



PAVILIONING MANCHESTER: BOUNDARIES OF THE LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL AT THE ASIA TRIENNIAL

Beccy Kennedy

Responding specifically to the Asia Triennial Manchester (established in 2008), this article locates the triennial's title theme of 'Asia' within the historical and cultural locale of the city of Manchester, and considers the conceptualisation of categories such as exhibition, festival, pavilion, city and continent, and divisions of 'east' and 'west' within this cultural landscape. It offers some alternative approaches to the presentation of so-called global artworks in the local spaces of galleries and pavilions, evaluating the international tri/biennial in relation to market forces and notions of nationhood and authorship. Two case studies – the Asia Triennial Manchester of 2008 and 2011 – highlight processes of categorisation and the difficulties these present for participating artists, explored from the perspective of the author's own involvement as an academic and curator. The article compares approaches taken by curators at other such art events in Istanbul, Gwangju and Singapore, in order to interrogate the place of such large scale festivals within global cities, and to consider how to represent art from different nations, with or without using pavilions. Finally, suggestions are made as to how this background of analysis may assist in envisioning the potential creative format for Asia Triennial Manchester 2014.

Key Words: pavilion, biennial, global, local, space, city, identity, boundaries, periphery.

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Abstract

Responding specifically to the Asia Triennial Manchester (established in 2008), this article locates the triennial's title theme of 'Asia' within the historical and cultural locale of the city of Manchester, and considers the conceptualisation of categories such as exhibition, festival, pavilion, city and continent, and divisions of 'east' and 'west' within this cultural landscape. It offers some alternative approaches to the presentation of so-called global artworks in the local spaces of galleries and pavilions, evaluating the international triennial in relation to market forces and notions of nationhood and authorship. Two case studies – the Asia Triennial Manchester of 2008 and 2011 – highlight processes of categorisation and the difficulties these present for participating artists, explored from the perspective of the author's own involvement as an academic and curator. The article compares approaches taken by curators at other such art events in Istanbul, Gwangju and Singapore, in order to interrogate the place of such large scale festivals within global cities, and to consider how to represent art from different nations, with or without using pavilions. Finally, suggestions are made as to how this background of analysis may assist in envisioning the potential creative format for Asia Triennial Manchester 2014.

Introduction

It is not always clear what a biennial is for. Aside from questions of whether the artworks at biennials are there to enhance public engagement with the arts, or to showcase the talents of curators and artists, there is the more specific issue of what each biennial offers within a wider global pattern of frequently staged art festivals on an increasingly large and elaborate scale. There is the scope to stop and ask what each biennial does for and of itself, in an otherwise global system of deferred biennials. In relation to the (arguably, associated) Lacanian and Derridean implications of 'the lack' (*le manqué*) (1961) and of *différance* (1968), the biennial can be encapsulated by such notions of deferred desires and differences. The biennial – a

reoccurring phenomenon – is never over as it either plods on regardless from edition to edition – or discontinues, making way for another to crop up somewhere else on the planet, creating both a display of differentiation and a throwaway deferral of cultural provisioning. To reflect on a defunct biennial seems lacking, its meaning 'deferred' because by the time one tries to decode its essence, it is in the past: no longer entertained as a cultural experience and devoid of its characteristic of self-contingency. It is perhaps more useful for biennial studies to focus on those biennials which are current, utilising the time available within the intersection of a past and a future edition and considering the one feature which does make each biennial different – their location. However, art biennials tend to be similar in their self-positioning as simultaneously global and local cultural affairs, as synchronically 'glocal,' by appealing ideologically (though not necessarily politically) to a globalised audience and to globalised, neoliberal (art) market demands, whilst locating themselves physically to a single locale. Seen in this way, we may ask, if each event is effectively global, yet located within a specific locale, how is one locale different or more appealing than another?

