

Learning from Crisis? On the Transcultural Approach to Curating *documenta 14*

Barbara Lutz, independent scholar

With the title “Learning from Athens,” the fourteenth edition of *documenta*—the internationally renowned exhibition series for contemporary art in Germany—opened in 2017.¹ It took place in two separate locations for one hundred days each: in the Greek metropolis of Athens from April onward and in the city of Kassel in central Germany from June. As artistic director Adam Szymczyk proposed upon his election in 2013, *documenta* should manifest “in the form of two autonomous, simultaneous, and related exhibitions in two very different cities and countries” to express “the dissolution of barriers separating those who lack the simplest means from those who are usually all too willing to give them lessons but seldom a hand.”² Thus, both projects of *documenta 14* aimed not only at “learning from their respective places and from each other,”³ but also at disengaging from its well-established position as a German hosting institution for artists and cultural creators from all over the world despite their different cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts. By creating these aims, Szymczyk assigned *documenta* a new role—“as a guest, with all the limitations and possibilities such a status implies.”⁴

Thus, the curatorial approach to *documenta 14* comprised a structural shift and extension of its spatial and temporal dimension. It can be argued that the strategic repositioning of the institution as a guest that has to adapt itself to the conditions of a nation facing an ongoing crisis, coupled with the call to not only to learn from Athens but also provide concrete assistance, may appear to be an affront to *documenta*, because it shakes the foundations

1 This text is an edited version of a lecture given at the Workshop “De-essentializing Difference—Acknowledging Transculturality. Art (History) Education and the Public Sphere in a Globalized World” on the occasion of *documenta 14*, Kunsthochschule Kassel, June 9, 2017, organized by RNTP—Research Network for Transcultural Practices in the Arts and Humanities.

2 Adam Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” in *60 Jahre documenta. Die lokale Geschichte einer Globalisierung*, ed. Hans Eichel (Berlin: B&S Siebenhaar, 2015), 237–246, on 243.

3 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 240.

4 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 241.

of the venerable art institution, which has been in existence for more than sixty years. However, this approach is closely tied to its origins; *documenta* was founded after the Second World War in 1955 through an initiative by a group surrounding the painter, designer, and teacher Arnold Bode in Kassel. Bode is not only responsible for setting the duration of *documenta*, which is based on his idea of the “Museum of 100 Days,”⁵ but also for the realization and periodic recurrence of the exhibition at its venue in Kassel, which, in addition to the election of a new artistic director,⁶ has been an essential characteristic of each *documenta* to date.

At the same time, the educational claim of Szymczyk’s curatorial approach to *documenta* seems to be entirely incongruous with the ongoing precarious financial situation of Athens and Greece, the full extent of which first became apparent in 2010. Still, “Learning from Athens” was “not meant to be the definite title of the exhibition,”⁷ and thus does not imply, for example, a thematic priority or a selecting criterion for the artworks on show. However, the term raises numerous questions: how is it possible to meet the expectations of the prestigious and well-attended international art institution⁸ in learning from a city or nation in crisis, where cultural institutions are affected by financial cutbacks and closures?⁹ What can be learned

5 Bode used the term for the first time in the preface to the catalogue of *documenta III* (1964, XIX). With this, he not only wanted to rehabilitate the notion of the international exhibition, which he considered at the time unfocused and meaningless, but he also indirectly criticized the museum’s preserving function as a mummification of the past and instead appealed to the museum to act as a production site and a lively place of encounter. See Klaus Siebenhaar, “Die Ausstellung als Medium. Überlegungen zu einem Zentrum kuratorischer Theorie und Praxis,” in *60 Jahre documenta*, 223–229, on 226–227.

6 Although Bode headed the first four editions, he helped shape the position of the artistic director at *documenta* when he stepped down from the board of directors of the *documenta* council and appointed Harald Szeemann as head of the fifth edition, designated as “general secretary.” From then on, the advisory board regulated the selection process for this position, which up to and including *documenta 14* corresponds to the position of a curator solely responsible for one edition. The only exception was in 2019, when the Supervisory Board appointed *ruangrupa*—a collective of ten artists and creatives from Jakarta, Indonesia—as the artistic direction of *documenta 15*, which will open its doors in 2022.

7 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 242.

8 Since its beginnings, *documenta*’s prestige and international success is, for example, confirmed by its steadily increasing visitor numbers. See “About documenta,” *documenta* Archive, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta-archiv.de/en/documenta/51/about-documenta>.

9 According to Greece’s Minister of Culture Lydiá Koniórdou Λυδία Κονιόρδου in 2017, the ministry has had to face a forty percent budget cut since 2009, making it impossible to create new jobs for the increasing number of museums and archaeological sites, or even keep the sites running during their opening hours. See Lydiá Koniórdou, “Zwischen dem Antiken und dem Zeitgenössischen. (Ein Gespräch mit der Kulturministerin Griechenlands von Heinz-Norbert Jocks),” *Kunstforum International* 248–249 (August/September 2017): 112–119, on 118–119.

from Athens, traditionally regarded as the birthplace of democracy¹⁰ and considered to be the cradle of Western civilization? Moreover, who is invited to participate in this exhibition and who is supposed to learn? Furthermore—referring to the establishment itself—is it possible for *documenta* to change its status as an art institution in the northwest of Europe and unlearn its cultural perspective and politics in order to learn from a city located in the southeast of Europe? And finally, how should *learning*—understood as continuous act(ion) or even a mode of being—be arranged in the context of this major project, and are there any preconditions required for that process?

On the one hand, these questions can hardly be answered comprehensively. Referring to the educational scientists Sönke Ahrens and Michael Wimmer, it could be stated that learning, especially in the context of political education and learning democracy, is bound to the possibility of participating in social life, while this possibility is at the same time a precondition for learning and getting access to education. Thus, learning and participating are not only mutually dependent but also coincide.¹¹ According to this, the educational claim of “Learning from Athens” requires a detailed analysis of its theoretical foundations and its practical implications in relation to participation in *documenta 14*, and must address the question of who is allowed or encouraged to participate, as well as which modes or formats are provided for that exchange.

On the other hand, a closer look at the curatorial concept of *documenta 14* suggests that Szymczyk does not simply disregard the history of the exhibition institution, but that he is particularly concerned with the primary “sense of cultural urgency,” as he defines the initial situation of *documenta* in 1955, which, in his opinion, “brought forth an experimental exhibition understood both as a harbinger of change and as a means to build a national and international community with the help of an aesthetic experience.”¹² For Szymczyk, the decisive factors of the significant development and achievement of *documenta* are determined by “the specific timing and choice of locale.”¹³ Facing the current Greek financial crisis, the increase in migration worldwide, and the refugee crisis at the borders of Europe at the end

10 For more on the invention of democracy by the ancient Greeks and how Greek democracy differs from modern forms of democracy, see, for example, Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

11 Sönke Ahrens and Michael Wimmer, “Das Demokratieversprechen des Partizipationsdiskurses,” in *Hegemonie und autorisierende Verführung: Zum Verhältnis von Politischem und Pädagogischem*, ed. Alfred Schäfer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014), 175–199, on 177–178.

12 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 237.

13 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 239.

of 2013—which continue to affect the world today—he sees the need to restore this sense of cultural urgency founded in the origin of *documenta* and thus aims to reclaim its social relevance for its fourteenth edition.¹⁴

However, Szymczyk neither discusses the meaning of this initial cultural urgency of *documenta* in his curatorial concept nor does he describe its potential effects on the cultural ethics of *documenta 14*. Meanwhile, the practical implementation of this theoretical concept can be examined from a visitor’s perspective. For example, *documenta 14* was advertised with the slogan “transdocumenta,” which was printed on a T-shirt and sold as a souvenir together with *documenta 14*’s publications in the accompanying gift shops (Fig. 1).¹⁵ What is actually meant by this self-image of *documenta*, that connects to the Latin prefix “trans-” in its meaning of “across,” “beyond,” or “through,” and how does it relate to the cultural understanding of *documenta 14* with its specific twofold structure of Kassel and Athens?



Fig. 1: T-Shirt with the slogan “transdocumenta,” souvenir shop of documenta 14, Kassel, 2017. Photo: Barbara Lutz

14 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 237.

15 The souvenir was part of the product line of three black T-shirts with white letters on a red and blue background, commissioned by, and printed with slogans from, the artistic director. They were designed by Niko Mainaris, a graduate student in design at Reutlingen University, Germany.

In this essay, I will investigate how the curatorial concept of *documenta 14* takes on the cultural self-conception of *documenta*'s origins and how it challenges not only the history, structure, and status of the institution, but also how it resumes and transforms *documenta*'s initial understanding of a community between nations in times of crisis and traumatic historical ruptures in the face of today's global cultural relations. In this respect, it can be useful to question the meaning of "trans-" with regard to the cultural ethics of *documenta 14* and to analyze the curatorial concept and its realization in relation to a transcultural understanding. In order to do so, I refer to Monica Juneja's art historical approach to transculturality, which is based "on an understanding of culture that is in a condition of being made and remade, [and] does not take historical units and boundaries as given, but rather constitutes them as a subject of investigation, as products of spatial and cultural displacements."¹⁶ As such, this approach refers to different kinds of transcending binaries¹⁷ and not only takes into account postcolonial and decolonial debates, but goes beyond oppositions and "views cultural phenomena as multi-sited interactions" in a global context.¹⁸ In relation to this understanding, I will critically reflect on how *documenta 14*'s claim of "Learning from Athens" addresses a shift and repositioning of *documenta* in the global context of art, and how it correlates with democratic demands of participation and the legitimacy to produce knowledge and meaning in a globally interconnected and increasingly unpredictable world.

