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(eds.)



Situating Global Art

Topologies
Temporalities
Trajectories

[transcript] Image

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From:

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Situating Global Art

Topologies – Temporalities – Trajectories

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In recent years, the term global art has become a catchphrase in contemporary art discourses. Going beyond additive notions of canon expansion, this volume encourages a differentiated inquiry into the complex aesthetic, cultural, historical, political, epistemological and socio-economic implications of both the term global art itself and the practices it subsumes. Focusing on diverse examples of art, curating, historiography and criticism, the contributions not only take into account (new) hegemonies and exclusions but also the shifting conditions of transcultural art production, circulation and reception.

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**Nanne Buurman, Sarah Dornhof,
Birgit Hopfener, Barbara Lutz**

Situating Global Art. An Introduction

In recent years, ‘global art’ has become a catchphrase in contemporary art discourses. Having gained momentum over the last third of the twentieth century, the Euro-American expansion in scope from an engagement primarily with ‘Western’ art to a broader geographical frame of reference has often been associated with an emancipatory project that challenges racist, sexist and classist exclusions by revising the canon to integrate cultural production from hitherto marginalized regions, groups of people or fields of activity. While the ‘world art studies’ or ‘global art history’ approaches affiliated with earlier traditions of world art history have generally taken a more additive stance,¹ other perspectives on art in a global context – particularly those informed by postcolonial and feminist theory – have also made an effort to deconstruct prevailing ‘Western’ categories of art and the disciplinary hierarchizations inscribed into their institutions.² Apart from simply including art by non-Westerners and non-males, or pop cultural practices and visual cultures as worthy of analysis, the latter have shifted attention to the systemic discriminations caused by the logic of national and regional canons, art history’s ‘colonial unconscious’ and other structural conditions of exclusion.³

1 On ‘world art history’ or ‘world art studies’, see for instance Onians (1996), Summers (2003), Elkins (2007) and Elkins/Kim/Valiavicharska (2010), Carrier (2008), Zijlmans/Van Damme (2008). World art discourses have been critically historicized, for instance, by Pfisterer (2008) and by Leeb (2015).

2 For a critique of art historical canon-building from a feminist perspective, see for instance Pollock (1987). She argues that adding women to the canon is not feminist because it leaves the underlying structures unchallenged. Another feminist art historian, Nochlin, was among the first to draw on postcolonial studies, more precisely Said’s concept of orientalism, in her study “The Imaginary Orient” (1983). See also Shohat (1998). Other early art historical work indebted to postcolonial theory includes Coombes (1992), Craven (1991), and Karentzos/Reuter (2012). See also Brzyski (2007)

and the programme *Kanon-Fragen: Die Ressourcen der Moderne* (2016–2019) at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

3 See Schmidt-Linsenhoff (2005). Like other contributors to von Bismarck and Below (2005), she criticizes the neocolonial implications of post-colonialism while at the same time acknowledging its historical importance. Likewise, Araeen, founding editor of *Third Text* (launched in 1987 as the first academic journal dedicated to decentring Eurocentric perspectives), became a critic of post-colonial approaches because in his view they upheld the modern ‘Western’ logic of Othering (Araeen 2000). See also Mercer (2005–2008), Schmidt-Linsenhoff (2010) and Juneja (2012).

Drawing on these insights, our introduction seeks to give a broad overview of the discourses and practices that today constitute the phenomenon of ‘global art’ in the widest sense, while also making a case for the need to situate global art by critically elaborating on its temporalities, topologies and trajectories. In this endeavour, we are indebted to a number of theoretical, curatorial and artistic perspectives that are currently working towards decolonizing art historical knowledge and replacing binary epistemological models (such as art vs. craft, occident vs. orient, progressive historical time vs. timeless traditions, theory vs. practice) with more relational approaches focusing on contacts, flows and circulations, as well as global relations of production.⁴ In their critical accounts of the complex entanglements of arts in a global context, many of these projects not only seek to dismantle North American and Western European hegemonies, but also revise postcolonial traditions to avoid once again reproducing colonial categories of thought. Importantly, this also means factoring in post- and neo-colonial realities, inequalities and power relations, which are increasingly addressed by the notions of the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’.⁵

This introduction documents our joint effort to come to terms with the concept of global art from different angles and disciplinary backgrounds, in the course of which a number of aspects came to the fore that pose significant challenges in critically dealing with ‘global art’: among them the tensions between historiography and contemporaneity, between universality and particularity, and between situated knowledges, identity politics and commodifications of difference.

4 Note, for example, attempts to construct a critical geography of art as an ‘expanded field’ (Rogoff 2000), a ‘horizontal art history’ (Piotrowski 2008), an ‘art history of contact’ (Kravagna 2013a), a ‘materialist history of circulations’ (DaCosta Kaufmann / Dossin / Joyeux-Prunel 2015), a ‘transcultural art-history’ (Juneja 2015b), or a ‘history of flows and counterflows’ (Verhagen 2017).

5 The term *Global South* is generally used not as a geographical category of location, but of geo-economic relations and developments, a “working concept”, a “mode of inquiry” (Gardner / Green 2014) or a “state of mind”, as suggested by the journal *South as a State of Mind* founded in Athens in 2012. See also Gardner (2013) and de Sousa Santos (2014).

Temporalities

The relatively recent (academic) mainstreaming of ‘global art’ as an object and a field of study⁶ has to be seen in the context of an intensified economic and cultural globalization since the 1990s,⁷ reflected, for example, in the booming international art market with its art fairs and auction houses, the multiplication of museums of contemporary art (MoCAs) and the proliferation of biennials worldwide.⁸ Due to the geopolitical shifts caused by the end of the Cold War as well as technological developments around the World Wide Web, the year 1989 has often been identified as a historical watershed, not least because other events like the Tiananmen Square massacre in China and political caesurae in South America took place that year.⁹ The expansion in international trade after the ‘victory’ of capitalism, together with new means of communication and cheap travel, gave rise to a heightened degree of connectivity, which has prompted both optimism about the opportunities of global exchange and critique of globalization as

6 The institutionalization of global art can, for instance, be observed in the foundation of study programmes. After pioneering programmes such as the DFG project *Das Subjekt und die Anderen. Interkulturalität und Geschlechterdifferenz von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, the graduate school *Identität und Differenz. Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Interkulturalität im 18.–20. Jahrhundert* (2000–2006) and the *Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies* at the University of Trier (2005–2013), German higher education has recently seen the establishment of a number of departments and research initiatives, such as the *Chair of Global Art History* (since 2009) and the cluster of excellency *Asia and Europe in a Global Context* in Heidelberg, the research unit 1703 on *Transcultural Negotiations in the Ambits of Art: Comparative Perspectives on Historical Contexts and Current Constellations* at the Freie Universität Berlin (2011–2017), the MA programme *Transcultural Studies* at the University of Bremen (since 2008) and the *Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile* programme in Munich (2017–2022). International programmes include the study programme *Art of the Contemporary World and World Art Studies* at the University of Leiden (since 2003), the research group *Art, Globalization, Interculturality* at the University of Barcelona (2008–2016), the MA course *Global Arts* at Goldsmith College, University of London (2011–2016), *The Global Art Studies Program* at the University of California (since 2016), the MFA *Global Art Practice* at Tokyo University (since 2016), the MA *Art History in the Global Context* at the University of Zurich (since

2013), and the PhD Program *Cultural Mediations*, Carleton University, Ottawa (since 2000).

Research programmes in museums dedicated to revisions of collection policies include the Guggenheim *Global Arts Initiative* (2012–2017), *Global Art and the Museum* at ZKM Karlsruhe (2006–2016) and *Global Museum*, a programme by the German Federal Cultural Foundation (since 2015), which is funding projects by a variety of German institutions. The authors of this text are founding members of the *Research Network for Transcultural Practices in the Arts and Humanities (RNTP)* (since 2015).

7 For a discussion of diverging understandings and periodizations of globalization, see Khan (2009: 11–20). See also Anderson (2005) for a discussion of nationalism, globalization, capitalism and US hegemony. In an interview with Nasar, Rogoff (2012: 102–103) criticizes the primacy of economic frameworks in thinking about the globalization of art and suggests thinking of it in terms of “cultural globalization” and affective registers to avoid conceptualizing art as merely reactive to the economy.

8 On the nexus of ‘Biennialization’ and ‘Globalization’ of art, see for instance Filipovic/van Hal/Øvstebo (2010), Eilat et al. (2014), Green/Gardner (2016) and Vogel (2010).

