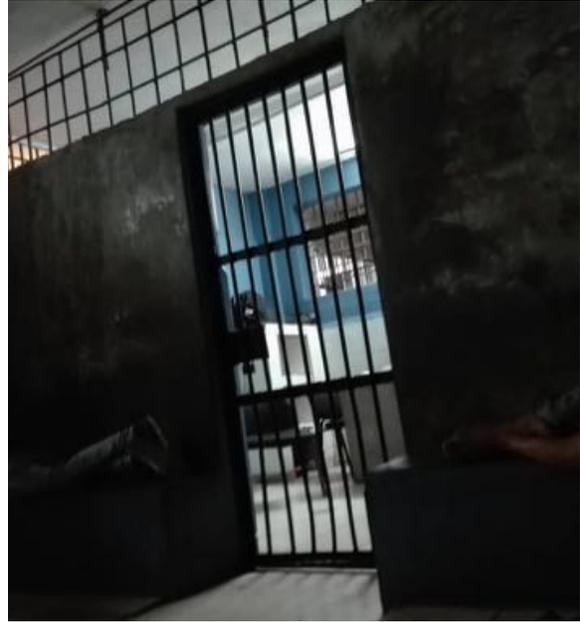


Figure 1.33. (right): José Ernesto Alonso Fernández, *Premio de la Popularidad de la XIII Bienal de La Habana*, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: José Ernesto Alfonso Fernández.

Figure 1.34. (left): Photograph taken by Fernández in jail after being arrested for his artwork *Premio de la Popularidad de la XIII Bienal de La Habana*, April 2019, Havana, Cuba. Photo: José Ernesto Alfonso Fernández.

Although falsely incentivized with an undisclosed prize, *Premio de la Popularidad de la XIII Bienal de La Habana* was a project to democratize the Bienal for Havana beyond an international elite. Fernández utilized four means to promote the work: social media with a hashtag, posters with SMS, flyers with a hashtag, SMS, email, and email with a hashtag, SMS, and email. Knowing that most people do not understand or care to use the hashtag for its social media purpose (since the internet is still relatively new in Cuba and it is accessed in WIFI parks with pre-paid internet cards) (fig. 1.35-36), Fernández specifically included an SMS option. Notably, SMS was how he received most of the votes from local Cuban participants. However, the hashtag received attention from official newspapers and magazines, causing confusion over

if “#Yoifuealabienal” was a social media initiative part of the official Bienal or not.²⁵⁴ While the Havana Bienal did have a social media presence on Instagram, they did not have a Facebook page, which is the typical means for referring to local art events by galleries in Havana. The lack of a Facebook page suggested to Fernández that an international presence was more important to the Havana Bienal than having a dialogue with local Cubans. Fernández’s presence and project were not appreciated by the Cuban police, who arrested him while he was putting up posters near the Malecón, demonstrating the antagonistic relationship to the state experienced by individuals not working within the validated artistic system.



Figure 1.35-36. 1-hour pre-paid Cuban internet card. Photos: Amy Bruce

Conclusion

The works of these biennial editions reinforce how the stakes are different for the artists and organizers of these two artistic events. Although it is an undoubtedly mundane claim, it is necessary to assert that each event’s organizers and participating artists are situated in contexts that have specified different aesthetic, intellectual, and activist ambitions, evidenced by these differing biennials. The official Havana Bienal has institutionalised Cuba’s

²⁵⁴ Fernández, “#YoFuiabienal,” September 19, 2019.

national artistic system based on national objectives. Even though the Havana Bienal supports South-South networks and artists, it only supports a certain kind of Cuban artist that must abide by national or *mestizaje* values. As a result, Cuban artists are systematically excluded if they are deemed controversial by the Cuban state. Comparatively, #00BH, through its political and inclusive curatorial goals, embodied and enacted through walking, promoted an alternative vision of a biennial, and more broadly, questions the Havana Bienal's stable and ongoing status as a biennial of resistance.

Ultimately, I am arguing that #00BH should be considered in a historical understanding of the Havana Bienal. To do so positions historical context not in a stable position with respect to the past but rather accounts for the structural difference reinforced by the repetitive format of biennials, as well as #00BH's interventions into the 13th edition of the Havana Bienal. If biennials are understood as exhibitions within their contemporary condition, as argued by recent scholarship, then arguably, a horizontal historiography of biennials is contextual to its contemporaneity. If history is changed by its relationship to the present, the fixed understanding of the Havana Bienal as a biennial of resistance is challenged by #00BH.

The task of writing a relational and horizontal kind of biennial history, one that is continually revisited as biennials themselves revisit contemporary art, is perhaps unachievable for art historians. Yet when events such as #00BH take place in dialogue with the Havana Bienal, its institutional legacy and its art historical gatekeeping, our historical evaluation of it must be imbued by the present. In an article reviewing the 13th Havana Bienal, co-organizer of #00BH and curator Yanelys Nuñez Leyva questioned the need for a biennial in Cuba, asking if the social and political systems would be better off with distance from the "outdated and

cynical biennial model.”²⁵⁵ Leyva is asserting, instead, that the true power of Cuban culture lies in alternative platforms, such as #00BH, which reveal a more complicated artistic contemporaneity and therefore contribute to a complex biennial historiography.

²⁵⁵ Yanelys Nuñez Leyva, “XIII Havana Biennial,” *Terremoto*, June 1, 2019, <https://terremoto.mx/en/online/xiii-bienal-de-la-habana/>.

Chapter 2: Neighbourly Resistance and the 15th Istanbul Biennial

Introduction

Flower covered porcelain surveillance cameras were easy to miss throughout the neighbourhood of Beyoğlu during the 15th edition of the Istanbul Biennial in 2017. The surveillance cameras are part of the installation *Follower* (2017) by Turkish artist Burçak Bingöls (fig. 2.1), who uses traditional ceramic techniques and floral designs and motifs common to the Islamic artistic tradition. The cameras were non-functioning, made out of porcelain, and were mounted next to real cameras in public areas in response to the increased surveillance Bingöls noticed in the city of Istanbul, particularly in Beyoğlu. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) uses authoritarian state surveillance, not unlike the Cuban government, as discussed in the previous chapter. As conceptualised by social scientist Özgün E. Topak, the party came into power in the early 2000s and was immediately confronted with the Kemalist elites (the politicians and elites who adopted modernizing policies and ideologies under Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)). The increased surveillance in Turkish neighbourhoods is part of surveillance mechanisms that were initially used to target the Kemalist elites, and later, Turkish society more broadly.²⁵⁶ An example of the AKP's surveillance tactics was during the 2013 Gezi protests when the AKP's authoritarian Islamism was challenged. The party responded by restricting freedoms, oppressing media, suppressing dissent, and used surveillance camera evidence to incriminate protestors.

²⁵⁶ Özgün E Topak, "The Authoritarian Surveillant Assemblage: Authoritarian State Surveillance in Turkey," *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 5 (October 2019): 456-457.



Figure 2.1: Burçak Bingöls, *Follower*, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce

Within this authoritarian complex, Bingöls interrupts and inverts the surveillance relationship between the viewer and the viewed by making the cameras inoperable and unable to monitor the public, only able to be observed. *Follower* presents “experiments in dissemblance and stealth, in which tradition [the flowers] becomes a means of camouflage or disguise,” and where “the implicit weaponry of the surveillance camera is neutralised by the

imagery of flowers, becoming fragile and even beautiful.”²⁵⁷ The decoration on the cameras includes flora and fauna native to Beyoğlu, which is stated in the exhibition catalogue, to be “a symbolic as a site of resistance.”²⁵⁸ In addition to flowers being a symbolic motif of peaceful political protest, the flowers in *Follower* are flora and fauna from a neighbourhood understood to be resistant by embracing historical frameworks of diversity. Immersed in neighbourhood streets, *Follower* subtly makes a political statement of resistance against AKP surveillance, emblematic of this edition as a biennial of resistance.

The 15th edition of the Istanbul Biennial was fittingly on the scale of a neighbourhood, Beyoğlu (fig 2.2.). With the title and theme, *a good neighbour*, the artist-duo curators Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset gesture for the incomplete phrase to be appended into complete sentences.²⁵⁹ Neighbourliness was central to their curatorial theme, probing what is important in neighbourhoods, who is a good neighbour, and what defines a neighbourhood. In Turkish, the word *neighbourhood* translates directly to *mahalle*, although in contemporary parlance, Istanbul locals refer to neighbourhoods with the more widely understood word of *semt*.²⁶⁰ *Semts* and neighbourhoods are relational, personal, and embodied local urban spaces, curatorially conceptualizing the 15th edition within the historical identity of the Beyoğlu *semt* to promote relational, intercultural, and situated histories and subjectivities. Through site-specific exhibition venues and artworks, the 15th Istanbul Biennial resists locally specific othering

²⁵⁷ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, eds., “Burçak Bingöl,” in *İyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = A good neighbour: 15th Istanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17* (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 155.

²⁵⁸ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, 155.

²⁵⁹ In the catalogue, they suggested completed phrases as a question: “Is a good neighbour someone you rarely see?”; “Is a good neighbour your friend on Facebook?”; “Is a good neighbour the homeless guy next to you?”; or “Is a good neighbour leaving you alone?”

²⁶⁰ Lale Eskicioğlu, interview by Amy Bruce, July 2019.

mechanisms and the authoritative, monocultural agenda of the Turkish government to be a biennial of resistance. The transregionality of the *semt*, as I centrally theorise, situates the 15th edition of the Istanbul Biennial as a biennial of resistance, despite being geographically and conceptually overlooked by Ranjit Hoskote's framework, thereby complicating biennial historiography.

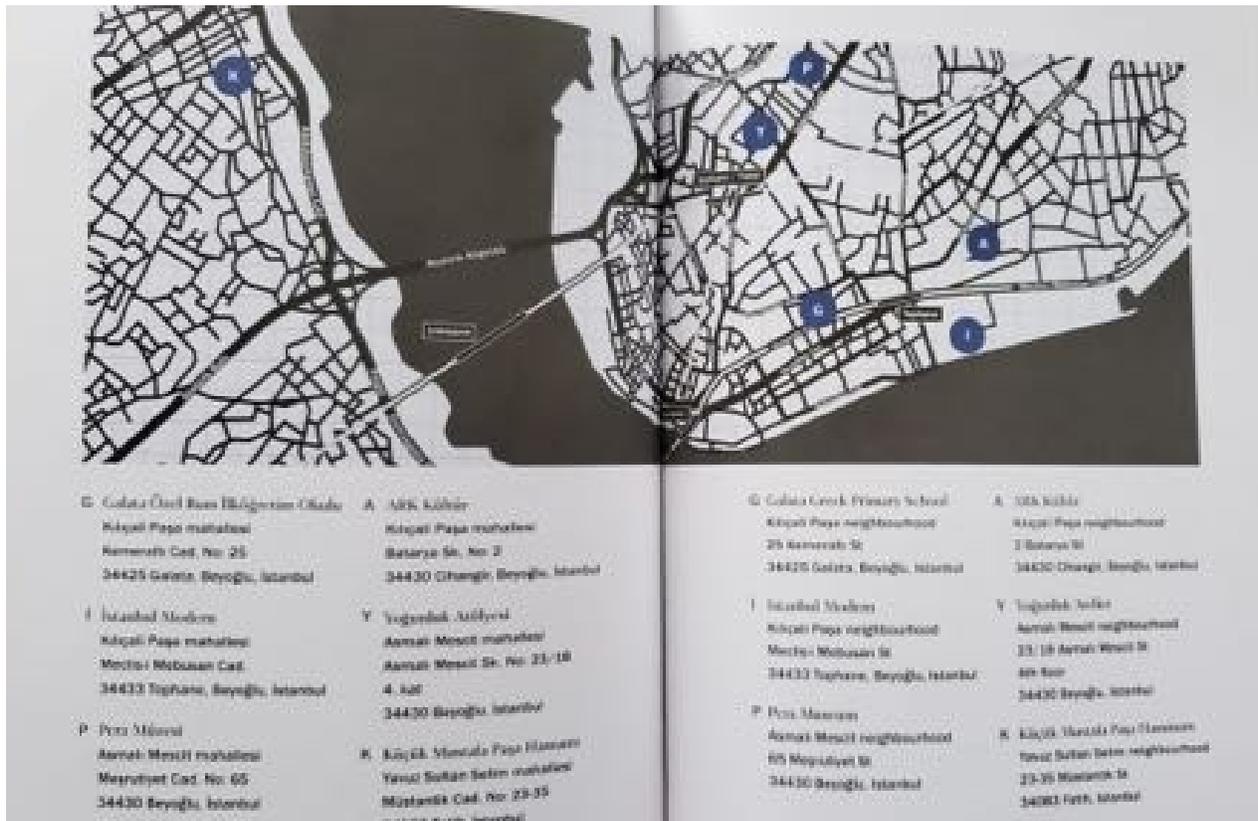


Figure 2.2: Beyoğlu from the *a good neighbour* exhibition catalogue, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

I discuss the authoritarian and centralizing power of the Turkish government to promote homogenization, financing development projects to transform the landscape of the city of Istanbul. Beyoğlu is a *semt* known for its pluralism and history of intercultural exchanges, which

provide a critical framework for this biennial edition despite gentrification processes within the city of Istanbul. In addition to contextualizing the Beyoğlu *semt*, my arguments are reinforced by contextual analysis of three of the exhibition venues, the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, the ARK Kültür and the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam and notable artworks at each venue. These sites were chosen because of their significance in relation to their cultural and legal neighbourhoods, *semts* and *mahalles*, as well as the historical relationship of the building to the curatorial narrative.

Semts and Mahalles

Geographer Amy Mills describes the *mahalle* as “a Turkish cultural concept” that “carries associations of belonging and familiarity, and of social and spatial intimacy.”²⁶¹ *Mahalles* are sites of social memory and historically reflected the administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire’s (1229-1922) millet system in the city. The millet system gave authority to communities based on religious affiliation and demarcated *mahalles*. *Mahalles* often had visible demographic concentrations, but Mills asserts that *mahalles* were social spaces with ethnic and religious identities. *Mahalles* were not homogenous communities, and allegiances were primarily to an individual’s home *mahalle*. *Mahalles* were a constitutive element of local identities since belonging to a millet meant familiarity with your *mahalle*.

²⁶¹ Amy Mills, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). Mills, 7.

If belonging to a *mahalle* was considered part of a resident's urban identity, Turkish writer Cem Behar asserts that belonging to a *semt* involved a "higher degree of abstraction."²⁶² While both *semts* and *mahalles* are important to identity construction, Behar demonstrates that *semts* were historically associated with prestige. Belonging to a *semt* often involved "self-positioning and status-seeking with respect to the rest of the city."²⁶³ *Semts* are almost always related to the functionality of the area within its urban organization (be that trade, education, commerce, politics, etc.); thus, being from a particular *semt* or neighbourhood would connote a particular identity.

Semt provides a looser definition that can be used conversationally to refer to neighbourhoods or boroughs. Locals in Istanbul have made a conceptual and linguistic move to use *semt* for the public meaning of *mahalle*, where *semt* is considered a newer word for referring to neighbourhood areas. Even though *semt* has become a synonym to *mahalle*, they are less defined and less official areas than *mahalles*. A critical distinction between *mahalles* and *semts* is that where *mahalles* are used by locals to refer to a general area or neighbourhood, they are also the smallest electoral district. A *mahalle* has an elected official, known as a *muhtar*. In larger cities, *muhtars* function as neighbourhood presidents within their elected district, working with municipal administrations and city mayors. Smaller cities or villages may only have a *muhtar* as the only locally elected representative. Alternatively, *semts*

²⁶² Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul: Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle*, SUNY Series in the Social and Economic History of the Middle East (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

²⁶³ Behar, 6.

do not have any official legal or electoral definition, and they do not have an administrative use. Although some *mahalles* can be locally understood as *semts*, not all *semts* are *mahalles*.

Notably, Elmgreen & Dragset do not refer to *mahalles* or *semts* in their exhibition texts or their biennial edition. In the Turkish translation of the exhibition catalogue, the word *komşu*, meaning neighbour or neighbouring, appears more frequently than *mahalle* or *semt*. Presumably, this is because of the legal connotation of, and translation associated with, *mahalle* as a district and *semt* as locally understood areas. However, the curators understood the key concept of neighbours beyond simply pertaining to domestic relationships but in a broader global understanding. In their words, “We don’t see the term “neighbour” as just applying to people, but geographic and geopolitical neighbours as well, but today these ‘neighbourly’ relations do not only pertain to the countries across nearby physical borders.”²⁶⁴ Neighbours, for the curators, extends beyond confrontable interactions to consider distanced and relational frameworks of social, political, and economic connectedness, which may directly relate to specific geopolitical contexts. Elmgreen & Dragset’s conception of neighbours could be influenced by technological advancements that make relationships outside of urban or community neighbours less important than they once were since people can engage in activities, physically and electronically, outside their local neighbourhood.²⁶⁵ I refer to sociologist Barry Wellman, who argues that communities become communities “without propinquity” and no longer defined by geographic proximity.²⁶⁶ Potential ties to a particular

²⁶⁴ Elmgreen & Dragset, “Interview with Elmgreen & Dragset,” May 22, 2019.

²⁶⁵ Barry Wellman, “The Community Question: The Intimate Networks of East Yorkers,” *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 5 (March 1979): 1201–31.

²⁶⁶ Wellman.

neighbourhood now compete with social opportunities outside their neighbourhoods,²⁶⁷ and residential attachment varying according to personally devised costs and benefits, depending on the individual or household needs.²⁶⁸

By focusing on the term *semt*, I adopt contemporary usage and public parlance of neighbourhoods in Istanbul and, more importantly, put forward a relational framework of analysis of the biennial of resistance. The venues are within walking distance from one another, reinforcing the importance of relationality, community, and locality. Relationality is especially important because not all the venues were limited to the larger Beyoğlu *semt*. Specifically, the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam is located in the Fatih municipality, outside the administrative, and even arguably the mental boundaries of Beyoğlu. I would posit that the inclusion of an exhibition venue outside of Beyoğlu maintains a focus on relationality and the lived exchanges and overlap between neighbourhoods and societal urban dynamics. Undeniably, logistical unknowns and availability could have contributed to the use of particular sites over others. However, a neighbour, and for that matter, a neighbourhood, is not exclusive; that is, a neighbour cannot be a neighbour alone. The idea of a neighbour is inherently tied to a relational model of coexistence since no one can be a neighbour by themselves.

Most importantly, Beyoğlu as a *semt* was curatorially critical for being rooted in local urban histories and academic discourses that frame the curatorial concept of the 2017 Biennial edition. Adopting *semt* as a critical concept utilises the local personal histories around

²⁶⁷ Claude S. Fischer, *To Dwell among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

²⁶⁸ AJ. Hunter and G.D. Suttles, "The Expanded Community of Limited Liability," in *The Social Construction of Communities*, by Gerald D Suttles (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973).

neighbourhoods since *semts* are not restricted to official spatial categories but are individually and locally defined. Individual understandings of a neighbourhood establish belonging rather than isolation, because everyone lives somewhere. As a result, individual understandings of a *semt* embrace multiplicity, diversity, and differences, a distinction crucial to Elmgreen & Dragset's of Beyoğlu as *the* neighbourhood of the Biennial. "Neighbourhoods, in their most positive sense," they state, relate to ideas of "belonging, coexistence, and diversity. The best neighbourhood in our eyes would be one in which your neighbours are not exactly like you."²⁶⁹ As general areas, *semts* refer to various urban spaces, including municipalities, *mahalles*, and other unofficial boroughs. Binnaz Tuğba Sasanlar states, "*Semts* are not bounded by administrative borders but rather mental ones."²⁷⁰ The mental borders around any *semt* could overlap with another *semt* or otherwise recognized neighbourhood, making *semts* contingent on contesting, converging, and collapsing conceptualizations of multiples spaces. Although *semts* are not official neighbourhoods in the same sense as *mahalles*, the term emphasizes informal, social, relational, and embodied experiences of and within neighbourhoods, in conjunction with respective collective understanding. Social definitions of *semts* would thereby involve antagonisms of boundaries, prompting designatory considerations and reflection. Applying *semt* as a critical concept for this edition of the Istanbul Biennial, the term allows for mutability, negotiation, contestation, and relationality to the historical context of the location and the venues themselves. This framework is useful because biennials of resistance exist within multiple conflicting biennial discourses while simultaneously perpetuating the global

²⁶⁹ Elmgreen & Dragset, "Interview with Elmgreen & Dragset," May 22, 2019.

²⁷⁰ Binnaz Tuğba Sasanlar, "A Historical Panorama of An Istanbul Neighbourhood: Cihangir from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 2000s" (Istanbul, Turkey, Boğaziçi University, 2006), 8.

diffusion of capital power, and as in the case of the 15th Istanbul Biennial promote an intercultural history despite the authoritative rule of the AKP government.

Won't You, Site-specifically, be My Neighbourhood?

While it is imperative to consider the relationality and flexibility of *semt*, it is also important to consider the site-specificity of Beyoğlu to the curation of *a good neighbour*. In relation to the Beyoğlu *semt*, the exhibition sites featured the city's layered pasts, present and future against homogenizing national politics. The small exhibition of only 56 artists was hosted in six nearby venues, including a villa, a former Greek primary school, a warehouse turned contemporary art museum, a neoclassical hotel turned museum, an apartment used as an artist-collective student, and an abandoned bathhouse. According to the curators, the location in the city and the exhibition venues were crucial to *a good neighbour*. Elmgreen & Dragset state:

For our edition of the Biennial, we chose to focus on a relatively compact geographical area. The vast majority of visitors to the Biennial are locals, who already know the city quite well, so it wasn't a priority to us to explore Istanbul's major sites. We also wanted to not fall for the picturesque nature of the Princes' Islands or similar locations. It was more important to us to keep the entire exhibition within walking distance and to focus on creating an opportunity for the participating artists to develop new artworks and expansive spatial installations, taking up entire floors in a museum, or inhabiting a whole venue. We wanted to keep the venues within walking distance so that visitors had the opportunity to fully experience all the works in our Biennial within a period of about two days. By choosing the moderate number of six venues, we wanted to play on the idea of a neighbourhood. All the venues are key community institutions: museum, school, villa, apartment, work place [sic], hammam, and in this way, they re-iterated the exhibition's themes in its spatial layout. Of course visitors could visit the venues in any order they liked, but in the accompanying exhibition catalogue, which also served as a guide book, we imagined starting with Galata Greek Primary School, moving on to Istanbul Modern, from there

continuing to Pera Museum, then ARK Kültür, on to Yoğunluk Atelier, and ending up at Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam.²⁷¹

Choosing “key community institutions,” it was important for Elmgreen & Dragset because they provided walkable destinations that did not fall into purely picturesque vistas. Not only was it important where the exhibition venues were located within the city, but the purpose and/or former purpose of the building was also equally important. They also considered how visitors would arrive and move throughout the city to each venue. By walking through the streets of Istanbul, the Elmgreen & Dragset proposition the neighbourhood as conceptually integrated (as addressed in the chapter on #00Bienal de La Habana with regard to walking as a biennial curatorial concept).

Even though the Istanbul Biennial is operated by a non-governmental agent, negotiating the historical partition of European influences on an Asian city makes for a delicate curatorial task for a biennial. The site-specificity of the exhibition spaces for the Istanbul Biennial is part of a lack of exhibition venues since the Biennial began, and curators have taken on including historic buildings as part of the biennial curation. The Istanbul Biennial has set a precedent to integrate exhibition sites critically and conceptually. Expressly, in the 9th edition of the Istanbul Biennial in 2005, the city of Istanbul was conceptually incorporated, even simply titled “Istanbul.”²⁷² In the 2017 edition, the curators mobilized historical connotations by way of site-specificity to carry the city’s past into this year’s present edition.

²⁷¹ Elmgreen & Dragset, “Interview with Elmgreen & Dragset,” May 22, 2019.

²⁷² This edition was curated by *Charles Esche* and Vasif Kortun with assistant curators Esra Sarigedik and November Paynter. According to the curators the title was “a metaphor, as a prediction, as a lived reality, and an inspiration has many stories to tell, and the Biennial will attempt to tap directly into this rich history and possibility.” <http://9b.iksv.org/english/>

Art historically, attention to site-specificity and site-oriented artworks emerged during the 1960s with institutional critique, where the presumed contextual neutrality of the museum and art gallery began to be questioned.²⁷³ As coined by artist and art critic Brian O’Doherty, the white cube accompanied not only aesthetic characteristics but also carried with it a Eurocentric modernist ideology for displaying art. During the twentieth-century and with the proliferation of the biennial form, the white cube became the global exhibition standard, offering a presumed legitimating context in conjunction with Eurocentric notions of universality and modernity.²⁷⁴ Since then, the spatial expansion of the exhibition site has coincided with broader artistic discursive engagement that has changed the relationship between art, the actual location, and the social conditions of the institutional frame. The site (the actual location and the social conditions of the institutional frame), according to art historian Miwon Kwon, become content by way of the artwork being subordinate to the artwork to identify “a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate.”²⁷⁵ Site-specific curating and artistic practices have increased in popularity because they generate a sense of uniqueness in place, memory, histories, and identities.

