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Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition

By Tim Griffin

Introduction, James Meyer, moderator, Francesco Bonami, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Martha Rosler, and Yinka Shonibare

When Francesco Bonami, director of last summer's Venice Biennale, famously wrote in his exhibition catalogue that "The 'Grand Show' of the 21st century must allow multiplicity, diversity and contradiction to exist inside the structure of an exhibition . . . a world where the



conflicts of globalization are met by the romantic dreams of a new modernity," it was reasonable to imagine that he was responding to structural and thematic questions posed by Okwui Enwezor in his Documenta 11 of the preceding year. After all, the Nigerian-born curator, focusing on the issue of globalization, had in a sense defocused his event, dividing it into "platforms"—conferences and lecture series engaging figures from a wide range of disciplines—that took place at different locales around the world over the course of the year leading up to the installation in Kassel. Of course, this very commonality sets up a significant contrast. Enwezor's globalism

resonated differently from Bonami's: The same word typically used—as at Venice—to describe an ever-expanding circulation of communications and commerce (with all the attendant conflicts that such connection entails) was in Kassel linked to the acute value of regionality and difference, where the emergence of the local and particular precluded the possibility of any unifying system or thematic but nevertheless comprised a field of what could be called "minor knowledges."

Indeed, few terms are so frequently bandied about in artistic dialogue today as "globalism," and yet few terms are so multifarious in their current usage, or unfold in so many dimensions. For example, the rhetoric of globalization allows for discussion of neocolonialism in an expanded art marketplace while at the same time entertaining the notion that New York has ceded its historical position as the city that "stole the idea of modern art" (perhaps becoming instead the capital of capital), and coinciding with these insights is a still-developing sense

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that tiers of access to information exist within the worldwide artistic community, dividing those who can from those who cannot afford to crisscross the globe and so speak knowledgeable of a contemporary art-world suprastructure.

Nothing in contemporary art speaks so directly to all of these issues as the large-scale exhibition—from Documenta to the Venice Biennale, as well as any number of other biennials that cropped up around the world during the past decade. This type of exhibition, endowed with a transnational circuitry, assumed the unique position of both reflecting globalism—since these shows happen in locations throughout the world, however remote—and taking up globalism itself as an idea. Establishing a new curatorial class able to bring artists together from wide-ranging geographic and cultural points, the large-scale exhibition altered the kinds of visibility afforded artists and so fundamentally changed the conditions of artistic discussion, ultimately forwarding the position that no show could, or should, presume an all-encompassing thesis—at least not in conventional terms and form. Rather, the exhibition extends through time and across geography to include panels, lectures, publications, performances, and public works that fall well beyond the parameters of the traditional show, and lies well beyond the grasp of any single viewer. In turn, these exhibitions have come to marshal the forces of any number of disciplines, including art history and theory, which leads one to the question of whether the critical function is in some sense migrating from critic to curator, or indeed whether such nominal distinctions are useful at all. (As Catherine David, curator of Documenta 10, says in these pages regarding related shifts in terminology, "The question for me is not about . . . who is the artist but about *how* to produce, discuss, debate, and circulate to various audiences a certain number of ideas and formal articulations proposed by author(s). At this level, I think that many people . . . with whom I am working no longer correspond to the economic, social, and cultural figure of the 'artist' as it has been constituted in the modern age.")

It is precisely in order to trace the contours of such shifts in thinking, and to offer a "postmortem" on the global exhibitions that have sought to articulate them, that *Artforum* invited a select group of curators and artists to participate in the roundtable that follows. These curators possess unsurpassed familiarity with the evolution of the large-scale, transnational exhibition, and they have already been, to an extent, in dialogue with one another through their work: Bonami; David, who organized "Contemporary Arab Representations" in Venice this past summer as well as Documenta 10; Enwezor, who, before directing Documenta 11, was curator of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale; and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who cocurated "Utopia Station" in Venice and whose other projects include this year's Tirana Biennale. Martha Rosler and Yinka Shonibare contribute here as two artists who have contemplated globalism in their work for some time and who appeared in Bonami's Biennale and Enwezor's Documenta, respectively. Finally, *Artforum* invited scholar and critic James Meyer to moderate. Meyer has written in these pages on Documenta 11 and composed key texts on nomadism in contemporary art and on the changing status of site-specificity.

The results of their dialogue—which was conducted online and assembled for the printed page—are hardly conclusive. But then, conclusiveness is not the intent here. Rather, this roundtable (followed by an essay penned by scholar and critic Pamela M. Lee on the

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construction of the art world in light of globalization) punctuates one moment in an ongoing discussion, providing an occasion for reflection before we encounter the generations of large-scale exhibitions that undoubtedly lie ahead. —TIM GRIFFIN

THE GLOBAL EXHIBITION

James Meyer Grand exhibitions used to simply show the "best" international work. This has changed: Beginning with the Pompidou's *"Magiciens de la terre"* in 1989, these shows began to stage "globalization" itself as their core theme. Documenta 10 addressed globalization directly in terms of urban questions; Documenta 11 was explicitly influenced by postcolonial theory and included five "platforms" staged around the world, culminating with the Kassel installation. The most recent Venice Biennale similarly underscored the importance of "global" themes. Now that these exhibitions have occurred, and a certain discourse has developed around them, it is well worth addressing the phenomenon of the "global exhibition" itself. Can we specify differences between Kassel and Venice, say, or between these "central" shows and the so-called peripheral biennials? What transformations can we see in the organization and duration of such shows? How has the curatorial engagement with globalism impacted artmaking? What have curators and artists such as yourselves learned from your efforts to address the new global reality?

Francesco Bonami: Well, I've learned that transforming the exhibition concept as you've described it isn't as difficult as transforming the habitual ways such exhibitions are seen. If true revolution changes the rules on how to change the rules, then we must arrive at terms that transform the very concept of the exhibition. The last Venice Biennale was judged on the antiquated model of the grand exhibition—as the grand exhibition gone too far. In fact, my idea was to see if pushing the old model's rules even further could bring about a transformation. I feel that, in some way, it did.

Martha Rosler: As an artist, I have learned that while curatorial themes change, the process of inclusion for artists generally does not. Although a few more criteria for inclusion based on identity and geopolitics have developed, the art world is still heavily commodified, and an artist without a sales (and therefore publicity) base in the developed world—or a curatorial support network in the world's "periphery"—is not going to be included. Further, the new terms of engagement may be geopolitical, but work from the "First World" must have a powerful aesthetic surplus or an antically unrecognizable political dimension in order to gain access. So many artists are doing serious work with directly political themes but do not see themselves included in these shows—and would not expect themselves to be—since the public visiting such exhibitions is not their audience of interest. Granted, the flattened terrain of modern communications is bringing the interlocking worlds of art production and display into closer proximity, so it would not be correct to claim that work with direct political address will always be left out. But is it still necessary to point out that while "geopolitical" can have the cover of a prefix to cover its political nature, the politics in question had better be far, far away?

The art world—a congeries of professional services along the lines of dentists, doctors, and professors on the one hand and high-end showrooms like car dealerships on the other—consistently offers the modernizing elite a compass for understanding cultural and social

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"facts" as they impinge on their consciousness. The global exhibitions serve as grand collectors and translators of subjectivities under the latest phase of globalization. But as we move between disparate colonialist eras, what is plain about the present moment is that there is no dearth of images of the colonized Other in public view, despite only a little more insight—and that quite momentary—into the interior lives of others than in the previous colonial moment. The elite in question, especially in the North and in developed industrial and postindustrial nations (which includes, perhaps, the antipodean South), may have a taste for edification via these new Crystal Palace expositions. And why not?

Okwui Enwezor: The significance of "*Magiciens de la terre*" is no doubt crucial paradigmatically for the expansion of so-called global exhibitions. However, I am a lot less sanguine about "*Magiciens*" as a model for the current globalist expansion in exhibitions such as Documenta 10, Documenta 11, and Venice. The discourse in "*Magiciens*" was still very much dependent on an opposition within the historical tendencies of modernism in Europe—namely, its antipathy to the "primitive" and his functional objects of ritual, and, along with this process of dissociation of the "primitive" from the modern, its attempt to construct exotic, non-Western aesthetic systems on the margins of modernism. To me, this was the flaw of "*Magiciens*": It took as part of its reality the fundamental existence of an opposition between the Western center and the non-Western periphery. Having said that, I do recognize that its curator, Jean-Hubert Martin, was seeking a way to address this relationship to non-Western aesthetic and discursive systems institutionally. And looking back, I'm all the more impressed by what this exhibition tried to accomplish. But the value of "*Magiciens*" for me rests in the question of how to recast its discourse in today's "global" exhibitions, which move to temporary contexts of evaluation distinctly different from the stable site of the institution.

