



# **The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art (Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies)**

*Panos Kompatsiaris*

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Contemporary art biennials are sites of prestige, innovation and experimentation, where the category of art is meant to be in perpetual motion, rearranged and redefined, opening itself to the world and its contradictions. They are sites of a seemingly peaceful cohabitation between the 'elitist' and the 'popular', where the likes of Jeff Koons encounter the likes of Guy Debord, where Angela Davis and Franz Fanon share the same ground with neoliberal cultural policy makers and creative entrepreneurs. Building on the legacy of events that conjoin art, critical theory and counterculture, from *Nova Convention* to *documenta IX*, the new biennial embodies at once an ethos of avant-garde resistance and an industrialized politics of creativity. This book examines a strained period for these high art institutions, a period when their politics are brought into question in the context of austerity, crisis and the rise of Occupy cultures. Using the 3rd Athens Biennale and the 7th Berlin Biennale as its main case studies, it looks at how the in-built tensions between the domains of art and politics take shape when spectacular displays attempt to operate as immediate activist sites. Drawing on ethnographic research and contemporary cultural theory, this book explores how biennials both denunciate aesthetic value as a bourgeois category and simultaneously diffuse and replicate its form varying across social landscapes.

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