

Manifesta 8: Published Conversations

CPS questions

How did you think to approach curatorially and theoretically a biennial with a clear thematic issue like “Dialogue with North Africa”? And why did you think it was important for Manifesta 8 board to propose yet again a sort of geopolitical framework?

Tranzit It is just a recent generalization that speaks about North Africa as a singular political current, a region, which in its inner ethnic, social, religious and political complexity is hardly to define – which reminds us of Eastern Europe. Therefore every a priori polarization of Europe and North Africa disregards history and it disregards the stormy developments of the last thirty or forty years. Europe and the Maghreb, North Africa, have become more deeply embroiled with in a mesh of political considerations and re-evaluations. We would argue for implicating the latter in a shared history of transition. There have been colonies and anti-colonial moves, a long row of religious and trade battles, a long history of changing domination and subalternity; but there as well are cultural and social copying processes, a history of multiple ex- and interchanges, mingled and intertwined. For us there is no Europe and no North Africa as separate entities. There are borders, there is an economic split, there are different forms of governance and there are local mentalities. But there always has been

a history of migrating humans and ideas since the times of the transhumance. The African North has been a driving force in the creation of Europe since antiquity. And: there is a North Africa in Europe – and not just in the banlieus (suburbs) of its cities – as there is a Europe in North Africa – not just in the modernist dwellings near the souk (local market). A field full of projections, counter-projections and translational turbulences

Deriving from the idea of the creation of an ambiguous imagery about the past and current of the region, the intention of our approach is to generate parallel channels of thought and understandings, point at alternative structures, research, hidden histories, and temporary conceptions of resistance. Theory and practice has to bring in as many different voices as possible. This may enable us, as we hope, to move beyond a “conflict of cultures” or an all-encompassing culture of the spectacle. In this sense think that it is highly important to react to this question right now, because we are witnessing a major shift of paradigm in the collective as well as national identity constructions. The reconsideration of identities already became important part all levels of political debate and action in the region and across the globe. And art.

ACAF

What does «curating» (curatorial practice) mean in a context in which expectations are high and

both politically and socially charged, let alone the «culturally charged» layer that we inhabit in Murcia?

Tranzit It is one of the most difficult things. Not to fall into the traps of essentializing locality and deny the complex, layered situation of cultural narratives for each local context that remain ignorant of one another. We are a bit skeptical to the idea that, with the help of art, an event like Manifesta 8 could create an arena for a battle conducted by the socially or politically “excluded” with the goal of establishing a new public stage for them. What might happen, in contrary, is that the event creates a lot of negative local responses and critique, that themselves might function as a unifying agent for political action on a local level. So our aim is more to engage the local communities and visitors in a relation with various, different artistic significations and experiences, which at the end of the day may bring unforeseen perspectives to the so-called local issues.

ACAF *****

What could be the new challenges your artists are facing with this biennial, are they bringing to surface new elements in terms of working methodologies and research/investigation issues or do you think they apply their mode of working unpacking the given context?

Tranzit Our contribution will not be able to solve the opposition between the aesthetic appeal of the artwork and the procedural techniques of artistic practice. In the current situation there is always the danger that every statement and every realization is getting reified. We see the exhibition that we work on together as a multi-authorial space; as a temporary space with its own rules in

relation to the people who conceive and make it and the people who produce its signification by visiting and receiving it; as an exhibition on actuality and the present which yet contains and reflects the histories of its making, and therefore as a built structure reflecting the temporality of human togetherness. For this we try to develop a Constitution for the exhibition in a process that accompanies its production and setting up. This Constitution or Charter will freely define the different functionalities of the spaces and the internal rules of the exhibition.

ACAF *****

What are the thoughts that are driving your collective (we know we are 3 very different collectives, but since we're invited as such...), what are you focused on in your approach, how are you intending to develop them within (or without) Manifesta 8?

Tranzit As tranzit.org is not a collective in a classical activist sense, but rather a polycentric structure of autonomous units cooperating across various borderlines. (Nations, languages, media, mentalities and histories). We try to analyze the possibilities for action in each case in relation to local artistic and intellectual constellations and in relation with various knowledge's and experiences that our collective generates.

Right now a major catalyser of our collective activity is the idea of the Constitution that substantially reformulates our self-definition as a collective. We are not sure about the result, but we attempt to create the conditions that all artists who want can join our collective on a basis of the Constitution for the time of the preparation and duration of the exhibition.

ACAF *****

If you have chosen a precise direction/line of thought in curating this biennial, do you think this could prevent your artists from finding their own thinking process and working shape/format?

Tranzit We do not build our project on such a distinction between the curator and the artist also because of the contradiction that you are mentioning.

ACAF *****

CPS Auto-Reflections

The question of who holds power and how power is used is maybe more relevant. What position do we the curatorial collectives hold within the context of Manifesta 8 in Murcia, within the power spectrum of state, local government, within the institution of Manifesta, within our individual projects and among our invited artists and contributors? Our main recourse has been to assess the context and conditions of Manifesta 8 in Murcia, understand how we operate within it, and then make something meaningful and significant out of it - in spite of it, and because of it. Our strategy has been to work with those factors we feel we have authority or influence over within the context of Manifesta 8; these factors are mainly in the sphere of the curatorial and the cultural. We have developed a curatorial methodology and process that opens up new conceptual territories for us and creates flexible space for our invited artists and contributors. Overall, the project can be seen as a prototype or model that lays the foundations for resisting an easy recuperation process by the politics that dominate artistic discourse.

A curatorial project without an imposed narrative that does not use the usual vocabulary of criticality, a curatorial approach that magnifies

the intricate complexities of contemporary socio-political and socio-cultural life, a curatorial project that does not declare a crisis because we will always be in some sort of crisis, an approach that is not afraid to pose solutions however unfinished these solutions may be, a project that looks at the collective unconscious of the art world as a force that needs to be reckoned with and that seeks answers in the institutional and cultural files of the 80's. These are some of the aspects built-into our project for Manifesta 8.