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# Diversity and (In)equality in the Global Art World: Global Development and Structure of Field-Configuring Events

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**Abstract:** There is a boom of art historical studies on the globalisation of the arts or global art world. Sociological accounts are, despite the rise of cultural and art sociology in recent years, almost complete absent from this discussion. This paper makes a contribution to the globalisation of the arts, but from a sociological and quantitative perspective. The focus of this paper is on particular type of global institution – biennials and other types of art festivals or large-scale exhibitions. These institutions are seen being major places of exchange and formulation of norms and standards. They define what is hip and new. However, theories of globalisation, in combination with accounts from professionals of the field, claim that these institutions propagate only Western values or have a homogenising quality, because they only show caste works from artists of the Western hemisphere or that they repeat the same works and artists across the globe. However, based on a large-scale quantitative survey, this paper will demonstrate that picture is more complex and that we find tendencies to homogenisation and heterogenisation existing at the same time or that the locality of these events acts as a source of uniqueness and innovativeness. The paper proposes a new theoretical framework that interprets these findings as based on Niklas Luhmann's idea of second-order observation and Bruno Latour's and Harrison C. White's conception of the network.

**Keywords:** global art world, diversity and (in)equality, festivals, hegemony, fine art, music, performing arts, art history

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## Introduction

The research<sup>1</sup> described here investigates the global development of international art events such as biennials, music and theatre festivals, which emerged after World War II and are considered key institutions in the global art world.<sup>2</sup> Despite the recent rise of art sociology, no recent sociological overview or summary of globalisation has incorporated the global art world or paid much attention to these events.<sup>3</sup> However, over the last 10 years, globalisation in the arts has attracted increasing research interest within the history of art, covering a broad range of topics that include methodological questions about how art history as a discipline can function in a global world, global historical narratives (Elkins 2007; Honour and Fleming 2009; Belting, Birken, and Buddensieg 2011; Verhagen 2017) and national art worlds in an international context (Belting, Weibel, and Buddensieg 2007; Belting and Buddensieg 2009; Onians 2008; Harris 2011; Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim 2011). Additionally, a growing number of art historical publications by academics or art professionals debate the role of biennials as a paradigm of the global art world (Bonnet 2016; Bydler 2004; Byrne 2005/2006; Clark 2007; Gielen 2009; Filipovic, Van Hal, and Øvstebø 2010; Stallabrass 2004). However, most of these accounts relate to the visual arts, employ a qualitative methodology and rely mostly on single cases.

Such terms as *globalisation of the arts* (note the plural) or *global art world* suggest an all-encompassing approach. However, most of the studies that employ these terms actually focus on globalisation in the visual arts (Buchholz and Wuggenig 2005; Green and Gardner 2016, Morgner 2015, Quemin 2006; Rogoff 2009). In the wider debate on the global art world, it seems that the art historical approach and its preference for the visual arts prevail. This narrow focus is also apparent in studies of large-scale events, where attention to biennials is almost obsessive. Even the most recent publications in this field do not question this focus (see Jones 2017; Kompatsiaris 2017), and the two narratives seem mutually reinforcing; biennials are seen as examples of the global art world, and the globalisation of the arts is best illustrated through the study of biennials. This tendency is not seen in

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1 This article extends previous research which focused on visual art exhibitions (Morgner 2015).

2 In this article, the term *art world* will be used in loose connection with a range of approaches that view the arts as a self-contained world, sphere or system, with its own self-producing structures and internal logic (see Albertsen and Diken 2004).

3 On the recent rise of the sociology of art, see Alexander and Bowler (2014) and De La Fuente (2007). Ritzer (2007), Lechner and Boli (2014) and Lemert et al. (2010) have compiled the most recent surveys on globalisation. These encompass a range of cultural topics from media to religion but not the arts.

the social sciences, which can therefore help to broaden the field of study by taking account of other types of event. While this kind of comparative approach would serve to reveal patterns of globalisation and their impact on different artistic practices, it would need to be informed by a conceptual framework to ensure that any empirical findings extend beyond a descriptive and potentially superficial account.

The growing body of literature that deals with related or similar events such as fairs, world cups, fashion weeks and music festivals (for recent overviews, see Roche 2000; Moeran and Pedersen 2011; Girogi, Sassatelli, and Delanty 2011; Fox 2016) is strongly divided between research addressing the outward effects of such events (including tourism, city branding, global reception and media coverage) and research that is more focused on internal aspects such as selection of artists, number of site-specific works and number of commissions. These lines of thought are also visible in the presentation of biennials. On the one hand, they are seen as centres of dissemination, bringing local artists into contact with the global art scene. As Lourival Gomes Machado (first curator of the São Paulo Biennial) states in one catalogue,

By definition the [São Paulo] *Bienal* should fulfil two principal goals: to put modern art of Brazil not simply in proximity but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world ... for São Paulo to conquer the position of an international artistic center. (Machado, cited in Nelson 2010, 129)

Similar statements are to be found in Marschall's (2010) discussion of the Johannesburg Biennial, in Konaté's (2010) description of the Dakar Biennial and in the introductory statement of the first documenta (Buerger 2005).

The other kind of presentation has a more inward-facing perspective, characterising the biennial as a form of global survey whose size lends it a unique quality: 'major art exhibitions [...] survey large swaths of global art developments' (Lum 2008, 147). Here, the focus is on the event's composition, participating artists and unique features:

While showcasing newly-released artworks of the cutting-edge contemporary art around the globe, the Triennale will also feature many site-specific works highlighting the distinctive charms of the host city so that it will unfold the large extravaganza of art. (Tsutomu 2008, 45)

The Paris Biennale was inaugurated to 'give a panoramic glimpse of international, young artistic talents' (Lebovici 2007, 68). 'With two million visitors and a large number of commissions and site specific productions, Gwangju Biennial is one of the biggest and richest in the world' (Karroum and Chubb 2008, 91). The exhibition 'included thirty-four artists from around the world, including large proportions of women and artists from under-represented regions' (Kendzulak 2007, 19).

Linked to the inward or outward focus of such events, two additional arguments seem to derive from different methodological approaches. In contrast to other global developments (from migration to financial industries), the social sciences have invested little energy in collecting long-term data on the global art world. As a consequence, the existing data largely reflect the professional experiences of practitioners, curators and other experts. Based on this practical and personal experience, art professionals tend to judge the role of biennials on a few current cases, with no access to long-term trends or comparisons with events from other artistic fields. The claim is that these events embody a global monoculture that eradicates cultural diversity – for instance, the well-known French art critic, art historian and curator Paul Ardenne (2012) contended that these events are ‘promoting what is already promoted ... by showing the same artists as everyone else’. Similarly, the Australian art historian and art critic Charles Green reported anecdotal evidence of curators ‘working with the same co-curators and many of the same artists’ at seemingly distinct art events (Green and Gardner 2016, 212). The American art critic and teacher Trainor (2007, 154) reinforced this argument, noting that ‘works by the same artists do the rounds of the international art world circuit’. These observations have led others to conclude that these events are ‘characterized by sameness’ (Dundjerovic and Bateman 2009, 414; see also; Hutnyk 1998, 408). In short, there is a widely held view that field-configuring events tend to be uniform, repeatedly showing the same artists and propagating a homogenised culture.

