



documenta 12 magazines

Project

documenta 12 is currently initiating a dialogue among over 70 print and on-line periodicals throughout the world. A network will be created that aims to explore and discuss topics of current interest and relevance (not only) to documenta 12. This dialogue will be developed along three main themes and questions—"Is modernity our antiquity?," "What is bare life?," and "What is to be done? (Education)"—with particular emphasis being placed on reflecting the interests and specific knowledge of the respective local contexts.

These debates will be compiled and published through an on-line magazine as well as in a series of publications. This "journal of journals", so to speak, will represent a forum for the contemporary aesthetic discourse.

Context

Art magazines and journals represent a central interface between the production, discussion and criticism of art. Various positions taken in the discourse are developed here and subjected to ongoing discussion. These periodicals thus play an important role in translating such positions into terms that can be understood and made use of by either a specific audience or a broader public. The journal, and more specifically the art and culture journal, is a medium uniquely devoted to reflecting the relationships between art and theory and between art and the public, as well as dealing with the issues involved in artistic practice and theoretical work. With this project, the documenta 12 will enter into a dialogue with journals worldwide. The means by which this dialogue will take place can be understood within the context of how it will relate to local configurations and translocal intentions. Not the size of the medium is significant here, but rather its relevance. The project will therefore spread its activities among media of different sizes, ranging from micropublications in relatively uncommon languages to leading transnational media, with the aspiration of becoming a platform for the transfer and discursive consolidation of specialized knowledge.

Structure

The project begins with a research phase in which an editorial team made up of local experts is drafting a mapping of discourse-relevant journals and their positioning. This editorial team will act as a curatorial network, selecting potential partners to serve as authors for the project, and encouraging their participation and progress. Each of the journals participating in the network will devote an article or text, section or even an entire issue to one of the themes, utilizing various formats: interviews and essays, features and fiction.

By virtue of the autonomous editorial teams participating in the project, the discourse will already be embedded in the local context and conveyed to the corresponding public. It will thus be able to reach very specific audiences all over the world. This will also ensure that disparate local and editorial approaches become discernible.



The texts and contexts, as well as the discussions in the workshops and in the individual journals will form the basic material used to put together *The documenta 12 Magazine*. This material will be supplemented with pivotal texts on the concept and context of documenta 12. Each of the documenta 12 publications will thus offer a general introduction to one of the core themes, providing a reader that addresses not only a specialist public, but the interested layperson as well. The first issue of *The documenta 12 Magazine* will be published in fall/winter of 2006 appearing in German and English. An on-line platform along with a print-on-demand tool will make it available in other world languages as well, such as Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic and French.

Main aims

Every response to a question, every theoretical debate, will raise a whole series of further issues: What does cultural transmission mean? Where are the boundaries between theoretical assumptions and actual aesthetic practice? What form do discourses take in alleged centres as opposed to putative peripheral areas? Which shifts in thematic emphasis and changes in paradigm can be ascertained between various disciplines? How does the concept of artistic work differ from other kinds of work, if at all? How does artistic theory differ from practice, and from other kinds of texts, for example from literature and politics, etc.?

documenta 12 magazines will open up a lasting dialogue. The project is not about a theoretical self-appraisal carried out by documenta 12 itself, but rather about the process of developing the theories of documenta 12 and juxtaposing these with ideas currently circulating in the art discourse and among artists in the international, local or other specific contexts. The point of the project is thus not the role played by discourses in artistic practice, but instead the discursive practice itself, with its media, dialects and transformations in various contexts. Since the project is based in particular on transregional themes and motifs, it can help to elucidate the differences and similarities between local dimensions of aesthetic practice.

An important aim of the network is to provide a broader forum in which authors, theorists and artists who work on the local implementation of discursive practices can expound on their experiences, and compare these experiences with those of people in other situations and contexts.

