

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO ART HISTORY



A Companion to Curation

Edited by

Brad Buckley | John Conomos



WILEY Blackwell

A Companion to Curation

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO ART HISTORY

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For Annette Michelson, in memoriam
1922–2018

For Paul Virilio, in memoriam
1932–2018

For Agnès Varda, in memoriam
1928–2019

For Okwui Enwezor, in memoriam
1963–2019

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Series Editor's Preface

Blackwell Companions to Art History is a series of edited collections designed to cover the discipline of art history in all its complexity. Each volume is edited by specialists who lead a team of essayists, representing the best of leading scholarship in mapping the state of research within the subfield under review, as well as pointing toward future trends in research.

This *Companion to Curation* offers a new and insightful consideration of the role of the curator, curating, and the history of curation. Focusing on the last 30 years, this volume explores the many new forms of curatorial practice that have emerged during this time. These practices, which take place both inside and outside of art institutions, are considered in a global context and include contemporary indigenous art, contemporary Chinese art since the 1980s, and the emergence of new curatorial strategies from beyond the Eurocentric art world.

The essays combine the viewpoints of leading artist-curators, curators, scholars, art historians, and theorists in the field of curating with newer voices to provide a genuine global cross-disciplinary dialogue about perspectives and issues related to curating. The volume is divided into four sections: An Overview: The Origin and Provenance of Curating; Movements, Models, People, and Politics; The Curator in a Globalized World; and Beyond the Museum: Curating at the Frontier.

These essays question the legacy of Western thought and culture on contemporary art and curatorship and argue that contemporary curating has different predicates. In this way we see interactions and innovations between art and curating in the contemporary world.

A Companion to Curation is a very welcome and timely addition to the series.

Dana Arnold, 2019

About the Editors

Brad Buckley born in Sydney, is an artist, urbanist, activist, and curator and a Professorial Fellow at Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, the University of Melbourne. He is also a foundation Fellow at the Centre of Visual Art (CoVA), the University of Melbourne. He was previously Professor of Contemporary Art and Culture at Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney. He was educated at St Martin's School of Art, London, and the Rhode Island School of Design. He is the editor, with John Conomos, of *Republics of Ideas: Republicanism, Culture, Visual Arts* (Pluto Press, 2001), *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD, and the Academy* (NSCADU Press, 2009), with Andy Dong and Conomos, *Ecologies of Invention* (SUP, 2013), and with Conomos *Erasure: The Spectre of Cultural Memory* (Libri Publishing, 2015). His most recent publication, with Conomos, is *Who Runs the Artworld: Money, Power and Ethics* (Libri Publishing, 2017). Buckley has also developed and chaired, with Conomos, several sessions at the College Art Association, US. He has been a visiting professor and artist at the National College of Art and Design (Ireland), Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, the University of Tsukuba (Japan), and Parsons School of Design, The New School (US). He is the recipient of the prestigious MoMA PS1 Center for Contemporary Art Fellowship (New York 1990–1991) from the Australia Council for the Arts, an Australian Learning and Teaching Council grant (with Baker), and numerous other awards and research grants.

His work, which has been shown internationally for over 35 years, operates at the intersection of installation, theater, and performance, and investigates questions of cultural control, democracy, freedom, and social responsibility. Buckley's work has been included in the *3rd International Biennial* (Ljubljana, [former] Yugoslavia), *My Home is Your Home: The 4th Construction in Process* (the Artists' Museum, Lodz, Poland), *Co-Existence: The 5th Construction in Process*, (the Artists' Museum, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel), and the *9th Biennale of Sydney*, and in exhibitions at Artspace (Sydney), Australian Centre for Photography (Sydney), Franklin Furnace (New York), the Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), the MoMA PS 1 Institute for Contemporary Art (New York), the Dalhousie Art Gallery (Halifax), Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane), the Tsukuba Art Gallery (Japan), and Plato's Cave (New York).

ABOUT THE EDITORS

John Conomos is an artist, critic, writer, and curator and Associate Professor and Principal Fellow at Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of the Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne. Conomos has also recently been appointed as a Fellow of the Centre of Visual Art (CoVA) at the University of Melbourne. Conomos has exhibited extensively both locally and internationally across a variety of media: video art, new media, photo-performance, installations, and radiophonic art. He is a prolific contributor to art, film, and media journals and a frequent keynote speaker and participant at conferences, fora, and seminars.

His video *Autumn Song* received an award of distinction at Berlin's Transmediale Festival in 1998. In 2000, Conomos was awarded a New Media Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts and in 2004 he was awarded a Global Greek Award (Hellenic Ministry for the Arts and Culture) for his contribution to the visual arts and the Greek diaspora. Conomos is the author of *Mutant Media* (Artspace/Power Publications, 2008) and in the following year he edited, with Buckley, *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy* (NSCADU Press, 2009), and in 2013 he was an editor, with Andy Dong and Buckley, of *Ecologies of Invention* (SUP). He is also the editor, with Buckley, of *Erasure: The Spectre of Cultural Memory* (Libri Publishing, 2015) and in 2017 of *Who Runs the Artworld: Money, Power and Ethics* (Libri Publishing).

In 2008, his work was included in *Video Logic* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and in 2009 his video *Lake George (After Mark Rothko)* was screened at the Tate Modern (London), where he also spoke on his art practice.

In 2013, Conomos exhibited *Spiral of Time*, which was accompanied by a major publication, at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney (ACP). Also in the same year, Conomos exhibited in *Etudes for the 21st Century* at the Osage Gallery, Hong Kong with leading European media artists Robert Cahen and Kingsley Ng. In 2016, he exhibited a performance video *Paging Mr Hitchcock* at the Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney. Conomos has also exhibited at Cementa 15 (2015) and Cementa 17 (2017). And with Steven Ball in 2016, Conomos exhibited a multimedia installation, *Deep Water Web*, at London's Furtherfield Gallery.

He is currently writing a memoir called *Milk Bar*.

Notes on Contributors

Thomas J. Berghuis is a curator and art historian, based in Leiden, the Netherlands. His monograph on *Performance Art in China* was published in 2006 with Timezone 8 in Hong Kong. Berghuis has further published on contemporary art, new media art, experimental art, and curatorial practices in China and Indonesia. Exhibitions curated by Berghuis include *Wang Jianwei: Time Temple* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2014) and *Suspended Histories* at the Museum van Loon, Amsterdam (2013).

David Carrier is a philosopher who writes art criticism for artcritical.com, *Brooklyn Rail*, and *hyperallergic*. He has published books on the art museum, the art gallery, the world art history, the pictures of Sean Scully, the paintings of Nicolas Poussin, and the art criticism of Charles Baudelaire. His most recent books are *Aesthetic Theory, Abstract Art, and Lawrence Carroll* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) and, with Joachim Pissarro, *Aesthetics of the Margins/The Margins of Aesthetics: Wild Art Explained* (Penn State University Press, 2018).

Juli Carson is Professor of Art at UC Irvine. She is also Philippe Jabre Professor of Art History and Curating at the American University of Beirut, 2018–2019. Her books include: *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics, Aesthetics, Love* (Generali Foundation, 2007) and *The Limits of Representation: Psychoanalysis and Critical Aesthetics* (Letra Viva Press, 2011). *The Hermeneutic Impulse: Aesthetics of an Untethered Past* was published this year by PoLyPen, a subsidiary of b_books Press.

Biljana Ćirić is an independent curator based in Shanghai and Belgrade. She was the co-curator of the 3rd Ural Industrial Biennial for Contemporary Art (Yekaterinburg, 2015), curator-in-residence at the Kadist Art Foundation (Paris, 2015), and a research fellow at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (Høvikodden, 2016). Her most recent project was the Second Assembly, a seminar series related to the exhibition histories of China and Southeast Asia, with a focus on the 1990s, which was hosted by the Rockbund Art Museum in 2018.

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Gregory Galligan is an independent curator and art historian and director/co-founder of the nonprofit research platform THAI ART ARCHIVES™ (f. 2010), in Bangkok. He lectures on global modern and contemporary art histories for the International Program in Design and Architecture (INDA), and cultural management and the history and theory of contemporary curatorial practice for the MA in Cultural Management (MACM) curriculum at Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok).

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Adam Geczy is an artist and writer who teaches at the University of Sydney. His *Art: Histories, Theories and Exceptions* (Berg, 2008) won the Choice Award for best academic title in art in 2009. Having produced over 16 books, recent titles include *Artificial Bodies in Fashion and Art* (Bloomsbury, 2017) and *Transorientalism in Art, Fashion and Film* (Bloomsbury, 2019). He is also editor of the *JAPPC* and *ab-Original* (both Penn State University Press).

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Elke Krasny, Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her research, writing, and curating connects feminist praxis, spatial economies, urban analysis, and curating's historiographies. Publications include the 2017 essays "Exposed: The Politics of Infrastructure in VALIE EXPORT's Transparent Space" in *Third Text* and "The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex" in *Feminism and Art History Now*, edited by Horne and Perry. The volume *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art* appeared in 2013.

Maria Lind is a curator, writer, and educator based in Stockholm. She is the director of Tensta konsthall, Stockholm, and the artistic director of the 11th Gwangju Biennale. She was director of the graduate program, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (2008–2010). Among her recent co-edited publications are *Art and the F Word: Reflections on the Browning of Europe* (Sternberg Press, 2014). She edited *Abstraction* as part of MIT's and Whitechapel Gallery's series *Documents on Contemporary Art*.

Sean Lowry is a Melbourne-based artist, writer, curator, and musician. He holds a PhD in Visual Arts from the University of Sydney and is currently Head of Critical and Theoretical Studies at Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne. Lowry has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally, and his published writing appears in numerous journals and edited volumes. He is also Founder and Executive Director of *Project Anywhere* (www.projectanywhere.net). For more information, please visit www.seanlowry.com.

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Djon Mundine, OAM, is a member of the Bandjalung people of northern New South Wales, Australia and is a curator, writer, artist, and activist. He has held prominent curatorial positions in national and international institutions. He was the concept artist of the *Aboriginal Memorial* at the National Gallery of Australia in 1988. In 2005–2006 he was Research Professor at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan. He is currently an independent curator of contemporary Indigenous art.

Melentie Pandilovski is an art theorist, historian, and curator. His research examines the links between art culture and science technology. He was previously director of Video Pool Media Arts Centre, Winnipeg, Canada and is currently Director of the Riddoch Art Gallery, Mount Gambier, Australia. He has curated more than 200 projects in Europe, Australia, and Canada. He is the editor (with Tom Kohut) of *Marshall McLuhan & Vilém Flusser Communication & Aesthetics Theories Revisited* (Video Pool, 2015).

Carole Paul is director of Museum Studies in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her current work concerns the history of museums and collections in the early modern period, especially in Rome. Her various publications include *The First Modern Museums of Art:*

The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe (Getty Publications, 2012). She is now writing a book on the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

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We are, of course, especially grateful to all of our contributors who gave their time and expertise in helping us to materialize our editorial intentions and objectives. Many heartfelt thanks to all of you in sharing our critical interest for the concerns and direction of contemporary curating in our society.

It is hoped that *A Companion to Curation* in its own way contributes to a better conceptual, cultural, and historical understanding of contemporary art discourse and its impact on our individual and public lives.

Brad Buckley and John Conomos

Foreword

The role of the curator has always evolved, as the definitions and institutions of art have changed. It is not only the role that has transformed, however, but also the expectations of what curators should do, not unlike what is now required of educators (and the roles are becoming more and more intertwined): to be highly productive and mobile; to be a consummate communicator, diplomat, scholar, and maybe fundraiser; to be at the forefront of emerging developments; and to be accessible to broad and diverse audiences. As exhibitions become absorbed into the mass entertainment industry, with institutions compelled to ever extend their visitorship, curators increasingly need to also move beyond the confines of the museum and into the public sphere – both physical and virtual – as facilitators, collaborators, advocates, and entertainers.

While the situation sketched here is by no means universal, it reflects the great diversification of curatorship in the twenty-first century. We can attribute this to numerous factors: new technologies, shifting demographics, globalizing artistic networks, the addressing of racial and gender biases in art history and museums, and the “educational turn” in the making, presentation, and communication of art toward research and knowledge production. Each has challenged the traditional institutions of art, opening them up to new histories and audiences, as well as building new models and alternative systems. Artists and curators, often from outside the dominant power structures and centers of modern art, have challenged how exhibitions are made, putting forth positions that have begun to dismantle what seemed unassailable only a few years ago. If we go back to the communicative role of the curator, it is now starkly evident that a close consideration of who speaks, to whom, and for whom, is fundamentally important to curatorial work.

To understand how these developments have brought us here, a wide-ranging and historically grounded anthology such as this is enormously useful. There have been numerous publications on curating in recent years, many coming out of the proliferating courses and conferences on the subject, as well as the rapidly growing scholarship on exhibition histories. This book adds substantially to the field by

bringing together a number of these research streams, enabling us to connect multiple perspectives and methodologies that have emerged over several centuries in different locations. The chapters here trace the transformation of the curator from a keeper of curiosities in seventeenth-century Europe, to a builder of collections and a maker of exhibitions, to a multifaceted cultural agent in a global, virtual world. Such a long, broad view brings into focus how complex and dynamic the curatorial field is. While deeply informed by history and the responsibilities that carries, it is continually being invigorated and challenged by the conversations taking place between individuals in the present. This publication affirms that in making our way through this vastly expanded arena – where we are often in danger of forgetting or getting lost – it is this willingness to keep the conversation going that is our surest guide.

Russell Storer

Deputy Director (Curatorial & Research)
National Gallery Singapore

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- 6.4 *Queering Yerevan's Collective Happenings In The Garden On Zarubyan Street 2008–2010*. Installation view of Suzanne Lacy's exhibition *International Dinner Party in feminist curatorial thought*, curated by Elke Krasny, Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, 2015. Courtesy of Elke Krasny.
- 6.5 *Mapping The Everyday. Neighbourhood Claims for the Future*, Audain Gallery, 2011–2012. Photograph of the installation view showing text-based horizon line and the archive of desmedia collective. Courtesy of Kevin Schmidt.
- 7.1 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.
- 7.2 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.
- 7.3 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.
- 7.4 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.
- 8.1 *Tribute to Magdalene Odundo*, ink and pencil on paper, 1996, H 60cm, W 42cm, Chris Spring. Courtesy of the author.
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- 9.1 *Martha Wilson*. Courtesy of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc. 2005. Photo credit: Christopher Milne.
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- 10.1 Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa, *Empty Bird Cage After Release of Bird* (1974). View of Mystical Reality exhibition held at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.
- 10.2 Lee Wen, "World Class Society". *Installation, video, soft sculptures, survey, Nokia Singapore Art 1999*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, September 1999 to February 2000.
- 10.3 Charles Lim, *SEA STATE 6 – capsize* (still), 2015, Single-channel HD digital video, c. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist. Venice Biennale Arsenale and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.
- 10.4 Cai Guoqiang, "Bring to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot", 1995. At the Grand Canal, Venice. For the exhibition *Transculture, 46th Venice Biennale*, 1995. Installation, wooden fishing boat from Quanzhou, Chinese herbs, earthen jars, ginseng beverages, bamboo ladles, porcelain cups, ginseng (100 kg), and handcart. Museo Naval di Venezia, Venice, Italy.
- 10.5 DGTMB by Eko Nugroho, *We Care as Much as You Pay*, manual embroidery patch on black cotton underlay, white MDF frame, 26 × 36 cm, 14 × 24 cm (embroidery). Purchased at Komunitas Salihara, arts shop, Jakarta, January 2016.

- 12.1 Bangkok Biennial opening ceremonies, 1 July 2018, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Biennial and May Thatun.
- 12.2 Bangkok Art Biennale co-founders Apinan Poshyananda (right) and Thapana Sirivadhanabhakdi, CEO and President of Thailand Beverage Public Company Limited (“ThaiBev”) [artwork: Choi Jeong Hwa (Korea), “Love Me Pink Pig”], September 2018, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Art Biennale, 2018.
- 12.3 Assistant Curator Vipash Purichanont (second from right) on a site visit for the Thailand Biennale at Krabi, 2018. Photo: Courtesy of the Thailand Biennale.
- 12.4 Apinan Poshyananda announcing the inaugural Bangkok Art Biennale 2018 at the 57th Venice Biennale—“Viva Arte Viva!” (2017). Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Art Biennale, 2018.
- 12.5 Sawangwongse Yawnghwe, *Yawnghwe Office In Exile—Platform To Dissent*. Bangkok Biennial Pavilion: Cartel Artspace, Bangkok 3 August–2 September, 2018. Photo: Preecha Pattara.
- 12.6 Myrtille Tibayrenc, *SIC–TRANSIT*. Bangkok Biennial Pavilion: Quid Pro Quo, Liv_Id Collective Bangrak Bazaar, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Toot Yung Gallery, Bangkok.
- 13.1 Installation view of exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* showing Marcel Duchamp’s *Sixteen Miles of String*, 1942. Gelatin silver print. © John D. Schiff. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library & Archives, Gift of Jacqueline, Paul and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp, 13-1972-9(303), Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.
- 13.2 Martin Kippenberger, *Museum of Modern Art Syros (MOMAS)*, 1993–1994. MOMAS sign by Christopher Wool, Syros, Greece, 1994. © Christopher Wool.
- 13.3 Thomas Hirschhorn, Musée Précaire Albinet, *d’Aubervilliers: Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers*, Paris (detail), 2004. Courtesy of <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/projet/musee-precaire-albinet/musee-precaire-albinet>.
- 13.4 *NEAR/AFAAAR* (Mitchel Cumming), *High Street* by Shane Haseman, work executed on French Doors of the curator’s kitchen, Redfern, NSW, Australia, 2014. Photo: Alex Gawronski.
- 13.5 Exhibition poster, *the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (ICAN)*, Sydney, Australia, 2010. Courtesy of the author and ICAN (Carla Cescon, Scott Donovan, Alex Gawronski).
- 15.1 Ramingining artists. Ramingining, Northern Territory, Australia *The Aboriginal Memorial* 1987–88 natural earth pigments on hollow logs height (irregular) 327 cm National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased with the assistance of funds from National Gallery admission charges and commissioned in 1987.
- 15.2 *Bungaree the First Australian: and Bungaree’s Farm*, Mosman Art Gallery’s T5 Camouflage Fuel Tank. Courtesy of the Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia 2015. Photo credit: Djon Mundine.
- 15.3 *Four Women (I Do Belong) Double*, Courtesy of Lismore Regional Gallery, Australia 2017. Photo credit: Carl Warner.

- 18.1 Constant Dullaart, *High Retention Slow Delivery!!*, 2014. Still from video essay. Courtesy the artist and Upstream Gallery.
- 18.2 Tamiko Thiel, *Gardens of the Anthropocene*, 2016. Commission for the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park, Courtesy of the artist.
- 18.3 David Rokeby, *Calgary Scroll*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.
- 18.4 Diana Domingues, *Biocybrid Fables: Borges' Fantastic Creatures*, 2010, Urban intervention in Mobile Augmented Reality (MAR) and Installation in AR, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of the artist.
- 21.1 *#exstrange Live Now on Ebay (Featuring Anke Schüttler)*, 2017. Internet-based work. Image courtesy of Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini.
- 21.2 *#exstrange Archive*, 2017 - present. Internet-based work. Image courtesy of Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini.
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- 21.4 *The Gallery of Lost Art*, 2013. Page devoted to John Baldessari, *The Cremation Project* (1970). Image courtesy of Damien Smith and ISO Design, 2012.
- 21.5 Project Anywhere, Screenshot of 2018 Global Exhibition Program. Courtesy of the author and Project Anywhere.
- 21.6 The Ghosts of Nothing, Screenshot of YouTube channel for The Ghosts of Nothing—*In Memory of Johnny B. Goode—World Tour—2014–2018*. Courtesy of the author and The Ghosts of Nothing.
- 22.1 *Trust* (series), Niki Sperou, Medium: glass Petri dish, gel medium seeded with E.coli, antibiotic, paper, light box. Created for the *Toxicity* exhibition, Plug-In ICA, Winnipeg, Canada, 2013. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.
- 22.2 *Man A Plant* (series detail), Niki Sperou, Medium: glass Petri dish, plant tissue culture, agar medium, drawing, on lightbox plinth. Produced via aseptic technique. Produced in 2006 for the *Man-A-Plant* exhibition, at the Flinders Medical Centre, Adelaide. Exhibited at Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide for Biotech Art – Revisited in 2009, and *The Apparatus of Life & Death* – SEAFair, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Macedonia in 2010. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.
- 22.3 *The Colonised Body* (detail), Niki Sperou. Mixed media installation 2016. Exhibited at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in 2016, and *The Rise of Bio-Society*, Riddoch Art Gallery, Mount Gambier in 2017. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.
- 22.4 *Preserves*, Niki Sperou. Mixed media installation. Created for the *Domestic Science Exhibition*, Royal Institution Australia in 2012. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.

Introduction

Brad Buckley and John Conomos

This book, *A Companion to Curation*, fills a crucial and longstanding need in the literature on the curator, curating, and the history of curation. This comprehensive collection is a clear, engaging, and timely addition to the field.

The main objective, as with all volumes in the various *Blackwell Companion* series, is to provide a reference work for the field of curatorial studies and curating in the visual arts that is at once comprehensive in scope and context, comprehensible to the non-specialist, and representative of the diversity of current approaches within the discipline and profession. One of the key concerns of our book is to discuss how and why curating has become such a central critical and practical concern within the “global contemporary” art world and how it will be imagined and manifested in the future. Essentially, we have examined a number of crucial developments since the late 1980s and early 1990s that have placed curating at the center of our present hyperinflated art system. This situation is characterized, according to Paul O’Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds, by a defining tension between curating as display-making (the exhibition) and curating as an expanded practice (the curatorial) (O’Neill, 2016). Relatedly, as these authors and others have recently observed, the rapid and pervasive changes to curating have been significantly predicated on the huge expansion of curatorial and educational platforms and programs in our tertiary educational and museological sector. This is evident in the contemporary literature on curating, which underscores how the current international focus on educational curating programs has produced problematic understandings and Eurocentric professional practices and perspectives.

A Companion to Curation primarily addresses the unprecedented interest in contemporary art curating during the last 30 years and how the curatorial discourse has changed during this period. What new forms of curatorial practice have emerged? Among the changes in the international art world is that the number of curators of various kinds, in and out of the art museum, archive, and other institutional contexts, including those who are embedded, adjunct – and who are also artists (as defined by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, 2015) – has exploded. Also, many artists have, in that period, in their practices, focused on international biennales, triennials, and documenta (Green and Gardner, 2016). And since the 1960s, when Harold Szeemann

became the first star curator, in particular with his spectacular *documenta 5* (1972) and biennales suggesting cultural and political change emerged, curators became also essentially fundraisers. This mainly occurred in the latter half of the century.

We emphasize as well, throughout the book, how the emergence of a globalized curatorial discourse since the late 1980s has occurred alongside the biennale culture of the same period. This indicates the contextualization of curating within the biennales and large-scale exhibitions of the last three decades or so, and the rethinking of curating as a medium of artistic practice. In short, this period has seen a radical convergence of art and curatorial practice for the first time. This rapid explosion of biennales, the so-called biennialization of international contemporary art, can be examined in the context of globalized neoliberalism. Critic Peter Schjeldahl once described this as “festivalism,” where art simply reinforced the neocolonial norms and currents of international capital, politics, and power (Green and Gardner 2016: 197–198).

For the influential curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist, biennales, triennales, and large-scale exhibitions, and archives, represent the notion of the exhibition space itself being a laboratory where ideas, knowledge, and cultural forms are articulated and distributed throughout the larger culture (Obrist 2011). This allows, to quote Obrist, “the unexpected, the spontaneous, and the unplanned” to take place in society (Obrist 2011: 177). In such key exhibitions as *Cities on the Move*, curated with Hou Hanru (1990), *Laboratorium*, curated with Barbara Vanderlinden (1999), and *do it* (1993), we encounter Obrist’s distinctively expansive knowledge and strategies. These strategies are based on a collaborative form of curating, treating it as a toolbox, so that curating itself can learn from urbanism, for instance. Curators, for Obrist, are responsible for the critical information that is transmitted between and through the objects of a given exhibition. Here the spectators themselves become the essential decipherers of the objects of an exhibition. Exhibitions should be curated based on understanding and accepting that there is no knowing exactly where they may lead. The classic example of this is the monumental exhibition *Les Immatériaux* that the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard curated in 1985.

Curators had been defined, since the seventeenth century, as people who take care, preserve, and classify objects worth caring for: as the German artist Tino Sehgal reminds us, in a word, “a specialist of things.” Nowadays, in an era of hyperspecialization and globalized technocracy, Obrist stands out as someone who is a generalist in many fields. He speaks with erudition and inventiveness, and is interested in curating as a means of articulating the intersubjective, the dynamic, and of transcending the static of the art world (Obrist 2011: 11). Ironically, in the mid-1990s Obrist was contemplating leaving the art world, but then applied his speculative curatorial objective to locating and cross-fertilizing the elements of an exhibition, treating it as a laboratory of ideas that will impact on society in a much broader context than the art world. He has problematized the very moral authority of the modern-day curator as a specialist who can alone decide on the validity of something. In his quest to redefine the role of the curator as a dynamic, intertextual, transdisciplinary agent in the contemporary info-scape, Obrist’s questioning of the static human–object interaction in the art world has been markedly affected by his belief in what he terms “infinite conversations” as the basis of critical knowledge (Obrist 2016: 9–13, 173–95). Obrist’s long-term concern with fluctuating and transformative exhibition structures and formats is predicated on (a) the recognition that curating is a subject lacking a

valid history, a field where cultural amnesia has played a significant role, and (b) the understanding that oral history is vital to its acceptance as a field in our post-computer era. In fact, what matters to Obrist in terms of curating is this very idea of its capacity to allow disparate elements of our world to connect to each other:

the act of curating, ... at its most basic is simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other – the task of curating is to make junctions, to allow different elements to touch. You might describe it as the attempted pollination of culture, or a form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, a people or a world. (Obrist 2015: 1)

Tellingly, today the very noun “curator” and verb “curate” have become viral outside the art world, and are used to cover most aspects of our lives. Even the historic New York department store Brooks Brothers now “curates” its latest collection of shirts and the once humble cookbook has now morphed into a collection of “curated” recipes. Even in sport, the cricket pitch is managed by a curator. We now curate playlists, fashion, events, food, film, and rock concerts, all of which clearly suggests that the curator’s practice has bled into all aspects of our culture. The Canadian critic and writer David Blazer deftly dissects the cultural, semiotic, and political dimensions of curating having become a cult thing in his book *Curationism*. He argues that curationism is the fashionable acceleration of the curatorial impulse, since the mid-1990s, into “a dominant way of thinking and being” (Blazer 2014: 2). Blazer’s opening pages describe his encounter with curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her explanation of why for *documenta 13* she refused to call her team curators. Instead she referred to them as “agents” and claimed that curationism itself can be explained in terms of our overall sociological alienation, where rather than being perceived as individuals we see ourselves as an anonymous multitude, all becoming the same. Hence one of the basic objectives of *A Companion to Curation* is to demystify the ideological, cultural, historical, and professional aspects of curation’s intricate relationship with late capitalism or post-Fordist society.

Although curating is considered a relatively new profession, it can in fact be traced back to ancient Rome. All of its distinct defining functions, such as preservation, selection, contribution to art history, and creating exhibitions for galleries and museums, are encapsulated in its Latin etymological root, *curare*, meaning “to take care of” (Obrist 2015: 15). These values are reflected in our popular understanding of curating as a direct expression, according to Blazer, of “taste, sensibility and connoisseurship” (Blazer 2014: 2). Essentially, in ancient Rome, curators were actually civil servants whose main responsibility was the caring and overseeing of public works, including the empire’s aqueducts, bathhouses, and sewers (Obrist 2015: 24–25). In medieval times, as Obrist points out, the emphasis shifted to a more metaphysical and religious aspect of human life, as the *curatus* (or curate in English) was a priest concerned with the caring of the souls of a particular parish. Significantly, by the eighteenth century, curators became more concerned with museums and their collections but importantly, as Obrist reminds us, different kinds of caretaking emerged over the centuries (Obrist 2015: 25). What quintessentially matters now is how the contemporary curator still remains connected to the concept of *curare*, in the sense of cultivating, growing, and pruning and trying to help citizens with their shared concerns (Obrist 2015).

One of the fundamental objectives of *A Companion to Curation* is to bring together in one publication, for the first time, leading artist-curators, curators, scholars, art historians, and theorists in the field of curating to consider curating in the context of this broad historical arch, and so to allow a global cross-disciplinary dialogue about perspectives and issues related to curating. Our contributors come from north and south, east and west of the equator, and can speak of new frameworks, angles, concepts, and experiences of contemporary curating. We have therefore included a number of newer voices, as well as established commentators in the field.

Importantly, *A Companion to Curation* discusses the global developments in contemporary indigenous art, the ascendancy of contemporary Chinese art since the 1980s, and the emergence of curators and new curatorial strategies from outside the Eurocentric and Anglosphere art worlds, particularly across Asia. It also focuses on a genealogical critique by tracing the concept of “curating” from its primary context in the northern hemisphere to the southern one, outlining its different meanings, inflections, and issues over the centuries, to the present day.

A Companion to Curation is divided into four broad conceptual parts:

- Part I: An Overview: The Origin and Provenance of Curating
- Part II: Movements, Models, People, and Politics
- Part III: Curating in a Globalized World
- Part IV: Beyond the Museum: Curating at the Frontier.

Part I: An Overview: The Origin and Provenance of Curating

This section begins with a focused study of the changing attitudes, tastes, and fashionable interests of a series of curators who directed the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, United States, in particular the problems and challengers they faced in selecting contemporary artists who represented a particular moment in contemporary art and whether in the selection process it is possible to choose who will endure beyond the exhibition. This section continues with a short chronology of the curator as the role emerged in the Middle Ages, when a curator was a keeper or guardian. It addresses how and why the first collections in the late Renaissance were not so encumbered by morality or dogma. As the name suggests, the “cabinet of curiosities” or *Wunderkammern*, which began to appear in the early seventeenth century, consisted of a random variety of objects and images that reflected the fascination of the collector. What was commissioned and collected followed choices, made by the patron to reflect his or her taste and wealth.

Since then the curator has typically been the custodial mediator between an art collection and its modes of display. This section then explores the way in which the curator, at times, operating outside the established salons and academies, became a force and influence that shaped modernism at the turn of the twentieth century. Interestingly, the artist-curator is often misunderstood as only a recent phenomenon in the contemporary art world. However, several of the most significant exhibitions during this period, starting with the Salon des Refusés held in Paris in 1863, were curated by artists as a reaction to their rejection from the Paris Salon and the implications this had for their careers and potential patronage.

With the expansion of art museums in Europe and the United States, the professionalization of the curator quickly followed, with the establishment of courses in

museum studies and curating. Most notable and influential was the course founded at Harvard by Paul J. Sachs in 1921. This section continues by placing in a broader context the professionalization of the curator from the Renaissance to the present and the general acceptance of standard practices by curators and directors of museums.

Importantly, museums historically transformed during the nineteenth century from places of “enlightenment – inspired iconoclasm – into places of a romantic iconophilia” in the twentieth century. Central to this has been Marcel Duchamp’s exhibiting of a urinal in 1917, which significantly altered the exhibition’s basic role in the art world’s symbolic economy. Fundamentally then, twentieth century curatorial discourse, as it was traditionally articulated in the patrician museums of modernism, emanated, as earlier suggested, from its original Latin etymological root *curare*. Paradoxically then, curating embodies the twin tropes of being iconophilic and iconoclastic at the same time.

David Carrier’s “A Select History of Curating in Pittsburgh: The Recent Story of the Carnegie International” is an engaging critique of the Carnegie International that was first established in Pittsburgh in 1896. It is, therefore, the second oldest international art survey exhibition. Carrier focuses on the Carnegie International from 1979 to the present and discusses the changing styles of curating as manifested in nearly 30 years of exhibition history. He describes in detail the history of the host institution itself, the Carnegie Museum of Art, and the vital relationship it has to Pittsburgh, and in so doing provides us with insight into the roles and ideas of the many curators involved, including John Caldwell and John R. Lane, Mark Francis, Laura Hoptman, Lynne Cook, Madeleine Grynsztejn, and Richard Armstrong. Carrier acutely delineates the many issues and problems of such a large international exhibition in a provincial city. He discusses the expectations and claims such an international art exhibition can pose to us in the context of the changing contemporary art world. He analyses how these various curators individually contributed to our understanding of contemporary art and, relatedly, how one can identify those artists who will endure in such a turbulent zeitgeist.

Adam Geczy’s chapter, “Curating Curiosity: Imperialism, Materialism, Humanism, and the *Wunderkammer*” delineates the fundamental genesis of the museum in the context of secular humanism, imperialism, and the very early stages of modern science. Crucially, Geczy illustrates that, despite their actual grounding in scientific enquiry, the earliest museums were essentially collections gathered by individual collectors and thus expressed their tastes, preferences, fantasies, and geographical location. To probe these early collections is, by definition, to also focus on the centrality of the qualities of curiosity and wonder that inform both art and science. *Wunderkammer*, *Kunstkabinett*, *Schatzkammer*, *guardaroba*, and *studiolo* are all, Geczy contends, implied in the English “cabinet of curiosities” and are the defining terms of the arrangements, settings, organizational principles, and philosophies that came to be the museum.

Etymologically speaking, the first museums were named after the Greek word *mouseion*, signifying “seat of the Muses,” and they were undoubtedly sites of wonder before ideas such as taxonomy and science began to play a role in the development of the museum. Geczy demonstrates that the original museums were not only storehouses of vast riches, but also sites for reflection on our world and the next one, illustrating the vastness and impulses of the world and how the metaphysical was placed in relation to the material. For Geczy, the word *Wunderkammer* continues to define a

hodge-podge gathering that dazzles us with wonderment. The *Wunderkammer* was indeed the first manifestation of the museum, and as the author argues, some of the great collections that have survived today, such as Oxford's the Ashmolean Museum, the British Museum, the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan (Italy), and Teylers Museum in Haarlem (The Netherlands), are structured according to the elementary principles of encyclopedic knowledge and the fascination with the *Wunderkammer*.

By the late sixteenth century, when the first collections arose, they represented a unique amalgam of the need for objectivity and order on one hand, and the randomness of individual desire and personal choice on the other. For the German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin, the very dynamics and logic of collecting always reflected the dialectical tension between order and chaos. Meditating on his own book collection, Benjamin writes:

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos on memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order. (Benjamin 1969: 59–60)

Geczy concludes that the first *Wunderkammern* demonstrate an underlying need to express an all-encompassing worldview and draw upon a huge reservoir of aesthetic resources that were necessarily the creation of numerous people. So, the history of the earliest museums was intrinsically connected to the changing nature of knowledge and perceptions about the world during the 16th and 17th centuries. Consequently, museums today inform us about ourselves, various worldviews, and our personal fantasies, all in the context of developments in these areas that have taken place during the last three centuries.

Andrew McClellan's "Professionalizing the Field: The Case of the United States" is a historiographical account of the professionalization and management of museums on both sides of the Atlantic before and after 1910, when there was a basic shift from artists and amateurs to trained specialists. This transition took place in the broader context of the specialization and credentialing of numerous fields, including business, the law, academe, and medicine.

By the 1880s and 1890s, important figures such as Stanley Jevons, Thomas Greenwood, and George Brown Goode (director of Washington's Smithsonian Institute) were arguing for the professionalization of museums in terms of their coordination, classification, building design, and administration. This led to the establishment of museum associations – in Britain in 1889, Germany in 1917, and the United States in 1906. The international and interdisciplinary dimension of museum administration and work was officially acknowledged with the formation of the International Museums Office (IMO), under the auspices of the League of Nations, in 1926. In 1946, the IMO became the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

Whereas the art museums in Europe were built on huge and magnificent collections under the centralized authority of the state, the museum movement in the United States (excluding the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC) depended on local initiative and private funding.¹

One of the more fascinating aspects of McClellan's chapter is his account of Paul Sachs's Museum Course at Harvard's Fogg Museum and its impact on the development

and professionalization of museums and museology in the United States. Sachs, of the Wall Street banking firm Goldman Sachs, was educated at Harvard, and although destined for a career in finance became interested in collecting art. The museum's patrician director, Edward Waldo Forbes, shrewdly invited Sachs to become an unpaid assistant director (Sachs was 36 at the time of his appointment). The museum was in need of an overhaul and a new strategic vision, and Forbes was able to connect the museum to the larger world of business, money, and private art collecting thanks to Sachs's network of New York's wealthy plutocrats and philanthropists such as J.P. Morgan, Benjamin Altman, and many others.

Forbes and Sachs developed the Fogg into an ideal university art museum that managed to both amass an immense art collection, and, importantly, articulate a pioneering – and influential – object-based approach to museology and the teaching of art history.

When the new Fogg opened in 1927, the Sachs's Museum Course graduates of that year included such future luminaries as Alfred Barr, Arthur Austin, Jere Abbott, James Rorimer, and Walter Siple, as well as art dealer Kirk Askew and architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock.

McClellan concludes his chapter by describing Sachs's legacy, which above all was his museum training program and its many graduates, who provided the essential leadership that determined the direction of art museums in the United States for most of the twentieth century.

Carole Paul's chapter "The Emergence of the Professional Curator" analyses the evolution and nature of curating in European collections of art and antiquities from the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century. Paul focuses on the private collections of the early modern period and public museums in the eighteenth century, which was the period when curating began to evolve into a profession. In essence, the most fundamental type of work done for collectors and museums is what we today think of as curating: curators are responsible for a variety of basic tasks, including collecting, organizing, storing, exhibiting, cataloguing, researching, and interpreting objects. These are all critical for the actual conservation of these works. Although the scholarly literature on curating in the contemporary world has expanded in recent times, the history of curating has yet to be fully examined.

Paul's meticulous account of the emergence of curators, public art museums, and even the phenomenon of artists as curators in Europe during the Renaissance and earlier is noteworthy. Artists, architects, and scholars (including antiquarians) sometimes curated their own collections. The sixteenth-century artist Giorgio Vasari, for instance, a Florentine architect, painter, and art historian, accumulated a most notable collection of drawings, which he organized into multiple volumes. Also, the earliest-known treatise on collecting, the *Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi* (Inscriptions), was written by a Belgian, Samuel Quiccheberg, and published in 1565.

Gradually, curators and directors of the early public museums implemented standards for their professions, many of which are still followed today. Significantly, it was only in the early twentieth century that women assumed important roles in art museums, at least in the United States. Paul notes how, from 1910 to 1923, Cornelia Bentley Sage Quinton was the director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, and in 1926, Florence Berger became the first professional curator at the oldest public art museum in the United States, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. Four years later, Maude Briggs Knowlton became head of the Currier Gallery of Art

(now known as the Currier Museum of Art) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and in 1930 Juliana Force became the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Part II: Movements, Models, People, and Politics

This section begins with a focus on individuals who, as curators, have shaped our understanding of contemporary art since the 1960s and the context in which they worked. It begins with the various liberation movements in the 1960s, such as civil rights, gay and lesbian rights, and, particularly, the women's movement, and examines the influence these had on the politics of the art world. Traditionally, during this period, men occupied all important museum and curatorial positions and thus controlled how the Western canon was displayed, exhibited, and thus understood. Working from this marginalized position in the 1960s, several key women curators and curators from minority groups began to exercise significant power across various exhibition platforms, altering our interpretation of the canon. This section examines the period from the 1960s and 1970s to the present, and the role that these curators have played in the advocacy, promotion, and understanding of art in its expanded field.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the emerging curatorial discourse – with the pioneering efforts of independent curators such as Harald Szeeman, Lucy Lippard, and Seth Siegelaub – included consideration of the articulation and production of art itself. However, in the 1980s, at the beginning of what we in retrospect understand as the era of global art practice, we saw a new breed of art curator: those we might refer to as auteurs or as flying curators, often freelance and itinerant. The contemporary art curator is as much a mediator of artists and their publics as of static objects.

This section concludes with a consideration of curators and their relationship to the changing and ever-expanding exhibition model, particularly with the recent multiplication of biennales and other major survey exhibition models. Biennales in particular have created opportunities for artists, directors, and curators. They also offer challenges regarding assigning a particular outlook or view of history to an exhibition, which requires taking a position on how the past, present, and future affect each other. These changes constitute a primary shift of the curatorial and exhibition center of gravity to new cultures and languages, to thinking that travels across national borders. All this allows curators to speak of the center and the margin, the local and the international, hybridity and fragmentation, and globalism and globalization.

Juli Carson's "Curating as a Verb: 100 Years of Nation States" presents her thesis that "curation" has moved from being a profession to being an action. She proposes this using Hannah Arendt's concept of "thinking," which is that there are no dangerous thoughts: it is thinking itself that is dangerous. Curating, then, is a form of transgressive aesthetic thinking, and it is taking place already through readymade art platforms and exhibits. It becomes, according to the author, a "self-generating process" that has neither start nor ending, as the curator questions curating as a kind of museological maintenance. Carson defines curating through this Arendtian lens, and sees the curator as a dialogical thinker questioning, daily, a given artwork's place in the world of biennales, global capital, and populist nation states.

It is precisely because the curator is anchored in the international art system that one is compelled to reconsider what exactly is curatorial practice today and how a

curator can separate the museological profession and its orthodoxies from the very act of thinking as defined by Arendt.

Elke Krasny, in “Curating without Borders: Transnational Feminist and Queer Feminist Practices for the Twenty-first Century” analyses five important instances of transnational feminist and queer feminist curating, in the context of 21st-century feminism.

Krasny first discusses a self-organized feminist art space in Berlin that started with women artists’ peace activism in the 1980s and problematizes white privilege in today’s international art world. Her second example is an exhibition in a university gallery in Ghent that linked past transnational feminism to postcolonial emancipatory art. The third example is an exhibition in a London national museum that examines displaced museum objects and links them with women’s refugee organizations. The fourth is a self-supporting art structure in Yerevan (the capital of Armenia) that connects local and diasporic Armenian experience. The final work discussed is a university gallery project in Vancouver that established a temporary alliance with Indigenous women’s resistance to fundamental colonial trauma.

Krasny argues that such locally specific transnational curating is far from lobbying for the inclusion of marginalized artists in the globalized art world. But, importantly, it delineates how its activism primarily relates to the India-born, US-based theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s feminism without borders and connects curating, art, and life (Mohanty 2004).

Basically, Krasny shows how curating reflects the politics of location and how specific territories, geographies, and histories produce the conditions in which art is created (Rich 2015). Curatorial material analysis, the author demonstrates, allows for the delineation of a cartographic path through the entangled connections between changing conditions and changes in art, thus also allowing artworks to be understood in the context of this century’s feminist and queer feminist wave. This analysis includes examining histories of colonial trauma, diasporas, displacement, and migrations in the context of globalization and neoliberal capitalism.

Maria Lind’s “Displacements and Sites: Notes on a Curatorial Method” is an account of two recent art exhibitions: the one-day performance *T.451* by artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and composer and musician Ari Benjamin Myers, which occurred across Stockholm on Saturday, 27 May 2012, and was organized by Tensta konsthall and Stockholm Konst, and the 2018 *Art Treasures: Grains of Gold* from Tensta’s Public Schools, which was an exhibition of public art in various municipal schools, located at Tensta konsthall and produced in cooperation with the Stockholm City Museum. For Lind, both events were unique examples of the role a series of displacements in the contemporary art world, across a number of different sites, could play. These works both posed challenging questions about the place of art outside the traditional white cube exhibition space.

T.451 provided a set of curatorial challenges relating to locations of art and its displacement, as sites included a small suburban art center and a municipal agency for art situated in a public space. Some were well known; others were not, and were quite unusual. The author has long regarded *T.451* as one of her favorite and most challenging artworks. Gonzalez-Foerster and Benjamin Meyers’s “poetic performance consisted of one-off, four-hour-long urban walks in Stockholm inspired by Ray Bradbury’s 1953 sci-fi novel *Fahrenheit 451*”, which was filmed by François Truffaut in 1966 with a Bernard Hermann score. In this performance, the audience was guided

through the city and the suburb of Tensta, stopping to see a number of re-enacted scenes from the film that were individually placed in various architectural environments, public spaces, and pieces of infrastructure. Choreography, live music, readings, and performative elements took place throughout the day, permitting the audience to encounter public sites as if they were directly taken from Truffaut's film.

With *Art Treasures*, 30-odd artworks by renowned twentieth-century artists which were located in corridors, teachers' rooms, and dining areas in Tensta schools were removed for an entire year and placed instead in an art center's gallery, which acted as a multipurpose space and classroom for meetings and exhibitions. Historical works that were customarily hanging on nearby walls 365 days a year were shifted from their "site, generating a non-site" in the art institution. Fundamentally, what Lind argues is that both events, instead of being Duchampian situations – where a mundane object from everyday life is placed into a traditional art institution, posing the question "What is art?" – show how displacement and the use of unexpected sites lead to questions about what art is actually doing. In *T.451* new perspectives on the familiar were created through displacement, and in *Art Treasures* what mattered was the value and relevance of what was already there.

Chris Spring's chapter, "Africa, Art and Knowing Nothing: Some Thoughts on Curating at the British Museum," is an account of the subject by someone who is both an artist and a curator. It uses an auto-ethnographic perspective that stresses the key decisions that the author took following the opening of the Sainsbury African Galleries in 2001. Spring discusses in some detail the problems and issues involved in such a major curatorial and museological enterprise from his own point of view. He also notes how critical it was to maintain the support of artists of African heritage, both in relation to the galleries and in relation to the acquisition of their artworks, and how their support contributed significantly to the resulting informed vision of a range of African art traditions from the past to contemporary times.

Spring's frankly autobiographical and honest depiction of his role tells of how rewarding and how frustrating it was to be involved in the curating of African arts in a major national museum. And how on certain occasions he would stand back from the curatorial problems and focus on his own work as an artist and writer. He tells us clearly that he is not interested in a curator being a constantly travelling exhibition-maker, working always on temporary contracts. Spring explains how important it was to him to be emotionally and critically involved with the curating of African artists, dead and alive, and how honored he was to curate and write about them and their works.² For Springer, curating is about actually caring for the artists and their work; it is this aspect of curating that demands the highest degree of professional responsibility.

One of the most important exhibition venues for feminist art and the avant-garde arts in the United States was New York's Franklin Furnace Archive, founded by Martha Wilson in 1976. Wilson's "Curatorial Crisis" is the author's enthralling overview of the genesis of the nonprofit arts organization in her loft in Lower Manhattan. It had a dual purpose: the exhibition, preservation, and distribution of artists' books, and the exhibition and promotion of feminist art, especially performance art. Wilson's chapter documents the indispensable role Lucy Lippard, Jacki Apple, and other feminist artists and curators played in its formation. It also speaks of the resistance to the early days of feminist art in New York from gallerists such as Ivan Karp.

Wilson describes the impact that the Culture Wars of the 1990s, under Ronald Reagan's administration, had on the site in terms of aesthetic, cultural, and ideological

ensorship of artists like Karen Finley. She then discusses how the Franklin Furnace Archive went virtual as an exhibition venue in 1996. Since then, Franklin Furnace has exhibited many artists whose works are engaged with social and cultural themes – AIDS, surveillance, gender, immigration, ecology, and race, for example. In more recent times, Franklin Furnace has become more involved with more artists, both male and female, of different races and cultures. As the founding director of the site, Wilson’s chapter delineates how Franklin Furnace, as an alternative nonprofit arts organization, has survived a series of curatorial, social, and political crises – these have also been the concerns of the avant-garde arts generally in the United States since the 1970s.

Part III: The Curator in a Globalized World

This section explores the curation, exhibition, and critical reception of the visual arts of the Indigenous peoples of North America and Australia. It also covers the establishment of new museums and the role of the curator in the growing ascendancy of contemporary Chinese art, and the new generation of curators who are challenging the Eurocentric and Anglosphere art worlds.

Importantly, it also addresses the rise of the artist who chooses to work in various guises: as a collaborator, innovator, or speculator. In particular, this means looking at why many artists establish artist-run spaces, known as artist-run initiatives (ARIs) in some countries. This model is innovative because it allows the artist to become the curator.

Curating the visual arts from the North and South, East and West today also implies discussing recent developments in art history and theory, critical and cultural theory, multiculturalism, orientalism, postmodernism, and trans-culturalism. This means questioning the classist, colonialist, racist, and phallogocentric assumptions, beliefs, and claims that have been entrenched in major Euro-American aesthetic and museological traditions. In particular, the curating, exhibiting, and theorization of art forms of Indigenous peoples brings questions around Aboriginality, cultural identity, displacement, ethnicity, fragmentation, nomadism, and sovereignty to the fore.

A number of key factors in the extraordinary rise of Chinese contemporary art, sometimes called the “Chinese avant-garde,” since the 1980s, can be identified. They include the role played by Chinese curators, who exposed this new generation of artists to Western contemporary art and the history of modernity, plus the partial political liberalization by the Communist government and a more cosmopolitanism attitude to culture in general. Added to these has been the recent influence of expatriate curators on Chinese artists living in China and the inclusion of Chinese artists in biennales, triennales, and museum exhibitions outside China.

The new generation of curators and scholars concerned with art in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East are informed by the politics of postcolonial theory, and the politics of identity and ethnicity in decolonized nations, and at times they comment on the more general politics of globalization and neoliberalism. They examine these influences, and at the same time analyze the work of the founding editor of *Third Text*, Rasheed Araeen, and of scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Jean Fisher, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, and their effects on curators working across the world today.

Thomas Berghuis’s “‘We Care as Much as You Pay’ – Curating Asian Art” is an account of curating Asian art and its complexities over the last three decades. It offers

an autobiographical discussion of the opening of the National Gallery Singapore in January 2016. For the author, this was a profoundly symbolic event in the curating of contemporary Asian art. The exhibition featured at that opening was *A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object*, and it displayed the works of three prominent Southeast Asian artists: Johnny Manahan (Philippines), the late Redza Piyadasa (Malaysia), and Tang Teng-Kee (Malaysia/Singapore). All three were instrumental in ushering in new discourses and art practices in Southeast Asia from the 1970s. They were influential precursors of the artists of the 1980s and 1990s who became engaged in new contexts and genres, such as performance art, in that part of the world. In fact, between 1993 and 2003, performance art was virtually banned, and performance artists faced severe bureaucratic and economic restrictions.

For Berghuis, Asian artists from the 1970s took on the role of critic and organized their own exhibitions; we also saw, from the 1980s on, early manifestations of artists' villages and alternative art spaces. A decade later, artists started to critique mainstream media, discussing human abuses and freedom of expression. The author discusses how in Asian art at that time there was a shift in the role of the curator, from caretaker to facilitator and agent, positioning work in relation to the art world, the art market, and the public. Berghuis pinpoints the turning point in the early to mid-2000s, when there was a dramatic increase in the size of the market in contemporary art in Asia. The 2000s were also a time of immense acceleration in technological development, in the impact of market forces on society and in the role of data in economies.

Berghuis also argues that future curators will need to consider their relationship to the public, the role of the artist, and the role of the artist-curator as producer and facilitator of art. All of this will occur alongside the current emphasis on economic and strategic realities and pressures, and the use of economic impact and social impact as key indicators of success for exhibitions.

Biljana Ćirić's "Museums Are Everywhere in China, There Is No Museum in China (or, How Institutional Typologies Define Curatorial Practices)" is an account of exhibition practices in China during the 1980s, and how they affected knowledge production and public discourse. The author traces the effects of these practices, including how they were deployed to leverage private investments in the arts and the creation of new art museums. Ćirić demonstrates how the Chinese boom in contemporary art during the last few decades, with its more experimental exhibition practices, mutated into a standardized mode of thinking about various institutional models. This shift had a direct influence on exhibition typologies and educational approaches to exhibition making.

Ćirić proceeds to delineate the types of exhibition formats that have been used in China in the last decade, such as solo exhibitions in large art museums, and group exhibitions of Chinese artists coupled with mainly international Western artists who are already familiar to the curator. Some group exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art were, she argues, an attempt to rewrite art history from a Chinese perspective: between 2012 and 2014, for example, the Minsheng Art Museum arranged a series of exhibitions, including *Chinese Contemporary Painting from 1979–2009*. This exhibition was followed by a series of similar exhibitions dedicated to specific mediums. Certain group exhibitions were selected from specific collections – young Chinese artists, biennales, and triennials, and finally, but very rarely, thematic exhibitions.

The most common form of art exhibition in China during this period was, according to Ćirić, the solo exhibition. In the main, these involved a minimal curatorial role; in

some cases, there were no curators at all. This meant that the artist him- or herself would organize the exhibition and the curator would just write the text for the catalogue.

In China, there has been a rapid increase in popularity of the biennial or large-scale exhibition (often called festivals), whilst elsewhere in the world the relevance of the biennial model is being questioned.

What is observable in recent years is how certain institutions have started to nurture young curators. The Power Station of Art in Shanghai, which is the first state-run museum of contemporary art in mainland China, established an Emerging Curators Program, where curatorial projects are selected, funded, and presented by the museum. For the author, there are certain problems with this program: primarily, young curators are not given sufficient time to collaborate or to discuss theoretical and practical issues such as exhibition design, the presentation of artworks, spatial connections, and other aspects of exhibitions.

Finally, Ćirić notes, the history of exhibitions is yet to become a valid academic field in China. Despite the huge popularity of contemporary art, many issues related to curatorial practices and strategies, display formats, relationships between artists and curators, the role of the spectator in exhibitions (and their individual and collective experiences), and the relationship between exhibitions and publications, still remain to be substantially analyzed.

Gregory Galligan's "Curating the Contemporary in Decolonial Spaces: Observations from Thailand on Curatorial Practice in Southeast Asia" is an analysis of three contemporaneous biennales in Thailand in 2018, highlighting the artistic, social, and political trajectories of contemporary curatorial practice in that region. Galligan focuses on the Bangkok Biennial (1 July–30 September 2018), the Bangkok Art Biennale (19 October 2018–3 February 2019), and the Thailand Biennale (2 November 2018–28 February 2019). Galligan underlines the post-global, postcolonial attributes of these three biennales, suggesting, in essence, that they are all key de-colonial spaces.

Galligan stresses the biennale as a "text" rather than as a material "spectacle," implying that it is important to appreciate the embedded and structural character of curatorial practice – its reflection of institutional histories, exhibition histories, and art histories (whether global or regional). What Galligan is arguing for is a move from the dated "auteur-curator" forms of exhibition making to a more *anarchic* curatorial practice. This is becoming more apparent in Southeast Asia, where emerging post-global and postcolonial characteristics are becoming evident in curatorial practice.

According to Galligan, the Bangkok Biennale was the most "contemporary" of the three biennales in Thailand, but it was underappreciated by most audiences claiming to be concerned with the biennale as a project of perpetual reinvention. Like the Bangkok Biennial, the 2013 Sharjah Biennial 11 (SB11) in the United Arab Emirates never set out to specifically reject anything. Both were located just beneath the threshold of political activism, and both offered themselves as an alternative to hegemonic curatorial practice without actually ever suggesting that they were "an alternative biennial."

Alex Gawronski's "Curated from Within: The Artist as Curator" is a discussion of how, since modernism, artists have established what we now understand to be modern curating. The various avant-garde movements since then created the types of display that fundamentally changed what was possible in an exhibition context. Gawronski

observes that artists in these avant-garde movements contributed to modern curating's challenging of art's separation from the world at large.

The author posits that since the 1960s maverick professional curators have indeed learned much from the various artistic avant-gardes. However, as professional curating courses became established, professional curators tended to overshadow the artist-curator in the art world. The rapid rise of the sociopolitically focused international biennale and the "star-curator," Gawronski notes, attests to the cardinal role of the curator in contemporary culture. The author looks at how various artists in this context established fictional institutions in order to critique the hegemonic authority of the institution of curating.

Gawronski's chapter focuses on how many artists became engaged with independent artist-run spaces that contributed to the notion of curating as an interventionist activity in the art world and in culture in general. He then uses three significant case studies to advance his ideas on the centrality of artist-run spaces to contemporary curatorial practice: (a) *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* (Kazimir Malevich, Xenia Boguslavskaya, and Ivan Puni), Petrograd, 1915; (b) *First Papers of Surréalism* (Marcel Duchamp), New York, 1942; and (c) *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* (Gutai Art Association) Tokyo, 1958. The author concludes that artist-curated exhibitions have, over the years, articulated the practices and methodologies of professional curating. But he also notes that the shift in curatorial culture from the 1960s to now has also seen the growth of the centrality of the professional curator in the international art world. He argues that artist-curated exhibitions in artist-run spaces tend to be more critical of the institutional apparatus of art than the larger international biennales, which tend to be more embedded in the neoliberal art market.

Gerald McMaster's "Decolonizing the Ethnographic Museum" illustrates that, before the 1990s, most modern art museums (with a few significant exceptions) had little interest in curating non-Western art. In contrast, ethnographic museums were concerned with the collecting, cataloguing, and exhibiting of "native" artefacts – not in terms of individual artistic expression, however, but in relation to supposedly representative group identification. But during the 1980s and 1990s, Indigenous artists, scholars, and writers started to criticize ethnographic museums' approaches and concepts, and art museums began to express interest in contemporary Indigenous artists. What McMaster shows is that these contemporary artists' practices represented a turning from ethno-tribal representation to individual expression. What McMaster asks is whether, in the wake of these sharp shifts and tensions, ethnographic museums can ever again become relevant to Indigenous artists.

Cultural institutions in Canada are now, according to the author, trying to surpass each other by creating friendly relations with local Indigenous artists and communities. Museums and related cultural bodies have responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report of 2015, by becoming more thoughtful about their representation of specific Indigenous artists and cultures, and have established relations with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Communities. Across Canada, many Indigenous artists have become very active in this resurgence.

McMaster reminds us that what we are witnessing now is a rapid increase in the numbers of contemporary Indigenous artists appearing in national and international art exhibitions; for many of these artists, ethnographic museums are no longer relevant for their practice, though they were for a previous generation. Importantly, calling this a "resurgence" reflects the resistance of earlier artists and activists. Many

galleries and museums in Canada are trying out and testing new ideas and approaches, and the public is now showing interest in experiencing Indigenous cultures via multilayered and challenging exhibitions.

Djon Mundine's "The Creature from the Id: Adventures in Aboriginal Art Curating" is a historical account of Aboriginal curating in Australia. The chapter begins using *Robinson Crusoe* as a parable which embodies the racist and power tropes of colonization that are part of any narrative regarding white Australian settlement and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. The chapter offers a first-hand and original account of the development of curating Aboriginal art in Australia.

For Mundine, the history of Aboriginal art has a number of overlapping, blurred-edge phases – it is market driven and European, and yet also offers up icons, ideas, and possibly a moral insistence on the (Aboriginal) other side.

Mundine sees the history of Aboriginal art, curating, colonialism, and dispossession in six phases of historical development. The first phase is from the beginning of time to the arrival of the British colonists and then through to the end of World War II. The second phase begins with the "discovery" of the bark paintings in Arnhem Land in the north of Australia toward the end of the 1960s. In the following decade Papunya and Western Desert dot and circle paintings emerged. This was the phase when Aboriginal art in southeast Australia also started to emerge.

The 1980s were a pivotal moment as a generation of Aboriginal artists graduated from Western art schools – they had a tremendous impact on contemporary Aboriginal art. They were shunned by commercial galleries and art museums, though, so a group of ten Aboriginal artists established the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in 1989.

For Mundine, the final two phases are the fifth, which took place in the 1990s when Aboriginal curators and writers began to exert some control over the marketing and "reading" of their own art and culture. And in the current phase, the sixth, which he calls "the blak empire strikes back," the author suggests that vested interests in the art market and white Australian society perceive these gains as a threat and have begun a de-politicized reading of Aboriginal art. Mundine argues that Aboriginal artists and curators should actively re-establish their position within contemporary art and broader social movements as agents of influence.

Mundine finishes his chapter with a personal history of curating and illustrates his exhibition strategies with three case studies, curated between 1988 and 2015. Ultimately, Mundine believes that Aboriginal art is a powerful tool in creating an understanding in white Australia of who Aboriginal people truly are.

Fatoş Üstek's "The Impact of Context Specificity in Curating amidst the Forces at Play in a Globalized World of Realms" is an examination of the politics of display in certain exhibitions in Turkey, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. Üstek's perspective is that of an independent curator, and she writes of the transformation through which the curator changed from a nomadic figure in the art world to a celebrity concept producer. She discusses the concept of internationalism and its emphasis on responsibility and autonomy in curatorial practices. Her three case studies also focus on the specificity of geography and political alignment, as well as experimentation in exhibition making and social architecture.

The author concludes that the curator's agency operates within the existential, sociopolitical, and economic realities of his or her immediate surroundings. Each exhibition therefore provides a new context for the interpretation of the visual arts,

and might also suggest a reinterpretation of the creative realm. Each curatorial project also fulfils the needs of a particular historical moment, whilst also acknowledging tradition and the production of truth in a given society.

Üstek contends that the contemporary curator is able to expand our understanding of the visual arts by looking at the specific dynamics that are in play. Given the current globalized mediascape of shared knowledges across nations and realities, the curator is obliged, according to Üstek, to expand their curatorial role to include a realm of truth beyond the specific context in which they perform.

Lee Weng-Choy's "The Neglected Object of Curation" is a discussion of the role of the biennale in the international contemporary art world, especially in Southeast Asia – particularly Singapore, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. It mainly focuses on Peter Osborne's theory that the biennale is symptomatic of neoliberal ideology and the geopolitical totalization of the globe. For Osborne, the biennale is not so much about an opposition between form and practice, or between local and global, but about using lateral interconnections to tell many diverse narratives about art. Art criticism, for the author, is a form of ethnographic writing aimed at not examining how art world cliques compete for attention and power but what it means when artworks are overlooked or neglected, and undervalued as cultural capital.

Lee Weng-Choy finishes the chapter with telling anecdotes about the writing practices of five curators presently working in Southeast Asia and how they reflect different aspects of the contemporary curatorial discourse. They include Patrick D. Flores, a professor at the University of the Philippines, Lim Qinyi, independent curator, Russell Storer, deputy director at the National Gallery Singapore, Michelle Wong, researcher, Asian Art Archive, Hong Kong, and Zoe Butt, independent curator and researcher and Artistic Director, the Factory Contemporary Arts Center, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Part IV: Beyond the Museum: Curating at the Frontier

This section primarily examines the aesthetic, curatorial, and technological complexities of curating new media artworks. Anyone who wishes to curate new media has to understand the translation processes that occur between contemporary art and new media art. This has been the case for the last 30 years. These complexities were first enunciated in the pioneering exhibition *Les Immatériaux* (Immaterials) at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, curated by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard with Thierry Chaput in 1985. This exhibition charted the shift from material objects to immaterial information technologies, registering the seismic transformation from modernism to postmodernism or what is now called "the contemporary." One could in fact go further back, to Jasia Reichardt's ground-breaking exhibition at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), *Cybernetic Serendipity*.

To engage with curating new media art one has to first problematize the entire curatorial, exhibition, and museological enterprise of art museums, cultural institutions, and the art academy. These valorize past and present art in one's society, and its canon and traditions.

Curating new media (including virtual reality exhibitions) necessitates a transdisciplinary, nonlinear, and post-object approach and an awareness of the various modes of curating inside and outside academic, art, and cultural institutions. It also requires

a rethink of modernist assumptions, concerns, and processes of curating in and beyond “the white cube space” of traditional art museums and galleries.

In addition, it requires a fundamental knowledge of various modes of curating and the spectrum of today’s curating positions – “embedded,” “adjunct,” and “independent” – and of today’s basic models of exhibition, from the monographic to the group exhibition. As Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook have recently suggested, the more recent models of exhibition – iterative, modular, and distributed – also need to be included (Graham and Cook 2015). The latter are web- and net-based art practices. More recently, we also see online or network models of exhibiting new media art (via cyberspace, social media).

This section concludes by looking at how best to curate, present, distribute, and know new media art and related online modes of art. It is crucial to know their concepts, characteristics, and behaviors rather than to impose a “top down” theory of art.

Therefore, curating beyond the traditional art museum means seeking to transcend and cross the boundaries, contexts, and categories of the disciplines themselves. It is this willingness to question the orthodoxies of art history, critical theory, and curating itself that allows us to rethink contemporary cultural discourse in order to exhibit, distribute, and discuss the challenging forms of art that will come after new media.

Sara Diamond’s “Parallel Processing: Public Art and New Media” is a timely cartography of the subject. Diamond examines the parallel emergence of public art and new media art and shows that the very term “new media public art” encompasses telematics, networked performance works, net and web art, locative art and games, mobile art, augmented and mixed reality works, data gathering, surveillance works, interactive sculptures, projections, interactive public screens, light works, and various works utilizing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, biotechnology (CRISPR), and implanted devices.

Diamond analyzes how new media public art has distinctive challenges of conservation and production, and sets mutual conditions with public art of access and audience participation. One of the engaging aspects of Diamond’s chapter is the way it discusses curatorial practices, whether by curators, artists themselves, art consultants, agencies, or institutions and platforms concerned with new media public art.

In this era of ubiquitous digital technologies, artists who are experienced with other media are starting to create new media public art projects. Also, curators who are not familiar with new media presentation contexts, according to Diamond, are commissioning these works into public art exhibitions (Quaranta 2013). Diamond also notes that works that have been constructed by earlier new media artists are being constructed again without any direct reference to their history, and that sometimes works themselves address concerns and issues outside new media art dialogues (Obrist 2003; Diamond 2013). Some prominent media curators, such as Cook or Dietz, have expanded their curatorial practices to include highly interactive behaviors with or without technology, computation or digital expression. According to Diamond, these trends have tended to shine a spotlight onto new media public art. Meanwhile, curators have also been seeking new types of commissions, such as collaborations between artists and scientists who use CRISPR to generate and exhibit new genetic formations in the public realm.

Ultimately, Diamond concludes that for curators there are now many opportunities and definitions of new media that require knowledge and context creation beyond the purely digital, as artists are now experimenting with surfaces, the Internet of Things,

intelligent textiles. Generally speaking, all this implies a radical shift “from screens to surfaces, from images to sensations.”³

Arnau Gifreu-Castells’s “Approach to the Curatorship of Virtual Reality Exhibitions” is a discussion of VR exhibitions’ specific curating concerns and issues. VR provides a new language with which to represent and communicate new stories. It is, in essence, a technique and a practice in which a computer-simulated environment places the spectator into an immersive experience.

The author describes the two main concepts of extended reality (XR) and virtual reality (VR). He then maps out and discusses the different kinds of curatorships of VR exhibitions, principally in Europe and the United States. This allows us to see the different strategies adopted by curators and artists and the specific needs and implications of this kind of curating. Gifreu-Castells proposes key ideas and pragmatic tips for curating and exhibiting this format today.

To sum up, the most significant aspects of VR for the author are:

- plan your “roadmap”;
- think through the specific fields you are dealing with and what works will best fit each field;
- think which technology is the best fit for these fields;
- carefully set up the required space and the distribution of space you need;
- think about your natural target audience;
- select the best works available and the required technical support;
- select the best platforms and channels to advertise your exhibition.

Eric Kluitenberg’s “Tracing the Ephemeral and Contestational: Aesthetics and Politics of The Living Archive” raises many questions concerning the conceptual and practical implications of The Living Archive concept as it was originally developed. This was in a practice-based collaborative research program of the De Balie Center for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam, the Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London, and Portsmouth University, between 2004 and 2008.

Kluitenberg focuses on two questions about The Living Archive. The first relates to how the original concept leads inexorably to a discursive appreciation of the archive. The second refers to the apparent contradiction between the immediacy and vitality of the living moment in event-based arts and activism and the atemporality of the archive, and how this can be dealt with conceptually and practically. The author then discusses four representative examples which embody some aspects of the defining characteristics of The Living Archive.

For Kluitenberg, activist and political interventions and event-based arts share a particular problem in relation to the capturing mechanisms of documentation and archiving. In the urgency and vitality of the living moment, the actual functions of documentation and memorizing are often overlooked or considered irrelevant or redundant. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine sensible political interventions without some connection to past events. This of course applies to artistic interventions as well. A way of mitigating this apparent contradiction between the atemporality of the archive and the vitality of the event is needed. The chapter endeavors to deal with the question of how this apparent contradiction can be understood conceptually, and also with how it can be approached practically.

Kluitenberg's chapter examines The Living Archive, both theoretically and practically, since the early 2000s. In so doing so, the author highlights three interrelated areas of inquiry:

- The issue of capturing ephemera, which has been a topic within archiving studies for some considerable time, but more recently has become increasingly significant with the rapidly growing circulation of digital objects that warrant some kind of documentation.
- Activist practices and forms of ephemeral arts practices (performance, urban interventions, online art works, campaigns) and the practicalities and sensitivities around documenting them.
- The relationship of ephemeral art forms to the archive.

The range here, the author argues, includes temporary interventions that often resist documentation, and ephemeral digital and online artworks that exist only temporarily, and are related to specific digital and media machines, and thus often vanish quickly.

Sean Lowry's "Curating with the Internet" is a discussion of emerging Internet-based and Internet-activated approaches to curating art. Today, we are encountering new curatorial approaches in tandem with digitally activated forms of presentation and dissemination characterized by perpetual reproducibility, and multiple intersecting temporalities and materializations. Lowry probes networked, distributed, and modular approaches that democratize, disrupt, institutionalize, and sometimes even bypass the curator.

Significantly, according to Lowry, many of these approaches are no longer connected to singular events or spaces and are therefore better conceptualized as omnidirectional movements between modes of conception, production, and dissemination, related through the screen as a communal space. He suggests that this communal space might provide access to new works, illuminate the existence of works understood to be elsewhere in time and space, and offer multiple materializations, versions, interpretations, and representations of existing works. Lowry's chapter provides an up-to-date, well-informed, and penetrating overview of curating as it applies to Internet art, net art, post-conceptual art, post-Internet art, postmedium creativity, and technology.

The author argues that the creative use of technology is simply part of the human capacity to create alternative worlds. For Lowry, Internet-based and Internet-activated art can mark the emancipatory potential of human existence.

Currently, through the World Wide Web, an artist, or curator, or collective, can be virtually indistinguishable from a brand or a corporation. The key point for Lowry is that, unlike the twentieth century, when the fundamental assertions of aesthetic autonomy prevailed in discussions of twentieth-century art, much art in this new century involves negotiating relationships and actually testing spatial and temporal boundaries. Perhaps the question that concerned artist and theorists of the twentieth century – "What is art?" – has now mutated to become "Where is art?" and "When is art?" Exhibitions and works of art are expressed in relationship with the Internet, and are less likely to be regarded as fixed in space and time. They are more interested in being porous and open to ongoing transformation. Lowry concludes that this is the beginning of the "digital century," and we have only a minimal sense of what art and curating can be with the Internet.

Melentie Pandilovski's "Arts and Science: The Intersection (Re)engineered" is a discussion of the intersection of the arts, science and technology, and philosophy from a contemporary curating perspective. Pandilovski focuses on the most difficult and unresolved questions arising from the relationship between the arts and the sciences, a relationship which has, for the greater part of the twentieth century, confounded humanity. This is achieved by discussing C.P. Snow's celebrated 1959 lecture "The Two Cultures," where the novelist and physicist proposes that the rift between the arts and science, if resolved, could produce a major breakthrough for humanity.

Snow was correct in stating that the artists and scientists of his era (and also currently) were educated in either the humanities or sciences: at the heart of that two cultures debate is the role that binary thought has played throughout Western civilization. The task of resolving the rift between them is thus especially difficult, as one has to negotiate the intersecting and overlapping aspects of art, culture, class, science, technology, politics, and spectacle.

Nevertheless, great steps have been taken in bridging this gap, with the rapid development of new art forms such as Robotic Art, Nano-Art, Quantum Art (art and the physical sciences), experimental interface art, BioArts and art developed in the realm of information visualization.

It is clear that the displaying of science-based artwork has changed the custodial role of the art institution. Art institutions have been developing their exhibition and curatorial policies in order to accommodate BioArts over the past 20 years. Art institutions such as Ars Electronica, The EMARE NETWORK SybioticA, Experimental Art Foundation Australia, and SEAFair (Skopje Electronic Art Fair) take part in this by supporting artistic research in the sciences. Their role in commissioning and supporting the work of artists who are opening up the "white box" to "live" artworks, produced in collaboration with scientists, is especially significant. The changing role of art institutions, including in supporting the work of artistic research in gray zones (such as biophilosophy and biopolitics) can be seen as connecting directly to the thinking of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri.

Some Final Thoughts

To conclude, what we have attempted in *A Companion to Curation* is to provide a comprehensive, incisive, and informed overview of contemporary curating across the globe. We suggest that contemporary curatorial discourse, particularly since the 1990s, has changed art and that art has also changed curating.

To this end, our contributors include artist-curators, curators, academics, theorists, and museum and gallery professionals, and are located across the globe. They represent, from our editorial perspective, our endeavor to engage in an understanding of today's curating and exhibition making. Also, we aimed to question many modernist myths of contemporary art and curatorship by stressing different perspectives on the continuing legacy of Western thought and culture. Our contributors have illuminated how contemporary curating should be appreciated as a relatively recent field of activities and ideas that are in essence quite different from the older, more established forms of curatorship.

Notes

- 1 The art museums in Europe came under the central control of the state, while in the United States art museums were privately funded.
- 2 Natasha Hoare et al. 2016. *The New Curator (researcher), (commissioner), (keeper), (interpreter), (producer), (collaborator)*, Laurence King Publishing. See also Rafal Niemojewski, “The Aspirational Narrative of the New Curator,” *ibid.*
- 3 Sara Diamond, Rags. Interview by Sara Diamond. Expert Interview, Toronto, November 2017.

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Part I



An Overview

The Origin and Provenance of Curating

A Selective History of Curating in Pittsburgh

The Recent Story of the Carnegie International¹

David Carrier

The Art Department should not purchase “old masters”, but confine itself to the acquisition of such modern pictures as are thought likely to become “old masters” with time.

Andrew Carnegie²

Andrew Carnegie’s decision to give away all he earned ... encouraged him to be even more ruthless a businessman and capitalist. Recognizing that the more money he earned, the more he would have to give away, he pushed his partners and his employees relentlessly forward.

David Nasaw³

The Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, first held in 1896, is the second-oldest ongoing international survey art exhibition.⁴ The rival Venice Biennale was founded just a year earlier, in 1895. And so a great deal can be learned about curating by considering the history of this exhibition. Thanks to a remarkable self-critical book recently published by the museum, we have a fully illustrated record describing the origin and development of this important exhibition (Clark 1996). And because I have lived in Pittsburgh since 1973, I have reviewed almost every International since 1979, and so have had a front row seat on this local history. My reviews thus provide one writer’s ongoing record of this major exhibition. In this selective account, I skip a couple of recent shows, which I saw but did not review in adequate ways.

As Andrew Carnegie explained in our epigraph, the goal of the Internationals was to bring to a provincial audience a sample of the best contemporary art. But the ideas about how to do that have, not unexpectedly, changed radically over time. Carnegie didn’t provide any detailed instructions. Nor did he provide an adequate permanent endowment for the exhibition. And so, it was up to the museum to choose how to

organize the show and to obtain funding. The history published by the museum effectively tells this long story up to 1996. It is convenient here to take it up in 1979 both because that year marked the beginning of my personal knowledge of these exhibitions and because analysis of the more recent exhibitions is most relevant for our purposes.

My commentary sets the activity of the Carnegie International curators in a historical and philosophical perspective. This essay has six parts. Part one is historical. I describe the recent Internationals, noting the changing styles of these exhibitions by listing and describing some of the artists. The rest of the essay draws the lessons from this history. Part two considers the context of this exhibition. Some features of this large survey exhibition are common to all such shows; others, however, are specific to Pittsburgh. I describe the place of the Carnegie Museum of Art in relation to the history of Pittsburgh. Part three presents the general concerns involved in curating such survey exhibitions. How, I ask, can the best contemporary art be identified? And I identify the ways in which the changing art market has affected the practice of curators. We want to understand why these exhibitions have changed so much in the past thirty years. Part four looks at the political background of the Carnegie Internationals. Then part five asks what perspective art history and philosophy can provide for the curators; can we offer a usable theory of contemporary art? Finally, part six, which is brief, presents a personal perspective. My goal is to describe this exhibition, placing it within a larger perspective with reference to contemporary art and aesthetic theory. Only by shifting between the concerns of an empirical history and this broader conceptual analysis is it possible, I believe, to adequately understand this ambitious exhibition.

The Origin and History of the Carnegie International

Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919), a poor immigrant from Scotland, made his fortune in late-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh. By the start of the twentieth-century he was the richest man in America. Resolving to give away most of his fortune for the public good, he wanted that the museum he created, the Carnegie Institute, should present the most significant contemporary art. At this time, in New York and elsewhere, newly rich American industrialists were assembling the collections, which made the United States a leading art museum culture. Carnegie's goals were different – he did not aspire to form an old master collection; rather, he was interested in displaying recently created art. In the 1890s, this was a very original idea. Until 1929, when the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was founded in New York City, the major American public museums were not much devoted to contemporary art.

Traditionally, the International had been a large group show. In 1977, there was a one-person show, and in 1979, because the museum was unhappy with the press response to recent exhibitions, the show was divided between Eduardo Chillida and Willem de Kooning.⁵ Then, after Gene Baro curated an exhibition, which was much criticized in 1982, a young museum director, John R. Lane, was appointed, and set out to revive the International. The 1985 Carnegie International was co-curated by Lane and the new adjunct curator of contemporary art who came with him to Pittsburgh, John Caldwell.⁶

Their 42 artists included the populist John Ahearn, who does sculptures of figures from the Bronx; such then well-known New York City figures as Eric Fischl, Jenny Holzer, Neil Jenney, Bill Jensen, Ellsworth Kelly, Sol LeWitt, and also Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, Julian Schnabel, and Frank Stella. And it included a number of Germans who also were prominent in New York galleries: Georg Baselitz, Jiří Georg Dokoupil, Jörg Immendorff, Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lüpertz, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter. Also, a number of their Italian peers: Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Luciano Fabro, and Jannis Kounellis. And, finally, some English figures who also were well known in American galleries: Richard Deacon, Barry Flanagan, Lucian Freud, Gilbert and George, and Howard Hodgkin. It was a good survey of the most prominent figures of the day: short on women, with no one from Asia. (Japan had been a major exhibitor during the mid- to late 1950s, with 25 Japanese artists represented in a show in the late 1950s.) In his introduction to the catalogue, a survey of then-influential writing about contemporary art, Lane rightly observes that there is no consensus about

the appropriate way for a critic to address today's art, or the relative significance of the various theoretical and stylistic directions now being pursued by artists. (Lane and Caldwell 1985: 17)

The show, like the writing in the catalogue, provided a good introduction to the best-known figures, Americans and Europeans active in the American art world.

The 1988 International was selected by Lane and Caldwell, with the aid of an advisory committee.⁷ Thirteen artists were in both shows. "While the works in the 1985 *International* were aggressive, big and spirited," Vicky Clark's essay in the catalogue says, "there is a hushed, muted and almost magical feeling to the 1988 exhibition" (Clark 1988: 8). There were political installations by Siah Armajani, an American, and Lothar Baumgarten, who is German; an important display of Joseph Beuys, who only belatedly was properly recognized in America. And Ross Bleckner and Peter Halley, famous young American painters; and Jeff Koons, whose apotheosis was in progress. Also, the exhibition included some very varied artists who were becoming well known: the Swiss duo Fischli and Weiss; some major senior American painters, Agnes Martin and Cy Twombly; and the Canadian photographer Jeff Wall. Like the previous international, this was, again, very much a New York-centered show; most of the non-Americans included were well known from gallery exhibitions.⁸

The 1991 Carnegie International was the most innovative International that I have seen. (My review, I regret to say, showed a complete failure to rise to the occasion.⁹) Going beyond merely presenting a selection of original art in the galleries, the displays extended into the natural history museum, next door to the library at the Carnegie; and indeed, out into the city at large. As the curator, Mark Francis, wrote: "The *specificity* of the museum has created possibilities and opportunities, and the *reality* of the museum, rather than a notion of the ideal or imaginary museum, has been our guiding principle" (Cooke and Francis: 19). He and his co-curator Lynne Cooke offered in the catalogue a suggestive account of the art museum. "Historically," she wrote in that catalogue, "there have been two principal roles for the art museum: treasure house and so storehouse, academy and so research center" (Cooke and Francis: 213).

A number of the artists used the full resources of the Carnegie: Michael Asher, for example, did an installation in the Hall of Architecture. And because for the first time the exhibition moved outside of the museum, reviewers from out of town couldn't merely walk quickly through the museum, on a day trip to Pittsburgh; they needed to travel about the city. Tim Rollins + K.O.S., well known political artists, did an installation in the public library of Homewood, a poor black neighborhood. Other parts of the show were on display in downtown Pittsburgh, nearby at Duquesne University and, also, at the Mattress Factory, a major local *Kunsthalle*. And Christopher Wool's billboard, *Untitled* (1991), "The Show is Over" was shown outside the museum and his painting, with a longer version of this slogan, entered the collection. Within the galleries, Louise Lawler and Judith Butler did critiques of museum, as also did Ann Hamilton, David Hammons, and Allan McCollum. There were installations by Ilya Kabakov and Mike Kelley; paintings by Christopher Wool and Philip Taaffe; and the belated appearance in the International of Louise Bourgeois, who was born in 1911. And the one Chinese figure, Huang Yong Ping did an installation, using discarded art books, in the Carnegie Library.

The 1995 International was curated by Richard Armstrong, who had three advisors.¹⁰ Because the 1991 show had been successful, they deliberately chose not to recapitulate its approach. Armstrong visited 27 countries. Our period, the catalogue notes, is

a moment of introspection and atomized political desire, embodied by the newly enlarged means symbolized by cyberspace. The shared goal of reaching the moon or neighboring planets has been replaced by a private, if universal assumption that we should be able to reach one another, instantaneously, with an almost limitless battery of data. (Armstrong 1996: 32)

The exhibition included a great variety of art: video by Chantal Akerman, Stephan Balkenhol's sculpture, Chuck Close's photorealist paintings, Marlene Dumas's figurative paintings, Louise Fishman's abstractions, Robert Gober's sculptural installations. And sculpture by Per Kirkeby – in earlier Internationals his paintings had been shown. There were some revivals of Americans, Joan Mitchell and Donald Judd. And some important new figures: Doris Salcedo, Richard Tuttle, Robert Therrien and Rachel Whiteread.

The 1999/2000 International had a new curator, Madeleine Grynsztejn. She presented Matthew Barney's films; John Currin's figurative paintings; Thomas Demand's photographs. Some veteran figures appeared-- Alex Katz, Edward Ruscha, Kara Walker. And there were some important new comers, William Kentridge and Martin Kippenberger, and also Kerry James Marshall, Gabriel Orozco, and Luc Tuymans. There is no obvious unity to the grouping, apart from the fact that it included many figures who were becoming well known in New York galleries. The most dramatic change came in the catalogue. The prior catalogues contained mostly straightforward commentary on the artists and the present situation of art. In 1999, the catalogue included essays by the curator and several scholars in the then-fashionable art speak. Because this writing was at a remarkable distance from the art on display, its publication raised real questions about the function of these catalogues. "What becomes of the self," one essay asked, "in the face of a reality that is perpetually subjected to the dynamic emergence of new relations, and to the

dissolution and reconfiguration of older models?” (Grynsztejn 1991: 99). Artworks, it proclaimed, “are first and foremost materially based, experiential forms that make their impact on the level of affect” (Grynsztejn 1991: 101). This was not prose meant for the larger public.

The 2013 Carnegie International was curated by Daniel Baumann, Dan Byers, and Tina Kukielski. In the 1980s, Internationals focused on the best-known American and Western European art that recently had been shown in New York.¹¹ When significant art is being made in many countries, that plan was no longer viable. In selecting 35 artists from 19 countries the curators did not claim that these are *the* most important living artists. Nor did they argue that their show had a unifying theme. “Art illuminates everyday life in all its beauty, imperfection, and comedy,” they said, and so “both history and a sense of place stand out as compelling sites for artistic inquiry” (Baumann, Byers, and Kukielski 2013: 26). Unlike the 1999 catalogue, this one contained reader-friendly essays. “Most of the people who will view the 2013 Carnegie International,” it wisely noted, “are not part of the ‘art world’” (Baumann, Byers, and Kukielski 2013: 262). On the entrance plaza was Phyllida Barlow’s playful anti-monumental installation *TIP* (2013), constructed out of flags and wooden poles. The exhibition included a variety of figures from outside North America or Western Europe: Amer Kanwar, who lives in India; Dinh Q. Lê, from Vietnam; Rokni Haerizadeh, an Iranian who lives in Dubai; and Kamran Shirdel, who works in Iran. And also, Zanele Muholi from South Africa, Paulina Ołowska from Poland, Erika Verzutti from Brazil as well as artists from China.

The Story of Pittsburgh as a Center for Art Exhibitions

To understand the activity of these Pittsburgh curators, you need to know something about that place. You cannot fully comprehend the Carnegie Internationals without understanding the history of the museum in which they are sited. In *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* the architectural historian Franklin Toker describes the features of Pittsburgh that are relevant here. In the late nineteenth-century the city, a world-class industrial center, was where the family fortunes of many of the men who became the leading American collectors were created. But the art collections of these men and their descendants went elsewhere: Andrew Mellon’s pictures to the National Gallery of Art, Washington and Paul Mellon’s to the museum collection endowed in his name at Yale University; Duncan Phillips’s modernist art to his own museum in Washington; Henry Clark Frick’s old master art mostly to his museum in New York; Walter Arensberg’s collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and G. David Thompson’s collection was mostly sold at auction.

Toker provides a very useful description of the Carnegie Library and Carnegie Institute building, constructed in 1895. The art museum, and also the natural history museum, a large concert hall, a lecture hall, and the main branch of the library are housed in one enormous building, almost 800 feet long. For the first time, Pittsburgh, a grand industrial center, had a major cultural attraction. The building employed 6000 tons of marble from Europe, and had a hall of architecture with an array of plaster casts of famous buildings and sculptures, a form of art which went out of fashion when museums sought to show only original works, and now has again become of interest; it remains part of the institution. “The effect of the casts and the

colossal space,” more than 70 some feet tall, Toker writes, is “little short of hypnotic” (Toker 1994: 100). The art galleries in this luxurious building comprise the site of the Internationals, though in 1974 the art museum was enlarged, with the addition of new galleries, which have, in turn, been renovated more recently.

Something can be learned about this story of the Carnegie Internationals by contrasting the development of the museum in Cleveland, another provincial industrial city, which is just a 120-some miles north-west.¹² Cleveland’s Museum of Art was founded in 1916, just two decades later than the Carnegie. (Many of the major Eastern and Mid-Western American museums were founded during this period.) Cleveland chose to focus on building a major permanent collection, and because in the 1950s it was the richest American museum, it had the resources to gather major old master and modernist European works.¹³ The most famous director, Sherman Lee, who was a great connoisseur of Asian art, was responsible for a renowned collection of Chinese and Indian art. Lee was not particularly interested in contemporary art, and although the museum hosted regular exhibitions of Cleveland art, it never developed an ambitious contemporary show like the Carnegie International.¹⁴ When I wrote much of my book *Museum Skepticism* (2006) on the history of art museums when teaching in Cleveland, I thought of the great collection as marking the high tide of local capitalism, thrown up thanks to the early twentieth-century prosperity, and left stranded now in that rustbelt city.

Carnegie and Frick had fallen out because of Frick’s handling of the strike in the Carnegie steelworks in 1892, in which the hired security force murdered a number of workers. Pretending to be ignorant of the circumstances, Carnegie let Frick be the fall guy. Since Carnegie and Frick became contentious, it seems clear that Frick would never support the museum named after his rival. Had the Frick collection become part of the Carnegie, that museum would have had a much stronger collection. But then, such arrangements often depend upon individual personalities. In Los Angeles, for example, the J. Paul Getty Museum has a good collection and a great building, and across town, the Norton Simon has a great collection. Were the collections combined, Los Angeles would now have a world-class old master museum.

After Frick’s death, in 1928 his daughter, Helen Clay Frick, constructed the Henry Clay Frick Fine Arts Building at the University of Pittsburgh, across the street from the Carnegie Institute. This building, much smaller than the Carnegie, but also grand, was modeled on a sixteenth-century Roman villa. It contains a group of full-size reproductions of Renaissance Italian frescoes by the restorer Nicholas Lochoff and two large sculptures sold to her as works by the Renaissance master Mino da Fiesole, which are modern forgeries, but no permanent art displays. When in the late 1960s she was unhappy with the way that the university managed this building, she built a museum, the Frick Art Museum on her father’s estate, a few miles east. (Her father had installed the major part of his collection in his museum in New York in the 1920s.)

The Carnegie purchased the best works from its Internationals for the permanent collection. (The museum also eventually created an additional collection, mostly of modernist art.) As a recent historian notes:

It is easy to understand why Carnegie and the Fine Arts committee would have been unwilling to give up the annual exhibition. It cost Carnegie only what was to him a negligible sum of money, and no labor at all ... A good permanent collection might

have been of equal or great benefit to the community, but it would have attracted less attention and thus would have been less satisfying to a man who reveled in his image as a public benefactor. (Neal 1996: 217)

You need only compare the permanent collection in Pittsburgh to the paintings assembled by Albert Barnes for his museum outside of Philadelphia to see some limitations of this policy. The Carnegie collection was the product of committees, and so while such eminent figures as Matisse and the founding director of MoMA, Alfred H. Barr Jr., were on the jury, the shows were the product of consensus. As of 1988, during the past 50 years, about a third of the collection came from the International. Picasso, Matisse, and Renoir (to name three of the best-known figures collected in depth by Barnes) are represented only by slight works. And, when you get to Abstract Expressionists, to Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and to Pop Art, then the Carnegie collections are relatively thin, if you consider what could have been easily purchased early on. Obviously, Carnegie could not have anticipated these developments in 1895 – no one did. But whereas in New York (and other major art centers) the museums correct the mistakes of earlier curators, by purchasing or obtaining donations of that art which has survived the test of time, in Pittsburgh, doing this is not so easy. After Andy Warhol's death in 1987, a museum devoted to him was established in Pittsburgh, under the Carnegie Museum of Art.¹⁵ Warhol grew up in Pittsburgh, but after he moved to NYC in the late 1940s, he had little connection with his hometown. His art was first acquired by the museum only the year before his death; the story of the Andy Warhol Museum thus is not part of this history of the Internationals.

In the early days of the exhibition, an organizer visited studios in the country, and also in Western Europe. More recently curators have done extensive gallery visits in New York, in Europe, and most recently worldwide. The one place to which a great deal of attention is *not* devoted is Pittsburgh itself, which artistically is a provincial city. Traditionally art historians made a distinction between centers of art production and peripheral places, which borrow from but do not much influence the centers. So, for example, within Italy, historians make distinctions between centers of innovation and provincial centers. In the era of the baroque, Rudolf Wittkower writes: “until well after the middle of the seventeenth century Florentine painting was provincial but had a distinct character of its own” (Wittkower 1973: 469). Because of the obvious derogatory implications of this value judgment, some art historians now seek to abolish it. It has become inappropriate, for example, to treat contemporary art from outside of North America or Western Europe as a merely provincial variation on art that comes from those countries. We should, it often has been argued, treat this art for its own sake, and not as a derivative, weak version of what's familiar. The critical question, still, is whether this is really possible, given our inevitable propensity to judge what is unfamiliar in terms of what we know.

In Pittsburgh, the museum effectively makes a distinction between art made in the major art world centers and that art produced locally, which is provincial.¹⁶ For 102 years the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, a group of artists within a 150-mile radius of Pittsburgh, have held annual exhibitions, usually staged within the Carnegie Museum of Art.¹⁷ So far as I know, in the years I have viewed the International only once have local artists been included in that exhibition. (In 2013, the group Transformazium based in Pittsburgh was included.) And in general, local newspaper

commentary of the arts is weak, although we have been lucky to have one energetic, thoughtful art critic: Graham Shearing.¹⁸

The reasoning behind this distinction between local art and art taken seriously by the curators deserves to be spelled out. To create significant original new art, it's generally necessary that you be in touch with the leading figures of the previous generation. This is generally true even when artists are hermits. And since the art world centers are the places where ambitious new art is presented, written about, and sold, that's where you need to start your career. Of course, once an artist is established, he or she may choose to live outside the art center, for then the dealers and curators will make their way to the studio. Suppose, still, that a young, highly original artist lived and worked in Pittsburgh. It would be very hard for such a person to attract critical attention and find a market for their art. There are no upscale local dealers. And it would be hard to get support from critics. Although I have published art criticism for more than three decades in a variety of national and international publications, none of my editors ever encouraged (or, indeed, even permitted) me to write about local artists.¹⁹ As with artists, so also for critics: it's limiting to be identified as a provincial critic. I usually identify myself as a New York-based writer, although I have not lived there since 1972.

Problems with International Survey Exhibitions

Some of the features of the Carnegie Internationals depend, as we have just seen, upon the history of Pittsburgh. Others, however, are common to all large contemporary art exhibitions. Large claims are made for a great many artists, although we know that only a few of them will survive the test of time. As Thomas McEvilley notes in his account of the 1950s, published in the 1988 catalogue:

The lists of works included in the shows in these years illustrate the arbitrariness of art history, as an occasional work is picked out to stand as a monument to a historical moment it may ill represent. Most of the artists in the exhibitions were not heard of again in international art discourse. (McEvilley 1988: 23)²⁰

Collecting contemporary art is tricky. If the museum waits too long to make decisions, then work of the artists who have become prominent will be expensive. The painter Sean Scully had an exhibition at the Carnegie in 1985, his first American museum show; but the museum didn't purchase his art until later, when it became more expensive.²¹ The Carnegie International is a costly exhibition, and so the funding available for additions to the permanent collection seems to have been limited.

If the museum supports artists whose reputation is not established, then more likely than not few of these figures will survive. Consider the record provided by the most influential and important American journal devoted to contemporary art: *Artforum*. Founded in 1962, published ten times a year, it almost always has a contemporary work on the cover, and doesn't often repeat selections. Being on the cover involves serious recognition – it shows that some segment of informed opinion takes an artist very seriously. In this short period, hundreds of artists have been on the cover of *Artforum*. But no one could reasonably expect that in 50 years even a small percentage of them will still be famous, or even well known.

There also are numerous coffee table books offering a selection of the most important contemporary art. For example, consider two recent massive surveys: *Defining Contemporary Art: 25 years in 200 Pivotal Artworks*, selected by eight curators from Europe and the United States (Birnbaum et al. 2011) and *100 Works of Art that Will Define Our Age*, a selection by the critic Kelly Grovier (Grovier 2013). These books present some of the contemporary art which attracts attention. As the titles indicate, they have somewhat different perspectives. And frequently they champion different artists. Neither of these surveys seeks a working definition of what art matters today – and neither can claim to offer anything more than opinions, different from those of other critics.

An exhibition exhibiting the vicissitudes of local taste could be of real sociological interest. It would be fascinating, for example, to see what contemporary art was valued in Pittsburgh since 1896. But in practice, what we want in the permanent collection are the modernist and contemporary masters: we want the best art. In the 1980s I walked through the Carnegie Museum of Art with the art critic Arthur Danto, who was surprised to find work there by many relatively obscure New York artists he had known in the 1950s. Since then the collection has been rehung – now the contemporary art on display is mostly by well-known figures.

The Carnegie Museum of Art is a very good provincial museum – good enough to attract ambitious curators and directors, but not well enough financed to keep them. After their stints in the museum Caldwell and Lane quickly moved on to San Francisco; Mark Francis to the Gagosian Gallery, London; Laura Hoptman to MoMA; Lynne Cook to a variety of distinguished posts; Madeleine Grynsztejn to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Armstrong to the directorship of the Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York. This history is a tribute to the museum, which has chosen curators who are in demand. But this changing cast means that the collection reflects very diverse sensibilities.

In 1896, no one could have envisaged the proliferation of ambitious survey exhibitions, in this country, in China and Europe, indeed almost everywhere. This means that Pittsburgh's show has to compete with many similar art displays. Its rival exhibition in Venice attracts visitors in part by virtue of its location. As Barry Schwabsky, art critic of *The Nation*, jokes: "It's hard to imagine the prospect of another trip to Pittsburgh setting the aesthete's heart aflutter quite like that of a visit to La Serenissima" (Schwabsky 2016: 175).

The Nature of the Public Art Museum

Museums are public spaces, determined to attract everyone; museums are essentially paternalistic institutions: this tension between their desire to serve the public and their private origins is basic to any account of their functioning. These institutions are heavily dependent upon their donors, but also need public funding. When you enter the Carnegie, you come into a luxurious space, open to every member of the public paying the admission fee. I enjoy this experience, but I am aware that the building is a palace. And if I, a relatively privileged, former tenured professor, see it this way, imagine how such a museum looks to a minority person, or a poor outsider.²² Nowadays, of course, these institutions work hard to attract multicultural audiences, for they very much want to be popular.

Museums like the Carnegie are basically paternalistic institutions. Carnegie chose how to spend his wealth, which he gained, thanks to his managerial wisdom and the labor of his workers. Suppose you were given a choice: would you like to have an art museum, natural history museum, and library or would you prefer to spend your money on something else with less redeeming social significance? In fact, you don't get to make this choice. The museum aims at your edification – Carnegie and his successors have decided that you will benefit from looking at art. He asked: "What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few?"²³ Carnegie's answer appealed to his version of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism. The duty of the wealthy was to organize "benefactions from which the masses of their fellows will derive lasting advantage." To be realistic, Pittsburgh would never have had an energetic, ambitious museum had it depended upon public funding. Only because of very smart, ruthless capitalists like Carnegie did the United States become a wealthy country. Only because some of these men were publicly spirited do we have lavishly appointed public art museums. And only because some of their successors generously support museums do these institutions remain strong.

