



# Curating Manifesta: The Spectacle of Erasure

“Writings are the thoughts of the state;  
archives are its memory.”

– Novalis

## 1 EUROPEAN BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART THAT NEVER HAPPENED

**M**anifesta—European Biennial of Contemporary Art was developed as an itinerant and nomadic biennial at the beginning of the 1990s, as an initiative of the Dutch government; although based in Amsterdam, it travels to different host cities with each new edition. Manifesta was created as

A response to the political and economic changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the consequent moves towards European integration, it aspired to provide a moveable platform that could support a growing network of visual arts professionals throughout the region (Manifesta Official Website, visited October 23, 2006).

There have been nine editions of Manifesta up to this date, and the sixth edition never took place due to the severe escalation of the confrontation between the curators and officials of the city of Nicosia, where it was supposed to take place; I will return to this case later in my analysis.<sup>46</sup> What is important here is that

<sup>46</sup> Although created to make a bridge between the East and West, most of the Manifesta editions took place in the former West: Rotterdam, The Netherlands (1996), Luxembourg (1998), Ljubljana, Slovenia (2000), Frankfurt/Main, Germany (2002), Donostia – San Sebastian, Spain (2004), Trentino – South Tyrol, Italy (2008), Murcia, Spain (2010), and Genk, Belgium (2012).

this manifestation entails two important concepts in its name: “European” and “contemporary art,” where the first refers to the political aspects of its activities, and the latter to its aesthetic aspects. Therefore, using the example of this biennial, it becomes possible to examine current definitions of both of these concepts as proposed by Manifesta, as well as shifts in political and aesthetic paradigms and their mutual interconnectedness.

The main point of departure of this analysis will not be the analysis of what is being intentionally exhibited, but rather the quest to detect what usually stays hidden behind this act, or indeed, what agents involved in the production of Manifesta discourses believe stay hidden or invisible. I will follow the notion by which the exposed objects have a double function of pointing out the discrepancy between the story they are supposed to tell and the story that they actually tell when seen within a wider framework, as proposed by Mieke Bal in her study on exhibitions entitled *Double Exposure* (1996). In the case of the recent edition of Manifesta, a biennial that never happened, I will focus on what would have been exposed in the exhibition whose curatorial concept had aborted artworks before they were even conceived. Using the perspective of narratology as a way to read exhibitions, undertaken to locate the constituted and potential speakers within this constellation, the following analysis will pose the question: what can silenced, aborted, or censored subjects and objects tell us about the constellation of power relations to which they simultaneously remain implicit?

## 2 CRIMES IN THE MANIFESTA ARCHIVE

**M**y starting question in this analysis was how I can read Manifesta—European Biennial of Contemporary Art as a cultural object. Bearing in mind that, in this case, I have not seen any of the actual exhibitions of the Manifesta biennials, my position as a cultural analyst became one of analyzing the traces where, and the meta-levels on which, this manifestation is still happening in the present tense. However, since Manifesta’s official rhetoric underlines the importance of its archive that supposedly contains of the all information needed for any future scholar interested in this institution, I decided to start my research there.

The creators of Manifesta consider it to be a democratic institution, and its publicly accessible archive is seen to be a guarantee of its democratic principles. This archive is promoted as an open resource, “a mobile, growing and partially interactive documentation project accessible on the Internet and available for public consultation” at its Manifesta at Home office in Amsterdam. Since my main interest was in the curatorial practices of Manifesta biennials, during my visit there I asked permission to look at the documents about the selection procedure of curators and host cities. However, I was denied any access to these documents, because, I was told, of “protecting the rights of curators.” I was given limited access to the e-mail correspondence between the board members about the selecting of the last host city, Nicosia in Cyprus. Instead of curatorial proposals, I was offered the proposals of rejected artists, since their interests, as it seems, are not in need of protection. While being denied access to most of the things I was interested in researching, the director herself introduced to a publication, a luxurious and impressive 300-page monograph on the history and mission of this manifestation, published by Manifesta itself and entitled *The Manifesta Decade*.



This publication offers a broad historical overview and analysis of the influences that this exhibition had in the past, including, as its final chapter, an overview of the archive as well. According to one of the editors, the archive is able to give “an act of re-experience” even to those who have never seen the exhibitions (Barbara Vanderlinden, 2005:232). Having in mind the obstacles in researching the “real” archive, I decided at that point to focus on this particular segment, testing the Lacanian notion that if there were any symptoms, they must be visible in every event produced by the subject in question.

