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Triennial City: An Introduction

Beccy Kennedy, Alnoor Mitha & Leon Wainwright

The hands of the artist Junebum Park are busy decorating the photograph of an empty building in Manchester. Signboards are quickly finding their way onto the window-sills and doorways of a brick built corner in the city's centre. The collage is almost full and its meaning is quite clear: the city has more rental space than tenants and more signage than windows. This is urbanism at its worst. It is a small consolation for the neighbours that advertising can be quite so loud; the results are vibrant and attention-grabbing but heave with desperation. A work of art in wry dedication to cities in financial crisis, *To Let* offers the local picture of a condition that repeats the world over (Fig. 1).

This book navigates between the sobriety of works such as Junebum Park's *To Let*—featured on the cover and discussed in **Steven Gartside's** essay—and more deliberately optimistic representations of the 'global city'. First staged in 2008, the Asia Triennial Manchester has frequently stirred enthusiasm about the role of contemporary art in urban space, and at the same time reflected upon the motivations for 'localising' the art of Asia in Manchester. The dissimilar currents that condense around this context are the focus for this collection of new writing about the ATM. The result contributes to a broader critical debate about art, its audiences, artists, critics and curators, in their changing relationships with Asia.

The tourist, promotional and official civic literature for Manchester offers a good sampling of plans and desires for the contemporary global city. Sir Richard Leese, Leader of Manchester City Council, for instance, writes of its hopeful future: 'An innovative spirit runs through Manchester's modern history and we're on the way to becoming a truly smart city region. Our Greater Manchester strategy sets out an ambitious vision for the city region by 2020' (Leese, n.d.). Such notions of an independently, even ingeniously 'smart city' go hand in hand with the bureaucratic wisdom that Manchester should enjoy long-term economic growth by continuing its pace of urban regeneration, improving the city's transport infrastructure and ensuring its impact on the region. If those seem identical to the sort of goals shared by most city planners around the world, what makes Manchester's

priorities apparently so smart is the style in which it pursues them. It seeks hard results by indirection. The ‘strategy’ is to embrace digital technologies and a low carbon footprint, while ensuring that there are amenities for older generations of the city’s inhabitants (who no doubt feel pretty mixed about all the upbeat rhetoric on ‘innovation’ and change). But above all it is by putting greater significance on ‘creativity’ that the city seems set to deliver on its development aims.

If such feelings of insecurity and crisis are shared around the world, then the challenges faced by a modestly sized city such as Manchester hardly compare to those felt by communities caught up in Asia’s rapidly proliferating urbanisation. In an increasingly interconnected world, the severing of place-specific roots and the eliminating of older boundaries has fundamentally recast spatial relations. Systems of capital accumulation have become progressively mobile and able to attach themselves to a widening choice of locations, reducing places to nothing more than sites of ‘fixed capital embedded in the land’ (Harvey, 1996, p.295). A sense of threat or vulnerability for place itself has fuelled competition among cities, as seen in vigorous efforts toward building reservoirs of cultural practice such as art biennials and triennials. Through globalisation, feelings of uncertainty about the meaning (or future) of a given urban setting may drive the need to create meaningful spaces. The onus falls on culture to embed and fix the world’s movements and transformations, participating in



Figure 1. Junebum Park, *To Let*, 2011. Single channel HD video, 08'20". Artist's collection

place-making and in the competitive ways that places use culture to ‘localise’ and differentiate themselves.

But in what ways is the concept of the city intrinsic to an art biennial or triennial? Perhaps it is only the global city (Sassen, 1991), which both craves and expects such cultural spectacles, anchoring public and private perceptions of the ‘art world’ to those urban locations that are most amenable to visitors. Cities with recognisably global histories, acknowledged tourist spots and vibrant cultural industries feel that they can substantiate these same identities further through the inauguration of an event such as an art triennial. Seen in this way, the triennial is, to some extent, a simulation of the city. As a branded presentation of contemporary art, it bases itself not on the city, but on the city’s own brand. If the city is only ever, arguably, an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), then the people and places within it transmogrify with each reimagining.

During late capitalism, it is the brand of a city that reconfigures not only public perceptions of what it represents but also expectations and ambitions, in terms of what it may offer them. Although the triennial product corroborates a city’s identity, it also adds layers of significance, creating flows and exchanges of information, rhizomatic connections that make up a cultural industry. This is how large-scale, international art events—biennials and triennials—work to create the global city itself, or at least to reinforce its image.