9 See for instance Belting (2009: 40) and Scheps (1999: 16ff.) For a critique of the Eurocentrism of this date, see for instance Kravagna (2013b) and Simbao (2015). For a problematization of 1989 as prioritizing Western-centric Cold War narratives, see Piotrowski, who points out that the ‘East’ has remained a blind spot in post-colonial and global art historiography (2015: 119). See also Hlavajova/Sheikh (2017).

the installation of a never-ending, all-inclusive capitalist now.¹⁰ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the *posthistoire* thesis has been adopted by art history and theory, which frequently equate 'global art' with contemporary art.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Eurocentric, linear, teleological historiography of progress, with its chronological periodization of modern, postmodern, and contemporary art, has been criticized for failing to take into account not only the multiplicity of modernities,¹² but also the heterogeneity of co-existing contemporary art practices.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why the exhibition format – with its capacity for synchronically displaying a variety of things with different status, and thus literally *presenting* objects and people from diverse contexts as co-present – is sometimes seen as a critical corrective of linear historiography and as a counter-model to diachronic narratives of progress.¹³ In fact, exhibitions such as *Magiciens de La Terre* and the *Third Havana Biennial* (both 1989), but also *documenta X* (1997) and *Documenta11* (2002), as well as the process that has been dubbed biennialization, are often considered as crucial for the formation of 'global art'.¹⁴

10 Bydler (2004), for instance, discusses the ambivalent effects of the globalization and biennialization of contemporary art, with particular attention to the labour market for art professionals as well as the potential for questioning given concepts of art and historiography. Lee (2012) argues that contemporary globalization is so all-encompassing that it is impossible to speak of a separate art world, which is why all artworks, regardless of their subject matter, are not only objects of globalization but also its agents.

11 Belting (2009), for instance, equates global art with contemporary art, which he posits as post-historical with respect to Western art history's periodization (into modern, postmodern and contemporary art) and post-ethnic with regard to local traditions. He builds here on his earlier work (1996; 2003). See also Belting/Buddensieg/Weibel (2013) and Harris (2011).

12 Discourses concerned with multiple modernities question the assumption that modernism is an exclusively 'Western' phenomenon or one that originated exclusively in Paris and was then copied by the rest of the world. See Eisenstadt (2000) for a deconstruction of the underlying binaries of the Western centre and 'non-Western' peripheries. See also Mitter (2008), Araeen (2007), Kapur (2000), and the *documenta 12 Magazine No. 1, Modernity?* (2007). While the notion of multiple modernities tends to focus on separate alternative modernisms, the notion of global modernism was introduced to emphasize that even European modernism cannot be studied without situating it in the larger global context of colonial entanglements. See for instance the *Global Modernisms* programme at the HKW, Berlin, in 2015.

13 Exhibitions with their colonial and imperial history of nineteenth-century great exhibitions, colonial collections and human zoos as well as their role in nation-building can, of course, also stage linear narratives of progress, imperial "world pictures" (Mitchell 1989; Mitchell 2007) or serve as "The Preserves of Colonialism" (Kravagna 2008). See also Rogoff/Sherman (1994), Bennett (1995), Duncan (1995), Meister/von Hantelmann (2010). Nevertheless, the format as such allows for more variation and modes of relating things than the linearity of written language in a book. For reflections on historically shifting display conventions and their varying effects on subjectivation, see Buurman (2016). For post-colonial museology, see, for instance Kazeem/Martinez-Turek/Sternfeld (2009) and Chambers et al. (2014). Discourses around 'the curatorial' have worked towards a transcultural and transdisciplinary revision of curatorial practice beyond the format of the exhibition, see von Bismarck et al. (2012; 2014; 2016) and Martinon (2013).

14 See the Afterall Book Series *Making Art Global* (Weiss et al. 2011; Steeds et al. 2013). Belting (2009), Juneja (2011: 280) and Piotrowski (2015: 116) also draw attention to this. For further discussion of the relationship between the exhibition form and globalization, see Enwezor (2010 [2002]), Groys (2009), Dimitrakaki (2012) and Osborne (2014).

Yet, curatorial tendencies seeking to overcome discriminatory classifications – such as the modern segregation between ‘ethnic objects’ and ‘high art’ – by integrating practices and artefacts formerly excluded from notions of modern and contemporary art are nevertheless frequently criticized: either for staging spectacles of exoticism or for the homogenizing and universalizing effects of decontextualizing displays.¹⁵ While the ‘denial of coevalness’ is problematic for its Othering of ‘non-Western’ practices as backward, the shift from a ‘museal’ to a ‘biennial’ temporal regime focused on the current state of the arts¹⁶ in some cases suggests a shared global experience of reality with little room to account for heterochronicity.¹⁷ To circumvent this totalizing assumption of spatio-temporal simultaneity and the dangers of conceiving ‘global art’ as a universal and ahistorical phenomenon where colonial inequalities and power hierarchies have been resolved, some scholars have sought to highlight the temporal and geo-political heterogeneity of art in a global context by conceiving of contemporaneity as a “disjunctive unity of present times”.¹⁸ This critical understanding of contemporaneity significantly acknowledges the co-presence and interrelation

15 As a response to anthropological critiques, particularly to Fabian’s problematization of the “denial of coevalness” (2002: 25f), differentiation between ethnographic artefacts and art works has been politicized along the lines of critiquing exclusionary exoticization on the one hand and undifferentiated universalization on the other. The Othering of non-European art practices as crafts has also been problematized, for instance, by Oguibe (2003), in critiques of the exhibitions *Magiciens de la Terre* (for instance Chandler 2009), *documenta 12* (for instance Kravagna 2007), and exhibitions of *Outsider Art* that took place in 2013 at the Barbican in London and the Venice Biennale. See also Clifford (1988; 1997a). For the politics of classification, the recent trend to rename ethnographic museums into museums of ‘world cultures’ and to commission contemporary artists to devise critical interventions in colonial collections, see Leeb (2013).

16 See Osborne (2014). The perennial exhibition *documenta*, for instance, one of the first recurring large scale exhibitions for modern and contemporary art, was founded in 1955 with the aim of re-establishing modern art, formerly ostracized by the Nazis as ‘degenerate’. The internationalist approach of arguing for art’s universality was emphasized at the first *documenta* by including photographs of all kinds of European and non-European arts and artefacts to provide genealogical backing for what Werner Haftmann would, during the second edition, term “Abstraktion als Weltsprache” (see Grasskamp 2017). This Euro-centric universalization of abstraction as the end point of teleological progress in art was followed in later *documenta* editions by a remark-

ably slow integration of ‘non-Western’ contemporary art. Participation of non-European/non-US-American contemporary artists only occurred in significant numbers starting with *documenta X* in 1997. For *documenta* as an example of a ‘local history of globalization’, see also Eichel (2015).

17 In his chapter “Is Modernity Multiple?” Moxey (2013) questions the idea that there is such a thing as a multiple modernity or multiple contemporaneity, arguing that the ‘Western’ colonial concept of avant-garde necessarily precludes an acceptance of practices as modern that have been produced under socio-economic conditions other than Western modernity. Belting (1999: 325) argues that ‘Western’ exhibition practice subjects other cultures to a ‘Western’ understanding of art by means of decontextualization, a process that Weibel (1997) describes as the colonialism of the White Cube with its universalization of ‘Western’ display conventions. Wuggenig/Buchholz (2005) use statistics to provide sociological proof that participation of artists from “non-northwestern” countries in the global art world has only risen insignificantly since the 1970s, which they believe speaks for unbroken hegemonies of ‘Western’ centres and their institutional structures.

18 See Osborne (2013: 22) for this notion of ‘contemporaneity’ that seeks to leave behind the conventional meaning of ‘contemporary’ as a concept of a linear historiography. For the controversial debates on contemporaneity, see also Smith (2008; 2015), Foster et al. (2009), *Asia Art Archive* (2012), Cox/Lund (2016), Belting/Buddensieg (2013).

of radically varying social conditions of art production, distribution and reception worldwide.

Building on existing critiques of the totalizing presentism of ‘the global contemporary’¹⁹ and on critiques of the ways in which identitarian thinking is reproduced in some postcolonial and multicultural theorization,²⁰ in this publication we attempt to avoid the false alternative between globalist universalism and localist particularism. Rather, our aim is to problematize reductive notions of global art and encourage a more differentiated inquiry into the diverse aesthetic, cultural, historical, political, epistemological and socio-economic conditions, possibilities and effects of both the term ‘global art’ itself and the practices and institutions it subsumes. By inviting authors to consider how practices of art production, curating, historiography and criticism relate to past and present processes of globalization, transnational circulation and transcultural exchange, our goal was not only to demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings which the notion of global art can acquire as an (artistic) genre, an (art historical) discourse, an (epistemological) *dispositif* or a (social) field of interconnected institutions and agencies, but also to situate specific phenomena of art historically, geo-politically, and socio-economically.

Topologies

Looking at diverse art forms, actors and institutions in increasingly globalized art fields, we hope the texts assembled here can help to counter (new) simplifying universalisms and nationalisms by analysing specific practices and discourses in their transnational and transdisciplinary entanglements.²¹ *Situating Global Art* should thus not be misunderstood as a call for a simple return to area studies, or – worse – a reactionist grounding of agency in fixed regional identities and phantasies of cultural homogeneity.²² We rather aim to problematize art historical and anthropological, academic and artistic border politics by paying attention to the convergences of the ways

19 *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989* (2011) was an exhibition at the Centre for Arts and Media (ZKM) Karlsruhe that has become a central reference point in discourses of global art and contemporaneity.

20 See for instance Juneja (2011), who draws on Mercer’s “Black Art and the Burden of Representation” (1990) in her call to leave behind additive, expansive or inclusive approaches in favour of a change of paradigm from politics of representation to a scrutiny of the conditions of visibility.