The lack of large-scale studies and the limited means of practitioners have led to a large number of single case studies (for an overview, see Bauer and Hanru 2013; Block 2000; Bonnet 2016; Von Bennigsen, Gludowacz, and Van Hagen 2009; Vogel 2010). Some of these accounts include reviews of individual events; others are based on long-term professional involvement with the curatorial committee or steering board of such events. Some deal only with the most well-known examples, which means that they are quite selective in ways that are not necessarily guided by strong methodological considerations. Instead, selection of cases seems grounded in the ideology of sophisticated and elevated art critique. It should be noted that this type of criticism is not simply concerned with the design and aesthetic pleasures but derives from a post-colonial intellectualism arguing against Western dominance. For instance, Lotte Philipsen discusses documenta as a case of Western dominance, citing Rasheed Araeen as support: ‘WESTERN ART IS NOT INTERNATIONAL; IT IS MERELY TRANSNATIONAL. [...] Therefore, in an international context, it would be more appropriate to call it IMPERIALIST ART’ (Philipsen 2010, 68, emphasis in original). Biennials are here described as harbingers of Western imperialism and cultural inequality. Although these events claim to be international in scope, many scholars and art critics insist that they are dominated by Western artists (Demos 2010; Hassan and Oguibe 2001; Montero 2012; Oren 2014;

Tang 2011; Wong 2015; Wu 2009) and continue to employ traditional hierarchical power structures – ‘the only difference being that “Western” has quietly been replaced by a new buzzword, “global”’ (Wu 2009, 115). These authors are led to conclude that the ideas and meanings configured and presented at these events are linked to ideas and meanings that have emerged mainly in the West and are copied by (or forced upon) the rest of the world.

## **Field-Configuring Events: Biennales, Theatre and Dance Festivals and Media/Sound Festivals**

The conception of biennials inherent in these models is by and large one of unidirectional dissemination, resembling traditional forms of mass communication. Biennials serve as senders, transporting meaning to other parts of the globe, where they seem to eradicate artistic traditions by replacing them with homogenous Western forms of artistic meaning.

To overcome these methodological (single case, Western focus) and conceptual (visual arts focus) limitations of current models, the data sample must not be based only on single cases or cases from mostly Western countries but on a more encompassing model that can accommodate artistic meaning-making beyond a medium centred visual arts approach. There is also a need to develop a theoretical model that considers the production of meaning from more than a unidirectional perspective, accounting instead for the much more complex constitution of the global art world as entailing a co-productive process of meaning-making. These issues are closely related to the concept of field-configuring events: international arts festivals ranging from biennials to literary conferences, fashion weeks and music events (see Anand and Watson 2004; Anand and Brittany 2008; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Delacour and Leca 2011; Moeran 2011). Such events tend to have a recurring perennial structure and are widely regarded as international meeting places (Lechner and Boli 2005). Occurring in large numbers around the globe, they range from the End of the World Biennale in Ushuaia, Argentina to the Alaska Fashion Week (Vautravers-Busenhart 2000). Research on these field-configuring events suggests that their main function relates to the process of meaning-making (Meyer, Gaba, and Colwell 2005; Oliver and Montgomery 2008). These events bring together artists and works of art, offering a platform for mutual observation, discussion and contestation through which shared meaning can unfold or established meanings can be challenged (Morgner 2014; Maxwell 2015). In this regard, Lash and Lury. (2007, 6) speak of artistic products (ideas, innovations, objects) as ‘constituted in and as relations’.

Consequently, the above-mentioned issues of cultural diversity and (in)equality are central to the debate of global effects generated by this process of artistic meaning-making (Garud 2008; Oliver and Montgomery 2008; Banks 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Saha 2013). Lack of diversity and dominant hierarchies (entailing high inequality or hegemonic dominance) are often associated with suppression of innovation and new meanings; a lack of diversity implies a lack of knowledge exchange or of different ideas, and a small cultural elite plays a gatekeeper role, valuing and validating ideas and meanings from their own cultural horizon (Hallam and Ingold 2007; Kurtzberg 2005; Lee, Florida, and Acs 2004; Sternberg 2006). In this context, it is important to ask to what extent these field-configuring events are balanced, diverse and equal in their representation of artists around the globe. However, there is little empirical research, especially from a quantitative and international perspective, on the artists and works that recur at these events – for instance, in terms of their nationality. Consequently, it is important to explore a range of these field-configuring events and their internal structure, with particular regard to two questions: 1) whether these events are dominated mostly by the same artists and 2) whether there is a predominance of artists from a particular region (e. g. the Western world).

These two perspectives inform two common supporting theoretical approaches in the literature. These relate to the impact of global events on cultural diversity and inequality, focusing on homogenisation/standardisation or on the imperialist dominance of one part of the world over the rest. However, as empirical data remain scarce and are generally limited in scope, referring mainly to single cases, their claims cannot be seen as conclusive and support theories of global homogenisation and imperialism only superficially. To begin to address this gap, the present article asks whether field-configuring events tend to repeatedly feature the same artists, and whether they reflect a cultural bias that favours Western artists.

## Methodology, Case Selection and Hypotheses

The above critiques can be condensed into two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Field-configuring events select much the same artists and works across the global art world.

Hypothesis 2: Field-configuring events are dominated mainly by Western or American artists.

These propositions can be tested empirically on the basis of available data. The cultural and national origins of attending artists are analysed here to establish whether the majority originate from a particular region, and whether there is a

dominant group (defined here as more than 50 per cent of those attending). While nationality is of course only a proxy for cultural diversity, it has proved to be a core variable in cross-cultural research as the best indicator of regional differences (see Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Harkness 2005). As some of the artists might live outside their home country, it would also be of interest to compare nationality to country of residence. However, this latter category is difficult to conceptualise; the events in this sample provide only a temporary snapshot and rarely collect such data. It is also difficult to define and assess the state of being a resident in another country. For instance, the UK grants residential status to those who have lived there for more than five years and allows only short stays abroad; as such legal definitions fail to account for the more essential meaning of calling a country one's 'home', definitions of home country and country of residence vary considerably. Noting the global circulation and migration of artists, O'Hagan and Hellmanzik (2008) observed that only a few artists remain abroad for longer periods, and that only a small number become successful in those other locales. Many return following their studies or exchange because they cannot establish a career abroad in the absence of a supporting network, which can be accessed more easily in their home country. Additionally, exposure to cultural norms in another region does not necessarily mean that one's cultural baggage is instantly eradicated. As Robertson (1992) demonstrated, the encounter with other aesthetic standards may have the contrary effect of reinforcing one's innate aesthetic standards and cultural norms. Because regional support networks in one's home country constitute an important infrastructure for artistic success, national affinities therefore continue to play an important role. Events provide only an annual snapshot of an artist's biography, and definitions of residential status may vary. Even if such archival information is available, then, it is likely to be quite unreliable. Any comparison of nationality and country of residence would require more concerted investigation of biographical patterns, as well as a more qualitative approach to unravel what *home* or *residence* might mean to the artist in question.

From among the hundreds (or more) of such field-configuring events annually, this article focuses on a number of well-known examples from three important areas of the global art world: (1) visual arts and film; (2) theatre and dance; and (3) sound art and electronic media. It should be noted that while there are some overlaps (in that art exhibitions may include performance or music, or theatre festivals may include film screenings and so on), the selected events can be said to be dominated by a particular medium. The events were selected from disparate cultural regions and are well-known, not least because of their longevity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A few art festivals that proved influential in the 1960s and 1970s disappeared soon after and are therefore not considered in this study.



Events falling into category (1) are documenta (Germany), the Havana Biennale, (Cuba), the Istanbul Biennial (Turkey) and the Gwangju Biennale (South Korea). Events in category (2) include the Avignon Festival (France), Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá (Colombia), Tokyo International Theater Festival (Japan) and the National Arts Festival (Grahamstown, South Africa). The events in category (3) are Ars Electronica (Austria), Japan Media Festival (Japan), A Maze (Johannesburg, South Africa) and FILE: Electronic Language International Festival (Brazil).

