

Existential Urgency

Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form

Peter Osborne

ABSTRACT What happens to the form of the biennial when biennials become part of a world system of art institutions, subject to the historical temporality of a global contemporaneity? In particular, what happens when the periodic rhythms of national narratives of biennial exhibitions are overcoded by a serial sequence of international biennials – competing for contemporaneity – seemingly without end? This essay approaches these questions via a consideration of the debate about the transitional symbolic significance of the 1989 Third Havana Biennale. It contrasts three historical problematics of ‘the contemporary’ as models through which to think the cultural function of biennials: (i) the critique of anthropology, or, the coeval; (ii) socialist post-coloniality, or the avant-garde construction of traditions; (iii) the historical contemporaneity of a global capitalist modernity.

KEY WORDS Anthropology, Biennials, Coeval, Contemporaneity, Contemporary art, Global capitalism, Modern, Postcolonial, Postconceptual, Tradition, Third World

1. Biennials

Art today lives – can there still be doubt? – in ‘the age of the biennial’: large-scale international exhibitions of contemporary art, which impose upon the artworlds of the world, the professionals who inhabit those worlds, and significant numbers of inhabitants of the cities that host them, a certain, very particular rhythm: the time of the every-other-year.¹ As we know, such events have proliferated exponentially since the late 1980s. The Havana Biennial, founded in 1984, was at that point only the 4th generally internationally recognized biennial in the world – following Venice (1895), São Paolo (1951) and Sydney (1975) – although there were several other less well-known ones, of course, between São Paolo and Havana. Today, 30 years after the First Havana Biennial, there are over forty-times that number: 175, at least. They extend across a proto-global space and the scope of their ambition is no longer primarily national, or even regional, but that of a geopolitical totalization of the globe, homologous with the ongoing, post-1989 expansion of the social relations of capitalism itself. (Fig. 1)

Since the end of the 1980s – symbolically, at a world-historical level, since ‘1989’ – we have seen the emergence of biennials characterized by two main features: artistic ‘contemporaneity’ and geo-political ‘globality’.

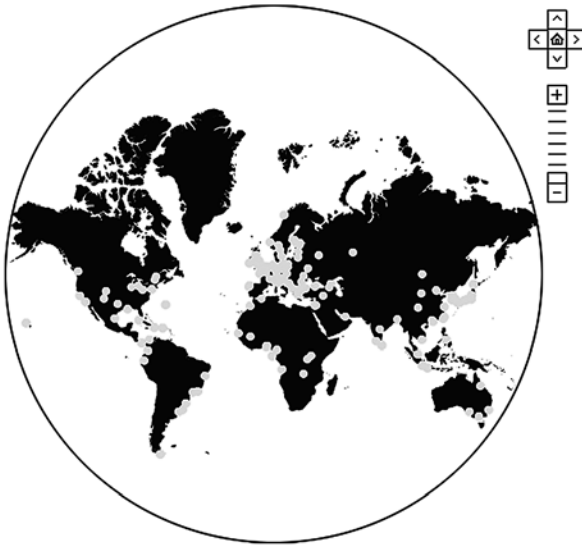


Fig.1. Biennial Foundation website map.

These two features are inextricably linked, since it is the tendential globalization of relations of social dependence, through the operations of transnational capital, that has produced the new and distinctive temporality of con-temporaneity – a disjunctive unification or coming together of different social times – as a *historically actual* temporality, for the first time.²

If we understand the modern – the temporal logic of the new – to be a cultural expression of the temporality of capital accumulation ('the aesthetic seal of expanded reproduction', in Adorno's phrase),³ its tendential global extension brings with it not just a global modernity, but through the latter, a new temporal structure articulating the fractured temporal unity of this global extent. 'Contemporaneity' is the temporality of global modernity, the temporal product of globalization.⁴ The temporalities of the modern and the contemporary are not successive historical stages (modernity has not been surpassed) but rather co-exist in complex and contradictory ways, transforming the conceptual shapes of the modern and the contemporary themselves.