21 For the concept of ‘entangled histories’ coined in the context of global history to analyse transnational, -cultural and -regional exchanges, see Conrad/Randeria (2002). See also Werner/Zimmerman (2002; 2006) for the concept of ‘histoire croisée’

that entails a self-reflexive dimension. For a transnational approach to art history, see Kippenberg/Mersmann (2016). For a problematization of ‘trans’ terminology and the insight that the problems caused by ‘transified’ terms cannot be transcended by simply coining new ones, see Weichhart (2010). **22** According to Juneja (2015a: n.p.) it is necessary to “make the concept of the region itself a subject of reflection” as “a product of spatial and cultural displacement, to define it as a participant in and as contingent upon the historical relationships in which it is implicated”. She problematizes the “congealing of regions as area studies” as a negative effect of the otherwise important call to “provincialize Europe”, formulated by Chakrabarty (2000).

in which cartographies of art production and reception, the different genres and media of art as well as the research concerned with them perform complex processes of de-bordering (and re-bordering).²³ Transnational and inter-art studies of *Entgrenzungen* (German for de-bordering) contribute to challenging essentialist notions of purity and counter the naturalization of boundaries between countries or art forms,²⁴ without subscribing to the fantasy that a world without borders is within reach just because capital moves freely. In fact, whether we like it or not, the nation, which has played an important role in anti-colonial struggles against empires of the past, is currently regaining its significance in world politics, with left and right movements appealing to ideas of sovereign statehood or national identity as reactions to the hegemonies of neoliberal capitalist globalization.²⁵

Against this backdrop, *Situating Global Art* proposes to look at (global) art from a transcultural perspective that acknowledges the inherent transculturality of artistic practices and artefacts,²⁶ whose dynamic cross-cultural constellations, migrations and transformations, locations and dislocations we would like to account for. Rather than subscribing to an abstract ideology of globalism, we therefore suggest looking at particular topologies made up of institutions, actors and more specific practices of art, historiography or curation as nodal points in networks that transcend bounded (geographical) categories of nation, region or city. These transcultural topologies become the sites of research, encounter or conflict within which commodities, knowledges and affects potentially circulate worldwide, thereby generating a kind of excess or “surplus” that cannot be captured entirely by global capitalism.²⁷ With artefacts, people, practices, theories and capital crossing

23 For border crossings and shifting boundaries, see also Randeria (2016).

24 For a problematization of the mutually conditioning, complicated and contradictory transformations of contemporary art as post-conceptual art and its relations to the dynamics of global capitalism, see for instance Osborne (2013: 28). See also Kravagna (2013b: 50). For parallels in the transcultural and intermedial dissolution of boundaries (*Entgrenzungen*) and the performativity of their reciprocal mediation in installation art, see Hopfener (2012).

25 It is important, however, to differentiate between the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983), the idea of a *Kulturnation* defined by a shared culture that pertains to cultural identity, and the idea of the nation state as a political, administrative entity, linked to citizenship and contingent territoriality. See Hühn et al. (2010: 19-21).

26 In her writing on transcultural art history, Juneja reflects not only the multidirectional reciprocity of empirical transcultural exchanges but also

the epistemological implications of a transcultural perspective, critically expanding on the genealogy of the concept from Ortiz’ notion of ‘transculturation’ to Welsch’s idea of ‘transculturality’. See, for instance, Juneja/Kravagna (2013).

27 In a conversation with von Osten, Maharaj (2013) describes ‘the global’ as something that “is not simply the connectedness of the world”, but “what is secreted out of that connectedness”, while von Osten demands “a focus on the surplus that transnational lives, economies as well as transcultural encounters are generating”, which they also link to Glissant’s notion of opacity. Moreover, Meskimmon (2010) argues that art plays an important role in the formation of a cosmopolitan imagination and Papastergiadis (2012), likewise, scrutinizes how art has turned to cosmopolitanist hospitality that counters the problematic linking of the figure of the terrorist and the migrant in the post 9/11 political imaginary by constituting an aesthetic cosmopolitanism, that is, a world-making activity.

and connecting different regions and social milieus, the local – therefore – should not be considered as disconnected from or in opposition to the global.²⁸ Instead, their mutual entwinement may be understood as a translocal condition of globality where cultural and economic globalization interact, raising the important question whether ‘global art’ is a political claim or an economic structure, or – in fact – both.²⁹ The potential of the proposed transcultural perspective on global art that takes into account not only the global (and globalizing) conditions of production but also specific localities is that it allows scholars to grasp cross-cultural connections, interactions as well as marginalized forms of knowledge and agency that are otherwise often overlooked or underestimated in their critical force. Focusing on the transcultural topologies of global art thus permits the study of relational processes of circulation and exchange while also calling into question the idea of ethno-cultural locality as a nostalgic marker of authenticity as well as celebrations of multicultural plurality that disregard ongoing inequalities in capitalist and (neo-)colonial power relations.³⁰

Indeed, acknowledging diversity and mobilizing local specificities may not only prompt emancipatory frictions and antagonisms in the face of cultural homogenization on the national or global scale, but must remain mindful of the risk of contributing to naturalize difference and otherness along with their commodification as local flavours in cultural industries and markets.³¹ This volume therefore attempts to trace the potentials and pitfalls of art practices and discourses confronted with an ever accelerating

28 See Appadurai (1990) for an account of the fusion of the local and the global and the concept of disjunctive scapes. His theory of flows rejects bounded limits without, however, taking into account the reterritorializations that Robertson (1995) describes. Following Robertson’s terminology of “glocalization”, Vogel (2013) suggests speaking of “glocal art”. For an art history perspective, see Preziosi/Farago (2012: 94–120)

29 This question is raised in the preface of *Texte zur Kunst*’s special issue *Globalismus/Globalism* (2013). Similar issues have been addressed in the alterglobalization movement since the turn of the millennium. Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2000), which is both an analysis of the new world order and a manifesto setting out the emancipatory potential of a decentralized constitution of empire, has served as a central reference for critics of globalization who insist that ‘another world is possible’. Explicitly drawing on *Empire*, Enwezor speaks of “strategic globality” (2010: 441) to insist on the emancipatory potential of large-scale exhibitions.

See also Bourriaud’s publication *The Radicant* (2009), which was developed out of his 2009 show *The Altermodern* at Tate London.

30 See Davis (1996) for a critique of neoliberal deployment of multiculturalism as “a veneer” to “create the illusion of victory over racism”. In her view, “diversity management” covers over “persisting economic inequalities” and “power relations”, turning pluralism into “a spectacle” (ibid. 40–45).

31 Hall had problematized this dialectic in “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity” (1997), where he also cites the phenomenon of the “ethnic artist” (38). For a mobilization of aspects of subjectivity such as race, class and gender in global capitalism’s biopolitics and its global divisions of labour, see for instance Dimitrakaki (2013). She sees a shift of art from postmodernism to globalization, from cultural to economic subjects, or from identity to labour in the first decade of the 21st century and warns that linking identity with representation risks resulting in tokenism (ibid. 55).

process of neoliberal globalization and its flipside, the rise of neo-nationalist movements worldwide. Despite best intentions to keep in mind the ways in which discriminations always operate at the intersection of multiple social categories (such as race, class and gender),³² it seems that the analytical focus on geography, ethnicity and cultural identity in global art discourses often leads to a disregard for the effects of gender and class, which is why earlier feminist or intersectional initiatives to break with Eurocentric narratives of art only rarely appear in the references. Likewise, the focus on cultural difference often tends to leave economic conditions of inequality unobserved, which is perhaps one reason why none of the contributions made it their prime concern to analyse gender issues or the workings of markets, even if dealers, auction houses and art fairs are perhaps the most powerful drivers of global art as a success story.³³

Trajectories

Situating Global Art, then, significantly also means acknowledging and defining the position from which one speaks, situating one's own discourse in order to prevent the naturalization of the perspectives and methods in use. In this sense, this publication and the contributions it assembles have to be considered as 'situated knowledges' in themselves,³⁴ for they assess the phenomenon of global art from a multiplicity of partial perspectives shaped by a variety of professional and disciplinary affiliations as well as social backgrounds.³⁵ Transdisciplinary dialogue between art history, anthropology, cultural and curatorial studies, for instance, is – as our collaboration as editors has enabled us to realize – particularly useful in identifying some of the blind spots in our respective axioms and thought systems by turning the disciplinary assumptions and methodological habits into objects of scientific reflexivity.³⁶ Moreover, it has allowed us to broaden our horizons by

32 Intersectional Feminism calls attention to the overlaps between racism, classism and sexism and the ways in which systems of exploitation and oppression intersect. The term was coined in 1989 by Crenshaw, although the ideas existed before and were promoted particularly by black feminists, such as hooks, Davis or Morrison. See Salem (2016) for a genealogy of intersectionality theories, in which she criticizes liberal white feminism's disregard for race and the neoliberal co-option of diversity as a governmental tool.

33 Vogel (2013) remarks that the art world is no longer a small exclusive elite 'Western' circle but a world-spanning economy worth millions. She points out that since 1991 the art market has grown by 575% (ibid. 44–45).