Museums have always inspired considerable resentment, which is one reason why there is a vast leftist academic literature on these institutions. And why, as we have seen, as in the 1991 International, some recent curators deal with these feelings by presenting art which critiques the museum. My present question, however, is whether this feeling of resentment is justified. What I offer is not a leftist argument. (Nor is it a libertarian or right-wing argument.) It is a philosophical argument whose political implications remain to be unpacked. Philosophers discuss the just distribution of goods. How you judge the origins of his museum depends, ultimately, upon how you evaluate the process by which Carnegie made his fortune. If you think that the process was just, then he had a right to choose how to use his fortune; if you do not, then a very different conclusion follows.²⁴

This line of thought is hardly likely to engage a working curator, who needs to think in practical terms. But that does not mean that my argument is unimportant. That the distance between philosophers' argumentation and everyday practice typically is often immense does not make their arguments unimportant. In the next section I consider two general accounts of curating. And the second of these approaches offers a direct response to this political argument.

Identifying the Most Important Contemporary Art

How can we identify the most significant contemporary art? This is the question that curators of the Carnegie International must answer. The most challenging recent theorist who deals with this issue, Terry Smith, Australian born, is a professor in Pittsburgh. (He has not, so far as I know, been involved with organizing the Internationals. At least not yet.) His book *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009) offers a finely detailed analysis, which is very relevant here. Observing that in one obvious way, all contemporary art is the art that is being made now, he seeks to define "contemporary art" in a more useful fashion. Right now, not only up-to-date works but also icons, Impressionist-style landscapes, and myriad historically

dated art forms are being made. What he really offers, however, is an account of why some art being made right now is *the* art of our time. At present, Smith notes, no single artistic style is dominant. This is abundantly clear from our account of the Carnegie Internationals. And so, he appeals to a philosophical analysis of the concept, “contemporaneity,” “a state defined above all by the play of multiple relationships between being and time” (Smith 2009: 1). What defines contemporary life, he says, is contemporaneity. In that way, it distinguishes us from, for example, the mid-twentieth-century modernist world. Ultimately, then, he finds three important artistic currents right now. First “the aesthetic of globalization,” which involves reworking modernism – Serra, Richter, and Wall, to cite famous artists shown in the International, are models here (241). Second, there are art forms emerging from decolonization – William Kentridge and Zoe Leonard are relevant artists. This art aims “to revive local traditional imagery and seek to make it contemporary by representing it through formats and styles that were current in Western modern art” (255). And, finally, there is art by young people “attracted to active participation in the image economy” (264).

These, Smith concludes, “are the *actual* kinds of art that these conditions (of art world display) have generated” (265). Of course, “play of multiple relationships between being and time” has been going on for a very long time: in the mid-twentieth century, when André Malraux (1967) wrote his multicultural history of art, the *Museum Without Walls*; in the mid-twentieth-century, when Matisse, Picasso, and other European artists looked seriously at what was then called “primitive” art; and, indeed, in the sixth century, when Buddhist art migrated from India to China. But it is arguable that these conditions changed drastically very recently. In the past 30 some years, the world has become interconnected in radically new ways. That, after all, is why the Internationals have changed so dramatically in this short period.

If you read Smith as a philosopher, offering a definition of art, then you may be disappointed. Arthur Danto influentially argued that ours is a post-historical period, an era in which any art form may be legitimate. That is a properly philosophical argument. But Smith offers a different way of thinking. Writing as a philosopher, Danto presented the necessary and sufficient conditions for something being a work of art; he thus identified the essence of art. If, as I propose, you treat Smith as a sociological theorist, then you will find his account very valuable. He offers a very good descriptive account of art in exhibitions like the Internationals. The practice of these exhibitions reveals what contemporary art is – his three currents effectively identify the art found in the recent Carnegie Internationals.

That said, I am not ultimately satisfied by Smith’s richly suggestive analysis. Partly the problem is that it’s not clear why there should be *three* currents of contemporary art. And, also, I find the account of “contemporaneity” too vague to sufficiently define contemporary art. So, I turn now to a totally different, more radical analysis. Where Smith in effect validates the working procedures of contemporary curating, Joachim Pissarro and I have developed a radical critique of the art museum. In two recent books, *Wild Art* and *Aesthetics of the Margins/The Margins of Aesthetics: Wild Art Explained* (2018) we present an account of what we call “wild art,” art outside the world of museums like the Carnegie (Carrier and Pissarro 2013, 2018). Now I summarize briefly that published account, focused on the lessons it provides for curating.

There are two kinds of art: art world art, which is art found in commercial galleries and museums like the Carnegie; and wild art, which is art outside of that art world. We model this distinction on two others:

- domestic animals/wild animals
- domestic plants/wild plants.

In making this contrast we are not praising wild art as such. There is much mediocre art in the art world – and much mediocre wild art. Our definition of wild art picks out location, not value; it is description, not evaluation. Body art, graffiti, and tattoos are just three of the forms of wild art presented in detail in our book *Wild Art*. Art critics and historians normally focus attention almost exclusively on art world art. Once, however, you discover that there are really two kinds of art, then you will understand art world art differently.

The end of the old regime in late-eighteenth-century Europe was marked by three events, which were of lasting central importance to the Carnegie.

- The creation of the public art museum, which involved moving the most important art from private collections into a public space. The opening of the Louvre as a museum, in 1793, is a symbolic moment because it took place during and thanks to the French Revolution.
- The birth of art history as an academic discipline, which provided ways of organizing that art displayed in museums.
- The development of aesthetic theory in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), which explains why aesthetic judgments are neither factual judgments nor mere expressions of option, but a distinctive kind of statement.

The old regime had an authoritarian top-down art world. Aesthetic judgments were believed to be grounded in the revealed nature of reality. The ruling elite controlled patronage, with no concern for public opinion. Most of the major works of art accessible to the public were in churches. By contrast, the art museum is a public space, accessible to all citizens. Within that museum, art is organized, typically, in historical displays based upon the scholarship of art historians. This is a radically new situation. Artistic modernism thus is associated with a democratic culture – here we find the essential link between art and politics after the demise of the old regime.

Once top-down aesthetic judgments were abandoned, then only the public could judge art. This situation was anticipated 25 years before the *Critique of Judgment* was published, when in the 1760s public exhibitions of contemporary art were held in the Louvre. Denis Diderot, the first great art critic, wrote famous reviews. And Thomas Crow explains why these exhibitions were important:

The Salon was the first regularly repeated, open, and free display of contemporary art in Europe to be offered in a completely secular setting and for the purpose of encouraging a primarily aesthetic response in large numbers of people. ... What transforms that audience into a public, that is, a commonality with a legitimate role to play in justifying artistic practice and setting value on the products of that practice? The audience is the concrete manifestation of the public but never identical with it. (Crow 1985: 3, 5).

The audience, we might say, is just the group of people who look at art, while the public is a community, a group self-consciously aware of its own identity. In making this distinction, I allude to the much-discussed concept of “the public sphere,” that community which defines modernist culture. What transforms the audience into a community is public debate. The art shown in Paris in the 1760s looks very different from what is presented nowadays in a Carnegie International. But the evaluation process is similar: like Diderot, we critics provide judgments which aim to articulate and even to guide the public response.

The details of Kant’s aesthetics are complicated, and his presentation is often obscure. And so, a great deal of academic discussion is devoted to understanding its claims, and their place within his elaborate philosophical system. For our present purposes, however, the key points can be summarized briefly. We each must judge for ourselves, for no one can legitimately tell us what pleases us. And so, then, the practical question concerns how to move from these individual free judgments to some public consensus about aesthetic value, which is necessary to run museums and organize art history writing. When Kant alludes to the importance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he underlines the political significance of his analysis. In a modern culture, aesthetic judgments are freely made *by all for all*. Needless to say, this is as yet an ideal. But it is an important ideal. In a democracy, you must make political judgments for yourself. And in an enlightened art world, you must make your own aesthetic judgments. There is no reason to believe that experts can make better aesthetic judgments; indeed, the very phrase “better aesthetic judgment” is essentially confused. There are only aesthetic judgments, mine and yours. Here the link between Kant’s famous short essay “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” (1784) and his aesthetic theory is essential (Kant 1991). Because he produced his account of aesthetics late in life, he himself didn’t make this connection between politics and art, which is obvious now to every reader. The problem of political theory is how voting can yield public policy. The question for the art world is how individual aesthetic judgments can be the basis for the museum.

The Kantian revolution of taste could have led to a truly democratic (or even anarchistic) artistic arena whereby the creative forces and the public aesthetic attentions of a new and widening public would happily merge with each other. As we know, looking back over two centuries later, things did not *quite* happen this way. A new situation developed: custodians of the art institutions – museum, curators, professors, critics – became the professionals whose charge was to transmit the meaning of art to the public: speaking about art, pronouncing statements, establishing values and meaning about art became pivotal activities within the art system. This is why curators are important. The art custodians write and teach art history, a discipline also born at the same moment, which became a preponderant function within the art system. Aesthetics establishes that judgments of taste are *free for all*; while the museum institution brings art to the people; a third factor, *art history* (also developed at the same time as aesthetics, and the museum institution were created, during the second half of the eighteenth century) came to regulate this potentially anarchistic flow.

In “What is Enlightenment?” Kant lays down his qualified optimism about human history.

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another ... The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* (dare to be wise!). (Kant 1991: 54)

If free discussion is permitted, as was *not* the case under the old regime (Kant's Prussia was part of that world) then we may arrive at the truth. In the art world, if we all are permitted to freely discuss our aesthetic judgments, then it is possible that we may achieve consensus. This is why the usual teaching of art history (in which I have participated) is all wrong. Instead of teaching students to trust their own aesthetic judgments, they are offered authoritarian accounts of what is the best art, a practice that hardly encourages independent thinking.

When Pissarro and I were developing *Wild Art*, we presented our analysis in detail to Philippe de Montebello. *If your argument is right*, he asked, then is what I have been doing all wrong? At the time, we weren't sure how to answer him. Here, however, is a response, which focuses on the role of curators. The art world has long been under the spell of historicist ways of thinking. New forms of art are brought into the art world – and so the claims of museums, art history, and aesthetic theory need to be adjusted. By the 1820s, in his lectures on art, the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel historicized Kant, and prepared the way for art history and the art museum, which in Berlin was built even while he lectured at the university there. Once Winckelmann published a history of Greek and Roman art, then analysis could be extended to what Hegel calls the “historical development of painting” (Hegel 1975: vol. 2, 869). In Berlin's museum, Hegel says in a lecture of 1829, we find

the essential progress of the inner history of painting ... It is only such a living spectacle that can give us an idea of painting's beginning in traditional and static types, of its becoming more living, of its search for expression and individual character, of its liberation from the inactive and reposeful existence of the figures. (Hegel 1975: vol. 2, 870)

More recent art historians mostly do not appeal to Hegel, but they think in similar historicist terms. To understand when (and why) something becomes art, and to properly place it in the historical narrative, you need an historical analysis. E.H. Gombrich, Clement Greenberg, Smith, and Danto all think in these Hegelian terms.

We are *not* saying that now wild art can join the art world in yet another expansion of that world as, earlier, abstract art, minimalism, and various forms of post-modern art joined the art world. What interests us, rather, is how this art world has always been organized by drawing a borderline between what is within and what is outside. The more things change, the more they stay the same: the recent addition of myriad forms of art to the art world has not dissolved the most basic barrier, the dividing line between art world art and what is outside. If you look within the art world, then it seems that there has been a long sequence of revolutionary changes. Compare the art museum a mere 150 years ago with that institution as it exists at present. Medieval art from Europe, artifacts from the Islamic world; photography, and a whole additional range of contemporary art have been brought into that museum. And look at how much museums of modern art have changed in less than a century. In the 1930s, MoMA was proud to do then-daring exhibitions of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. But now when those figures are the old masters of modernism, the contemporary art shown is radically novel. These changes in the contents of museums are reflected also, as I note above, in art history writing and aesthetic theory. Within the art world, the story since 1793 is one of radical ongoing change.

If, rather, you take our outside perspective, then a very different picture emerges. All of this radical change in museums, art history writing, and aesthetic theory has not changed the basic governing idea, the belief that identifying the contents of the art world system requires appeal to some rules set up by the art world authorities. Recently, there has been a great deal of discussion about the exact ways these ever-changing rules are developed. When an artist (Duchamp, Eva Hesse, Warhol, Jeff Koons, Elaine Sturtevant, and their successors) develops challenging novel art, how, exactly, do their claims get adjudicated? By curators and other art experts.

If, then, you take Kant's aesthetic theory as your starting point, you cannot have the art museum and art history as we know them, for these institutions require rules and norms. Museums collect the most important art – and art historians describe this art. Unless or until the critical consensus is formed, they cannot function. In practice, as we all know, the present art world functions in the top-down fashion of the old regime. Curators, professors, and reviewers make critical judgments, and the public follows. Like the aristocratic patrons of the old regime, these authorities dictate what art is displayed and interpreted. I am a former professor and so in criticizing professors I am offering a self-critique. Now, however, I am interested in how, with reference to the Carnegie International, this system might be changed.

What would happen, for example, if it were decided that a work of art did not belong within the art world? Such cases happen – Norman Rockwell and LeRoy Neiman were controversial, as are, still, a number of other wild artists. Do the artists make this judgment, or is it up to the curators; and what happens when there is disagreement amongst these authorities? What is assumed here is that there are some rules to determine this distinction between wild art and art world art. Those rules change: what was art in the art world in 1963, just before Warhol became important, is not what is art today. The rules change pretty much continuously, but what remains unchanged is the belief that there are generally accepted rules (whoever determines them) which make this distinction. The working assumption of present-day museums is that curators are experts with good taste in contemporary art. They can select the best new art and present it to the larger public. This is the point Pissarro and I question. Kant showed that aesthetic judgments are not rule-governed. What follows, then, is that there cannot be experts in contemporary art. There are of course people who travel widely, visiting many studios, and so see a great deal of contemporary art. But there is no reason to believe that by virtue of this experience they can make aesthetic judgments that are better informed than anyone else's. In fact, of course these experts often disagree with one another. And over time, as the changing styles of the recent Internationals show, there are remarkable shifts in expert opinion. When we identify our position as aesthetic anarchism, Pissarro and I underline this basic point: there can be no expert judgments of art, only your opinion and mine. Let the Internationals continue, we would urge, for nothing is more suggestive than seeing a variety of perspectives on contemporary art.

The implications of our analysis are, as yet, difficult to understand. Much discussion will be needed, we believe, to work through the implications of these claims, which are radical and unexpected. Here, however, some tentative observations are suggestive. Part of what is at stake is the distinction between art criticism and art history. Usually this distinction is understood as the contrast between journalist reporting, focused on contemporary art, and scholarly writing, mostly about older art. We, however, make

the distinction in a different way, contrasting the critic's judgments of taste and the art historian's presentation of factual information about the work of art.

In our culture, there is free discussion of popular culture. Go online and you find open debate about these contemporary art forms. (I am not contending that these media are themselves inherently democratic.) But the art world remains as authoritarian as under the old regime. Our analysis involves great faith in the process of open debate. People who believe in the primacy of expert opinion, whether they are on the political left as Marxists or on the right, will reject this account. And in the American art world, where for several generations leftists have been very influential, ours is a radical proposal. The larger public, it's true, votes on exhibitions by choosing whether or not to attend, but their tastes play no direct role in determining what art is on display.

Although Pissarro and I are the first writers to work out this analysis in detail, other commentators have developed related ideas. The well-known art dealer Michael Findlay writes:

Because most of us lack confidence in our ability to simply look at and feel art, in the same way that we can listen to and feel music, there exists a vast business of interpretation ... There is no possibility of empirical proof regarding the meaning of a work of art (Findlay 2012: 117).

Without offering an elaborate defense of this radical position, he reaches a conclusion, congenial with ours, which completely undercuts the everyday practice of contemporary art history and, also, the thinking of most museum curators.

Reviewing Large Survey Exhibitions

Large survey exhibitions pose a special problem for a reviewer. Most often one reviews a gallery or museum show of a single artist; sometimes, however, the subject is a group of figures with a relatively well-defined identity; female Impressionists or mid-career abstract painters would be examples. In these situations, it's satisfactory to describe just a few works, letting them stand for the entire exhibition. But because the International gathers work from 40 or more varied artists, it's not easy to identify the unifying subject. In practice, then, there are two ways to go. Some reviewers employ synecdoche, treating just a few of the works in the exhibition as standing for the entire show. Myself, I am skeptical about this procedure when the art in the exhibition is very varied. But the alternative, providing a descriptive listing of numerous works, often causes editorial problems, for such a review threatens to become a mere laundry list. This is one reason why catalogues can be very useful. Often, as we have seen, the curators provide a useful summary description of their exhibit.

Since the viewpoint of the present commentary is that of an art critic, something should be said about the obvious limitations and potential strengths of my perspective. Three out of the four times I curated modest exhibitions I needed serious help from curators; and so, I am well aware of my limitations.²⁵ Curators do the heavy lifting in the museum: they travel to select the art, arrange for shipping and installation in the museum, and organize the writing and printing of the catalogue. When Mark Francis describes a drive looking for art going through Lyon, Grenoble, Basel, Schaffhausen, Stuttgart, Darmstadt, Frankfurt, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Eindhoven,

Ghent, Paris, and Bordeaux, he hints at the stamina demanded (Cooke and Francis 1991: 117). By comparison, the critic has an easy job: he (or she) shows up at the opening, gets a catalogue, walks through the show, and goes home to quickly write a review.

But though the curator has a privileged inside view of the exhibition, like an employee of any corporation, she (or he) is certainly expected to not discuss the internal life of the institution critically in public. The critic, by contrast, though free to evaluate the exhibition within the limits of editorial license, is unlikely to be in a position to have significant inside information. This means that there are interesting questions about the Internationals I cannot answer at all.²⁶ At present in the art world, critics have a marginal role.²⁷ Of course everyone likes a friendly review, but I believe that few, apart from those for *The New York Times* or a very few national publications such as *The New Yorker*, are taken seriously by the museum. However, the previous section offers one constructive way to deal with this dilemma. Perhaps art critics need not just to judge shows but to offer a theory of what contemporary art might be shown. If we do that, then maybe museums will pay more attention to us!

In presenting this history, I also have been revealing one part of my life. Trained as a philosopher, with no formal study of art history, I grew up as an art critic in part by viewing and reviewing the Carnegie Internationals. And because I got to know some of the curators, I acquired some small feeling for the practical issues.²⁸ Being a curator is a very hard job – for certainly you cannot satisfy everyone. For all of my critical judgments about the Carnegie International, and skepticism about the viability of the project of international survey exhibitions, I owe a great personal debt to this institution. So too does everyone in Pittsburgh, and the many visitors who come to these challenging exhibitions.

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this chapter to Phong Bui, my visionary editor at the *Brooklyn Rail*.
- 2 Quoted in Armstrong (1996): 15.
- 3 Nasaw 2006: xii.
- 4 When this essay was being edited I published two additional relevant publications. On wild art my book with Joachim Pissarro, *Aesthetics of the Margins/The Margins of Aesthetics: Wild Art Explained* (University Park and London, 2018); with Graham Shearing, “Carnegie International, 57th Edition,” *Brooklyn Rail*, November 2018, <https://brooklynrail.org/2018/11/artseen/Carnegie-International-57th-Edition>.
- 5 My review: Carrier (1980).
- 6 My review: Carrier (1986).
- 7 My review: Carrier (1992).
- 8 I was asked for advice about essays for the catalogue.
- 9 This show did inspire my Carrier (2003).
- 10 My review: Carrier (1996).
- 11 My review: Carrier (1986).
- 12 I briefly compare the museums and discuss the Cleveland Museum in detail in Carrier (2006): Ch. 10.
- 13 When I told Richard Armstrong, Carnegie director, that I was taking a post in Cleveland, he noted that the Cleveland Museum was much better endowed than his institution.

- 14 When Michael Conforti, director of the Clark Art Institute, read the discussion of the history of the Cleveland Museum of art in the manuscript of what became my book *Museum Skepticism* he made an important point. When in 1916 that Cleveland institution was established, the founding directors gave it the name of the city, and not their own names, thus opening the way for other local donors to support the museum.
- 15 See Carrier (1994).
- 16 Joachim Pissarro has drawn my attention to a recent exhibition “State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now” at Crystal Bridges Museum which challenges this working assumption; it included some art from Pittsburgh.
- 17 I curated this exhibition in 2001.
- 18 He invited my only local publication about the International (Carrier 1999).
- 19 With two exceptions: (Carrier 1997) and (Carrier 2001). Both artists are African-American.
- 20 “On the Art Exhibition in History: The Carnegie International and the Redefinition of the American Self,” *Carnegie International* 1988, 23.
- 21 See my catalogue essay (Carrier 1985).
- 22 I learned about this problem when I served on an advisory committee, for Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections, Spring 1989.
- 23 Quoted in Nasaw (2006): 348, 249.
- 24 The museum was created several generations ago, in a different political environment; and nowadays the super-wealthy describe their goals somewhat differently. These qualifications do not change the basic argument.
- 25 See my “Seven American Abstract Artists,” (Ruggerio Henis Gallery, New York: November 1988); Associated Artists of Pittsburgh, Annual Exhibition, Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, August 2001. An exhibition curated with Cathleen Chaffee, “Wish You Were Here: The Art of Adventure,” Cleveland Institute of Art, October 2003, with catalogue essay, (Carrier 2003); Guest Curator, “Six Sculptors: Contemporary Sculpture in Ohio and Western Pennsylvania,” *Sculpture X* (The Sculpture Center, Cleveland: 2011).
- 26 For example, while obviously artists love the recognition given by being in the International, I have no idea if their presence has any effect on the art market. Nor do I know anything about shipping costs, which surely must play some role in the curators’ thinking.
- 27 See Carrier (2007).
- 28 At the Carnegie Museum thanks are due to Richard Armstrong, the late John Caldwell, and Madeleine Grynsztejn; and for comments on this draft Jonathan Arac, Vicky Clark, Darren Jones, Allison Miller at the Carnegie Museum of Art and her colleagues Elizabeth Tufts-Brown (the Registrar/Archivist who also assisted) and the curator of Fine Arts Louise Lippincott, Marianne Novy, Joachim Pissarro, and Graham Shearing. They are not responsible for my conclusions.

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Curating Curiosity

Imperialism, Materialism, Humanism, and the *Wunderkammer*

Adam Geczy

and so great is the consumption of luxury and of the multitudes of mankind; such a variety of patterned gems, such many-colored markings in stones, and among them the brilliance of a certain stone that only allows actual daylight to penetrate through it.

Pliny, *Natural History*

The vice contrary to curiosity is nonchalance

Montaigne

Wunderkammer, *Kunstammer*, *Kunstkabinett*, *Schatzkammer*, *guardaroba*, *studiolo* are all implied in the English “cabinet of curiosities,” and are the historical terms that enshrine the first settings, arrangements, philosophies, and organizational principles that have come to be the museum. Derived from the *mouseion*, the Greek for “seat of the Muses,” the first museums were truly places of wonder before other epistemic conditions such as taxonomy and science also held sway. Aristotle’s gnomic statement that philosophy begins with wonder suggests that the original museums were repositories for reflection on this world and the next. They were not only storehouses of riches but also a means of displaying the vastness and vagaries of the world, balancing the material with the metaphysical. The word *Wunderkammer* continues to be popular today, to characterize a hodgepodge gathering, a specular bricolage, intended to intrigue and delight. As such its contemporary uses invoke the earlier incarnations, which sought to be microcosms of the world but also to be reminders of life’s magnitude.

The *Wunderkammer* was the first manifestation of the museum, and its origin and development have much to tell us about people, society, statecraft, knowledge, imagination, and much more besides. Many of the great collections that survive today – the

Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the British Museum, Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan – were based on the principles of encyclopedic knowledge and fascination that the *Wunderkammer* embodied. To survey the first collections as they arose in the late sixteenth century is to see how museum collections are an intriguing combination of the need for objectivity and order, on one hand, and the arbitrariness of individual desire and personal predilection. As Walter Benjamin writes in his meditation on his own book collection:

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order? (Benjamin 1969: 60)

Benjamin muses on the way that the dynamics and imposed logic of collecting will always result in exposing the way in which order and chaos jostle between one another: "There is in the life of the collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order" (Benjamin 1969: 60). An eventful and gradual accumulation, as a collection becomes larger and more valuable, the more ambitious it becomes, and the more it bespeaks the character of the collector who then attempts to encapsulate and represent the world through his particular system of objects.

What the geneses of the first *Wunderkammern* all show is that, despite the need to be expressive of sweeping world views and to draw on as many aesthetic resources as possible, they are the product of single or a handful of personalities. This basic condition is also echoed by Benjamin, who observes that "the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner. Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter" (Benjamin 1969: 67). It is a truth that stands as a corrective to affectations of disinterest and objectivity by public collections. Moreover, the history of the earliest museums, which is bound so closely with the changing nature of knowledge and perceptions about the world in the seismic epistemic shifts that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has much to teach us of our own make-up, the construction of world views, and the personal phantasies that are taken as viable and real. The history of the *Wunderkammer* also tells of the heroic campaigns of knowing about the world, and the equally heroic failures in creating an encompassing and lasting vision. While many collections were with such claims, it is intrinsic to the nature of collection that it begins to ask questions about the world and the limits of the individual, while exposing the imperfections we have of answering such questions.

The Artistic and Intellectual Climate of the Earliest *Wunderkammern*

A common and regular way of characterizing the *Wunderkammer* is as a microcosm of the macrocosm. But for such a conception, it is also important to introduce the very idea of the macrocosm itself. For while civilizations have always sought to ponder the imponderable, from gods to stars, the *Wunderkammer* is very much the child of the early modern age at the end of the Renaissance, which was a period of imperial

expansion, scientific rationalization, and religious questioning. These changes made the macrocosm far less of an abstraction, while the Copernican revolution resituated the earth and humans within a different, wider space. According to the contemporary philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, the age of the scientific revolution, which coincided with the era of global trade and colonization, was in effect the beginning of what we now conceive as globalization. He speaks of the “Space – ‘revolution’” that

Carried out an explication of the Earth, of which the inhabitants became gradually aware, that the categories of what lay directly nearby no longer sufficed to interpret what it meant to live together with different people in an expanded space. This enforced the catastrophe of ontologies of locality, dissolving the old poetics of habitation. In the process of such enlightenments all the old European lands became *de jure* nations on a spherical surface; numerous cities, villages and landmasses turned themselves into *de facto* stations on a delimited flow of traffic where modern capital blithely maintained its pull on the fivefold metamorphoses of commodity, money, text, image and prominence. (Sloterdijk 2006: 53)

This new pull of forces understandably resulted in new configurations of knowledge that reflected more intricate and subtle economies of power, knowledge, and wealth. These economies exerted considerable pressure on old axioms of antiquity.

By the middle of the sixteenth century the flow of all kinds of goods increased exponentially. The awareness of the global difference and multifariousness of the world altered perceptions of the power of nations, which were perceptions no longer wagered according to military prowess and wealth alone. The expansion of what we now identify as cultural capital had already begun to emerge in the Renaissance, in which princes competed not only on the battlefield but through the talent that they could attract and ennoble them in image. It is not for nothing that some of the greatest artists of the High Renaissance are invoked together with their most famous patron, Lorenzo de’ Medici, named “the Magnificent” because of the artist favors he bestowed and what resulted from them. But by the middle of the sixteenth century what a prince could attract, collect, and amass from the broader reaches of the world and experience was also at a premium, reflecting his and his state’s worldliness and sophistication. Such princes operated in concert with scholars, seers, specialists (and charlatans), who were largely united in their ambition to emulate the ancients but also, in light of new discoveries, to create a new stage that built on, but was no longer subservient to, older systems of knowledge. Like the merchants themselves, scholars moved around a great deal. Academic migration was considered desirable, for the circulation of knowledge, meaning that scholars rarely stayed at one university for more than a few years. These universities, expanding with both students and professors, were far from architectural shells, but vessels for knowledge that included objects that could be used as empirical data for research and teaching. For a university, amassing material of curiosity and note, rivaled in importance the people who pronounced upon them. The dawn of the global age was the beginning of the material age, the world of artefacts and the information attributed to them.

Although many of the first examples of these early collections appeared in central Europe, a singular example of the significant changes in society precipitated by trade was Holland. Simon Schama describes in great detail the transformation of Dutch life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concluding that it “was not the austere

pleasure-denying culture of the historical cliché.” Indeed, by mid-seventeenth-century standards, its market for decorative and applied arts was arguably the most developed in Europe. “While it is true,” notes Schama, “that Venetian mirrors, Turkish carpets, Persian silks and Japanese lacquer-ware were all re-exported, it was also true that the domestic market was buoyant” (Schama 1987: 304).¹ The expansion of the world of things to observe or possess, together with scientific developments in modern optics, translated to a culture of visual data and description. Svetlana Alpers argues the material culture of Holland and Kepler’s optics situated images more prominently than before, giving them added “authority” in “their making and viewing” (Alpers 1983: xxvii). Many travelers to Holland commented on the role of paintings possessed by even the lower orders of society, and if not paintings then etchings. Possessing, seeing, representing, ordering, and displaying, the Dutch experience that reaches a climax at the end of the seventeenth century reveals in miniature what had begun a century before.

By the seventeenth century collecting by both the upper as well as the middle classes was a favored way of combining conspicuous consumption, the very nascent art of connoisseurship, the ability to obtain rarities, as well as the acumen to order and display them. As with today, collections by those with more limited resources were specialized and confined to one or a small number of examples. Numismatics, the study and collection of coins, tokens, and medals, was especially popular. The “*Kammer*” lent its name to a variety of interests. *Schatzkammer* was a treasury, while the *Kunstammer* was more confined to paintings, sculpture, and engravings; *Kunstschränk* (*schränk* means “cabinet” or “cupboard”) implied a smaller version of this. The proliferation and popularity of these smaller forms of display developed into an independent specialist craft: the *Mehrzweckmöbel* (multipurpose furniture) were themselves feats of technical mastery in which, more often than not, more than one artisan had a hand, examples of which can be found in Florence and Uppsala. (The Florentine cabinet even acknowledges the German provenance of such items, as it is called a *stipo tedesco*, “German cabinet”; Impey and McGregor 1985: 92–93.) There were also collections from the natural world, the *Naturalienkammer*, of rarities, bibelots, and artefacts, and the *Rarität-Kammer*, and of antiquaries, the *Antiquitäten-Kammer*. Other discrete collections included the *Kleiderkammer* for clothes gathered from around the world, the *Uhrkammer* for clocks. The collection of the Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel also housed an *Optisches Zimmer* and a *Mathematisches Zimmer* (optical and mathematical chamber) for optical and mathematical apparatuses and instruments (Impey and McGregor 1985: 107). Already this short list becomes a bit dizzying, but it does show how these classifications were linguistically divided yet exposes the innumerable overlaps between them.

The ever-growing field of classifying objects was reflected in disciplines themselves. Francis Bacon is credited as a leading figure in the empirical divisions of scientific knowledge but his had already begun as a result of the influx of new objects and concepts that called for codification. As Margaret Hodgen in her history of anthropology maintains, “Plainly, the whole great company of collectors, whether gatherers of shells, coins, fossils, proverbs, monsters, dialects, or artificial deformities, were good Baconians – some of them Baconians before Bacon” (Hodgen 1964: 129). The explosion of collecting the need for knowledge around it by way of what it elicited and what was required for justification and verification, resulted in splintering disciplines, or to put this another way, growing areas of specialization. Medicine, botany,

zoology, geology, and so on became discrete areas of knowledge with their requisite subdivisions. The growing expanse of knowledge and deepening specializations also meant that no one person could be representative of a discipline. Hence the modern notion of the community of scholars was born, and the *Wunderkammern* became places where they gathered and interacted.

Another significant development that is worth invoking in relation to the birth of the *Wunderkammer* is the growth in meaning of such words as “wonder” and “curiosity.” These were no longer just general philosophical concepts dealing with the imponderability of life; they now came to include a more theatrical dimension, which also accommodated the mischievous and the whimsical. In art history, the death of Raphael (1520) and the Sack of Rome (1527) mark significant watersheds that usher in Mannerism. Seen as reflective of a new age of uncertainty and growing secularism, Mannerism eschews the elegance, harmony, and naturalism of the High Renaissance in favor of distortion and artifice. Figures are often featured in improbable settings, in unusual poses, and with inconceivable bodily attributes. The love of theatricalization of the mid-sixteenth century also saw the birth of a new dramatic form, the *commedia dell’arte*, and at the end of the century, the operatic genre (Jacopo Peri’s *Dafne* was performed in 1598, Giulio Caccini’s *Euridice* in 1600, and Claudio Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* in 1607, all on the occasion of the annual Carnival.) The love of narrative and theater could be found, for instance, in Archduke Ferdinand’s (1529–1595) collection in Ambras Castle, which contained numerous paintings and suits of armor, the value of which was, as Elisabeth Scheicher explains, “not from age or aesthetic quality, but rather from association with some memorable event” (Impey and McGregor 1985: 34). This period also saw the growing popularity of groves and grottoes, false waterfalls, and automata. While the rarest of shells might be included in the collection, vast amounts of these were used to adorn these caves and other architectural conceits. (The term “rococo” is said to be from a derivation of *rocaille* or stonework.) This helps to explain how in broader terms many collections were valued according to their oddity, their lack of conformity with the norm. Archduke Ferdinand’s collection also contained, as Scheicher adds, “the largest known bowl of wood, playing cards for giants and dwarfs, and portraits of the crippled and the deformed” (Impey and McGregor 1985: 34). Aberrations and fascinations were de rigueur with the *Wunderkammer*, to the extent that fakes were not uncommon, and no less prized, asking rather large questions about the role of absolute truth in the birth of modern science. The inclusion of anomalies and untruths together with the panoply of examples from the real world is a paradoxical combination whose logistics fall straight into the hands of the philosophical dilemma of science itself, with the opposition between idealists and empiricists, foundationalists and relativists. The symbiosis of fabrication and fact in the theatrical scientism of the *Wunderkammer* is looked at later in this chapter.

Theaters of Order and the Spectacles of Collecting

Among the more influential and defining sources for collecting was Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia*, the earliest manuscripts of which date back to around the eighth century CE, but were made far more common knowledge when it was first published

in Venice in 1469, then again in Parma in 1476, and Venice in 1499 (Pliny 1967: xiii). This was an extensive taxonomy of the natural world, including flora and fauna, bodily movements, geographical formations, and the elements. Its relevance and influence was shaken, however, by the regular introduction of new species of plants and animals from the New Worlds, necessitating wider frames of reference, challenging previous suppositions.

A more contemporary influence on what was collected and how collections were ordered and displayed was the more contemporary Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus (1493–1541). Paracelsus, together with eminent figures such as Erasmus and Tycho Brahe, was another of the early forefathers of early humanism and modern science. It was from Paracelsus that the relation between microcosm and macrocosm was made apparent and introduced systematically, through the synthesis of chemistry and cosmology. As one of the first to use chemicals in medicine, Paracelsus also advanced ideas of hermeticism in which he propounded that the health of the body relied on a balance between the microcosm of Man and the macrocosm of Nature. Although the microcosm–macrocosm relation had had former conceptions and applications, Paracelsus used it to define the body according to chemical balances, disruptions of which resulted in illness or discomfort. Such details, brief as they are, go a long way to help understanding what the spectacle of the *Wunderkammer* meant, for it was not only a measure of the material world but also a way of meditating on human physiology. To be sure there were other more archaic systems that were also brought into play, such as the four elements of earth, fire, air, and water being mirrored by the four humors of sanguine, bile, phlegm, and melancholy. Yet Paracelsus, together with sea trade’s constant reminder that the world was a far bigger place than once believed, gradually disrupted earlier simplifications. The *Wunderkammer*’s place in all of this was therefore not simply passive display but a site of contemplation, experimentation, and study. While contemporary studies of curation propose the idea of the gallery as a laboratory as a particularly contemporary notion, this is in many ways incorrect, as the philosophies underriding the *Wunderkammer* – despite not being cohesive or monolithic – reveal the contrary. The bigger the collection, the more responsibility it demanded not only to the collector and his audience but also to the philosophies that guided and arranged it. Large collections would also expose the difficulties in organization, and thus the constraints and limits of the reason itself, revealing criteria of measurement to be irreducible to empirical data. Laws of scholarship frequently had to find allegiances with judgments of taste. In fact, the history of the *Wunderkammer* underscores the encounter of science with aesthetics.

What is identified as the first major treatise on collecting was the *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi* (in 1565) by the Belgian doctor Samuel von Quiccheberg (1529–1567). That Quiccheberg was a physician is of considerable consequence to the history of the *Wunderkammer*, which is occupied by numerous collectors and curators who had such a profession. For a large part of the basic education of physicians and apothecaries, the early form of pharmacy was based on large amounts of classification of elements and their properties, their causes, and effects. Having attended schools in Ghent, Basel, and Freiburg, in 1550 Quiccheberg enrolled in the Bavarian ducal university of Ingolstadt. Here he became a tutor of Jakob Fugger, who was the son of Anton, who headed a significant banking business and large personal collection that has a key importance to the history of the *Wunderkammer*. In these

years Quiccheberg also wrote his first treatise on ordering systems, a treatise on the use of charts and methods of categorization for medicine. Then, under the supervision of a Nuremberg apothecary, Georg Öllinger, he completed a manuscript rich with illustrations on zoology and medicinal botany. Mark Meadow points out that his contact with the Fugger family and these early tracts would have leave lasting impression on him, defining his interest in taxonomies (Quiccheberg 2013: Introduction). While working as a personal physician to Anton, Quiccheberg's principal role was as librarian, charged with placing the Fugger collection of books, amounting to some 30 000 volumes, into coherent order. But the collection was not solely bibliographic. It included a sizeable amount of exotica, clocks, coins, and works of art, which he also set out to manage. Before the Fugger firm collapsed in 1563, Quiccheberg had already in 1559 transferred to the employ of Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria. It was at this time that he traveled throughout Europe, inspecting the treasures and libraries of the high aristocracy, immersing himself in humanistic knowledge, while purchasing objects for his patron. The result of these efforts would play a large part in the formation of the famous Munich *Kunstammer*.

Given that the Munich collection was not confined to fine art but had more encyclopedic proportions, Quiccheberg gave it the title of *Theatrum* or *Theatrum Sapientiae*, in possible reference to Giulio Camillo's best known work *L'Idée del Teatro* (published posthumously in 1550 and translated as *The Theatre of Memory*). More confined and specialized collections were given the title of *Promptuarium* or *museum* (Impey and McGregor 1985: 86–87). Dating back to Pliny, the habitual separation of things was according to whether they were *naturalia* and *artificialia*, organic or fabricated. Quiccheberg expanded these categories also to include *mirabilia*, *artefacts*, and *scientifica*. In fact, in his *Inscriptiones*, Quiccheberg sketches out five possible classes for ordering objects. The first are the objects belonging or signifying the original collector. These have the status of sacred or secular artifacts, and may include maps, and arms and armor. The second are manufactured, three-dimensional objects, which include sculpture, weights and measures, coins, gold and silver smithing, and even etching plates. The third category draws from the natural world, including taxidermized animals, or other forms of animal replicas, articles of human anatomy, aberrations of nature, stones, minerals, and plants. The fourth are the tools of mediation, such as mathematical or musical instruments, writing implements and other tools related to science, medicine, or engineering. Added to this are foreign weapons, clothing, and hunting equipment. The final class of objects is confined to two-dimensional representations such as paintings and prints, but also carpets, tapestries, and maps. Within this genus are also items of instruction, ranging from diagrams, to tables and charts. Quiccheberg sees the boundaries between the five classes as porous, and emphasizes that, seen as a whole, collections are places of instruction, learning, and invention. He recommends the collection of models of machines that would lead to actual apparatuses that were better and more efficient.

Quiccheberg's description of the Munich *Kammer* in terms of a "theater" is particularly instructive, as it implies that all the objects are self-consciously staged, that is placed in a formal frame or plane for sensory consumption. It places emphasis on the modalities of appearance that are separate from, but relate to, the so-called real world. But like the paradox of the theater, where expressions and their meanings can be grasped as amounting to far more than the quotidian real, so too the *Kunstammer* could encapsulate the world with greater density and profundity than everyday experience.

The next important figure in early histories of collections is Ole Worm, or Olaus Wormius (1588–1654), a Danish professor of medicine who established a private collection of natural objects used for didactic and pedagogical purposes. “He represents,” writes H.D. Schepelern, “an early example of the university teacher who makes use of demonstrative material from his collection for the benefit of students in natural philosophy, as had been the case with Ulisse Aldrovandi in Bologna” (Impey and McGregor 1985: 122). Worm was one of the fathers of embryology, and his collection served himself and his students and is a significant benchmark in the use of preserved specimens in medical schools up until the present day. Published one year posthumously, his *Museum Wormianum* remains his most famous work. Far more than a catalogue, it is a history in four books of both natural and artificial objects, drawing on plants and parts of human anatomy, and works of art. In the tradition that advisors to collecting princes were medical men, his descriptions of objects were frequently accompanied by their descriptions of uses in medicine. After his death, his own collection was absorbed into Frederik III’s *Kunstkammer*. Inventories of the latter reveal that its organization lost the systematicity imposed by Worm to be arranged according to principles that were more historic and aesthetic (Impey and McGregor 1985: 124).

The Earliest Cabinets

Among the many watersheds associated with the Renaissance are authorship and personal space. The question of authorship with regard to artistic achievement and showmanship is well known, for it is from the Renaissance that we get the understanding of the individual artist and creator that we cherish today. Together with the artist, is the patron, the earliest form of curator (noting also that the etymology of the word links it to guardianship, care, and curing), who, when not from the church, mediated between artist, church, and state. In a sense, the rise of authorship took a reciprocal form, as the patrons could also see themselves as having a power and responsibility that was commensurate to the artists whom they commissioned and employed. Patronage and collecting were thus also introduced into the philosophical lineaments of statecraft, and with it the separation of artists from mere artisans. From the fourteenth century onward, it was also the practice of princes to separate themselves from the lower orders, and to hold meetings and meals in a more private space. By the second half of the fifteenth century, many of these spaces had grown to resemble their owners in various ways, including the kinds of objects collected in them. These objects could be signs of the taste and learning of their owner, or could also reflect his esteem in the people inclined to sell or give him things.

The *studiolo* (translated as “study” which in today’s parlance has more prosaic overtones) was one of the earliest of these forms of retreat, as was the *scrittorio*, the place where (significant) writing is performed. As the preserved examples of these clearly reveal, these chambers could be an elaborate and virtuoso affair, the walls consisting of intricate inlay and paneling, and with different types of draws, cabinets, and containers which were filled with more than objects of utility. A *scrittorio* could be for personal use, or a place where scholars and scribes deemed good enough by the lord of the house could conduct their studies in productive peace. A notable example of

these is the *scrittorio* of the great humanist patron, Duke Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482) installed in his palace in Gubbio (1475–1480), which has grilles for storing musical instruments, and weapons and armor. In the words of one of the contemporary authorities on the cabinet of curiosities, Anthony McGregor, “These [chambers] were intended as emblems of the scholarly and martial founder respectively and as references to his role as patron, yet curiously they adumbrate the physical appearance of the actual cabinets that came to be formed by succeeding generations” (McGregor 2007: 13). These were secular places of sanctuary and retreat, where instead of contemplating God one exchanged ideas, thought about the world, and about oneself, and the manners and mores of others. Rather than tracing the tracing the *Kunstkammer* and *Wunderkammer* to a single origin or set of origins, it is better to view its gradual emergence as material manifestation of a larger set of conditions, in which the (modern) ownership of the self-correlated to the creation, gathering and ownership of objects in the world that were correlated to ownership of one’s own imperium and the (colonial) claiming of those belonging to others. Before tracing some of the most important examples of these collections, a short examination of dollhouses and gardens as they evolved from the same period helps to confirm the notion that cabinets of curiosities must be understood across a multiplicity of practices that were contingent on broadly shifting world views.

Other Related Forms: Dollhouses and Gardens

If one pauses to consider the microcosm–macrocosm dynamic invoked so often with regard to the *Wunderkammer*, to cite dollhouses and garden design as affiliated phenomena is entirely understandable, since both are miniaturizations that flow from particular concepts of what the world is or ought to be.

While dollhouses date back to some of the earliest eras of civilization – houses with an array of figures including servants, livestock, and furnishings have been uncovered in Egyptian tombs – the first-known examples in Europe date from the same era as the cabinet of curiosities: the sixteenth century. They would have been congenial to the Mannerist taste for which the cute was never too far from the grotesque. Also, known as “baby houses” and “cabinet houses,” the earliest examples were not intended for children, and they were not considered playthings but rather models or domestic activity, owned by wealthy matrons. While the earliest documented example of a dollhouse comes from 1557, belonging to the *Schatzkammer* of the Duke of Bavaria, their rise in popularity in successive centuries was owing to their being female equivalents of the male collection cabinets (Rijksmuseum 2019a). It is a distinction that is, however, seldom made in the broad spectrum of scholarship on the *Wunderkammer* and the genesis of museums, although it sheds even more light on the way the museum was a vision of world, a small constructed totality. The *Wunderkammer* was an image of the outside world, while the dollhouse was the domestic space, in keeping with tenacious gender paradigms. If they were used by children in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they were for instructional purposes, for “training” as Patricia Storace comments, “the households children and illiterate in arrangement and care of household furnishings, in a period when linens and kitchen utensils were an inventory of expensive treasures. These houses were as maps are to landscapes, the cartography

of interior domestic life.” (Storace 2016: 19) There were occasional male-oriented exceptions to the feminine rule, for instance the Duc de Maine’s *Cabinet du Sublime* (1675), which provided the setting for miniatures of prominent writers of the period, including the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, Mme. de La Fayette, Bossuet, Boileau, and La Fontaine (Storace 2016).

The earliest-surviving dollhouses date back to the end of the seventeenth century, such as the Nuremberg House of 1673, and the Dollhouse of Petronella Dunois (c. 1676). The former is intricate, with details such as pewter tankards in a kitchen equipped with everything for cooking and food preservation. The Petronella Dunois dollhouse, on display at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, was made for its patron when she was about 26. It too has an elaborate kitchen together with storage area, with miniature barriques and jarred preserves. The walls of the dining area, populated with figures in the fashions of the day, are covered in paintings in traditional thick frames. The walls of the bedchamber are covered in richly patterned red Oriental silk. A four-poster bed is covered in the same cloth, opposite which is a mahogany chest supporting, among other things, a midget Chinese blue and white vase. The upstairs salon is similarly decorated with paintings, but this time portrait rondels; the women and children are lovingly clothed in fine lightly covered silks and muslins (Rijksmuseum 2019b).

Just as with dollhouses, gardens have a very long history, yet they were given added attention as a result of global exploration and colonization. Not only were they popular models of the natural world, but many were also outdoor museums of botanical specimens brought from all over the world. There were also various philosophies of what a garden should look like. These were based on understandings of nature, as well as notions of dominion, leadership, and control. It is this conjunction of proto-scientific with models of power that governs one of the first essays on gardening, “Of Gardens,” by Francis Bacon (1597, with successive editions in 1606 and 1612), which accompanied the essay “Of Building.” Both are concerned with the stately Tudor home, or palace. Observations about the ordering of nature had a long history since antiquity, with not only Pliny’s treatise by that of Aristotle’s successor, Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BCE), whose *Enquiry into Plants (Historia Plantarum)* was standard source material for scholars of his time inquiring into the laws of nature.

For Bacon, the garden had several functions, but had to work in concert with the building, or buildings, it complemented. A garden was far more than the organization of plants. It was a positive resource for studying nature. One of Bacon’s earlier dramatic dialogues weighs up the pros and cons of the active and the contemplative life. As Paula Henderson remarks in her essay on Bacon’s garden essay:

One of the speakers, who advocated “the Study of Philosophy”, recommended “the conquest of the works of nature” by creating “a most perfect and general library”, “a spacious, wonderful garden”, “a goodly cabinet”, and “a still-house, so furnished with mills, instruments, furnaces, and vessels, as may be a palace fit for a philosopher’s stone”. Bacon must have been inspired to begin work on the gardens immediately, for two years later Anthony Bacon would write to his brother praising “that wholesome pleasant lodge and finely designed garden.” (Henderson 2008: 74)

The small litany of things requisite to a wholesome and satisfying philosophical life decisively attests to fluid and close connection between the material elements of

learning, that well exceed the collection of books. A garden is named alongside “a goodly cabinet.” Bacon regarded the garden as central to developing his own philosophy of nature. Since ancient times, dating back to ancient Egypt, a guiding factor in designing gardens was, by degrees, mystical, linked to some deity or miracle (Wilkinson 1994: 1–17). But like his near contemporary Worms, Bacon favored an empirical approach that would gain in recognition by later generations of scientists and curators. One aspect of English Renaissance gardening that was congenial to the classificatory taste was its self-conscious partitioning. The gardens of the sixteenth century, as Roy Strong explains, showed a “solid adherence to the compartment system, a series of isolated garden incidents with separate enclosures” (Strong 1999: 4). Strong later asks, “What was the relationship between gardening and the advent of impulses like Baconism Experimentalism which led to the Newtonian mechanistic universe?” (Strong 1999: 8). While there is no firm answer to this, it is hard to deny that gardens shared the same theatrical impulse common to the *Wunderkammer* and to dollhouses, all of which drew attention to humanity’s situatedness in the world.

It took until the eighteenth century for Bacon’s efforts to have their desired effect: well into the seventeenth century the regnant metaphor for the garden was as a Christian sanctuary, an imperfect but consolatory Eden in a post-lapsarian universe (Bartos 2010: 177–193). Founded in 1788, 20 years after that of the Royal Academy of Arts, the Linnean Society of London amassed what is now one of the most extensive herbaria, including the collections of Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) and James Edward Smith (1759–1828) (Edmonson and Smith 1999: 244–252). A leading member of this society was Alexander Macleay (1767–1848). While colonial secretary of New South Wales between 1826 and 1836, his vast estate of Elizabeth Bay became the site for an extensive botanical garden. Macleay was also a leader in entomology, and in particular lepidoptery (the study of moths and butterflies). His unrivaled collection in the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney is now used to identify what might be extinct species.

Between Microcosm and Museum

In 1611, Philipp Hainhofer of Augsburg, himself a collector, visited the *Wunderkammer* of Duke Albrecht V, the collection that Quiccheberg helped to place in order, and what was by then one of the most famous examples of its kind. In his diary, he recorded that

Above the stables [*Marstall*, a special stables in the palaces of the nobility] is the *Kunstkammer* which has to be reached across a small hall and through double doors. Above the inside door hang portraits of several “madmen and women” [in the] front room stands a square, painted table with four sides containing a variety of instruments that are all playable. On a trellis is a wooden tree of paradise with many small wooden animals. (Bessler 2012: 12)

Hainhofer also mentions “a very big tortoise,” “a hydra with seven heads,” “hands,” “feet,” and “snakes” (Bessler 2012). The collections stretched over four rooms with some 6 000 different objects contained in 60 of the cupboard tables mentioned above, and also in chests or affixed to the walls. Although we only have a vague idea

how these things were arranged, the inventory of the period lists masses of coral and other notable sea-related objects, a calf's head, statuettes, books, maps, images of abnormalities, reliefs, plaster copies, ornamental canes, an aurochs' head, "Indian" (i.e. exotic) vessels and textiles, "Indian" weaponry, medallions, boxes made of mother-of-pearl, portrait miniatures of notable people, two glass cases with carved wooden objects, and so on.

While collections such as these are commonly identified as incipient museums, other views are that they represent a more scientific purpose, a material corpus metonymic of the entire world. Gabriele Bessler also suggests that the *Wunderkammern* in their earliest incarnations were ambitious embodiments of optical perspectivism as undertaken by Leon Battista Alberti's famous theory of one-point perspective a century before. The placing of things in space came with a consciousness of the expansion of world space, and the observation of the earthly space, and the heavens. The *Wunderkammer* was also a constant affirmation that the world and all its components was available for interpretation that would bring some satisfaction (Bessler 2012, 14–15). Objects were typically classified according to type, then placed in order of size – large to small, small to large – in a way that echoed a receding perspectival line. She refers to such tableaux as "miniature stages" (*Miniarturbühne*), a notable example of which is the *Korallenkabinett* (cabinet of corals), hailing from Ambras Castle. It exemplifies what Bessler calls the "matryoshka principle of the *Wunderkammer*." The collection evokes an "aquatic world of yesteryear with (by all accounts later added) Christian elements" (Bessler 2012, 15). An early treatise on gardening in German of roughly the same time, Peuchfeldner's *Nützliches Khünstbüch der Gärtnerij*, written for Rudolf II, also avails itself of laws of perspective and geometry (de Jong 2008: 194).

Such cabinets were not only a re-envisioning of the world but an assertion of power. In this regard, it is worth recalling Michel Foucault's famous correlation of order, knowledge, and power in *Les mots et les choses* (1966). An enriched, plentiful, and ordered collection (as well as a flourishing, ordered garden) was a sign of an equally prosperous realm in which everyone and everything knew its proper place within the world. Such presumptions were highly theoretical but also presumptively impractical, yet a compelling image of the state.

This was very much to be the case with the Holy Roman Emperor, also known as the Habsburg Emperor, Rudolf II (1552–1612), who, according to Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "has until recently been regarded as a kind of circus sideshow lacking any organizing principle or orderly display ... The Emperor is supposed to have grown increasingly mad as he spent his days contemplating his strange, secret treasure instead of tending to affairs of state" (DaCosta Kaufmann 1978: 22). As he argues, Rudolf II's collection, housed in the imperial palace in Prague, "like much of the art and public ceremony of his reign, was a form of *representation*, of imperial self-representation" (DaCosta Kaufmann 1978). In contrast to many other collections of the time, the collection was not available for scrutiny or comment, although it was used to welcome diplomats, for the sake of making the political encounter auspicious, or as a way of granting favor. When Duke Christian II of Saxony, himself a notable collector, visited the emperor, the meeting was conducted entirely in viewing the *Kunstkammer*: "Rudolf seems to have spoken in and through" it (DaCosta Kaufmann 1978).

Rudolf's collection, with its vast assortment of items, included coveted instruments and clocks, and masterpieces by Dürer, Brueghel the Elder, Raphael, Titian, and

Correggio. Rudolf himself was even subject of one of the great curiosities of paintings itself: a portrait by Arcimboldo, *Rudolf as Vertumnus* (c. 1590), where the monarch is configured as a decorative aggregate of all manner of flora, the sum of all the seasons (DaCosta Kaufmann 1985: 117–123). In sum, it was deemed the greatest collection of its time. Thus, as Kaufman observes, “In an age of princely collectors, Rudolf had a *Kunstammer* that was worthy of his rank as Holy Roman Emperor, as first among European rulers: he was first among collectors” (DaCosta Kaufmann 1985: 23). It was ordered in a way similar to that described and devised by Quiccheberg, and, again, according to the favored topoi of microcosm and macrocosm, yet the extent to which Rudolf’s *Kunstammer* was to be a theater of the world or something altogether more mystical is unclear. Nonetheless, the metaphor of the theater of the world does have a strong magical ring, and in the age of alchemy, it also suggests that such collections were not just passive but had the possibility to change the world outside them.

Rudolf and his vast and rich collection were exemplary in this regard. Although schooled in Spain with a strict Catholic education, Rudolf’s court observed an unusual degree of religious tolerance for that period of European history. As well as being the chief patron and curator, he himself was active in many of the experiments conducted within the closed confines of his courtly *Wunderkammer*-cum-laboratory. Scholars wishing to enter into his circle were expected to pass a series of tests and examinations to prove their worthiness and to weed out imposters. While we may not know in detail all that transpired in the heyday of Rudolf’s intellectual circle, we do know that science and the occult, alchemy, and chemistry were closely intertwined. Tycho Brahe was a member of Rudolf’s court, who then invited Kepler. But while the likes of Brahe and Kepler are cited as fathers of the objective sciences we know today, they operated within an intellectual climate that sought to unify the diversities, and hence irregularities, of all the manifestations of life. Among the most jealously guarded pursuits of this time were the alchemical searches into precious metals, the secret of life, and the desire to breathe life into the inanimate (Orus 2011). The need to animate life made inventing mechanical instruments a popular undertaking. Overall, the impetus behind Rudolf’s myriad objects, while typically a symbol of himself as an educated and wealthy ruler, can only be comprehended together with more holistic philosophical ambitions, that is the need to bring a fractured universe into a taxonomically coherent microcosm; or microcosms: for as the collection grew so the narrative threads began to disperse, despite efforts to rein them in. Often, particular virtues or properties were attributed to different materials in the collection, such that objects could serve more than one function, and therefore constitute more than one meaning. They were not isolated to things for passive contemplation but examples of mobile and causal phenomena, metonymic of relationships of both mythic and natural orders, and perhaps even intangible essences underlying material appearances. It comes as no surprise, then, that together with the first *Wunderkammern* came the first atlases, maps of the world. Working from Ptolemy’s travel narratives, maps of the Americas were devised in 1507 by Martin Waldseemüller, Matthias Ringmann and fellow canons of Saint-Dié, near Strasbourg. In 1544, Sebastian Münster devised his comprehensive *Cosmographia*, a plan of the cosmos. In these ambitious forays into mapping the world, the mystical met with the mercantile, evincing what Christine Johnson calls the “commercial gaze,” a new age of trade, travel, finance, and commodity exchange (Johnson 2008: 121).

Rudolf's collection and those of his Habsburg contemporaries were, furthermore, examples of the perception that all things were interconnected, that the study of things could only be competently undertaken in the presence of other things to compare and group, and also that the matter and phenomena of the world had to be apprehended on numerous levels. These *Wunderkammern* thus served to feed the interest in what Jan Westerhoff theorizes as "pansemioticism," the idea that every object has some corresponding signification in another object. An object of phenomenon can be only imperfectly studied when in isolation. "It is necessary to know what else this phenomenon signifies: its place in mythology, art and poetry, its moral signification, its astronomical, mystical, numerological, linguistic, and religious meaning etc." (Westerhoff 2001: 641). Despite the earliest collections being shaped according to the predispositions of the collectors themselves, their distribution and arrangement "was rather an order which arranged things in such a way that they could communicate with one another, thus making their hidden interrelations visible" (Westerhoff 2001: 645).

The House of Fugger

It is safe to argue that the first treatise penned on collections, by Quiccheberg, was both inspired and facilitated by one of the most coruscating collections in Europe. His first patron, Hans Jakob Fugger (1516–1557), was among the most wealthy and influential financiers of the latter half of the sixteenth century, and one of the most influential figures in the conception of the *Wunderkammer*. The House of Fugger, as it was known, lent money and traded goods from all around the discovered world, especially India. The range of things was immense, from monkeys, wild cats, and peacocks, to gemstones, animal skins, and dyes. In lending money, they would keep a site such as a mine as insurance, and keep it if the debtor failed to pay on time. As a result, the Fuggers in their heyday amassed an enormous fortune, a good part of which was funneled into their own collection, when not supplying the collections of others. The most important client and patron was the Holy Roman emperor Charles V, and it was their close commerce with the Habsburgs that also eventuated the family's ruin, because of ill-secured loans and a string of defaults until the end of the sixteenth century. Hans Jakob Fugger then retired from the family business to serve Albrecht V of Bavaria, to preside over his immense collection as court librarian.

In any case, Hans Jakob Fugger was perhaps better suited to this new appointment as he was an immensely learned and inquisitive man. He commissioned scholars for treatises, and employed a number of curators including not only Quiccheberg but also Hieronymus Wolf (1516–1580) and Jacopo Strada (1507–1588). Strada was a polymath whose interests and expertise included goldsmithing, painting, and machine-making. His likeness is preserved by Titian, who in 1567 painted Strada magnificently attired in furs and silks handling a statuette, a reference no doubt to his organization of the *Antiquarium* of Roman statuary for the duke's residence in Munich. While in the employ of Fugger, Strada assembled a record of coats of arms of the Italian nobility, which rose to 15 volumes. He also made a comprehensive collection and drawings of ancient coins that amounted to a 30-volume catalog. In 1556, he was made keeper of the Imperial *Schatzkammer* in Vienna. But it was ultimately to Fugger

that the likes of Strada and Quiccheberg owed their reputations. Although Albrecht's collection had been amassed well before Fugger's arrival, it was under his stewardship that it underwent a massive transformation. As Mark Meadow relates: "the more famous collections of Maximilian in Vienna and Rudolf II in Prague are conceptually related to those of Munich" (Smith and Findlen 2002: 192–193).

Two other points are worth emphasizing here. The first is that Fugger firmly established the collection as a confluence of learning. Like the collections of Rudolf and Maximilian, it sought to entice leading minds toward it, and to serve as much more than a mass of matter, and far more as the raw material for further discovery. This leads us back not only to the broader notion of the museum as laboratory but also to the longstanding role that collections would have in universities and other institutions of learning. "The *Wunderkammern*," as Meadow remarks, "served also as repositories for intellectual capital, functioning in a not dissimilar way to universities and their collections today. Antiquities and numismatic collections were fundamental resources for the study of the histories, languages and cultures of the ancient world" (Smith and Findlen 2002: 193–194). Moreover, as he goes on to state, "We can even think of the *Wunderkammern* as assemblages of examples of local and exotic raw materials and processes; there is for instance a consistent interest in mining to be found in these collections—think back to the origins of the Fugger wealth" (Smith and Findlen 2002: 194). The primacy given to research, instruction, and new knowledge in earliest collections also helps to explain the rationale behind acquisition that is still with us today. Namely, that aside from chance acquisitions due to benefaction or donation, the decisions as to what a museum collects and what it does not collect is largely dependent on how the prospective object, work of art, document, or whatever artifact will shed more light on what already is being kept. So, understood, collections are multilayered systems, expanding (or contracting) in an uneven way, based on both chance and rational decision-making. The second point is that many of these collections were placed in the hands of the nation, as the inalienable property of the state, a safeguard and symbol of its wealth and its depth of culture. The German adjective *gut* when used as a noun (*Gut*) denotes property, merchandise, an estate, wares, or commodities. The national *Gut* is national property, but also what exists for the good of the state: the state's welfare, its benefit.

Fact and Fabrication in Early Museums

One of Albrecht's more famous bequests to the imperial *Gut* was a narwhal tusk. Like the armadillo or the platypus, the narwhal is one of those animals that does appear to have arrived from some separate world of fantasy. Such animals were not only popular tokens to *Wunderkammern*. They were also prototypes for still more fantastic creatures that were fabricated specially for display. As we have seen already, by the sixteenth century collecting had become a major source of commercial interest. "It produced," as Paula Findlen states, "a world of entrepreneurs who saw nature in new ways because of the culture of collecting" (Smith and Findlen 2002: 299). The new and specializing consumption of nature was according to a variety of criteria, high among them being medicinal. The effectiveness of many cures was predicated upon the exotic, rare, and therefore expensiveness of the ingredients (Smith and Findlen 2002: 301–302).

But the conceits and liberties attributed to medicine were nothing on the embellishments on the natural world. As Findlen explains:

The spoils of Christian conquest included a kind of mythologized conquest of nature: Egyptian crocodiles, ostrich eggs, alleged unicorn's horns, griffin's claws, and other examples of exotic nature, real and imagined, began to appear in churches and treasuries throughout western Europe. While not as prized as sanctified relics, such objects reflected a growing interest in the fantastic parts of nature described in medieval bestiaries and other Christian allegories of nature that privileged certain animals as harbingers of God's will. The basilisks, griffins, and dragons found in the Bible and in such works as Pliny's *Natural History* became more than paper fantasies of natural omens. Increasingly, they were actual objects created to satisfy the taste for such curiosities. (Smith and Findlen 2002: 302)

Such observations help us to grasp that the cabinet of curiosities, the repository of interesting things, did not simply and innocently hold up a mirror to the splendor of the world, but just as much satisfied the need to believe that there was indeed splendor to the world. In other words, it served a reciprocal relation, of showing the world's variation, while also being assurance that there were more things on heaven and earth than are in a single man's philosophy. Pliny's *Natural History*, for instance, was full of speculation and invention, and it seemed only right that such fancies be appropriated.

This meant that in the cabinets of *naturalia* there were frequently creatures that were all but natural, but fabricated amalgams from a number of actual animals. The most popular animals were hydras and basilisks. To give the semblance of being genuine meant a considerable amount of skill, but at the same time the fraudulence did not necessarily warn collectors away, quite the contrary, for good fakes were also highly prized. If not feats of mendacious taxidermy, truncated parts of animals were willingly subjected to false attribution. The most common was the narwhal's horn being said to belong to a unicorn. Other reinterpretations included a griffin's claw, which was just an ox or bison's horn (Smith and Findlen 2002: 308). When not re-envisioning nature, fantasy creatures found their way into decorative objects such as jeweled cases and boxes, or other effects such as Dürer's dragon chandelier designed in Nuremberg in which a stag's antlers were repurposed for wings (Smith and Findlen 2002: 311). Despite the implausibility of such creatures, and the growing amount of hard evidence to support their non-existence, their popularity would continue, in much the same way that today's popular culture has a rich industry of dragon and medievalizing narratives that show no sign of decline.

As well as the appeal of fantasy, to keep monstrous objects – whether made up or aberrations of nature such as Isabella de'Este's two-bodied puppy – was also a reminder, since the word “monster” derives from the Latin *monere*, “to warn.” As Westerhoff remarks, freaks and grotesqueries were incidents “of God's wrath about the sins of the world and of His mercy in being a sign to grant the sinners a last chance of repentance” (Westerhoff 2001: 648). Different abnormalities corresponded to different kinds of sinning. These oddities were literally things that did not fit in the universe, their monstrosity being their inherent dislocation from the otherwise smooth continuities of nature and the universe.

The Fantasies of Collecting and Living

The *Wunderkammer's* life reached its height by the middle of the seventeenth century. Across Europe, and even through to Russia, it was a convenient and materially traceable way of displaying real and abstract notions of prestige and power. Its fate dwindled by the ever-increasing influx of items, and the growing interest in discrete collections of art, both of which had a fracturing effect on collections. This led, by the mid-eighteenth century, to a separation between collections of natural and fabricated artifacts, just as disciplines became more specialized. This also betokened more diverse ways of observation: the experience one has in a natural history museum is different from an art gallery, although the former does still allow for abstract and aesthetic contemplation. For although Johann Joachim Winckelmann has been attributed as the father of art history, with putatively the first book to have the words “art” and “history” together for the first time (*Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, 1764), there did nonetheless exist texts that treated art in a historical way, such as Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie* (1675–1679) (DaCosta Kaufmann 2001: 523–541) suggesting that already art was being considered as a separate entity for study, and by extension something to be collected and displayed separately as well.

The slow transformation from the *Wunderkammer* to the museum that occurred in the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century was symptomatic of the transformations in individual power and agency, as well as the evolving conceptions of historical periodicity. Until the mid-eighteenth century, as Louis Cellauro makes clear,

As in antiquity, the word *musaeum* was used from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century exclusively for places which were destined for concerts and poetic declamations, or for solitary studies, in other words, those which included *studioli*, libraries or humanists' salons. Each of these particular rooms itself could also be referred to as a *musaeum*. As early as 1476 this Latin word was applied to Federico da Montefeltro's *studiolo* in Urbino, and in 1596 to that of Cardinal Cesi in Rome. In 1612 the Accademici della Crusca stated in their significant dictionary that the Italian counterpart of the Latin *musaeum* is studio. The term must have already been Italianized, however, by 1664, when Gian Pietro Bellori published his work on museums and interchangeably used the words *museo* and *studio* for rooms containing collections. (Cellauro 2012: 96)

The modern museum was fundamentally a break from the collections that centered around the liege and patron toward an organization that obeyed mutually held, consensual, and therefore more democratic principles of organization.

It is this difference that also allowed collections in the eighteenth century until the present to differentiate between those that were meant to express a more universal, or national character, and others that were portraits of individuals. Two such notable examples in the eighteenth century were in Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Much has been written on Walpole but less on Jefferson, who in his career amassed a varied collection that was worthy of a rounded, erudite gentleman. On a number of occasions, he referred to his personal cabinet as his “Indian Hall.” As Joyce Robinson affirms, “Ultimately, the conceptual framework of the Indian hall is informed by Jefferson's belief in the order and harmony inherent in the world of nature and his faith in America's vital potential” (Henri Robinson 1995: 44).

It was also a working model for Jefferson's vision of America, an eclectic mixture of sources, where he hoped that eventually the erstwhile Europeans and the Native Americans would eventually intermix. Its contents were meant to exemplify the civilizing potential that, he believed, would be the Indigenous peoples' savior (Henri Robinson 1995: 58).

As dubious as such sentiments may seem to us now, the positive dimension to be drawn from such ideas is the meaning and relevance that these personal collections had for their owners. They were at once recreations of themselves, their inner and outer character, with the matter of the world, as well as being a vision of the world and cosmos itself. They were invested with extraordinary power and ambition with talismanic force that reached well beyond the things themselves. As Carla Yanni writes: "Cabinets of curiosities fulfilled many functions: the display of personal power, good taste, the advancement of prestige, the establishment of self-identity. But ... the mysterious objects held a more important epistemological value, by suggesting a cryptical [sic] and powerful way of knowing" (Yanni 1999: 16–17). Things in them were all material evidence, alibis to the fact that so much of the world and etiology is beyond our ken, yet worthy of further study and consideration.

If we cease taking for granted words like *curiosity* and *wonder*, the more scrutinized, less habitual sense of them may help us to reinvigorate what is often lacking in contemporary curating, which pays great lip service to social expectation, to commercialization, and to fashion. Yet while curiosity and wonder may court their own range of subterfuges, sentimentalities, and cheap tricks, they also point to a space of experimentation and adventure that affords refreshed perception of the world that can be as salutary as it may be surprising, or as with hidden truths, unwelcome.

Notes

- 1 Lunsingh Scheurleer also affirms that "In the seventeenth century, with its ever closer ties between the eastern and Western worlds, the exotic element achieved a more and more prominent place in Dutch collections. The objects concerned hailed mostly from Asia and South America; those from Asia consisted primarily of Chinese and Japanese porcelain and lacquerwork, those from South America of various articles of dress made of multi-coloured feathers. The dwellings of the Stadtholder Frederick Henry and his spouse Amalia van Solms reflect this development to a considerable extent. They possessed extensive collections of curiously wrought items of rock-crystal, cernelian, and jasper mounted in gold, and of amber, ivory and mother-of-pearl. The collection was clearly conceived as a *Schatzkammer*, but its *exotica* certainly exceeded in number and variety what was usually found in other European countries. "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities" in Oliver Impey and Arthur McGregor (eds.), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, 117.

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Professionalizing the Field

The Case of the United States¹

Andrew McClellan

On either side of the Atlantic in the decades just before and after 1900, the management of art museums passed from the hands of artists and amateurs to professionally trained staff, led at the top by curators and directors. The transition participated in the broader trend of professional specialization and credentialing encompassing the fields of law, medicine, business, academia, and many others. But it also stemmed from specific demands, in response to industrial modernization and the growth of cities, that museums of all sorts become more *useful* to society. Sponsoring nations and civic bodies looked to museums to educate, socialize, and soothe an amorphous and potentially restive urban public.

At the heart of the challenge lay the need for a common grasp of means and ends and standardized practice – in a word, the need for professionalization. In 1883, the British economist William Stanley Jevons bemoaned the absence of literature devoted to “general principles of management and economy of museums” and suggested that museums follow the lead of librarians by forming an association to define best practices in everything from building design and classification of contents to public service and employee salaries (Jevons 1883). Five years later, Thomas Greenwood, concluding a comprehensive survey of museums in the United Kingdom, echoed the call for coordination and systemization (Greenwood 1888). Across the Atlantic in the 1890s, George Brown Goode, director of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, declared that museum work should be acknowledged as a profession and pressed the urgent need for the “codification of the accepted principles of museum administration” (Goode 1895: 3).

The pace of professionalization varied by country, and criteria differed by field. However, by the late nineteenth century there was broad consensus that museums needed to simplify displays and the labeling of objects and improve circulation,

lighting, and space – all in order to mitigate visual fatigue and assist the general public. The prevailing view of museums as repositories of accumulated specimens catering primarily to the learned greatly limited their potential as social institutions. Command of museological conventions was added to field expertise as curatorial requisites. In the case of art and archaeology museums, field expertise meant object knowledge, or connoisseurship – the assessment of attribution, authenticity, quality, and condition. Government oversight and informal networks of curators and agents ensured a gradual uniformity of standards and practices, leading to the establishment of museum associations (Britain, 1889; United States, 1906; Germany, 1917) and professional journals. The international and interdisciplinary dimension of museum work was recognized with the creation of the International Museums Office (IMO) under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1926. The IMO became the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1946.

Wanted: Museum Directors

If standards for collecting and museum work migrated seamlessly from Europe to the United States, the museum landscape in which they took root in the new world was utterly different. Whereas the major European art museums developed from princely and aristocratic collections under the centralized authority of the state and watchful eye of established art academies, the museum movement in the United States (with the exception of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC) relied on untutored local initiative and private sources for operating funds and works of art. Financiers and industrialists drawn to collecting art were eager to be likened to old world nobility while demonstrating their commitment to American ideals of merit and opportunity to which they owed their fortunes; this they accomplished by aping the tastes of European aristocrats in their collecting habits but eventually donating the art they purchased, and often generous financial gifts besides, to museums for the good of all. For Protestant elites, the patronage of museums constituted what Max Weber identified as a rational use of wealth. Private collecting was made socially acceptable, not to say meritorious, when those collections passed to museums to be shared with fellow citizens. To the social distinction of owning great art was added the honor accorded to public benefactors. Public and private interests were brought in line. Museums joined with private collectors to fight tariffs and taxes on imported art (lifted in 1909) and support monetary donations to museums on grounds of art's educational potential. Tax concessions for gifts of art and money have been justified on this basis ever since. And in the case of art museums, the division of material support, with the rich paying for objects and buildings on one side, and public funds and seed grants from foundations propping up public services on the other, had consequences for the development of curatorial training.

The rapid formation and donation of private art collections, together with the mounting ambition of cities to proclaim their status as centers of culture, propelled the museum boom in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Statistics tell the story of mushrooming growth across the country. Between 1910 and the publication of Laurence Vail Coleman's comprehensive survey *The Museum in America* in 1939, the number of museums increased fourfold from 600 to 2500. Coleman boasted that the United States now had "perhaps a quarter ... of

the world's museums, some comparing favorably with the great museums abroad" (Coleman 1939: vol. 1, 18).

Investment in buildings increased from \$36 million to \$180 million and operating income from \$2 million to \$18 million. Aggregate attendance stood at 50 million, double what it had been in 1930. Museum memberships also burgeoned; at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art membership rose from 600 to 250 000 between 1873, when the program started, and 1930. Coleman was not alone in touting growth over the years. In a study completed for the Carnegie Corporation in 1932, Paul Rea celebrated the "vitality of this museum movement" evidenced by "its geographical spread throughout the country, its growth in numbers, in size and quality, in financial resources, and in attendance by the public" (Rea 1932: 4). Expansion was broad based, but both Coleman and Rea noted the special success of art museums, owing to the support of wealthy patrons. In 1910, three of the four museums with endowments surpassing \$1 million were art museums (Proceedings 1916: 10). In 1923, the American Art Dealers Association estimated that Americans were spending \$250 million a year on art, much of the best of it destined one day for a museum (Schwarzer 2006). Fueling rising attendance at art museums was a parallel expansion of higher education in the fine arts. In 1876, only seven colleges offered courses in art history or appreciation; by 1930, virtually every accredited institution did so (DiMaggio 1991).

Keeping score on such fronts points to a competitive drive shared by critics, collectors, and civic boosters to give the United States a cultural profile befitting its rising status as an economic and political power. The journal *Art and Progress* noted in 1913: "As a country develops, it ... gives more and more heed to art ... So with towns and cities ... The development of art museums throughout our land is a distinct mark of progress" (Art and Progress 1913). Measures to protect European (and also Asian) artistic heritage from the voracious appetites of American collectors did little to contain the flow of paintings, decorative arts, and architectural fragments to the mansions and museums of the new world.

The pace and scale of acquisition became a challenge at the receiving end as well, however. As Neil Harris observes: "Within a generation, American collectors and the museums they stocked had grown from the weak and dependent children of European parents to so concentrated a level of wealth that plenitude was itself a problem" (Harris 1990: 268–69). What celebratory statistics do not reveal was the shortage of personnel to meet burgeoning institutional growth. As early as 1907 a letter to the *Nation* beseeched industrialists to cease museum building until a trained workforce could be put in place (Schwarzer 2006: 173). The establishment of new museums and expansion of existing institutions increased the need for a widening spectrum of staff – directors, curators in different fields, educators, business managers, registrars, librarians, and eventually conservators. The lack of leadership was of greatest concern. In 1910, the journal *Art and Progress* published the article "Wanted: Museum directors" lamenting the "scarcity of trained men in this country." "Museums are being rapidly multiplied," it continued. "Before many years the demand for capable art directors will be incalculably increased and already men should be in training for these positions" (Art and Progress 1910). Until that time American museums had relied on artists or experienced hands imported from Europe, but the former often lacked managerial and connoisseurial skills, while the latter were in short supply and rarely stayed for long.

The need to create a pipeline of homegrown museum professionals was a key point of discussion at annual meetings of the American Association of Museums (AAM) following its inauguration in 1906. An early response to perceived need was a course for aspiring curators opened in 1908 by Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson as a collaborative venture between the Pennsylvania Museum and Philadelphia's School of Industrial Art (later both incorporated as the Philadelphia Museum of Art). Students attended lectures on museum history, toured and critiqued local museums, and engaged in practical work at the Pennsylvania Museum. Stevenson told a gathering of the AAM that only a few of the 11 students who enrolled in the first year had ideas of doing museum work, yet she would continue the course convinced "the time has come when the go-as-you-please method of museum building and museum administration must settle down to something less vague, less whimsical, and more definite" (Proceedings 1909: 119).

Her talk prompted a roundtable discussion on "Training of Curators" at the 1910 annual AAM meeting, at which time Dr. A.R. Crook from the Illinois State Museum of Natural History presented results of a survey of a dozen senior museum leaders seeking to define ideal qualifications for "the position of director or curator of a museum." He had undertaken the survey on his own having encountered a disturbing level of ignorance about museum work among "successful professional men, governors of states, presidents of universities, members of scientific faculties ... and even trustees of museums." In addition to basic requirements – a college degree, field specialization, languages, experience, an ability to solicit funds – the directors surveyed also expected candidates to have knowledge of the top museums and scholarly journals, recent trends in museum development, and the difference between museum scholarship and education; grasp of criteria for an effective building, display cases, room colors and furnishings, the principles of labeling, classification, and cataloguing; and informed opinions about museum libraries and publications. To all this the director-curator should also possess a "genial personality and good address, and of course unquestioned character. It is also desirable that he be of good family connections, in other words he should be able to meet in a proper way, to interest and to please persons of wealth and importance who may visit the museum or be inclined to lend their aid to its development." He (and the assumption was it would be a "he") must finally have "executive ability" and a "certain amount of diplomacy" (Proceedings 1910: 59–63). The president of the AAM, Frederic Lewis from the Brooklyn Museum, responded to Crook's findings with the opinion that formal training was pointless for "the curator is born and not made. I do not believe you can train a man to be a curator. He is the result of the combination of natural ability and circumstances" (Proceedings 1910: 64). Another colleague quipped that Crook's list of desiderata amounted to "as near omniscience as it is given mortal man to attain, coupled with all the virtues and graces that have ever been catalogued" and thought no training system could possibly equal the task (Proceedings 1912: 81).

Such skepticism notwithstanding, the call for training continued. In 1914, Benjamin Ives Gilman, secretary of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston delivered the presidential address to the AAM on "The Day of the Expert." Gilman believed growing responsibilities in museums had to be coupled with increased curatorial authority, power, and expertise. The correlation of duty and authority was the "foundation principle with which any study of the corporate sphere of the expert must begin" (Gilman 1914). What the country needed in every field, including museums, were "aristocracies of

demonstrated ability” and “specialists in all branches.” Just as “only a surgeon [knows] how to conduct an operation in tracheotomy ... only a curator [knows] how to install an ecological exhibit or make a collection of prints tell on the public.”

Compounding obstacles to professional development was the lack of communication. “There is no medium for the exchange of ideas other than the meetings of this Association,” remarked Paul Rea at the annual gathering in 1916 (Rea 1916: 11–12). “We need a regular museum journal and need it at once. Only the merest beginning has been made in offering training for museum work. Standards of museum practice have not been established ... Nowhere can the authorities of a museum draw from a common fund of experience and expert knowledge ... This is an age of specialized organization.”

Rea’s speech led to agreement on two resolutions: first, the AAM would publish a journal as a “forum for discussion of the principles and problems of museum organization and management” (Rea 1916: 19). The first issue of *Museum Work* (soon renamed *Museum News*) appeared the following year. Second, a committee consisting of Edith Abbot, a distinguished educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Earle Rowe, director of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum; and Benjamin Gilman, from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston was appointed to research training for art museum workers. The committee presented its report at the annual meeting in 1917. Three areas of museum work were identified: administration, curatorial, and education; training should cover all three. The committee determined that administration required business and social skills; education required sensitivity to community needs and a sense of “public endeavor” on top of teaching experience and familiarity with original works of art; curators, whose priority is acquisitions, needed above all “an unerring sense of ‘quality,’ in estimating a work of art” as well as familiarity with the market. All art museum staff should have knowledge of the history of art, museum ethics, and foreign languages; an ability to write and speak clearly and “extensive European travel.” Of benefit would be the “opportunity to deal with objects in their original setting” through “archaeological field work and the intensive study of later periods.”

It was assumed specialized training for such work would happen at the graduate level as a supplement to a solid college education. As to where such training could be pursued, the committee issued what must have seemed to many an unlikely and impractical recommendation: “Opportunity for graduate work along these lines may be enjoyed in such foreign schools as those of [the American Schools of] Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem.” Subsequent instruction from a “specialist in matters related to museum practice and administration” should be pursued, similar to what could be found in German museums. The committee regretted that no college or museum closer to home was equipped to offer adequate training or poised to collaborate. “When the college and the art museum work in conjunction and the former comes to realize that in the latter is found a true laboratory for art and history, then much may be done along the suggested lines” (Proceedings 1917: 13–17).

Meanwhile, the question of museum education entered the discussion. What qualified as education varied from one institution to the next and there were no standards of preparation. In 1918, a curator from the American Museum of Natural History opined that no special preparation was needed; this triggered fierce disagreement from a number of women who had risen to the top of the field – education being the one field of museum work women were encouraged to enter. Alice Kendall, from the

Newark Museum, argued that teaching in galleries with objects and diverse visitors was quite different from being a schoolteacher and that the museum instructor must be “technically expert, just as other members of the museum staff are technically expert in their various fields” (*Museum Work* 1918: 116). Training needed to be pursued under supervision in a museum setting.

How and where to train museum workers remained a constant agenda item at AAM meetings in the years that followed. An editorial entitled “Making Museumists” appeared in the association’s journal *Museum Work* at the start of 1924. Rejecting the idea that curators are born, not made, it asserted:

What the museum profession needs is a good training school – or several of them. We must increase our manpower. A wave of development has begun. Hundreds of new museums have come into being. Branches will be created. Already established museums will grow at an accelerated rate. Unless the output of trained museum workers is increased greatly – very greatly – within the decade, then the museums of the future are going to travel paths which we would not wish. (*Museum Work* 1924: 162)

The call to action finally produced concrete steps in the following year. In March 1925, the Newark Museum announced the creation of a “new school for museum workers.” Guided by Alice Kendall and the museum’s founder, John Cotton Dana, the curriculum would be “practical in the extreme” and expose students to the various departments and functions of a museum. It would equip them not with “expertise in any field of art or science,” but rather for “actual practice in making the contents of a museum interesting and, above all, helpful to the community that supports it” (*Museum News* 1925: 1, 3). Applicants had to be under 30 years old, hold a college degree, and possess good communication skills, general ability, and “good personal presence.” Fledgling initiatives also began at the Charleston Museum in South Carolina under Laura Bragg and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Of these, only the Newark program flourished. Little more than a decade after graduating its first crop of students, Coleman underscored its success in his survey of 1939: “The Newark Museum’s apprentice course has trained workers for so many museums that more than 40 of its former students were counted at a recent annual meeting of the American Association of Museums” (Coleman 1939: 2, 420). As Kendall’s comment makes clear, the Newark program was best known for producing educators, almost entirely female, serving all types of museum. The challenge of training specialized curators fell to the other program singled out by Coleman: the “Museum Course” run by Paul Sachs at Harvard’s Fogg Museum. Given its dominant role in the training of art museum curators, the remainder of this essay will focus on the Harvard program and its impact.

Paul Sachs and the Museum Course at Harvard

Paul J. Sachs was the scion of the Wall Street banking family that joined with the Goldman family to create the firm Goldman, Sachs & Co. Educated at Harvard and destined for a career in finance, Paul Sachs sought diversion in collecting art and committee service to the Fogg Museum at his alma mater. In 1915, at the age of 36,

Sachs left the family firm to take the unpaid position of assistant director at the Harvard museum, a decision questioned by many around him but which neither he nor Harvard was ever to regret. The invitation extended to Sachs by the museum's patrician director, Edward Waldo Forbes, was as shrewd as it was bold. The Fogg Museum, though only 20 years old, was already in need of a major overhaul and a new strategic vision. American museums, together with the art market, were on the rise, and Forbes seized an opportunity to link the fortunes of Harvard's museum to broader currents. Money, business, and ambitious private collecting were at the heart of America's nascent museum boom, and Forbes saw in Sachs and his network in New York a channel to those vital forces. The example of J.P. Morgan, Benjamin Altman, and others had turned perceptions of crass American materialism on their head, for here were plutocrats dedicating their vast accumulated wealth to the cultural uplift of their fellow citizens. The bankers and businessmen in Sachs's circle could bring this tremendous financial clout to the Fogg Museum. In return, they would receive the transcendent prestige of affiliation with America's top university. Sachs, for his part, had grown bored with banking and jumped at the chance to pursue his lifelong interest in art and to put his executive skills and experience to more creative use. The move paid huge dividends to Harvard and, eventually, to art museums in the United States. Together with Forbes, Sachs rebuilt the Fogg Museum as a model university museum, amassed a formidable collection of art, and used both to pioneer an influential object-based approach to teaching art history and museology. He repaid his gratitude for a fulfilling second career by leaving Harvard all he owned, including a collection of 4700 works of art. No less important, however, is what Sachs gave to the art world beyond Harvard: the legacy of his museum training program and the hundreds of students who laid the foundation of principled leadership that underpins American art museums into the present.

When Sachs moved to Harvard he was well aware of the growing void in qualified museum personnel. He recalled in his memoirs: "As a private collector before coming to Harvard, I had observed that priceless works of art from Europe and Asia gravitated first into private hands and then, through gift or bequest, entered into the public domain. The stream was sure to swell after World War I. Their proper handling and interpretation would enlist the trained intelligence of experts, of whom, up until that time, our universities had produced too few of international stature" (Sachs 1954: vol. 2, 1). Precisely when he and Forbes hatched the idea of using the Harvard Museum as a base for museum training is unclear but less than a year after arriving in Cambridge Sachs wrote in the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*: "in every prosperous municipality in the land, in the next ten years, the call is likely to come for thoroughly equipped curators and directors. Harvard must maintain its leadership in this new profession, the dignity of which is as yet imperfectly understood" (Sachs 1916: 424). In the following year Forbes revealed that Harvard was already receiving "applications from museum and university officials asking for trained men" (Forbes 1917: 6).

Harvard was well positioned to offer art museum training, boasting an art and archaeology faculty known for object-based emphasis as well as an established infrastructure for professional courses at the post-baccalaureate level in business, law, medicine, education, and more. Indeed, Harvard's preeminent status as a university depended in good part on colonizing the professions through superior graduate programs.

Developing the museum course took time, however. Sachs and Forbes both served abroad in the Red Cross in the last years of World War I. In the early 1920s, replacing the outmoded original museum, built in 1895, with a new one became their top priority.

Fundraising literature promoted the concept of a new Fogg Museum as a “laboratory” for the empirical study of art objects embedded within a research university. Art history as an academic discipline was still in its infancy in the United States and the museum’s directors were keen to give its practice at Harvard a practical, forward-looking profile in the field. The laboratory had gained broad purchase at universities as a site and metaphor of a new and progressive model of mental training dependent on open inquiry rather than canonical texts (Jones 1985; Reuben 1996). Professional development was a key component of the fundraising campaign. The *Museum News* announced in 1924 that transformative grants from the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations were earmarked “especially [for] the professional training of graduate students to serve as museum curators, critics and teachers of the fine arts” (*Museum News* 1924: 1). Sachs and Forbes invited a young Harvard-trained architect, Meyric Rogers, to collaborate on blueprints for the new building, producing an innovative museum type designed from the inside out for maximum service and integrated learning. In addition to simple exhibition galleries, the new Fogg included studios for technical work and conservation, object study rooms, open storage, book and photograph libraries, classrooms, a lecture theater, and offices for curators and faculty.

Sachs gave dry runs of his course, formally titled “Museum Work and Museum Problems” but known simply as the “Museum Course,” several times in the 1920s but it wasn’t until the new Fogg opened in 1927 that the class gained stability and momentum. The crop of graduates that year featured a remarkable constellation of future art world leaders: museum directors Alfred H. Barr Jr, Arthur Everett “Chick” Austin Jr, Jere Abbott, James Rorimer, and Walter Siple, the dealer Kirk Askew, and architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock. The decade that followed witnessed the foundation of Harvard’s reputation as the “cradle for museum men,” as described later by Agnes Mongan (Mongan 1945).

After several dry runs beginning in 1921, Sachs offered the Museum Course every year from 1927 to his retirement in 1948 (with one sabbatical break in 1932–33). The two-semester course was offered as an elective to Harvard students matriculated into the graduate program in art history; some qualified undergraduates and auditors were also admitted on an ad hoc basis. Sachs screened students for admission. Beyond requisites of intelligence and a sound education, preferably including some art history, he weighed a student’s potential for museum work, and in particular their interest in objects and people. Social skills and etiquette were crucial. Sachs recognized the value of “good” birth but he also believed in the transformative power and polish of Fogg Museum training to realize the potential of his most promising students, so long as they had the aptitude and desire to work with the art world elite. A preponderance of his most successful students came from solid bourgeois backgrounds. During the Sachs era (except for the war years, when enrollments were cut in half), the average class size was 18 just under half of whom were women. Female students, who enrolled through Radcliffe, were treated as equals in the classroom despite the limited opportunities and lower pay awaiting them upon graduation. Religion was not a factor in admission, but Jews and Catholics faced certain discrimination in the workplace. Race was never an issue in the Sachs era since systemic discrimination in higher education and the art world made sure there were never any students of color in the Museum Course, except a stray visiting student from East Asia.

By the time he retired, he had mentored some 350 students, roughly 160 of whom held positions in the “best museums in the land” (Sachs 1954: vol. 2, 13; Figure 1 and appendix). Graduates of the Museum Course remained active in the field through

the twentieth century, populating not only the dense swath of municipal, historical, and university art collections in the Northeast but also museums across the country. Aspiring cities with young museums, such as Toledo, Buffalo, Houston, Kansas City, Denver, and San Francisco, were as important to Sachs as the established bastions of art and culture on the East Coast. Harvard graduates were distributed geographically across the country and through the ranks of museum staffs. Over and above illustrious directors of major institutions – Alfred Barr, Chick Austin, John Walker, James Rorimer, Perry T. Rathbone, and others who paved the way for today’s celebrity directors and curators – a list of former students compiled in 1941 counted 43 directors and assistant directors, 25 curators and assistant curators, 19 educators, 29 museum assistants, 3 registrars, 18 book and photo librarians, 7 secretaries, and 4 in public relations (Figure 3.1). If at the beginning American museums relied on amateurs and artists or turned to Europe for expertise, by the mid-twentieth century, thanks largely to Sachs’s course, they were mostly in the hands of homegrown professionals imbued with shared values and standards of practice.

Simply put, the network of Fogg Museum graduates was responsible for shaping the professional field of museum management that delineated the organizational structure and ideals of institutions through which the American public came to know art. There were certainly alternative paths to museum careers, yet Sachs’s program acquired a reputation as the first place to turn when an art museum needed new blood. As Coleman noted in a museum survey, Harvard “has given directors to a score of art museums, and curators to as many more” (Coleman 1939: vol. 2, 420) and “has become the best known preparation for art museum posts of responsibility.” Indeed, Harvard graduates “are now so numerous as to color the whole scene” (399).

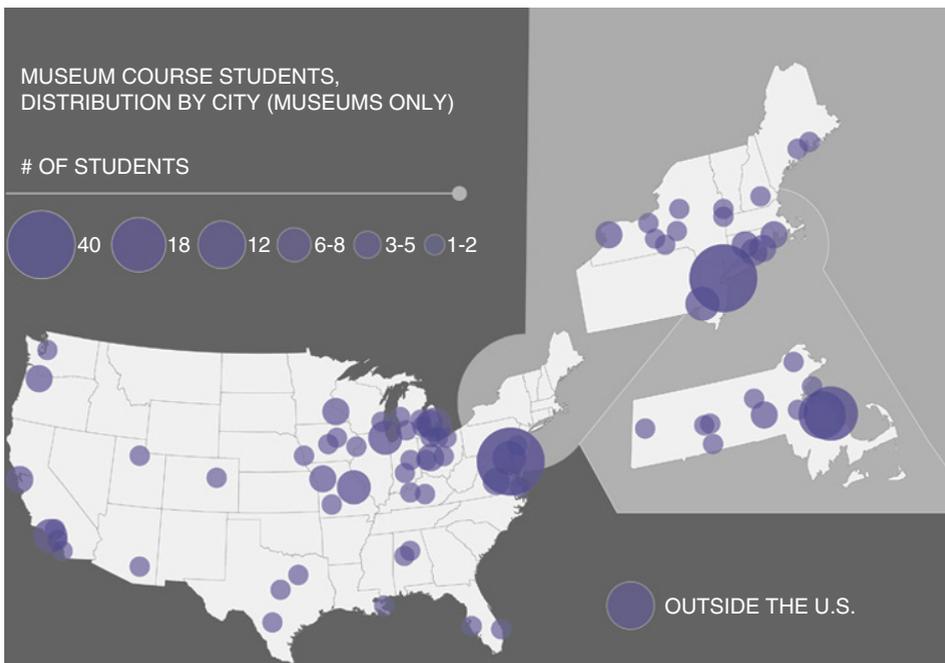


FIGURE 3.1 *Map of the United States showing distribution of Museum Course graduates.*
Design by Jeanne Koles.

Art museums in the United States are so well established today that it takes some imagination to fathom how undeveloped they were less than a century ago. When, for example, three Fogg graduates went to Kansas City in the early 1930s to establish the Nelson Gallery (now Nelson-Atkins), they found the empty shell of a new museum with no staff and a collection in search of definition. Under the watchful eye of expectant trustees, they were obliged to do everything from choosing wall and floor treatments, designing display cases, and selecting and arranging art to guiding school tours and training docents. Sachs's pupils inspired faith that museums would be safe in their hands. Trustees and civic boosters could count on Harvard graduates to deliver a product that would be recognized and validated by peer institutions across the country and beyond. The system quickly became self-referential and reinforcing for museums, their patrons, and Sachs's web of protégés.

Pedagogy and Process

What and how did Sachs teach his students? At the start of each year he listed the "qualities essential to a museum person." Those qualities included: visual curiosity and an eye for quality, what he called a "bowing acquaintance" with many fields but specialized knowledge of one, writing and speaking skills, foreign languages, "broad human sympathies including a belief in popular education," professional contacts in the art world, and a "collector instinct" that separated the museum person from the academic (Sachs 1954: vol. 2, 6). He did not expect to train socially polished, multilingual object experts in a year, nor did he think classroom instruction could substitute for experience learned on the job. The Museum Course was preliminary and prescriptive; it covered the essential spheres of administration, curatorial, and education and aimed to inculcate methods and values that would harden over time into a set of best practices and professional standards. Through classroom discussion and hands-on exercises, the curriculum addressed the history, purpose, funding, and organizational structure of American art museums; the relationship between museum design and function; the interests and profiles of key players in the art world; how to evaluate objects and make them accessible through public display and interpretation; and the proper conduct and responsibilities of the curator.

The class met twice a week, one day at Sachs's home, Shady Hill, on the outskirts of campus, the other day at the Fogg Museum (from the late 1930s the class met more consistently at the museum). Meetings at Shady Hill, later transferred to the Fogg Art Museum's Naumburg Room; (Figure 3.2), focused on cultivating the eye and learning the ways of art world.

Nothing was more important for American museums and the would-be curator than acquiring first-rate works of art. What to pursue and how to acquire it required both skill and tact. Sachs never imagined one could become a connoisseur in a year; what the Museum Course set out to do was instill principles that would guide future practice. His aim was "to educate their eyes so that they might be helped to see" (Sachs 1954: vol. 2, 1). Sachs's library, cluttered with an eclectic range of art and curios, offered a preliminary training ground for developing what Sachs called a "roving eye" and "bowing acquaintance" with diverse fields of artistic production. Over successive weeks, random objects were placed on a table and students were asked to identify and assess them, a nerve-wracking connoisseurial baptism by fire. Objects could include: real and fake drawings, unattributed paintings and prints, a



FIGURE 3.2 *Paul J. Sachs teaching in the Naumburg Room, Fogg Museum.* Photograph by George S. Woodruff, 1944. Harvard Art Museums/Harvard Art Museums Archives, Fogg History Photographs, ARCH.0000.265. Photo: Imaging Department (c) President and Fellows of Harvard College.

sculpted figure from an English choir stall, Persian illuminations, a carved rhino horn, a decorated ostrich egg bought in Atlantic City, Chinese bronzes, European silver, American ceramics, an Indo-Chinese sculpture, an inlaid sixteenth-century walking stick, a medieval corkscrew, a ceramic vase recently acquired in Mexico, an ancient stone head of uncertain origin, and more. Shady Hill also modeled the homes of collectors that students would later visit in search of potential acquisitions; curators needed to be able to scan a room and discern interesting objects amid the clutter. More important than precise identifications, the goal was for students “to recognize an extremely fine object, an object that is good but not outstanding, an object that is bad or an out and out fake” (Museum Course Notes, 15 March 1943).