Two methodological considerations informed the selection of these cases. First, these events are the largest in their respective regions and have often been of historic importance, increasing their significance in the overall population of field-configuring events. All were founded after WWII. Documenta and the Avignon Festival have their origins in a post-war rebuilding of artistic activities and were followed in the 1970s by the National Arts Festival at Grahamstown and Ars Electronica. The remaining festivals were founded in the last 30 years. With the exception of the Gwangju Biennale, most of these festivals initially attracted a relatively small number of visitors (sometimes only a few thousand) but have since grown considerably – the Gwangju Biennale, for instance, now attracts more than a million. In their early years, some festivals were limited to domestic artists, as for example in the case of the Avignon Festival and the Japan Media Arts Festival. Events are also selected because they represent a variety of curatorial and managerial approaches. For instance, the Gwangju Biennale or documenta usually invite a curator or curatorial team of international standing who might work in collaboration with a curator from the host country. Events like the Japan Media Festival or Avignon Festival usually appoint a multi-year director. Some events receive most of their budget through governmental funding or private sponsors and foundations. Some events invite artists directly while others adopt an open call system. In short, the events selected vary in terms of curatorial and managerial organisation. In the first place, then, these art events were selected on the basis of their model structure, varied managerial approach and international relevance. While no quantitative data are available to validate this assumption, a number of key publications associated with these events are regularly discussed in art journals across the globe, and they are visited by important curators, agents and professionals and discussed at relevant conferences (see Bydler 2004; Jordan 1992, LaBelle 2015).

Second, these cases were selected with a view to generating contrasting data, as advocated by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which suggests that data generation should be led by minimal and maximal contrasts. To that end, while the chosen cases are all similar in shape and appearance, large in scale and influential in the creative field, they occur in different historical settings and cultural contexts. To that extent, they meet the criteria of maximal



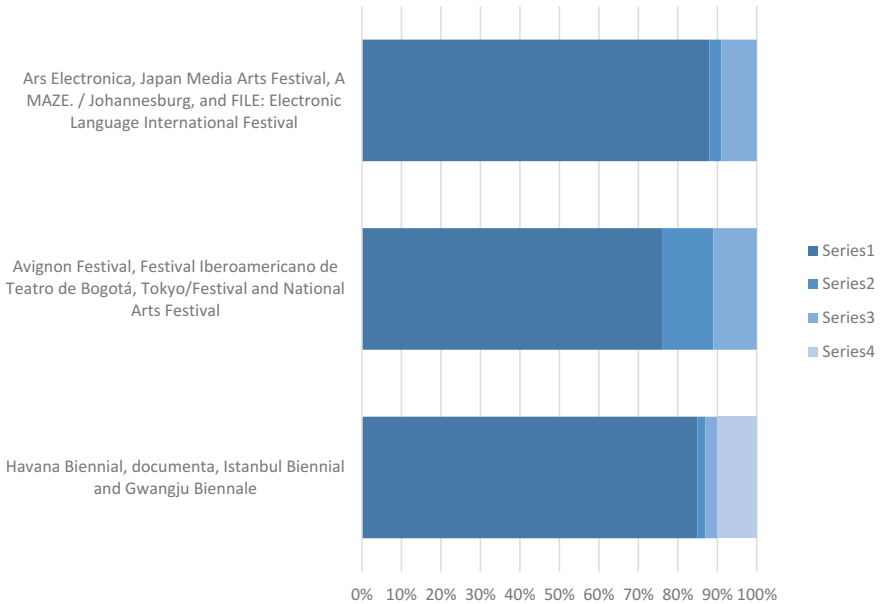
distance or contrast while sharing specific features. First proposed by grounded theory (drawing on Max Weber's ideal cases and now an established principle of case study research), this methodological approach enables the formulation of concepts that are not confined to the immediate phenomena but can be generalised to other cases (see George and Bennett 2005).

The data were drawn mostly from the catalogues of these exhibitions and festivals. Artists' surnames and first names, nationalities and other information were entered into a database for each event, which also recorded the name of the biennial or festival, the edition number and the year when it took place. Catalogues commonly contain some minor inaccuracies – for example, some artists are included who did not ultimately participate. Additionally, the catalogues may contain typos or information that is simply wrong, which creates particular difficulties when dealing with names and labels in various languages. The data were therefore revised and consolidated with the help of native speakers from Korea, Turkey and Cuba, making every effort to minimise such mistakes, especially in relation to artists' names. Spelling or correct use of nicknames was also important for the purposes of comparison. This information on names and nationality was almost fully available. Again, there were standardised labels for nationality, as the catalogues contained different versions (e.g. Britain, UK, United Kingdom, England) that could too easily be counted as different countries. For this reason, standard UN labels were used (e.g. Republic of Korea rather than South Korea). This proved difficult in a few cases, where artists were born in countries that had vanished, such as former Yugoslavia. This would have caused problems with artists born in new nation-states like Serbia or Croatia; in these cases, place of birth was deemed decisive – for instance, an artist born in Zagreb was classified as born in Croatia. The required information was available in more than 95% of cases, resulting in about 40,000 entries.

## Empirical Findings

**Hypothesis 1:** Field-configuring events select much the same artists and works across the global art world.

To test Hypothesis 1, it is necessary to show that a small group of artists is frequently included in exhibitions across various cultural regions, and that there is historical repetition of artists at that same event over time. To this end, participants in all the selected events were cross-referenced according to their respective media. The resulting data are presented in Figure 1 (biennales), in Figures 2 and 3 (theatre and dance festivals) and in Figures 3 and 4 (sound and media events).



**Figure 1:** Repetition frequency (averaged) of attending artists, performers or groups and musicians at the events (Source: Catalogues and flyers of the events).

Figure 1 shows that that no artist, theatre performer or group of musicians in the entire sample participated in more than half of the events. In the case of biennials, the majority of artists (85 per cent) participated in only one, and only 15 per cent participated in two or more. This picture is very similar for individual biennales, with 96 per cent of artists at the Gwangju Biennale and 90 per cent at the Istanbul Biennial and Havana Biennale participating only once. The results for documenta, the oldest perennial event in this sample, follow a similar pattern, as almost 80 per cent of artists participated only once. Only a few artists participated three times or more.

As compared to the biennales, the results of performance and theatre festivals are slightly different, as repeat attendance at these events among theatre companies and other professionals is marginally higher. In particular, the cohort of three or more attendances includes a number of participants. But is this an indicator of sameness? First, the number of higher frequency attendees remains quite low. Second, theatre and dance operate in a much more fluid and temporal field – while painting has a life beyond the exhibition, a dance or performance does not, and a larger audience can only experience a piece if it is shown several times. The temporal structure of these pieces also means that the same theatre company or group might actually show different

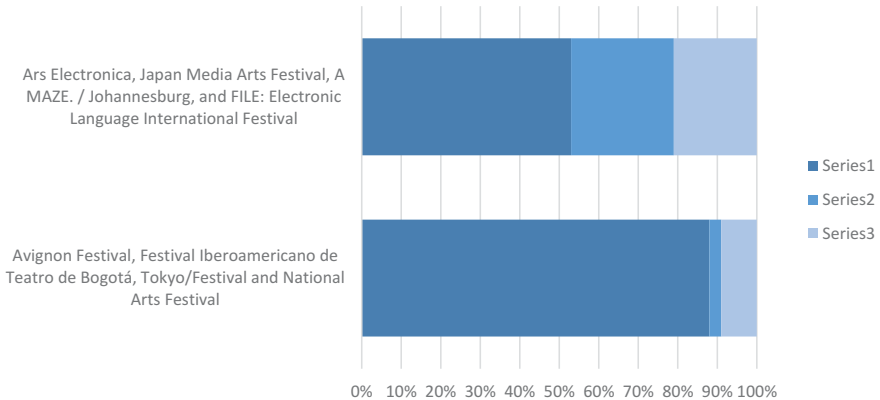
works, and different ‘[...] media structures limit or enhance organizational structure and functioning, rates of innovation and, ultimately, aesthetics itself’ (Zolberg 1980, 220). For that reason, any judgment of diversity or sameness must take account of the particulars of the work performed, to be presented following that analysis.