The origins of *documenta*'s cultural self-conception

The cultural self-conception at the origin of *documenta* is closely linked to its Kassel-born founder, Arnold Bode, and his confrontation with the post-war situation in the city of Kassel, which had been mostly destroyed in 1943 and was considered culturally desolate¹⁹ by the remaining population.

16 Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism (A Conversation)," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Model House Research Group (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 22–33, on 28.

17 From a transcultural perspective, Juneja points to binaries "in which culture is seen as flowing from high metropolitan centres to absorptive colonial peripheries," as the approach is based on postcolonial and subaltern studies with their focus on the asymmetries of power from the margins. In order to dismantle "the colonizer-colony binary," she locates "these processes in a global context that transcends this opposition and views cultural phenomena as multi-sited interactions." Juneja and Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," 29.

18 Juneja and Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," 29.

19 See Alfred Nemeček, *documenta* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 16.

As an art-creating visionary and university lecturer,²⁰ Bode was not only committed to restoring the city to more decent and humane conditions, but also felt the urge to comment on and document²¹ the artistic practices between 1933 and 1945 in Germany that had been denounced and prohibited during the Nazi regime. Seeing the bombed ruins of the classicist Museum Fridericianum, Bode believed in the improvement of conditions through aesthetic interventions.²² Furthermore, he saw the necessity of finding a way to reorient himself with new friends in Kassel, in post-war Germany, and in Europe, emphasizing the importance of active engagement.²³ Thus, Bode, in close collaboration with art historian Werner Haftmann, implemented an international exhibition of twentieth-century art with two aims. The first was to represent the development and European interconnectedness of modern art.²⁴ The second was to present works of artists ostracized by the Third Reich, which in Germany up to this point had never been exhibited together with abstract and expressionist works by artists from Europe and the United States.²⁵ As Haftmann stated, according to his understanding of art at that time, all of Europe was involved, in a kind of call-and-response, in creating forms of expression through which the contemporary world would be able to articulate itself artistically.²⁶ In order to resume this mutual cultural exchange on the aesthetic level after the isolation of Germany during the war, the curatorial ambition of the

20 In 1948, after the war, together with artists and colleagues, Bode re-established the Kassel Art Academy, which had been closed in 1932 by the Nazi regime, and later founded the association for the *Abendländische Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts e.V.*, through which he was able to realize his plans for a major international art exhibition, known today as the first *documenta*.

21 With this focus on documentation, the name *documenta* came into being.

22 See Nemeček, *documenta*, 32.

23 See Nemeček, *documenta*, 12. (Original quote: “Die Notwendigkeit, sich wieder zurechtzufinden mit neuen Freunden in Kassel, in Deutschland, in Europa – sich ‘zurechtzufinden’, aber nicht einfach wieder einzurichten – das kam hinzu.”)

24 See Werner Haftmann, “Einleitung,” in *documenta. Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts. Internationale Ausstellung im Museum Fridericianum in Kassel* [July 16 to September 18, 1955, exhibition catalogue], ed. Museum Fridericianum (Munich: Prestel, 1955), 15–25, on 18. (Original quote: “Als Aufgabe stellte sich also: Entwicklung und Verflechtung der modernen Kunst.”)

25 For the first time, the founders of modern art in Germany, including, for example, Paul Klee, Oskar Schlemmer, and Max Beckmann, were put on display together with the established artists of European modernity, such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Wassily Kandinsky, and Henry Moore. The only included artists living in America were Josef Albers, Kurt Roesch, and Alexander Calder.

26 See Haftmann, “Einleitung,” 18. (Original quote: “Ganz Europa war daran tätig, in Ruf und Gegenruf die Ausdrucksweisen zu schaffen, in denen der bildnerische Ausdruck der zeitgenössischen Weltvorstellung möglich werden konnte.”)

first *documenta* was to restore the international interplay by picking up the interrupted dialogue and bringing it back to its own turf.²⁷

From today's point of view, the first *documenta* followed an understanding of art that represented the perspective of European modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century, while the cultural dialogue with other countries remained largely limited to Europe and the Western art world at that time. Regarding the participating artists of the first *documenta*, Walter Grasskamp, for example, speaks of a "selective Eurocentrism"²⁸ and critically points to a lack of true internationality in adopting "the notion of art's universality"²⁹ in the exhibition. At the core of *documenta*'s civilizing mission was, according to Nuit Banai, the formal language of abstraction that "became a symbol of individualism and artistic freedom, and a means to differentiate West from East in the early years of the Cold War," in which Kassel became "the stage for the construction of the contemporary in relation to highly contested (art-)historical, socio-political, and ideological entanglements."³⁰

Thus, in its desire to socially and culturally revitalize the city of Kassel as well as to reconnect Germany internationally, the beginning of *documenta* can be understood as a place of reflection on the artistic practice and its working conditions on one the hand, and as a place for engaging in a specific socio-political situation on the basis of art on the other. This is shown, for example, in the selection and representation of artists in the catalogue of the first *documenta*, where they were listed by location. Over one third of the 148 participating artists were listed under Germany, England, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and North America. It is worth noting that for reasons of voluntary or involuntary migration, artists no longer identified with their national origin but with their various cultural affiliations related to their respective place of residence and work. According to Grasskamp, when national origin is taken into

27 See Haftmann, "Einleitung," 23. (Original quote: "Man soll sie [die Ausstellung] sehen als einen breit angelegten Versuch, wieder den internationalen Kontakt in breiter Form aufzunehmen und in ein lange unterbrochenes Gespräch sozusagen im eigenen Hause wieder einzutreten.")

28 Walter Grasskamp, "Becoming Global: From Eurocentrism to North Atlantic Feedback—*documenta* as an 'International Exhibition' (1955–1972)," in *documenta. Curating the History of the Present*, ed. Dorothee Richter and Nanne Buurman, *OnCurating* 33 (June 2017): 97–108, on 99.

29 Grasskamp, "Becoming Global," 101.

30 Nuit Banai, "Border as Form," *Artforum* [September 2017]: 302–305, on 303.

account, artists from around eighteen nations³¹ participated in the first *documenta*.³² Thus, the artists were classified according to their official national origin in only some cases in the catalogue. This discrepancy reflects that in cases of political emigration—e.g. from Russia and Germany—where the national affiliation of a number of artists had become uncertain, they were assigned either to their home or to their host countries depending on their (artistic) impact.³³ However, although the transcultural biographies of the artists were not mentioned explicitly or indicated in the catalogue of the first *documenta* due to the labeling rules at that time,³⁴ they were implicitly acknowledged and taken for granted because of their cultural significance to the arts.

Despite the Eurocentric understanding of art in the early days of *documenta*, its specific reference to the present was characterized by the curatorial ambition to grasp artistic positions and tendencies transnationally and transculturally, rather than merely within or between individual nations or clearly defined cultures. In this sense, *documenta* was driven by the idea of a place and an aesthetic for the “future of ‘Europe’ as moral arbiter and guardian of humanistic values” in Kassel.³⁵

While the first efforts to mend the foreign relationships of post-war Germany focused on Germany’s struggle to regain its rights as a sovereign

31 Most of the artists that were attributed to Germany and Italy actually originated from these countries, while many of the artists who lived in Paris at that time and were attributed to France, were born in Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Hungary, Denmark, Bohemia, or Greece. Other native countries, such as Austria, were not even mentioned. See Grasskamp, “Becoming Global,” 97–98.

32 See Grasskamp, “Becoming Global,” 99.

33 See *documenta. Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts*, 27. This is demonstrated by the fact that the artists Josef Albers and Kurt Roesch, who were both born in Germany and had emigrated to the United States in 1933 after the National Socialists seized power, were attributed to North America, while American-born Lyonel Feininger was listed under Germany. See Walter Grasskamp, “Kunst, Medien und Globalisierung. Ein Rückblick auf die *documenta 11*,” in *Die Kanäle der Macht. Herrschaft und Freiheit im Medienzeitalter*, ed. Konrad Paul Liessmann, (Wien: Paul Zsolnay, 2003), 195–213, on 202.

34 According to Grasskamp, the “official list of artists and nations [...] was still regarded as possible, necessary, and helpful” in the context of the first *documenta*. The problematic classification of art and artists along national lines, which is still being practiced for example by national museums today, goes back to “the nineteenth century, when European art was explicitly meant and officially supported to profile and celebrate national cultures,” and “started to become difficult and outdated, when radical modernism arose from many widespread national centres and mingled in international metropolises like Berlin, Paris, or New York.” Grasskamp, “Becoming Global,” 99.

