

# Part 1

## The Second Wave

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Figure 1.1 City view, Kassel, during documenta, with at left the Museum Fridericianum, documenta's main venue. Photograph Charles Green.

## 1

## 1972: The Rise of the Star-Curator

Exhibitions in this chapter: *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today) (1972, Kassel, Germany)

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (Questioning reality: Image worlds today), the landmark 1972 edition of *documenta*. Founded in 1955 by veteran art historian Arnold Bode and now held every five years in the German city of Kassel, *documenta* was from the outset intended to be a survey exhibition of modern art. Although it initially played a secondary role to a monster-sized flower show in this small provincial city – located closer to the East German border than to Cologne or Düsseldorf, West Germany's principal art centers – *documenta* is now widely regarded as the most important mega-exhibition of all.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion in *documenta* is an even surer marker of an artist's importance than selection into Venice, São Paulo, or any of the other biennials described in this book.

*documenta 5* was directed by the immensely influential Swiss curator Harald Szeemann. Even at the start of the 1970s, the charismatic Szeemann already had a reputation for adventurous, large-scale survey shows. This was largely the result of the notoriety and excitement surrounding his exhibition at the Bern Kunsthalle, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* (1969). *When Attitudes Become Form* was in part Szeemann's reaction to the conservative, abstract painting-dominated 4. *documenta* (1968), which was the last *documenta* to be directed by Bode. The civic controversy surrounding *When Attitudes Become Form* became a cause of his departure from the Bern

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Kunsthalle, the exhibition space of which he had been director and in and around which the controversial exhibition was held.<sup>2</sup> Extreme reactions from conservative municipal authorities and parochial local artists on the Kunsthalle board of management notwithstanding, *When Attitudes Become Form* signaled that a wide generational shift amongst artists into utterly nontraditional art forms had taken place. But as a now unemployed freelancer, Szeemann founded his own curatorial agency and immediately embarked on a furious agenda of equally unconventional exhibitions, in particular *Happenings & Fluxus* (1970), which he curated for the Cologne Kunstverein.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the documenta board in Kassel, deliberating about the next documenta, cleverly appointed the maverick Szeemann as its director. By 1970, then, he was already an auteur and an entrepreneur upon whose alternately idiosyncratic and prescient curatorial choices, and controversial display methods, much attention was inevitably focused. Szeemann was not yet the mega-star curator that he was to become by the 1990s, and much about his overwhelming directorial vision was controversial, for he was to now situate art within a wider field of visual culture and iconology, almost relegating artists to secondary importance. But “his” documenta was to immediately change the course of biennials, triennials, and other documentas, and of the ambition that their directors have for them.

His exhibition was a definitive statement, a work of art in itself. It was the precursor to what Maria Lind has called “the curatorial.”<sup>4</sup> According to her useful concept, works of art can be building blocks or signs pointing to a clear curatorial statement, a higher concept or, in this documenta’s case, to a phenomenological state: *documenta 5* was generously offering to guide viewers in their seeing of contemporary pictorial worlds.<sup>5</sup>

The backdrop to *documenta 5* must be sketched in: by the start of the 1970s, the liberalization (or as it is more usually called, the dematerialization) of artistic form was well underway. Equally important, contemporary art production was considerably more dispersed around the globe than is usually understood and this was not the result of the simple diffusion of influence from one or two centers of artistic production. Both liberalization and dispersal meant the rejection of American art critic Clement Greenberg’s media-centric, North Atlantic-dominated modernist narrative that culminated in abstract painting, then still influential but on the wane. It had dominated the first four documentas. Even so, the dispersal of innovation across the globe rather than its concentration in Western Europe and the American East Coast remained almost unacknowledged at *documenta 5*.

Los Angeles was as far afield geographically as Szeemann's choices went, even though he himself had already traveled much further afield.<sup>6</sup>

### Preparation for a Walk-Through Event Structure

In an early press statement released in May 1970, Szeemann proposed that *documenta 5* would be “a place for programmed events, as spaces of interaction, as a walk-through event structure with shifting centers of activity.”<sup>7</sup> *documenta*'s title was to be “The Hundred-Day Event.” Not unexpectedly and under considerable financial pressure, as planning for *documenta 5* progressed, Szeemann gradually retreated from this grand recapitulation of the anti-form and the appropriately unpredictable chaos of *Happenings & Fluxus* towards a far more choreographed, static exhibition design that could cleanly incorporate artist actions. Even putative protests, such as Daniel Buren's outdoor, signature-stripe, poster paste-ups, fitted neatly inside the exhibition and its anything-goes publication. Szeemann had not allocated each artist a simple, neatly demarcated space, but blurred the boundaries of each artist's contribution. Though Szeemann remembered that the sixty-nine artists in *Attitudes* “took over the institution,” by contrast *documenta 5* took over the art works. Sound spill, light spill, and the blurry-edged boundaries of installations and sight-lines were (and remain) a real challenge in large survey exhibitions of contemporary art.<sup>8</sup>

Szeemann had been appointed the General Secretary of *documenta 5*. The new job title reflected weighty expectations about the role. But each *documenta* director had thus far been like a United Nations Secretary General, embedded in a small bureaucracy but juggling for a pathway upon which great international expectation was focused, amidst more powerful players amongst whom were potent American art dealers and artists. This was, more or less, the Venice Biennale model. Szeemann, however, was gradually given wider latitude over the administration and the selection of the works. This turned out to be as much a rethinking of the way such exhibitions were administered as of what was selected. Szeemann quickly moved *documenta* to a different, much more director-focused managerial model. He ingenuously characterized this more presidential role as one that would allow for more transparency and experimentation during the organization of *documenta 5*: “I am convinced that, the more authority I have, the less I will have to play safe and be secretive during the preparations, and the more I will be able to be open on all sides.”<sup>9</sup> *documenta*'s previous committee

structures and voting systems all but disappeared by mid-1971, replaced by a small “Working Group,” consisting at its core of Szeemann as well as the documenta founder Arnold Bode, plus two very sympathetic writer-curators, Jean-Christophe Ammann and Bazon Brock. (Brock had been responsible for 4. *documenta*’s proposal for an eccentric Visitor’s School that, like the multi-media festival planned by Wolf Vostell, was cancelled before the opening, and shelved once again during *documenta* 5’s preparation.)<sup>10</sup> The four were supplemented by a list of freelance advisers and guests, including young Kasper König. Szeemann, as director, retained most power and responsibility. This was quite different from the more consultative committees of earlier documentas. Whilst the idea of a biennial as a project dominated by the sensibilities of a charismatic, independent director who does not have a permanent curatorial position in any institution is now so familiar as to seem normal, we should point out just how different this was from the organization of older biennials, including Venice. More unexpectedly, we should understand that later models of diffused curatorial responsibility that seemed so radical at the time and which we will examine later in this book – not least the first Asia-Pacific Triennial (1993) and the 2003 Venice Biennale a couple of decades after *documenta* 5 – represented a return to the past as much as a leap into a more collaborative future. But Szeemann’s autocratic auteurism did not mean that he was not interested in his exhibition’s reception nor in its impact: Szeemann’s network was wide, reflecting his internationalist perspective, restless travel in the lead-up to the opening, and the deep affection and profound admiration that he inspired. From the start, it was clear that this was a pioneering, landmark exhibition in which to be included was an accolade.