The value of the global paradigm for me—if it means serious interaction with artists and practices that are not similarly circumscribed—is in its allowance for greater methodological and discursive flexibility. I see the changing contexts of the temporary exhibition as one way to engage the limits and blind spots of the professional site of contemporary art. I believe that large-scale exhibitions are seriously addressing these issues, even if we may never be in complete agreement about what they add to the critical discourse of globalization.

Yinka Shonibare: We should without question applaud recent attempts to challenge a very tired, Eurocentric view of art. Exhibitions like "*Magiciens de la terre*," Documenta 10, and Documenta 11 created a necessary forum for giving visibility to the non-Western artist. What began as a radical political shift now seems to have become a global curatorial tendency, much as the civil, women's, and gay rights movements were all necessary interventions that allowed a broader discourse to emerge in the work of the artists concerned.

As an artist of non-Western origin, I feel strongly that the time has come to resist the temptation of defining artists by the narrow confines of nationality. The question of globalization and its political significance of course remains relevant in an economically divided world. But we must return now to the work of the imagination and prioritize the aesthetic and political concerns of artists rather than their origins. Globalization has produced a fantastic opportunity for visibility; let's take the next step.

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Catherine David: Most of the comments by Okwui and others regarding "*Magiciens de la terre*" are quite surprising to me. The major criticism I had—and still have—in regard to this show is that, with surely many good intentions, it reinforced major misunderstandings and preconceived ideas about center and peripheral modernity, as well as some other ideas romantic at best (the notion that there is an "exteriority" to modernity, under the guise of the exotic, archaic, or even anti-modern, etc.) and neocolonial at worst (that the non-West could offer premodern rationalities). I am getting tired of arguing that modernity is a complex phenomenon, full of folds we should unfold while taking into consideration temporalities which are not superimposable; and tired of quoting Walter Mignolo, "There are no people in the present living in the past"; and tired of saying that "*Magiciens*" would have been better served by inviting Hélio Oiticica rather than some folkloric maker of fake *candomblé* "fetishes."

Francesco Bonami: I think the main question is whether we can still talk about "exhibitions" when addressing phenomena like Documenta or the Venice Biennale. I feel very close to the idea of *bigness* that Rem Koolhaas applies to architecture: A building is not a building anymore but something else, with a plurality of functions. Similarly, an exhibition, when taken to a certain scale, is no longer an exhibition but a plurality of visions. When the *New York Times*' Michael Kimmelman pines for a reduced Venice Biennale of "a dozen or even a few dozen" artists, he is dreaming about a museum show—which isn't what Biennales and Documentas are about. People insist on looking at Documenta and Venice as unified territories, which they are not. Similarly, the concept of globalization is often used to define the world as a unified territory, which it is not. We experience fragmentation in the world, and that's what these big-scale events should reflect, with all the contradictions and tensions this implies.

I'd like to ask Martha Rosler about her experience in Venice, where I think the curators didn't want simply to expose their tastes—and some risk was, I believe, taken. Paradoxically, one of the accusations made about my directorship was that I didn't adequately reveal my taste, that I didn't "curate" the show enough. But to have done so would have contradicted our very conception of the Biennale.

Martha Rosle: My experience in Venice? You are actively soliciting an artist to complain—oops, I mean, to answer truthfully? Will I be committing suicide in public view? Sure, just ask again, I might actually say what my experience was!

Francesco Bonami: Well, I'll ask again. What was your experience? The significant issue here may be that people abandoned discussion, fearing that complaints would be answered with censorship or exclusion. I am honestly interested in hearing what artists experienced in Venice—what they feel they gained and lost.

Martha Rosler: Francesco's question takes me by surprise—I realize that we are thinking in different registers, which may not need underlining, but here it is: Curatorial enterprises, like all selection procedures, are abstract in relation to the objects of their choice compared with the physical dimensions of the experience for the artists who must be on site, especially if, horror of horrors, they are making an on-site "installation," or arranging for complex installations of preexisting works, or cobbling together some performance or physical object-

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set, and so on. Sadly for all of us, the physical conditions for the production of our work at Venice were dominated by the crushing heat. In the Arsenale, we were in the outback, with no facilities (water, toilets, food). The Biennale put us up in Mestre, an hour away, and the transportation provided was sporadic at best. We even had grave trouble obtaining vaporetto passes.

Our wonderfully mad "Utopia Station" included the garden at the end of the world—about a kilometer from the Arsenale entrance (and the toilets!). We were forbidden to use power tools or heavy machinery, so we raised our building the way old-timers raised barns in the United States, by hand. We had to plead for the installation of the electrical line we had been promised for six months. Our raw materials for the work could not be delivered because the man in charge was overbooked. Thus we had our artist army carrying sections of our building in teams of six to twelve, walking on dirt roads from the canal. I won't go on with this, except to say that information was not obtainable or consistent for the entire run-up period or the two weeks I was there (half of which I paid for myself).

I love my curators dearly. But I think there were too many projects in the show (sorry, Hans-Ulrich Obrist), which I put down to a large and generous vision. In my case, also, living and working in four different cities (two in Europe, two in the US), I lost contact with my curators for long stretches. What I liked best about the project, perhaps, was the open-endedness of it—announced as a seminar and a poster project above all, which removed emphasis from simple objectness. But everyone knows that that is not the way a grand exhibition of art is received—it's a show of wares, damn it! The poster part was grievously complicated, the seminar difficult to accomplish without technical support behind the scenes from the Biennale. The seminar element is what led me to invite my students and young associates to participate—another sure way to commit suicide publicly. (And is now the moment when I must aver to David Rimanelli that I am not now, and never have been, a dirty hippie [see "Entries," September 2003]? It was just too hot to look more soigné or to have my project maintain decorum.) My early experience in Documenta had already prepared me to know that these shows have something in common with childbirth. No matter how often you are warned, you can never be prepared for the enormity of *the labor*.

James Meyer Back to Catherine David's reservations about "*Magiciens*": Paging through that catalogue recently, I was struck first by the show's proleptic sense of what is to come (the global-themed show) and, second, by its neoprimitivist, regressive aspect—its Beuysian concept of the artist as shaman, of the work of art as auratic. Horrible! The later shows discarded the handmade fetish and "magical" artist for reproducible media and collective practices. The documentary photograph dominated at Documenta 10; Okwui's Documenta 11 favored the photo-projection and large installation (the mediums dismissed by some critics as "festival" forms). Another difference between "*Magiciens*" and later shows was the development of postcolonial and globalization theory, the integration of these discourses in curatorial practice, and the effort to politicize the exhibition itself—to connect it to counterhegemonic practices and transform curation into a kind of social critique and even (so the "Utopia Station" curators claimed) activism. Martha expresses skepticism about the transformative potential of such exhibitions. Yet Francesco's point that critics bristled at this Biennale's open-endedness, its free-for-all heterogeneity, suggests that his exhibition *did* hit a nerve.

Francesco Bonami: I hope that Venice hit a nerve! Of course, Venice has always fought against itself, meaning that the Biennale is constantly struggling with all that gives Venice its identity: the ancient city, the floating city. Mestre is no farther from the city's center than uptown Manhattan is from Tribeca, yet making the trip in Venice is like changing time zones—going to Mestre becomes something closer to a trip on the moon.

This year's Biennale included both open-ended projects and more defined ones. Audiences needed to change gears often, crossing different intellectual zones, which I understood would be an obstacle for some. People are used to monuments, milestones, visual focuses: the Gehry building in Bilbao, Ron Mueck's giants, Serra's spirals. If you don't build a "show" around these focal points, people get disoriented. But I realize, after all the criticism, that you can't ask certain people—professionals in particular—to customize their own movements within an exhibition: You need to direct them, to highlight what they should like or dislike. What's interesting is that the general public and, let's say, a generation younger than mine found this Biennale easy to navigate. They had no problem creating their own experience.

SCALE AND SPECIFICITY

James Meyer: Your point about the challenges specific to Venice as a historic, maritime city raises the question of disparities—economic, structural, locational—among these shows. Not all "global" exhibitions are so "grand." The Havana and Johannesburg biennials are not Venice. And—well, let's just say it—Venice is not Documenta. The differences between these two leading international art events have become increasingly apparent. Documenta is clearly better funded and planned. The curator has five years; the installations are impeccable. Each of those shows introduced an impressive new installation space. In comparison, Venice is less well funded and rushed—in fact, the installations were still going up during the press opening. Francesco's efforts in this regard struck me as pretty heroic. Has Venice—despite the fact that it is the "mother" of such exhibitions—taken a backseat to Kassel?