According to art historian Lucy Lippard, site-specificity serves a “differential function of place” because identity is fundamentally tied to places and their histories. Critics could argue against place-bound identities because of the desire for difference and the particularities of place associated with the continual expansion of capitalism.²⁷⁶ And certainly, the difference is

²⁷³ Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 12–13.

²⁷⁴ Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 322–45.

²⁷⁵ Kwon, 26.

²⁷⁶ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1998).

marketable for city-based international events like biennials, which work within a framework of promotional agendas and fiscal demands that require advertising distinct locational identities in a competitive global economic hierarchy. Rather than the serialization or commodification of site-specificity, I would like to position the site-specific orientation of the biennial in Kwon's formulation of relational specificity. Site-oriented practices in this framework can address "uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing *after* another."²⁷⁷

That is to say, biennials confront local and global distances between one thing next to another by emphasizing site- and context-specific engagement with local communities and the production of new localities, while negotiating multicultural coexistence in a global international context. Biennials institutionalised the internationalizing of local or regional art worlds, or rather localizing or regionalizing the international art world.²⁷⁸ Biennials are so indelibly associated with site-specificity through their host cities that they are detached from any national specificity, most simply titled after their host cities. And since biennials are distributed events throughout a given city and exhibition venues, sites become more than a place in order to revisit marginalized histories, a political cause, or disenfranchised groups. Curators Hoskote and Enwezor agree that biennials hold the localized potential to assert diversity, giving further importance to the curatorial conceptualization of *a good neighbour* in the Beyoğlu *semt*. Hoskote's model of biennials of resistance echoes curator Gerardo

²⁷⁷ Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 166.

²⁷⁸ Terry Smith, "Biennials Within the Contemporary Composition," *Liverpool Biennial*, Biennials Within the Contemporary Composition | Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, Stage 6 (April 2017): 9.

Mosquera's outlook of biennials as occupying a middle ground between entertainment and edification as sites of "critical transregionality." It is the "performative mode for intercultural selfhoods," where "practitioners reject insularity, and provincialism and ground self in engagement in various locations" that presents the biennials as sites "for a critical transregionality."²⁷⁹ Where otherwise overlooked by Hoskote's framework, the 15th Istanbul Biennial foregrounds the transregionality of the Beyoğlu *semt* and prioritises relationality, mutability, and interculturality, constituting itself as a biennial of resistance.

They Build this City (Istanbul since the 1990s)

Istanbul has experienced significant changes due to the leadership and sustained power by Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his party, the AKP. The resulting parliamentary changes, politics, and government scholar Arda Can Kumbaracıbasi states has enabled the formation of the first single-party government since 1987 in Turkey. The politically conservative party's rise to power is in part due to municipal and mayoral elections throughout Turkey. These elections helped the AKP win governmental leadership by a landslide in 2002. After local elections in 2004, party power was consolidated, and after the 2007 elections, the party's electoral base strengthened even more.

Prior to his recent re-election victory as president in 2018, Erdoğan was prime minister for 11 years and before that the mayor of Istanbul from 1994-1998. His position as mayor in the 1990s gave him national prominence, and since his leadership of the city, Istanbul has been the base of his support. Neighbourhood politics are significant in Turkey. The 1994 municipal

²⁷⁹ Hoskote, 306–21.

election is considered one of the most important; the Islamist precursor to the AKP began its political rise with Erdoğan's initial electoral victory as mayor of Istanbul.²⁸⁰ Even *The New York Times* highlights his neighbourhood upbringing in the *mahalle* of Kasımpaşa, a conservative working-class neighbourhood, which is known for its gangs, petty crime and pickpockets, as influencing his demeanour and political approach.²⁸¹ His supporters know his authoritative political style as "Kabadayı Mahalle Kabadayısı," which translates in English to a "tough uncle" or "protector of the neighbourhood."²⁸²

As the leader of the AKP, Erdoğan has undergone a process of new monocultural nation-building. This process includes architecturally transforming the city of Istanbul, which was socially engineered after the First World War. Turkey became a Republic, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when the Treaty of Lausanne was drawn in 1923. In the early twentieth-century, the process of nation-building was similar to Erdoğan's goal of constructing a unified national identity for the new republic.²⁸³ To do so, the AKP has portrayed itself as a modern, moderate, centre-right party with Islamic roots, which therefore required strategic balancing of these often-opposing fundamental values and strategic management. This was achieved by turning a political conflict into policy concerns, thereby optimizing party institutionalization.

²⁸⁰ The importance of local elections was recently felt with the mayoral win by AKP opposition leader, Ekrem İmamoğlu, in Istanbul. This loss for the AKP was seen as a political and symbolical challenge to the AKP's power. Several newspapers have speculated the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election has demonstrated a weakening of Erdoğan's political power. See Soli Özel, "Turkey's Municipal Elections: A Political Game Changer," *Institut Moutaigne*, April 12, 2019, <https://www.institutmoutaigne.org/en/blog/turkeys-municipal-elections-political-game-changer>.

²⁸¹ Deborah Sontag, "The Erdoğan Experiment," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/magazine/the-erdogan-experiment.html>.

²⁸² Lale Eskicioğlu, interview by Amy Bruce, July 2019.

²⁸³ Mustafa Kemal Bayirbağ, "Negotiated Urban Revolution: Dynamics of 'roll-out Urbanization' in the Global South" (Lecture, Ottawa, Carleton University, March 14, 2018).

Mustafa Kemal Bayirbağ, an urban planning and public administration scholar, outlines the changing Turkish government logic and coinciding urban development strategies from 2002 to 2015. He estimates that from 1994 until 2002, the Turkish government referred to a discourse of democracy to implement AKP reforms to “democratise, construct a developed market order, and equitably share the benefits of economic development.”²⁸⁴ Federal power transferred to local administrations, although the central and dominating power still remains with the AKP and AKP controlled local (neighbourhood) administrations.²⁸⁵ Urbanization during this time was presented to the public as focusing on serving the Turkish citizens. Policy rhetoric asserted that city development provided solutions to problems such as earthquakes, crime prevention, and equitable housing. However, entire city quarters were renovated, with an urban design that forced the relocation of residents and the destruction of historical buildings in favour of new luxury homes or lofty tourist attractions.²⁸⁶ The AKP’s attention to building cultural centres that are to provide venues for private sector events coincides with their policies for “economic growth, development, attracting investment and generating employment.”²⁸⁷ However, these efforts implicitly designate the construction sector as the focal point of the Turkish economy, where local administrations work with private investors by providing tax reductions or incentives and the deduction of promotional costs for the city to have become highly shaped by an authoritarian form of neoliberalism.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Bayirbağ.

²⁸⁵ Ayça İnce, “The ‘Mehter March’ of Cultural Policy in Turkey,” *L’Europe en Formation* n° 367, no. 1 (July 25, 2013): 83.

²⁸⁶ Dennis Mehmet, “The Architects of New Turkey: Globalization of Urban Space in Istanbul and the New Islamic Gentry,” *Dislocating Globality*, January 1, 2016, 153–81.

²⁸⁷ İnce, “The ‘Mehter March’ of Cultural Policy in Turkey,” 86.

²⁸⁸ İnce, 85; Emine Yetiskul and Sule Demirel, “Assembling Gentrification in Istanbul: The Cihangir Neighbourhood of Beyoğlu,” *Urban Studies* 55, no. 15 (November 1, 2018): 3341.

Erdoğan's almost complete focus on Istanbul since his 2011 election campaign has included the production of three architectural megaprojects, which consists of a Bosphorus bridge, a new airport, and a shipping channel.²⁸⁹ The development of these projects is to showcase Istanbul internationally and nationally as a "role-model" city and to "set the stage for economic and political grandeur."²⁹⁰ However, architectural historian Dennis Mehmet frames the AKP's agenda as "'re-writings of the city's history,'" to "establish a continuity with the imperial past."²⁹¹ Continuity, Mehmet asserts, will "streamline the history and appearance of the city into a conservative Sunni Muslim narrative, systematically excluding many Others in favour of an imagined community of heirs of an empire that in that form never existed."²⁹² For instance, the Atatürk Cultural Center (named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic) is located in Taksim Square (where the Gezi Protests of 2013 took place) has been demolished and rebuilt. In its place, the AKP government announced a new cultural centre that will not be limited to an "elitist" audience.²⁹³ The Chamber of Architects criticised the demolition of the Atatürk Cultural Centre as part of "systematic attacks on the Republican era's symbolic buildings."²⁹⁴

The AKP government's streamlining of history into a monocultural narrative conflicts with the lived intercultural history of Beyoğlu. By curatorially propositioning the 15th edition on

²⁸⁹ Mehmet, "The Architects of New Turkey," 159.

²⁹⁰ Mehmet, 159.

²⁹¹ Mehmet, 159.

²⁹² Mehmet, 159.

²⁹³ "New Atatürk Cultural Center at the Heart of Istanbul to Be Completed by 2019," Daily Sabah, November 6, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/istanbul/2017/11/06/new-ataturk-cultural-center-at-the-heart-of-istanbul-to-be-completed-by-2019>.

²⁹⁴ Daily Sabah with Agencies. "New Atatürk Cultural Center at the Heart of Istanbul to Be Completed by 2019." Daily Sabah, November 6, 2017.

the Beyoğlu *semt*, this edition is a biennial of resistance, despite never being mentioned by Hoskote. Moreover, in the face of Istanbul's changing architectural landscape, community members want to honour the architectural past rather than "re-writing" history. Several of the buildings in the 15th edition were repurposed or *adaptively reused* as gallery exhibition space, specifically ARK Kültür, the Galata Greek Primary School, and the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam. According to architecture and heritage discourse, adaptive reuse is part of preservation efforts that contribute to spatio-temporal continuity from past to present. Social, political, economic, and technological obsolescence necessitate the reuse of buildings. Building repurposing helps define localities. Historian David Lowenthal states, "the past is integral to our sense of identity...the ability to recall and identify with our own past gives [our] existence meaning, purpose and value."²⁹⁵ The cultural landscape is shaped by buildings in urban areas so that various identities and histories exist alongside or in conflict with each other. Current and historical cultural attitudes are revealed by what is chosen to be preserved, restored, and reused. In shaping localities, then, there is an indivisible link between architecture, time, and memory.

According to scholar Melinda J. Milligan, historic-built environments should expand contextualizing stories and narratives for multiple and coexisting meanings to justify building preservation.²⁹⁶ Architect and owner of Ark Kültür, Gülfem Köseoğlu, agrees with this argument, stating it was her personal responsibility as an architect to preserve the architectural

²⁹⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, Revised and updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41.

²⁹⁶ Melinda J. Milligan, "Buildings as History: The Place of Collective Memory in the Study of Historic Preservation," *Symbolic Interaction* 30, no. 1 (2007): 105–23.

heritage of Istanbul. She says, “Me being the neighbour across the street, [I] had to buy the building to save it from being torn down. It was not a listed building. The investors preferred five to six buildings [to a small art gallery].”²⁹⁷ For Köseoğlu, the former home is a “non-significant building” other than through its transformation into a gallery, conveying Istanbul’s “human scale quality; its being representative of its period (texture); front garden; [and] pleasant neighbourhood.”²⁹⁸ As public exhibition venues, ARK Kültür, the Galata Greek Primary School, and the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam impart various narratives of what is culturally significant while simultaneously engaging with multiple collective cultural and communicative memories. In adaptive reuse, these exhibition venues maintain and house a collection of practices as a built object of the past, present, and as an artistic site to project potential futures. Embracing pluralism and the intercultural histories of the location and neighbourhood of these venues situates *a good neighbour* as a biennial of resistance against the mono-narrative agenda of the ruling AKP government.

It’s a Beautiful day in Beyoğlu

Beyoğlu connects to Istanbul’s old city centre by crossing the Golden Horn by the Galata Bridge or the Unkapanı Bridge (fig. 2.3). Beyoğlu is on the European side of Istanbul, and includes the *mahalles* Asmalı Mescit and Kılıçali Paşa, which are both referenced in the catalogue.²⁹⁹ It is one of Istanbul’s 39 electoral municipal districts with an elected mayor,

²⁹⁷ Gölfem Köseoğlu, “Questions about Ark Kültür,” email correspondence, trans. Lale Eskicioğlu, October 3, 2019.

²⁹⁸ Köseoğlu.

²⁹⁹ The *mahalles*, Asmalı Mescit and Kılıçali Paşa are identified in the *a good neighbour* catalogue as part of the addresses of five of the six venues, the Galata Greek Primary School, ARK Kültür, Istanbul Modern, Yoğunluk Atelier

however, it is not an official *mahalle* because of its size and is known in public parlance as a *semt*. Initially, when the Istanbul districts were drawn in 1858, Beyoğlu was the sixth of fourteen municipal districts. According to the municipal website, its designation as the sixth district was to honour Beyoğlu after a revered and prosperous district in Paris.³⁰⁰



Figure 2.3: View of the Unkapanı Bridge, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Before the establishment of the Turkish Empire in 1923, Beyoğlu was known as Pera. Marketing scholar Özlem Sandıkcı outlines that Pera was established in the thirteenth-century as a Genoese trading colony, separate from the Byzantine empire. Pera maintained its independence even after Fatih Mehmet captured Istanbul in the fifteenth-century and formed

and the Pera Museum. Asmalı Mescit and Kılıçali Paşa are official mahalles, each with a Muhtar. This is also the case for the Yavuz Sultan Selim mahalle, where the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam is located.

³⁰⁰ “Beyoğlu and Beyoğlu Municipality,” Beyoğlu Municipality, 2011, http://en.beyoglu.bel.tr/beyoglu_municipality/default.aspx?SectionId=2086.

an alliance with the Ottoman empire. Increased trade between Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth-century propelled socioeconomic changes with an accompanying desire for European modernization.³⁰¹ During the nineteenth-century, European traders and embassies resided in Beyoğlu because of the docks and trade centres located along the Golden Horn. This more extensive and diverse Western population reflected a “European paradigm of urban sophistication”³⁰² in Beyoğlu.

Newly forming ideas regarding modern urban organization in Europe captivated the reformist elite in Istanbul, who were interested in mirroring a “Western city.” City planning initiatives inaugurated Beyoğlu as a municipal government, transforming Beyoğlu with street maintenance, garbage collection, the construction of sewer systems, waterways, and commercial regulations. Beyoğlu was among the first areas of Istanbul to have telephone lines, gasoil torches along its central street, Grand Rue de Pera, followed by electricity, trams, and the world’s second subway line, the Tünel, in 1875.³⁰³ By the end of the nineteenth-century, department stores, cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs lined Grand Rue de Pera, defining urban activities and sociability at that time.³⁰⁴ Residents of Pera were attracted to its social and cultural resources. The “cosmopolitan civility,” as sociologist Arus Yumul puts it, “‘made difference agreeable’ and allowed ‘civilised coexistence’ between people of different

³⁰¹ Özlem Sandıkcı, “Strolling Through Istanbul’s Beyoğlu: In-Between Difference and Containment,” *Space and Culture* 18, no. 2 (May 2015): 198–211.

³⁰² A. Aksoy and K. Robbins, “Changing Urban Cultural Governance in Istanbul: The Beyoğlu Plan,” in *KPY Working Paper 1*, (Istanbul, Turkey: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2011), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267786881_Changing_Urban_Cultural_Governance_in_Istanbul_The_Beyoglu_Plan.

³⁰³ “Beyoğlu and Beyoğlu Municipality.”

³⁰⁴ Sandıkcı, 201.

backgrounds.”³⁰⁵ Geography scholars Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins agree, stating that Beyoğlu had a “complex atmosphere of a cosmopolitan space” as a site of “ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity.”³⁰⁶ They continue to assert that despite the modernization and monocultural nation-building of the early part of the twentieth-century, Beyoğlu’s “cosmopolitan disposition” remains.

The reforms of Europeanisation, however, were not unilaterally accepted without critique. Sandıkçı highlights resentment among conservative Muslims who regarded Pera as a space of immorality. In general, when the capital of Turkey was moved from Istanbul to Ankara at the time of the Turkish Republic, Istanbul’s symbolic presence was met with distaste and hostility. After embassies relocated to Ankara, Istanbul remained “a symbol of the colonial, decadent, and multiethnic Ottoman past.”³⁰⁷ Pera epitomized these ideas and therefore threatened the emerging conservative Turkish national identity.³⁰⁸ The Turkish language campaign resulted in the Greek name Pera being replaced with a Turkish word, Beyoğlu, and the Grande Rue de Pera was also renamed İstiklâl Caddesi. The Wealth Levy of 1942, which disproportionately targeted non-Muslim wealth to fund a national army, initiated a substantial decrease in the non-Muslim population in Istanbul and specifically Beyoğlu. Sandıkçı states that the transformation from Pera to Beyoğlu, more broadly, “marked the transition from a multiethnic empire to a Turkish nation state.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Arus Yumul, “A Prostitute Lodging in the Bosom of Turkishness’: Istanbul’s Pera and Its Representation,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 58.

³⁰⁶ Aksoy and Robins, 5.

³⁰⁷ Sandıkçı, “Strolling Through Istanbul’s Beyoğlu,” 201.

³⁰⁸ Sandıkçı, 201.

³⁰⁹ Sandıkçı, 202.

However, the historical characteristics of Beyoğlu remain and situate it, according to translation scholars Şule Demirkol-Ertürk and Saliha Paker as a site of “interculture.” For them, intercultural exchange is understood as a “cultural network that is inherently hybrid.”³¹⁰ They examine the translation and publication of Armenian and Kurdish texts from publishers operating in Beyoğlu, which they argue “created new spaces of intercommunication and interaction, standing against ‘structured’ differences among ethnic and linguistic collectivities.”³¹¹ They describe Beyoğlu as having a history of intercultural exchanges, to which, Sandıkçı places importance on cultural exchange and diversity by examining Beyoğlu’s historical and present context as an accepted residential district for drag/transsexual subcultures.³¹² Significantly, these scholars stress Beyoğlu’s historical texture as a *semt* that engaged with and accepted a multiplicity and diversity of cultural and social backgrounds and practices. Unlike other *semt*s, such as Fatih or Tophane, which are locally known as being more conservative with a more significant following of the AKP, disapproving of secular lifestyles such as alcohol consumption and different dress styles, it made sense to locals for the Biennial to be hosted in Beyoğlu. As Istanbul resident Çiğdem Arıkan puts it: “The Biennial is a cool thing. It is art. For this reason, it suits Beyoğlu much more. If the locals of Fatih saw a poster, ‘There is a Biennial in Fatih,’ they would say, ‘What the heck? What is this thing called Biennial?’ Afterwards, when they learn what it is, they may not be happy with it.”³¹³ Elmgreen & Dragset utilise this local and lived understanding of

³¹⁰ Şule Demirkol-Ertürk and Saliha Paker, “Beyoğlu/Pera as a Translating Site in Istanbul,” *Translation Studies* 7, no. 2 (May 4, 2014): 170–85.

³¹¹ Yumul, 173.

³¹² Sandıkçı, 198–211.

³¹³ Arıkan, July 2019.

Beyoğlu to conceptualise the curation of *a good neighbour* against insularity and segregation to curate a biennial of resistance.

If the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art had a Hammer

Beyoğlu embraces interculturality through artistic and cultural power from an institutional concentration. It is home to the Istanbul Modern, the Pera Museum, the (controversially rebuilt) Atatürk Cultural Centre, and the Borusan Culture and Arts Centre. The area surrounding the Istanbul Modern was under construction during the Biennial (figs. 2.4-2.6). At the time of *a good neighbour*, Istanbul Modern was situated along the coast of the Bosphorus in Beyoğlu. Since the 2017 Biennial edition, the gallery has been moved to a historic mansion in the centre of Beyoğlu as a temporary home until the new gallery is rebuilt on its former site. At the time of *a good neighbour*, and presumably if unchanged after renovations, guests to the gallery restaurant are bestowed with stunning views of the historic peninsula, including the Ottoman-era Topkapi Palace and the Asian coast of Istanbul. The former warehouse, known as Antrepo No. 4, at what was Istanbul's main port until the 1990s, was converted into the first private museum for modern and contemporary art in 2004. The construction of Istanbul Modern was part of the Galata Port Project, a city-tourist initiative involving the construction of a cruise-ship port and the restoration of buildings and streets in the Karaköy *semt*, the transformation of which was already underway during the Biennial in 2017. The path for visitors to the gallery and the Biennial was through the parking lot,

populated by machinery, construction workers, and dirt. The symbolism of the ongoing gentrification and construction processes, given its timing, was not lost on visitors.³¹⁴



Figure 2.4-2.5. Construction outside of the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photos: Amy Bruce.

³¹⁴ This was also noted by d/railed reporter Dorian Batycka in his review: Dorian Batycka, “Amidst Uneasiness, the 15th Istanbul Biennial Draws to a Close,” d/railed, November 10, 2017, <https://www.drailedmag.com/2017/11/10/15th-istanbul-biennial-draws-to-a-close/>.



Figure 2.6: Line outside the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art for the 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

The construction at the Istanbul Modern did not deter Elmgreen & Dragset, however. Alternatively, they embraced the construction as part of the changing urban environment that has occurred in the past and present in Istanbul. Remarking on the changes since their first visits to the Istanbul Biennial in 2001, “Whole areas that used to be inhabited by small businesses such as hardware stores and wood workshops have morphed into trendy neighbourhoods with cafés, design shops, and boutique hotels. Other parts of the city, less frequented by tourists, have seen a surge in new shopping malls of all levels, from discount to luxury.”³¹⁵ Including the Istanbul Modern acknowledges the historical and current

³¹⁵ Elmgreen & Dragset, “Interview with Elmgreen & Dragset,” May 22, 2019.

transformations witnessed throughout the neighbourhood, the city, and, more broadly, urban contemporaneity as dynamic forces in social relations. The curators emphasised the significance of construction with several displayed works that directly addressed urban development issues, such as Young-Jun Tak, Alper Aydin, Latifa Echakhch, Klara Lidén, Volkan Aslan, and Rayyane Tabet. The exhibited works at this venue offered an interplay between perception and awareness of urban changes to re-write Istanbul's history, the consequences of (Aydin), regulations (or lack of) (Tabet), and lived urban transformations (Aslan) in erasing and denying pluralism and intercultural histories of *semts*.

Quite literally, *D&M* (2017) (fig. 2.7) by Turkish artist Alper Aydin referenced Istanbul's changing urban environment. The installation featured the shovel of a bulldozer, which had pushed trees and branches in the corner of the gallery. The trees piled by the bulldozer's blade were collected from a real thicket that was cut and removed to develop the new Istanbul airport, where the new airport required the displacement and relocation of homes. Inside the Istanbul Modern, the machinery and trees that appeared to be removed conveyed the destruction associated with, or rather, destruction due to city development, efficiency, and expansion.³¹⁶ *D&M*, perhaps, alludes to neighbourhood destruction or warns of the consequences of monocultural nation-building, where authoritative urban transformations can threaten cultural sustainability by damaging the cultural identity and diversity of the neighbourhood. Development can have adverse effects of forcing local inhabitants to relocate when inclusionary and integrative decisions are not part of neighbourhood revitalization

³¹⁶ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, eds., "Rayyane Tabet," in *Iyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = A good neighbour: 15th İstanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17* (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 320–21.

projects. The potential loss of intercultural exchange is at stake when demolition overlooks the uniqueness of a neighbourhood. Specifically, in Beyoğlu, where urban renewal projects have been proliferating under the AKP governments over the past decade, through collaboration between government policies, police, and private property owners to stigmatise members of the LGBT community, specifically transgender people, and other marginalised groups into displacement as a result of “cleansing operations” in 1996.³¹⁷ In response to growing tensions between residence in Beyoğlu and urban policy planning decisions and projects related to the neighbourhood, a neighbourhood association was formed dedicated to preservation discourse, often resorting to legal action. As a result of the neighbourhood associations, Beyoğlu’s has demonstrated local resistance to state-led gentrification, negotiating state-led gentrification by asserting local interests throughout the gentrification process “in a becoming together of multiplicity.”³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Emine Yetiskul and Sule Demirel, “Assembling Gentrification in Istanbul: The Cihangir Neighbourhood of Beyoğlu,” *Urban Studies* 55, no. 15 (November 1, 2018): 3343-3344.

