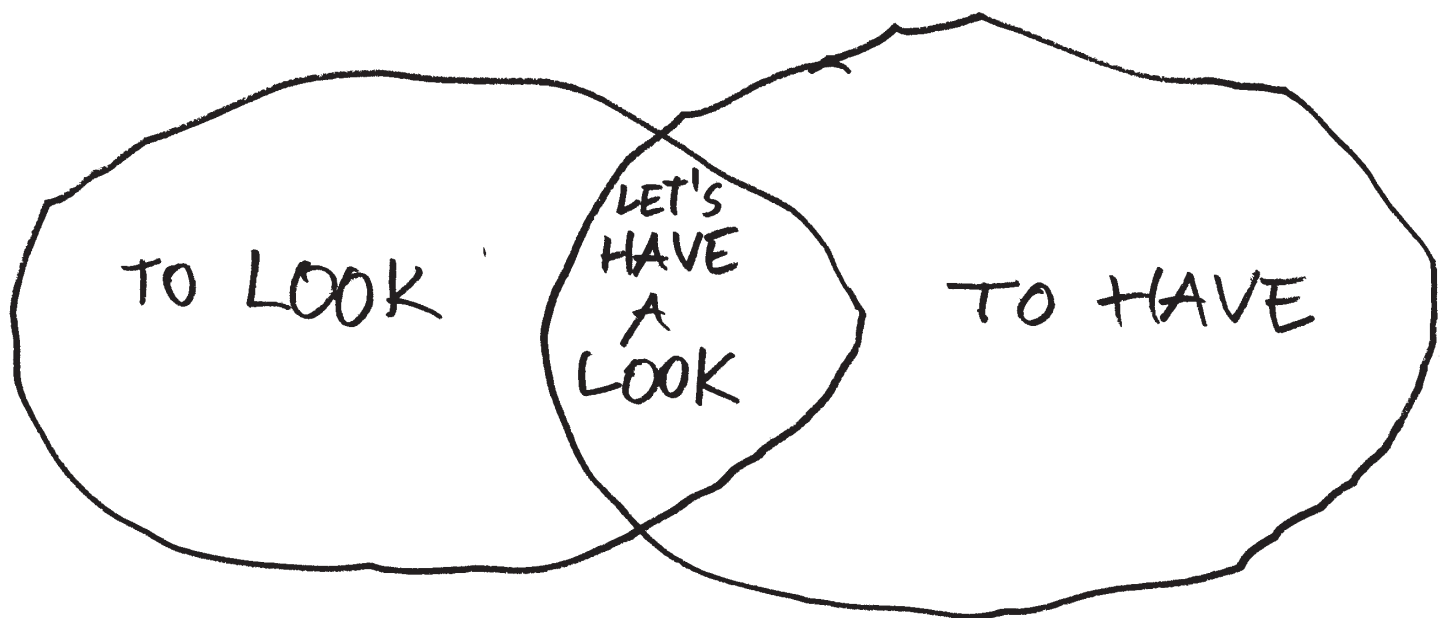