Francesco Bonami: Venice this year had a budget of roughly five and a half million euros—about half of Documenta's—and we had eighteen months to prepare. But rather than look at the situation in backseat/front seat terms, I suggest we focus on the specificity of these exhibitions and biennales. Venice and Documenta remain the two "mother" exhibitions because they were conceived with very specific goals in mind: Venice to counterbalance the decadence of the ancient city, and Kassel to give postwar Germany a new cultural voice. Today most of the biennales are staged, from the beginning, simply as "international events," overlooking at times their own specificity and often relying on international curators in hopes that the names will bring more attention. Venice is different from Kassel, and that's what gives Documenta and the Biennale their strengths. Without avoiding criticisms of the Biennale's organization, I strongly believe that the "heroic" aspect of the Biennale brings new insights every two years. Perhaps the difference between the two events is that we go to experience thinking in Kassel, and in Venice we go to think about experience.

Catherine David: After visiting many Venice Biennales and participating in the last one, I can say that we should acknowledge the unique (but for how long?) character of Documenta as a space where, working very hard and within a media circus, you can really develop a statement

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(and a real production structure) and find ways of implementing it. You might have problems with the local press and politicians, but nobody will ever put his nose into the catalogue's contents or lecturers list—perhaps because they wouldn't even recognize the names! I remember having to repeat Edward Said's name two or three times to the local authorities the day of the opening! Never mind. The other big difference between Kassel and Venice is that, when there's nothing challenging to see in Documenta, there won't be any consolation to find in buying Italian shoes or visiting the Accademia. In times of global cultural tourism, I find it interesting that you can go to a place just for a specific exhibition.

Okwui Enwezor: I am intrigued by Francesco's discussion of exhibition scale in relation to Koolhaas's theory of *bigness*. However, the use of the idea here still seems opaque. My worry isn't so much that the large-scale exhibition can no longer harbor a level of intimacy among artworks, artists, forms, or discourses but that there's a danger of totalization inherent in the attempt to address disparate practices, unless one sharpens the differences between them. Bigness may be great for Koolhaas's architecture, but I don't see how it can function in an exhibition without unnecessarily destroying the systems of differentiation proper to each artistic practice. Already we have the problem of sprawl in most large-scale exhibitions; and with the increasing tendency by artists to develop their work around long narrative cycles, temporal density adds to the sense of disorientation viewers are confronted with in exhibitions. I still insist on the responsibility of the curator to make legible statements by means of the exhibition. I do not want to abdicate this responsibility. If the exhibition gets too big, to the point that no one cares about the "plurality of visions," then we abandon the critical responsibility we have toward artists. That said, I would be interested to hear from Francesco how "bigness" functioned in Venice.

James Meyer: Okwui points to a loss of scale at Venice. Certainly, it wasn't only conservative critics who complained about the show's incoherence. Francesco mentions younger viewers finding it easier to navigate the Biennale, but then you had Scott Rothkopf observing, in a recent *Artforum* [September 2003], that he found the Arsenale utterly perplexing until he reached Carlos Basualdo's "The Structure of Survival" toward the end. I felt the same way. While the stated aim of this year's Biennale was (I quote your introduction) to "make the viewer feel the ground under his or her feet again" in a fragmented society, my own experience in the Arsenale, until I reached Basualdo's excellent installation, was of a general disorder. There would seem to be a tension between your desire to relinquish control and your other ambition to reinstate the viewer's "tyranny." Isn't curatorial control what a viewer longs for, needs? Why is a carefully organized exhibition with a strong point of view "conservative?" Documenta 11 had a very strong point of view, and I don't think this was merely the result of better funding or Kassel's relative compactness. And I don't think we could call Documenta 11 a conservative show. After all, the same *New York Times* critic didn't like Okwui's show, either.

Francesco Bonami: I use the word *bigness* to define a context where different practices can share the same skin but not the same focus. Venice was definitely structured to sharpen differences and not destroy distinct artistic practices. The problem was that critics old and young insisted on traveling through the Biennale as if it were a single show. There was resistance to the idea of traveling through eleven different exhibitions, each one clearly

defined. The name of the curators at the entrance of each show was not a way to promote the curatorial practice but rather a way to define a "territory." So I don't think that I abdicated my responsibility; my responsibility was to ensure that each exhibition maintained its own legibility. In turn, if the Arsenale was perplexing, then I feel it succeeded. Aren't we all perplexed by our contemporary, fragmented culture? Why not try to mirror this perplexity?

Also, it's quite interesting that this perplexity was diminished in the most analytical exhibitions. I am not here to defend the Biennale, but this general reaction proves that the pace of the Arsenale was right: Carlos Basualdo's and Catherine David's shows—"The Structure of Survival" and "Contemporary Arab Representations," respectively—were, in a way, Brechtian moments. The viewer obtained a certain clarity, getting back the awareness of being a viewer. The Arsenale was constructed in terms of rhythm, yet very few people devoted time to the analysis of each individual exhibition, where they could have found the "curatorial control" that a viewer longs for.

THE CURATOR'S "TYRANNY"

Okwui Enwezor: The ambulatory nature of the exhibition experience is a strong advantage for the curator, and Francesco's highly suggestive concept of the "Dictatorship of the Viewer" struck me as one way to exploit it. I found it surprising, though, that many critics failed to pick up on connections among the Arsenale's individual exhibitions. For example, Catherine David's section perfectly complemented Carlos Basualdo's: Both asked the same questions about phenomenological ruptures in urban space and used essentially the same analytical tool kit. While the exhibitions may not have had one central thread running through them, there were still moments where I perceived shared interests, and these helped soften the borders among the highly individualized capsules produced by each curator.

For Documenta 11, the legibility of the spaces was of paramount importance, and we spent a fair amount of time thinking about how to make viewers aware that the exhibition was not simply a series of arbitrary trajectories. We were fortunate to have worked with architects who understood the exhibition and designed simple icons that constantly grounded the viewer in the different buildings. Venice wanted to inaugurate a different kind of exhibition architecture.

James Meyer: Okwui's comparison of Venice and Kassel raises the question of the relative benefits of two different curatorial structures: a team of curators extending the vision of a main organizer versus a more autonomous collaboration—that is, different curators working alone but presenting their shows together. It also raises the question of having artists curate exhibitions, as they did under Francesco's directorship. The one resulted in Documenta 11's sprawling coherence; the other in the Arsenale's "heterogeneity."

Hans-Ulrich Obrist: It's very interesting that Francesco invited Gabriel Orozco and Rirkrit Tiravanija as cocurators of the Biennale. If we look at the twentieth century, we see that many of the most remarkable exhibitions were curated by artists—with examples from Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, and Richard Hamilton and the Independent Group. This is true even going back to the nineteenth century, with Courbet's "Realism" exhibition. If those exhibitions were

important, it was because they went against the grain of the times: Artists devised new exhibition concepts and displays because they were frustrated by the spaces and modalities in which their works were shown.

Martha Rosler: As far as the Documenta 11 platforms are concerned, my "Utopia Station" group found statements from those conferences (published in magazines and available online) to be of great interest in the seminars that led up to our Venice contribution. I have repeatedly returned to some published remarks by Catherine David, in the Documenta *Documents* book. Withal, I am a bit perturbed by Okwui's remarks that rather decisively elevate the curatorial metadiscourse above the contributions of the artists, which I can accept up to about 20 percent. I have to admit that I regard my own work as "instances" of a discourse rather than leaden "things," but I'm not sure how willing I am to have a curator say that!

Okwui Enwezor: On the contrary, Martha, I do not elevate the curator's metadiscourse above that of the artists at all—far from it. If I'm reluctant to treat the artist as an absolute god it's only because I find it difficult to press myself into the false idolatry of the artwork as the only meaningful theory and speculative object in an exhibition. I always take it that artworks by their very nature are concrete examples of highly speculative thinking, and as such, I come to respect the artist on terms that are beneficial to our mutual interests in the construction of an exhibition.

I also take your earlier point about the postcolonial and the art world's relationship to some of its products as the visual Esperanto for a mediated Otherness. But your reading presumes that the center still calls the shots, in terms of what the political ruptures of the present suggest about contemporary culture. In looking at the scrambled epistemological landscape today, I give careful attention to some of the antinomies you have pointed to, because it leads to the question of why the political is such a taboo in art. There's a kind of McCarthyism today, in which any exhibition of ideas with topicality is treated like an epithet: the monstrous, the untouchable. This turn is not only made by the market's tastemakers; it is also operative in the discourse of defenders of the neo-avant-garde, who deliberately turn away from the subject of the postcolonial, privileging instead a brand of "institutional critique" drained completely of its politics in order to rescue it as a collectible object for the museum and market. Whenever I encounter the term "advanced art," I can only cringe, because I see an attempt at closure that leaves no room for the unsettled nature and variety of "critical" practice today.