As an art-historical periodization, then, 'the age of the biennial' may

be taken to be, for the first time, a genuinely, properly or fully ‘historical’ periodization – in the modern philosophical sense of ‘history’ in the collective singular (*Geschichte* in the German) that emerged in Europe in the course of the 18th century. ‘Biennial’ thus presents itself as the first category of an incipient global art history. Or at least, this is the theoretical ambition implicit in its current understanding: its *constitutive fiction*. And it corresponds to a certain practical, intellectual and cultural ambition associated with the recent practices of biennials themselves. In this respect, it is their *collective fantasy*, we might say: the fantasy of providing comprehensive artistic coverage of the globe, through something like a world system of art. It is a powerful, self-actualizing institutional fantasy. Within this system, the biennial would appear as the dominant form, articulating the relations between itself and other elements – museums, art centres, galleries of multiple kinds, festivals, fairs, markets, sponsorships and other forms of institutional funding; ‘over-determining’ these other elements and the relations between them, whilst being determined in its own development by them in turn.⁵ The ‘exhibitionary complex’ will no longer be museological, it will be ‘biennial’ – a strangely simple temporal designation for what has become a highly complicated and contradictory institutional reality.⁶

What are the characteristic features, contradictions and prospects of this new biennial form? What are the deeper and wider histories of which it is the product?

To begin with, to stick with its literal temporal designation, one might note that the mechanistic chronologism dictating the periodic occurrence of biennials, every-other-year (or once-every-3 for a triennial; or every-5 for a quintennial...), projects a open-ended, serial, mathematical continuity, which installs a certain ideality, and with it, a comforting imaginary permanence. In combination with the recent exponential proliferation of instances, this envisages a kind of utopian/dystopian, progressive filling-up of the world – and by extension of the lives of the occupants of the world art system, and of cities more generally – with biennials, until there is one in each major city of the world. Indeed, having a biennial is increasingly one criterion of the status of a city being a major city, one way of ‘putting it on the map’. There are currently enough biennials to attend at a rate of more than three every two weeks, prospectively, for a lifetime. Every-other-year is now (for the global artworld) almost twice-a-week. As such, that is as a whole, ‘the biennial’ is no longer a feasible object of experience for even the most energetic of artworld professionals.

The longevity of the founding instances – Venice and São Paulo –

helps sustain a sense of the continuity of biennials as a quasi-natural process. (Venice will be 120 in 2015, its 56th edition; São Paulo is 63 years old.) Indeed, thus far, terminations of a sequence once initiated are extraordinarily rare; the loss of face is too great, perhaps. Johannesburg lasted only two editions (1995 and 1997), but it was the uniqueness of its failure that was exemplary. In fact, biennials are also reborn. In Brazil this year, for example, the Bahia Biennale, forceably closed by the military dictatorship in 1968, was brought back to life for its third edition, after a 46-year hiatus. This raises the Christological spectre that every terminated biennial is only a biennial waiting to be reborn; just as every city without a biennial is the site of a virtual biennial-to-come. It is the *religious naturalism* of this spectre of an endlessly repeated structure – rapidly ‘routinized’ and hence culturally entropic, yet not just recurring but spreading: a religious temporality of expanded reproduction, one might say, a new form of ‘capitalism as religion’ – that has provoked declarations of a ‘crisis of the biennial’; although these declarations have mainly emanated from ex-biennial curators, moving on to other parts of the art system, and so should perhaps be taken with more than a pinch of salt. And in any case, to every crisis comes its overcoming. ‘To biennale or not to biennale?’ was the clever question framing the 2008 international conference on biennials in Bergen, Norway – which gave birth to the 2010 Biennial Reader, an early staging post in the increasingly self-reflexive character of biennial discourse. But that conference was organized as part of the preparations for what was to become the Bergen Triennial (first edition, 2013): so whatever views were expressed, the answer was never in doubt: to biennale!⁷