In his approach to exploring the archive, Jacques Derrida advises us to look for an event, a momentum that will open up the archive for critical reading through specific archeological practice, when “*the origin then speaks by itself*” (Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1995: 58). In the space of the Manifesta archive in the publication, among “miniature” representations of the artworks from previous biennials, I had an unexpected encounter with something, or rather someone I did not expect to meet. This someone grabbed my attention at first glance and, since we have not been introduced before, soon became my main theoretical obsession. In numerous photographs of Manifesta curators and board members at official press conferences and “informal” meetings in cafes, there was someone whom the caption referred to as “unidentified.” This unidentified person took on different shapes – in some pictures it was a woman, in others it was a man, and in some it duplicated itself. It moves freely from city to city, from country to country, following this itinerant art manifestation as a shadow. What is the most shocking is the fact that these *Unidentified* persons are engaged in very close conversations with the main protagonists of the Manifesta decade, being part of panel discussions, or just giving a friendly hug to the identified ones as a way of showing their belonging to the photographed group. When encountered in the space of the archive, whose main

function is to preserve memory, what the Unidentified immediately brings is not only the shortness of the memory of those who were identifying these fairly recent pictures, but also the failure of the archive to perform the function for which it was created in the first place.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence, I decided to follow the

<sup>47</sup> Strangely enough, in some of the photographs we find the editor of the archive, Vanderlinden, as being engaged in a vivid talk with the Unidentified ones.

Unidentified one who took me in a direction I did not initially plan to follow, namely the analysis of the concept of the archive itself. Therefore, what I propose here is to read this unusual deletion, this unusual hole in the memory of the Manifesta archive, alongside with the context that has produced it, Manifesta's official rhetoric, and put its presumably democratic principles in a dialogue with Derrida's accounts on the archive. My main question here is what this Unidentified one can "speak back" about: at the very beginning, it clearly deconstructs the intention of Manifesta to have a full control over its historical image. As we can see, things (can) always slip out of control.

Images from curatorial research trips.

5. Tallin. *Center*: Inessa Josing.

6. Luxembourg City.

*Left to right*: Barbara Vanderlinden, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Maria Lind, Jo Kox, unidentified, Enrico Lunghi, unidentified, and Hedwig Fijen.

7. Bucharest. Dan Perjovschi in his atelier.

### 3 DELETED SUBJECTS

In his attempt to bring out of the archive the Greek word *arkhē* as the origin of the present uses of this term, Derrida reminds us of its double meaning, or two principles entailed in it: the principle of commencement and the principle of commandment. According to this, the archive is located in the house of the ones who command, who are not only the documents' guardians but also the ones who are given "hermeneutic right and competence" that gives them the power of consignation: of the unification, identification, classification, and interpretation of the archive (Derrida: 10). This position means the power not only over physical objects, but also over the historical discourse or the discourse of the commencement, of the origin based on the material traces guarded in the archive.

Although conceived and considered to be a nomadic, itinerant art manifestation, Manifesta has its home in Amsterdam, as does its archive. Created in the same decade when the information revolution took place, and when the digitalization of archives was at its peak, it seems unusual to encounter this retrograde tendency sustained by the argument that it would be impossible to move the enormous content of Manifesta's archive from one host city to another.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Selective and very limited insight into this archive is offered through the digital archive of the organization Basis-Wien that was commissioned by Manifesta to digitalize parts of its archive. For more see: [www.basis-wien.at](http://www.basis-wien.at).

Following Derrida, the physical location of the archive can be seen as the location from which power is being distributed, giving or denying the symbolic mandate to the ones who want to enter and interpret it. The need to control this process might stem from the fact that, although Manifesta constructs this recent decade as remote history, it is run by the agents who are still very active and influential within the art scene, therefore the need to



protect any document that could deconstruct their desired projected image. According to Derrida,

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation. A contrario, the breaches of democracy can be measured by (...) *Forbidden Archives*" (Derrida: 10-11 in the footnote).

As previously noticed, my first steps into the "real" archive of Manifesta were limited by the detection of invisible borders not to be crossed, and, as a consequence, the democratic principle of this institution became severely compromised by the discovery of the Forbidden Archive. Instead, through this attempt to control the archive, Manifesta shows a desire to control the image of its recent past, and to immediately profit from a self-created historical mandate. This practice is not unusual, or expressed only by this institution, but when presented in the guise of democratic principles, it becomes highly problematic.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> The attempt to present the presentation of the archive in order to materialize the concept of full democracy happened in one of the Manifesta exhibitions as well. The curators of Manifesta 4 decided to create an exhibition item out of the files of all the thousand artists they had visited during their exploration trips across Europe. This "administrative monument" (van Winkel, 2005: 222), was supposed to create an atmosphere in which nobody feels excluded, but instead hide the inherent (non-democratic) element of the curatorial practice that is based on the process of selection, therefore inclusion and exclusion. Not taken as a main curatorial concept that could have turned the exhibition into these collections of artists' documentations, the existence of this archive together with the selected, exhibited artworks merely seems like a politically correct version of the exclusory practice of curatorship.

The ideal archive that every archivist attempts to create is one that exists and functions as a single corpus, as a coherent body that nothing can divide or destroy. The archivist's power of consig-

nation treats the historical documents as part of a larger, coherent story, of a singular picture without cracks. Or, in Derrida's words, "in an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner"(10). This desire of the archivist to have the absolute power over the corpus of the documents it "guards" and to present history as a narrative without tensions or contradictions, becomes destabilized with the appearance of the Unidentified one. Hidden within the surrounding homogenous discourse, the Unidentified one manages to pass through these cracks and speak out. As we have learned, "the archive always works, and a priori, against itself" (Derrida: 14) and the Unidentified one embodies exactly this sickness, this desire of the archive to destroy itself.