The same question may be posed of the space of the urban art gallery, of how one cultural institution in a given city claims to offer to relate distinctively to



Figure 9.1: Photograph of poster installation for Taipei Biennial 2008 by Jun Yang, installed at 'Institution for the Future,' exhibition at Chinese Arts Centre for Asia Triennial Manchester 2011.

its public, potentially signalling elements of regional identity. For example, a gallery that is a 'white cube' and which stages contemporary exhibitions may differ from a smaller, independent and low-budget exhibition space, yet both offer contemporary displays that are roughly similar when compared to city galleries with Victorian roots and long established British or Dutch landscape collections. In the latter case, even though such galleries do not hold collections of works that are specific to the local region, they are not subject to the same pressures as a biennial programme when extending the promise to engage with the local. They are pressures that are ultimately about the authority of art festivals and their validity as art spaces, when compared to more established, institutionalised ones.

These predicaments for contexts of contemporary art are felt especially acutely outside the Northern metropolises with their traditions of public art collections and displays. Significant biennials have emerged over the last thirty years or so, that mark out novel territory for contemporary art and its international audiences, with the declared purpose of disconnecting from European museological traditions that emerged in the nineteenth century. In terms of visitor expectations of contemporary biennials, it is assumed that the Luanda Triennial in Angola, for example, is all about the locale of Luanda, as well as perhaps the nation of Angola, bringing to the fore its social, historical and cultural identities. The same seems true of the Venice Biennial in being about Venice, in the sense of underlining the importance of the city as a frequent and capacious host for dozens of national pavilions, Angola not least among them. But their circumstances set them apart. There is a general assumption that a triennial in Angola will figure the matter of local uniqueness differently from Venice, with the element of geography coming to shape displays designed to repay the interest of visitors travelling to a perceivably remote, even 'provincial' setting. For Venice, it is because the display is so 'mega' and momentous, so internationally embedded – and also so close to other attractions in Europe – that visitors will cross the globe to experience it. No matter then that the imperialist ontology of the national pavilions at Venice has become the focus of intense critical scrutiny: its footfall remains high as a tourist attraction.

The crux of the matter is that a biennial – as a creative industry – is often large enough to be visited in itself – unlike a single gallery, but it is also more one-dimensional than a city – specific in purpose, structure and *raison d'être*. It is a suspended tourist destination, a transitional art space and one which is both located and translocational; its creative vision may

be transnational but it is still tied physically to a nation. Visitors want a biennial in Australia to be different from one in Brazil because they believe the world is diverse and they are willing to pay to travel and experience it. Such diversity can be found at the national pavilions of Venice or at a triennial in Angola whose purpose is 'to reflect Angolan history', (on the Luanda Triennial see: Biennialfoundation.org), but the two festivals are barely interchangeable.

The growing attraction of the biennial as a phenomenon can be interpreted as significant for its successful branding. But with a large scale exhibition which is both international and reoccurring, its identity also rests on its creative vision and its thematic value, at least for those visitors who are not simply tourists but for those who visit biennials because they work in the arts, keep personal collections of art, or are leisured 'biennial fans'. The theme navigates what the biennial is for, whether it is to challenge boundaries of art's purpose and to encounter its potential as a mobilising political force – as in the case of the last Istanbul Biennial – or to celebrate notions of a city, nation or continent, such as those 'Asian' art biennials (for example, Art Asia Pacific in Australia) or the Havana Biennial with its goal to grant a platform to art of the 'Third World.' The theme and the branding of the biennial intersect in a way which is under scrutiny by the rest of the art world with each precarious new addition. It has to stand for something worthwhile and desirable but also for something unique; the rationale for visitors to travel anywhere other than to the Venice Biennial, with its eighty-odd national pavilions, in order to see international contemporary art. The specific theme of a biennial provides a proactive focus for the selection of artists, curators and artworks whilst encouraging a dialogue for their expanded field of analysis. Sometimes, however, the general title of a biennial and its bi-annual (or tri-annual) theme become blurred or interchangeable.