Szeemann was less interested in representing emerging art according to the artists’ and their promoters’ own terms for radically different new practices – conceptual art, arte povera, earth art, minimal art, or post-minimal art – and more concerned with evoking an immersive, “structured chaos,” identifying the works with “great intensity and freedom” and with the ecstatic liberation of the counter-culture.<sup>11</sup> He now replaced the already solidifying critical labels for contemporary art with his own thematic conceits, “Questioning Reality, Pictorial Worlds Today” (the exhibition’s subtitle) and “Individual Mythologies” (its widely publicized slogan), all of which were clearly announced in press releases and the literature distributed to the public at the exhibition. “Individual Mythologies” was a phrase borrowed from French artist Étienne Martin’s idea that his own sculptures represented a personal mythology understood by him alone; Szeemann had

staged an exhibition of Martin's *Demeures* (Dwellings) in 1963. With such concepts, Szeemann seemed on the one hand to stand back from art history and art theory, privileging the viewer's encounter with the artists' personal visions – their “individual mythologies” – above art critical mediation. On the other hand, the impression of immersion and freedom was actually the result of bypassing the artists' interpretive frameworks with his own elastic labels of individual mythologies and image worlds. Szeemann had veiled the artists' intentions. As Hans Ulrich Obrist observed, in the process he was formulating the concept of the curator as an *Austellungsmacher*, a maker of exhibitions.<sup>12</sup> Szeemann called himself an “inventor.”<sup>13</sup>

*documenta 5*'s title, *Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute*, was a clear allusion not just to nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel but also to the modish new discipline of semiotics (no matter that Szeemann disavowed any academic predilections in interviews or in the characteristically brief, two-page curatorial statement that opened the catalogue). The title was a development of the premise of Szeemann's previous exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form*. The curator was announcing that he would select works in order to trace a set of distinctions between reality, images, and art rather than simply survey the field of contemporary art or identify emerging trends. So, as contemporary critic Georg Jappe wrote before *documenta 5*'s opening, “For the first time *documenta* is not a judgement day, establishing world ratings, but a value-free, thematic exhibition.”<sup>14</sup> There would be three sections: firstly, according to the exhibition's media release, “The Reality of Representation” (which would include flags, postage stamps, and socialist realist posters); secondly, “The Reality of the Represented” (which would include Joseph Beuys and Bruce Nauman); and thirdly, “The Identity or Non-Identity of Representation and the Thing Represented” (which would include conceptual art, post-minimalism but also, confusingly, outsider art).<sup>15</sup> This was all, despite Szeemann's denials, a very dialectical and slightly belated, late-1960s mode of thinking. Indeed, Szeemann retrospectively claimed that “I wanted to trace a trajectory of mimesis, borrowing from Hegel's discussion about the reality of the image (*Abbildung*) versus the reality of the imaged (*Abgebildetes*).”<sup>16</sup> Szeemann was also, to be sure, reflecting many artists' interest at the time in phenomenological affect as well as their skepticism about ideologically driven, socially committed art that assumed the reality of what was depicted. Moreover, his title captured the skepticism, often mingled with nostalgia, about a realist or an activist view of the world that presumed that a depiction and that which is depicted are the same thing.<sup>17</sup> But 1972 was a late moment for





Figure 1.2 Cover of *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (*documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today*), exhibition catalogue, curator Harald Szeemann (Kassel: documenta, 1972). Courtesy documenta.

revolutionary praxis: artists and filmmakers had already been in a decade-long struggle to balance their desire to represent left-leaning politics (often embodied in collective authorship), but also to understand the politics of representation. 1972 was also the year that Jean-Luc Godard's two films, *Tout va bien* and *Letter to Jane*, appeared. Both encapsulate almost a decade during which the Swiss film director – along with a host of other film-makers – had already struggled for years to embody social commitment in a self-critical work of art. Szeemann's own approach was therefore surprisingly late to the game.

The thick book accompanying *documenta 5* looked like the packaging for office files appropriate to recording such a scientific-sounding investigation. This packaging, the crude-looking fonts and the grainy black and white were typical of many so-called exhibition catalogues of the time but, like them, the publication aspired to be far more than a simple exhibition catalogue. It was monumental in size and complexity, and included an almost unprecedented quantity of writings, floor plans, artist profiles, and lists. It marks the beginning of the phenomenon of the curator-as-editor as well



as the curator-as-star. It captured the exhibition's premise as effectively as any work in the show itself, exemplifying in its design the shift from the conventional, aesthetically pleasing art object to the documentation and indexing of quirky artistic process: Ed Ruscha's bright line of crawling ants meandered across the orange, plastic cover; the pseudo-corporate packaging and the trompe l'oeil cover embodied the idea of art as research and art as weird. Furthermore, *documenta 5*'s catalogue essays sought to do more than simply explain the works in the exhibition. Just as the publication looked like an instructional office folder, so the essays taken together represented a manual. Szeemann observed that, "the work of art can be experienced in various ways: as information for its connections, or as the way to a more concentrated statement."<sup>18</sup> The reader encountered ostensibly useful essays included to assist the visitor in navigating *documenta*. Among them were Hans Heinz Holz's essay on art as commodity; Seth Siegelaub's *The Artist's Reserved Rights Agreement*, which codified artists' rights to a reasonable share in the resale value of their work; and even an indictment of the exhibition itself, Robert Smithson's essay, "Cultural Confinement," which identified Szeemann with a prison warden whose cultural contribution was to position artists like chess-pieces across white cubes.<sup>19</sup> Smithson was one of a few invitees – the others were Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Fred Sandback – who chose to boycott *documenta 5* in order to register a protest against the curator's power and his apparent predilection to reframe or reform the artists' intentions, but even so Smithson was present, if only through his writing. "Cultural Confinement" is among the artist's most important essays and opens thus: "Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits."<sup>20</sup> Szeemann made it clear that this exhibition was a powerful enough concept that it would absorb anything, even the direct criticism and artist boycotts that gathered before the opening. A declaration of artist independence by Andre, Judd, Morris, Sandback, and Smithson, as well as Hans Haacke, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockburne, and Richard Serra, aimed directly at Szeemann, appeared in the June 1972 issue of *Artforum*. It began:

The undersigned affirm the following points, prompted primarily in response to *documenta 5*, but pertaining to all exhibition conditions. 1. It is the right of an artist to determine whether his art will be exhibited. It is the right of an artist to determine what and where he exhibits. 2. A work of art should not be exhibited in a classification without the artist's consent. 3. An artist must

have the right to do what he wants without censorship in the space allotted in the catalogue.<sup>21</sup>

Haacke, LeWitt, Le Va, Rockburne, and Serra did exhibit their works; the others withdrew or, as with Smithson, appeared only in the exhibition's monumental publication.