Data on music festivals focused on the field of sound and electronic media, known as electro-acoustic music, electronic music, computer music, new media or sound art. While the music industry is clearly much larger in scope, ranging from classical to pop to indie music, the specified category is strongly associated with creative or artistic practice involving new technologies and experimentation (see LaBelle 2006). Zolberg (1980) has suggested that the medium of sound differs from the other creative fields in terms of materiality and infrastructure. Sound art is enjoyed as it is performed, which requires trained professionals and a space for listeners, limiting the possibilities for performance. However, in contrast to dance and theatre, sound art can also be enjoyed in recorded form, and new media productions can be evaluated by others independent of its performance in space and time. In the digital age, recordings can even be accessed online, and most sound art and new media festivals involve a combination of live performance and pre-recorded pieces.

Figure 1 also presents information about those attending sound art and new media events, which is similar to the findings for performing art. Only a small number of the artists attending these events have featured repeatedly. Repetition tends to be more in evidence in the earlier history of these events, when they rely on emerging artists, personal networks and government funding, which may only be available to artists from the home country. However, as soon as an event gains in reputation, these limitations are usually overcome, and there is greater diversity.

As mentioned above, the diversity of artists in the theatre and musical arts means that the specific quality of works being performed must be recognised and tested, as the same works performed by different artists may lead to higher levels of similarity.

Figure 2 indicates the high level of diversity among plays performed. From a total of more than 4000 works at these four events, only one play (*Hamlet*) is shown more than 10 times across all of them, accounting for only 0.35 per cent. Most works (about 94 per cent) were performed only once, suggesting that although media structures in this creative field may limit the variety of participants, they do not limit the diversity of actual works (and therefore of the ideas being presented). Figure 2 also presents an analysis of musical pieces performed at these events. The findings are quite similar to those for theatre and dance, in that a number of sound art and new media pieces have the same title and are found across different events.



**Figure 2:** Repetition frequency (averaged by shown performance) of theatre, dance, musical performances and showcased recordings at the festivals (Source: Catalogues and flyers of the festivals).

However, more detailed analysis shows that this refers mostly to classical works, where the creative act seems to lie more in the interpretation, a nuance that statistical data cannot capture. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that this limitation of re-interpretation is not necessarily a limitation of the wider creative field or its cultural dynamics (homogenisation) but seems a more internal issue, as sound art and new media pieces can demonstrate diversity through different forms of re-interpretation as well as through different artists or new works. This analysis shows that innovation cannot simply be defined as novelty in the sense of new works or objects but is also linked to different perspectives and forms of re-interpretation. Taking these multiple patterns into account, the data demonstrate the great diversity of ideas, practices and interpretations that these events encompass over time.

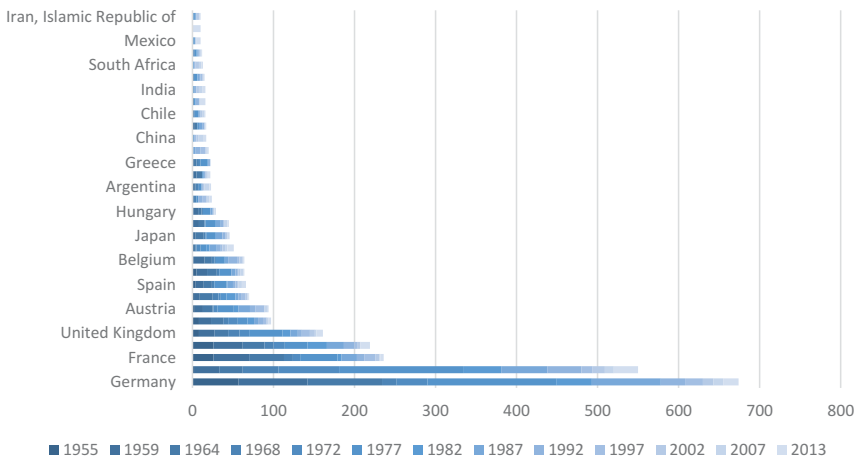
Among those scholars and critics who have voiced concerns about field-configuring events as agents of global monoculturalism through cultural homogenisation, a ‘McArtworld’ is seen as an outcome of these events, repeating the same artists across different events and time (see McNeill 2000; Werner 2005; Rebellato 2009). Their claim is that an underlying policy (for selection of participants and works) is applied across the board, with no regard to cultural diversity, results in a global homogenisation of the art world.

The data do not entirely support this sameness thesis, as all events have a history and orientation; in practice, they do not imitate others or select the same participants or works, and there is more diversity of attending artists than is sometimes acknowledged. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the diversity of participants and works varies across different artistic fields or media, perhaps indicating that this may result from the materiality or creative practice inherent to

the given medium rather than simply from the event’s selection policy. For instance, festival appearances by theatre and dance companies recurred more than artists at biennales, which seem more diverse. However, more detailed analysis suggests that some works appear repeatedly to reach a larger audience, and that performed works may be more diverse. The picture again differed somewhat in the case of sound art and new media pieces, as a slightly higher proportion of recurring works were identified. However, more detailed analysis shows that works that recurred more were based on established or classical works. This seems to be a particular feature of music, where creative practice and innovation is also demonstrated by re-interpretation of the same works.

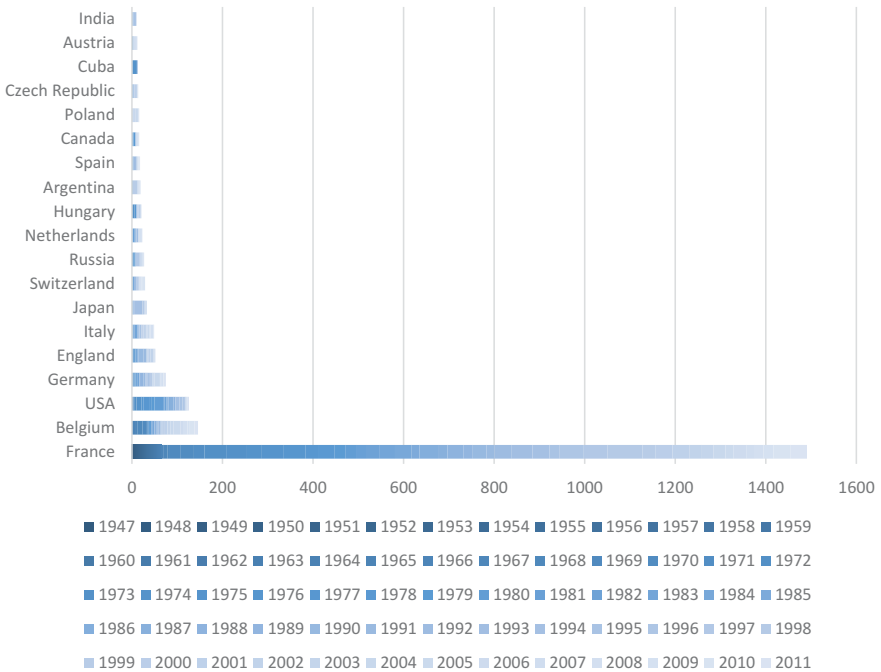
**Hypothesis 2:** Field-configuring events are dominated mainly by Western or American artists.

Although these results suggest that field-configuring events do not repeat the same participants or works, it remains a possibility that they may focus on artists from a particular region – the main hub from which selection criteria derive, typically identified as the Western hemisphere or so-called ‘Global North’. Those who voice this concern link this Western dominance to the institutional power and cultural resources of these regions (elite museums and theatres and a developed infrastructure and art market), in turn driving cultural inequality. Hypothesis 2 addresses this issue by asking whether the artists attending these can be shown to come predominantly from the Western world. Specifically, this posited inequality is assessed by analysing the nationality of participants. Figures 3–5 focus on the major Western events in this sample.