One of the interesting things about the proposal behind the 2014 Bahia Biennale is the way in which it mediated a return to its original regional project with its new global context; or better perhaps, the way in which its original regional project, retrospectively recoded, now appears as anticipatory of the newly global biennial form. Its title, ‘Is Everything Northeast?’, was a classical biennial title of rhetorical speculative totalization. The biennale, its Curatorial Proposal reads, ‘aligns itself with the main aim behind the two other editions of the Biennale of Bahia: instead of being historically and artistically read by the “Other”, it is the local experience, thought universally, that reads this “Other”.’⁸ ‘Local experience thought universally’, posited against the background of its inverse – international experience thought locally – has become a kind of chiasmic motto, or mantra even, of the self-consciousness of the form. It is the main, albeit the most abstract – because purely geographically formu-

lated – mechanism for producing those ‘general socio-political questions’ that Charles Esche, in his introduction to the Afterall book on the 3rd Havana Biennale, has argued is an important characteristic of the biennial in its post-1989 form.⁹ Yet it is also problematic, precisely because of its abstraction: an abstraction from the political-economic processes through which, in the current historical conjuncture, locality is *produced* by a globalization that is not opposed to it, but which rather *circulates* the ‘localities’ that it produces as localities, as its own constituent internal elements. As Arjun Appadurai has put it: ‘histories produce geographies and not [any longer – PO] vice versa’.¹⁰

I would like to dwell for a moment here on Esche’s extraction of a series of distinctive features of the post-89 biennial form, from his interpretation of the Third Biennial of Havana (1989), which, as he points out, ‘opened eight days before the Berlin Wall fell’ – an event that has recently marked its 25th anniversary. From the standpoint of this anniversary, the Third Biennial of Havana represents a kind of historical hinge, or vanishing mediator: it introduced a series of innovations that would subsequently be taken up in a new and very different geo-political context, to be given new meanings that would become constituent features of a new form.

The first five distinctive features of post-1989 biennials that Esche retrospectively finds in the Third Havana Biennial are:

- (i) a symbolic recognition of the art of the geopolitical periphery,
- (ii) a shift towards thematic curatorial authorship, generally taking the form of ...
- (iii) posing socio-political questions, which leads to ...
- (iv) an emphasis on debate and a strong discursive or pedagogical dimension, along with ...
- (v) a demographically based cultural self-definition in terms of ‘the political and social mix of the cities that host them’.¹¹

As Esche indicates, the Third Biennale of Havana was an exception to the model it inaugurated in two respects: first in being an international *socialist* mobilization of those regional art communities ‘marginalized’ from the main international networks in 1989; and second in being a self-consciously ‘Third World’ event. And, I would like to add, there is an internal relationship between these two aspects. The largest exhibition within the Biennial (at the National Museum of Fine Arts/Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes) was called ‘Three Worlds’ (‘Tre Mundos’). Yet in the wake of the end of state communism in Eastern Europe (and with it, the ‘Second World’ of so-called ‘historical communism’), 1989

was the very last moment that the concept of the 'Third World' could be mobilized. Subsequent, definitively post-communist biennials may have been increasingly self-consciously postcolonial, but this postcoloniality could no longer be thought as a 'third' world: the object of an ideological struggle between two world systems, struggling for its own, 'third' way (Bandung). This was not because the referent of 'Third World' disappeared, but because the Second World did, overnight, creating, on the one hand, a newly bipolar geopolitical system, symbolically named as 'North' and 'South', and on the other, more complicated economic and ideological divisions within capitalism: between China and the USA, and between increasingly religiously coded combatants, respectively. The purely 'economic' category of the BRIC countries to which Brazil 'belongs' – Brazil, Russia, India and China – is in this respect a somewhat spurious unity. China is a new global power in the way in which the others are not yet, while Russia is neither a country of the 'South' nor a prospective engine of the world economy. The recent addition to the group of South Africa, pluralizing the acronym, as BRICS, only draws attention to the incoherence and ideological over-determination of the idea by financial markets, in search of tidy packets of imaginarily mitigated risk. Geopolitics – and the geopolitical imaginary through which politics itself is so often conducted – continues to resist reduction to financial markets, however much these markets may come to dominate the relations between states.