### **“Therapy Has Changed and No Longer Encourages Copious Art Production”**

When the exhibition opened in June 1972, it was clear that *documenta 5* was first of all, like *Attitudes*, a highly personal and at the same time deeply scholastic atlas of the late phase of dematerialized, conceptualist, and post-minimalist art from Europe and North America. Szeemann gathered a maze of different, eccentrically named sections under the rubric of Étienne Martin's two words, “Individual Mythologies,” explaining that the purpose of foregrounding the idea was to point to the subjective creation of myths through artists' creation of presentations and objects.<sup>22</sup> Joseph Beuys, along with his often-repeated pronouncement that everyone is an artist, was the perfect exemplar of this, and he was in fact very prominent with his 100-day action, *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum, 1972), as were Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Michael Asher, and Franz Erhard Walther, the latter with his alternately rolled and unrolled swathes of canvas.<sup>23</sup> These artists were turning rules and plans into something altogether more casual, process-oriented, and open-ended than the first generation of conceptual art a mere five years before: their work was often apparently provisional, like a diary instead of art. For instance, the sheer number and variety of exchanges between artist, assistants, and audience during the tenure of Beuys's *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* meant that everything that happened in his office space immediately became part of the archive of the work, a process memorialized by the massive quantity of highly accomplished documentation – both photographic and film – surrounding this and all Beuys's works. If artistic form seemed to be in complete flux, it was no surprise that a considerable quantity of the art within *documenta* was that of dematerialized art and of an emerging art of institutional critique –

for instance Michael Asher's *Environment* (1972), a claustrophobic, perceptually confounding room, half-painted in black and half in white. Of course, that self-consciously critical trajectory was by then clear and codified. Its antecedents were already obvious, not least through the reassessment of alternative modernist grand master Marcel Duchamp, whose vast importance came into focus only in the mid-1960s. His rediscovery had been confirmed by a major Tate retrospective in 1966, and was now signaled by his inclusion in *documenta 5*. But also echoing Duchamp, artists were making their own museums in disguise, now converting conceptualist art into curatorial projects. At the Neue Galerie, a sub-section of the exhibition was titled "Museums by Artists." Here, in Szeemann's words, "an increasing number of artists created their own museums as works of art," a tendency anointed by Duchamp who was represented by his miniaturized, editioned, self-curated retrospective, *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935–1941).<sup>24</sup> Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* (1965–1977) was a museum of found or sculpted scruffy objects, all loosely linked to cartoon character Mickey Mouse. It came with its own curator, Kasper König. Herbert Distel's *Museums of Drawers* (1970–1977) was a cabinet with identical-sized drawers divided into spaces containing 500 artists' works, an organization parodying, according to Szeemann, the depreciation of value in favor of standardization. Marcel Broodthaers presented the fictional "closing exhibition" of his soon-to-be-seminal *Musée d'art moderne, département des aigles* (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles, 1972). Ben Vautier's *Cupboard* (1972), Szeemann recalled, was stuffed with the "essence of all his fluxus actions as well as his written pictures as a reflection on the triviality and glory of life as an artist and on his signature of all aspects of everyday life."<sup>25</sup>

A critical and suspicious attitude towards the so-called "system" and to a similar degree the "art system" had defined a considerable portion of artistic practice in the 1960s to the extent that conceptualist and dematerialized art was usually, but over-easily and incuriously, identified with an anti-establishment, politically self-conscious rejection of the confinement and control of the museum. This is the impression of *documenta 5* that survived quite prominently. However, the quantity of art made by artists who did not conform to this anti-conformity – the photorealism, the collections of consumer culture, the outsider art – has been less frequently recalled, even though *documenta 5* featured a bewildering combination of more traditional ways of making art. It included a substantial representation of photorealist paintings (selected by Ammann) impressive for their

extraordinary hyperrealism, notably Swiss painter Franz Gertsch's gargantuan portrait of his louche hippy friends in Lucerne, *Medici* (1971) and the highly finished, glossy photorealism of Californian painter Robert Bechtle's '64 *Valiant* (1971). The presence of this contingent – so apparently unlike works like those of Richard Serra or Hans Haacke – bemused many critics, who could only see in them a “third-rate naturalism.”<sup>26</sup>

The exhibition's subtitle, *Image Worlds Today*, had insinuated that the vast field of visual culture, constituting world after world of disparate images, both high and low, would be inserted into the show. *documenta 5* contained plaster garden dwarves and gnomes, Coca-Cola trays, odd kitsch objects, consumer goods, art by psychiatric patients and outsider artists, advertising posters, comics, political propaganda, and science fiction illustrations in combinations that alternately recalled supermarket displays or cabinets of curiosities. This aestheticization of the objects and images of everyday life, as if they were high art, had been practiced by pop artists and pop art theorists for a decade or more. Contemporary critics correctly understood these inclusions as the recognition of “everyday sign systems,” in which art, for instance Jasper Johns' exemplary *Flag* (1958), and objects that were not “art” at all but cultural artifacts instead, such as the garden gnomes, were linked by their shared semiotic status.<sup>27</sup> Early 1970s artists and curators were fascinated by semiotics and structural anthropology; art became a sub-set of the far wider field of cultural signs. Already skeptical American critic Hilton Kramer thus described *documenta 5* as the “oddest assortment of objects, images, environments and, yes, even live human bodies, that has ever had to bear the burden of being considered an artistic event.”<sup>28</sup> He correctly understood that both objects and works of art were being exhibited as cultural artifacts rather than as “advanced art”; this choice was to be immediately contested by those advanced artists, as we shall see shortly. Veteran British critic (by then based in New York) Lawrence Alloway commented, “Szeemann and his team do reveal a weakness for the visionary. This is betrayed, for example, by the inclusion of a large group of (marvellous) works by Wolfli, the classic schizophrenic artist,” but then wondered, “Why is he present in a show devoted to ‘Today's Imagery’? The fact is that therapy has changed and no longer encourages copious art production.”<sup>29</sup> This choreographed collage of high and low cultures appealed to Alloway's London pop art past (though representatives of that movement were absent from the exhibition). Yet *documenta 5* was insisting that contemporary art was neither autonomous from the wider field of art nor from culture in general. The exhibition thus recuperated the apparently hostile, anti-art

and anti-museum trajectory of 1960s art and relocated it inside a particular curatorial form, the high-profile international exhibition that might even temporarily occupy normally staid art museums. Szeemann anticipated artists' queasiness about this in early press conferences ahead of the opening.<sup>30</sup> He knew this would be controversial amongst artists.

The very contrasting responses of Daniel Buren and Joseph Beuys to Szeemann's invitation exemplified the artists' polarization accompanying the exhibition. Beuys chose to take advantage of the spectacle and public reach of the new exhibition form that Szeemann was pioneering, while Buren adamantly chose to preserve an adversarial relationship not just to art museums but even to this relatively new exhibition method – biennials and other large-scale, perennial, international group shows – in its apparently least conservative moment of transition. Szeemann knew that “he [Buren] would put me on the spot by choosing the most problematic locations for his striped paper.”<sup>31</sup> For his part, according to Szeemann, Buren thought that curators were becoming super-artists who used art works “like so many brushstrokes in a huge painting.”<sup>32</sup> Buren was deeply critical of Szeemann's exhibition for what he saw as its curatorial narcissism. In his essay, “Exhibition of an Exhibition” (1972), written for the show, he pinpointed the presumption that underlay Szeemann's *documenta 5*: the exhibition had become a work of art: “more and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Buren's objections did not block his participation in the show nor the publication in the exhibition catalogue of his deeply hostile essay.

