

## Manifesta 8: Published Conversations

The three Manifesta 8 curatorial collectives pose questions about practice, theory, priorities, dynamics, choices and other issues. It was not obligatory for all parties to respond to every question.

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questions are referred-to by the sign \*\*\*\*\*

ACAF questions:

Biennials are unofficially assigned the status of being global art platforms for addressing global issues. In what ways do you consider your contribution to Manifesta 8 to be «critical» in the sense that it probes certain socio-political conditions?

Tranzit: Criticality is a battered term. We think that art cannot not be approached normatively to provide a transparent or direct answer to questions regarding political or cultural power relations and conflicts. Art rather thematizes the assumptions behind socio-political conditions and strives with, sometimes, contradictory means to get at their origins – be they political, historical, philosophical or psychoanalytical. Art often is taking up a position of conflictive

thought without, however, neutralizing the conflict or making conflict its unsurpassable essence. Good exhibitions are models for spaces where conflictive forms, figures and events enter into mutual relationships. Our project for Manifesta 8 is intended to grow out of the topology and temporal conditions of these relationships – which, we hope, may not be reduced to mere representation. Working on a Constitution for a temporary display we imagine creating a space where the conditions and realities of exhibition making are consequences of a common constitutional effort.

CPS We understand the ‘being critical’ in the sense of changing – by providing means and contexts to change - perspective; this is not a peculiarity only of the art world and of artists, but rather a potential common to human beings. ‘Shifting perspective’ is the crucial mode of working for artists and anyone else who does not simply ‘address’ things within the art systems but rather produce this shift in her/his own life, and affect end effect other people’s life – regardless of the job she or he is doing for living. Our invitations to media producers, documentary filmmakers, writers, scientists, neuro-psychiatrists and other extra-artistic workers go in this sense.

To what degree and to what end have you -- as one of three curatorial teams -- been brought into this edition of Manifesta 8 in order to solve certain so-called crises (immigration, environmental, political, economical, for example) through an art project?

Tranzit Contemporary art practices are no remedies to any social problem. If what art had to do in this specific constellation of Manifesta 8 was to find forms of practice adequate to the expectations of a local politics or a response to a global crisis, this would determine the questions asked to issues of inclusion and exclusion in common affairs. We hope that the tranzit.org project for Manifesta 8 can offer an open surface to oppose this segmentation -- one that differently serves to create meaning, sociality, and politics. We think that we shouldn't impose any normative idea on art practice, because it should be free to create its own normativities. We imagine this as a space realized in the form of an aesthetic activity that would involve acts of subjectification and voicing one's opinion on a subject, disrupting prescribed identities, placements, and visibilities. And thus it would be able to become a space where one can negotiate, who remains excluded and invisible and why, who can participate and in which capacity. The methodology aims not to present a map but to suggest itineraries, fragmentary sequences of events and actions through spaces, a narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artists and the audiences. All that may happen, not only virtually, but also physically through a Constitutional modification of the condition of an exhibition.

CPS We don't think anybody expects us and the other two teams to solve crisis, even less through an art project. And we don't think

the population of the region of Murcia expects this either, we should stop for good to consider an audience's constituency a mass of critically uninformed people who believe whatever is brought to them. That's not the case and not the point. The point is rather that in Murcia and Cartagena, like anywhere else in the world, there are various issues that are important to be aware of, and that influence our lives on a daily basis. Why are these issues here, now, what are the ways to discuss them, how important are they, what will these issue potentially transform into, there and tomorrow? You can fill in the point relevant to your city and place where you live, and answer for yourself -- you don't need an art biennial for this, you can read books or simply have dinners and conversations with your friends and strangers. But an art biennial is a good place to see different positions and perspectives (perhaps 'shifted' see point above) and to build on them or articulate your own in contraposition/accordance/confrontation with them.

Who is your Manifesta 8 project for? Within the context of the excess of aesthetics, ideas and representation that is Manifesta 8, how do you intend for the audience -- both local and non-local, expert and non-expert -- to understand the inclusion of such an array of international artists? How will the audience understand the predetermined emphasis on «dialogue with North Africa»? What are the effects of this internationalism on your contribution?