Ironically, at an ideological level, socialism has remained more recalcitrant to global capitalism than Third Worldism. The general 'socio-political questioning' that came to characterize post-1989 biennials as a result of the recognition of the art of the geopolitical periphery, is grounded on a combination of postcolonial nationality and transnational capitalism. As such, it offers less of an alternative perspective to the latter than a new mode of its articulation. This resonates with the new political-economic function of the post-1989 biennials, to which we must add a final, sixth feature: namely, (vi) that they are declarations that particular cities are (in Esche's phrase) 'open for business'. The post-1989 biennial form is ineluctably tied up with corporate, municipal, national and regional development projects, and property markets in particular. The important role of biennials within the art market is, in this respect, by no means the main capital function at stake in biennials themselves.

The combination of the third of these features (the posing of social and political questions) with the first (the recognition of the geopolitical periphery by cultural institutions of the 'centre') is clearly in tension and poten-

tially direct contradiction with the sixth: the capitalistic political-economic function of corporate, municipal, national and regional development. It is this contradiction, I think – rather than the ‘routinization’ attendant upon repetition, generally cited – which is the more critical rationale behind the currently perceived crisis in the development of the biennial form. It has led to a displacement of the previously generally critical, socio-political questioning of the 1990s and early 21st century into increasingly intense self-historicizations of the biennial form – of which the founding of the World Biennial Forum, by the World Biennial Foundation, is an important institutional manifestation. Not only do we now have the verb, ‘to biennial’, and the concept of ‘biennialization’ – often a perceived threat to the so-called ‘ecology’ of local artworlds – but we also have a new proto-sub-discipline of art history: ‘bienniology’. These self-historicizations have increasingly been accompanied by often quite vaguely defined curatorial poetics, which distance curatorial thematics from social and political themes, whilst also re-presenting such themes through various quasi-literary recodings. It is the academicization of the discourse of self-reflexivity, perhaps, that has provoked the poetic character of its supplement/compensation/consolation, as part of what appears to be a withdrawal, not from politics as such, but from a historically imagined critical-political curatorial thematics. This is the real, critical crisis in biennial curation, derived from the increasingly in-assimilable legacy of the previous primacy of social and political questions in what we might call the early post-1989 biennial problematic. That problematic expressed itself artistically in the art-critical primacy of postconceptual work. This legacy continues, not at the level of curatorial thematics, but at that of the need to mine the archive of ‘as yet unrecognized’ formally and conceptually serious work from the 1950s–1970s, upon which biennials increasingly depend for their art-critical as well as their art-historical legitimacy. ‘To each biennial its own art-historical discovery’ is the new moral law of biennial curation here.

Such art – like much of the postconceptual work into whose canon it now enters, as ‘contemporary’ art in a critical serious sense – has an *immanently artistic* ‘critical acceptance of art’s relation to politics and social context’.¹² In this respect, one might say, at their best, biennials are places where the contemporaneity of art can engage its geopolitical conditions in the newly global, historical contemporaneity itself. (And it need not be especially chronologically recent to be activated as ‘contemporary’ in this respect.) When this happens, such works perform individual condensations of the cultural forms of historical (that is, political-economic, technological and socio-political) contemporaneity into artistic events.¹³

With regard to the historical structure of this new contemporaneity as it manifests itself within the biennial form, it is useful to contrast it with two other historical-temporal problematics, with which it is bound up, but which it definitively transcends: (i) the temporal dimension of the critique of anthropology, or the coeval, and (ii) the avant-garde temporality of the socialist postcoloniality, represented by the Third Havana Biennial. Schematically, as critical-theoretical formations, one might associate the former with the 1960s and 70s, and the latter with the 1970s and 80s. While that of contemporaneity, as the temporality of a global capitalist modernity, emerges from the 1990s onwards – with the post-modern problematic consigned to the past, not as a vanishing mediator, so much as a now-redundant historical placeholder for the new categorical form. (We should note here the fundamental critical irrelevance to historical contemporaneity of the whole ‘postmodern’ problematic.)