Three decades later, still furious but now well inside the canonical fold, Buren recapitulated his argument in “Where Are the Artists?” (2004).<sup>34</sup> According to Buren, curators exercise hegemony over artists, who passively accept the domination of the “author of exhibitions.”<sup>35</sup> Buren's distinction between art work and exhibition is important; the difference had in the intervening decades become blurred enough for the identification to seem both natural and the outcome of each artist's take-up of what seemed simply the artistic freedom putatively offered by biennial participation. He was explaining the opportunism that lies underneath what we now call “biennial art,” arguing that the corollary was that a work of art's meaning – the intention of the artist – was replaced within the ideological space of an exhibition when that intention was reframed by a curator. Buren had always been deeply suspicious of curators, seeing them as a self-interested professional cadre. The result of their control, according to Buren, was that art's

historical meaning was deteriorating to nothing more than a decorative gimmick, ensuring the survival of the museum's own creative, economic, and political agendas.<sup>36</sup> This was more than a little disingenuous, for artists would not be willing to organize exhibitions with the degree of professionalism, focus, and finish that curators must achieve, nor acquire the skills and experience to enable this, and it should be clear that we outline the argument without endorsing it. By 2004, Buren, ironically, had already become an angry art historical institution himself yet he still, as he had in 1972, imagined that it was possible to exist as an artist outside that system and to launch an assault on it.<sup>37</sup> Buren's rhetoric and his actions, even the renegade wall-posters that had appeared uninvited on Bern's streets during *When Attitudes Become Form*, counter-intuitively and certainly inadvertently reinforced the very art system he sought to criticize: whatever he did ultimately would demonstrate his targets' durability and adaptability. He simply could not stand outside curators' desires to co-opt dissidence, nor did he choose to in the long-term.<sup>38</sup> To use an old-fashioned and gendered term, Buren's muse was the institution. If Buren's posters were the birth of institutional critique in art, they were also the art institution's decoration and hence its celebration. Like it or not, anti-art's existence was to henceforth rely upon the dreaded system and its curators, even though the rhetoric remained that of rejection and exclusion.<sup>39</sup>

Joseph Beuys's contribution to *documenta 5*, on the other hand, embodied a very different rhetoric. Beuys presented himself as an artist who made the choice to work within the art system in order to change much vaster systems of economics and politics. Here and in later exhibitions, Beuys imagined biennials and *documenta* to be safe houses, or laboratories in which wider and larger issues than art could be explored. On June 1, 1971, Beuys had founded the Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung, locating it in an office at Andreasstrasse 25, Düsseldorf. Invited to participate in *documenta 5*, Beuys relocated the office (the Büro) to a room on the ground floor at the Fridericianum, *documenta's* main venue.

Dirk Schwarze described *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* in an article, "Zehn Stunden Beuys" ("Ten Hours Beuys"), which was published in the *Kasseler Stadtausgabe* on July 26, 1972:

10.00am. The *documenta* opens. Beuys, in a red fishing vest and felt hat, is in his office. He has two co-workers. On the desk is a long-stemmed rose, next to it are piles of handbills. On the wall with the window is a blue neon sign

1972: *The Rise of the Star-Curator*

31

that says: "Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum." Besides this, there are several blackboards on the walls. On each is written the word "man" ... 11.45am: Up to 130 visitors now. The discussion continues, with eight listeners. A young Swiss asks whether Beuys wants the nationalization of industry. The answer: "No, I have no use for nationalization, but I do want socialization."<sup>40</sup>

Beuys staffed the improvised office with volunteers from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. for 100 days, talking to visitors about his ideas with Schwarze and simultaneously producing innumerable blackboard drawings. On *documenta 5*'s last day on October 8, 1972, in an improvised boxing ring in front of a packed audience in the room occupied by the work of French artist Ben Vautier, Beuys and an assistant fought. This was an action, *Boxkampf für direkte Demokratie* (1972). A few short days later, after *documenta 5* and the *Büro* closed, Beuys was fired from his Düsseldorf professorship.<sup>41</sup> Beuys's *Büro* was a forum for the charismatic artist to present daily lectures, preserved by eloquent photographs, even though the *Büro* could never be experienced as a single fixed work. Everything that occurred in the space became part of the art. Beuys was already notorious for installations and videos that incorporated messy, decaying, disintegrating natural materials such as fat and felt. Here, his highly informal office – a collection of blackboards, desks, and chairs – was at the same time an installation resembling a hastily assembled campaign office and an action in which the studio of an egocentric artist was converted into collectivist politics. The *Büro* was propagating the ideas of his Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung and was a simulacrum of his office at the Düsseldorf Academy of Arts, with the difference that he would reach vastly more people in Kassel than in Düsseldorf. He humanized the *Büro*, decorating it with a single, spectacularly long-stemmed, fresh red rose "for direct democracy," replaced each day, in a tall measuring beaker, and two photographs: one of the rose, which he titled *Rose für direkte Demokratie* (1972); the other of Beuys in conversation with a visitor, *Ohne die Rose tun wir's nicht* (Without the rose we cannot do it) (1972). His familiar, scrawled-upon school blackboards set out Beuys's accumulating, didactic propositions, talking points from his lectures and discussions, according to his by-then familiar formula that explanation was an art form. Almost everything was potentially collectible, most obviously the give-away plastic bags printed with a diagram depicting the difference between party democracy and direct democracy. These had been printed the previous year and used



in a 1971 street action in Cologne. The bags are also, oddly, the precursors of later biennials' ubiquitous branded bags, all given out freely at vernissages and pavilions. Beuys's *Büro* became an indelible and unavoidable reference point for *documenta 5* visitors and in the wider reception of the show itself.

Several propositions about the conditions for a utopian *documenta* or biennial underlay both Beuys's *Büro* and *documenta 5*. Neither Szeemann nor Beuys had denied the complex networks of power and patronage that supported and underlay *documenta*. They had indexed them instead, representing them through metonymy. Beuys sold many of the blackboards from his *documenta 5* action to raise money for the Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung. Several residues from the *Büro* were soon used in later works, all of which are now in collections. The work *Stripes from the House of Shaman 1964–72* (1984), held in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, includes the coat Beuys wore in *Büro*. Even the rose in the office at *documenta 5* was used in several later works, notably a version of *Rose für direkte Demokratie* from 1973.

### **“The Most Important Exhibition of Recent Years”**

Homages to *documenta 5*'s legacy are ubiquitous. Indeed, it is now almost universally regarded as one of the most important and exemplary exhibitions of the last fifty years, even more than other potential candidates such as Seth Siegelaub's New York-based but itinerant exhibitions-as-catalogues or Lucy Lippard's nomadic numbered surveys. Siegelaub's famous exhibitions were available by mail order from his office in New York; they included the “first” exhibition catalogue-cum-book of conceptual art, titled *January 5–31, 1969*, which included “works” by Lawrence Weiner, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Robert Barry.<sup>42</sup> Lippard had “compiled” several portable exhibitions, traveling with artist instructions and cheaply printed books, mounting exhibitions that were named after the number of inhabitants of the host city: 557,087 (Seattle, 1969) and 955,000 (Vancouver, 1970), 2,972,453 (Buenos Aires, 1970) and c.7,500 (Valencia, California, 1973).

So the first reason for *documenta 5*'s great impact is that it was instrumental in the wider art museum acceptance of conceptualist and post-minimalist art into the emerging canon of contemporary art, as opposed to the very same artists own frequent rejection of art museums in favor of itinerant projects such as Lippard's or Siegelaub's. *documenta 5*'s far greater

historiographic durability was a partial by-product of documenta's recurring institutional nature (every four to five years), and the great financial and infrastructure resources thus able to be poured into it. *documenta 5* was always far more likely to be regarded as foundational simply on account of its durability and the preservation of its memory in archives, including in the form of the many striking photographs.