**Figure 3:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality at documenta; included are countries with more than 10 appearances (10 inclusive), between 1955 and 2013. (Source: Catalogues of the exhibition)

Documenta is the longest running perennial exhibition among the sampled visual art events, with more than 3,000 artists exhibiting over a period of more than 50 years. Data on the number of artists seem to support the existence of a cultural inequality at documenta (see Figure 3). Germany, where documenta takes place, has the greatest overall share, followed by a number of other mostly Western countries. However, it is important that the historical trend analysis also reveals that documenta has become more international in the last 20 years. Specifically, artists from Germany and the United States have fallen from about 50 per cent (or more) in 1955 to only 10 per cent in 2013, and other Western countries such as Italy and France are even less prominently represented.



**Figure 4:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality at Avignon Festival; included are countries with more than 10 appearances (10 inclusive), between 1947 and 2011. (Source: Catalogues and flyers of the festival)

The Avignon Festival in the south of France is another large-scale event, focusing mainly on theatre and dance (see Figure 4). In terms of the total number of performers over the last 60 years, participants from France predominate at

almost 65 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This differs considerably from the percentage of German artists at documenta and from the percentage of Austrians at Ars Electronica (see Figures 3 and 5). In explaining this effect,<sup>6</sup> it is notable that countries like the United States or Germany, which are important cultural regions, feature less prominently, with more participants from other smaller countries like Belgium (second highest) and Switzerland. In contrast to visual art and music, theatre relies heavily on language as a medium of creative expression, and as the festival is in France, it can be expected that a large proportion of visitors will come from France (see Ehis 1999) or will speak French. It follows that language may play a discriminatory role because the language the event takes place mainly in French. This has several technical implications – for instance, most of the technical support and instructions will be in French, as well as the marketing and main promotion channels. Several small French theatres, such as The Garage International based in Avignon, have now tapped into this market and offer bilingual technical and administrative support. Another discriminatory effect of language is that because a large proportion of visitors come from France, there is a strong incentive to represent the event as based on the cultural and affective dimensions of French language (although foreign language productions are increasing in number). For that reason, they may be less likely to enjoy a play in another language, and this may explain why Belgian or Swiss participants also feature quite prominently at Avignon. The historical trends analysis also reveals that France's overall share has fallen considerably, from virtually 100 per cent in its early years (when the festival was only open to performers from France) to an average of less than 50 per cent in recent years. In addition, the global diversity of participants has increased over time; in the last 25 years, the festival has invited performers from across the globe.

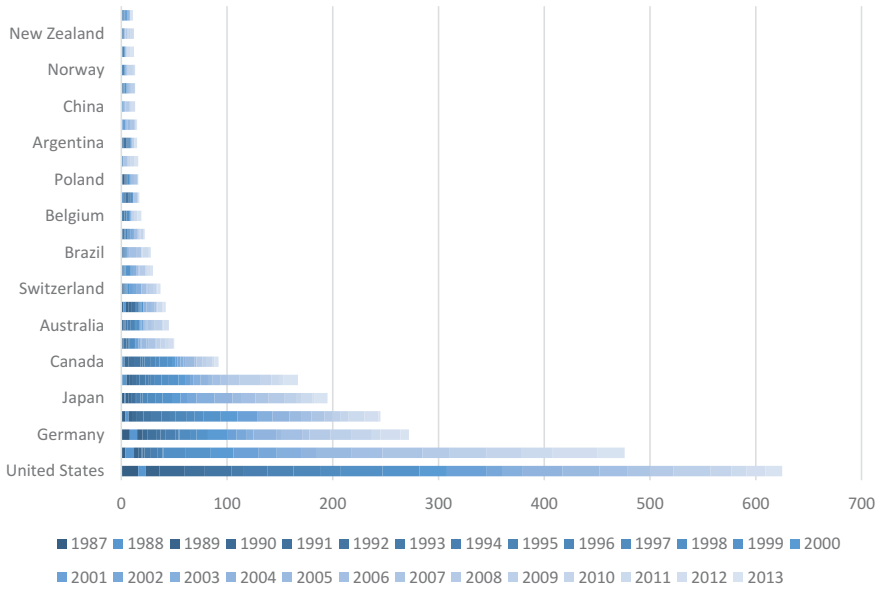
In contrast to the above events, which emerged just after World War II, Austria's Ars Electronica has its origins in the rise of digital media and electronic music production in the late 1970s (see Figure 5). The first festival was held in 1979, and the event developed a formal and perennial structure in 1986. The first Prix Ars Electronica was inaugurated in 1987, and data on selection patterns first became available in that year. Over the ensuing three decades, averaged data on the nationality of attending musicians and performers are similar to those for the two other events, with a predominance of mostly Western countries. The overall

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that, for its first two decades, this event was open only to artists from France, which explains why the darker areas in Figure 4 refer exclusively to that country.

<sup>6</sup> One important influence is the French state, which has a long tradition of public intervention in cultural life to provide artistic autonomy in the face of consumerist demands. This cultural politics and artistic affirmation of autonomous creativity is in evidence at Avignon (see Fabiani 2003).



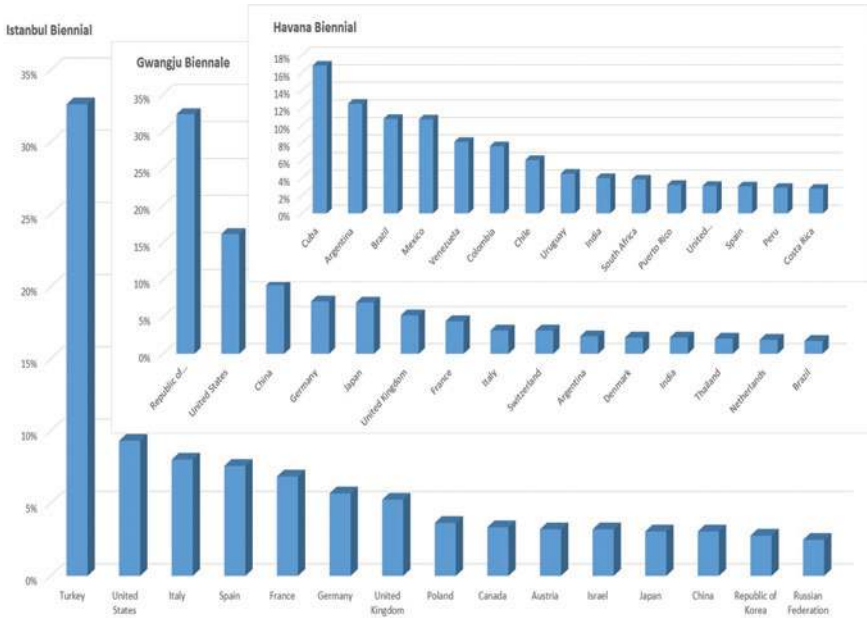


**Figure 5:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality at Ars Electronica; included are countries with more than 10 appearances (10 inclusive), between 1987 and 2013. (Source: Catalogues, archival information and flyers of the events)

structure is quite similar to documenta, with one exception; Austria, the host country, is second in terms of participants' nationality, outranked only by the United States. Looking at the other main countries suggests a partial explanation for this finding. Japan is in the top five – surprisingly, perhaps, as it is geographically and culturally distant. As noted above, electronic music and new media festivals depend on a developed technological infrastructure – for instance, access to computers and related technologies – for sound generation and experimentation. The United States and Japan in particular are regarded as technology leaders in the area of electronic music and wider music production – for instance, the major producers of electronic keyboards and pianos are all Japanese (Yamaha, Roland, Korg and Casio).

Overall, the data in Figures 3–5 clearly show that these events have a large share of artists from mostly Western countries, supporting the view that these events are characterized by cultural inequality. The data also reveal some interesting differences across events, possibly influenced by the role of language in theatre and the role of technologies in electronic music. The next part of this article reports on the cultural origins of participants at other (non-Western) events.