This article interrogates the theme of 'Asia' as a qualifier for the identity of the Asia Triennial Manchester (first staged in 2008), by orienting and 'disorienting' it in relation to this debate about the identities of art biennials. Biennials are notable for their continuing, rapid expansion around the world, a phenomenon referred to as biennialisation, and which is addressed here through the prism of first-hand experience of its impact in Manchester. The paper examines the triennial's overriding focus on the city of Manchester, suggesting that this aspect of the naming and staging of the triennial is rather less problematic and certainly more opportune than any reference to 'Asia'. Indeed, it is arguable, in light of the newer city-

focused, unofficial pavilions at the Venice Biennial – such as the Peckham Pavilion – this sort of emphasis on regional characteristics can be deemed constructive as a way of seeing cultural difference at biennials. In my comparison of the 2008 and 2011 instantiations of the Asia Triennial Manchester, I examine the nation-specificity of the first triennial, juxtaposed with the more collective ‘Asian’ approach of the second, suggesting that the former equates, problematically, to the national pavilion construct whilst the latter could be construed as mistreating ‘Asia’ as a nation. Within the case studies of the Asia Triennial Manchester, the practical and theoretical problems involved in the curating of such ‘global’ art events can be highlighted, and one can suggest more localised creative methods, which could work to counter some of the difficulties surrounding the triennial’s labelling and concomitant orientation.

The genesis of Asia Triennial Manchester: Protesting histories, re-orienting Asia

Manchester’s first art triennial – Asia Triennial Manchester – was launched in 2008, a project whose germination and subsequent support arose from discussions between Alnoor Mitha, director of the Manchester-based arts agency, Shisha (2001–12), and the artist, musician and academic, Professor John Hyatt based at Manchester Metropolitan University. The discussions reflected wider interests in Manchester’s local and global history as a dominant industrial city, whose former colonial endeavours had involved the monopolisation of raw materials (such as cotton and indigo) for trading on the growing world market and the large-scale exploitation of a labour force in the Indian sub-continent. The critical issues around that historical relationship between imperial Britain and India have frequently focused on Manchester. They were given symbolic momentum on the occasion of Gandhi’s visit to the Lancashire textile factories in 1931 while campaigning for Indian liberation. After 1945, during decolonisation, the movement of communities within the Commonwealth came to establish an Asian diaspora in Britain that has continued to impact on Manchester. At a local level, Manchester’s communities of Asian descent have long been integral to the city’s industries and social landscape, noticeable to visitors of the ‘curry mile’ in Rusholme or its China town. The arts organisation Shisha, under the terms of its public funding by the (then) North West Arts Board (see Mitha, 2007), aimed to make this presence more visible in the visual arts, pursuing a specific dual aim to develop the careers of artists of South Asian descent while drawing the participation of Asian British

communities to the field of contemporary art. A complement for this work may be found in the Chinese Arts Centre, the UK’s largest such organisation, as well as the development of new curricula and research focused on Asia in Manchester’s universities.

John Hyatt’s priority was to explore how Manchester’s global, industrial history interconnected with parts of Asia, and what correlations may be drawn between the art histories of these locations and deeper colonial legacies of empire and trade. It was agreed that the first triennial, in 2008, would focus on the theme of ‘protest’ because this could be mapped both locally and globally onto instances of cultural or artistic resistance in relation to forms of modern, industrial or post-industrial urban structures. Additionally, Hyatt addressed the word in terms of its etymological construction, suggesting that the two syllables can be divided to form two interrelated words: pro and test, referring to test or testing and experimentation. Thus, protest, in this sense, came to mean *for experimentation*, connecting the theme appropriately, again, to a more abstract one about cultural innovation.

Further, as the discussions around the Asia Triennial took off, among curators and arts organisers, the localisation of the term protest became more entrenched, used to frame Manchester as a locus of both invention and subversion. It seemed to highlight two apparently oppositional faces of the city: its capacity for being productive materially and technologically, while rebellious and iconoclastic – whether in the associations around ‘Madchester’ and its cultural creativity (the independent popular music scene of the last century), or the organised struggles of working people in the city, its suffragists and Chartists, and the events of the 1819 anti-poverty protests which became known historically as the Peterloo Massacre (see <http://www.peterloomassacre.org> for a dedicated website).

A systematic account of these strands of meaning was given at Asia Triennial Manchester 2008’s accompanying symposium, ‘Protest: reflections and revolutions’ (April 2008), attended widely by the festival’s artists and curators, as well as academics Gilane Tawadros, Leon Wainwright and Jacques Rangasamy. The theme of protest was interrogated at length with regard to issues of place and identity. The underlying discussion on Asian art and in relation to the triennial’s theme, was a sense that protest may be explored through cultural politics in the field of fine art, highlighting postcolonial and other oppositional practices in which artists from Asia have claimed equal status to their counterparts in the former metropolitan centres of the ‘global North’. Moreover, these debates

themselves came under scrutiny for their apparent endorsement of the dichotomous basis for all such east and west divisions and attempts to describe their inequalities – a renegotiation of the terms of the festival that served to underscore the value of its founding theme.