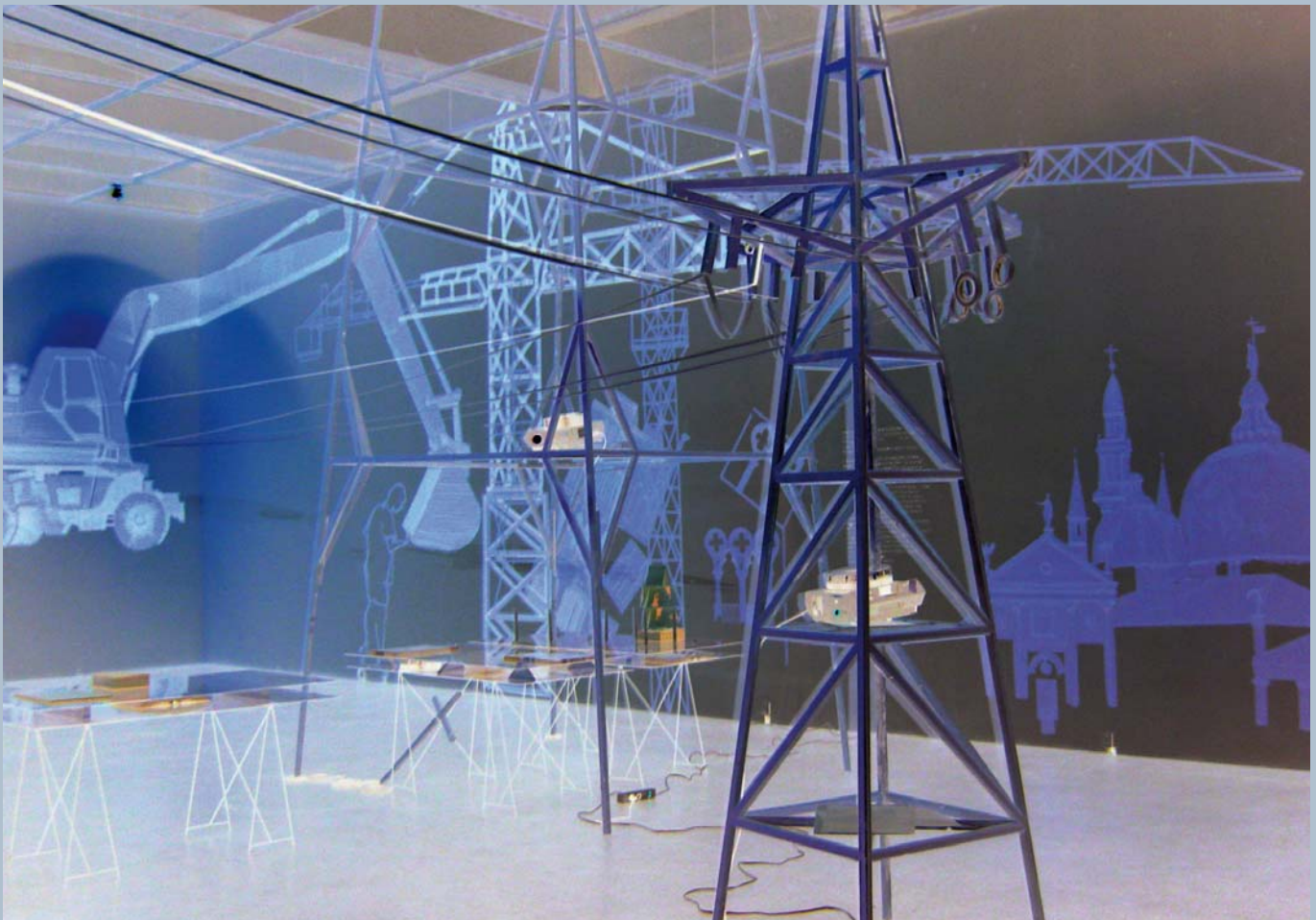