At the time of writing, the term ‘global city’ typed into a web search engine led more or less directly to a Wikipedia entry for Manchester. This is, perhaps, something of which its inhabitants should feel simultaneously proud and dissatisfied—a sign of the city’s global recognition but also indicative of the permeation of the unhindered, digital knowledge industry to which places are subjected and realised. Allegorically, the results of this online search sought to connote Manchester’s flair for reconciling binaries of high and low culture, of classical origins and contemporary trends, of industrial exploits and post-industrial endeavours, of philosophical scriptures and post-modern popular culture. Manchester has been internationally recognised as a trading centre since it played its central part in the Industrial Revolution but, through the post-Fordist era, it has nonetheless succeeded in distinguishing itself on a global scale as an inimitable centre of contemporary culture and commerce.

Most definitions of contemporary art are marked by a local agenda. Investigating the idea of a global city only confirms the sense that boasting about art’s ability to connect both the local and the global—the coveted means to see the world in a grain of sand—is as idealistic as it is corporate. Increasingly, post-industrial cities rely on the hosting of festivals and ‘mega-events’ to increase social, economic and cultural renewal (Carlsen & Taylor, 2003). By tapping into the city’s historical and urban character, such ‘festivalisation’ is a means to identify cultural contingencies between past and present.

The global adoption of this practice became obvious when the Asia Triennial Manchester was invited to attend the World Biennial Forum in South Korea. It was an opportunity for Manchester to explore affinities with numerous biennials from around the world and in particular the Gwangju Biennale. A project initiated by the Korean government, the coupling of the Biennale with urban development was explicit: the authorities sought to ‘turn a futuristic model of urban development into an innovative city. The backdrop of this project is to promote cultural development beyond Gwangju Biennale, having Gwangju as a starting point, which begins with cultural exchanges and builds through the cycle of creative works, research activities and education programmes’ (World Biennial Forum, 2012). Such bare articulations of urban development and culture prompt the question: how can artists who contribute to such programmes do so without being circumscribed by the imagination and financial goals of its organisers and sponsors? There seem to be very few available solutions even from among the most celebrated commentators. Proclaiming this to be the emerging ‘Asian century’ for contemporary art, Okwui Enwezor writes of a future in which ‘the dominance of Western ideas would no longer be the norm, even as the West fights to maintain its cultural influence across the board’ (2010, p.16). He suggests that artists at this time ‘are working less on ideological grounds’, but can give little assurance that biennials will escape the growing political economy where cultural competition has intensified at the hands of the rising new elites of ‘Russia, China, India, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and South Korea ... Sharjah, Bahrain, and Qatar’ (2010, pp.15-16). Going against the spirit of Enwezor’s account, perhaps artists should only participate in this politics of ‘spectacle’ if they can hold out against the ambitions of the world’s wealthiest in Asia’s new spaces of contemporary art.

Since Asia has been the locus for so much recent development in the infrastructure and markets for art, and Manchester is exemplary in defining approaches to the localising of art and culture, then the foundation of the Asia Triennial Manchester in 2008 arrived as no surprise. At the level of its curatorial literature, the Triennial can be seen as a lively response to the cultural memory of Manchester’s industrial past, its post-industrial present and post-colonial heritage: a complex mix of regenerated mills and canal areas, a lively contemporary arts scene, an innovative knowledge and media industry, and a changing if not growing presence of East and South Asian communities of numerous generations. But the background to the Triennial is more complex than that and its approaches to assembling contemporary art in urban space deserve closer attention.

Locating Asia in Manchester

The first Asia Triennial Manchester in 2008 was a research project jointly conceived and led by Alnoor Mitha—at that time a director of Shisha (2001-2011), a registered charity in Manchester that promoted South Asian contemporary art and crafts—and John Hyatt, director of research and postgraduate studies in art and design at the Manchester Metropolitan University. It was realised through an extensive consultation process with Manchester’s key museum and gallery curators, along with contemporary artists from Asia and the Asian diaspora, with the aim of promoting exhibitions with themes that were indexed to Manchester’s significant Asian

community and the growing economic and cultural boom in Asia.