35 Banai, “Border as Form,” 303.

state,³⁶ *documenta* can also be understood as a means to restore international contacts. From today's perspective, it rather represents an attempt to develop a social transformation of the culturally desolate, local situation of Kassel and within Germany by means of an art exhibition. According to Okwui Enwezor, *documenta* can therefore be related to a huge number of large-scale, perennial exhibitions, which have gained importance as post-war activities. By comparing *documenta* in regards to its significance as biennial³⁷ with the *Gwangju Biennale* in South Korea and the *Johannesburg Biennale* in South Africa, he questions the degree to which "the desire to establish such an exhibition forum have [*sic*] been informed by responses to events connected to traumatic historical ruptures."³⁸ While, in this respect, *documenta* can be considered as an "attempt to rebuild the basis of its destroyed civil society as well as the artistic and intellectual frameworks [...] of the avantgarde," all three exhibitions reflect in different ways "the political and social transitions of each of the countries."³⁹ Even though the biennials in Gwangju and Johannesburg commenced forty years after *documenta* in 1995⁴⁰ and differ substantially in the political histories of their countries, all three exhibitions mark "an important part of the transition," which is based on "the work of the imagination, as a fundamental part of society in transition towards democracy and development of new concepts of citizen."⁴¹ As the end of apartheid, for example, gave an

36 With the termination of Germany's status as an occupied territory (the State of Hesse belonged to the American occupation zone) in 1955 and the re-establishment of the Foreign Office in 1951, the Federal Republic of Germany widely regained its sovereignty in foreign affairs. On that basis, the Foreign Office founded the first cultural institutes in 1955, which later became the Goethe Institute.

37 Although *documenta* traditionally occurs every five years and significantly differs from the history of the oldest biennial established in 1895, the *Venice Biennale*, which is modeled on the nineteenth-century world exhibition, it ranks among the world's more than two hundred existing biennials today. This is because the term biennial is no longer only considered a two-year cycle, as its etymology suggests, but represents "a type or model of large-scale, perennial, international manifestation that has become so common in the landscape of exhibition-making today", as Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø state. See Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø, "Biennialogy," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 12–27, on 14. For a directory of the currently listed biennials in the world, see for example the homepage of the Biennial Foundation: <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/>.

38 Okwui Enwezor, *Großausstellungen und die Antinomien einer transnationalen globalen Form* [German/English] (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 47.

39 Enwezor, *Großausstellungen und die Antinomien einer transnationalen globalen Form*, 48.

40 While the *Gwangju Biennale* still takes place every two years, the second *Johannesburg Biennale* in 1997 was closed one month before it was due to occur and never continued.

41 Enwezor, *Großausstellungen und die Antinomien einer transnationalen globalen Form*, 48.

important impetus for the artistic power of imagination in South Africa, each of the exhibitions that are responding to traumatic historical ruptures can be understood as a translation of this imagination into practice, in the sense of an ethical approach to change the social and cultural self-understanding of society for democratic reasons.⁴²

Moreover, by comparing the post-war activity of biennials, *documenta* is set in relation to the “South” in the global discourse of art and its institutions. According to Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, this term is “clearly not restricted to exhibitions, but part of a broader, significant invocation of the South as inspiration for resisting the North Atlantic’s devouring of space, resources, alternative histories and epistemologies⁴³ [...] for antagonising the neo-colonial sweep,” and can thus be generally considered as “a model for change.”⁴⁴

Situating *documenta 14* in space and time

Szymczyk’s idea of taking Athens as a starting point for conceptualizing *documenta 14* indirectly involves Enwezor’s proposed strategy of responding to a traumatic situation on the basis of artistic imagination and by the means of an art exhibition. In this respect, *documenta 14* can be considered as an opportunity to reflect on and cope with the economic crisis of the Greek state and the ruinous social and cultural situation in its capital. As ruins, in the literal sense, also played a central role in the conception and realization of the first *documenta*—for example, the reconstruction

42 While the first *Johannesburg Biennale* was meant to restore the dialogue between South Africa and the international art scene after the years of isolation caused by the apartheid policy, the first *Gwangju Biennale*, titled “Beyond the Borders,” was intended to establish new orders and relationships between the arts and mankind, as well as to convey a kind of global citizenship that transcends divisions between ideologies, territories, religion, race, culture, humanity, and the arts. See “1st Gwangju Biennale, 1995,” *Universes in Universe*, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://universes.art/en/gwangju-biennale/1995>.

43 For more on the recovery and valorization of epistemological diversity into an empowering instrument against hegemonic globalization see, for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014). In his book, he argues that Western domination has profoundly marginalized knowledge and wisdom in the global South, and, therefore, global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice. He points to a new kind of bottom-up cosmopolitanism that would promote a wide conversation of humankind, celebrating conviviality, solidarity, and life against the logic of market-ridden greed and individualism. See Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2014).

44 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “South as Method. Biennials Past and Present,” in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum N° 2 São Paulo, Brazil*, ed. Galit Eilat et al. (Amsterdam: Biennial Foundation, 2015), 3–45, on 38.

of the Museum Fridericianum⁴⁵—the ancient Greek ruins, whose aesthetics have always inspired artists as well as travellers, in a certain way still reflect the relationship between ruinous pasts and the present-day situation of Athens and Greece, and can thus be considered a possible source of life and revitalization.⁴⁶

However, at second glance, the situation of Athens and Greece is not only addressed in a narrow sense, but also more broadly in a more global perspective. As Szymczyk points out, “Athens, located forever between cultures, connecting three continents and holding multitudes, remains the nexus of challenges and transformations that the entire continent is now experiencing.”⁴⁷ In this sense, the city not only reflects an important connection between several parts of a system that spans different cultural and geopolitical settings in Europe, but according to Szymczyk actually indicates “the stiffening embrace of neoliberalism.”⁴⁸ While the ideas of neoliberalism go back to the nineteenth century and are primarily associated with economic liberalism at the end of the twentieth century,⁴⁹ they have gained hegemonic power on a global scale today. Moreover, Szymczyk argues that these ideas are part of the crisis that reached Greece in 2008, broadening its geopolitical and economic impact, and led up to “the present and its defining, as-yet-unresolved moments

45 The Museum Fridericianum was almost entirely destroyed in 1941 and 1943 during the Second World War (apart from the enclosing walls and the *Zwehturm* tower) and reconstructed for the purpose of *documenta*'s main venue in 1955, as it remains today.

46 The confrontation with past, present, and future ruins in connection with *documenta 14* was, for example, part of the two-year research project “Learning from *documenta*” that started in 2015. The independent project was situated in Athens between anthropology, art, and media with the aim to critically observe and discuss aspects of *documenta 14*'s presence in Athens in relation to artistic, economic, and socio-political developments in Greece and internationally. See “About,” Learning from *documenta*, accessed September 25, 2017, <http://learningfromdocumenta.org/about/>.

47 Adam Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness—Learning and Working from Athens,” in *The documenta 14 Reader*, ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017): 17–42, on 29.

48 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 25. In this context, Szymczyk speaks about “the neoliberal war machine” that is supported by the “hegemonic order” and occurs as “the neocolonial, patriarchal, heteronormative order of power and discourse.”

49 The term neoliberalism refers to market-oriented economic concepts that have gained hegemonic power on an international scale since the end of Fordism around the 1970s. In comparison to the traditional liberal definition of a self-regulating, free market in the nineteenth century, neoliberal concepts of the twentieth century are characterized by a deep mistrust in any kind of interference with the market and only tolerate a minimum of involvement by the state and other institutions in economic activities. See Fernand Kreff, Eva-Maria Knoll, and Andre Gingrich, *Lexikon der Globalisierung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 259 and 427.

in Europe and around the Mediterranean.”⁵⁰ In his view, it is exactly this “complex entanglement of political and military powers” that keeps “the old and untenable concept of a world comprised of sovereign nation-states” alive and provides “an inescapable framework that must be addressed anew in order to understand our current circumstances.”⁵¹

Taking into account this statement for situating *documenta 14* temporally and spatially in Athens, it is also interesting to note that Szymczyk also ideologically points to “that part of Europe, which seems to be a model example of often extremely violent contradictions, fears, and fragile hopes” which could as well take place in “any other precarious contemporary democracy.”⁵² Thus, he not only points to Greece’s confrontation with the consequences of the economic crisis, the destruction of social structures and the associated rise of right-wing populism in the Western world, which in times of crisis often flourishes and calls democracy into question, but he also addresses the shared challenge for the entire continent of Europe to handle the increasing migration at its borders. With this in mind, he argues that *documenta 14* cannot just be considered as “a good starting point for reflection on the contemporary condition of actually existing neoliberalism,”⁵³ but rather stresses the need to give “a real-time response to the changing situation of Europe, which as a birthplace of both democracy and colonialism is a continent whose future must be urgently addressed.”⁵⁴

With this conceptual approach to *documenta 14*, Szymczyk seems to resume, transfer, and translate the particular cultural relevance founded in the origin of *documenta*, which helped to enable a social transition of the desolate country after the Second World War through a new idea of democracy, according to the political and historical experiences of the people at that time. According to Banai, Szymczyk and his curatorial team have not only considered recent permutations of the institution’s foundational conditions and aspirations, but they also “responded to the changed landscape of today [...] with timely questions about borders and their power

50 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 26. By this, Szymczyk especially addresses the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, Russia’s annexation of the Crimea, followed by the war in Eastern Ukraine, and the advances of authoritarian rule in Turkey. See Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 25–26.