The Bⁿ Project:
la Biennale delle biennali

A proposal for la Biennale di Venezia

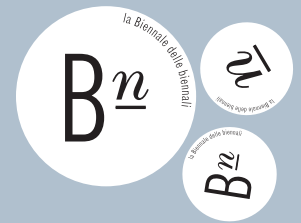
EMMANUEL LAMBION





honoré θ'0°, "New Scape", 2005, TMCA / Total Museum for Contemporary Art, Seoul

The Bⁿ Project



Can one be arguably pushy with an old and venerable lady / institution such as the Venice Biennale? And can we imagine that it could develop a more assertively daring approach of its own, in a more specific, both open and self-conscious fashion than it has been the case so far?

We'll start with a few statements and interrogations

1

Biennales are multiplying, proliferating. This is a common *topos* which fuels much self-reflexive debate in the art world, the art community: the issue is certainly complex, with socio-cultural stakes, behind and beyond. Are biennales merely to be seen as exportable cultural products from the Western world, which many countries strive to reproduce and assimilate, as a symbolic token for a recognised cultural status? Is it conversely the sign of a democratised, albeit in a globalised, or, for the better "glocalised" fashion, cultural world?

2

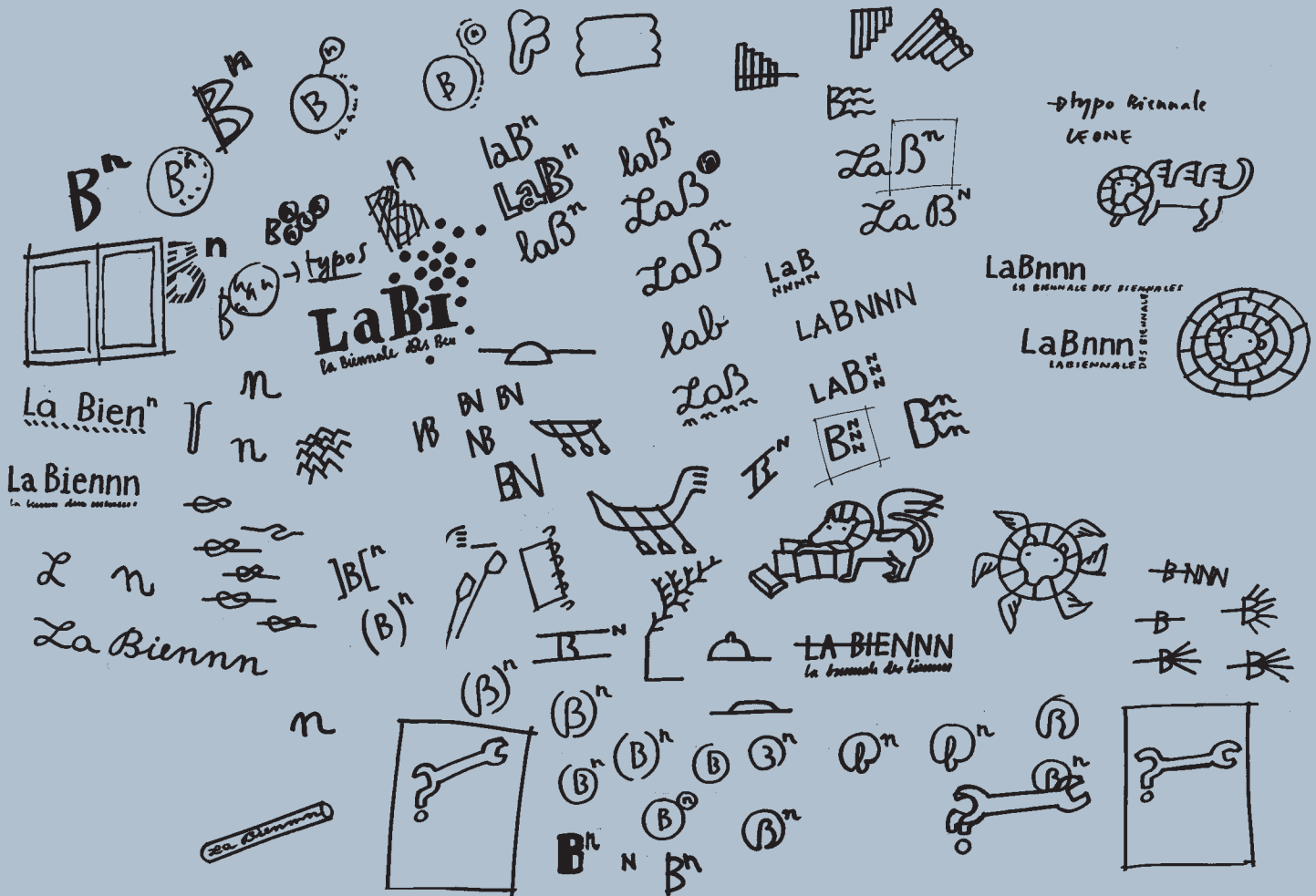
In the end, there seems to be the space and possibility for an infinity of variations on an archetypal abstract model, each Biennale having the possibility to adapt the standard "global" product to the peculiarity of a given national and urban context and to the specific missions and objectives it has assigned for itself.

But, overall, it has become consensual to acknowledge the fact that the traditional model of the international biennial exhibitions which Venice embodies is deemed to evolve.

The "glocalised" and contextualised approach of such Biennales like Istanbul or São Paulo seems to reconcile the objectives and aspirations of the majority of the cultural actors, whether they be professional artists, curators, critics or just visitors.

For example, in the past editions of the Istanbul Biennale, much effort was put into anchoring the manifestation to the urban structure of the city, by using anonymous buildings and in stretching it temporally, preparing a series of events preceding it, organising residencies for the participating artists, and prolonging a trace of the event, with a policy of permanent acquisitions for the Istanbul Museum of contemporary art.

For the historic *Antropofagia*, 25th edition of the São Paulo Biennial the educational aspect of the event was clearly emphasized and prepared beforehand.



Teresa Sdralevich, Sketches

With 300 teachers and 100 guides specifically trained for the occasion and educational material sent to 1 500 classrooms, it achieved to attract an approximate number of 200,000 school visitors / students.

3

If "The" Biennale, la Biennale di Venezia likes to see herself as the *Mother of all Biennales* - and I would like to quote Mr. Storr's very lagunar metaphor, who compares it to a flagship surrounded by many smaller vessels - it does not and cannot avoid the question of the redefinition or the reassertion of its profile amidst its numerous offspring.

4

Whether the mother is already a grandmother or a venerable ancestor is subject to debate, but an obvious point of consensual concern amidst professionals is to consider the de-contextualised approach to its socio-economic and local environment somehow anachronistic.

In Giardini and Arsenale, there seem to be hardly any links with the reality of the majority of contemporary Venetians, those who live in Mestre.