These are three successive problematics that incorporate the previous ones within themselves, not through a Hegelian sublation (negated and preserved, transformed), but in a much more contradictorily ‘living’ manner, as registers of subordinate but still (at certain times, in certain places) decisive contradictions. Each problematic has its own concept of ‘the contemporary’, but it is only in the third problematic that contemporaneity comes into its own as a historico-temporal structure, acquiring a distinctive and decisive temporal form. I shall briefly review these forms before ending with some concluding remarks about the temporality of the biennial form.

2. Three Historical Problematics of ‘the Contemporary’

a. Critique of Anthropology, or, the Coeval

Classically, anthropology played a founding role in the establishment of a historical differential between cultures (the basis of all developmentalist and modernization theories) by virtue of positing the existence of non-European cultures in *another time*. The concept of the coeval takes centre stage in the critique of the time-consciousness of the discipline of anthropology via its identification as that which anthropology denies. In the words of Johannes Fabian, whose 1983 book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* is the basic text here (summing up two decades of critique): denial of coevalness – characteristic of anthropology – is ‘a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse’. Coevalness, then, would be a recognition that the referent(s) of anthropology inhabit the same Time as the present of the

producer of anthropological discourse', or 'a placing of the referent(s) of anthropology in the same Time as the present of the producer of anthropological discourse'.¹⁴

There are three things to note here. First, it is more than a simultaneous occurrence in *physical* time that is at stake here (which Fabian refers to instead as synchronicity, or *Gleichzeitigkeit*, in German). Rather coevalness is 'a common, active "occupation", or sharing, of time'. It is a social, inter-subjective concept. Second, this social time of communication is not an intersubjective given, or a transcendental form, given as a condition of communication. It 'has to be created' through a communicational relationship, and, in the case of anthropology, this is a relationship between different or 'other' social times. However, third, for Fabian himself, this shared time is *not* to be associated with contemporaneity. For Fabian, 'contemporary asserts co-occurrence in ... typological time.' I.e. it is a sociologically periodizing category. For Fabian, coevalness marks the fact that contemporaneity itself is 'embedded in culturally organized praxis'. Or to put it another way, 'intersocietal contemporaneity' must be actualized as coeval praxis.¹⁵ In other words, for Fabian, contemporaneity is not a theoretical category as such. Nonetheless, coevalness lays the groundwork for the subsequent construction of contemporaneity as a theoretical category, once it comes to critical self-consciousness in the course of the 1990s, in the context of globalization. As a category of the philosophy of historical time, contemporaneity projects coevalness at the level of the global social whole. In the process, its conceptual shape (and the shape of the coeval itself) changes. For, the open-ended global totalization of the multiplicity of relations of coevalness (sharings of time) can only be a fractured whole of relations that are as disjunctive (in their multiplicity) as they are conjunctive (in their intersubjectivity). Theoretically, its unity can only be speculatively projected, since it cannot be actually unified, in principle, within the purview of an actual subject. 'The coeval' thus anticipates but is structurally transformed by the globally 'contemporary'.

The second problematic, the avant-garde of a socialist postcoloniality, recognizes coevalness as the temporal ground for its construction of traditions, but maintains a much stronger sense of futurity.

b. Socialist Postcoloniality, or, the Avant-Garde Construction of Traditions

Here, I shall take Geeta Kapor's presentation to the conference of the 3rd Havana Biennale, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', as my exemplar. It was written on the cusp of the transition

from the dominance of the second to the third of these problematics, and although primarily concerned with contemporary art in India, it has a general theoretical significance marked by the context of its presentation in Havana. The two main polemical categories at issue are 'Tradition' and Contemporaneity' – the subtitle of the 'Three Worlds/Tres Mundos' exhibition within the Biennial – with the category of modernity as a background, mediating third term. All three categories are treated as 'notations within the cultural polemic of decolonisation', which function 'largely as pragmatic features of nation-building'. Kapur writes:

the term 'tradition' as we use it in the present equation is not what is given or received as a disinterested civilizational legacy, if ever there should be such a thing. This tradition is what is invented by a society's cultural vanguard in the course of a struggle.