There was a right way for curators to evaluate an object, a methodical process that started with keen observation and a gut response and progressed to judgment backed by research, science, and second opinions. Experience informed and sharpened an instinctive reaction and dictated when and how to proceed. First and foremost: “*Look at the Object* – let it speak to you. Does it arrest your attention? Do you approach it with enthusiasm: If not, is it because it does not lie in your field of interest? If you were the director of a museum would you want to push the matter further, and find out all there is to know?” (Museum Course Notes, 2 November 1931). One progressed from enthusiasm to questions of authenticity, attribution, style, condition, and the market.



FIGURE 3.3 *Students studying an early Italian fresco painting at the Fogg Museum.* Photograph by George S. Woodruff, 1944. Harvard Art Museums/Harvard Art Museums Archives, Fogg History Photographs, ARCH.0000.1100. Photo: Imaging Department (c) President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Training the eye also took place in the galleries at the Fogg Art Museum (Figure 3.3). Because objects on public display were labeled and known, analysis advanced to a higher level. How could one go about confirming an attribution? Was a given painting exemplary of the artist's best work and in good condition? Condition was a tricky issue and students were told to consult with conservators. The Fogg was among the first museums to house conservation scientists, and students routinely examined works of art through their eyes.

Was a painting in an original frame and well presented? What was it worth and would you want it for your museum? Students were asked which of the objects on display they would choose first to build a collection around, and why. The well-trained museum eye was ultimately an acquisitive eye.

The other half of acquisition required negotiating the world of collectors and the market, where nothing was straightforward. Given the rising cost of art and lack of independent funds, museums counted greatly on gifts of art. Temporary exhibitions also depended on the generosity of collectors. One way or another, curators needed to be collectors of collectors. In the privacy of Shady Hill, Sachs shared sensitive information about collectors – how to cultivate donors and negotiate loans, who had bought wisely and who had not. No potential gift should be overlooked but, at the same time, museums should not take unwanted gifts; he opposed de-accessioning and

accepting collections that came with restrictive conditions. With remarkable candor, he told students of museums that had acquired second-rate art in the interests of haste or to please donors. He encouraged students to travel widely to visit museums and collectors. Each spring, the class took a field trip to the leading museums, dealers, and private collections on the East Coast, opening doors and modeling protocols of art world etiquette. Sachs cultivated contacts assiduously on behalf of his students and occasionally helped them with money to travel. For example, Sachs provided Barr with no fewer than 103 letters and cards of introduction to scholars, curators, collectors, dealers, and critics on his tour of Europe and the Soviet Union in 1927–1928.

Fakes were a persistent concern. Just as students had to consult conservators about condition, so they were urged to seek second opinions about authenticity. The market was rife with forgeries and misattributed works, and American collectors, rich but impatient and ignorant, had proven especially vulnerable to unscrupulous dealers. Museums, as beneficiaries of the public trust, needed to establish a high bar with respect to accuracy and transparency. As one museum director confessed: “There is nothing more damaging to [a curator’s] prestige than buying a fake” (Munro 1947: 183). Mistakes were inevitable, and Sachs shared several of his own early misadventures as a collector. The best protection was ceaseless training of the eye and selfless reliance on the help of other experts.

Museums and the market were becoming steadily more imbricated and it was vital for would-be curators to understand the ways of the art trade as well as the worth of money. He profiled dealers, which ones could be trusted and how to negotiate prices. He peppered the course with timely exercises designed to teach the relationship between quality and the market. When the collector Julius Bache was rumored to have offered \$400 000 for Thomas Lawrence’s *The Red Boy* in 1931, Sachs asked the class if such a price was justified. Shortly after Andrew Mellon bought some 70 pictures for 19 million dollars in 1935, he gave students the list and asked: “If you had \$19 m to spend would you have made this selection? Would you have paid \$800 000 for the *Niccolini-Cowper Madonna* by Raphael? Could you get something to represent the same tradition for less?” (Museum Course Notes, 15 April 1935). He encouraged students to follow his own example by climbing into bed each night with the latest auction catalogues to keep abreast of the market. On different levels, Sachs’s insider knowledge of the art world and its leading figures proved immensely useful to young curators venturing to new or understaffed museums.

If the probity of dealers was an important concern, so was the ethical conduct of curators. Sachs insisted every museum professional “must be guided by high standards of morals” (Museum Course Notes, 29 November 1946). He never questioned how the powerful men who funded art museums made their money or led their lives; the moral purview of the course was limited to how museum men and women comported themselves on the job. He urged curators to treat all colleagues, the public, and potential donors with courtesy and respect, and to be generous toward other museums with information and resources. The improvement of individual institutions benefitted the museum community as a whole. Sachs was adamant that curators should never accept gifts from dealers or receive payment for authenticating works of art. Taking gifts or money for services compromised one’s judgment as well as the reputation of the museum. In another moment of candor, he offered the cautionary tale of Bernard Berenson who, in Sachs’s estimation, tarnished his reputation as a connoisseur through his lucrative partnership with Duveen and the world of commerce. Sachs told students: “To lead a protected life of the scholar he did something that he now regrets” (Museum Course Notes, 6 April 1936).

One shortcoming by today's standards was Sachs's stance on provenance. Though he was directly involved in recruiting the famous "Monuments Men" to oversee the Allied repatriation of art looted by the Nazis in World War II (no fewer than 20 of his students served as such in Europe and Asia), he was relatively lax when it came to the origins of works of art that passed through the market. At the height of the war he told students that if museum staff suspected a given object had been smuggled, it was proper to communicate with the country of origin; however, if the "controlling authority of a country is careless and corrupt, the museum should not have to be on the alert to repair deficiencies" (Museum Course Notes, 22 March 1943). He never urged students to question the source of a dealer's stock. Sachs's acquisitive ambition and passive attitude to provenance, shared by colleagues and passed on to his students, characterized collecting policies at American museums through the twentieth century.

Sachs preached that museums are judged by their collections and curators by what they acquire, but the Harvard program also put great emphasis on the display and interpretation of collections. To that end, students studied museum installations and display cases. Everything about the Fogg Museum was closely analyzed, from floor plans and the hanging of art to the system of ventilation and bearing load of the elevator. At the end of each year students mounted an exhibition and took responsibility for the choice of subject, loans, installation, catalogue, publicity, and public programming. Opportunities for further experimentation arose on occasion during the year, for example when Sachs persuaded Lord Duveen to lend the Dreyfus collection of Renaissance sculptures in 1932 before they were sold, or when, a decade later, he prevailed on Alfred Barr to include the Fogg Museum in a national tour of Picasso's *Guernica*.

It was widely understood that what separated American museums from their European counterparts was a commitment to public education. The active utilization of collections for public benefit became the cornerstone of progressive American museology during the first half of the twentieth century. Public utility figured in the charters of virtually every museum and justified foundation support and local tax incentives. Sachs insisted on the museum's responsibility to serve the public through educational outreach, a message further underscored by guest lectures, readings, and assignments, notably practice gallery and radio talks. He praised the work of noted educators, objected to the use of unpaid amateur docents, and told would-be curators never to "high-hat" the education staff or the general public. However, like many in the art world, he believed that educational programming depended on, and followed behind, building a strong collection to work with. The relative importance of objects and audience remained a contentious issue through the progressive era and beyond. To frame the debate, Sachs assigned oppositional readings – in the 1920s and 1930s, using texts by Benjamin Ives Gilman and John Cotton Dana, and in the 1940s a pair of articles by two former Harvard students, the pioneering educator Theodore Low and future Fogg Museum director John Coolidge. Low's essay called for expanding access through educational outreach. He criticized the disengagement of both academics, who prostrate themselves "before the idol of Heinrich Wölfflin," and the curator, who busies himself with "hanging pictures on walls in perfect symmetry and then retires to his office, his job done, to apply his vast experience to a tricky problem of attribution which he hopes to publish in the next bulletin" (Low 1942). Coolidge conceded the value of education but argued that object scholarship was the foundation of museum work. What good is it, he asked, if the "the type of popular interpreter whom Mr. Low admires [expatiates] upon Renaissance humanism, Christianity and

capitalism, as illustrated by the delicate psychological insight displayed in the face of some Madonna” only for it to be discovered that the painting was “entirely the product of a restoration executed in 1860?” (Coolidge 1943).

Sachs welcomed free discussion of contested topics (others included the use of period rooms and inclusion of contemporary art in encyclopedic collections), but he also let his own views be known, and in the matter of the collection vs. interpretation he sided with Coolidge over Low. He accepted, and cemented, the hierarchical division of curating and education into separate professional tracks, with the former requiring specialist training in art history and focused on collections, and the latter a general education and teaching skills to reach a broad public. Harvard’s priority was to produce curators, and directors who rose from their ranks, generating an inescapable bias toward objects and collections that marked his students and shaped institutional values through the twentieth century.

The Museum Course was embedded in a graduate program whose overall goal was to produce scholars with sophisticated skills of art historical analysis. With the Fogg Museum as a base, Harvard’s special niche was the assessment of quality, materials, style, and authorship – comprehensive object training that came to be known as the “Fogg Method” (Kantor 1993). The emphasis on connoisseurial skills strengthened when Sachs invited the German émigré scholar and curator Jakob Rosenberg to the Fogg in 1937. Appointed curator of prints and drawings at the Fogg Museum, Rosenberg joined Sachs in teaching the Museum Course from 1938 and contributed to a pedagogic tilt away from museology toward formal analysis and art appreciation. Encouraged by the added gravitas Rosenberg brought to the program, Sachs pressed his students to become more scholarly and inward looking. Following a student presentation on the use of publicity to increase outreach in 1938, Sachs said to the class: “Can we, in the work that we are doing, become too obsessed with what our duties are to the great public – may we run the risk of becoming too superficial?” (Museum Course Notes, 29 March 1938). In an address to the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art a year later, he called on museums to adopt a more “severe discipline” in order to produce higher standards of scholarship and connoisseurship reflected in acquisitions and publication (Sachs 1939). And in 1945, he published an article in *Museum News* stating that post-war emphasis in museum preparation should be “on the acquisition of objects; the care and conservation of objects; and the exhibition and presentation of objects” (Sachs 1945).

As a leading research university, Harvard was in any case ill equipped to train students to deal with the general public. The target audience for the Fogg was (and remains) the highly educated Harvard community. Then as now, the discourse of graduate school was lost on the masses. Museum Course graduates came to realize this for themselves, as we see in a report sent back to Sachs by former student Perry Rathbone in 1935:

The situation in a museum in such a city as Detroit is so totally different from that of the Fogg that it took some time and patience to become accustomed to it. It is so easy to presume too much. The overwhelming majority of people to whom I talk, are completely untutored in the field of the fine arts; they are even surprised to know that the objects in the collections are originals, and not copies and plaster casts ... The “fine arts vocabulary” that one unconsciously acquires, means so little to the lay public that it must be completely abandoned in gallery talks and lectures. It is a little

hard to confront a public that is unconcerned and apathetic to styles, schools, paint itself, technique, and other things that one has studied and been interested in for so long. To hold attention, one must dwell on personalities, upon countries, upon the civilizations and societies that have produced the pictures, rather than upon the pictures themselves. I am sure that the need for fine arts educational work throughout the country is great; but I am also convinced that popular interest in art has its narrow limits. (Rathbone 1935)

Demise and Legacy

In a sense, Sachs anticipated the obsolescence of the program he spent over 20 years crafting and refining. To the extent that object training and graduate-level work in art history emerged over time as the true core of curatorial preparation, what need was there for the Museum Course, or at least its museology component? This was precisely the conclusion of the Fogg Museum's Visiting Committee when it reviewed the fine arts curriculum at Harvard in 1955. Following Paul Sachs's retirement in 1948, the Museum Course continued under his successor John Coolidge. Seeking input on current museum needs, Coolidge consulted colleagues in the field as well as the Visiting Committee. The committee (which included four former Sachs students) offered the following advice:

There was striking unanimity among our many consultants that *breadth of experience* and *sound scholarship* are more valuable assets to the museum man than specific training in museology ... Museum training is best founded upon the same basic training which graduate students in the history of art should receive under optimum conditions. We stress again that this means constant study of objects, and devoted guidance in learning to "see" them. Fortunately, museum training at Harvard has always emphasized study of the quality of a work of art ... The museum curator and the university scholar of the history of art ought to be nearly interchangeable persons. The curator who is no scholar is surely no curator at all; and although long experience with original objects is absolutely indispensable for him, it is also indispensable for the art historian. (Visiting Committee 1955–1956)

Propelled by the report, the Fine Arts Department condensed museological instruction to a one-semester elective taught by Coolidge and his museum colleagues (Charles Kuhn at the Busch-Reisinger and later Agnes Mongan) and created a course on connoisseurship required of all graduate students taught by Jakob Rosenberg. An internal review a decade later reaffirmed the status quo: aspiring curators and academics required the same rigorous training in connoisseurship working with original objects, training that "pervades all the work for all courses" (Coolidge and Mongan 1966). Students seeking practical museum experience were expected to secure internships at the Fogg or elsewhere.

The course was suspended following the retirement of John Coolidge in 1972, only to be resumed again in the mid-1970s under Seymour Slive. Slive, a veteran member of the Fine Arts Department who became director of the Fogg Museum in 1975, was dedicated to the Fogg Museum tradition of integrated object study. By now, however,

a PhD was expected for those pursuing careers in both museums and universities. Museology was further reduced to occasional “bull sessions” for a handpicked selection of students, scheduled at the director’s discretion and designed not to impede progress toward the terminal degree (Freedberg and Grabar 1979). Internships at the Fogg were available to learn basic museum operations. What remained of the famed Museum Course was offered for the last time in 1981–1982, by which time Slive was busy overseeing the construction of the new Sackler Museum and absorption of the Fogg Art Museum and Busch-Reisinger into a new and larger administrative unit of the Harvard Art Museums. Following the demise of the Fogg Art Museum name, the removal of the Fine Arts faculty to the Sackler in 1985 signaled the disintegration of the Fogg Method.

Two consequences arose from the steady erosion of the program Sachs had created. If from the 1950s what was deemed essential training for entry into the curatorial profession was advanced art history, together with a patchwork of internships, then adequate preparation could be obtained at a number of elite graduate programs affiliated with museums. Harvard gradually lost its competitive advantage. Following Sachs’s retirement, and with a growing number of museums in the United States in need of staff, there was further impetus to found rival programs. Two former Sachs students, Charles Sawyer at the University of Michigan and Otto Wittmann at the Toledo Art Museum, joined forces in the late 1950s to create a course primarily serving the Midwest. Closer to home, New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) teamed with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1956 to offer a program that closely resembled the Fogg Art Museum’s. Sachs disciple James Rorimer, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, approved the museum’s initiative and another Harvard graduate, Colin Eisler, came in to supervise the IFA portion, offering a course on the history of museums, collecting, and the market.

In the mid-1960s Eisler published an article “Curatorial training for today’s art museum” that upheld the importance of honing “the refined sensibilities and informed eye of the connoisseur in combination with the intuitive sense for quality and acquisitiveness of the dealer” and the ability to “associate comfortably at all times with the most affluent members of the community” (Eisler 1966). Continuing strongly into the 1970s, the purpose of the IFA–Met course, as at Harvard, was supplemental, exposing interested graduate students to museum work through visits to curatorial departments, internships, and structured exercises.

Also, lost with the flattening of the Sachs curriculum was the opportunity to think openly about the social role and responsibilities of museums. Through the 1960s, the Fogg retained its focus on object training and distanced itself from the outside world. Siding with mainstream art museums, it rejected the bold call by the Met’s maverick director, Thomas Hoving, to become socially engaged and “relevant,” delivered in an address to the AAM in 1968 (Hoving 1968). In defiance of Hoving, and protesters who picketed New York museums and interrupted the AAM conference in 1971 in the name of social justice and greater inclusivity, the museum establishment insisted that the proper function of museums was to serve as a respite from, rather than platform for, worldly concerns, political and otherwise. In the Fogg annual report for 1969–1970, director Agnes Mongan declared that there would be no “politicalization of museums” at Harvard, no movement toward “‘relevant’ interaction with the social problems bombarding our everyday lives.” The mission of the museum would

remain to “to collect and conserve ... the highest artistic achievements of civilization” as a laboratory “for the study of works of art, of connoisseurship, of museum administration” (Mongan 1971).

Content with its profile and traditions, Harvard was slow to accommodate shifts in museological thinking and the discipline of art history. The demise of museum training at the Fogg coincided with the arrival at Harvard of the “new art history,” a constellation of new methodologies (including feminism, Marxism, semiotics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, post-colonialism) that from the 1970s and 1980s combined to direct attention within the field from questions of aesthetic quality, authenticity, attribution, style, and influence to the conditions and contexts of artistic production and reception. As the editors of an early compilation of revisionist essays wrote in 1986: “In discrediting the old art history, words like connoisseurship, quality, style and genius have become taboo, utterable by the new art historians only with scorn or mirth” (Rees and Borzello 1986: 4). Shifts in art historical practice inevitably created a rift between museums and academia. Marjorie Cohn, Fogg curator and disciple of John Coolidge, reflected: “This reorientation [of art history] led to a distrust of the priorities of museum professionals – acquisition, preservation, exhibition – which hinged on discrimination of quality and evaluation of authenticity” (Cohn 2012: 328). In 1982, the Fogg Visiting Committee noted with regret and alarm that “the Fogg Museum as a place where students work closely with works of art is evidently in decline ... The virtual disappearance of the museum course seems especially regrettable” (Cohn 2012: 333).

New interest in contexts of making and meaning rendered museums, as the resting place of art removed from original settings, less relevant, if not an obstacle, to purposeful inquiry. As Norman Bryson remarked, formalist art history was aligned with exhibition practice premised on “decontextualizing the image in order to permit unmediated communication between the viewer’s eye and pure form,” creating a kind of “perceptual purity: timeless, sequestered from the social domain, universal” (Bryson 1988: 107). A sub-field of revisionist art history – “new museology” – challenged the museum’s image as a neutral repository in which self-evidently transcendent works of art speak for themselves. Museums found themselves branded as ideological spaces that enforce aesthetic hierarchies, promote certain visual traditions and objects over others, and the interests of controlling elites at the expense of broader access. Academic critique sided with forces within the museum field pushing for expanded public engagement. A pair of landmark reports issued by the AAM – *Museums for a New Century* (1984) and *Excellence and Equity* (1991) – signaled the ascendance of education and a decisive shift in mission from “being *about* something to being *for* somebody,” in the oft-quoted words of Stephen Weil (Weil 2001).

Revival of earlier debates between collections and interpretation sparked criticism of Sachs’s program and its connoisseurial emphasis. The sociologist Paul DiMaggio argues that Sachs perverted the democratizing mission of American museums by grounding the “distinctive cognitive basis for museum professionalism *not* in education ... but in art historical scholarship and the cultivation of dependent collectors,” supported by “an etiquette of appropriation, and a justifying ideology of connoisseurship, that defined authentic artistic perception in a manner that reinforced the status claims of elite patrons while devaluing the aspirations of the less well educated and well to do” (DiMaggio 1991: 285, 269). Though this observation is certainly correct, it also fails to acknowledge that without the support of elite patrons there would be

no public art museums in the United States. As noted above, the bias toward collecting was rooted in the drive to develop strong collections as the basis of programming as well as a funding and governance structure that has always relied on donor-collectors. The credentialing of curators and directors in leading doctoral programs that measure success in terms of scholarship more than pedagogy further ensured the relegation of museum education to second-class status.

One way and another, the Harvard program gave America the curators and museums it was willing to pay for rather than ones it might have had under different economic and political conditions. But in light of the swerve from objects to interpretation in both museums and academic art history, whither curatorship and curatorial training? As we push into the twenty-first century, economic, demographic, and technological forces have prompted re-consideration of age-old tensions between patrons and the public, and further complicated Sachs's ideal of the curator-scholar. Rising operating costs have forced museums to seek new revenue streams to supplement philanthropy from the traditional donor class. Grants from federal funding agencies and foundations look for healthy and diverse visitation as a sign of money well spent. Corporate sponsors channel support toward events and exhibitions that generate maximum publicity for their goods and services. Museums lure new and repeat visitors with more temporary shows and programming for adults and children, dramatic architecture, expanded shops and restaurants, films, concerts and all manner of social happenings. New technology and social media are also changing visitation habits and visitor expectations, especially for younger generations on whose patronage the future of the museum depends. Curators now partner with educators, community-relations staff, diversity officers, and marketing departments in previously unanticipated ways. Contributing to an erosion of traditional curatorial prerogative, museums have invited public input, or crowdsourcing, of exhibition content and more. Indeed, to quote a headline from the *Wall Street Journal*, we have entered a moment in which "Everybody's an Art Curator" and the verb "to curate" is now loosely applied to all manner of environments and experiences (Gamerman 2014).

All the while, curators are still called upon to uphold standards of quality and authenticity across collections. Museums remain a trusted source of knowledge and impartial expertise. Even as higher degrees are expected for most new curators, university art history departments rarely match the scope of museum collections and resist incorporating the means of assessing quality, authenticity, and value into the curriculum. The general view dating from the 1950s that curators need graduate training in art history but not museology still holds, though qualitative object assessment is now far from the central concern of graduate work and the methodological framework that took its place is no friendlier to the general public than the formalist paradigm of yesteryear. Some worry that standards in object appraisal have slipped. Already in 1999, John Walsh, at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, warned that as a "consequence of the much discussed shift in our field ... toward contextual and theoretical questions about art and its function" there had been a decrease in "firsthand experience with, and study of, works of art in the original," resulting in a "shrinking pool of talented young people with the training and inclination to take museum jobs" (Walsh 1999).

Perhaps the material turn in art history and neighboring disciplines will revalidate the study of objects and open fresh channels of communication between curators, conservators, and academics. A dramatic shrinkage in the academic job market has

forced leading doctoral programs to treat museum careers as more than a second-best option for their graduates. Programs designed to bridge gaps between current art history training and museum needs have lately been sponsored by the likes of the Center for Curatorial Leadership, the Association of Art Museum Curators, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation), adding to an explosion of university-based museum studies courses. At the same time, however, economic pressures, especially on less-well-endowed institutions, threaten to reduce the curatorial workforce and limit pay, which will continue to skew the pipeline toward the elite and inhibit much needed diversification. The “death of the curator” is surely exaggerated, but curators of the future will need a broader skill set and more flexible profile than Paul Sachs would have envisaged or thought desirable.

Appendix: North American Museums Directed by Students of Paul J. Sachs, 1925–1990²

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA
 Albany Institute of History and Art
 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
 Art Institute of Chicago
 Asia Society, New York
 Baltimore Art Museum
 Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA
 Birmingham Museum of Art, AL
 Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, Austin
 Boston Atheneum, Boston
 Bowdoin College Museum of Art, New Brunswick, ME
 Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, MA
 California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco
 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
 Chicago History Museum
 Cincinnati Art Museum
 Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York
 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
 Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
 Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH
 Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, MA
 Dallas Museum of Art
 Dayton Art Institute
 Denver Art Museum
 Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, DC
 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY
 Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, ME
 Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, MA
 Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI

Fogg Museum, Cambridge, NY
Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles
Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, IN
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Kimball Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX
Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans
Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, CT
McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, MA
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Milwaukee Art Museum
Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, NY
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Museum of the City of New York
Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon, MI
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MI
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA
Oakland Museum, CA
Pasadena Museum of California Art
Peale Museum, Baltimore
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Portland Art Museum, OR
RISD Museum, Providence, RI
The Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL
Saint Louis Art Museum
San Diego Museum of Art
Seattle Art Museum
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA
JB Speed Art Museum, Louisville
Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
USC Fisher Museum of Art, Los Angeles
University of Texas Arlington Art Gallery
Vancouver Art Gallery

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
 Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore
 Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT
 Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

Notes

- 1 For a more comprehensive treatment of this subject, see Sally Anne Duncan and Andrew McClellan, *The Art of Curating: Paul J. Sachs and the Museum Course at Harvard* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2018).
- 2 This list is compiled from a variety of sources and may be incomplete.

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The Emergence of the Professional Curator

Carole Paul

The oldest and most fundamental kind of work done for collectors and museums is what we now call curating. Curators are responsible for the basic tasks of collecting, organizing, storing, cataloguing, exhibiting, researching, and interpreting objects, and their knowledge is essential to those who conserve them. Although the scholarly literature on curating in the modern and contemporary world has burgeoned in recent years, the history of curating is yet to be written. The Latin word *curator* is defined as “he who cares for or takes charge of a thing, a manager, overseer, superintendent, keeper” (Lewis 1989: 501). In ancient Rome some works of art were installed in temples and other publicly accessible buildings. Between 11 BCE and 14 CE, Emperor Augustus established an administrative board to oversee public collections and the buildings that housed them. Later, around 200 CE, there was one official in charge of paintings (*procurator a pinacothecis*) and another of sculpture (*adiutor rationis statuarum*); in 335–37 CE there was a curator of statues. These may have been the first professional – or at least officially titled – curators (Pearce 1995: 92).

Of course, there were also private collectors in the ancient world. In Rome, their efforts were supported by an active art market as well as art historians and advisers. During the Middle Ages, wealthy and powerful people might have accumulated precious objects, but the finest collections may have been kept in churches and their treasuries. One of the greatest examples was found at the Abbey of St. Denis, near Paris, which was rebuilt and splendidly decorated and outfitted under the direction of its famous abbot, Suger. Suger’s account of his activities as abbot includes a detailed description of the precious objects that he acquired to adorn the altar table (Panofsky 1948: 78–81). Some of these objects appear in a set of engravings, published in 1706, of five armoires containing the abbey’s treasures at that time (Pearce 1995: 102–03).

Beginning in the Renaissance, private art collections of various kinds were more in evidence in Europe, and a few civic or state ones were established as well. The number of both types of collections continued to increase, especially from the seventeenth century onward. These early modern collections were tended by their patrons and/or by individuals with different types of expertise. With the emergence of public museums in eighteenth-century Europe, curating began to evolve into a profession. This chapter will examine the nature and evolution of curating from early modern private collections to public museums of art and antiquities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. What follows is not a comprehensive survey, but is rather intended to illustrate the development with some important examples and to highlight significant issues.

Curating Private Collections in Early Modern Europe

Before the advent of public museums, was curating done professionally and, if so, by whom and for whom? Were those who did it paid or otherwise compensated for their labor? How would they – or their contemporaries – have defined themselves by profession? In the early modern period, the household property of elites, including works of art, might have been cared for and guarded by servants who held the keys to the places where they were kept, but their duties may have been more custodial than curatorial. Artists, architects, and scholars – such as antiquarians – sometimes curated their own collections, as did collectors who were not of those professions, though in doing so they were not working in a “professional” capacity. Examples of such artists include the Florentine painter, architect, and art historian Giorgio Vasari, who in the sixteenth century assembled a famous collection of drawings, which he organized in multiple volumes (Tempesti 2014). The drawings, by Italian artists, dated, according to Vasari, from the thirteenth century to his own day. Vasari acquired some of them from the artists or their heirs and others were given to him or purchased. He conserved or retouched the drawings as he felt necessary, designed paper frames for them, and labeled each with the name of the artist to whom he attributed it. He then glued the framed drawings to pages, most likely arranging the pages in historical order by artist to accompany the order of their biographies in his *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* (*Lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors, and architects*, 1568) (Vasari 1966).

The great seventeenth century Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens amassed a large collection that included classical statuary, Renaissance and Baroque paintings, ancient gems, ivory sculptures, and crystal and stone vases (Muller 1989). As Jeffrey Muller shows, Rubens carefully selected the objects in his collection based on the criteria of quality and personal taste. Using contemporary guidelines, he arranged the artworks thoughtfully in his house in Antwerp, enhancing the installations with decorations or designing complementary spaces for their exhibition, such as the rotunda like “Pantheon” where ancient statuary was displayed.

Among those who were not professional artists and curated their own collections was Padre Sebastiano Resta. Resta came from a noble Milanese family but joined the Oratorian order in Rome and acquired his collection from his cell at the Casa dei Filippini (House of the Oratorians), adjacent to the order’s church of Santa Maria in Vallicella (Warwick 2000). Between 1680 and his death in 1714, he amassed over 3500 drawings, which he had bound in some 31 volumes. Like Vasari, Resta acquired

some drawings directly from artists – the largest group in his case – while others were given to him or purchased through his various contacts. In some of his albums he also followed Vasari's example in organizing the drawings chronologically by artist, but grouped them as well by period and regional style. Other albums were devoted to the work of a single master, most notably the great sixteenth-century Emilian painter Antonio Allegri, known as Correggio.

Novel, too, were the notes that Resta made to accompany individual drawings, which included historical and connoisseurial information (Warwick 2000). Regarding the latter, he would create stylistic “genealogies” for artists, tracing their influences from the work of other artists. Sometimes he illustrated these relationships through the juxtaposition of drawings in the albums, which he conceived as virtual galleries. When the attribution of a drawing was questionable, Resta used his understanding of artists' styles and at times solicited the opinions of others to assign authorship, pointing up the fundamental importance of connoisseurial skills to curatorial work, which continues into the present, even if connoisseurship methods have evolved. In curating the albums Resta thus promoted art historical knowledge, which he then disseminated by presenting them to prominent patrons, from whom he solicited donations for church charities in return. While Resta was recognized from his own day as a collector and connoisseur, might we also think of him as an amateur curator who was, in a sense, compensated for his work?

Collectors who did not curate their own collections sometimes had advisers, agents, and dealers for appraisals and acquisitions, but they did not necessarily function as their curators. One such example is the famed sixteenth-century sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, who advised Cosimo I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, on the value of gems and statues that he had purchased or was given (Cellini 2002: 305–07, 313, 318). Another example is Sir Dudley Carleton, English ambassador to Venice, who in the early seventeenth century served as an agent for the great collector Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (Brown 1995: 18–20). However, curating may have been one aspect of the work done by those, such as artists, architects, librarians, and secretaries, who served nobles and royals in other capacities. The roles of the former may not have been primarily curatorial and their titles might not have been either. Vasari, for instance, was appointed *pittore stipendiato* (salaried or court painter) with a monthly salary of 25 *scudi* in 1554 by Cosimo I and served the duke as an artist and architect (Goldberg 1988: 4). Among his various activities for Cosimo, he selected and arranged a group of small objects and paintings, mostly ancient bronzes or modern works created in imitation of them and, notably, a series of Medici portraits, in a study in the Palazzo Vecchio, the Florentine town hall (Gáldy 2014; Pegazzano 2014). As was appropriate to his patron and the site, Vasari emphasized Tuscan and Etruscan works in his selection and designed the shelves, drawers, and architectural decoration in the room to accommodate different types of objects in a carefully curated installation. He painted an image of the muse Calliope that adorned the ceiling of the study, which was known as the Scrittoio di Calliope. Apparently, though, this display of Tuscan heritage and leadership was short lived: completed by 1559, it seems to have been dismantled by the early 1560s.

What might have been the first official curatorial position of the early modern period, the *Commisario delle Antichità* or Prefect of Papal Antiquities, was established by Pope Paul III in 1534 (Ridley 1992). The position was held by leading antiquarians, architects, and artists: among the most famous occupants of the office were

Giovanni Pietro Bellori in the seventeenth century and Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth, both antiquarians and art historians. The Commisario was charged with protecting the antiquities of Rome, overseeing excavations throughout the Papal States, drafting inscriptions for restored monuments and public works, controlling the export of antiquities, and serving as a tour guide for important visitors, which could prove lucrative. The position of Commisario was terminated in 1870, when the Papacy lost temporal power in Rome with the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy.

The office of Commisario notwithstanding, others who did curatorial work in the early modern period often continued to perform multiple functions for their patrons. Fulvio Orsini, for example, was an antiquarian and himself a collector who served the Farnese family in Rome as a scholarly adviser. He lived at the Farnese Palace and first worked as librarian for Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese. When Ranuccio died in 1565, Orsini retained his post as librarian to Ranuccio's brother, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, also taking on the curatorship of Alessandro's collection of antiquities (Robertson 1992: 223–30). He continued in these roles under Alessandro's great nephew, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. Orsini's duties, particularly during Alessandro's tenure, were both those of a humanist adviser and a curator. As was customary for the former, he composed epitaphs and inscriptions for monuments and devised iconographic programs for fresco cycles. In his curatorial role, Orsini concerned himself with the arrangement of objects in the cardinal's *studiolo* or study, which contained small antiquities, such as ancient coins, sculptures, Renaissance drawings, miniatures, and illuminated manuscripts and other books. These were displayed in niches in the wall or stored in wooden drawers, much as in the Florentine study of Duke Cosimo I. Orsini also advised Alessandro on the acquisition of paintings and antiquities and on the choice of artists for various commissions.

About a century after Orsini, Filippo Baldinucci similarly served the Florentine Cardinal Prince Leopoldo de' Medici in a variety of capacities (Goldberg 1988). Baldinucci is best known today as the author of some important art historical writings, but he was also a collector and, by vocation, a businessman. He entered Leopoldo's service as his bookkeeper in 1664, after which time his ability as a connoisseur was recognized. By 1673, Baldinucci seems to have functioned as the coordinating secretary of the cardinal prince's extensive network of agents and advisers for collecting art, especially drawings and artists' self-portraits. Records indicate that Baldinucci systematically appraised drawings as they arrived for Leopoldo's consideration, assessing their attributions and suggesting the prices to be offered for their purchase. In 1673, he published a master list of the cardinal prince's drawings that was intended to be circulated among his agents. By the time of his death in 1675, Leopoldo had acquired over 11 000 drawings by more than 650 artists; this included a collection owned by Baldinucci that he either sold or unintentionally donated to the cardinal prince (Goldberg 1988: 168).

Leopoldo's vast drawing collection had been amassed in the spirit of Vasari's own, to illustrate a history of art that emphasized the leading role of Tuscan artists (Goldberg 1988). To complement that purpose, Baldinucci began a chronological index and historical diagram of the artists represented in the cardinal prince's collection, which he left unfinished. However, Baldinucci did carry through on a related project that was also influenced by Leopoldo's art historical interests, an expansion and updating of Vasari's famous compendium of artists' biographies. The six volume *Notizie de' professori del disegno...* (*News of the professors of design...*, 1681–1728)

(Baldinucci, Baldinucci, and Ranalli 1974–1975), Baldinucci's chief publication, began to appear after Leopoldo's death in 1675 and was completed by others after the author's in 1696. Thus Baldinucci's scholarship, much like Vasari's, went hand-in-hand with his curatorial work.

Collectors in northern Europe employed advisers as well, some of whom appear to have functioned as curators and even to have had curatorial titles. Balthazar Gerbier, a painter and connoisseur, advised George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, on assembling his noteworthy picture collection. Acting as Buckingham's agent, he traveled to acquire paintings for him. When Gerbier entered Buckingham's household in 1619, the duke remarked that, he "began to have the keeping of my pictures and other rarities" (Brown 1995: 24), which seems to have been an early instance of the British term "keeping" applied to curatorial work. Soon after, in 1625, Abraham van der Doort, a Dutch craftsman skilled in coin and medal making, was appointed "Keeper of our Cabbonett Roome" by King Charles I of England, with an annual salary of £50 (Millar 1958–1960). Charles's Cabinet Room at the Palace of St. James in London contained his impressive collection of paintings, sculptures, miniatures, coins, and medals, which van der Doort was charged with "Colecting, Receiving dilivering soarting placing remoaving or causing of making by our appointing such things as wee shall thinke fitt and allsoe to keepe a Regester booke of them and all other sarvices as hee shall know from our selfe or Receave Direction" (Millar 1958–1960: xiv). As was appropriate to his skills, van der Doort was also appointed to two positions at the Royal Mint, where he created an image of Charles that appears on some of the king's coinage. His fourth appointment, granted for life, was as Overseer or Surveyor of "all our pictures of Us [Charles], Our Heires and Successors", "at Whitehall and other our houses of resort." The curatorial duties outlined for this last appointment were:

to prevent and keepe them [the paintings] (soe much as in him lyeth) from being spoiled or defaced, to order marke and number them, and to keepe a Register of them, to receive and deliver them, and likewise to take order for the making and copying of Pictures as Wee or the Lord Chamberlaine of Our Household shall directe, And to the End [we] are pleased that hee shall have Accesse at convenient Times into Our Galleries Chambers and other Roomes where Our Pictures are... (Millar 1958–1960: xiv)

Van der Doort took his obligation to keep a register seriously; in 1639, he produced the first draft and fair copies of a detailed, systematic inventory of the paintings and artworks in his care, though he never completed it. He was in theory well compensated for his service to Charles, as all his appointments carried annual salaries and he was also granted a daily allowance as groom of the chamber, but he encountered persistent bureaucratic obstacles in receiving payment. Moreover, his curatorial duties could be stressful: others in the king's service thwarted the access he had been afforded to some of the artworks in his charge. That, together with his despair at having mislaid a miniature entrusted to him by the king – which was later discovered by his executors – may have led to van der Doort's suicide in the summer of 1640, when he hanged himself.

The Fleming David Teniers the Younger was, like Vasari, a court painter who also functioned as a curator. By 1651, Teniers had been appointed court painter to the

Austrian Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, ruler of Flanders, and between 1653 and 1655 he was additionally named *ayuda da camara* (valet de chambre or groom) (Klinge 2006). The artist made paintings for the archduke as well as tending to his superb picture collection in Brussels, which was especially strong in coveted Venetian paintings of the sixteenth century, such as those by Titian and Paolo Veronese. Uniquely combining his roles as both painter and curator, Teniers “publicized” the highlights of the collection in a notable group of pictures of Leopold Wilhelm’s gallery. The gallery installations differ in Teniers’s various paintings, none representing the actual room or arrangement of the pictures but rather the curator’s ideal exhibition strategies, which reflect standards for early modern display. In this version, paintings by various artists of different sizes, formats, and genres, simply framed, are hung close together in a harmonious symmetrical arrangement (Klinge 2006: 74–76). Large mythological pictures dominate the upper wall of the room, and various portraits and religious scenes are paired throughout. Teniers seems to have taken great pride in both the collection and his work, for he included his own portrait and that of the archduke in this and other images of the gallery. In this one, the artist stands behind the table on the left-hand side of the room, while Leopold Wilhelm, wearing a hat, appears on the other side (Figure 4.1).

Disseminating knowledge of the Archduke’s collection even more widely, in 1660 Teniers published a catalogue of it – really a set of prints – entitled *Theatrum Pictorium*,



FIGURE 4.1 *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in His Picture Gallery in Brussels, c. 1651*. Oil on copper, 104.8 × 130.4 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photo: Scala/Art Resource NY.

that included 243 engravings after the Italian paintings and appeared in Dutch, French, Latin, and Spanish editions (Klinge 2006; Waterfield 2006). Working on collection publications is, of course, one activity in which curators routinely continue to engage, but this project again conjoined Teniers's talents as painter and curator in a unique way: he made copies of the pictures to be included in the catalogue, scaled to the size of the volume, for the engravers to use as models. Although he received some financial support from Leopold Wilhelm for the project, Teniers also bore some of the expense for the production and publication of the catalogue, which, in its quality and lavishness, set an important precedent for later such volumes.

In addition to their curatorial work for private collectors, artists or others were sometimes involved in the organization of temporary exhibitions, some of which were more public in nature. In seventeenth-century Rome, for example, Renaissance and Baroque paintings were displayed in the cloisters of churches to celebrate the name day of the order's patron saint or other occasions. The annual exhibitions held at the church of San Salvatore in Lauro were curated for many years, beginning in 1676, by Giuseppe Ghezzi, a painter, restorer, and collector. As the officially appointed organizer of the displays, Ghezzi secured the loan of pictures from private patrons and supervised their installation, for which he drew up guidelines that were followed throughout his term of office (De Marchi 1999: 61–64; Haskell 2000: 9–12).

The examples considered above offer some sense of the kinds of curatorial work that were done in early modern Europe. They suggest that curating was a type of work done by collectors or those of various professions, the latter holding a variety of positions, some of which were nominally curatorial. Using their diverse forms of expertise, artists, architects, connoisseurs, craftsmen, and scholars performed the tasks that would prove fundamental to curating as it came to be defined and fully professionalized. However, there was very little written about the practice of curating during the period. No doubt some knowledge of curating was passed down orally or learned by working with those who did it, but this does not mean that there was no conceptualization of the practice, which – even if not named as such – was taken up in a few sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writings on collecting.

The earliest-known treatise on collecting, the *Inscriptiones* (*Inscriptions*), was written by Samuel Quiccheberg, a Flemish physician, and published in Munich in 1565 (Quiccheberg 2013). In addition to practicing medicine, Quiccheberg had worked for the German merchant Hans Jakob Fugger as his librarian and collection manager. At the time that he wrote the *Inscriptiones* he was managing the collection of Albrecht V, the Duke of Bavaria. Quiccheberg's treatise, however, presents not a discussion of Albrecht's collection and the museum that he was building for it, but rather offers guidelines for assembling, storing, and displaying an ideal princely collection of the type known as a *Kunst-* or *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities (see Chapter 2). These kinds of collections, which proliferated in northern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, included both works of art and objects used in the study of science and natural history. Although Quiccheberg's treatise is essentially a "how to" manual, he outlines the significance of such collections, indicating not only their traditional appeal in showcasing the cultivation, power, and wealth of their patrons, but also their practical function as sites of education and research. The treatise may have reflected contemporary practices but was not widely distributed, and there is no evidence that it was used; nonetheless, it is possible that Quiccheberg disseminated his curatorial guidelines through his broad social network of European collectors.

Similar to Quiccheberg's text, Giulio Mancini's *Considerazioni sulla pittura* (*Considerations on Painting*) of 1621 is a comprehensive consumers' guide for aristocratic collectors and viewers, focusing, as the title indicates, on picture collections (Mancini 1956–57). Mancini was an erudite dilettante and, like Quiccheberg, a doctor. His treatise was not published until modern times, but he, too, may have disseminated his ideas through his elite social network, for he later became the personal physician to Pope Urban VIII. Mancini's text laid out conventional biographical, historical, and theoretical material on painters and painting, establishing *avant la lettre* the notion of the connoisseur and his expertise in judging quality, making attributions, and distinguishing copies from originals. Perhaps even more innovatively, it also indicated the practical applications of such information in purchasing, conserving, and exhibiting pictures, thus providing probably the earliest and certainly the clearest account of the relationship between viewing practices, collecting, and display.

Mancini's guidelines for the installation of paintings were both aesthetic and didactic, and, as Frances Gage has shown, varied in accordance with different factors and circumstances, such as the type or function of the rooms of palaces in which pictures were displayed (Gage 2014). Some of his recommendations were conventional, such as that collectors consider lighting and space in organizing paintings. His guidelines for palace galleries were more novel – prescient, in fact – for he advocated that pictures be grouped in them by period and regional school, an elaboration of Vasari's strategy of arranging his drawings in historical order by artist (Paul 2012: 5–8). Mancini's rationale was that, “In this way the spectator will be able with greater facility to look and to enjoy, and after having looked and enjoyed, to retain in his memory the pictures seen” (Mancini 1956–57: vol. 1: 144–145). Yet, given the random nature of collecting and the typically limited scope of Italian collections, few patrons could have implemented the chronological-and-geographical scheme. Mancini therefore suggested a historicized sort of “mixed school” display that juxtaposed paintings of different styles from the same century within the groupings by period and school, affording viewers the opportunity to compare their diverse qualities – in accordance with elite viewing practices of the time – but positioning individual achievement in a wider developmental context. For Mancini, historical understanding was to frame what Andrew McClellan has since termed “comparative viewing” in the gallery, much as in his treatise an art historical overview preceded a discussion of various aspects of painting (McClellan 1994: 31–48).

Manuals in the tradition of Mancini's treatise appeared throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of them less concerned with offering guidelines for the installation of paintings and more with fostering the development of connoisseurial skills. Other practices that have been detailed here continued in the curation of private collections. The eighteenth-century French collector, connoisseur, and art dealer Pierre-Jean Mariette, who was not an artist, curated his own drawing collection, contributing to the evolution of earlier conventions in so doing (Smentek 2014: 139–189). In the tradition of Vasari, Mariette retouched his drawings (and sometimes radically cut them), designed paper frames for them, and labeled them with the names of the artists to whom he attributed them. However, his celebrated frames were more elaborate than Vasari's, and he did not fix the order of the sheets by binding them in volumes, thereby allowing greater flexibility for comparative viewing. That practice was subsequently adopted by other collectors.

In the eighteenth-century, too, artists, connoisseurs, and scholars continued to curate private collections. The famed German antiquarian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, for example, served from 1758 until his death ten years later as librarian to Cardinal Alessandro Albani, a well-known antiquarian and dealer, and was custodian of the extensive collection of antiquities displayed at Albani's grand villa in the suburbs of Rome. In 1763, Winckelmann also took on the post of Prefect of Papal Antiquities, the only non-Italian ever to have served as such (Potts 2006: 9–10). During the period temporary displays were curated as well: the annual public exhibitions by members of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, beginning in 1769, were installed under the direction of a team of curators, the Committee of Arrangement, drawn from the academy's governing council (Sunderland and Solkin 2001: 23–37). The curatorial practices associated with private collections and temporary exhibitions would naturally inform those at public museums as the latter began to appear alongside the former throughout eighteenth-century Europe.

Public Museums and Professional Curators

Before the eighteenth century, there were isolated examples of public museums of art and antiquities in early modern Europe. The Statuario Pubblico della Serenissima, in Venice, a collection of about two hundred antiquities that opened in 1596 in the Antisala or vestibule of the Libreria Sansoviniana (now the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana), may have been the first, though its accessibility to visitors is not entirely clear (Favaretto and Ravagnan 1997). The Ashmolean Museum, opened at the University of Oxford in 1683, is considered to be the first public museum in Britain, but at the time of its founding it was primarily a science and natural history collection, not an art museum (MacGregor 2001: 56–59). The public art museums that appeared in greater numbers in the eighteenth century were created with artists and elite or scholarly visitors in mind and usually displayed the same kinds of works as the most prestigious private collections, privileging antiquities and early modern paintings, especially Italian examples of the latter. As at contemporary private collections, painting and sculpture tended to be exhibited separately. Public museums differed from private collections, however, in that they were accessible to the public without letters of introduction or the accompaniment of tour guides (Paul 2012: vii–xxi). Many, in fact, began as private collections that had been opened to a wider public, and in most cases their royal or aristocratic founders and patrons continued to exercise ultimate authority over their operations. Few were publicly funded in the way that museums we call public are today.

Private art collections, as we have seen, were tended in various ways, but with public museums came the need for more systematic oversight by qualified staff, which in turn led to the establishment of museum professions. The staffs of these early public museums, who assumed and expanded on the types of work that had been done for private collectors, were small by comparison with those today. Their duties sometimes overlapped, so that staff members with differing titles may have performed the same functions (Paul 2012: xvii–xviii). Thus, directors saw to the general operation of their museums, but, like curators, they might also have been involved in the acquisition and maintenance of works of art and their installation in the galleries, the writing of catalogues and guidebooks, and giving tours. For this reason the roles of

directors and presidents need to be considered in the history of curating, just as those of curators would need to be considered in the history of museum directors and presidents. At the same time, a hierarchy began to develop, with the director or president at the top. The term “curator,” though in evidence since the 1660s, was not much used, but rather “keeper” or “custodian” or even “librarian” in English or some form of these in other languages.

Working under the leadership of directors and curators were deputy or assistant curators, who sometimes lived on site, as did directors and curators (Paul 2012: xviii–xix). These assistants might have been charged with opening and closing their museums, admitting visitors, collecting entrance fees, giving cursory tours, keeping the galleries and works clean, and preventing misbehavior and theft. By the nineteenth century some museums hired guards for the last task. Most museum employees were salaried, but some also relied on gratuities or received honorariums, the latter being the case especially for directors. In addition to those who regularly worked at public art museums, numerous others were involved in their operation. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, restorations were usually done by artists, who might, along with architects, have advised on installations and worked on the decoration of galleries. Craftsmen of various types also helped with installations and decorations. Artworks were often acquired through dealers, who remain essential to the growth of museum collections. Over time museum staffs grew in size, and the duties associated with various positions became more specialized.

Museum professions and their hierarchy were established from the first at public art museums, as evidenced at the Museo Capitolino in Rome. The Capitoline Museum, founded in 1733 and opened in the following year on the Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill), is the earliest institution of international significance to manifest the defining characteristics of the public art museum as it has evolved into the present day (Paul 2012: 20–45; Johns 2015; Arata 2016). Unlike other such institutions that developed from private collections, the Museo Capitolino was established expressly as a public museum by Pope Clement XII (r. 1730–1740) with the purchase of a large and outstanding collection of antiquities from Cardinal Alessandro Albani. The driving force behind the project was the Marchese Alessandro Gregorio Capponi, an enthusiastic amateur antiquarian and intimate of the pontiff who held offices in the papal curia. Capponi had convinced Clement to buy Albani’s statuary and found the museum, and in return the pope appointed him to run the institution, acknowledging his dual role as director and curator with the title of *custode e presidente antiquario* (custodian and president antiquarian).

Capponi began his duties by supervising the physical creation of the museum in the Palazzo Nuovo (New Palace) on the Campidoglio (Paul 2012: 25–27). He hired the architect, artists, and craftsmen who worked on the project, determined their payment, and oversaw the accounts. Consulting with antiquarians as well as Cardinal Albani, he determined the installation of the statuary. Once the museum was opened, he saw to the growth of the collection and reserved the right to grant permission to artists and others to draw the antiquities. Capponi’s role was pioneering: as director and curator of a public art museum, there were really no precedents for him to follow, but he drew in part on practices already implemented in private collections.

For more menial tasks Capponi was granted the right by the pope to appoint a *sottocustode*, or deputy, to work directly under him (Paul 2012: 27). This position was given to Pietro Forier, whose duty was to maintain the keys to the Palazzo Nuovo and

open the museum for the visiting public at appointed hours on designated days, care for the antiquities, and make sure that no one drew the sculpture without Capponi's permission. The position of *sottocustode*, like that of *custode e presidente antiquario*, was essentially a lifetime appointment. Forier was assisted by his son Gasparo and lived in an apartment in the Palazzo Nuovo. The father was paid seven *scudi* per month, was reimbursed for cleaning expenses, and was expected to receive tips, presumably from the visitors he admitted; there seems to have been no official fee for admission. The son must have had at least some antiquarian knowledge, as in the early 1740s he put together a small, portable guidebook for visitors to use in the museum. This book would have been necessary to identify the subjects of the works, since the statuary was for the most part not labeled, and it also included other brief information on some of the antiquities, such as noteworthy characteristics, provenance, or previous scholarship.

As at the Museo Capitolino – and as with private collections – those who did curatorial work at public museums were chosen for their expertise, the suitability of which varied with the type of collection (Paul 2012: xviii). Some continued to hold other positions or work at other professions, as was done by curators of private collections. In the case of museums with major collections of ancient sculpture, the posts of directors and curators were usually occupied by antiquarians, such as Capponi. At the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, there was a director, an antiquarian, and a custodian, all of whom were more or less knowledgeable about antiquities and came into conflict with one another over the boundaries of their duties (Findlen 2012). Only later was the position of vice director added, when the art historian and antiquarian Luigi Lanzi was appointed to oversee the Uffizi's painting collection. If directors and curators of painting collections were not scholars or connoisseurs, they tended to be artists, like Joseph Vogt, a painter from Bohemia, who served from 1755 as the first *custode* of the Gallerie de' Quadri (now known as the Pinacoteca Capitolina), or picture galleries, on the Campidoglio, which had opened to the public in 1751 (Marinetti 2014: 32). In addition to his supervisory duties, Vogt made copies of paintings in the galleries that he sold to supplement his monthly income of five *scudi* (Marinetti 2014: 84). Similarly, the first director of Munich's Alte Pinakothek, a picture gallery, was the painter Johann Georg von Dillis; more unusually, Dillis was also the director of Munich's Glyptothek, a museum of ancient sculpture, but he had helped to acquire statuary for the collection in Rome, an indication of his expertise with antiquities (Buttler and Savoy 2012). Some curators of picture collections, such as William Seguer, the first keeper of London's National Gallery, were restorers as well as painters, their dual skills obviously being useful to their positions (Taylor 2012: 266).

While continuing practices that had been followed in private collections, some of the directors and curators at early public art museums set important precedents for succeeding institutions. Capponi's innovative displays of antiquities, for example, reflected the public nature and enlightened educational mission of the Museo Capitolino (Paul 2012: 36–37). Although the sculpture was grouped for exhibition by conventional themes and types – busts, statues, herms, urns, reliefs, and inscriptions – the Capitoline's rooms were less richly ornamented than those of private galleries and encouraged a different mode of viewing. Busts of the Roman emperors, for instance, were common in private collections, where they were usually arranged for decorative effect in niches or on pedestals, but not necessarily in any particular order and usually with other types of statuary. At the Capitoline, not only were the



FIGURE 4.2 *View of the Stanza degli Imperatori.* Palazzo Nuovo, Musei Capitolini, Rome. Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

imperial busts placed in historical order by subject, they were also exhibited together in their own room, on simple shelves, inviting visitors to reflect on the sitters and to compare the quality of their likenesses – especially when multiple images of the same individual were placed side by side – as well as on the trajectory of Roman history (Figure 4.2).

Capponi's displays contributed to the advance of aesthetics and connoisseurship, too, for, as more and more antiquities could be systematically viewed and compared in such installations, a better sense of the chronology, regional variety, and stylistic evolution of ancient sculpture began to emerge. This growing knowledge would eventually allow museums to exhibit antiquities by date and geographical origin, as was first done at the Glyptothek when it opened in Munich in 1830. However, that initiative must be credited to the museum's architect, Leo von Klenze, rather than Dillis, a reminder that curatorial decisions at public museums, as for private collections, weren't always undertaken by curators or directors. Capponi also had to respond to the nature of the Museo Capitolino as a public institution in more practical ways, and in so doing established models for later museums. Under his supervision an ingenious and inventive security system was installed in the galleries: in a nearly invisible manner smaller, more portable antiquities, such as busts, were fixed in place with bronze wire, eyelet hooks, and clasps disguised as heraldic papal seals (Franceschini and Vernesi 2005: 57; Paul 2012: 26).

In addition to creating new types of installations for the display of statuary in public museums, directors and curators were instrumental in formulating new strategies for the exhibition of paintings. In private collections as well as at some early public museums, pictures tended to be displayed either according to the "mixed school" strategy or grouped by genre or regional school or installed in ways that were aesthetically harmonious but conceptually unsystematic (Paul 2012: 2–5). Sometimes these strategies were

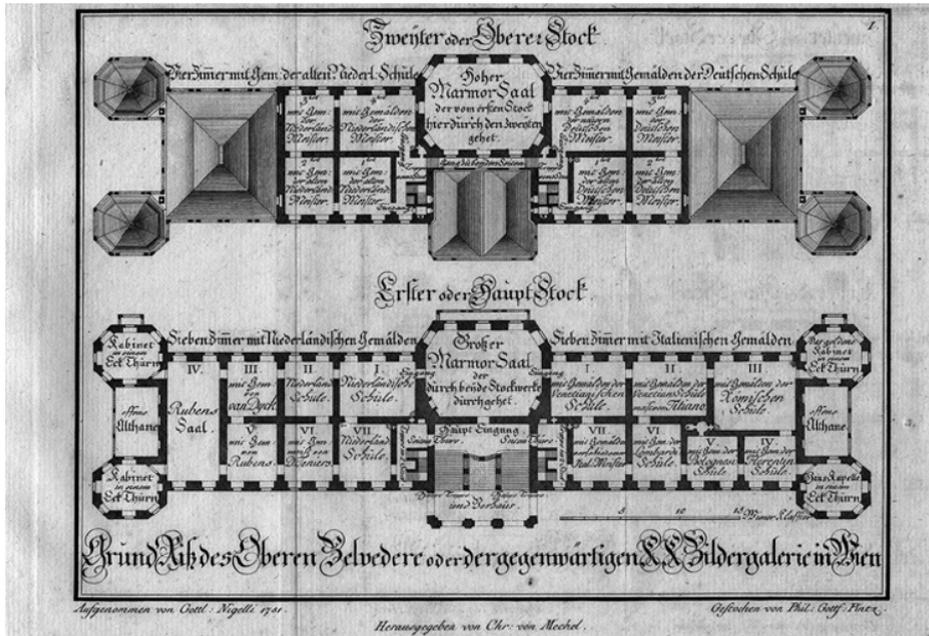


FIGURE 4.3 *Belvedere Palace, Imperial and Royal Picture Gallery*. Plan and arrangement of first and second floors. From Christian von Mechel, *Verzeichniss der Gemälde der kaiserlich königlichen Bilder Gallerie in Wien* (Vienna: Christian von Mechel, 1783), plate bound into end of volume. Courtesy of the author.

combined in the exhibition of a collection, as Mancini had suggested they could be or in other ways. In the mid-eighteenth century, innovative arrangements for early modern paintings, which grouped works more strictly by geographically defined schools – as Mancini had recommended – were introduced in German galleries, first at the Dresden picture gallery, then at the Düsseldorf picture gallery, and in the late 1770s more systematically at Vienna’s Belvedere Museum (Paul 2012: xiii–xiv).

The installation at the Belvedere was created by Christian von Mechel, an art dealer and engraver from Basel, who had been summoned to Vienna by the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II to undertake the task, much to the consternation of the museum’s director, the Viennese-born painter Joseph Rosa (Yonan 2012; Swoboda 2014). Working as a visiting curator, Mechel separated the pictures according to the schools from which the artists hailed, and organized them chronologically within each school in order to demonstrate the development of various artistic traditions as well as the evolution of individual artists’ oeuvres (Figure 4.3). In fact, Mechel characterized his arrangement as a “*sichtbare Geschichte der Kunst*” (“visible history of art”). This novel historical installation quickly established a standard that continues to exist today, partly because it must have proven effective as the audience for public museums broadened over time: those who had little or no knowledge to bring to their viewing experiences could instead be educated in the history of art by the ordering of the works. In some museums, such as the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, the historical arrangement served to support political agendas, too, by incorporating paintings by artists from regional schools into the canon of works on display (McClellan 1994, 2012; Schulz 2012).

However, the historical organization also raised important questions that would affect acquisition policies as curators and directors debated – and continue to debate – whether their emphasis should be on collecting great works by great artists or on adding lesser works to form more complete histories. Exacerbating the tension between these positions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the question of which audience the museum should address: educated connoisseurs who visited for aesthetic experience or a broader public that went to be educated in the history of art? To some extent, this understanding of the relationship between collecting and exhibition strategies and audience interest and response was unnecessarily polarized, for historical display was not designed to preclude aesthetic engagement; it was quite the opposite, as such display could also serve as a site for “comparative viewing” and, in the latter part of the period, for more Romantic responses to works of art. Nonetheless, after Mechel left the Belvedere in 1783, Rosa, who was more interested in encouraging aesthetic experience, altered the former’s historicizing installation in a way that he felt would better suit his goal, though ironically claiming its relevance for a broader public (Yonan 2012: 180–186). Similar debates about exhibition strategies and their effects were later taken up at Berlin’s Altes Museum, which opened in 1830, by members of the curatorial committee charged with installing its collection, including Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the museum’s architect, Gustav Friedrich Waagen, its first director, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, a prominent educator and philosopher (Gaehtgens 2012: 296–99).

At the Belvedere Museum, Mechel instituted other exhibition practices that became customary, even if he wasn’t the first to implement them. He standardized the frames of the paintings in order to lend the galleries a more uniform appearance, as had already been done for private collections in Rome, for example, but unlike the simple frames used for the latter, he chose a florid ornamented type that was popular in eighteenth-century Vienna. Mechel also had the pictures labeled with the artists’ names and with numbers corresponding to the relevant entries in the catalogue he wrote (Yonan 2012: 177). Similar labeling had been done previously at the Düsseldorf picture gallery, the illustrated catalogue for which Mechel produced together with the court architect Nicolas de Pigage, though neither was director or curator of the collection (Gaehtgens 2011). In addition, curators and directors were concerned with the colors of the wall coverings in galleries. Olive green was usually thought to best complement displays of early modern paintings, but when the painter Sir Charles Lock Eastlake was keeper and later director of the National Gallery he experimented with red as well as green (Klonk 2009; Taylor 2012: 276).

Some curators and directors at early public art museums wrote collection catalogues or guidebooks, establishing standards for these kinds of publications that remain influential. Although the terms “catalogue” and “guidebook” are sometimes used interchangeably, they can be understood to designate two different types of publications (Paul 2012: xvii). Guidebooks tend to be small enough to be carried around in museums and usually suggest routes to be taken through them, indicating an ideal order in which to view works that correlates with the installations in the galleries. The amount of information given on individual objects varies, but guidebooks are generally not as comprehensive as catalogues, which tend to be more scholarly in character and larger, even appearing in multiple volumes. Since guidebooks were intended to be used in museums, those published in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally were not illustrated, aside from floor plans of the buildings, whereas

catalogues often functioned as “virtual” museums and thus were illustrated with engravings of the works on display. Sometimes curators and directors were responsible for both sorts of publications, as in the case of Taylor Combe, underlibrarian of antiquities at the British Museum, who in the early nineteenth century wrote a guidebook to the collection and began a 12-volume catalogue series on it (Anderson 2012: 60–61). Significant contributions to both genres were also made by consultants, like Mechel, who worked on the aforementioned catalogue of the Düsseldorf picture gallery, notable for its views of the gallery’s walls showing how the paintings were installed. Another example is the large four-volume catalogue of the Capitoline Museum written by the eminent scholar Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (the last volume was by Niccolò Foggini), which became a model for subsequent museum catalogues in its erudition and organization, with a substantial entry on each object and an accompanying engraving (Paul 2012: 27).

As influential for their profession as curators and directors at the first public art museums were, not all of them set consistently positive examples. At the Uffizi Gallery, the negligence of the custodian Giuseppe Bianchi resulted in a chimney fire in 1762, and Bianchi was later convicted of stealing multiple objects from the gallery over two decades of service (Findlen 2012: 89–96). Dominique Vivant, Baron Denon, the director of the Musée du Louvre (then called the Musée Napoléon) appointed in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, was responsible for important displays of early modern paintings at the Louvre that elaborated on Mechel’s historicizing installations (McClellan 1994: 140–148, 2012: 229–230). However, Denon also oversaw the Napoleonic looting of artworks from museums throughout Europe to enhance the Louvre’s collection and did his best to resist the order of repatriation issued by the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) with the collapse of the empire.

Even as curating was professionalized and its practices became more standard at early public art museums, there doesn’t seem to have been much written about it, if at all. As in the period before the emergence of public museums, some knowledge of curating must have been passed down orally or learned on the job while working with others. Curatorial practices were also disseminated from one institution to another when curators, directors, and consultants worked at or shared their expertise with more than one museum, as still occurs (Paul 2012: xviii). Mechel, for instance, applied what he had learned at the Düsseldorf picture gallery to his work at the Belvedere Museum. Waagen served as an adviser on various issues for London’s National Gallery; the catalogue of its collection written by the painter Ralph Nicholson Wornum when he was keeper and published in 1847 was indebted to the 1841 edition of Waagen’s catalogue of the Altes Museum (Taylor 2012: 269–277). The great scholar Ennio Quirino Visconti, who helped to catalogue the antiquities at the Vatican’s Museo Pio-Clementino, later became the curator of ancient sculpture at the Louvre and implemented exhibition strategies there with which he was familiar from his work on Italian collections (Collins 2012: 140; McClellan 2012: 228).

Curators and directors at the first public art museums also spread their influence through other institutions with which they were associated and were influenced by them, too. For example, the first curator of the Royal Museum in Stockholm (the predecessor of the Nationalmuseum), Carl Frederik Fredenheim, who was appointed when the museum was founded in 1792, was also president of the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts and worked to create a strong link between the two institutions (Olausson and Söderlind 2012: 206–207). In the nineteenth century, with the

introduction of art history in university curricula, especially in Germany, curators and directors began to hold teaching positions in universities and art academies and to have university degrees in the discipline, as is expected today (Sheehan 2000: 89–93). Waagen was a professor of Art History and Wilhelm von Bode, creator and curator of the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum (now called the Bode Museum) on the Museum Island in Berlin, was one of the first curators to hold a doctorate in Art History, which he had earned in 1870 from the University of Leipzig (Sheehan 2000: 157). Thus, curators both helped to shape and were shaped by the academic discipline of art history, even as ongoing tensions persist between its practice in the museum and in the academy.

Curators and directors at early public art museums instituted practices and established standards for their professions in both the kinds of work they did and how they did them that continue to be followed to this day. With time, of course, the curatorial profession and its attendant duties have evolved. There have also been important changes in staffing curatorial positions. The reader will have noticed that all of the curators and directors so far named in this chapter were men. Only in the early twentieth century did women assume important roles in art museums, at least in the United States (Schwarzer 2010: 17–19). From 1910 to 1923, Cornelia Bentley Sage Quinton was the director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. In 1926, Florence Berger became the first professional curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut, America's oldest public art museum. Three years later, Maude Briggs Knowlton was made head of the Currier Gallery of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire, and in 1930 Juliana Force became the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan. Women currently fare well in the curatorial profession, though less so as museum directors; another challenge that remains is to create a more ethnically diverse workforce for both kinds of positions. Nonetheless, curating has made great strides in its development since its beginnings almost three hundred years ago as a profession.

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Part II



Movements, Models, People, and Politics

Curating as a Verb

100 Years of Nation States

Juli Carson

It is in the [thinker's] nature to undo, unfreeze as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought – words (concepts, sentences, definitions doctrines) ... The consequence of this peculiarity is that thinking has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics. These frozen thoughts, Socrates seems to say, come so handy you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now arouse in you, has roused you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then you will see that you have nothing in your hand but perplexities, and the most we can do with them is share them with each other.

Hannah Arendt, 1971 (175–176)

Overture: Thinking

In the eternal return of the culture wars, artists and writers are habitually the first to ask: “What is to be done?” Given that the secondary market, museums, and the biennial system are now part and parcel of the same global financial machine that sparks these culture wars, the question must also be asked of curators. And yet, it’s precisely because curators are inextricably embedded in this system, quite differently than are their fellow artists and writers, that we must first reconsider just *what* a critical curatorial practice might entail. With recourse to Arendt, I’d like to conjecture the following. What if we were to consider “curation” along the lines of *thinking*. By way of displacing curation’s grammatical definition from a noun to a verb, the notion of

“curation” shifts from being a *profession* to being an *action*. This proposition is deceptively complex. For it appears that both would be true: one *thinks* about curating *as* a profession. A profession that, in turn, puts art into action. Certainly, this is the conventional practice of curatorial studies dominating the universities, art institutions, museums, and galleries. What I’m proposing is a bit different. Should we conceive of curating through an Arendtian lens? We uncouple the profession of museology, for instance, from the act of thinking in the space of art. In everyday practice, you can have both. But as the scientists say: correlation does not equal causation.

This impasse between profession (noun) and thinking (verb) is one I’d like to court as a curatorial model of *doing* theory in the place of merely professing it. From this vantage, curatorial thinking provides no doctrine, no established canon, contrary to the practice of knowledge acquisition that typifies art historical, museological practice. To the contrary, in Arendtian logic, when one curates *as a verb*, “The need to think can be satisfied only *through* thinking, and the thoughts which I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I can think them anew” (Arendt, 1971: 163, my emphasis). No doubt the question still persists: what would the curator *do* in place of producing philosophical doctrine or art historical narrative, beyond the selection of artwork and exhibition design? S/he thinks *through* the exhibition, in order to grapple with a latent principle, a repressed paradox, within the entangled fields of politics, theory, and aesthetics that the artwork evokes. By playing the role of theoretician in the space of producing a given exhibition – a dialogic exercise from the start between artist and curator – “interpretation” or “truth” entails neither description of the artwork nor its supplication to the curator’s professed a priori theories. Rather, the mutual reflection of a given artwork and a related theoretical “perplexity” – a double mimesis – is *hinged* by the exhibition, wherein a contingent meaning presents itself.

On the subject of mirrored reflection, I’m intentionally conjuring up an “outmoded” hermeneutic theory of aesthetics – one put forth by Hans-Georg Gadamer in the 1960s and later deconstructed by Jacques Derrida in the 1980s – that’s resurfacing among scholars today (Derrida, Gadamer, and Lacoue-Labarthe 2016). “Double mimesis” was Gadamer’s term for the mutual reflection of art making and philosophical writing, activities that are phenomenologically hinged by the viewer/reader’s historical consciousness of a given artwork, which comes to us from the past, presented and discussed in the present. Gadamer’s assertion that the task of hermeneutics is *to bridge* the personal or historical distance between minds, entails conceiving the exhibition as a field of play, whereupon the “truth” of an artwork – related as it is to myriad historical artifacts, aesthetics, political doctrines, and philosophy – is never rooted in the past, from which it comes, or in the present, to which the contemporary artwork belongs. Rather, truth is lobbed back and forth, as in a game, between speakers or players: first between artist and art historian and subsequently between exhibition and viewer (Gadamer 2007: 123–131). I suggest that we extend this principle to the space of contemporary art’s production, exhibition, and receivership. In this case, the curator hinges the exhibition’s subject (the artwork) to the exhibition’s object (a discursive formation) toward the end of *contingently* positing a given perplexity.

Should we combine Gadamer’s notion of the exhibition as a field-of-play with Arendt’s notion of Socratic thinking, we then encounter the pulsative nature of aesthetic meaning, one that is contingently present today and differently inflected

tomorrow. We could henceforth reframe Arendt's axiom toward this purpose as the following. The "thoughts" that the artwork instilled in me yesterday will satisfy me today only to the extent that I can continually think them anew. *That* would be the task of a curator who seeks to amplify the double mimesis between a contemporary work of art and its critical writing and the double mimesis of the exhibition's site and the viewer's perception. This series of mimeses, between which the exhibition stands as a hinge, *keeps* us thinking through the labyrinth of an artwork's endlessly refracted meaning, be that artwork historical or contemporary in its making. Moreover, the curator-thinker-writer who employs Arendt's model does so in order to enfold the viewer-thinker-reader into becoming historically conscious in the presence of an artwork through the self-critical rupture of his or her own conventional presuppositions.

For Arendt, the political imperative of moral thinking was conceived in the post-war period, when she reflected upon a citizen's personal responsibility and capacity for judgment under dictatorship. A related political imperative exists for us today, given the most recent chapter of the revived twentieth-century cultural wars. For it is on this Western geopolitical field that we encounter what we collectively thought we'd moved beyond: that regressive authoritarian-minded leader who imposes strict rules and regulations – ones brazenly convoluted or distorted in his own hands – upon the state's citizens, a move designed to instill an utter lack of thought – if not a complete lack of will – as the dominant cultural zeitgeist. This return wouldn't have surprised Arendt. In "Home to Roost," her last piece of writing before her death in 1975, she prophetically laments our current moment:

I rather believe with Faulkner, "The past is never dead, it's not even past," and this is for the simple reason that the world we live in at any moment *is* the world of the past; it consists of the monuments and the relics of what has been done by men for better or worse; its facts are always what has *become*. In other words, it is quite true that the past *haunts* us; it is the past's function to haunt us who are present and wish to live in the world as it really is, that is, has *become* what it is now. (Arendt 1975: 270)

If it would seem we live in a graveyard, following Arendt, we might learn something from those who perpetually haunt us. What follows is a consideration of several curatorial moments, spanning the twentieth century into our recent *fin de siècle*, through which we might do just that: learn to think. Each exhibition dealt with a present moment haunted by a past as a model of curatorial thinking. Moreover, each exhibition waged a secondary operation, a theoretical means of action, to achieve this thinking.

Primal Scene: The Possible

By the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, Germany's *Kulturkampf* had reached a breaking point. The word *Kulturkampf* specifically denotes the struggle for power within Bismarck's German empire, a confederation of monarchies. More generally it refers to all late-nineteenth-century sovereign rivalries ignited by the emerging constitutional and democratic nation states throughout Europe vis-à-vis the declining global authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Monarchical *ancien régimes*,

endowed with Divine Right, suddenly found themselves down river from the force of modern secular governments bestowed with universal (manhood) suffrage. In order to exploit the rising democratic and socialist sentiment, Bismarck stipulated that the lower chamber of government, the Reichstag, be elected by the people. The lifeblood of these modern governments – monarchical or democratic – was thus the popular vote, which depended upon the sovereign’s successful possession (i.e. manipulation) of the public’s interest and collective mindset. In its own effort to maintain power, the Church had enacted the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870, making it incumbent on Catholics to accept the pope’s proclamations on faith and morality regardless of their national citizenry. This set of geopolitical rivalries – monarchical, democratic, and papal – was further triangulated by the global, financial market centralized in Europe’s industrial “inner zone” (Great Britain, Belgium, German, France, northern Italy, and the western portion of the Austrian empire) that coordinated and imposed regulation upon Europe’s agrarian “outer zone” (most of Ireland, the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, Bohemia, and Austria proper). Beyond Europe’s borders, the United States’ northeastern seaboard constituted an extended inner zone, while the southern United States, Latin America, and beyond were a designated outer zone. Beyond this, in Asia and Africa, one found the “third zone,” that which the Eurocentrics deemed “uncivilized.”

In this way, the seeds were sown for the global meltdown of 1914 because the establishment of all these borders and zones demarking inside from outside, civilized from uncivilized, ushered in their inevitable transgression. (The more you attempt to clean things up, the messier they get.) The irony was that these nation states were at once controlling their populations through various tactics of purges and containment – driven equally by the competing forces of finance, on the one hand, and governmental and religious hegemonies on the other’ – while paradoxically competing for the people’s vote. The condition would only worsen after the First World War, when the League of Nations’ mandate, having further remapped Europe, drafted minority treaties establishing the “rights of man” for those people not culturally or ethnically native to their new sovereign state. Effectively, demographics perceived as peripheral were now embedded within the newly demarcated “inner zone.” The situation was untenable. As Arendt notes, “Hatred, certainly not lacking in the pre-war world, began to play a central role in public affairs everywhere, so that the political scene in the deceptively quiet years of the twenties assumed the sordid and weird atmosphere of a Strindbergian family quarrel.” This produced a general disintegration of political life, Arendt continues, with “nobody to make responsible for the state of affairs – neither government nor the bourgeoisie nor an outside power” (Arendt, 1962: 268). Subsequently, republics would transition into authoritarian dictatorships and, even further, into totalitarianism over the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Back to Europe’s *fin de siècle*, on the eve of this denouement. Just as the *Kulturkampf* was coming to a head, so was the international avant-garde’s progression. That is, right before it abruptly regressed back to naturalist figuration, in 1915, when “the perceptual conventions of mimetic representation – the visual and spatial ordering systems that had defined pictorial production since the Renaissance and had in turn been systematically broken down since the middle of the nineteenth century – were reestablished,” as Benjamin H.D. Buchloh famously notes in his polemical essay “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation

in European Painting”(Buchloh 1981: 107). It was there that he connected the avant-garde’s aesthetic regression – just two years after the Readymade and the Black Square – to an overall ideological backlash that idealized “perennial monuments of art history and its masters, the attempt to establish a new aesthetic orthodoxy, and the demand for respect for the cultural tradition.” He perceived such culture wars – then, in the twenties, and at the time of Buchloh’s writing, in the eighties – to be endemic “to the syndrome of authoritarianism that it appeals to and affirm the ‘eternal’ or ancient systems of order (the law of the tribe, the authority of history, the paternal principle of the master, etc.)” (Buchloh 1981: 111). Notably, authoritarians are not endemic to any single region or governmental structure. The same relapse would occur in the Soviet Union, during the early twenties, when avant-garde artists affiliated with the Moscow Circle – Malevich, Mayakovsky, Lissitzky, and Rodchenko, key among them – fell under the heel of Zhdanovist socialist realism. A decade later, Stalin’s Comintern would officially declare socialist realism as the state sanctioned aesthetic, whereupon Rodchenko’s realist photographs that had previously propagandized the Bolshevik Revolution – “Young Pioneer,” “Call for Literacy,” and “To the Demonstration” – were accused of exhibiting “formalist deviation” (Carson 2012: 92). That a transplantation of the European avant-garde would occur, on the eve of the two-pronged cultural and ideological backlash, should not surprise us. That the avant-garde would jump the pond in the hands of a grassroots, artist-led curatorial group conspiring to take on the New York’s rearguard elite, the reigning voice in American art, however, might.

Enter the famed Armory Show. As Europe sat on the brink of World War I, an “International Exhibition of Modern Art,” organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS), opened at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City on 15 February 1913. The idea could be traced back to 1911, instigated by four young artists – Jerome Myers, Elmer MacRae, Walt Kuhn, and Henry Fitch Taylor – who were troubled by the difficulty American artists had in showing their work within (or outside) established circles. Hence the foursome’s founding of the AAPS to showcase not only a new vanguard but also a new platform for artist-driven exhibitions. As Milton W. Brown recalled in 1963: “The AAPS had done the impossible. They had, all on their own, collected and exhibited more than twelve hundred American and foreign works of art for the edification and education of the American art world and public.” This, he continues, “had been calculated from the beginning as a mental jolt to stir America out of its long esthetic complacency” (Brown 1963: 26). In so doing, the organizers aspired to introduce the public to the works of Goya, Ingres, and Delacroix through that of the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Fauves, and Cubists, with hopes of radicalizing them. By their own declaration, the AAPS aimed at showing young American artists that they had nothing to dread from the European avant-garde. And it was with revolutionary zeal that they challenged the American Academy of Design that was tenaciously committed to training, and by extension *curtailing*, American artists within the rearguard parameters of the naturalist school. Such that, if spirit of nationalist revolution thus ran through the AAPS’s organizational veins, then their symptom was reified by their chosen symbol: the pine tree, used on flags during the American Revolution, as the official emblem of the Armory Show (Brown 1963: 4).

Whereas conventional art historical accounts double down on the organizers’ nationalist thematic, lauding the Armory Show as ground zero for Modernism’s

triumphal landing in America, I would argue that the exhibition's organizers were, in fact, doing something quite other than grafting a foreign aesthetic on their own shores. Under all their conventional nationalism, they were also *incepting* – on an unconscious level, no doubt – an idea around which a conceptual aesthetic platform has since evolved: the aforementioned curating-as-a-verb. For is it not, precisely, this kind of thinking that the Armory organizers' statement of purpose sought to evoke? To administer a mental *jolt*, in their own words, to stir America out of its long esthetic *complacency*? We should recall that Socrates had metaphorically called himself a gadfly, a metaphor that Arendt, in turn, used as a model for critical thinking: "He [the thinker] knows how to arouse the citizens who, without him, will 'sleep on undisturbed for the rest of their lives,' unless somebody comes along to wake them up again." And what does the gadfly arouse in them? Arendt answers: "To thinking, to examining matters, an activity without which life, according to him, was not only not worth much but was not fully alive" (Arendt 1971: 174). That said, I would add the caveat that only when this performative practice becomes a *conscious* endeavor – only when it is connected to the kind of Socratic thinking that Arendt, in turn, connects to a kind of "responsibility" taken in relationship to dictatorship and empire, be it at home or abroad – does such practice become a critical *act* in the hands of artists, curators, and writers.

Which brings us back to Buchloh. Holding artists accountable for *thinking* in the face of fascism, Buchloh absolutely gets right the performative *responsibility* central to Arendt's model. "First there is the construction of artistic movements with great potential for the critical dismantling of the dominant ideology," he argues, which is "then negated by those movements' own artists, who act to internalize oppression ... and then, at a later stage, in the outright adulation of manifestations of reactionary power" (Buchloh 1981: 108). It's the formal component of Buchloh's equation, when he argues, quite universally, for there being "a causal connection, a mechanical reaction, by which growing political oppression necessarily and irreversibly generates traditional representation," that, willing or not, he departs from Arendt (Buchloh 1981: 107). That *one* aesthetic form would timelessly be inherently progressive while the other regressive, and that, moreover, this should occur in a cyclical manner – figuration returning in the 1920s just as it returns in the 1980s – again equates correlation and causation. Arendt, on the other hand, was adamant that there would be no such readymade templates for knowledge, i.e. for aesthetic form or philosophical method, only operational modalities for the manner in which we interrogate *all* such epistemological strategies. For Arendt thinking was a rinse and repeat activity. Having thought the *undoing* of one hegemony, naturally, returns another one to the status quo. Such that you really have to keep on top of it. Thinking, in short, is a full-time occupation without formative rules, templates, or master plans.

Returning to our band of conspiratorial curators – those *thinkers* of Modernism, plotting on the Upper West Side of Manhattan – we see that their own transgression would meet a similar fate as their predecessor, the conservative National Academy of Design. For having ushered in the European vanguard, at its waning moment abroad, the Armory organizers would find their endeavors no less "thought about," if only structurally. This time the instigator would be none other than their friend and colleague Marcel Duchamp. Having made an international splash with his

Cubist–Futurist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, no 2* at the Armory Show,¹ four years later Duchamp would pivot to stage his next scandalous work, the performative readymade sculpture *Fountain*, at the First Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, the successor to the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, which had since been dissolved. The Society itself was born in 1916, when Duchamp, along with his cohorts – French émigrés Jean Crotti, Albert Gleizes, and Francis Picabia as well as Americans Walter Pach, Joseph Stella, Charles Sheeler, Morton L. Schamberg, John Covert, Katherine S. Dreier, and poet Wallace Stevens – gathered at Louise and Walter Arensberg’s apartment to conceive an exhibition platform along the lines of the Parisian Salon des Indépendants, which had been a launch pad for the French avant-garde. It was decided that the board of directors, to which Duchamp belonged, would be bound by the Society’s founding constitution to accept all members’ submissions for exhibitions, mounted without jury or prizes, thus giving the right to anyone to exhibit upon payment of a modest fee. Whereas the AAPS made their selections on “merit” with “no axes to grind, no revenges to take,” (Brown 1963: 27) – a quip meant for the Academy – the Society aimed at hosting a yearly exhibition *completely* free of any established aesthetic criterion associated with so-called old-guard New York art world, in order to “reach the kind of people who have no chance to show otherwise,” as Pach surmised (McCarthy 2017: 32).

Hence the “no jury” tenet upon which Duchamp surreptitiously set about launching his own inception plan – as head of the hanging committee for the Society’s first exhibition at Grand Central Palace – to demonstrate that non-juried shows were in fact institutional mirages. We should note that Duchamp himself had been rejected by the (non-juried) Salon des Indépendants in 1912, when they’d refused to include his *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* in their annual exhibition, unhappy with the work’s subject matter and title (Hulten 1993, 9 April 1917). Since then – after leaving the Parisian painting circles behind in 1913 and relocating to America in 1915 – Duchamp had been exploring an “aesthetics of chance,” which culminated in his *Three Standard Stoppages*. The work’s operation was simple: three threads, each having a length of one meter and held horizontally, were dropped from the height of one meter onto a piece of canvas and fixed in position there by means of varnish. Thus, favoring contingency over perspective, *Three Standard Stoppages* opened up a way “to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art.” And in so doing, if *chance* came to supplant *paint* as Duchamp’s new medium of choice, it was toward the end establishing an aesthetic centered around the notion of “the possible” (Molderings 2010: xi–xii). As Herbert Molderings maintains: “Neither ‘likeness’ nor ‘truth’ was [*Three Standard Stoppages*] key aspect, as in all the brands of realism; nor beauty, harmony, or balance, as in the aesthetics of formalism; but rather ‘the possible’ in the sense of what is merely conceivable, the idea that all things can be perceived and conceived differently” (Molderings 2010: xiv–xv). I would concur with Molderings, adding that chasing “the possible” logically entails negating conventional ideas of what is *impossible*. Accordingly, by inducing a series of readymade chance operations – an aesthetics of chance extending from his art to his exhibition production – Duchamp was in pursuit of *what had yet to be*, instancing another modality of thinking beyond established knowledge or artistic norms.

Consequently, there stands Duchamp, on Friday 6 April 1917, endeavoring to mount the first annual, non-juried exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. What does he do? Pontus Hulten recounts the scene:

Having been elected head of the Hanging Committee of the exhibition ... [Duchamp] is faced with the task of installing 2,500 works in three days. To avoid any pre-conceived idea of grouping, Duchamp's suggestion that a democratic formula should be imposed on the arrangement of the show has been adopted. The works will be hung, commencing in the north-east corner of the main gallery in the Grand Central Palace, according to the artist's surname in alphabetical order. In the morning at the exhibition hall, witnessed by Roché and Beatrice Wood, *the letter "R" is drawn from a hat*, which determines for Marcel the works to be hung first. (Hulten 1993: 6 April 1917, my emphasis)

Faced with the quagmire of hanging (without curating) a self-selected group of artists, something surfaced that Duchamp already knew: that non-juried shows are in fact institutional mirages. Which is to say, they are impossible, *especially* when the jury is negated. Because the repression of criteria for the artist's involvement, beyond the artist's fee, assures that such criteria will return in unexpected (contingent) ways, something Duchamp painfully experienced in his submission of *Nude* to the Salon. In an effort of short circuiting this inevitable return, Duchamp mobilized a curatorial chance operation: drop the letters of the alphabet into a hat, blindly withdraw a letter, and establish the alphabetical ordering of the artists from there. And yet, objective "selection" – in this case, alphabetical order – continues to operate in the dialectical reversal of negating subjective selection and letting chance play itself out. Which is to say, this "curatorial readymade" situation – the chance operation of "dropping" elements into a societal organization and attendant exhibition space – establishes for the first time a willful curatorial modality of chance. And this performative action – *taking a chance* – constitutes the "verb" of Duchamp's own readymade "curatorial" method.

If the first exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists was curatorially undermined by a chance intervention, one dropped upon it by their founding member Duchamp, the aforementioned organizational structure was just one such intervention. The *Fountain*, being the most famous intervention, not only constitutes the founding move of Duchamp's own practice but also serves as ground zero for a curatorial aesthetics of the possible (engaged thinking). In the same gesture, however, it contingently founded an aesthetics of the *impossible* (expelled refuse). As to the latter, the *Fountain's* story is cannon fodder. I'll thus cite Hulten's account, which begins with the *Fountain's* fall out:

The discord amongst the officers and directors of the Society of Independent Artists dominates the atmosphere at the Grand Central Palace until the opening hour of the exhibition. The subject of the dispute is *Fountain*, the entry sent by Richard Mutt from Philadelphia, who has paid his \$6 membership fee and has the right to exhibit. Its defenders maintain that there is nothing immoral in the sculpture and to refuse it would be against the very principles upon which the exhibition has been organized: "No jury, no prizes." Its detractors led by William Glackens, president of the society, who considers it the product of "suppressed adolescence," believe the object

to be indecent and certainly not a work of art. Reminded of the cartoon strip characters Mutt and Jeff, George Bellows suspects that someone has sent it as a joke. (Hulten 1993: 9 April 1917)

Placed atop a black pedestal, the “shiny white enamel form causing all the argument” was none other than a male urinal turned on its back (Hulten 1993: 9 April 1917). In terms of the work’s “author-function,” before *Fountain* was a canonical readymade conjured up by Duchamp (the artist) it was an anonymous curatorial intervention enacted by Duchamp (the organizer). An intellectual fracas immediately ensued among the Society’s directors, the majority of whom would conclude that *Fountain* has no place in an art exhibition because, *by no definition*, was it a work of art. Hence the aporia of the “juried non-juried” exhibition. If *Fountain* was “not a work of art,” by any definition, then it *couldn’t* have been excluded by the directors. The Society’s “no jury, no prize” rule, ensuring total artistic inclusiveness, wins by *legal* default. But checkmate, in fact, goes to Duchamp, who exposed the Society’s internal contradiction through this chance operation. In so doing, Duchamp was at once he who *placed* the urinal into the Society, and then, when he claimed authorship of this act, by proxy he was that which the Society *expelled*.

Extimate Objects: The Exception

If Duchamp’s aesthetics of the possible could be considered ground zero for a modality of modernist curatorial thinking within the context of geopolitical shifts among European nation states in and around the *fin de siècle*, as I have argued, by the mid-twentieth century a parallel line of *biopolitics* came to a head with the catastrophe of World War II. This catastrophe, in turn, ushered in a different, but related, tendency within post-war contemporary art that I’ll call the “aesthetics of extimacy,” a concept to which I’ll return momentarily.

“Extimacy” was Jacques Lacan’s neologism for the psychic effect of foreign objects that we designate as the *not me*, which, nevertheless, intimately come to *define me*. Like a moebius strip, extimate objects therefore defy the categories of “inside” and “outside,” because they’re paradoxically perceived as being both exterior and interior to one’s sense of self. So, we have a bipolar, narcissistically paranoid, relation to such extimate objects. For Lacan, this begins with the primordial encounter we have to our own mirrored image. He derived this psychoanalytic formulation – his famous “mirror stage” theory – in 1936 to describe the infantile subject, who, between the age of six months finds him/herself at the threshold of a visible world, narcissistically enraptured by his/her own image, and “in a flutter of jubilant activity brings back an instantaneous aspect of his/her image in the mirror” (Lacan 1977: 1–2). At the same time, the fledgling subject’s jubilation is immediately countered by an acute sense of paranoia because the subject’s sense of self is *exteroceptive*. Meaning, it is stimulated by an *image* of itself that is *external* to itself. In short, the subject’s founding moment, the sense of an inside “me,” is always already exterior to us because it is *there* – in this *other* that is me – that the “I” am activated. Going forth, the subject tends to *abjectify* objects – those people, places, images, and concepts – that appear extimate, for the simple reason the subject likes to imagine that he or she is rooted, whole and intact, in one place. That is to say, that she or he exists *without* contradiction.

Echoes of the ambivalent subjectivity produced by the mirror stage might be found in what Michel Foucault has called the “bio-political sphere.” For Lacan’s mirror stage theory was born in precisely that cultural context. While delivering the first pass of his “Looking-Glass Phase” theory at the Fourteenth Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Marienbad in 1936, Lacan himself observed how this primordial scene manifests itself in mass phenomenon. Leaving the Congress, Lacan visited the Nazi fair at the Eleventh Olympiad in Berlin, where, for the first time in history, propagandists for the Third Reich had turned the games into a massive publicity stunt complete with large-screen film projections, directed by Leni Riefenstahl. As Philippe Julien recounts: “With his invention of the mirror stage, Lacan had exposed the very source of racism; now in Berlin, he saw its glaring manifestation. Indeed, the power of racism is rooted in the primordial fascination of each of us with his or her counterpart, in the captivating vision of the Gestalt of the other’s body as mirror.” That is the love. That is the narcissism. “On the other hand,” Julien continues, “this vision excludes the stranger, the one with whom I cannot identify lest he break my mirror” (Julien 1994: 29). That is the hate. That is the paranoia. Biopolitics – those technologies of state and global powers exerted over entire populations – thrives upon such duplicity, transforming individual “subjectivity” into mass “subjugation.” As such, according to Foucault, biopolitics is the mechanism through which power determines who is allowed to exist (to live) inside the public sphere and who is expelled (to die) outside of it.

Giorgio Agamben – the Italian philosopher whom cultural practitioners have read extensively from the mid-1990s to the present – further addressed the manner in which modern subjects are inextricably *caught up* within the extimate paradoxes that define biopolitics. Specifically, he addresses the Ancient Roman concept of *homo sacer*, Latin for the “the sacred man” or “accursed man,” denoting anything “set apart” from common society in the sense of being “hallowed” or “cursed.” For Agamben, *homo sacer* is the foundation for the modern concept of “bare life,” as he

who may be killed and yet not sacrificed, and whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert. An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed), has thus offered the key by which not only the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power will unveil their mysteries. At same time, however, this ancient meaning of the term *sacer* presents us with the enigma of a figure of the sacred that, before or beyond the religious, constitutes the first paradigm of the political realm of the West. (Agamben 1998: 8–10)

The modern political apparatus framing Agamben’s *homo sacer* is Carl Schmitt’s notion of sovereign exception. According to Schmitt, when a perceived enemy of the state enacts an existential threat to the nation, the sovereign authority has the legal power to impose a “state of exception” – as did Hitler, for whom Schmitt was a crown jurist – suspending the governing constitution and thus law. Endowed with this power, Schmitt conceived the sovereign as he who “stands outside of the normal juridical order, and yet belongs to it, for it is he who is responsible for deciding whether the constitution can be suspended in toto” (Agamben 2005: 35). This borderline status – the sovereign’s indeterminate zone between law and anomie – marks the enemy’s extimate relation to the state. Although the enemy – that collective

embodiment of the “not me” – appears to be outside the state’s milieu, the enemy is paradoxically and quintessential to the nation state. For the enemy is the nation state’s *raison d’être*. Annihilate your enemy, and you annihilate yourself.

As such, the sovereign and the enemy topologically mirror each other, connecting the sacred to the profane. Bare life, moreover, precisely personifies this “being-outside and yet belonging to” topological structure, indicative of the aforementioned subject (in Lacanian terms) and the state (in Arendtian terms). As for the state, Agamben himself points out that, by linking the fates of the rights of man to that of the nation state, Arendt implies an *intimate* connection between the two. And in so doing, “the paradox from which Arendt departs is that the very figure who should have embodied the rights of man par excellence – the refugee – signals instead the concept’s radical crisis” (Agamben 1998: 126). To be conscious of this crisis, this aporia, entails trying to understand why modern democracy was incapable of saving all living beings “whose happiness it had dedicated all its efforts, from unprecedented ruin.” For Agamben, modern democracy’s “decadence and gradual convergence with totalitarian states in post-democratic spectacular societies” was most likely rooted in this aporia. Should this prove to be true, then “until the contradictions that this fact implies are dissolved, Nazism and fascism – which transformed the decision on bare life into the supreme political principle – will remain stubbornly with us” (Agamben 1998: 10).

Which brings us back to extimate aesthetics. Over the last two decades, Nazism and fascism *has* stubbornly remained with us. Concomitantly, our collective memory of Eurocentric totalitarianism in the past and our collective denial of its global return in the present has taken root in the curatorial narrative hosted by the international contemporary exhibition platform documenta – a nonprofit organization supported and funded by the City of Kassel and the State of Hesse, as well as by the German Federal Cultural Foundation – held every five years. That said, documenta was originally conceived in 1955 by the Kassel painter and academy professor Arnold Bode, as a platform celebrating the triumphal return of modernism *over* such despotism. As documenta’s retrospective narrative relays: “Arnold Bode endeavored to bring Germany back into dialogue with the rest of the world after the end of World War II, and to connect the international art scene through a ‘presentation of twentieth century art.’”² Conceived as a “museum of 100 days,” Bode aimed at returning those extimate modernist artworks – ones famously denounced and expelled by the Third Reich in the Degenerate Art exhibition of 1937 – into modernity’s restored *grand récit*. His aim, by documenta’s own account, was “not to present an overview of art produced during the first half of the twentieth century, but rather to ‘reveal the roots of contemporary art in all areas,’ as Bode wrote in the exposé. Bode wanted to develop a genealogy of contemporary art, generated from a mood that might be described as a blend of postwar trauma and the will to modernize.”³ And that he did, focusing on the classical genres of the avant-garde: Expressionism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Cubism.

In the process, however, even *more* extimate objects were produced when significant artists and artworks failed to meet Bode’s criteria for his modernist genealogy. Most notably absent were the political, more subversive genre of Dada. Case in point, while the French figurative sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon was included, his brother, Marcel Duchamp, was not. Nor were any artworks selected conceived in the *Fountain*’s readymade vein. One would have to wait until Harald Szeeman’s famed documenta 5, of 1972, for the artworld’s contemporary extimate objects to make their own

triumphal return. And yet, then again, artists and artworks conceived along the Conceptual–Pop–Fluxus trajectory – Ed Kienholz, Claes Oldenburg, Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono, Bruce Nauman, Hermann Nitsch, key among them – were presented within another *grand récit*: that of Szeeman’s famed “individual mythology.” This was Szeeman’s dialectical reversal of Bode’s rooted “museum of 100 days” model, which he reconceived as a transitive “100 day event.” In Szeeman’s hands, documenta’s *narrative* might have rotated 180 degrees from Bode’s – the art historical story of what constitutes contemporary practice flipping from modernist to conceptualist – but the canonical *manner* in which this art historical story was told did change. In this way, the curator-as-sovereign ruler of the exhibition platform – a platform he is at once a part *of*, as its maker, and apart *from*, as its exception – remained firmly intact. This was symptomatically confirmed in the form of a signed letter submitted by a group of participating artists declaring Szeeman’s documenta to be nothing but an “exhibition of an exhibition.” Ironically, Szeeman’s curation of individual artworks had collectively and hegemonically been subsumed under his own thematic of “personal mythology,” as an uncritical, unconscious paradox.⁴ As such, Szeeman’s impresario-driven model is as much a self-affirming mirror onto itself as are the authoritarian nation states described by Schmitt, for both rely on a metanarrative with which the impresario-sovereign deems his subjects to be ontologically synonymous or else they’re expelled. Conventionally, even though art curation and national narration are mythologically perceived as separate – *especially* when they are connected, as is the case with documenta’s nationalist structure – in reality, art curation and national narration are always connected, as Buchloh’s “Figures of Authority” essay aptly points out.