34 For the concept of 'situated knowledge' see Haraway (1988). Self-situating has also been important in the 'writing culture' debates in anthropology, see for instance Clifford (1986: 22;

1997b: 11). For art history as an ethical practice of self-positioning, see also Seth (2007) and Farago (forthcoming).

35 It should be noted that the majority of authors write from a German or 'Middle European' point of view drawing on 'Euro-American' traditions in art history, cultural studies and anthropology that inform their thinking as much as the use of English as a foreign language, which perhaps unavoidably entails reproducing dominant tropes from the so-called 'Anglosphere'. On the need to provincialize the European perspective, see Chakrabarty (2000).

36 On the need for an interdisciplinary global art history as a transcultural history that decentres 'Western' modes of historiography, calling into question their imperial claim to universality, see for instance Mersmann (2016) and Preziosi (1998).

learning from each other. Being aware of the specificity of our viewpoints and their limitations,³⁷ the book nevertheless also seeks to contribute to de-centring and decolonizing Eurocentric knowledge and power structures.³⁸ This also calls for a critical investigation into the neoliberal co-optation of emancipatory politics of inclusion and diversification as capitalist assets.³⁹

Consequently, a critique of the epistemological foundations which underlie institutions of art production, distribution and reception, particularly of those analytical tools of art history that are still very much rooted in Euro-American worldviews,⁴⁰ must be complemented by critical reflections on the governmental effects of canon expansion, the naturalization of difference in identitarian policies of cultural or national representation, and the ideology of inescapable capitalist global contemporaneity. To acknowledge both the structural constraints and the potentialities for agency, we suggest replacing theories of (fixed) *identity* with the notion of (changeable) *positionality* in relationship to a number of intersecting and potentially shifting social affiliations (race, class, gender, age, location). In other words, we would like to encourage casting aside the obsession with origins and *who one is* in favour of a perspective of practice and *what one does*, from *being* to *doing*, without forgetting that the options for agency are sometimes heavily confined and policed by outright violence, not to mention subtler mechanisms of discursive, social or biopolitical control.⁴¹

Taking into account the intersectionality of different entangled factors that define the complex and shifting relationships of actors and institutions in the arena of global art, we would like to call attention to the ethical effects of 'Western' modernity's binary thinking structures, its accompanying hierarchical spatio-temporal order, into which difference can be incorporated seamlessly unless it challenges the underlying

37 As scholars, who happen to be 'white', 'female', middle-class German citizens, we are aware that we speak from a specific position, which entails certain privileges as well as blind spots. See Greve (2013) for theorization of 'critical whiteness studies' and its kinship with 'critical masculinity studies' as reflexive approaches that seek to raise consciousness about structural privileges arising from constructions of race and gender. She also provides an overview on the adoption of concepts of 'critical whiteness' and 'critical Occidentalism' in Germany and German art history, particularly in feminist art history.

38 For a problematization of 'epistemic violence', see Spivak (1988). For more recent theories dedicated to decolonizing thinking, see for instance Mohanty (2003), Mignolo (2009; 2012 [1999]), Mignolo/Tolstanova (2012) and de Sousa Santos (2014).

39 For problematizations of the commodification of difference in the arts, see for instance Kwon (1997), Shohat (1998), Jones (2010), Osborne (2014), and Barbisan/Bremer/Marguin (2015).

40 See for instance Jones (2012), who analyses the history of the modern Western binary structure of thinking and being in the world and its effects on notions of art and identity.

41 In "Necropolitics" (2003) Mbembe, for instance, expands on the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, drawing attention to its risk of neglecting the role of bodily violence and politics of death, legitimizations of murder and the right to kill in contemporary politics. See also his *Critique of Black Reason* (2017) for the entanglement of colonial and capitalist racist politics of objectivation / desubjectivation.

ideological (and epistemological) regimes.⁴² Both the extended application of traditional European art historical categories – such as artistry, autonomy, intentionality, style and mastery – and placing an emphasis on ethnic difference, with all its exoticizing effects, often turn a blind eye to the persistent hierarchies, exclusions and violence that are glossed over in sometimes all too optimistic accounts of global connectivity and exchange, where the contemporary ‘itinerant artist’ has come to epitomize mobility, migration and cosmopolitan sophistication.⁴³ Embracing (cultural) plurality while leaving problematic inherited disciplinary categories and narratives intact risks reinforcing and extending their validity as well as keeping racialized, gendered and classed hierarchies, exclusions and inequalities hidden from view. Against this backdrop, our insistence on differentiation should not be misunderstood as a naturalization of differences, but read as an attempt to acknowledge the multiple ways in which delineations, identifications and discriminations play their part in constructing particular understandings of reality and history, which has ethical implications because these imaginaries have social and political real world effects.

Section Summaries

With the triad *Topologies – Temporalities – Trajectories*, we hope to provide a framework that accommodates not only the ways in which particular positions, situations and situatings have been reached but also to open up space for their future contingency. The book is conceived as a discursive arena to negotiate the potentials and pitfalls of global art’s discourses and practices. From a wide range of different entry points, contributors interrogate the ways in which art and its theorizations are affected by (infra-)structural changes in the art field and the shifting conditions of transcultural art production, distribution and reception. They concern themselves not only with critical reflections of the status quo but also with potentials for agency in the context of an ever globalizing world, raising the following questions: What are the epistemological and socio-economic frameworks for global art *dispositifs* and what possibilities for political action do they engender? How can artists and curators intervene in given institutional structures and how can the latter be hijacked or reinvented for critical purposes? What

42 See Davis (1996) for her critique of the position that “difference doesn’t make any difference, if only we acquire knowledge about it” (ibid. 46). “Yet, although you are permitted to be an ‘other,’ you must work ‘as if’ you were not a member of a marginalized group.” (ibid.) See also the conference *Difference that makes no Difference* (2015) in Frankfurt am Main, organized by Dhawan: http://www.frcps.uni-frankfurt.de/?page_id=2739.

43 For a problematization of the itinerant artist as a role model, see for instance Kwon (1997: 100–101) and Foster (1994). On migration as a topos of art works, see for example Demos (2013). See also Karentzos/Kittner/Reuter (2010), Dogramaci (2013), Mersmann et al. (2015) and *Texte zur Kunst Wir sind Ihr / They Are Us* (2017).

kinds of (hi)stories are told in museums and how can curators stimulate alternative museological narratives? What kinds of subjects are constituted in the context of globalization and to what extent are practices of self-cultivation, informed by transcultural conceptions of art, reproducing or subverting dominant norms of subjectivity and identity?

The first section in this volume addresses the epistemological frameworks of global art discourses and the shifts occurring within them. Responding to exhibitions such as *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989* (Karlsruhe), *Documenta 11* (Kassel), and *Harmonious Society: 天下無事* (Manchester), as well as to individual artistic positions, their shared motive is to investigate the ideological conditions behind global art practices. Problematizing the totalizing capacity of contemporary capitalism, where the notion of global art functions like a brand, the dialectics of situatedness, and the need to negotiate the repressive tolerance of neoliberal regimes (including contemporary China), the contributions here offer a historical perspective on how art history (Jacob Birken) and art criticism (Andrew Weiner) as well as large-scale exhibitions (Antigoni Memou) and Biennial participants (Voon Pow Bartlett) have engaged with 'global art' as a tool of both critique and propaganda. They negotiate the ambivalence of emancipation from modernity and modernist ideologies (of progress), with liberal post-historical diversification making it difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between the critical and the complicit. Insisting on such ambivalence, these contributions demonstrate how established binaries can no longer provide suitable epistemological frameworks and are obliged to remain indecisive, so that each individual example needs to be considered in the light of its specific critical potentials.

The contributions in the second section of the book address artistic and curatorial practices that intervene in or reinvent institutional politics. They discuss artistic collectives, generations or projects that seek to critique the exclusionary and violent effects of the neo-colonial conditions of globalization, in particular the economic and social inequalities that are reinforced by the expansion of capitalist production, financial markets and neoliberal politics. Case studies of Gulf Labor's protest against the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (Janna-Mirl Redmann) and interventionist urban redevelopment projects in Seoul (Birgit Mersmann), as well as curatorial reflections on the contradictory agendas within the *Ghetto Biennale* in Port-au-Prince (Leah Gordon) and on art as civil engagement in Morocco (Abdellah Karrroum), trace the scope for alternative responses to more or less authoritarian regimes and to an expanding capitalist domination of global social relations. The papers in this chapter also draw attention to relationships between state politics and critical artistic engagement, and to tensions between institutional policies and institutional critique.

This concern to critique and reinvent institutional politics is shared by the authors of the third section, who scrutinize curatorial strategies with regard to their creation of museological narratives. Focusing on a variety of institutions, collections and exhibitions, such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (Jelle Bouwhuis), *documenta 12* in Kassel (Barbara Lutz), or exhibitions of Moroccan contemporary art in Rabat and Paris (Sarah Dornhof), as well as the challenges curators of group exhibitions encounter when mediating between different cultural contexts, for instance in the House of World Cultures in Berlin (Annette Bhagwati), these scholarly analyses and curatorial reflections examine how museological conventions construct particular Eurocentric or universalist worldviews. Taking into account the conflictual history of differentiating between ethnographic artefacts and works of fine art (arts and crafts) in theory as well as in display, the texts in this section reflect on alternative exhibition practices that explore an adequate response to colonial histories, postcolonial structures and more recent neo-colonial global power relations. They shed light on different modes and strategies of transcultural curating and on recent conceptual shifts in the making of exhibitions of so-called global or world art.