51 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 26.

52 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 241.

53 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 24.

54 Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” *South as a State of Mind #6 [documenta 14 #1]* (Fall–Winter 2015): 5–6, on 5.

to police people, knowledge and (art) history.”⁵⁵ While this goes along with Enwezor’s notion of the founding principles of *documenta*, in a certain way Szymczyk also adopts the transnational and transcultural perspective of the first *documenta*. Just like Bode, he does not consider the local situation of the city or country as an issue limited to itself. He sees nationally and culturally interrelated processes and entangled (hi)stories of the European continent as a necessity and an opportunity to critically reflect upon its difficult times, to react to them, and to transform them by the means of art and in the format of an exhibition. Moreover, he seems to be convinced that, “rather than being a mere reproduction of existing social relationships, art can produce and inhabit space, enable discourses [...], and act to challenge the predictable, gloomy course of current political and social global events that keep us sleepless and suspended.”⁵⁶ As the living and working conditions of artists are far more international and globally intertwined than in 1955, for a number of artists, their national identity is in question, as they affiliate with various cultures at the same time. According to the transcultural understanding that describes culture as being in a permanent process of becoming, the artists in *documenta 14*’s *Daybook*⁵⁷ are also neither assigned to a single nation nor characterized by linear biographies.⁵⁸

Situating *documenta 14* in relation to the desolate conditions of a city and country at the border of Europe can thus be considered as referring in a more comprehensive way to “the uncertain future of Western-European democracy in a world gradually losing fixed points of reference,” which “makes Athens possibly the most productive location from which to think and learn about the future to come,” as Szymczyk points out. In this sense,

55 Banai, “Border as Form,” 303. Here, Banai goes even further by relating the history of *documenta* to its present when she recognizes *documenta 14*’s geographical focus as an update of “the mega-exhibition’s historical status as a frontier and bellwether of Western humanism for contemporary conditions of neoliberal global capitalism.”

56 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 32.

57 The *Daybook* is a kind of polyphonic anthology in which each living artist of *documenta 14* is granted one day of the exhibition’s 163-day period and, respectively, two pages including a newly commissioned text in the form of a close reading of the artist’s practice (e.g., a criticism, a letter, a poem, or a parable) by different writers, such as critics, curators, poets, novelists, or historians, and images selected by each artist. See “Publications—documenta 14,” *documenta 14 Daybook*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/publications/15730/documenta-14-daybook>.

58 In some cases, biographical data of the artists and their (trans)cultural affiliations are mentioned in the text of the two pages or can be read between the lines and in the selected images.

the additional claim “Learning from Athens” as a working title⁵⁹ specifies both the transitional stage of Europe’s current social, political, economic, and cultural upheavals, and the provisional stage for the emerging event of *documenta 14* as a nationally and culturally shared process of working and learning, which can no longer be limited to a temporary and local exhibition of exactly one hundred days in one single place—which first and foremost addresses the well-established Western and Northern European position and status of the institution⁶⁰—as the origin and tradition of *documenta* implies.

Decentralizing *documenta*’s institutional and ideological structures

In fact, *documenta 14*’s focus on Athens does not completely disregard the institution’s home in Kassel. However, the specific relationship to the world that *documenta 14* holds with its twofold structure is neither based on a one-sided reference of Kassel to Athens, nor on its exchange or any kind of comparison between Germany and Greece. Thus, instead of importing the crisis to Kassel and analysing it on an aesthetic level in Germany alone, Szymczyk decided from the beginning of his conceptual preparations for *documenta 14* to move one part of its production from the centre of Europe to its southeastern border.

Szymczyk adopted a transcultural perspective by taking into account a postcolonial approach to current socio-political and cultural affairs in the global intertwinings of art on the structural level of *documenta*. This can firstly be seen in the way he takes the historical units and boundaries of the Western art institution as a subject of investigation and as products of spatial and cultural displacements, on the one hand,⁶¹ while on the other

59 The two words were designed with a blue hand-lettered font and presented in brackets right underneath the block letters of the heading “Learning from Athens,” and appeared in every newsletter of *documenta 14*, beginning with its ninth release on November 15, 2016. See “Newsletter Archive,” *documenta 14* Newsletter, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/press-materials>.

60 According to Szymczyk, “[t]he world cannot be explained, commented on and narrated from Kassel exclusively—a vantage point that is singularly located in Northern and Western Europe—or from any one particular place at all.” Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 26–27.

61 In contrast to the modern Western conception of culture during the colonial past that is founded on the notion that a people, nation, or race bear and represent merely one culture, contributions to early transcultural thought are not only based on the attempt to dissociate race from culture, but also on acknowledging the permeability of boundaries (e.g., between European, Amerindian, and African cultures) and the hybrid forms of cultures and races—even as a means of undoing racist orders of domination, as Kravagna points out in reference to the development of cultural studies in South America between the 1920s and 1940s. See Christian Kravagna, “Transcultural Beginnings: Decolonisation, Transculturalism, and the Overcoming of Race,” in *Transcultural Modernisms*, 34–47, on 36.

hand, he applies the divide and shift of a part of the exhibition as a curatorial method to deconstruct, rethink, and confront the institution with its Western history and its implicit narratives of modernity. Here, one of *documenta*'s main venues in Kassel, the Museum Fridericianum, plays an important role, being one of the first public museums on the European continent,⁶² and is thus also a bearer of Europe's colonial history. Secondly, Szymczyk aims to free Athens from the role of the subordinate. He does so by taking into account the fact that "Athens stands metonymically for the 'rest' of the world that is lacking privileges."⁶³ With this approach, he not only implicitly refers to the binary notion of the West in contrast to the rest of the world, as it was taken up in postcolonial theory,⁶⁴ but he rather goes beyond the binary thinking of Western superiority in opposition to non-Western inferiority, or any kind of hierarchical order, when he brings up a "distrust toward any essentializing and reductive concepts of identity, belonging, roots, and property in a world that is visibly out of joint" and claims to "think in solidarity"—with Germany and Greece acting both "as simultaneously real and metaphoric sites."⁶⁵

In this sense, Szymczyk's concerns can be related not only to a post- and decolonial discourse, but also to a transcultural thinking in the arts which, for example, refers to the understanding of the dissolution of artistic limits, its pluralization, decentralization, and interconnectivity in terms of its production and reception. The perspective of a transcultural history of art would furthermore involve questioning the "canonical premises" and "the taxonomies and values that have been built into the discipline since its inception and have been taken as universal,"⁶⁶ particularly according to stable and homogeneous units of national, stylistic, or epochal categories of Western art historiography. In what ways Szymczyk's concerns for a practical realization of his ideas for both Germany and Greece can be linked to "transformatory processes that constitute art practices through cultural encounters and relationships,"⁶⁷ as Juneja's conception of a transcultural history of art also implies, will be considered later on.

62 The Museum Fridericianum was built and completed in 1779, in the spirit of enlightenment and classicism.

63 Szymczyk, "documenta 14: Learning from Athens," 243.

64 See Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Geiben (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 275–295.

65 Latimer and Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter," 5–6.

66 Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'," in *Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 274–297, on 281.

67 Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation,'" 281.

With regard to previous editions of *documenta 14*, it can be argued that the curatorial idea of a spatial extension and geographical decentralization is nothing new and has already been applied in various ways and dimensions by some of its direct predecessors: *documenta 11* (2002), *documenta 12* (2007), and *documenta 13* (2012) have each developed specific formats taking place outside of Germany and Europe on different continents before or simultaneously, and partially with direct reference to the exhibition in Kassel.⁶⁸ With differing emphasis, whether explicitly or implicitly, the Western centralization of the institution was questioned, destabilized, or at least suspended for the duration of the respective *documenta*. Although *documenta 14*'s structure does not extend beyond the European continent, it falls in line with the global perspective of its predecessors by creating a counterhegemonic position with Athens towards the established center of the West. Furthermore, *documenta 14* not only refers to, but rather connects with a specific location in Southern Europe where “the contradictions of the contemporary world, embodied by loaded directionals like East and West, North and South, meet and clash.”⁶⁹ Therefore, Athens, or rather Greece, can be recognized as a European hub of key importance that marks a point of intersection. It is at this point where people with different world perspectives and cultures are gathering and interacting with each other—notably at a time of rising levels of migration, which recalls the climate of *documenta*'s origin.

Thus, by relating *documenta*'s home to a specific location that is characterized by challenges and changes affecting the whole of Europe in an increasingly interconnected and complex world, Szymczyk does not want to reproduce colonial categories, but enables, encourages, and induces a fundamental repositioning of the institution on the structural, organizational, and discursive level. This is also shown, for instance, in the name and meaning of the *documenta 14* magazine *South as a State of Mind*,⁷⁰ which is designed to represent a “counterhegemonic library for present battles.” It is “filled with essays, images, stories, speeches, diaries, and poems” and therefore considered

68 One year before the opening of *documenta 11*, five transdisciplinary, discursive platforms were presented on four continents, taking place in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos. Before the opening of *documenta 12*, transregional meetings for the *documenta 12* magazines project were held in Hong Kong, New Delhi, São Paulo, Cairo, Johannesburg, and New York with participating editors, authors, and theorists of local magazines. *documenta 13* organized a parallel exhibition in Kabul and a study and exchange program in Cairo and Alexandria, as well as a retreat and research residency program in Banff in Alberta, Canada.

