

Magazines field, or, the next Documenta should be curated by magazines

Patricia Canetti with Leandro de Paula

Canal Contemporâneo

I attended Documenta 12 on two different occasions: in June, for the show's opening, and in July, in order to participate with *Canal Contemporâneo* in the Magazines Project's Lunch Lectures. Each visit was marked by an image of Friedrich Platz, Kassel's main square, around which Documenta takes place. In June, the square was empty, its flower beds full of dry earth, scorched by the then-intense heat, a soil in which it was difficult to picture Croatian artist Sanja Iveković's installation, 'Poppy Field'.¹ On the second visit, I stepped out of the tram into the square and, when I lifted my head, found a sea of red poppies radiating in the late afternoon sun. Simply glorious.

This contrast between the June and the July images of Friedrich Platz is something of an allegory for the contradictory feelings aroused by Documenta 12 and its Magazines Project. The promise of a network of publications from diverse countries, brought together to discuss the most relevant themes of the planet's most important art exhibition, certainly amounted to an interesting invitation.² More than that, it was a brilliant idea: a vision of authors and editors meeting on an online platform specially conceived for the discussion, lasting for ten long months, demanded daring, breadth and enthusiasm. At the end of such an adventure, we would have seen all content published online, open to the public, so as to feed both the participant magazines and the three printed *Magazine* editions – one for each theme – linking up multiple collaborations from all over the world to the ideas of curators and artists present in the show.³ And that was not all. We could imagine the sequel to this meeting that we might elaborate together: an international theoretical-artistic web, biased towards permanent exchange. For me, a digital community activist artist, a real radiant poppy garden.

However, what we lived with for more than a year of the project's cycle up to the opening of Documenta 12 was a dry earth flower bed. The online tool promised

for May 2006 was made available only in February 2007. Devoid of the digital environment where the nature of the initiative could be understood from its own development, the diverse group of participants became an unfocused and ossified collective, snarled in Documenta's bureaucratic dynamics.

The three printed editions – *Modernity?*, *Life!* and *Education* – were not the fruit of a publications network, because such a network simply never came to exist. What promised to be a daring collaboration became a tool of institutional visibility. This kidnapping was clear at the show's opening, from the small space allotted to the Magazines Project in the Documenta Halle, the omission of the names of publications from the exhibition's catalogue, and the way that participating magazines were classified on their passes as 'Press'. Nothing against the press, but such a detail announced the new function that had been delegated to us, so different from the original idea that had seduced us all.

At the opening, despite there being few participating magazines, and despite the atmosphere of frustration that engulfed us at that moment, we managed to experience a spark of such network. There we were sat around a table, *Brumaria*, *Canal Contemporâneo*, *Chto delat'?*, *Empyre*, *Pages* and *Radical Philosophy*, discussing, finally. At the same time as each of us shared our disappointment, we tried to discover possible paths to be taken and to analyse their difficulties. The blind spot in the project, regarding the exchange of contributions between the participating publications, was that a waiving of copyright was not sufficient, because of the language barrier, and with it the financial hindrance of translation costs.

With the mutilation of the project and the language problem disrupting its development, all that was left was the meeting. This spontaneous gathering, originating in the exchange of emails, informally anticipated what had been designed for the participation of the



Magazines during the exhibition itself: meetings and chats among a group of participating magazines, mixing with invited artists, critics, curators and educators, in the course of Documenta 12's hundred days. This final stage became the project's last opportunity to realize its essential idea: the establishment of a publications network.

Back in Kassel the following month, to take part in the *Paper and Pixel* week, which brought together the publications *Canal Contemporâneo*, *Concrete Reflection*, *Empyre*, *Esfera Pública*, *Neural*, *Sab0t* and *Zehar*, we tried to extract from this last phase new exchanges that would allow us a glimpse of a future. Again, after sharing and clearing our sense of frustration, common interests and important revelations emerged. We enjoyed the surprise of learning the story of *mag.net*,⁴ its attempt to create a network of publications, and their contribution to the origin and development of the Magazines Project.

Different moments, diverse interests, paper or pixel, with more or fewer collaborators, the story has shown the difficulties that independent publications face in carrying out their work anywhere on the planet. It would not be different with the building of this network. It is necessary to develop tools that can widen contact and our collaborative potency, without, however, losing our individual features and the critical stance common to our independent practices. All this becomes even more complex with the present configuration linked to a big institution such as Documenta. Sometimes I think

that the name Magazines has confused the institution's focus. It considered it sufficient to amass publications in great numbers, failing to understand that the force of the project would not rest on the number of cells in this organism, but instead on the quality of the synapses produced. The experience of this project swings like a pendulum between real expectations and digital frustrations, a handful of potencies and ossifications typical of such big institutions.