Second, it is remembered as a key moment in the creation of the canon of contemporary art simply because it stood right at the start of the period we now denote by the name "contemporary art."<sup>43</sup> *documenta 5* occurred at a critical juncture. Critics and artists were intensely aware of this: reporting on a *documenta 5* press conference a year out from the exhibition's opening, Georg Jappe wrote, "In New York the art scene is disintegrating; in Europe the museums and art galleries are suffering from a malaise which gives rise to an increasingly heated debate among curators, museum organizers and students on the social value of art."<sup>44</sup> At a lecture during *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung's* staging, Joseph Beuys declared, "Art is experiencing a crisis. All fields are in a state of crisis."<sup>45</sup> This strong sense of emergency meant that *documenta 5* would almost inevitably be remembered as a radical statement, almost by association, even though many artists were intensely doubtful that Szeemann was a radical figure, as we shall see. At the time, *Studio International's* reviewer, René Denizot, wrote, "In retrospect, the first thing that stood out at *documenta 5* was the exhibition's seriousness. First, because one had to regard it as the most important exhibition of recent years, and no opportunity had been spared to make it just that."<sup>46</sup>

But underneath all this, underneath the programmatic, metaphysical, and literary dimension of Szeemann's synchronic, ahistorical approach, the emergent curators' art of the "curatorial" had been amplified by the spectacular documenta platform and was now easily adopted by other biennial directors. Its impact was unambiguously clear on the 1979 Biennale of Sydney (the subject of the next chapter). Its longer-term and most carefully considered influence was clearest not in another documenta or biennial but in an exhibition that was originally conceived as a stand-in for a biennial, in place of the continuation of the by-then defunct Biennale de Paris. This exhibition was curator and museum director Jean-Hubert Martin's seminal global art survey, *Magiciens de la terre* (1989). Entrusted in 1985 with the task of relaunching the Paris Biennale, Martin, then director of the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, produced *Magiciens de la terre* instead in the exhibition spaces left vacant after the Biennale's unfortunate

cancellation due to budget overruns. The dark clouds of parochial Parisian press notices and art-world chatter during and after *Magiciens de la terre* contributed significantly to Martin's departure from the directorship of the Musée national d'art moderne.<sup>47</sup> But like it or not, *Magiciens de la terre* was to become the model for the next wave of 1990s biennials organized by themes that inevitably recalled "Individual Mythologies," and which invariably in its wake sought out a global selection of artists, no matter that *Magiciens de la terre* had been widely if unfairly criticized in Paris newspaper reviews and by art historians for its supposed cultural imperialism and obliviousness to then-ascendant theories of the marginal Other.

The prescient aura with which this epochal documenta was retrospectively enveloped overshadows the fact that Szeemann's show – and in particular the extra-artistic inclusions – also, like Martin's exhibition, drew enraged responses, notably from Buren and Smithson, though at the same time other artists, including Joseph Beuys, embraced Szeemann's dispersal of objects, categories, and events. Claes Oldenburg thought the exhibition was the ideal venue for his museum, commenting, "I doubt that I would have pulled the museum together if this occasion had not presented itself."<sup>48</sup> Even those who refused to exhibit participated through very public protests. The most obvious example, as we noted earlier, was Smithson's essay protest against the "warden-curator" who directs a "cultural prison" and "imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits."<sup>49</sup>

Even if the form of many of the works in *documenta 5* was open-ended, artists like Haacke et al. – the signatories of the artist petition against curatorial hegemony – wished to return the artist's intentions to the center of attention, and definitely align and stabilize a viewer's experiences in relation to these intentions. This hostility was generated by the emergence of the star-curator, a phenomenon that potentially relegated the artist to secondary importance in the now rapidly evolving biennial form. René Denizot wrote, "Thus, the artist and his works were supplanted by the gallery and its guardians as the custodians of artistic truth."<sup>50</sup> Artists were well aware of this, many seeing a danger. Smithson's comments still carry the acid aura of brittle fury. But Szeemann was easily able to incorporate such dissent within his very broad atlas of signs and freedom, forestalling, absorbing, and ultimately replacing criticism.

These reactions, and Szeemann's infuriating cultural combinations, reflected the Cold War raging at its height at the time, and so here it is worth backtracking into documenta's history. As we noted in this chapter's

introduction, documenta itself had been initiated in 1955 by art historian and first documenta director Arnold Bode. The legacy of the Second World War and especially the Cold War were central to its mission. With impressive but always ultimately inadequate funding, documenta was to compensate for Nazism's cultural scorched earth policy, for the division of Germany into East and West, and for Kassel's backwater location close to the East German border. Bode's aim had been to stimulate German culture, to definitively move beyond the National Socialist past, to remedy its erasure of modern art, and to align West German art firmly inside the democratic ideals of the West.<sup>51</sup> Szeemann's original intentions, evident in his early correspondence around the show, ultimately challenged Bode's in that Szeemann wanted to bring together different "realisms" by seeing both advertising and socialist realism – and thus both West and East – as equivalent utopian fantasies. The exhibition unfolded like a scholarly argument, from publicity and propaganda (both communist and capitalist kitsch; in Szeemann's words, "images that lie") proceeding past religious, cultic images and utopian projects, past Beuys's *Büro*, to post-minimalist art such as Richard Serra's assemblage of steel plates, *Circuit* (1972).<sup>52</sup> West Germany's post-World War Two economic miracle had been intensely consumerist in character. Many artists, not least Wolf Vostell, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter, had already tartly described West Germany's consumerist utopia, but without any Marxist sympathies either, and Szeemann's sympathetic inclusion of a substantial collection of American and European photorealist paintings, along with his less complimentary bracketing of socialist realism alongside commercial advertising, signaled the equivalence of both sides of the Cold War as well as his complete lack of interest in the previous libertarian connotations of abstract art. What must have truly perturbed Szeemann's critics, beyond his usurping of artist voices, were the subtle correspondences that a truly spectacular and thematically organized documenta of "advanced" art now revealed: that the emerging, increasingly dematerialized and performative contemporary art, for all its subtexts of critique, and consumerism had much in common. Minimalism and conceptual art essentially staged impassive objects for individual consumption in much the same way that consumer goods were mass-produced, indifferent commodities, even if advertising and packaging seemed to tailor them to the individual's desires. Robert Smithson understood that when Szeemann thematized contemporary art as "Individual Mythologies" the Swiss curator was anchoring his art within the forest of cultural dreams. So Smithson wrote, "So these dream worlds start proliferating.... You have to cut your hair before you

go in. It's the incipient fascism of all dream worlds."<sup>53</sup> That, however, was to be the condition of art from this point on. The exceptions, like Beuys's *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, would stand in an unstable and contested relation to what was rapidly evolving into the now-familiar neo-avant-garde canon. And exemplars of the new canon, such as Richard Serra and Michael Asher, contributed works that implacably occupied rather than merely filled the exhibition spaces at *documenta 5*, in their resistance confirming the drift of Szeemann's dramaturgy.<sup>54</sup>

American artists, critics, and collectors therefore took *documenta 5* far more seriously than its predecessors. *Artforum* devoted much of its October 1972 issue to multiple reviews and features on the exhibition by major US-based critics Carter Ratcliff, Lizzie Borden, and Lawrence Alloway; it was the most attention that a single European exhibition had received in the journal's history, although all *Artforum's* reviewers more or less dismissed Szeemann's idea of individual mythologies in favor of the exceptionalism of the individual works.<sup>55</sup> Ratcliff praised those art works whose "challenge to *documenta* is complete."<sup>56</sup> The best works, he thought, stood apart from Szeemann.<sup>57</sup> He thought that the four steel plates of Richard Serra's *Circuit* (1972) divided its room in such a way that it created a space that was "self-sufficient enough to stand independent of *documenta*."<sup>58</sup> But in a Cold War context, if the curator's unsettling redefinitions of art as a part of larger image cultures was not a neutral action, neither was obdurateness.