Shisha was established during the period of the New Labour government and took up a social inclusion agenda to improve the representation of South Asian identities in the North West region of England. The idea for Shisha was initiated by Mitha whilst a curator at Gallery Oldham in 1998 when he approached the North West Arts Board (later incorporated into Arts Council England) which led to his secondment there. His remit was to apply the new multicultural policy for the arts that Richard Blanco had set out—‘No Difference, No Future’—in a way that would satisfy claims for a grassroots level of support among Asian British ‘stakeholders’ in the arts. It aimed to reach the targets that were set for a proportional representation in the public arts of people of Black and Minority Ethnicities (BME), focusing on the need to change the ethnic makeup of art audiences (Dewdney et al, 2013).

Directing and curating an array of art events, Shisha generated exhibitions and programmes that responded to the official concern for cultural diversity, emphasising the presence of communities of people of Asian descent living locally. It drew together stakeholders in the arts and heritage sector and local academic institutions, presenting itself as relatively independent of top-down decision-making and cultural policy. Together with John Hyatt—who had begun to attract students and staff of Chinese backgrounds to Manchester—Shisha worked to engage with Asian artists beyond the micro networks of Greater Manchester in order to establish lasting exchanges with those in Asia itself. In 2002, as part of the Commonwealth Games cultural programme launched in Manchester, Mitha initiated *ArtSouthAsia*, comprised of four distinct exhibitions curated by distinguished international curators, presented at public sector galleries and museums in England’s North West. In various ways, the success of this award-nominated programme pointed to the scope for a large, ambitious project such as the Asia Triennial Manchester.

Through the collaborative research with partner venues, the ATM has aimed to develop a long-term programme of international exhibitions and residencies by contemporary Asian artists that can create opportunities for Western audiences to view significant cultural phenomena from Asia and its diaspora. Founded on principles of knowledge exchange and partnership, the Triennial commissions world-standing artists, forges links between public and third sector organisations across multiple venues, and seeks out previously unused sites for cultural events. It fosters collaborative networks among academics, artists, curators and policymakers, culminating at intervals of three years and located primarily in the city of Manchester.

The inaugural Triennial in 2008 was underpinned by the theme of ‘Protest’. This gave scope to local and global significance while recalling Manchester’s history of radical politics, its enthusiasm for new approaches to artistic practice, and resonances with Asia. The programme knitted together a range of galleries across Manchester, following a research agenda in which individual gallery curators researched and devised their own distinctive yet interrelated contributions under a common theme. This resulted in

venue-based exhibitions, site-specific new art commissions, a series of international artists' residencies, public talks, screenings and workshops. The first Triennial was distinctive for combining outdoor performances, 'teahouse' discussions (on a Chinese, rather than a Bostonian model) and an academic symposium, with diverse contributions from artists based in mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Two renowned South Asian artists, Rashid Rana and Subodh Gupta, were shown at relatively early stage in their respective careers and both are now represented by commercial galleries and enjoying successful careers. The Triennial of 2008 afforded an unprecedented view for the UK onto the art of Asia. It sought to parse a relationship between artists who command a local sphere of attention and those with more international visibility, connecting each to a common concern with the multiplicity of Asia's contemporary art.

The theme chosen for the Triennial of 2011 was 'Time and Generation'. It was researched and devised by Mitha and Wainwright with the intention of inviting artists, curators and audiences to explore what defines the contemporary moment in time, both within and beyond the context of the production (or generation) and exhibition of art. The terms served as a portmanteau beneath which the numerous artists, planners and curators for the Triennial could assemble. It allowed them to bring together a range of concerns about the present historical moment—its migrations and changing global demography; its new politics of place, territory and community—and to explore the significance of art in forming a public understanding of cultural production and generational difference. Artists and curators were especially encouraged to consider the expanding geography of art's digital practitioners and how these link locations in Asia to one another and the wider world, perhaps in the way that artists share critical perspectives on political events and environmental change, or forge novel approaches to art making using technologies borrowed and adapted from outside artistic traditions.

More specifically, the Triennial of 2011 offered the chance to reflect on the passage of time itself—a fitting direction for an art programme that had already transformed and grown considerably in size since its first manifestation in 2008. It drew attention to the concept of temporality, suggesting that art can generate views onto movement *through* time and the changing conceptualisation *of* time, and pinpoint the temporality of artworks themselves. As such, the theme encouraged artists interested in time-based visual media, in the predictive or speculative qualities that art may have in helping to think about the future, or, equally for reconsidering the past. Above all, the Triennial of 2011 opened the way for a look at generation gaps and interrelationships between people with regard to age and life experience, opening onto a wider theoretical debate about the lineages of cultural practice and succession among artists of different generations.

