How much did the demand ‘the next documenta should be curated by an artist’ change your view on the documenta, the old ones and the new one?

In fact there is no direct relation between the article published in the book “The next documenta should be curated by an artist”, organized by Jens Hoffmann for e-flux in 2003, and my participation at the documenta 12, in 2007. If you regard the dates of each project, you will see that the “Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?” project started in 1994 and was updated in 2007; the essay for the book was written in 2003 – and when I was invited to contribute to the book I had no possibility to know that I would exhibit at the documenta 12. But if you look closer at my project “Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?” you are going to see that it shares with the essay “I love etc.-artists” some common preoccupations regarding the role, identity and image of the contemporary artist (the one who works in the contemporary art field). In fact, my activity as an artist (mostly in Brazil but also in the international context) has been developed (as one of its aspects) as an investigation of the limits of the role of the artist in terms of its interface with the roles of the ‘agent’, the ‘curator’ and the ‘art critic/writer’ – that is, the artist “as agent, as curator and as critic”. As you know, I have been publishing regularly texts on contemporary art and theory (for instance, Magnet, London, InIVA, 2000; and Art after conceptual art, Alberro and Buchmann [Eds.], MIT press, Generali Foundation, 2006; among others; and I have just published in Brazil my MA research essay on the relation between text and artwork, entitled Além da pureza visual [Beyond visual purity], Porto Alegre, Zouk, 2007]; and I sometimes do curatorial work (very specific projects, like “Mistura + Confronto”, Oporto, Portugal, 2001; “On difference #2”, Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2006; “Pogovarjanja”, Skuc Gallery, Ljubljana, 2006). Very soon since I started to work as artist, by early 1980s, in Rio de Janeiro, I began to develop work with writing and organization of art events (first catalogue text published in 1987). I soon realized that it was not enough just to work as an ‘artist-artist’ (i.e. enclosed in the studio space) and that it was necessary to negotiate my insertion as an artist through writing and other gestures related to an intervention on my local context. This change of attitude was not motivated by economic reasons (the awareness that it was completely impossible to survive as an artist in Brazil because of the difficulty of selling the kind of work I was interested to do) but for political ones: for creating a critical position in the context of contemporary art it is necessary to play in a larger arena, which considers that working as an artist should be complemented by the roles of the critic, agent and curator. So I started to publish reviews and write for the catalogues of artists whose work I felt I was close to and with whom I found connections within my own practice. Later, together with other artists, I co-directed and edited the art magazine “Item”, published in Rio de Janeiro (six issues published from 1995 to 2003); and I also co-directed the artist space “Agora / Capacete”, in Rio (where we organized exhibitions, lectures, films and videos, from 1999 to 2003). I tell this long story to demonstrate that, as many other artists today, I have been developing my role as an artist in close connection with a critical and curatorial practice – which for sure has a consequence of creating and implementing artworks and projects that include this discussion into themselves, in their ‘structure’. Thus, it is clear that my project “Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?” has incorporated several of the preoccupations described above, and that in fact it is a project that proposes a discussion on the role of the contemporary artist today, in addition to be “a project about involving the other as participant in a set of protocols indicative of the effects, conditions and possibilities of contemporary art”. In fact, my view of the role of the artist as incorporating aspects of the critical and curatorial games has been very important in terms of comprehending all the art events of our times – not only documenta, of course – from the point of view of their constitution and organization.

What is the meaning of a documenta today, if there is meaning of it? In comparison of biennales and art fairs and the importance of being an art-fan.

Documenta is still important (although some shifts can be expected in the near future, as the world now is less eurocentric) and the main difference between it and most of the biennales is its
preparation time: the fact that it is developed in a five year period makes the exhibition very particular and much more intense – all the staff (including curators, curatorial office, etc) has a different involvement with it, which is reflected in many exhibition organization details. I don’t feel myself capable of establishing “the meaning of documenta today”. For sure documenta is one of the main international events of contemporary art and each edition should be carefully visited, enjoyed and criticized – I believe that one of the main tasks of art is the production of thought. But documenta is also an impressive machine for the production of visibility: everything and everyone there (curators, artists, artworks) – including the city of Kassel, of course – is located under strong lights during the 100 days (but even before). It must be taken in consideration, then, that this visibility is the symptom of the presence of several interests at the same time, and thus documenta carries many things besides ‘art’ – opening itself to political and economic aspects of the world today. But as anyone knows, strong lights also produce intensive shadows and this is an interesting aspect to be considered…

Who is more important the artist or the curator?

I have no doubt that the most important thing is the artwork itself (in all of its material and immaterial aspects): the presence of the artwork produces a concrete intervention on the state of things and makes the world change (it doesn’t matter if today or tomorrow…). Artists without any artworks (unless they are the artworks themselves) and curators without artists can be very boring – in the sense that the big shift is triggered by concrete conceptual/material proposals: they are the “poems on display” in the sense that they produce the eruption of the poetic among ordinary life, with all of its political implications. In that sense artists are more necessary than curators, although the curators can also produce poems. Also it is clear that the artist today embodies the knowledge of the curator as one of the requirements to be a ‘contemporary artist’. But my final answer is: it doesn’t matter if artist or curator, the ‘emergence of the poetic’ is the most important thing – whoever triggers this process is the most important character of the event.

Is the documenta a market, a playground or an exhibition?

An event like documenta has many borders and layers and it has to be organized in close connection with all the aspects mentioned in your question. First, it is an exhibition; but any exhibition today can not escape from a confrontation with the ‘market’ and with ‘entertainment’. Documenta is not (and should not be) isolated from the ‘real’ world – with all its limits and contradictions. So the answer is that documenta is an exhibition, playground and market – each artist in the exhibition has to find a position in between all these aspects and see how it’s possible to make the artwork function there.