This mode of public discussion continued in a dedicated space at the second Triennial in October 2011. A curatorial 'laboratory' was set up for artists, curators and academics who were invited to an informal exchange, sharing their perceptions of the festival through break-out groups and round-circle discussion. Questions were asked about the overall purpose and usefulness of the chosen theme of the Triennial – which was 'time and generation' for the 2011 edition - as well as the Asia label itself, as well as some of the tactics that had been used to market triennial events. Artists from parts of East Asia – namely Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam – who had contributed to the exhibition *Institution for the Future* at the Chinese Art Centre (Figure 9.1), questioned the wisdom of including at the ATMI opening event a performance of live dance by Devika Mao at the John Rylands library. For them, the opening ceremony was crucial for introducing the Triennial event effectively and encapsulating its theme. Mao's performance, however, was a classical Indian dance ceremony, in line with the venue's exhibition *Thought Mala*. A complaint emerged that the dance itself was hardly representative of the festival as a whole, with its emphasis on contemporary visual art practice and its critical problematizing of expectations surrounding art in and of Asia, rather than classicism or indeed forms of dance. The presentation tempted a latter-day 'orientalism', it was argued, and frustrated the larger efforts of curators and artists who contributed to a festival that they hoped would signal a deliberate departure from pan-Asian spectacle and neo-primitivist taste. Although this led to articulations about the need to continually reaffirm the Triennial's more progressive foundations, there was also a sense of scepticism that a festival focused so firmly on Asia would be able to overcome the reactionary ways in which race, nationality and ethnicity has been represented in the arts in British museums. Issues, here, surrounding misrepresentation and pigeonholing were outlined in addition to concerns surrounding notions of 'inclusivity' in terms of the 'proportionality' of BME identities in the Britain – a criticised perspective which was formerly endorsed by the Thatcher government (Dewdney et al, 2013, p.201). In terms of the latter perspective, Asia Triennial Manchester came at these issues from a different place. Shisha formed during the time of the New Labour government and in response

to the 'No Difference! No Future!' report commissioned by the aforementioned North West Arts Board (NWAB) in 1998 (Mitha, 2007, AAA). The report encouraged the diversification of cultural practices in mainstream museums through the establishment of smaller, vanguard agencies – such as Shisha – which could advise and direct tailored programmes of events focusing on the representation of BME identities. Indeed, this intention was realised within the ATM programme as Manchester galleries responded to Shisha's directorship and their focus on South Asian art.

Some of the academics present at the discussion, however, contended that a triennial cannot or should not define itself by the provenance of its artworks, and that the really powerful works would override expectations and stereotypes about the national or continental labelling that was involved in the Triennial programme, pointing perhaps to more differentiated identities. It was conceded that nonetheless the discomfort that many participating artists had felt about being associated with one another under the 'Asia' label, spoke directly to their own positions and identifications. It was further argued that aside from questions of a perceivable latter-day orientalism there are also more practical, etymological problems with these systems of categorization. The term 'Asia' is reductionist to the point where, after even the lightest of debriefings, it hardly works as a qualifier for a festival of artworks. There are over fifty countries in Asia, spanning from Afghanistan to Yemen, including all predominant organised religions, touching multiple seas, embodying countless trade routes and carrying myriad histories of empire. Running synchronically, yet somewhat dialectically in relation to such brute facts, are interpretations of what Asia constitutes as an imagined concept, or as a theme. From the perspective of a European culture maker, Asia represents something significant in that it is an alternative to Europe – which itself is a multiplex concept or site – but whose own convolution is not questioned because it is the beholder of the discourse. The continued mega presence of the Venice Biennial as a must-see art event, which scatters national pavilions of non-Western art throughout its city, does little to disrupt the core/periphery discourse as the pavilions were founded on late nineteenth century colonial fascinations for the anthropological exposition and the world fair. What is significant is the lack of reflexivity concerning what constitutes the 'self'. If a city in Europe is to hold a triennial of art from Asia, then where or what is Europe and who is Europe to make this decision? Venice disregards the potential 'official' status of its non-nation specific pavilions, such as the Internet Pavilion, the