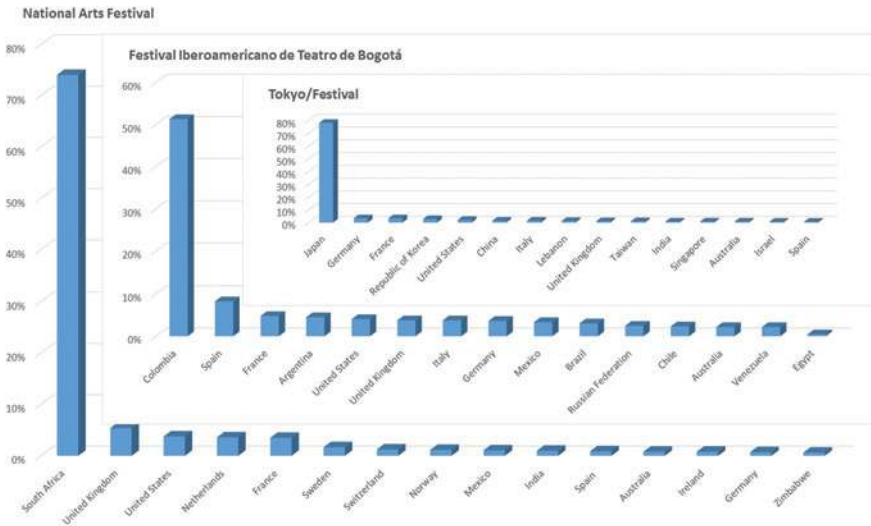
Figure 6, which refers to non-Western art exhibitions in this sample, highlights two important findings. First, none of these events is dominated by artists



**Figure 6:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality (top 15) at Havana Biennial (averaged 1984–2013), Istanbul Biennial (averaged 1987–2013) and Gwangju Biennale (averaged 1995–2010). (Source: Catalogues of the exhibitions)

from Western countries, and second, it should be noted that artists from the host country and its surrounding cultural region predominate (e. g. Cuba and Latin America or South Korea and East Asia). It seems that this emphasis on the home region is not solely a feature of events in the Western world but might be common to all the art exhibitions in this sample. This is true even among exhibitions that foreground either seemingly global aspirations or their regional nature. In the context of theories of cultural inequality, these findings have a paradoxical quality because inequality is not a feature of one actor over another but is employed as a strategy to singularise the event. As discussed later, this pattern can be seen to relate to meaning-making in the art world, based on an interlinked process of observing and juxtaposing works of art. The data therefore suggest that the critique of Western events as exclusive or excluding non-Western artists does not necessarily apply only to Western events but seems to be a common pattern. In this sense, it can be said that all art exhibitions have an ‘imperialist’ outlook in selecting artists from their own country.

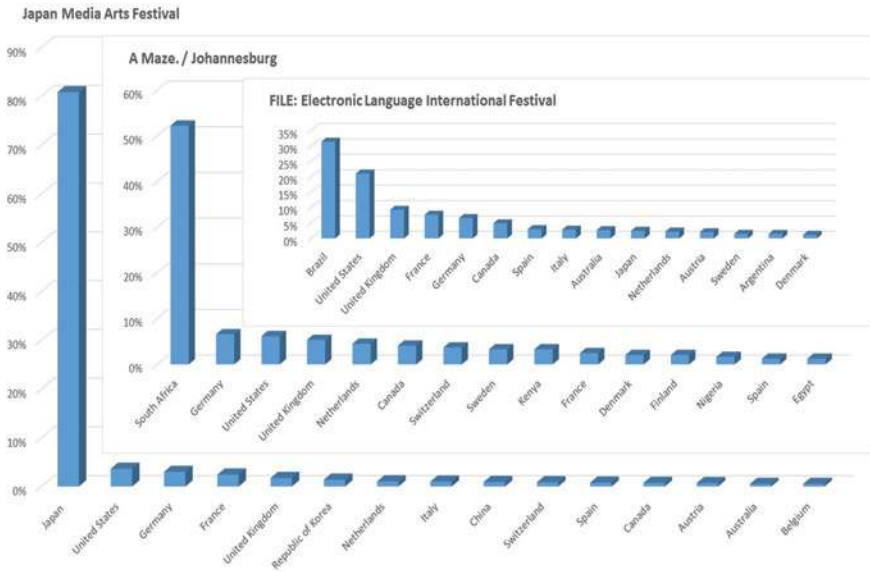
The data in Figure 7 refer to non-Western theatre and dance festivals. Not unlike the Avignon Festival, the importance of language as a medium of creative



**Figure 7:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality (top 15) at Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá (averaged 1988–2014), Tokyo/Festival (averaged 1988) and National Arts Festival (averaged 1973–2015). (Source: Catalogues and flyers of the festivals)

expression and the physical requirement for performers to be in one place can be seen as a factor that limits attendance from other countries, so creating a degree of cultural inequality. In particular, countries that share the same language group tend to feature prominently at these events. For instance, Spain is the second most important country at Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá (after the home country, Colombia), and other Spanish-speaking countries such as Argentina and Mexico are also prominent. Similarly, as a mainly English-speaking (and to some extent Afrikaans-speaking) festival, the National Arts Festival at Grahamstown in South Africa is also characterized by this kind of cultural affinity – for instance, the United Kingdom is much more prominently represented than other English-speaking countries. In summary, it can be said that all theatre and dance festivals foster cultural inequality, favouring artists from the host country. An additional feature of these festivals is that this preference extends to cultures within the same linguistic region. As mentioned above, the affective and technical discriminatory quality of language seems to be at work.

The final analysis looks at non-Western electronic music, sound art and media festivals (see Figure 8). Data related to Ars Electronica (Figure 5) revealed the predominance of the home country and the higher participation of countries



**Figure 8:** Frequency of artists according to their nationality (top 15) at Japan Media Arts Festival (averaged 1997–2014), A MAZE. /Johannesburg (averaged 2012–2015), and FILE: Electronic Language International Festival (averaged 2000–2015). (Source: Online archive, catalogues and flyers of the festivals) .

with a strong tradition in sound and recording technology. The cultural inequality inherent in selecting artists from the host country is again found in non-Western sound art and new media festivals – for instance, Austria, one of the leading countries in Ars Electronica, scarcely features at events in other regions. International prominence seems more closely related to the role of technology in a particular country’s culture than to cultural dominance, and Japan features quite strongly in this category.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that field-configuring events in the global art world are dominated by Western artists; typical examples are documenta, the Avignon Festival and Ars Electronica. The present analysis reinforces this assumption but yields an almost paradoxical result in relation to inequality when compared with the other events considered here. With regard to the dominance thesis, it can be said that all of these events favour domestic artists, supported by a diverse range of artists from other regions – in other words, they display an almost imperialist outlook. This is a paradoxical finding in the sense that, from a global perspective, the art world combines a ‘politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference’ (Appadurai 1990, 17) – a sameness that in turn leads to diversity.

## Summary: Field-Configuring Events as Networks

Art historians leading the current debate on globalisation of the arts view the international art festivals and biennales that emerged after World War II as an important global institution. Based on their research and their professional experience in curating and directing such events, they have voiced important concerns about how artists are selected for these events and the potential negative impact of this selection process on the global art world. Given the lack of sociological research on the global art world, this article complements the observations of art historians with a type of data analysis rooted in the social sciences, investigating two important concerns. The first of these relates to the proposition that these events repeatedly select the same artists across different events and around the globe. The fear expressed by some scholars and art critics is that this sameness might lead to cultural homogenisation. The second concern relates to the perceived dominance of Western artists at such events, as the success generated by better access to elite institutions, art education and the art market may be reinforced by festivals and biennales, further entrenching Western dominance of the global art world.