In the run-up to the main part of the 2011 Triennial, a year-long 'trail' programme entitled *Connecting Cultures* was staged in order to reflect on the changing themes of the ATM and to orient its development. The

ideas surrounding 'Protest' and 'Time and Generation' came under review through efforts to posit new ways of thinking about the discontinuities between older and newer forms of protest, and older and more emergent ways of living, such as in the selection of artworks that John Hyatt made, drawing on his exhibition and book publication *State Legacy* (2009). The programmes that followed in late 2011 brought international artists and art critics to Manchester and encouraged local galleries to engage with the city's Asian communities while considering the global, manufacturing history and post-colonial migratory flows that are integral to the experience of the Asian diaspora in the UK. Documented in international publications such as the *A-N (Artists Newsletter)*, and *Art Asia Pacific*, the Triennial of 2011 attracted not only a much wider audience in terms of visitors but also a greater number of regional, cultural partners. The Triennial of 2011 built upon the knowledge gained and methodological foundation of the 2008 Triennial, expanding to include eighteen core organising partners who presented forty artists, countless new commissions for art, craft and dance, and seven film premieres. This expanded fellowship of organisers in turn saw a more comprehensive gathering of artists from thirteen Asian countries, and reflected a breadth and depth of commitment to sustaining the Triennial which stands it in good stead for the future.

Preparing for the 2011 Triennial, Mitha and Wainwright began to develop the first series of Curatorial Laboratories with the aim of supporting museum curators who were compiling new knowledge about Asian cultures. This was a hub for educational activities and public-led discussions held at locations including Castlefield Gallery and the Chinese Arts Centre. A point of foment was the last in the series of Laboratories held at the Manchester Museum in 2011, filmed by The Open University. Information on the event was disseminated to the Triennial partners and together with a significant number of local contributors, as well as artists and academics drawn internationally from the field of Asian art. The debate focused on the purpose of the Asia Triennial Manchester and reviewed and evaluated its motivations for working with artists of Asian origin, setting the process against the background of prevailing tropes of biennialisation and the vocabularies that emerged in the arts after the exploration of post-colonial perspectives during the 1990s and 2000s. The number of attendees and the fortitude of the debate suggested that the Triennial is above all self-reflexive; it is open to serious questions about its value and consequences for contemporary art, and concerned about its positioning within interdisciplinary and local-to-global discourses around art, globalisation and cosmopolitanism. The results of the Laboratory were as encouraging as they were trenchant, surprising and critical and, in response to the latter, when compiling and editing this anthology we have taken up its dialectical tone.

Biennials have been criticised for their unapologetic endorsement of neoliberal and post-Fordist production styles (Gielen, 2009; Harutyunyan et al, 2011). Less is the artwork akin to a commodity, or the artist to a kind of labourer, than that the media biennial event itself becomes the commodity, constructed via immaterial labour forces and financed by corporate sponsors and the (liberal) nation state. It is sometimes easy to become carried away with the promised yield and signified associations

of the biennial brand. To focus entirely on the aesthetics—relational or otherwise—of the biennial’s artworks may risk overlooking that their artists are at the same time participants in a global phenomenon. In some cases there may be a contradiction between the signifying practices of the event organiser and of the artist who is attached to that event, as well as between their desire to engage with the event’s brand but also to be creatively autonomous from it. Arguably, the neoliberal cultural, economic structure provides the artist with no other choice if they want to showcase themselves to the world. As a perceivable alternative, a shoestring, pop-up exhibition may evade corporate sponsorship and official arts policy prerogatives but it is less likely to be noticed by a global audience unless its curators are social media mavericks (although, admittedly, Twitter is also a product of venture capitalism). Global capitalism is analogous to global movement, making the biennial event—and its associated expectations of travel—both attainable and prolific. Artists benefit but they are also beneficial; they convey but they are also conveyed. Caught beneath their political and financial underpinnings, they can, however, at least broach these same circumstances and try to ‘speak back’.

The tendency and, indeed, the expectation, for the contemporary art exhibition to travel and to be travelled, provides impetus for reflexivity and deliberation amongst the critics who visit biennials—and within the practices and products of the artists whose work they constitute. Whilst biennials showcase artworks often taken from a wide range of nations, all collated within one cultural space, they are still a place that needs to be visited. The biennial is a cultural tourist destination comprised of the replicas of other nations’ artistic products. Artists, curators and academics need to ask what is the justification for travelling to see art and why should art gain importance through being attached to a biennial or triennial? The essays in this volume provide responses to such questions, either, explicitly, through academic renderings, or more tacitly via artists’ reflections or curatorial mission statements—all of which have in common a site-specificity as texts that are the written products of an engagement with the Asia Triennial Manchester.