³¹⁸ Yetiskul and Demirel, 3338, 3349.



Figure 2.7: Alper Aydin, *D8M*, installation view at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

What physically and materially remains to the realities of lived spatial relationships and disjunctions between individual and shared experiences is explored in the contemplative three-channel video, *Home Sweet Home* (2017) by Turkish artist Volkan Aslan (fig. 2.8). Commissioned by the Biennial, the video takes place on the Bosphorus Strait in a houseboat, common housing for poorer families. The boat drives down the Bosphorus, specifically situating the boat's location in Istanbul and on the Bosphorus, also suggesting passage or transit. The sound of the boat's engine played over an intermittent piano melody. The screen on the left portrayed domestic

scenes of a woman; she smoked a cigarette, drank tea, read a book, and re-potted a plant.

Scenes of the Bosphorus occupied the middle screen, rendering the occasional coastline, boat, or clouds in the sky. A second woman was the subject of the third and right-hand video. She was outside on a boat, silently minding her time by drying and brushing her hair and sitting at a desk playing cards.



Figure 2.8: Volkan Aslan, *Home Sweet Home*, installation view at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

As the video continued, it became apparent that the women were occupying the same boat. The separate views of each channel revealed that they were simply occupying different views of the same reality. The catalogue specifies that the video stressed humanity and human

connectedness. It states that the work “reflects meditatively on a world upended and inverted, in which many are on the move and in disarray, where even tragedies that initially seemed too distant to affect us are closer than we think, and neighbours we may not know are in fact right beside us.”³¹⁹ The landscape views of the two women, once seeming singular from their perspective, reveal themselves to be more linked than initially perceived. Structured differences between inside and outside, home and transit in *Home Sweet Home* give the perception of self-segregation and separation. As is later revealed, the two women are not isolated from one another, and alternatively, are connected, despite the illusion of different perspectives, views, daily tasks, and activities. The women existing with differences and with their own particularities co-exist in a singular place, not unlike neighbours in a neighbourhood.

Aslan’s *Stories* contribution, *Better*, complements *Home Sweet Home*, telling of a narrator (presumably Aslan) meeting and subsequently living with a neighbour after they were both forcibly removed from their building. Situating *Home Sweet Home* in personal experience, the narrator describes (presumably) himself as a type of neighbour who “tried my best to stay away from those kinds of social relationships,” Aslan writes about how he and his “foreign” neighbour’s relationship had developed to the point of exchanging presents and sharing outdoor space, where they have planted tomatoes and peppers. After buying a fishing boat, Aslan constructed a “make-shift ‘add-on level’,” where his neighbour now lives. About their living situation, Aslan writes, “You get used to the sound of the motor after a while. We keep moving forward without stopping. ‘Humanity is moving forward.’ Neither of us knows which

³¹⁹ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, eds., “Volkan Aslan,” in *Iyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = A good neighbour: 15th İstanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17* (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 145.

way we're going. All we know is that we're heading for 'better things.' Towards a better life, towards being a better person, towards being a good neighbour."³²⁰ Aslan's statement highlights the importance of neighbourly relationships, relationality, and intercultural bonds, reinforced by *Home Sweet Home*. Neighbours are connected, despite appearances of separateness. Where Turkey's homogenizing national agenda effaces multiplicity, diversity, and interculturality, the artworks included at the Istanbul Modern embrace historical and lived cultural entanglements as experienced in the Beyoğlu *semt*.

Next Door Neighbour: Fatih and the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam

A neighbour cannot be a neighbour by themselves: it is inherently relational. Nearby but not within Beyoğlu *mahalle* was the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam (fig. 2.9). The hammam is more specifically located within the Fatih *semt* of the Cibali *mahalle*. "Situated near the Greek Patrimony, in the Ayakapi suburb of the Fatih region in Istanbul,"³²¹ the Fatih district is a poorer neighbourhood and predominantly Islamist cultural-political identity, according to Amy Mills.³²² It was the furthest exhibition site, yet still a manageable walking distance from the other venues and the Beyoğlu *semt*.

³²⁰ Volkan Aslan, "Better," in *Iyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = Stories: A good neighbour: 15th İstanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17*, ed. Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 488.

³²¹ "About the Monument | Kucuk Mustafa Pasa Hammam," Kucuk Mustafa Pasa Hammam, 2018, <http://kucukmustafapasahamami.com/en/yapihakkinda.html>.

³²² Mills, *Streets of Memory*, 2.



Figure 2.9: The Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

As an exhibition venue, the inclusion of the hammam in the biennial could warrant orientalist provisions since cultural exposure does not resolve orientalism. Cautions of orientalism are partly because, in nineteenth-century European art, the hammam was portrayed as exotic, mysterious, and sexually uninhibited for a European gaze. Since the curators are European, there is the risk they are coming from this European context. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said conceptualized the false representation of non-Western

cultures to serve imperialist enterprise and their colonizing agenda.³²³ Despite the Ottoman Empire never formally being colonized by the West, Western universalist tendencies included cultural imperialism to expand orientalism outside the lands under Western imperial rule. The rhetoric of orientalist criticisms, according to architectural historian Zeynep Çelik in her book on the urban transformation of Istanbul between 1838 and 1909, was internalized for a self-imposed colonization and rejection of the Ottoman legacy by the government.³²⁴

Philosopher Fred Dallmayr, however, argues for the patient and sustained cross-cultural inquiry. He reasons that to “exit orientalism” all participants need dialogic engagement to be “potentially transformed.”³²⁵ While the degree to which Elmgreen & Dragset engaged with and were transformed by the city and the hammam may be only known to them, in their catalogue introduction, they address changes they have witnessed in and to Istanbul. They write,

It has been sixteen years since we first visited Istanbul, where we took part in the 7th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Yuko Hasegawa. Not only Beyoğlu – which includes Tünel Square, İstiklal and Taksim Square – but the city as a whole has changed tremendously since then. Today we encounter a completely modernised urban landscape. However, this change probably cannot even be compared to the extreme transformation through which Istanbul must have gone.³²⁶

Their admission to the changing cityscape is inevitably lesser than that of a resident but suggests their sustained cultural inquiry into Istanbul.

³²³ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993).

³²⁴ Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Publications on the Near East, University of Washington, no. 2 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).

³²⁵ Fred R. Dallmayr, “Exit from Orientalism,” in *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*, by Dallmayr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 120.

³²⁶ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, eds., “Introduction,” in *İyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = A good neighbour: 15th Istanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17* (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 42.

In addressing the hammam, I favour questioning cultural exteriority and emphasizing layered cultural or intercultural exchanges and historical texture. Ottoman scholar Halil İnalçık emphasizes shifting delineations of distinct entities to question cultural contact and reciprocity between groups and the accompanying essentializing categories. Scholars Zeynep Çelik, Mary Roberts and Jill Beaulieu similarly work to complicate, and nuance entrenched assumptions about the parameters and limitations of interpreting orientalist visual culture.³²⁷ Where orientalism is the improvisation of power, perhaps the use of the hammam could be considered as self-representation because the most prominent and central exhibition space was dominated by Turkish artist Tugçe Tuna. Tuna's performance *Body Drops* will be discussed more shortly, but briefly, she presents a multi-person choreographed performance with dancers of various abilities to demonstrate the diversity and connectedness of people living in Istanbul. The idea of self-representation, as architecture historian Nebahat Avcıoğlu argues, "is a practice of manufacturing one's public identity for socio-political purposes," which encompasses a performative aspect.³²⁸ Self-representation becomes about empowerment to advocate for self-definition of cultural representation, working within systems of self-legitimacy and "where mimetic identification can both find marked separations and similarities within the symbolic system feeding the 'other' and 'self' polarities with dynamic yet practical cultural expressions."³²⁹ Performative modes of intercultural selfhoods engage with the hammam as a

³²⁷ Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000); Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, eds., *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography, Objects/Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

³²⁸ Nebahat Avcıoğlu, *"Turquerie" and the Politics of Representation, 1728-1876* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 7.

³²⁹ Avcıoğlu, 15.

site of transregionality, thereby propelling intercultural and plurality to resist monocultural narratives proposed by the AKP government.

Visitors to the hammam, outside the scheduled Tuna's performance times, entered to see two installations by artist Monica Bonvicini, *Guilt* (2017) and *Weave This Way* (2017) (fig. 2.10-2.11). Bonvicini's work is concerned with, as described by curator and art critic Angela Rosenberg, "symbolic and sexual connotations of architecture in relation to the body and the surrounding, built context, as well as power structures that limit and restrict the body."³³⁰ Rendered from mirror squares, *Guilt* spells its title, with the letters "g" and "u" stacked on top of "-ilt." The work was displayed opposite the large collage, *Weave This Way*, composed of nude female body parts from magazines. These two works, juxtaposed against each other, point to the problematic and often troubled relationship for women regarding social and personal demands on their bodies as well as self-reflection and shame. In the male section of the hammam, it is difficult to ignore criticisms of female subservience and to accompany physical and aesthetic pressures.

³³⁰ Angela Rosenberg, "Monica Bonvicini," *MAKE: The Magazine of Women's Art*, no. 92 (2002): 44.



Figure 2.10-2.11: (Left) Monica Bonvicini, *Weave This Way* (2017) and (right) *Guilt* (2017), installation view at the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photos: Amy Bruce.

Historically as a public forum, hammams maintained gender separation practices. Entrance times were designated and alternated to allow men and women privacy or large enough to accommodate gendered sections. In these larger hammams, often architectural ornamentation visualized the gendered spaces; the men’s sections were typically more ornate and the women’s sections less so to signify female modesty.³³¹ Socially hammams were significant to women’s daily lives. Visits to the hammam offered a legitimate outing from household duties at a time when women were obligated to their husband’s control. Hammams provided freedom for women visitors, who, according to Cichocki, “created a party-like atmosphere in which they could move around freely.”³³² She continues that “The state of undress and the physical contact and intimacy entailed in the process of bathing and cosmetics must have created a kind of openness conducive to share confidentialities, even with women

³³¹ Nina Cichocki, “The Life Story of the Çemberlitas Hamam: From Bath to Tourist Attraction” (Phd dissertation, Minnesota, University of Minnesota, 2005), 74.

³³² Cichocki, 76.

outside the immediate circle of friends.”³³³ The informal form of association and co-mingling could even have economic or martial strategic purposes. Mothers of eligible sons would inspect possible brides, and women of lower economic standing could attempt to foster potential patron-client relationships.³³⁴

Although speaking about Moroccan hammam cultural practices, cultural studies scholar Said Graioud stresses that the hammam experience should be framed by the power relationship that regulated the gender designation of space. Gender solidarity and bonding are promoted through hygienic practices. Since male spatial practices dominate public spaces in Istanbul, women’s use of the hammam is strategic as a communal space as a “grassroots alternative.” Graioud clarifies that it is not because women’s access to public spaces was limited, but that it is women’s appropriation of the hammam to “short-circuit the intrusive patriarchal structure that must be highlighted.”³³⁵ Reading the hammam as a subversive site coincides with an interpretation of a patriarchal presence in the hammam. Presumably, women are performing beautification rituals for male partners and doing so in gender separated spaces in accordance with societal segregation practices and exhibiting women artists in the male hammam portion undermines the enactment of gender-specific segregation.

For Tuna’s performance, visitors were invited into the hammam after the performers were in place, lying in various positions on their backs and sides on the floor. *Body Drops* (2017) began with dancers gently moving their limbs as if stretching in anticipation of their own

³³³ Cichocki, “The Life Story of the Çemberlitas Hamam: From Bath to Tourist Attraction,” 76.

³³⁴ Cichocki, 77.

³³⁵ Said Graioud, “Communication and the Social Production of Space: The Hammam, the Public Sphere and Moroccan Women,” *Journal of North African Studies*, 9:1, (2004): 104-130,112.

performance with the lights off. Synchronizing with backlights, the performers pull a sheet of plastic to the surface of the floor and start crawling around it. Slowly rising to stand, the dancers in staccato movements that are simultaneously still and gestured. Their bodies were individually collapsing then expanding to make seemingly erratic, dipping, and twirling movements – their elbows pointing when still – until they were all facing out in a sizeable untouched circle (fig. 2.12-2.13).



Figure 2.12: Performance of *Body Drops*, the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.



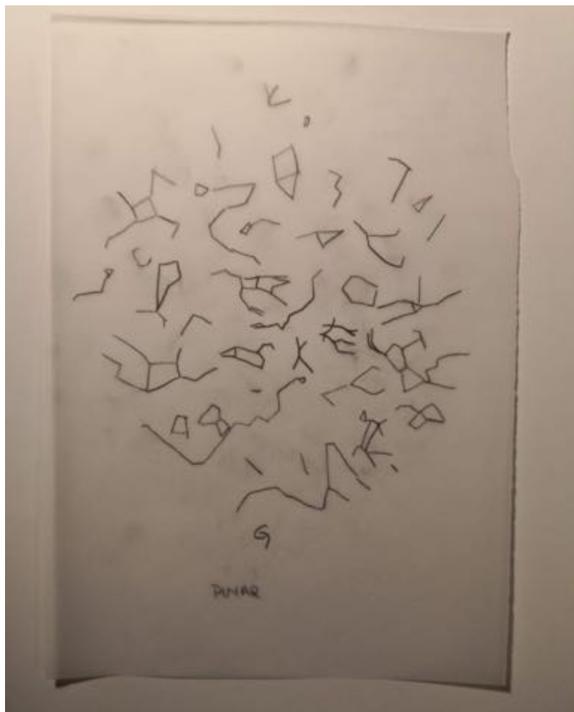
Figure 2.13: Performance of *Body Drops*, the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

The dome of the hammam was Tuna's unifying focal point. Tuna specifies that in Turkish, the dome also means "sky dome" (*gök kubbe*). Accordingly, Tuna states that "The conceptual connection between the dome of the hammam and the sky became an inspiration for the movement creation"³³⁶ (fig. 2.14-2.15). Drawing from the connection between the sky and the dome, the organization of the dancers was arranged in relation to the astrological configuration of their birthdays. This gesture was an attempt to relate their bodies equally between sky and earth. During rehearsals, as the dancers' perspired in the hammam, the humidity highlighted the intangible resonances between the bodies, the marble floors, the

³³⁶ Tugçe Tuna, "Body Drops," July 6, 2019.

height of the dome, the humidity, the sounds, and the interactions between these conditions.³³⁷

In Turkish, “damla” (singular) or “damlalar” (plural), from the performance title, *Beden Damalan*, refers to any liquid in the drop- or pear shape. The English translation of the title does not similarly convey the artistic resonances desired by Tuna between the performance site, sounds, bodies, and invisible relationships between these entities.



BODY DROPS

Figure 2.14-2.15: (Left) preparatory sketch of constellations, Tuna, 2017; (right) constellations above the dome, Tuna, 2017. Photos: Courtesy of the artist.

In many ways, *Body Drops* had elements of singularity, as each dancer moved uniquely yet with unity. As an artist, Tuna is motivated by feminism and inclusion. She regarded the dancers as neighbours, working together and individually. Regarding *Body Drops*, Tuna

³³⁷ Tuna.

remarked, “Maybe it was my inner intention to show that those who possess very many identities are able to stand side by side, together, under the dome of the sky, and share LIFE together, and create together. And maybe it was my intention to remind the viewers the richness of diversity and compassion, and to spread all of this from the hammam to Beyoğlu, and then to Istanbul, and then to Turkey.”³³⁸ Metaphors of complex urban connectivity come to mind, as Tuna refers to her conceptualization of the dancers as neighbours. Her relational framework addresses issues of acceptance, “otherness” and marginalization, in terms of gender and visible disabilities, from the historically dominant culture, histories and even city spaces.

The inclusion of disabled performing artists alters the meaning and media of a work (fig. 2.16-2.17). For Tuna, it was central to the work to concern what she calls “kinesthetic empathy, the sediments in the body and its invisible losses.”³³⁹ Considering, for instance, that many performers are trained to move their bodies to meet prescribed techniques or movement vocabularies, they are demanded to replace their idiosyncratic gestures with standardized ones. However, disabled performance artists may require accommodations, altering repertoire, aesthetics, the collaborative process (presumably disabled performers would need to specify what movements they are able and comfortable to execute), notions of performativity, and perhaps gendered notions of movement. In this way, disabled and performance arts scholar Carrie Sandahl argues that by “considering disability, we expose the normative biases out of

³³⁸ Tuna.

³³⁹ Tuna.

which the art form and concomitant academic discipline evolved, and we uncover new alternatives.”³⁴⁰



Figure 2.16: Performance of *Body Drops*, the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

³⁴⁰ Carrie Sandahl, “From the Streets to the Stage: Disability and the Performing Arts,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 120, no. 2 (March 1, 2005): 620–24.



Figure 2.17: Performance of *Body Drops*, the Küçük Mustafa Paşa Hammam, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

According to disability theorists David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, disability attributes serve as a marker of inferiority. They explain that disability in Western literature, rhetoric, and visual traditions “inaugurates the act of interpretation.”³⁴¹ Since governments and social programs often see disability as a “problem” that needs to be fixed, disabled peoples are in an ambiguous position. Yet disability is featured frequently in literature because of the representational split between the body and the mind. Most often, they argue, it is done so to convey metaphorical or symbolic meaning, a discursive dependency they call “narrative prosthesis.”

³⁴¹ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse, Corporealities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 6.

I would contend that *Body Drops* does not include disabled performers merely symbolically, but as an attempt to include the social experience of disabled persons and better represent Tuna's understanding of bodies, the invisible losses that unify bodily experiences and alterity. My assessment of *Body Drops* is thus that the disabled performers were integral to the work not as a narrative prosthesis, that is, not included as a metaphorical "other" – as is often the case with disabled bodies. In representational narratives, Mitchell and Snyder specify that disabled bodies act as "a reminder of the 'real' physical limits that 'weigh down' transcendent ideals of the mind and knowledge-producing disciplines."³⁴² At times throughout the performance, this interpretation could be argued, such as when a man with crutches walked out and dropped his crutches. The other performers were under underneath a plastic sheet barrier with him above it. As eerie music began, the crutched man separated his torso from his legs to do a handstand and pull himself around on top of the bodies under the plastic. When the music paused briefly, the plastic sheet was crumpled into a ball, and the lights dimmed.

Additionally, the performer in the wheelchair rolls onto the stage as another man moves his hands in the corner; behind him, a man tucked himself into a ball to fit in the windowsill, and the crutched man stared at the wall. While the disabled performers' movements identify their physical difference from the other performers, their gestures and movements are also entangled and incorporated with the other performers – not alien to them. For example, the performer who used a wheelchair made the same arm movements as a standing man. They were accompanied by another performer who twirled the performer who used a wheelchair to be joined by another performer, twirling. Eventually, everyone separated to be moved and be

³⁴² Mitchell and Snyder, 49.

still throughout the space, including window alcoves and the accessibility ramps. Moreover, each of the performers is individually and freely moving about the hammam. The disabled performers are not framed as Other among the performers. As performers and as a collective, the dancers demonstrate multiple and connected experiences, resisting singular ideas of life in the Beyoğlu *semt*, and more broadly, in Istanbul. By focusing on relationality and the diversity of the performers, *Body Drops* reinforces the curatorial ambitions of interculturality as proposed by the Beyoğlu *semt* for the 15th edition to be a biennial of resistance.

Full House: ARK Kültür

Embracing the intercultural history of the Beyoğlu *semt* is the expansive artwork by Mahmoud Khaled's (1982) artwork in the Biennial, *Proposal for a House Museum of an Unknown Crying Man (Proposal for a House Museum)* at the site-specific exhibition venue, Ark Kültür. *Proposal for a House Museum* encompasses the entire venue of Ark Kültür, to be what Elmgreen & Dragset refer to as a "home-museum." While ARK Kültür (fig. 2.18) was formerly a home, it was not a historically specific or important home to the history or narrative in general or to Khaled's work. As art historian Andrea Terry outlines, house museums are both suppliers and sources of history. She explains that as sources of history, house museums undergo processes of museumification based on various architectural and or socio-political merits. House museums represent historical figures and their domestic culture as suppliers of

history.³⁴³ Objects construct or perform narrative coherence for the sake of history. House museums, as Terry situates them, foster a collective sense of cultural history.



Figure 2.18: Mahmoud Khaled, *Proposal for a House Museum of an Unknown Crying Man*, the exterior of ARK Kùltür, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Egyptian-born, Khaled situates his work, *Proposal for a House Museum*, on the real event of the biggest trial of men in Egypt. In May 2001, 52 men, now known as the Cairo 52, were arrested after a police raid of the Queen Boat, a gay nightclub docked in Cairo on the river

³⁴³ Andrea Terry, *Family Ties: Living History in Canadian House Museums*, McGill-Queen's/Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation Studies in Art History (Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 5.

Nile.³⁴⁴ Despite Egyptian law not criminalizing homosexuality, it is a social, cultural, and religious taboo. Those arrested on the Queen Boat were charged and convicted on the grounds of debauchery and contempt of religion.³⁴⁵ The apprehended men were tortured by police, including medical examinations, and suffered humiliation and ill-treatment by the state and media. Human rights groups condemned the Egyptian press for its false reporting, including lurid accounts of events on the Queen Boat and the release of the men's names and workplaces.³⁴⁶ The case ignited uproar inside and outside of Egypt for the persecution of homosexuality and was mentioned in the United Nations Council 2011 Report. To mitigate attention and harassment during the trial, the Cairo 52 would cover their faces with white towels. The partially covered face of one man, noticeably crying, became a powerful image "iconic within the Egyptian gay community as an expression of forced exposure, suffering and concealment as homosexuals continue to be persecuted."³⁴⁷ Khaled utilised an image from the trial of the Cairo 52 to fictionalize the life of one of the men (fig. 2.19).

Figure 2.19: Members of the Cairo 52 covering their faces on route to trial, *Times of Israel*, accessed January 2, 2021. Photo: Removed for copyright.

³⁴⁴ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, eds., "Mahmoud Khaled," in *Iyi bir komşu: 15. İstanbul Bienali, 16.09.17-12.11.17 = A good neighbour: 15th İstanbul Biennial 16.09.17-12.11.17* (İstanbul, Turkey: İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2017), 320–22.

³⁴⁵ Katerina Dalacoura notes that debauchery laws were introduced "by Egyptian nationalists in 1951 as part of the anti-colonial struggle against British 'immorality'. It specifically targeted state-licensed brothels, which serviced the British military." See Dalacoura, "Homosexuality as Cultural Battleground in the Middle East: Culture and Postcolonial International Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 7 (August 9, 2014): 1290–1306.

³⁴⁶ Caroline Hawley, "Anger over Egypt Gay Trial," *BBC News*, August 15, 2001, sec. World: Middle East, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1493041.stm.

³⁴⁷ Elmgreen & Dragset and İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, "Mahmoud Khaled," 2017, 237.

Khaled drew upon established house museum rhetoric and aesthetic for *Proposal for a House Museum* to foster a sense of a collective cultural history for gay Egyptian men. Staging a home, and abstractly a life, for an unknown person humanized the members of the Cairo 52 that saw intense media, cultural and judicial scrutiny, animating a symbolic physical structure of gay pride in Egypt. Not unusual to the museum and house museum experience, the house was even accompanied by an audio guide headset to provide visitors, describing the fictional former resident and the carefully collected objects that comprise a home. The audio guide referenced the home's exterior as the unifying stylistic theme. The decorated home and the guided audio tour reinterpreted a moment in the collective memory of the LGBTQ community in Egypt as an emotional, personal, and physical site.

As a micronarrative and fictionalized performance of the past, Khaled used the image of the crying man to create a person with a personality, daily routine, interests, and friends. The crying man's home was unified by repeated images of the mass-produced Italian painting, the *Bragolin Crying Boy*. The crying imagery was reproduced throughout the home in multiple media (fig. 2.20-2.21). Objects such as the mirror in the living room, which featured the image of the unknown crying man, were fictionalized as made by the crying man himself as a homage to his persecuted community. The *Bragolin Crying Boy* became a haunting image from the crying man's childhood and was normalized as part of the dining room table dishware or the arrangement of drawings and figurines on top of the piano mantel. The household objects and art reinforced an authoritative representation of a former home, concealing its rhetoric of history and neutralizing ideology.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Terry, *Family Ties*, 20.



Figure 2.20-2.21: Images of the *Bragolin Crying Boy* repeated throughout *Proposal for a House Museum*, Ark Kültür, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photos: Amy Bruce.