The reason for this desire of the archive to destroy itself is in its hypomnesic character, since it has been constructed as an exterior technical model of the psychic apparatus. Defined in this way, Derrida argues that archive cannot escape the drive that originally haunts human psychic apparatus – the death/aggression/destruction drive. Therefore, the archive is built on unstable ground that is constantly endangered by its inherent contradictions, namely of the desire to remember and the drive to erase from the memory. Nevertheless, "this contradiction is not negative, it modulates and conditions the very formation of the concept of the archive" (Derrida: 90). If we go back to the Unidentified one, she was born precisely in this void, at the place where she still exist as a trace of a deletion, as a phantom between two worlds. What follows is that this secret of Manifesta archive and its failure to preserve past events from deletion becomes exposed, as does the validity of its historical narrative constructed on this ground. Thanks to the Unidentified one, to this *phantom of the archive*, we are allowed to enter it and gain these insights without the control of the guardians.<sup>50</sup>



50 "I tried to show elsewhere that though the classical scholar did not believe in phantoms and would not in truth know how to speak to them, forbidding himself even, it is quite possible that Marcellus had anticipated the coming of a scholar of the future, of a scholar who, in the future and so as to conceive of the future, would dare to speak to the phantom" (Derrida: 29).

According to Derrida, we live in an age in which everyone burns with the desire to archive, in which each of us is possessed by *le mal d'archive*, or archival fever (14). What this sickness means is "to have a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement" (57). What can the Unidentified one, as a resident of the place where the archive *anarchives* itself, tell us about the nostalgic spot to which the archive of Manifesta wants to return? The answer seems clear and simple, if we search for the moment that Manifesta cites as the moment of its birth: it is the year 1989, the year of its *arkhē*, of its beginning of counting time.<sup>51</sup> Nostalgia also occurs as the effect of the significant loss and, following this, the

51 Consequently, the first chapter in *Manifesta Decade* is entitled "One Day Every Wall Will Fall: Select Chronology of Art and Politics after 1989" and is dedicated to the selected facts and figures from art and politics after 1989. Through this symbolic act, the counting of Manifesta time officially starts from this year.

year 1989 can be read as a traumatic moment in the Western art discourse, as a moment of major political and social changes in the recent European past. Seen this way, Manifesta becomes a strange monument to the times before the occurrence of the trauma, revealing a nostalgic mourning for the times already gone. Following the Unidentified one through the archive and its symptoms, we have arrived to the political level of the activities of Manifesta, or the primary reasons it was created for – to assist with the encounter with the Others in the new chapter of European history.

This chapter of European history is characterized by attempts to create a stable and unique cultural and political identity

of the European Union, summarized in one of its official slogans “United in Difference.” Nevertheless, this discourse of a “unity of differences” points out its homogenizing tendencies that are inherently undemocratic, hence the real democratic position would be “difference in unity,” or the flexibility to accommodate all the heterogeneous traits that this unity contains. What connects this process to the previous discussion on the archive, according to Derrida, is the fact that both processes are impossible without violence:

The gathering into itself of the One is never without violence, nor is the self-affirmation of the Unique, the law of the archontic, the law of consignation which orders to archive. Consignation is never without that excessive pressure (impression, repression, suppression) of which repression and suppression are at least figures (Derrida, 50-51).

As the discovery of the Unidentified one in the Manifesta archive testifies, the Other is no longer on the other side of the border, somewhere in the far East. The Other has crossed the line and infiltrated within Us. The Unidentified one seems to be created at this spot where the Other is allowed to enter the official discourse, but is denied identity, denied a proper name, in that way remaining the unidentifiable Other forever. Radical deletion of the nameless Other is happening in her full presence, testifying to her existence in limbo, between two worlds, where the democratic principle of equality is being practiced only on the level of rhetorics. If we take into account the view on the current political process as proposed by Giorgio Agamben, it is possible to see the Unidentified one as the embodiment of someone he calls “homo sacer,” or someone who is legally dead, deprived of a determinate legal status, while biologically still alive. Thus, Agamben argues, “the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely

unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterize them as rights of the citizens of a state” (1998:199).<sup>52</sup>

52 The most flagrant example of this deletion was discovered in Slovenia, one of the *Manifesta* “hosts”: “On 26 February 1992, at least 18,305(3) individuals were removed from the Slovenian registry of permanent residents and their records were transferred to the registry of foreigners. Those affected were not informed of this measure and its consequences. The “erased” were mainly people from other former Yugoslav republics, who had been living in Slovenia and had not applied for or had been refused Slovenian citizenship in 1991 and 1992, after Slovenia became independent. As a result of the “erasure,” they became de facto foreigners or stateless persons illegally residing in Slovenia. In some cases the “erasure” was subsequently followed by the physical destruction of the identity and other documents of the individuals concerned. Some of the “erased” were served forcible removal orders and had to leave the country.” More on the case of Slovenian “erased” ones see in: Slovenia Amnesty International’s Briefing to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 35th Session, November 2005, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur680022005>, visited January 2, 2007.