A final complex relates to processes of subjectivation framed by art's globalization and the multiplication of art (historical) knowledges. These papers interrogate artistic and curatorial practices concerned less with identity politics than with performances of transcultural subjectivity. Beyond critical engagement with processes of cultural appropriation and mimicry, the contributors trace contemporary practices of self-cultivation in response to multiple historical notions of art and artishood, the demands of globalizing art markets and widespread imperatives of self-branding. Analyzing strategies as diverse as queering, self-exoticizing or self-orientalizing, literary practices of self-positioning and disembodiment, the texts in this section consider the inter-ethnic, cross-gender performances in Miao Xiaochun's 3D works (Isabel Seliger), the self-marketing of Takashi Murakami as a global brand (Ronit Milano), transcultural mapping in Qiu Zhijie's *Total Art Maps* (Birgit Hopfener), and the ambivalences of deterritorialization in Hans Ulrich Obrist's autobiographical publication *Ways of Curating* (Nanne Buurman). In so doing, they highlight the diverse ways in which questions of identity and subjecthood are mobilized cross-culturally in an ever globalizing late capitalist art world. •

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Barbara Lutz

Curating as Transcultural Practice. *documenta 12* and the “Migration of Form”

As migration increases and different ways of life evolve around various cultural affiliations, art needs to be considered within a global discourse. Given the complexity of the social, cultural and economic exchanges and dependencies that accompany globalization, universalizing criteria cannot do justice to the diversity of interrelated stories about people and things. Postcolonial and subaltern studies have shown that in the age of globalization art can no longer be monopolized by a Euro-American culture. It follows that “art history can no longer afford its national narrow-minded point of view”, as Susanne Leeb points out (2011), especially as art has always reflected, articulated and interpreted global transformations of socio-political conditions and cultural relations. Besides, the trajectories and trade routes of artworks cannot be traced back to a single – allegedly homogeneous – culture. Artistic traditions and symbols have been exchanged across national and cultural borders and between inherently different cultures since ancient times, and have thus always been highly heterogeneous and intertwined in various ways.

With this in mind, the use of the term ‘global art’ is highly ambiguous, for it expresses neither the multifarious cultural approaches to art nor the dynamics of art and the mobility of its producers. Rather it suggests a unifying approach to art that provokes an even more specific identification and mapping of art and artists, reflecting the way art histories have divided the world from a regional standpoint based on geographical, national, federal or cultural criteria, and predicated generally on difference.¹ But if the discourse on ‘global art’ aims to break away from defining and classifying art in terms of universalistic or particularistic concepts, then the result has to be a revision and renewal of (still Western-dominated) art historiography and its localizing criteria. According to art historian Monica Juneja,

¹ According to art historian Hans Belting, the global age not only tends to restore its unity on another level than art history has divided the world, but it also shows “a new mapping of art worlds in the plural, which claim geographic and cultural difference” (Belting 2013: 184).

a global context calls for investigating the transcultural dynamics in the arts, which means sharpening awareness for a more dynamic definition of culture that emerges from the cross-border mobility of ethnic, religious and national constellations and is engaged in a permanent process of becoming. She suggests a transcultural perspective that provides new impulses for rethinking concepts of culture, identity and nation (2011). This not only raises the question of how to approach art theoretically, but also requires rethinking the modalities for presenting and mediating art. But first of all, what exactly constitutes a transcultural understanding in the arts, and what kind of historiography or narratives can it draw on?

From a Transcultural Perspective to a Transcultural Understanding in the Arts

Focusing on a transcultural perspective in curating,² it is art historian, critic and curator Gerardo Mosquera who first applied the term *transcultural* to this activity in 1994, seeking from the Latin American vantage point of Cuba to expose the problems of universalizing tendencies in the conception of international exhibitions. In criticizing how “exhibitions showing one or more cultures to another, take place along the vertical axis from the centres down to the peripheries”, he addresses the dichotomy and power imbalance between the “curating cultures” of the Western art world and the “curated cultures” of the non-Western art world (Mosquera 1994: 135). In his view, this critique is connected with an imperialistic function of Western curators and played a dominant role in the discourse on curating in the early 1990s.³ He argues that this situation would improve “if the transcultural projects emanating from the centres were collegiate, including the participation of specialists from the curated cultures right from the moment of conception”, by which Mosquera means the participation of “at least one representative of the culture or cultural region being curated” (ibid.: 137). Even if this kind of participation appears to be a fundamental step towards intercultural cooperation between peers, it is quite obvious that the effort to include and hence to make visible artworks and artists from parts of the world that are usually ignored by the Western art world automatically implies the exclusion and non-visibility of many others. Taking a critical view of this perspective, the common practice of many Western museums and exhibitions – selecting artworks, artists and curators for an exhibition by criteria like territory or cultural region and applying a quantitative and additive approach to participation based on national identity – seems

2 For topologies in transcultural curating emerging with exhibitions at the turn of the 1980s in Europe, see for example the contribution by Annette Bhagwati in this book.

3 For more on this discourse see, for example, the chapter “Biennials and Global Curating from the 1990s Onward” in Paul O’Neill’s book “The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)” (2012: 60–70).

highly questionable and misleading. This is not only because culture is attributed to a supposedly homogeneous geopolitical area or local community, but also because the inclusion of participants is still based on an established system of power which determines the integration of *others* to ensure a balanced cultural *representation*⁴ on a global scale. In contrast to this, transcultural curating has to consider first and foremost the propensity of people and things to associate with multiple cultural affiliations at the same time and hence to consider art through a critical reflection of different but equal cultural perspectives beyond geopolitical perspectives. But this raises questions about how to understand and how to deal with the complex interrelationships within and between cultures.

A transcultural understanding that takes into account social interrelationships was initially conceived by anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940. He introduced the Spanish term *transculturación* when he was researching the cultivation of tobacco and sugar cane through different migrant workers and local people in the context of the Cuban economy. (Ortiz 1995) Rejecting the notion of acculturation (i.e. the cultural adaptation of migrants to the host culture) predominant at the time, Ortiz argues that encounters between different populations lead to new social and cultural formations of mutual give and take that profoundly change everyone involved. As the term was only picked up later on,⁵ transculturality is mostly familiar today as a comprehensive philosophical concept developed by Wolfgang Welsch and first published in 1992. Welsch goes beyond a specific geopolitical history by including current as well as former cross-border conditions of cultures, also with respect to the arts. At the heart of his concept is the idea that – especially due to increasing global migration in the 1990s – people identify with more than one way of life, language or tradition. As he argues, the question of identity is therefore no longer linked to steady, monolithic categories of nation, class or race, but set within the dynamics of multiple cultural affiliations. (Welsch 1999: 194-213)

While Welsch's concept follows an understanding of culture that ought to be free of any predefined cultural categories and demands for homogeneity, it also responds to social realities, as he points out with reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein's pragmatically-based concept of culture. According to Welsch, Wittgenstein's philosophical notions are an excellent basis for a transcultural concept of culture, because they focus on situations

4 In accordance with the critique of representation in the field of visual culture, this notion is criticized for neglecting the fact that representation can no longer be defined as mimesis of a concrete reality. In constructivist approaches, representation must be considered as a production of reality, always raising the question of who is represented (or excluded from representation) by whom and how.

5 Ortiz's concept first spread in the 1980s in Latin America and French Canada before it also took root in the USA and Europe as a cross-disciplinary concept primarily applied in linguistics, and in literary and cultural studies (cf. Rama 1982; Lamore 1987; Pratt 1992).

of interaction, when “practices in life are shared” (Welsch 1999: 202).⁶ As Wittgenstein subscribes to the idea that practices are the fundamental social phenomenon and focuses on how they function as vehicles for understanding, the notion of culture to which Welsch relates here can be characterized as neither bound to an intellectual concept of knowledge nor to representations of an independently existing reality. Instead, this notion comes close to an understanding of practice in social theory that emerges in the interconnection of human forms of acting and living as well as symbolic and cognitive structures of knowledge. According to Andreas Reckwitz’s detailed characterization of practice theory, knowledge is thus not only a form of cognitive understanding or restricted to a mental activity, but bound as well to bodily activities.⁷ As such it “enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world” (2002: 246).