Like other house museums, *Proposal for a House Museum* used its architectural context as aesthetic inspiration for the objects inside.³⁴⁹ The house and its Bauhaus design were influential to the interior aesthetic of the crying man's home. Furniture was said in the audio guide to have been commissioned by the crying man to replicate Bauhaus designs or stylish stand-ins. The importance of detailed objects for *Proposal for a House Museum* even extended to a souvenir gift shop, although the objects were not for sale at the time of my visit. Each of the artifactual representations Khaled created and arranged in the home to become greater than the sum of their parts in order to strategically “convey specific values, concepts or convictions.”³⁵⁰ Imagery became symbolic in order to convey support. The image of the crying man was the central figure of the home, and his image was immortalized throughout the home. Khaled imagined this man living in exile in Turkey, where he lived a mysterious, sophisticated but melancholic and lonely life.

³⁴⁹ Terry, 20.

³⁵⁰ Terry, 19.

The Cairo 52 debate in Egypt constructed homosexuality, as outlined by international relations scholar Katerina Dalacoura, as a cultural threat by the prosecution and media. Dalacoura states that homosexuality was “deemed to be part of ‘the globalization of perversion’, a Western-driven process.”³⁵¹ The Egyptian government used the Queen Boat case to “reproduce Egyptian identity and re-establish the boundaries of the Egyptian nation by constructing heterosexuality as an essential marker of national difference from the West.”³⁵² Egyptian human rights groups were caught in the middle because by supporting the Cairo 52 they would have had to stand against the state and Egyptian sovereignty in support of Western values. International support confirmed the Egyptian government’s need to protect Egyptian cultural values and sovereignty from Western erosion. The protection of Egyptian “cultural authenticity,” as Dalacoura comments, ironically used legal instruments founded on European criminal codes.³⁵³ Khaled addresses the ideological and national tension by the inclusion of Western cultural products, such as Truman Capote’s book *A Tree of Night*. The Egyptian cultural and national tension is poetically addressed by the reinterpretation of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ installation, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991) above the bed (fig. 2.22-2.23). *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* consists of two synchronized clocks side-by-side that, over time, become out of sync, metaphorizing personal relationships. In the crying man’s room are two magnetically mounted stainless-steel serving trays he composed. One circle reflects gold and the other rainbow hues.

³⁵¹ Dalacoura, 1295.

³⁵² Nicola Pratt, “The Queen Boat Case in Egypt: Sexuality, National Security and State Sovereignty,” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 139.

³⁵³ Dalacoura, 1295.

Like Gonzalez-Torres' clocks, the identical circles, different yet unified, beautifully reflected their surroundings, arguably to propose a future of cultural harmony in Egypt.



Figure 2.22: Daybed with an open copy of Truman Capote's *A Tree of Night*, installation view of *Proposal for a House Museum*, ARK Kültür, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.



Figure 2.23: Two mirrors installed above the bed much like *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, installation view of *Proposal for a House Museum*, ARK Kültür, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey, October 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

In light of Turkish politics and growing Islamification under Erdoğan's political tenure, by visually contextualizing *Proposal for a House Museum* on ARK Kültür's Bauhaus style, Khaled demonstrates the importance of addressing the context of local political issues in assessing the types of resistance proposed by biennials. Khaled draws on international aesthetics and artworks, making the context of *Proposal for a House Museum* more global because of these interconnections to the world. By doing so, Khaled is arguably appealing to the international bias of contemporary art that is primarily a Western construct. *Proposal for a House Museum*

could be read as participating in a global contemporary aesthetic controlled by a set of international idioms of art that holds a historic Western basis. *Proposal for a House Museum's* utilized ARK Kültür's context as a former home and international aesthetic. ARK Kültür is more specifically located in a *mahalle* within the Beyoğlu *semt*, Cihangir. It is located on a hill with a panoramic view of the Bosphorus. The historic peninsula and Üsküdar, the Asian side of the city, is on the opposite shore. The residential profile had an interest in art. New apartment buildings included early nineteenth-century architectural design elements. Gentrification and renovations of older buildings similarly saw transformations to modern architectural styles. Such is the case of ARK Kültür. The former family home was restored by architect and owner of Ark Kültür, Gülfem Köseoğlu to its current Bauhaus style in 2008 and transformed into a gallery. In an interview with Milliyet, Köseoğlu attests to Uzun's summary in her justification for opening the gallery. She said, "The beauty of the neighbourhood, its historical texture and significance drew my attention at that time. I realized that Cihangir was not at the place it deserved. Since I am an architect, the dissonant developments in Istanbul were already bothering me too much."³⁵⁴ In preserving the building, her goal was to add to the secular and global heritage of the *mahalle*. The international aesthetic, residential narrative, and site-specificity of ARK Kültür within the intercultural Beyoğlu *semt* enabled *Proposal for a House*

³⁵⁴ In Turkish, Köseoğlu said, "Semtin güzelliği, tarihi dokusu ve önemi o zaman dikkatimi çekti. Cihangir'in hak ettiği yerde olmadığını gördüm. Mimar olduğum için İstanbul'daki çarpık yapılaşma zaten gözümü çok fazla rahatsız ediyordu. Cihangir'in de bu yapılaşmadan payını alıyor olması beni harekete geçirdi. Cihangir sonradan popülerleşmiş bir semt. Bu durum da otomatik olarak onun hem kültürel hem de mimari yapısını bir anlamda tehdit ediyor. A.R.K'ı hiçbir kâr amacı gütmeyen, sadece semte hizmet etmek için açtım. Burası bir sanat galerisinden çok Cihangir'in ruhunu yaşatmaya devam edecek bir ev." Lale Eskicioğlu, trans., "Cihangir'in ruhunu yansıtacak galeri," Milliyet, June 12, 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cihangir-in-ruhunu-yansitacak-galeri/cumartesi/haberdetay/13.06.2009/1105955/default.htm>.

Museum to confront Turkish national agendas. The 15th edition resists locally specific discourses as a biennial of resistance rather than broader Western hegemonic cultural forms.

Conclusion

By situating this chapter on the idea of the *semt*, I argued that *a good neighbour* utilized the curatorial concept of neighbourhoods in the Beyoğlu *semt* for an exhibition that promoted diversity and historical texture, resisting othering mechanisms and structures, and the homogenizing political agenda of the Turkish government. The artworks chosen by Elmgreen & Dragset reinforced notions of recreating personal relationships with neighbourhood identities, paradoxical continuity within the face of change and continuous practices of making that involved the past and the present. Nuanced interpretations of what it means to live somewhere offer dynamism and multiplicity, where national programs typically reiterate and circulate through linear and singular narratives. Ultimately, this edition of the Istanbul Biennial accentuates the perspectival bifurcation of local and global contexts. On the one hand, *a good neighbour* perpetuates and participates in global hegemonic narratives. On the other hand, notions of diversity, relationality, and historical texture contradict Turkish national agendas.

Chapter 3: Resisting documenta: documenta 14, A Post-Internet Connection

Introduction

The video, *Thirty-Three Situations* by artist Anna Daučíková, pans from images of various people or scenery outside a window to a paper printout (fig. 3.1). Each account is formulated in a template comprised of rows and columns, “evoking the aesthetics of a repressive state apparatus, of police dossiers or medical files.” The template offers an unjudgmental perspective, presenting the information as documented recollections. The single sheet of paper narrates thirty-three individual cases of different people’s experiences of having a “secret life.” Daučíková, who lived in the former Soviet Union in the 1980s, narrates these situations as a particular form of survival in an oppressive regime. For instance, in one case, under the column, “Place,” details, “Union of Artists – Moscow Division. Policy Chief Office*/Small room, furnished with writing wardrobe, table and chairs. Dirty tan linoleum on the floor.”³⁵⁵ The column, “Persons,” details, “Policy Chief: woman, around 55 old./Corpulent, blond dyed hair, freckled face, tired eyes/ She became a member of the Communist party when she was 20. Soon after, she had a hot sexual adventure with her boss, a spectacular woman, who nonetheless soon disappeared. Later she had countless love affairs only with her male colleagues of all ranks/ Artists, two males and one female are sitting in front of her. At this point, they entirely forgot about their sexualities.”³⁵⁶ The account describes how their political awareness and loyalty to the Soviet Union were tested until, embarrassingly, they all watch a “large cockroach appears

³⁵⁵ Anna Daučíková, “33 Situations (Excerpt),” *d-est*, accessed October 9, 2021, <https://www.d-est.com/33-situations/>.

³⁵⁶ Daučíková.

walking from beneath the Chief officer's table." An addendum in a final column reads, "*Policy Chief ("Politrak") is responsible for correct political orientation of members of Union of Artists. She gives the main recommendation for processing the visa to travel abroad."³⁵⁷

Figure 3.1: Anna Daučíková, *Thirty-Three Situations*, 2015, digital video, installation view Stadtmuseum Kassel, Kassel, Germany, documenta 14. Photo: Removed for copyright

In another account, a 23-year-old man named "Andrei" is described as "living in one room of 16 square meters with his mother and young sister" and enjoying "games of fooling and cheating."³⁵⁸ In the communal kitchen in the apartment building, Andrei was lying on the "green rubber floor" for 24 hours, "being stepped over by his neighbours and members of his family until one of them realizes that he is dead*."³⁵⁹ The postscript describes how Andrei had taken a "handful of miscellaneous drugs to make the state of his health unacceptable at the Military Service control." He was found inadequate for service, and to celebrate, he purchased "two bottles of vodka and one bottle of port-wine" but died after drinking one of his bottles.³⁶⁰

The details of these accounts demonstrate complicity with or fear of authority or neglect or dismissal of community. Although some accounts are fictionalized, Daučíková creates and re-creates these accounts "as proof of the times, but also as proof of a certain parallel way of life that all these people lived to survive."³⁶¹ The difficulties of daily life require concessions for individual survival, which is perhaps necessary when life feels too hopeless to resist outspoken measures. In some ways, *33 Situations* provides an alternative illustration of

³⁵⁷ Daučíková.

³⁵⁸ Daučíková.

³⁵⁹ Daučíková.

³⁶⁰ Daučíková.

³⁶¹ Daučíková.

resistance, or individuals' minor acts of resistance by maintaining and living their lives, if still in secret.

Quiet, passive, or daily resistances are arguably a more nuanced form of resistance, where resistance is a corollary to understanding power as intrinsic to the social world. It is also on a smaller, lived scale, brought together with the expansive and global scale. The 14th edition of documenta (d14), which occurred April 8, 2017-September 17, 2017, enacted passive, and active resistance with debatable critical success, partly due to the size of the biennial. It was a particularly sizeable exhibition compared to that of previous iterations. This ambitious edition with 160 artists, led by artistic director Adam Szymczyk, hosted documenta in two cities and two countries, Kassel, Germany and Athens, Greece, as a discursive generator of politically, socially, and culturally constructed narratives. Despite the discursive importance of hosting d14 in two cities, exhibition reviews of the biennial included such adjectives as “sprawling,” “indecisive,” and “expansive” to denote the unwieldy nature of the event. Some reviewers even remarked that having missed events: *The New York Times* journalist Jason Farago and critic Evelyn Wilson are two such examples. For instance, Farago admitted in his review that he missed Marta Minujín’s performance, *Payment of Greek Debt to Germany with Olives and Art* in the lobby of the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) in Athens.³⁶² Wilson remarked her time in Athens “was too short” to see more than two venues.³⁶³ Art historian Andrew Stefan Weiner asserted d14 was following a trend established by earlier documenta editions, where, “There simply isn’t a stable position from which anyone person could capably evaluate

³⁶² Jason Farago, “Documenta 14, a German Art Show’s Greek Revival,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 2017, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/09/arts/design/documenta-14-a-german-art-shows-greek-revival.html>.

³⁶³ Evelyn Wilson, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 17, no. 1 (2018): 128-130.

all this material and render a meaningful judgment of it.”³⁶⁴ As such, d14 exemplified Weiner’s valuable concerns regarding the unstable and fragmented reality of contemporaneity, which has particular relevance when considering the biennial alongside the internet and the post-internet condition. I pursue an internet mode of analysis because the temporal and spatial structures of the internet exist within and because of processes of globalization that also produce, replicate, and constitute biennials. The internet, therefore, offers critical value for reading d14 as unstable and fractured, signalling processes of fragmentation that unhinge totalizing notions, resulting in d14 being a biennial of resistance. I argue d14 is a biennial of resistance because its curation “hacked” or resisted institutional exhibition conventions, advocating for multi-sitedness and entanglements. d14’s resistivity is particularly in part due to its focus on political tensions between the global North and the global South, offering a fragmented temporal structure, and lastly, highlights processes of fragmentation through subjective spectatorship. As a result, d14’s curation challenges/resists traditional modalities of Western/Eurocentric art history.

To demonstrate the relevance of the internet, and what I call *post-internet contemporaneity*, and to convey d14’s engagement with resistance to Eurocentric modes of art history and the global contemporary art world, I draw a comparison between curatorial selection and the logic of computer algorithms that mediate content for users. Curators can hack institutional exhibition traditions to change algorithmic processes – which even saw and gave space to resistance and fragmentation through artistic participation, as discussed by the

³⁶⁴ Weiner, “The Art of the Possible: With and Against Documenta 14,” Biennial Foundation, August 14, 2017, <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2017/08/art-possible-documenta-14/>.

artistic performance and protest by a Greek LGBTQ+Refugee group. I draw parallels between the structures and governance of the internet and critiques of the d14 exhibition articulated. d14 presented a multi-temporal edition modelled after what I argue can be conceived through the lens of Robert Hassan's conception of the internet as Network Time to fragment a universal temporal structure. This is to say, that typically when people are connected to the internet, they have the ability to create their own context-dependent understandings of time. I reiterate this point through a visual analysis of Daniel Knorr's d14 contribution *Materialization* (2017). Lastly, I argue that there is a parallel between fragmented and subjective visitor (or user) experience as mediated by the curators and what Caroline A. Jones calls the "aesthetic experience" of biennial culture. Here I examine the public programming of d14, and Marta Minujín's participatory artwork, *The Parthenon of Banned Books* (2017).

documenta – A Short Historical Contextualisation

documenta was inaugurated in Kassel, West Germany, in 1955 by a group of twenty-two artists, art teachers and others. Some of the initiating members were affiliated or benefited from the National Socialist German Worker's Party Nazi (NS) regime, while others suffered at the hands of the NS regime³⁶⁵ – paralleling Kassel's position as an artistic site for documenta and its participation as the main ammunition factory for the NS.³⁶⁶ The initiation of documenta

³⁶⁵ The group included Arnold Bode, Werner Haftmann and others, despite Bode often being singled as the founding father of documenta. The network of relation between the members is not yet known. Mirl Redmann, "Reconstruction of the I: The National Socialist Past of documenta's Founders," *HOW? WOW! WOW...: Study Session*, presentation, Kassel, Germany, July 17, 2019.

³⁶⁶ Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1-2,12-15.

was part of Germany's rehabilitation in the Western democratic world, with new nation-building rhetoric to reconnect Germany with modern art that was previously considered degenerate by the NS. Initially, the documenta exhibitions were concerned with modern art's artistic, social, and political viability and continuity, focusing on itself as a paradigm-setting contemporary art exhibition.³⁶⁷ In this way, documenta has always been related to specific contemporary socio-political contexts, responsible as a commentary of its contemporary times. In an interview, Szymczyk claims this aim is above that of showcasing contemporary art.³⁶⁸ The curatorial ambition reflects Szymczyk's proclamation by reflecting on political and economic contemporary conditions and tensions brought on by neoliberalism, colonialism, and abuses of power, rather than newly commissioned artworks that purely satisfy contemporary art world and art market consumption.

To put this ambition to fruition, d14 was split between Athens, Greece and its long-time host city, Kassel, Germany. It was not the first edition of documenta that was not exclusively in Kassel or the first edition to take a postcolonial critique. Specifically, the 9th edition of documenta in 1992, curated by Jan Hoet, critiqued Euro-American hegemony. In 1997, Catherine David theoretically elaborated on postcolonialism, and the 11th edition (d11), curated by Okwui Enwezor, is widely considered to be the first postcolonial documenta. Subsequent editions continued to curate with a postcolonial perspective. Enwezor's edition was not

³⁶⁷ Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness – Learning and Working from Athens," in *The documenta 14 Reader*, ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, (Munich, Germany: Prestel, 2017) 22-25.

³⁶⁸ He stated: "Documenta is an exhibition on contemporary issues, not necessarily of contemporary art...Documenta since its inauguration has also been a meta-exhibition — making a statement about the contemporary world, of which culture is a sensitive part, a cognitive extension." In interview with Catrin Lorch, "Blind Spot," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 15, 2015, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kunst-der-blinde-fleck-1.2434563>.

exclusively held in Kassel, with seminars and exhibitions hosted in different cities, specifically Vienna, Austria, New Delhi, India, the West Indian island of St. Lucia, and four African cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's edition in 2012 also exhibited outside of Kassel, in Kabul, Alexandria-Kairo, and Banff.

d14 elaborated on the postcolonial perspectives seen in these earlier editions and is perhaps most indebted to the 2002 edition of documenta curated by Enwezor and his curatorial team – Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya – because of d11's postcolonial perspective of globalization constituted by temporally fragmented subjective positions. This edition has been acclaimed by many as the “first truly postcolonial biennial to be held in one of the ‘centres’ of the Western art field, taking up and working with this dissident understanding of non-Western art.”³⁶⁹ d11 was curated from the understanding that non-Western art was a contradiction and Western projection. “Not only does the Western search for so-called ‘authentic/ art outside the Western art market’s systems of circulation holds the danger of fuelling the notion of the so-called indigenous ‘Other’,” Oliver Marchart states, “it also fails to recognize the agency of non-Western artists in their active appropriations of Western modernity, making these artists less non-Western than the West would like them to be.”³⁷⁰ In complicating the dynamic between Western and Western art, d11 positioned Latin American artists whose work is politically conceptual, such as Luis Camnitzer, Artur Barrio or Cildo Meireles, and likewise African artists, such as Bruly Bouabré along with

³⁶⁹ Oliver Marchart, “The Globalization of Art and the “Biennials of Resistance: A History of the Biennials from the Periphery - ONCURATING,” *Cumma Papers* #7, 2014, 7, <https://cummastudies.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cumma-papers-7.pdf>.

³⁷⁰ Marchart, 7.

European conceptual artists, such as Hanne Darboven, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Maria Eichhorn. By doing so, he was attempting to dismantle the racist cliché and primitivist notion that art from outside Europe is more ‘emotional’ and not founded on ‘intellect’ by framing all these artists as conceptual artists.

Exhibition conventions were also challenged when d11 hosted discursive platforms before the exhibition in Kassel. Hosting the exhibition second, symbolically reversed the traditional relationship between art and discourse to discourse and art. The discursive platforms outnumbered the exhibition as only one of the five platforms. The platforms addressed topics such as democracy, truth, and reconciliation (in South Africa and consideration of the development of African megacities and creolization) instead of topics solely related to the art field. These platforms, as previously mentioned, were held in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, Lagos, and St. Lucia, spatially challenging the primitivist notion of the biennial “centre” in Kassel, much like d14. Marchart calls these efforts the “de-Kasselization of Kassel,” even if they are only in a “centre” deemed a “centre” once every five years.³⁷¹

It is important to consider d11’s concentration on decentralizing what would be considered the global North and debunking Western art historical myths. The platforms format had a threefold purpose for the curatorial team. In his introductory text in the d11 catalogue, Enwezor clarified:

As an exhibition project, Documenta11 begins from the sheer side of extraterritoriality: firstly, by displacing its historical context in Kassel; secondly, by moving outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus

³⁷¹ Marchart, 5.

of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.³⁷²

As Enwezor's statement notes, the platforms were a threefold proposition. As Anthony Gardner and Charles Green summarize, the platforms were first "a manifesto, a rhetorical gesture and an outline of a plan for the future."³⁷³ The platforms were conceived to function together, offering different "vantage points." Gardner and Green outline:

the view was prospective in that the participants [invitees] described future reconciliation in the political, cultural, and social spheres – sometimes in their papers or later, in Kassel, in their works of art – in utopian or sometimes dystopian visions. Their views were, equally, retrospective in that the Platform speakers and, just as obviously, Kassel's artists were documenting and mapping the global present.³⁷⁴

Gardner and Green state that the global present d11 was attempting to map was the idea of "not elsewhere, but a deep entanglement,"³⁷⁵ where all five platforms and their host cities were equally important. It is this third understanding of platform that sets d11 apart from the then-familiar usage as "a matrix-like assemblages of software that is so open and permeable that it permits interoperability and easy plug-ins, and in turn linking this to the highly informal, relational art of the late 1990s."³⁷⁶ Gardner and Green compare d11 to the 2003 Venice Biennale, *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, curated by Francesco Bonami to convey how Enwezor's "artistic priorities [differed] despite the common network within which both curators moved."³⁷⁷ Bonami premised the 50th edition of the Venice Biennale on that third

³⁷² Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box - ONCURATING," *On-Curating*, June 2020, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/the-black-box.html>.

³⁷³ Gardner and Green, "Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the 'Global' Exhibition - ONCURATING."

³⁷⁴ Gardner and Green.

³⁷⁵ Gardner and Green.

³⁷⁶ Gardner and Green.

³⁷⁷ Gardner and Green.

idea of platforms, relying on decade-old terms of “conviviality,” and “sociability,” using a global vernacular for passive politics. d11, alternatively, stressed entanglements to demonstrate ideas of global avant-garde art and to re-evaluate exhibition-making practices.³⁷⁸

As has been made evident, earlier documenta editions established an institutional lineage of postcoloniality for resistance that the d14 curators chose to continue. Through critical discussions and the ability of biennials to reach wider audiences, art historians have argued for the potential of biennials to provide models of resistance to the hegemony established by art institutions and Western art history.³⁷⁹ Specifically, Enwezor has claimed that biennials expose “the limits and contradictions of Western epistemologies.”³⁸⁰ Building on Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and Michel de Certeau’s “idea of the everyday user as not a passive consumer and receiver of culture but an active participant and agent whose critical engagement with culture makes the complexity of its meaning more focused,”³⁸¹ Enwezor argues that “postcolonial subjective claims (multiculturalism, liberation theology, resistance art, feminist and queer theory, questions of third cinema, antiapartheid, environmental and ecological movements, rights of Indigenous peoples, minority demands, etc.)”³⁸² have transformed biennial spectatorship. The singular concept of spectatorship becomes diffused, different, and fragmentary because of counter-hegemonic conceptions of looking in the wake of globalization. What Enwezor calls “the hegemonic concept of spectatorial totality” is

³⁷⁸ Gardner and Green.

³⁷⁹ See Paul O’Neill and Oliver Marchart

³⁸⁰ Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form (2004),” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 439.

³⁸¹ Enwezor, 441–42.

³⁸² Enwezor, 442.

replaced with the idea of “general spectatorship,” which is tied to neither the logic of the nation-state nor that of imperialism, meaning it has not yet been homogenized by institutional logic.³⁸³ That is, since biennials function under the nation-state’s view of culture, they operate with and within globalization mechanisms. When viewed through Mikhail Bakhtin’s theorization of the carnivalesque, in some instances, Enwezor asserts, biennials strategically resist “de-personalization and acculturation of global capitalism”³⁸⁴ by still transmitting perceptions of what constitutes culture. In parallel and as will be discussed, the internet, arguably is always carnivalesque, is never experienced in its totality, having the potential to be driven by active users (general spectators) within larger globalized and networked systems. The biennial is the medium because it is an ideological tool utilized for hegemonic or counter-hegemonic purposes.

In “A Response to Okwui Enwezor,” George Baker critiqued Enwezor’s crucial importance of spectatorship and audience. Baker contended that because of the size of biennials, they could not be “taken in, digested, understood, or read in any complete manner” and that the “sublime scale serves the function of obfuscation.”³⁸⁵ Baker calls this a “phenomenological violence” imposed on spectators that are augmented by a “social violence” by the increasing demand to see art at biennials. The implication, here, is that there is a singular or total understanding to be accessed by spectators. Moreover, biennial spectators are professionally associated with them as sites of exclusivity for Baker. Baker agrees there are

³⁸³ Enwezor, 442–44.

³⁸⁴ Enwezor, 444.

³⁸⁵ George Baker, “The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 448.

benefits to local audiences but criticises Enwezor's underdevelopment of "diasporic public spheres" (that is, the deterritorialized experience of moving media by viewers, in the face of the nation-state as the key arbiter of culture) to fragment processes of globalization. Biennials, in this sense, are not "readymade" and possible paradigm shifts deterritorialize spectators to encounter different artistic works and visual cultural expressions without wholly possessing them. Biennials, like diasporic public spheres, become spaces where cultural translation, by way of mass mobility and mass mediation, "postulates an open-ended relationship, with a variety of institutional productions and private experiences," thereby fragmenting spatial and temporal orientations of the biennial (or in the case of the "diasporic public sphere," the global city).³⁸⁶ As a result, Enwezor's less possessive, deterritorialized, and fragmented spectatorship unhinges universalised notions of art and culture, not dissimilar to how I am framing d14's post-internet's framework and mediated position as different but equal fragments of contemporary art and culture for d14's spectators.