In the case of *Manifesta*, it seems that we are dealing with a translation of this same practice into the realm of culture, where the institution created to accommodate ongoing shifts was not able to prevent the internalization of the processes it was trying to fight against. One seems to be unaware of its own split, of its own divisions and cracks of the picture of the ideal Self, the split necessary for it to exist in the first place.

The main mechanism of the violence, whether encountered as the archival impulse or as the unifying process of the Self, is repetition. According to Derrida, “the One, as self-repetition, can only repeat and recall this instituting violence. It can only affirm itself and engage itself in this repetition. This is even what ties in depth the injunction of memory with the anticipation of the future to come” (Derrida: 51). In the case of *Manifesta* exhibitions, the traces in the archive testify to the process of repetition:

The absence of radically different selection procedure in all five editions of *Manifesta* suggests that, even if the cura-



tors were not pressured to conform to a pre-established model, they voluntarily acted as if they were under such pressure. (...) [Moisdon Trembley] also evoked the ineffectiveness of repeating the intensive trans-European survey that the curators of the previous Manifesta edition had performed only a year and a half before: "An art scene, or context, does not renew itself that quickly" (van Winkel 2005: 226).

In order to exist, Manifesta has to repeat itself, repeating the same violence against itself and against the Other, with every new edition, every new exhibition. The archive is the record of this violence but also a way to assure future developments, since the archive does not only record events, it also produces them, or, according to Derrida, it produces the criteria by which the future events will be *archivable* (17). Hence, the control of the archive means not only control over the past, but control over the future as well.

Caught within this circle of repetition, the question to be posed here is what options are left for the subjects to escape it, as well as its inherent violence. In his analysis of the archive, Derrida makes a brief but theoretically valuable connection between the creation of archives and the creation of artworks through the activity of the death drive: "The death drive tends thus to destroy the hypomnesic archive, except if it can be disguised, made up, painted, printed, represented as the idol of its truth in painting" (14). A possible interpretation of this insight is that the repetition and destruction of memory can be escaped if the death drive is turned into art, into impressions that are "memories of death" (Derrida: 14). According to this, the disappearance or deletion of the art objects takes away the possibility of creating a difference, a difference that can break the circle of the repetition of violence. In the next section, I will examine what the possible theoretical

implications are of the deletion of art objects, as proposed in the curatorial concept of Manifesta 6.

1. Opening speeches for Manifesta 5. 2. *Left to right:* Massimiliano Gioni, unidentified, Henry Meyric Hughes, and unidentified. 3. *Left to right:* Unidentified, unidentified, Joxe Juan Gonzalez de Txabarri, and Lourdes Fernández.



#### 4 ABORTED OBJECTS

What would we find in the archive of the hypothetical scenario in which the planned Manifesta 6 did in fact take place in the way it was supposed to? Similar to the previous discovery of the Unidentified ones, the trace we would have to follow is not the one behind the things or events that did happen, but rather the ones left as a void behind the ones that did not happen. In this case, there would be no trace left of the artworks: through this act of erasure, the art objects would incidentally and definitively disappear from the archive. Nevertheless, this occurrence should not be considered to be uniquely part of Manifesta practice alone.<sup>53</sup> Rather, this tendency in curato-

<sup>53</sup> The curatorial concept for Manifesta 6 is defined as being part of the “didactic turn” in curatorship, as it was called by the editors of the Dutch art magazine *Metropolis M*. This turn limits the function of exhibitions to their didactical value, excluding the possibility of viewers to gain knowledge through a wider sensory perception. For more see: *Metropolis M, Expanding Academy*, 2006.

rial practice, to shift its main focus away from the artworks, also occurred when curating went through the process of redefining its practice in the 1990s. These new types of curators are usually referred to as “independent curators,” where “independent” relates to the flexible, “nomadic, traveling elite,” not officially employed by any one particular institution (Vanderlinden 1998: 210). The process of the “nomadization” of curating has put one more demand on this profession: curators must not only be art experts, but, more importantly, experts in terms of local cultures. As Francesco Bonami defines it, “the role of the curator today involves such enormous geographical diversity that the curator is now a kind of visual anthropologist – no longer just a taste maker, but a cultural analyst” (in Boutoux 2005: 204).

Since these times, the discussions in curatorship have shifted from broad aesthetic issues to social and political ones.

Or, as Camiel van Winkel concludes:

This generation of curators barely alludes to the fact that curating entails showing works of art to an audience; they seem to be more interested in other aspects of their job. (...) This also explains why the desire to generate aesthetic experience is completely absent from the Manifesta discourse. The curators see the aesthetic experience as a static and private moment that makes the process of a dialogue and creative exchange – and thus the social dimensions of the work of art – turn inward and evaporate (2005: 228).