The next factor behind *documenta 5's* impact was the force and originality of Szeemann's auteurism. This was manifest both in his chaotic, eclectic, and highly literary – but absolutely timely – exhibition rationale and in his creation of a centralized, short-term, project-based organizational structure centered upon the figure of the director-curator. The long-term result, given that biennials, triennials, and *documenta* would rapidly become the largest, most prominent contemporary art events, was that their curators inevitably became very influential figures in the art world system. This visibility was double-edged. Despite the enormous attention it garnered and its huge visitor numbers, *documenta 5* generated a very large financial deficit. Aware of his own personal liability for this, Szeemann had alerted his board to the funding shortfall quite early and even offered to resign (this was refused); after the exhibition closed, however, he was presented with an invoice by the board and the state government for a sum so huge that he would never have been able to begin to pay it back. In the decades after *documenta 5*, he alternated between taking on the quick turn-around

directorships of high-visibility biennials (principally, the Venice Biennale in 1980, 1999, and 2001) with far more left-of-field, eccentric, densely researched exhibitions held in isolated locations, focusing on non-artists and utopian communities. The most famous of these was his exhibition of artist utopias at the mountain community of Monte Verità, near Ascona in Italy, which took years of research and an extraordinarily sustained personal commitment. Such loyalty to a single idea and single site was to be rarely seen in the curatorship of biennials. They were, after Szeemann's time, often directed by itinerant freelancers like Szeemann himself. Such cultural nomads did not necessarily have any long-term relationship with either host institution or city, nor did they perform the tasks that traditional curators in museums are occupied by, such as collecting and acquiring works of art, or arranging for their conservation (at Monte Verità, Szeemann involved himself in the preservation of the disintegrating buildings where generations of northern European artists and intellectuals had sought their own utopias). Of course, freelance directors needed to keep good relations with a biennial's non-executive board members, to whom they ultimately answered, as much as any art museum director or curator cultivates a board of trustees. Szeemann, though, was not shy of institutions but wanted to convert them into utopian sites and above all, utopian experiences.<sup>59</sup>

In short, Szeemann's *documenta 5* and its many theme-driven followers, including most of the exhibitions in this book, took the job of canon formation away from art historians, from art books, from art museum departments of painting and sculpture, and from art critics. Veteran art historian Werner Haftmann had been deeply involved in previous *documentas*, but *documenta 5* resulted in a new expectation: that curators, rather than artists or critics, would assume the roles of the primary decision makers in the art world as well as become its – henceforth usually utopian – theorists through curatorship, through the curatorial, and through editorship of comprehensive, wide-ranging exhibition catalogues. This editorial role, though not as obvious as the authorial role (the star-curator function), was to be vastly important and to displace art historians and critics from their positions in the eco-systems of contemporary art. Szeemann's impact was that great (and yet he did still hammer in nails, as contemporary photographs attest).

Curators would determine the content of biennials through their own more or less arbitrary nomination of themes that might – or might not – explain a zeitgeist and, further, interpret the theme both through selections and juxtapositions and, further still, through their own catalogue essays or

Kritische Theorie des ästhetischen Gegenstandes	1
Audiovisuelles Vorwort	2
Trivialrealismus & Trivialembematik	3
Bilderwelt und Frömmigkeit	4
Gesellschaftliche Ikonographie an zwei Beispielen	5
Werbung	6
Politische Propaganda	7
Science Fiction/Heute von gestern gesehen	8
Utopie/Morgen von heute gesehen	9
Spiel und Wirklichkeit	10
Bildnerie der Geisteskranken	11
Film	12
Museen von Künstlern	13
Sozialistischer Realismus	14
Realismus	15
Individuelle Mythologien – Selbstdarstellung – Prozesse	16
Idee + Idee/Licht	17
Information	18
Verzeichnis der ausgestellten Werke	19
Allgemeine Bibliographie	20
Während: Ereigniskalender	21
Nachher 1: Text	22
Nachher 2: Bild	23
Nachher 3: Presse	24
Fotonachweis	25

Figure 1.3 Page from *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute* (documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today), exhibition catalogue, curator Harald Szeemann (Kassel: documenta, 1972). Courtesy documenta.

those of other curator friends. Curators would usurp the role of art critics in the process and, rather than trace trends and delineate art movements, they would often eliminate the historicizing function altogether and thus obliterate the role of art historians. Though art historians might occasionally (very occasionally) write short essays for biennial catalogues or, more often, contribute the mandatory but even shorter, cursory artist profiles for these publications, the connection between art curator and art historian was surprisingly tenuous. There would be exceptions. From the late 1990s onwards, particular biennial curators – most substantially Okwui Enwezor – would



launch ambitious projects to rethink art's history and its relation to wider world histories through the biennial platform. Even then, however, these projects were very substantially curator-driven rather than the products of collaborations with art historians, as opposed to much more desired collaborations with cultural theorists, economists, poets, and political scientists.

But meanwhile, along with Szeemann's dynamism and his lack of interest in art history's modernist master-narratives (which had dominated the first four documentas), came a decisive shift in cultural authority and in the public mediation of art. With an expanding art market, a growing international audience, and museums and collectors in search of new styles of art, the authority to validate and frame contemporary art became more and more important. Artists, critics, and curators were, in fact, in competition to maintain whatever control they had previously exercised or were fighting to gain by way of influence. Conceptualist artists, in particular, were attempting to police the institutional framing of their works much as they had earlier attempted to police the dissemination and interpretation of their texts.<sup>60</sup> Despite their quite self-conscious efforts, by *documenta 5*, the battle for authorial certainty was over. Daniel Buren's striped posters appearing by invitation at *documenta 5* were a belated reiteration of his uninvited Bern poster paste-ups that had resulted in his arrest during *When Attitudes Become Form*, in 1969, rather than a real challenge to Szeemann or the art system. This was not even the first time that *documenta* witnessed abrasive radicalism and protest. The more conservative *4. documenta* had been the scene for Wolf Vostell's, Jorg Immendorff's, Friedrich Heubach's, and Chris Reinecke's far blunter, equally uninvited, satirical intervention at the exhibition's press conference, with their notorious Honey Blind action, during which Immendorff smeared honey over the microphones, Reinecke hugged everyone in sight, including the agitated director Arnold Bode, and Heubach raised a banner thanking Bode for such a pretty show. As Walter Grasskamp commented, even artist protests reified the mythology of *documenta*.<sup>61</sup>

So *documenta 5* was, oddly enough, an act of domestication: the art of the 1960s – marked by an anti-institutional trajectory which had reached its apogee in the couple of years immediately preceding *documenta 5* – had been moved mostly indoors. The museum had won. This was the moment when the avant-garde moved into the art museum and fully into the public domain, integrating itself into spectacular culture, with long-term effects that we will see right to the end of this book.

At a deeper level, this development affected the nature of art production itself. First, art was increasingly shaped and slanted by the opportunities of the biennial system that supported it, as opposed to other exhibition opportunities that had previously dominated the emergence of modern and now contemporary art, principally the one-person exhibition in dealer galleries or the art museum project show. From this point, as we observed earlier, a type of art appears that can be called – we intend no pejorative subtext – “biennial art.” The result was that the division between studio, gallery, and museum became increasingly blurred at biennials; Szeemann and other biennial directors systematically encouraged artists to contribute “projects,” such as *documenta 5*’s five artist museums, that artists would not have realized at their dealers’ galleries and that were only made with the encouragement and infrastructure offered by biennial directors. Second, though it was not obvious at the time, *documenta 5* continued an unlikely partnership: that between the adventurous end of the art market and apparently uncommodifiable art. Even if in retrospect this seems unlikely, private dealers, especially German dealers, rather than museum curators, were promoting and often curating conceptualist artists into not-for-profit and museum shows. Konrad Fischer’s entrepreneurial representation of American artists included in *documenta 5*, such as Bruce Nauman, was merely the important example of this (Fischer was part of Szeemann’s wider curatorium at *documenta 5*; he had first shown Nauman in 1968), for the phenomenon occurred globally, for instance at Australian dealer Bruce Pollard’s Pinacotheca, in Melbourne.<sup>62</sup> Szeemann tapped into these networks right across the world during his peripatetic travels, from Sydney and Melbourne (where he assembled a survey exhibition, *I want to leave a nice well-done child here* (1971) in a fortnight), to New York, in preparation for *documenta 5*. Szeemann’s *documenta* was not made in opposition to dealers, but neither was he at their behest.