The Internet, Post-Internet, Art, and Exhibitions

d14 was not the first large-scale biennial, nor the first large-scale documenta for that matter; nor are large-scale exhibitions exclusively associated with documenta. In fact, large-scale international and global biennial exhibitions have an even longer history with encyclopedic or representational curating, where artworks are positioned as representing objective value. documenta embodied its educational aims through encyclopedic orders of

³⁸⁶ Enwezor, 440.

knowledge of “inventory, compare, and organise the relevant contemporary moment.”³⁸⁷

Caroline A. Jones argues more broadly that the representation of artworks and artefacts displayed in biennials are linked to the “international” or “global,” reshaping/create worlds as ancestors of world’s fairs and universal expositions.³⁸⁸ However, there have been curatorial changes since the early twentieth-century and more dramatically after the 1960s, shifting towards *the curatorial* rather than curating. The curatorial departs from the logic of representation, instead “emphasizing the referential and relational dimensions of presenting art, which transforms exhibitions into spaces where things are ‘taking place’ rather than ‘being shown.’”³⁸⁹ Largely this transformation and departure from representation, as outlined by art historians Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, is a result of the expanded and dematerialized status of the art object, a change in the relation of the artwork to the viewer from contemplation to participation, and a changed relation to the institution where institutional practice aims at social change.³⁹⁰ Sternfeld and Ziaja propose is curation as *post-representational*. For them, post-representational curation is a return to “the role of history and research, of organizing, creating a public and education.” Post-representational curating is characterised by understanding curating as performing the archive. Sternfeld and Ziaja understand the archive “as a discourse that intervenes in the hegemonic canon of knowledge.”³⁹¹ The second feature is

³⁸⁷ Gardner and Green, “Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the ‘Global’ Exhibition - ONCURATING,” 21.

³⁸⁸ See Jones, *The Global Work of Art*.

³⁸⁹ Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, “What Comes After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating,” *Open Space* 03 (2013), accessed July 19, <http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013/en/journal.php?j=3&t=5>. Also see, Victoria Horne, Kirsten Lloyd, Jenny Richards, and Catherine Spender, “Taking Care: Feminist Curatorial Pasts, Presents and Futures,” *On Curating* Issue 27 (December 2015), accessed July 19, 2019, <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/taking-care-feminist-curatorial-pasts-presents-and-futures.html#.XTMJ85NKjBI>.

³⁹⁰ Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, “What Comes After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating,” *OPEN Space*, no. 3, accessed August 2, 2021, <http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013/en/journal.php?j=3&t=5>.

³⁹¹ Sternfeld and Ziaja.

curating as an organization, where the organization takes antagonism into account for curating to be processual. Lastly, post-representational curating engages with the educational turn in curating as “exploring possibilities of an alternative and emancipatory production of knowledge that resists, supplements, thwarts, undercuts, or challenges powerful canons.”³⁹² d14’s curation is, arguably, post-representational, since the curators engaged with the curatorial as Sternfeld and Ziaja describe. However, while the framework of the encyclopedic and representational exhibition is useful in terms of understanding how artworks are transformed by the symbolic, it does not actively engage with the global geopolitical reality simultaneous with the curatorial; this chapter is interested in considering d14 in relation to the vast scale of the internet.

The internet is a product and mechanism of replicating global systems, where, as sociologist Marianne Franklin notes, the internet allows for the recognition that is a product of sociocultural and political-economic forces that are simultaneously experiencing historical change; I would say, this is not unlike exhibitions. Moreover, there is also its perceived vast availability, amount of content, and what I call the *vast multiplicity of experiences* available to users of the internet that is useful because it is not dissimilar to d14’s focus on availability, amount of content, and the multiplicity of experiences sought after by Szymczyk and his team. The internet and its constituent technologies utilize networks that are concurrently in motion, resulting in anchored yet delocalized users. The internet is not only a digital reality of daily life, where it has become “as a synecdoche of how the world has been changing and how people access this world and see themselves in it.”³⁹³ What becomes useful about the internet as a

³⁹² Sternfeld and Ziaja.

³⁹³ Marianne Franklin, *Digital Dilemmas Power, Resistance, and the Internet*, 2014, 201, <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9780199982714>.

reference is that it provides new ways of thinking about how biennials are nodes in larger global networks that are simultaneously, fragmentary while connected, anchored in the local, yet delocalized in the global.

There has long been an interest, engagement, and influence of computers and internet technologies on artists, curating art, and how scholars write about both. Early internet art of the 1990s had practitioners referring to net.art, net art or internet art. Positioning internet art or net art, art historically, art historian Rachel Greene indebts internet art to conceptual art because of “its emphasis on audience interaction, transfer of information and use of networks simultaneously bypassing the autonomous status traditionally ascribed to art objects.”³⁹⁴ Art existing online or dealing with internet culture has technological, economic, and social specifications. From its “early heroic phase” to its commercialization and the more current revival of the user-generated tradition,³⁹⁵ the evolution of the internet contrasts with early internet arts. The distribution of post-internet arts heavily relies on social networking platforms.³⁹⁶ These platforms have led to the use of the internet as a medium and environment for art. With networked individualism or digital identity formation defining current internet usage, the result, curator Jennifer Chan states, is “careful [online] self-curation” (which parallels the growing application of the verb “curate” to activities outside of the art world) and “indiscriminate over-sharing.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ Rachel Greene, *Internet Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 31.

³⁹⁵ James Curran, “Rethinking Internet History,” in *Misunderstanding the Internet*, ed. Des Freedman, James Curran and Natalie Fenton, (New York, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012): 59.

³⁹⁶ Jennifer Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet Art,” in *You Are Here — Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (UK: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014): 110.

³⁹⁷ Chan, 110.

Even though the scope of internet art is still evolving, the term “post-internet” was introduced by artist Marisa Olson to describe the “necessity and influence of the internet on everyday life and subsequently, art practice.”³⁹⁸ By no means is the intention of the prefix to imply that the internet is over. Chan reduces the breadth of what constitutes post-internet art to “a philosophical translation of online culture and practices into the physical world.”³⁹⁹ Chan clarifies that post-internet “does not purport that the internet is obsolescent.”⁴⁰⁰ Rather “there are many overlapping interests between internet art, post-internet, and the New Aesthetic – ideas that developed coterminously due to the artistic use of the internet as a mass medium, and the translation of its underpinning ideas into physical spaces.”⁴⁰¹ Technological and new media stipulations are no longer a criterion as art critic Gene McHugh situates post-internet as a departure from these constraints.⁴⁰² Post-internet art lacks aesthetic and/or political cohesion.

Similar to post-digital, post-internet offers a paradigm for understanding the impact of digital domination. Unlike post-internet, post-digital, as described by Ian Andrews, refers to a rejection of the digital revolution.⁴⁰³ Aesthetically, according to Mel Alexenberg, this means post-digital artists are concerned with the “humanization of digital technologies.”⁴⁰⁴

Purportedly, post-internet is more concerned with internet technologies and cultures. Even

³⁹⁸ Marisa Olson, “Post-internet,” *Foam Magazine*, Issue 29, (November 16, 2012): 59–63.

³⁹⁹ Chan, 110.

⁴⁰⁰ Chan, 107.

⁴⁰¹ Chan, 107.

⁴⁰² Gene McHugh, *Post Internet* (Brescia: Link Editions, 2011).

⁴⁰³ Ian Andrews, “Post-digital Aesthetics and the return to Modernism,” accessed July 19, 2019, <http://www.ian-andrews.org/texts/postdig.html>.

⁴⁰⁴ Melvin Alexenberg, *The Future of Art in a Postdigital Age: From Hellenistic to Hebraic Consciousness*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 35.

though post-digital is also an imprecise term, it is often merely used to frame a generational movement of art.⁴⁰⁵ However, already the term post-internet is considered by some as outdated. The fact that the term, post-internet, is already passé “is further evidence of the ubiquity of the conditions it seeks to encapsulate.”⁴⁰⁶ Artistic production and discourse happen on an increasingly broader scale, in conjunction with the speed and acceleration of technologies ensuring a perpetual out-of-date-ness to content.

Curatorial and institutional interest in internet art and accompanying changes to art and art practice has seen numerous exhibitions. Such exhibitions include *Programmed: Rules, Codes, and Choreographies in Art, 1965–2018* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, (2019), which conceptually explored uses of the programming, with artworks that focused on instructions, rules, and algorithms in the artistic content, and instructions and algorithms used to manipulate TV programs and image sequences. *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today* (2018) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, was more interested in how the internet changed art production, distribution, and reception. This exhibition included a range of artistic media, including painting, performance, and web-based projects to explore ideas of bodily enhancement, the internet as a site of surveillance and resistance, and subjective positions, to name a few. *Thinking Machines Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959–1989* (2018) at the Museum of Modern Art (New York, USA), which looked at art made by computers and computational thinking systems. There are also the exhibitions *Open Codes* (2017-2019) and *net*

⁴⁰⁵ Lauren Cornell, Halter, Ed, and Phillips, Lisa, eds. *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press. 2015).

⁴⁰⁶ Sean Lowry, “Curating with the Internet,” in *A Companion to Museum Curation*, ed. Brad Buckley and John Conomos, (Oxford; UK: forthcoming October 2019; 2018): 9.

condition (1999) at the ZKM Centre for Art and Media. *Open Codes* has had two editions, with the first interested in various kinds of codes, such as Morse, genetic, and digital codes, and the second edition is interested in the world as a “field of data” and how data dictates our interactions within the world. *net condition* was not about net.art, per se, but rather it was “about the artist's look at the way society and technology interact with each other, are each other's »condition«.” Lastly, there was *Cybernetic Serendipity* (1968) at the Institute of Contemporary Art (London, UK), which was the “international exhibition in the UK devoted to the relationship between the arts and new technology.”⁴⁰⁷ The exhibition was interested in the real and possible crossover and links between artists, art, science, and scientists. There has even been the online establishment of the Digital Museum of Digital Art, which was created in 2013 for the preservation, collection, and commission of digital and virtual reality arts.

Surveying art history, the relationship between artistic production and technology has notably been theorized by Walter Benjamin with his essay “Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (1936). For Benjamin, the aura (the originality and authenticity) of a work of art has been lost with film and reproducibility. In the 1960s, with the early development of the internet, when the military and the space race sponsored internet technological advances, writer Jack Burnham analogized technology and subsequent changes for art systems and artists.⁴⁰⁸ Film critic Bill Nichols in 1988 considered cybernetics shifts from mechanical reproduction to computer systems and technological consequences to art and economic and

⁴⁰⁷ Catherine Mason, “Cybernetic Serendipity: History and Lasting Legacy,” accessed January 7, 2022, <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/cybernetic-serendipity-history-and-lasting-legacy>.

⁴⁰⁸ Jack Burnham, “System Esthetics,” *Artforum* (September 1968): 31-35.

social structures.⁴⁰⁹ Beyond technical impacts, digital humanities scholars Charlie Gere and Hazel Gardiner's edited volume *Art Practice in the Digital Age* (2010) considered collective usage and technological networks as a result of the internet with a broad scope on the subject. Networked systems and institutional responses, specifically given emerging artistic immateriality, reproduction, and alternative distribution mechanisms on the internet, have also been addressed by curator Steve Dietz.⁴¹⁰ In terms of the impact of curating in the internet age, art historian Boris Groys argues that curatorial selection in the age of the internet "reinstates the universalist project of modern and contemporary art" because it creates "a unified space of representation, equally representing different fragments."⁴¹¹ As a result, Groys claims that for biennial exhibitions to be relevant, they must "present universal, global art and culture of a non-existent utopian global state."⁴¹²

Art historian Sean Lowry views an important aspect of "post-internet culture" as an irrelevance between virtual and physical distinctions of contexts. Representations of virtual and physical contexts should not be limited to in-between representations but rather inclusive of and considering varying pasts and ongoing interpretations of virtual and physical representations and the in-betweens in the shared contemporary temporality. I use the term post-internet predicated on the relational and anachronistic temporality that is intrinsic to the internet itself. Rhizome's Artistic Director Michael Connor affirms that the term "post-internet"

⁴⁰⁹ Bill Nichols, "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems," *Screen* Volume 29, Issue 1, (Winter 1988): 22–47.

⁴¹⁰ Steve Dietz, "Curating (on) the Web," *Museums and the Web*, April 1998, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw98/papers/dietz/dietz_curatingtheweb.html.

⁴¹¹ Boris Groys, "Curating in the Post-Internet Age," *e-flux* Journal #94 (October 2018), accessed June 20, 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/94/219462/curating-in-the-post-internet-age/>.

⁴¹² Groys, "Curating in the Post-Internet Age."

has adapted with the evolution of the internet, constantly requiring artists, and more broadly, everyone who uses the internet, to re-evaluate their critical positions. Therefore, post-internet represents a critically evolving dialogue rather than as a clear demarcation of “before” or “after.”⁴¹³ Curating a politically engaged d14 meant there was curatorial engagement with complex social relations in distributed systems (economic and social formations between multiple agents in on- and offline networks) in a post-internet framework. As a result, many curated elements challenged Eurocentric institutional exhibition conventions, partly because they were unavailable to visitors due to their ephemerality or geographic distances. In doing so, the curators conceptually advocated for negotiation and entanglement between its cities in the global North and the global South, ultimately proposing for d14 visitors a fragmentary and unique experience rather than an official and unitary experience. Even though d14 is a biennial in the global North, it questions the dichotomy between the global North and the global South, as upheld by Hoskote’s framework for biennials of resistance, mobilizing “South” as a concept, thereby positioning d14 as a biennial of resistance.

Curating Algorithms and Unlearning Systems

While the term post-internet evidently has been related to artistic practice, the impact of the internet and internet technologies, I argue, has equally affected curatorial practice and exhibition-making. With regards to the curator as “performer of the image” given digitization,

⁴¹³ Michael Connor, “Post-Internet: What it Is and What it Was,” in *You Are Here — Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (UK: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 57.

“the curator has usurped the role of the artist,” according to Osborne.⁴¹⁴ Simply put, “curators are content producers and selectors.”⁴¹⁵ Regarding the implications of the internet on curating, art historian Julian Stallabrass argues that the “post-medium condition” of internet art enables malleability with a lack of final versions and multiple iterations.⁴¹⁶ Stallabrass’ argument extends to the broader implications of net art and internet art in relation to mainstream galleries and art markets. The flexibility of net art and internet art for Stallabrass complicates the commercial integration and the role of the curator. Comparatively, art theorist Joasia Krysa asserts that curating should and has changed the given immateriality of social, communication, information, and network systems. New forms of “self-organizing and self-replicating systems, databases, programming, code and source code, net art, software art and generative media within the wider cultural system” has new curatorial models emerging, such as “software curating.” Software curating, according to Krysa, engages with the literal and metaphorical program, programming of and processes on which the program relies to run.⁴¹⁷

Between the online realm, the ascension of the curator, and the professionalization of the art world, curating is an authorial practice that attempts to affiliate with or appeal to different audiences or consumers. The contemporary condition of the “curationist moment” has become part of everyday life experiences, where self-branding and identity formation are concerns of individuals, celebrities, and corporations, having wider implications for the figure of

⁴¹⁴ Osborne, 130.

⁴¹⁵ Lowry, 3.

⁴¹⁶ Julian Stallabrass, “Can Art History Digest Net Art,” in *Netpioneers 1.0 – Contextualising Early Net-Based Art*, ed. Julian Stallabrass (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 165-179.

⁴¹⁷ Joasia Krysa, “Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems,” in *Curating Immateriality (Data Browser 03)*, ed. Joasia Krysa (New York: Autonomedia, 2006), 10.

the art world curator.⁴¹⁸ Professional curators organise and arrange exhibitions but also create multifaceted events that include conferences, texts, or workshops. Curating itself has become to be acknowledged as an art of its own.⁴¹⁹

The rise of the internet has seen the rise of algorithmic processes of information sorting and distribution. The increased visibility and access made possible by digital databases has paralleled what scholar Lars Bang Larsen surmises is the acceptable curatorial practice of exhibition-making separate from physical archives.⁴²⁰ To put it generously, algorithmic processes make informed predictions based on previous behaviours by humans. Algorithms increasingly influence everyday decisions as companies and social networking sites track and index personal internet usage. Understandably, there has been some recent anxiety over the impact of algorithms given their pervasiveness in daily life, which inform societies' political, social, and economic choices. The notable critic is Eli Pariser, who worries that the tailored information results in "filter bubbles," "information cocoons," or "echo chambers." Pariser reiterates Groys' cautions of the danger of information confirming value sets and that limit intersecting or diverse information. Furthermore, there is the potential devaluation of information that is not immediately perceived as relevant.

The strengths of algorithms, according to art theorists Christian Nagler and Joseph del Pesco, is their "ability to learn, deepen, complexify its relationship to a dataset through various recursive and reflective functions; and the ability to approach information with semantic

⁴¹⁸ David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, Pluto Press, 2014), 53.

⁴¹⁹ Balzer, 20.

⁴²⁰ Christian Nagler and Joseph del Pesco, "Curating in the Time of Algorithms," *Fillip*, Issue No.15 (Fall 2011): 53.

neutrality – that is, to avoid being influenced by the data it processes.”⁴²¹ These strengths are part of the skillsets of curators to build on previous knowledge to produce new information, offering organization to cultural production and filtering artworks. Nagler and del Pesco argue curators produce similar work of algorithms because curators have the ability to search and sort large quantities of art, given their global scope, and make new connections and dialogues.⁴²² Admittedly, their argument negates the human biases and faults of algorithms’ creators and the relational decision processes required by curators. What is gained by their analogy is an understanding of the unseen distilling and mediating operations practiced by curators, which is then respectively navigated by exhibition visitors.

Digital curating, that is, curating an online exhibition, inevitably, requires different technological, spatial, and temporal parameters than curating in a traditional gallery space, yet operates with similar selection and production processes. For example, established exhibition filters include monographic, historical, or geographical surveys, medium specificity, ahistorical or thematic exhibitions. The parameters of each of these exhibition styles require curators to select from larger datasets of artists. Exhibitions become the operating systems of institutions.⁴²³ More extremely, scholar Manique Hendricks thinks through the potential of algorithms by proposing algorithms take over the role of curators, where museums are the databases.⁴²⁴ Her proposition generates further questions regarding the role of curators in the

⁴²¹ Nagler and del Pesco, 54.

⁴²² Nagler and del Pesco, 60.

⁴²³ Nagler and del Pesco, 60.

⁴²⁴ Manique Hendricks, “Algorithm as Curator: In Search of the Non-Narrated Collection Presentation,” *Stedelijk Studies*, Issue #5 (Fall 2017), accessed June 24, 2019, <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/algorithm-curator-search-non-narrated-collection-presentation/>

current curatorial moment and the accompanying associations to connoisseurship, value, and data-mining for individual consumption.

As sociologist David Beers puts it, “As well as being produced from a social context, the algorithms are lived with, they are an integral part of that social world; they are woven into practices and outcomes.”⁴²⁵ He surmises that algorithms are part of social processes, “modelled on visions of the social world, and with outcomes in mind, outcomes influenced by commercial or other interests and agendas.”⁴²⁶ There is power in algorithms since they are an integrated part of social processes, with “the potential to reinforce, maintain or even reshape visions of the social world, knowledge and encounters with information.”⁴²⁷

Thinking through the power of, what Beers calls, the “notion of the algorithm,” the notion of the algorithm is “part of broader rationalities and ways of seeing the world” and “how the algorithm is envisioned to promote certain values and forms of calculative objectivity.”⁴²⁸ In parallel, exhibitions have long been understood as promoting certain values and propositioning objectivity. Beers’ theorization of the notion of algorithms could easily replace the “notion of the algorithm” with “exhibitions.” He writes, “Within these notions of the algorithm, we are likely to find broader rationalities, knowledge-making and norms – with the concept of the algorithm holding powerful and convincing sway in how things are done or how they should be done.”⁴²⁹ Human geographers Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge agree, contributing that

⁴²⁵ David Beer, “The Social Power of Algorithms,” *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 4.

⁴²⁶ Beer, 4.

⁴²⁷ Ben Williamson, “Computing Brains: Learning Algorithms and Neurocomputation in the Smart City,” *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 84.

⁴²⁸ Beer, 7.

⁴²⁹ Beer, 2.

“algorithms are products of knowledge about the world and how they produce knowledge that then is applied, altering the world in a recursive fashion.”⁴³⁰ Although there is a potential concern regarding algorithms’ power to influence decision making, on- and off- online, algorithms are not inherently good or bad. Rather they are knowledge products and systems of producing knowledge that can, optimistically, change or propose how the world could be. If curators are like algorithms, programming the course of knowledge, they are, however, still human beings and able to shift and produce new (or challenge current) algorithms/systems of knowledge.

To this endeavour, the curators of d14 focused the 2017 edition of documenta on “unlearning,” through theorization and processes of decolonization, where unlearning is the analyzation and deconstruction of the frameworks that constitute specific discourses and knowledge. Arguably “unlearning” fragments/destabilises/resists – or in internet parlance, to hack– the current Eurocentric exhibition/algorithmic practices/code. The title, *Learning from Athens*, was called a “working title,” suggesting the idea of a process rather than a conclusion. The title and the decision to divide d14 were a “bold step in rethinking the location of the show in the centre of Europe and its Occidental viewpoint on contemporary art.”⁴³¹ As described by a member of the (un)education team George Papadopoulos, the curatorial experiment was articulated on a “double axis”: the relocation of the public program through a decolonial logic to Athens and the proposition of a decolonial ethos to contemporary art.⁴³² In doing so, d14

⁴³⁰ Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), 248.

⁴³¹ Georgios Papadopoulos, “Documenta 14 and the Question of Colonialism: Defending an Impossible Position between Athens and Kassel,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 18, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 305.

⁴³² Papadopoulos, 305.

sought to “subvert the ideology according to which Western Europe still holds the position of authority, dictating and the responsibility to teach its Southern neighbours.”⁴³³ Athens was not a “destination of a revived romantic tour where the ruins of ancient temples are replaced or complemented by the ruins of the social body,” art historians Theophilos Tramboulis and Yorgos Tzirzilakis surmise. “However,” they continue, “it has constructed Athens through a twofold statement: on the one hand, it claims Athens to be at the core of European identity, part of the system of Europe’s social and political structures; on the other, that Athens is forever remote from Europe, forever not belonging to Europe, precisely because this proximity/distance makes it something from which we will learn.”⁴³⁴ Athens was arguably symbolically incorporated, imbuing d14’s solidarity with Greece and more broadly with the “South,” alternatively as an *appropriation of “South.”* Szymczyk even postured that “Athens could be anywhere,”⁴³⁵ meaning that the city was just one example where political, social, cultural, and economic crises existed; crises that exist between and in relation to the “North.” What could be misconstrued as a flippant remark neglects the deep-rooted entanglements of why Greece, and the relationship between Germany and Greece, North and South, were subject of d14.

For the curatorial team, the idea of “learning from Athens” meant beginning with “unlearning everything we believe to know.” During the d14 press conference, Szymczyk specified that this meant that “the great lesson is there are no lessons; no school that can

⁴³³ Papadopoulos, 307.

⁴³⁴ Theophilos Tramboulis and Yorgos Tzirzilakis, “When Crisis Becomes Form: Athens as a Paradigm,” *Stedelijk Studies*, 6 (Spring 2018), accessed January 18, 2021, <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/when-crisis-becomes-form-athens-as-a-paradigm/>.

⁴³⁵ Jeni Fulton, “How Documenta 14 Failed Everyone but Its Curators,” *Sleek Magazine*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/documenta-14-kassel/>.

dispense it and that no masters that can tell us how to live and what to do.”⁴³⁶ Unlearning was focused on the institutional and operational level of documenta and the museum. What this meant to the curators was presenting affronting colonial, white-supremacist, and heteronormative musicological practices and history. Artworks engaged with these ideas include works such as *Library* (2017) by artists Annie Vigier Franck Apertet (*les gens d’Uterpan*), which consisted of two library shelves of books that “failed to mention the works of the artists” in order to “display the conventions that critics and connoisseurs establish” exhibited at the Torwache in Kassel; El Hadji Sy’s *La nouvelle muséologie* (2017) at the Benaki Museum comprised of bones, shells, a stone, an axe, and other earth material with a work by Tshibumba Kanda Matulu, an artist who painted a series of works in the 1970s to represent the colonial history of Dakar that was shaped by militarization on two butcher tables; and Daniel García Andújar’s *Disasters of War, Metics Academia* (2017) at EMΣT in Athens and *The Disasters of War, Trojan Horse* (2017) at the Neue Neue Galerie “offered an account of how classical sculptures were employed in the Occidental canon to normalize bodies and identities, drawing connections to racism, evolutionism, criminology and fascism.”⁴³⁷

During the press conference, the public programs curator, Paul Preciado, elaborated on the idea of challenging exhibition and institutional standards and practices in relation to transgender issues and prevailing institutional modes. Referring to the natural history museum in Kassel and the potential targeting by such an institution, Preciado said,

Maybe I could be a subject at the Naturkundemuseum. Many of the artists of this exhibition—themselves, their bodies, their languages, their tradition, their art

⁴³⁶ Hili Perlson, “What Adam Szymczyk Has to Say About Documenta 14,” *artnet News*, April 6, 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/adam-szymczyk-press-conference-documenta-14-916991>.

