

The documenta 12¹ exhibition took place in Kassel from June 16th to September 23rd 2007, and was the joint effort of curators Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel. As early as December 2005 Buergel announced three leitmotifs which were to determine the concept of the exhibition – *Modernity?, Life!, Education:*. He formulated these leitmotifs by posing broad questions – “*Is modernity our antiquity?*”, “*What is bare life?*” and “*What is to be done?*”.

In recent years it has become customary for each documenta to be accompanied by the publication of texts which place the exhibition within the context of current theory and practice. The tradition reaches back to documenta X (1997) and the volume compiled by curator Catherine David simply titled *The Book*. Curator of documenta 11 (2002) Okwui Enwezor divided the entire project into five “platforms”, the first four of which took the form of symposiums held in various cities throughout the world which were dedicated to various themes. The fifth platform was the exhibition in Kassel itself. A separate publication was created for each platform. The authors of documenta 12 decided to pursue a more open model for the textual component. A year and a half before the exhibition opened, a project called *documenta 12 magazines* was begun. Project leader Georg Schöllhammer selected ninety four magazines of various formats from all over the world and invited their editorial staff to consider the three questions of documenta 12. Individual contributions were published online at <http://magazines.documenta.de> where they are freely accessible in English and in the original languages. By the time the exhibition opened, over three hundred articles, essays, interviews, and visual contributions had been amassed reacting to the given theme. A small fraction of these, selected by the editors of the project, were published in print in the form of three thematic issues of *documenta 12 magazines*.

The editorial staffs of the periodicals which were contacted reacted differently to this appeal. Representatives of the French magazine *Multitudes* critically noted the hegemonic position assumed by the *documenta 12 magazines* towards the publications addressed. As a response they created their own project *Multitudes-icônes* (<http://multitudes-icônes.samizdat.net>). Here they offered somewhat

¹ In accordance with the tradition of *documenta* we have presented the titles of individual years of this exhibit without the use of a capital letter at the beginning (ed. note).

pre-formulated questions to artists, through which in their own words they denied the division of labour between theoreticians and artists which is implied in the duality of the exhibition and the magazine project. Georg Schöllhammer welcomed this initiative: according to him *Multitudes* magazine functions within the *documenta 12 magazines* project as its internal critic (Elena Zanichelli, “We also expected answers that weren’t harmonious.” Interview with Georg Schöllhammer, <http://www.documenta12.de/1389.html?&L=1>).

While the Czech Republic was strongly represented by artists exhibiting in Kassel such as Běla Kolářová, Jiří Kovanda and Kateřina Šeda, no Czech magazines participated in the *documenta 12 magazines* project. Considering this absence, the Czech intellectual environment did not have an opportunity to visibly react to the model offered of three leitmotifs, not even negatively in the spirit of *Multitudes*.

The original intent of this Notebook issue was to repeat the appeal of *documenta 12 magazines* in a local context. We wanted to remove the questions raised from the context of the exhibition and test their general and interdisciplinary relevance. We asked around twenty Czech thinkers and publicists for their thoughts. In selecting respondents we decided not to contact authors who are professionally involved in some aspect of contemporary art. In this way we felt sure to obtain somewhat different reactions to the artistic project of the given format than those commonly encountered in Czech professional publications. And we also hoped to at least partially breach the ramparts of mutual misunderstanding and disinterest which exists here between artistic practice and the theories of the social sciences.

The final form which this issue of Notebook has taken is mere fragment in comparison with what was originally conceived. Unfortunately, the majority of potential contributors which we contacted declined to participate, generally citing time as a factor. Not everyone of course entirely understood our intent: in declining some people mentioned that they had not seen the exhibition, which we, to the contrary, considered to be an advantage. And although we expressly stated that our intent was to determine the overlap of the *documenta 12* leitmotifs beyond art (it is significant that the first leitmotif concerns “modernity” and not “modernism”), two of the original three contributions which we finally received dealt with these leitmotifs directly in conjunction with contemporary art.

Along with the original material from Czech authors we are including several translated texts, selected to illuminate, deepen or

problematize the three leitmotifs of *documenta 12*. These are of course together so closely interwoven that in certain cases it is difficult to assign a text to one or another leitmotif. Therefore, instead of arranging the issue schematically according to individual leitmotifs, we have adopted a looser approach moving freely from texts reflecting reference to modernity to considerations of the possibilities of action. The translated texts are with one exception taken from the freely accessible internet archive of *documenta 12 magazines*. We attempted when possible to select pieces which did not appear in the final printed version of the *documenta 12 magazines* project. Further, with the author's permission we have included the piece by Slavoj Žižek, "Resistance is Capitulation", which we consider to be a provocative response to the question "What is to be done?". We would like to thank Radovan Baroš for bringing this text to our attention. We would also like to thank all those who took our appeal seriously and devoted their time and diligent work to the preparation of this issue of Notebook amid its somewhat chaotic beginnings.

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