Yinka Shonibare: The number of artists participating in this debate highlights the "dictatorship of the curator" (sorry, Francesco, it's a joke too good to resist). I think Martha will agree that the art of curating has become almost more important than the art, and the exchange between the curators here demonstrates this quite well. How did we get to a point where the rise of the global curator has brought artistic practice to its knees? It feels like a David and Goliath situation. This discussion reminds me of a dinner conversation between a critic and artist friend. The critic said to my friend, "You are simply an actor, and the curator is the director." My friend, who had had quite a bit to drink, screamed in horror, "How dare you say such a thing! I am nobody's actor. I'm an artist." To which the critic replied, "You are an actor whether you like it or not!"

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Okwui Enwezor: Yinka's position about the curator as Goliath and the artist as David is rather surprising. It simply repeats a familiar stereotype. I wish that this opposition between artists and curators could be put in better perspective. As a curator, I have no interest in subordinating or instrumentalizing an artist's work, even if I concede that once you treat works of art like objects and don the curator's hermeneutic hat, the work in question may be used to prove a theory, explore a hypothesis, or test an intuition. All these are proper and legitimate parts of the curator's task.

In any case, I did not perceive a dictatorship of the curator in Venice any more than I witnessed a dictatorship of the viewer. Francesco's theme was metaphorical, perhaps even engaged in gallows humor. What I perceived was an approach to curating that defied the rules of a singular curatorial overview. We can quarrel with whether the approach was productive or not, but it certainly was not dictatorial. What is ironic is the fact that Francesco involved artists in the curatorial team of Venice, an action taken in a truly affiliative spirit. I wonder what Martha and Yinka's responses to such inclusion are. Were the artist/curators in your view strong advocates for the artists in their shows? Martha, what was your curatorial interaction with Rirkrit Tiravanija like? Did it improve your position, vis-à-vis your project? Was he more empathetic than the average power-besotted curator who wants to eat the artist and her work whole?

Martha Rosler: How was it to have an artist as a curator? Well, not so different from not having one. Answers to questions about available Biennale resources were a bit difficult to come by. I'll tell you what Rirkrit said when he was unable to provide answers to most of my group's preliminary questions. He reminded me mildly that he was a Buddhist, and we laughed and ate the meal he had prepared. I have myself been an artist-curator, and I still don't know how different a curator I would have been, had I been trained. Artists may trust one another more, since we are generally operating on the same side of the power divide; less is lost in translation. But there is always the press of friendship, which cuts both ways in organizing shows.

Catherine David: In most interventions concerning global exhibitions today, what seems to be explicitly and implicitly in discussion are the limits of the traditional "exhibition" concept and format at a moment when many challenging contemporary aesthetic practices no longer conform to the three unities of classical theater: unity of time, unity of space, unity of narrative. In other words, many projects today are dealing with ubiquitous spaces, developing simultaneously in heterogeneous media. The question for me is not about who is leading or even less about who is the artist but about *how* to produce, discuss, debate, and circulate to various audiences a certain number of ideas and formal articulations proposed by author(s). At this level, I think that many people (in this case, too, I prefer to say "authors") with whom I am working no longer correspond to the economic, social, and cultural figure of the "artist" as it has been constituted in the modern age. And they don't worry too much about it.

EXTENSION

James Meyer: Catherine points to recent transformations in the duration and extension of today's exhibitions. One could perhaps discuss these tactics as a response to the fashionable

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concept of "time-space compression"—David Harvey's term for the purported temporal and spatial shrinkage of global society. The "platform" formats of Documenta 11 and "Utopia Station" were efforts at spatial and temporal extension, attempts to bring the exhibition beyond its traditional site- and time-specific locale. Now that these platforms are over (but are they?), I'd like to hear more about what happened at Lagos, at Saint Lucia, at Berlin? How did the platforms impact one another? How "ongoing" is "Utopia Station"? What will happen to "it" after the show in Venice is packed up?

Okwui Enwezor: The platform idea was a continuation of work that began for me with the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, where I took up the challenge of Catherine's radically paradigmatic Documenta 10. For the platforms in Lagos, New Delhi, Berlin, Vienna, and Saint Lucia, we were interested in expanding the temporal scale and spatial reach of Documenta 11 in order to question the casual discourse often found in exhibitions. All the platforms, with the exception of the one in Saint Lucia, were organized as public debates in contexts where we believed those debates would show broad disciplinary formations, already alluded to here, as a consequence of globalization. We showed specificity in the various communities of discourse by collaborating with institutions in each place: For example, for the "Under Siege: Four African Cities—Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos" conference, we worked intimately with the Dakar-based CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, the preeminent social science think tank in Africa) to learn more about the institute's research. In Lagos, the critical participation of the Nigerian public showed the degree to which intense local debates could intervene in assumptions about power so often arrogated to centers in the West. Most important, the platforms offered the opportunity to confront the limits of any exhibition model that tries to simply appropriate the term "globalization" without a rigorous review of what the "global" actually is in relation to different spaces of production.

But to answer your question as to whether the platforms have actually stopped, I would say no, in the sense that the individual publication connected to each project is today being read avidly as an important contribution to each of the different disciplines we focused on, whether urbanism and architecture, theories of justice, comparative literature, film, or postcolonial studies.

Hans-Ulrich Obrist: "Utopia Station" owes a debt to novelist, poet, and Caribbean studies theorist Edouard Glissant's ideas regarding large-scale exhibitions and globalization, especially his understanding of the exhibition as archipelago—which carries with it the idea of the coexistence of several time zones. He believed that the exhibition should resist the time format of the fly-in, fly-out exhibition industry, in which an exhibition is switched on and off and where everything is repainted white once the show is dismantled. The exhibition, according to Glissant, shouldn't be consumed in one visit but be an ongoing experience. In fact, he understood the exhibition as research, an occasion for a group to work together and progress—not a model for showing materials but for creating a collective form of intelligence. Thus "Utopia Station" is permanently changing, both in its presentation and "content" (goals and reservoir of ideas). The structure will evolve, and different artists will be included, demonstrating that an exhibition is not merely a product to be packaged and shipped off to the next venue. And through this process, we hope to demonstrate the exhibition's power to

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critique globalization understood as a homogenizing force—the exhibition becomes a process of transformation on the local level.

For another example of an alternative exhibition time frame, consider the example of *The Land*, a large-scale social collaborative and interdisciplinary project started in 1998 on a plot that Tiravanija purchased in the village of Sanpatong, near Chiang Mai, Thailand. It's a kind of laboratory for self-sustainable development, a site where a new model for living is being tested. There are two working rice fields, monitored by students from the University of Chang Mai and a local village. A slew of contemporary artists have carried out projects. Kamin Lerdchaiprasert built a gardener's house, Atelier van Lieshout developed a toilet system, and Tobias Rehberger, Alicia Framis, and Karl Holmqvist worked on housing structures. Arthur Meyer constructed a system for harnessing solar power, Prachya Phintong a program for fish farming. Mit Chai-Inn planted trees to be later made into baskets, and the Danish collective Superflex developed a system for the production of biogas. Finally, Philippe Parreno and the architect François Roche have begun their plans for a central activity hall that will function as a biotechnology-driven hyperplug. The Plug-In Station uses nature to produce the interface: It will make use of a satellite downlink, and an elephant will generate the necessary power. Composed of complex exchanges that have begun among individuals all over the world and long before Tiravanija staked out its territory, *The Land* demonstrates perfectly a collaborative promiscuity. To that end, it is important that *The Land's* collaborative development is somewhat unpredictable. The artist's calendar is no longer determined only by the exhibition rhythm: The time frame seems to come from somewhere else.

Martha Rosler: I very much agree with Hans-Ulrich's suggestion that viewing needs to be rethought. But in practical terms, what do we do with shows that require the press to travel long distances and descend en masse on the exhibition, read it in a brief moment, write their columns in their hotel rooms, then rush off? The press is the prepotent audience for global shows. The reception of the exhibition for most people amounts to a reading of these journalists' columns, which supply a framework for viewing, if not the entire experience. "What do artists want?" is the question often posed with annoyance by those with more power in the distribution hierarchy. Artists who exhibit anything other than medium-size paintings are akin to independent movie producers, who must gain funds, generally through the sponsorship of small governments or highly capitalized dealerships, to produce large-scale works and to support a group of assistants and installers: Invited artists and their projects need a more adequate level of support. Hans-Ulrich's description of Rirkrit's project speaks to this question of the duration and complexity of artists' projects, without direct relation to exhibition or display.