⁴³⁷ Papadopoulos, 312.

practices—could have been the subject of vitrines. We have been given agency to destroy the vitrines where those considered less than human were exhibited...and become artists and curators. The colonial, the white supremacist, and the heteronormative—they created the modern museum.⁴³⁸

As Preciado notes with regards to exhibition practice, the curators abandoned traditional exhibition strategies. To this endeavour, the curators abandoned a traditional survey catalogue in favour of a guidebook they called the *Daybook*. The *Daybook* did not include traditional book elements such as a table of contents nor specific information detailing the works included in the exhibition. Alternatively, artists were invited to select days, historical or contemporary, to structure a non-alphabetic sequence of artists. Artist entries, written by themselves or by an invited author, typically a curator familiar with their body of work, consisted of summaries of their overall artistic practice or artistic statements rather than entries about the exhibited works in d14. Similarly, the exhibition installation subverted typical exhibition standards, such as by excluding wall texts about the works, and in Athens providing labels that resembled scrolls with a marble nameplate (fig. 3.2) for tombstone information exhibited on the floor rather than on the wall.

⁴³⁸ Nate Freeman, "Documenta 14 Opens in Kassel with Fiery, Combative Press Conference as Curators Pledge to Fight Neo-Fascism," *ARTnews.com*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/documenta-14-opens-in-kassel-with-fiery-combative-press-conference-as-curators-pledge-to-fight-neo-fascism-8469/>.

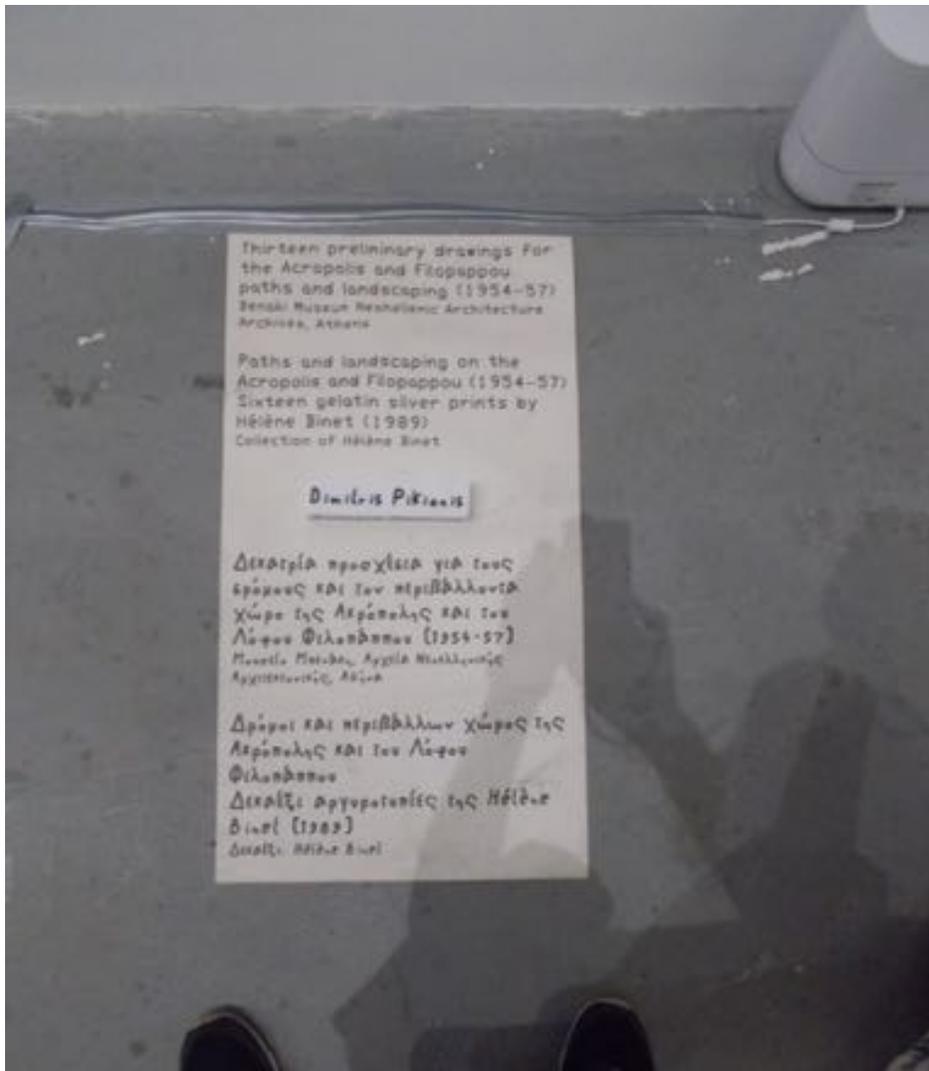


Figure 3.2: Example of tombstone label at d14, in Athens, Greece. Photo: Amy Bruce

Even the graphic design for d14 was used to probe institutional conventions and a singular exhibition branding identity. Four design teams were hired, Vier5, Ludovic Balland, Laurenz Brunner & Julia Born, and Mevis & van Deursen, and were not provided rules or guidelines from the curatorial team. They agreed not to share ideas between the firms in order to generate multiple perspectives on d14's identity. Henriette Gallus, the head of d14's communications team, explained the decision to work with multiple graphic design firms

continued d14's questions of "all notions of one-directional understanding of one right answer to one right question, and re-framing content into recognizable patterns. The approach is conceptual, in the least because we need to accommodate three languages in our communication and design and two locations."⁴³⁹ The result of having multiple firms producing branding material for d14 was four visually distinct aesthetics (fig.3.3). In conjunction with the commissioned graphic outputs, there were numerous non-commissioned graphic outputs by Greek locals that contributed to the d14 visual identity. Throughout Athens, graffitied contributions appeared at the time of d14's installation and continued to appear throughout its duration. Spray painted in stencilled lettering outside the Athenian School of Art, read, "Dear Documenta: I refuse to exoticize myself to increase your cultural capital," (fig. 3.4) to which the graphic design firm Vier5 responded in gest by appropriating stencilled lettering for their graphic material.⁴⁴⁰ The operational imperatives such as the placement of exhibition labels and graphic design were a curatorial attempt to redirect institutional structures, or hack the programmed algorithmic code, to confront the ongoing product and production of Eurocentric museum standards. Among the forms of resistance practiced by d14 was their challenge to exhibition standards in these ways.

Figure 3.3. documenta 14 corporate designs. Photo: Removed for copyright.

⁴³⁹ Madeleine Morley, "Germany's Historic Art Exhibition, Documenta 14, Questions the Omnipotence of Corporate Identity," *Eye on Design* (blog), June 14, 2017, <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/germanys-historic-art-exhibition-documenta-14-questions-the-omnipotence-of-corporate-identity/>.

⁴⁴⁰ "D14, Identities of Critique," Typical Organization for Standards & Order, October 17, 2017, <https://typical-organization.com/documenta-14-visual-identities/>.



Figure 3.4. Poster in Athens. Photo: Amy Bruce

Moreover, there were political and ethical imperatives of *unlearning* extended to visitors of d14. Not only did d14 take place against the backdrop of social and economic

hardships in Greece – urgent political and humanitarian issues such as displacement, migration, colonialism, violence, and protest – the art selected by the curators embodied these themes as a result. For example: *Being Safe is Scary* (2017) by Banu Cennetoğlu inscribed “Being Safe is Scary” onto the neoclassical museum’s frieze, replacing the Museum Fridericianum’s name, a tribute to Kurdish journalist and former freedom fighter Gurbetelli Ersöz, effectively publishing the formerly imprisoned and now deceased journalist’s work in an act of censorial defiance; the film, *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017) by Naeem Mohaiemen, featured documentary footage of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, showcasing the complex political landscape of the Cold War period; and Hiwa K’s *When We were Exhaling* (2017), an installation of twenty ceramic stacked pipes, each arranged with minimal comforts to resemble various rooms of refugees who had squatted in Athens since the European migration crisis in 2015. Because these works were inspired by and drew upon real political figures, historical political movements, and current crises, they necessitated knowledge and awareness of these events and figures by visitors. Ideally, visitors would not only witness the works in d14 but be compelled by them to become politically engaged and motivated. In the press conference, Szymczyk asserted that, collectively, “We must assume responsibility and act as political subjects instead of simply leaving it to elected representatives.”⁴⁴¹ Thus, Szymczyk and his curatorial team saw the coming together of visitors as untapped political potential, as part of the general spectatorship, for which their exhibition would motivate this collective to act in resistance to social and political hegemony. And despite

⁴⁴¹ Julia Michalska, “Politics and Performance Take Centre Stage at Documenta 14 in Athens,” *The Art Newspaper*, April 6, 2017, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/politics-and-performance-take-centre-stage-at-documenta-14-in-athens>.

the geographic distance between the two countries, which could inhibit visitors from participating in d14 in its entirety, audiences were advised to “visit the exhibition according to [one’s] geography” and not to “run to the big venues first...[in order to]...give some insight into how we [the curators] worked on the projects.”⁴⁴² For the curators, the political aim of the works in each city, as transnational cities, had the potential for visitors to become politically motivated in their local contexts. It is evident that d14’s curatorial algorithm, so to say, looked to question the status quo and decolonise traditional canons.

It is also notable that the exhibition practices were critiqued and opposed within d14’s curatorial efforts. For example, a participating LGBTQ+Refugee group in Athens stole part of an artwork in an action that was part performance and part protest called *#rockumenta 14* (2017) (fig. 3.5). Utilizing social media, much like #00BH to publicise their intervention, the collective was invited to participate as part of a performance for the installation by Roger Bernat and Fratini’s, *The Place of the Thing* (2017). Bernat and Fratini’s artwork was conceived to deconstruct the “thingspiel,” a Nazi regime idea for mass theatre. Comprising of a replica of the ancient Greek oath stone, which would be transported by performance groups from Athens to Kassel, collectives would theatrically inscribe their positions to the stone in a political act contrary to sacralising the stone; an emblematic emphasis like that of documenta 14 on Athens. In a statement regarding their theft of the stone, a participating LGBTQ+Refugee group in Athens condemned the “fetishization of refugees and disparage[d] the use of vast resources on the high-profile arts event, while hundreds of thousands of refugees languish invisibly in

⁴⁴² Freeman, “Documenta 14 Opens in Kassel with Fiery, Combative Press Conference as Curators Pledge to Fight Neo-Fascism.”

Greece and across Europe.”⁴⁴³ The rock-napping collective dubbed their act as “Between a rock and a hard place” and decided since rocks cannot speak, they would. Their ransom note continued to outline possible locations of the stone, highlighting the bureaucratic and humanitarian challenges experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. In response to the group’s action, the artists undermined their project calling the stone a “cheap fake” that only held symbolic value.⁴⁴⁴ Yet the symbolic theft was an empowering political act for the collective against Documenta’s presence in Athens, which begs the question, when has symbolism not been important to artists and curators to convey meaning? The curators also made no attempts to hide the collective’s action, arguably accepting the resistance as a part of the inevitable power structure, even within other resistant ideologies.

⁴⁴³ Claire Voon, “LGBTQ Refugee Rights Group Steals Artwork from Documenta in Athens,” *Hyperallergic*, June 1, 2017, <http://hyperallergic.com/382407/lgbtq-refugee-rights-group-steals-artwork-from-documenta-in-athens/>.

⁴⁴⁴ “LGBTQI Refugee Group Steals Documenta 14 Artwork,” *Artforum.org*, May 31, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/news/lgbtqi-refugee-group-steals-documenta-14-artwork-68785>.



Figure 3.5: LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” Statement published on Twitter. May 2017.

Greek-German Networked Relationships

The contention between the Greek and German relationship and the analyses of the dual-sided critiques that resulted from d14 is not dissimilar from the governing structure of the internet and its subsequent criticisms. Debates regarding global internet governance began in the mid-1990s to replace the “ad-hoc solutions and institutional bricolage” with a “more efficient, accountable, transparent, legitimate and democratic Internet governance.”⁴⁴⁵ At this

⁴⁴⁵ Roxana Radu and Jean-Marie Chenou, “Global Internet Policy: A Fifteen-Year Long Debate,” in *The Evolution of Global Internet Governance Principles and Policies in the Making*, by Roxana Radu, Jean-Marie Chenou, and Rolf H Weber (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag GmbH, 2014), 3–4.

time, according to Jean-Marie Chenou and Roxana Radu, “Internet governance was envisaged mostly as the technical issue of allocation of unique domain names and Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.”⁴⁴⁶ “A broader base” or “stakeholders” were required to legitimate governing faculties before Issues regarding ownership of intellectual property or intergovernmental organizations could be confronted. Individuals from intergovernmental organizations composed the International Ad Hoc Committee within the United Nations (UN) as an attempt to root internet governance. The move to institutionalize internet governance within the overarching governing body of the UN, Chenou and Radu explain, “foresaw an overarching role for the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the specialized agency which had been in charge of the regulation of most telecommunications networks since its creation in 1865.”⁴⁴⁷ Subsequent governance systems were created in support from the ITU and outside the United States, which compelled reactionary American government involvement and American internet entrepreneurs to initiate private regulation systems for internet domain names. This resulted in the creation of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in 1998 and was led by the United States Department of Commerce.

The ICANN became a “nexus of political conflict between diverging views on the role of governments in Internet governance,”⁴⁴⁸ according to Chenou and Radu. Non-US governments argued that the ICANN needed more inclusion from national governments and new repartition of roles among stakeholders. The ICANN went through reform processes during the early 2000s,

⁴⁴⁶ Radu and Chenou, 4.

⁴⁴⁷ Radu and Chenou, 5.

⁴⁴⁸ Radu and Chenou, 4–5.

intended to “strengthen the participation of civil society in Internet governance.”⁴⁴⁹ However, the ICANN was still criticised by non-US governments, deemed to be marginal players in internet governance, because ICANN never “relinquished its role as the ultimate authority for the management of critical Internet resources.”⁴⁵⁰ According to historian Richard Hill, internet governance is a new form of imperialism, in what he refers to as “techno-imperialism,” because of the internet policy’s conflation with traditional political imperialism.⁴⁵¹ Hill details that the current internet governance model “allows US entities to influence the economic and policy authority of other nations (and indeed even, to some extent, of the US itself).”⁴⁵² Hill refers to the world order system with developed and developing country terminology, but it is worth noting that he also refers to the shift in geopolitical power in the twentieth-century towards the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa). BRICS and their allies hold competing ideological and economic views to those held by the United States and their allies, which was exemplified by the national delegation votes at the 2012 World Conference on International Telecommunications on a series of revisions to internet regulation.⁴⁵³ Hill addresses this allied division when he discusses developed and developing countries.

⁴⁴⁹ Radu and Chenou, 5.

⁴⁵⁰ In 1998 when ICANN was envisaged, the US statement policy that resulted in its creation stated that the ICANN should “allow the private sector to take leadership for DNS [domain name system] management and national governments now have, and will continue to have, authority to manage or establish policy for their own ccTLDs [country code top-level domain].” See Richard Hill, “Internet Governance: The Last Grasp of Colonialism, or Imperialism by Other Means?,” in *The Evolution of Global Internet Governance: Principles and Policies in the Making*, ed. Jean-Marie Chenou, Roxana Radu, and Rolf H. Weber, 1st ed. 2014 (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg : Imprint: Springer, 2014), 80–81.

⁴⁵¹ Hill, 79.

⁴⁵² Hill, 79.

⁴⁵³ Among the BRICS signatories (with exception of India who voted as a non-signatory) of 2012 ITRs at the WCIT-12 include: Argentina, Bangladesh, Barbados, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Mexico, Nigeria, Panama, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe, to name a few. Non-signatories include Armenia,

Hill goes on to clarify that because the internet is based on a “receiver pays” model, meaning the end-user pays for the content they want, at the level of international connection, this model is viewed by developing countries as penalizing them. This is because poorer countries access more content than they produce, meaning they use and are required to pay for more international bandwidth to obtain less information. Internet access, consequently, costs more for less access in developing countries than in developed countries. Moreover, because telecommunications technology is primarily operated as a barter economy, unlike other important infrastructure, there are high tariffs for connection between Africa and Europe, compared with the tariffs between Europe and North American or Asia and Europe. Policy choices by developed countries reinforce economic domination. Established technical norms by developed countries, barriers include the ability to participate in organizations such as ICANN, the ability to speak English, travel, and hold sufficient technical knowledge. Hill asserts that “certain key norms are developed by private companies and imposed de facto without formal input from users,”⁴⁵⁴ which are typically individual companies from developed countries, where developed countries still maintain influence over the norm-setting organizations.⁴⁵⁵ Private companies from developed countries, as a result, maintain or extend control over economic and policy matters by controlling the development and use of certain technologies, in what Hill refers to as techno-imperialism. Techno-imperialism is not solely motivated by the economic interests of private companies, Hill specifies, but rather, also a technological superiority.⁴⁵⁶ The

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America.

⁴⁵⁴ Hill, 91.

⁴⁵⁵ Hill, 91.

⁴⁵⁶ Hill, 92.

interests of developed countries are conflated with the interest of technologists, so that, as Hill puts it, “traditional colonialism is conflated with techno-imperialism.”⁴⁵⁷

Optimistically, Hill offers ways to change current internet governance. The steps for him are envisaged as accepting discussion and accepting discussion on fundamental issues, accepting comparison with other infrastructures and, lastly, seeking an agreement for equal rights to all countries.⁴⁵⁸ Hill’s proposal for discussion parallels the curators’ proposal for *Learning from Athens* to be a catalyst and proponent of post- and de-colonial discourses in an open-ended forum. Changing the current system of internet governance cannot disassemble existing hegemonic and geopolitical power structures. However, as Hill proposes, it is crucial to discuss fundamental issues in order to seek an agreement to address the current asymmetries in the role of governing. If “the status quo is not considered satisfactory by all,”⁴⁵⁹ then it is imperative, according to Hill, to accept discussion rather than refute it.

The title *Learning from Athens* raises questions such as “What can one learn from Athens?” or “Why should one learn from Athens?” or simply “Why Athens?” These questions proved the difficulty of a divided documenta and the two locations. To answer the question “Why Athens?,” Szymczyk and the curatorial team elaborated that the geographic location of Athens. For them, Athens was “the perceived ‘border’ between Europe, Asia and Africa, its documented millennia-long history, its position in the European imagination as the ‘cradle’ of (European) civilization but, above all, that Athens features many of the challenges and contradictions that Europe currently faces – migration, austerity, crisis of representative

⁴⁵⁷ Hill, 92.

⁴⁵⁸ Hill, 92–93.

⁴⁵⁹ Hill, 94.

democracy, right-wing populism – in their most extreme expression in the continent.”⁴⁶⁰ The curatorial team faced criticism because of the difficult relationship between Germany and Greece, inevitably infusing the interpretation of the d14’s split location. For example, Greek curator iLiana Fokianaki and Secretary-General of the MeRA25 (a left-wing political party in Greece) asserts that the answer to the question “Why Athens?” is woefully and problematically insufficiently answered.⁴⁶¹ Papadopoulos outlines the criticisms as bilateral, coming from both “the left and the right.” He states it was the “conservatives in Germany and especially the alt-right that is represented by the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland)” as being “hostile to the critique of Occidental cultural hegemony and the attempts to rewrite the history of contemporary art attempted by D14 by turning to the ‘backwaters’ of artistic production.”⁴⁶² This criticism seems to be fuelled by the ongoing tensions regarding Second World War reparations and bailout money paid by Germany to Greece. Alternatively, Papadopoulos outlines that “many in Greece, especially from the left, interpreted it [the relocation to Athens] as a (neo)colonial intervention and not as a genuine attempt consistent with a curatorial vision.”⁴⁶³ Arguing d14 as a neocolonial event was exacerbated by staff remuneration and documenta’s brink of bankruptcy due to overbudgeting.

By hosting part of d14 in Athens, the curators drew attention to the failure of the capitalist system that led to Greece’s near-default on its debt in 2010: Greece averting bankruptcy by government bailouts. Comparably, the cost of operating two locations

⁴⁶⁰ Papadopoulos, 306.

⁴⁶¹ iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis, “‘We Come Bearing Gifts’—iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis on Documenta 14 Athens - Frontpage - e-Flux Conversations,” *e-Flux*, June 2017, <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/we-come-bearing-gifts-iliana-fokianaki-and-yanis-varoufakis-on-documenta-14-athens/6666>.

⁴⁶² Papadopoulos, 306.

⁴⁶³ Papadopoulos, 306.

contributed to a deficit of more than 7 million Euros to the finances of Documenta GmbH. To cover these losses, the city of Kassel and the state of Hesse, shareholders in the company, intervened with guaranteed loans. According to the curatorial team, politicians and media primarily attributed the budget overrun to the financial strain of hosting the exhibition in a second city, Athens.⁴⁶⁴ Controversy ensued with news media referenced high electricity bills in Athens and excessive transportation costs to both host cities.⁴⁶⁵ Perhaps ironic, d14's bailout recalled curatorial concerns from the exhibition of historical, and arguably current, Euro-American cultural colonialism, exacerbated by the ongoing debt crisis and Germany's "hardline attitude" towards Greek repayment. It is noteworthy that this was not the first time for a biennial to exceed its budget in recent years. For example, the first edition of Prospect, the New Orleans triennial, exceeded its budget by over \$1,000,000 USD in 2008, postponing a second edition. The Montreal Biennial announced a deficit of \$200,000 CAD in 2016, resulting in the cancellation of future editions.⁴⁶⁶

"What is happening now," Szymczyk stated in an interview, "is an attempt to make this a problem exhibition because of some financing issues."⁴⁶⁷ In defence of the curatorial and cultural work by the d14 team, Szymczyk prompted that the budget was calculated before his appointment and neglected to appraise the extended financial cost of two host cities.⁴⁶⁸ The

⁴⁶⁴ In a statement released by the curatorial team, they assert "Unfortunately, politicians have prompted the media upheaval by disseminating an image of imminent bankruptcy of documenta and at the same time presented themselves as the 'saviors' of a crisis they themselves allowed to develop."

⁴⁶⁵ Benjamin Sutton, "Debtumenta: Governments Step in to Save Documenta from €7 Million Deficit," *Hyperallergic*, September 13, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/400281/debtumenta-governments-step-in-to-save-documenta-from-e7-million-deficit/>.

⁴⁶⁶ Sutton.

⁴⁶⁷ Catherine Hickley, "Why a World-Famous Art Exhibition Needed a Government Bailout," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2017, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/20/arts/design/documenta-germany-contemporary-art.html>.

⁴⁶⁸ Hickley.

curatorial team responded to dispute the media claims in a collective statement “to protect the independence of documenta as a cultural and artistic public institution from political interests.”⁴⁶⁹ Questioning the value of financial bottom-lines, the curatorial team defends “the values of a free, critical, and experimental documenta,” arguing for the artistic, cultural, and discursive gains of their edition, while simultaneously affirming the financial profitability of d14. Bracing the curatorial resistance against value production being solely about financial profits, they state:

In a spirit of collective reflection, we believe it is time to question the value production regime of megaexhibitions [sic] such as documenta. We would like to denounce the exploitative model under which the stakeholders of documenta wish the “most important exhibition of the world” to be produced. The expectations of ever-increasing success and economic growth not only generate exploitative working conditions but also jeopardize the possibility of the exhibition remaining a site of critical action and artistic experimentation. How can the value production of documenta be measured? The money flowing into the city through the making of documenta greatly exceeds the amount the city and region spend on the exhibition.⁴⁷⁰

The curators demonstrate their resistance to overseeing financial bodies is a collision between the financial and curatorial outcome of biennials, and more aptly, the division between political and curatorial responsibility. This is exemplified by the end of the curatorial statement where they optimistically profess that they “hope of generating thoughtful discussion and a new awareness of what is at stake”⁴⁷¹ By acknowledging this tension and the division, the curators are simultaneously questioning the Eurocentric and neoliberal structures that financially support the document, while also attesting to their project. The fiscal conflict and backlash

⁴⁶⁹ Adam Szymczyk, “Statement from the Artistic Director and Team of Documenta 14,” *Hyperallergic*, September 14, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Statement-from-the-Artistic-Director-and-Team-of-documenta-14.pdf>.