Catherine David’s documenta X – the last documenta of the twentieth century in which the city of Kassel was conceived as a “modern ruin” – explicitly forged the connection between national politics and aesthetic narration, aware as she was that artworks are alternately included or expelled from historical narratives *exactly* the way people, who are reduced to bare life as *homo sacer*, are from Western political states. And when the two realms are discursively connected, within a self-conscious curatorial narration of their relation, then the aesthetic critique of artworks changes as does the tone of their curation. In this vein, David conceived documenta X as a series of “retrospectives” intended to frame the post-war period in a “post-national” space of memory and reflection, while exposing, in the same gesture, the “omissions of Western art historiography.”⁵ David’s “100 Day – 100 Guests” thus further mutated Szeeman’s “100 day event” model into curatorial performative, where guests from all regions of the globalized world were invited to talk with David about various matters every evening, starting at seven o’clock and held in documenta Halle. With documenta X, we are thus in the *thinking* game again, where narration curation does and *undoes* the canonical Western art historical narrative in the same gesture. David’s logo for the exhibition poster performatively demonstrated this. A small black “d,” denoting documenta, over which a large orange “X,” denoting the exhibition’s tenth chapter, was superimposed. To the outrage of institutionally identified followers, this connotatively signified the *crossing out* of documenta. But that, again, is to run too quickly into myth, that is, into dialectical reversal. For crossing something out is *not* synonymous with erasure. To the contrary, that which is crossed remains there, to be seen *beneath* the mark of erasure, a mark which is literally held in check. As such, documenta, like historical narration and national identification, is typographically presented as a specter.

Neither fully there, nor ever fully gone, in David's curatorial hands, documenta "itself" was the object *cause* of our entwined aesthetic and historical desire.

Return: The Impossible

Fast forward to 2008. On 29 September, the Dow Jones industrial average fell 777 points, the biggest single-day fall in American history (at that time). The crash was the aftershock of the US subprime home mortgage crisis, initiating a systemic infection of the world's entire free market, one that strictly adhered to Milton Friedman's school of economics which, under President George W. Bush's stewardship, shunned any and all government regulation. Consequently, the entire global financial market, not just the US housing market, became infested with "toxic assets."⁶ Consequently, large bundles of troubled assets sat, immobile, on the books of vast numbers of financial institutions, initiating a race to the bottom. As their value continued to decline, these assets threatened the solvency of an entire global network of banks and institutions unable to unload them. The subsequent crash had been so shattering, so cataclysmic for free market thinkers, that even Alan Greenspan, the former US Federal Reserve Chairman, admitted to Congress that "those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders' equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief" (Andrews 2008). Thus began the governmental bailout of international banks deemed "too big to fail" by the titans of Wall Street. But the money had to come from somewhere and so big Western governments – led by the financial "inner zone" of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – imposed austerity plans onto those "outer zone" countries whose banking system and thus governments were also underwater. A chain reaction of nation state crises ensued, precipitating mass protests in the European Union's inner and outer zones and into the Middle East, which, in turn, precipitated a renewed twenty-first-century global refugee crisis. And when the Western world has incurred a refugee crisis it has historically turned to the right. Arendt voice, once again, echoes in our collective ear: the world we live in at any moment *is* the world of the past.

If, over the last century, nation states have alternately been defined by geopolitical shifts, to biopolitical technologies, to global financial market crashes, contemporary nation states are now entrenched in the quagmire of these related systems' complete interdependence. Correspondingly, critical approaches to curatorial thinking now must account for the manner in which international biennial, triennial, and quinquennial art platforms are themselves concomitantly embedded within this quagmire. Hence the curatorial thematic, "Learning from Athens," employed by Polish curator Adam Szymczyk's as artistic director of documenta 14. Szymczyk's decision to turn documenta into a "divided self," between Kassel and Athens, was, in his own words, "a decidedly anti-identitarian stance."⁷ After positing this divided self – which is to say, after *thinking through* our current nation state problematic vis-à-vis the contemporary international exhibition platform – Szymczyk immediately warned of his curatorial endeavor's institutional limitation:

In this field of economic and political forces, the institutional self-preservation mechanism of documenta does not easily allow for "experiments" that go beyond what can be projected onto the notion of "artistic freedom" that documenta famously offers

to its “artistic director.” The question we ask – what about freedom not limited to artistic expression only, freedom that is not at all conditional on the “artistic” qualifier? – remains to be answered in documenta 14. (Szymczyk 2017: 22)

Setting aside the platform’s impending failure, fiscal and otherwise,⁸ Szymczyk tenaciously persisted in waging this experimentation with freedoms related to bare life, not just artistic expression, mindful of documenta’s insidious global backdrop in which it was ensnared: the local and global “implementation of debt as political measure, the gradual destruction of what remained of the welfare state, wars waged for resources and the market, and the resulting and never-ending humanitarian catastrophes. This darkening global situation has leaned heavily upon our daily (and nightly) thinking about, and acting on and for, documenta 14” (Szymczyk 2017: 22–23).

Szymczyk further argues that foremost among these catastrophes

has been the economic violence enacted, as it seems, almost experimentally upon the population of Greece brought about by subsequent phases of austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions in unison with European Union leaders, such measures have resulted in the de facto loss of sovereignty of the current and any future Greek political constituency, as well as the loss of Greek citizens’ individual freedom after capital control instruments were implemented in 2015. Alongside and entangled in this social collapse have been the disastrous war in Syria and the continuing arrival of refugees, by land and sea, to Greece and southern Europe, and finally the dark rise of authoritarian rule, right-wing populism, and fascism across the continent and the world at large. (Szymczyk 2017: 23)

“Catastrophe” is not an arbitrary choice of words to denote the current global social collapse. It’s one that figures centrally in the language of Polish Messianism, a Romantic ideology born in the wake of Poland’s *catastrophic* partition by Prussian, Russia, and Austria in 1795. Of course, all doctrines of Messianism – Jewish or Christian – begin and end with an impending catastrophe, in that Messianism is at heart an eschatological doctrine. But the Polish brand of Messianism is less apocalyptic than it is optimistically (albeit spiritually) hopeful that in the wake of authoritarian catastrophe comes enlightened self-governance. In Poland’s case, Messianism’s most famous spokesman was the romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, who, like many of the Romantics, was influenced by the so-called “Christian” Kabbalah – a doctrine created by Spanish mystic Ramon Llull, popularized in the romantic *Sturm und Drang* movement (Bielik-Robson 2014: 31–32). The doctrine christened Poland – which established its commonwealth in 966 as an island of democracy in a continental sea of absolutism – as the martyred “Christ of Nations.” As Joel Burnell recounts, Polish Messianism maintained that only “the resurrection of an independent, democratic Poland would demonstrate the triumph of freedom and justice over tyranny and oppression, and usher in a new era of peace, justice and international brotherhood among nations of Europe” (Burnell 2009: xvii). In Polish Messianism, faith in a heavenly deity is thus replaced with faith in historical progress. Szymczyk’s desire to stage a likeminded redemption for the martyred outer-zone Greek nation state vis-à-vis Kassel’s inner-zone exhibition system resonates here.

While Szymczyk’s Messianic desire may have been implicit, another curator, Israeli Galit Eilat, has explicitly employed Messianism as a critical discourse of curatorial

negation.⁹ In her 2008 exhibition *C.H.O.S.E.N.* – hosted by the Israeli Center for Digital Art in coordinated with the Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdańsk, Poland – Eilat invited Israeli and Polish artists, philosophers, and sociologists to address Messianism as a concept of “prophecy” beyond the Judeo-Christian context, within the national narratives of both Poland and Israel, in specific, and the post-colonial global national narrative more generally. As Eilat explained, the exhibitions and conferences (and subsequent reader) comprising *C.H.O.S.E.N.* “set out to examine the way national or contemporary communities’ narratives are influenced by Messianic philosophy, literature and ideology ... [but also] how visions of individuals, nations or countries acting as agents of unique mission of liberation, salvation and intensification are reflected in contemporary art; and to see the cultural plot entwined with a private vision: the hero, the prophet, the saint, the politician, the intellectual and the artist” (Eilat 2008: 9–10). Of course, a revamped Messianism wouldn’t be the first ideology constituted within the Modern era offering up a secular alternative for religious doctrine. From the far left to the far right, modern political theory has proffered Marxism, Nihilism, Communism, Socialism, Zionism, and, most horrifically, Nazism. Taken to their most earnestly idealistic ends, they are all inherently problematic if not apocalyptic. Could a “progressive” take on a mystical, eschatological doctrine be performatively deconstructed to critical end in the aesthetic, philosophical, and sociological spheres? It’s a difficult, maybe purposefully absurd, question, but it’s one that drives Galit Eilat’s curatorial practice toward the ends of a radically interdisciplinary model of human rights activism, in which factual and fictional spheres intentionally collide and blur.

Such deconstructive Messianism vitalizes Eilat’s sensibility, her *urgency* really, to move curatorial practice beyond the descriptive, the decorative, or declarative act of thematically organizing readymade artworks for viewership. Hers is a desire for curatorial practice to *do* something with myriad readymade national borders, to *think* about national borders by performatively transgressing them in and through the curatorial act. We should note that there’s plenty of subject matter there. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, construction of border walls has globally spiked from 15 in the year 2001 to 63 across four continents in 2015. Most of these barriers have been erected within the European Union – a region where borders had ostensibly been erased – as a response to the rush of more than a million migrants, the majority of which were (and still are) fleeing wars in Syria and Iraq (Granados et al. 2016). In 2004, the year following the US declaration of war on Iraq, the collective “Artists without Walls,” to which Eilat belonged, set its sights on one wall in particular: the 420-mile-long partition separating the West Bank from Jerusalem. Their statement read:

A joint project of Israeli and Palestinian artists, which is minimalist and fascinating in concept, will take place this evening at 6 P.M. in Jerusalem’s Abu Dis neighborhood, near the separation fence. Two video cameras will film what is happening on both sides of the wall, and the material filmed by each of them will be screened at the same time on the other side of the fence. In this way, on each side of the wall, one will see scenes from the other side, and the wall will become “transparent” for several hours ... There is a danger in opening a window in the wall, for ultimately what we want and what we came together for, is to do away with the wall altogether ... the wall is merely an expression, in a concrete form, of what is already there, a

high degree of segregation and wish for separation, a mentality, a feeling which is widely present in the public ... So to work against the wall means working against this, changing the mentality ... The question is what it means to work against it, in both publics, both the Palestinian and the Israeli ... It means to know that public, and to know how to bring the issue of non-separation in a way that still moves them... (The Divide 2004)

The group's self-imposed curatorial crisis – what to do with, on, and around this partitioning wall – entailed a willful flirtation with failure, a danger that they would re-inscribe the wall with aesthetic value and thus further root Israel's ideological claim that the wall was “naturally” sited. Of course, the wall's mythological sited-ness was a non-thinking claim by those subjects interpellated, in Althusser's sense of the word, in and by the Zionist narrative, a narrative that the United Nations performatively validated in 1948 when it allowed the rallying call that Palestine was “land without people for a people without land” to go unchallenged. Reflecting on the wall project, Eilat spoke about the curatorial “opportunism” at hand, taking care to note that opportunism is not meant in the negative sense of being “transactional.” Rather it is meant to denote those projects standing between what is possible and what is powerful, given the opportunity to shift something *impossible* into that place of power. In so doing, one finds the potentiality to shift the discursive, narrative *base* of that standing power.¹⁰

Eilat's notion of “opportunistic tactics” – an instance of curating-as-a-verb, *par excellence* – aligns with Jean-François Lyotard's notion of “critical pragmatics.” This was Lyotard's term for denoting the tactical, performative act of replacing universalist meta-narratives – inherent to both structuralist theory and modern politics, to which I would add art history – with situational, locally specific interventions. Hence his related notion of the “phrase,” which stresses fragmentariness over narrative. Geoffrey Bennington likens Lyotard's “phrase” to a “sentence” *detached* from the whole of a narrative. Situationally the critical pragmatics of phrase-sentence stands in for narrative, in essence enacting a metonymic contingency over narrative's metaphorical monumentality.¹¹ Eilat's own version of curating-as-a-verb enacts something similar to this, breaking up the internalized narrative – in her case that of both art and state – and externalizing this rupture through public practice, to *infect*, opportunistically, others with this modality of thinking and working. Accordingly, in 2010, when asked what she had changed using art, she replied: “First I changed myself and the people working with me. I learned a lot about the mechanisms of the state, and the mechanisms of art in the context of the state” (Eilat 2012: 106). Further, by *detourning* or *fragmenting* the militaristic narrative inherent to both the historical avant-garde and the state of Israel, she equates her curatorial practice to that of being a drug dealer, for a *good* drug dealer corrupts narrative, the act of which becomes a progressive addiction:

What I do is create an army of my own soldiers. How? I'm like a drug dealer. I create a network on the streets. Once I get the first couple of soldiers addicted, I send them into the streets, to other countries, around the world. They sell drugs to others who also become addicted. I'm a good drug dealer. All those massive ideological mechanisms work in a similar way. Why not make it useful for us? The only problem is to develop a good drug. (Eilat 2012: 108)

That good drug might well be The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), an art project steeped in Messianic ethos, the catalyst and centerpiece of which was Yael Bartana's seminal film trilogy *Mary Koszmary* (Nightmare) (2007), *Mur i wieża* (Wall and Tower) (2009), and *Zamach* (Assassination) (2011). Curated by Sebastian Cichocki and Galit Eilat for the 2011 Polish Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, the project came to be known as ...*and Europe will be stunned*. As a whole, JRMiP presented a filmic narrative in three parts documenting an imaginary political group calling for the return of Jews to the land of their forefathers. If this time around the Jewish homeland turns out to be Poland, rather than Israel, it's because JRMiP's call is conflicted, one equally permeated with repressed dystopic demons of the past and hopeful utopian dreams of a transnational future. As Cichocki and Eilat's press release relays: "The films traverse a landscape scarred by the histories of competing nationalisms and militarisms – overflowing with the narratives of the Israeli settlement movement, Zionist dreams, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the Palestinian right of return. Apart from realizing the film trilogy, the artist has established the foundations of a new political movement" (e-flux 2011.) But if JRMiP is a "political movement," then it's one that's wrapped in a fictive artwork, which, in turn, performatively initiates a political move in the real artworld.

JRMiP's political move has everything to do with its siting in Venice, which brings us back to where we began. For it was at the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century that the Venice Biennale would make its debut, on 30 April 1895 as The 1st International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice. Aesthetically traditionalist and politically nationalist, the Venice Biennale was solemnly inaugurated in the presence of the king and queen, Umberto I and Margherita di Savoy. Its design (then and now) combines a series of group exhibition halls with a consortium of nation state pavilions (29 to date). Each pavilion constitutes its own jurisdiction, akin to global state embassies, inviting one artist (or a collection) to "represent" their nation every two years. In its nascent moment, just who was permitted to represent whom was already a conservative affair, the general secretary of the Biennale, Antonio Fradeletto, having famously removed one of Picasso's works from the Spanish pavilion for being too shockingly modernist. And although the Biennale's exhibition platform has liberalized over the last century to include various forms of avant-garde strategies combined with interventionist protest art, up to and through the Venice Biennale's 55th chapter, in 2011, the nationalist agenda of the pavilions' conception still prevailed. Accordingly, Bartana was the first foreign national to represent Poland in the history of the Venice Biennale, and only the third foreign national in the biennale's history (at that time) to exhibit in a pavilion other than that of her citizenry. In this way, JRMiP was a conscientious "attempt to implement artistic fiction in the body of a national pavilion, to use the voice of the state to invite 3 million Jewish people to return. The use of art, or the condition of an artwork to become useful, was to be as such *outside* the realm of art or the art institute," as Eilat recalls.¹²

JRMiP's placement – a readymade narrative sited within a national pavilion that accorded with the artwork's *subject matter* rather than the artist's country of origin – was a Duchampian move as radical as the *Fountain's* original placement within the Society of Independent Artists. While Bartana's fictive *mise-en-scène* was openly invited by Poland's Ministry of Culture, on the Israeli side, however, the move was scandalously received. Israel's Culture and Sport's Minister Limor Livnat at first

refused to visit the Polish pavilion, accusing Bartana's work as being anti-Zionist. Without having yet seen the work, Livnat issued an official declaration that "Culture is a social bridge, and the political debate must remain outside cultural and artistic life" (Rosenblum 2011). Succumbing to public pressure, Livnat eventually capitulated and visited the pavilion, reportedly leaving the installation with a "blank stare." President Shimon Peres, however, never visited the Polish Pavilion, only the Israeli one. Hence the return of real politick that underlid JRMiP's allegorical fiction. Reflecting on the work's scandalous reception, Amalia Rosenblum notes, "The hypothesis of a Jewish return to Poland finds an echo in questions that people are asking around the world – certainly the Europeans, who are contending with immigration, for whom the question of the right of return has yet to come off the agenda" (Rosenblum 2011). These were the type of questions upon which Bartana staged her epilogue to the JRMiP's filmic debut in Venice: the performative First Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, comprising her contribution to the 7th Berlin Biennale in 2012.¹³ Curated by the Polish artist Artur Żmijewski, who promised "more discussions than ever before," the Biennale was presented at 12 sites in Berlin and in Eisenhüttenstadt in an attempt "to negotiate art as a tool for social transformation by presenting a range of attempts of influencing politics directly" (Berlin Biennale 2012). In Berlin, the JRMiP was, in effect, a nodal point of Bartana's fellow diasporic travelers – philosophers, politicians, artists, writers, curators, and others – operating in the liminal space between the possible and impossible, the national and transnational, and, accordingly, the world as it *is* and the world as we might envision it *to be*.

Coda: Diaspora

By 2017, JRMiP's transgressive move would become the norm. Addressing the proliferation of "rogue" pavilions presented at the 57th Venice Biennale, Hettie Judah pondered: "To be selected is an honor – what artist would reject a platform like Venice. But what exactly does it mean to 'represent' a country? And what does it mean for a country not to be represented by an artist? Or for an artist not to have a country to represent? And what associations does national stewardship carry at a time when nationalism is on the rise?" (Judah 2017). Her questions reflect the *raison d'être* of the Venice Biennale's recent transnational pavilion phenomenon. Witness the ad hoc British-backed Diaspora Pavilion at the Palazzo Pisani San Marina for the 57th Venice Biennale "conceived as a challenge to the prevalence of national pavilions within the structure of an international biennale [in the form of] nineteen artists whose practices ... expand, complicate and even destabilize diaspora as a term, whilst highlighting the continued relevance that diaspora as a lived reality holds today" (International Curators Forum 2017). Alternately, observe the Slovene collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), whose ad hoc pavilion, State of Time – headlined by Slavoj Žižek for the same 57th Venice Biennale – was conceived as a utopian formation with no physical territory and no identification with any existing nation state. As the NSK press release read: "The pavilion does not stand in opposition to the national structure of the Venice Biennale, but rather seeks to stand as an independent Pavilion that will redefine the idea of the state and proffer a new type of citizenship" (Buffenstein 2017). In all these select curatorial performatives – in alliance with countless others

beyond the scope of this essay – Arendt’s moral specter of “the thinker” has come to haunt the international biennial system from the twentieth-century *fin de siècle* to the present. And if, as Arendt claimed, *there are no dangerous thoughts, thinking itself is dangerous*, then this model of curating – this act of thinking through readymade art platforms – is one with no beginning and no end. Rather, it is a self-generating process. The thoughts that a given curated artwork instilled in me yesterday – the problematic imbrication of international art exhibitions, global capital, and populist nation states, for instance – will satisfy my need to think, only to the extent that I can continually think such thoughts anew today. For a model of critical *practice*, as opposed museological *maintenance*, curators must continue to facilitate *and* participate in any and all transgressive acts of aesthetic thinking. This is the very definition of curating-as-a-verb.

Notes

- 1 From *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*: “Hanging in gallery 53, reserved for the Cubists, Duchamp’s *Nude* is the one picture the public wants to see and it is the first illustration in the catalogue. The public flock to see the ‘Art Institute Circus,’ as it is dubbed by the *Evening Post* and revel in their bafflement, shock, hilarity or even fury roused by the new art,” 24 March 1913. Monday, Chicago (Gough-Cooper 1993). (Note that the catalogue’s pagination is in accordance with the astrological chart.)
- 2 documenta. 2019. “Retrospective: documenta I, 16 July –18 September 1955.” <https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 documenta. 2019. “Retrospective: documenta 5, 30 June –8 October 1972.” https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_5, accessed 13 March 2019.
As per documenta’s archival account: “Many artists, including both participants and nonparticipants in the exhibition expressed severe criticism of documenta 5 as an ‘exhibition of an exhibition’ that aimed to anoint itself as a work of art and exploited art for that purpose. In a sharply worded letter, Robert Morris forbade the exhibition of his works, which were selected and presented without his approval – misused, he wrote, for the purpose of ‘illustrating misguided sociological principles and categories of art history.’ Along with Carle Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry Le Va, Sol LeWitt, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson, he signed a declaration in opposition to documenta, which was published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 12 May 1972. Except for Andrea, Judd, Morris, and Sandback, all those who signed were represented at documenta, however.”
- 5 documenta. 2019. “Retrospective: documenta X, 21 June –28 September 1997.” https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_x, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 6 Toxic assets are those mortgage-backed securities, collateralized debt obligations, and credit default swaps that have become illiquid when the secondary market for buying and selling them disappears because they were artificially and systemically over-valued.
- 7 The identitarian movement, is a European and North American white nationalist movement that originated in France, advocating the preservation of national identity and a return to traditional western values. Austria’s Freedom Party, Germany’s Alternative for Germany, France’s National Front, the Netherland’s Freedom Party, The Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), Italy’s Northern League, Greece’s

Golden Dawn, the Sweden Democrats party, Bulgaria's United Patriots, and the People's Party Our Slovakia are all participants of the identitarian movement. Meanwhile, in the United States the alt-right movement has coined President Donald Trump as its first "identitarian president." (See: Weigel 2017.)

- 8 Szymczyk notes the double-sided fear: "Kassel feared the 'loss' of documenta to Athens (as exemplified in a Christian Democratic Union 2016 Kassel local government election slogan: '100 good reason for the change – so that documenta stays in Kassel'), and Athens feared yet another big event with no sustainable effect much like the 2004 Olympic Games, which were followed by Greece's gradual decline" (Szymczyk 2017: 21). As to the latter, indeed, the Athens component of documenta 14 came to be blamed for the organization's going over budget and falling into debt, marking Szymczyk's accusation of the Western world using "debt as a political measure" as prophetically apt. Apropos documenta practice, an open letter of protest was signed by 200 of the artist participants. (See Russeth 2017.)
- 9 I am employing the word "negation" here in the Adornean sense of the word.
- 10 Conversation with Eilat, 15 May 2018.
- 11 As Geoffrey Bennington states: "narrative is indeed a good place to look for a possible elaboration of the event: not simply in the obvious sense that narratives recount or represent events, but that such recounting or representing is a particular way of dealing with the event, of neutralizing what is here still thought of as a quantitative charge. On the other hand, it is also claimed that narrative can in some sense *be* an event" (Bennington 1988: 110).
- 12 Conversation with Eilat, 22 February 2018.
- 13 For an in-depth analysis of Yael Bartana's Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, both as the film trilogy and the performative congress, see Carson (2013: 29–37).

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Curating without Borders

Transnational Feminist and Queer Feminist Practices for the Twenty-first Century

Elke Krasny

We are living in a time marked by perennial war, massive displacement of people, and searing accounts of human rights abuse. There is a triple crisis, in politics, the economy, and ecology. The global division of labor under neoliberal capitalism accelerates highly gendered and racialized injustice. Owing to right-wing and religious fundamentalisms circulating through global social mediascapes, there is an unprecedented surge in homophobia, misogyny, queerphobia, xenophobia, and transphobia. Structural, institutional, and what Gayatri Spivak in 1988 termed “epistemic violence” define people’s everyday lives. At the same time, the twenty-first century has given rise to a new wave of feminism. In 2017, Shami Chakrabarti spoke of “the resurgence of interest in the women’s cause” as we saw the contours of a new feminist, a new women’s movement taking shape. Feminist and queer feminist activism, at once local and global, is based on transnationally connected social, political, and cultural networks. The activities of the 2017 Women’s March, which was documented a year later in a book, or the 2015 anthology *I Call Myself a Feminist: The View from Twenty-five Women Under Thirty* are just two out of the many examples.

This chapter is concerned with feminist and queer feminist curating practices testing out locally specific transnational ways of working. The analysis here places these practices in the context of the twenty-first-century feminist movement. The focus is on curating beyond the art world, based in what art historian Angela Dimitrakaki in 2016 named “real feminism.” Collaborative in nature, such curating seeks to counteract the dire realities described above and establishes links to past feminisms, in particular the period from Second Wave to Third Wave Feminism with its key moments of transnational feminism like Forum’85 on the occasion of the United Nation’s Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The very same period in time has also witnessed profound changes in curating. Globalization in the art world led to a new caste of curators epitomized in the star curator comparable to the star architect or star

artist. Fast-paced knowledge economies, high-speed communication, and a vast production of global art chosen or commissioned for big exhibitions, biennales, triennales, or other large-scale festivals is characteristic of this curating. The same period also saw the emergence of socially and politically involved forms of bottom-up curating with its intellectual, aesthetic, political, and infrastructural activism transgressing the borders of the art world. Aware of this dual legacy of curating in the late twentieth century, the curator-star and the curator based in self-organized structures and networks beyond the art world, the focus here is on giving an account of the latter in its transnational dimension of feminist and queer feminist practices for the twenty-first century. Effectively leading to an expanded field of curating, these involved practices are research-based and aligned with social movements, refugee movements, immigrant activism, antigentrification, antiracism, decolonial, or LGTBQIA struggles, grassroots women's centers, or critical work in academia. They make time and space for practices referred to as "substantive citizenship" by James Holston and Arjun Appadurai in 1996, not bound to the formal status of citizenship.

Cultural analysis, and writing the histories and theories of such twenty-first-century transnational feminist and queer feminist curating practices, is only just beginning, despite the fact that curating has garnered much attention in art historical scholarship, and in the writings by curators. Since the 1990s, a history and theory of curating has been established.¹ Feminist and queer feminist scholarship have counteracted the omission of women curators' achievements in most of this recent history and drawn attention to feminist and queer feminist interventions. First Wave Feminism exhibition making remains to be an understudied field. Notable exceptions include *Feminist Space: Exhibition and Discourses between Philadelphia and Berlin 1865–1912*, by Mary Pepchinski in 2007; *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at the World's Fairs*, edited by T.J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn in 2010; and Julie M. Johnson's 2012 chapter on women artists curating a big historical survey exhibition at the Vienna Secession in 1910. Relevant publications with a focus on today's practices as they relate to the legacies from Second and Third Wave Feminism include the 2006 essay "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices Since the 1970s," by Katy Deepwell and *Curatorial Strategies*, an issue of *n.paradoxa* international feminist art journal, edited by Renée Baert and Deepwell, and published in the same year. The 2010s witnessed an increased interest in transnational dimensions of feminist curating evidenced in the volumes *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, edited by Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe in 2010; *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*, edited by Katrin Kivimaa in 2012; *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry; and *Women's Museum: Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, edited by Elke Krasny and Frauenmuseum Meran, both published in 2013.

The following account of feminist and queer feminist practices for the twenty-first century expands this scholarship by placing curating as a specific "transnational feminist praxis" in the context of the emergent twenty-first-century feminist movement: "Decolonizing feminism and demystifying capitalism," as postcolonial feminist theorist Mohanty elucidated, are crucial to transnational feminism (Mohanty 2003: 10). Such feminist praxis, and this includes curating, operates within today's globalized conditions of neoliberal capitalism and the resurgence of right-wing nationalism bleeding together politics and media. The following cultural analysis of curating

practices is attentive to what Adrienne Rich in 1984 called “politics of location.” She emphasized the “need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history in which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create” (Rich 1984: 212). Such a dialectical approach is useful to the “curatorial materialism” employed here (Krasny 2016). Rich advises to “begin with the material” and to pay attention to “when, where, and under what condition” (Rich 1984: 213–214, 221). Recent scholarship in the histories of art making and curating has (re)turned to forms of materialist analysis. While some of 1970s and 1980s feminist art history had a strong materialist orientation, 1990s feminist art historical scholarship leaned toward psychoanalysis and post-structuralism. Given today’s devastating conditions of rising injustice, feminist art historians call anew for “materialist alliances” (Horne and Perry 2017: 17). “Most significantly ... the task is to connect this promising anti-capitalist feminist critique with the vital social activism going on in the world around us, and encompassing queer, decolonial, and social reproduction struggles” (Horne and Perry 2017: 17).

Structured in five sections, this chapter examines examples from Berlin 2015, Ghent 2015, London 2015, Yerevan 2008–2010, and Vancouver 2011–2012. The Berlin example is a self-organized feminist art space that dates back to women artists’ peace activism in the 1980s and seeks to counteract white privilege in the art world today. The Ghent exhibition was held at a university gallery and linked key moments in historical transnational feminism to feminist and queer feminist postcolonial emancipatory art making today. The London project worked across displaced museum objects and women’s refugee organizations at a national museum geared to global audiences. The self-supported art structure in Yerevan works across the experiences of local and diasporic queer Armenian lives today. The project at a university gallery in Vancouver forged neighborhood collaborations with a focus on Indigenous women’s resistance to colonial trauma and today’s neoliberal urbanism with its gentrification pressures. While the projects take place in very different types of institutions ranging from a garden in Yerevan to the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, all the projects start from their specific local context and aim to transgress the borders of the art world. They all engage in historical and contemporary research and initiate collaborations across existing networks or initiate new ones. The fact that they employ exhibition and conversation in equal measures links them to the dual nature of curating. Only recently has the history writing of curating excavated its dual genealogy of exhibition and conversation. Both have been identified as formative to the historical, eighteenth and nineteenth century, development of what today is called curating. With Tony Bennett’s 1995 analysis of the “exhibitionary complex,” the focus of curating histories has been on the exhibition format. Recent feminist scholarship has identified “a conversational complex” relevant to curating’s history, in particular its female genealogy (see Krasny 2017a: 147–163). Exhibition and conversation are equally important to the sample of transnational feminist and queer feminist curating practices chosen here with the curator’s position occupied by art critics, artists, architects, cultural anthropologists, cultural theorists, translators, or writers.

While the museum and globalized art world events have been the target of feminist interventions with many transnational large-scale contributions since the mid-2010s, the focus here is on different transnational curating practices across art and activism at the grassroots level with an emphasis on substantive citizenship practices.²

Maura Reilly uses the term “transnational” to describe a curatorial framework that seeks to offer “a fresh and expanded definition of feminist artistic production for a transnational age” (Reilly 2007: 19). Such a curatorial approach uses the strategy of integrating previously marginalized artistic positions into a globalized art world. The sample of practices chosen for analysis here reveals emancipatory feminist and queer feminist curating that seeks to understand how the personal is transnational with complex intersections of multiple oppressions owed to neoliberal capitalism and histories of colonial trauma and genocide. In their specific locales, the five chosen examples forge alignments with social movements, civic organizations, or critical research activism within and outside academia to counteract today’s devastating conditions. The curatorial materialist analysis given in the following account uses layered descriptions that combine fieldwork, including site visits and extended conversations with curators or artists, art historical, and urban research, and feminist theory.

Precarious Art: Protest & Resistance, Berlin 2015

Upon entering Berlin’s feminist gallery alpha nova & galerie futura in 2015, one can feel a change. The walls have recently been painted black. In a public conversation on 12 September 2015, occasioned by the opening of the exhibition *Prekäre Kunst: Protest & Widerstand (Precarious Art: Protest & Resistance)*, the three invited artists, Melody LaVerne Bettencourt, Karina Griffith, and Lerato Shadi, explain their motivation behind this. They sought to change the conditions expected in a gallery space. Paint and color were used to critique and transform white walls. More than metaphors, white walls are seen as concrete materialization of “spaces of power and privilege” as they represent “white spaces” in the context of Berlin and Germany (LaVerne Bettencourt, Griffith, Shadi 2015: 10). The radical change to black walls highlights “what it would be like or look like to live in a Black-friendly world” (LaVerne Bettencourt, Griffith, Shadi 2015: 10). The three curators, London-based artist Stacie CC Graham, and the two artistic directors and managers of the gallery, cultural anthropologist Katharina Koch and Marie-Anne Kohl with a background in gender studies, wanted to use the gallery as an opportunity to collaboratively create knowledge and exchange on strategies how black women and women of color counteract structural and everyday racism and sexism, and marginalization in the white art system (see Graham, Koch, and Kohl 2015: 7).

Such painting black of white walls in a self-organized feminist art space has to be situated in the larger historical context of post-colonial memory politics specific to Berlin. The year 2015 marks both legacies of the historical trauma of colonial imperialism in Berlin and legacies of resistant self-organization by black Germans and black people living in Germany. In 1885, separated from 2015 by 130 years, the Berlin West Africa Conference, also known as Congo Conference, took place in Berlin with European powers deciding on their Africa policy. Their adopted “doctrine of effective occupation” meant that “a European power claiming territory in Africa must demonstrate ‘effective’ presence on the ground” (Chamberlain 2013: 54). This led to massive European presence on the African continent. In 1915, separated from 2015 by 100 years, colonial rule of the German Empire in Namibia, then German South West Africa, ended. Historian Reinhart Kössler dedicated his 2015 book to the politics of memory regarding “the first genocide of the twentieth century,

committed by German troops during the Namibian War of 1903–1908 (Kössler 2015: 1). He argues that “colonial amnesia was (and remains) widespread even amongst generally informed and critical sections of the German public” (Kössler 2015: 50). Black lives empowerment in Germany is equally part of this 2015 commemorative genealogy. In 1985, separated from 2015 by 30 years, the Initiative of Black People in Germany (Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland) was founded. A transnational feminist dialogue with Audre Lorde, American poet, womanist, and civil rights activist, during her Berlin years, 1984 to 1992, inspired the founding of this initiative. In particular, Lorde encouraged black women in Germany to write and publish stories from their situated perspectives. Lorde attended the large-scale gathering of women at the UN World Women’s Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. This is where she met Dagmar Schultz, then lecturer at the Free University of Berlin in West Berlin, who organized for Lorde to receive a visiting professorship at this institution in 1984. The seminar taught by Lorde coined two new terms, Afro-German and Black German (see Schultz 2012; Griffith 2015; Lennox 2017). Today, with many changes since the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany’s capital is characterized by globalized migrations, with many international artists, cultural producers, and intellectuals, among them a new generation of black women and women of color artists, are attracted to living in Berlin where cost of living used to be comparatively low. Claims to substantive cultural citizenship practices by black women and women of color artists active in Berlin extend across the legacies of descendants of African-American soldiers and Germans during and after World War II, and today’s globalized migration (Griffith 2015).

Alpha nova & galerie futura dates back to 1980s Second Wave Feminism in Berlin with a particular focus on peace activism in response to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Today, the self-organized art space seeks to develop strategies of situated feminist transnational solidarity counteracting white privilege, as it forms part of Berlin’s transformation into a poor global metropolis rich in the production of art and culture. This shift from industrial to post-industrial culture, and leisure-based production, has provoked much critical engagement with precarity, as worked out, for example, from a transnational European perspective in the multilingual online journal *Transversal* (<http://eipcp.net/transversal>). Located since 2012 in the arts and culture complex at Flutgraben, a post-industrial and post-socialist reuse of a repair workshop for the East Berlin public transport system, the alpha nova & galerie futura is the only feminist art space in this 3800-square-meter complex dedicated to independent art spaces. Funded by the Berlin Senate’s Department for Labor, Social Affairs and Women, the gallery delicately balances fulfilling the funder’s expectation of providing skills and training toward women artists’ professionalization, and the artists’ expectation to have a platform that supports the production and exhibition of their art work. Katharina Koch, who since 2015 shares the artistic directorship with artist Dorothea Nold, emphasizes that feminist curating practices should share and distribute financial and infrastructural support in such a way that they promote solidarity through an antiracist agenda. The gallery actively does so by networking within the Berlin community and beyond to find like-minded artists and theorists, by establishing links with immigrant, diasporic, and globally active artists, and by cultivating exchanges with older women artists, including members of the gallery’s founding generation. For the exhibitions and the series of events programmed for *Precarious Art: Protest & Resistance*, Koch managed to secure funding from the German Lottery Foundation Berlin and

The curators honor its history as a self-organized Second Wave Feminist art space, as they actively expand this legacy to counteract white privilege by making possible the production of new transnational feminist and queer feminist work in art, activism, theory, and networks of knowledge exchange.

Show Me Your Archive and I Will Tell You Who Is in Power,
Ghent 2015

The narrow passage leading into the central room of KIOSK's exhibition space, an initiative of the nonprofit organization Kunstensite vzw (nonprofit art site) and University College Ghent – Faculty of Fine Arts (KASK), is lined by white boards holding a range of different printed materials and photographs. Pamphlets, booklets, books, letters, and posters offer an introduction to the local feminist movement in Ghent, and the Belgian context, through the 1970s and 1980s, foregrounding its transnational dimension with participation in the campaign for Angela Davis or the FORUM'85 in Nairobi. We see documents from Dolle Mina, the first autonomous women's organization in Belgium, and from the Belgian Free Angela Davis Committee. There are the proceedings of the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women held in Brussels 4–8 March 1976 and documents, including black-and-white photographs, from the FORUM'85, a key event of transnational feminism in the 1980s. This alternative gathering of autonomous women's organizations and NGOs was held in parallel to the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi 15–26 July 1985. The documents gathered together by the curatorial team, the art critic and independent curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, and Wim Waelput, founding director and curator of KIOSK, reveal that with Chantal De Smet's involvement in the above-mentioned local and transnational feminist movements there is a specific biographic reason as to why Ghent's KIOSK was chosen for this project. Chantal De Smet, pioneering feminist activist, who cofounded the Ghent Dolle Mina, and was Belgian special envoy to FORUM'85 in Nairobi, was the first, and so far only, female director of KASK, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Ghent (now the University College Ghent – Faculty of Fine Arts) from 1989 to 1996. Yet, the exhibition is not a monographic appraisal of De Smet's achievements. Much rather the transnational curating chosen complexly unfolds layers upon layers of transhistorical, translocal, and transnational relations.

The exhibition title *Show Me Your Archive and I will Tell You Who Is in Power* is a reference to the opening statement delivered by Gloria Wekker, Afro-Surinamese Dutch feminist scholar, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary celebration of ILAV, Amsterdam's Women's Library and Archive, in 2005 (see Vried 2011: 3). This reference makes explicit that the Ghent exhibition forms part of the archival and the historiographical turn in feminist art history writing and curating, foregrounding here the dialogue across generations and locations of feminisms (see Eichhorn 2013; Horne and Perry 2017: 15). The Ghent project combines historical exhibition making with a contemporary art exhibition including a programming of lectures and discussions. There are archival materials and historical documents on the transnationally networked structures of large-scale gatherings bringing together women from the global North and the global South. Interestingly enough, it is an exhibition in the context of contemporary art that made visible again the 1976 International Tribunal on Crimes against Women and the FORUM'85 in Nairobi. With few exceptions,

these large-scale transnational women's gatherings of the 1970s and 1980s have remained largely understudied (see Antrobus 2004).

The tribunal, so far the only one of its kind, was a large-scale, bottom-up assembly of women speaking out about violence against women, including domestic violence, rape, pornography, prostitution, and femicide. The tribunal adhered to a horizontal feminist politics with no judges appointed and used awareness-raising strategies with 2000 women participants from 40 countries giving testimony. On the occasion of the tribunal, Simone de Beauvoir, unable to attend, sent a letter of solidarity, in which she emphasizes the transnational dimension and distinguished the self-organized nature of the assembly from the UN Women's Conference in Mexico City 1975. De Beauvoir writes:

Dear Sisters ... In contrast to Mexico where women, directed by their political parties, by their nations, were only seeking to integrate Woman into a male society, you are gathered here to denounce the oppression to which women are subjected in this society. ... talk to one another, talk to the world ... I salute this Tribunal as being the start of a radical decolonization of women. (de Beauvoir 1976: 5)

The 1985 UN Conference in Nairobi witnessed FORUM'85, a mass gathering held in parallel to the official conference with 14 000 delegates from autonomous women's organizations and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) attending. Debates and knowledge exchanges between feminists in the global North and the global South were intense and heated. No historical museum has so far dedicated exhibitions to these large-scale assemblies of transnational women's activism.

In the Ghent exhibition, the historical documents render legible the contemporary feminist and queer feminist transnational aesthetic language as it relates to past feminist movements and the context of the emerging twenty-first-century women's movement (Figure 6.2). The two curators invited six artists – Marwa Arsanios, Saddie Choua, Amandine Gay, Kapwani Kiwanga, Ato Malinda, Eva Olthof – and the collective Study Group for Solidarity and TransActions to make “new works from a postcolonial, transnational or politically emancipatory context” (KIOSK 2017). Invitations commissioning new work require financial and spatial resources. *Show Me Your Archive and I Will Tell You Who Is in Power* demonstrates far-reaching networking and fund-securing skills. It was included in the context of the long-term project *The Uses of Art: The Legacy of 1848 and 1989* carried out by the museum confederation L'Internationale with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union. L'Internationale is a group of the following six modern and contemporary art institutions in Europe: Moderna galerija (MG+MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS, Madrid, Spain), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA, Barcelona, Spain), Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey), and Van Abbemuseum (VAM, Eindhoven, the Netherlands). University College Ghent School of Arts (KASK, Ghent, Belgium) is one of the partners they work with. L'Internationale references the historical labor movement by making the title of the international workers' anthem the name of the confederation. Additional local funding in Belgium was secured from educational and research institutions having to do with gender and history, such as Amsab-ISG, the Institute of



FIGURE 6.2 *Show Me Your Archive and I Will Tell You Who is in Power*, Kiosk Ghent, 2015. Photograph of the installation view. Courtesy of the author.

Social History, AVG-Carhif, the Archive and Research Centre for Women’s History in Brussels, and Sophia asbl/vzw (the Belgian network for Gender Studies).

This is further evidence that the exhibition bridged the format of a historic and an art exhibition and extended, in particular through its extensive program with lectures and film screenings, beyond the art context.

The contributing artists work in archival, documentary, research-based, or performative ways on colonial trauma, racism, sexism, and the entanglements of women’s movements in war. Saddle Choua’s performances deal with *Zwarte Piet*, “imagined to be a Moorish servant of a white bishop, Sinterklaas or Saint Nicolas” and reveal the long-ignored racism in the “Dutch cultural archive” (Wekker 2016: 138, 141). Kapwani Kiwanga employs Afro-Futurism acting as a kind of galactic anthropologist in engaging with the story of Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman whose suffering from a most severe form of cancer was exploited by using her bodily material as resource to create an *in vitro* cell chain without seeking her consent. Armandine Gay focuses on giving voice to the experiences of diasporic black women. Others assume the role of artist as historian, like Marwa Arsanios’s research and field work on the Kurdish autonomous women’s movement born in war or Eva Olthof who works with archival documents. Olthof creates new anticolonial narratives by imagining encounters between female figures important to Congo’s history, Andrée Blouin, Patrice Lumumba’s head of protocol, his wife Pauline Opanga Lumumba, and Queen Fabiola, married to the Belgian King Baudouin. Study Group for Solidarity and

TransActions reveals little-known histories of transnational resistance with a transnational system of letters that sent money in support of antiapartheid forces active in South Africa.

Show Me Your Archive and I Will Tell You Who Is in Power uses archival and historiographical strategies for transnational feminist curating. This contributes to raising consciousness for the 1970s' and 1980s' transnational women's movements, as it is linked to contemporary artists, who – starting from their personal transnational immigrant or diasporic subjectivities, their interest in substantive citizenship, and non-Western-centric women's, feminist, and queer feminist emancipation – work in the context of the twenty-first-century women's movement.

More than One Fragile Thing at a Time, London 2015

In November 2015, a group of 50 women gathered around two tables at the Victoria and Albert Museum. They are in the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries, a large space filled with fountainheads, doorways, church tombs, steps, and other fragments from buildings in Europe. Next to the colonnades, originally from Belgium, two new tables have been installed in such a way that they can have their conversations, part of their English class (Figure 6.3). These women were invited by muf architecture/art to transplant their weekly class to the museum. The class is offered by the Women Asylum Seekers Together group, which is supported by the charity Women for Refugee Women, active at the grassroots to work with women asylum seekers in the UK. Since 2014, they run the Set Her Free campaign with the aim to end women asylum seekers' detention, and they also organize the National Refugee Women's Conference. Making this invitation possible was central to muf's installation *More than One (Fragile) Thing at a Time*. Muf architecture/art, a collaborative practice, who tirelessly emphasize their focus on “social, spatial and economic infrastructures of the public realm,” do not call themselves curators, yet they do have a history of curating, including the British Pavilion at the 2010 Venice Biennale. Their contribution at the Victoria and Albert was part of the exhibition *All of This Belongs to You* shown from 1 April through 19 July 2015. Curated by Corinna Gardner, Rory Hyde, and Kieran Long, the project “examined the role of public institutions in contemporary life and what it means to be responsible for a national collection” (*All of This Belongs to You* 2015).

The Victoria and Albert Museum, a national museum established in the wake of the first World Fair, and *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, held in London in 1851, have to be considered part of the cultural infrastructure typical of a global city today. In 2001, Saskia Sassen used London as one of her examples to put forward the notion of the global city defined as a center of the contemporary globalized economy playing out both within and beyond the nation state. Even though Sassen does not address this in her analysis, the global city has also given rise to a new type of museum, the global museum, with the update of existing infrastructures and new star architecture being built. Their current expansion and far-reaching globally networked activities attest to the global museum function of the Victoria and Albert. In 2003, Sassen also identified the global city as the site where a “repositioning of citizenship” with new “denationalized forms” takes place (Sassen 2003: 41). Muf's project at the Victoria and Albert was a demonstration of the fact that a global museum understood as a public good can actually be made useful to this repositioning of



FIGURE 6.3 *More Than One Fragile Thing at a Time*, Victoria & Albert Museum London, 2015. Photograph of the installation view with new tables designed by muf art/architecture. Courtesy: muf architecture/art.

citizenship and its substantive practices. This includes refugees or other groups without formal citizenship status who could make use of the museum as their space of appearance in the Arendtian sense (see: Arendt 1958: 199).

A conversation between Kieran Long, then the Keeper of Design, Architecture and Digital at the museum, and Liza Fior, principal of muf architecture/art, filmed in the installation reveals muf's research-driven process (Fior and Long 2015). Fior describes this as a series of tests. "Test number one was the English class. And test number two was bringing on board the idea of that tension. What happens when you take one space and suggest it should be shared with another, and in this case the precious objects with people" (Fior and Long 2015: 2 min. to 2 min. 14s.). Transplanting the self-organized English class for refugee women to the museum led to thinking about standardized sizes for classrooms. They examined the regulations from the Mayor's Housing Guidance for classroom sizes for 30 children and projected the outline of

such a standard classroom with a black line on the floor of the gallery. Starting from the objects assembled in the gallery, muf engaged in historical and material research and relocated some of the objects in their places of origin. All objects shown provide evidence to the logic behind a nineteenth-century imperial museum collection. They have been displaced, torn from their original context, many of them broken, some of them missing from buildings that still exist in other parts of the world. In the video, Fior points to a misericordia and explains that in today's Venice there is still "a misericordia-shaped scar on the building" where it comes from (Fior and Long 2015: 3 min. 50 s to 3 min. 53 s). Muf contacted the Arciconfraternita di San Cristoforo e della Misericordia, still active in Venice and included objects in their Victoria and Albert installation that show their activities, for example their social work at the Venice Women's Prison, today. Muf's approach is a take on current museographic debates on provenance and restitution. They set in motion transnational research chains in connecting objects' provenance to today's functions and meanings of sites or institutions of origin. This is, of course, extremely relevant as a method to work on entangled histories of colonialism, imperialism, the Nazi empire, or authoritarian regimes. Equally, this method could be used to work out transnational connections of emancipation and solidarity through objects held in museum collections.

In conversation with the author in London on 11 February 2016, Fior emphasized that their project literally follows the legal definition of the Victoria and Albert Museum as a "a category D space, a pure public good." A public good is "a commodity or a service that is provided without profit to all members of society, either by the government or by a private individual or organization" and it is for the "benefit or well-being of the public" (Oxford University Press 2017). Historically, the museum institution has occupied a prominent place in the history of the political imaginary of the public and the idea of Western citizenship as established by the French Revolution. The prototype for the modern art museum as a public space for such new rituals practicing the modern idea of citizenship was the Louvre in Paris (see Duncan 1991). The French Revolution decreed the Louvre "the property of all" which helped "to confer on the citizen 'a national character and the demeanor of a free man'" (McClellan 1994: 99). Positing a "cultural right" to the museum, Tony Bennett develops the idea of "formal equals" (Bennett 1995: 8 and 104). We can easily see the conflict between a gendered and racialized notion of citizenship connected to free men and formal equals. Therefore, muf's insistence on the museum as public space is useful to understand the political dimension of claiming this public good for cultural practices of substantive citizenship.

Inviting the Women Asylum Seekers Together group to appear with their English class in the public space of the Victoria and Albert Museum is a practice of solidarity just as much as it is a claim to how a public good should be afforded to all its members. Muf brought together material practices and political thought, insistence on the literal and design to turn constraints into possibilities. They adhered to the museum's conservation demands and designed two new tables curved and bent in such a way that they do not touch the colonnades, originally from a cloister in Belgium. Their attention to detail went all the way down to felt-lining the tables' feet so they didn't scar the museum floor. And this prepared the public space in such a way that it became useful to the Women Asylum Seekers Together group for their English class, and to hang a large quilt behind the tables. The pieces of the quilt are messages of resistance and solidarity, including one by Angelina Jolie. Muf used the legal definition and the

politico-philosophical notion of museum as public good for a research-based exploration of displaced objects and substantive citizenship practices. Alignments across the museum and a feminist grassroots organization, such as Women for Refugee Women (2019), who “work to empower women who have sought sanctuary in the UK to speak about their own experience to the media, to policy-makers and at public events,” point the way for future feminist and queer feminist curating that claims the museum as a public good relevant to an emerging culture of transnational citizenship practices following Saskia Sassen’s 2003 argument that “citizenship is partly produced by the practices of the excluded.”

Queering Yerevan’s Collective Happenings in the Garden on Zarubyan Street 2008–2010

The vegetation is lush. There are many fig trees in the garden at 34 Zarubyan Street in downtown Yerevan. Their branches reach over corrugated iron sheets, indication of informal building activities. Artist Astghik Melkonyan places a white cutout silhouette on the ground. Soon she will fill the outline with flour. The photo series *Fragmented Self* (2008) by Adrinch Der-Boghossian is dangling from the fig trees. Audience and artists share animated conversations. Then the opening speech commences. Shushan Avagyan and Angela Harutyunyan take turns speaking. Throughout, the wind chimes sound. On a laptop placed on a dry patch of grass under a makeshift wooden tripod Tsomak Oga screens her video *Untitled*. This opening is captured in the film by the Queering Yerevan Collective’s *Happenings in the Garden on Zarubyan Street 2008–2010* composed from video footage shot in the garden transformed into an art space for local and diasporic Armenian artists experimenting with what art making they called “queering Yerevan” (Figure 6.4).

One of the contributors, New York-based Neery Melkonian, writes the following: “I realized that the term ‘queer’ had probably entered or inhabited my imagination vis-à-vis the English language. That is to say it belonged to another Euro American – cultural geography ... the word da-RO-ri-NAG-vadz had no place, no equal, nor a companion in my Armenian imaginary” (Melkonian 2011: 9). Queer refers to lived experiences under the harsh political and economic realities of Yerevan just as much as do acts of art making with multiple forms of translation at its core. Queering Yerevan’s use of the garden as self-organized art space to be shared with friends can be located in a genealogy of two different strands of sharing art in private space: first, the women-led and lesbian-led nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe-wide salon culture, and secondly the late-twentieth-century avant-garde underground apartment exhibitions in the former USSR and Eastern Europe.

The Queering Yerevan collective with its three core members, Arpi Adamyan, Shushan Avagyan, and Lusine Talalyan, and the larger and fluctuating group around them, insist on non-normative terms for their art making. Lusine Talalyan explains: “we did everything through our own means and abilities” (Harutyunyan 2011: 204). Independence to them means to refuse any legitimizing tokenism of Armenian state institutions, since living as a queer woman in the twenty first century Yerevan remains to be challenging: “from 1936 till 2003 homosexuals were shamed, criminalized and imprisoned on account of Article 116 of the Armenian Criminal Code” (WOW Collective 2019). Even though the “laws have become more tolerant towards the



FIGURE 6.4 *Queering Yerevan's Collective Happenings In The Garden On Zarubyan Street 2008–2010*. Installation view of Suzanne Lacy's exhibition *International Dinner Party in feminist curatorial thought*, curated by Elke Krasny, Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, 2015. Courtesy of Elke Krasny.

LGBT community since then ... non-heteronormativity is still heavily condemned in most strata of Armenian society” (WOW Collective 2019). Traditional heteronormative culture is strongly upheld by lived patriarchy. In 2008, Armenia adopted the UN declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation. This raised awareness for the rights of sexual minorities actually resulted in increasing violence and anti-queer rhetoric, with politicians speaking out publicly against nonheteronormative sexual orientations by declaring them to be pathological diseases. In 2009, the Women-Oriented-Women (WOW) Collective, the name previously used by the Queering Yerevan collective, authored an *Open Letter Against Intolerance* posted on their queeringyerevan.blogspot on 28 January 2009. It included the following quote

by Karine Danielyan, head of the Sustainable Human Development agency in Armenia: “It’s been always considered that 4–5% of humanity has such pathologies ... these should be regarded as a disease.”

Independence for Queering Yerevan not only means resistance to state-run cultural institutions in Yerevan, they also refuse to have anything to do with celebratory global art world progressivism, including international funding bodies promoting cultural and civic change for the former republic of the USSR. Talalyan expresses the collective’s fear that financial support by international organizations might turn the collective into “an instrument” providing the funders opportunities to present “themselves as advocates of progressivism” (Harutyunyan 2011: 204). This presents the risk of “glamorizing and normalizing what is queer” (Harutyunyan 2011: 204). Therefore, they take upon themselves the precarious situation of unpaid work based on self-organization and self-funding in order to protect their art making from capture.

They tap into their contacts and networks to secure the resources necessary for the production of books, exhibitions, screenings, or gatherings. In addition to private support by individuals, they use Kickstarter campaigns. And, occasionally, curating for the Queering Yerevan collective might mean to get out hoes and shovels and clean up a garden to transform it into a temporary art space.

The garden anchors *Queering Yerevan Collective’s Happenings* in the context of diasporic transnational NGO networks, as they emerged as civic society infrastructure during the period of post-Socialist transition in the territory of the former USSR and Eastern Europe. The two NGOs, the Women’s Resource Center and the Utopiana Cultural Center, with the first dedicated to women’s rights and the latter working against local artists’ isolation, are both connected to the Armenian diaspora and its transnational networks. The Center belongs to the Human Rights House Network, which is active in the Caucasus Europe, and the Balkans. Founding members of the initial WOW group worked for Utopiana, and Shushan Avagyan was a founding member of the Women’s Resource Center. Members of the Queering Yerevan Collective were well aware of the organizational structures of NGOs and therefore decided to experiment with a different form of loose association based upon collective self-organization. But they gladly accepted to use the garden behind the house shared by the two NGOs as temporary art space for three consecutive summers.

“Transnational” in the context of Queering Yerevan refers to the specific situation of the Armenian diaspora. Yerevan is marked by the historic trauma of the Armenian Genocide between 1915 and 1923. Today, “around 8–10 million people of Armenian descent [are] currently living outside Armenia (whose own population is currently estimated at around 2.9 million)” (Burman 2019). While travel for Armenians remains restricted with visas required in 80 countries round the world, Armenia became accessible for travel to the worldwide Armenian diaspora after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Historically, the formation of the Queering Yerevan Collective has to be located within these newly emerging links between members of the Armenian diaspora who express an interest in their country of origin from which they might have been separated for over four to five generations and might never have been to. Artists, writers, and intellectuals part of the queer diaspora within the Armenian diaspora were highly motivated to connect with locally lived queer experience in Armenia.

Queering Yerevan’s formation in 2007 was motivated by the personal experiences of silenced queer orientations, including their visual or literary expressions, and by a political climate with its violent homophobic oppression of queer sexualities. Queering the term “queer” from their situated Yerevan perspective, the collective joins other

appropriations as witnessed in *cuir* (in Spanish), *kirik* (in Turkish), *kvar* (in Serbian-Croatian), or *kuir* in Portuguese (Schwärzler 2015). With regard to a politics of location and its orientations, the queer feminist self-curating practice of Queering Yerevan means diasporizing the queer diaspora just as much as it means queering the local. The work of the Queering Yerevan entails not only the production of visual art or poetry but also the creation of the very conditions of production on their own terms through infrastructural and resource activism.

Mapping the Everyday: Neighbourhood Claims for the Future, Vancouver 2011–2012

On 26 November 2011, a group of people sits in a large circle. They discuss how to best work toward “Collective Futures in the Downtown Eastside.” They are surrounded by white walls with horizontal lines of text in black letters (Figure 6.5). Most of the claims exhibited in this text-based wall installation are English, some in Chinese and Squamish. Researched and selected by women at Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre (DEWC), visitors to the exhibition read claims such as the following: “Stop Violence Against Women” (1980–), “No homophobia” (1989), “No racism” (1989), “Red Road Warriors” (1989), “Sisters Resist” (2001), or “Safe Housing for Women” (2007). The neighborhood assembly with a large circle of people discussing possible collective futures has been organized by activist artist collective desmedia as part of the exhibition *Mapping the Everyday: Neighbourhood Claims for the Future* held at Simon



FIGURE 6.5 *Mapping The Everyday. Neighbourhood Claims for the Future*, Audain Gallery, 2011–2012. Photograph of the installation view showing text-based horizontal line and the archive of desmedia collective. Courtesy of Kevin Schmidt.

Fraser University's Audain Gallery. For this multipart project the Audain Gallery's artistic director Sabine Bitter, a transplant to Vancouver from Austria, the coordinator of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, black Canadian Cecily Nicholson, and Vienna-based curator Elke Krasny, invited through the Audain Visual Artists in Residence Program, formed a temporary collaboration to explore ways of working together under the conditions of neoliberal urban gentrification, aware of Indigenous women's history of unresolved grief and resistance to the trauma of colonialism.

Located close to each other, the DEWC and the Audain Gallery, are best described as unequal neighbors. In 1978, the Centre was founded and incorporated. Established in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood, "a culturally diverse community with 48 percent of its population representing visible minority groups, including residents of Chinatown, a large number of First Nations people from across the Americas, and many new immigrants to Canada," it served as a daily drop-in center supporting women's, in particular Indigenous women's and elderly Chinese immigrant women's, capacities of self-empowerment and resistance (Newnham 2005). For decades a vital women-run infrastructure offering everyday support, be it hot meals or legal advice, the DEWC contributes to the neighborhood's spirit of community activism and its resistance to systemic oppression. In 2010, the Audain Gallery was opened. It is part of Simon Fraser University's new downtown campus located at the Woodward Building, a historic Vancouver landmark with an iconic department store dating back to 1903. After the Woodward's bankruptcy in 1993, the building was vacant, squatted by activists in 2002 to claim the site for social housing. After demolition by explosion in 2006, the site was redeveloped following a concept of architectural firm Henriquez Partners Architects. The Audain Gallery highlights that contemporary art spaces, including university galleries, are significant to urban gentrification. The Downtown Eastside, always described as the poorest postal code in all of Canada, has witnessed massive gentrification pressures. The feminist collaboration across such unequal neighbors, like the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre and the Audain Gallery, started from the awareness of the fraught conditions described above. Following feminist theorist Mohanty, such a collaboration "must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis" (Mohanty 2003: 24). Working across Indigenous, immigrant, social work, art making, urban research, and activist perspectives, transnational feminist curating here went beyond established models of institutional critique seeking to self-challenge the institution by working across its boundaries despite conditions of asymmetry and threats of capture (Alberro and Stimson 2011). Collaborative research required an engagement with feminist Indigenous studies and practices of commemoration and healing conscious of the complex nexus of coloniality and neoliberal urban transformation. The exhibition space was used in equal measure as a forum for neighborhood assemblies and performance-based art, such as a new work commissioned by red diva projects, with founders Marie Clements and Michelle St. John combining storytelling and the Indigenous knowledge perspectives of women from the Centre.

Central to this multicomponent work of curating was my proposal of working with women at the DEWC on a collaborative historical research of their resistant struggles. The Centre's newsletter, issued since its inception, was researched by an ad hoc group of women who regularly come to the Centre. The ad hoc group included Stella August, Muriel Brunelle, Dalannah Gail Bowen, Shurli Chan, Pat Haram, Audrey Hill, Suzanne Kilroy, Karen Lahay, Terri Marie, Joan Morelli, Ramona, Sandra,

Sara Dell, Sue Lee, Stirling Sexton, Beatrice Starr, Debbie Ventury, Bernice Verde, and Deanna Wong. They mapped the historical claims which became the core of the exhibition in the form of a text-based horizon line along the gallery's walls.

"Justice for Missing and Murdered Women" (1990s) and "The February 14th Women's Memorial March Committee" (1992-) are two of these claims which refer to the history of femicide in the Vancouver's Downtown Eastside with over 60 women disappeared between 1978 and 2001, many of them sex workers, and Aboriginal. These claims stand for the political campaigning and consciousness-raising that demands commemoration and justice for the victims of femicide. Many of the women at the DEWC are involved with the Women's Memorial March which works translocally and transnationally to raise awareness on the systemic nature of violence targeting sexualized and racialized women. "The first women's memorial march was held in 1991 in response to the murder of a Coast Salish woman on Powell Street in Vancouver" (Women's Memorial March 2019). The practice extends to cross-Canadian awareness-raising, with other memorial marches held in many different cities, and to transnational activism to make public how a "noticeable silence, a public secret, created the historically and geopolitically specific conditions for the murder of Indigenous women as a way to commit both human and cultural genocide" (Due to Injuries 2019). On the occasion of the 2012 Women's Memorial March, also announced in the booklet containing the exhibition program, the organizers went international: "The Feb 14th Women's Memorial March Committee and DTES Women's Centre have recently made submissions under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and are now seeking justice internationally" (Women's Memorial March 2019).

Together, Sabine Bitter, Elke Krasny, and Cecily Nicholson secured the funding necessary to involve the DEWC's participation and to commission contributions by the following artists. Desmedia is an art collective that in 2000 began to run workshops for a collaborative community practice documenting and narrating life in the Downtown Eastside. Their living archive challenged the dominant media image with its negative stereotypes reveling in poverty, homelessness, violence, drug abuse, and sex work. Their archive, including shelving, a workstation, videotapes, and paintings, was placed in the center of the exhibition. Red diva project created a new performance starting from the women's claims assembled for the exhibition. Coupe, a multidisciplinary collective formed in 2010, conceived of public meetings called Wednesday Night School. Funding for the project came from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts, and Culture, Am Johal, director of the Vancity Office of Community Engagement as part of Simon Fraser University Woodward's Cultural Unit, the Ellen and Warren Tallman Writer in Residence Program at the English Department at Simon Fraser University, and the City of Vancouver's 125th Anniversary Grants Program. Just like the working together between unequal neighbors, applying to this grant program was critically discussed among the three collaborators. Founded in 1886, Vancouver's beginnings are owed to the expansion of colonial transport infrastructure, the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Even though up until today most of the province of British Columbia has remained unceded land, colonial legislation sought to ensure control of and power over the territory. Vancouver is located on the traditional unceded territory of the *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish), *xw̓m̓ θkw̓ ý̓ m̓* (Musqueam), and *s̓í̓l̓w̓ ta* (Tsleil-Waututh) First

Nations. The *Mapping the Everyday: Neighbourhood Claims for the Future* project decided to partake in the year of anniversary celebrations to raise awareness for the history of a self-organized, bottom-up women's center as it gives everyday support under neoliberal economics and seeks to find ways of grieving, and of healing from colonial trauma and its human and cultural genocide.

The transnational feminist strategy forms part of what Maria Lind has called "collaborative turn" in curating working across Indigenous, immigrant, and contemporary art world perspectives, and equally across collaborative historical research and contemporary artistic production (Lind 2007: 15–31). Curating brought together a self-organized activist women's organization, evidence of Second Wave Feminism's lasting "feminist solidarity urbanism," with contemporary, socially, and politically involved ways of art making and critical research useful to commemoration (see Krasny 2017b). This emphasized that a university gallery, co-implicated in the dynamics of gentrification and studentification, can perform a vital public function for commemoration and urban citizenship practices specific to the local conditions of colonial trauma and "actually existing neoliberalism" (see Brenner and Theodore 2002).

Conclusion

Curating registers change. Some, not all, curating registers change through the politics of location, understanding how territories, geographies, and histories create the conditions in which art is created and seeks to create, to follow Adrienne Rich's line of thought. Curatorial materialist analysis opened up a path here that rendered legible how some curating practices register the entangled relations of changing conditions and changes in art making in such a way that their work has to be understood as part of the larger context of a new wave of twenty-first-century feminism. Complex histories of colonial trauma, genocide, diasporas, migrations, and displacement as well as globalization under neoliberal capitalism have rendered places on the map, and lives in these places, transnational. Migratory, Indigenous, diasporic realities, and the lived experience of transnational places are rendering the personal transnational. The politics of the feminist and queer feminist curating praxis is far from lobbying for the inclusion of the previously excluded or marginalized artistic positions in the globalized art world. Quite the contrary, the intellectual, aesthetic, political, social, and infrastructural activism is not about globalization's borderlessness. As these practices refer back to the transitional period from Second Wave to Third Wave Feminism and build collaborations beyond the art context to support substantive citizenship practices today, they are not "border-less" (Mohanty 2003: 2). Working across immigrant, non-immigrant, black, queer, diasporic, Indigenous, refugee, people of color, or white lived experiences and knowledges takes into account what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has described as "the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment borders present" (Mohanty 2003: 2). Both, in exhibition and in conversation, these practices mobilize the emancipatory potential of curating without borders as they work toward feminist and queer feminist futures. It is too early to tell, but we might not only be witnessing curating that has to be placed in the context of the new feminist movement, but actually the formation of a feminist and queer feminist curating movement for the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 Much referenced are the following: Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak. 1996. "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, 230–250. London and New York: Routledge; Hans-Ulrich Obrist. 2008. *Brief History of Curating*. Zurich: JRP Ringier; Bismarck, Beatrice von, Jörn Schaffaff, and Thomas Weski. 2012. *Cultures of the Curatorial*. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press; Terry Smith. 2012. *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International; O'Neill, Paul. 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press; Hoffman, Jens. 2015. *(Curating) From A to Z*. Zurich: JRP Ringier, Current discourse can be traced through the following journals: *Manifesta Journal. Around Curatorial Practice*, <http://www.manifestajournal.org/about> (2003–); *OnCurating*, <http://www.on-curating.org> (2008–); *The Exhibitionist*, <http://the-exhibitionist.com> (2009–); *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (2012–; the only one peer-reviewed); *Artist as Curator*, <http://www.theartistascurator.org> (2013–).
- 2 Large-scale feminist exhibitions include the 2005 Venice Biennale curated by María de Corral and Rosa Martínez, the opening of the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 2007 and its inaugural exhibition *global feminisms. New Directions in Contemporary Art* curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, the large-scale survey shows *WACK Art and the Feminist Revolution* curated by Connie Butler for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* curated by Bojana Pejic for mumok, the Museum of Modern Art Vienna. This wave of feminist exhibitions has been widely discussed. Important contributions to this discussion include: Jones, Amelia and Angela Dimitrakaki. 2013. "Viable or Merely Possible? A Dialogue on Feminism's Radical Curatorial Project. In: *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, edited by Elke Krasny and Frauenmuseum Meran, 67–78. Vienna: Löcker; Robinson, Hillary. 2013. "Feminism meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows since 2005." *Anglo Saxonica*, 3 (6): 128–152; Tang, Jeannine. 2013. "The Problem of Equality, or Translating 'Woman' in the Age of Global Exhibitions". In *Politics of a Glass Case. Feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions*, edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, 244–259. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

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Displacements and Sites

Notes on a Curatorial Method

Maria Lind

What does a dystopian future scenario do in the urban fabric of Stockholm in the early 2010s? Can a fictional storyline change our routine perceptions and experiences of everyday environments? These were some of the questions fueling the one-day performance *T.451* by artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and musician and composer Ari Benjamin Meyers, which took place across Stockholm on Saturday 27 May 2012, organized by Tensta konsthall and Stockholm Konst. At the same time, *T.451* offered a set of curatorial challenges concerning locations of art and its displacement, to a small suburban art center and a municipal agency for art in public space; while some spaces were well known, others were not. In addition, over the years, *T.451* has grown to be one of my all-time-favorite art works – a poetic statement on some of the most strongly felt conditions of our time.

Gonzalez-Foerster and Benjamin Meyers's performance *T.451* was a one-off, four-hour urban walk in Stockholm with surroundings which traced a classic story in a current reality. The performance was inspired by Ray Bradbury's 1953 sci-fi novel *Fahrenheit 451*, and the film version by François Truffaut (1966), with music by Bernard Herrmann. In *T.451* the public was guided through the city and the suburb of Tensta, encountering reenacted scenes from the film inserted into architectural environments, infrastructure, and public places in Stockholm. Live music, choreography, readings, and performative elements were presented throughout the day, allowing the audience to experience public sites as if they were taken directly from Truffaut's film.

In Bradbury's original story, set in a future society, the only communication is made through television and images. Literature is regarded as dangerous for the unified community and has thus been classified as illegal. The printed word is actively searched for and destroyed by firemen, who instead of putting out fires burn books to prevent disillusioned human conditions. Some individuals object to this and try to secretly



FIGURE 7.1 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.

save literature, and together with that the possibility to think freely. Gonzalez-Foerster and Benjamin Meyers's *T.451* – starting at Gunnar Asplund's famous Main City Library by Odenplan (Figure 7.1), continuing in the Stockholm subway (Figure 7.2), and ending in the late modernist housing area Tensta – was testing the possibility of an imagined future through a new form of musical and performed narrative, well beyond the walls of an art institution.

The method of displacement has often been employed within the field of curating. It entails moving something from one context, typically one which can be considered a “home turf,” to another. The plethora of initiatives concerning “art in public space” is a well-known way of enacting displacement, with the purpose of allowing art to go public in places where people spend a lot of time, and it can be experienced without paying an entrance ticket. Whether in squares and subways, or in parks and hospitals, this has implied a liberation of sorts for art, which is released from its white cube institutional confinements. Largely a post-WWII phenomenon in the Western hemisphere, it is nevertheless not an entirely new phenomenon after centuries of art being “applied” in churches and palaces, and monuments on squares. However, a new aspect is the expectation of experience and enjoyment of art for its own sake, rather than as a tool for political boasting. Today, the prevalence of “art in public space” even triggers the question: how much of it can a city take, thinking, for example, of Germany's Münster and its large-scale Sculpture Projects?

For a while now, the white cube paradigm has been considered limiting, for some of the right reasons but also for some reasons which to me seem wrong. Whereas the white cube paradigm has been dominant for the last 50 years, albeit to various degrees in different parts of the world, it has not been entirely coherent. Exhibition conditions in museums, art centers, and galleries continue to vary and it is becoming



FIGURE 7.2 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.

increasingly relevant to reconsider the uses and values, both of displacement as a method and the site/off-site relationship that it generates. In addition to Marcel Duchamp's Copernican art revolution based on displacement, Robert Smithson's ground-breaking art works entitled *Non-Sites* made the natural site – typically industrial areas well beyond city limits – primary, and the art institution where, for example, rocks from the primary site would be displayed in cube-like structures, secondary. The *Non-Sites* tested how meaning changes through the displacement of an object. In doing so, reversing Duchamp's gesture, these sculptures emphasize the relational process, the act of moving something to a different place, and the connection which is thereby created between the institution, which Smithson thought of as an abstract container, and another location. Furthermore, to him the site involved scattered information, and the *Non-Site* contained information. Similarly, I am interested in the displacement of art, a commuting of sorts, and the recombination of objects, locations, and questions, and what effects these have.

T.451 was a collaboration between Stockholm Konst, a municipal agency, and Tensta konsthall, a private foundation, with support by Stockholm Library (Stockholm's stadsbibliotek) and Tensta Library (Tensta bibliotek). It came about because the politicians in the municipal parliament disregarded the arm's-length principle and gave a precise brief to Stockholm Konst: they required Stockholm Konst to make a temporary art project at Odenplan to try to ease tension among the inhabitants in this part of the city around a planned underground shopping mall on the site. Stockholm Konst approached Tensta konsthall and we suggested that Gonzalez-Foerster would be invited to make a proposal for a temporary art work connecting Odenplan to Tensta, which are two radically different parts of one of Europe's most

segregated cities.¹ One is a wealthy and white inner-city neighborhood, demographically speaking, and the other a poor and colored late-modernist housing area in the suburb.

By inserting scenarios where music played a big role into architectural environments, infrastructure and public places, *T.451*, like many of Gonzalez-Foerster's works, played on time, situations, and the public, rather than material and structures. At the same time, a number of the scenes did in and of themselves perform a displacement of activities which are not necessarily connected to art. Her works, which often are inspired by other fields, thereby displacing literary classics or films, reflect more than just a narrative: they attempt to capture the public situation, the immediate encounter with art. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that her works appear as multi-dimensional enactments where sound and visual elements combine with the existing environment, making the work into an experience that reveals the potential of art to produce imagined, as well as real, change. The works have taken place in a variety of locations, ranging from white cube settings and other institutional spaces to parks and even a circus. Gonzalez-Foerster and Meyers first worked together in 2007 as part of *Il Tempo del Postino*, the group show/artist opera curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno, which premiered as part of the inaugural Manchester International Festival.² Their work together often takes its inspiration from specific films or pieces of music and has been described by themselves as being "audience-based."

The Stockholm performance reached its audience through ads in newspapers, on social media, and in the organizers' newsletters.³ Some people also tagged along after having stumbled upon one of the scenes. A handful of facilitators were guiding the group, consisting of more than one hundred attendees, who gathered at the Main City Library, where a string orchestra of about 30 professional musicians played some of Herrmann's film music, into the subway where scenes were staged on the platforms as well as in the carriages. There, the performance program was handed out to the attendees who quickly discovered that it only contained drawn images of the various scenes, and no text. In Tensta the scenes included a 1930s fire-engine loaded with firemen driving through the neighborhood at full speed, a drill under the local water tower, firemen spraying water – standing in for fire – on heaps of books on the courtyard of a housing block (Figure 7.3), a woman hysterically trying to protect a room full of books in a wooden cottage, and a lady in a dressing gown staring at a flat-screen television on the wall of an apartment furnished as though it was still 1969. The final scene took place in a small forest in the neighborhood, and being close to its equivalent in the film, people were slowly walking around reciting famous novels by heart, in order to rescue literature from oblivion.

The displacements within *T.451* happened in several ways: scenes from a book and a film were transposed to outdoor and indoor public, or semi-public, space, and the reenacted activities themselves "belonged" in other locations. For example, a fire brigade drill is highly unlikely under a water tower in a residential area, and reciting literature rarely happens collectively in a forest. The art institution did not present the artwork but instead acted as the producer of the performance, allowing its team to dislocate its work to other places than usual. Thereby, the risk of routine curating was avoided by a considerable margin. It seems to me that working curatorially in meaningful ways lends itself less to routine than almost any other activity, with each project demanding its own unique tailor-made treatment.



FIGURE 7.3 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.

A project which posed different and yet related questions to do with displacement as a method and going beyond professional routine is the 2018 *Art Treasures: Grains of Gold* from Tensta's public schools, an exhibition of public art in municipal schools, at Tensta konsthall in cooperation with the Stockholm City Museum.⁴ Some 30 works of art by renowned artists of the twentieth century which are normally found in corridors, teachers' rooms, and dining areas in Tensta schools were loaned for a whole year to the art center and placed in the gallery's so-called classroom, a multipurpose space which hosts meetings, courses, screenings, and lectures. In this way, historical works which are hanging on nearby walls 365 days of the year were brought from their "site," creating a *Non-Site* in the art institution.

Once the artworks were displaced, a program was organized for the vacant spaces at the schools left by the art on loan to Tensta konsthall to be activated by artists invited to do temporary art installations and workshops.⁵ These contemporary works encompassed drawings, watercolors, sculpture, and installation. Events took place at Tensta konsthall as well, including teacher seminars, art tours, and school viewings.⁶ Throughout 2018, all the roughly 70 school classes of Tensta were invited to Tensta konsthall for a practical workshop and an introduction to the actual exhibition, as well as the history of art in schools.⁷

Why is there art in the schools of Tensta in the first place? A brief historical account of their journey from studios and exhibitions to the *Non-Site* of the schools might be helpful in understanding how the recent displacement in fact is a reversal of a much older displacement. The artworks included in *Art Treasures* are a selection from Tensta's municipal schools, all having landed there through a variety of circumstances and through different periods of time. However, the reason behind their placement

in schools is the same for all: to make it possible for children and young people to be able to experience original art at close quarters. The artworks, now belonging to the municipality of Stockholm, have been placed in the schools through the public art department of the City Museum. While several of Tensta's comprehensive schools were built in the 1960s and 1970s, at the same time as the neighborhood itself, Tensta Upper Secondary School was opened in 1984, and as one of Stockholm's most modern upper secondary schools, it took possession of a distinguished art collection from the Norra Latin School, which was closed in 1982. In addition to the collection from the Norra, Tensta Upper Secondary School also received new works as well.⁸

The Swedish program of placing art in schools goes back to the latter half of the nineteenth century when art history as an academic subject was established and art museums were built in most major European cities. During the same period, pictures were becoming increasingly common in teaching, primarily through reproductions and illustrations in textbooks. In Sweden, public schools were introduced in 1842, and it was stipulated that every parish and town congregation should start an elementary school with certified teachers. A number of elementary schools were built in rural areas, mostly out of wood, while the cities had "school palaces," grand, imposing buildings, designed by more or less well-known architects. Slightly later, at the turn of the twentieth century, educators such as Carl G. Laurin (1868–1940) and Ellen Key (1849–1926) asserted the importance of stimulating school children's and young people's interests in art through visiting and studying their local monumental buildings and museums. Laurin emphasized in his "Art and School" from 1899 how children learn to "use their eyes" and claimed that it was high time "to take art to youth and youth to art," and – moreover – "Only the best is good enough" for this purpose (Laurin 1899). This idea has roots in Romanticism's concern for the child's innate creativity and its efforts to foster the individual personality.

At the same time, ideas about the noble functions of art in general were common. Ellen Key, who in 1900 published the pioneering book *The Century of the Child*, argued that there was a direct connection between beauty, order, and purity. Art in schools was seen as positive, both for teaching history and for aesthetic development. Sources of inspiration included Alfred Lichtwark's (1852–1914) innovative work at Kunsthalle Hamburg, which during the decades surrounding 1900 lay the foundations for what is now called "museum pedagogy." The art historian and idealistic social critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–1896), textile designer, novelist, and social activist associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, were also important influences.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a handful of individual schools in Sweden received large murals with patriotic and other edifying motifs.⁹ The murals arrived at the schools mainly on the initiative of the headmasters and with the help of private donations. Thanks to the Association for Decorating Schools, founded in Stockholm in 1897, later called Art in School (1903), a large number of schools were furnished with specially commissioned monumental artworks on the one hand, and on the other, reproductions of historical and contemporary painting. The schools that became members of the association paid a membership fee, and soon there were affiliations in other cities. Similar associations already existed in Germany and England, and then later in Norway and Finland during the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰

After the World War II, efforts to democratize art and extend it into wider circles were invigorated. The state Art Enquiry from 1948 strongly recommended that art

should reach all levels of society. In Sweden, the introduction of the compulsory comprehensive school entailed focusing on individual pupils who should be trained to use their own eyes to see, understand and be able to personally relate to art. This was thought to help people become conscious of their own situation. A new association, with the same name as its predecessor, Art in School, was formed in 1947 in order to arrange touring exhibitions with both original art and reproductions. Exhibitions of original art usually contained 15 to 20 works, which were presented on portable display screens in the classroom and other places in the schools. Individual artists loaned their own work, and even collectors and gallerists made artworks available.¹¹ Schools were also given the opportunity to purchase works of art for long-term viewing, often in cooperation with Konstfrämjandet (the People's Movement for Art Promotion), which since its founding in 1947 produced graphics in collaboration with many of the leading artists of the time at reasonable prices.

A comprehensive pedagogical program was connected to the touring exhibitions, which were often thematic.¹² Over and above a certain “art fostering” effect, the aim was that art should function as a pedagogic, interdisciplinary instrument extending over subject boundaries: art should be an integrating tool. Through financial help from the Royal Fund (Kungafond), Art in School was able from the mid-1950s to also purchase artworks and place them in schools all over the country. The association came to become largely a rural organization, having a particular impact outside of the cities that had their own art museums.¹³ In sparsely populated areas it was not unusual that Art in School's exhibitions offered the first opportunity for people to experience original art first hand. In 1967, Art in School joined forces with the newly started Riksställningar (The Swedish Traveling Exhibitions) and remained as their specialist department for art in schools until 1976.¹⁴ Stockholm's municipal Art Committees



FIGURE 7.4 *T.451*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, 2012. Courtesy of Tensta konsthall. Photo, Robin Haldert.

were formed during the first half of the 1960s, in the wake of the State Art Council's inauguration in 1937 and the increasingly frequent implementation of the "one percent" rule that came after the Second World War, through which one percent of building and renovation costs should be allocated to on-site art projects.¹⁵

Pondering *T.451* and *Art Treasures*, I am rather thinking about sites and sites, than sites and *Non-Sites*, or sites and off-sites, without prior hierarchization. Instead, a fascinating aspect of *T.451* is precisely the chain of displacements on which it is based (Figure 7.4). No one location is privileged over another: they are equally relevant but unlike each other. This goes beyond the Duchampian directorial power of moving a mundane item from daily life into the art institution, anointing another royal object. The main question in the Duchampian displacement is "What is art?" The chain of displacements, whether long or short, instead stimulates questions around what art actually is doing. Then it is not surprising that mediation of art, and its reception, take on a different significance. In *T.451* the power of new perspectives on the familiar were brought about through displacements, and in *Art Treasures* it was the value and relevance of that which is already there. Finally, Bradbury's concerns about the position of literature remains significant but it is perhaps less connected to the disappearance of books and screens taking over than to the ability to focus on a narrative over a longer stretch of time. Bringing this to the fore is one thing which these particular art projects achieved.

Notes

- 1 Eventually Stockholm Public Transport (SL), the Greater Stockholm Fire Brigade, the organization Röda Hanen, Einar Mattsson real estate company, Tensta boxing club, the Stockholm City Museum, and the Kurdish association in Spånga also chipped in, in various ways.
- 2 Their first full production as collaborators followed in 2008 with the work *NY 2022* for the Peter B. Lewis Theater in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. In 2009, they premiered the Performa 09 commission *K.62/K.85* at the Abrons Arts Center in New York. In 2011, this production subsequently traveled to Kaaithater, Brussels (*K.62/K.73/K.85*) and then to Hebbel Theater Berlin (*K.62/K.85/M.31*).
- 3 The performance was preceded by talks at Tensta konsthall where the artists introduced their practice and the screening of Truffaut's film, both at the konsthall and the main building of the Stockholm Library.
- 4 The reason for choosing *T.451* and *Art Treasures* as case studies is not that they in any way can be considered better or more relevant than other projects but simply because my knowledge of them is intimate.
- 5 The artists participating in this program were Bernd Krauss, Mats Adelman, Nina Svensson, Peter Geschwind, Thomas Elovsson, and Ylva Westerlund.
- 6 The events were organized in collaboration with Elinsborg School, Enback School, Gullinge School, Hjulsta School, Spånga Upper Secondary School, and Tensta Upper Secondary School.
- 7 The project *Art Detectives* (2015–2016) preceded *Art Treasures*: artist Pia Sandström and architect Stefan Petersson, together with teachers and students from the Enback School, Elinsborg School, and Gullinge School, charted and discussed public art in their own institutions, in collaboration with the Stockholm Konst.
- 8 By artists such as Veronica Nygren and Torsten Renqvist.

- 9 For example, Reinhold Callmander's (1840–1922) paintings with Old Norse themes in Gothenburg's natural science grammar school in 1888 and Carl Larsson's (1853–1919) *The Swedish Woman through the Centuries* from 1891, at the Elementary Grammar School for Girls, also in Gothenburg.
- 10 Certain artists, for example Anders Zorn (1860–1920) and Prince Eugen (1865–1947), donated the proceeds from some of their exhibitions to start a fund to augment the membership fees. In Stockholm, Norra Latin, Norra Real, Södra Latin, Nya Elementar, and Olofslunds School are noted for their ambitious mural paintings.
- 11 The artist Sven "X:ct" Erixson, for instance, had a continuous touring exhibition for several years. The large number of women artists in the association's exhibitions has been explained by the fact that they were prepared to loan out their work more often than men were.
- 12 For example, *The Face and Masks*, *Ten Women Painters*, and *Trees*. The latter contained original art, children's drawings, reproductions and photographs, and was considered suitable for teaching drawing, local history, natural science, and nature conservation.
- 13 That is Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, Eskilstuna, and Norrköping.
- 14 Of Riksställningar's 212 exhibitions in 1973, 151 were school exhibitions. During this period, so-called box or packaged exhibitions were often used and in time they began to be classified as "educational materials."
- 15 The school art committee was one of the municipal committees and in 1993 these committees merged and became the City Art Council, whose art department was commissioned to spur interest in art and the school milieu, not least through art in school yards. In a text from 1997, Monica Wallin from the Stockholm City Art Collection wrote that to encourage "the desire to learn through art and one's own creativity" is one of the school's most important tasks.

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Africa, Art, and Knowing Nothing

Some Thoughts on Curating at the British Museum

Chris Spring

Introduction: The Sainsbury African Galleries

In 2017, an academic research review of publications authored by staff of the British Museum (BM) noted that one area which was completely lacking lay in the field of the curatorial experience and the curator's intellectual and emotional journey. This essay attempts to address that deficiency; it builds upon my doctoral dissertation (Spring 2015), from which I quote extensively. I shall discuss my professional career as artist and curator in the Africa section of the BM, particularly following the establishment of the Sainsbury African Galleries early in 2001. This was a time of intense critical scrutiny of the ways in which the arts of other cultures were being displayed in museums. It was also a period of global sociopolitical upheaval. In September 2001, I had a major solo show of my work as an artist, entitled *Green and Dying*, at the Jersey Galleries, London. During the show the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York took place, followed by a number of other cataclysmic events which changed the lives of billions of people around the world (Ellis 2002), adding a particular significance to what I and my colleagues were trying to achieve in displaying and celebrating the arts of Africa.

In this chapter, I will try to examine critically the decisions I made as a curator, together with my growing understanding of my responsibility to present a positive, nuanced, and reflexive vision of Africa, introduced to the public through the medium of contemporary African art. The Sainsbury African Galleries, while continually evolving, also offer a template for how contemporary art can mediate and extend older and long-established traditions in Africa in order to present a dynamic vision for the future – as well as an acknowledgment of Africa as the cradle of global artistic production and the birthplace of all humankind.

I have approached my research activity using the methodological framework of auto-ethnography – a way of thinking and writing which grew out of the tectonic shift which took place during the postcolonial period in the social sciences. Without the postcolonial, postmodern transformation which have taken place, moving curatorial practice from “description” to “communication” in ethnography, I would not have been able to construct this essay, much less to have taken the approach I did in curating the African Galleries at the BM. This transformation is described by Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (1996: 4).

One important change for the future of ethnography is the transformation from description to communication... The goal is not only to know but to feel ethnographic “truth” and thus to become more fully immersed – morally, aesthetically, emotionally, and intellectually.

One way of negotiating this awkward curatorial terrain has been with the help of contemporary artists. In 1996, the Kenyan-born ceramicist Magdalene Odundo introduced me to a teacher who radically altered my approach to my own artistic practice, and I subsequently commissioned a vessel by Odundo as one of the four works by living artists which introduced the galleries to the public in 2001 (Figure 8.1).

Today, outstanding work by more than 20 contemporary artists of African heritage are to be found throughout the BM galleries, mediating the displays and allowing the curatorial voice to fade into the background. This is one example of how my role as curator subtly changed during my time at the museum. The curator is often perceived as the mediating presence in an exhibition – a lens through which the content is interpreted and made accessible. However, as the number of works by contemporary artists in the African Galleries grew, so did their ability to speak for themselves and to interpret or contextualize the other older works of art surrounding them. They act as dynamic contemporary standard bearers for long-established traditions, which were once portrayed in museums as frozen in time rather than as living phenomena, with a vibrant present and future, as well as a distant past.

Within this context, as artist and curator, it became my role to find the right place in the extended canvas of the African Galleries to place each new work so that it may have the maximum effect and impact. By this means artists not only mediate and curate but also take ownership of the galleries.

In planning the initial displays in the African Galleries, I worked closely with Gus Casely-Hayford, now Director of the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. He perfectly summed up the mood of the time and the impact I was trying to make in curating the galleries:

At this fluid moment in museology, this British Museum exhibition has set down a new way of being in an ethnographic gallery. ... It allows us to get up close to the objects and inhale them like art. But it also gives us back-up in panels, in film, in the catalogue, so that we can step across the gap, into the frame to decode some of the conundra that would otherwise have perplexed us and closed us out. In this period in which the tenets of post-modernity have begun to be questioned, this is a refuge of common sense, an approach that works for the experienced visitor, and for those who are new to displayed African culture. (Casely-Hayford 2002: 127)

We considered many different approaches to displaying our African collections, though some choices were prevented by the physical shape of the galleries which have



FIGURE 8.1 *Tribute to Magdalene Odundo*, ink and pencil on paper, 1996, H 60cm, W 42cm, Chris Spring. Courtesy of the author.

a main entrance from which the public can turn either left or right, as well as two further access points. In a sense, there is no beginning and no end to the galleries and so, rather to my relief, a linear narrative arranged either historically or geographically, was out of the question. The galleries were purpose-built for the collections, but there was no existing available space in the museum itself, so they were created underground, away from any natural light. Although this provided a much more stable environment which allowed us to show many ex-case works of art and to display relatively fragile works like textiles, it inevitably also created political problems, which I address later.

Although geographical displays might have helped to head off the criticism of perpetuating the idea of Africa as a single country, such an approach would also have emphasized the colonial history of the collections, with a large proportion coming from Nigeria and Ghana. Other parts of the continent, such as North Africa, were hardly represented at all. As a solution, we decided that the different sections of the galleries should be arranged to examine the deep significance inherent in materials

such as clay, iron, wood, brass, and cloth – and within these material divisions to allow a discussion of some of the issues people might otherwise expect to encounter under thematic headings, such as history, religion, and trade. Far from provoking confusion and bewilderment, I consider that this juxtaposition has opened up the galleries to a much deeper discussion. For example, by placing “clay” and “iron” together in one space, with the leavening addition of pieces by contemporary artists working in the same traditions (for example Odundo in ceramics and Rachid Koraïchi in metalwork), the classic binaries of hot and cold, nature and culture, women and men – as discussed at length in anthropological literature – are allowed full expression.

Fieldwork and Collecting

In the past an anthropologist would go and carry out fieldwork on location, now the fieldwork happens in the museum. Just as I wouldn't dream of going out collecting, it makes complete sense that with this amount of material you don't have to look for something unknown: the unknown exists within your stores. (Deliss 2016: 191)

I understand what Clémentine Deliss, who was the Director of the Museum der Weltkulturen in Frankfurt between 2010 and 2016, is getting at in this statement, but collecting – or as one cynical colleague at the BM suggested, “shopping” – still has its place in throwing light on the “unknown.” Of course, there is no longer any compulsion to go to remote places and “collect” anything which is not now freely available in the marketplace or in the factory. I am thinking, for example, of the machine-manufactured textile traditions of eastern and southern Africa and their global history of production, driven at all times by African taste and patronage.

I might cite a now quite famous *kanga* which I remember showing to a group of potential fieldwork funders shortly after the African Galleries had opened. “What is it that's African – never mind Tanzanian – about that?” they asked. “It looks more like a Damien Hirst spot painting than anything else, and it's printed in India. It's not really African at all, is it?” I pointed to the slogan in Kiswahili printed on the textile – *HUJUI KITU* (You know nothing) – in order to explain what was, among many things, “really African” about it, in particular that it might perhaps be worn by an older woman to comment on her presumptuous young rivals. “You young people think you are so smart but *HUJUI KITU* – you know nothing!” I also knew NOTHING when I bought it in the market on Zanzibar. This is a good rule of thumb for working anywhere in Africa, because if you know nothing, you may begin to learn something, whereas if you think you know everything you'll never learn anything (Spring 2012a: 361).

In the end the funders did grant me a little money for my fieldwork, and that *kanga* I had bought was chosen by my colleague Kiprop Lagat from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) to feature in a ground-breaking exhibition called *HAZINA* (Lagat and Hudson 2006). This was a collaboration and a sharing of collections between NMK and the BM and was displayed in a specially refurbished gallery in Nairobi in 2006–2007. This might have seemed like taking coals to Newcastle, but my fellow curator Lagat could see the potential for this particular *kanga* to tell a story to his public in Nairobi, just as I could see the impact it could make on my public at the BM in London. That *kanga* sowed the seeds for what would become a particular research

interest of mine. Displays of machine-printed and woven textiles from eastern and southern Africa would feature in the African galleries, in Gallery 91 at the BM (2013) and as a separate touring exhibition *Social Fabric: Textiles of Eastern and Southern Africa* in four UK regional museums in 2015/16. Commenting on the show at the BM, Mark Lowcock, Director of the UK Department for International Development, said that he had visited Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Mombasa many times – seeing their marketplaces bustling with thousands of women wearing colorful *kanga* cloth, which in some ways represents one of many African stereotypes. However, for the first time he had seen beyond the stereotype of the colorful marketplace, to that which had previously been “unknown” to him, at last enabling him to understand a little bit of the true significance of the scenes he had witnessed (M. Lowcock, personal communication 2013).

South Africa: The Landscape and Three Million Years of Art

Together with my friend the South African June Bam-Hutchison, who had written passionately about her experience of growing up in the apartheid era (Bam-Hutchison 2010), I led the curatorial element of the BM’s collaboration with the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, resulting in the South Africa Landscape which transformed one of the anonymous strips of grass on the forecourt of the museum and became a focal point for celebrations of the 2010 World Cup (held in South Africa) and of the first international Nelson Mandela Day, attended by almost 25 000 people. The Landscape was something far more than a display of exotic flowers: it was at pains to show, through strategically placed information panels and artworks, the deep-seated connections between plants, people, and the ownership of the land in South Africa.

I asked my friend the artist Taslim Martin, whose work is displayed in the African Galleries, whether he might be able to reproduce on the rocks in the landscape some of the works by artists of the San, South Africa’s First Peoples. In so doing, he himself learned deeply from a tradition he had never paid much attention to in the past, and also helped to create respect for the San people of today whose ancestors were responsible for these magnificent works of art.

A few years later I returned to South Africa as the subject for my final major exhibition at the BM. I co-curated *South Africa: Three Million Years of Art* with the archeologist John Giblin, in which we boldly attempted to tell the history of South Africa through artworks, from the deep past to the present day. Works by at least 20 South African contemporary artists commented on each historical moment and on the artworks which were “contemporary” at that time. At the insistence of certain elements within the BM, the exhibition was re-titled *South Africa: The Art of a Nation* (Giblin and Spring 2016), despite the fact that all the banners and posters for the show had been printed and a press conference called. This meant we were saddled with the problematic word “nation” in our title, which instantly attracted criticism. The controversy revolved around a small object, the Makapansgat pebble, which was discovered amongst the approximately three-million-year-old remains of australopithecines, ancestors of modern humans, and appeared to have been carried there for at least several kilometers because its geology differed from the site at which it was found. Crucially, two “faces” formed by water erosion appear on either side of the pebble, and it is believed by some that this feature, combined with the reddish color of the

pebble, might have explained the reason for its “collection” by one of our early ancestors. Of course, there is absolutely no way that this can be proved, one way or the other, but apparently there was a worry that it might bring the BM into disrepute to suggest that “art,” in the sense of symbolic thought, might have existed three million years ago. I can’t speak for John, but to me this summed up what was both imaginative about the BM (in staging the exhibition) and self-consciously pedantic (in re-titling it). As John and I pointed out in the accompanying book, “Whatever one’s point of view, the pebble and other such manuports present us with an opportunity to consider how and why early humans first began to value natural objects and to collect and curate them” (Giblin and Spring 2016: 30).

Despite these problems, the exhibition was a great success (Picton 2016) and, amongst other innovations, allowed us to use the art collection of the late great Robert Loder to good effect.

Together with Sir Anthony Caro, Loder founded the Triangle Network of artists’ workshops in various parts of Africa, which had a huge impact around the world (Savage 2014). Artists’ workshops, art centers, studios, art fairs, and biennales are important vehicles for artists across the continent, particularly the more experimental work by emerging or lesser-known artists that might not find their way into conventional “white cube” galleries or museums. I considered that these workshops could help to empower and energize museums in Africa, just as the African Galleries and the wider BM benefited from the input of living African artists. With the blessing of Robert Loder and the help of my friend and colleague Julie Hudson, we managed to find the money for the BM to support three of Loder’s workshops, in Mozambique, Ghana, and Nigeria. I participated in these both as artist and curator, creating lasting links with artists and museum colleagues. The current director of Triangle, Alessio Antonioli, and Anna Kindersley, who was the International Exchange Coordinator for Triangle from 1992 to 2005, give a flavor of these workshops, their history, and their potential benefit for individual artists, local communities, and participating institutions:

Free from having to produce a finished object or present a final outcome, the workshops allowed artists to experiment and focus on process rather than product. This included peers and the public in conversations that furthered the development of a specific piece and, often, the direction of an artist’s practice. Talking about the 1982 workshop, Sir Anthony Caro recalled:

“There was an incredible sharing of ideas, knowledge and techniques... All the people who came to Triangle were makers. It is through the friendships you build by spending time with other people that you can get the kind of support and guidance you need. ... With the workshops, we wanted to create a structure that revolved around talking and making art. It’s totally art-orientated. For those two weeks, that’s your life!” (Triangle Network 2017)

Triangle was, and continues to be, a group effort. Artist and Thupelo Coordinator Jill Trappler described the initial group of organizers including Anthony Caro, Robert Loder, Willard Boepple, Bill Ainslie, David Koloane, Karen Wilkin, and Lionel Davis as the Acorn Planters. Their commitment, energy, and enthusiasm inspired and involved thousands of artists, hundreds of organizers (in many cases themselves artists), curators, coordinators, writers, critics, and the whole cultural scene that surrounds and also expands the ambition and scope of art making. <https://www.trianglenetwork.org/triangle-network/about/triangle-network-history/>.