To date, research in this area has focused mainly on field-configuring events in the Western hemisphere, and on visual art, and the lack of cross-cultural and cross-medium studies has made it difficult to substantiate the global role of these events in terms of diversity and inequality. To address this deficit, the present study created a large database for a number of well-known events in the global art world, including visual arts, dance and theatre and sound and media arts festivals. The notion of diversity was operationalised in terms of performers, artists and works appearing over time and across the different events. Assessment of cultural inequality compared events in terms of data on nationality.

From a quantitative perspective, the results here do not support the assumption that the same artists appear repeatedly, or that events favour Western artists. As some of these events have run for more than 50 years and in regions that can be viewed as peripheral to the global art market, the findings suggest that selection criteria differ across the global art world and cannot easily be linked to theoretical conceptions such as cultural imperialism or cultural homogenisation. In particular, these findings indicate that a high number of artists attend these art events across the globe and over time, and that all of these festivals and biennales show a preference for showcasing artists from their own country. There is to this date no theoretical framework that accounts for the global art world or that attempts to incorporate these events into such a framework. Among existing theories, Pierre Bourdieu's field theory of literature,

Niklas Luhmann's system theory of art and Howard Becker's network model of the art world were formulated within national boundaries, and none of these makes reference to such global arts events. However, this should not mean that the core theoretical ideas developed by these authors cannot be extended to the case of field-configuring events and the role of meaning-making.

Although biennials and theatre and music festivals constantly iterate their selections, this does not appear to undermine the events. The selections present themselves within a world horizon of other possible artistic selections, creating global contexts in which, apparently, local selections are embedded, so forming a perspective that directs the art world. Inward/outward distinctions are unfeasible because both sides function together to stabilize each other. Rather than reducing cultural diversity, it seems that the art world is challenged by a continuous production of meaning-making between homogeneous and heterogeneous tendencies. Becker (1982, 34) makes a similar observation when describing the tension between conventions and inventions: '[...] breaking with existing conventions and their manifestations [...] increases artists' trouble and decreases the circulation of their work, but at the same time increases their freedom to choose unconventional alternatives and to depart substantially from customary practice'. Diversity and fluidity principally represent an inward/outward view, and local/global orientations are largely products of an outward/inward direction.

Niklas Luhmann developed a concept of second-order observation that deals with precisely these kinds of re-entries of observational perspectives: '*Observing* can be defined as an operation using a distinction for indicating one side of the distinction and not the other' (1993, 485, emphasis in original). This understanding of observation combines distinction and indication – for example, a biennial/theatre/music festival presents a work of art by XY; not only is the work distinguished from other works but which work it is (i. e. title and artist) is also indicated. Second-order observation means that these observations are in turn observed, as in the case of field-configuring events, which can be described as unfolding as a 'concentration of observational relationships' (Luhmann 2000, 70). In other words, biennials and theatre and music festivals entail dense networks of observed observations and of participants observing being observed. This notion of observation relates to processes of global artistic meaning-making in biennials and theatre and music festivals as 1) the infrastructure of a global art world, 2) global amplifiers, 3) global anchoring devices and 4) coping devices in the history of art. While 1) relates to the rise of these events; 2) relates to increasing artistic variety; 3) relates to the global/local orientation of these events; and 4) relates to the changing situation of the art world in the second half of the twentieth century.

Regarding the first aspect, the question of the growth and spread of social structures is normally addressed as general global diffusion or, more specifically, global diffusion of institutional patterns (Strang and Meyer 1993). Research conducted by John Meyer et al. (1997) established that although standards of living and economic and political orientations differ widely, similar educational structures develop around the globe. The researchers explained this isomorphism in terms of a world polity approach, in which a world culture develops through the construction of universal models projected around the world. According to Meyer et al.,

Common evolving world-societal models, not a hundred different national trajectories, have led states to establish ministries and other agencies purporting to manage social and economic planning, education, population control, the environment, science policy, health, gender equality, the welfare of the old and the young, and much more. (1997, 157)

The inherently phenomenological quality of this conception is found everywhere, but without the full functionalist and rationalist qualities of the constructed models. Instead, worldwide formations depend on the frequency and intensity of observations and their structural integration into the art world. Biennials and theatre and music festivals serve as an infrastructure for these observations, constructing a knot or *mélange* of dense but artistically diverse observations (Papastergiadis and Meredith 2010) that provide intense and compact data embedded in a web of observations of other events. In such networks of linked observations, expectations can be formed and condensed forms of meaning-making emerge (see Luhmann 2000). This can lead to the diffusion or worldly projection of such categories within the art world, resulting in change and stability at the same time. This diffusion must take account of how local conditions vary and influence both local and international representations of these events. While some events may embrace a global orientation (e. g. documenta), others might restrict their cultural focus (e. g. Havana Biennial, the early Avignon Festival). For instance, although the Dakar Biennial is well known outside of Africa, it is only open to artists from Africa and constructs its global message around this ethos.

In relation to events as global amplifiers, the global pool of artistic activities (including the production and consumption of art) extends to many places and times. This pool of resources appears to be almost without coherent organization – fluid, ever changing, and without order. All of these artistic micro-activities appear and disappear constantly in vast numbers. In a setting with many variations, observers may have difficulty detecting what is going on and, more importantly, the outcome – that is, the future course of these artistic activities. Luhmann (2012) suggests that, in such settings, social devices emerge through which the scope of



variations is reinforced. It could be suggested that biennials and music and theatre festivals can be seen as catalysts, fostering a diverse range of artistic variations across different cultures and media. Many works of art cannot themselves attract public attention but must rely on catalytic devices to attract attention through reactions and connections among these catalysts; just as businesses can form joint ventures, works of art can rely on field-configuring events. The catalytic function of such events derives from their ability to assemble and concentrate a great number of works of art for a short time in one place, from many regions and times or cultural backgrounds, creating a diverse cosmos in that place.

This notion of meaning-making can be further elaborated by describing field-configuring events as a world public sphere. In contrast to museum studies and theories of cultural consumption or mass communication, public spheres cannot be equated to audiences as receivers. Rather, they entail a much more active notion, such as that developed by Habermas (1989). In Habermas's terms, a public sphere comprises three aspects that are of relevance here: as a medium of public bodies, discussions and opinions. A public sphere develops from gatherings where a public articulates its perspective with regard to the wider society (Habermas 1989, 176). First, an act of assembly takes place – in the present case, a biennial or music or theatre festival, summoning works of art. However, Habermas's concept of 'the public' is more than just a crowd or a large number of people assembled in one place; connections have to be forged between these actors, and they must share their perspectives through the medium of public dialogue to form a public opinion. In addition to the lectures, workshops, seminars and publications that surround them, biennials and music and theatre festivals also connect a diverse range of works of art, brought into contact to engage and encounter each other (Enwezor 2002, 46) under one roof. This linking or framing amplifies the direction of these practices, forming a 'public body' in which the broader art world is affirmed or challenged. Biennials and music and theatre festivals can therefore be seen as platforms from which artistic observations are in turn being observed (see Papastergiadis and Meredith 2011), linking observations within an encompassing structure to create a local/global perspective.

These intentions are evident in the literature, but this provides little information about an international 'outside' present at these events. It also fails to explain why intentions vary so much across the events discussed here, or why the international 'outside' should be receptive to local ideas and how this informs the global art world. As noted above, the underlying model of this function of biennials is the classic transmitter, through which information is broadcast to an audience or public sphere, for which the transmitter provides a programme according to its viewers' preferences. Rather than proposing that

public spheres constitute a sort of physical ‘outside’ or a mechanical receiver of messages, this article stresses how a public sphere or configuration of the public is embedded in each event’s observational structure. This pattern of second-order observation is an observing of being observed, which is also the observational structure of the stage or theatre. As Goffman argues,

The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones [...] [O]n stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players; the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction. (1959, XI)

Goffman further elaborates how this type of action unfolds itself as an encounter in which participants form a visible public for each other and by which their actions are influenced through the presence of other individuals, so performing for each other (Goffman 1959, 15). This performance enables the actors to present themselves to their designated public in specific ways, revealing a special position to be observed by the public.