Roma Pavilion and the Peckham Pavilion (the Palestine Pavilion of 2013 is also contentious here) and this does not help to appease its imperialistic 'cause'. Fresher, de-centred ways of representing art from different nations can perhaps be found in smaller, low-cost biennials which do not parade national pavilions.

To pavilion or not to pavilion? Selecting nations, displaying nations

The Asia Triennial Manchester 2008 worked on a smaller scale than its second manifestation in 2011, involving fewer venues and with fewer Asian countries 'covered'. As a pioneering Manchester arts event, the focus for this first instalment seemed to approach and embrace the notion of Asia literally, as a continent containing countries which would be worthwhile to 'explore' in a specifically Mancunian setting. Each gallery involved in the triennial cohort decided at an early stage to select artists from an Asian nation, agreeing that different nations should be covered by each space. This created what could critically be described as a pick-'n'-mix of Asian national exhibitions displaying across Manchester's galleries. As someone who was party to early discussions of the organisation of Asia Triennial Manchester, I do not recall the possibility of pavilions being entertained to represent different Asian nations. By pavilion I apply the etymological origins of the term and its subsequent cultural usage to refer to a kind of free standing structure – tent-like or more solid – with the (usually temporary) purpose of containing and conveying desirable aspects of culture, in this case, artworks. ATM's lack of consideration for the use of pavilions could be due to the relatively low gross budget of the triennial and its disassociation as a brand from more traditional and/or jumbo style biennials. More positively, there may have been a perception that by virtue of having a small-scale triennial in Britain committed to representing Asia, the Manchester Asia triennial became a pavilion in itself; a non-aligned festival, positioned ambiguously in relation to larger biennials in Europe (not least nearby Liverpool), that forged an independent reputation by looking to Asia. Much of the Triennial's self-perception rested on this matter of scale and geography. The prospect of installing a range of discrete pavilions in Manchester for the purpose of representing Asian nations was regarded dimly: Asia seemed both a definable context in itself and yet more than enough to reckon with for a regional city outside London. Finally, the pavilions format seemed obtuse since curators felt able to persuade the Triennial's audiences of the purpose for a critical, post-colonial reading of Asia as a nation. The danger is that some audiences may begin to *just view Asia as a nation*

through the Asia Triennial format *because* of the lack of signalling towards different nations.

However, despite the absence of self-defined national pavilions, the resulting segregation of participating artists by country at the Asia Triennial Manchester in 2008 was nonetheless, in effect, a reiteration of the arrangement of pavilions in a more established art festival. This is testament to the influence of the pavilions format, but it also suggests that the reformulation of that pattern through the Asia Triennial Manchester in 2011 provided a critical opportunity to review and problematise the frequent pattern in the larger biennials of staging national pavilions. It showed up what must come to stand as the serious failings of pavilion structured art festivals in general. Firstly, that they determine a physical sense of fragmentation and disconnectedness which ciphers an aura of incoherency and non-communication between nations as global actors. This was felt in Manchester when the first ATM struggled to overcome the disjointedness between partner galleries in the city and their difficulties of marshalling their curatorial and institutional priorities other than through a formal directorial role which no-one individual was prepared to assume, perhaps for fear of forming a hierarchical organisational structure. Secondly, by designating a particular space to the artworks of a particular nation, a scattering of pavilions seems to connote nation-ness, implying that each nation offers a distinct form of art which is so unique and differentiated from the next that it merits exposition or even exploitation. This was a scene of 'culturalism' that the Asia Triennial Manchester negotiated, such as in the expectation that there would be discernible 'Indian' qualities as compared to 'Chinese' or 'Mongolian' ones that translated into different media or examples of national cultural 'character' – a reiteration of Orientalism under local conditions and pressures for curatorial 'coherence'. Ultimately, it was felt in Manchester that such conventions for organising international artworks fail to explore contemporaneity or fluidity within exhibitory practices and models of curating, even within the framework of a themed art festival. Such unease suggests that the closer a given art biennial becomes to the methods of organisation typified in Venice's pavilion model, the more culturally and critically unreceptive they may seem.