In the example of the “Manifesta Archive,” in the publication I was using to read through this manifestation, this strategy is evident in the apology of the editors for not having enough space for the visual images of all the works to be fully reproduced. The reason for the lack of pictures of artists was explained as an attempt to avoid the “romantic notion of the mastery of the artist, showing shots of him or her at work, to make the artistic craftsmanship visible and create an illusion of intimate participation. A contemporary version of the ‘grand masters’ is not of interest here” (Vanderlinden 2005: 236). Nevertheless, there was enough space to include numerous photographs of curators at work, of curators visiting artists, visiting remote countries, having hard thoughts, or having public discussions. What happened here was the substitution of this “romantic notion” of the artist with the image of the curator. Characterized by Vanderlinden as “one of the leading artistic forms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (236), the exhibitions have officially become recognized as a form, and the curator is the one who molds them.<sup>54</sup> The artworks are there because they

<sup>54</sup> This same period brought up the tendency of curators to “mold” not only artworks, but the social relations and political processes as well. This process has been named as relational aesthetics by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud. For more see in: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (2002).

cannot be evaded or, as seen in the case of Manifesta 6, perhaps they in fact can be.

What matters here is the question of what else is being erased by this act of erasing the artworks before they were conceived. As art history teaches us, the twentieth century brought new shifts in the experience of visual representations and what can be considered as Art, from Surrealists and Breton's found objects and Duchamp's readymades, to the Sixties and the first cycle of the dematerialization of art as an attempt to escape commodification within the dominant system of capitalistic production. Nevertheless, what makes this current shift different is that the motivation to temporarily put artworks aside came not from the artists, as in previous times, but from the curators. In this case, when the disappearance of the object became a curatorial concept rather than part of an artistic strategy, the third part of the exhibition triad – artwork, curator, and viewer – has disappeared as well. At the moment when artworks were aborted and expelled from the site, there was no place left for the outside world to enter. In the case of the dematerialization of objects as an artistic strategy, the entire process depended on the viewer, who had to be present for the dematerialization to happen. The only exhibition we would be left with in the case of Manifesta 6 was the exhibition of established relations between the attending curators and artists, adding a new function that the exhibition is to serve, one that was probably hard to imagine in some previous times.

If the objects are aborted, then what is Manifesta's attitude toward cultural contexts that host its itinerant editions? The particular "insensibility" of Manifesta curators for local contexts, local institutions, and people was already noticed years ago.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed analysis of the attitude Manifesta curators and the negative consequences on the local art scene in the case of Ljubljana see more in: Thomas Botoux 2005.



Constructed as a manifestation whose economic existence depends largely on the budget of a local host, Manifesta was soon turned into an economic enterprise and a brand to be desired and competed for by most of the cities in Europe, which desire to promote their “positive” and European image in the wider political and cultural agenda. From this perspective, Manifesta more resembles a virus than the nomadic construction it desires to be seen as, with “Manifesta at Home” as its place of residence. What makes this practice different from the old colonial attitude is its complicity: within this construction, the host participates voluntarily, paying a high price for the benefits it gains from the virus it hosts. Brought to work within the limits of this constellation, the curators turn out to be nothing more than cultural tourists, who at the end of the process bring home their own picture, projected onto different local contexts.

The most recent escalation of the “misunderstandings” that curators had with the local context happened in 2006, when Nicosia was selected to host this edition of Manifesta. The Manifesta Board had selected this particular location over Tallinn, Estonia because of its specific political and cultural present, as the closest spot where, according to them, Europe touches the Orient, or the Middle East:

And of course it’s about the location that is between real West and real East. Not to mention beautiful southern climate and historical sites. (...) The choice is very difficult having in mind that Manifesta 6 in both Tallinn and Nicosia will be a metaphorical confirmation of European expansion of EU of culture (Jara Boubnova, email correspondence 12 May 2004, Manifesta Archive).

As it seems, the selection of Nicosia follows current political shifts in Europe, where its former East has moved further

south, and the opportunity to have a first edition in the country from the former Eastern Bloc was thus missed. Perhaps the most worrying of the issues that dominated the official discourse of debate around the cancellation of Manifesta 6 was the insistence that the cause for the “misunderstanding” should be found in the local context. The conflict between the Greek and the Turkish sides was constantly in focus, but what remained hidden the whole time was the fact that Cyprus is actually divided into three parts: the Greek, the Turkish, and the British.<sup>56</sup> From this per-

<sup>56</sup> The official reason for the cancellation was the refusal of the Greek side to financially support part of the school that was to take place in the Turkish zone: “A conflict has arisen between Manifesta and Nicosia for Art Limited (NFA). Manifesta maintains that NFA, a special legal entity set up by representatives of the Municipality of Nicosia and the Cypriot Ministry of Culture and Education to administer Manifesta 6 in autumn 2006, has not fulfilled its contractual obligations to secure the selected venues by the curators in the entire city, i.e. in both North and South Nicosia.” Official explanation of International Foundation Manifesta, <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/instInfo/inst/6058/contentType/news//nlD/2943/lang/1> Accessed 23 October 2006.

spective, the independence that Cyprus gained in 1960 should be perceived as a moment when all the trouble began; at the same time, its colonial past seems like an orderly utopian dream. The decision of curators to establish a school, and exclude from their focus the specific historical and political circumstances of this island, turned their enterprise into an extended holiday that could have taken place at any other “exotic” spot on Earth. As it turns out, the decision to abort art objects has also erased any possibility for critical reflection on the circumstances in which Cyprus finds itself today.