Indeed, since

tradition even in its conservative allegiances emerged in the decolonising process as an oppositional category, it has the power of resistance... the power to transform routinely transmitted materials from the past into discursive forms that merit in consequence to be called contemporary, even radical.¹⁶

In the case of the Third Havana Biennale, it was the use of 'pre-Columbian traditions in contemporary Latin American art' that was at stake – especially its relations to Latin American constructivism, in the Argentinean context, as discussed by Louis Camnitzer in his review of the Biennale.¹⁷

What is of particular retrospective interest about Kapur's 1989 text, is the way in which term 'contemporary' is introduced, yet 'assumes a kind of neutrality'. It does not yet have a polemical force of its own. Rather, she argues:

We can, if we want, 'correct' the situation by giving contemporaneity the ideological mantle of the term 'modernity'. [But i]mmmediately, of course, complications arise, but that is perhaps the point: to induce the turmoil and give a definitional ambiguity to the present so that the future is predicated at a higher level of consciousness.¹⁸

The modern function here as 'a signalling device for the future', while the contemporary primarily marks off the historical presentness of the present, from the past whose elements it recombines and refunctions. Kapur continues:

We have to bring to the term tradition... the concreteness of extant practice, and to make the genuine extension of small particularities into new and contemporary configurations. Also, at the same time, we have to bring to the term modern a less monolithic, a less formalistic, indeed a less institutional, status, so at least to make it what it once was, a vanguard notion leading to a variety of experimental moves. Only with such initiatives can Third World cultures begin to justify their worth as alternative cultures.¹⁹

‘Alternative’ here has the political sense of offering a political alternative to the current historical state of things (beyond a merely cultural meaning): ‘Thus, positing a tradition-in-use in Third World societies encourages an effective method of politicising culture.’ In the context of the post-1989 biennials, however, there has been an intensification of what was already an inherent danger: namely, (and I quote) ‘the commodification of traditions as such, and of traditional forms and artefacts, to serve both the state and the market.’²⁰ The *transnationalisation* of postcolonial economies, associated with the post-1989 globalization of capital, refunctions national identities forged in the struggle for decolonisation, into cultural commodities for international consumption. In the process, an established ‘postcolonialism’ (as opposed to an ongoing *process* of postcolonial decolonisation) takes the invented traditions *out* of one contemporary use (the building of alternative cultures) into another: using them instead as icons of an imaginary cultural continuity, the imaginary status of which is covered over and repressed. It is for this reason, Kapor concluded, that the task of what she was still calling the Third World intelligentsia, including artists, should be ‘to bring existential urgency to questions of contemporaneity’.²¹ Her essay thus takes us, with an acute theoretical and political self-consciousness, to the threshold of the current period, in which the historical role of a globalising transnational capital has given both new meanings to the terms ‘contemporary’ and ‘contemporaneity’ and a newly generalized existential urgency to the experience of the temporal forms that they have come to denote.

In the internally fractured and multiple modernity of a globally transnational capitalism, the perspective of the agents of decolonization (of the 1970s) is folded back into the cultural-political dynamics of global capitalism as a residual, but still problematic and contradictory one. It is this set of contradictory relations that many of the biennials of the 1990s and early 21st century attempted to present through a new kind of curation of art, but which are rapidly being overridden by dynamics more wholly immanent to the logic of capital accumulation itself.