Accordingly, at the first Asia Triennial Manchester, one of the display spaces – Castlefield Gallery – broke the nation-space mould, inviting artist groups from Singapore and Taiwan (the groups known as *Channel_A* and *p-10*) into their exhibition space and programme. Not only did these artists collaborate on the staging

of several mini symposia (one of which was open to the public), within these ‘happenings’ the focus was an active discussion of the global/local issue, using paper and bamboo scaffolding to write down ideas, thus forming physical artworks within the gallery and generating a continuous element of socially engaged discourse for the course of the exhibition. Within this format, artists, curators and members of the public were able to respond to the triennial’s positioning – and their own location - in the context of globalisation and glocalisation. The artworks and discussions worked to contest subtly and positively the nation per venue model. In other ways, the national representation model was circumvented altogether. There was some regionally focused rhetoric surrounding some of the Asian nations represented at specific sites. Shisha – as an agency for South Asian art – were always keen to work with artists from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Shisha and Whitworth Art Gallery chose to work with Asian artists whom they felt to be connected with the theme of protest, or whose art would work effectively and strategically in the gallery or community spaces. Examples of this include Rashid Rana’s site specific work at Rusholme job centre and Subodh Gupta’s *27 Light Years* (Figure 9.2), both of which were responses to the sights, sounds and people of the local area, largely of South Asian backgrounds. Gupta’s large, shiny, rocket shaped sculpture was comprised of the kind of metal kitchenware you would find in a contemporary Asian British-run restaurant, whilst the positioning of the installation outside the gallery literally pointed the way towards Rusholme – the head of the rocket suggested it would fly in that direction. This part of the triennial was called the Rusholme Project and served to launch the event in 2007, coinciding with the then better-known Manchester International Festival. It drew on the theme of Asia without fetishism. There was no suggestion here of a distinct, oriental Other; it explored the relationship between Asia and Manchester as a cohesive entity, signalling forms of glocalisation within the region.

With the second triennial, the notion of Asia – and to some extent its application to a nation – was treated less literally as an automatic qualifier for the presence of an artwork for each corresponding venue. This may have been, in part, because with the greater number of venues involved there were fewer concerns of Asian national replication and so the focus moved away from the representation of artists from Asian nations to the representation of artists per se. Additionally, it would seem that discussions resulting from the curatorial laboratories that took place in 2010 and early 2011, as well as other feedback from

audience monitoring forms per venue, had changed the perspectives and prerogatives of the venues’ curators concerning how to broach the triennial’s 2011 brief. Considerations of nationhood and contestations of the linguistic and geographical – as well, at times, as geopolitical – divisions of the globe into continents were not taken for granted by curators. In some cases the dynamics of these concerns were explored within the exhibitions themselves and in discussion with the artists, as, for example, at the Chinese Arts Centre, Castlefield Gallery and Madlab shows which explored issues of immigration (Figure 9.3), the biennial project (Figure 9.1) or divided territory and exile (Figure 9.4). In other cases, artworks were less political and were identified discreetly – or not – with artists from Asian nations. The variety and quality of the planned installations (typically site-specific), and the sorts of



Figure 9.2: Photograph of sculpture at Whitworth Art Gallery by Subodh Gupta, ‘27 Light Years’, for Asia Triennial 2008.



Figure 9.3: Photograph of ticket machine in entrance to Castlefield Exhibition – ‘Life in the UK’, part of Asia Triennial Manchester 2011.

unusual venues to be used (including the observatory complex at Jodrell Bank and Manchester Cathedral), as well, perhaps, as the collaborations among curators that emerged, were almost enough to somewhat distract – or even seduce – audiences from earlier questions about Asia and triennial's identity altogether. Arguably, the centrality of the Triennial's theme became secondary to the artistic content, though this did not necessarily redress the problem.