## Conclusion

At *documenta 5*, Joseph Beuys had made the art system and the vast, recurring survey exhibition work to his advantage just as Szeemann performed for the press like a Fluxus emperor reigning over his exhibition, as is evident in the many famous press photographs showing him cavorting and hamming it up for the photographers. This spectacular hubris and machismo grated with many artists – not least Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren,

as we saw – and with feminist curators and writers including the furious Lucy Lippard. But Szeemann's cultivation of projects like Beuys's *Büro* and artists' mini-museums such as Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* demonstrated the flexibility and symbiosis of the emerging genre of "biennial art," which managed to combine site specificity with spectacle. Beuys was developing a now-familiar attitude that sounded like the Andy Warhol of a few years before, observing coolly, "Everyone who lives in the system participates in it. I make use of it through the sale of my work."<sup>63</sup>

*documenta 5* itself had become director Harald Szeemann's Büro and the most dramatic sign of an emerging curatorial ascendancy. The juxtaposition of "high" art alongside "low" mass culture, though familiar to London-based audiences who had seen the Independent Group's exhibitions through the 1950s, was almost unprecedented in a biennial or *documenta*. It was not even to be taken up by his successors, though the insertion of older works of art alongside the new was. Experiments of the latter kind were exemplified at Paolo Herkenhoff's 1998 Bienal de São Paulo, then less coherently and more arbitrarily at Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack's quasi-Warburgian *documenta 12* (2007), and finally at Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's revisionist reincarnation of past *documentas* (including *documenta 5* and 1959's *II.documenta*), at her *dOCUMENTA (13)* (2012). Szeemann's iconological, genuinely Warburgian attitude had also presaged the rise of visual studies in the academy a decade or two later but it was not an intellectually isolated event for, as we noted before, many artists and critics of the later 1960s were fascinated by semiotics and by Claude Lévi-Strauss's then modish structural anthropology.

In fact, *documenta 5* was one of the first instances of what we might call not only a mega-exhibition but also a meta-exhibition. This was not just because of its five-yearly rarity relative to the more constant churn of biennials or even triennials, and not just because of its huge funding and prestige, relative even to the Venice Biennale, but because both rarity and funding would encourage *documenta*'s artistic directors to juxtapose many kinds of exhibition under the one roof. That complex, meta-exhibition model would be taken up by future biennial directors, not least by curator Okwui Enwezor at *Documenta11* (2002), and then at the 2008 Gwangju Biennale. If Beuys's *Büro* had turned *documenta* into a symbol for the utopian potential of art, then Harald Szeemann's *documenta 5* and, in a wider sense from this point on, biennials, triennials, and *documentas* in general, presented themselves as neither the enemy of "the system" nor as part of this "system." They were to become – or so it seemed – the sites where cultural and political change

would be described and debated, as if these enormous exhibitions were cultural laboratories. This was a momentous change.

### Notes

1. For an overview of documenta's foundation, see Walter Grasskamp, "For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?," in Sandy Nairne, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Reesa Greenberg (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 67–78; Walter Grasskamp, "Degenerate Art and *documenta 1*: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses and Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 163–190.
2. The exhibition itinerary was as follows: Harald Szeemann (curator), *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*, Kunsthalle Bern, March 22–April 27, 1969; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, May 9–June 15, 1969; Institute of Contemporary Art, London, August 28–September 27, 1969; also see Harald Szeemann, Tobia Bezzola, and Roman Kurzmeier, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite; Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957–2005* (Zürich: Edition Voldemeer, 2007), pp. 225–265; also see the definitive account, Teresa Gleadowe, Christian Rattemeyer, Claudia Di Lecce, Steven ten Thije, Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Piero Gilardi, and Richard Serra, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* (London: Afterall Books, 2011); for an overview of his impact, see Roberta Smith "Harald Szeemann, 71, Curator of Groundbreaking Shows, Dies," *New York Times*, February 25, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/25/arts/design/harald-szeemann-71-curator-of-groundbreaking-shows-dies.html> Accessed October 9, 2015.
3. The exhibition itinerary was as follows: *Happening & Fluxus*, Cologne Kunstverein, November 6, 1970–January 6, 1971; Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin; for an account of this exhibition see Szeemann, Bezzola, and Kurzmeier, *Harald Szeemann*, pp. 284–303.
4. Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction," in Maria Lind (ed.) *Performing the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 9–20.
5. Gabriele Mackert, "At Home in Contradictions: Harald Szeemann's *documenta*," in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.), *Archive in Motion: 50 Years of documenta, 1955–2005* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 253–262.
6. To be fair, Szeemann had visited Australia in 1971 at charismatic collector John Kaldor's invitation, assembling at breakneck speed a survey exhibition of Australian art from Melbourne and Sydney as the second of John

Kaldor's Art Projects; the visit did not result in the selection of any artists for *documenta 5*, nor any subsequent interest by Szeemann in those artists. By contrast, Szeemann's 1999 Venice Biennale was marked, late in his career, with the timely acknowledgment of Chinese artists, though 1999 was later than many other globetrotting curators' patronage of the burgeoning Chinese art scene.

7. Media release, *documenta 5*, May 1970, reproduced in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.), *Archive in Motion*, p. 252.
8. Szeemann, in Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Mind over Matter: Hans-Ulrich Obrist Talks with Harald Szeemann," *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 3 (November 1996), pp. 74–79 and 111–112, 119, 125, esp. p. 111.
9. Harald Szeemann, in Hans-Joachim Muller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006), p. 157.
10. The title that *dOCUMENTA (13)* gave to its docents – the Worldly Companions – echoed Brock's concept of a Visitor's School.
11. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 111. As Birnbaum, Altshuler, and many others have noted, New York conceptual art dealer and curator Seth Siegel was exploring even more radical curatorial forms, creating exhibitions where artists might make their contributions from anywhere; his famous exhibition catalogue in place of an exhibition, *January 5–31, 1969*, consisted of photocopies of texts and photographs by the exhibiting artists who included Joseph Kosuth; see Daniel Birnbaum, "When Attitudes Become Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann," *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005), pp. 55–58 and p. 346, esp. p. 58; also see Jean-Marc Poinot, "Large Exhibitions: A Sketch of a Typology," in Sandy Nairne, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Reesa Greenberg (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 39–66, esp. p. 48.
12. Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 75.
13. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 125; in this and many other interviews, Szeemann used the word "inventor" to encompass his new role as biennial curator.
14. Georg Jappe, "What Is Reality? The Theme of *documenta 5*," *Studio International*, no. 182 (July 1971), pp. 2–3, esp. p. 2.
15. Media release, *documenta 5* (March 1971), reproduced in Glasmeier and Stengel, *Archive in Motion*, p. 252.
16. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112.
17. See Muller, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 42; also see Szeemann, Bezzola, and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 314.
18. See Denise Frimer, "Pedagogical Paradigms: *documenta's* Reinvention," *Art and Education*, (2010). <http://www.artandeducation.net>. Accessed April 1, 2011.
19. The enormous volume begins with the mammoth essay by Hans Heinz Holz, titled "Kritische Theorie des ästhetischen Zeichens," in Harald Szeemann (curator and ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute*