This practical understanding of culture also opens the door to approaching art in a transcultural way. It is reflected in Welsch’s idea of providing “a fuller picture of cultural aesthetic approaches, one not modelled on European ideas alone, but encompassing and doing justice to the richness of [...] arts and cultural traditions” (Welsch 2002: 89). He refers to the personal encounter with artworks and points to the situation of “fascination” or “primary attraction” that, in his view, does not necessarily depend on the viewer’s familiarity with the work’s cultural affiliations, but is effected by a “context-transcendent connectedness on the aesthetic and cognitive level” (ibid.: 91). Thus he stresses the need to take artworks, “whatever the distance in time or space may be, to be *present* challenges” (ibid.: 89, with original emphasis) and to recognize their activating potential, triggering a greater openness and sensitivity to various concepts of cultural life, and indeed to everyone’s own way of being. In this approach he underlines the potential of artworks to be “transculturally effective” and in this way he is also criticizing the modernist understanding of contextualism, for he exposes the problems of cultural determinism with its tendency to restrict all experience and cognition to “their cultural framework” and hence to consider all works or conceptions of art to be “limited to a specific cultural context”, generally the one they originate from (ibid.: 90).

Drawing on this practice-based approach of transculturality in order to rethink the aforementioned problems of transcultural curating and to examine its current meaning for staging an exhibition implies revisiting

6 In relation to this, he points at the need to overcome an understanding of culture that is based on “hermeneutic conceptualizations with their beloved presumption of foreignness on the one hand and the unfortunate appropriating dialectics of understanding on the other hand”. Instead he suggests focusing on “pragmatic efforts to interact”. (Welsch 1999: 203)

7 Knowledge is also a certain way of wanting and feeling that does not belong to individuals, but emerges as a specific form of social practice. (Reckwitz 2002: 254)

some essential questions. The first is about how art can be contextualized transculturally, taking into account the definition of knowledge and its sharing. The second, closely related, is about how to realize a transcultural approach in the process of encountering art, which then begs the third question of how to present and mediate art, focusing on the production of meaning. Returning to my earlier point about the need for transcultural thinking in the arts, I will refer to Welsch's practical understanding of transculturality and relate it to the curatorial concept underlying *documenta 12*, which was known as the "migration of form".⁸

Understanding and Approaching Art Transculturally at *documenta 12*

The twelfth edition of *documenta* took place in 2007 in Kassel⁹ and was curated by artistic director Roger Martin Buerger and curator Ruth Noack. As part of their curatorial approach to *documenta 12* they posed three questions which emerged in their encounter with contemporary art and served as *leitmotifs*¹⁰ that structured the entire programme and theoretical discourse. Even though neither the term *transcultural* nor the concept of transculturality were cited explicitly by the curators in the context of *documenta 12*, I will argue that a practical understanding of transculturality is particularly evident in the concept of the 'migration of form'. This concept was harshly criticized by many professional viewers, such as art historians, art critics and curators, for its decontextualizing formalism that allegedly ignored the artists' intentions and the cultural specificity of the social contexts in which the works were produced.¹¹ I will adopt a different perspective below by exploring the curators' decision to deliberately withhold authorized information and knowledge, to supply subjective narratives rather than an allegedly authentic context for the exhibits and to encourage viewers to produce their own readings by actively participating in the exhibition.

As the curators pointed out, the concept of the 'migration of form' was "the organizing principle of the show" (Buerger/Noack 2008: 5),

8 This approach is part of my dissertation on the paradigm of transculturality in relation to exhibition practice. Within a multidimensional analysis of *documenta 12*, I am investigating how specific structures of knowledge emerge in different forms of curatorial practice, which are not only considering transcultural entanglements in the arts, but are also manifested in the discourse and the display of the exhibition and its associated formats for a heterogeneous public.

9 *documenta* has been held for one hundred days every five years since 1955 (with some irregularities in its early life), based principally in Kassel, Germany.

10 While the first *leitmotif* "Is modernity our antiquity?" asks whether and to what extent our thinking and way of life are related to modern forms and visions of modernity, the second *leitmotif* "What is bare life?" concerns the existential nature of the human being as a creature continually threatened by torture, terrorism and other disasters in the post-modern era. The third *leitmotif* "What is to be done?" points to art education and the question of how to bridge the gap between art and public understanding.

11 See, for example, Enwezor 2007: 384; Holert 2007: 414; Egenhofer/Kravagna/Marchart 2007.

reflecting an approach to art which is neither dominated by an overriding topic that then has to be illustrated by the artworks in some way nor bound to “a coherent rule or strict concept that could be generalised to a universal law independent of the works of art that were shown or of the specific encounters between the works and the audience” (ibid.). The concept thus demonstrated the curators’ specific interest in the phenomenon of migration and “the long history of globalization” (ibid.: 6) that goes back much further in time than the so-called global turn, which is described as the rise of economic, socio-political and technological entanglements around the world since the end of the 1980s. Since migration implies the movement of people or entire populations from one place to another with an uncertain length of stay, there was a recognition here of different cultural perspectives and intertwined histories that could not be denied by a subject-independent, universal truth. This transcultural approach to art becomes even clearer in the curators’ claim to neither “succumb to all-encompassing concepts”, nor to favour “geopolitical identity (à la ‘art from India’)”. (Buergel/Noack 2007a: 11) In this regard, the ‘migration of form’ was used to avoid the nation-based identification of artists and artworks. At the same time, it indicated the curators’ strong interest in overcoming established criteria of cultural difference that are traditionally used to organize and classify art collections in Western museums. Accordingly, the curators started their work by tracing back the multifarious migratory routes of artists and artworks across national borders and across established periods of art history. They were not only prompted to “reconstruct the fates of certain forms” by tracking the migratory dynamics and aesthetical transformations of forms through various parts of the world, but also to consider how forms were enriched locally, interpreted or rejected, and to recognize “how the result has been an interrelation that is today rather dialectical” (Buergel 2007a: 97–98).

In the show, this approach became visible, for example, in the selection of drawings and paintings from the Berlin Saray Albums (Diez-Albums) of the 14th up to the 16th century, the oldest works shown in the exhibition. Taking these as orientation for their preparatory work, the curators especially focused attention on one drawing that shows a landscape.¹² It was drawn by an artist from Persia who went to China with a delegation of Persian diplomats and integrated some Chinese forms in his conception of the world (for example, a specific form of rocks), which were later used as formulas in different cultures. (Buergel/Noack 2007b: 173/177; Buergel/Noack 2008: 6) Recognizing such interrelations in

12 It is called “Herbstlandschaft am Fluss” (Autumn Landscape by the River) and shows a miniature on paper measuring 20.3 by 29.1 cm.

the arts and the heterogeneous cultural connectedness of artistic forms, the curators arranged works in diverse constellations with regard to, for example, historical, genealogical, biographical or formal considerations. Their intention was to realize “an expansive layering of correlations that work thematically as well as aesthetically on changing levels of complexity” (2008: 5).

To demonstrate how the ‘migration of form’ reveals a transcultural approach to art, I will reflect on a specific exhibition situation in the documenta-Halle.¹³ I will take a closer look at two exhibits: *The Zoo Story*, produced by artist Peter Friedl for *documenta 12* in 2007, and the Garden carpet, anonymously produced in the late 18th century in the North-West of Iran. Both works are part of an arrangement of several exhibits which are staged in the grand main hall on the lower level of the venue.¹⁴ Entering the rectangular hall by walking down the stairs on one of the short sides of the room, the carpet appears on the right. It is placed on a breast-high slanting plate that projects from the long blue wall. At a certain distance and in contrast to this high-mounted object, *The Zoo Story*, a life-sized stuffed giraffe nearly four metres high, stands on the dark green floor at the other end of the elongated hall. (Fig. 1)

Obviously, all the works in this room are different in many ways. First of all, they present different media – painting (Davila), drawing (Stollhans), installation (Bonin), sculptural wall hangings (Konaté and Osmolovsky), textile traditions (Anonymous) and the stuffed animal (Friedl) – that would usually go on display in a wide range of different museums, such as a museum of contemporary art, a museum for applied arts or, in the case of the animal, a natural science museum. Secondly, they differ in the dates of their creation. While most artworks were made at the beginning of the 21st century, the ancient carpet and the painting by Davila are linked to other periods. And thirdly, as the works, their titles, and the names of their producers – but without explicit national identification – suggest, they relate to different geographies, including Africa, Russia, Germany, Israel, Palestine, Chile and Iran. Taking all this into account, what could have been the reason for choosing and arranging the works in this way? How could the various differences and idiosyncrasies of art be set in relation here?

13 The construction of this building shows a sequence of rooms, starting from the main entrance on the ground floor with a long and narrow entry space and some lateral cabinets on the left, continuing downstairs in the main hall in an elongated shape with a huge interior height that ends in a little separate, slightly tapering room.

14 Besides the two chosen works in the hall, the arrangement consists of a work by Cosima von Bonin (“Relax, it’s only a ghost”, 2006) in the centre and works by Abdoulaye Konaté (“Gris-Gris pour Israël et la Palestine”, 2005 and “Symphonie de bleu 8R”, 2007), Juan Davila (“The Lamentation: A Votive Painting”, 1991), Anatoli Osmolovsky (“Bread”, 2006), and Jürgen Stollhans (“w_2037405: Caput Mortuum”, 2007) hanging on the walls around it.