Hans-Ulrich Obrist: We have not spoken about the city itself as a potential "living" biennial—in other words, the idea of using a biennial to trigger something on a different plane, continuing and expanding a public project, and so moving beyond the traditional frame of the biennial itself. At the Poughkeepsie Utopia Meeting and "Utopia Station" at the Biennale in Venice, Anri Sala showed a film of Tirana, Albania, where the mayor, Edi Rama, had himself painted various apartment-building walls painted in colorful geometric patterns to improve the quality of life—since there was no money for major renovations in the city. Rama believes that the relation between the elected and electors is quite similar to that of the artist and the spectator. When Anri and I were invited to curate a section of the Tirana Biennale, we

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proposed that the mayor open the color project to other artists, thus creating a group show that does not just come and go. The buildings are going to stay, there will be many more houses, and eventually more artists will propose more projects, but they will inherit the colors that already exist in Tirana.

AVANT-GARDES AND UTOPIAS

James Meyer: Okwui, I've been struck by your antipathy to the concept of the avant-garde, elaborated in the Documenta 11 catalogue, where you observe: "While strong revolutionary claims have been made for the avant-garde within Westernism, its vision of modernity remains surprisingly conservative and formal. . . . The propagators of the avant-garde have done little to constitute a space of self-reflexivity that can understand new relations of artistic modernity not founded on Westernism." Here, you single out the particular tendency of institutional critique as being "drained" of politics and postcolonial awareness.

I would argue that what you are calling a neo-avant-garde practice is a space where issues of colonialism and neocolonialism have long been addressed, if by no means sufficiently. If you're talking about such reflexive practices as Daniel Buren's and Michael Asher's revelations of the white cube, I won't disagree with you. But if you're looking for postcolonial awareness, you need look no further than Hans Haacke's countless works linking Western art museums and foundations to repressive regimes (apartheid South Africa, Pinochet's Chile, etc.). Martha has been addressing these questions since the early '70s, from her *Tijuana Maid* piece [1975], right up to *Chile on the Road to NAFTA* [1997]. Younger artists working in and around institutional critique—Renée Green, Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion—have also dealt with these questions. So while I greatly admired your Documenta, I was struck by the scarcity of reflexive work there (the same at Venice). One of Documenta 11's strengths was its foregrounding of such forms as video projection and installation, which you clearly feel are best able to address the social concerns that interest you. But perhaps our understanding of the "global" show would benefit from projects that address these issues in relation to the exhibition frame—to your own curatorial practice.

The idea of the avant-garde is also interesting in light of an initiative like "Utopia Station," which very much constituted itself in these terms. Hans-Ulrich's discussion of Tiravanija's project sounds classically avant-gardist: Let's set up new models for living; let's improve life with art. And indeed, throughout "Utopia Station" one saw markers everywhere of avant-gardist memory: the creation of an experimental space far from the rest of the exhibition; a poster alluding to Courbet's 1855 World's Fair pavilion. Even the word "station" brings to mind the Suprematist El Lissitzky's definition of the Proun as a "way station for affirmation of the new." Knowing Hans-Ulrich's admiration for Alexander Dorner, the famous director of the Hannover Provinzialmuseum who commissioned Lissitzky's Abstract Gallery in 1927 as a space that could activate a beholder—one of the ambitions of "Utopia Station" and of Venice in general—I wondered whether the avant-garde in its historical, transformative formation was being revived. To set up a counter or laboratory space that could bring art into life is an old avant-garde dream. Where Okwui rejects avant-garde memory, the Utopians—here at the start of the twenty-first century—engage it.

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Okwui Enwezor: James, you're correct about my general antipathy to the concept of the avant-garde, but my position is neither hostile nor an opposition per se. While there is much in the legacy of the avant-garde that is wonderful, I find it of limited use, beyond the trace of its constantly reinvented heroic and mythologized past. I do feel the stakes are much higher today and the object of attack quite different. If the study of the avant-garde is to be useful, then we must expand its locus. What would the history of the neo-avant-garde be like if it were to pay attention to the radical trope of subaltern studies in India; liberation theology in South America; resistance art in South Africa; *creolité* discourse in Martinique and the Caribbean; Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas's "Third Cinema"; and many other movements that emerged in the last half of the twentieth century, with an awareness that they were intervening strongly in the field of culture and history simultaneously?

We are not entirely in disagreement on artists such as Haacke, Green, and Rosler, to whom I would add Chris Marker, Glauber Rocha, and Djibril Diop Mambéty. Given how susceptible the instruments of the avant-garde are to capture by forces of institutional power (a great example is the dissipated energy of anti-globalization movements today), perhaps what one can hope for is the articulation of a new kind of "state of emergency," in Walter Benjamin's sense. Only then can new alternatives, new alliances, and the fostering of more interaction in the space of culture happen. Only through such rethinking can the avant-garde make sense in the current dispensation of coercive politics and state of exception ushered in by Bush and company. While it would be naive to think that the current artistic sphere would bring about true change in this regard, it would serve us well to rethink the civilizational dichotomy that at present has engulfed the field of culture. If this is what the neo-avant-garde wants to achieve, then I am greatly reassured. But I am skeptical. It's too difficult for people to give up their memory, their past, their history.

Hans-Ulrich Obrist: I would like to quote Molly Nesbit from one of our most recent "Utopia Station" discussions in Venice: "The word 'avant-garde,' like the word 'utopia,' is now too full of associations and diverging experience to be useful all by itself. Historically the avant-garde was understood to be a bounded group, much like a classical political party. Art itself was never an institution per se any more than it was a single discourse. Last weekend Immanuel Wallerstein spoke in 'Utopia Station' of the 'movement of movements' that currently defines the World Social Forum. Why not consider the intensely mixed efforts we see at 'Utopia Station' and the last two Documentas to be contributing to the greater, moving movements at stake there? The old definitions of art's place in the political debate need to be updated. 'Avant-garde' may not be the most productive of words now. . . . It's not that the old language is bad, but it is preventing us from thinking in fresh directions."

James Meyer: I appreciate your point that terms like "avant-garde" and "utopia" may be freighted with historical implications one may not want to revive. At the same time, you did call your effort "Utopia Station," invoking precisely these implications; your statement located the effort within this narrative, and even now you discuss the participation of artists as curators by reference to Courbet, Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, and Richard Hamilton and the Independent Group—which makes a lot of sense. I believe it's imperative to recall past efforts so as to be clear about what one is doing now. We can think freshly only by being conscious of what's gone on before. I'm actually far more troubled by Okwui's critique. Okwui, I obviously disagree with your suggestion that Westerners (or anyone else) give up their memory, their

past, their history. I hope you'll agree that history allows us to think clearly about the past, its occlusions and less savory aspects. If we didn't think historically about the avant-garde, we wouldn't be able to discuss the primitivist fantasies of the Surrealists, for example. Still, I find it devastating and true when you say Western critics are "reassured" by the concept of the neo-avant-garde, as if this were the *only* narrative of "advanced" practice and the only language in which this could be discussed. This means, of course, that the same names, the same references—from Courbet to Hans Haacke—are continually brought up. Apart from the obvious point that they are mainly Western names, the tradition itself is conceived as self-referential and self-perpetuating, not unlike Greenberg's modernism.

Martha Rosler: As a rule of thumb, art has been said to advance partly through a willful misunderstanding of what has gone before (as artists tend to insist, and as Harold Bloom has codified). So, despite the militarism of the avant-garde paradigm and the downright hubris it presupposes, the idea remains attractive, for its whiff of political and cultural vanguardism, perhaps, but most especially for our desire to affect the course of social events, redirect discourse, and advance civilization. (This is all boilerplate.) We like our scouts to be progressive, not reactionary; thus, avant-gardism carries the sub-text of utopia, which I have called an embarrassment. For me at the Biennale, the utopian concept was rescued by the interposition of the idea of "station" (despite its echoes of the Passion on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other). Note that, as James points out, Hans-Ulrich's examples have vacated the terrain of the exhibition for the "real world"—the goal of avant-gardism as we have understood it—whether in toilets and fish farms or new urban spaces.

THE GLOBAL MARKET

Martha Rosler: Early on, James writes, "Martha expresses a certain skepticism about the transformative potential of such exhibitions." My skepticism extends to social transformation more than art-world transformation, which is the one thing we may be sure is always on the horizon, even if we are tempted to remark "*plus ça change . . .*" But I do intend my remarks to be taken as noting a new, imperative role for art beyond decoration, whether of home or of portfolio. I see the international exhibition as a grand collector and translator of subjectivities under the latest phase of globalization. This is far from trivial.