69 Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” 6.

70 The magazine was founded by Marina Fokidis in Athens in 2012. In 2015, it temporarily became the journal of *documenta 14*, publishing four special issues, with the last one published in the summer of 2017.

as a “guiding vision for [...] the *documenta 14* publication program as a whole,”⁷¹ as the editors claim with reference to the contribution of Françoise Vergès in the first volume. As such, *documenta 14*’s relation to the South describes a working concept beyond the postcolonial center–periphery model. In considering the South operating on a synchronic axis of the trans-local,⁷² this concept “extends beyond geographical location and beyond the contours of the ‘global South’ as a category of geo-economic development [and] tries to resist easy assimilation within hegemonic global currents.”⁷³

According to Marieke van Hal, who asks for the meaning of South in the context of the ongoing “North-South dialectic of postcolonialism” in the making of biennials in contemporary times, “South as a state of mind” represents “a more abstract or creative concept” in contrast to “a geo-political focus that relates to a certain history tied to the struggle against colonization and the necessity of decolonization.”⁷⁴ *Documenta 14*’s successive start at two locations, with the earlier than usual opening of one part of the exhibition in Athens outside the institution’s home in Kassel and its temporal extension by a total of sixty days can thus be understood as a practical implication of acknowledging the institution’s Western position from a post- and decolonial point of view. It can further be seen as a creative attempt to equalize its cultural significance with other institutions in other parts of the world.

According to this approach, the claim of learning from Athens seems to be, first and foremost, an invitation to question Western (i.e. white and male, as well as nationalist and colonialist) privileges. This is also apparent in Marina Fokidis’s critique of the “idea of the purity of so-called mythical Ancient Greece” that is not only represented through the assumption of Greece as the cradle of Western civilization, but is in fact “a construct” and a result of several cleansing processes of “Western hegemonic culture” with

71 Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” 6.

72 For Gardner and Green, the South emphasizes not only “a rich history generated from long-standing unease with North Atlantic hegemony” and thus operates on “the diachronic axis of reference back to rich if unstable histories of trying to conceive different models of trans-local exchange,” but it also requires a kind of “transnational response through which that hegemony might be displaced,” and thus operates as well on “a synchronic axis of the transnational—or better still, the trans-local, given the vicious arbitrariness of national frontiers.” Gardner and Green, “South as Method. Biennials Past and Present,” 29.

73 Gardner and Green, “South as Method. Biennials Past and Present,” 29.

74 Marieke van Hal, “[Untitled Preface],” in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times*, 5.

the aim of creating a pure past.⁷⁵ In line with this recognition, Szymczyk wants to “see the world again in an unprejudiced way, unlearning and abandoning the predominant cultural conditioning that, silently or explicitly, presupposes the supremacy of the West, its institutions and culture.”⁷⁶ Accordingly, a space of possibility should be created to unlearn what is known, such as outdated concepts of belonging, rootedness, and identity, instead of giving lessons to people.⁷⁷ In order to overcome the form of an “asymmetrical power relationship between the sovereign and the subalterns” criticized by postcolonial theory, Szymczyk suggests that we “imagine a symmetrical situation of the encounter of equals” as is shown and implemented for him especially in the way artists are “‘learning to learn from below’,” as Szymczyk points out with reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or “learning from others in order to live together,” with reference to Souleymane Bachir Diagne.⁷⁸ While the latter two theorists are part of the postcolonial discourse that suggests submitting any Westernized self to the opposite and thereby defining a kind of prerequisite for the encounter of equals, Spivak’s claim especially relates to the challenge of a critically minded education. It does not merely advocate an improvement or change of conditions, but rather suggests that we “learn to let the logic of what constitutes the ‘here-and-now’ emerge and render that aspect accessible,” as Nikita Dhawan and María do Mar Castro Varela point out in relation to postcolonial strategies of unlearning.⁷⁹ In practical terms, *documenta 14* aimed to create an awareness for the individual cultural (pre)conditions of both locations.

75 Marina Fokidis, “Learning from Athens—A Working Title and a Working Process for *documenta 14* in Athens and Kassel,” in *Stages #6: The Biennial Condition*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial, 2017), 2–6, on 2. Here, she also argues that the “classicists’ idea of the pure white of the Greek statues and temples” is “a construct, since everything was painted in vivid colours: fuchsia, gold, cyan, red, terracotta. Even the columns of the Parthenon were painted with stripes [...]. The assumption of whiteness [...] was a kind of a cleansing process, eradicating paganism, multi-theism, multivalent expression, a successful effort to create a pure past, stripped not only of its shadows but also of its variety of aesthetics.”

76 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 29–30.

77 See Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 32.

78 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 33. As Szymczyk clarifies here, artists like “writers, filmmakers, sculptors, painters, musicians, actors, and all those once excluded from the Republic—can teach us that we must first learn to become strangers to ourselves, and thus undergo a decreation [...] instead of sustaining overproduction. They can show us how to shake the foundations of our positive and passive understanding of the world, teach us how to abandon the cities and then inhabit the cities again (Kassel and Athens are cases in point), and how to care about the way in which we work and what we do with the fruits of our labors.”

79 Nikita Dhawan and María do Mar Castro Varela, “Breaking the Rules. Education and Post-colonialism,” in *documenta 12 education II: Between Critical Practice and Visitor Services. Results of a Research Project*, ed. Carmen Mörsch (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2009), 317–329, on 327.

Challenging *documenta's* host role

According to the idea of learning in relation to the encounter of equals, the structural repositioning of the institution also addresses an adjustment or a change of the cultural-political involvement, which, in the case of the internationally-operating institution of *documenta*, is related to European foreign (and integration) policy. Concerning this policy, an involvement in cultural affairs basically refers to the framework of intercultural dialogue.⁸⁰ According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this framework should facilitate an “[e]quitable exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect and the equal dignity of all cultures,” which in turn marks “the essential prerequisite for constructing social cohesion, reconciliation among peoples and peace among nations.”⁸¹ However, the concept of interculturalism as such was strongly criticized from the perspective of postcolonial studies in the 1990s because in most cases, dialogue did not occur on a level playing field, while the focus on cultural difference and hybridity tended to conceal social and political inequality, as Carmen Mörsch stated.⁸² Furthermore, from the philosophical perspective of transculturality, an intercultural understanding is not sufficient to overcome classical cultural boundaries because it only advocates a mutual understanding of different cultures and refers to the concept of culture as part of a homogeneous and separate sphere, which can only collide with, defame, or combat other cultures, as Wolfgang Welsch points out.⁸³

Thus, in the framework of the intercultural dialogue, *documenta's* historically established, cultural-political position of host, which for Szymczyk “becomes ideologically difficult to maintain if the host never

80 According to art educator Carmen Mörsch, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of intercultural dialogue is still a dominant approach in German-speaking areas in discussions of appropriate guiding principles for cultural institutions in a migration society. See Carmen Mörsch, “Über Zugang hinaus: Nachträgliche einführende Gedanken zur Arbeitstagung ‘Kunstvermittlung in der Migrationsgesellschaft’,” in *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind*, ed. Ruth Noack (Milan: Politecnico di Milano, 2013), 51–62, on 51.

81 “Intercultural Dialogue,” UNESCO, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/intercultural-dialogue/>.

82 See Mörsch, “Über Zugang hinaus,” 51–52.

83 See Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality—the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Thousand Oaks, 1999), 194–213, on 196–197.

dares to assume the role of guest and leave home,”⁸⁴ would keep its traditional, privileged Western perspective and could only end up in the symbolic meaning of a bridge⁸⁵ or a mere cooperation between Greece and Germany. While cooperation describes a number of actors who work together and split into intact entities after their joint activity, thus remaining separate from each other,⁸⁶ a necessary prerequisite for rethinking and shifting the traditional Western position of the institution is seen in abandoning its “exclusive role of host,”⁸⁷ which has been assumed by *documenta* over the decades, and instead take on the role of guest. But how can an institution’s established role of host be subverted into the role of guest without being invited as such?

The proposed guest status of *documenta 14* challenges the stable position of the more than sixty-year-old art institution to welcome artists and artworks from around the world in Kassel. Moreover, it creates a paradoxical attitude especially towards the role of the artistic director, if one assumes that a “curatorial situation is always one of hospitality” because it “implies invitations—to artists, artworks, curators, audiences, and institutions; [...] which have left their habitual surroundings and find themselves in the process of relocation in the sense of being a guest,” as Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer say.⁸⁸ According to the claim of decentralizing and repositioning the institution, the “nation-regulated right to hospitality,”⁸⁹ which once created the position of the foreigner,⁹⁰ would have to be relinquished. This relates to Jacques Derrida’s fundamental tension

84 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 240.

85 Instead of “a bridge in the form of projects that complete each other between the two locations, or end up as two isolated sequences of displays addressing the specifics of each of the two sites separately,” Szymczyk wanted the exhibition to be built on a “structure of gaps, disconcerting repetitions and dislocations” that “would embrace discontinuity.” Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 244.