Terminology

I use the terms “contemporary African art” and “African heritage” throughout this chapter, so I should define what I mean by them here, particularly as they both lead to a third term: “global Africa” (Sanyal 2015), which I also use on several occasions in the text, although not necessarily in the context of contemporary art. Scholars such as V.Y. Mudimbe (1988 and 1994) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (1995) note that “Africa” and “African art” are in many ways constructs, and that in reality there are many “Africas,” just as there are innumerable artistic traditions practiced by the diverse peoples of the African continent. In the public imagination, however, “African art” still suggests primarily western and central African masks and wood sculpture. Part of my role as curator has been to expand these public perceptions by promoting an understanding and appreciation of the great diversity of artistic traditions across the continent.

The late Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, two of the most influential curators in the field, offer the following description of contemporary African Art.

More concretely, contemporary African art denotes a field of complex artistic production, research, interpretation, and a repository of rich intellectual discovery at the inter-section of the shifting models of cultural, political, social and epistemological analyses in which Africa is meaningfully interpellated. Here the connection to Africa ... applies to the very complex models of identity and ambivalent identifications of the artists who reside both inside and outside Africa; or who move easily between both. (Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu 2009: 11)

I use the term “African heritage” as opposed to “African descent” (we are all, literally, of African descent) because it is not primarily about ethnicity. African heritage not only incorporates an extraordinary spectrum of people who regionally might be described as “White South African,” “Amazigh” (Berber), “Black British,” “African Caribbean,” or “African American,” but also people who have “inherited” something which is culturally immensely powerful and manifests itself in every conceivable art form around the world, in politics, philosophy, science, religion, and in every walk of life. This is what I call “global Africa.”

The Museum of Mankind

In common with Pablo León de la Barra and other curators, particularly of my generation, I came into the profession “by mistake” (de la Barra 2016: 114). After university, I was trained as an artist and have continued to practice as an integral part of my role as curator, although a sequence of events took me stumbling from the gates of the Royal College of Art to making coffee two days a week for the librarian at the Museum of Mankind, which then housed the Ethnography Department of the BM in its temporary home behind the Royal Academy of Art in Piccadilly. I knew nothing about the arts of Africa but, surrounded by the books and by the exhibitions of my colleagues, I learned fast. That became my life, so in one sense I conform to what Rafal Niemojewski describes as “the old model of the curator ... who stay in their position during their entire professional career” (Niemojewski 2016: 9). I used to describe myself as “a lifer” at the BM, though even in those early days of the late

1980s I could see that I might be able to make a difference in the way in which the arts of Africa were perceived by our public and presented by my colleagues. I addressed particularly the validity of divisions between the “contemporary,” “the traditional,” and “the ancient,” and the academic disciplines by which they were represented: art history, social anthropology, and archeology. It was quite obvious to me that “ancient” was once “contemporary” and that “contemporary” will one day be “ancient” – and that the “traditional,” in the sense of a dynamic continuum, could be the element which would link them together.

I began my career at the BM when museum ethnographers/anthropologists were expected to do the kind of fieldwork which Deliss refers to as shunning the urban environment and traveling to (usually) quite remote locations where they are expected to “form a collection” which then becomes the basis of a curated exhibition. However, my first exhibition, *Power of the Hand: African Arms and Armour* (1994–1995), and its accompanying book, was of the second type which Deliss refers to – that is to say one drawn entirely from the museum’s stores (Deliss 2016: 191). The works on display were familiar as those which visitors to ethnographic museums had encountered for more than a century, although their true significance, in the eyes of those African artists who created them, had remained “unknown” to those same museum visitors.

Some of the exhibitions Deliss helped to curate at the Museum der Weltkulturen addressed similar issues to those which the African American artist/curator Fred Wilson highlighted in his seminal exhibition/installation *Mining the Museum* (1992) at both the Contemporary (Museum) of Baltimore and Maryland Historical Society (Baltimore, MD). Wilson in particular addressed the issue of how museums consciously or unwittingly reinforce racist beliefs and behaviors, by what they both show and do not show – and, of course, by how they interpret the works on display. Whilst doing initial research for my book *African Arms and Armour* (1993) in the BM’s stores, I came across endless boxes marked “unidentified African weapons,” often containing extraordinarily beautifully crafted, multibladed works which the literature described as “throwing knives” (Figure 8.2). However, the small amount of existing academic research (Jedrej 1975) seemed to suggest that the people who created these extraordinary objects conceived them in terms of male human beings, in other words highly stylized metal sculptures. The Victorian sensibility – and indeed that of some of my colleagues who advised me against staging an exhibition of “nasty, sharp pointed things” – saw them simply as missiles and as exotic ways of killing, even though many of them were never designed to be thrown, much less to be used in warfare.

In 2004, I remember the Algerian artist Rachid Koraïchi coming across the display of “throwing knives” in the African Galleries at the BM and gasping in amazement and admiration. I wanted to acquire his work *The Path of Roses* (2001), which was in part dedicated to the medieval mystic poet Rumi and his spiritual as well as physical journey to found the Mevlevi Dervish order in Konya, Turkey. Unfortunately there was no room in the African Galleries to include Koraïchi’s large and small metal figures, embroidered textiles, and ceramic dishes in one space. It therefore seemed natural that I should follow his suggestion of allowing his small metal figures to “walk” along below the throwing knives, emphasizing both the idea of a journey as well as their anthropomorphic form – and thus their humanity and artistry. This remains one of the most successful collaborations between contemporary African artist, curator, and “traditional” artwork in the BM galleries.



FIGURE 8.2 Drawing of a ‘throwing knife’, pencil on paper, 1993, H 38cm, W 51cm, Chris Spring. Courtesy of the author.

North Africa

At the Museum of Mankind, I developed research interests in North Africa, which gave me a sense of the whole continent and of the age-old connections not only between one region and another but also with the rest of the world. My own fieldwork in Africa and in “global” Africa has almost always been conducted in collaboration with contemporary artists who unfailingly provide the introductions to other interested colleagues (often in local museums). The insights provided by their own work made each trip and each project a full and rounded experience. In 1997 and 1998, I undertook two periods of fieldwork in Tunisia with my friend and colleague Julie Hudson, collaborating with the artists Khaled Ben Slimane and Nja Mahdaoui and acquiring fine examples of their work – as well as an exceptional collection of urban handwoven and embroidered textiles, several of them commissioned from local weavers (Figure 8.3).

North Africa has frequently been described to me as “not really Africa,” the “real” Africa belonging in “sub-Saharan Africa,” a highly divisive term which has its roots in the colonial period. As the curator, Simon Njami, observes in the introduction to the catalogue accompanying the touring exhibition *Africa Remix*:

This kind of revisionism is pathological, for it seeks to negate the multiple influences fuelled by exchanges between the large Sahelian cities and their North African neighbours since the Middle Ages ... In short, it seeks to negate the common history that united the destinies of nations colonized by the same powers and their ensuing struggles for liberation. (Njami 2005: 13, 23)

At this time, I was also beginning to understand that the past, the present, and the future could be described in a dynamic way through liberating the ideas and the



FIGURE 8.3 A silk weaving loom in Tunisia, oil pastel on paper, 1997, H 11cm, W 30cm, Chris Spring. Courtesy of the author.

histories concealed within almost all of the artworks in the BM's collections. Perhaps the greatest challenge in curating the arts and cultures of Africa is to present a positive picture of the continent's diverse, dynamic, creative, and profoundly spiritual and humorous peoples, while at the same time acknowledging the darker side of their histories – and the histories imposed upon them. The Middle East and Africa are so often portrayed in the media as places of violence, and Islam as a religion bent on cultivating extremism and terror (Marvasti 2005). These perceptions have been in place ever since the African Galleries first opened to the public – but they have intensified over the past few years. Now, more than ever, the African Galleries have a heavy responsibility to show the other side of the story. Although the slave trade, colonialism, the Cold War, apartheid, and the HIV and AIDS pandemic are all alluded to in the African Galleries, it is in the context of a creative and redemptive response by artists of African heritage.

Mozambique: The Throne and the Tree

Shortly after the African Galleries opened to the public I purchased a sculpture (*The Throne of Weapons*) by the artist Kester which led me to research the war of independence against the Portuguese and the more recent so-called civil war in his country, Mozambique. I also commissioned from him and three other artists a much larger sculpture, *The Tree of Life*. Both were made of decommissioned weapons and created as part of the *Swords into Ploughshares* project, founded in Maputo in 1995 by the Anglican Bishop Dom Dinis Sengulane. This in turn led me to read *A Different Kind of War Story* (1997) by the anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom, and this cemented in my mind the methodological approach of auto-ethnography which I had

begun to adopt, both in the curatorial decisions I made in my fieldwork and in my published writing. As Nordstrom says:

When I travel to Mozambique I am not interested in documenting an “Other”. I am interested in looking for solutions to the very pressing problems facing the world as a whole. Political violence, to me, is among the most pressing. If Mozambique provides solutions to these lethal matters, then that is where research should lead. (Nordstrom 1997: 233)

The “solutions” to which she refers are there for all to see in the *Throne of Weapons* and the *Tree of Life*: works of art which have inspired countless projects by academics, artists, prisoners, poets, community groups, and musicians – all of them stemming from Bishop Sengulane’s project. These sculptures are war memorials with a difference, telling stories which are not in the history books but which show how the wars in Mozambique were not ended by soldiers or politicians but by people who were brave enough to stand up, unarmed, and reject the culture of violence and the addiction to the gun which had afflicted their country for so many years.

Both the *Tree of Life* and the *Throne of Weapons* highlight how violence does not need to be the end of the story, and more peaceful and just futures can be imagined and created. (Mitchell 2012: 3)

The *Tree of Life* became the centerpiece and identity image for the BM’s *Africa ’05* program and played a crucial role in the dynamics and development of the galleries, while the *Throne of Weapons* has toured the UK and the world, spreading its message in venues as disparate as schools, shopping centers, and even a prison. No other works of art have caught the imagination in quite the same way as the *Throne* and the *Tree*, so much so that within a few short years they had claimed their own chapter in the *Treasures of the British Museum*, a weighty tome which is a kind of *Who’s Who* of the BM’s most revered artefacts.

During *Africa ’05* a small exhibition at the entrance to the BM entitled *Made in Africa* focused on the artistry and aesthetic appeal of the oldest objects in the BM’s collections, the 1.8-million-year-old stone hand axes from Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. Moving from the dark, though dramatically lit, space of that exhibition into the bright, open space of the Great Court, the public encountered what was then the most recent acquisition in the African collections: the *Tree of Life*. It was a supremely powerful experimental juxtaposition, and I think for the first time there was a real public understanding of the dynamism and continuity in the arts of Africa from the distant past to the present day. Seeing this happen made me feel that I was achieving some of my most important curatorial objectives.

Sponsorship and Africa in the Basement

Sponsorship for any kind of research is not easy to come by, and in a large museum such as the BM much of that work is done by a development department, whilst it is up to individual curators to remind colleagues of contentious sponsorship which

would be highly detrimental if accepted. Many banks and mining companies have well-documented and often controversial relationships with Africa and the developing world, but curators should nonetheless make sure that the museum is aware of these and the possible consequences of a sponsorship relationship, such as various forms of protest, including live interventions, picketing, and press reports. The ethical dimension to the sponsorship of individual exhibitions by particular sponsors is never far from a curator's mind, as illustrated by one incident occurring during the installation of the Sainsbury African Galleries. As mentioned earlier, I had commissioned a new work by Magdalene Odundo specifically for the purpose of making our public think about what they were seeing as soon as they entered the Galleries – through the inclusion of work by a living artist, born in Kenya but trained in Britain, and working in the ceramic tradition – still today not always associated with fine art. I was also impressed with comments Odundo had made when curating an exhibition during the Africa '95 festival: “My aim is to show that historical and contemporary work can be viewed as a continuum” (Odundo 1995: 26). This observation greatly influenced my ideas as to how a new Africa gallery at the BM might be curated. However, the positioning of Odundo's work at the very entrance of the galleries prompted Steve Hooper, the director of the Sainsbury Institute and representative of the Sainsbury family, to request its removal to another part of the exhibition, and it to be replaced with one of the “iconic treasures” from Africa in the collections, the *Ife Head* from Nigeria. The significant point of introducing our public to the arts of Africa with works they would not expect to see – works by named living artists – would have been lost if we had agreed to that request. To his great credit, Hooper accepted the validity of the point we were seeking to make and returned to Norwich.

Despite the supreme importance to the UK of a permanent African gallery in a big national museum like the BM – especially in a city like London with its huge African heritage population – there will inevitably be deep political and emotional ramifications surrounding its siting and contents. This is especially so in an institution with the baggage of colonial looting, barbarism, and appropriation hanging over some of its most renowned collections. The physical position of the African Galleries – as a result of space constraints built underground by the distinguished architect Lord Norman Foster as part of his millennium development of the BM – continues to be a source of lively debate, by turns perceived as an insulting slight on the continent or as a place of profound spirituality which is, both literally and figuratively, the foundations of the BM. Siting a few introductory works at the top of the stairs leading down to the galleries would have been a way of presenting not only the rationale behind the displays, from Africa's deep past to the present day, but also the reason for their physical position “in the basement” – and the fact that they could serve only as a brief introduction both to a vast continent of 54 countries and to the phenomenon of global Africa. Despite our failure to convince the BM of the importance of such an introduction, the galleries have attracted considerable praise from a number of quarters. Bonnie Greer, the African American playwright and former Deputy Chair of the Trustees of the BM, visited the African Galleries with colleagues from Spelman College in Atlanta, US. In common with many others, Bonnie had always felt the positioning of the African Galleries to be a major impediment to her appreciation of the work displayed there. This time, however, after we had spent a full hour in the galleries, she stopped, turned to me, and said: “This is right.” I was also interested to hear the reaction of Jack Obonyo, Curator of the Abasuba Community Peace Museum

in Kenya, during a recent visit to the Africa Galleries. He commented that the Africa Galleries' positioning in a discrete space not passed through by people on their way elsewhere – as almost all the other galleries in the BM are – imparts to them a particular dignity and level of respect.

In the context of this ongoing, healthy debate about the physical positioning of the African Galleries and their actual content, a recent market survey came up with some interesting findings. First of all, the “dwell time” – the length of time members of the public spend in any particular gallery of the BM – is twice as long in the African Galleries as anywhere else in the museum. Second, people behave in a much calmer, almost reverential way, in the African Galleries than they do elsewhere in the museum.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

Toward the end of 2005, the BM began to address the sensitive problem of how best to mark the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 2007 (Spring 2011). After considerable debate, I convinced the BM to purchase *La Bouche du Roi* by Romuald Hazoumè of the Republic of Benin, a large-scale installation work which had been first conceived in 1997 but not completed until 2005.

It was a contemporary work which could be the focus of the BM's response to the Bicentenary, but which was not created with the Bicentenary in mind. With its themes of resistance and remembrance, and its modern take on the famous abolitionist image of the slave ship *Brookes* – substituting petrol drums for the images of enslaved Africans – it was obviously appropriate for display during that year and beyond.

If I learned one thing from the experience of the Bicentenary it is that curators should come out of their comfort zones, should not be afraid to be emotional, whatever their positions in museums. Until they do so, they will never truly be able to begin to suggest and portray to their public the many layers of interpretation which may lie within traumatic historical periods or events. Denis Byrne and others have argued strongly that the field of cultural heritage should break free from “the politics of tangibility” in order to make an emotional connection between our lives and those who have lived in the past. If we museum curators are not careful we may, as Byrne puts it, “create landscapes of the past that seem to be inhabited by stone tool traditions and ceramic cultures rather than people” (Byrne 2009: 245).

One of these approaches is to take ownership of that history by showing the slave trade from an African perspective, highlighting African resistance to the trade, and showing how Africans as much as, if not more than, Europeans contributed to the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean “worlds,” and how African culture and people of African heritage have emerged victorious even from this most evil and devastating assault.

Romuald Hazoumè taught me that the film showing the hazardous illegal trade in black market petrol importation between Nigeria and Benin, which is an integral part of his artwork, did not represent as we had at first thought a modern form of enslavement – quite the contrary. By risking their lives in tapping the oil pipelines and running the highly inflammable proceeds across the border by boat and then on by motorbike, these men should be seen as clawing back a little of Africa's huge wealth of natural resources, which for centuries have been exploited by a few while the vast majority remain in poverty. “With *La Bouche du Roi* the British Museum has achieved

something extraordinary,” wrote the producer and director Pam Fraser-Solomon in an e-mail to me shortly after the event. “I am a regular visitor to the Tate Modern and yet *La Bouche du Roi* is the best example of the global importance of contemporary art that I have ever witnessed.”

During this time, I worked closely with a community group, *Rendezvous of Victory*, and their young people. It was they who not only gave us the title to the day of *Resistance and Remembrance* on 25 March 2007 (it could so easily have been Remembrance alone), but also helped to turn the event from a possible showcase for the solemn pronouncements of the great and the good into a day for all people, particularly people of African heritage, to affirm the enduring glory of global Africa, a glory which the slave trade tried and failed to extinguish.

Following the Bicentenary, I began discussions with the British/Trinidadian artist Zak Ové to see whether he might bring the contemporary Caribbean into the African Galleries, telling the story of emancipation through carnival and with it a creative, global African response to the Atlantic slave trade. Finally, the opportunity arose – as it often did at the BM, almost out of the blue – to commission from Zak Ové two large sculptures representing the moko jumbies, stilt walkers from Trinidad and other Caribbean carnivals that have their roots in West African and Tanzanian masquerade. The BM director, Neil MacGregor, had decided that the museum should celebrate Africa in 2015 and so, with the generous help of two additional benefactors, I was able to commission the two sculptures. They appeared initially in the Great Court, just before the Notting Hill Carnival, and were celebrated by a performance from the Trinidad Carnival Queen and a troupe of moko jumbie stilt dancers. Following fairly extensive modifications, they re-appeared in the African Galleries where they have an imposing presence, conveying the creative response of African/Caribbean carnival in bringing emancipation to previously enslaved peoples of African heritage (Jon Snow, Channel 4 2017).

Restitution and Reparation

I had the deepest respect for those who saw the works of art on display in the African galleries as “looted cultural heritage” and for the calls for the return of these works. However, I felt that, in common with the views which Kwame Anthony Appiah would later express in his book *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), these magnificent works should represent the varied cultures of Africa in a museum in which so many other great cultures of the world were strongly represented. Located there, in some sense they would help in the struggle against the ignorance which led to their acquisition by force during the colonial era, an ignorance of the sophistication and dynamism of Africa which is still strongly alive in so many societies today.

Coming to terms with and confronting the realities of colonialism in general – and of British imperial looting of African works of art in particular – has to be one of the most delicate and demanding duties of British curators today faced with the task of displaying these works of art to the public. Of course, it is easy to argue that these works of art belong to the world, or at least to global Africa (Cuno 2009). It is also true that the ignorance and racist bigotry which allowed the looting of these works in the first place is still very much alive in British and global society, and that displaying these works of art and the history of their acquisition confronts and questions those

who still hold such views today. This, however, does not cut much ice with those who point out that the Abuna of the Ethiopian church, the Asantehene of the Asante kingdom and, the Oba of Benin are still vital, living heads of their respective cultural, religious, and political organizations, who might lay a just claim to the return of artworks so deeply imbued with their spiritual as well as secular authority.

Perhaps the key to displaying such sensitive works is to try as far as possible to tell the true story of their acquisition, at the same time as drawing out the full complexity of their significance and the brilliance of their execution as works of art. In this respect, my acquisition of a large painting by Kimathi Donkor, a British artist of Ghanaian heritage, helps to tell the story of the looting of Kumase by the British during the three Asante wars, with much of the plunder ending up in the BM. The painting depicts Yaa Asantewaa, a woman who rallied the Asante men to rise up against the British after they had demanded to sit on the Golden Stool, a deeply ignorant and discourteous request as the Golden Stool represents the spiritual heart of the Asante kingdom. The painting will be displayed between a royal kente cloth of the Asante and the cast brass plaques looted from the royal palace of the Oba of Benin in 1897.

In a wider context of British imperialism, *Nine Flags* by the British artist of Nigerian heritage Raimi Gbadamosi offers another dimension to the African Galleries because it is a conceptual work which extends our notions of Britishness and British-associated identities by offering a decolonization of the Union Jack. Far from mocking the Union Jack, the work suggests a new kind of respect for this sometime symbol of imperial dominance in the diverse society of Britain today (Spring 2012b: 72).

In the case of Benin, there has never been a stronger argument for presenting the ongoing and dynamic significance of the works on display through the lens of a contemporary artist's practice. Benin-born, London-based artist Leo Asemota and his *Ens Project* (Spring 2019) comprises a five-stage, multimedia artwork focusing on the ancient Igue ritual of Head worship practiced by the Edo people of Benin, the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 against the Royal Kingdom of Benin, and Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*. The work's third stage, MISFORTUNE'S WEALTH, examines the Igue ritual, as well as the ritual materials used: orhue (kaolin/chalk), coal, and iron. These materials carry magical and historically symbolic meanings for the empires of both Benin and Britain, in the one case healing and protecting the Oba and his kingdom, in the other fueling the Industrial Revolution and the economic and military power it engendered. This deeply thoughtful and respectful use of materials attracted me to Leo's work, not least because the rationale underpinning the African Galleries at the BM is similarly devoted to an understanding of the symbolic complexities inherent in substances such as clay, iron, wood, brass, and cloth.

Curating is an ongoing, collaborative, and deeply rewarding way of life, though inevitably it can occasionally be extremely frustrating. As an artist and creative writer, I have been able to stand back at times, take a breather, and become involved for a while in my own work. Yet the life of the curator who is "a constantly travelling exhibition-maker working on temporary contracts" (Niemojewski 2016: 9) does not interest me. I cannot help but become deeply emotionally and critically involved with the artists, living and dead, whose works I have had the honor to curate and write about to the best of my ability. Many of these artworks are devoted, in one way or another, to African people, their hopes, fears, and aspirations, and to the lands in which they live, whether on the continent or in global Africa. It is to these people,

most of whom will always be unknown to me, that I feel the strongest emotional and intellectual tie – and the greatest sense of responsibility for. For me that is what curating, in the original sense of “caring for,” is all about.

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Curatorial Crisis

Martha Wilson

This chapter reviews the evolution of curation at Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc., a not-for-profit arts organization I founded in my living loft in Lower Manhattan on 3 April 1976. I had moved to New York from Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Canada, after Richards Jarden, my boyfriend at the time, and I parted company, in an effort to find out if I really was an artist. This was an open question, because my mentor in Halifax (who had been my painting teacher in college) told me, “Women don’t make it in the artworld.” And indeed, while in the art school environment there were plenty of women students, there were very few in the professional ranks of galleries and museums, and almost no coverage of women in the art magazines or journals.

When I founded Franklin Furnace it was my intention to show equal numbers of women and men (Figure 9.1). But at the same time, I did not want my personal taste to dictate what art was being presented; I did not feel my exposure to the wider art world was sufficient and I did not want to be chased down the street by artists wanting to show me their slides. So, I turned to my friend Jacki Apple, whom I had met through the exhibition catalogue of Lucy Lippard’s *c. 7,500*. The back-story of my inclusion in one of her “number shows” is that Lippard, who at the time had decided to devote her career to solely organizing and writing about women’s work, came to Halifax in 1973, looked at the photo/text work I was doing, and told me, “Yes, you are an artist, and there are other women artists around North America and Europe who are doing feminist art.” She gave me this term! I now understood that I was part of a wider trend and that I was not alone in using my female body and perspective as the basis for my work. I started corresponding with Apple, and we collaborated on a performance art work, *Transformance: Claudia*, which took place at the Plaza Hotel and in SoHo in December 1973.

There is another curation story that fits right in here. Some months after my arrival in New York, Apple made an appointment for us to show our work to Ivan Karp, then



FIGURE 9.1 *Martha Wilson*. Courtesy of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc. 2005. Photo credit: Christopher Milne.

Director of OK Harris Gallery, located on West Broadway in SoHo. Apple presented her work, then I presented mine. Then Karp started yelling: “WHY ARE YOU SHOWING ME THIS? I WOULD NEVER EXHIBIT IT. THIS WORK IS TERRIBLE!” The experience was so traumatic that I put all the work I had created in Halifax under my bed and focused instead on founding an organization.

Still another story from those early days. My first job in New York was at Harry N. Abrams, Inc. I read a notice in *The New York Times* that a publishing company was seeking someone with editorial experience and an art history degree, so I figured it had to be either Praeger or Abrams. I arrived at Abrams at 8.30 in the morning, and watched the 8.00 interviewee leaving. The managing editor frowned when the candidate before me admitted she was an artist. So, I decided not to admit that I was an artist at this point and got hired. The reason this anecdote is important to the story is that I learned more by working for this business than I had learned in many years in graduate school.

Returning to the early days of Franklin Furnace. After my nine-to-five job at Abrams, I would go downtown to see performance art events at the Idea Warehouse, a venue established on Reade Street by Alanna Heiss, founder of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources (which evolved into MoMA PS1). One performance in

particular stands out. Virginia Piersol, an artist and filmmaker, developed a harness which supported a Super-8 film projector facing forward on her body, and another facing backward. Wearing roller skates, she cruised around the gigantic Idea Warehouse loft so that the film image would grow larger and smaller on the walls. I thought this was wonderful!

Later, hearing that I was looking for a living loft downtown, Piersol intercepted me on Park Place to let me know there was a ground floor loft available at 112 Franklin Street, which I leased. Franklin Furnace was established.

Franklin Furnace was founded to sell, exhibit, and preserve artists' books, an art form that was being ignored by the uptown institutions, in spite of the *Information* show organized by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1970. Richards Jarden – as noted, he was my boyfriend at the time – had his work included in this show, and it was such a big deal that we came from Halifax to New York for the opening, to see conceptual work by artists from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner on display. Five years later, I returned to the MoMA bookstore to ask if they would sell my artist book; the store manager said, “Look, lady, your book costs \$5 but it would cost me \$5 to do the bookkeeping, so no, I’m not going to stock your book.” Plus, at the time there was no agreement as to whether artists’ books were books or art. The American painter Ed Ruscha was reported to have been delighted that the Library of Congress mis-catalogued his *Real Estate Opportunities* under real estate instead of art, because he thought regular people might run into it (Senior 2016).

On opening day, Franklin Furnace exhibited about 200 published artists’ books on trestle tables, as well as the one-of-a-kind works of Karen Shaw and Claire Fergusson. We were not sure what to call what we were exhibiting: book-like works by artists? Bookworks? Artists’ Books? Should there be a distinction between the one-of-a-kind works and published, multiple works? Also, at the same time that I was running around Lower Manhattan visiting the Department of Law and the IRS to incorporate and obtain not-for-profit status, a group including Lucy Lippard, Sol LeWitt, Pat Steir, Mimi Wheeler, Walter Robinson, Robin White, and Edit DeAk were meeting to found Printed Matter, Inc. At first, it seemed clear that we had the same goals but that I had storefront space, so we should collaborate; this fantasy exploded when the artist Willoughby Sharp, publisher of *Avalanche* magazine, who had pioneered the net lease of 112 Franklin Street, came downstairs with his attorney, shouting, “THIS WILL NEVER BE KNOWN AS THE PRINTED MATTER BUILDING!” Eventually, Printed Matter found a space at the Fine Arts Building on Hudson Street; it later moved to its own storefront on Lispenard Street. But meanwhile, we re-apportioned the pie so that Printed Matter, Inc took on (for-profit) publishing and distribution of artists’ books, and Franklin Furnace (not-for-profit) did the preservation and exhibition of artists’ books.

Now a Few Words about Performance Art

Three months into Franklin Furnace’s life in Lower Manhattan, one of the artists whose artists’ book was in the collection asked to do a reading. I expected Martina Aballéa to just read, but she showed up in costume, making the live event the embodiment of her text. The performance art program was born. For the first two seasons, I called what artists were doing “artists reading,” in spite of the fact that every artist manipulated the performative elements (light, sound, relationship to the audience,

props, costume, time) as part of the work. (The misnomer “performance art” had not as yet taken hold either.) The word in vogue at the time was “piece,” which encompassed the thought, the action, the documentation – drawn or photographed or filmed or published or taped or using whatever was available.

From Opening Day on 3 April 1976 until 1980, Jacki Apple was the first curator of Franklin Furnace. She was a New Yorker who knew many artists already, and was in fact married to one, Billy Apple, who had also run an art space for himself and his friends. She would meet with artists who had one-of-a-kind works they wished to display, and with prospective performance artists. At this point, there was no money or budget, as I was living on unemployment insurance. As payment, Apple took 50% of the door from performance art events. Around this time, Barbara Quinn, a painter and sculptor, walked through the door and announced, “You need to hire me.” Her day job was as a fundraiser for not-for-profit organizations. She asked for \$35 per day. My unemployment insurance was only \$75 per week but I thought that if I did not hire her, I would go out of business anyway, so we made a deal. So, we three blonde women ran Franklin Furnace for the early years.

However, we never discussed curatorial quotas. After Apple moved to Los Angeles in 1980, there was a curatorial crisis during which I decided to turn Franklin Furnace’s selection process over to a peer review panel of artists whom I would select but over whom I would not have aesthetic control. This meant that Franklin Furnace might be presenting artists I didn’t value, which was an exciting idea, and one that would expand my own understanding of what prescient contemporary avant-garde art looked like. In four decades, my limits have been challenged multiple times and I have had to expand my definitions and appreciations.

In my opinion, the body is the new art medium of the twentieth century, discovered by way of text by visual artists, who were inspired by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, whose 1897 poem “*Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*” (“A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance”) was widely discussed in turn-of-the-century Parisian café society. The artist and curator Jaroslav Anděl approached Franklin Furnace with a proposal for *The Avant-Garde Book*, a wide-ranging, scholarly exhibition that used Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem as a touchstone. What was so significant about “*Un coup de dés*”? This poem was ardently discussed not only by poets but also by painters, sculptors, musicians – everyone on the cultural scene. The poem’s words appeared in various point sizes on the page, transforming the page into visual art space, and freeing the reader from prescribed linear order, conferring the possibility of multiple interpretations. Finally, its subject and form were congruent. An art dealer on the scene, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, declared: “It was only after 1907 that the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, in my opinion, exerted a powerful influence on plastic art, an influence that was combined with Paul Cézanne’s painting. It was through reading Mallarmé that the Cubists found the courage to invent freely” (Hultén and Grassi 1986: 520).

Performance art, in my view, is the opposite of theater, which holds, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “the willful suspension of disbelief” as its objective. Performance art has raided literature, music, dance, and theater traditions (while theater has borrowed from performance art conventions), spreading confusion; but in general, performance artists remind their audiences: THERE IS NO ARTIFICE HERE. THIS IS HAPPENING NOW, IN “REAL” TIME. Because it is embedded in the body, performance art takes time itself to be its primary subject. A good example of this is Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performance 1981–1982*, which was exhibited as an installation at Franklin Furnace from 16 February to 12 March 1983. During



FIGURE 9.2 (*Reading*) *Versus* (*Reading Into*), Dara Birnbaum. Courtesy of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc. April 11, 1978.

Hsieh's *One Year Performance* he did many things: he lived in a cage, he punched a time clock every hour, he lived outside, he was tied to another person, and he placed the body's expenditure of time at the center of the idea.

Franklin Furnace found itself in trouble a few times during the Culture Wars, which inspired us to change the program of the organization (Figure 9.2). During the 1980s, avant-garde artists lost their place as the darlings of American culture. Gradually, the administration of Ronald Reagan and conservative religious groups promulgated the idea that artists were a virus eating away at the health of the body politic. In 1984, Franklin Furnace exhibited *The Second Coming*, curated by Carnival Knowledge, a feminist performance collective of nine women artists and activists, who asked if there could be such a thing as "feminist pornography," or pornography which didn't denigrate women or children. Carnival Knowledge invited Annie Sprinkle, a porn star, and the members of her porn-star support group, Club 90, to participate in their January event at Franklin Furnace. Photographer Dona Ann McAdams, who shot the publicity still "Feminists and Porn Stars" in a Broadway loft, suggested that the participants pose topless with signs identifying them as either "Feminist" or "Porn Star," but many traded signs in a show of solidarity. This publicity still was widely reproduced in publications, ranging from *Hustler* magazine to the *Village Voice*. The performance itself, entitled "Deep Inside Porn Stars," involved tea and cookies, and sought to remind the audience that sex workers are mothers, daughters, wives, and women, just like their feminist counterparts. It was at this event that Annie Sprinkle changed her identity from "porn star" to "performance artist," contrasting the personae of Ellen Steinberg, a fat girl raised in southern California, with Annie Sprinkle, a gorgeous porn star who lives in New York.

After *The Second Coming* closed at the end of January, the Morality Action Committee swung into action, writing postcards to elected officials and letters to Franklin Furnace's corporate and foundation supporters, claiming that we had shown pornography to 500 children per day. As a result of the Culture Wars, in which this was an early skirmish, the work of (especially) performance artists became "politically impossible," and the Individual Artists Fellowship Program of the National Endowment for the Arts was terminated.

In 1983, Karen Finley performed – for the first time in New York – at Franklin Furnace, with her husband, Brian Routh, one of the Kipper Kids. She used plenty of fluids, taking a bath in a suitcase and making love to a chair with Wesson cooking oil. Nothing happened, as her performance was standard downtown fare. In fact, I told Finley she should move to New York and she did! Then in 1989, as a result of her performance, *Constant State of Desire*, Finley was branded the “chocolate-smearing young woman” by conservative syndicated newspaper columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak. This is because she smeared her naked breasts with chocolate frosting to symbolize the degradation of women, then sprinkled bean sprouts, then glitter, on top. In addition to her bare bosoms, I think what also made the guys angry were the Woolworth’s cotton underpants, loafers, and tube socks; items of clothing which resist the sexual gaze.

Franklin Furnace presents “emerging artists,” selecting by peer panel review from among proposals submitted from around the world. Karen Finley successfully made the case, when she proposed an installation work, that while she had “emerged” as a performance artist, she was “emerging” as a visual artist. A *Woman’s Life Isn’t Worth Much* consisted of texts and images drawn directly on the walls of Franklin Furnace, as well as altered book covers and a slab of granite with inscribed text that we installed on the front radiator. By 1990, the Culture Wars were in full swing, so I asked John Frohnmayer, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, if he would come to Franklin Furnace to see for himself that Finley’s work was not obscene, but he declined.

The third and last time Franklin Furnace had problems with the religious right was in 1996, for mounting an exhibition entitled *Voyeur’s Delight*. Curated by Barbara Rusin and Grace Roselli, it brought together works that explored the power of looking, ranging from voyeurism as perversion to voyeuristic pleasure as a prime aspect of media culture. Jocelyn Taylor’s installation for *Voyeur’s Delight* was a room with a mirrored floor, which enabled viewers to look up women’s skirts; and with small video monitors inset into the floor which showed images of her vagina spread with a speculum. This piece was concerned with the invasive nature of Western medical science in regard to women’s bodies.

A group entitled the Christian Action Network (CAN) claimed that Franklin Furnace had raised over \$100 000 in federal funding for the *Voyeur’s Delight* exhibition. We had indeed just received a \$100 000 advancement grant from the NEA, so they had the math right. However, what was galling was that CAN used performance art tactics to dramatize their claim: they dressed up a guy as the Grim Reaper and built two coffins which they filled with flyers, one calling for the death of Franklin Furnace and one calling for the death of the National Endowment for the Arts, to carry up the steps of the Capitol building in Washington, DC. According to colleagues who attended the protest, a National Guardsman told them, “You can only carry one coffin up the steps.” To this day, we don’t know which coffin they chose.

Reevaluation of Our Purpose

At the end of the 1990s, Franklin Furnace went through a period of re-evaluation of our purpose, and in the wake of the Culture Wars we decided to “go virtual.” During Franklin Furnace’s twentieth-anniversary season (1996–1997), we mounted our last

exhibition in physical time and space, *In the Flow: Alternate Authoring Strategies*, curated by Daniel Georges. This exhibition examined how, during the past two decades, art had changed from “solid” painting and sculpture to “liquid” interactive works that fundamentally questioned the role of the artist as sole author, and were created through collaboration. At the same time, we were asking ourselves where freedom of expression was going to be possible in the future, and decided that cyberspace was, for the time being, that free zone. Franklin Furnace “went virtual” on 1 February 1997, taking our website, www.franklinfurnace.org, to be our public face, and incorporating artists’ statements with images – so that the public could understand why Jocelyn Taylor has a speculum in her vagina, for example.

I thought that when Franklin Furnace “went virtual” the body of the artist would be left behind, and indeed, our first collaboration in 2000 was an online game, *Superschmoozio: The Game of the International Art Market*, by Jack Waters. This interactive online game replicated the climb through the ranks of the art world in order to become a “professional artist,” complete with the schmoozing and backstabbing necessary to achieve this goal. Building a game modeled on Super Mario Brothers, which predicts every possible interaction, costs approximately \$500 000 in programming; Franklin Furnace helped Waters implement his idea by introducing him to artists Lisa Brenneis and Adriene Jenik, who had developed “desktop theater” using online software called The Palace to create environments in which avatars, controlled by individuals located around the world, interact. The use of avatars in place of the body and virtual environments in place of real ones touches the heart of discussions of liveness, presence, and the medialization of performance.

Bikes Against Bush was a collaboration by Joshua Kinberg and Yuri Gitman which marked the convergence of the body and technology, and was selected for Franklin Furnace’s 2004–2005 season. Their Magicbike was a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot that provided free Internet access wherever it traveled. A custom-designed printing device mounted on the bike printed spray-chalk text messages from Web users to the surfaces of the street, overlapping public art with techno-activism by creating work that combined the community wireless movement, bicycle culture, street demonstrations, and contemporary art. Theory became practice on 30 August 2004, when the Magicbike being ridden by Kinberg in preparation for protest at the Republican National Convention in New York City was impounded by the police on the grounds that text messages being printed on the street would deface public property and were therefore subject to laws intended to prohibit graffiti. (Kinberg’s collaborator, Gitman, was on the scene with a camera as the arrest took place. The court case went forward, clearing Kinberg; however, the Magicbike was “lost” while in the possession of the NYPD.)

Since going virtual, Franklin Furnace has presented artists whose work is engaged with social and political concerns such as race, surveillance, AIDS, immigration, gender, and ecology. On 28 and 29 July 2012, artist Chin Chih Yang presented his interactive performance art piece *Kill Me or Change*, in front of the Queens Museum of Art. Chin Chih Yang and his crew collected 30 000 aluminum cans, which is the average number of cans one person throws away over a lifetime, and contained them in a mesh net globe suspended 30 feet above ground by a crane. The contents of the net were released onto Yang’s head, in a colorful and overwhelming display of aluminum waste. Yang hoped that showing, quite literally, the suffocating effects of one person’s personal polluting, would serve as a call for audience members to examine their habits of personal consumption.

Some Franklin Furnace Fund recipients have developed performance art projects that have direct social benefits. Shaun Leonardo's *I Can't Breathe* (2015) was a public participatory workshop and performance that took the form of a self-defense class. During the class, participants learned a range of self-defense techniques from purely pacifist, self-protective maneuvers (including how one may relieve the pressure of a chokehold) to more overt, defensive strategies. In 2017, this artist has successfully developed a diversion program that presents alternatives to incarceration (and other adult sanctions) for court-involved youth (who are treated as adults by New York state's Criminal Court). Recess, an art space with which Leonardo is partnering, is in turn partnering with Brooklyn Justice Initiatives to recruit program participants, at the court level, to participate in arts programs designed by Leonardo. When participants complete the program, prosecutors may close and seal their cases.

In Conclusion

Over the course of four decades, the concerns of artists have changed, but artists' commitment to presenting ideas that change cultural discourse has not. Franklin Furnace is very proud to have made these works public. To this day, I have never done a count of the number of women in relation to the number of men who ended up in the program. However, I am proud to report that, in recent years, the number of artists of color has increased substantially: of the 2017 class of Franklin Furnace Fund recipients, 8 of 12 are of color. This is due to the composition of the panel, which the Program Coordinator and I select to represent diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, ability, and age perspective. We are helping to darken the face of contemporary art through our curatorial work.

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Part III



The Curator
in a Globalized World

“We Care as Much as You Pay” – Curating Asian Art

Thomas J. Berghuis

Prologue

I last met Lee Weng-Choy in January 2016. He is the former artistic co-director of The Substation, Singapore’s first independent contemporary arts center, which was founded in 1990. We were both attending an opening at the new National Gallery Singapore (NGS), a new museum and important cultural hub for Singapore, located in the former City Hall and Supreme Court buildings in the city center. The Asian art world had gathered around the Singapore Art Week and the Art Stage Singapore art fair, with its slogan “We Are Asia!” The National Gallery Singapore also hosted the closing symposium of “Ambitious Alignments,” an ambitious three-year research project developed by the Power Institute (2012) at the University of Sydney and supported with a grant from the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles. On the night of our meeting, in the basement of the former Supreme Court building, the exhibition *Earth Works 1979*, featuring a historic installation by Singaporean artist Tang Da Wu, opened its doors to the specially invited guests gathered at Concourse Gallery 2 of the NGS.

At the end of this brightly lit corridor, in Concourse Gallery 1 the exhibition *A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object* opened simultaneously. This exhibition featured works by three Southeast Asian artists: Johnny Manahan (Philippines), the late Redza Piyadasa (Malaysia), and Tan Teng Kee (Malaysia/Singapore). All four artists were pioneers in putting forth new discourses and practices of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, from the 1970s. Their works become situated in relation to the introduction of conceptual art in Southeast Asia. Curator and art historian June Yap describes how Piyadasa was an “unwitting conceptualist artist” who adapted local materials and referenced *zen* and Taoist *shan* or *chan* Buddhist traditions related to Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki (Yap 2017: 241). Both inspired artists in the United States and Europe as well. Artists like Redza Piyadasa also seem to have important

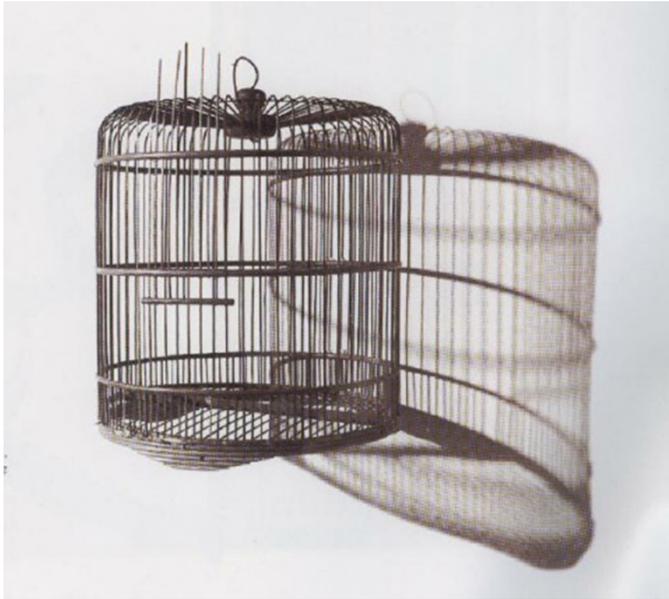


FIGURE 10.1 Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa, *Empty Bird Cage After Release of Bird* (1974). View of *Mystical Reality* exhibition held at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

new aesthetics and ephemeral contexts in their work, through their considering “objects of real time and space” (Abdullah and Chung 2014: 203) (Figure 10.1).

Their work can also be understood in relation to their roles as artists and critics who critique the art establishment at the time, marked by conventional forms and practices of modern art, particularly in abstract painting and sculptures. Especially, in relation to the new art movements in Southeast Asia, like *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*.

In many ways, these artists and their works, dating back to the 1970s, are the precursors for artists and art critics from the late 1980s starting to push new critical discourses and practices of art further; and seeking new contexts for art, including in performance art. In Singapore, the Artists Village, founded in 1988 by Tang Da Wu, has become one of the critical conduits for artists to re-examine and challenge the established discourses and practices of art. A number of controversies followed between December 1993 and January 1994, when a series of performances drew severe criticism. In 1996, Lee Weng-Choy published a full witness account of these events (Lee 1996: 63–72). During the ten years, between 1993 and 2003, performance art was effectively banned, and performance artists faced economic and bureaucratic restrictions.

These events relate complex and multilayered histories of art in relation to the public. From the 1970s, artists took on the role of the critic and organized their own exhibitions. During the 1980s, the early development of artists’ villages and alternative art spaces took place, followed by artists criticizing mainstream media, human rights abuses, and freedom of expression during the 1990s. The following analysis on curating Asian art considers a shift in the role of the curator in Asia from the caretaker to the agent and facilitator who positions his/her work in relation to the art world, the public, and increasingly to the art market. It locates an important turning point in

the early to mid-2000s, which saw the rise in the market and the consolidating of public and private investment in contemporary art, led by Asia. The 2000s also marked the acceleration of technological advancement, the impact of market forces on society, and the rise of new data-driven economies.

The following analysis examines and addresses the consolidation of curatorial practices of contemporary art in relation to the public, the market, and the creative industries. It describes a field in which curators in Asia are aligning themselves with the art market and the creative industries in making contact with the public demand and interest for art, and in coping with the predicament of a failing public infrastructure and the development of private and corporate sectors leading the art world. The analysis will lead a discussion for future curators to consider their relationship to the public and the role of the artist, curator, and artist-curator as producer and facilitator of art. As art and curatorial practices are increasingly led by economic incentives and strategic endeavors that position monetary as well as circulatory value, key performance indicators, and social and economic impact as key measures of success.

Institutions, Strategies and Regional Exchanges

In 2004, Claire Doherty offered an analysis of new institutionalism in art, by stating how it “is the buzzword of current European curatorial discourse” (Doherty 2006: 6). Just how integrated new institutionalism has become in curatorial discourses and practices in Asia became clear in the title of one of the only compendia on curating in Asia today, under the title *Who Cares?* (Fominaya and Lee, 2010). The statement was raised at a key seminar on new institutionalism, titled *Institution 2*, conceived by Jens Hoffmann and organized by NIFCA, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in collaboration with KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, from 3 December 2003 to 5 January 2004. The compendium took a popular quote from Jens Hoffman in 2004, asking of institutions, “Why should anybody care?” starting a series of dialogues for advocating new institutions for the 21st century. Others, including myself, have considered the role of the collective in shaping contemporary art, such as in the example of the artists’ collective ruangrupa in Jakarta (Berghuis 2011). In a subsequent critique, titled “Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship,” theorist, curator, and founding director of the for-profit art gallery Future Perfect in Singapore, David Teh, argued instead how ruangrupa had been successful in “appropriating the function of curatorship,” something that was seen as “tactical” but not part of a “strategic program” on the part of the collective. Here, Teh may have overlooked the strategic initiatives and programs of ruangrupa, and the ways in which artist run initiatives and collectives in Asia are taking on clear tactic programs for their collective development and survival, beyond the curatorial faculty, however diverse or productive it may seem.

One such strategic program connects to the book project titled *siasat* (“strategy”), which was never published but was planned to accompany the 10-year anniversary of ruangrupa in 2010, marked by a series of curated exhibitions, including those held at the National Gallery of Indonesia as well as by a series of discussions and events on the topic of “Expanding the Space and the Public.” Also in 2010, plans were discussed in developing a more institutional basis for ruangrupa – leading its practices as an artists’ collective in the southern part of Jakarta. Initial plans included a future commercial branch, later named “RURU Corps” and strengthening the relationship with the

Jakarta Arts Council, including the development of arts education and the creative community connected to *ruangrupa*. There were also stories of a future bureau for the creative industries and the possibility of working with a Jakarta business in consolidating a new space for *ruangrupa*. This was eventually secured in 2015 with the lease of two large warehouse buildings in Gudang Sarinah, in Pancoran, South Jakarta. Also in 2015, President Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, established the Badan Ekonomi Kreatif (BEKRAF) agency for supporting the creative industries in Indonesia. Under the previous cabinet led by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a creative industries initiative was discussed under the guidance of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Industry.

In Asia, almost all tactical moves became part of a larger strategic program that sought to generate political and economic leverage leading to the survival of artists, curators, and so-called alternative spaces, practices and platforms for art. To consider a unique model for these strategic and tactical decisions, without seeing a strategic plan or program, would be simply naive or strategic in itself to position some type of independent curatorial model on a strongly consolidated and tactical field. To consider contemporary artists, curators, and audiences as somehow able to engage autonomously with contemporary art, based on care, would be to create the illusion of an idealized critical field that somehow stands separate from any strategic and economic incentives. The present, past, and future of contemporary art and curatorship in Asia is tied to the market and to the art system operated by the state, academia, and the cultural industry. For example, the avant-garde and experimental art in China was always destined to be consolidated into the art system (*yishu xitong*) led by the production of discourses, practices, commodities, services, and curricula that distinguish high art from degenerate art and to lead to the expansion of capital and the ethical and moralizing function of art (Berghuis 2006).

The shift from the 1990s to the 2000s was generally marked by consolidating radical art practices and the expansion of cultural and artistic capital in the habitus of institutions and the art market in Asia. It is just that these developments seem to be glossed over by a perpetual desire to develop exclusive models that raise the profile of art, artists, curators, and institutions in Asia, which are disconnected from their counterparts in Europe and North America, because they are located in a different region with distinct traditions, contemporaneities and leading new developments in art, including art's relationship to the public domain and curatorial practices in Asia and elsewhere. It has become popular to raise the profile of Asian art on the basis of its unique relation to history, politics, and the market while ignoring the strategies that lie beneath consolidating discourses and practices within an art system that raises the profile of art in contact with the creative and cultural industries.

The late 1980s and the 1990s marked what can best be described as the “discovery stage” of contemporary Asian art, not only art from China but clearly the attention for contemporary art across the Asia-Pacific, led by Japan and Australia, as well as by Singapore, and connecting to Southeast Asia. Two major exchanges that emerge during the 1990s were situated around the Asia-Pacific and around transnational and transregional exchanges linking Japan to Greater Asia, and that also had their origin in linking metropolises across Asia as alternatives to the prevailing centers of modern art production in Europe and North America. These exchanges led to the development of discourses and practices in Asia that were generally described in terms of new art, the avant-garde, and alternative practices. They further led three generations of curators, artists, and art historians to consider models of alternative and multifaceted

modernities and contemporaneities enabling Asian art to be a distinct discursive field (Clark 1993; Turner 1993).

The field of Asian art and Asian art history could be considered to have its origins in political incentives in Australia and Japan, in part defined by the rapid rise of Japan's economic power in Asia during the 1980s and Australia's bid to play a leading role in regional affairs in Asia and Asia-Pacific, launching the concept of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 1989. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, regionalism had its origins in strengthening economic ties across Asia and Asia-Pacific. In many ways, the attention for Asian art followed the attention for strategic exchanges in Asia and, for Australia, Asia-Pacific. In Japan, with the Japan/Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Comprehensive Exchange Program (founded in 1987), the establishment of Japan Social and Cultural Dimensions Foundation offices in ASEAN countries, and the ASEAN Cultural Centre, transformed into the Asia Centre in 1995 (Yamamoto and Hernandez, 2003). The exhibition *Under Construction: New Dimensions in Asian Art*, comprising seven local exhibitions and one final exhibition in Tokyo, culminated the first wave for regional exchanges of Asian art led by the Japan Foundation. The exhibition was directed by the curator of the Mori Art Museum, Mami Kataoka, and involved nine curators from seven countries: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand (Kataoka 2002).

In Australia, the 1980s were marked by calls for regional exchanges in Asia as a way of diversifying Australia's cultural exchange policy and what has been described as the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts' "forceful course of intervention through vigorous policies of internationalisation, bureaucratisation of contemporary art spaces and professionalization of the arts 'industry'" (Zeplin 2003). These led to the founding of the Australia and Regions Exchange (ARX) in Perth in 1987, renamed the Artists' Regional Exchange in 1991, and ending in 1993, followed by the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane. The founding of Asialink by the Australian Government's Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation in 1990 led to incentives for strategic exchanges with Asia in business, culture, and education. The launch of the *Art and Asia Pacific* magazine in 1993 provided a further basis for growth in attention for Asian art led from Australia. In October 2003, *Art and Asia Pacific* was bought by Zhao Gang and Wendy Siegelman and was then published in New York under the new title *ArtAsiaPacific*. In 2004, Elaine Ng became editor-in-chief, purchasing the magazine with author Simon Winchester in March 2005. In 2011, as sole publisher, Ng moved the head office to Hong Kong.

Another trajectory for regional exchanges in Asian art emerged in Singapore, starting in the 1990s, as Singapore strove to become a creative hub in Asia and a conduit for exchanges in visual arts, design, and the creative and cultural industries in Southeast Asia with the goal of expanding audiences for the arts and tourism in Singapore. Starting in 1995, the annual National Day Art Exhibitions of the 1960s to the 1980s and the Singapore Art Fairs of the early 1990s which becomes a biennial Singapore Art event, held in 1995 and 1997, respectively. In 1999, the event is expanded and draws on the support of the mobile phone company Nokia and turned into the Nokia Singapore Art; a biennial visual arts festival that aimed to showcase the best of contemporary art from Singapore. The first edition of the *Nokia Singapore Art 1999* drew on close to 400 artists in 26 exhibitions spread across 15 venues,

centered around the Singapore Art Museum, founded in 1996 to support and present the best of contemporary art practices in Singapore, Southeast Asia, and Greater Asia and later building a collection of Southeast Asian contemporary art. Also, founded in 1996 is the Museum Roundtable (MR), an initiative led by the National Heritage Board (NHB), led a collective of public and private museums, heritage galleries, and programs and events on science and discovery that aimed to support and develop “a stronger museum-going culture in Singapore” (Museum Roundtable 2019).

Nokia Singapore Art 1999 was accompanied by a symposium, student programs, and monthly activities aimed at accommodating “the broad range of artistic trends and tendencies, as well as the different interests of the public.” A press release from Nokia Singapore Art contains a statement that “Artists may reflect or critique through the visual environment of the city on the physical and social transformations that are taking place, the relationship between physical structures including architecture, popular imageries and representations, and systems including ideology and cultural values” (Nokia Singapore Art 1999). The event led the way for artists and researchers to also organize critically engaged interventions in the public environment in Singapore; where we could look at such initiatives as Artists Investigating Monuments (AIM) in 2000, led by artists from the Artists Village, founded in 1988. With its emphasis on promoting Singapore art to the public in the Nokia Singapore Art, this created a series of incentives which helped position Singapore as an important center for the visual arts and the creative industries, and a vision backed by new government incentives toward building a world-class art hub in Singapore.

These incentives and visions were critically reflected upon in an installation by the late Lee Wen for Nokia Singapore Art 1999, installed at the Singapore Art Museum and titled *World Class Society* (1999), in which the artists dressed in a white color shirt and black tie (standard office clothing) was seen on a TV monitor viewed through a long tube of cloth (“the barrel of a gun”) announcing slogans relating a “world class society” to a “world class economy”... and so on (Figure 10.2).

World Class Society was first exhibited at Nokia Singapore Art, from September 1999 to February 2000, followed by the *Critical Response* exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery in Sydney in May 2000. A decade later, the installation was part of the exhibition *Video, an Art, a History 1965–2010: A Selection from the Centre Pompidou and Singapore Art Museum Collections* at the Singapore Art Museum, from June to September 2011 and *Welcome to the Jungle: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia from the Collection of Singapore Art Museum* at the Yokohama Museum of Art, from April to June 2013. In a short online essay, Lee Wen reflected on the context of “nation building” in Singapore and the “impossible dream of one class less we become a nation made by power who may only see it through the barrel of a gun,” hinting at the shape of the barrel featured in the installation (Lee 2013).

Singapore provides an interesting case study for examining regional exchanges in Asian, and particularly Southeast Asian, art. In global art terms, the rise of international attention for contemporary art and artists from China from the early 1990s, and art and artists from India starting from the 2000s onwards, may point to the lack of historical attention for art and artists in Southeast Asia. Discussions on the rise of attention for contemporary Chinese art are linked to early “marker exhibitions” in Europe, Australia, and the United States. These include the exhibition *China’s New Art Post-1989* at the Hanart TZ Gallery in Hong Kong that traveled in different iterations to Australia and



FIGURE 10.2 Lee Wen, “World Class Society”. *Installation, video, soft sculptures, survey.*, *Nokia Singapore Art 1999*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, September 1999 to February 2000.

the United States (1993–1994); *China Avant-garde: Counter-currents in Art and Culture*, which opened at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin and traveled to the Netherlands and the UK (1994); and the exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, at the Asia Society Museum in New York (1997). As well as the participation of a growing number of Chinese contemporary artists selected for the *Aperto* (Open) section of the prestigious La Biennale di Venezia – International Art Exhibition, starting in 1993. One can also look at the build-up of clear strategies and incentives leading to the attention for regional exchanges of contemporary art and artists from Southeast Asia, including those spearheaded by Singapore in its desire to become a “visual arts hub.”

In 2005, Singapore’s prime minister, Lee Hsieh Loong, first revealed plans to convert the vacated Supreme Court building and City Hall in the center of Singapore into The National Art Gallery Singapore (TNAGS) later abbreviated as NAGA and eventually rebranded as National Gallery Singapore (NGS). The founding of the Singapore Biennale in 2006, led by the internationally acclaimed Japanese curator Fumio Nanjo (who would also curate the second Singapore Biennale in 2008), marked the start of a program that would spearhead “Singapore’s prominence as an international visual arts hub, not only providing new opportunities for Singapore artists, curators and arts businesses, but also as a key enabler of exchange and collaborations for the global arts community” (Singapore Biennale 2006). The Singapore Biennale 2006 incorporated 16 venues across the city, including the City Hall building and Supreme Court building (still in their original state); the newly reopened National Museum, the National Library, several public sites and historic buildings spread across the city, and Tanglin Barracks, a vacated military complex and the former headquarters of the Far East British Forces.



FIGURE 10.3 Charles Lim, *SEA STATE 6 – capsize* (still), 2015, Single-channel HD digital video, c. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist. Venice Biennale Arsenale and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

Starting in 2001, Singapore started to participate in the Venice Biennale, which led to a successful special mention by the Biennale jury for Ming Wong, for his work at the Singapore Pavilion for the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. Following a brief hiatus in 2013, when Singapore did not participate in the 55th Venice Biennale, the Singapore Pavilion returned in 2015, this time with the support of almost the entire arts community, and accompanied by an elaborate symposium on Southeast Asian art organized by the National Gallery Singapore and the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) with the National Technology University (NTU). The re-launch of the Singapore Pavilion in Venice was accompanied by the announcement from the Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth that Singapore had taken a 20-year lease on the new space at the center of the Arsenale, the second official site of the Biennale, outside the Giardini. The Singapore Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale can be considered a success, not least for uniting the Singapore art community around the exhibition and commission that featured a large installation by Charles Lim, titled *SEA STATE 6*, that would become part of a long-term project that Lim started in 2005, examining the changing contours (and conceptualization) of the Singapore island nation state as it expanded its territory and role in the region (Figure 10.3).

Works in the “SEA STATE” project that was founded in 2005 were featured in Manifesta 7, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, held in Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy in 2008; the 7th Shanghai Biennale, in Shanghai, China, also in 2008; and at the 3rd Singapore Biennale, titled *Open House* in 2011, when the Singapore Biennale changed its focus from an international star-curator in Fumio Nanjo, who curated the first two editions in 2006 and 2008, to a national, regional, and international team, led by artist Matthew Ngui and inviting Russell Storer, then curator of Asian Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) in Brisbane; and Trevor Smith, curator at the Peabody Essex

Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. The exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale was accompanied by a full day symposium on *The Geopolitical and the Biophysical*, organized by the NTU Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, and held in Venice on 9 May. In June 2015, this was followed by another scholarly symposium at the National Gallery Singapore.

Two years later, in 2017, the Singapore Pavilion at the 57th edition of the Venice Biennale features an exhibition and commission of Zai Kuning, titled *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*. The exhibition examines the long and complex maritime history of the inhabitants of the Riau and Malaysian Archipelago, since the 7th century CE. Overall, the exhibition seemed less successful in drawing on the critical momentum in bringing various stakeholders together in support of the artist, the exhibition, and the Singapore Pavilion. This time, there was no symposium at the opening. The complexities of the project seemed to have been largely overlooked by the commissioner, also with the lead curator of the project, June Yap resigning from the project just two months before the opening. Both the artist and curator cited “differences in operational approaches” in a statement released by the National Arts Council of Singapore (NAC) on 31 December, reported by Alyssa Buffenstein in an article for *artnet News* (Buffenstein 2017). These comments by the National Arts Council confirmed the complexity of the project and of drawing on critical curatorial and artistic practices.

Visitors were experiencing a large vessel made from bamboo, wax, cloth, and red thread, that was exhibited in earlier iterations at Ota Fine Arts, Singapore in 2013; Palais de Tokyo in Paris, 2015; and the Esplanade-Theatre on the Bay in Singapore, also in 2014. In the nearby Naval Officer’s Club, an Ocean Archive and Guide was conceived by the Hong Kong-based MAP Office (Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix) – involving a great number of artists, including Heman Chong, from Singapore. This event as well as the maritime histories and institutions of Venice could have perhaps been used to towards a public program and deeper engagement with the work of Zai Kuning, similar to the NTU Centre for Contemporary Asian Art symposium two years before, accompanying the installation of *SEA STATE 6* by Charles Lim.

Activating local and global contexts and histories of interaction and exchange have been an important part of the Venice Biennale, at least since 1995, when Cai Guoqiang made international headlines with his project *Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot*, part of the *TransCulture* section at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995, curated by Fumio Nanjo and Dana Friis-Hansen, featuring a Chinese junk on the Grand Canal in Venice. The main work was collected by the Museo Naval di Venezia (Naval Museum of Venice) (Ong 2012) (Figure 10.4).

By comparison to these early exhibitions marking the “discovery stage” of Asian art and artists in the international art field, the institutional turn seems to indicate a complexity of stakeholders, strategies, and incentives that connect national, regional, and international exchanges of increasingly complex proportions. This includes the Singapore Pavilion, and its connection to the new National Gallery Singapore, tertiary institutions as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, as well as galleries, collectors, and stakeholders. As such, curatorial practices become part of a complex set of strategies and incentives that connect institutional and individual stakeholders, thus leading the consolidating power of institutions and the market for contemporary art in Asia.

Following the 1990s, the curatorial approach in contemporary Asian art becomes increasingly tied to an institutional strategy by national governments working with private and public-sector stakeholders in generating new national and transnational



FIGURE 10.4 Cai Guoqiang, “Bring to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot”, 1995. At the Grand Canal, Venice. For the exhibition *Transculture, 46th Venice Biennale, 1995*. Installation, wooden fishing boat from Quanzhou, Chinese herbs, earthen jars, ginseng beverages, bamboo ladles, porcelain cups, ginseng (100 kg), and handcart. Museo Naval di Venezia, Venice, Italy.

priorities, above regional incentives in the promotion of Asian art and culture. The period after 2000 becomes increasingly a stage for “consolidating powers” in the development of Asian art curating Asian art, artists, and prominent art collections.

The concept of “consolidating powers” was first discussed in a public conversation I conducted with Pi Li, Sigg Senior Curator of M+ in Hong Kong, at the University of Sydney, under the title *Chinese Contemporary Art: Consolidating Power* on 11 September 2012. The conversation reflected on the curatorial path that Pi Li himself took as a critic, art historian, and independent curator in the 1990s; to becoming an art dealer and later a teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing in the 2000s; and eventually taking on the position as the representative curator of the Uli Sigg collection of contemporary Chinese art at the M+ (Museum Plus) in Hong Kong. The long-anticipated M+ is due to open in 2019 following delays in construction (Leong 2017). Consolidating Powers also focused on the consolidation of the experimental art scene by the art system in China and the rise of the domestic art market for contemporary Chinese art after 2002. In 2006, it already became clear that the government would consolidate the experimental art movement through a combination of advocating aesthetic and ethical principles, and supporting the development of a domestic market for contemporary art that would adhere to these principles. The radical turn in experimental art would “lead [to] a ‘regeneration of public morality’ as well as a ‘move towards expanding the order of cultural capital’” in China (Berghuis 2006: 122, 165). In March 2001, the Ministry of Culture issued a decree that would ban certain forms of performance and installation art that were

considered to bring a bad name to contemporary art. Subsequently, the decree would lead a path of consolidating artists and art practices that were deemed successful in upholding certain aesthetic and ethical principles and were also increasingly successful in drawing a Chinese audience (Berghuis, 2012).

Next, the conversation on “consolidating powers” moved to the role of the government working with private businesses and entrepreneurs in leading the museum boom in China, particularly after 2010. The curatorial approach in contemporary Asian art was no longer determined solely by curators generating new discourses, new exhibitions, and new alternative platforms for curating and exhibiting Asian art to new audiences and a close cohort of artists, critics, and supporters. Rather, the field became increasingly determined by a complexity of regional, national, and international incentives that saw a substantial growth in the art market, especially during 2006–2007 and followed by growing public and private investments in the arts and creative industries in Asia in the decade that followed.

From 2000–2003, the “discovery” stage of Asian art rose toward a “consolidating powers” stage that saw the creative industries and the market for art and cultural capital connect to soft and hard power incentives. Those who would consider art as simply being generated for new audiences or even for the market would fail to see the cultural leverage that art and the creative industries had gained in Asia, as well as in the Middle East, and elsewhere across the globe, including in Europe and North America. Art was no longer just business or culture. It had become the business of culture that rendered a new future for the arts, in close contact with the creative industries. The role of the curator became increasingly that of a cultural and creative broker, capable of generating leverage for art in close proximity with the creative industries; the media, culture, and communication industries; and the market for education, training, and human resources for a creative economy in the twenty-first century. Curating became a way of doing the business of cultural, creative, and intellectual brokering and consolidating powers. How this operates becomes clear in the number of times that the idea of curators wearing “multiple hats” is being brought forward in discussions on curation. Curators also comment on having an interest in the creative, the psychological, and sociological aspects of the art world and what is often considered internally and sometimes expressed toward the public as a game.

One such example of curatorial self-perspective in relation to contemporary art and the contemporary art world is expressed in a feature on “up and coming curators” in Hong Kong, a city that has, over the last decade risen to become one of the most successful cultural capitals for the contemporary art world, more so than Singapore in Southeast Asia or Dubai in the Middle East. When asked about his interest in art, one of the “up and coming curators” of Hong Kong, Isaac Leung, Chairman of the non-profit arts organization Videotage, located in the highly successful Cattle Depot Artist Village in the Kowloon district of Hong Kong, states how his interest in art ultimately stems from the way “that it opens up the possibility for people to transform themselves in what I would call a ‘charismatic-networked game.’ Besides the virtuosity of art, I’m interested in the sociological aspect of the art world, like how players survive by breaking, playing by or re-inventing rules” (Leung 2016).

These “sociological aspects” of the art world increasingly concern financial aspects and incentives as well. They bring the “charismatic-networked game” of the art world in very close proximity to the art market and to cultural and creative capital, as the art world once again reinvents the conditions for connecting to the world of capital and

finance. The strategies and conditions for curating Asian art moves very rapidly into the market, as it has done so in the past from the Italian Renaissance, to the Salon in Paris and the “capitalism collects” in the United States during the turn of the twentieth century. That which involves curators generating important leverage for distributing art and culture in regional, national, and transnational exchanges.

The final section of this chapter on curating Asian art examines the role of the curator in relation to cultural capital and generating the leverage for the global market for contemporary art, culture, and the creative industries in the twenty-first century.

Productions of Discourses, Knowledge, and Engagement

The previous section introduced the “age of discovery” of Asian art in the international realm, working from the first regional contact zones in the late 1980s and 1990s connecting curators and the building of bridges in exchanging new knowledge on the production and development of contemporary Asian art. This section describes some of the alternative discourses and publications that constitute the art critical, art historical, and curatorial engagement with modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. One example was the *documenta 12* magazine project, led by the Austrian curator and editor Georg Schöllhammer, drawing together journals, (online) magazines, people, publications, and networks from across the world in a special research-based and valuable curatorial exchange for *documenta 12*, in 2006–2007 (Schöllhammer 2007).

In January 2006, a two-day transregional meeting for the *documenta 12* magazine project took place at The Substation, Singapore Contemporary Arts Centre with support of the then director Lee Weng-Choy; Kuala Lumpur-based writer and journalist Sharaad Kutan; and artist, lecturer, long-term resident of Kuala Lumpur, Ray Langenbach. I was fortunate to attend the transregional meeting which involved discussions with the editors as well as with the audience: writers, artists, curators, academics, and art historians. The meeting invited more than a dozen speakers, writers, and editors of (online) journals, art magazines, and other publications from across Southeast Asia. Journals and magazines represented at the meeting included *Focas*, Singapore, edited by Lucy Davis; *sentAp!*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, edited by Nur Hanim Khairuddin; and *Karbon*, Jakarta, Indonesia, edited by the artists’ collective ruangrupa. This list includes magazines that have since ceased publication, often owing to a combination of financial constraints and shifting priorities on the part of the editors. It also shows signs of a consolidation of an institutionalism taking place in Singapore and Indonesia, connected to the market, and to the governance of creative capital and the creative industries, including media and art criticism. Not present at the Singapore meeting, but represented at another transregional meeting at the Asia Archive in Hong Kong, was the curator and the editor of *Kalam*, a briefly existing but important publisher of books on Indonesian art and culture, including a collection of essays by the late art critic and lecturer Saneto Yuliman, edited by Asikin Hasan, *Dua seni rupa: Sepilihan Tulisan* (Yuliman and Hasan 2001).

One of the participants in the *documenta 12* magazine project was the curator and writer Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, who is well known for her contributions in *PANANAW: Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*, which received the Alice Award and Public’s Voice Winner for best magazine on contemporary art in 2012. In 2016, Legaspi-Ramirez

published an essay on what she stated was the “tempering curatorial hubris” in Southeast Asian art, and included a critique on the *documenta 12* project, which left some disappointed and disillusioned by the “diffused opportunity to engage” (Legaspi-Ramirez 2016: 243–245).

In September 2006, the same year as the *documenta 12* magazine project event was held in Singapore, Lee Weng-Choy also organized the second event for a project that he started in 2003, titled *Comparative Contemporaries*, organized with the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, The Substation, Singapore Contemporary Arts Centre, and the International Association of Art Critics, Singapore section. The event focused on planning a (future) anthology of critical essays on contemporary art in Southeast Asia and involved Lee Weng-Choy working with five editors, amongst them artists, curators, and scholars each of whom would chose 10 key texts and essays on contemporary art in the context of Southeast Asia. The five editors selected were: Sue Acret, founder of *Ocula* magazine and the Art Asia Advisory and former editor of *ArtAsiaPacific* magazine from 1997–2001; Patrick Flores, Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila and Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines, which he chaired from 1997 to 2003; Ho Tzu Nyen, artist and lecturer from Singapore; Ly Daravuth, co-founder of Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Keiko Sei, founder of the Myanmar Moving Image Center in Yangon, Myanmar and editor for Southeast Asia with the *documenta 12* magazine project.

Comparative Contemporaries was first conceived at a workshop in Singapore, in 2003, held at The Substation. It was designed to grow into an extensive online platform that was described as a “community of writers, researchers, curators, artists and readers engaged in debating and discussing contemporary art and art writing from Asia” (Lee et al. 2013). In 2013, 10 years after it was first conceived, *Comparative Contemporaries* was launched as a blogpost site, hosted by the Asia Art Archive. The 10 key texts on Southeast Asian art selected by each editor are listed in the web-based anthology, with a general introduction and introductions for each of the essays. Unfortunately, the intended “discussions and debates” amongst researchers, curators, artists, and readers, mentioned in the brief for the anthology, have remained absent until now, and the anthology has yet to be expanded to incorporate further editors, and texts on additional regional contexts in Asia, and elsewhere.

One could argue that *Comparative Contemporaries* was launched late, at a time when critical discourses were already consolidated, and therefore was not able to instigate meaningful, open discussions online. By comparison, the online collective platform n.e.w.s. (<http://northeastwestsouth.net>), launched in 2008, also at The Substation and coinciding with the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in Singapore, did provide an open-source platform for online discussions on art in relation to Asia, including on such topics as the role and position of the Asian Art Biennale (Lee 2008). The editors, including artist Renée Ridgeway, initially created a “2.0 Web” open discussion platform, based on blogs (images, archives, and comments) and what the founders called “wiki-like ‘books’” of “collaborative writing” and “tagging” with content becoming “curatorially determined.” Later this became a 3.0 Web platform offering what the editors identified as “the giving of data freely and the debate over control of public time and space” (Ridgeway 2008). The original contributors were: Ade Darmawan, director of ruangrupa; Ingrid Commandeur, then senior editor of *Metropolis M*; curator Inti Guerrero; writer Mia Jankowicz; artists

Rich Streitmatter-Tran; artist Mustafa Maluka; theorist-writer Stephen Wright; curator Yuliya Sorokina; art critic Branka Ćurčić/Kuda; and myself as curator and art historian working first at the Centre of Contemporary Art & Politics, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, and later, in 2008, at the University of Sydney. The moderators of the site at the time were Lee Weng-Choy and Renée Ridgway. The editorial board consisted of curator, art historian, and former director of the Gate Foundation Sebastian Lopez; art theorist Gunalan Nadarajan; art historian Kitty Zijlmans; curator and then Head of Exhibitions at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin Shaheen Merali; and writer and Professor of Visual Arts Sarat Maharaj. A simple subscription fee is requested, but after this, participants can post comments on the threads and themes, or instigate new discussions. The open-source character of the website allowed open discussions. The editors, registered participants, and unwritten law of criticality guaranteed a certain level of creative, lively, and foremost engaging discussions. n.e.w.s. (<http://northeastwestsouth.net>) functions less as an archive, repository, or resource of knowledge, and more as an open-source platform or conduit for critical exchange.

When *Comparative Contemporaries* was finally launched, in 2013, its influence did strengthen after the Asian art market boom of 2007–2008. *Comparative Contemporaries* was launched at a time when critical discourse was also consolidated in peer-reviewed academic journals and well-funded academic forums linking universities and museum institutions, such as the Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art project, funded through the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles and developed by the Power Institute at the University of Sydney, Australia, with the National Gallery Singapore and the Institute of Technology, Bandung in Indonesia. For one year, between early 2014 and early 2015, Ambitious Alignments established a platform for exchanges between a select group of senior and junior scholars aimed at advancing new histories of Southeast Asian art. The website of the project (www.ambitiousalignments.com) contains a description of the project and brief overview of the scholars, with the exchanges taking place in closed group seminars and workshops held in Sydney and Bandung, and a final conference at the National Gallery Singapore in January 2016, coinciding with the Singapore Art Stage Art Fair and Singapore Art Week. The Ambitious Alignments project will culminate in an anthology publication of a select number of essays by the editors.

Coinciding with the Ambitious Alignments project, a group of junior scholars and recent PhD graduates of the Asian art program at the University of Sydney further established a peer-reviewed scholarly journal on Southeast Asian art, titled *Southeast of Now*. First, the editors created a Facebook page which almost immediately became a lively platform for sharing information, comments, and discussion on Southeast Asian art by its member-subscribers. In January 2017, the journal was officially launched and published online and in print by the National University of Singapore Press. Prior to its launch, in January 2017 the subtitle was changed from *Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art* to *Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, exemplifying the need for situating the journal's location in the context of Asia and Asian art in addition to a more open and discursive positioning of modern and contemporary art in relation to the time and spaces of "Southeast of Now."

Since the launch of the journal, the Facebook page seems to have become less active in generating discussions amongst its members and administrators (organizers), and seems more used for sharing and promoting events, job postings, conferences, and

seminars, thus generating an overarching sense that a decade after the *documenta 12* magazine project took place in 2007 and nearly 15 years after the initial idea of the *Comparative Contemporaries* was conceptualized the present-day field of scholars, academics, and curators of Southeast Asian art privileges specialized workshops, seminars, and published anthologies and journals with universities and national museums over the desire of having “a community of writers, researchers, curators, artists and readers engaged in debating and discussing contemporary art and art writing from Asia” (Lee 2003–2013).

The general consensus now is that institutions and organizations lead the production of knowledge and critical engagement and, ultimately, lead the distribution of cultural capital, including knowledge-based cultural capital highlighted in journals, seminars, archives, collections, artworks, and curatorial and scholarly debates and exchanges. During the 1990s and 2000s, there were brief moments and examples of grassroots art circles taking the lead in the production and distribution of discourses, practices, and knowledge production on contemporary art in Asia. These were led by the development of artists’ collectives, alternative spaces, exhibitions, and publications. The tremendous conservatism of the official bureaucracy in charge of the production and dissemination of art in countries like China, Singapore, and Indonesia left government institutions completely out of touch with the production of new and experimental contemporary art. Groups and collectives of artists, writers, critics, and curators were generating completely new and independent grassroots infrastructures and alternative spaces and platforms for the production and dissemination of contemporary art. Alternative spaces and productions of contemporary art in Asia and from across the globe were further connected through biennales, triennials, and other recurrent exhibitions, and often through satellite events and exhibitions.

Important funding models were also created for these grassroots platforms and initiatives for supporting their global interconnectivity and exchanges, and expanding their networks of close cohorts of artists, curators, writers, supporters, and collaborators. Important funding bodies include the Mondriaan Fund, Prince Claus Fund, and development organizations such as Hivos, working from the Netherlands, which has an emphasis on supporting artistic and cultural exchanges based on the important role of art in society and leading social transformations, and in leading cultural and artistic development across the globe. Other examples include the British Council, and also organizations such as Asialink in Australia, and the Asian–Europe Foundation in Singapore. Translocal and transnational network organizations, such as Arts Collaboratory and also ResArtis with their headquarters in the Netherlands, also provide significant infrastructures for long-term exchanges and engagement. Together, they lead an important infrastructure for grassroots exchanges of exhibitions and initiatives linking artists, artists’ collectives, writers, researchers, and activists across Asia and the globe.

A more compressive analysis of the funding structures for grassroots platforms and initiatives linking artists, artists’ collectives, grassroots practices, platforms, and exchanges of art across Asia is needed, but exceeds the limits of this paper, which introduces the discovery stage leading toward a consolidation of powers in curating Asian art. Over the past decade there have been studies examining the growth and phenomena of the Asian Art Biennale and the Asian Biennialization (Clark 2007, 2010; Gardner and Green 2014, 2016). Studies on the art market and the “economics of art” are on the rise as well, and becoming increasingly complex, drawing on analysis of the exchanges between artists, curators, and the market (Buckley and Conomos 2018).

Further studies can be developed that focus on the market for artistic and cultural exchanges and events, and the market for art and cultural capital, linked to the creative industries. A classic study on the business of art and the privatization of the art and cultural industry is *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Invention since the 1980s* by Chin-tao Wu (2002).

There is a growing need as well to understand the art world led by artists' collectives and their communities and "ecologies." As argued in my essay on the Jakarta-based artists' collective ruangrupa, these artists' collectives play an important role in activating discourses, spaces, and places for contemporary art and activism in Asia (Berghuis 2011). Instead of thinking about the collective as a creative commons, which is a more recent phenomenon and particularly driven out of discursive models coming from Europe, these artists' collectives in Indonesia and Asia provide the incentive for contemporary artist or groups of artists to produce their work in a structure that can generate collective funding but still allows supporting individual artistic practice and curatorial practices. Still, the argument being that the collective can potentially generate a (future) "art to come" through the workings of the collective and through the collective means of the production, knowledge, and collaboration through art and activism.

In his critique of my thesis on the collective, David Teh argues how a "curatorial faculty" remains "crucial" and "pivotal" in understanding the important work and workings of ruangrupa. He further states that ruangrupa's inherent "curatorship" marks the important "sense of intense struggle ... over creative and intellectual labor" (Teh 2012: 115). For Teh, any viewpoint on the role of the "collective" in shaping discourses and practices of art diminishes the important role of the curator as the facilitator and curatorship as the "faculty" of important practices in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Strategically, Teh continues to see a strong aura for the independent curator as an important "worker" in leading the "*spirit* of curatorship" toward the somewhat traditional concept of the "audience" as the "ultimate object of curatorial care" (Teh 2012: 117). Furthermore, curators in Southeast Asia would indeed struggle for status, recognition, and meaningful contact, if it were not for the opportunities that curators and curatorial practices in Asia have generated, often with great élan, wit, and charisma. It is these qualities with which curators conduct their curatorship and gain access to the art world and the "charismatic-networked game of curatorial practice and exchange." What essentially connects curators and artists is their access to discursive leverage inside a relatively small production field that the curator communicates to an increasingly large audience and a diverse public sphere, which generates further leverage, status, and power.

The "curatorial faculty" and "curatorship" increasingly drives the incentives for curators generating curatorial leverage in working with artists and leading their brokerage into close cohort art circles. What started as a desire and a need to be independent and alternative has become part of the mainstream. A curatorial habitus is now present in every sector of the art world. New institutions have been coupled with existing structures and are being consolidated into strategic networks across the world, driving cultural and artistic capital together with the creative industries. Some art districts, such as the 798 Art Zone in Beijing, have become productive cultural zones, while others, such as Gillman Barracks in Singapore, struggle to coexist with a technocratic system seeking to use cultural capital as part of a knowledge economy that can compete on a global scale.

In Jakarta, six artists’ collectives, linking groups of artists, researchers, curators, and many people working in the creative industries in Jakarta, have assembled themselves inside the Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem – a complex comprising two large warehouses and an open area in the center, located in the Pancoran area of South Jakarta. The Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem serves as the main venue for the Jakarta Biennale since the 16th Jakarta Biennale in 2015. In 2015, the 16th Jakarta Biennale was organized for the first time by the Jakarta Biennale Foundation, where previously it was organized by the Jakarta Arts Council, since its founding in 1974. The 2015 Jakarta Biennale is curated by Charles Esche, working with six curators from Anwar “Jimpe” Rachman, Asep Topan, Benny Wicaksono, Irma Chantily, Putra Hidayatullah, and Riksa Afiaty, under the title *Maju Kena, Mundur Kena (Neither Forward nor Back): Learning in the Present*, November 2015 to January 2016.

One of the main organizers of the Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem is ruangrupa, which now also incorporates a contemporary art gallery on site, supporting the work of artists, writers, and curators through a more traditional commercial gallery model and structure. Other components of ruangrupa include RuRu Corps, a visual communication bureau founded by ruangrupa, Forum Lenteng, and Serrum. Rather than striving for collective mobility or a perpetual curatorship, ruangrupa now seems to strive for establishing clear foundations in the consolidating powers of the contemporary art world in Indonesia. These include the foremost art works produced by the creative industries in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Against the current background stands a complexity of forces that cannot be described in terms of curatorship or of the traditional artists’ collective. Rather, the consolidating power and forces of the market for contemporary art and the creative industries have generated a new and more complex desire for collective workmanship that could be linked to the “*spirit* of contemporary curatorship” as well.

A Coda: “We Care as Much as You Pay”

There is no way of distinguishing the “spaces of the curatorial” from the spaces of capital, the art market, and the market for creative and cultural industries, including in Asia. Yet, we continue to project distinctions between mainstream “art” and “alternative platforms” and “curatorial spaces” and practices of contemporary art and culture in Asia (Bauer and Oetker 2016). How, then, do we continue to uphold the notion of independent curatorial practice remaining a point of critical reflections on curating Asian art, besides the Asian art biennale or the rise of the art market in Asia? The art world and a curatorial world have long been connected to the art market, with some exceptions, perhaps, including the early onset of the experimental art movement in China, from 1993 until 2003. During this time artists, art critics, and early curators were antagonizing the art system and the art market in China by introducing experimental art practices, exhibitions, and events featuring performance art, installation art, video art, and new media arts. Today, these artists have led the latest wave of contemporary art inside a complex global art system and market for contemporary art. Today, these artists have led the latest wave of contemporary art inside a complex global art system and market for contemporary art – supported by private investors and public and private museums and collections worldwide, as well as in diplomatic

ties backed by organizations such as the China International Exhibitions Agency, supporting exhibitions such as *Living in Time (Shenghuo zai Cishi)*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2001–2002 and *Alors, la Chine?* (Well then, What about China?) at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, 2003–2004 (Berghuis 2006: 136).

In Singapore, one can look at the recent discussions and development of The Substation in relation to “spaces of the curatorial” and curatorship in Southeast Asia, which followed criticism of The Substation failing to uphold its relevance as a critical center for art. Criticism followed the appointment of curator Alan Oei as artistic director and his plans to redevelop the art center. This criticism led Oei to organize a town hall session in which he apologized for not consulting widely enough with the arts community (Fang 2016). In late 2016, *ArtReview Asia* published an article by Alan Oei, in which he lays out the challenges facing anyone wanting to lead a critical art center in Singapore, let alone maintain one. Where The Substation was a “key catalyst to a cluster of new cultural infrastructures in the 1990s,” these days it “hasn’t quite been able to keep up.” Oei links this to “a lack of ambition and meaning in the public and cultural sphere,” and follows by bringing back its past history and legacy as an “independent and critical centre for art” (Oei 2016).

These days, Gillman Barracks seems a more likely candidate to gain support from the public, especially in the eyes of its key developers and investors, the Singapore Economic Development Board, JTC Corporation, and the National Arts Council. The Gillman Barracks are a preferred model with their emphasis on a creative hub featuring commercial galleries, cafes, artists residencies, non-for-profit and for-profit art centers, and “spaces for the curatorial,” including the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, led by Ute Meta Bauer and a team of curators and guest curators, as well as the Chan + Hori Contemporary (formerly the Chan Hampe Galleries), led by director and curator Khairuddin Hori, former Deputy Director of Artistic Programming at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and Senior Curator at the Singapore Art Museum and former Senior Curator at the Curatorial Development Department of the National Heritage Board, Singapore. The DISINI festival, featuring events, exhibitions, and public artworks across the Gillman Barracks, started in January 2018 as part of the Singapore Art Week, and is likely to drive the curatorial success model in drawing in the public for contemporary art in Singapore. DISINI is an example of a curated event that connects art, design, architecture, and the cultural and creative industries. It aims to generate a public that expects to be engaged, activated, and immersed in expressions of art and the creative industries. These events mark what could be described as the “latest genre public art” marked by the desire for broad public engagement with art and the creative industries, rather than following traditional models or modes linking “spaces of the curatorial,” “curatorial care,” and independent, critical centers for art and art criticism, led by a contemporary curatorial faculty.

In discussing the development of the curatorial faculty linked to the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, curator and art historian Patrick Flores discusses how the arrangements between “collections” and “collectives” in the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia becomes “complicated by the mutation of the artist into a curator, from the late 1970s until today (Flores 2016: 36). They are led by Redza Piyadasa in Malaysia, Jim Supangkat in Indonesia, Raymundo Albano in the Philippines, and Apinan Poshyananda in Thailand. They turn “the ‘avant-garde’ agent into an institutionalizing wunderkind who can make the art, pave the path for it, conceptualize a theory for it, and historicize it” (Flores, 2016: 36). To this list, Flores could have easily added artists and artists’ collectives who have

been important for the development of contemporary art and spaces of contemporary art, art criticism, and the curatorial in Southeast Asia, but who may not have followed the common model of artists as exhibition makers. Rather, these artists and artists’ collectives activated critical discourses, practices, and exchanges as well as critical spaces of the curatorial and of the production of art and art criticism in Southeast Asia. These include artists such as Ray Langenbach, Wong Hoy Cheong, and Liew Kung Yu in Malaysia; Amanda Heng, Lee Wen, Zai Kuning, and Lucy Davis in Singapore; and artists collectives and artist-led initiatives such as *ruangrupa* in Jakarta, as well as Agung Kurniawan and *Kedai Kebun Forum*, founded in 1997 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In his thesis of the curatorial faculty in Southeast Asia, Flores follows the notion of the continental philosopher Slavoj Žižek that “curation” marks “the exceptional gesture of self-reflexivity” (Flores 2016: 31–32). This is followed by a long quote from Žižek, ending with the notion that “the ultimate artist is not the producer but the curator, his activity of selection” (Žižek 2000: 337).

It would seem that many artists in Southeast Asia have in fact taken on the role of producer and, this time, are leading the production of art, culture, and the creative industries. One example is the “curated festival” of DISINI by artists turned curator Khairuddin Hori and director of the for-profit-art space Chan + Hori Contemporary, which is connecting exhibitions, public events, and engagements with the public space, galleries, and heritage of Gillman Barracks, and presenting what is considered as a “possibilities for meaningful meetings, discourses and a juncture to consolidate the collective spirit” (DISINI 2019). Some further examples are the recent expansion of the role of producer of art, culture, and the creative industries by Eko Nugroho. These include the DGTMB or *Daging Tumbuh* (‘Growing Meat’) production company, creative agency and shop *Daging Tumbuh* (A Growing Meat) based in Yogyakarta; and with distribution channels through other art spaces and shows across Indonesia, and online. Another example is the embroidery *We Care as Much as You Pay* of DGTMB by Eko Nugroho (Figure 10.5).



FIGURE 10.5 DGTMB by Eko Nugroho, *We Care as Much as You Pay*, manual embroidery patch on black cotton underlay, white MDF frame, 26 × 36 cm, 14 × 24 cm (embroidery). Purchased at Komunitas Salihara, arts shop, Jakarta, January 2016.

An Indonesian curator stated to me when he saw the work that it could be a reference to the position of domestic workers in Indonesia in their care for Indonesian middle-class and upper-class families. The work can also be a reference to the workers who make these embroideries, and who would ultimately be after their pay – even when we reminisce about the “collective spirit of contemporary art” (Berghuis 2011). Or, if we uphold the role of the artist-curator in leading “curatorial care” (Teh 2012).

“We care as much as you pay” could mean the transition from the perceived self-reflexivity of the work of the artist, curator, and artist-curator in making art, conceptualizing art, selecting art for exhibitions, and caring for art, artists, exhibitions, and the audience toward repositioning a role of the artist, curator, and artist-curator in being the producers of art and cultural capital, and the creative industries in Asia. *We Care as Much as You Pay* has therefore provided the somewhat provocative title of this paper and its conclusion, by way of a coda that raises some recent examples and discussion of artists and artists-curators turned to producers of art, culture, and the creative industries. These examples could be also used in considering the role of curating Asian art from the present into the future. At the same time this chapter has also raised some of the important discussions and examples of curating Asian art, leading from the “discovery stage” in the 1990s to the “consolidating powers” of curatorial practices, institutions, public and private initiatives, the art market, and the market for the creative industries.

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Museums Are Everywhere in China, There Is No Museum in China¹

(or, How Institutional Typologies
Define Curatorial Practices)

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Before the boom of museums, galleries, and the art market in China, the role of artists in the development of exhibition practices could be traced back to the period after the fall of the so-called Gang of Four, toward the end of the Cultural Revolution of 1976.² This period was marked by a new wave of hope in China and, with it, a spirit of freedom.³ As part of this, there was a strong urge to establish a public sphere for open dialogue, which led to such initiatives as the Democracy Wall, inaugurated in 1978 in Beijing. The wall was no more than 10 meters in length, and it was closely monitored by the police, but it became a national symbol of freedom, particularly of free speech, and people pasted their political views and creative expressions onto it. Many artworks were first viewed as part of this phenomenon, on the wall in Beijing. It was definitively a product of its time as manifested by a younger generation's desire to speak out, to express their ideas through poetry and other forms of writing, and to create space for criticality. (Even though many of the artworks were impressionist-style paintings, and may look rather traditional to us today, the action of showing their own individual work in public could be understood as a critical or political gesture.) Art works were hung with ropes from nearby trees, and so the exhibition would appear and disappear at the end of each day. These actions marked an early instance of strategies to temporarily occupy public space through the development of self-organized exhibitions of art, as there was an utter lack of support for such activity during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Artistic practices gained significant momentum during the mid-1980s, when a new generation of artists emerged from the country's art schools and began to experiment. In 1985, what is now referred to as the "New Wave" spread through art circles and independent exhibitions all around the country; remarkably, most of the practitioners were unaware of each other's activities. The only point of connection between the different cities at that time – when most artists could not afford to travel – was through

the different local art magazines or journals that would collect slides and publish what works they could, thereby making them publicly known. Such magazines included *Jiangsu Pictorial*, *Fine Arts (Mei Shu)*, *Fine Arts China*, and *Art Currents*. These publications were integral to the circulation of ideas throughout China, and mark the beginning of the ongoing explorations as evident in the artistic practices of today.

People involved in all the different happenings and events across China would send slides to the editorial offices of the abovementioned publications, hoping to have their work, their exhibition, or event published. As an artist noted in an interview around that time, in the 1980s “information meant power,” and so the editors of these magazines also became organizers of significant exhibitions later on. They also organized two important meetings: the Zhuhai (commonly referred to as the Zhuhai Conference) in 1986 and the Huangshan conference in 1988, inviting practitioners from all over the country to attend. During the meeting in Zhuhai, slides of artists’ work from all around China were projected, and it could be argued that this was one of the earliest attempts at a survey exhibition. Exhibition practices shifted dramatically when these editors took on the role of curators for the first time in the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* in Beijing, a moment when the more modest gesture of screening slides was translated into the spatiotemporal reality of an exhibition.

Interestingly, though, the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* did not present the organizers as curators, but instead introduced the role and working methodology of the exhibition organizer – literally translated as “Preparation Committee Member” – which would later be re-named as the “Academic Organizer,” and even later finally the term “curator”⁴ would be adopted. The Chinese use of this term still causes confusion. Whenever I lecture to students about curatorial practices, the first question is generally: “What is the difference between curating an exhibition and curating a commercial event for a company, or decorating a promotional booth?” The Chinese term for these actions is quite similar.

Thus, in the 1980s, one will not find the title of curator in Chinese texts or materials, for the simple reason that most of the exhibitions that happened in the 1980s were artist-organized and did not credit the organizers as curators.

Eventually, the internationalization of the Chinese art scene did introduce the role of the curator to the region and locals, this was accompanied by the development of an art market – as many of the first buyers of Chinese contemporary art were foreigners.

In the early and mid-1990s the role of local curators and critics quickly shifted toward the role of mediators between Western curators and institutions who were interested in conducting research visits to China. In a way, they became gatekeepers that would decide what should be seen or not seen. More recently, that role has been transferred to the commercial galleries, which began to emerge in the late 1990s.

As part of this historical account, I should mention the special case of an exhibition from 1992 titled the *Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair* (in the Chinese title “art fair” is not included). Organized by critic Lu Peng and funded by a private company, this exhibition truly foresaw the boom and importance of the art market within the context of Chinese contemporary art. A situation that maintains and largely characterizes the current state of affairs wherein commercial enterprises and private investment have absolutely replaced state forms of sponsorship.⁵

The exhibition in Guangzhou showed some 350 works and all works were for sale. Although problematic in nature and in the end a failure, which was even acknowledged by the organizers, this exhibition or art fair was a direct reaction to what was

happening at that time, when the only buyers were foreigners, and whose tastes began to influence the local artistic practices at that time. What this exhibition attempted to do was to raise awareness of the importance of developing a local art market and cultivating local collectors in a place where there were none. While now there are many art fairs and biennial exhibitions, in a strange way this exhibition conflated these two formats under one umbrella event and could be seen as a projection of what was to come: the current state of the international art system, not only in China but globally, is characterized by the close relationship between biennials and art fairs, as many of the same artists circulate through both simultaneously.

While this exhibition was a preface to a trend that would become mainstream in the next decade or so, most local artists continued to develop their practices in a self-organizing manner, temporarily occupying different spaces for their exhibitions. Such spaces included university classrooms, Workers' Palaces, abandoned basements and other spaces, their own apartments, and public spaces, cafes, to name a few of the venues in which many of the most experimental exhibitions took place.

These conditions that shaped production strongly influenced the character of many artist-organized exhibitions, as well as artistic practices more broadly. Artists were actively learning about many of these characteristics while also putting them into practice, and as such they began to make choices that would influence the public appearance of their work.

It is also important to point out that, until the mid-1990s, there was almost no support for exhibitions – no markets, institutions, no platforms for critical discussion, no local collectors, and no connoisseurs to support and observe the experiments that were taking place. The participating artists bore all the costs, while exhibition opportunities were made possible almost entirely through networks of established friendships, shows of solidarity, and a strong belief in the work being undertaken together. Thus, many works did not survive the period, and today there is an urgency to find, preserve, and study what documentation of this energetic moment might remain. However, owing to the lack of institutional support, the archives related to these exhibitions are inconsistent and fragmented, and do not exist under a single institutional roof, but rather these materials are scattered among the participating artists.

The Rise of the Art Museum and the Creation of a New Public Realm

In China, the white cube gallery would not be introduced until after the year 2000, and at that point it was strongly connected to the commercialization of the art scene. This reality remains true to this day. This is very different from the context of the former West, wherein the notion of the white cube space was introduced after World War II and was closely linked to the institutionalization of art. As such, artist-initiated exhibitions in China, rather than museums, acted as the sites for the production of knowledge, which was in contrast to the situation in the West, where museums, the development of modern and contemporary art, and the study of art history were very much interconnected. The prominence of the white cube space was re-enforced through the interconnectivity of the private art museum sector and commercial galleries, and has since exerted great influence on curatorial practice and its very rigid way of approaching exhibition-making.

The strength of the art market not only standardized the role of curators but also meant the demise of many artist-run spaces or so-called independent spaces, which in some countries are also known as artist run initiatives (ARIs), while also doing away with the legacy of artist-organized exhibitions that was such an important contributor to early thinking around the process of curating and exhibition practices more generally from the late 1970s through to the early 2000s.