I would like to point out, though, that the means of selection have been institutionalized in a way that drags on the selection process rather than the selection guidelines. Artists are commonly put forward by other interested parties, such as powerful gallerists or curators, whose investment is often linked to prospective sales. As in most realms, short-term gain (fortune and fame) trumps any collective project such as we are describing here and subtly or not promotes reductiveness in an artist's project, if nothing else, to increase its legibility and signature value.

Yinka urges us to "prioritize the aesthetic and political concerns of artists rather than their origins." But in my observation, conservative aestheticians—the beauty huggers—convince themselves they can operate that way, privileging formal concerns over questions of national origin, because they are specifically allergic to the "political part." For all those of goodwill, it is not possible to separate the geographic/geopolitical from the other criteria, and in fact that

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feature casts a determining shadow over even such matters as whether "the political" will be considered at all, as I suggested earlier.

Yinka Shonibare: At the beginning of our conversation, Martha addressed the historical question of invisibility, the historical relationship of the colonized Other as depicted in grand nineteenth-century curio fairs like the great exhibition at the Crystal Palace. I have been extremely concerned by the proliferation of and a curatorial tendency toward a neo-nineteenth-century "discovery" of the new and foreign artist. The overtraveled curator brings back a "discovered" foreign artist, who is in fact already known in his or her own country; and that foreign artist today likely already has a sense of the global, even while staying physically at home. The artist working in Delhi or South Africa can no longer fulfill an exotic desire, but they can surely construct one. A two-way exchange would be truly global and by far more productive. There are simply not enough artists from the powerful North being shown in the South. Of course we understand that there are economic and political barriers to a more balanced exchange. This indeed brings us to the issue of diaspora and why the Western metropolis is increasingly multicultural. An increasingly multicultural West faces a challenge of reconstructing its institutions. This is why I think that while excessive traveling may be useful, the question of globalization is not necessarily manifested in physical geography.

James Meyer: Martha, whose work emerges out of a New Left politics and critical theory, continues to discuss the "grand" exhibition in critical terms. Yinka, on the other hand, observes that "globalization has produced a fantastic opportunity for visibility." Martha questions the global tendency. Yinka embraces it yet questions a current "neo-nineteenth century" tendency to "discover" the new and foreign artist.

Let's recall that both Documenta 10 and 11 were conceived as counter globalization efforts. To what extent are these shows in fact "grand collectors and translators of subjectivities under the latest phase of globalization," as Martha claims? Are they essentially glorified trade fairs for the presentation of new and increasingly diverse goods? One cannot underestimate the role played by the exhibitions of Okwui and his peers, including the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, in establishing this market. Reading Okwui's poignant essay "Between Worlds: Postmodernism and African Artists in the Western Metropolis," published in 1999, in which he speaks of the "exclusion" of African artists in the West, I am struck by how much this situation has changed (though I wonder how much, *really*).

Francesco Bonami: It's curious to note that it's often the artists best fed by the market who tend to dismiss or refuse to participate in biennials or Documentas—not those who polemicize the market and its influence on these events.

Okwui Enwezor: It is easy to ascribe a demonic character to the market, but the market is never one thing, any more than the museums, curators, biennials are. So I hesitate to draw any overgeneralized conclusions as to what they each do. I, for one, am a member of this community, the art world. While there are practices and positions I abhor, most of the agents operating in the field of contemporary art are relatively benign. Only a small few truly affect the discourse in a fundamental way. To add to my earlier point about proximate relationships to the market, one artistic example that springs to mind is David Hammons, who for nearly four decades has placed his work in the interstices between disappearance and immanence.

Even if his legendary refusal may sometimes grate, it nonetheless manifests a real ethical sense of distancing his practice from the market. And yes, one does find his work in major museums and galleries, but his political stance is incontrovertibly clear.

Francesco Bonami: The market, as Okwui points out, is one variable in the system. It's part of the system because we live in a world ruled by economics. To be honest, dealers are among the few who—how do you say it?—put their money where their mouth is. They are the few who can invest and take risks. In recent decades we have witnessed a change, however. Before, most of the artists made it to Venice or Documenta after a solid gallery career. Today many artists land in good galleries only *after* a solid career in the biennial system (e.g., Shirin Neshat, William Kentridge, and Anri Sala).

CENTER AND PERIPHERY

Francesco Bonami: As to Yinka's comments about neo-nineteenth-century discovery, I have always insisted that recent curatorial practice risked becoming a kind of cultural safari for contemporary souvenirs. We travel to prove through the discovery of the unknown our knowledge of it (even while curators and organizers often compromise in order to have big names on their "list"). Western artists should invest more into projects appearing in different contexts, or this situation and division will stay the same. The peripheral will remain peripheral.

Hans-Ulrich Obrist: One can't emphasize enough the importance of the "peripheral" biennials in the '90s. The peripheral biennials, at least until the end of the decade, were not just "another Biennale again"; it was really a time when they were tools, helping a new generation of artists from different cultural backgrounds become internationally visible and also helping curators test ideas. The success of the biennales in some countries also triggered the building of more permanent structures and sustained exhibition activity: A good example is probably Vasif Kortun's Proje4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art. Okwui's 1997 Johannesburg Biennale and Paulo Herkenhoff's 1998 Bienal de São Paulo are among the most influential shows of the '90s, as important as Documenta or the Venice Biennale.

Okwui Enwezor: Hans-Ulrich makes a great point. In fact, any proper analysis of the globalization of contemporary art should begin with how we review the antagonism set up by the center/ periphery relations of power around artistic circulation. The rise of biennials in Cairo, Dakar, Havana, and Sydney, the Fukuoka and Asia Pacific triennials, and even Manifesta occurred at a moment when there was a series of large consolidations in the marketing of global culture (think of "world music" and postcolonial literature). But the biennials took on an inverse logic. Rather than looking to the Western metropolitan centers to set the agenda, they developed a logic of proximate relationships to the art market and museums of contemporary art, thereby eluding absolute circumscription by forces of the market and those who possess discursive authority. By forcing the art world to change its traditional trajectories, these biennials brought about a new critical pressure on institutions like Venice and Documenta to renovate. Another point of great historical consequence is that the terms of debate brought about by the expansion of the exhibition to the periphery forced changes in the attitudes of the curators; for not only were curators exposed to complex social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements, they were also confronted with their inability

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to translate practices that no longer were dependent on the mechanisms of the market and logic of canon formation and hence needed a different kind of engagement. If we take a biennial like Dakar as an example, we find that it was not just a matter of "another biennial" but an attempt to define a cultural and artistic terrain that at its inception was delineated as pan-Africanist, in the same manner that Cairo is fundamentally pan-Arabist. Even something like Manifesta, which I have been critical of because of the way it has pretended that Europe has no postcolonial history, is part of these redefinitions, at the heart of which is a struggle to define the consequences of modernity. If you ask me, I would claim that most biennials, however compensatory and impoverished they may appear, are the true sites of enlightened debate on what contemporary art means today, a position thoroughly abdicated by museums. The proposed model of discourse that they insinuate is reticular, and when the dust settles they may perhaps give direction to how we think of, write about, and curate contemporary art. In fact this is already happening (take a look at any recent art-history survey book). Given this turn of events, it's important this change be registered more frequently on the pages of *Artforum*.

James Meyer: Okwui, I appreciate your point about the pressure exerted by the so-called peripheral biennials on Documenta and Venice to renovate themselves and broaden their purviews. I wonder, though, if you could explain what you mean when you say these shows "developed a logic of proximate relationships" to the commercial gallery and contemporary museum, thereby "eluding absolute circumscription by forces of the market." What is the distinction between "proximate" and "absolute" here? Martha and I take a more cynical view of how these peripheral biennials might work within the Western art market: as suppliers of new goods. Again, this *has* happened to some of the practices you've brought to attention in Johannesburg and elsewhere and then showed in Western museums. Some eventually have made it into blue-chip galleries and onto the cover of *Artforum*. You've *succeeded* in bringing a broader visibility to "non-Western" or diasporic practice (though the number of artists is admittedly few). This visibility—for Kentridge, for Shonibare, for Seydou Keita—has only been achieved within the framework of the present "global" network of exhibitions and galleries. I don't see this as a problem. It's the way it is, or rather, the way it's becoming. So to claim that these shows have "eluded absolute circumscription by forces of the market"—well, I just don't see this. And, teasing out something Yinka implied earlier—sorry, Martha—I don't think the market is always a negative thing, if it can bring in new forms of visibility and meaning.