Paul Gladston’s essay, ‘International curatorial practice and the problematic de-territorialisation of the “identity” show’, explores comprehensively the recent historical, socio-economic conditions amongst which international artists now operate. He engages a comparative analysis between the Asia Triennial Manchester of 2011 and the third Guangzhou Triennial, ‘Farewell to Post-colonialism’ in 2008. **Alice Ming Wai Jim** considers the artistic manifestations of such exposures in ‘20 years of “Departure Lounge Art”’ and shows how artists and curators have responded to the increasing requirement for air travel in relation to artistic practices. ‘Departure Lounge Art’ is ‘art that engages with the experiences, policies, air-travel infrastructures, and identity and freedom industries associated with air mobility’, all of which are compounded through the embedding of art in biennials and the kinds of topics that may be explored in relation to them. Using examples taken from several Chinese artists and Didem Özbek and Osman Bozkurt’s mimicking of a typical visa application centre in Istanbul for Castlefield Gallery’s ATM exhibition of 2011, Jim suggests that the

politics of ‘air mobility’ creates a site for new, aesthetic explorations, focusing not only on issues of territory and (trans)national identity but also on the nuanced changes to everyday lifestyles that it brings. With a focus on the transitory, Jim’s chapter highlights the normalising relationship between itinerant artists and non-places and the new forms of aesthetics associated with art which travels. She suggests that Asian art remains a popular export but that artists from the South who travel to biennials in the North still feel subjected to a one-way perception of otherness, bound to always carrying a kind of luggage which cannot be simply unpacked from a shipping container. Curator of the Özbek and Bozkurt Castlefield Gallery show, **Clarissa Corfe**—in interview with one of the editors for this volume—also elucidates the difficulties of co-curating an international exhibition that is located in the North and that also considers the precariousness of border crossings between Europe and Asia.

There is a sense that shifts in artistic processes across time and generation in the art practices of Jagjit Chuhan, **Daksha Patel** and also Rashid Rana (which is addressed by Punj) consolidate corresponding shifts in their cultural identities, as artistic actors and as cosmopolitan participants. Patel’s drawings of bodies and the biomedical impact of the city upon them—some of which were displayed in light boxes at Piccadilly station at ATM11—indicate her consciousness as an artist who has become firmly established in a given metropolis. This suggests that contemporary identity formations are structured by everyday urban life, not least by how urban space affects our physical states of being. The city is much more significant than the nation for Patel; Asia Triennial Manchester, she suggests, is about her relationship to the environment of Manchester as an artist more than it has to do with a desire to highlight notions of Asian identity for the purpose of the event. As she writes:

My practice is not concerned with identity or notions of art in and of Asia. It responds to contemporary medical practices of looking at, measuring and representing the internal body. Although my own history of migration—a first generation immigrant to the UK, who was born in East Africa and lived in India prior to coming to the UK—inevitably shapes how I look at the world, my understanding and experience of identity is fractured and multi-layered. It isn’t connected to geographical location, but emerges out of fractures and fissures between different places and identities.

At both Triennials, the fractures and fissures which already constitute Manchester’s ‘multi-national’ community were brought into sharp relief by the presence of the event. The intention was for collaboration amongst different national and ethnic communities, rather than their smoothing over into something globally palatable and packaged. As such the Triennial *is* indeed about a specific geographical location but only because this location is itself diverse and multi-layered, not least in relation to generations of people with Asian identities and their contemporaries.