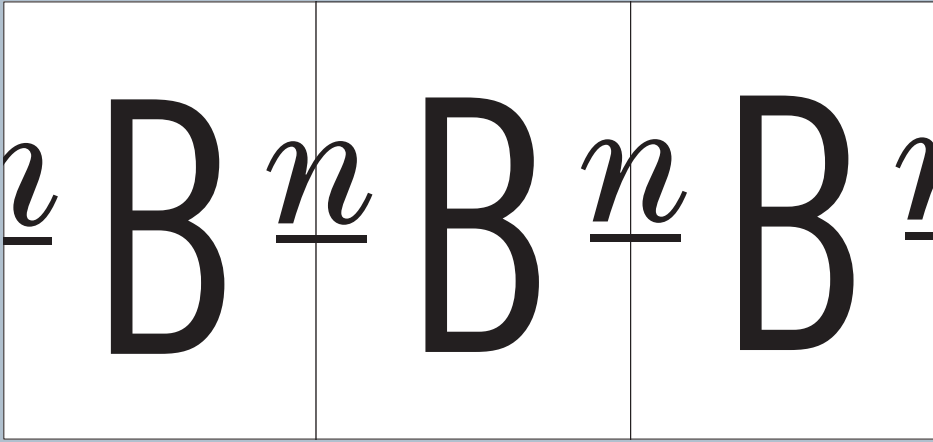
Of course, it might be argued that the socio-economic reality of Venice is largely represented by its present condition of open-air museum almost exclusively devoted to the industry of tourism, of which events of art and culture such as la Biennale, are an important element.

5

On a more "global" and political level, there is also the fact that, within the Giardini space, the limited number of pavilions can certainly not secure



The Maasai Mara Biennale



Teresa Sdravovich, Repeating posters, Bn booklet

an accurate and democratic representation of the contemporary community of nation states. The present distribution of the national pavilions is archaic and obsolete, symbolic of a colonial hierarchy and balance of powers which is no longer existent.

6

But one could go of course as far as to question this very system of national representation. Is it still to be hoped for or simply to the point?

In an ever-increasingly globalised world, both in terms of cultural and qualitative values and of socio-economic structures (52% of the world's GNP is in the hands of 500 private companies), what can the territorial nation state still wish and aspire to represent?

As eternal forerunner or patent symptom of societal changes, the art world or, at least, those who define themselves as the art world (i.e. the small emerging part of a larger, deeply-rooted and diversified social reality) already definitely work, from the one fair to the other biennale, as a "global salon" for most of its happy protagonists and actors (artists, curators, critics journalists and... directors of Biennales).

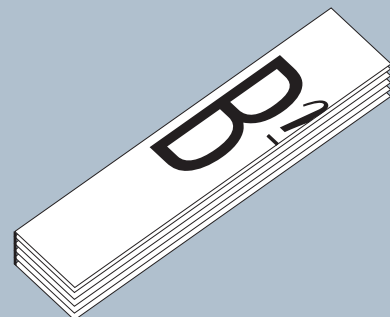
And now the proposal and a few tracks:

To keep the "ancestor" alive, to reposition its position amidst its offspring, to integrate the globalised dimension of the art world, whilst questioning any limitative framing of it as a mere cultural expression of a national identity, to help redefine the relationship of art with its territory of creation and expression, between global and local, we would suggest Venice could reprofile itself as

Bⁿ = La Biennale delle biennali, the Biennale of the biennales.

A

Instead of national presentations, the pavilions and the exhibition spaces would be allotted to the different existing Art Biennales, leaving them the choice as to where and how they should present themselves. The curatorship would be ensured by the Directors of the forthcoming editions of the various Biennales, allowing thereby Venice to





Le tempo ne compte pas

encompass and experiment, within its own context, the distinctive approaches and focuses developed elsewhere.

B

La Biennale would trespass its usual "boundaries and limits", seeking / fostering a connection in time and space with the Venetian hinterland, e.g. Mestre, Marghera and their inhabitants. In time and space, before and after the event.

C

Every other year, the invitation would be returned from the "offspring". The Director of forthcoming edition would accept the invitation from one / several of the other Biennales.

D E F G H I J...

To be developed, in the best of the art worlds, of course, whether they be virtual or real.

Very Special thanks to Simona Denicolai & Ivo Provoost, Michel François, Honoré d'O, Teresa Sdrlevich, Christophe Terlinden and Freek Wambacq for prompt reactions and original contributions to the project.
Graphic design: Teresa Sdrlevich.



Christophe Terlinden, Rolschaatsen, 7