86 See Mark Terkessidis, *Kollaboration* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), 14.

87 Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” 6.

88 Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, “Introduction,” in *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions: (Cultures of the Curatorial 3)*, ed. von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016), 6–15, on 8.

89 Von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer, “Introduction,” 11.

90 With reference to Evi Fountoulakis and Boris Previsic, “Gesetz, Politik und Erzählung der Gastlichkeit. Einleitung,” in *Der Gast als Fremder. Narrative Alterität in der Literatur*, ed. Fountoulakis and Previsic (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 7–27, on 9, the open concept of accommodating all those who travel—understood as an anthropological, fundamental right that persisted into the Middle Ages—was already redefined in ancient times by laws on hospitality in the sense of the law concerning foreigners. See von Bismarck and Meyer-Krahmer, “Introduction,” 9–10.

between the regulated and unregulated conditions of hospitality,⁹¹ in which the latter is based on an altruistic concept that abandons all claims to ownership and control of the guest but is thereby, at the same time, circumventing the possibility of hospitality. Therefore, in whatever way the mutual relationship of host and guest is built, it has to deal with questions of superiority and with the negotiation of the conditions for its functioning. In connection with the worldwide increase in migration and the refugee crisis in Europe, the status of the host as well as the status and conditions of the guest seem more than ever to be a key question for transnational and transcultural cohabitation and social interaction. Taking a look at the political structure of the exhibition, according to Beatrice von Bismarck, the relation of hospitality generally raises questions about responsibility, dependencies, rules, codices, and the conditions of inclusion and exclusion, while also describing a situation in which people and things transfer from a familiar setting into the exposed setting of an exhibition and could thereby experience uncertainty and defenselessness. Thus, hospitality constitutes a necessary antithesis to the foreignness, unfamiliarity, or strangeness towards all people and things that are arranged in the process of curating an exhibition.⁹²

In this sense, hospitality also marks a kind of cultural-political position from which the institution of *documenta* should think and learn about its hierarchical and powerful role in the cultural sector and in the global intertwinings of art with other institutions. From the perspective of critical education, Szymczyk's abovementioned claim of "unlearning and abandoning the predominant cultural conditioning" points to "the necessity of unlearning, [as] a reflexive approach and [...] a shift in the position of cultural institutions from representing civil society to an active role as agents and arenas in the political domain."⁹³ On the other hand, his reference to Spivak's "learning to learn from below" especially addresses those who are advocating change to be willing to change themselves.⁹⁴

Taking into account Szymczyk's claim to "think in solidarity" with Germany and Greece acting both "as simultaneously real and metaphoric

91 According to Derrida, any attempt to be hospitable is inevitably associated with keeping guests under control, with the closing of boundaries, with nationalism, and even with the exclusion of particular groups or ethnicities. See Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 151–155.

92 See Beatrice von Bismarck, "Die Politizität des Gastspiels: Zur politischen Struktur der Ausstellung," in *When Exhibitions become Politics*, ed. Verena Krieger and Elisabeth Fritz, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2017), 139–153, on 142.

93 Mörsch, "Über Zugang hinaus," 51.

94 See Dhawan and Castro Varela, "Breaking the Rules. Education and Post-colonialism," 327.

sites,” *documenta 14*’s aim to reposition the institution stresses the necessity not only to acknowledge its emergence and historical development in the Western context but also to question its own privileges. Consequently, *documenta 14*’s claim of learning proposes an inherent process of “unlearning the given,” as *documenta 14*’s Curator-at-Large, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, stated in a joint project with Elena Agudio, which paralleled his work on *documenta 14*.⁹⁵ In his view, “the dominant Western and Eurocentric educational structure intimately supports racist power structures and knowledge systems” and continues “along a universal qua Western educational system that has found or forced its way into almost all four corners [...] of the globe.” In line with this thinking, the project’s concept points to the challenge “of deconstructing the ideologies and connotations eminent to the constructs that frame our societies today.” While the project also refers to Spivak’s notion of the fundamental process of unlearning privilege⁹⁶—for example, in relation to race, class, nationality, and gender—both curators want to open up to “a certain kind of Other knowledge” that does not imply receiving more information but “knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social position.” In this sense, the process of unlearning privilege can be considered “the beginning of an ethical relation to the Other.”⁹⁷ Similarly, from the perspective of critical education, this process means more “than being well-read and accumulating information; in fact, it involves confronting the often painful process of self-questioning,”⁹⁸ and draws attention to the necessity of allowing oneself to experience a fundamental uncertainty in relation to self-image, in the sense of not reproducing but shifting power relations.⁹⁹

95 The project was called “Unlearning the Given. Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality of Ideas and Knowledge” and was conceived as “a performative, discursive and corporeal curatorial framework” for The Long Night of Ideas in Berlin, which took place on April 14, 2016 at Savvy Contemporary. See Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Elena Agudio, “Unlearning the given. Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality of Ideas and Knowledge,” ART at Berlin (April 14, 2016), accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.artatberlin.com/savvy-contemporary-zur-langen-nacht-der-ideen-art-at-berlin/>.

96 For the original quotation, see Gayatri C. Spivak, Donna Landry, and Gerald Maclean, *The Spivak Reader: Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

97 See Ndikung and Agudio, “Unlearning the given.”

98 Dhawan and Castro Varela, “Breaking the Rules: Education and Post-colonialism,” 328. In this context, Dhawan and Castro Varela relate to Spivak’s term of “transnational literacy,” which can only be achieved by questioning one’s own privileges.

99 Mörsch, “Über Zugang hinaus,” 58–59.

Sharing experiences by means of an art exhibition

As noted above, in line with the post- and decolonial demand for a critical self-reflection of one's position and privilege, Szymczyk aimed to free Athens from the role of the subordinate, or rather refused to relegate the city or country to the role of a guest of *documenta 14* in the first place. Although he tries to change *documenta*'s established position of host, he nevertheless speaks of invitations. Obviously, this does not mean a unilateral request from Athens or from the inside of *documenta*. According to his idea of reconnecting *documenta 14* to "the urgency of its beginnings," this is conceived as a more open approach of a "journey" in order to get "a better understanding of the world and of ourselves." However, this journey has no clear purpose and should not be misunderstood as an expedition. It is rather meant as an inner journey in the way of a "willful estrangement that is supposed to lead to new realizations for those who undertake it."¹⁰⁰

According to Sepake Angiama, Head of Education at *documenta 14*, from a geographical perspective, "Learning from Athens" implies a deliberate way of distancing oneself "from a location that is considered on the edge of Europe but is almost a central connection between Europe and other geographies, between Europe and its shared histories with the Middle East and Africa."¹⁰¹ In respect to the fact that learning is closely tied to "unlearning," Angiama stresses the need for "considering forms of knowledge that have been suppressed and excluded from the 'canon'" and, even more fundamentally, of recognizing that also "education has been colonized." Thus, she first pleads for the decolonization of education in the form of an "acceptance and acknowledgement of wrongdoing."¹⁰² While this requires a process that will question, change, and leave behind usual ways of knowledge production in order to gain new or different insights than the ones already established, the entire project of *documenta 14* cannot simply be "divided into exhibition, public program, and education," but must be defined as a whole organism that relies both on "collective action and individual capacity," as *documenta 14*'s education program of

100 See Szymczyk, "documenta 14: Learning from Athens," 240.

101 Sepake Angiama and Elke aus dem Moore, "Under the Mango Tree (A Conversation)," *Contemporary And (C&A)* 7 (2017): 40–43, on 42.

102 While the "process of colonizing education was a violent and brutal obliteration of indigenous cultures, traditions, and language," as Angiama states, the "process of decolonization will bear the fruits of a painful process of recognition, repatriation, and reconciliation." Angiama and aus dem Moore, "Under the Mango Tree," 42.

“aneducation”¹⁰³ implies.¹⁰⁴ The question that remains is, did this way of learning take place within the production and reception of *documenta 14*, and if so, how did it take place? Or, returning to one of the fundamental arguments of this essay, namely that learning is bound to the possibility of participating in educational processes: who is actually invited and how could the process of (un)learning be realized in relation to participating in *documenta 14*?

Taking into account the reconsideration or reinvention of democracy in difficult times “when authoritarian thinking prevails over the participatory model,”¹⁰⁵ Szymczyk points to the role of the “audience”—which the art world and its institutions, including *documenta*, conventionally tends to think of less as participants in a common task and rather as voters.¹⁰⁶ With the aim of taking a different, much more collective approach from the bottom up, he therefore suggests that *documenta 14* should overcome “normative economic, political and geographic divisions” by “attempting a shared experience mediated by culture and, more specifically, by the contemporary art exhibition.”¹⁰⁷ According to this experience, the visitors to *documenta* were invited “to take a similar route as its makers,” with the hope that “the exhibition will thus become an agent of change and a transformative experience for its audience and participants in both cities.”¹⁰⁸

From the curatorial point of view, it has therefore not been a matter of fulfilling “one predetermined scenario during the three years of making,”¹⁰⁹ but rather a “thorough onsite research to forge connections including political ones and to find local allies willing to engage.”¹¹⁰ Within this process, Szymczyk wanted to develop “forms of collaboration” and to negotiate “terms of invitation.”¹¹¹ In order to become

103 In connection with education, the prefix “an-” refers to undoing something and describes learning as a way of shifting positions or seeing something from another point of view. See Angiama and aus dem Moore, “Under the Mango Tree,” 42.