⁴⁷⁰ Szymczyk, 1.

⁴⁷¹ Szymczyk, 2.

faced by d14's curators are echoed and highlighted by Germany and Greece's political and financial strain, layering their decolonial curatorial prerogative.

To better understand the significance of the two host cities, the critiques faced by d14, and the dichotomy its curators were trying to address, it is useful to outline the historical and ongoing strain between Greece and Germany. In his "Editor's Text" in the first edition of *South*, the Greek magazine that published four issues in conjunction with d14, Szymczyk and critic Quinn Latimer frame the current Greek-German tension as an extension of the ongoing binary between North/South, West/East, Right/Left:

The economic and social conditions in Greece have been deteriorating further still, as the nominally left-wing Greek government has implemented a string of austerity measures (with the tacit compliance of the neoliberal opposition) mandated by the EU and its attendant international financial institutions. Fully oblivious to any idea of social and economic recovery, such measures, and the politics they produce have engendered indifference, frustration, despair, and, at best, rage.

Are we exaggerating? In Germany, the rise of right-wing populism (in the guise of the AfD party, or "Alternative for Germany") and extremism (organized around the fear of the "other," conflating local Muslims and new refugees with terrorists) is apparent as never before in the country's postwar history. Similar nationalistic, xenophobic forces in democratic disguise have been coming to the fore across Western Europe (see: Austria, Denmark, France, Switzerland) and in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (consider Hungary's strongman Viktor Orbán and Poland's Jarosław Kaczyński), while Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia, following the annexation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine, begets specters of the Cold War. The politics of the until recently marginal European parties that profit from all forms of populist resentment parallel the lack of new political initiatives from the former "main" parties that could be founded on ideas of solidarity and a commons [sic].⁴⁷²

It is worth quoting Latimer and Szymczyk at length to convey the political divisions they are interested in addressing. As they write, the political divisions are supported by longstanding

⁴⁷² Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter," *Documenta 14 South*, no. Issue #7 [documenta 14 #2] (2016), http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/452_editors_letter.

stereotypes and cultural misconceptions perceived by Germans of Greeks and likewise Greek perceptions of Germans. Political theorists Claudia Sternberg, Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis assert that the relationship between Greece and Germany is as much about national “innermost insecurities and fears” about oneself as it is about misrepresentations about the other. Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsoyanni and Nicolaïdis examined media discourses, specifically magazine and newspaper articles, to analyze the relationship between Greek and German national perceptions, so, notably, they are referencing national imaginaries that may not be entirely shared by the populous of the entire country. However, they demonstrate the pervasiveness of “othering” national stereotypes as well as how culturally and discursively entrenched they have become when they discuss the German 1974 song “Greek Wine” by Udo Jürgens. The ballad is about a lonely German man, who is invited to drink with a group of presumably Greek men, and later revels in his longing for their company, happiness, and home comforts. The authors detail that as in the song, German “scorn was now still often tempered by an implicit admiration for the Greeks’ ability to get away with a less stern approach to life, work and finances, managing to pull it all off in the end.”⁴⁷³ The image of Greece is one of a mix of admiration and envy, with ancient Greece valued as the pinnacle of aesthetic and democratic civilization, and a sense of Contemporary Greece contrasted it as a nation of lazy, wasteful, and merry people. This idea is complicated by an idea that was popularised in German media, where the results of a comparative European Union survey in 2013 concluded that Southern European households possessed higher assets than households in Germany. The inference of

⁴⁷³ Claudia Sternberg, Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Kalypso Nicolaidis, *The Greco-German Affair in the Euro Crisis: Mutual Recognition Lost?*, 1st ed. 2018, Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK : Imprint: Palgrave Pivot, 2018), 24.

the survey results was that Southern Europeans were richer than German's despite being a poorer country. These perceptions neglected to understand that Greece was a country with high inequity, higher unemployment rates, and lower per capita income. At the same time, the authors continue, these perceptions of Greece were complicated in relation to a self-perception of Germany as a nation of hard-working people, fuelling fear of helping a country that was "ultimately better off, or happier and more attractive than oneself, while missing out on the good life oneself."⁴⁷⁴

Germany's economically strong position is in part due to crediting countries agreeing to forgive West German debt in the Conference of London in 1953. Being able to prosper after experiencing economic hardship, Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni and Nicolaïdis assert that later led some Germans to hold a sense of entitlement and that Germany was an example of how to economically prosper: "Just like Greeks suffered today, Germans had suffered yesterday."⁴⁷⁵ Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni and Nicolaïdis note that for some Germans, the austerity measures were an opportunity, not a disadvantage. Alternatively, there was the issue of Greek overspending, which is commonly portrayed because of cheap borrowing rates from the Economic and Monetary Union.

Greek sentiments towards Germany are rooted in the history of the Second World War and Germany's brutal occupation of Greece during that time. During this time, Greeks experienced famine, hyperinflation, homelessness, death, and Jewish extermination. Among the many traumas in Greece was the Kalavryta massacre, which saw the near male extinction in

⁴⁷⁴ Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Nicolaidis, 22.

⁴⁷⁵ Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Nicolaidis, 30.

1943 or the massacre of over 200 people by German soldiers in the village of Distomo in 1944. Germany paid reparations to Greece in 1960 in a state-to-state agreement, yet Greeks argued that the issue of reparations was not finalized, and the settlement prevented individual victims from pursuing claims. The issue of reparations is an ongoing tension, and Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni and Nicolaïdis note the statement made by Manolis Glezos, “famous in Greece for his role in the resistance and for having taken down the German flag from the Acropolis in May 1941, and who was then a SYRIZA MEP as well as chair of the National Council for the Claim of German Debts to Greece, declared: if ‘the Germans can’t pay for the mistakes for the Greeks’, then ‘the Greeks can’t forget the crimes of the German army in Greece during the Occupation’.”⁴⁷⁶

Greece is not without its own financial concerns and past economic mistakes, however. The political elite established a system of economic patronage in feudal democracy that benefitted them and created a significant economic disparity between the classes. The established system was insular, with public funds used on credit to bolster the wealthy, regularly evading taxes. Although the reform was promised in his election campaign, Kostas Karamanlis, the conservative party leader in Greece, faced many scandals due to billion-euro property deals and money transfers out of retirement funds. Most problematically, Karamanlis’ government falsified the financial data reported to the EU and doubled the national deficit, but that did not stop him from appointing relatives and friends to the administration before being elected out of office. Yet Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni and Nicolaïdis point out that media

⁴⁷⁶ Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Nicolaidis, 50.

discourse argued the whole of Greek society was to blame. They reference a Kathimerini journalist's remark:

[in] a 1988 ministerial decision to grant public sector employees who worked with computers six extra days of paid annual leave, a provision that was retained in Greek law until September 2013 as saying: It is with crazy things like this that we used to cook the lobster pasta that we enjoyed. These are the things we used to borrow [...]. Everyone has been talking for so many years about the "big interests," but it is the many, the small and allied interests from the grass roots that proved undefeatable. It is under their weight—that is to say, under our weight—that we collapsed.⁴⁷⁷

As the journalist details, the Euro crisis provided a number of external candidates to blame, the Troika, the IMF, credit-rating agencies, which replaced Greece's anti-Westernism, with anti-German sentiments. The antagonism between Greece and Germany is inevitably complicated by real political and economic strain experienced by people in each country. While a biennial may not be able to resolve such a tension successfully, d14 acknowledges the complexities of each side's position, thereby restoring processes for understanding entanglements and mutual recognition. In doing so, d14 resists the conceptual geographic binary between (global) North and (global) South to situate itself as a biennial of resistance.

A Fragmented d14 Internet Temporality

The second aspect of how d14 conceptually challenged Eurocentric art historical hegemony was by fragmenting its temporality. d14 took place over two cities in two countries in two separate time zones. While this made it more difficult to travel between cities, especially via walking, as was the case for #00BH and the Istanbul Biennial, showcasing part of documenta

⁴⁷⁷ Sternberg, Gartzou-Katsouyanni, and Nicolaidis, 27–28.

in a second location was a “displacement of the exhibition,” according to Szymczyk, as an effort to challenge exhibition norms.⁴⁷⁸ As previously mentioned, exhibition venue text panels were often on the floors rather than the walls, challenging viewers to look down rather than up and d14 hired four design companies to disrupt exhibition “identity systems,” marketing and branding. In the exhibition reader, he states, “Opening up the space and time of a continuum of one exhibition in two cities, and beginnings well before the scheduled opening dates, with a multitude of actors joining to constitute what we have been referring to as the public dimension of the project, documenta 14 is comprised of its making, its experience, its discussion, and its possible continuations.”⁴⁷⁹ The spatial and temporal displacement of d14 not only confronted documenta’s exhibition norms, but it also networked the biennial’s chronology, and viewers were not offered a linear approach to the exhibition.

According to media theorist Robert Hassan, the intertwining or network of fragmented time is what he has termed *network time*. As Hassan theorises, “Network time is digitally compressed clock-time, and as such operates on a spectrum of technologically possible levels of compression.”⁴⁸⁰ Connectable operations are possible with the internet as the “back-bone.” In a networked society, people have the ability to create their own times and spaces, undermining or displacing clock time. As a result, society is comprised of networks, which are powered by information and information-based technology.⁴⁸¹ As people spend more time online, reading the news, shopping, booking travel, communicating with friends and family, time spent on the

⁴⁷⁸ Ulrike Sommer, “Documenta Art Director Warns Against Nationalism,” *DW*, April 7, 2017, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://www.dw.com/en/documenta-art-director-warns-against-nationalism/a-38234426>.

⁴⁷⁹ Szymczyk, 27-28.

⁴⁸⁰ Robert Hassan, “Network Time and the New Knowledge Epoch,” *Time & Society*, Vol. 12 No. 2/3 (2003), 225–241.

⁴⁸¹ Manuel Castell, ed., *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004).

internet presumably negates geographical time zones as people experience the same time when they are connected online. People separated in space and time, invariably living in different worlds, can live virtually together. Trans-geographic and trans-cultural communities emerge in content and the ease of interactive networks assisted by internet-based communication. Living in a virtually common world involves a cooperative process of spatio-temporal negation. People have the potential, as a result, of creating and experiencing their “own context-dependent times.”⁴⁸² Interactions with computers, the internet and digital media embody intertwining use in space and time and co-terminously online and in a lived reality. Network time is connected through contexts and experience and disconnected from external zoned hours of the clock, changing our relationship with clock time. Network time is in relation to individual subjective experiences of time, relying on perceived temporality.

As users browse the internet, their individual perceived experience of time, or subjective immersion on the internet, they flow from one point to another in what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi postulates as the “theory of flow.” There are eight components of flow: a clear goal, challenges that match an individual’s skills, control over the task, immediate and efficient feedback, concentration and focus, loss of self-consciousness, loss of a sense of time, and an activity that becomes autotelic.⁴⁸³ These components of flow are accessibly applied to surfing the web and are, arguably, not dissimilar from exhibition visitors moving through an exhibition,

⁴⁸² Mike Sandbothe, *Media Temporalities in the Internet: Philosophy of Time and Media with Derrida and Rorty*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* Volume 4, Issue 2, 1 December 1998

⁴⁸³ Stephanie Caskenette, “Presence and the Present: Subjective Temporalities and Flow on the Internet,” *Hardwired Temporalities: Media, Infrastructure, and the Patterning of Time*, August 17, 2016, accessed June 28, 2019, <http://www.hardwiredtemporalities.org/2016/08/17/presence-and-the-present-subjective-temporalities-and-flow-on-the-internet/>.

especially an exhibition as large as d14, where visitors are continually, newly and repeatedly experiencing its content in their own exhibition loops.

Visitors, depending on their geographical engagement and financial determinations, may only see part of the looped d14 contribution by Nigerian-born artist Otobong Nkanga *Carved to Flow* (2017) (fig. 3.6). The work comprised the performance, installation, enterprise, and charitable work by manufacturing and retailing soap between Athens and Kassel. It included three components, the “laboratory” phase was in Athens, where oils, kinds of butter and lye from the Mediterranean, Middle East, North and West Africa were used to produce the soap. The “warehouse” phase and distribution, which consisted of the storage and sales in Kassel. The soap was available to d14 visitors during performances for 25 Euro a bar at the Neue Galerie. Lastly, there was the final “germination” phase, which was the creation of a foundation. The germination phase redirected soap profits and attracted additional funding to support spaces in Athens and Nigeria “for research and exchange on material entanglements structured around exhibitions, workshops, and events.”⁴⁸⁴ According to Nkanga’s website, the foundation was intended to be a research platform for material culture and foster local exchange, such as maintaining space in Athens for soap maker Eva Lachana and non-profit art space for curator Maya Tounta.⁴⁸⁵ The phases, according to the artist, “sought to provide audiences with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the different oils that make up

⁴⁸⁴ Otobong Nkanga, “Carved to Flow,” *Visibleproject* (blog), 2019, <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/carved-to-flow/>.

⁴⁸⁵ “Germination,” *Carved to Flow by Otobong Nkanga*, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://www.carvedtoflow.com/>.

the soap's primary ingredients, and at the same time reflect on the economic transactions through which these materials are placed in circulation."⁴⁸⁶



Figure 3.6. Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow* (2017), performance at documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

Depending on a visitor's location and information, the counterpart components change the relationship to the interpretation and consumption of the artwork. Visitors to Kassel were able to purchase the soaps but were unable to witness its manufacture and vice versa in

⁴⁸⁶ Nkanga, "Carved to Flow."

Athens. However, as the title suggests, *Carved to Flow*, the work was conceived “to create awareness around the networked geographies, economic histories and affective entanglements that inform the creation of everyday products.”⁴⁸⁷ Even though a person might buy something in their hometown, manufacturing often occurs elsewhere, specifically in lower economically developed countries. Suppose Athens and Kassel are bifurcated by geographic distance. In that case, Nkanga ties them together through the manufacturing and distribution of soap, where one is dependent on the other or networked to complete the work.

Like network time, which is premised on interconnectivity, d14 interconnected two cities, Athens and Kassel, in addition to the numerous venues in each city, thereby constituting d14 in an exhibition networked time, simultaneously destabilizing a singular temporal structure of d14. Perhaps a d14 visitor to the Benaki Museum in Athens may not have necessarily considered their temporal contextuality in Athens in relation to Neue Hauptpost in Kassel, but at the level of curatorial imagination, there were temporal networks in an open-ended continuum. This does not mean there was a cancelling out of temporal events but rather a greater awareness of temporal asynchronistic connection.⁴⁸⁸ As a continuum, d14 constituted temporal worlds constructed by information technology and the internet, interpenetrating the exhibition spaces with temporal diversity.

Daniel Knorr conceived of his d14 contributions as looped or networked between Kassel and Athens. In Kassel, Knorr’s work *Expiration Movement* (2017) (fig. 3.7) consisted of white

⁴⁸⁷ Nkanga.

⁴⁸⁸ Because network time is internally asynchronistic, emails can be sent and read later, internet can be throttled, there is the potential to misconceive that diversity can flourish. However, Hassan clarifies that network time relies on its own meta-logic that reflect the capitalist imperatives that built it.

smoke rising from the tower of the Fridericianum Museum. Smoke usually requires burning, although this is not the case for *Expiration Movement*, which used a machine to generate the smoke, to the alarm of several Kassel locals.⁴⁸⁹ In the German context, the smoke and burning could easily recall the devastating destruction of burned books, property, and lives by the Nazis party.



Figure 3.7: Daniel Knorr, *Expiration Movement* (2017), documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

⁴⁸⁹ Alyssa Buffenstein, "At documenta 14 in Kassel, an Artwork will get its Own Fire Safety Personnel," *Artnet.news*, April 11, 2017, accessed June 23, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/daniel-knorr-documenta-14-artwork-fire-safety-921476>.

Funding *Expiration Movement* was Knorr's second work in Athens, *Materialization* (fig. 3.8). At the Athens Conservatoire, *Materialization* was part installation and part performance in the building's atrium. In a large pile were gathered an abundance of found objects from the streets of Athens. Selecting from the pile, Knorr would paste various objects into a one-of-a-kind artist book with a vice machine for paying customers. Individuals would choose objects for their books alongside Knorr's selections. Possible objects included beer cans, metal scraps, view master reels, and plastic toys. The books were sold for 80 Euro.

Figure 3.8: Daniel Knorr, *Materialization* (2017), installation view Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), documenta 14, Athens, Greece, 2017. Photo: Removed for copyright.

I would like to propose *Materialization* as metaphorically representative of the arguments I have presented. *Materialization* is perhaps best understood as a material example, networking information for practitioners into quantifiable information datasets because post-internet speaks to the impact of the internet in life. This proposition includes reservations since, admittedly, *Materialization* employed fewer technical mechanisms than the systems, networks, and routers required for computers and the internet. Even more so, producing a book as the finished product reads as analogue, adverse to the technological advances brought on by the internet. However, perhaps by producing a book, the work also initiates parallel reflections regarding the cultural, social, and political transformations from the technological advances of the printing press. Therefore, I would like to postulates that the work's lack of digital

technology should not overlook corresponding elements to the internet's influence on the curatorial.

The internet comprises both technological and informational systems. However, I propose that momentarily these systems are isolated and, for the purpose of this analysis, to only consider the internet in terms of its information network and faculties. In doing so, the pile of objects collected by Knorr for *Materialization* could similarly be framed as the body of information that comprises the network that is the internet. In the atrium, the pile of objects is finite, however, the selected objects were acquired from the streets of the city of Athens, generating a vague expanse that corresponds with potential internet information. The size of the pile appears as if it is organizing information through a conveyor belt or mediated system for a final information product. The objects selected could be said to have been guided by an invisible influence by any series of events that shape decisions, not unlike algorithms. The work was participatory, with the artist and visitor, or patron, working together, collaborating to select objects to produce the final product of the artist book. Although the books were multiple, they were also individual. The action of producing the book, and therefore the work, engaged the makers, artist, audience, content, and book into its own formula of networked time. The books are imprinted by the subjectivities of their producers and blended with the coming together of the array of objects (found from different places and at different times) into one object – and conceptually networked trans-geographically to Kassel. The two cities were linked conceptually and curatorially, yet fragmented; in doing so, d14 resisted Eurocentric singularity – to be a biennial of resistance.

Generating Fragmented User (Aesthetic) Experiences

Temporal fragmentation was not the only fragmented curatorial element, visitor, or rather in internet parlance, user experience comprised of subjective assemblages. Contemporary art and exhibitions, Groys argues, are about contexts, frameworks, backgrounds, or theoretical proposals. Contemporary art, he continues, is, therefore, less about the production of individual artworks and instead more about individual decisions of inclusion and exclusion.⁴⁹⁰ In Groys' article, he refers to the decisions made by artists and curators and how the installation is an individual and subjective assemblage of things in space; I would extend his assertion to art audiences. There are many modes of presentation exhibition goes of a biennial of d14's size must refract from the totality of the information through prisms of mediation: be it word-of-mouth, online reviews, proximity and individual experiences of exhibition spaces. The embodied presence of exhibition-going, arguably, offers a range of dialogic exchanges. Where internet users may have to seek out alternative perspectives by changing their search terms or reading contrasting news or blog sites, biennial viewers embody curatorially mediated content as they not only observe artworks but move through the exhibition spaces.⁴⁹¹

Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, have transformed microblogging into a daily occurrence for many people; perhaps these daily occurrences have partly transformed the curator-audience relationship to give responsibility to art audiences as both

⁴⁹⁰ Boris Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art," *Moscow Art Magazine* No.2, 2007, accessed June 20, 2019, <http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/42/article/824>.

⁴⁹¹ See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1977); Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings, 1972-1977*, (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1984); Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, (New York: Routledge, 2005); Juliane Rebentisch, Daniel Hendrickson, and Gerrit Jackson. *Aesthetics of installation Art*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); Rolf Steier, "Posing the Question: Visitor Posing as Embodied Interpretation in an Art Museum," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 21, no. 2 (2014): 148-170.

art producers and consumers. Combined with hardware developments, where a large portion of the internet users are equipped with personal mobile devices with cameras and internet access to share information as it happens, newsworthy incidents are shared anticipating another person's interest. Exhibitions similarly anticipate interest, and where interest has succeeded, exhibition images beget more visitors and more images on social media. Moreover, as Groys states, visitors are put in a situation of choice with looped video installations. Each visitor develops their own approach, depending on where they entered the loop, constructing their own observation strategy, and forming an individual film narrative. "The time of contemplation must be continually renegotiated between [curator,] artist and spectator."⁴⁹² Because visitors to d14 potentially would not have been physically, financially, or geographically able to witness all of the exhibition venues, they entered the biennial at various points of its "loop," thereby generating their own aesthetic experiences of d14. What I am considering the d14 visitor loop recalls Stallabrass' conception of the post-medium condition but applied to curating instead of internet art. Where the d14 curators considered the biennial as a work-in-progress (even choosing to include "working title" as part of the title)⁴⁹³ suggests multiple and perhaps partial rather than concrete outcomes in tandem with participants in, as d14 curatorial member Marina Fokidis, posited as "this endless [exhibition] process of learning."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art."

⁴⁹³ Simen Joachim Helsvig, "The View from Karasjok," Interview with Adam Szymczyk, *Nordic Art Review* (14 September 2016), accessed July 1, 2019, <https://kunstkritikk.com/the-view-from-karasjok/>.

⁴⁹⁴ Marina Fokidis, "Learning from Athens – A Working Title and A Working Process for documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel," *Liverpool Biennial – Stages Issue 6* (April 2017), accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.biennial.com/journal/issue-6/learning-from-athens-a-working-title-and-a-working-process-for-documenta-14-in-athens-and-kassel>.

Working with biennial visitors is not new to biennials, which have cultivated a culture of art-as-experience. The aesthetic experience of art plays against universalizing “world-as-picture” rhetoric presented by biennials because experience requires embodiment. What Caroline A. Jones refers to as the “aesthetics of experience” allows visitors’ bodies to occur in fluid spaces of negotiation that can be “called the *work* of art.” Arts’ critical globalism or global entanglements emerge from embodied engagements with specific localities. “Site governs a crucial aspect of the *duration* involved in attending a biennial,” Jones clarifies, “how long we have travelled to get there, what histories are embedded in the site, the where-ness we feel ourselves to be, what local knowledge is referenced by the art, how all this is assembled in the event, how media unspool or perform over time, how we discuss the art afterwards.”⁴⁹⁵ These aspects are what she considers the *work* of art. The working of art in biennial culture through aesthetic encounters with experiential art embodies visitors to understand global differences. Because biennials recur, they produce an “echo for experience,” where “the possibility of art’s working will extend to the next visit, when the next biennial has appeared.”⁴⁹⁶

The rapid development of a participatory internet has communication scholars Joseph B. Walther and Jeong-woo Jang identifying four elements that comprise participatory websites: proprietor content, user-generated content, deliberate aggregate user representations, and incidental aggregate user representations. Proprietor content includes messages and content displayed by a primary author. This does not necessarily mean owner-generated content since individuals, for example, may maintain a Facebook profile with proprietor privileges, but they

⁴⁹⁵ Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 202.

⁴⁹⁶ Jones, 202.

do not own their profile page. Content contributed displayed by users other than proprietors is a defining feature of participatory websites. Reactive or interactive user-generated content comprises user-generated content as interactive—lastly, aggregate user representations, which Walther and Jang identify as deliberate or incidental. Aggregate user representations depict the accumulated data from user opinions. Deliberate representations may take the form of reflecting the number of users who have “liked” a product or vendor reliability ratings. Incidental representations include recorded user data that was not deliberately intended by users to express evaluations but often reflect popularity. Walther and Jang exemplify incidental aggregate user representations as someone’s number of Facebook friends on their profile. Increasingly user participation, in any of these formats must be maximized for perceived user value and benefit.⁴⁹⁷

Undeniably both of these developments, the rise of user-generated content and the aesthetic experience of biennial culture, are consequences of neoliberalism and the coinciding element of free consumer choice as a defining feature of the market economy. The authority of the neoliberal order answers to individual desires and aesthetics, as Jones asserts, it “is always haunted by economics.”⁴⁹⁸ The tension between neoliberal and anti-neoliberal ethos present in d14 has been heavily criticised, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁴⁹⁹ And while d14’s curatorial paradigm is not without flaws, it proposed an anti-neoliberal democracy – a direct democracy. Szymczyk’s curatorial statement proclaimed everyone as the owner of the

⁴⁹⁷ Joseph B. Walther, Jeong-woo Jang, “Communication Processes in Participatory Websites,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 18, Issue 1 (1 October 2012): 2–15.