The appearance of white cube spaces standardized exhibition-making as a format. To a certain extent, they also standardized the language used not only around exhibition-making but also artistic language, which is especially obvious among the younger generation of artists whose first exhibitions are now taking place within gallery spaces.

The attempt to create a new public sphere, which the early artist-organized exhibitions set their sights on, was more or less erased after 2000, as a result of the privatization and corporatization of most of the contemporary art field. Around the same time, an unspoken mutual agreement between the state and active artists took root, through which contemporary art moved from an underground status to being “on the ground.” With the acceptance of contemporary artworks into the 2000 edition of the Shanghai Biennale, artists found themselves in a new, undefined position that remains somewhat unclear even today. The state does not really support the work of contemporary artists, but tolerates its existence and perhaps helps to define its existence solely through its market successes.

The majority of the newly established art museums in China are privately funded. Most of the companies that establish these new art museums are real estate or investment companies, or else private collectors that have the desire to share their collections publicly.

This situation has rapidly shifted over the last decade and it is still to be ascertained what influence these private art institutions (the founders of these institutions are mostly collectors) have contributed to the expansion of the public sphere. What kind of values do they attempt to define and embody? What kind of art practices are promoted through these privately funded art museums? How do they cultivate public opinion within the public sphere?

It is interesting to note that, of all the other possible institutional formats, the art museum has gained greatest popularity. There is very little interest in other institutional formats, like the *Kunsthalle* or the art center, to name but a few. When one looks at these museums and their new buildings, one notes that they do not follow in the tradition of the old-fashioned museums from the nineteenth century, but rather serve as massive exhibition halls. Very quickly they have come to incorporate the existing institutional programmatic structures and perform the predetermined functions of an art museum: creating rotating exhibitions, educational programs, and hosting talks. Within these institutions there are rarely any institutional experiments or innovative and radical approaches towards a reconsideration of what an art institution is or what an art institution should be and do. These institutions are usually dependent on one source of funding: the private collector of a real estate company, for instance (and generally they do not operate with an independent accounting system for the museum), so there is little analysis as to how to make the institution more sustainable and less dependent on a sole source of funding, which may not exactly be stable either. As a result of much of this, there is very little reflection on how institutions such as art museums should perform their own role within the public realm.

The one thing that could be described as radical about these places is the size of these museums, as they are all huge architectural experiments, each competing to be their local city's primary landmark.

In recent years, the emergence of foundations has made a slight change in the ecology of the art scene, and a new focus on supporting the discourse of production. These foundations are also privately funded, backed with a collector's money, who aside from collecting and exhibiting their collections also attempt to support other institutional programs both locally and internationally, which is an important shift. This to a certain extent provides a good example of a different way of thinking about one's contribution to the system. The 21st Century Art Foundation and Frank F. Yang Art and Education Foundation are noteworthy in this respect.

Most newly founded art museums embrace the work of artists from abroad and include them in their collections, aside from also exhibiting and collecting the work of local artists. It is primarily private collectors and founders of museums that define trends in collecting interests, and it is important to note that very few museums have advisory boards that are actually performing their perceived function. These new clients create a wave of market force by expanding the number of dealers and galleries around the world that are interested in acquiring expensive works from internationally recognized artists for their collections. Nevertheless, more and more art institutions in the West are also struggling for survival, and now more than ever turn to China in search of lucrative collaborations based on financial support.

The question here is: what kind of networks or what kind of transnational dialogues are produced by these connections, and how can they actually complicate the art historical narrative and its Western-centricity. Unfortunately, such concerns are generally relegated to the margins in these kinds of exchanges, and so the role of the curator, or another actor who could engage some of these questions with the artists, remains sidelined.

In such instances, the exhibition remains a form of spectacle, and it is exactly these kinds of exhibitions that are on view in most of the institutions. The success of an exhibition is defined by abstract accounting of visitor attendance and the number of selfies taken in the exhibition space on the WeChat platform.

Many of these new art museums also turn to institutions from the West seeking collaboration. This strategic move helps these institutions to gain so-called global visibility, and at a much faster rate, as they aspire to elevate their name on a par with their collaborators. The West Bund Artistic Center in Shanghai (a museum funded by the West Bund Development Group), which opened in 2018, recently signed a five-year strategic agreement with the Centre Georges Pompidou to collaborate from 2019 to 2024. What this entails, at least initially, is that the Pompidou will be "in residency" at the West Bund Artistic Center and will organize 20 exhibitions and events within that five-year period. These 20-something exhibitions and events will likely be the majority of the institution's program during that time, so the institution won't have to provide its own program, and instead will serve as a container for a new Pompidou program.

This way of working is not new to Asia. The recently established National Gallery Singapore (NGS) commenced its program with a series of exhibitions, each in collaboration with a different art museum, for instance with Tate Britain's *Artist and Empire: (En)countering Colonial Legacies* (2015) and Centre Pompidou's *Reframing Modernism* (2016). None of these exhibitions toured to Paris or London; the exhibitions began and ended in Singapore.

As artist Shi Yong said in an interview conducted in 2014: “Today, many institutions in China have a lot of funding. Even more than institutions formerly had in the West. But in essence this looking to the West did not change. Although China is probably equal on an economical level with many institutions around the world, they still think that they are inferior in terms of the cultural field. So, they try to do everything and anything in order to enter the power structure that is typified by the so-called West. So in essence, nothing has changed” (Ćirić et al. 2015).

However, stuck between the art market and private institutions, public art institutions have very little funding and freedom to realize their visions. They have collections that are usually based on gifts and donations, with ridiculously small acquisition budgets. If collections can be seen as an indicator of how institution’s write and maintain art histories, these institutions missed their chance to contribute to these histories a long time ago. Their roles are more or less that of an exhibition hall. Plus, knowing the current prices for works by Chinese artists, it must surely seem impossible to acquire such works anytime soon. Then there is also a lack of clarity from the government with regard to policies toward contemporary art. The lack of appreciation for the need of preservation also urges many private collections of Chinese art to leave mainland China and take up residence elsewhere – an example is the Sigg collection that was donated to the M+ Museum in Hong Kong. The remaining significance that many of these art museums still have is of symbolic value, especially for the older generation of Chinese artists. Their retrospectives are often presented within these institutions (like the Power Station of Art or the former Shanghai Art Museum), with support provided by their galleries, as a kind of national acknowledgment of their contribution to the field.

Art fairs are the only format that the Chinese state supports. The city of Shanghai now has three art fairs, all emerging recently (021 Contemporary Art Fair, West Bund Art and Design, and Photofairs Shanghai), and they are all supported by municipal governments. The Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, although presented by a government agency, is fully supported by private money that curator Qiu Zhijie personally fundraised.⁶

Of course, these art fairs are much more popular and receive more mainstream media coverage than any other institutional exhibition. So, we have a situation in which people judge the art fairs by the standards of an art exhibition, making no distinction between an art fair designed as a sales display and actual, curated exhibitions.

In this reality, art fair display booths become sites for children’s educational programs to introduce the concepts and visual languages of art, putting the commercial booth on the same plane as a museum exhibition. Personally, I find this bizarre and upsetting.

Performance of the Curatorial

Some readers may think that these institutions⁷ must have a great number of curators and educators, among other positions, to support their large programs. But the truth is that these museums do not need curators; in these institutions, curators play more the role of coordinator or administrator, rather than producing research related to an exhibition.

The rise of new institutions simultaneously contributed to a number of new schools of thought with regard to curatorial work, which I intend to reflect on further.

In some cases, the museum founders are also the acting directors, and the curators view their position as an easy job; one that could be done by a lot of people, without consideration for the fact that exhibition-making is an intellectual and knowledge-producing activity, which requires a deep and analytical appreciation for aesthetics. This model, however, actually works very well since many blue-chip commercial galleries are more than eager to present their artists to Chinese audience and collectors through such empty museum exhibitions. At the same time, many of these art museums are searching for a certain caliber of international artist to attract the attention of mainstream media and to have a visual impact. In these situations, there is almost no need to even discuss the curatorial role.

The guest curator is another strategy that is often used by museums and institutions. The strategy of bringing someone from outside the institution to curate exhibitions, rather than having an institutional curator on staff, has been used by many privately run museums. Though it is true that many of these museums have a person with a name-card on staff that identifies them as a curator, despite the fact that she or he rarely curates exhibitions. The programs are run on the model of guest-curated exhibitions, or touring exhibitions, and in most of these cases there is little to no connection between the show and the institution, other than a shared institutional vision and an interrelation between their programmatic interests.

In some cases, there may be no curatorial involvement, and the exhibition is produced instead in collaboration with a gallery. At times the living artists are also not directly involved (the recent scandal around the *Anselm Kiefer in China* exhibition is a good example of this way of working). More often than not, though, the abovementioned methods, with or without curatorial involvement, end up as blockbuster endeavors and occupy most of the available space.

These types of working models brought many opportunities and curatorial jobs, but unfortunately very few positions actually provide the necessary freedom to develop curatorial discourse. This is usually also compounded by the great lack of time these individuals have to develop and implement an exhibition, as well as the institutions' very limited understanding of what an exhibition could be or become. A lack of curatorial interest to engage the institution on a deeper level and to explore the context in which they are working also contributes to the very superficial relationship between an institution and a guest curator.

One extreme example of this working methodology in relation to curating is the K11 Art Foundation. This approach cannot be seen as a popular institutional strategy, and it is indeed unique to this institution.

The strategy employed by K11 led them to financially support a number of important Western institutions over the last few years, including the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) (London), the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) (New York), the Centre Pompidou (Paris), and the Serpentine (London), to name a few. This raised the foundation's status abroad. On the other hand, its in-house curatorial team, which occupy different venues from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Wuhan, are invisible most of the time or play more managerial roles.

The foundation's very successful marketing strategy involves making the best of important alignments; for instance, during biennials or art fairs, they invite directors

and curators from the institutions they have supported to curate exhibition within K11 venues, mostly in Shanghai and Hong Kong. As a result, K11 Art Foundation has hosted exhibitions curated by such figures as Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Klaus Biesenbach (at the Hong Kong venue during Art Basel Hong Kong in 2017), and most recently Lauren Cornell at K11 art space, Shanghai, to name a few.

These kinds of strategies introduce very little to the local art scene, aside from promoting the activities of the foundation, benefitting only the artists within the foundation's collection. Each group stands to profit from this relationship as the artists are presented within the foundation's exhibitions, and as a result their work might end up in the collections of some of these other institutions. Recently, K11 donated works to the Centre Pompidou and MoMA, and it will be interesting to see how this plays out in the long term. How might these strategies influence the collecting practices within these larger scale institutions? Again, this opens up questions as to what corporate and public values are, and how they negotiate with each other in order to coexist.

For independent curators this created new jobs, allowing individuals to move from one exhibition to the next, but at the same time it could also be extremely challenging and frustrating if you are hoping for more depth from these relationships throughout the exhibition-making process. The curator is constrained by the opportunity's temporality, and of course exhibitions are temporal realities that come and go frequently. More often than not, it seems, after the exhibition is open, the museum already begins working on the next show, with little or no time for reflection. The question then is: "How do we interrupt this endless loop or at least try to complicate it?"

From a personal perspective, I always try to think together with artists as to how we can actually engage with the host institution on a deeper level, and expand the level of involvement across both time and space. To do so could actually transform the encounter into something powerful. I developed this curatorial strategy as a defensive mechanism to the overconsumption of exhibitions that I saw taking place; they open and close every day. But very few of them actually produce any forms of knowledge or are of any relevance. They are stripped bare and become simply a visual backdrop for the vanity of the selfie.

These gestures in collaboration between artists, curators, and institutions create an opportunity for the development of long-term, mutual commitments, of new types of relationships, and in so doing could also create new rituals for the future. These very rituals then may also produce new institutional models, or at least, hopefully, different kinds of museums.

One example of such an experiment is my recent collaboration with Ming Contemporary Art Museum (McaM). The collaboration began as an exhibition titled *Proposals to Surrender* but has since continued to evolve over time through one of the projects known as *Ghost Letter*, which is an ongoing research project by Ei Arakawa, and Sergei and Stefan Tcherepnin. The exhibition served as a starting point for their research and engagement with the institution, which delved to a deeper level. It's these types of encounters that I believe are important and that change the rigid ways of collaborating from within.

It is true that the great majority of exhibitions at the moment provide a superficial set of relationships based on corporate logic, which is very hard to unpack. This is one of the greatest challenges everywhere, not only in the Chinese context.

What these new art institutions do have, and I see it as a great advantage, is flexibility and a different kind of dynamic, as a result of only being recently established.

This great advantage, perhaps also a disadvantage, is due to the fact that their working methods are not yet fully formed and could be used as a testing ground for different institutional experiments, as this is what many institutions in the former West have let slip away. It is a great regret, however, that such opportunities are usually not seized and the same old status quo persists.

An institution should have its own capacity to change and transform, and many institutions with long histories have lost this capacity over the years. Instead, they remain trapped in their bureaucratic circles of management, fundraising, strategic planning, counting visitor numbers; channels in which the opportunity for negotiation are very narrow. This is very much the case with large institutions, while many of the small-scale art institutions are instead facing a crisis around their own survival owing to funding cuts and shifts in cultural strategies. These reflections on the infrastructural changes in the West has been radicalized in China, and produced a very unified approach to institution-making and its main ritual exhibition.

Exhibiting and Exhibition-making Typologies

These kinds of institutional typologies in turn define very simplified exhibition types and the terminology that surrounds them. The majority of large-scale art museums either host solo exhibitions that occupy the whole venue; group exhibitions that pair international artists already familiar to the curator with Chinese artists (since the exhibition takes place in China); group exhibitions related to Chinese contemporary art, with some attempt at rewriting art history (between 2010 and 2014 the Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum organized a series of exhibitions, such as the *Thirty Years of Chinese Contemporary Art: Painting (1979–2009)*, in 2010, followed by a number of similar exhibitions according to specific mediums); group exhibitions culled from specific collections; group exhibitions showcasing one country's art practice (which are usually touring exhibitions); award-based exhibitions for young Chinese artists; biennials or triennials; or the very rare, thematic exhibition that employ a research-based approach.

It is interesting to look at the format of solo exhibitions, since they are the most common type of exhibition. Usually art museums give over the whole space to the artist. Of course, if it's an artist who is thinking about the exhibition as a format and is interested in interrogating its ritualized structure, then this would create a great exhibition. But in most cases, it ends up being a museum filled with objects. In many of these solo exhibitions, the curatorial role is also very minimal or there is no curator at all. So basically, the exhibition is done entirely by the artist, in coordination with the institution that deals with the different practicalities. In the end, perhaps, the curator will write a text for the catalogue.

Unfortunately, there are very few examples of really strong solo exhibitions in which the perspectives of the artist and curator are developed through a dialogue to create something meaningful. Meanwhile, to give over space to a great artist as a specific challenge, such as with Philippe Parreno (his solo exhibition was presented at the Rockbund Art Museum in the summer of 2017) or Thomas Hirschhorn (his solo exhibition was on view at the Ming Contemporary Art Museum during 2018) were great exhibitions. However, to a certain extent, such a working model places the majority of the responsibility in the artist's hands, while the institution's curatorial teams play the role of coordinators.

Another exhibition format that has gained in popularity is the biennial also known as biennale, or large-scale exhibitions that are sometimes also called festivals. Although there is a growing number of critics who questions the relevance of biennials today – their shifting position within the art world has introduced many questions as to whether or not the format will survive or even if it should – biennials in China, however, continue to grow, with more and more born each year.

The Shanghai Biennale began in 1996 and was organized by the Shanghai Art Museum, and although at that time it was not international in scope, it was an early initiative in the region. However, by 2000 the Shanghai Biennale had certainly gained international recognition.

Poignantly, when Jens Hoffmann was invited to reflect on his co-curation of the 2011 Shanghai Biennale, he stated that working on the exhibition was the cause of great frustration, as he felt as a curator he had one of the least significant positions within the organization.

Aside from the Shanghai Biennale, there have been a number of similar large-scale exhibitions launched in recent years and all of them have been corporate-funded rather than city-funded (for instance the Shanghai Project, founded by the Shanghai Himalayas Art Museum and Envision Company; the Nanjing International Art Festival, which will become a biennale exhibition this year; or the Yinchuan Biennale, funded by MocA Yinchuan).

I recently presented at a seminar during the abovementioned Nanjing International Art Festival. When I asked one of the company employees over dinner to introduce us to his company, he stated: “The company has auction houses in a few cities, a few galleries, and we are establishing a company that will work to refurbish housing complexes in order to bring art into every single household ... and we have a biennial.”

What is the role that a biennale can serve in a context like this? It is part of a marketing strategy. Rather than buying expensive advertising, the company can pay a certain amount of money to establish a biennale, which offers a so-called academic label that suggests that what they are doing is for the public good. All this, while also raising ever-larger profits. But the company looks good when discussing tax policies with the local governments, since they have brought an international event to a city that is not Shanghai or Beijing, but a secondary city interested in cultivating an appreciation of the arts.

In such a scenario, there is almost no thought put into the exhibition as a specific format, with its endless possibilities, consideration of the borders between individual works and their larger contextual installation, or what possibilities might exist to make connections across space and time, the arrangement and sequential viewing, what any of this might mean for an exhibition. In most cases, the exhibition is taken as an already dead format without any imaginative possibilities.

Curating the Future

What is noticeable in recent years is the interest on the part of a few institutions to nurture young curators. The Power Station of Art established an Emerging Curators Program that through an open call collects curatorial proposals and selects a number of these that are funded and presented by the museum. This positive initiative, from my perspective, still lacks something very important and that is the time to work with

a team of advisors or interlocutors who will assist the young curators in the development of their projects, on theoretical grounds but also to discuss very practical issues as well. This could include such things as exhibition design, the specific presentation of artworks, spatial connections, and many other important aspects of exhibitions that are usually not taken into account. Just offering the money and the space is not enough. The opportunity to work together is crucial, and sadly the exhibitions that I have seen from this program remain very standardized, very modest, although much of the research itself is quite impressive.

Another similar attempt has been made by the Frank F. Yang Art and Education Foundation, which launched an open call for curatorial proposals that will be realized in the future. Part of this process entails bi-annual workshops with young local curators in a format conducive to sharing each other's experiences, while also offering them the opportunity to discuss their ideas with more established curators. These are invaluable opportunities to just talk about curating and exhibition-making, especially as there are no seminars specifically related to this topic in China. While the open call might still face many of the same problems, as previously mentioned, the key here would be to reframe the workshops. If these mini-workshops were slightly longer, I believe the outcome would be very different and what would be the result if they had a longer period of time to work together to produce their exhibitions.

While many young curators are getting their start working in commercial galleries, unfortunately working in this context does not offer many opportunities to discuss curating and exhibition-making. Perhaps workshops or seminars where these emerging curators could reflect on art history and its relation to the present would certainly lead to new ideas and actions in the future. This situation has everything to do with the needs of the larger art museums for established curators whose names are recognizable. With this in mind, then, supporting young curators also becomes a marketing strategy. This situation often forces young curators to turn to the commercial gallery sector for opportunities, where they may get trapped, while a very few may try to find their own alternative working strategy.

The importance of reading art history through the history of exhibitions⁸ and the discourses that surround these fields of study thus appears to be critical, and leads us back to the artist-organized exhibitions that I discussed at the very beginning of the chapter. This important art historical knowledge, which embodies curatorial history within it, is not often publicly discussed, yet I believe it is significant to understanding the current discourses around curating. How can we revive these exhibition histories in relation to our own working methodologies as artists and curators today? What happens to artworks when they become public through the process of making an exhibition?

What comes to the fore for me when I think deeply about these artist-organized exhibitions and their material legacies is their sense of urgency – to communicate in public the values that they stand for. The actions that grew out of these different senses of urgency became powerful tools within the social context.

Reflecting on our own positions, one question that comes to mind is: “What is our current sense of urgency and how does this urgency manifest itself today?” We produce much more than we can even grasp or need, and this production line has become urgent – to produce, to be seen, to appear, to display. Of course, this is all part of the standard apparatus of a consumerist model of existence.

The idea of a history of exhibitions is yet to become a proper academic field that feeds back into the history of art in China.⁹ Its lack of existence, and by overlooking the discourses around it, directly correlates to today's oversimplified approach to exhibition-making and the failure to recognize the many inherent possibilities that this unique medium provides. There are many neglected issues such as different display formats, curatorial choices, relationships between artists and curators as reflected in exhibitions, the role of the viewer within exhibitions and their individual and collective experiences, the relationship between publications and exhibitions, and thinking about how to document exhibitions for posterity; all of these areas are yet to be unpacked. Rather, it seems many prefer the oversimplified view that exhibitions are merely editorial choices as to what is in and what is out.

As a curator actively working in the field, I hope to see and feel many different senses of urgency to act and speak in public as a voice that stands against the corporate standards and logics within the art world. Even if it is based on a naive belief that art can still change the world. Or to try to answer the question that Maria Lind once asked: "What does art do?"

Notes

- 1 The title of this text is borrowed from the work: *Museums Are Everywhere in China, There Is No Museum in China. What China Needs Might Not Only Be Museums?* (2012–ongoing) by artist Hu Yun. The work follows the transformation of the art museum within the Expo area in Shanghai.
- 2 With thanks to Steven L. Bridges for his careful reading and editing of the first drafts of this chapter.
- 3 In May 1966, Mao Tse-tung launched the Cultural Revolution with the goal to preserve what he considered "true" Communist ideology. During this period, millions of people were persecuted or harassed, and masses of urban youth were sent to re-education camps in rural areas, bringing the entire country's educational system to a halt. As a result, a whole generation of youth grew up without schooling, while most of the artifacts related to the heritage of China (called the "Four Olds": old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas) were destroyed as symbols of an outdated society. After Mao's death, a political faction nicknamed the Gang of Four came to prominence and controlled the power organs of the Communist Party, prolonging the terror of the Cultural Revolution. Its members were later charged for their crimes.
- 4 In the Chinese language, the word "curator" doesn't have the same etymological Latin root meaning "to take care," which is an important legacy of the term in the West; rather, the literal Chinese translation is "exhibition planner."
- 5 The first biennial exhibition with lasting continuity was the Shanghai Biennale. Its first edition was held in 1996.
- 6 One of the major supporters is the Ming Contemporary Art Museum, a private art museum established in 2015 by the Ming Yuan Group, Real Estate Company, which owns most of the properties around the museum.
- 7 On average, nearly 100 new museums are built annually across the country. During 2011, that figure reached a staggering 386 – more than one per day. These figures are discussed in Jeffrey Johnson, "The Museumification of China," *Leap Magazine* (May 2013), <http://leapleap.com/2013/05/the-museumification-of-china/>, accessed 13 March 2019.

- 8 I have conducted a great deal of research and created archives related to the artist-organized exhibitions in Shanghai from 1979–2006. This research is published in the book: *History of Exhibitions: Shanghai 1979–2006*, published by CFCCA in 2014.
- 9 Many curators have tried to revive their own exhibitions through books and texts. What are most fragile are the artist-organized exhibitions. For one, there are practical concerns around the difficulty of gaining access to the many scattered materials, dispersed by time and memory. Then, there is also the more complicated issue that many artists do not want to revisit their own past and to be associated with certain exhibitions, events, people, or groups of artists.

Reference

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Curating the Contemporary in Decolonial Spaces

Observations from Thailand on Curatorial Practice in Southeast Asia

Gregory Galligan

Three Thailand Biennials as *Criti-Curatorial* Case Study¹

Bangkok Biennial (1 July–30 September 2018)

Bangkok Art Biennale (19 October 2018–3 February 2019)

Thailand Biennale (2 November 2018–28 February 2019)

One might easily be forgiven for failing to recognize in Bangkok's brutalist, concrete cityscape one evening in mid-2018 the smart, if largely invisible, inauguration of a new global art biennial – in retrospect arguably one of uncanny, if not historic, dimension. Along the storied banks of the Chao Phraya River (its fulsome curves carve the capital city of *Krung Thep Maha Nakhon* into numerous “heritage” and modernist byways), and tucked inconspicuously under the looming steel and concrete deck of the Rama VIII traffic bridge – the futurist behemoth is named in memoriam for Ananda Mahidol (r. 1935–1946), Thailand's eighth monarch of the modern Chakri dynasty – a crowd of neighborhood denizens in Spandex and Nikes were collectively singing the Thai national anthem. (The 1930s parade rendition of the *Phleng Chat Thai* is piped throughout the city twice daily, morning and evening, thus bracketing business hours with patriotic splendor.) Within seconds of the song's emphatic conclusion, all present were pumping muscle in synchronized, K-pop dance step (Figure 12.1).

Only the presence of two towering, thrashing wind puppets, each labeled “BANGKOK BIENNIAL” in vertical uppercase, and a makeshift table bearing posters and pocket-sized zines labeled “Guide to Pavilions” – all printed in agitprop grayscale – might have suggested to a casual bystander that something cheeky, if not anarchic, was happening there.²

If the quotidian inauguration of the Bangkok Biennial (1 July–30 September 2018) seemed to recapture something of the artist-alternative, do-it-yourself spirit prevalent



FIGURE 12.1 Bangkok Biennial opening ceremonies, 1 July 2018, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Biennial and May Thatun.

throughout the Thai capital some two decades earlier, only several weeks prior to its launching, however, the celebrated Thai independent curator Apinan Poshyananda (b. 1956), mastermind of an entirely unrelated, and comparatively corporatized, Bangkok Art Biennale (BAB; “Beyond Bliss,” 19 October 2018–3 February 2019), which was supported handsomely by a bevy of sponsors, had already hosted his twelfth preview “BAB Talk” (a promotional teaser event) at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC).³ Poshyananda – BAB’s founder, chief executive, and artistic director – seemed everywhere visible, as though any biennale modeled on its famed Venetian prototype required embodiment in a charismatic impresario. The official BAB lineup of five Southeast Asian co-curators hailing from Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines – Poshyananda himself at the helm of the geopolitical triangle – hardly mediated this impression of first-person hegemony, as Poshyananda has come to epitomize, both regionally and globally (notably over the course of a quarter century), a virtual gold standard of the “independent curator.”⁴ In his rather swift rise to that celebrity status some two decades ago, Poshyananda doubtless benefited, in part, by the “small pond phenomenon”: for his entire curatorial career, one dating from the early 1990s to the present, he has had neither curatorial complement nor competitor in the country apart from the slightly younger, albeit equally ambitious, Gridthiya Gawewong (b. 1964),⁵ the ubiquitous and richly empowered artistic director of the Jim Thompson Art Center.⁶

No talent can prove productive without an appropriate platform, or, at the very least, not without its energies synchronizing with amenable contextual and historical headwinds. As though to attest to such art world ecologies, Poshyananda rose to international celebrity in the early 1990s promptly after completing a doctorate on the history of modern art in Thailand at Cornell University, his dissertation published

immediately as an unprecedented, groundbreaking study of the emergence of modern art in Thailand over the course of the last two centuries (Poshyananda 1992). To this day, *Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* remains the only English language survey available to scholars and the general public, indeed some 20 years subsequent to its printing (there has been no second edition), making for a remarkable shelf life.⁷

Within several years of the book's publication, and after participating as co-curator (of the Thailand section) for the *First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (APT1; Queensland Art Gallery, 1993), Poshyananda received a major commission to mount, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan (at that time arguably still the global art world's epicenter), what would eventually be hailed as a watershed exhibition. *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (1996), at the Asia Society Museum (collaborative sites included the Queens Museum and the Grey Art Gallery, of New York University), featured contemporary work from India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. It has since been frequently cited as a major, paradigm-shifting exhibition of contemporary South and Southeast Asian art not only for the ways it has helped to focus global attention on Southeast Asia's burgeoning "contemporary," but for unapologetically asserting that its subject had neither desire for, nor need of, the West's canonic approval.⁸ The latter, discursive point was not lost on New York art critics, who immediately recognized that *Traditions/Tensions* constituted something like another "Contemporary" developing apart from Western globalism altogether, no less one boasting its own self-justifying, modernist prehistory (Cotter 1996; Heartney 1997; Munroe 1997).

It is notable that not unlike others of its storied dimension – *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989; Georges Pompidou Centre), curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, is considered an important, if rather *too white* forerunner⁹ – *Tradition/Tensions* did not emerge from an historical vacuum; rather, it is as much a part of institutional history as it is representative of an early moment in the evolution of contemporary "exhibition histories," no less the even more recent emergence of a truly global independent curatorial practice.¹⁰ At that historical juncture the Asia Society Museum (f. 1956) and its staid exhibition halls – the dated interiors of the 1981 building by Edward Larrabee Barnes would eventually undergo a colorful, futuristic remodeling by Bartholomew Voorsanger in the late 1990s – on upper Park Avenue had recently come under the new, charismatic direction of Vishakha N. Desai (b. 1949). Formerly a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Desai effectively launched Poshyananda's global career in tandem with the strategic unrolling, in the early 1990s, of her visionary mission to redirect Asia Society's exhibition programming away from its traditional orbit around a permanent collection of antique Asian sculpture (a passion of John D. Rockefeller III) toward the showcasing of the recent, global emergence of the "Asian Contemporary." Desai's own rise to the position of director was a kind of curatorial coup of theretofore unheard of proportion. Thus the epic momentum of which *Traditions/Tensions* was only one example (a vast, equally groundbreaking survey of Chinese contemporary art, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, was already in production) took concrete form in Desai's initial collaboration with Poshyananda on the show's core principles (she ultimately entrusted the selection of artists and artworks to her precocious guest curator).¹¹ This "surplus history" (one overrunning a persistent tendency in curatorial historiography to privilege the individual achievement of "author curators" over contributing, contextual factors) is virtually embedded in the exhibition's full title, namely in its pan-Asian prefix, *Contemporary Art in Asia*, despite

Poshyananda's casting the spotlight in the exhibition itself on cutting-edge work by selected artists hailing from the Asian "South."¹²

Now a quarter-century hence and enjoying a late career as a reincarnated, independent curator after serving for over a decade (2003–2016) as a civil service officer in Thailand's Ministry of Culture (where as a high-ranking, "deputy permanent secretary" Poshyananda perfected a dual identity as a government heritage official and a peripatetic, transnational art ambassador), Poshyananda was arguably fashioning in the Bangkok Art Biennale what nobody had been able, or ever dared, to hypothesize: the biennale as implicit *autobiopic*, its every principal component seemingly mirroring the curriculum vitae of its storied producer (Figure 12.2).

To explain such an exceedingly reflexive phenomenon, one must look back to another aspect of Poshyananda's curatorial pre-history, namely his origins in the mid-1980s as an independent, conceptual *performance artist*.¹³ Well before he would take up doctoral studies at Cornell in art history, Poshyananda practiced performance and multimedia installation art, only gradually moving away from that studio-based orbit toward more conceptual disciplines, even as he would always retain something of the artist's messy penchant for experimentation and social engagement (by the early 1990s, as Poshyananda exited Cornell, the notion that art and life were inseparable, no less that artists should energetically engage in "erasing" the walls of the museum, had become globally accepted truisms).¹⁴

A somewhat parallel history is shared among several regional postmodern, artist-turned-curators of Poshyananda's generation – namely Redza Piyadasa (Malaysia), Raymundo Albano (Philippines), and Jim Supangkat (Indonesia) – all just coming of age across Southeast Asia at that postcolonial moment (Flores 2012). This perhaps



FIGURE 12.2 Bangkok Art Biennale co-founders Apinan Poshyananda (right) and Thapana Sirivadhanabhakdi, CEO and President of Thailand Beverage Public Company Limited ("ThaiBev") [artwork: Choi Jeong Hwa (Korea), "Love Me Pink Pig"], September 2018, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Art Biennale, 2018.

suggests why, some quarter-century hence, Poshyananda would lavish top-billing at BAB to Marina Abramović, the celebrity performance guru with whom he had already collaborated in Thailand on two occasions during the first decade of the new millennium.¹⁵ As though vividly attesting to that closely interwoven history, Abramović's trademark, "Mata Hari" portrait adorned BAB publicity materials repeatedly in the lead-up to its inaugural festivities (mid-October 2018), her dour, dead-on visage even featuring at one point as a gate-keeping "pop-up" on the Biennale's official, blissful website.

Poshyananda thus embodies an instructive case in the emergence in Southeast Asia over the decade of the 1990s of the transnational curator as "global author," whose methodologies may be said to participate in, intersect with, or even provide contrast to the rise of a new "discursive turn" in independent curatorial practice gradually taking hold among a globally peripatetic "curatoriate" (Clark 2007) of biennials and other large-sale, theme-driven group exhibitions since the late 1980s (O'Neill 2012). A perusal of Poshyananda's collected writings of public talks and exhibition catalogue essays of his early career (a period roughly spanning 1991 to 2007), indeed, reminds one of his flair for provocative and yet ultimately reassuring, or therapeutic narratives. These early writings are peppered with allusions to shipwrecks, natural disasters, political calamities, and "global crack-ups," no less taking into account his penchant for pointing out the cruel duplicities of Thai smiles and other pitfalls of the culture's superficial happiness doctrines (Poshyananda 2007).

However, if the Bangkok Art Biennale may therefore be said to have approached, in composite formation, something discursively speaking to the life and oeuvre of the chief executive staging it, such auteur-curators are hardly the only ones with a stake in sustaining the biennial model as a platform for their quasi-experimental projects. Entire governments, replete with all their attendant, state machinery (ready access to public bursaries and related resources, ready site provision, the potential enhancement of critically important infrastructure, and so forth) often have much to gain, both economically and socially, by "biennializing" their regional art scenes.¹⁶ As has been demonstrated in a recent study of the biennial format and its numerous manifestations since the late 1950s (Green and Gardner 2016), context can be everything, indeed especially when municipal or even national governments regard the biennale (or other periodic, large-scale group exhibition) as a convenient vehicle for enhancing local economic and civic development, a point not lost on Asian and other Pacific Rim cities since the launch of the First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, at the Queensland Art Gallery, in 1993.¹⁷

Acquiring a certain "biennial literacy" can be accomplished at first tentatively by securing a national pavilion in the historic, Venetian venue as a sort of reflexive exercise in "biennial baptism." Poshyananda himself had much to do with Thailand's own self-awakening to this process of biennial maturation, when as director of the newly created Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC, a subdivision of the Thailand Ministry of Culture) in 2003 he promptly established a Thailand pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale already well in development. As curated by Poshyananda himself, the pavilion carried his trademark, methodological double-speak: *Reverie and Phantasm in the Epoch of Global Trauma*, a group installation set against the theme of resurgent worldwide terrorism and persistent Western, colonialist perceptions of Southeast Asia as a den of dangerous, if seductive, "oriental" ghosts and goblins (this was, after all, a pavilion trailing in the wake of 9/11 and free-floating Bin Laden anxiety).

There was nothing especially remarkable at the time about Poshyananda's artists' roster for Thailand's debut at Venice, the pavilion comprising what was by then already unanimously understood, both within Asia and among Western curatorial heavyweights, among whom Poshyananda already moved smoothly (he would soon be invited by Alexandra Munroe to join her prestigious, inaugural Asian Art Council at the Guggenheim Museum), to constitute a core circle of Thailand's most accomplished, cutting-edge contemporaries working in painting, sculpture, mixed media, installation, photography, and conceptual performance art: Sakarin Krue-On, Kamol Phaosavasdi (he had figured prominently in Poshyananda's *Traditions/Tensions*), Tawatchai Puntusawasdi (who designed the freestanding, mock-Thai pavilion structure), Michael Shaowanasai, Vasan Sitthiket, Manit Sriwanichpoom, and Montri Toemsombat. Far more significant for Thailand's, and arguably Poshyananda's, future was the curator's perfectly calibrated discursive appeal to Western expectation, which was to see in the "Asian" entry something at once recognizable and threatening, no less reassuring and yet speaking to an ascendant, transnational perception of twenty-first-century reality as an ever-unfolding nightmare of "epochal," if not "terror-inducing," proportion.

It is worth noting that Poshyananda's oxymoronic juxtaposition of positive and negative signifiers – "reverie" and "phantasm" – in the Thai pavilion's curatorial remit of 2003 at Venice speaks in both practical and philosophical terms to his equivocal theme of *Beyond Bliss* some 15 years later, as Thailand mounted its own biennale on home shores under the watchful eye of an already four-year-old military dictatorship. As though to reveal and conceal simultaneously – a common tactic of many Southeast Asian contemporaries, who, working under high-surveillance societies, publicly avow themselves to be innocently exploring what it means to attain happiness while, in actuality, their smiles function as superficial decoys for underlying political resistance – Poshyananda's theme of *Beyond Bliss*, for all its connoting of Buddhist self-composure, struck most observers standing outside a tight circle of corporate benefactors (always prone to reading surfaces as the reflection of their own confirmation biases) as the stuff of a questionable, if not delusional, curatorial discourse.¹⁸ Thus, Abramović's widely quoted biennale endorsement that "In this chaotic world, *Beyond Bliss* of Bangkok Art Biennale is a way of hope" risked coming off, at least for art world insiders, as a sign that the "Abramović Method," which was to figure prominently during BAB's multi-month venue, had been thoroughly "consumerized" by a new, and particularly phantasmagoric force of empire, the global capitalist "machine that creates a continuous call for authority" (Hardt and Negri 2000, esp. 13–17).

Francesco Bonami's *Dreams and Conflicts: The Viewer's Dictatorship* (2003), of the 50th Venice Biennale, at which the Thais thus made their tentative debut, has been widely cited in the critical literature for its unprecedented privileging of art from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (this Biennale also featured Thai celebrity artist Rirkrit Tiravanija as co-curator, with Molly Nesbit and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, of the durational, audience-participatory platform Utopia Station). It was to prove a propitious launching; Thailand's biennale entries during the ensuing decade, that is extending from the 50th biennale of 2003 to the 55th edition of 2013 (Poshyananda's direct role as national commissioner apparently ended by 2011) generally comprised some of the country's most progressive contemporaries: Montien Boonma and Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (2005); Amrit Chusuwan and Nipan Oranniwesna (2007); Sakarin Krue-On, Michael Shaowanasai, Sudsiri Pui-Ock, Suporn Shoosongdej, and

Wantanee Siripattananuntakul (2009); Navin Rawanchaikul (2011); and Arin Rungjang and Wasinburee Supanichvoraparch (2013). Over more recent years, and by way of decided contrast, the Thai government has more opportunistically and ceremoniously utilized the prestigious international event as a convenient vehicle for bestowing national honors on comparatively academic, “late career” practitioners. Initial plans to feature the dated, “Neo-Traditional” modernist, Thawan Duchanee (1939–2014) at the 56th Venice Biennale of 2015 (*All the World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor) were thwarted by the artist’s untimely passing in the run-up to preparing his platform; a quick switch-out to featuring the work of his designated curator, conservative printmaker Kamol Tassanachalee (b. 1974), arguably made Thailand appear as though it were trapped in an eternally “pre-contemporary” condition.¹⁹ The most recent Thai pavilion *Krung Thep Bangkok* (57th Venice Biennale 2017) was by the abstract painter Somboon Hormtienthong (b. 1949). Having spent most of his working life in Munich, he was roundly regarded by casual visitors (the international press completely ignored it) as constituting a decidedly un-contemporary, if not auto-Orientalizing paean to the Thai capital – all elephant sculpture and antique display cases emerging as some form of extended escapism in the wake of Thailand’s bloodless, “happiness restoring” military coup of mid-2014.

Given such bureaucratic misfires, the announcement in late 2017 of the preparations by the military government for an entirely open-air Thailand Biennale (2 November 2018–28 February 2019), curated by academic Jiang Jiehong (Birmingham City University) for the southwest beach province of Krabi; was met with widespread bemusement. The biennale would revolve around the curatorial theme *Edge of the Wonderland* (once again an oxymoronic construction ostensibly denoting a benign social condition to please government ministers while purportedly reserving room for more conceptually sophisticated or politically risky interpretations of the theme). The Thailand Biennale seemed to round out a “biennale triumvirate” with an element of ceremonious, nationalist fanfare, given that the event clearly embodied a state-sponsored public works project (talk of the show’s potential for lending new economic life to the traditional arts-and-crafts-based fishing community of Krabi figured prominently in official biennale literature) as much as it may have aspired to the condition of a truly globally informed show of conceptually challenging, site-specific installation art (Figure 12.3).

Had Poshyananda not retired so recently, the Thailand Biennale could have come right out of his curatorial Moleskine, given his demonstrable track record of mounting sprawling, inspirational group exhibitions in the virtual wake (if not in the very midst) of political chaos (as an example of the latter, Poshyananda’s intergenerational group exhibition *Imagine Peace: Contemporary Art in Thailand in the Age of Turbulence* opened to the public at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre in mid-2010, even as fires from recent street protests still smoldered at a heavily vandalized, neighboring shopping mall).²¹

If the Bangkok Art Biennale and the Thailand Biennale seemed destined for very different platforms – one mapping itself over 20 heritage, tourist, hotel, and shopping sites in the capital, the other capitalizing on the lure of coastal nature as a challenge for artists to both complement and equal – both derived from a shared assumption: that curating a “biennale” was itself an identifiable commodity, one deriving handily from Venetian wellsprings, indeed the format presumably *nameable* in certain basic



FIGURE 12.3 Assistant Curator Vipash Purichanont²⁰ (second from right) on a site visit for the Thailand Biennale at Krabi, 2018. Photo: Courtesy of the Thailand Biennale.

outlines and core principles, something prestigiously “known,” albeit malleable and *morph-able*. Notably, neither biennale was to entail any appreciable discursive or “para-curatorial” (McDowell 2016) project (other than the obligatory symposium), whether in leading up to its actual vernissage, transpiring over the course of its material venue, or extending (in any conceptually sophisticated manner) beyond its actual, *spectacular* formation. As though the biennale format were some kind of exportable, yet fundamentally unique brand of “festivalism” (Schjeldahl 1999), no less one implicitly protected by international trademark, both Thai biennale iterations intended that their audiences subliminally trace back to Venice their generational and operational premises – not unlike the recalling of a presumably uninterrupted, genetic bloodline.

This was more than implied by Poshyananda’s grand public announcement of the upcoming Bangkok Art Biennale at the 57th Venice Biennale of 2017 – the giddy “Viva Arte Viva” was curated by Christine Macel, of the Pompidou Center – where along its water-logged corridors he poured drinks before the Santa Maria della Salute with the city’s deputy mayor for a clutch of canikons (Figure 12.4).

Among bystanders who would one day be seeking favors – a newly minted independent curator, a globe-trotting Manhattan gallerist, an “emerging” Bangkok performance artist (she would later prove to be squarely among Poshyananda’s coveted exhibition roster) – nobody dared to point out, had they even dared to recall clearly, that this kind of publicity junket had been enacted here before, *just like this*, and all too recently. Indeed, only several years prior to Poshyananda’s reception, and taking place at the 55th Venice Biennale of 2013 (The Encyclopedic Palace, curated by Massimiliano Gioni), another smart cabal of Thai curatorial and regional municipal officials thought they were launching something spectacular: the so-called Pattaya Biennale 2014 named after an expat- and tourist-friendly beach city some two hours’ drive (about 150 km) south of Bangkok – nothing if not an “alternative” biennale that



FIGURE 12.4 Apinan Poshyananda announcing the inaugural Bangkok Art Biennale 2018 at the 57th Venice Biennale—“Viva Arte Viva!” (2017). Photo: Courtesy of Bangkok Art Biennale, 2018.²²

they intended to detonate in renegade, if ostensibly polite, fashion well before the launch of anything Poshyananda may have been concocting for his post-ministerial future.²³ In what could have been the same hotel setting, and standing beside their own official, if quizzical, Pattaya Biennale poster (designed by celebrated Thai indie film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, the poster’s close-on image of a headless, soaring motorcycle helmet trailing a horse’s mane, and ghosting blue skies in the middle of nowhere, was, for such purposes, delightfully mortifying), Pattaya Biennale founder Thasnai Sethaseree (one of the country’s most celebrated artists and a revered professor at Chiang Mai University), and inaugural curators Gridthiya Gawee Wong and Pier Luigi Tazzi (b. 1941; co-curator *documenta IX*, 1992), were accompanied

ceremoniously by Pattaya municipal benefactors. Smartly disheveled, and looking perfectly “grassroots” as though it were a bother to stand there, all grinned coyly for their empathic paparazzi.

By mid-2013, it had long been understood by anyone familiar with Thai contemporary art and politics that this group arguably represented one of the most progressive curatorial and artistic circles of Thailand today, no less one whose contemporary politics favored the underclass of northern Thailand’s Isaan citizenry, one recently empowered by the populist communications tycoon and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (having since been brought up on charges of corruption), and still intent on achieving sociopolitical parity (at least someday) with an “elitist,” Bangkokian oligarchy. The Pattaya Biennale was therefore, beneath its “bubbly,” nothing less than a call to artistic and political revolution, even while boasting its own unique, if contingent, ties to Venice, in spirit equally sisterly and *contrapposto*, and its representatives cloaked by Mona Lisa smiles calibrated perfectly to simultaneously veil and deliver something approaching curatorial anarchism. The Pattaya Biennale was to be, in other words, no mere “alternative” festival but an explicit rejection of Bangkokian centralism.²⁴ If anyone were incredulously still asking, “Why would you not have Thailand’s first-ever biennale in Bangkok?” they were unwittingly revealing that they were politically clueless.²⁵

It was never to happen. By May of 2014, as vast street protests against the government of Yingluck Shinawatra (herself now wracked by charges of misguided and opportunistic populism) called for a “RESTART” of Thai democracy, the Pattaya Biennale was to prove a casualty of political implosion. Fatigued by Thailand’s continual political upheavals – various camps had been arguing and sporadically lobbing bombs or dabbling in arson for over a decade – and doubtless demoralized by yet another round of military ascension (it was the 12th successful military *coup d’état* since 1932, that is ever since Siam had become a constitutional monarchy), the Pattaya cabal quietly dropped all pretension of mounting any momentous, curatorial offensive. No official announcement was ever made of its cancellation; the Pattaya Biennale simply evaporated.²⁶

Considered in retrospect, it seems Poshyananda was destined to get his centrist – *beyond bliss* – biennale after all, even boasting as early as 2014 to a Tokyo audience that the junta had “brought happiness” to the people in a way that finally lent to Thai society the kind of cultural stability a “burgeoning art scene” so implicitly depends on.²⁷ (He would repeat the argument in media interviews in the run-up to BAB in mid-2018, just as everyone was wondering whether democratic elections would ever arrive as promised.) Poshyananda was hardly being an apologist for military coups and related political calamities; more to the point, he had long ago learned that “Thailand was Thailand” (Tsang 2018), as he carefully put it in a uniquely Thai way of saying everything while saying nothing, and if one was to get anywhere, one would do best to smile and assume a “smart casual” posture. Indeed, Poshyananda had already said as much over a decade ago in his “Annual Hilla Rebay Lecture” (2007) at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, where he frankly opined: “The sinking feeling in [the] Thai contemporary art scene today is not healthy. Thai artists and filmmakers simply have to grin and bear it. Freedom of expression previously enjoyed even during the time of tensions during [the] Thaksin government has been sorely missed. Sadly, it seems that constraint and coercion in contemporary Thai art will linger for a long while to come” (Poshyananda 2007).²⁸

Curatorial Practice in Decolonial Spaces

This is my favorite song, Itt.
 What's wrong...?
 There's something in your eye...
 I think I'm dreaming, Itt. I really just want to wake up.
 Then...just open your eyes wide, like this...
 Wider! Ah – very good...
 Jen, of all the places we've been,
 This is by far the most opulent.
 But it's devoid of decoration.
 Not even gold?
 Not even!
 From here you can see the most fertile lands.
 Fields full of rice, and rivers full of fish.
 Mmmm... but it looks lonely, no?
 Mmmm...
 I see everything clearly now, Itt.
 Oh?
 At the heart of the kingdom,
 Other than rice fields,
 There is nothing –.²⁹

In the critical literature that attends the “slow cinema” of Thai independent filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul (b. 1970), it has been observed that the globally celebrated indie artist seems to find something especially moving, or even symbolic, in scenes of open-air aerobics (or “dancercise”) sessions of the everyday type one frequently happens upon in city parks or other urban spaces of public assembly every morning and evening in the Thai capital (as well as in other metropolitan communities in the country).³⁰ These civic-funded, open-access “pep sessions” are apparently no mere curiosity for Weerasethakul, who has notably integrated them into several of his major films since the early 2000s, namely *Tropical Malady* (2004), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), and *Cemetery of Splendor* (2015). The leitmotif of the open-air aerobics gathering would seem to function for Weerasethakul as an equivocal, shifting signifier, in that it lends itself to interpretation as a metaphor for mass conformity, or, conversely, for a never fully realized political formation. Formally the motif would seem to function as a trope of quizzical time-shifting; it emerges in these films as a moment of frank transition from events of psychological intimacy to its opposite condition: *collective* activity “taking place” – the “taking” happening both *time-wise and spatially* – as though the linear unfolding of history were suddenly, completely suspended, the mechanism of a clock ticking perpetually in circles, its ratchets and click stops marking time without anything progressing forward in any ideological or practical direction.³¹ The open-air aerobics class, all arms and legs flailing in puppet-like “dancercise,” arguably embodies, in composite formation, a moment extracted cleanly from a ceaselessly agitated universe to be examined through an artist’s lens before it is returned, with surgical precision, to a discomfiting, “real time” dimension. *The automaton dwells here*. The aerobics class is, in other words, a

“ground zero” moment, ironically and perhaps hauntingly constituting an urban-scape of *conceptual stillness* (in almost hallucinatory fashion) in the middle of dizzying perceptual, *retinal commotion*.

Arguably his most existentially discomfiting work to date (the film harbors numerous political and cultural perspectives on the indie artist’s wondrous, yet – in his own words – “violent” home country), Weerasethakul’s *Cemetery of Splendor* introduces itself by way of a renegade “teaser title,” one that jams together a concerning subject (Thais never find cemeteries unproblematic) with a convivial condition (splendor in such hierarchical, patriarchal cultures evokes some kind of aesthetic surplus, if not suspicious spectacle-making).³² Somewhat hauntingly, the oxymoron “Cemetery of Splendor” could easily constitute a perfect biennial theme in the wake of a military *coup d’état* that was, itself, cleverly *curated*, having arrived neatly (the political term is “bloodless”) in May 2014 with its own carefully crafted happiness culture, the city center penetrated, almost sexually, by monstrous tanks (let us remind ourselves that for all the fascination they hold for little children, they are industrial killing machines) bearing flowers in their erectile canon chambers, their starched pilots languidly “chewing the fat” with passersby and posing for tourist selfies – as though all were enacting a dream sequence scripted by an influencer for Starbucks.

As Weerasethakul has presented it – seemingly self-evident, as though it constituted nothing particularly special – the mortifyingly giddy congress of the open-air aerobics class begins to suggest, just as self-evidently, that it perhaps harbors potential to comprise a grassroots “parliament of bodies” (*documenta 14*, 2018) of hitherto squandered potential for *political activism* (one might say that, for the time being, the collective energies or *agency* of the anonymous “multitude” remain entirely, if not tragically, atomized). There is a latent power to be perceived in the invisible, relational energies flowing between these diehard “Swing” dancers, their invisible ties of community reminding one of lessons in sociability learned from numerous examples of global “participatory” art since the late 1990s (Bourriaud 2002). Both activist and pacifist leaning simultaneously, relational aesthetics has always trafficked in the notion of “tiny revolutions,” the exhibition serving as an arena of “momentary groupings” of social interaction that might change the world modestly, or “within the existing real” (Bourriaud 2002: 11–18). The open-air aerobics class is thus the perfect “relational” exercise, at once productive and potentially anarchic, or proactive and yet completely un-purposeful, the latter in an essentially “pluriversal” sense of a society constituted by unique, individually empowered participants who nonetheless depend upon achieving critical mass for putting forth a collective identity.

How now, to make the necessary transition? Is it possible to fashion a kind of *decolonial curatorial practice*, the conceptual equivalent, perhaps, of an intellectually anarchic “burning and looting” of the metropolitan center (Virgioti 2012)? In an era in which “violence structures our relations in and with the world, as well as the disparate offerings (linguistic, visual, auditory) continually created as a cultural movement of opposition to it” (Latimer and Szymczyk 2017), could there be any such thing as a productive act of *curatorial violence* or *vandalism*? In a region of the world still permeated by colonialist histories (even Thailand, which escaped political domination, internalized the colonialist impulse),³³ what might it mean to arrive at a new curatorial contract between the organizers of biennials and their publics, a contract intent on

achieving a decisive delinking from all colonialist discourses, or from a “Colonial Matrix of Power” (Mignolo 2007) that seems to yet prevail in the discipline?³⁴ This, despite notable challenges to the globalist system posed periodically over the past two decades by über curators, perhaps most notable among them Okwui Enwezor and his efforts at “deterritorialization” for the profoundly discursive *documenta 11*, of 2002, which boasted progressive research-oriented platforms in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos leading up to its culmination in Kassel (Enwezor 2002). If Bangkok were to add anything significant to this evolving discourse, might something intra-regional in potential emerge from a *curistic* (curatorial/artistic) practice of creative and spontaneous, or at least minimally scripted anarchism?³⁵

Out of the adamantly pluriversal, “parliamentary assembly” of the open-air aerobics gathering, in which every individual retains her unique standing while simultaneously expressing a collectively sanctioned contract of mutual respect for, and interdependency with, all others, what might constitute a primarily de-centered, “open-access” biennial platform? The anonymous organizers (they rigorously shunned the label “independent curators” for as long as possible) of the Bangkok Biennial never suggested that the embedding of their event’s inaugural festivities in an open-air aerobics session had any relation with Weerasethakul’s own favoring of the aerobics motif for signifying something existentially provocative, if not artistically and politically *revolutionary*.³⁶ Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that its organizers were apparently unaware of the Thai indie filmmaker’s apparent fascination for the aerobics trope as a metaphor for conformity. Yet one that still bears potential for both the horizontally dispersed energies of political activism (we are, after all, following the thread of a hypothesis in what might be called a theoretically informed, criti-curatorial project) and the Bangkok Biennial’s curatorially operative, open-access format. The entire conceptual and material fruition, nonetheless, proved to be one of the most progressive iterations to date of the biennial as discursive construction, or of the “exhibition as research” (Sheikh 2015), whose work unfolds over time and depends ultimately on its participants and variable audiences for achieving “a sense of cohesion,” indeed where “the meaning of the work (and exhibition) is a negotiation between the sum of its parts – the objects, concepts, labels and spaces or tension between works – in the context of a particular site” (Fowle 2015). By denying themselves the role of the curator, no matter whether the “curatorial” be defined as constituted in a single individual or a collaborative formation, the organizers of the Bangkok Biennial were implicitly testing whether the “curatorial” could be successfully atomized, indeed to such an extent that curatorial practice, as an asterism of conceptual and materialized action, might ultimately be rendered unrecognizable, if not virtually redundant, its principles having been so effectively turned over to the “multitude” of numerous “pavilions” (the latter a traditional institution that was also thoroughly called into question in this context) that simultaneously constructed and deconstructed the biennial as a presumably tangible, if not all-too-familiar, architecture.

What finally complicates this a-curatorial, or even “anti-curatorial” (Heidenreich 2017), distribution of curatorial practice throughout a lateral asterism of self-sustaining pavilions, or platforms, was that the biennial, as composite formation, could by definition be only partly purposeful; this biennial both erected and demolished the biennial exhibitionary model as a privileged subject of contemporary curatorial practice, having both raised the issue of curatorial hegemony and categorically dismissed it and hence the need to retain the “biennial” as a discursive concept all the better to question its prevailing, underlying mythologies. One might say, then,



FIGURE 12.5 Sawangwongse Yawnghwe, *Yawnghwe Office In Exile–Platform To Dissent*. Bangkok Biennial Pavilion: Cartel Artspace, Bangkok 3 August–2 September, 2018. Photo: Preecha Pattara.

that the Bangkok Biennial was by design only quasi-purposeful, its organizers having fully embraced elements of pure chance and “invisibility.” It would be virtually impossible for anyone to take in the biennial in its entirety, as desirable, fundamental qualities of its nature as a globally distributed, time-based, and performative phenomenon. The biennial’s ever-contingent reality of taking place, in simultaneously transpiring over time, and seeing itself to completion, within an actual, nearly un-mappable spatial dimension.

The Bangkok Biennial’s genesis appeared out of nowhere, as well as its persistent rejection of conclusive definition, was marvelously in keeping with its originally ad hoc, even anarchic, conception. Three artist-colleagues sharing a studio (one also ran a neighboring indie art gallery) in Bangkok’s “old city” found themselves wondering in mid-2017 what might have happened to the mythical Pattaya Biennale of several years ago.³⁷ Poshyananda had not yet announced his Bangkok Art Biennale, but its very possibility doubtless ghosted these artists’ more immediate interest in the composite and experimental – even renegade – *documenta 14* “Learning from Athens,” curated by Adam Szymczyk, featuring the work of 160 artists, took place successively in Athens and Kassel from early April through mid-September 2017. *Documenta 14* featured its own radio program for “on air” exhibitions (the provocative genre implicitly carried strong associations with postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon’s concept of radio as a “medium of resistance”), as well as an extensive discursive curriculum of happenings and time-based projects that evoked the possibility of a post-capitalist culture of empathic collaboration and the forging of an “aesthetics of human togetherness” – the latter reflecting recent theoretical investigations into an “anthropology of the otherwise” (Povinelli 2011) that may be implied by “gift economies” as potential models for a post-capitalist condition. At the same time,

documenta 14 adamantly proposed that a truly global, transnational society adopt a critical, decolonialist practice of the “South as a State of Mind” (the eponymous name of a contemporaneous magazine that served as a time-based blog, of sorts, throughout the exhibition’s five-month itinerary), by which is meant one’s assuming the position of the long-marginalized Other in order to thoroughly decolonize *knowledge*, as well as systemic institutional practices based on long histories of Western imperialism and insidiously oppressive policies of *whiteness* (Mignolo 2017).³⁸ Although still directed by a central figure – the curator as prime mover and conceptual catalyst – *documenta 14* explicitly promoted the sprawling group show as a collectively authored phenomenon, one surpassing all categories of personal ownership (a favorite mantra was “*documenta 14* is not owned by anyone in particular”).

If *documenta 14* arguably remained within the realm of utopian discourses characterizing various globalist biennials as early as curator Harald Szeemann’s *documenta 5*, “Questioning Reality, Image Worlds Today”, of 1972 (where the legendary artist-shaman Joseph Beuys himself “curated” his own bureau of “direct democracy”), the Bangkok Biennial would plow headlong into a meaner future by setting up a thoroughly dispassionate, if egalitarian, curatorial premise: anyone who wanted to participate could submit a simple “pavilion” registration of creative intention and pledged collusion, the results of which the organizers would then watch unfold episodically through an infinitely expandable (at least hypothetically) matrix of digital and geopolitical spaces (one could perfectly well put up a “Bangkok Biennial” pavilion in Kassel or Karachi, if one were inclined to do so). An infinitely revisable and open-access wiki site was established for each individual “pavilion,” within which any project could potentially morph as much as it wanted to, and thereby surpass the organizers’ or anyone’s first-person control and hegemonic surveillance. While this seems like a great metaphor for the biennial-as-embodied-democracy, there is nothing saying that such a lateral distribution of curatorial agency necessarily guarantees successful resistance to a hegemonic center (Figure 12.5). As has been observed by those working with new challenges implied in curating digital works of “immateriality,” it is perfectly possible that even when “control is no longer centralized or even decentralized anymore and is [thus] not hierarchical [it] still exists in a distributed form of organization” (Krysa 2006).

So much for Utopia. As if to emphasize the point, the Bangkok Biennial embraced no central theme or subject, opting to resist the first order of business of any biennial wishing to make an impression: the overarching narrative, curatorial manifesto. If it might one day be said that anything held this biennial together, that is beyond its implicit rejection of all preconceived standards or organizational logic – one thinks of Georges Bataille’s concept of the *informe* as constituting a rude disruption of the visual field so as to imply the impossibility of any centrally unified subject (Bois and Krauss 1997) – it would have to emerge from the event itself as an attendant quality arising *episodically*, even *ephemerally*, from collaborative action carried out individually and contingently in numerous places over an extended timespan.

Finally, boasting some 250 participants both regional and distant (one of 73 participating pavilions, for instance, hosted temporary screening events from an artist-run space in Okinawa, while another coordinated site-specific installations in both Bangkok and Maastricht), the Bangkok Biennial anticipated the “open-access” possibilities and challenges implied in an increasingly impersonal, post-narrative curatorial practice currently being actively explored in the realms of digital art and

so-called post-human curating (Tyzlik-Carver 2016). Such practices embrace “distributed network models” that implicitly challenge dated, hierarchical curatorial methodologies – arguably the product of imperialist and hegemonic traditions (the “author-curator” ideal of Western derivation) – thus rendering them increasingly untenable (Krysa 2006).

Perhaps what the Bangkok Biennial ultimately epitomized was the arrival of a “post-curatorial turn” (Sheikh 2017) of provocative implication for the future of any viable Southeast Asian regional, *decolonized curatorial practice* (Mignolo and Nanibush 2018), one by which Southeast Asia might gradually “delink” from its Western well-springs and re-conceptualize contemporary curatorial practice as a more widely inclusive, DIY, and even *post-democratic* – if not conceptually *anarchic* – “wiki” culture. Such an experiment holds out promise for returning biennials to serving artists over their administrators, producing an exhibition that largely turns away from “the traditional biennial model and shifts the power from the institution and the curator towards the artist” (Muñiz-Reed 2017). If the biennial, as curatorial genre, has even arguably become its own kind of institution, one that actively coerces artists to produce implicitly biennial-specific spectacles worthy of Disney (one thinks of Damien Hirst’s *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* in 2007 for the 57th Venice Biennale of 2017, to cite only a recent example), how are we to address that “the curatorial has signaled the ever-present possibility in which institutionalized discourse subsumes radical politics” (Soon 2016)? How is curatorial practice to critique its own embedded reality, not only within multiple institutions but multiple histories – institutional, exhibitions-based, art historical, among others – and thereby fruitfully question how it is itself “ideologically, historically and culturally produced” (O’Neill 2005)?

If the Bangkok Biennial seemed to traffic in some of the most dematerialized qualities of an event characterized by potentially infinite dispersion, it was paradoxically one of the most “grounded” global biennials in recent history. Pavilions by distant artist collectives and progressive locals, among them recent curatorial and fine arts graduates of universities in Bangkok, New York, Chicago, and London, mounted pavilions of performance art, installation art, fine art photography, body art, projects of archival and/or socially-engaged practice, screening of underground film, Dada-inspired karaoke sessions, participatory football, apartment-based (“condo”) art exhibitions, exhibitions of “social sculpture,” sound art, community empowerment workshops, open studios, and acts of “craftivism” (among others).³⁹ There were platforms that functioned as agencies of free translation, self-documentation of the biennial, and a requisite symposium. The material guide to pavilions itself recalled an earlier, 1990s Bangkokian fascination for the DIY artist publication, or scrappy “zine,” which seemed to culminate in artist Rirkrit Tiravanija’s earliest forays into the genre in the oversized zine *VER* (the title alludes to the pronunciation of the Thai word for “excess,” denoting a kind of exceedingly expressive surplus).⁴⁰ In this distinctly grounded, post-orbital quality – a “biennial cacophony” rooted in the “glorious mess” that is the Thai capital – the Bangkok Biennial *delinked* from recent valorizations of the “transnational” in order to recall a new kind of anchoring, if not a “heaviness” or “gravitas” (Adajania and Hoskote 2010) connoting one’s indubitable belonging to a specific time and place despite the simultaneous participation in a global constellation of progressive, artistic citizenship (Figure 12.6).

As though embracing the “case for regarding heaviness as an anchor that keeps us committed to the world’s regional histories, each incarnating a specific entanglement

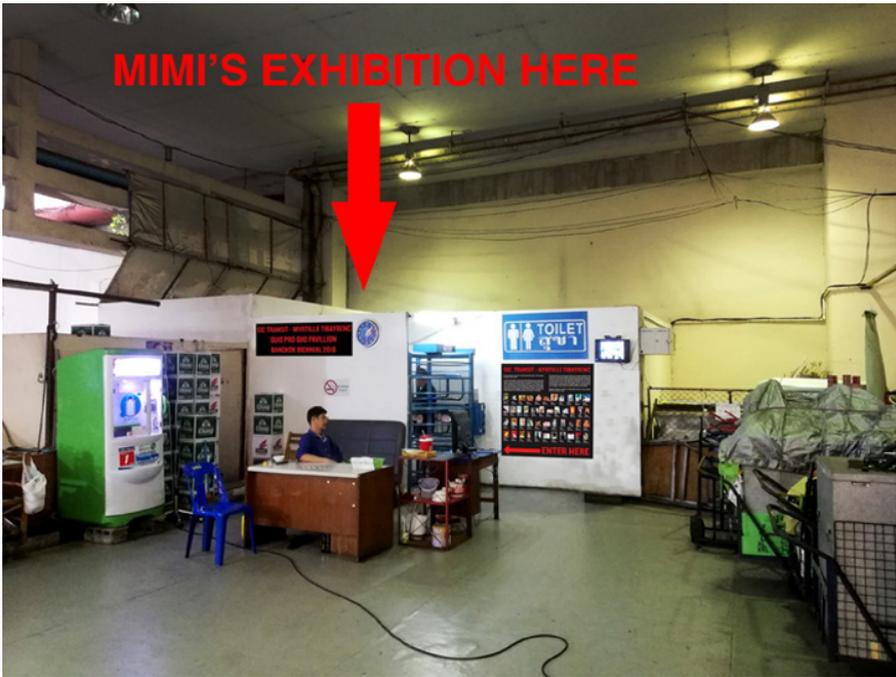


FIGURE 12.6 Myrtille Tibayrenc, *SIC-TRANSIT*. Bangkok Biennial Pavilion: Quid Pro Quo, Liv_Id Collective Bangrak Bazaar, Bangkok. Photo: Courtesy of Toot Yung Gallery, Bangkok.

between home and elsewhere, point of reference and vanishing point, *each with its own intellectual and artistic sources of a regional modernity*,” the Bangkok Biennial embraced the current conditions of a hyper-contemporary, *transitional* postmodern, postcolonial, and post-“altermodern” (one may add to this list “post-transnational”) society, or what has been referred to as an “Agoratic condition” wherein “the ground of politics resembles quicksand more than it does the floor of a debating room” (Adajania and Hoskote 2010).

If the Bangkok Biennial was the smartest and most “contemporary” biennial of what turned out to be for Thailand a hyper-biennialist season, it paradoxically remained underappreciated by most audiences claiming to be engaged with the biennial as curatorial object of perpetual reinvention. It may be instructive to raise a point of comparison. Roughly five years ago, decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo (this text has referenced him frequently, without any apologies for doing so) ecstatically singled out the Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013; *Re:emerge-Towards a New Cultural Cartography*, curated by Yuko Hasegawa) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as signaling a “change of epoch” (Mignolo 2013). Considered from the methodological perspective of his “Decolonial AestheSis,” which prescribes a curatorial practice of “critical intervention” so as to “challenge the hegemonic normativity of modern aestheTics” (Vazquez and Mignolo 2013), Mignolo found in the Sharjah Biennial a new “option that both marks the limits of modernity and its sequels (postmodern, alter-modern, postcolonial), while contributing to global processes of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience.

It is worth noting that, not unlike the Bangkok Biennial, the Sharjah Biennial 11 (SB 11) never set out to explicitly reject anything; in remaining just below the

threshold of political activism, both biennials simply offered an alternative to hegemonic curatorial practice without ever claiming to be an “alternative biennial.” According to SB 11 curator Yuko Hasegawa, who had adopted the “courtyard” and its garden-like principles of multiplicity as a metaphor for cultural memory, the “taking place” of the SB 11 not only signaled a turn away from a Eurocentric viewpoint but embodied a shift toward a new kind of “local consciousness” (Hasegawa 2013).⁴¹ As Mignolo had long ago insisted, one cannot simply delink from a flawed, even tragic, condition (i.e. Western imperialist, colonialist hegemony) without identifying an aspect of indigenous reality to re-link with. How a “curating of the contemporary” in Southeast Asia engages that challenge in its decolonial spaces of the future will constitute a curatorial practice truly worthy of sustained and studied attention.

Notes

- 1 The author intends the term “criti-curatorial” to denote a turn within curatorial practice that has a primarily discursive, over material, object of attention. The exhibition is ultimately a kind of *text*, known and received as such even more widely than the exhibition itself (as material installation). Biennials produce their own historiography, which comprises a widely circulating and reflexive object that the criti-curatorial project “works on” in order to flesh out its full ramifications for both “applied” practice and a more conceptual, critically informed – even theoretical – sub-category of what is already widely understood by the umbrella term “contemporary curatorial practice.” It also seeks to articulate how contemporary curatorial practice is profoundly *embedded* in institutional, exhibition, and art historical matrices that demand simultaneous study if we are to uncover their fundamentally *contextual*, over *auterial*, realities.
- 2 It should be noted that there were brief opening and closing remarks made by Bangkok Biennial staff members, as well as a fleeting ribbon-cutting exercise (one hesitates to call it a ceremony in any real sense of the term) to mark the momentous occasion, arguably in mock-manner of typical Thai art openings of a more academic or bureaucratic nature.
- 3 Other preview talks in the run-up to BAB featured Lee Bul (South Korea), Heri Dono (Indonesia), Michael Elmgreen (of Elmgreen and Dragset, Denmark, and Norway), Pichet Klunchun (Thailand), Yoshitomo Nara (Japan), Huang Yong Ping (China), and Aurèle Ricard (France). The Bangkok Art Biennale derived its multimillion-Thai-baht financing from a constellation of corporate and foundation sources, most prominent and well-heeled among them the Thailand Beverage Public Company Limited (ThaiBev), a frequent corporate funding resource for cultural events in the capital, indeed many at the Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre, the city’s principal *Kunsthalle* – there is no national, collections-based museum of Thai modern and contemporary art in the country – for contemporary art, music, dance, and related programs.
- 4 BAB’s curatorial team of five comprised three Thais and two others tapped regionally, notably all close colleagues of Poshyananda in various academic and curatorial capacities: Patrick D. Flores (University of the Philippines and Vargas Museum, Manila), Luckana Kunavichayanont (formerly Bangkok Art and Culture Centre), Sansern Milandesuta (Bangkok University), and Adele Tan (National Gallery, Singapore). BAB boasted a comparatively illustrious advisory board comprising David Stuart Elliott

- (formerly Moderna Museet, Stockholm and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo), Nanjo Fumio (Mori Art Museum, Tokyo), Nigel Hurst (Saatchi Gallery, London), Sunjung Kim (Gwangju Biennale Foundation), Alexandra Munroe (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), Eugene Tan (National Gallery, Singapore), and Rirkrit Tiravanija (Chiang Mai and Berlin); <http://www.bkkartbiennale.com/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 5 Gaweewong was educated in Arts Administration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the early 1990s, where she wrote a master's thesis (1996) on the feasibility of setting up an alternative art space in Thailand, a goal subsequently achieved in her founding the independent, Bangkok-based platform *Project 304* (ca. 1996–2001). She subsequently arrived at the Jim Thompson Art Center (JTAC) in 2007. Reflecting a general dearth of comparable globe-trotting curators in the country – only several university museums and the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre provide minor exceptions (albeit none is equal to Gaweewong in international reach or influence) – there is notably no additional curator at the JTAC. Rather, Gaweewong presides over a small staff of young, “emerging” culture workers who eventually depart the JTAC in the manner of graduated apprentices in pursuit of their own independent projects.
 - 6 The JTAC is an educational and exhibitions venue of the Jim Thompson House Museum, which is backed by the James H.W. Thompson Foundation (JHWTF), the latter to which Gaweewong serves (2007–present) as a primary advisor. Her direct supervisor, close friend, and colleague Eric Bunnag Booth, Assistant Managing Director of the Thai Silk Company, Ltd., and a perpetual trustee of the JHWTF, is arguably Thailand's most active private collector of Thai contemporary art. Along with stepfather Jean-Michel Beurdeley, Booth has recently built the MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum in the northern city of Chiang Mai (f. 2016), for which Gaweewong effectively serves as its unofficial “guest curator.” Booth is also the primary catalyst behind the new \$3 million-plus expansion of the JTAC on adjacent properties of the Jim Thompson House Museum in Bangkok; Eric Booth in email correspondence with the author, 23 August 2018; also <https://www.gwangjubiennale.org/en/biennale/event/plan.do>, accessed 13 March 2019.
 - 7 Poshyananda was not the first Thai historian to attempt a chronological survey of Thai modern art; a slightly earlier effort by Thai scholar Piriya Krairiksh (b. 1942), who received a doctorate from Harvard University in the early 1970s, doubtless served in some manner as a model for Poshyananda's more lavish, and internationally distributed achievement; see Krairiksh, *Art Since 1932* (Thammasat University, Bangkok, 1982). Poshyananda also participated in Krairiksh's exhibition *Thai Reflections on American Experiences* (Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art, Bangkok, 1986) just prior to taking up the doctoral program at Cornell University.
 - 8 The *Traditions/Tensions* catalogue, bearing on its cover an expressionist self-portrait by Thai artist Chatchai Puipia (b. 1964), remains a classic for early postcolonial and “multicultural” scholarship, with contributions by Geeta Kapur, Thomas McEvilly, Marian Pastor Roces, Jae-Ryung Roe, and Jim Supangkat, in addition to Poshyananda's own introductory and concluding essays. Desai and Poshyananda collaborated on devising the contributors' roster; Vishakha N. Desai in email correspondence with the author, 3 November 2017.
 - 9 On the quasi-orientalist and apparent colonialist leanings of *Magiciens*, see Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962–2002* (New York: Phaidon, 2013), esp. pp. 283–94; for background see also *Third Text*, Special Issue, *Magiciens de la Terre: Les Cahiers* 6 (Spring 1989).

- 10 Although not readily acknowledged by an increasingly politically polarized academy in Southeast Asia today, exhibition histories need to be studied in close and often-times *symbiotic* relation to histories of institutional and curatorial practice, with special attention being paid to how they participate in each other's centripetal, discursive expansions over various geopolitical and chronological horizons.
- 11 Vishakha N. Desai in email correspondence with the author, 3 November 2017.
- 12 It is worth noting that some two decades later we are just beginning to fully appreciate how that moment represented the rise in Southeast Asia of what might be called a "Third Avant-garde," in which contemporary regional artists and their colleagues practicing in various contexts of diaspora were newly synthesizing traditional (and sometimes craft-based) materials with a discourse of "global conceptualism"; see Leonor Veiga, 2017, "The Third Avant-garde: Messages of Discontent," in *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1(2): 91–127; see also Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exh. cat., Queens Museum, Walker Art Center, and Miami Art Museum, 1999.
- 13 Partly influenced by currents in the United States and Europe, mixed media, installation art, environmental art, performance art, and experimental printmaking were increasingly popular disciplines among Poshyananda's Thai colleagues starting in the early 1980s; see Vichoke Mukdamanee, *Mixed Media and Installation Art in Thailand* (Art Center, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, 2002). By 1998, Thailand would see the launch of *Asiatopia*, an annual international performance art festival founded by performance artist Chumpon Apisuk (b. 1948).
- 14 By the time of the opening of the provocative, sociopolitically oriented Whitney Biennial in March of 1993, both Europe and the United States had been host to several major exhibitions more or less explicitly calling for artists and curators to take up social and political topics, if not effectively transform their disciplines into tools of social agitation and political activism. See, for example, the exhibition catalogues for *Choices: Making an Art of Everyday Life*, curator Marcia Tucker, New Museum, New York, 1986; *documenta 8*, curator Manfred Schneckenburger, Kassel, 1987; and *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, curators Elisabeth Sussman et al., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1993.
- 15 Poshyananda first met Abramović in Tokyo in the early 1980s and subsequently hosted her in Thailand in 1983, where she produced, with partner and collaborator Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen), the short experimental film *City of Angels* (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Abramović subsequently returned to Thailand (again at Poshyananda's invitation) in the aftermath of the devastating tsunami of December 2004 to perform *Sea Punishing* (2005), a public "healing event" on the beach at Phuket island (a luxurious resort destination, it was one of the hardest-hit coastlines), which entailed her wading into the ocean and whipping and chopping the waves with her arms in simultaneously benedictory and admonishing fashion (the work survives as a work of video installation).
- 16 For all their problems, biennials provide such rich benefits to their curators and host governments that they are not likely to be abandoned anytime in the near future. For curators, they have become a coveted path to global celebrity, even for those claiming to be fundamentally critical of the *biennial as spectacle* (at least one emerging "auteur-curator" in Southeast Asia has recently gone so far as to imply that one must curate a biennial to qualify as a proper critic of the genre, a patently absurd proposition, but

- one that allows the curator to perpetuate the biennial phenomenon while purportedly remaining fashionably critical of it). For municipal governments, the biennial is doubtless only one among a number of ways of “art washing” their communities, often while pursuing profoundly inequitable gentrification schemes of urban redevelopment.
- 17 The role of the biennial in regard to Asian contemporary art’s emergence on a global stage is discussed at length by John Clark in his forthcoming *Contemporary Asian Art at Biennials* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019). The author is grateful to Clark for sharing with him an advance copy of the manuscript in the course of writing this essay.
 - 18 Poshyananda has suggested that the apparently benign theme of Beyond Bliss was always intended as a partly *paradoxical* one, and that BAB invited artists to “critically comment on the conditions in the world we live in, including the state of delusion in this country” (Poshyananda in text message correspondence with the author, 1 August 2018). Notably, only the most informed observer might have gleaned this from BAB publicity materials, which merely hinted at such a paradoxical concept in gingerly stating how any “blissful” condition of “happiness” was “seeming unattainable” in a time “when different parts of the world are going through their own dilemmas”; *Bangkok Art Biennale 2018*, Issue 1, March 2018, p. 2; <http://www.bkkartbiennale.com/content/e-bab-mag-1.pdf>, accessed 13 March 2019.
 - 19 Tassananchalee’s installation in the Thai National Pavilion comprised a playful, oversized stainless-steel sculptural installation *Earth, Air, Fire, and Water*, based on the Four Elements; see Gregory Galligan, 2015, “Atlas Bangkok: Who’s/Whose Thai Contemporary?” in *Art in America* 103(5): 65–66.
 - 20 In keeping with state-administered, hierarchical projects, lead curator Jiang Jiehong was assisted by four assistant curators and four curatorial assistants. Sixty “emerging” regional and international artists were chosen to participate in an exhibition of entirely open-air, site-specific installations spread over several natural and heritage-designated venues throughout Krabi province.
 - 21 Poshyananda’s “inspirational” curatorial practice is readily reflected in the titles of his major exhibitions – *Thailand Eye: Contemporary Thailand Art*, 2015; *Thai Transience*, 2013; *Bangkok Bananas*, 2010; *Traces of Siamese Smile: Art+Faith+Politics+Love*, 2010 – all invariably evoking a troubled regional, global, or historical backdrop against which he paints a conciliatory, if sometimes contingent, tone of existential reckoning. This tendency toward a *therapeutic* method in Poshyananda’s practice extends all the way back to his earliest exhibitions for Asia Society, not only in *Traditions/Tensions*, of 1996, but in his follow-up, monographic exhibition *Montien Boonma: Temple of the Mind*, of 2003, where Asia Society audiences were treated to a profoundly Buddhist-inflected interpretation of the work of a pivotal Thai contemporary who actually embraced Buddhism only after exhausting an earlier, more socio-politically inflected ideology. For comparatively more conflicted readings of Boonma’s aesthetic, see [*Montien Boonma*]: *Unbuilt/Rare Works*, exh. cat., curated by Gregory Galligan and Gridthiya Gaweewong, Jim Thompson Art Center, Bangkok, 2013.
 - 22 For details pertaining to the launch of BAB at Venice, see <http://www.bkkartbiennale.com/inaugural-launch-bab>, accessed 1 September 2018. The “canikon” is an experienced photography professional that favors slightly older Canons and Nikons; the author extends thanks to Christian Hogue for this reference.

- 23 As early as 2010, during the height of political tensions in the capital, it was widely known that Poshyananda's multi-venue festival *Bangkok Bananas*, which was apparently inspired in part by the Mori Art Museum's exhibition *All about Laughter: Humor in Contemporary Art* (2007), served as a virtual "pilot run" for a fully fledged biennale that the curator longed to realize one day in the capital. Hence the so-called Pattaya Biennale could not help connoting a kind of intra-national, geopolitical counterfoil to Poshyananda's centrist, inspirational curatorial agenda.
- 24 As is amply reflected in her Gwangju Biennale 2018 platform "Facing Phantom Borders," which explores themes of migration and "deterritorialization," Gawewong has long claimed publicly that her primary curatorial interests lie in "decentralizing" the Thai art scene and focusing on "small narratives," i.e. the uncovering of untold histories of the politically and socially (and thus artistically) marginalized; see <https://www.gwangjubiennale.org/en/biennale/event/composition.do>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 25 Sethaseree has confirmed that the Pattaya Biennale was conceived in the spirit of catalyzing the "art economy" of Thailand "towards other directions, or [away from] the status quo of artistic discourse centered in Bangkok"; Sethaseree in text message correspondence with the author, 23 August 2018.
- 26 Some of the renegade, postcolonial spirit of the Pattaya Biennale informed the inaugural *Khonkaen Manifesto 2018* (6–26 October 2018), and its stated ideology of an "Aesthetics of Resistance," staged in the heart of Isaan country by Bangkok-based curator and academic Thanom Chapakdee; see <http://khonkaenmanifesto.art/home/> (accessed 13 March 2019). Chapakdee, a close associate of the Pattaya Biennale cabal, confirms that the *Khonkaen Manifesto* partly intends to encourage a "community-based" and "participatory perspective" implicitly acting "against the mainstream art of Thailand [that is] mostly based in/from the center (Bangkok)"; Chapakdee in text message correspondence with the author, 21 August 2018.
- 27 In early October of 2014, notably only months after the military *coup d'état* in the Thai capital, Poshyananda's comments were made in a keynote speech in Tokyo for the Innovative City Forum 2014, where he spoke on *Creative Chaos: Art and Design for a Chaotic Future*; <http://icf.academyhills.com/2014/en/index.html>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 28 It has become commonplace (both within and outside of the country) since the military *coup d'état* of May 2014 to speak of Thailand as suffering a "lost decade" (ca. 2006–2016) in political and economic development (to which one might arguably add "cultural" development, despite an unceasing, distracting culture of "festivalism"); *The Wall Street Journal*, 2014. "Coup worsens worries over Thailand's lost decade." <https://www.wsj.com/articles/thai-coup-worsens-worries-over-lost-decade-1400827373>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 29 English subtitles from screenplay of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour*, 2015 (modified slightly by the author to convey various shades of mood in the cinematic original).
- 30 See Travis Bean, "How the final scenes of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films represent the divided, inquisitive souls of his characters," *Film Colossus*, 1 June 2017; <https://www.filmcolossus.com/single-post/2017/06/01/Apichatpong-Weerasethakul-filmography-endings-progression-divided-inquisitive-characters>, accessed 13 March 2019; see also *Thislight.org*, "The films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and public aerobics," 16 December 2017, http://thislight.org/ThisLight_Stuttgart.html, accessed 13 March 2019.

- 31 David Teh has notably characterized the historical evolution of Thai modern and contemporary art as “traveling without moving”; see Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).
- 32 Notably Weerasethakul’s traveling solo exhibition *Apichatpong Weerasethakul: The Serenity of Madness* (2016–present), by Independent Curators International (ICI) and curated by Gridthiya Gaweewong, once again repeats the oxymoronic curatorial formula by juxtaposing terms of stark contradiction.
- 33 For Thailand’s internalization of the colonialist impulse (sometimes referred to as “internal colonialism”) of the late nineteenth century, see Thongchai Winichakul, “The quest for ‘Siwilai’: A geographical discourse of civilizational thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Siam,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59(3) (August 2000): 528–49; see also Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); and Michael Herzfeld, “The conceptual allure of the West: Dilemmas and ambiguities of crypto-colonialism in Thailand,” in Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson (eds), *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010): 173–86.
- 34 The concept of a “colonial matrix of power” (CMP) derives from the theoretical work of Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano (1930–2018); Mignolo summarizes the CMP as denoting four interrelated, colonialist domains: “control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)”; see Walter D. Mignolo. 2007. Coloniality of power and decolonial thinking. *Culture Studies* 21(2–3): 155–67; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09502380601162498>, accessed 13 March 2019. For Quijano’s seminal text on the subject, see Aníbal Quijano. (2000) Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South* 1(3): 533–80; a reprint is provided by Mignolo in the same issue of *Culture Studies* (cited above).
- 35 The author is proposing the term “curistic” as denoting a collaborative enterprise in which the curatorial and the artistic aspects are not only shared, as in a traditional sense of “collaboration,” but also *obscured*, or even implicitly *rejected* as being identifiable as such (i.e. a binary construction) by the exhibition’s material outcome. This is in distinct contrast to the recent development of “curating as a medium of artistic practice,” or employing the “exhibition as medium”; on the latter, see Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), esp. pp. 87–129.
- 36 The core organizers of the Bangkok Biennial were finally self-identified in mid-2018 (as the BB opened to the public) as comprising the Bangkok-based artists Unchalee Anantawat (Thailand, b. 1982), Jeff Gompertz (United States, n.d.), and Liam Morgan (Canada, 1982); who were further assisted and/or advised by artist Mit Jai Inn (Thailand, 1960) and the independent curator Penwadee Nophaket Manont (United States, 1983). Notably, when queried why they chose the open-air aerobics class format for their inaugural venue, Morgan never mentioned Weerasethakul’s “trope” in the course of listing several quotidian reasons why they settled upon the Rama VIII Bridge as constituting a particularly desirable, “found” format; Liam Morgan in email correspondence with the author, 31 July 2018.

- 37 The author is grateful to the Bangkok Biennial's organizers for agreeing to meet after the biennial's official launch to discuss the biennial's conceptual and material genesis (17 July 2018).
- 38 It is worth noting that the Bangkok Art Biennale and the Thailand Biennale both featured exclusively Asian curators. Poshyananda explains this as a practical necessity for ensuring that his curatorial team were familiar with the region and its artist-practitioners, especially given that nearly 50% of his participating artists were Thai, or Thailand-based in practice; Poshyananda in text message correspondence with the author, 1 August 2018. Co-Curator Patrick Flores has independently suggested that this curatorial arrangement was particularly salutary at a time when Southeast Asia needs to construct its own modernist and contemporary histories distinctly apart from prevailing Western imperialist methodologies; Flores in email correspondence with the author, 30 July 2018. (Disclosure: Co-curator Adele Tan was invited to lend her own thoughts on this subject but was ultimately unable to respond in time for publication.)
- 39 For the complete program, see *Bangkok Biennial: Guide to Pavilions, 01.07–30.09.18* (Bangkok: Bangkok Biennial). http://bangkokbiennial.com/Bangkok_Biennial-Guide_to_Pavilions_2018/Bangkok_Biennial-Guide_to_Pavilions_2018.pdf, accessed 1 September 2018.
- 40 The experimental zine *VER* (originally briefly *O-ver*) was published by the Bangkok-based, artist-run platform Namdee Publishing Station (subsequently Gallery VER) in a pilot edition in 2000; it was followed by only three additional issues released between 2000 and 2005.
- 41 Yuko Hasegawa in conversation with the author, 22 June 2018, Bangkok; see also Hasegawa, "Re: Emerge: Towards a new cultural cartography," *Sharjah Biennale 11* (Sharjah Art Foundation, 2013): 18–25.

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Curated from Within

The Artist as Curator

Alex Gawronski

It is a little-recognized fact that artists curated many of modernity's most iconic and influential exhibitions. The individual and collective curatorial activities of artists paved the way for the emphatic role professional curators would play much later. What was revealing about modern artist-curated exhibitions was the primacy they accorded the art and artists exhibited: curating was a means of staking a wider socio-political position as an artist. The notion of the curator's professional prestige and cultural power was of little concern to these artists staging epochal exhibitions. Besides, at the time, curating was by nature a conservative occupation centered on the archiving and preservation of existing collections. It was artists who were first to grasp the potential of the exhibition as a truly modern, conceptually testing, sociocritical form. Artists seized the exhibition medium as a means of propelling their formal, conceptual, and political concerns into a wider public arena. They altered the very notion of what an exhibition could be, both aesthetically and via questioning the idea of what it meant to present art in the first place. The individual and collective gestures of modern artist-curators left an indelible mark on a new breed of dedicated curators. The 1960s witnessed the ascendancy of maverick independent curators. They valorized and embraced, somewhat paradoxically, the frequently anti-institutional curatorial tendencies of artist-curators like Kazimir Malevich and especially Marcel Duchamp. Close to contemporary artists, important curators of this period regarded curating as a creative rather than presentational act. The 1980s saw the burgeoning of new art institutions and the expansion of the professional curatorial degree. These developments were buoyed by an economic boom, especially in the US and northern Europe. Such a situation fueled curators to realize bigger and more ambitious exhibitions, most significantly, the global biennale. Despite experiencing a comparative economic downturn, the 1990s saw the rise of the star-curator. Propelled by institutional and commercial favor, the star-curator became the key articulator of

contemporary artistic and cultural discourses on a global scale. The formative position artists had once held as curators during modernity was publicly reversed. Not entirely, though. Increasing skepticism about the curator as a type of celebrity, and the increasingly spectacular nature of their exhibitions, led numerous artists to found and curate their own museums and related institutions. From here they interrogated the cultural authority of curating by proposing it more generally as a fiction. Elsewhere, other artists and artist collectives began to deploy interventionist and quasi-activist modes of curation. In both instances, the artist-curator practiced curating from within as an extension of artistic practice. They challenged the assumptions of institutionalized “auteurist” curating particularly as it was growingly beset by neoliberal demands and corporate expectations. In fact, independent artists co-practicing as curators have eked out positions from which they uniquely question the dictates and effects of capital on contemporary culture, including the culture of curating.

The Importance of Precedents: Three Case Studies

Modernism aimed generally at the complete overhaul of artistic and cultural traditions. Its artistic exponents represented an extreme, often ideologically warring, diversity of positions and attitudes. The changes modernist artists desired to make within the cultures in which they lived and worked extended to curatorial action. Unquestionably, the exhibition became one of the foremost mediums for the presentation of advanced thinking about art, culture, politics, and society while providing a forum from which to challenge conventional notions of all of these. At its most ideologically driven, curating became a means of advancing formal experiment in parallel with the radical reshaping of modern society. This was seen in the curatorial exploits of the Russian avant-garde at a time of momentous sociopolitical change. Curating also took the shape of the equally radical questioning of the nature of art and its institutions. Marcel Duchamp, friend and associate of Dada and Surrealist artists, variously pursued such an approach. Duchamp was an artist who had undertaken an (“anti”) career based on repeatedly questioning the core assumptions traditionally defining artistic value. Artist curating was also importantly transcultural and transdisciplinary. In an increasingly internationalist context, the curatorial experiments of artists in nations until then considered “closed,” spread relatively quickly to others generally regarded as artistic centers. This was the case with the Japanese *Gutai* movement. Its influence on modern art in the West was considerable not least because it pursued the individualism of highly atypical formal experiments from within a collective practice rooted in discursive interaction. These precedents opened important paths for many artist-curators to come.

0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures: Kazimir Malevich, Xenia Boguslavskaya, Ivan Puni, Petrograd, 1915

Contrary to its description, *0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* was one of the first and undoubtedly most significant public outings of contemporary avant-garde art in Russia. Decisively underlying the exhibition’s conception and appearance was its joint curation by three artists: Kazimir Malevich, Xenia Boguslavskaya

(also known as Kseniya or Ksenia Boguslavskaya), and Ivan Puni. These artists, and the important exhibition they mounted, were deeply immersed in a climate of significant sociohistoric upheaval. Predating the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, the contemporary radicalism of the work presented in *0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* spoke to its specific historical embedding. Any consideration of the nature of this artist-curated exhibition must take into account its organizers' parallel commitment to the course of radical artistic and social change, or their conviction that the former would occasion the latter. Part of these artists' commitment to wide-scale transformation was their essential re-casting of the roles of art and artist. For Malevich and the Suprematists, art was to be the dematerialized anti-representational "zero-point" from which the new society would arise (Chlenova 2012), a "tabula rasa on which the new visual practices of socialism (would) take form" (McNeill 2005: 7). The Suprematists sought to surmount base material concerns, calling instead for a thorough overhaul of tradition, including, importantly, that evidenced by official museum culture. The Constructivists, on the other hand, led by Malevich's key rival Vladimir Tatlin, and as that movement's name suggests, explicitly emphasized the artist as a type of socially embedded engineer. The artist was a worker among other workers. Their position within the new socialist society was one of alignment rather than dissent (Groys 2016: 62). The artist-worker would construct the new society from within, using the latest technological and industrial means. Common to both Suprematism and Constructivism, however, was their revolutionary emphasis on immanence. Art would be an outmoded concept to be replaced by much more socially integrated modes of cultural production. An immanent art was revolutionary because it was not grounded in pictorial tradition dictated by representational habit. In fact, such an art was resolutely nonrepresentational. Accordingly, this new art would occupy itself with the constant reformulating and building of the present. Art's task was to annihilate and build, not to reiterate.

Calling for the complete rethinking of art and of museums meant the equally radical rethinking of curatorial practice. Certainly, no professional curator in Russia would have proposed the wholesale destruction of museums as Malevich did (Groys 2016: 64). For Malevich as a co-curator, *0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* was not a mere professional stepping-stone conditioned by an orthodox individualistic artistic ambition. For Malevich and the Suprematists, as much for Tatlin and the Constructivists, collective orientation was paramount. Indeed, the "communist" impulse underlying *0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* was central to its curatorial imagining. This meant that at times it was practically impossible to discern individual authors among works by either Suprematists or Constructivists. The new antirepresentational formal vocabularies of these artist collectives, no matter how dissimilar their camps, were endlessly inventive but also, crucially, largely interchangeable and effectively transpersonal. Questions of form were equally questions of politics. For both Suprematist and Constructivist artists, form was inherently political because it aimed to displace entirely the traditional role of representation in art. Malevich and the Suprematists unconventionally orientated their pictures toward the corners of the exhibition space in staggered clusters. Works were interspersed with handwritten polemical statements. Many were numbered but unnamed. As has often been remarked, Malevich's iconic *Black Square* surmounted the highest corner of the overall pictorial assemblage where it symbolically displaced the position of

the Orthodox religious icon (Néret 2003; Chlenova 2012; Shatskikh 2012). In the adjoining rooms, Tatlin's *Corner Reliefs* (1914–1916), constructed of industrial rather than typical art materials, animated the usually overlooked juncture between walls. From this position, they functioned as visual fulcrums from which the rest of the museum space opened out. Denying the frontally static, Tatlin's works dynamically implicated the museum itself as an active construction, a type of experimental factory. As a curatorial endeavor enacted by artists, *0.10 – The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* was of utmost significance in its foregrounding of art production and presentation as collective undertakings. As a willful act, curating was intimately, rather than merely circumstantially, tied to sociopolitical conditions. The exhibition's aim was committedly connected to the realization of related sociopolitical alternatives. The collectivism of Suprematist and Constructivist modes of organization anticipate activist curatorial practices in the twenty-first century.

Marcel Duchamp and the *First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942

The *First Papers of Surrealism* was a seminal presentation of Surrealist art in an international context. Although Surrealism's leader and head spokesman, the poet André Breton, was listed as the exhibition's "curator," the artist Marcel Duchamp undertook the greater curatorial and staging tasks for the show. By 1942, the exhibition format had already "become a type of artistic-medium" (Kachur 2014: 143) for Duchamp. Undoubtedly, Duchamp's prodigious drive to expose the framing parameters that allowed art to be read as art, most emblematically encapsulated in his ready-mades such as the (in)famous urinal *Fountain* of 1913, heavily conditioned his activities as a curator. Earlier Duchamp had behaved as "*générateur arbitre*" (144) of the epochal Surrealist exhibition the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* presented in Paris in 1938. Indeed, through this show, "Duchamp inaugurated the curatorial paradigm through his understanding of the exhibition as a means of interrogation, a tool by which to critically question the limits of both the (art) object and its institutions" (Filipovic 2012: 160). In the case of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* this act extended quite literally to supplying visitors with torches to view paintings in an exhibition mounted in otherwise darkened rooms. No longer could the artwork be exempted from its surroundings as it was forced now to become an actor within an exhibition scenario whose boundaries extended beyond the confines of the gallery or museum. Most famously, Duchamp hung a multitude of coal sacks from the highly decorative ceiling of the venerated though otherwise stuffy Musée des Beaux Arts, completely obscuring it as coal dust intermittently rained on the expensive opening attire of visitors. Duchamp also installed a steel brazier replete with live coals in the center of the museum space. Provocatively, such an object was more readily associated with groups of homeless and unemployed men who lived precarious contemporary lives partially in public.