c. *Global Capitalist Modernity:*

The Contradictory Contemporaneity of the Biennial Form

The problem that biennials currently face, at the level of pure temporal form, is that the periodic rhythm of artistic-cultural definitions of the historical present, in each place, every-other-year (or every-three-years, or even every-five) has become overcoded, at the level of the whole, by the intensive serial sequence of biennials, the temporality of two-every-three-weeks, all of which are competing for the *same* contemporaneity – seemingly without end. Not only is every-other-year always this-year, but every-other-place is always next-week. This is the famous bad or ‘spurious’ infinite of the temporality of capital accumulation – expanded reproduction – subsuming the biennial to capital at the level of its temporal form. Terry Smith, among others, has referred to this as a problem of ‘overproduction’²² – the overproduction of biennials and hence of artworks for them to show. In a sense, this is true, at the level of the whole (and its intelligibility as a whole) at least, although not necessarily at the level of more local participants and audiences. However, we should remember that ‘overproduction’ is a necessary systemic effect of capitalist production as the production and accumulation of value; a driver of crisis as the mode of transformation of one regime of accumulation into another. Overproduction is not something that can be dispensed with while still producing and accumulating value, and biennials are now, even if only indirectly, very much an integral part of such production. The logic of contemporaneity as a historical-temporal form and the temporal logic of the biennial as a systemic form are varying *articulations* of the temporal logic of capital accumulation – although not reducible to it: they articulate its temporality with other temporal forms.

Perhaps it is time to stop thinking about the contemporary within the terms of historicism, to stop asking ourselves, ‘When *did* the present begin?’ – the question of the durational extension of the present backwards.²³ Rather, perhaps we should begin again to ask, in the present tense, ‘When *does* the present begin?’, the present as the time of utterance, of enunciation and of action.²⁴ (Fig. 2) Or better still, perhaps, to ask in the future tense, ‘When *will* the present begin?’: the present as the time of the production of a qualitatively different future.

When will the present begin again?



Fig. 2. Photo of Museum Rietberg Symposium Sign. Photo: Peter Osborne.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a text first presented at the Colloquium, 'Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art', Aarhus Institute of Advanced Study (AIAS), Aarhus University, 3 November 2014. An intermediate version was delivered as the Keynote Lecture at the World Biennial Forum No. 2, Biennial Foundation of São Paulo/Institute for Contemporary Culture, São Paulo, 26 November 2014; and published in the proceedings of that event, as "Every Other Year is Always this Year": Contemporaneity and the Biennial Form', in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2, Sao Paulo 2014* (Biennial Foundation, 2015), 15–27; http://www.biennialfoundation.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Biennials-in-Contemporary-Times_Home-Print.pdf

2. See Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), Ch. 1.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Athlone Press, London: 1997), 21.

4. See Peter Osborne, 'Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time', in *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between the Present, the Past and the Future*, eds. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 69–84; and 'The Post-conceptual Condition, Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today', *Radical Philosophy* 184 (March/April 2014), 19–27.

5. For the notion of overdetermination, see Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and

Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation', in *For Marx* (1965), trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), 87–128.

6. See Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex' (1988), in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Ch. 2.

7. See *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology of Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, eds. E. Filipovic, M. Van Hal and S. Ovstebo (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall / Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 292–375.

8. Third Bahia Biennale, 'Curatorial Proposal', <http://bienaldabahia2014.com.br/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Vers%C3%A3o-em-ingl%C3%AAs.pdf>

9. Charles Esche, 'Introduction – Making Art Global', in Rachel Weiss et al, *Making Global Art (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011), 9.

10. Arjun Appadurai, 'How Histories Make Geographies: Circulation and Context in a Global Perspective', in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 66.

11. Esche, 'Introduction', 8–11.

12. Ibid., 12.

13. For an emphasis on the 'evental' character of the biennial, in distinction from the museum, see Terry Smith, 'The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials', http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/368

14. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31.

15. Ibid., 31–4 and 148.

16. Geeta Kapor, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', in Weiss et al., *Making Global Art (Part 1)*, 194.

17. Louis Camnitzer, 'The Third Biennial of Havana', in Weiss et al, *Making Global Art (Part 1)*, 211.

18. Kapor, 'Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories', 198.

19. Ibid., 201.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 203.

22. Smith, 'The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials'.

23. Cf. Peter Osborne, 'To Each Present, its Own Prehistory', in *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind*, ed. Ruth Noack (Milan: Mela Books, Politecnico di Milano, Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura, 2013), 20–32.

24. 'When the Present Begins' was the title of a conference held in Zurich, 10–11 October 2014, at the Museum Rietborg and Johann Jacobs Museum, organized by Roger Buerger, Director of the Johann Jacobs Museum.