Okwui Enwezor: I was not suggesting that these biennials and artists inscribed in the local circuits where they operate don't have a keen interest in being part of the broader international context; however, I do not believe they want to be absorbed and transformed in toto by such a context either. Therefore, the strategy of proximity (a strategy that keeps them in the game, while effectively situated outside of it) seems to utilize the idea of the trickster—a mode of behavior akin to Situationist *détournement*—to confront the power of the market. Because these biennials and the institutions that run them are weak and underfunded and function under precarious conditions, they know that absolute circumscription is the beginning of their demise; so they offer something of a counterstrategy of disinterest, which allows them a certain level of autonomy to circulate their brand of contemporary art and modernity. The same with artists who operate in them but with great suspicion of the market, like Martha. Therefore, what we see are parallel economies (as in professional tennis) that allow artists to

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survive and continue to be productive, even if they do not "make it into blue-chip galleries or onto the cover of *Artforum*." In the end, the global exhibition, and its expansive network, has been a boon to the art market. And I agree with you that this is positive in more than economic terms for artists. Professionally, for curators and museums it is a rich source for looking at art and meeting artists from outside the more mainstream circuits. But I needed to make the point based on personal knowledge, that biennials and artists in the periphery do not look into the Western framework opportunistically. They want to be valued, respected, and celebrated like everyone else.

AESTHETIC/ANTI-AESTHETIC

Yinka Shonibare: Martha, speaking as a self-confessed beauty hugger, I would like to add that I have found beauty one of the most radically subversive strategies to counter a Eurocentric hegemony on the use of beauty. The debates on aesthetics cannot be narrowly defined as a modernist concern; the politics of aesthetics is directly related to issues of globalization, particularly when taste is defined by the powerful center in the North that, in turn, defines the art market globally. Curatorial structures, while important, often leave artists somewhat dumbfounded; the curatorial debate about Venice and Documenta deals closely with the dissemination of ideas. I feel that in the current global climate maybe, just maybe, we need to return to the big idea again. Documenta 11 was clear in its political vision. Venice was more heterogeneous.

Martha Rosler: Yinka, I can only say that in the States, the debate over beauty has been deeply reactionary, a cry for "art for art's sake" to return us to the grand old days when the critics were in control, patrons knew what to buy, and artists didn't mess with politics.

I am also very much interested in the actor-director debate, but I would remove it from the stage setting to the artisan's shop, if not the factory floor. I think it bears mentioning that art is a system with a complex enough set of codes and multiple levels of discourse, none of which can fully capture the phenomenon at hand. I will continue to speak here for the workforce of small suppliers; curators appropriately talk in terms of an overarching vision, which as a metadiscourse by its nature renders the event as a series of strategies.

The codes in art discourse also govern the types of "issues" deemed to bear an acceptable level of aesthetic address, and those that will earn the legitimation necessary to join the exhibition. As academic discourses increasingly infuse art discourses, their fashions help determine the direction of the art world's political gaze. Speaking personally, I am much, much happier with the direction these international exhibitions have taken as they seek a global mission because they have recognized the genuine wish of artists to join the international conversation about the nature of civilization. Artists, more than most curators, I think, dream of having their work effect social change—a romantic legacy, no doubt. Art that threatens (even if only symbolically!) to go beyond symbolic discourse becomes a hot potato that may require curators and museum directors to decide whether to speak in its defense. I think that is an invisible brake on the sort of issues that may be considered, and why the aesthetic surplus as cover remains so critical. It also helps explain why the compass of global concerns in the art world is limited.

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James Meyer: Yinka, could you say more about your self-identification as a "beauty hugger" in light of Martha's claim that the "return of beauty" of recent years is a reactionary "cry for 'art for art's sake'"? You suggest that the anti-aesthetic is a "Eurocentric" tendency trapped in a "modernist" sensibility.

Yinka Shonibare: When in 1910 Coco Chanel appeared in a man's suit at a society event, she sought and achieved the power of a dandy's glamour. The clothing she chose to wear defied societal restrictions imposed on her class (she was working class) and defied her status as a mistress. To reclaim aesthetics for the left (as opposed to its traditional home on the right), I will begin with some surgical work. In the mid-'80s my generation of artists encountered the discourse around deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory. You can imagine how we felt about Clement Greenberg. In my own practice and my interest in popular culture and black music, I began my own brand of sampling. My unruly practice overlapped semiotic theory with Victoriana, on account of how this colonial period has influenced my own identity formation with a dose of glorious dandyism. In dandyism I found a subversive use of aesthetics as masquerade and mimicry. The dandy is the defiant aesthete par excellence. I became immediately intrigued by Oscar Wilde's and Beau Brummel's relationships to the establishment of their time, as they were both outsiders. Baudelaire described dandyism as "an institution beyond the laws"; he spoke of the dandy's "joy of astonishing others." For him dandyism was a déclassé achievement based on talents that work and money cannot buy. The aesthete does not have to be reactionary. My reclamation of aesthetics has more in common with the strategies of a trickster who is utterly impossible to place because he is a fun-lover who is at home with confusion yet politically astute. Beauty is political when it is appropriated by the "other," of course. The trickster is unknowable because he is always in disguise.

Martha Rosler: Dandyism is something that has always captured my interest—I agree it is aesthetically driven; all of Pop deriving from Warhol is dandyish, which at the time left me provoked and intrigued but unfulfilled, because dandyism shies away from engagement. (Here I, too, will choose Marker—and Godard—who flirt with dandyism but who don't fail, finally, to articulate a political point.) Much of female performance art of the turn of the '70s relied on dandyism (female masquerade), and both Rauschenberg and Johns, and likely Ellsworth Kelly, wear the suit of the dandy. Although sexual politics often drives dandyism, it is perhaps in more general terms the garb of the displaced Other and, I would argue, often represents a pose adopted by politically repressed (powerless) dissidents. It is a useful strategy of evasion, deferral, postponement. Rather than offering these remarks as a challenge, however, I am simply interested in what you have to say. The mask of beauty is likely not what Kant had in mind!

OMISSIONS

Okwui Enwezor: To take Yinka's exhortation further, I would also like to think that for artists who have for so many years worked under the threatening shadow of dismissal as being cheap copies of Western artistic values, a transversal art world allows us the opportunity to think historically in the present. And in this sense, the postcolonial, as the ethical response to the challenge of the global, should be seen as a kind of tactical maneuver.

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Martha Rosler: I have been somewhat dismayed to see the array of artists invited to some of the new global shows, since they seem to comprise mostly the usual international/Eurocentric cast, with some local spice. But it's possible that these shows have now found their footing and are willing to include more of the local—which one hopes would bring a genuinely different set of practices.

I support postcolonial discourse as the crucial discourse of the present—neocolonial—moment, but the framework within which Western (mostly northern) audiences greet this work may not be all that different from the exoticism and Orientalism of the Crystal Palaces to which I alluded earlier. While this allows for the presentation of desperately necessary geopolitical perspectives not generally apprehended otherwise, it imposes some difficult conditions on Western artists, who are accorded different roles in the world divide constructed in the Western imagination. Postcolonial discourse is often cast as a "different" politics (more so than the politics of difference), a wound we can appreciate. (That is sedimented somewhere in the phrase "All politics are local," recast to mean "Only local politics are political.") Marker long ago remarked that people are capable of retaining only one exemplar of each idea, and I would suggest that "globalism" as a theme has allowed for the erasure of other, similarly global themes, starting with feminism and sexuality.

James Meyer: Martha asks: Has the dependency of the global exhibition on postcolonial theory subtended other political questions, including gender, sexuality, and, one might add, AIDS—issues that achieved a passing prominence in exhibitions of the early '90s, namely, Elisabeth Sussman's Whitney Biennial of 1993? American-style multiculturalism was opaque to global questions, but it did a certain justice to these other politics. Feminist work did enter Documenta 11's purview but was lacking at Venice. Queer subject matter is rarely seen in these shows, even though gay and lesbian rights is at the center of public debate. AIDS is a major global problem, with over forty million people infected. Yet work that actually acknowledges the epidemic is invisible at these exhibitions.

Okwui Enwezor: What you point to is a dilemma that needs further exploration. Perhaps then what may be useful in our discussion, since Yinka specifies it quite well in his attempt to claim beauty for a different aesthetic cause than the one that is currently being merchandized, is the idea of the intercultural. We began this forum with a review of the importance of "*Magiciens de la terre*" for the current tendency in large-scale exhibitions. However, we can go back even further to MoMA's "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" show of 1984; both exhibitions are primers for thinking the intercultural. Yet when confronted with this the principal curators of those exhibitions lapsed back to predictable defenses of the primacy of the object while glossing the larger discursive tension of the intercultural that inspired them in the first place. To be attentive to profound distortions and asymmetry in exhibition discourses that deal with the social, we may have to return to the zone of the intercultural.