If we try to read this disappearance of objects as a symptom, it will bring us to the expertise of psychoanalysis, where objects, or rather the lack of objects, are considered to be a key element in the formation of subjectivity, as well as in the economy of drives and desires. As Slavoj Žižek argues, the relation to the



desired objects forms the basis of the relationship that the One has with the Other:

What bothers us in the Other (Jew, Japanese, African, Turk) is that he appears to entertain a privileged relationship to the object – the other either possesses the object treasure, having snatched it away from us (which is why we don't have it), or he poses a threat to our possession of the object (1998: 999).

Going back to the previous analysis of the Manifesta archive and the discussion about what loss we could speculate it had been created to hide, and what traumatic event it refers to, European unification also brought a temporary deconstruction of the European Other. In the clinical experience of psychoanalysis, the patients who have lost their admired object cannot proceed to the mourning phase, since they need a “symbiotic, idealizing type of identification with their objects in order to stabilize their identity” (Weiss and Lang, 2000:326). In the case of European political shifts and the “traumatic” moments in the process of creating a unified One, these symptoms could be interpreted as a continuous need to replace the lost object, the idealized Other, with the new idealized Other in order to stabilize fragile identity. In Lacanian terms, the evolution of subjectivity is linked to a fundamental symbolic process, in which “the relationship to the Other is transformed into a symbolic one. (...) In the moment that the primary Other can be symbolized (...) the possibility to distance oneself arises and thereby the beginnings of a space where an own identity can be developed” (326).

This ability to symbolize the relationship with the Other brings us back to the position of artworks as objects that can serve as a way to temporarily stabilize one's continuously unstable identity. What can also be read from the act of erasure of art objects

in curatorial practice is a disbelief in the possibility of the artists to present new insights through their works, or new ways to symbolize their relationship with this Other – a historically, politically, and culturally rich island. Cyprus seems to be used as a setting, a scenography for the proposed art school, a move that has blocked alternative interpretations of reality and the destabilization of dominant discourses.

## 5 MANIFESTA DEMOCRACY REVISED

**A**s the discovery of the Unidentified ones in the Manifesta archive earlier showed, the democratic nature of this institution has been severely compromised. At this point, I was interested in what this same phantom can say about two other aspects on which Manifesta bases its democratic character: its functioning as a network, and its actively practiced self-criticism. As we have read, Manifesta developed into a fast-growing network for young professionals in Europe, and one of the most innovative biennial exhibition programs to be held anywhere. This was due, in no small measure, to its pan-European ambitions and to its uniquely nomadic nature. Both the network and the exhibition, with its related activities, are equally important components of this itinerant event (official Manifesta website).

Interpreted this way, networks are assumed to have an inherent democratic nature. Nevertheless, as Camiel van Winkel has noticed in his critical analysis of Manifesta rhetorics,

Networks are not inherently democratic. On the contrary, a network is exclusive rather than inclusive, built upon a set of privileged relations between selected individuals. What place does the public occupy in relation to the network? (...) Ascribed as simply open to the public, to “everyone” (...) the discourse is of such a general and abstract nature that any notion of privilege or exclusion evaporates (2005: 221).

Hence, the network *per se* has a democratic potential, a potential to be an instrument of democratic procedure, but as long as it is practiced as an entity to include, there will always be the ones who are excluded. The projected picture of the Manifesta network of happy individuals, of a Manifesta “family,” becomes

broken when we perceive the Unidentified one in the picture. The Unidentified one speaks about this position of being excluded, of being nameless, irrelevant and unrecognized, although having the same physical, bodily traits as the identified ones. Through this, one more power of the archivist becomes visible: the authority to name things, in this case people, and to position them in the discourse, giving them name and identities, giving them the history or denying them the right to speak. The *un-networked* ones are dismissed by the archivist as the *unidentifiable* ones, left alone at the other side. The network fails to perform its democratic potential; instead, it serves a particular function to hide the actual authority figures who would be deposed if the democratic transparency were real.

In this same rhetoric of the free interpretation of basic concepts of democracy, “in the Manifesta language game, ‘democratic’ means ‘open’ and ‘inclusive’ but also ‘open-ended’” (van Winkel 2005: 221) and this has been practiced by its curators as well. All of these strategies (open-ended, process-based approaches) are evidently practiced through the critical attitude that Manifesta takes towards its own practice. They are the strategies that Manifesta employs to survive attempts of external criticism. Through this rhetorical move, the failure is turned into success:

The final result is valued less than the path followed in order to achieve it. With it, the possibility of a failure can be openly acknowledged and even thematized. (...) Thus the built-in option for curators to admit and elaborate their own “failure” paradoxically contributes to the rhetorical construction of Manifesta success (van Winkel 222).