Tranzit We do not consider the exhibition as a school where audiences are taught, nor as a mere space of consumption. Instead of trying to moderate between the different presumed expectations of possible audiences we try to self-thematize the conditions of production and

perception of the exhibition. We'd rather rely on the potential of the disinterested, aesthetic viewpoint of the visitors. And we are in favor of maintaining the tension between the interested community (thus including specific histories) and the idea of a general public in a formalist act –our Constitution of a Temporary Display. We believe that art maintains this tension – and an exhibition is an engaged “manifestation,” to the extent that the artworks it comprises have an engaged character without verging on politics – this as well is what constitutes its resistance. In keeping with Godard's definition, artistic form (but also an exhibition, we think) is the a priori figure of engaged-ness. This is why we consider it of the utmost importance that artists be a part of the process of creating the forms of the exhibition – this is reflected in our team, as well.

CPS Internationalism goes as far as you want, and can stop within your own four walls. For our research, we started first to position ourselves, what we were doing there, our own position in a region that we didn't know. We spent times, we met people, we worked with NGOs and governments offices, we met the artists living and working there and those from there but living and working somewhere else, and we started so to expand, in a spiral-like research, our process outside the two cities of Murcia and Cartagena. First embracing the region, then Spain, then Europe and further on north Africa and the so-called Middle East, ultimately to reach contacts and issues in Latin and north America. All these contacts, trips, researches, works and processes have been calling each other, one thing leading to another, spiraling out from our own position as curators and producers in Murcia. But of course these paths could have been totally different if we'd have met different people or would been there at a different time. The point is start

questioning and assessing your work and being in a certain place, not taking it for granted.

To what extent are you planning to differentiate or integrate theory and practice? How do you «mind the gap», so to speak, between them? In relation to this, to what degree are you planning to reconsider the familiar formats of biennials past for the production and presentation of art in your Manifesta 8 project?

Tranzit Biennials and art shows based on elaborate theoretical concepts often suffer from a certain incoherency – an inability to translate the proposed criticism into the form of an exhibition. The challenge for us was to reconsider the physical and mental space of the exhibition in order to bridge the gap between critical imagination and making. The starting point for a consideration of the activity, the meaning and the representation of our activity for Manifesta 8 was the conflict between theory and practice known from the humanist sciences – philosophy, sociology, post-colonial studies and so on. We were led to it not only from objective formulations of this conflict<sup>1</sup> but also from the practice of persons linked in intellectual changes in four countries of East or Central Europe. We began to sense this conflict between theory and practice strongly in the 1990s, when Eastern European art in the eyes of a Western art institutional, non-institutional and academic practice found itself one of the offshoots of Orientalism. The historically new, already post-orientalist<sup>2</sup> quality of arguments deriving from anti-essentialist paradigms, Deleuze epistemology, post-Foucault reception and antagonistic political reflections, was very surprising. We did not understand until later that this change of paradigms had only and exclusively a theoretical statute and dimension.

On a practical level such a theoretical apparatus, often driven by hegemonic, narcissistic, capitalistic and power agendas creates a lot of confusions and miss-productive conflicts that we would like to learn from.

CPS In this regard, Aristotle's triangular disciplines and categorization of knowledge and behaviour were very helpful reminders: the productive, the theoretical and the practical got us to reconsider new arrangements where the content and method are constantly evaluated. We understand theory as practice and practice (or better 'praxis') as theory, therefore no need to 'mind the gap'. We worked with theorist who do their work as fully effective practice and with practitioners who are changing the theory of what they do as they go; for instance, through his research and the work with CPS, neuropsychiatry scientist Professor John Kennedy is challenging his own environment in relation to blindness and visualization. His work redraws the history of art (and visibility), from cave inscriptions via the founder of the camera obscura Ibn al-Haythm (965-1039-) and the appearance of Filippo Brunelleschi's vanishing point in his perspective drawings, until the birth of the phenomenological blind artist Esraf Armagan (1953). We do the same also when the medium CPS is dealing with is not scientific research and art history but information processes.