104 See “About,” *documenta 14 Public Education*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/>.

105 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 31.

106 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 35.

107 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 243.

108 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 240.

109 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 245.

110 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 241.

111 Szymczyk, “documenta 14: Learning from Athens,” 241.

a “participatory experience, and an exercise in presentist democracy,” *documenta 14*’s visitors should be empowered “as the true owners of *documenta*, each holding a share in a common undertaking, together with the makers and the organizers of *documenta 14*, alongside the artists and other participants”.¹¹² Hence, the possibility of inviting others should not be based “on the representative capacity of legitimate elected officials.”¹¹³ This relates to the context of museum studies in the cultural sector where participation is used to define the possibility of opening up and reconnecting the museum or the exhibition to society as the actual owner of public space. Here, in the sense of “ownership,” visitors are encouraged to leave behind the role of passive consumers and to take on a more active role as coworkers in the process of mediating, designing, selecting, denoting, and representing works within the museum.¹¹⁴ Thus, *documenta 14*’s call for participation does not mean to simply go and visit an exhibition or to accept an invitation to it. Instead, visitors need to have “the possibility to question the rules of the game: the conditions under which education, the public realm and representation within institutions happen,” as Nora Sternfeld points out in connection to “participation in the post-representative museum.”¹¹⁵ In doing so, the existing logics of society can be shifted and participation opens up “the possibility of transformation.”¹¹⁶

But how could this “shared experience mediated by culture” be realized, and to what extent does it actually involve all the participants of *documenta 14*, such as curators, institutions, artists, artworks, visitors, and the citizens of Athens and Kassel? And finally, does the self-image of *documenta 14* as “transdocumenta” reveal itself in relation to these practical implications? Since collaboration is based on participation and only

112 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 36. Similarly, Marina Fokidis, Curatorial Advisor of *documenta 14*, points out that “[n]othing can be completed, assumed, learned without the participation of the visitors, whom we like to think of as part of our team in this endless process of learning.” Fokidis, “Learning from Athens,” 4.

113 Szymczyk, “14: Iterability and Otherness,” 36–37.

114 Anja Piontek, “Einführung,” in *Museum und Partizipation. Theorie und Praxis kooperativer Ausstellungsprojekte und Beteiligungsangebote*, ed. Anja Piontek (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), 13–29, on 17.

115 In doing so, Sternfeld relates to the political theory of Jacques Rancière, for whom “demanding to have a part is also a question of politics. Extending an invitation does not result in participation: this is achieved through struggles that transgress and reshape the hitherto existing social logics.” Nora Sternfeld, “Playing by the Rules of the Game. Participation in the Post-Representative Museum,” *CUMMA PAPERS* 1: 1–7, on 7; see also Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

116 Sternfeld, “Playing by the Rules of the Game,” 4.

takes place when actors work together interactively and welcome being truly transformed through this process,¹¹⁷ a look at its particular forms could provide insight into how far the collaborations of *documenta 14* go beyond intercultural cooperation and open up to various modes of a transcultural practice.

For the realization of *documenta 14*, various collaborations were specifically developed for the exhibition, and also for parallel projects, public meetings, and events set up by a variety of actors in different locations. Besides the position of the artistic director, about twenty curatorial co-workers were located in Athens, in addition to about twelve curatorial co-workers in Kassel, together with a large team responsible for organizing the exhibition at the many venues, for presenting art, mediating art, and running the public programs in both cities.¹¹⁸ After the three years of the curatorially proposed process of making, a large number of institutional and urban interventions could be found both in Athens and in Kassel. Besides several main institutional partners and venues, *documenta 14* spread across the city of Athens in more than forty different public institutions, squares, cinemas, university locations, and libraries in approximately thirty different locations in Kassel, including many conversions of existing buildings.¹¹⁹

A special form of collaboration was realized by one of *documenta's* main venues. The Museum Fridericianum became the temporary home for the collection of the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens (EMST) during the exhibition in Kassel. As Katerina Koskina, Director of the EMST and curator of the exhibition at the Museum Fridericianum, pointed out in the wall text of the entrance hall, the exhibition marked the first extensive presentation of the collection of the EMST and presented artworks by “pioneering Greek artists, highlighting and revisiting their national and international journeys.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, this exchange not only allowed both institutions to learn more about their diverse missions and common goals, but also strengthened their links to showcase the social role of art and its capacity to denounce and transform the traumatized world. With the title “ANTIDORON,” the exhibition referred to concepts of negotiation, such as sharing and offering or, more literally, “the returning of a gift.” Thus, the prefix “anti-” points to “a distinct position and consequently a view, not necessarily opposed to,

117 See Terkessidis, *Kollaboration*, 14.

118 “Team,” *documenta 14 Team*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/team>.

119 “Athens Venues/ Kassel Venues,” *documenta 14 Venues*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-exhibition/>.

120 As such, the exhibition also took up issues of border crossings, diasporas, and cultural exchange.

but departing from a different point in order to communicate, to argue, to bridge, to converge, and to accept each other's stances," and should embody "the mutual respect of both institutions."¹²¹

From a transcultural perspective, the curatorially initiated terms of invitation and forms of collaboration for this part of *documenta 14*'s exhibition could, on the one hand, be acknowledged as a shared cultural practice going beyond the simple logic of differences or oppositions between Kassel and Athens. On the other hand, this approach resembles the established invitation from *documenta* as a hosting institution, where the guest is generously invited on the basis of individual conditions and unintentionally returns the favor with a gift for the duration of *documenta 14* in Kassel. The act of giving that is implied in this approach by *documenta 14* could easily turn into a patronizing attitude. This becomes even more clear in *documenta 14*'s support to open the four floors of the museum in Athens, including those which had been open to the public since the museum's reconstruction in 2014. Although it might be also the first time for the Museum Fridericianum to host a collection from another museum in Europe during *documenta*, the question remains whether this approach goes beyond an intercultural dialogue and whether it helps decolonize the Western perspective of modernity, or if it is just reconstructing the canon of art in its definition of international, contemporary art for both museums on a joint basis and for the institution of *documenta* itself.¹²²

Another concept of collaboration was to involve artists who do not belong to the established art market. This can be said for most of the nearly two hundred artists who were invited to present their works in Kassel and Athens. These artists presented the same or different artworks to the exhibitions and could thus respond to one or both contexts, establishing contingent, possible, or new connections between different narratives. According to Fokidis, by "receiving artists from all over the world," *documenta 14* was not only "sharing the organisation, the implementation, and later, the presentation of the work" in both cities, but "has triggered the 'locals' of each city to think actively about issues of identity and relationships between economy and power structure rather than in terms of nation."¹²³ From the perspective of Athens, this became apparent in a specific manner. Here, the reversal of the relationship between guest

121 See Katerina Koskina, Fridericianum Wall Text, unpublished photography at *documenta 14* (Kassel, 2017) by Barbara Lutz.

122 In terms of an in-depth analysis of the exhibition, this question should also be asked in relation to the visual realization of the exhibition and the design of its display.

123 Fokidis, "Learning from Athens," 5.

and host remained quite ambivalent. The questions that emerged first concerned the possibility for such a hierarchically structured and financially powerful institution to come to Athens with the aim to provide concrete assistance to “those who lack the simplest means”—to return to the initially mentioned claim of *documenta 14*—without running the risk of exoticizing or colonizing the city and its citizens, or exploiting their trauma for the institution’s own benefit. This concern, for example, became visible in two artworks—a poster and a work of graffiti—critical of *documenta 14* that were on the walls at the premises of the Athens School of Fine Arts. One criticized the kind of capitalistic gesture inherent in the financial support of *documenta 14* while at the same time misstating the amount of the budget (Fig. 2).¹²⁴

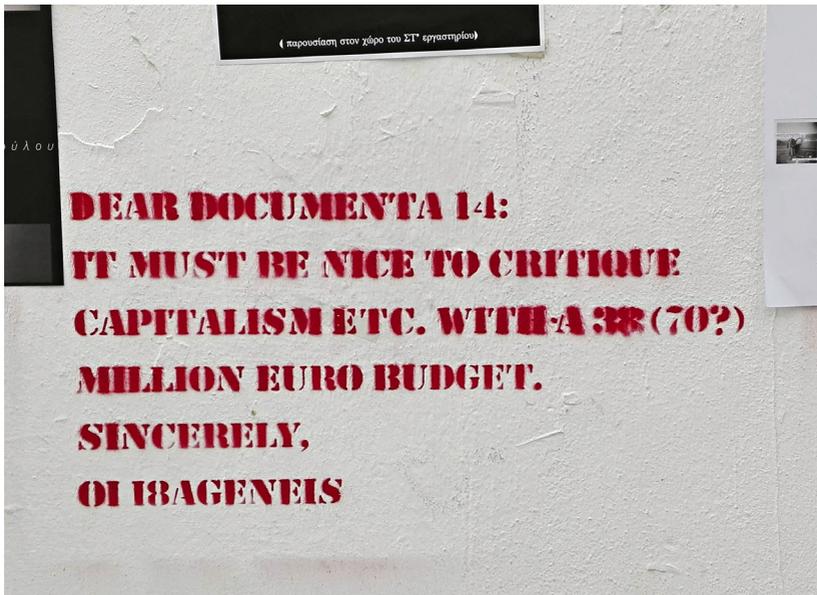


Fig. 2: Graffiti at the premises of the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA), 2017. Photo: Barbara Lutz.