These exhibition tendencies pronounced in the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* were further developed for the *First Papers of Surrealism*. Most notable about the exhibition was its inclusion of Duchamp's so-called *Sixteen Miles of String* (Figure 13.1). Lacing the entire exhibition with a continuous length of twine,

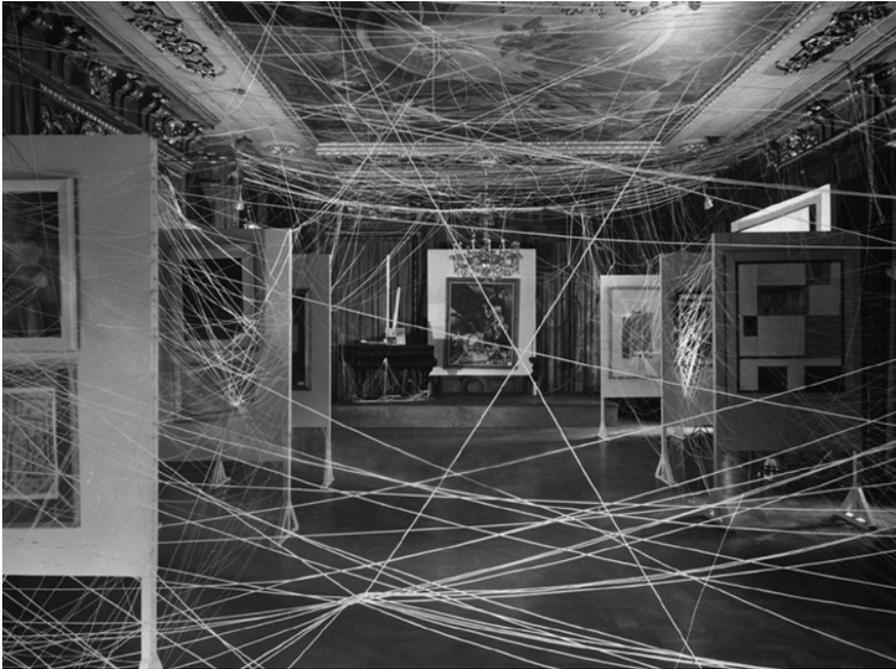


FIGURE 13.1 Installation view of exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* showing Marcel Duchamp's *Sixteen Miles of String*, 1942. Gelatin silver print. © John D. Schiff. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library & Archives, Gift of Jacqueline, Paul and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp, 13-1972-9(303), Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

Duchamp created a temporal spiderweb-like labyrinth that prevented exhibition goers from moving freely about the museum space. In doing so, he again forced a dramatic reconsideration of what museum space was: was it the space of free contemplation often presumed of it, especially from the New World perspective of a postwar New York hungry for new ideas? Similarly, it asked, was the museum the space of democratic free expression habitually expected of it by artists? In the first instance, the answer was ambiguous for, by partly blocking both wide and intimate views of the art, the museum visitor was likely confounded by their frustration at not being able to see, and thus symbolically possess, everything on show. By the same token, in the second instance artists whose works were now semi-occluded by fellow artist Duchamp's curatorial gesture were implicitly compelled to deal with the fact of their works' physical inaccessibility. Such inaccessibility could possibly prevent monetary acquisition by collectors as well. Moreover, were the *Sixteen Miles of String* a work by Duchamp? It is impossible to imagine it outside its exhibition situation, while it was obviously equally an "autonomous" artistic deed. Ultimately, Duchamp's curatorial direction of *the First Papers of Surréalism*, hinging on the *Sixteen Miles of String*, simultaneously proposed and problematized the curatorial act as equally an artistic one. In this way, curating itself was transformed into a work of art (Filipovic 2012). As it was inherently spatially contingent on the architecture it entwined, *Sixteen Miles of String* dually questioned the assumed autonomy of art as the production of discreet aesthetic products, and curating as the simple thematic organizing of existing artworks. In fact, the true audacity of

Duchamp's activities as an artist-curator lay in his conflating and emphasizing the interpenetrability of both art-making and art-exhibiting. This fundamental re-conceptualizing of the notion of both art and curating was to be highly influential on subsequent artists, curators, and exhibition designers. It was especially influential on artists engaged in what was later known as "institutional critique."

The First *Gutai Art Exhibition*, the Gutai Art Association, Tokyo 1955

Post-World War II Japan represented a culture in dramatic flux. Under US occupation, generationally cemented social and political relations in Japan were suddenly subjected to critical scrutiny and questioning as part of far-reaching sociopolitical transformation. Democratization, however, brought with it its own restrictions about what could be expressed and by whom. Responding to this turbulent environment while simultaneously challenging the inscribed rigidity of prewar national(ist) culture, the *Gutai Art Association*, all of whom were practicing artists, aimed to explode the possibilities of contemporary artistic production in Japan. The majority of artists associated with *Gutai* came from Ashiya, west of heavily industrialized Osaka. *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* was the group's first presentation of their work in the nation's recovering capital. "Among the most experimental artists working after World War II" (Altshuler 2008: 339), *Gutai* embraced performative possibilities that emphasized physicality and impermanence. Rather than producers of discrete commodities, *Gutai* artists welcomed an extreme relativity that favored gesture over product. Defying the gravity and restrained sensibility common to much traditional Japanese art, *Gutai* practitioners pursued instead the force of direct action and the aesthetic and conceptual potential of unconventional materials.

Unlike a standard exhibition of separate works, *Gutai* collectivism contributed an overall environmental dimension to their inaugural show. Central to the overall atmosphere of the *Gutai* exhibition was its deliberate engagement with senses other than the primarily visual. Atsuko Tanaka's *Work (Bell)* (1955–1993) incorporated a switch that sequentially activated a series of 20 work bells throughout Ohara Hall in Tokyo, where the exhibition was staged. The piece further functioned as something of a critique of the remorseless and ruthlessly competitive salary culture then accelerating in Japan. Murakami Saburo's *At One Moment Opening Six Holes* involved the artist breaking through a series of stretched paper screens six times on the opening day. This simultaneously auditory performance added to the expanded sensory aspect of the show. Elsewhere, Kazuo Shiraga performed *Challenging Mud* (1955), for which he famously wrestled a pit of wet clay using his body to literally "paint" the earth. In another room, Akira Kanayama's contribution was a huge balloon occupying and obscuring the ceiling where it hung. Nearby, arranged over the floor, was a series of 25 tin cans coated in bright metallic paint by Tsuruko Yamazaki. The sheer difference and endemic experimentalism of the works shown in *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* attested to a similarly experimental curatorial approach. Considered as a whole, this exhibition's distinct parts ultimately contributed to a greater environmental effect. From a curatorial perspective, the collectivism of the artists who staged *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* was somewhat reminiscent of that of the Suprematists and Constructivists of the Russian avant-garde, no matter how individualistic they otherwise were. *The Gutai Art Association* conceived themselves as a mutually

committed, tightly knit group whose founder, Jiro Yoshihara, described as working “together very harmonically” (Chong 2012: 351) “devoting their energies solely to *Gutai* projects” (Chong 2012: 50). As a collective, they openly encouraged the shared possibilities of group discussion and discursive interplay (Tomii 2016: 27). This explicitly discursive tendency could be traced back to Yoshihara’s formation in 1951, of the *Contemporary Art Discussion Group* known as *Genbi*. The considerable diversity of experimentation evident in *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* foresaw many key tendencies of 1960s art. These included Happenings, Installation, Land Art, Performance and Sound Art. More widely, *The First Gutai Art Exhibition* anticipated various trends in contemporary art by many years. These number a range of discursive tendencies loosely associated with “relational aesthetics” and posthuman materialist tendencies connected with what has been dubbed the “Anthropocene” (Davis and Turpin 2015). Moreover, *Gutai*’s curatorial approach precedes varieties of contemporary multimedia, extended installation, and performance practices that have become pivotal to global curatorial events like biennales.

From Artist-curator to Curator-creator

The artist-curated exhibitions mentioned above represent but a small sample of related endeavors that defined avant-garde artistic activity from at least the late nineteenth century. In fact, the effects of the formation by artists in 1884, of the *Salon des Indépendants* in Paris, spread throughout the modern era and beyond and ultimately testified to the artist’s centrality as the key creator of advanced exhibitions up until the 1960s. The degree to which artists utilized the exhibition context as a platform to advance and interrogate ideas about art, society, and politics dramatically transformed what exhibiting had been. The implications of this alteration were not lost on subsequent generations of curators. By the 1960s, professional curating effectively became “an extension of the project of the historical avant-garde” (O’Neill 2012: 9). This meant that advanced exhibition-making shifted more and more out of the hands of artists and into the hands of independent curators. Notable among this new generation of curators, art world identities in themselves, were figures like Harald Szeemann, Lucy Lippard, and Seth Siegelaub. Significantly, such practitioners were itinerant rather than dependent on the stable employment of particular cultural organizations or institutions. More generally they evidenced the “rise of the curator as creator” (Cherix 2010: 7). Curators of their ilk were categorically no longer mere arrangers of contemporary artifacts. Their curatorial enterprises were unarguably innovative in their extrapolation of what they identified as major artistic and social dispositions within contemporary culture. By the late 1980s, the growth of independent curating, coinciding with the significant expansion of related specialist education particularly in Europe and the US, saw the first curatorial training program in Europe established at Le Magasin in Grenoble, France. This was followed in the same year by the initiation of the highly influential Art/Museum Studies component of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) later renamed Curatorial and Critical Studies (O’Neill 2012: 2). The professionalization of the contemporary role of the curator during the 1980s took heed of 1960s examples while seeking ways to institutionalize the otherwise maverick curatorial efforts of these earlier practitioners. The 1980s also crucially witnessed a boom in art markets that had dramatic effects on the wider ecology of

contemporary art (Žerovc 2015). Linked was the equally dramatic expansion, both physically and geographically, of mass group exhibitions of current art. The globalization of the art market encouraged the rapid rise to dominance of the biennale and its variants as the paradigmatic form of global contemporary exhibition. Western curators' increased access to and knowledge of non-Western contemporary art echoed the impact of Western markets on geopolitical regions previously considered peripheral, culturally or economically impenetrable. Despite a new emphasis on collective curating and the principled politicization of globally themed biennales, influential curators of this period nonetheless assumed roles as authoritative "auteurs," shapers of transdisciplinary discourses. Following from the expanded curatorial platforms assumed by curators like Okwui Enwezor, Francesco Bonami, and Charles Esche in the 1980s, was the emergence, in the 1990s, of the star-curator (Filipovic 2012, Balzer 2014). The hypervisibility of the star-curator signified more broadly the ultimate solidification and institutionalized professionalization of curatorial discourse within the globalized world. Curators like Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Klaus Biesenbach have become widely mediated spokespeople and important arbiters of contemporary values within a now endemically globalized culture. Such curators, apparently driven, work in idiosyncratic, highly subjective, and artistic ways. Simultaneously, even if seemingly paradoxical or incidental at times, the sheer scale of their exhibitions has drawn contemporary art ever closer to spectacular expressions of global commercial culture. For many, the ambitious, open-ended productions of these curators have come to literally define contemporary art (Birnbbaum et al. 2011).

In 1969, Harald Szeemann staged the exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form – Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* at the Kunsthalle Bern. The exhibition foregrounded some of the most experimental developments in late 1960s art. The show's combined formal and apparently casual physical organization, many of the included works' unconventional use of non-art materials, and its overall discursiveness were somewhat reminiscent of the much earlier *First Gutai Art Exhibition*. Indeed, the exhibition's spatial blurring of boundaries between separate objects and the identities of their authors, regardless of how well known, creatively transformed the exhibition into an open dialogue around a wide range of contemporary art trends. These included Minimalism, Arte-Povera, Conceptual Art, and its derivatives like "Process Art" and "Information Art." This sense of the dialogic interpenetration of varieties of works is readily apparent in documentation from the exhibition. Importantly, the show testified to Szeemann's embedding in, multiple absorption, and incorporation of a wide range of prevalent artistic practices as though he too were an artist projecting his own ideas into the exhibition space (von Hantelmann 2017: 226). Lucy Lippard, an important critic and theorist of 1960s conceptual art and the "dematerialization of the art object" (Lippard 1997), also practiced as an autonomous curator. In her Seattle exhibition *557, 087*, also held in 1969, Lippard received instruction works from a broad range of well-known Conceptual and Minimalist artists, including Sol LeWitt, Michael Heizer, Jan Dibbets, Carl Andre, and Richard Serra. She then proceeded to execute these herself, thus testing the limits of this system of the distant transfer of artistic information. Lippard also freely acknowledged instances where it had been impossible to realize the works to the artist's specifications, had mistaken aspects of the artists' instructions, or where works had simply failed to turn up in time (O'Neill 2012: 15). Questioning the presumed imperviousness of the curated exhibition while acting literally as an artist,

accorded closely with the inclinations of the artists she chose to show. In a related vein, Seth Siegelaub became one of the most fervent supporters of Conceptual Art. This was at a time that for him “the different art world categories were breaking down ... the idea of the gallery dealer, curator, artist-curator, critic-writer, painter-writer, all these categories were becoming fuzzy, less clear” (O’Neill 2012: 19). For the exhibition *January 5–31, 1969*, Siegelaub chose to align himself with a variety of artists who produced work that deliberately questioned the primacy of the commodified object within the art world. Among these artists were Robert Barry, famous for his otherwise invisible work with inert gasses; Douglas Huebler, who issued statements pointedly challenging the purpose of art production; Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth, who focused differently on notional and interrogative uses of situated text. In their roles as curators, Szeemann, but especially Lippard and Siegelaub, took on the anti-art legacy set in motion by Duchamp. By adopting stances that were far removed from, even antithetical to, the preservational role of the traditional curator, key curators of the 1960s internalized and embraced the interrogative practices of previous generations of avant-garde artists. In this way, they effectively transformed themselves into artists.

The rapid proliferation of the biennale form across the globe in the 1980s significantly transformed the curator’s role. The internationally orientated though comparatively localized experimental expressions of independent curators of the 1960s, as had also been the case for the formative exhibitions of avant-garde artist-curators, now became resolutely global in focus. Attendant with this widening exhibition scenario was a tendency toward curating as a collective enterprise. However, rather than undermining the idea of the curator as creator, the collective impulse within new global curating practices echoed important art historical examples of collectivization among earlier artist-curating avant-gardes. Related, too, was the fact that such collective curating of necessarily networked exhibitions, like global biennales, frequently pursued overtly political agendas. The politicized ambitions of the Russian avant-gardes, aiming to transform world sociopolitical structures in alliance with the Soviet Revolution, was now partially echoed in contemporary exhibitions whose theoretical intentions were to collectively wrest cultural dominance from entrenched Western centers. For example, for the 2002 Kassel *documenta 11*, renowned Nigerian-born curator Okwui Enwezor invited six co-curators to mount a series of five globally charged “platforms.” Collectively, these sought to foreground *documenta*’s “commitment (to) global issues” in order to “break with the occidendo-centrism of the art world” (Lesage 2011: 67). Francesco Bonami’s 50th Venice Biennale of 2003 invited a group of 11 co-curators to complete the exhibition. Curiously, this tactic was deployed to avoid “unwieldy thematic structures” (Rugoff 2003), while the exhibition everywhere invoked a “rhetoric of emergency ... to grapple with global problems” (Rugoff 2003). Nonetheless, the 11 interrelated exhibitions comprising the 50th Venice Biennale listed the individual curator’s name at the entrance to each manifestation. This act in itself emphasized the by-now-cemented authorial dimension of the contemporary curator’s role. More moderate in its political ambitions by comparison was Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun 2005 Istanbul Biennale, which was realized in collaboration with assistant curators Esra Sarigedik and November Paynter. The exhibition’s title, simply *Istanbul*, subtly hinted at that city’s historical straddling of East and West and the renewal of its fraught geopolitical identity in a post-September 11 climate obsessed with terrorist threats. Yet despite the push toward the curatorial collectivization of large-scale global exhibitions, it remained that it was

usually the head curator of these events whose name was henceforth associated with it. The curator-director authored proceedings and in the end retained the position of auteur, the formulator of exhibitions on a global scale. Auteurist curating overtook the notion of the artist-curator as the determinant player in the international presentation of their work and that of their colleagues.

By the 1990s, the professional curator had achieved a position of cultural dominance never before seen, enjoying an “extraordinary presence and prominent position in contemporary culture” (von Hantelmann 2017: 227). At its most highly visible, mediated extent was the “star-curator” who extended lessons gleaned from the example of the curator-creator of the 1960s who benefited from knowledge of practices developed during the previous decade of “biennialization” (Sapiro 2016). The star-curator came to be identified evermore with the upper echelons of a new cultural class generically known as “creatives” (Raunig, Ray, and Wuggenig 2011). Creatives were individuals working in a distinctly mobile fashion across globalized cliques of specialists engaged in varieties of increasingly interdependent cultural areas. These included unambiguously commercial pursuits like event-management, advertising, and brand development but also fashion, design, new media practices, graphics, and illustration. The term also exponentially encompassed previously elite pursuits, like gallery management and curating. Unsurprisingly, as critic Brian Holmes remarked, this shift occurred as the contemporary museum had

been penetrating ever more deeply and organically into the complex mesh of semiotic production. Its spin-off products – design, fashion, multimedia spectacle, but also relational technologies and outside-the-box consulting ... among the driving forces of the contemporary economy. (Möntmann 2006: 28)

The role of the star-curator was thus evermore connected to a museum culture drawing exhibitions into close proximity with global culture “in general,” most of it overtly commercial. This type of curator formulated platforms for which they selected artists they believed most representative of the themes they chose (Žerovc 2015). They operated against the backdrop of a pervasively monetized neoliberal culture from which they benefited, no matter how political the stated intentions of their exhibitions (Gielen 2009: 9). Also, the sheer number of contemporary artists “vying to be shown who (could not), in light of their fragile careers, afford to be so principled” (Balzer 2014: 53) meant that they often implicitly became spokespeople for the individualized visions of the particular curators who had chosen them. Thus, art world focus shifted even more forcefully from artist to curator. The star-curator was not only a creator but also a grand framer of global discourses. These ranged across everything from politics, postcolonialism, fashion, architecture, pop music, and industrial design. Moreover, the star-curator was often as individualistic and idiosyncratically inclined as the most egocentric, recalcitrant, or unpredictable artists. Not only were such curators connoisseurs and selectors of artists but directors and organizers of great numbers of other administrative, pedagogical, publicity, and common staff as well. The exhibitions these curators orchestrated, once again usually biennales and other, attenuated group shows, were often massive. The exhibitions themselves, regardless of their immense scale, and as though this were not enough, spread outwards to encompass hosts of other events. These included talks, symposia, workshops, tours, peripheral offsite exhibitions, publicity drives, and fund-raising campaigns: overall “a virtuoso combinatorial system (feeding) the symbolic mill of cognitive capitalism, acting as a

kind of supplement to the endless pinwheels of finance itself” (Holmes 2009: 55). At the core of these activities was the curator as overseer. Sometimes this occurred even as curators working at this level downplayed the extent of their influence. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, one of the most accomplished, prolific, and mediatized contemporary curators, has gone so far as to decry the very use of the word “curator” (Smith 2015). Even more ubiquitous among contemporary high-end curators, Hans-Ulrich Obrist expanded his endeavors to staging and recording seemingly endless discussions with the most visibly successful contemporary artists and many other “creatives” in adjoining fields. Meanwhile, Obrist’s younger protégé, the unapologetically “fame obsessed” (Viveros-Fauné 2015) Klaus Biesenbach, currently director of the Museum of Modern Art PS1 and Chief Curator at Large at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, had been accused of turning “MoMA into Planet Hollywood” (Miller 2015) through his courting and curating of exhibitions of contemporary pop-culture icons. The star-curator rose as a type of a contemporary cultural celebrity in coincidence with the ascendance of the star-artist, a quasi-pop-cultural identity regardless of the seriousness of their endeavors. The creative dimension of curating tended increasingly to focus away from strict art-critical discourse. Instead it targeted a more generalized and lucrative global culture, the subjectivized exhibition seeking to “become more and more a distinctive event” in the hope of attracting “ever greater attention from the media and the public” (Žerovc 2015: 9). Meanwhile, the “former art world ... turned into what we can term a visual industry loosely equivalent to other cultural industries (Hollywood etc.)” (Graw 2006: 147). In this climate, the star-curator’s name operated as a global creative brand.

Taking Control: The Artist-curator and the Museum Paradigm

The rise to dominance of the contemporary curator working on a massive scale across continents and with hundreds of artists has posed a number of challenges for the artist-curator. While it had been suggested that a “turf war” broke out during the 1990s between artists and curators a “rush for the division of power” as Francesco Manacorda, a student of the curating course at the Royal College of Arts in London, commented in 2003 (Cooke 2006: 32), the situation was more complex. In fact, “as a result of the recognition by museum curators of the artists’ intuitive sense of perception and presentation, there had been a growing tendency for museums to invite artists to arrange material from their collections” (Putnam 2001: 132). Yet there were much more challenging curatorial approaches adopted by artists than that offered by this concession made by professional curators toward them. As curatorial practice became growingly “artistic,” many artists became increasingly self-institutionalizing. Turning away from the classic paradigm of the expressive or even outwardly critical artist, particular artists chose instead to imitate the institutionalized nature of creative curating. Much of this work could be regarded as “institutional critique,” but it was critical in ambivalent or poetically opaque ways that were much more difficult to rationally disassemble. Taking the museum as a source of “inspiration,” artists like Marcel Broodthaers, Martin Kippenberger, Elaine Sturtevant, and the Slovenian collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) instituted and curated their own museums, museological-seeming collections, or other para-institutional constructions. Questioning the museum’s ideological grounding by treating it fundamentally as

fictional, these artists practiced curating in a virtually pataphysical manner as the pursuit of imaginary or imitative solutions. Such an approach was particularly acute emerging as it did out of an often-self-aggrandizing curatorial scenario where artist selection had come to have more and more to do with “the vested interests of dealers, collectors and patrons” (Storr 2006: 22). Creating and curating their own institutions and collections meant that these artists forewent the types of compromises endemic to large-scale exhibition curating. Not least of these since the 1980s was their inevitable enmeshing with neoliberal demands calling for economically quantifiable outcomes (Gielen 2009: 10). Neoliberal imperatives also ideologically underwrote the gentrifying politics of “place making” that global exhibitions like biennales could be seen as especially symptomatic of. Biennales were “that cultural form par excellence in keeping with the nomadic misadventures of global capital” (Lee 2012: 10). Anticipating the implications of such changes to the art system, practitioners like Broodthaers, Kippenberger, Sturtevant, and the artists of NSK, choose to practice differently. They turned the institution of curating into an object of meta-criticism from within their own expanded practices.

In September 1968, the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers opened the Musée d'Art Département des Aigles, XIXe siècle appointing himself director, curator, and publicist. An official invitation was posted to friends and to prominent art world identities locally and farther afield. Further contradicting standard authorizing practices, Broodthaers's museum was inaugurated in his own apartment in Brussels. To add veracity to opening proceedings, Johannes Cladders, a critic and then director of the Museum of Modern Art Mönchengladbach, officially launched the museum. Exhibited in Broodthaers's at-home museum were dozens of crates borrowed from the Continental Menkés art transport company (Haidu 2010). For the opening, the company's truck was deliberately parked across the front of Broodthaers's home thus blocking any view to the inside. Taped to one wall opposite the crates were a series of around 50 postcard reproductions of key nineteenth-century paintings ranging from Jacques-Louis David's Neoclassical *Madame Recamier* (1800) to Gustave Courbet's Realist *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* (1854). Additionally, film lights were positioned throughout the space contributing an expectant mood to the overall situation (Haidu 2010: 108). Broodthaers's apartment-bound museum with its “informational” contents ironically transformed the art institution and its attendant activities into a critical, rather than merely presentational, entity. Indeed, Broodthaers confronted art's increasing institutionalization by extending Duchamp's concept of the readymade to the museum: “As Marcel Duchamp said ‘This is a work of art’, essentially I said, ‘This is a Museum’” (Moure 2012: 228). Duchamp's readymade questioned the autonomy of art by bringing an object from outside the traditional aesthetic gamut of the museum inside. Broodthaers took the museum for a found object, theoretically placed it outside in the real world, and thus questioned the institutionalized separation of a museum's contents from its context. As Jacques Derrida noted, Broodthaers showed that “the idea of an interior set apart from, or uncontaminated by, an exterior was a chimera, a metaphysical fiction” (Krauss 1999: 32). Following this intuition, he came up with the idea of the “museum fiction.”

Curatorially, Broodthaers extended the concept of the fictional museum by exhibiting the borrowed (empty) containers of art, which he exhibited alongside readily available reproductions of artworks originating from the very outset of modernity. In this way Broodthaers implicated radical contemporary challenges to the notion of

an exhibited artwork's intrinsic worth. Considerations of the value of art, and of the "masterpiece" in particular, were amplified in the commodifying international climate that had been steadily developing since the early twentieth century. In this climate, an artwork's worth came to depend increasingly on its reproducibility. Therefore, the more visible a work in its cultural context, the more it was effectively "advertised" and thence able to be recollected, the greater value it seemed to generate. That the work could be easily owned in reproduction, by more people than ever, paradoxically granted the original a greater aura, as desire for access to its authenticity multiplied (Benjamin 1935). Broodthaers's curatorial endeavor mounted from within the confines of his own apartment and only exhibiting art's secondary cast-offs testified to the ultimate inaccessibility of the original institutionally venerated art object, its very reality simultaneously interrogated via this maneuver. The question here concerned "reification, one of the central issues of Broodthaers' work and a topic of Marxist debates in his generation" (Snauwaert 2014: 15). As an artist curating, Broodthaers chose objects, like the crates, that were mass-produced and, on final consideration, belonged to someone else, in this case the manufacturers. These un-authored "found" objects did not constitute Broodthaers's "art." Rather, his art was the act that made the museum itself as possessable as a postcard. No longer beyond the artist's reach, Broodthaers claimed the museum for himself as a site of self-authentication, the penultimate curatorial gesture.

Following Broodthaers's example, Martin Kippenberger founded the Museum of Modern Art Syros on the remote Greek island of Syros, in late 1993 (Figure 13.2). Kippenberger chose for his museum an incomplete concrete pavilion erected originally to house a slaughterhouse. The artist had discovered the structure by accident



FIGURE 13.2 Martin Kippenberger, *Museum of Modern Art Syros (MOMAS)*, 1993–1994. MOMAS sign by Christopher Wool, Syros, Greece, 1994. © Christopher Wool.

while visiting friend and patron Michel Würthle, the owner of Berlin's Paris Bar, for which Kippenberger had earlier produced a series of paintings. As with Broodthaers's museum, Kippenberger appropriated all positions normally associated with museum operations. He was at the same time, "founder, director, curator, publicist and event planner" (Krieger 2015: 4). Crucial to Kippenberger's directorial and curatorial effort was his deliberate situating of the museum far away from typical art world centers. Difficulty of physical access intentionally rendered the artist's museum peripheral. The hyperbole of the title Museum of Modern Art Syros, abbreviated as MoMAS, parodied the cultural centrality of monolithic organizations like New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). The contrived air of casualness that surrounded MoMAS, extended to the manner in which Kippenberger curated it over the three years of its existence. For Kippenberger, MoMAS was an extension of his "long activity as a curator of both his own and other's work" (Morgan 2006: 21–22). Fittingly, the artists Kippenberger selected were largely friends or close associates. There was no pretense to a "proper" selection process, although Kippenberger did assign some artists he invited honorary roles within his museum. For example, participating artist Christopher Williams was named director of the MoMAS "film department," while fellow practitioner Johannes Wohnseifer was assigned a role as a "museum guard" (Krieger 2015: 6). The isolated self-ascribing nature of Kippenberger's museological effort, away from the centralized scrutiny of key art world metropolises, simultaneously granted the institution a quasi-mythological dimension. Knowledge of its existence, attested to by printed invitations and other press miscellanea Kippenberger produced, was in almost all other respects circumstantial. Little documentation exists of the exhibitions staged in and around MoMAS. Descriptions of events that occurred there traveled instead by word of mouth, making it virtually impossible to state categorically how much of what had been related was true. The absent walls of Kippenberger's far-flung institution, suggesting transparency and openness, equally conjured doubt about its actual function: was it a joke or just an indulgent waste of time and (minimal) resources?

By no means averse to joking in his wider practice, the humor underpinning Kippenberger's outlying museum was also serious, "a new twist for Kippenberger's own brand of institutional critique" (Morgan 2006: 22). Moreover, "One figure was particularly at stake in the project: the curator, and the curatorial role in conditioning the hermeneutical and historical reception of art" (Krieger 2015: 4). In its brief history, MoMAS staged five exhibitions involving nine artists. Many of those artists were already highly regarded within the international art world, like Christopher Wool, Stephen Prina, Cosima von Bonin, and Heimo Zobernig. The cultural cachet of their associated names automatically prevented Kippenberger's action from being dismissed as mere folly. Besides, the works produced by these artists for MoMAS were continuations of existing projects, site-responsive re-workings of accomplished artistic practices. In the end, Kippenberger's museum and the curatorial activities he undertook within it, although undoubtedly legitimate in themselves, at the same time challenged dominant curatorial approaches at the time. Against a background of biennales burgeoning on almost every continent, Kippenberger "hopelessly" mounted small-scale, barely attended exhibitions (Kippenberger 2011) on a remote Mediterranean island. The artist wove an implicit critique of new moneyed curating that was simultaneously deployed as a means of increasing global tourism and heightening competition between nations and regions for increased cultural and economic prestige. MoMAS was

Kippenberger's "statement against the globalized art business" (Kippenberger 2011: 439) from which he, an internationally successful artist by the conclusion of his career, had benefitted. He also showed how, in a contemporary art world where the vast majority of art was impossible to view in person, curation was as much, if not more, about incessant mediation (Žerovc 2015). Rumor and the strategic reproduction of at least some photographic evidence, were greater guarantors of artistic success than the stolid pursuit of aesthetic perfection in the studio.

The activities of US artist Elaine Sturtevant had similarly embraced the language of institutionalism to subvert and challenge traditional curating. Unlike Broodthaers's and Kippenberger's founding of fictional museums, Sturtevant precisely overlaid artistic production with curatorial practice. In fact, Sturtevant's curated exhibitions comprised works that were both by and not by her at the same time. Throughout her career, which began in the mid-1960s, Sturtevant copied and exhibited the works of other artists. Long before appropriation became a staple of 1980s postmodernism, Sturtevant questioned through imitation the authorial role of the modern artist. Also unlike the generation of appropriation artists to come, Sturtevant did not appear, in any obvious way, to critically comment on the works she copied. The blankness of her approach, despite evidence of her creative touch, seemed to want to abolish all authorial traces. This meant that emphasis was placed back onto the curatorial idea "which emanated from within the context of a specific exhibition concept" (Maculan 2004: 18). Sturtevant deliberately worked in series creating entire shows of the output of other artists, concerned as she was with "staging groups of works and not with the presentation of individual artefacts" (Maculan 2004: 19). Thus a "Warhol" exhibition of Sturtevant's might include some of that artist's most iconic pieces, from portraits of Marilyn Monroe to repetitious screen-prints of flowers to a rendition of his 1966 *Silver Clouds* installation of floating metallic balloons. A Lichtenstein show would include some of that artist's most famous cropped Pop-cartoon imagery. In 1967, Sturtevant even created *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, a closely considered variant of Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961), which seriously tested the imitator's relationship to her more recognized contemporary (Maculan 2004). Indeed, a radical aspect of Sturtevant's artistic undertakings was her frequent imitation of the work of her contemporaries. Rather than waiting for an artist to become well known, Sturtevant intuited the value of a contemporary's work within her own time, the time they shared. At question here was not how closely Sturtevant was able to pull off an imitation of another artist's work but more generally "what we believed art to be" (De Vries 2004: 33). Such an enquiry was especially testing when it came to the work of artists like Duchamp and Warhol. Both artists had already seriously challenged the supposed homogeneity of artistic authorship. Both artists had also variously downplayed the previously central role placed on the handmade within the art system. By taking these seminal "impersonal" artists' works as her subject (or "object") matter, Sturtevant showed that their work too was a prime locus for myths of artistic exceptionality. Remaking their works pointed to the paradox of a system whereby desire to escape or criticize the fetishistic aspects of art-making finally led to its repetition (Hainley 2013). Awareness of this core dimension of Sturtevant's output prompted Italian conceptual artist Giulio Paolini to remark that ultimately Sturtevant was the only artist who could never be copied (De Vries 2004: 36). Importantly, Sturtevant the artist assumed the overlapping role of curator by choosing to collate and exhibit the work of existing artists. Only in her case she opted conceptually to personally remake rather than borrow the works she curated.

Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), the Slovenian art collective formed in Ljubljana in the 1980s, pushed the identificatory critique of the institution of art even further. NSK formed against the censorial backdrop of Eastern bloc communism and deliberately provoked challenges to its vision of universally contented workers. The conceptual sophistication of NSK's interrogation of the rapidly changing nature of global geopolitical relations simultaneously challenged the presumptions of many in the Western art world also. NSK's practices were widely transdisciplinary encompassing music (the Industrial band Laibach), painting (IRWIN), theatre (Scolion Nasice Sisters Theatre), and design (New Collectivism), as well as philosophy. Like the Russian avant-garde before them, NSK considered their collective activities intrinsically, rather than extrinsically, political. Correspondingly, in 1992, the group founded their own transnational virtual state, the NSK "State in Time." NSK proclaimed this state to be "an abstract social body situated in the very sociopolitical space of Europe" (Gržinić 2003: 248). Contrary to traditional state formations NSK's State in Time was realized predominantly within internalized private and domestic spheres. This choice echoed the proclivities of the group's Russian contemporaries, the underground *sots art* and apartment-art (*apt-art*) movements (Gržinić 2003: 261). Unlike these, NSK and its associated manifestations, including their State in Time, mimicked the official rhetoric and formality of classic state-sponsored cultural events. At the same time, it rendered its actions more or less inaccessible to state scrutiny owing to the privacy of the locations in which they took place. Historically, of course, statehood was inherently nationalistic and bound by ideologically formulated definitions. Opposed to this model, while constrained by it in daily life, the NSK State in Time welcomed like-minded individuals to curated events mounted mainly in apartments and private homes. These often involved the curation of artworks by the various branches of NSK like the IRWIN painters and the New Collectivism designers. Coinciding with the presentation of NSK art were series of group debates, themed roundtable discussions, as well as lunches and dinners. These convivial add-ons imitated the symposia and other peripheral events habitually associated with contemporary global biennales. They also provided an internalized uncensored "free space" encouraging open discussion among participants. Contrastingly, NSK manufactured plaques, flags, and other official-looking paraphernalia in accordance with typical state self-presentations. Through these, NSK embraced critique as a type of excessive identification with the loaded symbolization of existing state apparatuses (Žižek 1993). Theirs was a meta-critique that seriously complicated more obvious frontal attacks of state shortcomings.

As part of their State in Time, NSK momentarily established "embassies" around the world. These appeared in Moscow in 1992, Ghent, Belgium in 1993 and at the Berlin Volksbühne, also in 1993. In addition, NSK founded temporary "consulates" internationally in places like Florence, Italy at the Hotel Ambasciatori in 1993, and in Umag, Croatia in 1994. The latter consulate was established in the "inappropriate" context (Monroe 2005: 250) of the personal kitchen of the collector Marino Cettina (Gržinić 2000, 221). NSK also planned an embassy in Beijing, China (1994) and formed an online virtual "electronic" embassy for Tokyo, Japan (1996). Most recently the collective set up a State Pavilion for the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. Subverting the inevitably regressive nationalism that still clings to many biennales, especially the most established, NSK were not representing Slovenia in this instance. Instead they curated yet another iteration of their mobile, autonomous State in Time. From within this conceptual construct they continued their practice of issuing NSK state passports

to anyone willing to complete the associated paperwork. These passports are produced with the utmost veracity to real models perfectly imitating their functional national counterparts. In fact, their sheer realism has encouraged their illicit use (Monroe 2005: 264). Via these combined symbolic actions, NSK'S State in Time recreated the state as a discursively "a-national" cultural phenomenon in opposition to the bureaucratic utility and manipulative expediencies of actually existing state politics. There was an ironically utopic endeavor that predated and anticipated the full force of globalization's rhetoric of flexibility and borderlessness. NSK'S State in Time interrupted the hyperbole of such rhetoric in awareness of the irony that a "fake" imaginary state could also operate in the real world. Indeed, as the State in Time is not confined by geographic, economic, or political boundaries, its symbolic dimension is intensified and its existence therefore arguably realer. Economic globalization's post-state impact on the fate of nations is theoretically replaced by a virtual state that supersedes it because anyone who chooses to can belong. As theorist and NSK collaborator Eda Čufer has mentioned, the State in Time is conferred not on territory but on the mind "whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of [the] symbolic and physical collective body" (Monroe 2005: 251). As perhaps the broadest possible curatorial statement, NSK sought the "establishment of transnational infrastructures for art through an altered and inherently unstable state formation" (Gardner 2015: 101). By making the state an artwork (Benson 1996: 187), NSK referred to the history of the public museum and its origins during the French Revolution (Schubert 2009). At that moment, the museum became a key cultural player in world politics. Museum curators of the Enlightenment era knew their roles were fundamentally conditioned by ideological responsibility for the "good of all humanity." NSK's State in Time restressed the museum and its associated venues as innately political sites where the artist's collective curatorial act implicated everyone as a participant.

Independent Alternatives: Redefining Curating from Within

Artists challenged professional curators by exposing and questioning the authoritative dimension of curating. Artist-curators appropriating institutional methodologies highlighted the conjunction of art, artist, and institution as the locus of art's ultimate sociocultural meaning. The curatorial activities of artists involved in running independent artist-run initiatives in many ways echo the practices and attitudes of artists who consciously sought to re-frame curation from within the domain of artistic production. Curiously, the history of artist-run spaces, also known as artist-run initiatives, has been read in the same terms as the emergence of the new field of independent professional curating in the 1960s: as a continuation of the avant-garde (Detterer 2012: 13). What distinguishes the curatorial activities of artists running their own spaces and organizing their own initiatives, though, is their independence from institutional constriction. The nature of the independence of these initiatives, which is also often innately precarious owing to ongoing practical pressures (like paying the rent), is not predicated on answering institutional demands compelled by the vested interests of associated board members, corporate sponsors, trustees, or targeted audiences, for example. While the extent of their operations is normally necessarily humble, there is also critical strength in this fact. At their most incisive, independent artist-run spaces

practice oppositionally to the commercial, institutional, and strictly bureaucratic demands whose conjunction defines the contemporary sphere of global neoliberal capital, the world prefigured primarily as economic enterprise. By practicing contrary to the imperatives of this seemingly inescapable model, artist-curated independent spaces exemplify how it is still possible to stake out a terrain not beholden to the pursuit of measurable outcomes and profit. The active embrace of elective affinities and friendships, as well as the critical frisson these inevitably elicit, marks this terrain (Condorelli 2013: 62–73). Of course, such spaces are by no means utopian either. Indeed, the post-Fordist models emphasizing cognitive labor over material production that define the workings of contemporary neoliberalism borrow heavily from the example of artistic practices. Such practices are frequently based on a willingness to work long hours for little or no pay in association with an attitude espousing qualities of flexibility and inventiveness (Aranda, Kuan Wood, and Vidokle 2011). Some artist-run initiatives in fact ape neoliberal values by un-ironically internalizing and deploying bureaucratic and commercial methodologies that bear little structural relationship to the needs of their actual operation (Sholette 2011). Differentiated from these opportunistic organizations are those that extend the example of artists and artist-collectives awareness of the fictional aspect of institutions, including the institution of curating (Gielen 2009). These independent curatorial endeavors might take place from within tense and censorial political situations. They may occur in atypical locations like domestic shopfronts or basements. They need not be restricted to physical spaces either. Artists might choose to curatorially engage the virtual though ubiquitous spaces of the Internet instead. Or they may practice across multiple mobile platforms curated simultaneously. Artist-run spaces might additionally be curated according to lessons learned from self-interrogating practices that deflect outwards to question the contemporary institution of art more broadly.

In the late 1960s, the artist Graciela Carnevale was a key participant in a series of events and exhibitions that took place in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Argentina. Collectively titled the *Experimental Art Cycle*, these activities eventually led to *Tucumán Arde (Tucumán Burns)*, a combined research, activist, and exhibition initiative realized in 1968. The activities of *The Experimental Art Cycle* challenged, among other issues, governmental censorship of coverage of worker riots in Tucumán, an impoverished region of Argentina, provoked by conditions of extreme exploitation (Carmen-Ramirez 1999: 67). In the same year, Carnevale staged her *Acción del Encierro (Confinement Action)* in a disused shop in Rosario. Its curatorial aspect well exceeded mere considerations of the discreet placing of pictures. It was simultaneously a trenchant critique and as Carnevale herself stated “a proposition of doing things differently, of thinking differently, of considering art differently – with a role in society” (Copeland 2015: 79). Papering the windows and doors of the shopfront she had claimed with posters, Carnevale invited audience members to join her inside. Once the space had filled to capacity on opening night, Carnevale secretly locked all exits making departure impossible. The ambiguity of the event’s intention was enhanced since there was nothing to see, no art to look at, within the space. Meanwhile, visitors’ awareness of their forcible entrapment was gradual. Once it became clear that they were not free to leave, many panicked (Filipovic 2012: 164). Staged against the oppressive backdrop of military dictatorship and the rampant censorship of media, Carnevale’s curatorial contribution was essentially her deliberate exacerbation of fear and anxiety, those emotions structuring Argentinian society at the time. These were

effectively the “objects” on display. The exhibition ended when a passer-by, witnessing the panicked situation inside, smashed the shop window allowing people to flee (Kester 2011). Carnevale’s curatorial gesture was notable for its deployment of critique as a form of “over-identification” (BAVO 2007): the artist did not attempt to question the status quo by predictably counter-posing it with its enlightened opposite. Instead, *Acción del Encierro* employed the brutal methods of the governing power to reveal, in a comparably brutal and visceral way, what contemporary Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn later claimed he wanted to reveal via his work: that “(A)rt and the art world cannot be removed from the larger world” (Gardner 2015: 151). Responding to a different, though similarly censorial, sociopolitical situation was the show *Let’s Talk About Money: Shanghai First International Fax Art Exhibition*. Artists Shen Fan, Zhou Tiehai, Shi Yong, and Ding Yi, in collaboration with the Canadian artist Hank Bull, curated this scantily documented exhibition. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, public actions by Chinese artists were placed under strict scrutiny by the government (Debevoise 2014). This resulted in a series of “underground” curatorial endeavors mounted by contemporary Chinese artists. *Let’s Talk About Money* was sited literally in the underground context of the basement of Shanghai’s Huashan Art Vocational School. By 1996, the year this exhibition was presented, government restrictions had eased somewhat. In the wake of this comparative relaxation and the related economic reforms that followed came a huge increase in Chinese development. New spending, however, did not translate to benefits for Chinese contemporary artists, whose work, as artist Shi Yong recalled, was still generally considered “rubbish” (Ciric 2015: 21). With little to no infrastructural support, in China “it came about that artist-initiated exhibitions rather than museums acted as sites for the production of knowledge” (Ciric 2015: 22). As an initiative of contemporary artist-curators, *Let’s Talk About Money* was significant on a number of interconnected levels: it defied government restrictions by independently inviting exchange with artists from a wide range of countries outside China, it utilized restricted technology (the fax machine) that allowed the instantaneous transfer of imagery and information before the late introduction to China of the Internet in 2000, and it deliberately interrogated China’s burgeoning embrace of capitalism. Referring sardonically to the exhibition’s title, one participating artist, Chen Yanyin, went so far as to fax step-by-step DIY instructions on how to counterfeit money and make credit cards. Part of the acuity of this artist-curated exhibition, which inspired numerous others, was its far-sighted anticipation of an eventual situation in China where “(A)rtist-organized exhibitions have mostly disappeared since 2007 or so, as an outcome of an art system that became increasingly market-centric” (Ciric 2015: 33).

The interventionist dimension of the artist-curated actions above has been echoed more recently by the independent curatorial initiatives of artists that are either openly activist or skirt the border between activism and art. In Milan, Italy, for example, the collective L’Isola dell’Arte (Isola Art Project) answered the rapid postindustrial gentrification of that city in a spirit associated with the Italian squat movements that were especially influential after the 1980s. The L’Isola dell’Arte occupied a large industrial building known as the Stecca, which they used as an autonomous creative space between 2003 and 2007. The artists of the L’Isola dell’Arte critiqued the Italian government’s active compliance with a corporatized vision of Milan as a new “creative city.” Such branding they viewed as a cynical, barely veiled marketing ploy designed to attract a “newly rich creative class” to an area otherwise considered “disused”



FIGURE 13.3 Thomas Hirschhorn, Musée Précaire Albinet, *d'Aubervilliers: Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers*, Paris (detail), 2004. Courtesy of <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/projet/musee-precaire-albinet/musee-precaire-albinet>.

(Raunig 2013: 132). As a retort, the L'Isola dell'Arte artists curated a counter-exhibition in the rooms of the Stecca, replacing the concept of “site-specificity,” which had been seminal to progressive sculptural and installation practices since the 1960s, with the concept of “fight-specificity.” Correspondingly, these artists produced works, some of them permanently installed, “to serve the purpose, among others, of hindering eviction and the demolition of the Stecca” (Raunig 2013: 135). The exhibition therefore functioned as an obstruction and literal blockade erected in opposition to both capitalist utility disguised as creative development and the concept of art as a “pure” practice insulated from genuine real-world affect. Working alternatively from within the context of the existing art world, Thomas Hirschhorn has nonetheless frequently drawn on activist-like methods to call the insularity of the art world, as an assumed artificial haven, into question. In 2004, Hirschhorn realized his *Musée Précaire Albinet d'Aubervilliers* in a banlieue of Paris (Figure 13.3). The artist’s “precarious museum” was constructed largely, as are most of Hirschhorn’s works, of cheap materials: cardboard, paper, photocopies, cloth, and packaging tape. The museum itself was a sprawling makeshift series of rooms, each one dedicated to a famous artist: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, Fernand Léger, Le Corbusier, Andy Warhol, and Joseph Beuys. Borrowing from the feted collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Hirschhorn curated original and highly valuable historical works by these predominantly modernist practitioners into his temporary museum. Yet as the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou stated, Hirschhorn’s “was an artistic proposition and not an institutional exhibition, [and] his request could not be treated as a conventional loan” (Pacquement 2004). Considered central to an elite discourse of Western aesthetics, Hirschhorn inserted “priceless” works of European art into a neighborhood whose

demographic was composed mainly of working class non-Europeans. The active dimension of Hirschhorn's curation, which comprised an art work at the same time, was to bring works typically believed inaccessible by the "peripheral" working class, as represented by residents of the Aubervilliers banlieue, directly to them. Hirschhorn additionally invited specialist speakers to articulate the concepts and histories of the artists and artworks he chose. However, denying the typically chauvinistic attitude of the colonizer, the artist also invited any local who so wished to freely talk in public about the works they saw. He also involved residents in the physical handling and installing of the works, bringing them into direct contact with the exhibited art (Hirschhorn and Bizzarri 2011). Via these means, Hirschhorn's curatorial project functioned in parallel as an activist gesture of artistic demystification. It encouraged those to whom such art may not have meant anything to regard it instead as belonging vitally to the same sociopolitical sphere in which they lived and acted.

Ostensibly a work of art like Hirschhorn's museum, Caleb Larsen's *A Tool to Deceive and Slaughter* from 2009 was similarly an innately curatorial proposition. Physically the work is a featureless, reflective, quasi-minimalist black box. Beyond its physicality, though, the object partakes of a type of "hactivist" art that has become especially prevalent since the widespread use of the Internet (Christiane 2015). Much of this work has critically addressed the paradox of the Internet as both an open (democratically communicational) and closed (closely surveilled) space (Schöpf and Stocker 2007). Indeed, corporations currently routinely practice constant data-mining, involving the collection and storage of users' personal browsing habits, in anticipation of future commercial benefits (Pariser 2011). Responding to this pervasive contemporary phenomenon, *A Tool to Deceive and Slaughter* is a physical object connected virtually to the commercial spaces of the Internet via eBay. There, the object perpetually "sells itself" (Scott 2010) by way of an automated algorithm. If the object is unplugged from the Internet, it ceases to be a work of art (Larsen 2009), because its conceptual integrity has been interrupted: the object only "lives" while it is connected. Larsen's black box established a closed-loop of theoretically eternal inaccessibility. It is an uncommodifiable commodity that complicates the assumed, though in reality complexly monitored, simplicity of online financial transactions. Curated into the virtual spaces of the Internet, the work identified those spaces as a viable place for the exhibition of art. Furthermore, it implicated all things for sale on the Internet as potential, albeit virtualized, post-Duchampian found objects, making the Internet the most extensive of all existing art galleries (Groys 2016).

In a different vein are mobile curatorial projects that draw attention to the inherently framed conditions of exhibited art. One such example is the interconnected curatorial projects of Australian artist Mitchell Cumming. These interlinking projects were NEAR, AFAAAR and AJAR. NEAR, commencing in 2014, consisted of works commissioned for the French doors of the artist's own kitchen. These glass doors formed a readymade triptych that further historicized the works shown. The first project manifested was by another Australian artist, Shane Haseman's *High Street*, a series of professionally hand-painted signs that humorously aligned references to the historical avant-garde, Dada particularly, with types of businesses often operating in the liminal spaces demarcating public and private affairs: personal therapy, private massage, funeral parlor (Figure 13.4). Unlike "professional" curatorial scenarios, works for NEAR, as the name indicates, were accessible only to invited guests. Their existence partook of the informal setting in which they were executed. Overall, the endeavor further alluded to the compromises facing professional curators forced to



FIGURE 13.4 *NEAR/AFAAAR* (Mitchel Cumming), *High Street* by Shane Haseman, work executed on French Doors of the curator's kitchen, Redfern, NSW, Australia, 2014. Photo: Alex Gawronski.

answer escalating institutional demands. These included demands for maximum audiences and maximum public visibility in an era of overexposure representing “today’s most *phenomenal culture*: ... what is most *mediatized* in Western capitals” (Derrida 1994: 15). The intimately connected concept, AFAAAR, utilized publication as a curatorial medium. It produced small-run deluxe editions of the works of invited artists, in a manner reminiscent of early avant-garde journals. Lastly, AJAR, initiated in 2016, took place in specific relation to the window of Cumming’s studio at Sydney College of the Arts. The use of the window, a classic reference-point for Western modernity, toyed with art historical associations while further articulating the distinct separation of public and private within the spaces of contemporary curation. Collectively, NEAR, AFAAAR, and AJAR formed one interrelated structure whose multiple, overlapping, and cross-referencing dimensions indicated the conditions that define art’s greater presentational identity, its very “curatability.”

Also, engaging issues of the contextual framing and presentation of curated artworks were numerous exhibitions mounted at the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown or ICAN. Founded in Sydney by the artists Carla Cescon, the late Stephen Birch (1961–2007), the artist-gallerist Scott Donovan, and myself, ICAN was established partially as a type of para-fictional institution. It operated for seven years from late 2007 out of an urban shopfront in inner-city Sydney, Australia. As part of its general orientation, ICAN recognized the wider potential of “alternative spaces for exhibitions as platforms for voicing critical positions towards mainstream institutions” (Milevska 2015: 176). By no means its overriding aim, ICAN nonetheless recognized its potential to formulate exhibitions that confronted specific accepted trends in the local and wider contemporary art worlds. For example, the gallery regularly staged shows responding concurrently to the themes of the Biennale of Sydney. In 2008, ICAN staged *The Most Meaningful Art of Our Time: What Goes Around Comes Around*.

The exhibition paraphrased a statement by that year's Biennale of Sydney curator, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, regarding the Biennale's overall intention. Reflecting on the hyperbolic and heroic tone of such language used by high-profile curators in press releases and media statements, ICAN produced an exhibition subtly parodying such overarching curatorial sentiment. The relatively small gallery space was in this case divided into three even smaller triangulated annexes. These were accessible via three separate doors hinged centrally in the middle of the room. Installed in each awkwardly partitioned space was the work of an individual artist. Exhibited work included schematically realist paintings of varieties of old technology discarded in back alleyways by the Australian painter Simon Barney's. Nearby a work by the late New Zealand conceptual artist Julian Dashper portrayed the final second of the 2007 Venice Biennale as a mere audio-visual blip in time and space. Above the fridge in the gallery's "office" area, Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist's 1987 video *Sexy Sad-I*, depicting an unidentified naked man running and dancing erratically in a forest, continually looped.

Two years later, ICAN presented *The Australian Pavilion 2010: "Swallow it Dog" (after Goya)* an oblique response to the English curator David Elliot's 2010 Biennale of Sydney, *The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age* (Figure 13.5). Ostensibly a well-intentioned survey of a multitude of practices addressing issues of global trauma and inequality, the 2010 Biennale of Sydney failed to confront at any point the self-privilege of its curatorial mode of address, a key commonality of these sorts of exhibitions (Gawronski 2014: 124–137). In response, ICAN's deliberately crude referencing of Francisco Goya's 1799 etching of a quack-doctor forcing dubious medicine on a patient suggested that Biennales participate precisely in the sorts of sociopolitical mechanisms that the works they embrace habitually critique (Lee 2012). For the show, veteran Canadian conceptualist Bruce Barber, exhibited *Alphabet Bomber* a vertical alphabetized list of possible types of contemporary bombers, both ludicrous and actual. Sydney artist Andrew Hurle displayed a fictional book titled *1000 Nazi Girlfriends* allegedly produced by the famous art publisher Taschen. Nearby, the Vienna-based collective 0-gms, participating simultaneously in the official Biennale of Sydney, showed their video *The Plans of 0-gms* which depicted one of its members sardonically reciting a list of current global biennales, triennales, and art fairs to gauge other members' enthusiasm (or lack of) for potentially participating in them. Different though related in spirit, ICAN showed in 2012 the work of artist-curators Paul Lamarre and Melissa P. Wolf, co-founders of EIDIA House in Williamsburg, New York. EIDIA's *Occupy's ICAN* consisted of documentary photographic images of the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in New York in 2011. It also featured found paraphernalia, banners, flyers, and leaflets associated with diverse groups of the Occupy phenomenon. Inside the gallery, videos depicted Occupy rallies, speeches, and evidence of the extreme police presence in New York at the time. Empathetic, the exhibition was also intentionally distanced, allowing viewers to absorb the material according to their experience of its accumulation on site. More generally, the purpose of these exhibitions, and others of their inclination, was not to attempt to reinstate a binary between institutional and non-institutional curating, automatically valuing the latter over the former. It was, however, to broadly reveal the limitations that condition institutional curating as far as such curating is rarely critical – although it may be thematically critical – of its own methods and self-privileging. Contrastingly, independent artist-run spaces are structurally bound by an awareness of their limits and precarity, a fact that is also critically enabling.



FIGURE 13.5 Exhibition poster, *the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (ICAN)*, Sydney, Australia, 2010. Courtesy of the author and ICAN (Carla Cescon, Scott Donovan, Alex Gawronski).

Conclusion

Artist-curated exhibitions effectively defined the practices and methodologies of contemporary professional curating. That this fact remains relatively little known is both curious and telling. It indicates how fully the figure of the curator, particularly at their most globally mediated, has usurped the contemporary centrality of the artist as curator. The shift in curatorial culture from the 1960s to now has firmly embedded the professional curator at the center of the presentation of contemporary art. Meanwhile, large-scale curatorial practices have steered art evermore toward a generalized global culture. In response, artist-curated internalizations of the institutionalized creativity of the professional curator have been consistently acute as well as often humorously wry. And they remain so. The regular deployment of humor as a reflexive mechanism within artist-curated exhibitions is additionally revealing of the conditions

separating them from the endeavors of professional curators. A professional curator presenting a show on “humor” will rarely, if ever, allow the effects of such humor to implicate the operations of the institution in which it is shown. Parody, satire, and irony must remain wholly contained within a thematic package. Indeed, “non-serious” gestures are typically barred to the professional curator, as money, especially serious money, is no laughing matter. This is especially the case in a scenario where “addressing the conditions of the art field, as well as the blatant corruption within it – is a taboo” (Steyerl 2012: 98). Alternatively, artist-curated exhibitions, especially those staged from within independent spaces, are inherently mutable and metamorphic owing to their a priori precarity. Furthermore,

(O)ne might argue that already inscribed into the formation of an artist run space is a critique of the institutional apparatus of art, which tends to flatten out even the most critical, polemical sort of practices, domesticating them into objects of consumption. (Faguet 2012: 97)

The limits of the activities of these spaces are predominantly practical. The limits to professional curating on the other hand, particularly from within highly visible public institutions, are mainly the result of their increasing entanglement with corporate culture. Such culture relies on the “accelerated abstractions of finance capital based on positivist data” requiring the “demonstrable impact” of metrics enshrined in the “banality of [the] spreadsheet” as part of the “tsunami of fiscal imperatives [that] threatens to deluge all that is complicated, vulnerable, intelligent, adventurous and critical in the public sphere” (Bishop 2013: 62). One cannot bite the hand that feeds. Yet all institutions, including the institution of curating, are porous and ultimately questionable. When budgets are at risk and jobs on the line, institutional questioning becomes a delicate, if not untenable, option. This would also explain why, within the field of professional curating and although not impossible, genuinely “critical content remains exceptional” (Smith 2015: 30) – unless, of course, “critique” is merely thematically representational.

In a global scenario beset by manifold social, political, humanitarian, and ecological crises, however, where the term “democracy” is still frequently used as a salve in the art world as elsewhere, is not the questioning of an institution’s operations not imperative to the concept of this democracy? Without self-questioning, nothing is ever staked and the status quo prevails “particularly the neo-liberal structures that privilege and enable the few over the many” (Jelinek 2013: 4). In fact, numerous museums of contemporary art have been forced to close as a result of financial pressures exerted by neoliberal models as “state funding for art has been increasingly redistributed from programs that presented critical positions to (those representing) uncritical positions or commercial enterprises” (Raunig 2013: 90). The practices of economically targeted institutions are deemed not to comply with the imperatives of globalized capital. Such institutions and the curatorial practices they promote are regularly negated as “unrealistic” (Bishop 2013). Some professional curators facing these conditions have managed to inventively turn them into a critical strength, utilizing existing collections in combination with works commissioned expressly for their institutions. They have established genuine connections with local audiences without ignoring their institution’s inevitable global enmeshing. Institutions of this type, and the curatorial methodologies they encourage, crucially recognize that curatorial culture at its most vital is also attached to the places where it occurs. The tendency of curators, especially

curators of large transnational exhibitions like biennales (as well as many artists), to first consider problems faced by other cultures frequently exempts the interrogator from facing or questioning their own situation. The more global culture is, the more it is regarded as residing “somewhere else” as “artists, curators, and art institutions ... mistake appropriation of activist discourse for actual political action” and are uniformly “unwilling to acknowledge their own privilege and how they themselves benefit, and often sustain, inequity” (Acre and Yamamoto-Masson 2017). Ignored are the “site-specific” conditions that structure and determine the interplay of artist and curators.

To say that artists and curators now simply partake of the same cultural ecology (O’Neill 2012) is actually too simplistic because that interplay is highly differentiated from location to location. In global economic centers, there are simultaneously more artists and more curators, and the competition of the former for recognition by the latter is fierce. The contemporary cultural shift in favor of the professional curator over the artist as curator attests to a scenario where artist-curated exhibitions still sit “almost without exception on the periphery of official narratives” (Filipovic 2012: 157). Indeed, opportunities for contemporary artists to share equally the projects of curators are significantly limited. There are simply not enough curators to cater to current artistic output. Of course, contemporary art production is excessive as there have never been more artists. The benediction the international curator bestows on the artist is consequently of paramount symbolic and practical importance, now more than ever. As a result, the domains of the artist-curator and professional curator are interdependent and connected to a degree never before witnessed. Still, it is overly reductive to equate artist-curated activities with the undertakings of professional curators, not because those of the former are “unprofessional” but because, beyond issues of social and geopolitical circumstances, the dynamic between the two groups is fundamentally lop-sided: present “dealings between the curator and artist ... are evidence enough that this relationship is hardly an equal one” (Žerovc 2015: 32). Globe-trotting curators with reputations as attenuated as the funds they are able to harness, speak loudly through their access to such resources. Their mobile, larger-than-life command of art world terrain grants them an apparently irreproachably authoritative voice as primary arbiters of contemporary artistic and cultural discourses. They frame the artist and make “more” of their work via their use of it. Meanwhile, where “critique has always been marginal and resistance has always been found co-opted in one way or another” (Raunig 2013: 112) artist-curated exhibitions have tended to fare better and are valued more, if they take place within museums or under the guiding (financial) auspices of officially sanctioned cultural organizations. Otherwise, the generalized undervaluing of the artist as curator continues. We cannot, however, discount the wealth of genuinely interrogative institutional curating that is not “intellectually crippled by ... blockbuster exhibitions designed to attract corporate investors” that is (Bishop 2013: 55). Most importantly, though, it needs to be emphasized that artist-curated exhibitions persist in their capacity to “undermine, or denature, established ideas of the exhibition” (Filipovic 2012: 158). Furthermore, “they were, and in many cases remain, the sites most conducive to experimental art and reflective curating” (Smith 2015: 28). Indeed, with nothing to lose, artist-curating operating from within, and as, artistic practice tests the limits of exhibiting in ways most contemporary institutional curating cannot. This is because artist-curating, at its most acute, does not shy away from confronting the very fictions that define both curatorial and artistic procedures.

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Decolonizing the Ethnographic Museum

Gerald McMaster

In September 1992 I was working as a curator at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History), across the river from Ottawa. That month, as I was just about to open an exhibition called *Indigena*, I received a call from a distraught artist from the American Southwest venting his frustration over an exhibition being held at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC). In his words, the exhibition ought to have “real Indian artists” like him, instead of artists posing as Indians. I soon realized that his complaint was motivated, in large part, on legislation recently introduced in the United States (1990) called Public Law 101–644: Expanding the Powers of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. This law explicitly states that it is unlawful for individuals who are not from a “federally recognized tribe” to exhibit or advertise as “Native American artists.” The artist about whom the caller took issue was Jimmie Durham, whose work the NGC had included in its landmark exhibition *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery* (I believe he was confusing that exhibition with *Indigena*). Durham is an American artist and poet who up until then claimed to be of Cherokee descent. His tribal identity, however, has frequently been vigorously disputed, with some claiming Durham is merely “playing Indian” (Holland 2017: 19). The artist who called me felt Durham was not “legitimate” and should have stepped aside in deference to some other artist of verifiable, legally authorized American Indian ancestry.

The issue raised by the caller spoke to the significant, and continuing, tension surrounding Indigenous identities across North America, both in the political arena as well as in the art world. In terms of my career, this conversation was a turning point for my interest in the subject of Indigenous identities as they are brought into play in the domain of artistic and cultural expression. For me, the whole dispute underscored the multiple overlapping and sometimes contradictory positions involving Indigenous subjectivity and self-definition in relation to shifting politics and communities.

Except for Inuit contemporary art, prior to the 1990s, Canadian art galleries and art museums took little interest in collecting or exhibiting non-Western art. As Robert Everett-Green points out in an account of the “inclusive new approach to Indigenous art” sweeping Canada, “galleries tended to be oblivious to object-making from before the time when Indigenous people began selling into the commercial gallery system. It’s no longer okay.” He adds, “to give the impression that Indigenous people made nothing that could be discussed as art till 60 years ago” (Everett-Green 2017).

Ethnographic museums, on the other hand, had a long history of gathering and displaying works by Indigenous artists and artisans. Yet, the narratives they told basically stopped at the time of White settlement. During the 1990s, however, Indigenous voices began influencing ethnographic museums to change the essentially Victorian, colonialist way they were representing Indigenous peoples. In addition, spurred on in part by new discourses surrounding “identity” and “identity politics,” art museums began taking notice of Indigenous contemporary artists, who themselves had begun experimenting with new forms of expression and critiquing the institutions and the gallery/museum system in which they exhibited. For many Indigenous artists, these changes entailed shifting away from crafting works meant somehow to showcase collective identity to creating pieces that were anchored more strongly in individual expression.

In this chapter, I draw on this history of shifting politics and aesthetics in order to explore various perspectives on Indigenous identity in the visual arts in connection with resistance and, more crucially, resurgence. I begin by examining the legacy of Canada’s Indian Act of 1876 in terms of its multigenerational consequences for the perception of individual and collective identity across the country’s Indigenous communities. Then, I address works by contemporary Indigenous artists from two different generations that challenge, counteract, and resist the political, historical, and psychological trauma caused by the Canadian and US governments’ multifaceted colonization and assimilation efforts.

Impact of the Indian Act

Canada became a dominion separate from the United Kingdom on 1 July 1867. For about the next 80 years – from the 1870s through the 1950s – there were swift and often painful changes and developments in the social, political, economic, and cultural relationships between Euro-Canadians and Indigenous Canadians. During the nineteenth century, many European travelers and explorers had a penchant for collecting objects from foreign lands, especially as souvenirs. In what has come to be known as the Museum Age, vast quantities of material were gathered up and studied under the three rough divisions of “art,” “history,” and “science.” Museums of natural history across Europe created rooms for the study of African, Oceanic, and native North and South American objects. Rather than an attempt to assess these collections for their artistic merit, Indigenous peoples’ arts were surveyed according to their ethnological value.

During those eight decades, Indigenous people across Canada had to survive massive (sometimes overwhelming) changes, moving from a dependence on the land and sea, to a European-style capitalist economic system. This immense shift ruthlessly undermined Indigenous customs and values rooted in a collective, tribal-based

relationship to the earth, while at the same time valorizing individual ownership and profit within a highly racialized social context and political system.

The two major, all-pervasive influences affecting changes at every level of Indigenous society were the federal government and the Christian Church. Both entities had powerful and sweeping programs authorizing deliberate cultural change. Through the Indian Act of 1876, Ottawa forbade free cultural expression and, instead, enacted a program of assimilation. The federal government also gave certain Christian denominations the responsibility of educating Indigenous children. Most who were removed from their families and sent to church-run residential and industrial schools to become “civilized” wound up utterly deprived of the chance to have a traditional education. Many of these children were abused while at school and thousands upon thousands lost the knowledge of their ancestral languages, customs, and beliefs. Other, related forces that brought about major changes in Indian arts and crafts at that time were industrialization and associated new technologies, low-cost mass production and Westernization – a profound trend that saw many Indigenous artists adopting techniques and visual vocabularies associated with Western European art.

During the 1920s, Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs grew very active in organizing and supervising Indigenous exhibits at industrial and agricultural exhibitions. Bureaucrats encouraged students from industrial and residential schools to produce arts and crafts, and one role of the Indian Affairs’ agent was to exhibit their products in order to demonstrate their modern, “civilized” qualities rather than their basis in traditional forms and materials. Many in the federal government believed that, by engaging in such activities, Indigenous people would thereby acquire a Euro-Canadian spirit of competitiveness and motivation. Beneath the veneer, however, lay the chilling fact that these arts-and-crafts exhibitions were ideologically predicated on the department’s policy of assimilation.

A further, related pressure arose from the outlawing of certain cultural and spiritual practices, such as the West Coast Potlatch and the Plains Sun Dance, a move that resulted in many culturally relevant objects losing their values, functions, and meanings. In the wake of this systematic discontinuity, massive quantities of distinct tribal objects were no longer useful and many ended up in public and private collections, where they came to be regarded as “artifacts” of a disappearing race. These objects represent what cultural theorist Mieke Bal refers to as “deceptive denominators” (1996: 204). Such objects, she argues, take on “synecdochical” identities; on this logic, an artifact is a small element that stands in for a much larger whole. Bal’s argument helps to clarify what happened with Canada’s Indigenous artifacts. As they disappeared from Indigenous communities and reappeared in ethnological collections, their attendant cultural practices and meanings simultaneously disappeared. Their original purposes did not endure, but neither were they ritually “killed.” Gathering dust in museum collections across the country and around the world, Indigenous artifacts acquired new – deceptive and static – identities as commodities, specimens, art, heirlooms, cultural heritage, or sacred emblems.

Repatriations

In Canada and the United States since about the 1970s, however, we have been witnessing a profound interest by Indigenous communities in having such objects, particularly those considered sacred and of cultural or historical importance (patrimony),

returned to them. Indeed, before such repatriation had become routine, museums and galleries were often targeted as sites of struggle by several Indigenous contemporary artists. James Clifford says the story of artifact repatriation “seem[s] to be a striking example of how [the] dominant practice of collection and display has been turned to unanticipated ends. Master narratives of cultural disappearance and salvage could be replaced by stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle” (1991: 214).

As Indigenous peoples in the 1970s and 1980s became more aware of the historical circumstances that led to the removal of millions of objects from communities across the Americas – artifacts that now sit dead in storage facilities around the world – a critical question arose: how can life be given or returned to these precious items? For such repatriation even to be considered, however, a critical shift first had to be initiated by Indigenous peoples: this entailed challenging the authority of museums and other institutions, which often spoke for Indigenous peoples through what I call “ventriloquism.” This throwing of a paternalist voice did not sit well with Indigenous people, especially artists (perennial troublemakers!). It took great efforts by many brave, brilliant people to change and decolonize the dominant narrative. The U’mista Cultural Centre, located on the north end of British Columbia’s Vancouver Island in the town of Alert Bay, for example, became significant for its decisive role in repatriating objects back to their communities. Founded in 1980, U’mista – which, in the language of the Kwakwaka’wakw people, means “the return of something important” – was a new kind of museum operated by Indigenous people.

Contemporary Artists Respond: 1980s/1990s

Critiquing the exoticization of early colonialist collecting, Jimmie Durham – the controversial “Cherokee” artist I mentioned at the outset of this chapter – created some of the most interesting and critical “primitivist” works during the 1980s and 1990s. Durham was recently the subject of a major retrospective at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (29 January to 7 May 2017). Rather understandably, Durham and the show were roundly criticized by the Native American art community (see Griffin 2017; Holland 2017; and Meredith 2017). After many years of championing Indigenous rights, Durham ironically found himself on the outside looking in. Regardless of whether he is disqualified from ever exhibiting as an American Indian, it can be argued that he was constituted within the discursive boundaries of American Indian art. While he remains absent, in exile in Europe away from any critical reception by the American Indian art community, his older works and words remain part of the contemporary Indigenous art discourse.

Among them is the humorous 1986 work *Types of Arrows: On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian*. Labeled “tiny, wavy, and short and fat,” Durham’s collection of arrows is a critique of the positivist examination of cultures by one proto-ethnographic museum, New York’s Museum of the American Indian (now called the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian). Specifically, the piece targets the way museum exhibitions typically presented Indigenous objects in impersonal and simplistic terms, and in aesthetically unappealing fashion, thus rendering their associated cultures one-dimensional, primitive, and child-like. This discursive mode of displaying Indigenous objects could be called “exhibitionist primitivism.” Indeed, displays like these rest on a racialized binary between civilized and uncivilized cultures. Durham complicates such ethnographic discourse by injecting a language of

his own – “sociofacts” and “scientifacts” – with a collection of materials that are “part-found, part-fabricated.” Jean Fisher notes that Durham’s installation “purported to illustrate the ‘natural history’ of the Indian. ... Despite the absurdity of the items, their signs of ‘Indianness’ led many viewers to mistake them for genuine museum articles, missing the parodic humour in his *mime* of the act of ethnographic surveillance” (1992: 47). Rather than presenting the artifact as synecdoche, Durham draws attention to our blind faith in scientific objectivity and the coldness of museum representation, strategies that prompt viewers to accept this quasi-museum piece as truth. In this display, Durham displays these “arti-fakes” – a term coined by Haida artist Bill Reid to describe some of his early works that were copies of originals (Holm and Reid 1975: 134) as they might be presented in the Museum of the American Indian: lifeless and de-sanctified. The power in so much of Durham’s output is the deliberately naive quality of the workmanship. But in *Types of Arrows*, the viewer sees only objects randomly presented, and most viewers are unaware that the display is ironically pseudoscientific. Just about anyone who gazes on *Types of Arrows* is caught up in reading the text as context, oblivious to the fact that the entire work should be read as a text.

James Luna’s *The Artifact Piece* is widely considered one of the most profound works of its era. Introduced by way of a public performance at San Diego Museum of Man among its permanent exhibitions in 1987, *The Artifact Piece* prompted diverse reactions from the observers who stared at the body-as-artifact – as representation and thus synecdoche. Viewers were attracted to a body because of its reality effect, and the occasional movement of the belly belied the body-as-object and revealed it to be a living being. The semiotic effect of *The Artifact Piece* lies in the viewer’s treatment of it. The museal discourse compelled museum visitors to treat it as an object, relegating it to third-person status. It is conceivable that museum-goers did not know the historical underpinnings of this piece; in some ways, this is one of its most attractive aspects, in that it caught viewers completely by surprise, even more so in this southern California locale where the Indian is both fiction (of Hollywood) and artifact (of the museum). Luna, the artist, is rendered powerless and excluded until, of course, he decides to get up off the table. At that point, he rendered viewers suddenly self-conscious as they realize they are now the spectacle: “This ‘being seen’ is precipitated in the voyeur by what Jean-Paul Sartre calls ‘le regard’” (Silverman 1996: 164). The observer is now on view and becomes “other.” For a moment, the artifact piece is alive, giving the artist/Indigenous person control over his identity and subject position. Andrea Liss writes: “*The Artifact Piece* is designed to dislodge their (our) sense of mastery over territorial space and to acknowledge the contemporaneous existence of specific others” (1992: 9). In *The Artifact Piece*, the body as eavesdropper waits for the moment to disarm the gaze. I recall Luna telling how outraged he felt because of the comments he overheard during his position as eavesdropper. He could not believe the kinds of ideas (baggage) people continued to hold true about Indigenous people.

Despite the original and provocative nature of *The Artifact Piece*, there is little evidence that Luna changed attitudes about the objectification of Native Americans in either museums or outside in general society (it may, of course, be that the public’s identification of Indians as past and savage was clarified a little during this time). Nevertheless, Luna forever influenced the discursive space of the ethnographic museum, which, by their presentations, had to reconsider their power relations.

Another project that pushed the temporal boundaries of Indigenous museum artifacts and brought them into the present is Joane Cardinal-Schubert’s *Is This My Grandmother’s?* (1988), which she was inspired to create by a visit to the research

collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. During one visit, she saw in the museum's storage vaults many objects, including leather shirts, dresses, and moccasins stuffed into clear plastic bags. Not realizing that this practice of putting objects into plastic bags is a common form of preventive care designed to ward off pests, she had a spontaneous adverse reaction. Instead, she asked: "Just who are the pests?"

Many Indigenous contemporary artists have understood full well the strategies of resistance, articulation, and empowerment, of connecting art with the social and political. In *Is This My Grandmother's?*, Cardinal-Schubert focuses our attention on the physical and discursive distance between museums' artifacts and their originating communities. As Indigenous peoples become more aware of the historical circumstances that led to the removal of hundreds of thousands of objects from communities across the Americas, and that now sit lifeless in storage facilities around the world, the question for both communities is: how can life be brought back to these objects?

Cardinal-Schubert was inspired not by beauty but by horror, fear, and helplessness. Horror, in a loathsome sense of seeing the objectification of her heritage; fear, in the reverential sense that many of these objects were sacred and she could do little to rescue them; and helplessness, in that she knew little of the appropriate address to be made to the object as a traditional way of entering into dialogue. These profound feelings led her to ask: "Is this my grandmother's?" The question is rhetorical, but it does make us ponder the cruciform shape on which this dress hangs. First, the idea of the crucifix, which holds up the encased dress, is one of humiliation, as Christ was humiliated when he hung on the cross. Although Cardinal-Schubert's dress is a facsimile of a Ghost Dance dress, she presents it as an objectified dress left open for examination as an artifact. Originally, a Ghost Dance dress would have been a sacred object; this modern simulacrum is displaced, desanctified, and devalued. Another aspect is its necrotic, death-like arrangement, outstretched as if it were on a rack. Similarly, the cross or tree from which Christ hung was used as an instrument of torture and persecution, and later came to represent both sacrifice and resurrection. Cardinal-Schubert makes a similar pronouncement in that the artifactuality of the dress is condemned to suffer and never to return to its original purpose; yet for Cardinal-Schubert there is a sense of resurrection of the Indian body politic. The rack on which the dress hangs is a framework not only for display and storage but also for its "artifact-ness." Its identity will always be "other."

The *Warshirt Series*, of which *Is This My Grandmother's?* was part, spoke of Cardinal-Schubert's warrior-like fortitude at a time when a shift in power relations was taking place between museums and Indigenous communities. The series began as a response to realizing that many actual war shirts ended up in museum collections. For her, sanctity is possible only if Indigenous objects are liberated from their confines and returned home.

Jane Ash Poitras does not share the same museological polemic as the other artists discussed here, although she utilizes similar critical strategies. Instead of criticizing the (ab)use of the object, her subject is the Indian body politic as a casualty of modernity. Against modernity, she positions the spirituality of the shaman as salvation for Indigenous culture. Since the late 1980s, her *Shaman Never Die* series has expressed the shaman's social and cultural position of healer for many of the social ills Indigenous people experienced during the reservation period. The shaman as metaphor is traditionally figured as magician, priest, mystic, poet, and master of ecstasy.

In her practice and personal life, Ash Poitras celebrates the survival of her ancestors and the shaman. Thus, her paintings are both a critical practice and a reverential activity in which some of the qualities of the shaman unfurl.

In *Transformation, Assimilated Indian, Hudson's Bay Lure* (1992), she uses a museological technique of the display case as a way to discuss seduction, change, and conversion. Reflecting a personal journey of discovery, from birth to death and back to rebirth, Ash Poitras's frailties are an example of the problems and conflicts that are a constant threat to Indigenous community life. The first display case, *Hudson's Bay Lure*, is framed around materialism, commodification, and wonder. Of the three vitrines, this one has the look and feel of an early-twentieth-century showroom (the other two are modern), and it is filled to capacity. This case performs at least two functions: the first is to entice customers to consumer goods made by Indians; the second is to figure an ethnographic trap, displaying objects salvaged from Indigenous cultures as a cabinet of curiosities. The display seduces viewers, interpellating within them a dominant ideology as they look upon their "other."

In the second case, however, Ash Poitras frustrates our desires. *Assimilated Indian* presents the dangers of habits and addiction, offering up an unbearable lightness of being in which addiction signifies death. The skeleton reaches for a can of beer while hovering over a field of cigarette butts. Drinking alcohol among Indigenous people has long been a sign of resistance, a way of countering the pain of existence and the conditions of poverty. But abuse of intoxicants has, of course, had immense negative consequences for individuals and their communities. The idea of assimilation has also always been part of the anthropological discourse describing the Indigenous state of affairs: a kind of longing for the past while, at the same time, Indigenous cultures are absorbed into the great body politic of the West. Assimilation is to make similar, to change identity. In this case, Ash Poitras's skeletal figure is the final signifier of this idea. In the end, death renders us all the same: food for worms. However, there is a twist. Although not apparent because of the visible signifiers, Ash Poitras's surprise is that this work is about museal practices, beginning with exhibition of Indigenous people as artifacts and ending with the intense scientific interest in their remains. Ash Poitras adds a bit of salt, noting that it is abundantly clear how this person died; there is no need for exhumation.

After the fragmentation and disintegration that arose during the reservation period, Indigenous people now find themselves in radically new dispositions of renewal, affirmation, and self-determination. In Ash Poitras's final case, *Transformation*, we sense such freedom, self-control, resistance, and rebirth. The vitrine is completely empty, a void that is anathema for museums that need objects for display. So, what has been transformed? There is a sense that museums can no longer (ab)use Indigenous people for museal purposes, since many of the objects were not made for these purposes. The transformation is a shift from subjection to sovereignty.

Contemporary Artists Respond: 2000 to the Present

Since 2000, a younger generation of Indigenous artists from Canada and the United States have continued the critical turn away from the ethnographic museum to express their own voices. Not unlike Durham and Luna, they often deploy humor and irony as their vehicles. Yet this new generation of artists also use the form and style of the

institutions that framed their ancestors by reversing the ethnographic, colonialist gaze in a much more biting critique.

In her 2005 work *The Collector/The Artist in Her Museum*, Métis artist Rosalie Favell takes on Charles Willson Peale's 1822 painting *The Artist in His Museum* by inserting herself into a Victorian museum of natural history. Peale's original work shows the artist pulling back the curtain to reveal his well-ordered collection, which served as the inspiration for his Philadelphia Museum of Art. Peale's interests were formulated by the paradigm of combining natural history and ethnography of the American Indian. Despite the eventual demise of his museum, the discourse upon which it was founded remained powerful through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Favell disrupts this colonial establishment view by inserting aspects of her personal and cultural heritage, such as family pictures in place of Peale's paintings. Also in the picture plane, she inserts a large bronze elephant sculpture and a stick-chewing beaver. For Favell, the work is a statement about the modernist/colonialist practice of "museumifying" otherness. Despite her wearing nineteenth-century clothing, she nonetheless suggests that Indigenous peoples should rightfully exhibit their own culture and history.

Similarly tackling early museal practice, *Ethnographic Zoo* was a 2015 performance piece by Paiute artist Gregg Deal done outside the Denver Art Museum during his residency at the museum. *Ethnographic Zoo* was conceived as a deconstruction of the commodification and consumption of the Indigenous image, a particularly acute topic given the museum's location in Denver, a city that is central to the cowboy-and-Indian discourse (which was itself the subject of the Denver Art Museum's 2017 exhibition *The Western: An Epic in Art and Film*).

Much of Deal's performance dealt in stereotype, appropriation, and the troubling amount of authority that museums possesses over Indigenous identity, such as shaping the ways in which people understand and interact with both images and Indigenous people. A sign outside the velvet rope enclosing Deal read, "Please do not feed the stereotype." The twist? Everything the artist wore was mass produced in China; nearly all elements were made in China, or made from a kit with materials manufactured in China. Deal's headdress, made of dyed turkey feathers and pre-produced bead strips, was the center point only because it represented the quintessential feature of Indigenous masculinity, at least so far as Western culture is concerned. The production and purchase of these items amplified the irony of people's excitement and fascination with what they saw because what they perceived as bona fide was as far from it as, well, China. According to Deal, *Ethnographic Zoo* represented "the inept understanding Americans have, or westerners have, to what indigeneity is and what it isn't. So in essence, I'm a stereotype personified" (Deerchild 2015). In this piece, Deal self-presented as a living artifact, much like James Luna, only in this instance he sat outside an art museum and not within an ethnographic museum. While Luna brought attention to the ways Indigenous peoples are represented in museums, Deal continued along the lines so many before addressed: stereotypes are difficult to kill off. He brought his message to a major American art gallery, yet it appeared as though it were intended more for the gift shop than the discursivity of the galleries.

Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin's work *White Carver* (2014) is an installation featuring a human subject named "Ed," a well-dressed Caucasian man with an eager face sitting on a platform behind a velvet rope and working on a wood carving. On the wall behind him is a composite photograph containing an Edward S. Curtis

photographic image of a Hopi woman and a picture of *Star Wars*' Princess Leia. As if in an educational film, Ed is making a wood carving that conforms to traditional Northwest Coast art. But what exactly is Ed carving? Well, it looks like a "pocket pussy," as Galanin called it, like the one that is the subject of Galanin's *I Looooove Your Culture* (2014) – a sex toy in the shape of a woman's genitals. The sex toy, Galanin explains, suggests how shallow mainstream society's "appreciation" of Native American culture is: "You don't want the culture, you just want the object, the iconography" – a personal experience that Galanin encountered when he worked as a carver at a cultural center in Sitka, Alaska (Johnson 2014). Galanin, like many of his generation, did not learn to work with wood from a master carver; instead, he sought out information in libraries, which, ironically, is similar to how his ethnographic subject, Ed, must have acquired his skill. It is a similar situation one might still see outside the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, British Columbia, where local Indigenous artists work on poles in a carving shed while visitors can watch and ask questions. This modern day ethnographic zoo is what is being challenged by artists such as Galanin.

Known for his paintings, films, and performances that challenge ethnographic Indigenous stereotypes, Cree artist Kent Monkman reshapes the history of colonization and the North American landscape painting tradition under the guise of his queer-camp alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Monkman's painting *Duel after the Masquerade* (2007) is based on early-nineteenth-century painter Paul Kane's *Medicine Mask Dance* (1848–1856). In his work, which appeared in 2008 as part of the Royal Ontario Museum's exhibition *Shapeshifters, Time Travellers, and Storytellers*, Monkman shows the artist Kane being held up by masked Indigenous dancers in an environment not of their own but elsewhere. His easel lies on the ground as he looks in astonishment at Miss Chief, who strides away in a white fur coat. Monkman's painting takes its title, however, from a mid-nineteenth-century picture by French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, which depicts a defeated man dressed in Pierrot costume slumping into the arms of his friends while his adversary, dressed in Indian costume, departs from the scene. Art critic Sarah Milroy (2007) argues that Monkman's mixed ancestry – part Cree, part British, part Irish – gives him an entitlement to access both the Indigenous and European sides of his heritage.

More recently, in 2017 Monkman's major exhibition called *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto brought together art and artifact, for example by situating several baby carriers (papooses) alongside a painting depicting the abduction of children destined for residential schools. In another space, a long table riffed on a dinner that could have been served during the European rococo period. Not only does this piece reverse the European gaze but it darkly contrasts Western plenty and excess with a very pointed statement about the starvation experienced by Indigenous peoples in the late nineteenth century when the buffalo were hunted to near extinction by Euro-Americans.

The contemporary generation of Indigenous artists confront the museal and historical institutions head on. Not only do they call out issues and oversights in institutional representations of Indigenous art, they also shed light on the racist stereotypes created and perpetuated by these institutions. Artists such as Favell, Deal, Galanin, and Monkman find their spaces in canonical art history and deliberately insert themselves in the contemporary period. The disruption is necessary, as for hundreds of years institutions had kept living Indigenous cultures behind vitrine glass.

The Discursive Space of the Museum

Religious studies scholar Antonio Gualtieri (2017) observes that “objects don’t mean, people mean.” With this simple, yet provocative, thought in mind, I turn to a question that is critical for Indigenous people – and especially Indigenous artists – today: “What are the signifying practices that museums exert upon tribal objects’ meanings, identities, biographies, and futures?”

A major thrust of my current research involves exploring to what extent “the museum” is itself an emerging discursive space that could make possible new interpretive thresholds – in-between, even liminal spaces – where an interdisciplinary approach could offer new modes of understanding and resurgence. As I consider this question, I find anthropologist Michael Ames’s formulation helpful: “Large public museum[s] may express and authenticate the established or official values and images of society in several ways, directly, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternative values” (1992: 22). While it is not absolute, museums possess a good deal of power in controlling the narratives assimilated by their publics; most obviously, museum curators control the messages physically attached to objects and exhibitions. Not long ago, a persistent narrative for museums was the depiction of Indigenous peoples as existing in a classic, quasi-Golden Age before the arrival of Europeans. Natives’ true, authentic identities existed only prior to 1492. Understandably, given museums’ cultural authority, most visitors took this account as the truth. Consequently, through the reifying power of synecdoche, the objects upon which they gazed came to stand for *former* Indigenous cultures – their stories were always framed in the past tense.

But what, I wonder, would happen if we were to replace synecdoche with metonymy? As Bal explains, metonymy is where one thing stands for another adjacent to it in place, time, or logic (1996: 80). While a synecdochical reading isolates an object as an artifact, a metonymic reading suggests that the same object can be understood only if it is situated in relation to other connected objects, for example in a contextual display.

There are, however, ways of regarding an object other than simply as art or artifact. What if we were to extend our categorizing range to other possibilities, such as heirloom, commodity, sacrament, or patrimony? Ames suggests that these identities “are all properties or values of the object, all phases in its life.” Furthermore, he says:

Values may be imposed by those wishing to possess or appropriate the object, and others asserted by those claiming moral jurisdiction. These transformations of meaning and use during the object’s careers could be better represented in museum interpretations. The longer the career of an object, however, the more segmented its history becomes, and the more knowledge about it becomes fragmented, contradictory, differentiated, and fodder for commodification and dispute. (Ames 1992: 144)

Like words, part of the function of “objects” is to structure our understanding of the world. They reflect and, sometimes, are keys to different realities. We understand also that an object is a sign. But such signs do not refer exclusively to things; they signify also concepts, and concepts are aspects of thought, not of concrete reality. In the past, museums assigned certain meanings to objects made by Indigenous people. Now, however, we are seeing Indigenous people, including artists, layer onto them new perspectives, such as patrimony and sovereignty.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) concept of "cultural capital" certainly inheres in this process of resurgent re-inscription. Indeed, the struggle to transform the inequalities of variant and often competing perspectives is the essence of cultural politics. Objects, after all, are repositories of knowledge shared by various people and institutions, particularly those who have heavy investments in them. This can lead to ideological struggles over how they are treated. If, therefore, objects have many associated properties and values, it may be useful to theorize them under the concept of identity. One might ask, therefore: how do language and ideology inform an object's identity? How does the career (or subjectivity) of an object change within different situations? And, how do objects serve to express Indigenous people's identity and, subsequently, the arts of resistance and resurgence?

From 1981–2000, I held a curatorial position at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC), which, although not an art museum, included a gallery dedicated to showing contemporary Indigenous art. I enjoyed my time working at the CMC, where I collaborated with ethnologists, archaeologists, folklorists, historians, and an Inuit art curator. During this part of my career, however, I also experienced the dilemma experienced by most, if not all, Indigenous artists: having their art represented in a non-art museum. My friend Edward Poitras, whose work I curated at the 1995 Venice Biennale, helped me to resolve this issue. His view on the matter was that he did not mind being presented or collected by such museums as it made him feel closer to his ancestors – because, like him, their productions were not in art galleries either.

In 1992, Carl Beam created a work called *Burying the Ruler*, in which he critiqued the basis of Enlightenment knowledge and the principles that came to represent the Age of Discovery (and Conquest) of the New World. The ruler – a parodic riff on Protagoras's familiar adage "Man is the measure of all things" and its implied Rationalist ideology – was, for Beam, oppositional to Indigenous thought. The ruler symbolized for Beam the systematic subjugation all Indigenous peoples of the Americas by European powers. In 1992, while much of the world was celebrating the Columbian Quincentennial, Indigenous artists and thinkers across North America were fully engaged in taking a stand and pouncing on the celebratory atmosphere. They denounced the complete lack of awareness and understanding for the historical injustices done to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, demanding their histories and voices be heard and respected. Beam's work during this time continued to pound away at this idea.

What, exactly, had we gained from five centuries of exploitation, violence, disease, and displacement? Compared to today, 25 years ago when all these works were being created, Indigenous artists as a political force were still relatively unknown in the art world. As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, in 1992, across the river from the *Land, Spirit, Power* exhibition of contemporary Indigenous artists at the National Gallery of Canada, I co-curated with Lee-Ann Martin an exhibition called *Indigena* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Our concept for this was an anti-celebration exhibition in which exclusively Indigenous voices would be present. We marketed the exhibition as a politically hard-hitting critique of a half-millennium of colonialist history.

The same year also saw the release in Canada of the *Task Force Report on Museums and First People*. This report concerned the relations of Indigenous peoples with museums and it proved that the Canadian landscape was quickly changing. One of the

upshots was the emergence of a more dynamic consciousness of the us/them duality, where museums with Indigenous holdings became more likely to work in partnership with specific Indigenous communities – to become simply “us.” Marianna Torgovnick points out that such a composite “we” identification runs the risk of “effac[ing] particularities and affirms identification with a larger body whose common features are relatively bloodless” (1994: 264). In the case of Canadian museums, galleries, and Indigenous peoples, however, I would suggest that the reverse has increasingly become the norm. My contention is that, in a growing number of instances, the political power of Indigenous peoples is affirming museums’ subject status. Torgovnick argues that, in the politics of inclusion, someone must surrender an aspect of themselves. Rather unexpectedly, in this case, it is museums and galleries that are “surrendering” and not, for the first time in a very long while, Indigenous peoples.

In 2005, I began work at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) as the Fredrik S. Eaton curator of Canadian art. I was responsible for the new re-hang of the Canadian galleries, which included greater representation of women and Indigenous artists. I also brought in contemporary art to hang alongside the AGO’s extensive historical collection. Our first consideration for the re-hang was to recognize that Canada has a visual art history predating the arrival of Europeans. With this new introduction, we effectively shifted the traditional view of the start of Canadian art. The first “Canadian” gallery visitors entered at the AGO was filled with a thousand projectile points – arrow heads, spear points, and knives. Less than half were small, fully formed points dating from 1000 to 11 000 years ago; they sat on one wall. On the other wall, more than half were half-formed; in other words, they may have been discarded or not yet fully formed. Together, all these projectile points were presented as an art installation within an art gallery not an ethnographic or archaeological museum (although we worked closely with an archaeologist). During the installation’s gestation period, there were many internal debates over the points’ status and worth as art objects. These debates prompted us to bring various voices (Anglophone and francophone) together: an art historian, a contemporary art curator, an archaeologist, a First Nations carver, an art student, an 8-year-old, a First Nations elder, and a tribal leader. We asked everyone the same question: “Are these works of art?” Our goal was to bring the conversation out into the public realm; in other words, we sought transparency within our own decision-making.

The AGO’s new Canadian Wing was organized thematically under Memory, Myth, and Power. For example, one of the galleries, called “Ancient Memory,” explored the ways in which memories are recorded as a means of marking our place, our time, and our events. We sought to understand the ancient history of Indigenous peoples through their art over the past millennia and longer, and our curatorial thinking was guided by questions such as: how does the past shape the present? How do we examine the past through a contemporary lens? How have we tried to erase ancient memory? And how has art preserved these memories?

In presenting the new Canadian galleries along the lines of viewing the past through the lens of the present, we opened ourselves to being criticized for presentism. We acknowledged that danger, but we believed it was a risk worth taking. Historical examination is full of contradictions, points of view, and compromises. We could have chosen other approaches, but the one we followed seemed the most relevant for our institution and the state of the discipline at the time. The past cannot be undone but it can be revised and rewritten.

Reasons for Optimism

Museums, as many of us know, have differing identities that, like our own personal and group identities, are constituted in language. For this reason, museums are discursive spaces with hybrid identities. They are given public meaning by the objects they hold, and vice versa. Museums' strategies and practices for exhibiting and collecting also vary. For example, curators and other museum professionals view collections aesthetically, historically, and/or anthropologically. They ask various questions about objects: what are their provenance? Who made them? When? Where? What were the circumstance and conditions of their creation? In today's museums, objects and collections encompass new realities rarely, if ever, previously considered.

In Canada, for instance, our cultural institutions are now more likely to try to surpass each other in establishing friendly relations with local Indigenous communities and artists. Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report in 2015, which included a call for museums and other cultural bodies to improve their representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015: 8), institutions across Canada have been building strong relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Across the country, Indigenous contemporary artists are very much active players in this resurgence.

Recently, for example, the National Gallery of Canada transformed its formerly Canadian galleries into an expanded Canadian and Indigenous Galleries "Canadian and Indigenous Art: From Time Immemorial to 1967" (completed on 15 June, just in time for Canada's 150th birthday celebration on 1 July). The aim of the renovation was to combine almost 800 works to tell a more complete story of art in Canada, a good part of which entails giving "new prominence to contemporary and historic object-making by Indigenous peoples" (Everett-Green 2017). Included are 185 works by Indigenous artists from the gallery's vault, and 95 additional works loaned from national institutions, such as the Canadian Museum of History and the Bata Shoe Museum. Across a half-dozen gallery spaces over two floors, contemporary art by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians intermingle, claiming equal ground. In the words of gallery director Marc Mayer: "It presents Canadian and Indigenous art, side by side, telling two separate stories that may seem to converge in the present, but converging without assimilation" (Panico 2017). A potent example of the gallery's new philosophy is the decision to install an Algonquin canoe in the middle of a room displaying paintings by Canada's iconic Group of Seven artists. In the summer of 2017, the National Gallery of Canada embraced the task of tipping the scales to the center when it installed Carl Beam's *The North American Iceberg* (1985) as the unofficial welcome sign to these re-imagined spaces. Through this lens, visitors are now able to see two Canadas – often separate, never equal – displayed, at last and nevertheless, as one.

Also in the summer of 2017, both *documenta* (in Kassel, Germany) and the Biennale di Venezia (in Venice, Italy) featured numerous works by contemporary Indigenous artists (McMaster 2017). Similarly, when I was artistic co-director, with Catherine de Zegher, of the 18th Biennale of Sydney in 2012, we included many Indigenous artists from around the world mixed in with other contemporary artists. What we are witnessing is the rapid integration of Indigenous contemporary artists in a wide array of national and international exhibitions of contemporary art. For many of these artists, ethnographic museums, where previous generations got their start, are no longer

relevant to their identities or their artistic practices. As Mark Engstrom, the deputy director of collections and research at the Royal Ontario Museum, observes, “It’s an old division, to suggest that people who are Western have art and other people have ethnographic work. These old lines are disappearing in the modern museum” (Everett-Green 2017).

This is all great. Wonderful, in fact! Yet, resting on laurels would be premature. Caution and continued resistance remain necessary. Despite, for instance, certain European museums changing their names to some variant of “World Culture Museum,” are they truly willing to venture into a trans- or interdisciplinary arena where Indigenous contemporary artists could be brought in to help, not just with the scenography but with methodology and content as well? We must, I think, be wary of merely glossier versions of nineteenth-century ethnography either creeping back in or, perhaps, never actually having left the building. So, I ask, can highly intelligent, nimble, and creative Indigenous curators not be fully included or is the idea of absolutely decolonizing ethnography museums still a dreaded thought? As we all know, unimaginative, unexamined “Indian displays” remain. But for how much longer?

The future has not yet been written. Overall, the message I want to convey is a positive, optimistic one. But as we look to the future, let us remember a couple of important things. First, the “resurgence” we seem to be enjoying today is based on the brave “resistance” of earlier artists and political activists. Second, I want to underscore the fact that the aesthetics of Indigenous resistance and resurgence are always contingent on the real, often harsh, socioeconomic and cultural conditions in which artists live and practice.

Today, I derive great hope from the fact that in galleries and museums across Canada and other parts of the world new ideas and approaches are constantly being tested and implemented – and the public really is eager to see, hear, touch, taste, and experience Indigenous cultures via bold, challenging presentations. My people do not want just to hear about the past. We want to co-create, live in, and enjoy a genuinely resurgent, fully decolonized future.

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The Creature from the Id

Adventures in Aboriginal Art Curating

Djon Mundine

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.

Nietzsche (2017)

The story of Aboriginal art in Australia is a Robinson Crusoe story. It is the story of a white European male who is shipwrecked on a tropical island in the Pacific Ocean. He believes, or would like to believe, that the island is unoccupied physically, conceptually, socially, and spiritually. In such a self-constructed empty space, he is lonely and yearns for human interaction. After some time, one day in his travels on that island he sees a mark. If you know the story, he sees a footprint. In academic terms, he sees a sign, and the sign that tells him the place is occupied and that he is not alone is Aboriginal art.