⁴⁹⁸ Jones, 202.

⁴⁹⁹ Iliana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis, “‘We Come Bearing Gifts’ – Iliana Fokanaki and Yanis Varoufakis on Documenta 14 Athens,” *eflux*, June 2017, accessed June 13, 2019, <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/we-come-bearing-gifts-iliana-fokianaki-and-yanis-varoufakis-on-documenta-14-athens/6666>.

exhibition. In doing so, Szymczyk proposed that visitors partake in d14 not as separated individuals but as multiple and interrelated singularities: a network.⁵⁰⁰ The success of Szymczyk's proposal can most certainly be debated, however, I would posit that if visitors were not owners of d14, they were at least proprietors. For example, Maria Eichhorn (1962) engaged with the public by asking for documentation and papers regarding the expropriation of European Jewish populations. Within the context of her project, *Orphaned Property in Europe* (2017), the Rose Valland Institute was based on the Neue Neue Galerie, hosting workshops and individual presentations for the public.

In more detail, artist Marta Minujín's d14 contribution, *The Parthenon of Banned Books* (*El Partenón de libros prohibidos*) (2017) (fig. 3.9), invited individuals, libraries, and cultural institutions to donate banned books to comprise the massive sculptural work in the design of the Greek monument. Minujín originally created the installation in 1983, with the Parthenon as a symbol of democracy, which she felt had been corrupted in Argentina under the dictatorship of the National Reorganization Process (1976-1983). The initial installation was more local compared with the installation as part of d14. Minujín called the work a "mass participation artwork"⁵⁰¹ because there would be no work without participants donating their formerly owned books. The sculpture was composed of 25,000 banned books, suggesting that approximately that many people donated to the work. The long list of books included 120,000 titles, while the shortlist comprised 170 titles. The titles on either list were either currently or formerly banned in various places around the world. Titles included the entire works of

⁵⁰⁰ Szymczyk, 41.

⁵⁰¹ As cited by Anna Sigrídur Arnar, "Books at documenta: Medium, Art, Object, Cultural System," *On Curating* Issue 33 (June 2017).

Immanuel Kant, the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tales, H.G. Wells, and J.K. Rowling’s “Harry Potter” series. At the end of d14, the books were redistributed to visitors, public and private libraries worldwide. Art critic and curator Pierre Bal-Blanc conclude that *The Parthenon of Books* is “ultimately the living construction of social and cultural relations, a site where a population could come together around her [Minujín’s] ephemeral architecture for a certain period of time and then disperse.” There was collective work to produce the work, which continues, however, “in a fragmented and dispersed state.”⁵⁰²



Figure 3.9: Marta Minujín, *The Parthenon of Banned Books* (*El Partenón de libros prohibitos*) (2017), documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, 2017. Photo: Amy Bruce.

⁵⁰² Pierre Bal-Blanc, “Marta Minujín’s The Parthenon of Books: A Living Elevation of Social and Cultural Relations,” *Flash Art*, January 20, 2020, <https://flash---art.com/article/marta-minujins-the-parthenon-of-books-a-living-elevation-of-social-and-cultural-relations/>.

Moreover, participation through non-hierarchical dialogue was an integral component of d14. In his text, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse,” art historian Paul O’Neill positions biennial exhibitions as critical sites of “inter-national, trans-national and multinational scale, where the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ are in constant dialogue.”⁵⁰³ The importance of dialogue and education to d14 was undoubtedly present, even represented in the title. This is even more evident by the quantity and goals of public and educational programming events and activities, including walks, forums, conferences, intensive courses, radio programming, cooking, night events, film screenings, DJ sets, cartography, and more.⁵⁰⁴ One example is the d14 program series “Synantiseis,” which invited “the public to participate in a series of interdisciplinary sessions to foster a dialogue between the context of documenta exhibitions and the socio-political transformations that have taken place in Greece and the world as a whole.”⁵⁰⁵

In conversation with d14’s head of education, Sepake Angiama, she further conveyed the importance of the educational team’s desire for non-hierarchical approaches that sought to stretch history to think about the contemporary moment. To them and of interest here, is that this meant considering various lengths of time to accompany historical and lived knowledges.⁵⁰⁶ The educational team sought the use of empty kiosks in the city for their programming as a strategy to engage site-specificity, self and embodied knowledges from different publics that may not be familiar with each other. Acknowledging embodied and affective knowledges that

⁵⁰³ Paul O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse,” in *Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, eds. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), 16.

⁵⁰⁴ See <https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/> for a full list of public programming events.

⁵⁰⁵ Documenta 14, “Synantiseis,” accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/25172/syantiseis>.

⁵⁰⁶ Sepake Angiame in conversation with students from the summer session, The Global Contemporary, summer 2017.

facilitate multiple readings and recognitions to an exhibition, Angiama spoke of d14 as a score that could be performed or interpreted differently as a means to “undo” solo or monolithic narratives. Angiama conveyed the corporeal and affective emphasis to rethinking the role of biennials as she posed the question in conversation with students from the summer session if it is possible to understand something from someone’s perspective, noting that shifting d14 to exhibit partly in Athens was also an attempt to shift cultural values, narratives, and social histories.⁵⁰⁷ For example, the public programming “Parliament of Bodies” was premised on migration, movement and hospitality in Europe of the “so-called long summer.” The programming proposed “inventing new affects and creating synthetic alliances between different world struggles for sovereignty, recognition, and survival.”⁵⁰⁸ Some events were coordinated with Noospheric Society, which uses technologies, insisting that the fissure between the speed of machines and thoughts require collective regrouping.⁵⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the debate regarding the successes or failures of d14’s intentions, including exoticism and neo-colonialism, d14 sought to foreground global and social structures by pursuing modes of interaction with its audiences by maximizing embodied and participatory experiences and dialogues. These experiences are inevitably personal and contextual with regards to visitors being able to visit either or both host city, thereby fracturing and resisting the traditional Eurocentric exhibition practice of unification or singularity to situate d14 as a biennial of resistance.

⁵⁰⁷ Angiame, 2017.

⁵⁰⁸ “The Parliament of Bodies,” *documenta 14*, April 6, 2017, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/927/the-parliament-of-bodies>.

⁵⁰⁹ “The Noosphere Society,” *The Etheral Brother/Sisterhood*, accessed July 29, 2019. <http://eternalinternetbrotherhood.com/2017/07/20/the-noospheric-society/>.

Concluding Byte

d14 curated a biennial edition that was unstable, that is unpredictable, fractured, and not singular. d14 was a biennial of resistance, despite being in the global North and outside of Ranjit Hoskote's framework because of its resistance against curatorial exhibition convention, entanglement of geographic dichotomy between global North and global South through a dual temporal structure, which reinforced fragmented, partial, and subjective spectator experiences. These curatorial strategies challenged traditional representational paradigms of Eurocentric art history. As a temporal and spatial structure, where on- and off-line are blurred, the internet is a valuable paradigm for conceptualising biennials as products and producers of the social realm. The pervasiveness of the internet has undoubtedly impacted not just contemporary art but also contemporary curating, as evidenced by d14. Post-internet contemporaneity has informed a curatorial practice that values discourse with its audience, where curators and biennial visitors are co-mediating their biennial experience. The framework of post-internet embraces temporal diversity, transmitted relationships, and subjectivity, although within prescribed global networks or curated parameters. d14's expansive appearance may not have been to a human scale; however, it was scaled to participatory subjectivities connected in network time.

While the success of d14 is still heavily criticised, such as by Theophilos Tramboulis and Yorgos Tzirzilakis, who question d14's solidarity with Germany's southern neighbours as appropriating an image of "the South." Their critique demands careful consideration of the entanglements of localities rather than symbolisms. This is because the political implications of biennials as a cultural form operate through globalizing mechanisms, making the effective work of biennials to bring about political, social, cultural, and economic discourses occur when in

plain sight, even if it is only once every five years. A biennial of resistance, like with any act of resistance, active or passive, means that “struggle-with-defeat as a real option,”⁵¹⁰ or success is negotiated. By embracing a conceptualization of d14 as a collective of fragmented subjectivities, d14’s subjectivity is generated and distributed as nodes interrelation for understanding interactive entanglements, diffused and fragmented for unique interactions rather than hegemonic ones. In relation to distributed systems remains democratic potential, yet at the same time, there are contradictions or new forms of control and power. Global forms of dependencies have been produced by the spatial and temporal mechanisms that define the internet and its uses, not limiting counter-hegemonic subjectivities to geographic binaries, providing additional relational modes of understanding the forms that comprise the contemporary condition.

⁵¹⁰ Franklin, 27.

Conclusion

The lurking question is whether the biennial model still makes sense in a post-pandemic world.

- Siddhartha Mitter⁵¹¹

Biennials of resistance are a concept for understanding how biennials can be sites of post-/de-colonial dissonance against political, economic, social, and cultural hegemony. As I have demonstrated, biennials of resistance have been understood by curator Ranjit Hoskote as a strategy for reorientating biennial discourse to acknowledge contributions made by biennials in the global South and that these biennials mark a substantial alternative to the Venetian history of the biennial. However, I have argued for conceptually routing Hoskote's framework to qualify biennial resistivity through the case studies of #00Bial de La Habana (#00BH), the 15th Istanbul Biennial and documenta 14 (d14). In doing so, the restrictive and traditional dichotomy between the global North and global South is conceived as entangled, pluralised, and co-constituted. The boundaries of the North-South dynamic limits the global and cosmopolitan infrastructures that underpin biennial resistivity, biennials of resistance, and biennials at large. By thinking about "South" as a theoretical perspective rather than a geographic constraint, the established and canonised genealogy of anti- and postcolonial biennials that includes biennials of resistance can be put in dialogue with biennials and editions that would otherwise be ignored/overlooked despite their discursive and resistive contributions.

⁵¹¹ Siddhartha Mitter, "Art Biennials Were Testing Grounds. Now They Are Being Tested.," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2020, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/01/arts/design/art-fairs-biennials-virus.html>.

Biennials' investigative and art historical interests in artistic and curatorial practices that developed after the "discursive turn" opened and enabled possibilities to focus debates on biennials themselves; meaning biennial discourse should also be self-reflexive and reconsider not simply the canonization of the Venice Biennale but also the canonization of perceived anti- or postcolonial biennials. Furthermore, the canonization of biennials of resistance should not be taken as a given but rather understood relationally throughout the course of their institutional histories since biennials are defined by their contemporary/contemporaneity. The aim of this dissertation has been to contribute to scholarship on the discursive outcomes of biennials of resistance by refocusing on biennial resistivity for relative considerations of biennials as sites for promoting dissent and resistance in relation to local contexts, local discourses, and cultural domination in traditional Eurocentric art history. Ultimately, this dissertation was interested in the relationship between art, resistance, and allyship, questioning what counts as resistance, who is resisting, and where resistance happens.

The purpose of the editioned case studies was to critique, problematize, and expand the biennials of resistance, as Hoskote introduced the concept. As outlined in my introduction, biennials of resistance are a framework for understanding biennials as sites to counter Eurocentric art history primarily centred on postcolonial theory and emancipatory politics, as demonstrated by biennials of the global South. As Hoskote puts it, the global South is a "network of sites of cultural production sharing common questions, themes, and indeed, a common precariousness,"⁵¹² where regionalities are globally responsive through intercultural engagement that should not exclude or reject varied locations linked by critical transregionality.

⁵¹² Hoskote, 322.

Building on Hoskote's concept of critical transregionality and using the South as a theoretical lens rather than a geographic boundary, biennials such as documenta and the Istanbul Biennial can be recognized for their decentering curatorial contributions within the axis of an anti- and postcolonial canon. If anti- and postcolonial biennials aim to question Eurocentric biases and constructs, abiding by Eurocentric geographic constraints maintains division rather than acknowledging lattices of global exchange. And while documenta and the Istanbul Biennial were excluded, the Havana Bienal's position remained unquestioned since its inaugural editions despite local perceptions of the Havana Bienal as having transformed over time into being unprincipled, compromised, and exclusive. This was the position of the organisers of #00BH, who advocated for inclusion in the local art world and the wider biennial art world system.

As was demonstrated, each of the case studies, #00BH, the Istanbul Biennial, and d14, should each be considered biennials of resistance, as anti- and postcolonial biennials, and moreover, each engaging with exhibition-making processes, for which I proposed conceptual frameworks to analyse the curatorial approaches, respectively, whereby they enact emancipatory rhetoric and politics. Specifically, with a focus on #00BH, it becomes evident that the unquestioned position of the Havana Bienal as a biennial of resistance is no longer valid. As an armature of the Cuban government and Cuba's national artistic program, while still postcolonial in ambition, the official biennial is exclusive towards artists who are not approved and therefore dismissed as artists on a local and global platform. By integrating the curatorial component of walking, #00BH promoted its political activism and inclusivity agenda and questioned the historiography of anti- and postcolonial biennials. #00BH demonstrates that the

framework of biennials of resistance is not an unquestioned category but rather dependent on institutional historical arcs and individual biennial editions.

Despite being overlooked by Hoskote, even though the Istanbul Biennial would otherwise meet Hoskote's criteria, I argued for the 15th edition to be understood as a biennial of resistance. Again, looking at the individual edition, the 15th edition of the Istanbul Biennial, *a good neighbour*, utilized its local context by curatorially focusing on the Beyoğlu *semt*. Although not exclusively, the edition took place in Beyoğlu *semt*, taking advantage of site-specific exhibition venues built upon the historical characteristics of the neighbourhood. The historical characteristics of the Beyoğlu *semt*, which include cultural diversity and pluralism, in contrast to practices of othering, were the curatorial platform, which confronted the ruling political objectives of the Turkish AKP government.

Lastly was the 14th edition of documenta, a biennial of resistance despite being geographically excluded by Hoskote's framework. d14, entitled "Learning from Athens," followed in the institutional history of previous documentas of probing postcolonial curation. Hosted in two cities, thereby decentralizing and decolonizing traditional Eurocentric exhibition practice, while promoting geographic entanglements by questioning the dichotomy between global North and global South, through fragmented and subjective spectatorship, d14 is a biennial of resistance despite being not geographically South. Building from d14's promotion of alternative modes of learning, or "unlearning," I proposed thinking about the internet as a paradigm for understanding biennials rather than within the tradition of encyclopedic or representational exhibitions. This is because biennials, like the internet, are products and producers of global systems of the social world.

Since these case studies occurred within a relatively short time frame from each other, primarily within the year 2017, this offered a new methodological opportunity. This dissertation attempts to propose an alternative methodological framework for biennial historiography that focuses on a contemporaneous temporal framework dictated by the biennial exhibition structure to evaluate them relationally with each other. In order to complicate a history of biennials, which ignores that “Biennials are not the same all over [and that t]here is not a ‘biennial format,’ [and] no single ‘biennial discourse,’ but several,” a biennial historiography should be constructed by case studies, where analyses of “the origin and development of biennials can produce real examples or archetypes.”⁵¹³ Specificities can be produced by synchronous historical analyses. As art historian Vittoria Martini puts it, “the only way to historicize a biennial is to identify its specificity.”⁵¹⁴ Therefore, in a departure from biennial studies thus far – which situates a biennial historiography in a trajectory from world’s fairs and expositions – this dissertation positions biennial editions as case studies, contemporaneously, to evaluate them within a co-temporal structure, where specific local power dynamics, contexts, and biennial institutional histories have been considered, thereby offering a potential strategy to Hoskote’s and others’ call to complicate that traditional Eurocentric linear art history trajectory that has already dominantly informed and dictated biennial history.

Biennials are ripe for comparison, and temporal comparison, because they occur at regular intervals, yet each edition and biennial institution, although a *repetition*, is *different*

⁵¹³ Vittoria Martini, “The Era of the Histories of Biennials Has Begun,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 11–12.

⁵¹⁴ Martini, 11.

from every preceding and forthcoming edition and each biennial institution. Repetition, Caroline A. Jones states, is “leveraged by linking it [biennials] to an ever renewing present and future; in this way difference is promised.”⁵¹⁵ Jones quotes curator Rosa Martínez’s 2005 Venice Biennale curatorial statement to outline the typical positioning of biennials as looking simultaneously “beyond the present and into the future.”⁵¹⁶ Unlike museums, which are “temples for the preservation of memory, continuing to quote Martínez, “Biennials are a context for the exploration and questioning...of the present.”⁵¹⁷ Underpinning the biennial is that it can only be a biennial through repetition, where it inherently anticipates its own future every two years and cannot exist without this anticipation. The rudimentary characteristic of the biennial means biennials share a general structural component whereby they resemble each other, however, editions, inaugurations, and contexts are singular, thereby inscribing their particularity and specificity. Even though biennials share generalities that make them resemble each other, perhaps lending to a Eurocentric teleological analysis, their perpetual contemporaneity instantiates a temporal framework that examines local and global dynamics.

In her reference to Martínez, Jones also mentions how biennials are viewed as alternative artistic and exhibition spaces compared to museums. In contrast with museums, which rotate between relatively static exhibition displays of permanent collections and temporary exhibitions, often partly from their collection, another museum, or a private collection, biennials are primarily assemblies of new and contemporary artworks. In agreement, art historian Terry Smith notes that “biennials occur as an alternative to both the collection and

⁵¹⁵ Jones, 72.

⁵¹⁶ Jones, 72.

⁵¹⁷ Jones, 72.

the temporary exhibition, while at the same time having features of both.”⁵¹⁸ Without collecting mandates and each edition followed by another, biennials are experimental and alternative exhibition sites. Ultimately, if curators and art historians consider biennials as *alternative* exhibition sites, then the historiography of biennials should be approached *alternatively* from standard art historical universalizing teleological tropes.

Biennial Futurity

The Coronavirus upended the world in every sense in early 2020. Amidst the global pandemic, many scheduled biennials were forced to cancel, postpone, or alter the planned events – in light of travel restrictions and the health and safety of artists, visitors and staff – meaning the future has yet to determine the vitality of the biennial format and model in a post-pandemic world. Biennials such as the Yokohama Triennale, curated by the Raqs Media Collective, decided not to postpone their 2020 edition, with artworks rolling out as permitted by various travel and health sanctions, building over the course of the summer until its official opening in October 2020. Alternatively, Anastasia Blokhina, curator and executive director of the second edition of the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary art (RIBOCA) in Latvia, “reimagined” the biennial by creating a feature film length exhibition tour in lieu of the visitors being able to visit the biennial physically.⁵¹⁹ Moving further away from the exhibition convention, the 12th edition of Sonsbeek, curated by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, will take

⁵¹⁸ Terry Smith, “Biennials: Four Fundamentals, Many Variations,” Biennial Foundation, December 7, 2016, <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2016/12/biennials-four-fundamentals-many-variations/>.

⁵¹⁹ *Exhibition Tour with RIBOCA2 Chief Curator Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel*, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AW5YacFK5MY>.

place over the course of four years, predominantly online, and will heavily feature a radio component, broadcasting from different countries and various communal spaces.⁵²⁰

The upcoming 15th edition of documenta has already announced its intentions of postponing its June 2022 opening due to organizational issues caused by travel restrictions since artists are required to be in Kassel to work collectively on their contributions to the exhibition.⁵²¹ Curated by the Indonesian artist collective, ruangrupa, documenta 15 is premised on local participation, planning to work closely with the city of Kassel, collaborating with community technologists and economists to focus on current issues such as alternative education systems and regenerative economic models.⁵²² Even though documenta 15 remains on track, general director Sabine Schormann argues that “it would make ‘absolutely no sense’ to go ahead with Documenta in 2022 if this [edition] could only take place in a ‘streamlined form that would not convey the spirit’ [of the curatorial theme],”⁵²³ which means that exhibition details and parameters will remain uncertain until further notice.

Similarly, the Istanbul Biennial has postponed its 17th edition, citing the surge in Covid-19 cases in Turkey. As of May 2021, there was a dramatic increase in case numbers of the Coronavirus in Turkey, spiking to over 60,000 reported cases daily.⁵²⁴ The 17th edition, curated by Ute Meta Bauer, Amar Kanwar, and David Teh, was originally scheduled to take place in

⁵²⁰ Mitter, “Art Biennials Were Testing Grounds. Now They Are Being Tested.”

⁵²¹ Catherine Hickley, “Documenta 15 Postponement Increasingly Likely, General Director Says,” *The Art Newspaper*, January 13, 2021, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/documenta-15-postponement-increasingly-likely-general-director-says>.

⁵²² Hickley.

⁵²³ Hickley.

⁵²⁴ Tessa Solomon, “Citing Surge in Covid Cases, Istanbul Biennial Postpones 2021 Edition,” *ARTnews.Com* (blog), May 6, 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/istanbul-biennial-2021-edition-postponed-covid-1234592052/>.

2021 but has since been rescheduled to September 17-November 20, 2022. The curators premise the 17th edition on the notion of “compositing processes,” which will “rethink the purposes and potential” of biennials, using six categories: geo-poetics/elemental politics, news, pedagogy, ancient solutions, synaesthesia, and an-archiving.⁵²⁵

The organizers of #00BH had also made plans for a second edition in 2020 tentatively titled #00Bial_2020. This second edition is intended to be more curated, with a more directive curatorial theme and more invited artist participation whose artworks correlate with the curatorial theme. Fearful of government accusations and persecution, the event has been postponed. While there was discussion of #00BH taking its platform online for the second edition, it was thought it would not have the same impact without a direct encounter between object and visitor. The future of #00BH remains particularly precarious as its organisers, specifically Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, fight for artistic freedom of expression against the Cuban government. Alcántara is the primary leader of the San Isidro Movement (MSI), a dissident group of artists, journalists, and academics formed in 2018 to combat government censorship, and he has been arrested 21 times since 2018.⁵²⁶ The tension between Alcántara and the Cuban government escalated after an at-home performance Alcántara held in his private residence in April 2021. The work is titled *Garrote vil*, referencing and utilizing a seventeenth-century torture device, whereby the Cuban State Security broke in and confiscated Alcántara’s recent artworks, including the garrote from the performance. In response to his

⁵²⁵ Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (iKVS), “The 17th Istanbul Biennial Calls for Intimate Public Encounters in Times of Crisis and Isolation,” Istanbul Biennial, accessed October 27, 2021, <https://bial.iksv.org/en/news/the-17th-istanbul-biennial-calls-for-intimate-public-encounters-in-times-of-crisis-and-isolation>.

⁵²⁶ Luis Rodriguez, “Who Is Artist Luis Manuel Otero, Symbol of the Resistance and Thorn in the Side of the Cuban Regime?,” trans. Allison Janos, *Global Voices.Org*, May 13, 2021, <https://globalvoices.org/2021/05/13/who-is-artist-luis-manuel-otero-symbol-of-the-resistance-and-thorn-in-the-side-of-the-cuban-regime/>.

artworks being confiscated, Alcántara demanded the return of or payment for his artworks, reimbursement for the damages to his house and an end to the 24-hour police surveillance (including blocking his internet access) with a hunger strike.⁵²⁷ After nine days, Alcántara was forcibly removed by government officials from his residence and taken to the hospital for medical attention after increased international media exposure. In an article in the Havana Times, Alcántara's hospitalization was criticised as a "kidnapping," with *Washington Post* journalist Abraham Jiménez Enoa concluding that Alcántara's hospitalization was a means to silence him, under the guise of "claiming to take care of him."⁵²⁸

While it remains uncertain how exactly each of the forthcoming editions of these biennials will proceed, their futurity is in the company of general anxieties surrounding biennials. Journalist Siddhartha Mitter echoes art historian Maria Hlavajova's playful question posed as part of the Bergen Biennial Conference in 2009, "To biennial or not to biennial?," undermining any assumptions about the biennial phenomenon and urging curators, artists, and art historians to rethink biennials in "response to the specificities of its location." If biennials are to sustain relevance as the "experimental cousins of more established art institutions,"⁵²⁹ it is a biennial's specificity that distinguishes itself through its repetition, response, reimagination as a biennial, how each biennial continues after the Covid-19 pandemic is not dictated by the general term and meaning of the *biennial* but rather the subtler characteristics associated with

⁵²⁷ Abraham Jiménez Enoa, "Opinion | Why Cuba Can't Afford to Let a Black Activist Die for Demanding Basic Rights," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2021, sec. Opinion, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/07/cuba-san-isidro-luis-manuel-otero-alcantara-hunger-strike-repression/>.

⁵²⁸ Enoa.

⁵²⁹ Maria Hlavajova, "How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to the Art Institution," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 293.

the inescapable specificity of the context of each edition. It has yet to be seen if the forthcoming editions of #00BH, the Istanbul Biennial, and documenta will continue to be biennials of resistance, reinventing or repeating the history of that particular biennial.

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