This strategy becomes visible in the case of the Unidentified one as well. Through the act of giving her (any) name, the



archivist hides her failure to perform her function, hides the mistakes and slips of memory that are incorporated into her version of this particular history. The failure is incorporated into the discourse where this impossibility or unwillingness to research and reveal the identity of the persons encountered just a few years before does not turn the caption into some general description such as “the curators and panelists,” but openly reveals its own failure to give a name to the people who contributed to this history in the first place. Hence the picture and the caption seem to be all in order once we look at them: the image is there, the names are there, and the ones we do not remember also have names. Through this practice, Manifesta neither deconstructs nor destroys the authoritarian nature of curatorial (and archival) practice; instead, it hides them behind the basic postulates of democracy. The travesty of democracy is revealed thanks to the deprived Unidentified one.

The remaining question here is whether we should place all the blame for the rhetorical and “free” interpretation of democratic postulates on this art manifestation that might be the only one that manifests the symptoms of the same practice that takes place in the wider political discourse. Sometimes accused of being “an extension of Brussels’ cultural policy” and “complicit in the current official disappearance of immigrants in Europe from its cultural institutions” (Enwezor 2005: 184), Manifesta leads us further to the question of the possibility to read “Europe” through its art biennial. Hence, how does this “Europe” look in the scope of current political developments?

In her study of recent European films that deal with current issues of the relationship between the Other and cultural and political processes, Yosefa Loshitzky chooses one particular scene from the film *JOURNEY OF HOPE* (1990) as the “ultimate iconic image of Fortress Europe.” In this scene, hungry and freez-



ing refugees, who have just survived the harsh winter mountain storm, desperately knock on the double-glazed glass windows of a warm, indoor swimming pool inside an Alpine spa hotel. They see the owner of the hotel swimming in the pool, but because of the soundproof glass walls, he cannot hear the refugees' desperate cries for help:

Perhaps this shocking image of reflective duality of privilege mirrored by its counter-image of a luxury spa hotel turning into a hospital of potential deportees is the ultimate iconic image of Fortress Europe guarding its visible wealth and comfort against the pledge of non-Europeans in search of a better life. The image of "hospitality" denied is the image of the New Europe (Loshitzky 2006: 754).

The important detail in this image, in this frame, is the disappearance of the voice. The visually present Others are denied the power to communicate by the institution of the sound-proof double glass. In this scene, the subalterns do speak, even shout, but nobody is able to hear them. The visual presence of the Other is no longer able to disturb Us: their voice is stacked somewhere in the middle, in the invisible space between two layers of glass. A similar analogy of "tolerance" seems to be noticeable in the treatment of artworks as reflected in the current curatorial practice: the artworks are put on a pedestal, but are protected by double-glass that will not allow their voice to be heard. Censorship no longer means the radical destruction of artworks; rather, artworks are turned into background illustrations, into wallpaper images not to be reflected upon.

Nevertheless, this attitude of Europe toward its Others is nothing new in European history, as Saskia Sassen shows in her recent analysis:

Today we deal with different religions and phenotypes and cultures, and we think that is the reason for the difficulty of incorporation. Our very European history suggests we had feelings of similar intensity about those who from today's perspective appear to be "one of us": the Germans, the Belgians, the Italians, just about any of the current EU membership. Given the acts of violence and the hatreds we felt against them, I cannot help but wonder whether those who we experience today as so different and difficult to assimilate will not undergo the same transformation over the coming generations (2006: 645).

Although comforting, these historical facts should not be used as an excuse for present crimes, for all these erasures, deletions, and mutilations that we are witnessing today. The ones in power would like these unidentified, undocumented, nameless, and hidden ones to remain that way. In this journey to which the Unidentified one has taken us, the role of cultural analysis was not to discover the historical or archival "blind-spots" and find the "real" names of the Unidentified ones, but rather to read these erasures as signs, as symptoms that point to deeper and bigger problems than what was assumed at first glance. Our role is to make these invisible glass borders visible, to find cracks through which the voice of the Other will be able to pass, to discover the voice that will be able to speak back; as it seems, this is the same way Europe will need to include the Others as its legal citizens in order to exist, it will need new artworks as well as a way to create a difference and to destabilize the current homogenizing political and cultural discourses. Once again, the One should not be afraid of the cracks in its idealized image.

1. *Left to right*: Unidentified, Marta Kuzma, and Massimiliano Gioni. 2. *Left to right*: Massimiliano Gioni, Marta Kuzma, and Joxe Juan Gonzalez de Txabbarri during the opening press conference for Manifesta 5. 3. Henry Méyric Hughes (*left*) and Miren Karmele Azcarate. 4. *Left to right*: Lourdes Fernández and Hedwig Fijen. 5. Massimiliano Gioni (*left*), and Marta Kuzma. 6. *Left to right*: Martin Fritz, unidentified, Hedwig Fijen, Igor Zabel, unidentified, and Lourdes Fernández. 7. Vincente Todoli (*left*) and Lourdes Fernández.