This entire discussion of whether the Triennial has found new ways of brokering these complex social relations through its organisational structure is addressed by **He Hai** of China's art collective the Utopia Group, in his 'The Utopia Group and a decentred triennial'. More specifically, he addresses whether it is acceptable to burden artists with the responsibility to represent some aspect of their ethnicity or identity—a pressure that the Triennial may add to, by virtue of its focus on Asia. He asks if the expectation for artists to convey aspects of their identities has lessened since Chinese artists 'made their debut' in the West. He surmises that artists who choose to break new ground and refuse to 'play the Chinese card' can be exhibited constructively alongside those that locate their work in a politics of identity. This is what the Triennial of 2011 offered and its value for He rests on the diversity of approaches to art production that it encouraged, through an open remit to participants and a 'decentred' triennial with no presiding curatorial dictum. A companion essay by He Hai, '*Enclosure: An absurdist allegory on the reality of transposition*', turns to the artworks that the author contributed to the 2011 Triennial, together with the Utopia Group artist, Dafei. The principal work was a costumed performance motivated by a historical reflection on the process of rationalising the use of agricultural land throughout the Industrial Revolution. Relating the traces of this story of social and economic development—in particular Manchester's rise and fall as a manufacturing base for global trade—involved both artists in a slow, painstaking movement around the city's streets dressed in artificial wool. The dragging pace of their passage invited a lamentation on time and its commodification during modernity, set against a character study of the humble herbivore. Presenting themselves as absurdly giant sheep kicking balls of wool, the artists recalled how textile products (such as wool and cotton) flowed from the North West region of England at its industrial height. This enabled a sideways glance at the more recent 'transpositions' for mass production that are transforming Asia, with deep consequences for the morphology of urban space.

¹ Further material of this sort includes video footage of an illustrated conversation between Rashid Rana and the curator David Elliot (11 October 2011), held in the open access repository, the Open Arts Archive: <http://www.openartsarchive.org/oaa/content/rashid-rana-and-david-elliott-conversation>.

Manchester's status as a 'cottonopolis' during the period of Empire connected it to the area now known as Pakistan, so it is fitting that the Triennial should showcase works by one of Pakistan's most prominent artists, Rashid Rana, and to highlight major historical trading relationships and colonial undercurrents through the participation of certain Asian artists. The interconnected, subsequent periods of South Asian migration to the city are represented in the progressive ontology of the city that the Triennial produced, captured in essays by **Jagjit Chuhan** and **Rajesh Punj**. These address the particular allure of Rashid Rana's pieces exhibited at Cornerhouse for the Triennials of 2008 and 2011, and draw from interviews and conversations with him.¹ They also refer to movements in modernist art history, such as Dada, pointillism and minimalism (to name a few) and interweave these narratives into the tendencies and concerns of art practice in the post-digital era. These contingencies and contradictions are elements of creative practice that are palpable as artistic processes in Rana's oeuvre; along with the often large scale and lavish materials of his installations, Rana's works could be said to pulsate and punctuate the Triennial, beaming in audiences to the city. The art historical concerns of Punj as he describes and dissects Rana's work highlight the practical and

conceptual assignments of any internationally renowned contemporary artist who works in diverse cultural landscapes around the globe—regardless of in which part of the globe the artist was born or raised, where the artist currently lives and produces art, or the biennials that are chosen for exhibiting it. The biennial represents the globe—or, here, at least, Asia—and as such is not a place in itself, yet neither is it the contemporary global art scene or global market. Artists who are working internationally are forever relocating, exchanging and cross-fertilising ideas and elements of art practice, making it a difficult and fruitless task for their audiences to try and ascertain their origin or influence. As Punj argues, in his essay, ‘Rashid Rana: A return to the real’, ‘he [Rana] doesn’t wish to dwell on his nationality and neither does he wish to discuss his Indianness or the lack of it’. Perhaps, more so, artists want to exchange and transfer the knowledge they gather from international art travel whilst engaging creatively with that knowledge itself. Part of knowledge exchange involves engaging with an audience: the very same public that endeavours nonetheless to pinpoint an artist’s origin.

The broadly evidenced desire for artistic and public knowledge exchange can be seen in particular exhibitions, artworks and events at the two Asia Triennials. The exhibition at Madlab, *38° OF SEPARATION*, discussed in a curatorial chapter by **Hwa Young Jung** and **Beccy Kennedy** (‘Korea—time, generation and the everyday’), explores this territory from different national perspectives. It examines a digitally interactive piece by Hyojung Seo that was commissioned to explore the generational and cultural interchanges between North and South Korea since the country’s division. The artist, Seo, described in an interview how the site-specific installation had enabled her to engage with North Korean history and culture and consider the differences between the two Koreas. The interactive element of the artwork also encouraged audiences to posit questions about Korea to the artist on the exhibition’s opening night and to the Madlab invigilators over the months that followed. Hyojung Seo’s digitally interactive piece can be considered alongside Junebum Park’s *To Let*; both artists are from South Korea and have partially witnessed the rapid digitalisation and über-capitalist development of the country in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, with its creeping multiversity of technological brands and other products that increasingly infiltrate the expanding urban spaces. Park and Seo both highlight the presence of the complacent and complicit consumerism that occupies the ‘everyday’ of South Korea’s virtual and actual spaces. This is also explored lyrically in relation to the experience of the city, in **Steven Gartside**’s ‘Objects of curiosity: On the work of Junebum Park’.