CLOSING REMARKS

Martha Rosler: We are nearing the end, and I want to add some final thoughts. As an artist, I have the luxury of not having to choose between the frameworks sketched out by Okwui and by Francesco. I liked Okwui's (geopolitical) discourse-heavy approach [at Documenta] very

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much; but it allowed the unavoidable residue of absurd inclusions and puzzling exclusions to stand out glaringly for all to see; it also allowed sympathetic observers to put their finger on the shortcomings of certain artists' claims for their work. (Maybe I am saying it could be too legible?)

As I moved through Francesco's Biennale, there was much to appreciate but also much to scratch one's head over. I'd include in my puzzlement the show's title. Should we take the dictatorship and tyranny of the viewer to mean that the viewers (for whom, after all, the curator is the surrogate) are—at long last, one exclaims—given back the upper hand over the artists' indiscipline? And whose dreams are we dreaming?

But as far as the demand for a programmatic legibility there is concerned, I had, as I've suggested, little sympathy for the hounds of the press who had to get their mental snapshots and rush off with a ready-made opinion. I have to protest to Okwui that the metadiscourse constituted by present or, for all I know, all curatorial practices is structural far more than personal. It is the way it is, and this hierarchical relation serves a necessary symbolic organizing function in an information-overburdened, geopolitically roiling world. It seems to be just what we need (or should I say "deserve"?). The power to make "global" choices (I am here referring not to physical territoriality but to elements in a set) is always greater than the power to make singular or serial interventions, let alone objects. And you have referred, after all, to "Utopia Station" not as a set of highly diverse and sometimes overlapping practices but as a search engine—of data, what else?

Nevertheless, I appreciate Okwui's remark that my comments continue to overprivilege the West; that is quite possibly true. But I cringed at the invocation of both "*Magiciens de la terre*" and the "Primitivism" show, which I and others took to be examples of just what you suggest they are: efforts to reinstitute the dark heart of the Other at the center of reception and, as I have remarked in another context, to offer the artists the role of bees while "our" set, whether critics, artists, or curators, take on that of architects. (But as to institutional critique, I am no fan of it in its present, depoliticized understanding; I'll take Fred Wilson's reading of such practices any day. Or Hans Haacke's). On the theme of the global exhibition (this time referring to the world), I would like to sign on to this contribution by Yinka: "An increasingly multicultural West faces a challenge of reconstructing its institutions. This is why I think that while excessive traveling may be useful, the question of globalization is not necessarily manifested in physical geography."

The curatorial discipline of Okwui's approach and the multiplicity of Francesco's do not seem necessarily pointed in different directions in that regard. It is a matter of instituting the terms offered by this broad mandate, whether this is brilliantly illuminating or disastrously obfuscatory. If the curatorial "sensitivity" is stuck in the (Kantian) faculty of taste, we wind up with the infamous "arrangements of objects" of the cultivated curator, a thoroughly unhelpful inwardness. I prefer the outward-looking vision that reinterprets inescapably shared experience, returning something to those sharing it.

Okwui Enwezor: On the curatorial front, I cannot help but foresee a collapse in terms of ideas. There is already a weakening of curatorial discourse, because, unlike academics, curators have very little time to engage in substantive research that requires a long period of

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gestation, and there are few structures capable of giving this to curators who work outside the museum. Even the museum is not a hotbed of intellectual ferment. There is a sense of exhaustion that I perceive, as if something has ruptured internally in the entire mechanism of the global exhibition. I, for one, want to step back. I want to develop for my own practice an evaluative criteria that is not dependent on the continuous expansion of areas needing to be covered, or artists to discover (though it is impossible to resist making studio visits on a constant basis; the machine has to be appeased somehow).

Francesco Bonami: Large exhibitions are tools of communication that, as Okwui suggests, could be replaced by more in-depth research or books. Yet as human beings we need conviviality, moments where the physicality of our thoughts, ideas, dreams, and conflicts is expressed.

Catherine David: I find Hans-Ulrich's questioning of exhibition temporality/-ies very challenging and promising. I just think that there's a lot of work to do in terms of inventing new "formats." There are many "interfaces" and "events" to articulate between discourse, production, and visibility/-ies. I also think that there are necessary alternatives to globalized, transnational rendezvous—and a lot of work to do in terms of consolidating local critical platforms. Please note that I am not using the awful "emerging" word. Here I would completely agree with Okwui's pointing out of the handicap of the curator compared with the academic. Whether I agree or disagree, I do believe that there are some solutions to be found, some possibilities of getting more involved and precise. Without being too personal I guess that part of my compromise (and happiness) with my "Contemporary Arab Representations" project at Venice—and its continuing seminars, publications, and performances aiming to encourage exchange among centers of the Arab world and elsewhere—stems from these kinds of issues.

James Meyer: Okwui observes that curators, unlike academics, have little time to engage in research. He also claims that innovative curatorial thinking is on the wane. I don't doubt that this is true, but I have come to the conclusion that at present it is the curators, rather than scholars and critics, who are most interestingly engaged with shaping how we think about contemporary practice. Within the new dispensation, it's the curators who travel the most, who see the greatest range of work, who have the broadest sense of practice; the curators whose activity (exhibition) is closest to practice and has the greatest impact on it. Many critics today wonder why criticism is so enervated. We have our own roundtables and mourn our obsolescence. We feel nostalgia for the heydays of criticism—the '60s and the postmodernist '80s. We also note the reduction of criticism to the "quick take." But this discussion suggests something else: that the vitality of critical debate appears to have shifted, at least for now, from discourse to curation. Greenberg used to observe that it was impossible to be a truly informed critic if one didn't live in New York. Well, the rules have changed: It's impossible to be informed if you don't *travel*—globally and constantly. You've got to *leave* New York—a lot. Very few writers can afford to do this. Curators with generous travel budgets (for "research") can. I think that's what's really behind the phrase "tyranny of the curator," for me at least: the recognition that it's the curator who is most informed, who is most able to articulate what's interesting and important in art practice. The "global" structure demands a criticism that can keep up with *its* evolution.

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Hans-Ulrich Obrist: When I started to curate at the beginning of the '90s I very often had two or three years to research exhibitions. By the end of the '90s I often had only six or eight months. When Hou Hanru and I started to work on "Cities on the Move," we decided to work on the concept of a traveling show—not a finite or finalized product (the exhibition has never had a closed artist list; whenever the exhibition takes place in a city, it involves local research), but a traveling laboratory revealing its results along the way. And in fact every step would be a step of the research and that the exhibition would be ongoing over two or three years. The exhibition at the Wiener Secession was only just a beginning, and from there it started to grow like a complex dynamic system with many feedback loops. It attempted to initiate more exchange between art and architecture and to trigger manifold collaborations among different practitioners, not only within the exhibition, but also beyond it. Little by little, very interesting things started to happen. New collaborations were triggered. On the one hand it was very fast, on the other hand there was a very slow process of emerging dialogues. For around two years the participants of "Cities on the Move" kept meeting in different cities. We couldn't just say, "We want three years for our research," because then the show would never have taken place. So there was a kind of given parameter. The question became: How, within this parameter, do we change the rules of the game? And we thought that it might be interesting to develop a traveling show that wouldn't always stay the same, but to actually have this research occur throughout the travel schedule. This also leads us to the evolutionary aspect of "Utopia Station." We are planning future "Utopia Stations" that will build from our experience in Venice. The "Utopia Station" in Venice is part of a larger project, a field of starting points: gatherings, meetings, seminars, exhibitions, and books.

Yinka Shonibare: At this point, I should add that although I may have been critical of the work of the curator, I by no means undermine the curator's monumental endeavor. My reference to the "dictatorship of the curator" was meant rather as a provocative wordplay. It is not meant literally. (It however gives me particular sadistic pleasure to continue to set the curator's arse on fire!)

I confess to the naive utopian view that art can have a political impact, if not in the short term, then at least in the long term. Avant-gardism may have become ossified; I, for one, continue to support the spirit of vanguardism. This is why I think that the global exhibition expresses a continuing convergence of the world. (Oscar Wilde said, "The true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes, and he annexes everything.") It remains a better sphere for conflict in an increasingly dangerous global world, where by distancing ourselves from others we risk real cultural misunderstanding—which is always inevitably fatal.