Fig. 1 Exhibition view: *documenta 12*:
Peter Friedl, *The Zoo Story* (2007)

Rethinking Knowledge through Contextualization

documenta 12 gave no direct instructions or guidance for making sense of this constellation and arrangement of works in the exhibition. Besides the labelling of each exhibit with the name of the artist, the title, the year of production and its funder or lender, there was little further text or information about the works on the walls of the room.¹⁵ For many critics it was uncomfortable, confusing or embarrassing not to know what histories, intentions and significance these works were all about.¹⁶ Walking through the exhibition at *documenta 12* could thus induce a strong desire for comprehensive information about the specific contexts of the works.¹⁷ However, this moment of uncertainty and irritation was intended. It was in line with the *documenta 12* idea of art mediation and education, as Noack points out: “Dispensing with explanatory exhibition texts played a vitally important role in furthering the viewers’ own visual literacy skills. We preferred the painful exposure of knowledge gaps, lest the text-knowledge regime be played off against aesthetic experience.” (Noack 2009: 315) Obviously, the curators avoided any kind of information – expressed verbally or in writing – which might impose an explanation or determine the meaning of the exhibit and compete with the viewers’ individual readings of artworks at the moment of experiencing them in a particular exhibition situation. Moreover, this implies the curators’ conviction that the eyes of the viewer do not have to be glued to wall texts in order to acquire allegedly true or original knowledge about art.

This withholding of knowledge on the works differs fundamentally from traditional art historical conventions. Moreover, the critique of knowledge transfer through contextualization that is raised by Noack indicates a critical rethinking of historical paradigms. According to cultural theorist Mieke Bal, “contextualism was art history’s answer to the need to open art up to the world”, and thus “one of the most powerful movements in art theory of the late twentieth century” (Bal 2006: 86): Context proves to be a “tenacious dogma”,¹⁸ because “sticky from the single-temporality determinism out of which it emerged, [it] wrongly suggests that the ‘text’ – the work of art – is both protected and delimited from, yet dependent on, its con-text” (ibid., with original emphasis). Since for Bal the work of art itself can be understood as text, her notion clearly shows the need to doubt the general validity of any additional text that usually explains the meaning of

15 As Bonin’s work took centre stage in the arrangement of works in this room, there was a text plate hanging freely from the ceiling to the body height of the viewer.

16 See, for example, Egenhofer / Kravagna / Marchart 2007.

17 For example, Okwui Enwezor, artistic director of *Documenta 11*, complained about *documenta 12*

that the viewer was left to proceed through the venues “from one decontextualization to the next” (Enwezor 2007: 385).

18 From a transcultural point of view, Welsch is also criticizing “the typically modern axiom – or dogma – behind the contemporary relativism, contextualism and culturalism dominant in the humanities and in cultural studies today” (Welsch 2002: 90).

an artwork primarily or exclusively with respect to its specific period of origin. This obviously also points to traditional forms of presenting art divided into, for example, ancient art and contemporary art, as well as into artefacts (any object manufactured by human beings) and artworks (belonging to the Western canon of art). From this perspective, the critical notion of context also fundamentally questions the production of meaning in terms of culturally coded power relations in space and time. In a detailed examination of Friedl's *The Zoo Story* at *documenta 12*, curator Marco Scotini even notes a way to disarm power configurations: in an aesthetically autonomous object without any additional information or visual clarification he acknowledges the attempt to reset all things, pictures or statements to a state of potentiality that is not exhausted by a concrete expression, but articulates the absence of prescribed rules and the capacity of signs, forms of narrating and forms of being. (Scotini 2013: 183) In terms of power relations, the avoidance of comprehensive data about the exhibits at *documenta 12* corresponds to the transcultural argument about overcoming the authoritarian status of predefined knowledge and the chance to approach art with an open mind. This, however, does not necessarily mean that approaching art is or can ever be free of any preconceptions. But rather than providing additional text on the works, the curators of *documenta 12* created a situation which draws attention to the allegedly natural order of things – that is, in a Foucauldian sense, always bound to a historical set of power relations with no simple centre but within complex networks and diverse relations of society.

Enabling Multiple Narratives Simultaneously

The question of an adequate contextualization of artworks was not answered by *documenta 12* in general. However, the curators were not trapped in a simple denial of context, as many critics claimed in their accusation of formalism. Instead the curators tried to realize “a cosmology of micro-stories told at multiple levels” (Noack 2009: 315). Rather than leaving behind all (art) historical narratives, this implied considering artistic phenomena in relation to various cultural perspectives and histories. In the *documenta-Halle*, visitors were obviously not left alone to read artworks, as the ‘literacy skills’ suggest. The wall label of each exhibit contained a reference to a page in the exhibition catalogue. This provides texts on each work in chronological order (by the date of its making) that were written by different authors, such as art historians, curators, art critics, or theorists. Moreover, the catalogue includes biographies of the artists and a list with information about all the works shown or involved in *documenta 12*. Since the catalogue was “meant to be used as a reference tool” (ibid.), the texts on the exhibits provided theoretical reflections.¹⁹ (Fig. 2)

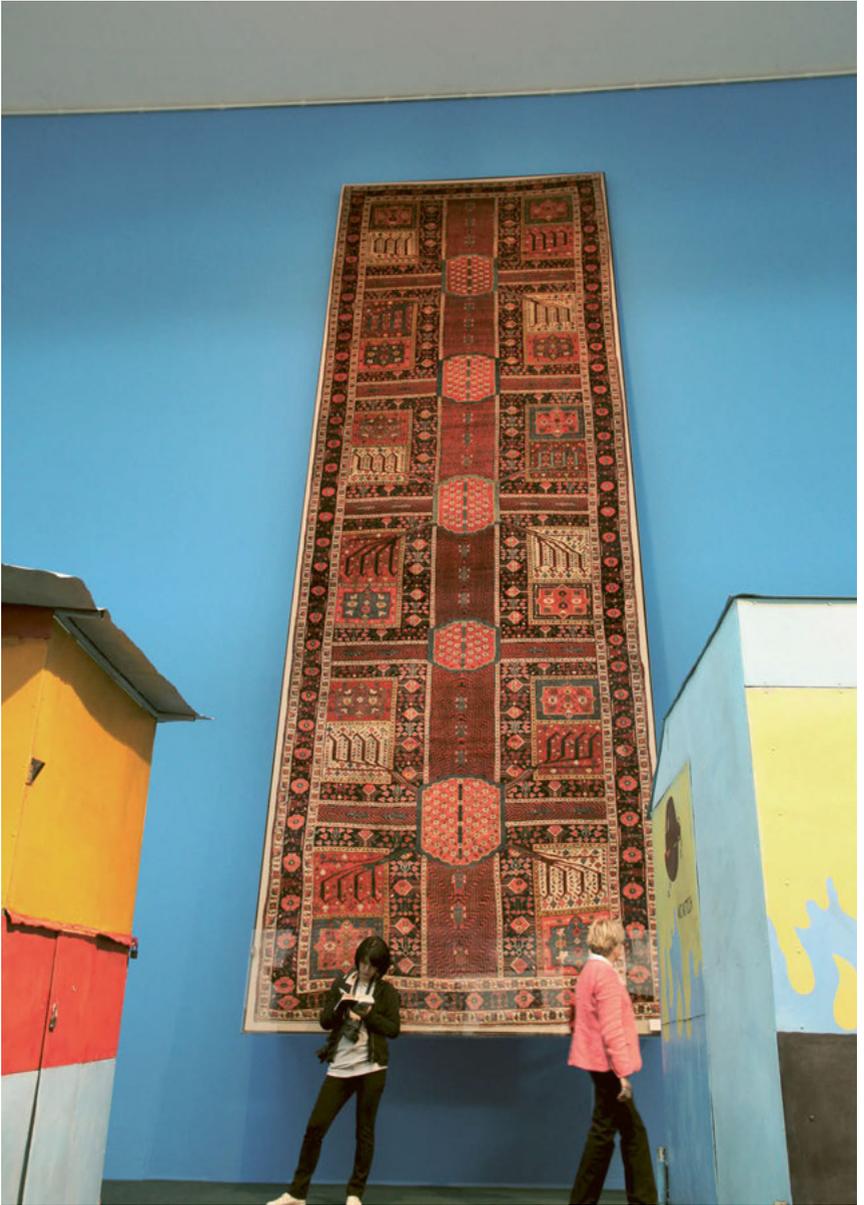


Fig. 2 Exhibition view: *documenta 12*:
Garden carpet (ca. 1800)

In the catalogue text for Peter Friedl's *The Zoo Story* it is the artistic director himself who acquaints the reader with the biographical fate of the giraffe and the artist's idea of triggering stories beyond scientific knowledge of the object. The giraffe was called *Brownie* and was once a resident of the zoo in Qalqilya, a city in Palestine, before it died during the second Intifada in August 2002, when it panicked at the bombing and ran against an iron bar. After preparation, the animal was exhibited in the zoo's museum. Earlier, *Brownie* had been brought as a gift to Qalqilya in 1997 when it was still a prosperous city and had not yet been cordoned off by the Israeli Security Wall. (Buerger 2007b: 246) Thus, at first sight, the giraffe could be seen as a symbol or a documentation of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is also a widely known fact from many media pictures. But as Buerger points out finally, the essential aspect for Friedl lies in the notion of *Brownie* as an image that would hopefully trigger "a narrative distinct from the stereotypical impotent media images of the conflict and occupation zone, which bloodily offend any political rationality" (ibid.). For the carpet, in contrast, there is no such biography of the object. But neither is it categorized as an artefact with reference to manufacturing methods. Instead, the text on the carpet by art historian Friedrich Spuhler focuses on a description of its visible patterns connected to its use in garden culture. As he outlines in the catalogue, "[l]ovingly tended gardens were a luxury in the generally barren landscapes of the Near East" and thus the cultivation of gardens "established a contrast between wild, dangerous nature and the idyll tamed by humans and enclosed within garden walls" (Spuhler 2007: 32).