The Asia Triennial that finally emerged in Manchester in 2011 was fascinating for showing that an art festival organised by way of pavilions is most appealing when contingent on the localisation that can be made of that format. In Manchester, it was a pattern that was tried and found to be lacking, but could not be entirely rejected: without a nationally focused art festival echoing the use of pavilions in other international expositions, the public chose to focus on ideas about the Asian-ness of the event's artworks which would risk the generalisation of national identities under the heading of a single, continental identity. Some



Figure 9.4: Photograph of digital installation by Seo Hyo Jung, 'Two Koreas by Word and Image,' exhibition at Madlab for Asia Triennial Manchester 2011.

creative yet nuanced responses had then to be found in order to effectively 'cover-up' the Asian dimension since it could not be conveyed openly also without the prospect of associated stereotypes. This path of development is no doubt distinctive and grounded in the sort of historical and institutional circumstances that I have been describing for Manchester. If similar difficulties have affected Venice in its recent past, they have yet to break the surface and become apparent in a change to its established routine. Instead, criticisms have remained external to its unmatched structure. Underwritten by suppositions of nation-ness, it has yet to take away its pavilions and opt to display works from international artists together in large exhibition spaces – as at the recent Liverpool or Gwangju Biennials, which have escaped criticism about any such colonial categorisation.

The Asia Triennial Manchester evidently has little of these options available to it; it may always be saddled with the role of exploring and negotiating the matter of how to define art in and of Asia, since the weighty matter of categorisation will persist for as long as it keeps its name. If it is to maintain that focus on art and Asia then simultaneously there is a need to come to terms more fully with what is involved in presenting and encountering art *in* Manchester, in a more deliberate aim at understanding the relationship between the two. Rather than designating its art spaces to Asian nations – whether labelled as pavilions or galleries – or by otherwise clouding artists' national identities, the festival seems to be at a stage of needing to critically articulate its locality – Manchester – making this exterior to its public offer. As a set of complex practices which I have only sketched here, the localisation of the festival is constitutive to its cultural value and in defining its connections to Asia. The question now is how may the Asia Triennial Manchester come to reckon with the contradictions faced when standing as a pavilion of sorts in a world of biennials?

Towards ATMI 4: Disorienting divisions and flexing reflexivity

In some ways, the ontologically heterogeneous nature of the art biennial – or festival - and its capacity for scattered micro cultural governance provides the scope for representations of nations within it to be fluid and flexible. However, if a biennial's prime concern is to generate touristic revenue for its host city, then it may not want to advocate the inclusion of artists who challenge preconceptions of what art is or of how it relates to perceptions of local and global identities. As discussed above, Shisha encouraged curators and artists to explore issues of national and continental identity

– although particularly in the second Asia Triennial Manchester, 2011. At the same time, Shisha's original aims were not opposed to showcasing Manchester as an international cultural city, whose own Asian history could work to 'celebrate and create high-profile and accessible representations of Asian culture', whilst describing Manchester as 'one of the UK's largest thriving multi-cultural communities' (Shisha, 2006). In this way, the triennial could claim multiple grounds for its identity, including its position already as a global city but also its relevance to the theme of Asia in a glocal community sense.

Even so, the 'Asian' communities in Greater Manchester, many of which consist of at least second-generation migrants, do not necessarily identify themselves as Asian, nor crave the spectacle of artworks which seek to explore or convey ancestral connections. Also, often, people do yearn to see art which is in some way different to their own, everyday experiences. One solution to the complexity of countering the balance between local and global interpretations of 'Asia' is to provide the opportunity for local artists with a connection to Asia – ancestral or otherwise – to partake in the triennial. This was raised by students at a session on Asian Diasporas on the course 'An Introduction to Asian Art,' which was held at Cornerhouse in association with the Asia Triennial 2008. It would seem that if an art biennial is to be focused thematically on the subject of Asia, then it is constructive to address the concept of Asia in a way which is broad and intercultural, whilst embracing a position of self-awareness or activist reflexivity which can also be transferred in terms of the associated artistic endeavours. It means incorporating artists from Asian diasporas who want to be involved, whether they categorically refer to themselves as Asian diasporic or not. It also means including site specific artworks, such as those in The Rusholme Project, which explore a sense of the glocal and not just in terms of the locale's global, industrial history as a city but also in relation to the wider impact of this glocal character today - including other forms of global movement in a post-colonial world. Whilst both editions of the Asia Triennial Manchester have been open to interpretations of what Asia might constitute as a theme, the second triennial purposefully created the space for a dialogue concerning the difficulties and possibilities for a British festival of Asian art.