The creation of long-term international cooperations and excellence networks beyond the scope of the project itself should provide inspiration and ideas. The project will also endeavour to open up new channels for independent distribution networks, and to encourage flexible forms of translocal communication. Particularly interesting here will be the long-term effects of the project well beyond the period of documenta 12 itself, such as the development of sustainable information infrastructures, databases and other communication tools.

Key topics

Is modernity our antiquity?—Many of the utopian projects of modernity have survived only as fragments and today appear “unfinished”. Many of the material structures, forms and achievements we associate with concepts of modernity



seem to be disappearing amid present-day transformation processes. Yet at the same time, the real and conceptual spaces of modernity—its aesthetic and political structures and idea—continue to be a major preoccupation of numerous projects taking place in the artistic realm and beyond, and also give rise to conflicting projections. Is modernity our antiquity?

Roger M. Buergel, Artistic Director of documenta 12, writes in regard to the “leit-motifs” for the exhibition (December 2005): “*Is modernity our antiquity?*—This is the first question. It is fairly obvious that modernity, or modernity’s fate, exerts a profound influence on contemporary artists. Part of that attraction may stem from the fact that no one really knows if modernity is dead or alive. It seems to be in ruins after the totalitarian catastrophes of the 20th century (the very same catastrophes to which it somehow gave rise). It seems utterly compromised by the brutally partial application of its universal demands (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*) or by the simple fact that modernity and coloniality went, and probably still go, hand in hand. Still, people’s imaginations are full of modernity’s visions and forms (and I mean not only Bauhaus but also arch-modernist mind-sets transformed into contemporary catchwords like ‘identity’ or ‘culture’). In short, it seems that we are both outside and inside modernity, both repelled by its deadly violence and seduced by its most immodest aspiration or potential: that there might, after all, be a common planetary horizon for all the living and the dead.”

What is bare life?—At issue here is “the subject”: the exposed nature, powerlessness and defencelessness of the subject fuels many current philosophical and aesthetic debates. This is accompanied by political considerations and artistic demands for a new self-empowerment of the subject. The forms of representation of such considerations, and questions related to the status of the subject in contemporary art, provide the thematic framework for this particular project topic.

Roger M. Buergel (December 2005): “*What is bare life?*—This second question underscores the sheer vulnerability and complete exposure of being. Bare life deals with that part of our existence from which no measure of security will ever protect us. But as in sexuality, absolute exposure is intricately connected with infinite pleasure. There is an apocalyptic and obviously political dimension to bare life (brought out by torture and the concentration camp). There is, however, also a lyrical or even ecstatic dimension to it—a freedom for new and unexpected possibilities (in human relations as well as in our relationship to nature or, more generally, the world in which we live). Here and there, art dissolves the radical separation between painful subjection and joyous liberation. But what does that mean for its audiences?”

What is to be done? (Education)—The question of developing adequate forms of education and communication is one of the most fiercely debated issues in present-day society, not just in the art world. Accepted practices and established institutions are coming under increased pressure and currently find themselves in the midst of a crisis of definition. Newly founded institutions, however, often follow the example of these traditional models. In a parallel development, a wide range

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of new forms of organisation and self-organisation, new kinds of artistic and communications work have emerged—above all on a local level. Which of these local initiatives and action spaces are capable of securing the future of advanced, open and autonomous working practices and providing answers to the question of education they themselves represent?

Roger M. Buergel, December 2005: “The final question concerns education: *What is to be done?*—Artists educate themselves by working through form and subject matter; audiences educate themselves by experiencing things aesthetically. How to mediate the particular content or shape of those things without sacrificing their particularity is one of the great challenges of an exhibition like documenta. But there is more to it than that. The global complex of cultural translation that seems to be somehow embedded in art and its mediation sets the stage for a potentially all-inclusive public debate (Bildung, the German term for education, also means ‘generation’ or ‘constitution,’ as when one speaks of generating or constituting a public sphere). Today, education seems to offer one viable alternative to the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism).”