In a different way, ATM08’s *Symposiums of the Local*—a discursive project presented by artists (Channel_A, and p-10) from Taiwan and Singapore at Castlefield Gallery—was an opportunity for artists, curators and members of the public to debate issues of the global and the local in contemporary art. Director of Castlefield gallery, **Kwong Lee**, in an interview with Beccy Kennedy, reflects on the participatory practices surrounding the symposium, contextualising this in relation to the gallery’s artist-led ontology and vision. **Ming Turner** draws from this exhibition, considering the attractiveness of

Taiwan as a cultural player within the Triennial in ‘Whose cosmopolitanism? Globalisation, Taipei Biennial and Taiwan’s presence at the first Asia Triennial Manchester’. She explores the complex, intersecting notions of exoticism and opportunity from a Taiwanese as well as from a global perspective. **Lee Weng Choy** nudges towards the relevance of the *Symposiums of the Local* in his essay, ‘Missing and public: Conceptual art in Singapore’, although not without cynicism, suggesting that the time frame and engagement from the Manchester artistic locale could have been more extensive—something which is perhaps indicative of the smaller scale and budget of the ATM08. Lee also investigates exchanges and transitions in art and media theory and practice, negotiating cultural conduits between Europe and Asia, referencing Duchamp (also, incidentally, mentioned by Punj in his essay on Rashid Rana in relation to the birth of conceptual art), da Vinci and Kosuth. He goes on to discuss the impact upon the biennial scene of several Singaporean artists, Lim Tzay Chuen, Amanda Heng, Ho Tzu Nyen and Jeremy Chu (the latter of whom worked with p-10). Lee explains:

While it could be argued that all four are of Singapore in their thought and practice, their works are addressed not only to local audiences but they also appeal to wider regional and global art publics. Moreover, each of their practices exceeds the specific cultural conditions from which they arise.

Like all the essays in this volume, Lee reflects on the global appeal of these artists’ contributions, not because the artworks are necessarily internationalised to the point where they have become ‘a-national’ but because they inhabit realms of both localised and globalised artistic influence and social impact. And this, in a sense, is what a triennial in Manchester represents, too. Lee highlights the necessity to transcend the specific labels of influence, whether they are internationally or locally harboured. Such labels, for example, may infer outmoded modernist art movements or whole continents.

Alnoor Mitha provides a summative, chronological history of ‘The Local Triennial: Manchester’s journeys into art and culture’ where he charts the connections and developments of Shisha and the ATM. Mitha’s chapter contextualises Shisha and the South Asian art scene in Britain, connecting this to the development and representation of ‘Black Minority Ethnic’ art exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s that informed the cultural approach of the ATM. The essay also provides a summary of the activities of partner venues that were involved with the ATM11 festival, interspersed with snapshots of the artistic achievements of ATM08. The descriptions of the artistic corpus of the two triennials within Mitha’s chapter provide a foundation and a form of reference for tracing and aligning the involvements of curators and artists included within the essays.

In the final piece, ‘Traversing triennials and reorienting boundaries: Considering Manchester, Asia and Asia Triennial Manchester’, **Beccy Kennedy** considers more critically the qualifier of ‘Asia’ within the title of the triennial, drawing from debates surrounding the ATM curatorial

² The discussion draws particular attention to the ‘Open Space’ session that took place on 1 October 2011 at Manchester Museum. Video footage of the discussion can be found in the open access repository, the Open Arts Archive: <http://www.openartsarchive.org/oa/content/atm-curatorial-lab-open-space>.

laboratories.² She suggests that whilst Asia and Manchester are historically and culturally interconnected—providing a clear structure for the Triennial—the curatorial and artistic processes and production of the event could be much more reciprocal between the city of Manchester and a city or cities *in* Asia. The emphasis for ATM14 need not be focused on greater commercialism or marketing strategies common to mega biennials but on developing more extensive international networks between artists and curators. This would better support a two-way flow of knowledge, and a knowledge which is reflexive of the means in which it shifts in relation to the global city.

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