The poppy field shows that even in dry soil it is nonetheless possible to move ahead, provided one can gather the necessary elements and wait for the right time for their development. In his text 'The Beauty of Printing and the Glory of Networking', published in *mag.net*, Andreas Broeckmann defines the paradox of networking as being that 'those who most need the help from others are usually those who most invest in the strengthening of networks.'⁵ The challenge is to orchestrate focus and the premisses of particular works with contemporary art's global context and to understand the real role played by independent media in a cyber-connected scenario.

Perhaps the best way is to stimulate the flourishing of this field grounded on the slow but concrete force of small exchanges. The debate about the value of the Magazines Project, taking in the worst sense of the adjective 'virtual', seems a tangible beginning. The next Documenta should be curated by magazines.⁶

Translated by Gavin Adams

Notes

1. www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=1049&L=1.
2. www.canalcontemporaneo.art.br/documenta12magazines/_v2/sections.php?id=6&page=2#presentation.
3. <http://magazines.documenta.de>.
4. <http://magnet-ecp.org>.
5. <http://magnet-ecp.org/The-Beauty-of-Printing-and-the-Glory-of-Networking>.
6. Cf. 'The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist': www.e-flux.com/projects/next_doc/index.html

Canal Contemporâneo (www.canalcontemporaneo.art.br) holds and spreads information, knowledge and debate about Brazilian contemporary art in its different online modules. Basing itself on the concepts of Virtual Community (Rheingold), Radical Media (Downing) and Tactical Media (Garcia/Lovink), it has been effective in rousing communication and interaction, connecting people and institutions around the twenty-seven Brazilian states and over eighty countries. Its activism guides frequent journal articles and has encouraged political mobilization, for example, for the inclusion of the Digital Art in the scope of the Brazilian Cultural Funding laws (2004). Canal Contemporâneo took part in exhibitions such as *hiPer> relações eletro//digitais* (*hiPer>electro//digital relations*), curated by Daniela Bousso (Santander Cultural, Porto Alegre, Brazil), *Tudo aquilo que escapa* (*Everything that escapes*), curated by Cristiana Tejo (Museu do Estado, Recife, Brazil), *Ocupação*, (*Paço das Artes, São Paulo*).

The big lie

Dario Corbeira and Irene Montero, *Brumaria*

When *Brumaria* was invited to take part in the Documenta 12 Magazines Project, in February 2006, we were filled with enthusiasm. We drew up an ambitious project, 'Art: The Radical Political Imagination', which, based on post-1968 experiences and recent experiments in counter-hegemonic practices, tried to set up some critical-theoretical points of departure through a congress, two seminars, an online discussion and three issues of the printed publication.¹ However, the invitation had some special conditions: we had to respond to the three questions/leitmotivs that were to articulate the exhibition — 'Is modernity our antiquity?', 'Bare life?' and 'What is to be done?' From the outset, we found these questions ambiguous, shallow and excessively abstract, but at the same time, this ambiguity allowed us to tackle other subjects we were more interested in.

We thought it excessive that Documenta was asking us to contribute without giving us 'anything' in return, other than its image and its success in the media. Nevertheless, the Magazines Project appeared to be an interesting venture that would make it possible for us to establish relations with other editorial teams across the world and have different kinds and formats of exchange. From our perspective, it is important to open a global discussion about the social, political and cultural characteristics of the present and their reflection in, and contradictions and similarities with, the proposals, images and power-platforms that contemporary art is running; questions about forms of

government, global war, political artistic and editorial practice.

Finally, at the opening of the exhibition itself, we realized what Documenta 12 consisted in. The contributions of the ninety-five editorial teams, the transregional meetings (about which we have received no information), the materials contributed by the magazines, and the relations that had been established between magazines had not been useful. Documenta 12 looked just like the big five-year event that triumphant neoliberalism needs these days. One could feel the terrible 'richness' that the old and new Right are putting into the political playground, in contrast to a diminished and weak Left incapable of producing any changes, no matter how tiny.

In this context, art institutions, located within the culture industry inside an ideologically fragile cultural capitalism, are going through a moment we could describe as delicate and dubious, which places the market on top of all other discursive considerations. The 'Grand Tour' of Venice–Basel–Kassel–Münster, which Documenta should never have entered, became a planetary tribute to Art Basel, the market in its purest form, while the rest of the events have been criticized from all imaginable points of view. The art market has never had either so much power or so many consensuses around it. Documenta could have offered an analysis of the situation, making clear that there are more options when building a 'great exhibition' than the univocal market. But its view that simply by