- (documenta 5: Questioning reality, image worlds today), exh. cat. (Kassel: documenta, 1972), section 1, pp. 1–86.
20. Robert Smithson, “Cultural Confinement,” *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), p. 39; this was the essay that Szeemann included in *documenta 5*’s exhibition catalogue in place of an image by Smithson, and translated into German as “Kulturbeschränkung,” in Harald Szeemann (ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, section 17, pp. 74–75.
  21. All ten artists signed the declaration; see Lawrence Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 30–36; and Mackert, “At Home in Contradictions,” p. 259.
  22. Daniel Birnbaum, “When Attitudes Become Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann,” *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005), pp. 55, 59, 346, esp. p. 59.
  23. Beuys had been prominent at 4. *documenta*, in 1968, and was to be again prominent at *documenta 6*. At 4. *documenta* (June 27–October 6, 1968), Beuys contributed a sprawling installation *Sculpture room* (1968); the documenta Archive at Kassel has extensive holdings of documentation of all of Beuys’s works at the different documentas. Beuys constantly repeated his message about creativity: for instance, he stated, “Creativity is no longer specific to people who are working with colors, to painters; it’s no longer specific to people who are working with form, to sculptors. Everybody’s formulation and environments – let’s also say social relationships – have to be seen from the point of view of creativity, of art, and the principles of form. In German we have this fantastic word, *gestalt*; it exists also in some sense in English” (Joseph Beuys, interviewed Dusseldorf, June 18, 1984, in Bernice Rose, “Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys,” in *MOMA Magazine*, no. 13 (Winter–Spring 1993), p. 17); for photographs of Beuys at *documenta 5* see Brigitte Hellgoth, *Untitled Photograph from Joseph Beuys, Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (1972), black and white photograph from Beuys’ 100-day action *Büro der Organisation für Direkt Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, June to October 1972, Kassel. Photograph taken from the original image in the documenta Archiv, Kassel (DA 2633/12A).
  24. Szeemann, in Szeemann, Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 316.
  25. Szeemann, in Szeemann, Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 316.
  26. Jappe, “What Is Reality?,” p. 2.
  27. Lawrence Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” p. 32.
  28. Hilton Kramer, “Art: German documenta; Exhibition Is a Melange That Assumes Culture Is an Outworn Fiction,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1972, Leisure, p. 11.
  29. Alloway, “Reality, Ideology at D5,” p. 34.
  30. See Jappe, “What Is Reality?,” p. 2.
  31. Szeemann, in Obrist, “Mind over Matter,” p. 112.

32. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112; also see Mackert, "At Home in Contradictions," p. 259.
33. Daniel Buren, "Exposition d'une exposition," in Harald Szeemann (ed.), *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, section 17, p. 29; the statement is reprinted in translation in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 210–211; Buren continued, "And the artist throws her- or himself and her or his work into this trap, because the artist and her work, which are powerless from the force of habit of art, have no choice but to allow another to be exhibited: the organizer."
34. Daniel Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," in Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2004), pp. 26–31, esp. p. 27; *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist* was an *e-flux* publication, one of a group of texts in a project curated by Jens Hoffmann for Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta 11*; Buren's essay is reprinted in Filipovic et al., *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 212–221.
35. Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," p. 30.
36. Buren, "Where Are the Artists?," p. 27.
37. See Andrea Fraser's discussion in "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 1 (September 2005), pp. 278–283 and p. 332, esp. p. 282.
38. See Benjamin Buchloh's skeptical discussion of Buren's politics in "The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT," *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 9 (May 2008), pp. 310–313.
39. Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique," in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 2–19, esp. p. 4.
40. Dirk Schwarze, "Zehn Stunden Beuys," *Kasseler Stadttausgabe*, July 26, 1972, trans. Tom Nicholson, in Tom Nicholson, "Actions towards the Image: On Traces, Images and Memory in the Work of Joseph Beuys," PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, April 2007, p. 118.
41. We draw here and throughout this chapter on the detailed account of Beuys's *Büro* presented in Nicholson, "Actions towards the Image."
42. For a contemporary interview with Siegelau see Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large," *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 202–203. See also Jack Burnham's comments on Siegelau's role as conceptual "gallery director" in Jack Burnham, "Real Time Systems," *Artforum*, vol. 8, no. 1 (September 1969), pp. 49–55, esp. p. 54.
43. On the surface, this is a circular argument; however, it should be increasingly clear that we are arguing for the agency and influence of an exhibition such as this, even on artistic practice. For an increasingly accepted definition of the



- term, contemporary art, see Terry Smith's chapter 13, "What Is Contemporary Art?," in *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 241–271; also see Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (New York: Lawrence King, 2011).
44. Jappe, "What Is Reality?," p. 2.
  45. Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze, "Report on a Day's Proceedings at the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*" (1972), in Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 120–124, esp. p. 122.
  46. René Denizot, "Exposition of an Exhibition: A Backward Look at documenta 5," *Studio International*, vol. 185, no. 953 (March 1973), pp. 98–99, esp. p. 98.
  47. For a full account of *Magiciens de la terre* and its reception, see Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (Part 2): "Magiciens de la terre" 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013); the response in Paris was not unanimously malicious; a young Nicolas Bourriaud wrote a perceptive review of *Magiciens de la terre* in *Flash Art*, no. 168 (1990).
  48. Angela Westwater Reaves, "Claes Oldenburg: An Interview," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 36–39, esp. p. 37.
  49. Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," p. 39.
  50. Denizot, "Exposition of an Exhibition," p. 99.
  51. Grasskamp says, "The first documenta, in 1955, measured even by its own claims, is to be understood as an answer to the trauma that resulted from that original antimodernist smear campaign [the 1937 Degenerate Art exhibition]," in Grasskamp, "Degenerate Art and *documenta 1*," p. 165; also see Grasskamp, "For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?," p. 67.
  52. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 112.
  53. Robert Smithson in Bruce Kurtz, "Documenta 5: A Critical Preview," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 46, no. 8 (Summer 1972), pp. 30–43, esp. p. 31.
  54. Carter Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 40–44, p. 40.
  55. See Eric Banks, "October 1972," *Artforum*, vol. 41, no. 2 (October 2002), p. 56; Lizzie Borden, "Cosmologies," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 45–50, esp. p. 45 (Borden is less hostile than the other reviewers but still cautiously disapproving of Szeemann).
  56. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 40.
  57. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 40.
  58. Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," p. 43; Szeemann was aware of this objection but disagreed; according to Jappe, "Two points were emphasized repeatedly at the (1971) press conference: any work of art that lays claim to autonomy will be shown on its own." (Jappe, "What Is Reality?," p. 2).
  59. Szeemann, in Obrist, "Mind over Matter," p. 125.
  60. This desire to police the audience now seems quite distant and odd, but conceptual artists and their spokesmen, notably Seth Siegelaub, were determined to

*1972: The Rise of the Star-Curator*

47

avoid “misinterpretation.” American artist Douglas Huebler, for example, said: “What I say is part of the art work. I don’t look to critics to say things about my work. I tell them what it’s about” (Douglas Huebler, in Charles Harrison, “On Exhibitions and the World at Large: Seth Siegelaub in Conversation with Charles Harrison,” *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 202–203, note 1, p. 203). There was no space in their minds for anything else.

61. Grasskamp, “For Example, documenta, or How Is Art History Produced?” p. 72.
62. See Sophie Richard’s fascinating book, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists, 1967–77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009).
63. Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze, “Report of a Day’s Proceedings at the *Bureau of Direct Democracy*” (1972), p. 121.