What is relevant here is how the texts are articulated: these interpretations of works by authors with different professional backgrounds underline that there is no universally valid truth about the works. Like in the case of the labels, the works are not categorized by traditional methods of classification centred on Western modernity (for example, by nation, era or style). Moreover, the integration of the texts in the catalogue did not necessarily establish a direct comparison, contrast or competition with the viewer's own readings. Rather, the texts offered a further, more specific reason to discuss different readings of each work, even when considering them as part of the arrangement in the exhibition.

This again highlights the curators' aforementioned idea of 'furthering the viewers' own visual literacy skills' by inviting every viewer to participate in the process of producing meaning in order to open up different and multiple narratives. Placing exemplary readings in the catalogue enabled

19 With the handy size of approx. 23 x 17 x 3 cm the catalogue could be read not only before or after, but also during a visit to the exhibition.

When the curators realized that not everyone was buying it, they also provided copies within the different exhibition spaces (Noack 2009: 315).

viewers to encounter art in an open situation, where they were not obliged to follow specific, culturally coded knowledge, but instead could rely on their own cultural affiliations and knowledge as a first step to approaching the art. While this can be related to Welsch's transcultural approach to providing a 'fuller picture' of arts and culture, it also indicates the potentially uneasy situation or, at the same time, enriching experience evoked by the 'present challenge'.

The Production of Meaning as a Shared Practice of Mental and Bodily Activities

Closely associated with this approach to art, the curators were propagating the notion of 'aesthetic experience', derived from their idea of taking into account the variety of multiple narratives on different levels and in different formats in the exhibition, where the meaning of an artwork is not yet sanctioned by the truth claims of an authoritarian interpretation. Besides, in keeping with a practical understanding of transculturality it no longer seems appropriate to decode an artwork by extracting one, allegedly authentic, meaning from the exhibit (see also footnote 4). Rather its meaning is produced in the personal interaction of the viewer with the artwork, which is, according to Reckwitz's notion of knowledge, based on the interconnection between both mental and bodily activities and suggests a process of understanding that emerges as 'a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world'.

According to the definition by the research team for *documenta 12 education*, 'aesthetic experience' occurs when a viewer is forced to make sense of an artwork. By referring to Juliane Rebentisch's *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (2012 [2003]), however, they claim that the reading of a work can never be completely fulfilled for the viewer, so that he or she is repeatedly confronted by something new as a potentially unresolvable process (Ballath/Gressel/Landkammer/Ortmann/Settele 2009: 333). The approach to art formulated here connects the analytical process of reception with a generative process of production, dissolving the rigid boundary between them. Moreover, it implies that the meaning of artworks can never be determined definitely or comprehensively, but is always open to changing interpretations in the process of the production of meaning by each viewer. Looking back at *documenta 12* in a lecture in 2009, Buergel contemplated how this process might evolve: "The migration of form is nothing but the very passage of subjective transformation that may turn a giraffe into a carpet, or [...] not. It is an activity of the mind, of the imagination". According to this idea, the display of works was intended to trigger movements of thought that require a certain kind of individual engagement. This seems all the more in line with Welsch's view of artworks as a 'present challenge', as the

curators make it clear that ‘aesthetic experience’ is less about immediate perception, but rather something which “challenges immediacy, and enables us to rethink the terms, which guide us through the present.” (Buergel/ Noack 2007c: 3). Thus it seems that the ‘migration of form’ not only envisages connecting artworks by virtue of their outer or visual appearance, but also by drawing on the potential of imagination, which is closely connected to the cultural and social affiliations of every viewer. Buergel argues that viewers can make links with their own present if “the function of memory is getting activated that way, that is by reviving the chain of things that once mattered and still matter to us” (Buergel 2009).²⁰

Different meanings can emerge when viewers use their own imagination to set heterogeneous exhibits from a wide range of artistic forms of presentation in relation to one another. But participating in the production of meaning as an ‘aesthetic experience’ also involves all the senses. According to Buergel, this occurs when “memory is allowed to travel, to experience a passage, moving back and forth – at least if a human subject makes itself available to precisely this exchange” (2009). In this sense, mental activity goes hand in hand with the physical movement of people, and thus, in the figurative sense, the visitors to *documenta 12* could also be imagined as people crossing different borders and living in a transitory space²¹. Even though they are located on the safe or institutionally secured ground of the exhibition space, the duration of their visit is limited to a particular time of access. Moreover, exchanges happening here are provided through various constellations that enable cultural and social interactions and are thus characterized by mental and bodily activities. These activities are not only related to the encounter with artworks, but also with their specific arrangement, with the display and the architectural styles²² of the venues, and in particular, with the different understandings, languages and cultural

20 Similarly, for Scotini the giraffe shows a method for revealing internal connections that serves as a way to study the outer phenomena and as an instrument to activate imagination (2013: 188). Looking at the silent and motionless body of the giraffe he reveals different stories: they are linked, for example, to the wall that encloses nearly the whole city of Qalqilya in the West Bank, or to the ghettos and enclaves that are created by the security wall. Besides this, he refers to apartheid in South Africa, where *Brownie* originates from and, moreover, to the history of zoos, invented in the early 19th century when the first living giraffe came to Europe in 1827 as a gift of the Egyptian viceroy to the French king, decisively triggering the development of zoological, ethnological, and later colonial exhibitions. (ibid.: 185-186)

21 Hilde Van Gelder also speaks about a transitory space with regard to the production of meaning around Friedl’s artistic work. Although this space is primarily conceived as imaginative, it also offers

a certain potential for activity that is based on the in-between: “There is always a gap between the intended and the produced meaning of an artwork. But that exactly is a fascinating void. It is in the transitory, fragile space where the work of art produces its own meaning – or releases its reflexive image – that new political insights, new philosophies, new ways of living together can be imagined.” (Van Gelder 2013: 152)

22 The architecture of the five different main venues of *documenta 12* conveys inherent concepts of the public sphere prevalent at the time of their construction. Built at the end of the 20th century, the *documenta-Halle* reflects concepts of modernity. For Noack “[t]he modernist *documenta-Halle* seems to assume a ready-made public, its glass façade signifying transparency and the absence of barriers – though we know, of course, that the decisive barriers (class, social background, education, etc.) are invisible.” (Noack 2009: 315)

affiliations of the visitors, who are participating in or even generating these constellations for a certain time in this space. It was the curator's intention to encourage viewers to make individual choices and to play an active part amidst the various constellations of the exhibition. This was supported in many different ways by the exhibition design. In the documenta-Halle, for example, the colour scheme for the rooms, like the blue wall and the green floor, was designed to avoid the "apparent neutrality" (Noack 2009: 315) of the *White Cube*²³ that today not only constitutes a historical paradigm but still denotes the ideal vision of a space for exhibiting art based on the principles of European and North American modernism. Hence the visitors to *documenta 12* were placed in a position to examine their own specific relationships to things and people, and thus to the world.

This practical understanding of transculturality becomes all the more apparent from the fact that visitors were not obliged to follow an arranged pathway or to reconstruct a specific knowledge about art. Instead they were offered several constellations that might correspond to multiple cultural affiliations and in very different ways. Accordingly, visitors were treated as self-empowered viewers who could take centre stage in the production of meaning in the here and now of the particular exhibition situation. This practical production of knowledge was specifically taken up and developed by the public programme *documenta 12 education*, which was understood as an integral part of the curatorial concept, but also critically reflected on it within a separate research project. With their claim to share several approaches to art and to generate different formats for a diverse range of visitors and groups of varying interests, the programme team applied a participatory approach to art that was oriented towards the third *leitmotif* of *documenta 12* and the question "What is to be done?" It was dedicated to aesthetic education and based on formats of discourse and communication, rather than on the mere acquisition of facts and information as imparted in the traditional lecture style. Thus, *documenta 12* offered a variety of interactive formats designed to encourage direct engagement with art, inviting visitors to share their experiences and explorations at special locations in- and outside the exhibition space. While critically complementing and at the same time extending the curatorial approach to art, the activity of *documenta 12 education* was much less concerned with transmitting knowledge about the art on display than with enabling and using the activity of the visitors to create situations for reflecting on art as a transcultural medium. •

23 For the concept's historical development see O'Doherty [1976] 1986. For the incorporation of the *White Cube* ideology in the context of biennials and large-scale exhibitions see, for example, Filipovic 2005.

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Fig. 1 Exhibition view: *documenta 12*: Peter Friedl, *The Zoo Story* (2007), Photo: Ines Agostinelli / documenta Archiv

Fig. 2 Exhibition view: *documenta 12*: Garden carpet (ca. 1800), Photo: Ines Agostinelli / documenta Archiv