In each edition, the events here bring together many new artists from diverse cultural contexts, so requiring the installation of new frames to fit each edition. The creation of these frames (see Goffman 1986) is based on a certain density or compactness, in which observations occur and are related to each other – in other words, identifications arise out of a process of social comparison. These observations are marked by well-timed interlocking within an orientation toward other observations. According to White (1992) and Latour (2013), this form of connection and interlinking can be defined as a network: ‘Identities come to perceive the likelihood of impacts to other identities in some string of ties and stories. The social result is called a network’ (White 1992, 65). Latour (2013, 42), who distanced himself from earlier notions of the network, argued in similar fashion that ‘Net-sense’ results from passing ‘through surprising associations’, adding meaning to the quality of that activity. Relatively heterogeneous elements of networks – in this case, the works of art presented at biennials, music and theatre festivals – engage in meaning-making, within which the identities of single elements (XY’s work of art) are defined according to how they directly or indirectly enable other elements to control themselves, firmly or non-firmly. According to White (1992, 62), ‘The triggering of one identity activates control searches by other identities with their own impetuses toward control of any and all exigencies, including each other’s’. Likewise, Latour (2013, 62, emphasis in original removed) writes: ‘In order to exist, a being must not only pass by way of another [...] but also in another manner [...], by exploring other ways, as it were, of altering itself’.

Using the horizon metaphor, sequences in this network can be said to be constructed within the horizon of other sequences. Therefore, each event observes itself within the horizon of the 'outside', embedding this into its own observations to create a particular point of view. Global/local observations, then, are part of the overall framing process, forming the initial and closing brackets (Goffman 1986, 251). In this way, a particular frame is formed through the inclusion of something external – something from outside of kin (i. e. habitual relationships).

The pattern of observing being observed creates an anchor (Goffman 1986, 247) enabling artistic variations to become both locally and globally orientated. Robertson (1992) calls this the process of 'relativization'; people and societies regard the world as a single entity, within which they must make sense of their own cultures and identities as distinct from those of others and must frequently define their own standing in relation to a globalized world. The definitions they develop depend on their local vantage point and so produce multiple world-views. In other words, the observational structure of biennials not only reinforces particular cultural practices but also embeds these into a global, universalized cultural repertoire. The above detailed empirical data and associated theoretical discussion suggest that a global art world is not fuelled by a simple process of standardization; it also evolves through the paradoxical process of constantly increasing cultural diversity, embedding works of art in the art world's wider narrative.

The fourth and final consideration is that these ideas can be further condensed and integrated in a sociological and historical framework. Among sociology and history scholars, there seems to be a broad consensus about the ambivalent status of the arts (for an overview, see Zolberg 2005). This is typified by the almost enervating question of what makes a work of art or what makes an artist, in which artistic practice is defined by reference to the rejection of standards and to creation and uniqueness. In other words, there is no general framework that artists might cite or refer for guidance on how to paint, compose or perform something unique and innovative; indeed, such a framework would perhaps defeat the purpose of artistic expression as new and deviant. This invites the further question of how the formation of practices and wider societal structures can be theorised in such an uncertain context. In relation to unpredictable markets, White (2002) has proposed the idea of a network that evolves as a kind of coping structure. Some markets can set prices by estimating demand; other markets can set prices by determining numbers or kinds of product. However, in some markets where neither of these is possible, uncertainty is reduced or managed by cumulative means – that is, through the formation of mutually observing networks. In such networks, one observes

how other actors set their prices while being similarly observed, and account must therefore be taken of this reciprocal process. Mutually interlinking adjustive reactions provide direction and may lead to the stabilisation of certain values. In the present context, it could be said that the creation of value and meaning for deviance and innovation depends on the possibility of interlinking such artistic creations (Peterson 1997; Beckert and Rössel 2013). In this way, field-configuring events can be seen as networked platforms (Morgner 2014).

Two immediate questions arise: why did an institution that copes with uncertainty emerge principally after World War II,<sup>7</sup> and is there any explanation for the boom of the past 25 years? No art historical or sociological research points to how large-scale societal changes might have influenced the evolution of the art world since the late nineteenth century. However, it is possible to speculate in this regard in terms of the number of artists and art institutions, their increasing professionalism and the increasing variety of art narratives. Comparing the situation in late-nineteenth century Paris to New York in 1945, Taylor (1987: 77) noted that the Parisian art world at that time housed about 2,000 artists, producing about 200,000 works in a decade. There were only a few professional art galleries and art colleges, and few artists would have been able to exhibit or showcase their work frequently. In New York in 1945, there more than 150,000 artists who claimed more or less professional status, producing 15 million works of art. There were about 700 galleries and several hundred theatres and music venues. Decolonization after World War II and the formation of new nation states also led to the foundation around the world of new art colleges and degrees, national museums, opera houses and theatres. The scale of the art world changed radically, with considerable expansion and a trend towards professionalism. This increasing professionalism is also marked by changes in the means and methods of cultural display, critique and curation – for instance, the move to more ‘transparent’ and ‘representative’ practices, as well as the need to develop new narratives that could not be integrated into established venues (see Karp and Lavine 1991). It was in this climate that the first post-war art festivals and biennales emerged, mostly in peripheral regions,

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7 It should be noted that large-scale survey exhibitions have existed before World War II. For instance, the great Victorian tendency towards ‘global’ (i. e. Empire-displaying) exhibitions/festivals – the World Exhibitions or World Fairs, but also the more nationalist versions, like the French Salons, perhaps do provide a past model for the present exhibition landscape. However, it is also important to note that these exhibitions differ a great deal from each other. None of the events in this sample organises the artists according to their nationality, the events focus exclusively on works of art and not industrial inventions, and the artists are not directly selected by the government (Altshuler 2008 presents an overview of the different types of large-scale events in the nineteenth and twentieth century).

where artists sought inclusion by showcasing and comparing their work at the centre. The 1960s saw further waves of expansion and the creation of further new art institutions, including thousands of new art degrees, museums, theatres and music venues (Crane 1987; Efland 1990; Greenfeld 1989; McClellan 2008). Decolonization continued, and a range of major art festivals emerged in those regions, with a clear curatorial shift towards more a conceptual and meaningful framework for the exhibition medium (see Voorhies 2017).

The so-called boom phase of art festivals and biennales commenced in the early 1990s (Finkel 2009; Green and Gardner 2016; Montero 2012). The division of the world into two political systems came to an end, enabling the freer flow of works of art and of artists. New global art cities emerged in Berlin and Beijing, and large parts of Asia and Latin America saw the rise of relatively stable democracies and economies, in which artistic cultures could grow more freely. With this greater diversification of the art world, innovations were coming from everywhere and anywhere (Stichweh 2000), making it problematic to identify a single world centre or global narrative that might incorporate these diverse and changing developments.

This climate of uncertainty and the rising numbers of artists contributed to the further emergence of field-configuring events. Often modelled on earlier historical examples, they stress the importance of locality and are less concerned with inclusion in the international circuit of artistic developments, as access is less problematic but seems to serve a narrative role in the process of artistic meaning-making. In this ocean of artistic uncertainty, these events engender meaning and value by creating networked platforms for works of art, from which the art world can be observed and new ideas consecrated. In demonstrating that the globalisation of the arts is a highly complex phenomenon, involving seemingly paradoxical developments and rapid social change on a vast scale, the present research identifies a need for further and ongoing sociological and historical research in this emerging field.

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