## 6 THE EUROPEAN LOGIC OF NEGATION

In determining the logical procedure behind the creation of the Unidentified one as a *thing* that is excluded through its inclusion in the system, we might want to recall Alain Badiou's remarks on the concept of negation. According to this, if we were to define the strategy of defeating the "enemy," we should first define which one of the three logics of negation we were confronting: classical negation,<sup>57</sup> intuitionistic, or para-

57 "The heart of classical logic, (...) when the negation of negation is equivalent to affirmation. (...) Classical negation is (...) always *either* yes or no, with no other possibility" (emphasis in the original, 2009: 4)."

The quotes presented here are from the unpublished manuscript by Badiou, "On the Concept of Negation," that was handed out at his summer seminar at the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee in August 2009.

consistent. In the process of defining which of the three logics is in operation, we should "know what the variations of the operator of negation are in these three different logical contexts" (7):

In the framework of classical logic, the conflict is structured in an antagonistic, binary way. (...) Either your troops are occupying the city or your enemy's are. (...) In the framework of intuitionistic logic, the conflict is not necessarily structured in such a rigid way. Each situation must be examined on a case-by-case basis. Naturally, (...) a city cannot be occupied simultaneously by your troops and the enemy's. But a city will be able to be called "occupied" if it is occupied by the troops of a neutral country. (...) With paraconsistent logic (...) a city can be said to be "occupied by our troops" and also "occupied by the enemy," and consequently, although it is occupied by our troops, in a certain way it isn't. (...) These two sides can construct a situation whose truth is not formalizable in the principal of non-contradiction (8-9).

In the trajectory from one type of logic to the other, “the potency of negation becomes increasingly weaker as we move from classicism to intuitionism and from intuitionism to paraconsistent logic. (...) Just as in Hegel’s dialectic,  $p$  can be co-present alongside its own negation” (9). In the paraconsistent system, we can have a statement that is weakly true, and that will through the process of negation become absolutely true. Thus, we could conclude further, besides having elements of truth, a statement can contain the predominantly false element, or its negation as well.

In the art and political system before the fall of the Berlin wall, we were dealing with classical negation, when the enemy was clearly defined. In words of Hans Belting:

The unity of Western Art, which had become uncertain, gained its common profile from the contrast to that of East European art. (...) Each lived from a tradition that was defined against that of the other. This is why open frontiers that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet empire gave rise to such hysterical reactions in the West, when it became clear that matters of identity had to be defined in substance rather than by demarcation (2003: 54).

What the presence of the Unidentified one testifies to is exactly this logical procedure, when the thing remains the same after the event, denied the right to change its status from one to the other side of equation. Following Badiou, in the paraconsistent system, “the force of the change cannot be perceived on the level of visible therefore we deal with a false event, with the simulacrum of the event” (14). This insight further raises the question of whether the political changes after 1989 truly signified an event or, if they did, for which side of the political opposi-

tion they actually happened? In other words, the question here is whether the event that initiated Manifesta, the fall of communism, was a true event from the subject position of its creators and, subsequently, for the policies of the European Union of which it is a reflection?

As already noticed in the discussions on the developments of contemporary art, one side of the opposition was marked as a winning one:

Western culture, which claims for itself the idea of freedom and the presence on the market, now emerges as the universal heir of history, simply swallowing up the eastern culture that was so much compromised. (...) Now, even in the East, art has to be “professional” in that it is “paid for, exhibited and institutionalized” (Belting 56-57).

Hence, from the perspective of the West, the proclaimed event never happened, since if it had happened, we would be able to find some trace of change on its side, after this encounter with the Other. Instead of the change that we are all to believe in, we are dealing with the situation where the Other and the initiating subject in question never reached the unifying level that they were supposed to reach, which manifests the logical procedures in which it suddenly becomes possible to present the permanent exclusion of the Other in the guise of false inclusion. What happened was the expansion of the Western art market that swept away the differences in how art is being made and practiced on the other side of the wall. Its “irresistible pull on the East, however, seemed to confirm the Western self-assessment that the only art worthy of the name came from the West” (54). In case of the true encounter with the Other from the other side of the wall, we would find the change in the archive as well, since “the archive cannot absorb everything without fundamental change to its own content and significance”:

The more and the faster it incorporates what is new, the less it can guarantee the hierarchy it represented. Protection against the new only meant that the archive was admitting the new only after it had become compatible with the existing hierarchy in the archive. The mechanism of constant extension does not by itself guarantee the continuity of cultural memory. Likewise, expanding the archive in the direction of other cultures cannot fail to change the former (Belting 65).

Unfortunately, we believe that the consequences of this same logic on the political level in Europe are still to be seen. What we should remain alert to are new modes of presenting permanent exclusion in the guise of its false opposition, inclusion.