The other excoriated the hierarchical structures of the *documenta* institution by portraying a decapitated depiction of the owl with a turned head adopted

¹²⁴ Each *documenta* is funded by the City of Kassel and the State of Hesse with 14 million euro, and by the German Federal Cultural Foundation with 4.5 million euro. The remaining portion of the budget has to be generated by each *documenta* itself through the exhibition (e.g., tickets, catalogues, merchandising products, and sponsors), brings the total up to 37 million euro. In Athens, *documenta 14* was additionally supported by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and the Goethe Institute.

as a symbol by *documenta 14*, due to its status as the traditional symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and learning, and mythological patron of the Greek capital. This poster, with its rolling head, can be interpreted as harshly questioning the claim “Learning from Athens” (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the art scene of Athens was split on the matter. While many local artists who were not included in *documenta 14* complained that *documenta 14* did not care for the reality in Athens or its residents but was, first and foremost, perceived as an event for tourists, local gallerists and curators welcomed the international attention for the local art scene and presented alternative concepts or projects,¹²⁵ thus also offering a platform for artists who were not invited to take part in *documenta 14*.

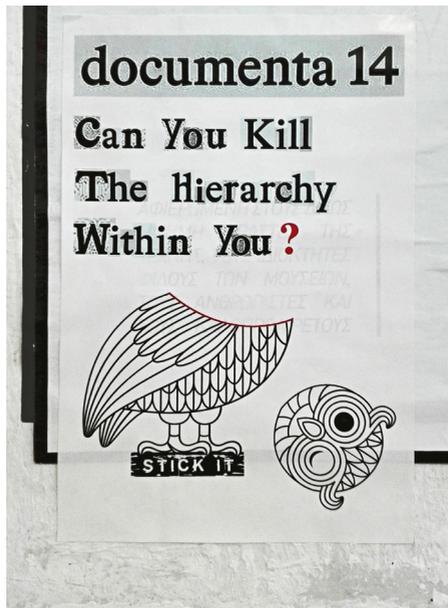


Fig. 3: Poster at the premises of the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA), 2017.
Photo: Barbara Lutz.

125 One of those projects was the 6th Athens Biennale (2017–2018), which was titled “Waiting for the Barbarians.” With reference to *documenta 14*, it critically reflected on questions like, “Will there ever be any ‘Learning from Athens’? What do words such as ‘education,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘queer,’ ‘north,’ ‘south,’ ‘indigenous’ signify in contemporary cultural debates? Are we witnessing the coming of the Barbarians, or the taming of the Barbarian?” However, since the Barbarian was neither considered to be “the ominous Other, the refugee, the migrant, the Muslim, nor [...] the ‘northern colonialist,’” here, the Barbarian was supposed to be “closer than ever.” According to this, the 6th Athens Biennale did not consider itself a host, but “invite[d] the Barbarians in.” “6th Athens Biennale 2017–2018,” Athens Biennale, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://athensbiennale.org/barbarians/>.

The Greek anthropologist Elpida Rikou Ελπίδα Ρίκου articulates another critique of *documenta 14*'s presence in Athens.¹²⁶ She problematizes the legacy of *documenta* in adopting “a discourse of the oppressed other, of the refugee, of the trans subject, or of the marginalized indigenous,” while “at the same time, *documenta* is a powerful institution that comes to a city in crisis.” Taking into account this kind of relationship, she compares it to the situation when “activists acquire an important role in an important institution,” while their discourse changes the context and creates other effects. In this respect, she calls on every art production to consider “the relationship between grassroots projects and the institutions that adopt the same language.”¹²⁷ While, from a transcultural perspective, the selection of artists, their site-specific work, and their multi- and trans-local ways of presentation can be acknowledged as a step beyond the master program of the Western art canon, from a post- or decolonial point of view, the institution does not seem to have reflected on its own position of superiority—be it culturally or economically—and has proved to be successful mainly in connection with comparable institutions in the cultural and educational sector.¹²⁸

In order to truly experience the exhibition venues and to learn from *documenta 14*, visitors were faced with its geographical extension, and thus with the financial and logistical challenges of visiting both cities. As it was almost impossible, or not the aim of *documenta* at all, to attend all venues during a stay in one of the cities,¹²⁹ visitors were not only invited but expected to select a few locations or drop in randomly. In this way, individuals were encouraged to find their own route through the urban infrastructure, thereby getting the opportunity to deeply involve themselves in the matrix of the respective city and its people, or at least gaining a better understanding of (their capacity to involve) themselves.

126 Together with anthropologist Eleana Yalouri Ελεάνα Γιαλούρη from the department of social anthropology of Panteion University, Rikou is one of the coordinators of the research project “Learning from Documenta,” that has been investigating *documenta 14*'s impact on Athens since its curatorial team first arrived in the city in 2015.

127 Risa Puelo, “The Messy Politics of Documenta’s Arrival in Athens,” *Hyperallergic* (April 10, 2017), accessed April 12, 2019, https://hyperallergic.com/371252/the-messy-politics-of-documentas-arrival-in-athens/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=The.

128 In Athens, institutional partners were, for example, national museums, theaters and festivals, libraries, universities, foundations, or research centers. See Latimer and Szymczyk, *The documenta 14 Reader*, 680.

129 As stated in *documenta 14*'s newsletter on September 19, 2017, during the one hundred days of *documenta 14* in Kassel 891,500 people visited the exhibition venues, the events, and works in public space, while the exhibition venues of *documenta 14* in Athens were visited over 339,000 times. See “Newsletter Archive,” *documenta 14 Newsletter*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/press-materials>.

In this context, “aneducation” invited “the visiting public to engage with contemporary artistic practices and to leave traces in Athens and Kassel.” It provided a public program which focused on learning as a process that engages one’s body and senses in an active way.¹³⁰ One of the activities that exhibition visitors in Kassel and Athens could attend, for example, was a walk in a group with one of the nearly two hundred members of the *documenta 14* Chorus, who took their point of departure from the encounter between different “voices” of different people, with the aim of learning from each other’s contexts in relation to art, artists, and the public. In this respect, the program did not refer to usual “dichotomies,” such as “knowing and not knowing, sense and nonsense, significance or insignificance.” Instead, it was rather pointing to the “absence of grand narratives” and approaching “the project of working and learning together through a reorientation guided by shadows and echoes.”¹³¹

Although this process of art mediation could also be experienced as a disillusion for visitors hungry for factual, easily accessible knowledge, it was in line with the curators’ claim of “learning from” as a “working process that forms multiple questions rather than concrete answers,” as Fokidis points out with the intention of “a creative and necessary confusion.”¹³² By adopting this approach, participating in *documenta 14* could be an “unsettling experience,” as it is termed in postcolonial pedagogy in order to question what remains uncontested in educational and cultural machinery. This kind of experience should make us realize how we are inevitably intertwined in specific histories, social settings, and cultural conditions that let us (re)produce difference, because “[o]nly then does unlearning become a means to imagine non-dominant futures.”¹³³

Closing thoughts

Almost two years after *documenta 14* finished, the question remains whether its various forms of collaboration turned out to be anti-authoritarian and thereby have actually effected transformation and ensured equality for the various positions, such as those of the participating institutions, artists, curators, visitors, and the many other actors in and beyond Kassel and

130 As the education program for *documenta 14*, aneducation adopted methodologies and approaches that were based on the work and understanding of different artists, architectural practitioners, thinkers, or educators, such as Annemarie and Lucius Burckhardt, Lina Bo Bardi, Oscar and Zofia Hansen, and Ulises Carrión, who lived and worked mainly in the twentieth century.

131 “About,” *documenta 14 Public Education*, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/>.

132 Fokidis, “Learning from Athens,” 4.

133 Dhawan and Castro Varela, “Breaking the Rules. Education and Post-colonialism,” 329.

Athens on a cultural level. Another question is whether and in what way the high demands of the curatorial concept could generally meet the educational claim of the postcolonial approach to exhibiting and mediating art in a global context, and could also be of value for *documenta 14*'s successors. In order to overcome the shortcomings of intercultural dialogue in the light of current realities, the process of learning *with* instead of *from* others could have been the next reasonable step to reduce or even dismantle hierarchies and overcome binaries from a transcultural perspective. Thus, in addressing principal aspects of postcolonial pedagogy in the global intertwinings of art today, many of *documenta 14*'s initiated collaborations seem to reveal an international exchange for the benefit of some powerful institutions. In this way, *documenta 14* only appears as a powerful catalyst for the image of the institution in the global context of art with reference to Athens, or respectively to a European hub of key cultural importance.