At the curatorial laboratory, it was suggested that the title of the triennial should also be open to negotiation. The answer to Asia Triennial Manchester's problematic *Asianism* could be to encourage participation in the event from all continents. However,

the theme of the triennial would then no longer be geographically or ethnically engaged and the internationalised identity of the event would simply be implicit. The name would need to change – perhaps just to the Manchester Triennial – and the themes which are specific to each edition would navigate and anchor the direction of the curatorship. This would, of course, involve a re-branding and re-marketing of the event and there would be a danger that it would lose its legacy. Another option is to keep the title of the festival as the Asia Triennial Manchester, but to reformulate the organisation and locatedness of the event, disorienting and reorienting the structure both from the bottom-up and the top down. This could involve encouraging the participation of co-organisers and co-curators who are themselves situated in parts of Asia as well, perhaps, as arranging an overall twinning with an Asian city whose organisers could then change the last part of the title to include the city's name. The two cities, one European and one Asian, could then encourage a two way dialogue surrounding notions of city, state and continent in relation to cultural identities and the art world.

The accompanying events, such as symposiums, could also be held in multiple or dual locations, with the possibility of including tele-conferencing or the involvement of European and Asian speakers and publishers. In touristic terms, 'package deals,' could be arranged with – for example – sponsoring airline or travel agencies to encourage movement between the two cities, a little like the Singapore–Gwangju–Shanghai package offer in 2006. Whilst this would require organisation to take place on a larger (international) scale, it could also work to downsize and to broaden some parts of the administrative and decision making process. However, from a critical perspective, this could make the structure of the triennial even more like a post-Fordian, neoliberal production process for the 'operation' of what Pascal Gielen (2009) refers to as 'immaterial labour' (similar observations about the neoliberal stance of art biennials have been made by numerous critics, for example, Elkins and Valiavicharska, 2010). Drawing on both senses of the term immaterial in relation to the production of art, Gielen alludes to the decentralisation and dumbing down of the cultural cohort via the production processes of the art biennial, which also involves the presence of larger multinational corporations to provide economic feasibility to the project (such as the aforementioned travel agencies and airline companies.) This would not suit Manchester's – or the triennial's ethos and would only work to exchange narratives of neo-orientalism into neoliberalism.

One of Asia Triennial Manchester's strengths is the closeness and collaborative receptiveness of its cultural cohorts, including those artists and curators who have been involved and who are based outside of Manchester and Europe. The triennial is also receptive to change in a way, perhaps, that the historic Venice Biennial – and its entourage of national pavilions – is not. What would be impressive would be if – like the Istanbul biennial – Asia Triennial Manchester continues to reflect upon its public and ideological purpose whilst twinning with a city in Asia so that the debate concerning what Asia actually constitutes continues in a dialogue which is both reciprocal and expansive. In order to sustain the closeness of the triennial's character, the selected twin host in Asia could be a small urban or rural built environment which does not strive to be a 'global city,' but which values its own locale as a kind of micro-globe – a self-fulfilled pavilion but one which is also open to the endorsement of its facing canopies. Perhaps, moreover, this twin city should be one which – like the organisers in Manchester – does not judge success solely upon the price tag of its budget or its generated income for businesses. If the triennial wants to make a difference to public perceptions of art and culture, it needs to try not only to constructively break down the tired terminological divisions between global and local, east and west or centre and periphery, but also to address the growing awareness and unrest surrounding the concern that one per cent own the economic (and cultural) world and ninety nine per cent are subsumed by it. The biennial is not just subject to such globalised neoliberalism, it actively embodies it. All biennial locales may be glocales but that does not mean that they cannot make it their mission to counter globalisation on some level. Manchester's triennial should expand, not economically or even quantitatively, but ideologically and communicatively, working with reflexive or activist artists and curators and with themes like 'protest' so that it traverses some of the boundaries that previous biennials have created.

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