Shortly after, he meets the person who made the mark. Normally you would say on meeting a stranger, “Hello, my name is... What’s your name? Where are you from?” But the first thing Crusoe says is, “I will name you (Friday)!” He names that person. He fails to correctly read the sign, and in renaming that person (who already has a name) he colonizes that person, he appropriates that person, and, ultimately, he dominates that person. A great historical, social, and intellectual moment is missed. Of course, this is a “dreamtime” fable, an intellectual discussion removed from the brutal reality of invasion, massacre, rape, and dispossession on a wide scale, and one that art has yet to discuss and possibly cannot handle.

For Aboriginal people art is a cultural expression, a history of a people, a statement of self-definition resulting from a series of life experiences, a recounting of an untold story, and the bringing to light of a truth of history. It is a statement that is possibly unable to be made in any other way. The art the Aboriginal painter makes is made to

be “seen” in motion – if not on bark, the earth, rock walls, or canvas, then on their own bodies. The paintings are a form of *cantastoria* or a traveling storyteller or singer in some cultures.¹

The term “liminal” means a threshold, the point of conscious awareness below which something cannot be experienced or felt. Non-Aboriginal Australians periodically approach the awareness that they are not living in Europe, that they are not even living in a colony of Europe, any more but are now living in their own homeland. As each successive Australian generation draws within reach of this point, it suddenly, inexplicably, falls back, almost recoiling in terror at the idea that they could become so independently human. We cannot blame the British any more.

In 1971, *If the War Goes On: Reflections on War and Politics*, by the German writer Hermann Hesse, was published.² In the chapter “The European,” Hesse describes a (European) world war wherein blind ego and hate lead protagonists to destroy the North Pole, flooding the world. Humanity only just survives, as two of every race are together on a type of Noah’s Ark, riding the oceans. They rescue the last resident of the last, now-destroyed European city. A festival is taking place among the “passengers,” and he is invited to contribute and join. He proclaims that the only offering he has is something invisible, intangible, almost inexplicable, awe-inspiring and without form: his intellect! His “intellect,” it appears, is outside, and above the cooking, eating, singing, dancing, and enjoyment of the other passengers (the rest of the world).

They are about to throw him back into the floodwaters but Noah intervenes. Since he (the European) is the last of his kind and cannot reproduce, Noah says, he should be allowed to live out the rest of his life as an example of the folly and arrogance of this time.

The history of Aboriginal art has had many phases. Today, it is partly market driven, following European traditions, and partly a pure presentation of icons, ideas, and possibly a kind of moral insistence. It entails a discovery, an unpeeling, of the many Aboriginal societies, one by one, and an understanding that there is no one Aboriginal person.

First Phase: The Arrival of the British

First, there was the period from the beginning of time through to the arrival of the British colonists in 1788, then to the time at the end of World War II. Of course, many people had visited the continent to trade well before the arrival of the British. Makassan fishermen from Sulawesi (now Indonesia) visited Australia from at least 1621 until 1908, and it is possible that Chinese explorers visited around 1200. The Englishman Captain James Cook came to Australia in 1770, and in 1788 a fleet of English criminals arrived in Australia – it was so far from Europe that it operated as an open prison. The death, disempowerment, and dispersion of Aboriginal people has been taking place ever since.

Since our arrival on this land, 40 000–50 000 years ago, Aboriginal societies curated and choreographed their cycles of religious ceremonies, where numbers of related individuals, across all ages and genders, came together for spiritual veneration, and to create art: singing, dance, and the visual arts. The participants, through enacting these performance, affirmed their relationships to each other, their relationship to their society, their relationship to the land, and their relationship to the

spiritual cosmos. Any physical “art” objects created are almost irrelevant, made of temporary materials, existed only as part of the social action (and usually destroyed in the process). As colonization removed the essential player-parts of these gatherings, they began to fall apart across the continent. Such spiritual cultural gatherings were seen by the invading British as “war parties” and were broken up – “dispersed” in the official language of the day.

In this phase, all inhabitants of this southern continent, larger in size than Europe, which had over 250 languages and societies, were labeled and defined by one name: Aboriginal (the original people) by the British colonizing power. The British stereotyped all Aboriginal people as primitive, stone age, unsophisticated, and/or unintelligent. To them, it seemed that Aboriginal people had no physical wealth. In 1880, an exhibition of images on paper created by the Aboriginal prisoners of Darwin’s Fanny Bay Gaol, called *The Dawn of Art*, was hung in Adelaide. The works in this exhibition set out or demonstrated the structure of all the existing colonial racist prejudices.

From then on, bark paintings and similar works on paper were curated by white Australian institutional male curators in several national survey exhibitions. I think these were a reaction to the African art shown in European exhibitions, and/or presented as national curiosities, and/or aimed at building a history for this young nation. However, the strategy of not naming the Aboriginal artists or titling the works continued the stereotyping of Aboriginal people.

Second Phase: The “Discovery” of Bark Paintings

The second phase is the “discovery” of bark paintings from what is called Arnhem Land, in the north of Australia, and the proposition that Aboriginal art is art with a capital “A,” and possibly that it is contemporary art. This was the time when the Beatles and the Rolling Stones came to Australia. In 1962, the Menzies Federal Government gave Aboriginal people the right to enroll and vote in Commonwealth elections. In the late 1950s, Aboriginal artists were named in exhibitions for the first time (1957). Until then, only a few, such as watercolorist Albert Namatjira, were named. In 1958, the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) started to collect bark paintings and Aboriginal art, and to move it from being categorized in ethnographic terms to being considered fine art. The fact that these artworks were similar in form to Western art (portable figurative and abstract paintings on a flat surface) assisted this recognition. Various discussions took place, attempting to place or locate Aboriginal art in the system and history of Western art. Is it Surrealist, Cubist, Minimalist, and so on?³ No definitive answer was arrived at, and at the time of writing (2019), this art still remains at the AGNSW, if a little uncomfortably, intellectually speaking. One of course should realize that when we talk of art, when we learn about art, when we see art, it is “white Western” art history that we see, that we are told about, and ponder on, in white Western art institutions.

Although collected and displayed as fine art in the AGNSW from the 1950s, it was almost as though post-World War II art aesthetics and attitudes, plus the exoticness of the art’s materials – and possibly their subject matter – initially denied Aboriginal artists full acceptance and stature as art. After the rush of collecting and debate in the 1960s, the inability to turn the corner into Western art theory would slow real

progress in the ability to read and value these beautiful creations as serious works of art. In fact, I feel that internationally, despite recent hype to the contrary, this prejudice has yet to be overcome. A non-Aboriginal, non-Australian curator once raised certain issues with me. First, Aboriginal art is not developmental. Second, Aboriginal art is too self-referential. Third, Aboriginal art references are not current. Fourth, Aboriginal art is not influential on other art movements.

These comments are debatable and refutable if one sees art as something also practiced outside the Western art world. Aboriginal artists in Arnhem Land had been incorporating and absorbing influences from Makassan visitors in their language, music, songs, and visual art for over 100 years by the time Cook arrived in 1770. Our art did not need to go through the “camera” representational shock, that is the invention of the camera and its impact on painting that beset Europe in the late 1800s. In Australia, our reading and meaning of our compositions were certainly current, as evidenced in land claims and native title cases. The legal repercussions of these cases eventually influenced international law.

“Save your pity for those who have no dreaming.”

Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula⁴

Third Phase: Papunya and the “Western Desert Dot and Circle” Paintings

The third phase was the beginning of the “Western Desert dot and circle” painting on canvas movement at Papunya, northwest of Alice Springs, from the early 1970s. This was the time of the Whitlam government, the time of jingoism, of nationalism, and of liberalism in the arts and society. It was also the time of Bazza McKenzie;⁵ and for Aboriginal people, it was still essentially assimilationist. Why wouldn’t Aborigines want to become part of Australian society, God’s own country?

Although anthropologists and others had collected drawings on paper, cardboard, and other flat surfaces for some time, these were seen as curiosities, not as art. In the early 1970s, as the artists of Papunya moved from ochre paints, mashed plant fiber, and discarded carpenters’ off-cuts to acrylic commercial paints, art board, and fine canvases, their work was sold as “art”, if somewhat unsuccessfully at the time. By the end of the 1970s, the artists were working on large-scale, fine canvas compositions. Another discussion arose around the question of what to “name” this art movement. Attempts were made to define it as pointillist, religious, spiritual, narrative, abstract – these have now fallen back on “modernist” – but the artworks did not really fit any description comfortably. Nothing is ever concluded, but the works are accepted as just art!⁶ As such, they are included in various major contemporary exhibitions, although they pull the rug out from under notions of “landscape painting” and concepts of relationships to land and history. Using acrylic paint on canvas and the works’ similarities to (but also differences from) popular pointillism make it a very marketable product in a commercial sense.

Its development is still unfolding. The “dot and circle” painting movement became more widespread, exciting, and popular and, more importantly, was the most important Australian art movement of the 20th century. All other movements have come to Australia from somewhere else. In a way, as Jackson Pollack’s large abstract paintings

were adopted as signifying the emergence of authentic American painting, this Western Desert painting movement appeared to become a “real” authentic Australian art movement and was commercially very successful.

Seen everywhere in non-Aboriginal-owned commercial galleries and institutions, it was the central art form of the 1988 *Dreamings* exhibition at the Asia Society Museum in New York and at the John Weber Gallery, a commercial gallery also in New York.

Fourth Phase: Urban Aboriginal Art in Southeast Australia

With the fourth phase has come the re-emergence of the art of the southeast, and the beginning of what is called “urban Aboriginal art.” Although Aboriginal people of mixed descent in the southeast have expressed themselves across numerous practices, their work was never seen widely as “art” but as a kind of craft practice or folk art. Under the influence of postcolonial writing, the artists of the 1980s generation who have attended Western art schools now use Western materials, concepts, and references to some extent to tell their Aboriginal stories.

While an ever-increasing number of Aboriginal artists were graduating from art schools, they were shunned by commercial galleries and art museums. So, an enterprising group of these artists formed the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in 1987. The original 10 artists were Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda L. Croft, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quail, the late Michael Riley, and Jeffery Samuels (McDonald 2012).

Fifth Phase: Aboriginal Curators and Writers

The fifth phase, from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, was where Aboriginal people began to curate, write about, and gain some control over the marketing and “reading” of our own culture. This had mixed results. This phase really began in the late 1980s with the Boomalli group, who curated their own exhibitions, and later, in 1994, when I collaborated with Fiona Foley (Boomalli co-founding member) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) to curate *Tyerabarbowarryaou II: I Shall Never Become a Whiteman II* for the 5th Havana Biennial, installed at the International Press Center, Havana, Cuba and later at the MCA in Sydney.

The Boomalli group also moved to self-define, and refused to have their Aboriginality – that is their race status and resultant art creation – defined by a non-Aboriginal art world which was largely based on Western art history.

A special corner was turned as the Bicentenary of the coming of the first fleet of British convicts to Australia (1788–1988) approached. With the Bicentenary, a wave of national history examination occurred. Most of the population supported a celebration of the beginning of British colonization, but Aboriginal people saw no joy in this event. Many Aboriginal artists (and just as many non-Aboriginal artists) boycotted cultural events in that year.

In the 1980s, Aboriginal activist Gary Foley was appointed Director and Charles (Chicka) Dixon was appointed Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. I was told by Dixon that the two of them had informed the Australia Council that the Aboriginal Board would not fund any

project involved in Bicentenary celebrations. They planned to take art exhibitions internationally to make their political statements about the crimes of British colonizing of the Australian continent, away from the festivities at home. Of course, this created some tension with the Australia Council. Their contracts were not renewed, so their plans lapsed.

At the same time, a group of mainly non-Aboriginal anthropologists based at the South Australian Museum (SAM) curated an extensive exhibition of Aboriginal art with the development of the central desert “dot and circle” painting movement at the center of the exhibition. This exhibition traveled to the United States as a Bicentenary event. The prestigious New York art dealer John Weber took several of these central Australian artists into his stable of artists. When the exhibition was being developed by SAM, I was invited and took part in the selection of part of the exhibition. Although advised by Aboriginal people, this project was still largely led and controlled by non-Aboriginal academics and curators.

Sixth Phase: The Blak Empire Strikes Back

Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, Aboriginal art has been, whether intentionally or not, whether overtly or implicitly, a decisive political tool. A sixth phase of Aboriginal art is currently taking place, which I call “the blak empire strikes back.” Conservative vested interests in the art market and white Australian society generally see this as a threat on several levels. There is now a return to a depoliticized reading of Aboriginal art, which means that Aboriginal artists and curators must re-establish their power position within the art world and broader social movements. The arm wrestle begins and the debate continues.

A Personal Approach to Curation

My approach to curating has also passed through several transformations. In the 1970s, I began to work with a state-supported Aboriginal commercial gallery chain, where I assisted in mounting survey exhibitions of yearly outputs from traditionally living artist cooperatives across regional Australia. The re-emergence of “urban Aboriginal art” had yet to come.

At the end of the 1970s, I moved to Ramingining, a traditional-living remote Aboriginal community in the north of Australia for whom painting on bark was the main art form. At the beginning of the 1980s, the prejudices from the start of colonization still held: Aboriginal people were unintelligent, unsophisticated, uncultured, simple, and primitive beings. To use art to present a true view of people and history, I began to document artists’ lives, to give them individual personalities and personal styles, and I began to curate art shows around the ideas of science, language, and philosophy that existed within Aboriginal society. In 1984, I curated an exhibition – *Objects and Representations from Ramingining: A Selection of Recent Art from Arnhem Land* at the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art, the University of Sydney – of work of a collective of artists, a mix of ages and genders, bonded around an idea. I arranged objects, paintings, weavings, tools, and utensils that illustrated the extensive Aboriginal system of taxonomy, that is the naming of all plants,

animals, and all living things, and showed how art often acts as a mnemonic device to trigger and retain this information.

“Paint it black” was a term used in Australia’s national capital, bureaucratic circles in the 1970s and 1980s. It was about replacing “white Australian” staff with Aboriginal staff. However, this strategy did not necessarily change the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of institutions. While there often were numerous Aboriginal staff members, very rarely, if ever, were they in positions of power.

I suggest that the biggest move in Aboriginal art and curating is the claiming of this territory by mainly young Aboriginal women who accept large amounts of corporate sponsorship (from mining companies, state tourism bodies, and property developers), seemingly unfazed by any apparent questions of political compromise.

Working with Living Artists

I prefer to work with living artists, giving each artist their primacy but working with them in the presentation of their stories and ideas. In fact, I describe in the three case studies below – which I curated between 1988 and 2015 – how I work with a set of artists, often the same ones over and over again. It’s rather like working through ideas, over time, with a troupe of avant-garde theater performers.

Amongst the many exhibitions that I have curated I will discuss these three important exhibitions: *The Aboriginal Memorial*, first exhibited in Under the Southern Cross: Bicentenary Biennale of Sydney (1988); *Bungaree, the First Australian: and Bungaree’s Farm* (2015) at the Mosman Art Gallery’s T5 Camouflage Fuel Tank in Sydney, and *Four Women (I Do Belong) Double* at the Lismore Art Gallery in 2017.

Aboriginal Memorial

The Aboriginal Memorial is an installation of 200 hollow log coffins or burial poles from Central Arnhem Land (Figure 15.1). It commemorates all the Indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land. The artists who created this installation intended it to be located in a public place where it could be preserved for future generations.

It was conceived by me over a three-year period from 1986 to 1988 and realized by 43 artists from Ramingining and four neighboring communities, all of whom live in over 300 square miles of central Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory. Artists who participated in its creation included men and women, and the late senior artists David Malangi and George Milpurruru. The work was created to coincide with the Australian Bicentenary and commemorates those Indigenous Australians who died as a result of European invasion.

As the Bicentenary approached in 1988, many Aboriginal artists were boycotting festivities to protest the attempted annihilation of Aboriginal people, and all other injustices perpetrated since the colonization of the continent. I had taken part in many conversations in this regard but in the end thought that absence would not be a strong enough statement. We had to be present, but on our own terms. In a country overflowing with memorials to Australian war dead from various wars on foreign



FIGURE 15.1 Ramingining artists. Ramingining, Northern Territory, Australia *The Aboriginal Memorial* 1987–88 natural earth pigments on hollow logs height (irregular) 327 cm National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased with the assistance of funds from National Gallery admission charges and commissioned in 1987.

fields, there was no war memorial to Aboriginal people killed who died defending their country in the frontier wars.

All great art has meaning and exists in a time and a place. The idea of a forest of burial poles had been in my mind for some time and the 200 years of colonization became the defining, critical number. In ritual practice the *dupun* hollow log-bone coffins are sacred objects, so to extend their meaning to this political statement had to be negotiated through many conversations, agreements, and trust. I began a conversation with eight senior male painters in the community but soon realized that clans lived with their own specific tree species, eco-systems, and areas of land, and that many other members of the clans would have to participate. In the end 43 men and women contributed, and the result showed the different clans murdered across the continent.

After it was shown in the 1988 Biennale of Sydney, it was acquired by the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). Since 2014, it has stood at the entry to the NGA's new building. *The Aboriginal Memorial* was also the centerpiece of an exhibition of Indigenous art at Russia's Hermitage Museum in 2000.

Bungaree, the First Australian: and Bungaree's Farm

Nga ba ya! Ah is it so!
Kore wommang ke? Where is the man?
Kore yo! Man away!
Kore wommang ke? Where is the man?
Kore yo! Man away!
Nga ba ya! Ah is it so!
Birripi lament (c. 1830)⁷

Bungaree was an Aboriginal man from the east coast of Australia, just north of where the city of Sydney now stands. He lived at the time of the arrival of the British in 1788. He moved to and lived with his family on land on the north shore of Sydney, now called Mosman. He later traveled with the British explorer Matthew Flinders when he circumnavigated the continent of Australia for the first time. He was the first person, Aboriginal or colonizer, to be called an “Australian.” Bungaree was the first Aboriginal person to be pronounced king and given a king-plate gorget, or breastplate (Troy 1993). As such he would row out to visiting ships and demand customs duties. In 1815, the British colonial governor, Lachlan Macquarie, presented him with a plot of land, animals, and farming tools in an effort to convert him to an agrarian life.

It is said that white Australia has a black history. In 2012, Mosman was one of the most expensive suburbs of Sydney, and it remains so. In that year, I was asked to create an exhibition about the life of Bungaree, to return an Aboriginal presence to these now upper-class areas (Figure 15.2). To bring his persona into being I invited 15 artists, who had varying practices and were at different stages of their careers. I invited Aboriginal people with connections to the land surrounding Sydney Harbour. I asked them not to bring artwork, but to create new work inspired by two workshops where they were provided with copious facts about the life of Bungaree and his family from the historical record. They were also taken to the sites of habitation by land and by boat.

Some artists used photography and moving image. Others wrote songs, and still others used neon and installations that created an intense feeling of empathy with his struggle to forge a meaningful relationship with the ever-increasing British presence.

Three years later, in 2015, on the occasion of the centenary of his land grant, I was invited back to create an exhibition about Bungaree again. I had a large space to use: a rehabilitated diesel tank on the harbor. I invited virtually the same group that had



FIGURE 15.2 *Bungaree the First Australian: and Bungaree's Farm*, Mosman Art Gallery's T5 Camouflage Fuel Tank. Courtesy of the Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia 2015. Photo credit: Djon Mundine.

been involved in the earlier project to participate. The tank was at least 30 meters in diameter and three or four stories high, and completely empty. The most effective way to use such a space was to fill it with sound and vision, and human creation. I employed award-winning Aboriginal dramaturg and theater director Andrea James to take us through a set of exercises: traveling Bungaree, singing Bungaree, and being Bungaree. I asked each artist to think of an idea and then to perform it to camera, so it could be recorded. Later these performances were projected onto the tank walls, filling the space with sound and vision. As we had filmed each piece inside the tank with the black walls as a backdrop, the projection of black on black meant the images had no frames. To create a further immersive experience, each artist was invited to perform a whispering ghost voice that was looped in a continuous and constant “white” noise. The full run of projected images, music, and sounds came together in an exciting and effective way, and won the 2015 Museums and Galleries (now known as Museums and Galleries Australia) exhibition of the year award.

Four Women (I Do Belong) Double

Lismore Regional Art Gallery in northern New South Wales moved to a new, larger purpose-built art gallery in 2017 and invited me to curate their opening exhibition.

The exhibition I curated was *Four Women (I Do Belong) Double* and included the work of Karla Dickens, Fiona Foley, Romaine Moreton (in collaboration with Lou Bennett), Wart, Therese Ritchie in collaboration with Jacky Green and Seán Kerins), Nasim Nasr, Teena McCarthy, and Carolyn Strachan (in collaboration with Alessandro Cavadini) (Figure 15.3).



FIGURE 15.3 *Four Women (I Do Belong) Double*, Courtesy of Lismore Regional Gallery, Australia 2017. Photo credit: Carl Warner.

In Australia, this was also the year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum that allowed Aboriginal people to be counted in the census, and to vote in all elections.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of enormous social, cultural, and political upheaval, particularly in regard to women and people of color. Many ideas were developed by Aboriginal people in those decades: the Aboriginal Medical Service (1971), the Aboriginal Legal Service (1970), and the Black Theatre (1972), for example. In 1963, the people of the clans of Yirrkala (mission) painted what is called the *Bark Petition* and presented it to the Australian Parliament to claim their prior ownership of land in East Arnhem Land and begin the process of the recognition of Aboriginal “land rights.”

It has been suggested that this time was the “second phase” of feminism, and was part of a wider international civil rights struggle, which included the anti-Vietnam War movement, the African American civil rights and gay rights movements, the passing of the equal rights constitutional amendment in the United States, and the granting of equal pay (on paper at least) to Australian women.

In 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama in the southern United States, four young black girls (Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Denise McNair, and Addie Mae Collins) were killed when the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan. An infuriated Nina Simone moved her creative work to a more political position. She then wrote a group of songs in response, including: *Mississippi Goddam* (1964), *Young, Gifted, and Black* (1970), and *Four Women* (1966), the latter about the four women they may have become. The exhibition was inspired by Simone’s song, as I had always thought of that song as an opportunity to discuss many issues of race, gender, and history.

In 1972, a group of Aboriginal activists, feeling that Aboriginal people were still not treated as Australian citizens, but practically as foreign people, set up a tent – this became the Aboriginal Embassy – on the front lawn of what is now old Parliament House. In Alessandro Cavadini’s 1972 documentary *Ningla A-Na* (Hungry for Our Land), which captures the Aboriginal political movement of the times, including the Tent Embassy, a group of Aboriginal women tell several white feminist women that they do not believe in dividing the Aboriginal movement along gender lines, and remind them of white women’s complicity in the colonial process.

In the 1960s, there were few women (and fewer Aboriginal) curators or film directors. In the late 1980s, when artist Fiona Foley and her colleagues founded the Boomalli co-operative, they were shunned by state museums and commercial galleries, and so curated their own exhibitions. Assuming the power position of curator or film director is now recognized as a key way to effect change. It was something the feminist movement realized at this moment: that if all oppressed people were to be given a voice, they needed to allow “all” to be “there.”

Almost 40 years on in 2017, activist curator Therese Ritchie collaborated with academic Seán Kerins and Aboriginal artist Jacky Green in curating the *Open Cut* exhibition. By invitation, they worked to allow the Garawa traditional land-owning people of the Borroloola region of the south-western Gulf of Carpentaria, a voice in their fight against the government and the Swiss-owned mining company that was open-cut mining their land on the McArthur River, and poisoning the environment.

“Haptic specificity” is the term used in the exhibition: that you only allow certain other individuals into your personal space to touch your body. In Aboriginal society

only certain other members of your society may paint your body design on your body. They are in a specific spiritual and personal relationship to you. The painting also creates a relationship between you and the site in the land the paint comes from. The men and women in Therese Ritchie's subject-directed photo portraits were painted with those words by those correctly tied individuals in their society, in keeping with what is ritually practiced. If the earth is female – “my mother the earth” – it also has special spiritual spaces that can only be touched by people in this spiritual relationship to it. Who do you allow to mark that “earth body”?

In a truly civil society it is a common right for every member of that society to be able to move freely about in their daily work and social lives without being assaulted, robbed, or raped, and without fear of such attacks. In 1992, David Lynch's psychological horror film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* was released. The film's story follows the last week in the life of murdered fictional teenager Laura Palmer, and then the investigation into her death, which uncovers a society of drugs, corruption, hypocrisy, and immorality. It reveals the historic truth about a small country town.

Karla Dickens's hero images for the exhibition *Her Sleeping Beauty Quartet* honor the memory of a series of young women murdered in the Northern Rivers region, in some cases famous and current, others a little distant, but people we often know and strongly feel for, in what is a beautiful physical and potentially socially creative region.

Teena McCarthy's *Ophelia* self-image was directly inspired by a small publicity article (“Whatever Happened to Laura Palmer?”) but broadened the hidden murder in *Twin Peaks* to comment on the unrecognized massacres of her Barkindji people in the colonization of the upper Darling River.

African American Black Power writer Eldridge Cleaver's important autobiography, *Soul on Ice: Complete and Unabridged* (1968), tells his story of the meeting line of black-white races in the United States from a black man's point of view. He initially defends his raping of white women as a political action in a colonial race war, but later shifts ground to see the pointless, immoral violence of his behavior. Early in the book he reviews another side of this crossing of race when he asks his fellow black prisoner colleagues their race preferences for women as sexual or life partners. Some preferred white women, some Japanese, some Chinese, but to his surprise, though his fellow prisoners were all black, none preferred black women. As Eldridge Cleaver writes in his novel, “I don't want nothing black but a Cadillac!” (Cleaver 1963).

In Australia during the 1970s, I worked in an office with predominantly male co-workers. At the end of the work week, Friday night drinking sessions were common, and at one of these this comment was made when the topic of Aboriginals came up: “We shot all the men, and we're fucking the women out of existence.”

Fiona Foley's photo portraits point to the low esteem Aboriginal women in Australian society were held in for many years. Aboriginal women were called “Black Velvet” in colonial times and this term is still used by some today. Her “Venus # 4 (stilettos)”, from the *Sea of Love* series, is a form of “oppositional gaze.” It is a symbol of a confident, sexually alluring Aboriginal woman. She is sexy and knows it, and revels in it. Foley said that she felt Aboriginal women can be educated, sophisticated, well-traveled, and yet, still, unaccepted socially. As in colonial times, they are Black Velvet, women you use but do not marry.

As the black American Carine says, “I used to wear high heels everywhere! Even if I were making a simple grocery store run, I'd be in stilettos!” (Mcgrath 2017).

Fourth phase feminism is in many ways, I think, a return to the second phase of striving for acceptance in society. As a young female colleague said to me, “We don't

hate men. We do not imitate men. We have a common ambition to reach an equal, free, and safe society for all.”

This includes a recognition of the true colonial history of the last 200 years, and of the disempowerment, displacement, and murder of the Aboriginal people who lived here when the first shipment of British prisoners arrived in 1788. A social and political debate is taking place internationally on the historical (mainly male) figures the state sees fit to memorialize. I was told by a non-Aboriginal academic that, traditionally, Aboriginal people did not have memorials in the way Western societies do to commemorate historic events. There are, of course, far fewer statues of women (or Aboriginals) anywhere. The Aboriginal poet and filmmaker Romaine Moreton's *Ragtag* (2014) talks of the use of Aboriginal people, particularly women, as tourist fodder: not people we need to talk to or who have feelings we should care for, but tools, obscene objects, there merely to make money.

Since the end of World War II, Aboriginal art beyond the Australian art world has proved to be an amazingly powerful tool for the recognition of Aboriginal rights and our place in the national history. However, this art is still a subtle and persistent attempt to convert wider Australian society to reimagining of the truth of who we are and living up to the nation's responsibilities toward Aboriginal people.⁸

Notes

- 1 Italian for “sung story” or “singing history,” but known and practiced by other names in many cultures and countries around the world. A performer tells or sings a story while gesturing to a series of images (painted, printed, or drawn) on any type of material.
- 2 Originally published as Herman Hesse, *Krieg und Frieden: Betrachtungen zu Krieg und Politik seit dem Jahr 1914*, Zurich, 1946.
- 3 Douglas Stewart, writing in *The Bulletin* (1 July 1959), took this negative stand: “the 17 grave-posts ... make a somewhat bizarre display ... and most people, admitting that the poles are delightful in themselves, will wonder if the proper place for them is not the museum ... These Melville Island posts, though they have definite artistic merit of an elementary kind, are really more in the nature of ethnological curiosities than works of art.” James Gleeson, writing for *The Sun* (18 July 1959), reacted differently: “Whatever their symbolic significance might be they represent an ensemble of abstract shapes of considerable aesthetic appeal. The very limitations of the technique and the restrictions imposed by the media produce a fine unity of design despite the fact that no two posts are identical in shape or decoration. Even in the artificial atmosphere of an art gallery they are impressive, for the painted posts stand about the grave in a protective ring, forming as it were, a barrier between the world of living reality and the shadowy world of the spirit.” Both cited in Berndt (1964).
- 4 Interview with Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula in “Master painter will settle for a Toyota,” *The Weekend Australian*, 5–6 July 1997, 5.
- 5 In 1972, the film *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* was released, based on the published book. In 1974, a sequel, *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own*, was made. The films starred Barry Crocker as McKenzie, and chronicled the character's adventures in Britain and France respectively. In the films, McKenzie is the nephew of another of Humphries's characters, Edna Everage. Despite the banning of *The Wonderful World of Barry McKenzie* in Australia, the films received considerable support from the

- Australian government of John Gorton, becoming the first to receive funding from the *Australian Film Development Commission*. Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam appeared in *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own*, granting a Damehood to McKenzie's aunt, Edna Everage. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Adventures_of_Barry_McKenzie, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 6 "For better or worse, it is the strongest and most beautiful show of abstract paintings I have seen in a long time." Terence Maloon. 1982. Aboriginal paintings: Strong and beautiful abstracts survive the cultural dislocation. *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 January).
 - 7 *Aboriginal Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines 1824-1859*, Vol. I, Niel Gunson (ed.). 1974. Australian Aboriginal Studies No. 40. *Ethnohistory Series No. 2*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, ACT, 59.
 - 8 Richard Flanagan, "The world is being undone before us. If we do not reimagine Australia we will be undone too", *The Guardian*, August 5, 2018.

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The Impact of Context Specificity in Curating amidst the Forces at Play in a Globalized World of Realms

Fatoş Üstek

The future is promising. This future is aligning itself toward activating the realm of visual arts and the creative domain and taking a course of action that will influence the wider social realm, perhaps more so than the 1960s or 1970s Land Art movement, or art in the expanded field. Art, as it were, is being disseminated beyond the gallery walls or the white cube, and collections are gaining a wider sociopolitical focus through public engagement schemes in institutional and governmental contexts. This means that respective cultural intent and content can be regarded as an active force field where the possibility of change through social imaginary is nurtured by the aesthetic and critical signifiers of our times. Thus, the future aspires to proliferate the art encounter, where streets and historic locations, iconic sites alongside galleries, and museums and other dedicated art venues will be charged by the artistic content. The possible ways in which this situation will crystallize is still dependent on government cultural policies. That is to say, there is a sense of optimism regarding visual arts and wider creative domains that are increasingly engaging in the social realm, through public activation strategies and by taking art out of its isolated institutional contexts. However, the potential of social and cultural rejuvenation through encounters with art may be endangered especially given the sociopolitical turmoil across countries and even continents that is actively shaping their social structures, partly driven by the ever-increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, speech, and movement.

Under these new regimes of power, curating is assigned a new-fangled agency— one that crosses the shores beyond assessment and archiving, to an extent in which the artwork gains a factual and fictional value within the history of the arts. That is to say, facts and fictions play a significant role in the formalization and elucidation of our understanding of the world as such. The amalgamation of data and subjective as well as collective narratives impacts on the processes of the production of knowledge.

The domain from which these conclusions is derived may not always be straightforward, necessitating further research and elaboration of the forces that might have shaped the events, let alone their reason for happening. Today's curator, in contrast to the curator of historic and modern art, is not only responsible for caring and restoring the knowledge of the arts but also responsible for the contexts in which art is experienced. The curatorial practice thus expands into the realms of perception, elaboration, and processes of understanding with the consolidation of sociopolitical, psychoeconomical dimensions of the visual domain. Thus, the curator today, through affirmative processes of care, responsibility, and genuine engagement with artworks, intermittently responds to the specificities of the contexts in which she or he performs, whilst profiling exhibitions, or sequences of art encounters that manifest as books, conferences, lecture series, and social practice initiatives. These curatorial outputs may also aspire to global concerns, at times being shared across continents and cultures, resonating a collective response from a global audience.

Moreover, the context of the arts having now attained a further globalized realm with the introduction of the World Wide Web and the open access to data from numerous localities that are published online. There are, of course, many geographic locations that do not contribute to this gigantic pool of information, and there are governments that play a crucial role in controlling the dissemination of data, but the Internet still strives to be a platform for social engagement and a place of knowledge and information exchange. Thus, the World Wide Web continues to contribute to the shaping of the social and political realm, and the economic, psychological, and sensorial attestations of receiving, processing, and responding to manifestations of reality.

Exhibition as an Act of Contextualization, Curating as an Active Force

An exhibition is a social and collective form, a presentation that is produced for an experience that disseminates a particular aesthetic and intellectual quality, over time and in physical and virtual space, by and for the public. The work of curating can then be defined as a way to assemble a selected set of art experiences into an order, where a new spatiotemporal arrangement emerges to further convey some united meaning. According to art critic and philosopher Boris Groys (2006), the work of the curator is to make things public, where the art works, as it were, are programmed to meet audiences, gain visibility, and enhance meaning. If we were to define the exhibition as a temporary state of affairs, the relationship that is fostered not only includes the recognition of the displayed entities as art, as objects of resonance built upon their physical and ephemeral qualities, but also charges the experience as a meaning-oriented encounter. Every exhibition is an act of contextualization that crystallizes through the curatorial agency. Every exhibition is thus a constellation of entities that gain meaning in the new contexts in which they are placed. According to curator Jens Hoffmann:

The act of exhibition making is the creation of a display within a particular socio-political context based on a carefully formulated argument and presented through meticulous selection and methodical installation of art works, and related objects. (Hoffmann, 2017: 29)

The particularity of the social and political dimensions in which an exhibition is placed plays a significant role in its formulation and execution. The exhibition with its social concerns, or political aspirations, processes these contexts into its body of knowledge, where the selected works of art directly or indirectly surface under the schemes of these clusters of meaning. In other words, beyond the intended meaning of the exhibition and its sociopolitical statement, it is contextualized by the location that it is situated in, and therefore its specific cultural context. In developing exhibitions, a number of curators might concentrate on drawing parallels to the universalism of the art encounter through their respective exhibitions with local artists, while at the same time aligning their conceptual framework and inspiration from an internationally shared discourse or cross-cultural signifiers. Thus, it is not only the specific scenario of the local context but the multishared platform of artistic endeavors that aspire to define the *modus operandi* of the exhibition. “What is important in curating is eloquence of expression, and first and foremost is the vitality of the questions asked.” states Jens Hoffman as he proposes the curator as “someone who limits, excludes, creates meaning using existing signs, codes and materials” (Hoffmann 2017: 30). His questioning of the curatorial role in exhibition-making takes on a wider function than a producer or someone who merely assembles things. Hoffman continues with saying that: “Curating is not just about making selections criteria, ideology, social and political preoccupations and possibilities of presentation”(30). The natural world, the theoretical world, and the world of subjective experience are all strands in producing the reality of the curated event. In the sense that the exhibition posits beyond the mere assembly of objects and statements in space, producing an amalgamation of relationships that are explored spatially, intellectually, and through the current set of values and belief systems. If we were to expand on this definition, an exhibition may be regarded as a temporary constellation of relationships that are choreographed with regard to the idea of an audience, through the epistemological and formal qualities of the works of art that are collated to form a sense of social context supported by the expansive aesthetic and moral qualities. According to curator Elena Filipovic:

An exhibition is the form of its arguments and the way that its method, in the process of constituting the exhibition, lays bare the premises that underwrite the forming of judgement, the conditioning of perception, and the construction of history. It is the thinking and debate it incites. It is also the trajectory of intellectual and aesthetic investments that build up to it. But most importantly, it is the way in which its very premises, classificatory systems, logic and structure can, in the very moment of becoming an exhibition, be unhinged by the artworks in it. If artworks are simultaneously the elements in an exhibition’s construction of meaning while being dialectically, subjected to its staging, they can also at moments articulate aesthetic and intellectual positions to define modes of engagement that transcend or even defy their thematic or structural exhibition frames. (Filipovic 2013)

The exhibition, therefore, is a crystallization of form, mirroring the current systems of thinking and evaluation that have their origins in the phenomenology of perception, and sociology of the encountered, fostering a relationship between modes of engagement and modalities of art’s reception. Within this framework, where an exhibition is coded in an organic network of relationships charged by a multitude of reading and interpretation, the role of the curator is to be formulated around an active

engagement through which each and every choice, inclusion and exclusion, profiles his or her respective practice, whilst amplifying its approach and rephrasing of the contemporaneity in the visual arts. Each and every exhibition that is taking place in the now is representative of its times, even if the curator's intention is to make a landmark exhibition, such as a large-scale retrospective of a deceased artist or survey of an art movement.

So, the curator's position and propositions and the manner in which his or her choices are manifested in public schemes of engagement with the arts carry a weighty responsibility. Moreover, the voice of the curator is then signified as a defining factor in the realm of visual arts through those who are selected, and the various schemes of inclusion and exclusion (of artists), manners of display (exhibitions), and validation, and through this the domain of the arts are transformed. At this point one may ask whether this has always been the case. However, the response would be to the contrary, as the position of the curator is an evolving phenomenon over the last half-century, as the curator's role has transfigured from one of career and classifier toward the centralization of his or her subjective interpretation of the arts and its domain of knowledge production. This metamorphosis, as it were, is an outcome of the wave of internationalization, where the history of the arts and its numerous contexts have been brought together under the impact of globalization. Moreover, the new educational structures and schemes offer an alternative understanding about the history of the arts, partly owing to new approaches to knowledge building that are currently being explored in curatorial studies. The impetus in making art visible across countries has been a precursor to the introduction and emergence of new centers of power. The curator in the midst of the arts ecology is an occupant of one of those centers. Before exploring any further the phases of transformation and the various modalities that can be observed, it is crucial to explore the notion of internationalism, as the concept itself has gained a dual meaning over the course of the past three decades.

Two Aspects of Internationalism

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which brought about the reunification of the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR), commonly called East Germany, and West Germany is still a significant precursor to recent history and provides a crucial reference point to the changing sociopolitical circumstances. The opening of borders between the East and West correlated with the shift in political and financial centers and with this introduced a cultural hegemony, creating a duality to the notion of the international. The context in which "international" is used now differs from the globally acknowledged and translatable entity to a locally specific international representative. The international acknowledgment, as it were, is then attributed to distinct positions: one occupies the status of the global representative of the local and the other its contra-positive, that is the local representative of the global. For instance, an artist or a work of art may gain international value or attestation through the significance it gathers from its local context, which then transforms to symbolize a representation of the peculiarity of respective sociopolitical and aesthetic circumstances. Thus, internationalism for the aforementioned artist or the artwork stems from embracing the context it is born into, which is then translated into the international scale of

affairs. Thus, international value can be attained through the production of a significant and weighty representation of the respective set of values and systems of thinking with a particular yet ingenuous relationship to both the aesthetic and the critical. Alternatively, internationalism can be attained through the international discourse of the arts, using the consensually shared visual domain and the employment of common terminology, let alone tapping into the collective sensitivities shared across countries and continents. Thus, the work of art necessitates no further elaboration of its specific geopolitical context, because of the consensual domain of the visual arts that is shared across the world. For instance, an artist who is questioning a specific medium of artistic production or investigating an intercultural context through focusing on some of its components may align with artists from different cultural backgrounds, sharing similar rigor and intent. The former internationalism, however, resides in the representation formalities, and makes use of local tradition and production of truth within the immediate registries. Alternatively, it responds to its sociopolitical dynamics, and thus is defined from and within the parameters of context-specific value, quality, and tradition. On the other hand, the latter internationalism operates around representing a universal claim on truth and knowledge. The universality may perhaps be defined as a commonality shared through the masses, a consensus that evokes an idea and image in cultures across the world. The international hence attains a global value, where it can be translated into and transformed as a unique perspective which is shared by more than a singular cultural entity or a group, or a community. For instance, an artist investigating the medium of sculpture and producing works that are informed by her or his respective background and responsive of the discursive cultural canon may attain international acclaim, as her or his works are exhibited in different cultural contexts triggering strong sensual resonances.

However, there is a danger in oversimplifying internationalism and its stakes, as the capitalist exchange and reason may overwhelm and undermine the intellectual and aesthetic rigor of both dimensions. To stay consistent with a substantive critique of its own character, the artwork, or the artist, assigned with the adjective of the international, may be criticized at times of populism and consumerist approaches. The representation of both forms of internationalism thus necessitate an ever-evolving resistance to the dominant tendencies of the mainstream culture, whilst keeping the production of the aesthetic and critical currency of the times intact. The Cuban curator and art historian Gerardo Mosquera, when speaking about the condition of globalization, pronounces on the danger that comes with “the illusion of a trans-territorial world of multi-cultural dialogue.” Mosquera also argues that the “power to continue to be exercised from an artistic centre located in the major metropolises of the West, which integrates art from peripheral countries whilst organizing it within a Western-centric criterion, therefore maintaining the existing hierarchy” (Mosquera, 1994: 133). Mosquera’s sensitivity toward the definition of internationalism charged by a mono-directional understanding of culture disseminated from the West to the global context calls for heightened awareness on the means of art and its contribution to the visual domain alongside its reception and elaboration. This sensitivity is not a singular attribution of the current streams of awareness but bears significance for future generations. In this regard, it may be necessary to underline the fact that, given internationalisms dual meanings, there is always a locality that the artwork or the artist made visible, amidst the scale and dimensions of the surrounding social structure.

Context Orientation and Specificity that Matters

In the light of these discussions, it is crucial to explore the plausible domain that the local spans. In other words, if we were to estimate the demarcations of local value, how could we define what is contained and what stays outside; and most significantly how could we explore the possibility of defining a set of values and customs that belong specifically to a singular social identity, even though some of those values intersect with other parallel domains. In every instance society constitutes its symbolic order, which is neither neutral nor totally cryptic. A society and its citizens are born into a previously constituted language, a system of signs and symbols that is neither random nor perfectly adequate. The operational space of eloquence of expression and movement oscillates between the predefined meaning and freedom of exploration. Perhaps, in order to elucidate the demarcations of culture, the domain of imagination may be consulted. Societies, let alone communities, operate on connecting invisible threads that are defined by the faculties of imagination and judgement. Thus, the notions of social imaginary, responsibility, and modalities of autonomous action inhabit the communal form fostered by ethics and tradition. According to philosopher of hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), human knowledge is based on language and tradition and the dissemination of knowledge follows the guiding principles that a society institutes itself with. The infamous theoretical project and the term coined by philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, the social imaginary, has been looked upon reductively as a mere superstructural phenomenon, interpreted abstractly and idealistically as the spontaneous product of individual consciousness. For him, the imaginary is an instituted social reality that operates as a material force in history. Social imaginary thus exceeds the personalized set of beliefs and forms of thinking to the commonly shared set of customs and rituals, intermingled with the myths and social epistemology of the language spoken. In other words, the term “social imaginary” is an incomplete domain that a society operates and institutes itself within, that contains not only the observable facts but also the inconspicuous concepts informing the features of a culture, as it were. In this regard, social imaginary is both unique to societies yet can be shared across cultures in intersecting domains of mannerisms and approaches as well as faculties of aesthetic judgement. Castoriadis (1987), in order to explore further the plausible specificity of social contexts, and the reality of the imaginary as a form of collective social creation, introduces a further term: “radical imaginary.”

The central concept in Castoriadis’ reformulation of social theory is the radical imaginary. He begins with the thesis that every society “institutes itself” through the creation of “social imaginary significations.” The radical imaginary institutes by “constituting new universal forms” that result in shared social meanings. Its radicality comes from the fact that it is “the emergence of something new” in history that is the result of “unmotivated creation.” Its creative activity is unpredictable through any “series of logical operations,” and results in “the emergence of radical otherness” and “non-trivial novelty.” Furthermore, it is radical even in deeper ontological and epistemological senses, because the most fundamental elements of social understanding depend on it. Thus, even a society’s conception of the “rational” and the “real” presuppose “the primary and unmotivated positing of a real and a rational significations” related to the social imaginary. (Clark, 2002: 67)

Radical imaginary is then unique to a society, in the manner in which the “new” that is introduced to the social domain is juxtaposed by a specific response. To elaborate further, one may think of an artwork that introduces a “new” aesthetic and critical form to the current domain of the art shown and discussed in a defined social group. As the nature of everything that is not like something before, the new work of art with its form and content stirs up the respective domain defined by the social imaginary, provoking to further crystallize the immediate visual and epistemological detailing of anything that can be similar. As philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1993) argues, societies realize themselves in the image of examples, that it is not the actual factuality but the illustration of its idea that evokes an action and an elaborate behaviorism in return. In this regard, the new form of art that is introduced into the existing domain of the arts intrigues yet inquires a new form of approach, which is to be defined by the existing features of the social domain yet to be expanded by the experience of the “unthought” or not-yet-existing. Radical imaginary is also related to the autonomous qualities of a society, the defining features in which the ethical and the rational informs the understanding of freedoms of movement and speech in that specific sociopolitical and emotional context.

The following two case studies survey distinct yet similar cultural features that necessitate the study of the possibility of radical imaginaries, given the demanding and regulating regimes the respective societies operate within. By considering the recent histories of both countries and the specificity of the contexts in which art flourishes, the influence of the various publics at large is discussed.

Case Study 1: Turkey, Once a Southeastern European Now a Middle Eastern Territory

Turkey, as a country with its geopolitical location, functions as a political and cultural bridge. Previously, Turkey’s orientation was North to South, connecting Russia and her territories to Mediterranean countries. This has now been replaced by an East and West axis. This shift of orientation is supported by the newly introduced finance capitals, as well as the political unrest in neighboring countries from Ukraine to Syria, Russia to Iraq, and on a much larger scale between North Korea and the United States. The ever-transforming power dynamics and the poignant state of the social destruction taking place in the country and its immediate vicinity plays a crucial role in the current state of affairs in visual cultures, let alone society at large. Moreover, new schemes and alignments of power have shifted Turkey from being a country considered part of southeastern Europe, its current region holding the name “Central Europe,” to its recent allocation amongst the countries that span the Middle Eastern region. In its newly organized state, the art and cultural scene seeks new ways of inventing forms of resistance and freedom of speech under the current restricted governmental regime.

The last two decades of Istanbul’s artistic landscape offer quite a striking picture. What has taken place and the pace of events are beyond what could have been expected. The rise of an international scene within a decade followed by its demise with the recent political shift is almost the embodiment of the unimaginable. The small and self-contained state of the arts, unfolded into a wider scene following the international political shift of the 1990s, then fragmented into subgroups within 20 years. Not only

the establishment of new institutions and spaces for contemporary art but also the rapid inflation in value of works of art and the art market have been significant in reshaping the visual arts ecology in Istanbul in the beginning of 2000s. The first decade saw a multitude of players, from independent curators to directors of institutions, commercial gallery owners, collectors, private museums, and art critics.

The millennium was no longer defined by the omnipresence of the biannual festivity of welcoming international artists and curators from abroad, or the singular position of bank supported art venues. The second decade, however, marks a substantial transformation of the governmental policy and the institutionalism of power which centralized, and ideologically refined and dominated, these spheres. On the one hand, there is an accelerated internationalization of the scene as its players become more visible nationally and globally, while on the other hand there is an ever-growing tone of nation-defined symbolism impacting on the scene. This has created a situation where many of the key players are leaving the country, seeking new possibilities of autonomy outside the given regime. This situation is leaving Turkey on the brink of desolation, isolation, and constraint.

The Istanbul Biennial was established in 1987 and still has an irreplaceable value and place in contemporary art in Turkey. Through the various thematic and curatorial approaches, the biennial brings together a wide breadth of artistic production, and hence artistic positions into the city and to the realm of the art scene in Turkey. Especially, since the 1990s and early 2000s, that is to say before the expanded use of the World Wide Web, the biennale was the only source for the local scene to experience and be part of international discourse, as mobility was dependent on financial and political constraints. Some of the artists only recently gained their right to travel abroad owing to their political affiliations in the 1980s. As the world becomes smaller via the Internet and transcultural exchange, the biennale's position shifted toward more theme-oriented curatorial projects. Other initiations, such as international conferences, art fairs, and cultural events that draw the attention of the globe-trotting art professionals, and hence introduce a continuous flux of visitors to the city, are currently, owing to the politics, not as frequent or are on hold. Unlike the 1990s, the 2000s hosted many new spaces varying from commercial galleries to artist-run spaces (also known as artist-run initiatives) that expanded the possibilities for the visibility of art production. The respective investments in the domain of arts, opening new museums and art galleries, created better conditions in which the scene operated.

Moreover, new players were regularly introduced which altered the whole power structure, creating a continual shift, which accelerated the quantity of art venues, galleries, and museums, as well as and private institutions, to then decrease their volume of production.

And no fewer than two art fairs (with the addition of the Classic and Modern Art Fair started in April 2013), art prizes, collections, artist residencies, and lastly artist-run initiatives produce a complex and fluctuating picture. Within the span of the last 10 years, the number of commercial art galleries have quadrupled, new museums have opened, and new patrons of the arts have emerged. The genre of contemporary art has gained visibility across the societal realm, recognition in the daily press, let alone the financial domain. Not only has the artistic landscape grown but a scene defined by patrons, collectors, and gallerists has emerged. The pace of production has accelerated exponentially with the demand, reflected in the quantity of artists, let alone artworks. Young and newly graduated artists had more possibilities of engaging within the

contemporary art scene. That is to say, commercial conditions produced their own set of artists while the alternative scene worked on formulating new positions. The impact of the Istanbul Biennial was particularly important in attracting thousands of professionals from all over the world and was responsible for triggering activities across every space as they worked to realize various projects.

During this period of rapid change and activation, art took a stance by introducing the idea of change, gaining a prominent state in the public realm. However, this short-lived renaissance was to be replaced by the ever-dominant voice of the ruling class. The plethora of voices, which once had the chance to flourish, are now diminished to a set of gestures about what can be expressed. Istanbul's *nouveau riche*, who invested in not only the cultivation of its cultural infrastructure but also the proliferation of its aesthetic texture, is also deeply influenced by these conditions. The profile of support given toward the continuity of art production is also under the influence of the new ruling class. The patrons of the 2000s, with awareness and criticality, still continue to support the current status quo, while new patrons of the arts have emerged to support artists or art production with a certain tone and content. That is to say, the art market today has evolved around the mainstream and the popularization of the immediate and aesthetically pleasing. Cultural players are either retreating to their studios, furthermore internalizing auto-control, or leaving their current town or city for places abroad in order to resume freedoms of self-expression and artistic intellectual attestation. If it was a cultural renaissance, it had a short lifespan. The recent political events, from the Gezi Park uprising in 2013 to the occasional bombings and the governmental structuralizing of education, deregulation of the law courts, and issues with the army, leave the country in a vulnerable state. The domain of the social imaginary is bound to be defined by the norms instituted by the government, and its practices of power. Art production and curating in this overtly controlled normative domain requires an acknowledgment of current politics and of a diminishing state of social freedoms let alone questioning of autonomous incentives. Curating, like any form of cultural production, is influenced by the politics of restraint, and must reinvent itself with a new language that does not comply with the terminology of the government, in order to attain a radicality in the social spheres of Turkey.

Case Study 2: Gwangju Biennale, Strike toward the Elevation of Social Consensus

Unlike the Istanbul Biennale, the biennale in Gwangju, South Korea is an outcome of social unrest and an uprising that anticipated the government's unjust decisions on regulating farms and the financial incomes of the farmers in the 1980s. The streets filled with citizens seeking attention and fair treatment. This led to violence induced by the actions of the army, in order to take control of "the scene." The political unrest was to be recognized as an uprising only half a decade later by the new governor, which ignited the need for international recognition and a creative approach to the destructed state of the city of Gwangju, and its citizens. In many countries, biennials were being established every couple of months and a new initiative emerged, which became the Gwangju Biennale, which is now internationally acknowledged as a major exhibition.

Over the past two decades, the biennale has transformed into a major institution where not only the local public but the international art crowd follow the current

fashions and artistic approaches and practices charged by genuine engagement with Gwangju's and Korea's history, with a wider perspective of neighboring countries, the continent, and lastly the world at large. Its growth over time only proved its strength in the generation of new statements and allowed the society to engage with its currencies, its defining features not only through subtle reflections but also through showcasing similar social contexts under its framework.

The 10th Gwangju Biennale curatorial team (myself and Emiliano Valdés, led by artistic director Jessica Morgan) undertook extensive research into the recent history of Korea. We also explored local socio-political dynamics and elaboration of arts in Korea alongside engaging with the plethora of artistic voices. The intent of the biennale was to make a statement on the condition of society and the arts, especially after the Cold War in Korea and in the Asia Pacific region, bringing forward influences and artistic content from other continents that juxtaposed, inspired, and activated the cultural domain. Our research into the Korean art scene of the 1970s and 1980s allowed us to bring forward photographers whose work was not catalogued or acknowledged, which led to their archiving and visibility in the course of the biennale. Using this set of curatorial sensitivities focused on not only introducing visibility to the unseen or forgotten but also the unspoken and neglected. The research methodology involved searching the public archives, collections, scanning the promoted and visible artworks, and the short history of the arts in the country, with a further inquiry into the language, its traditions, and customs, the games that are played, and the books that are being published. Outsourcing across disciplines was a crucial asset as none of the curators was necessarily from the region or had local experience, which on the bigger scale allowed us to see a picture that is perhaps different, an elucidation that is perhaps not possible for insiders to recognize. It was important not to overexoticize the features that are specific to the culture we were operating in, as well as not to overlook the signifiers of any cultural codification. Furthermore, our research extended beyond the Korean territory, to neighboring countries, the continent, and the world at large, looking for artistic practices that resonated with the conceptual rigor of the biennale as well as bringing forward artistic positions that would engage in a conversation with the other selected works to illustrate the commonalities and divergences of respective social imaginaries. The 10th Gwangju Biennale, titled *Burning Down the House*, based its curatorial premise on the outlook of the Cold War era and the trajectory of change over the last 60 years. Morgan (2014), in the introduction to the catalogue, asserts that Walter Benjamin's term *Tigersprung* (tiger's leap) describes a leap into the past that breaks up the continuum of history by reactivating a historical event or idea for use in the present. As such, it can be a revolutionary gesture, but for Benjamin the *Tigersprung* was exemplified by fashion, where a past style is quoted eclectically and irreverently by a contemporary trend. As is typical of his approach, he finds the most radical gesture in the least expected context, in this case the most commercial and popular field of modern culture. Commodities in particular, as they go in and out of fashion, their styles becoming popular and then falling into misuse, have the critical potential to revive the past in their objecthood. More immediate than artworks, fashionable dress styles cite the past not in a nostalgic or postmodern manner but as commercial propositions that quote from the "source book" of costume history.

To make a connective leap from Benjamin To the East, the "tiger economies" of Asia define themselves as free markets dependent on a consumer culture that has to

renew itself constantly without any obvious recourse to the past. For the tiger economies, new fashions are both the real economic basis (they produce textile and clothing for consumption in the industrialized West) and their preferred form of consumption (branded goods). So, what is the meaning of the *Tigersprung* for a tiger economy?" (Morgan 2014: 3).

As a team, we were looking into the possibility of tiger's leap as a radical way of viewing history, exploring how new economies may be planted in the appraisal of negating the past, and emphasizing the societal impact of technological progress and innovation in integrating material advancements. Amidst these questions, a guiding principle was to look at the possibility of a new approach where negating the past was replaced by an evocation of social patterns and mannerisms from history to be later activated as a radical gesture, which then succeeded with the necessitated change that the society was seeking to achieve. These context-oriented questions informed the selection of the works and the constellation of the exhibition. *Burning Down the House*, charged by political cogency and heightened social awareness, planted seeds of provocation that did not necessitate immediate response but a contemplative illumination.

Benjamin's formulation suggests that, when South Korea, for instance, neglects its past in favor of constant progress and advancement (however this may be defined), it does so by making recourse to existing forms of expression that are only superficially new, being structurally in keeping with certain national or cultural identities. This is expressed in South Korea in the way in which the state ostensibly ensures economic and political progress ("democratization") by implicitly negating original cultural traditions while in fact adhering to the same political caste that has marked its position since the early 1960s, the election in 2012 of Park Geun-hye, daughter of Park Chung-hee, the third president of South Korea, who served between 1963 and 1979. These economic measures are paralleled by social and political directives that operate within a binary structure of Cold War oppositions in order to underscore uninterrupted economic growth and establish political relevance. In this context, the Asian tigers could be regarded as satellites of post Second World War US foreign policy, seeking political expansion through the promotion of a particular cultural, social, political, and economic system that has been adapted to local tradition. This has involved, in certain instances, a neglect or negation of national history in order to support an ostensible progressive movement forward, defined by almost interchangeable terms like "modernization," "democratization," "Westernization," and so forth (Morgan 2014: 3).

Burning Down the House thus not only provided a survey of a nation's recent history and elucidation of its defining character but also introduced insights to the unseen or neglected, tapping into the need for the emergence of something new, in order to open artistic and intellectual, let alone sensual and critical contexts. The selection of artworks by artists across generations introduced a ground for a multiplicity of voices that resonated both locally and cross-culturally.

Contemporary Exhibitionism

Exhibitions are dynamic, living systems, with the components of artworks, the spaces they are built in, the temperatures they are viewed through, the subjects they are visited by, and the concepts they have adhered meaning to. Exhibitions cannot be

motionless dead structures, even if they would be solely composed of objects and white abstracted walls cooled down to agreeable room temperatures. Moreover, exhibitions, through the politics of displaying artworks and generating content, diverge from one another in style and manifestation. In the uttermost immediacy, exhibitions are places for art where artworks become experiences to gain new contexts. As Susan Sontag reminds us:

A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing in the world, not just a text or commentary on the world ... [Artworks] present information and evaluations. But their distinctive feature is that they give rise not to conceptual knowledge (which is the distinctive feature of discursive or scientific knowledge – e.g. philosophy, sociology, psychology, history) but to something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgement in a state of thralldom or captivation. Which is to say that the knowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something rather than knowledge of something (like a fact or a moral judgement) in itself. (Sontag 2001: 21)

Thus, every exhibition, built on the conglomeration of artworks, generates multifarious experiences, elevating sensual and ethical presence instead of conceptual and sensorial knowledge. Every exhibition is a generator of a political iconography as every experience is a representation of a social structure and internal aesthetic. The place of the curator is then to follow the principle of inclusion and exclusion with sheer responsibility of enhancing the potential that the artwork can trigger as experience, with the ingenious study of its display, thus the context of the encounter. “Applying a metaphysical aestheticism, an agile craftsman’s ingenuity and cheerful political shrewdness to making exhibitions that covered a staggering range of work” as Robert Storr (2005) defines the profile of the (auteur) curator. Moreover, the exhibition today no longer needs to be defined by a group of artworks and a space that they are located in: it can assume new forms of public engagement, from community projects to educational structures, to art encounters custom-tailored at unconventional non-white-cubes, or a combination of all. The following case study aims to bring forward two recent curatorial projects that explore and experiment with curating contexts.

Case Study 3: *fig-2* and Art Night, Two New Modes of Curating Art Encounters

The project *fig-2* is a revival of a project titled *fig-1* that took place in the year 2000 generating 50 exhibitions in 50 weeks, showcasing one work at a time throughout the year. Art Night is a new contemporary art festival of London’s that draws inspiration from Nuit Blanche, dedicated to activating public spaces, iconic buildings, and historic sites charged by artworks to be experienced over the course of one summer’s night. Both projects, experimental in their nature, collate and diverge in respective contexts and their dissemination.

The concept and framework of *fig-1* was set by Mark Francis and supported by Jay Jopling in 1999. With the backing of the financial advisory services group Bloomberg,

a team was set in place to realize 50 exhibitions in 50 weeks, based on the structure of presenting one artist with one work at a time, thereby bringing together a set of practices that spanned not only the visual arts but also design and music. The line-up of artists that were curated stands out, as the project not only activated the London art scene but also predicted the prominent players of its future. Taking place in a Georgian house (Fragile House) in Soho, *fig-1* excited audiences from various backgrounds, and with its Monday openings and visionary paper-free announcements, it became a hub for students, artists, and art enthusiasts.

In its revival, 15 years after, as the curator of the second edition, I wanted to respond to the currency of London. Showcasing a single work by an artist did not necessarily comply with what 2015 London had to offer. Given the introduction of the Tate Modern, Frieze Art Fair, and 130 or more commercial galleries introduced to the contemporary art scene, *fig-2* was set to perform different modalities and forms of artistic production, providing insights into the aesthetic and critical currency of our times. The artists did not yet need to be established; however, their body of work sufficed to make a bold statement, introduce a strong position, and yet contain an intrinsic malleability to proliferate the audience experiences. In a way *fig-2* was profiled to reflect on what's happening in the artistic practices and how artists are producing their works, which is not solely based on thinking in the domain of visual arts, but expanding borders and territories, and not only being influenced by but drawing inspirations, and highlighting those experiences, from other disciplines such as literature, dance, science, physics, and music.

Art Night on the other hand, was a bold and large festival that took over a range of London boroughs. In its second edition, I was given the area of East London for the festival. Informed by the collaboration partner, Whitechapel Gallery, the land volume of the festival spanned a 1 km radius, with the gallery at its center. The curatorial challenge was not to come up with 50 evocative artists to be shown in consecutive weeks, but to find sites and artistic practices that would evoke an enchanting experience of the selected venues charged by artistic ingenuity. It was significant to introduce an underlying theme to the festival that would connect and inform not only the choice of artists and their respective practices but also the cumulation of venues as the sites of the festival. Borrowing the term “fusion of horizons” from the philosopher of hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer, I constructed the foundation of the festival to expand upon, inspired by the East End and its inevitable change and demographics. The “fusion of horizons” refers to the fact that each individual is defined by their respective horizon line, that not only visually stands for the limit of sight but also epistemologically stands for a limit of aspirations, dreams, desires, as well as knowledge. “Fusion of horizons” thus underlines the amalgamation of realities within the given intent and openness by the parties involved in a genuine dialogue. Given that the East End of London has always been marked by differences that shaped its feature and nature of the social realm, fusion of horizons provides reading across time.

The conceptual framework of *fig-2*, however, follows the footsteps of *fig-1*, yet it has been adapted to the conditions of 2015 by observing the format's potential for the production of human knowledge. In other words, setting a primary intent for *fig-2* involved looking at different types of exhibitions and modes of artistic endeavor, and at settings or scenes of art encounters that resonate. Then, looking at sub-intentions, the aesthetic and critical currency of our time was enriched by providing a ground for play for artists from various backgrounds who produce different bodies of

work, allowing them to realize their innermost dreams and their desires to emerge. The interchange between desires and artistic output allowed us not only to encapsulate the urgencies and sensitivities of the practitioners who came on board but also to engage with a larger framework of thinking, where information from various disciplines was called upon. Moreover, *fig-2* is configured as a whole that is composed of 50 parts. Analogous to a house with 50 rooms, where each room opens to its successor, differing in size, color, feeling, and content, *fig-2* manifested as a giant dwelling that generates knowledge in various manifestations. In its actualization, it was significant to embed conceptual, contextual, media-specific commonalities across the program, and most crucially introduce a thread that crosses through and connects each *fig-2* project or commission. Furthermore, some of the projects were indirectly connected to others, allowing the audiences to come up with their own interpretations of common threads. *Fig-2* worked not only with visual artists but also with a wide spectrum of contributors who brought with them their expertise in architecture, design, cybernetics, big data, and environmental science, amongst others. Calling on different forms of knowledge was further evident in a number of collective exhibitions, which gave the program a transdisciplinary aspect. Moreover, different temporalities played a significant role in the curation of the project as a whole, for each project was connected to its successor and to other projects in nonlinear ways. Whereas some artists were called upon to exhibit their work weeks or months in advance, others only had 10 days to put together their solo exhibition.

For a festival like *Art Night*, the selection of venues reflected on the conceptual premise while their strong historic associations or iconic values, even secretive nature, demanded adept allocation of art works, which would then respond to, establish a relation with, and explore further what was given. The festival was geared to provide works that were not only site-specific but also site-adapted and site-responsive. The art, in this context, was initially and a priori an experience, or in other words the festival was conceptually brought together as a sequence of situations, each of which wrapped audiences in altered states of engagement, through fluctuating and resonant surfaces.

The extensive use of media was inherent in both projects, the former geared toward an intimate engagement with a defined group of audiences who were already invested in questioning art as experience, whilst the latter reached out to wider audiences who not necessarily held a primary interest in the elevation of an experience triggered by art and its contexts.

Moreover, *fig-2* played a role in the activation of the scene in London, while drawing on influences and inspiration from the international art discourse. *Art Night 2017* put forward an impetus in activating a borough, a neighborhood that is a composite of subjectivities, and whilst introducing new forms of social engagement, it also highlighted what was already active through its associate program. Both projects, thus diverging in size and scale, contemplated the encounter with art and the dissemination of meaning, furthered by production of knowledge at large.

Conclusion

Every exhibition provides a new context for the arts and proposes a reinterpretation of the creative domain. Each and every work of art contributes to the elaboration and crystallization of understanding of the arts, and the visual domain. The artwork is a

culmination of a selection taken from an infinite number of possibilities, charged by artistic intent and informed by sociocultural parameters.

Art in the modern period is not evidence of an accumulation and transmission of a shared set of intellectual and cultural skills that practitioners inherit and collectively build on, but a vast shifting, self-negating, transmuting constellation of aesthetic particularities that are defined one against the other as a condition of what gives them value: the singularity of the artwork as the singular expression of the artist or group of artists. (Roberts 2011: 102)

Today's curator, taking agency in the accessibility and visibility of the arts, operates within the sociopolitical, sensual, and economic realities of his or her immediate surroundings. Through providing a selection and an assembly of artworks in the form of exhibitions, she or he fosters the acknowledgement of thought processes actively taking place in the immediacy of the local context, with a potential to further align an international discourse. Thus, the curatorial project must fit the needs of a particular moment and associate itself with the acknowledgment of tradition and production of truth within a society, to later claim a wider acknowledgment. That is to say, the contexts in which the curator expands the knowledge of the arts is always defined by the specificity of its dynamics and forces that are at play. Moreover, given the current state of sharing knowledge across continents and cultural realities, the curator's role and responsibility expands to grasping and activating a wider realm of truth that is accessible beyond the specific context she or he performs.

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The Neglected Object of Curation

Lee Weng-Choy

The Octopus and the Cat

The octopus, Chus Martínez (2014) reminds us, “is the only animal that has a portion of its brain ... located in its (eight) arms. Without a central nervous system, every arm ‘thinks’ as well as ‘senses’ the surrounding world with total autonomy, and yet, each arm is part of the animal.” For Martínez, the octopus as metaphor provides insight into what art does – which includes, among other things, allowing us to imagine what a “decentralized perception” could be; art “enables us to sense the world in ways beyond language. Art is the octopus in love.”¹ Speaking of love, a number of major news outlets, reporting on a recent research paper on cats, suggested that *Felis catus* is not the cold, indifferent creature of stereotype, but may in fact reciprocate the affections of their human companions (Vitale Shreve, Mehrkam, and Udell 2017).² When I shared these findings with a friend who is very fond of her felines, I was met with skepticism. Why do humans and cats misread each other so? With dogs, we look at each other face to face, happily, mutually reciprocating. And so, we try the same with cats, sometimes staring adoringly right into their eyes. Alas, to the furry critter, the direct gaze is a threat. Better to do as follows: remain adjacent to her and calmly pretend to mind your own business – unlike the orange tabby who is actually ignoring you – then, eventually, when she glances at you and slowly blinks, repeat what she does.³ The cat is a figure of intimate familiarity and radical difference at the same time. One reason I regularly employ animals as metaphors in my writing is for their suggestive potentials (their constant reminder that we live in a world much bigger than ourselves is another). I first paired the octopus and the cat when mulling over the question of who reads art criticism (Lee 2015). For my discussion here, on certain aspects of the curation of contemporary art, I would like to recruit them again.

Is neglect the opposite of attention? Consider this somewhat random pair of references: Ralph Ellison's (1952) great novel of the African American experience, *Invisible Man*, and Linda Nochlin's (2015) landmark essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Back in the twentieth century, one of the important intellectual political interventions happening in the Western world was the critique of the construction of its cultural canons, and how its discourses were predicated on the elisions of other, often marginalized, perspectives. Fast forward a few generations to our increasingly globalized artworld, and we find that major international events like biennials predominate, the stock-in-trade of which is the representation of the margins, juxtaposed alongside the spectacular, or vice versa. In the twenty-first-century attention economy,⁴ neglect and attention function arguably less like the opposites of old than positions along a spectrum, where what the former sometimes represents is less invisibility than a lack of maximized visibility. So, what might the "neglected object" of my chapter title be? It could be something that we can see right before us, but which, for whatever reasons, we do not adequately attend to, or do not quite know how to look at; perhaps not too unlike the way a human "mislooks" at a cat. Yet let me defer indefinitely from trying to name this object or objects of our gaze. My argument depends on slow "unfoldings." Let me ask, instead, how can the octopus help us think about contemporary curation? The cephalopod mollusk offers an image of complex interactions with an environment: fragmented perceptions that are nonetheless each part of some larger whole. Is this not a perfect metaphor for contemporaneity in global art? And what about the notion of biennials as tentacles?

Which brings me to Peter Osborne (2015) and his essay, "Every Other Year Is Always This Year: Contemporaneity and the Biennial Form." Osborne, who has written extensively on these topics,⁵ opens with the contention that: "Art today lives – can there still be any doubt? – in the 'age of the biennial'" (15). He goes on to maintain that their scope is "no longer primarily national, or even regional, but that of a geopolitical totalization of the globe, homologous with the ongoing, post-1989 expansion of the social relations of capitalism itself" (15). Osborne advances a critique of the biennial as symptomatic of neoliberal capitalism⁶ by clarifying the relationships between contemporaneity, the biennial, and globalization. Among his many salient points are: "the modern and the contemporary are not successive historical 'stages' but co-exist in complex and contradictory ways" (16). For the first time in human history, capitalism and globalization have produced the "new and distinctive temporality of 'contemporaneity' – a disjunctive unification or coming together of different social times" across the world (16). Since 1989, the biennial has been characterized by two main, "inextricably linked," features: "artistic 'contemporaneity' and geopolitical 'globality'" (16). Furthermore, these events are "ineluctably tied up with corporate, municipal, national and regional development projects, and property markets in particular" (20). Capitalist production is defined by overproduction, and "biennials are now, even if only indirectly, an integral part of such production" (26). This age of the biennial is made possible by the "constitutive fiction" and "collective fantasy" that a "comprehensive artistic coverage of the globe" is both desirable and now finally possible (16). One more point, and a tangential comment: Osborne finds problematic the recent tendency of biennials to self-consciously historicize themselves as they attempt to address the urgencies of life around the globe and make reparative gestures towards the marginalized. Simon Soon (2016), in his essay "Curatorial Colonialism," has a different take on the issue, noting that, while curatorial discourse may make

“bold critical claims towards discursive reflexivity,” what sometimes obtains is that “third world art and activism achieves contemporaneity by becoming an archive, pressed into the service of institutional critique in the first world” (221). Arguing against such appropriations, which at their worst are attention-seeking gambits, Soon, believes that one “must work from a genuine compulsion to know, driven by curiosity rather than urgency” (225). What Soon recommends is an anthropology of sustained listening.⁷

There is much that Osborne says that I find persuasive and instructive. Although maybe I misunderstand him – I think he overestimates the role of the biennial in contemporary art, and I disagree that exhibitions, large scale or otherwise, are the most important sites of meaning making.⁸ The preponderance of biennials is possibly less defining of our artworld – though there has never been anything close to fairly distributed ownership – than the pervasive reach of neoliberal capitalism into the everyday lives of people everywhere, arts and cultural workers included. To be sure, Osborne is aware of the many other dimensions of cultural production and experience that are not aimed at or contained by biennial exhibition, for instance the interactions that take place outside institutional art spaces within local communities. These encounters are certainly not disentangled from the effects, uneven as they may be, of globalization, and these moments can always be converted into fodder for future biennials. And when it comes to the biennials themselves, Osborne seems to privilege their form and neglects – if that’s not too strong a word – the multiplicities and specificities of biennial practice and practicalities. It is almost as if, at moments in his critique, he is caught staring at that phantasmatic horizon of a fully realized contemporaneity.

In the same publication, following Osborne, is an essay by Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2015), “South as Method: Biennials Past and Present,” which I read as an implicit correction to “Contemporaneity and the Biennial Form.” Gardner and Green give evidence of a history of biennial practice as irreducibly heterogeneous.⁹ Instead of analyzing and abstracting these events as having an underlying form that has universal or global application, their approach to biennial research – and this is my interpretation – follows from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1953) notion of family resemblances (some examples, A, may resemble others, B, but then there are those, C, which resemble A, but hardly resemble B, and so on). By attending to a wave of biennials of the “South” from the 1950s to the 1980s, they make the case that not all of them have operated as a centralizing force, and not all functioned in structurally analogous ways that then built up to today’s neoliberal-dominated artworld. Their use of the “South” is nuanced and I cannot do justice to it here. For Gardner and Green, it is “a loose working concept for that which tries to resist easy assimilation within hegemonic global currents generated outward from the North Atlantic”; moreover, it “operates on two axes concurrently: a synchronic axis of the transnational – or better still, the trans-local, given the vicious arbitrariness of national frontiers – and the diachronic axis of reference back to rich if unstable histories of trying to conceive different models of trans-local exchange” (29). For my purposes, what is crucial is how their research demonstrates that the various biennials they studied are not defined solely by their exhibitionary forms; a number of these platforms were significant as enabling sites for conversation, collaboration, and creating networks that were less global than regional. They found “in catalog preface after catalog preface, biennial makers insist that, by replacing cultural division with curatorial adjacency, large-scale international exhibitions can be models for replacing Cold War divides with forms of

intercultural friendship” (31). Having said all this, it is important to stress that far from trying to “smooth out the South” (35), Gardner and Green emphasize contradiction and struggle. Their essay is neither a celebratory recovery of a neglected history nor the promotion of an oppositional counter-narrative. Rather, their aim is to unpack the binaries through which hegemonic discourses operate, and they embrace the interruptive potential of anecdote. At its most hopeful register, anecdote can open space for imagining multiple possibilities: artworlds characterized by more equitable intercultural collaborations, where what matters are communities and collegiality, friendship, or even something akin to the adjacent companionship humans have with cats; contemporaneities that are not a foregone neoliberal conclusion but remain unsettled – complex *decentralized* nervous systems, like those of our curious octopus.

Subcultural Criticism

From metaphor let me move on to questions of methodology. I opened my discussion on neglect in contemporary curation by looking at a theorization of the biennial as symptomatic of the geopolitical totalization of the globe, pointing out what I believe that analysis overlooks by shifting from the meta-perspective that privileges form to a ground-level approach that emphasizes practice. At stake, however, is not an opposition between form and practice, or global and local, but the utilization of lateral interconnections to tell diverse stories about art.

In April 2017, I co-facilitated an art writing workshop at ZeroStation in Ho Chi Minh City.¹⁰ During my preparations, while deliberating over reading assignments, Sarah Thornton’s (2008) *Seven Days in the Art World* came to mind. When the book was published, I was dismissive – unfairly, as I had barely skimmed it – and here was an opportunity to correct my prejudice. So, I read it and some other writings by Thornton. Then I learned that Nguyễn Như Huy, founder and artistic director of ZeroStation, wrote the Vietnamese translation (Thornton 2016). That happy coincidence confirmed my decision. Thornton would be perfect for the first seminar, for which I assigned texts that ranged from covering a regional biennial to offering a global overview, and from addressing the general audience to fully engaging theory – that last would be Thornton’s (1995a) own “The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital.” While I enjoyed *Seven Days*, I told the workshop participants that I also hated it, and mainly because I admire her earlier ethnographic work on subcultures. My problem is not with the book’s conceit, seven sites that stand in for the *whole* of the artworld, or with its seduction with spectacle in the chapters on the auction or the art fair. But when Thornton visits an artist’s studio, it is the big machine that is Takashi Murakami’s, and when she sits in a class at art school, it is with Michael Asher and one of his legendary all-day crit sessions, and so on. The book is unrelenting in its glamorization of art. Her well-crafted storytelling attests to her ethnographer’s powers of observation, but I wish her anecdotal portrayals of artworld personalities were more diverse in their representations and varied in their tone. Most of all, I wish the book were more analytical.

Because, when Thornton is analytical she can be very good. Her *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Thornton 1995b) is, in part, an ethnography of the rave and dance club scenes in Britain from the 1980s to early 1990s, which

builds upon Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital and the Birmingham school's work on cultural studies from the 1970s (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003: 4–5, 7–12). *Club Cultures* is not about “dominant ideologies and subversive subcultures” (Thornton 1995b, 9), where the latter are framed mostly in terms of deliberate or inadvertent resistance to the former, as if subcultures and mainstreams are only defined against each other (94). Thornton's focus is on how subcultures help produce youth identity in context with other subcultures: “Subcultural ideologies are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (10). She points out that studies of popular culture from the 1970s and 1980s “have tended to embrace anthropological notions of culture as a *way of life* but have spurned art-oriented definitions of culture which relate to *standards of excellence*” (8). Especially when applied to youth subcultures, she rejects these assumptions that high culture is “vertically ordered,” while popular forms are “horizontally organized” (8). She observes that distinctions are “never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of *others*” (10). The “social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't” (105). Thornton develops her concept of subcultural capital based on Bourdieu's cultural capital, conceptualizing “hipness” as an example of the former (11), and describing fashion as one manifestation of subcultural capital in object form (114). But there are differences: subcultural capital is less class-bound than cultural capital, with youth typically rebelling against the “trappings of parental class” (12), and it is less reliably convertible into economic capital (12). Moreover, both Bourdieu and the Birmingham school neglected the role of media: “classic Birmingham subcultural studies tended to banish media and commerce from their definitions of authentic culture” (9), while several scholars have “remarked upon the absence of television and radio from Bourdieu's theories of cultural hierarchy” (13). In contrast, “within the economy of subcultural capital, the media are not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction (which is the way Bourdieu describes films and newspapers vis-à-vis cultural capital), but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge” (13).

Following Thornton – who suggests that “clubber and raver ideologies are almost as *anti-mass culture* as the discourses of the artworld” (5) – let me entertain the notion that arts communities are subcultures. Artists, curators, critics, and such are prolific consumers of media and culture as well as intensely preoccupied with re-imagining and re-inventing languages and value systems so as to articulate positions of identity, authenticity, distinctiveness, resistance, or some other purpose. That mid-career arts professionals might be comparable to teenagers haunting underground dance clubs may not readily resonate with the former, though not because we are any less self-absorbed or status conscious – we may not be as cool as the kids; we're just more cosmopolitan. In the past, I've written about the limits of self-ethnography and identity politics in art (Lee 1997); see also Taylor (2011) and Flores (2016).¹¹ Until now, I hadn't thought to frame my own work as an art critic in terms of studying a subculture that I might admit to belonging – or, rather, the more appropriate mouthful is: a dynamic network of contemporaneous and intersecting local, regional, and global subcultures. But my interest in artworld subcultures has less to do with how various cliques jockey for visibility and attention than with what it means when artistic work is relatively neglected and remains undervalued as subcultural capital.

Art criticism may very well be a kind of ethnography of the artworld. My own writing has made a virtue of the accidents and contingencies of my encounters and relationships with artists and other co-workers. Criticism is a mixed breed. It is not a discipline like art history, which, innovative as it can be, has a responsibility to be comprehensive and methodical, and is taught in university departments. But criticism can be capacious as well as personal, providing room for an argument to meander as it unfolds, allowing for changes in rhythm and tone, mixing debates over theory with digressions, deferrals, and repetitions, all the while conjoining seriousness and sarcasm, irony and sincerity. Criticism often seeks out the anecdote because it wants to place the exception or the exemplary in tension with a larger thematic, and while it may resist overarching theorizing and question grand narratives, ultimately, the critic is also a storyteller of sorts. Although sometimes the best way to address neglect is not by compensating with a direct burst of attention, but by living adjacently, being neighborly, listening, and waiting for a slow blink of recognition.

Conversations with Curators about Writing

When I started this chapter, I knew that I wanted to examine the relationships between writing and curating, but the final shape only became clear to me after a call I had with Zoe Butt, who is the artistic director of the Factory Contemporary Arts Center, Ho Chi Minh City. When we spoke about her experiences in the region, she lamented that too many of her colleagues don't seem to take curatorial writing seriously enough (Zoe Butt, personal communication, 3 February 2017). After our call, I quickly put together a short list of associates whom I wanted to approach for their stories about their curating and writing practices: Patrick D. Flores, professor, University of the Philippines; Qinyi Lim, independent curator; Russell Storer, deputy director, National Gallery Singapore; and Michelle Wong, researcher, Asia Art Archive (AAA), Hong Kong – plus Butt, which makes five. While I can't provide a rationale for this particular grouping, what I do know is that I didn't want too small a number like three, and if I had much more space, perhaps I might have gone with eight (just to beat the octopus metaphor to death). The reason I decided on this quick, gut selection is because it functions like a random sampling of my friends from the artworld.¹² Rather than attempt a comprehensive survey or present a paradigmatic case study about curatorial writing, both of which are beyond the scope of these modest reflections, my hope is to offer a suggestive representation through a small range of anecdotes – “range” being the operative term here. Also, I want to play with a quasi-ethnography drawn not from informants but from conversants.

In *Seven Days*, Thornton (2008) has lunch with *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith, of whom she says, “Many believe no one critic wields quite as much power as Smith”; whether or not that's true, Smith is indeed mindful of her position of authority, which is why she never buys art and never writes about close friends (172). One could retort that those in power don't really have friends, only interests, but Smith's reason for avoiding her pals in her work is, ironically, my reason for embracing them, which keeps me honest. During a workshop in January 2017, at Sa Sa Bassac in Phnom Penh,¹³ Storer asked me why I often wrote about friends, and I said something like the following: ideally, friends are the persons with whom we have our most honest conversations. We share backgrounds, sympathies or interests, but we also have

disagreements. We choose our friends, unlike our families, and they can be quite different from us. Friendship is a practice and one of our most important ones at that, a theme which Butt (2016) herself takes up. Being a good friend requires consistent effort and attention, as well as empathy, generosity, and criticality – friends should call each other out on their crap. For me, as an art critic, friendship and writing are inextricably linked and mutually constitutive. They are both practices of address; writing and friendship are about learning how to locate and place oneself, how to be in the world and how to speak, listen, and live with others.¹⁴

Train to Biennale

In the summer of 2015, Maria Lind, artistic director of the 11th Gwangju Biennale, *The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)*, approached Michelle Wong about joining the team as an assistant curator. As Wong told me, “the communication with Maria was characteristically very direct. We had met earlier in May when she saw a small display of the Ha Bik Chuen archive at AAA,” and “this is what small can do” made an impression on Lind. The invitation caught Wong by surprise, however. Hitherto, she had never imagined pursuing a biennale curatorial position and this would be her first. But the opportunity to “develop new capacities,” and to be involved in “such a completely different mode of working” was enticing, so she signed up. “I’m a bit like an octopus in that I like to work on many different things. Why not work on over twenty-five artist projects at the same time, do a publication, and try to understand a different language?” (Michelle Wong, personal communication, 13 August 2017.)

In “Train to Biennale,” her essay of reflections on her experiences working in Gwangju, Wong opens with a reference to the Korean zombie film *Train to Busan* (2016). “At one point or another during the making of a biennale, everyone becomes a zombie. Half-alive, half-dead, half-asleep, and definitely hungry. It is as if a somewhat blind, uncontrollable force dominates our bodily actions, absent any human intention, reasoning or limitation” (Wong, forthcoming).¹⁵ When she spoke with colleagues about zombies and biennales, the question of vampires came up; whereas the latter are “fueled by *desire*,” “zombies are mindlessly propelled by *drive*.” Wong writes of how, as the events of Gwangju “recede into the recent past and my memories of it take on a softer hue, I begin to wonder, if we were, metaphorically, more vampires or more zombies.” Her essay finds its voice precisely by attending to metaphor – of the train and the monster, with the latter taking on multiple forms as well as forms of multiples: zombie hoards, a coven of industrious vampires, and the seemingly endless succession of international biennials.

A “biennale is often a ride with high stakes. It can be a career entry point into larger circulation and higher visibility.” But Wong’s attitude and approach toward Gwangju wasn’t about networking to create an opportunity for her next big show; it was about inhabiting the spaces of working in this one. Not that it has to be wrong to be career-oriented. If I could return to teenagers and their club cultures: there, one may encounter social climbers, but what is arguably more defining of a subcultural scene is the desire to inhabit it, rather than the drive to move on and up (I think of inhabiting and living in adjacency as interconnected – what’s at stake is not only members of a subculture interacting but also the simple joy of being alongside one another). Wong provides the following anecdote about investing time with colleagues, which

she sets up via a train metaphor. One readily imagines the curator as the driver of the “train to biennale,” but, as Wong suggests, we can also visualize her as the passenger.

My most distinct memory of this passenger experience was at a reading group that was part of the Monthly Gathering program leading up to the Biennale. We were reading an essay by Julie Ault (2013), titled “Active Recollection: Archiving ‘Group Material’.” It was 20 May 2016, and so the city of Gwangju was painfully aware of the recently passed anniversary of the 18 May Democratic Uprising. The essay was translated into Korean from English, so each participant in the group chose to read the text out loud in the language they were most comfortable with. And so, for over two hours, we were enveloped in this reading and discussion on expansive notions of histories and archives that trespassed two languages. At that point, no single person was driving, because when a city’s silent awareness of its own historicity, present, and futures takes the driver’s seat, you sit back, and go along for the ride (Wong, forthcoming).

Edges and Measures

Australian-born Russell Storer made his first research trip to Singapore in 2003, while he was a curator with Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA). “For a long time, I had an interest in collective activity, and wanted to triangulate Sydney with a city in Asia and a city in Europe” (Russell Storer, personal communication, 19 August 2017). The exhibition that developed from this research was *Situation: Collaborations, Collectives & Artist Networks from Sydney, Singapore & Berlin* (2005), and it led to him working with the Artists Village as well as other artists and organizations in Singapore. The MCA, which he joined in 2001, was Storer’s first job at an art institution. In 2008, he joined the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane (QAGOMA), and moved to his current position at National Gallery Singapore in 2014. Storer has also contributed to various biennials, including Singapore and Sydney, as well as *documenta*. But as long as I’ve known Storer, I’ve never thought of him as your typical institutional curator. Not that he tries to be otherwise. He has done his fair share of institution-building; for instance, he speaks of working on the collections at QAGOMA as “one of the most rewarding things I have ever done,” and at National Gallery Singapore, he has co-curated blockbuster shows like *Yayoi Kusama: Life is the Heart of a Rainbow* (2017). Yet there remains, at the core, a very personal scale to his practice. “My favorite program at the MCA was the ‘Level 4’ exhibitions. These were solo survey shows of mid-career artists which were not big enough to be retrospectives but substantial enough to look at an individual artist in depth. We would choose an element of an artist’s practice and really pursue that. With the Matthew Ngui show (2007), for example, I saw the whole exhibition as a single artwork.” In 2016, Storer co-curated a small exhibition at National Gallery Singapore, *A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object*, featuring Johnny Manahan, Redza Piyadasa, and Tan Teng-Kee. For Storer, its intimacy and focus were reminiscent of his work on the “Level 4” MCA projects – “I really miss doing those shows.”

I spoke with Storer about writing at, what I called, the edges of the institution – of finding one’s own voice in the midst of a large organization. But for him, it’s more about finding “the right voice,” and in the context of writing with care about an artist

or idea. He mentioned Guy Brett, an English curator and critic who was instrumental in introducing Latin American art to Britain in the 1960s:

There is a beautiful essay by Brett (2004) about how he found his voice, called “New Measures”. It’s about trying to get the measure of something with words, and how to describe the visual or ineffable. Brett takes the position of an ordinary person in the midst of life, drawing the reader or viewer into a conversation as he’s working through his ideas. I’ve always liked writing when it’s part of the process of learning.

Storer also mentioned, “Spin,” a short text he wrote for Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s 2008 Biennale of Sydney, *Revolutions-Forms that Turn*. “It’s one of my favorite kinds of writing – not the standard catalog essay – where you take a small idea and just follow it.” Storer begins by recounting the story of Perth engineer, Ralph Sarich, who invented an award-winning design for an orbital engine – a form that turns – then traces its connection to aspects of the mainstream Australian psyche, which has never experienced revolution. “The urban myth that circulated in Western Australia in the 1980s was that the Ford Motor Company had bought the patent for this home-grown innovation and suppressed it” (Storer 2008: 63). The truth was the design was ultimately impractical and Sarich went on to achieve considerable success with other engineering ventures. “Yet the story lingers in the local unconscious. After all, it resonates with a deep-seated feeling of being the underdog ... Australia is one of the most active micronation producers in the world, many of them arising from disagreements with officialdom” (64). Storer describes the situation as symptomatic of “a condition of apathetic acceptance of authority: grumbling about it perhaps, but preferring to retreat into our shells – or it seems, set up our own country – rather than overthrow the powers that be” (64).

Poetry and Progress

Perhaps it’s too much to say that modern Singapore is predicated on the neglect of poetry. But I have heard it persuasively argued that forgetting is its founding condition. This was at a conference in 1994. Janadas Devan – then a literary critic, nowadays the Chief of Government Communications – had evoked the Lee Tzu Pheng poem, “My Country and My People,” as he spoke about that self-described “moment of anguish” when Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced separation from Malaysia on 9 August 1965. Lee had fought for Merger but failed to convince the Malaysians, who expelled Singapore from the Federation. Janadas (1999) argues that the country’s founding could not be told as a “triumphant nationalist narrative” (29); rather, “Singapore occurred, and continues to sustain itself, as a result of recurrent acts of forgettings” (22). Perhaps why the poet Alfian Sa’at (2001) could write a collection about his homeland entitled *A History of Amnesia*.

From 2012 to 2016, Qinyi Lim was the curator at Para Site, Hong Kong. Every Chinese New Year she would return to her native Singapore. On her 2014 visit, she came across an anthology of local poetry whose title is a quote from the famous speech Lee Kuan Yew made in 1968 at the then University of Singapore, “poetry is a luxury we cannot afford,” the prime minister had claimed. For Lim, many a curatorial

conceit has come from a literary encounter, and her reading of *A Luxury We Cannot Afford* (Chia and Ip 2014), especially the foreword by Gwee Li Sui, would develop into a project at Para Site with the same name, held in the year of the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence. Lee Kuan Yew contended that poetry and similar pursuits had to be postponed until the nation achieved economic progress. This agenda would define the first decades of the country but then "shifted in the 1990s when cultural development was viewed as a necessity ... in gaining status as a developed nation" (Lim 2015: 1). As Lim explains in the catalogue, she wanted to take the "term 'luxury' away from its common consumerist and capitalist underpinnings" and explore the notion when "applied to personal and civil liberties in the futuristic language of Singapore's governmental mandate over the last 50 years" (1–2). The exhibition posits the utopian promises of its nation-building ideology as "unanswered, unfulfilled" yet continually resurfacing (2), and has its own moments of anguish, including, for example, Liang Wern Fook's song "Sparrow with Twigs," which was unbanned after 23 years and finally recognized as heritage.

Somewhat ironically, *A Luxury We Cannot Afford* was meant specifically for Hong Kong but not Singapore. It offers a displaced critique of nationalism. Lim spoke to me about not wanting to deal with the probable institutional and self-censorship that bringing the show back home would have entailed. She also mentioned how Hong Kongers are fascinated by the comparison with the island city-state in both economic and democratic terms. In conversations with colleagues, she is often put on the spot to speak for her country and "in a sense this exhibition was curated to respond to their questions" (Lim Qinyi, personal communication, 6 September 2017). Although for Lim, *Luxury* is the furthest thing from an exhibition as authoritative self-representation; it is an "intergenerational explorative essay" (Lim 2015: 1), as she put it in the catalogue, and because no matter how complex or crafted, for Lim, the essay form does not aim to be comprehensive, but performs by being suggestive or speculative.

The themes of futurism and nationalism would find resonance in another project, one where Lim commissioned some writing on biennials. In 2017, the Singapore Section of the International Association of Art Critics, in collaboration with the online magazine *ArtsEquator*, published three roundtables on the 2016 Singapore Biennale; Lim was the facilitator of the last of these. Whereas the first two featured exchanges between their various participants on the current Singapore exhibition, Lim invited three curators and asked each of them to write short science fictions about future biennials (Ditzig 2017; Hsu 2017; Tay 2017). Lim prompted each writer to "tell me about the biennale you want to see" (Lim 2017), thereby asking for reflections on what is possible as well as what is ideal, what is contained by present-day parameters, and what can be imagined beyond them. Two of the texts were more visual culture-oriented and like episodes from the television show *Black Mirror*, while the third was arguably more writerly, in a post-Internet sense, as its structure was a play on bookmarking. When Lim was studying at the curatorial program at de Appel, "one of our assignments was to write, firstly, a fragment about how we experienced an exhibition, and then, secondly, to further explore how we experienced it emotionally and tactilely. That was what I was trying to drive at by asking the curators to write these fictions. I was also interested in – if I might borrow a word Ahmad Mashadi uses – *destabilizing* our vocabulary." (Ahmad is Senior Associate Director, National University of Singapore Museum; Lim worked there from 2007–11.)

When Writing Became Important

My point in assembling these short stories about curatorial practice is not to conclude with my own analyses of them or some general observations. Rather, I want to present them as sitting next to each other autonomously but still interconnectedly. I hope it is apparent that each extends well beyond my own framing and representation. The last two sections consist of texts by Zoe Butt and Patrick D. Flores, which were co-produced through our conversations and written exchanges. First up is a reflection by Zoe Butt on speaking and writing (edited email, 16 September 2017).

Over the years, it became impressed upon me that the ability to speak your ideas is one of the key skills to success as a curator. To be an orator is to be able to persuade, or at the very least compel someone to consider something differently. When I moved to Asia from Australia, it became even more evident to me that the cultural fields were lacking in independent leaders – think China, think Vietnam, where the power of culture has been and continues to be largely state-driven and purposed; contemporary culture has few spokespersons and few good orators. Having led artist-driven organizations for the past decade or so, and having been afforded the myriad chances to attend and participate in discussions, seminars, forums, and artist critique sessions, I've come to realize that my writing skills have improved with the practice of speaking in public. Is this just a case of becoming more confident, or a case of observing the impact my spoken ideas have on the artists around me? Probably both.

Also, since moving to Asia I have become all too aware of the great lack of critical and discursive platforms for contemporary art. To focus on Vietnam – today, we still have no written form of review, introduction, or critical analysis about artistic production! Programs such as San Art Laboratory and Conscious Realities were born as a response to this situation.¹⁶ In the process of curating art in Vietnam, I have also been subjected to the censorship of my ideas on a daily basis. I am continually aware of what I am saying, writing and to whom and how (email, direct message, website, Facebook). This constant self-awareness of my words has meant that I often feel a lack of poesis in my own language. I've become aware that in order to really, really write about an artist, I need to mentally remove myself from the administrative censors that have become habitual and the anxiety that I now have normalized. It is not easy. But lately, I find myself trying to return to the texts of Thich Nhat Hanh (1967) and the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Sogyal 1992) so as to remind myself that my state of mind is always in my control. Writing for me currently is a desire to return to poetry whilst fighting the battle of surveillance in the everyday. I suppose I could abandon this yearning; however, were I to do that, I think I'd lose my relationship to the work and to art, and so I guess that is not an option for me.

Tie a String around the World

Patrick D. Flores was curator for the Philippine Pavilion of the 2015 Venice Biennale, which marked a return after a 51-year absence. A written exchange with Flores took place over late August and early September 2017, and I have reconstructed his replies to my questions as a continuous text below.

When I was approached to be curator, I insisted that there be a call for proposals. I thought it was important to invest in a process of selection that was less vertical and ensured wide participation – a more dialogical, participatory procedure – since a national pavilion project is always contentious. But to critique the nation and the pavilion concept, for me, was facile and opportunistic, and also a bit belabored. I opted for a less dialectical approach, a more cosmological argument that was grounded geopolitically and geo-poetically. I wanted to do art history within the contemporary: to restage modernity as critical moments of film, installation, and video that intersected with the epic and the folk. That was the game plan. When I started, I was not aware of Venice artistic director Okwui Enwezor's thesis. The Pavilion title, *Tie A String around the World*, is a line from the Manuel Conde film *Genghis Khan* by way of James Agee's English narration. It is interesting how this phrase resonates with Enwezor's title, *All the World's Futures*. It was co-incidental, which is part of the curatorial, constellative instinct. Also, it was serendipitous that the Philippine Pavilion was next to the Mongolian, which exhibited a video of an arid, barren land.

I regarded our 2015 participation as a return to Venice – a reiteration of the National Pavilion of 1964 and a revisit to *Genghis Khan* which was screened in the Film Festival of 1952. The path had been trodden; it was a matter of retracing it and reencountering the scene. I proceeded from the premise that the Philippines was fine as it is and its sortie into Venice was a matter not of conquest or the pursuit for parity as it was of equivalence or comparatively. Venice for me was part of the world of water and the history of the sea that inflected the archipelagic history of the Philippines. It was also a question of entitlement: the Philippines was entitled to the Western or the global because it co-produced it even if the latter would refuse it at certain phases of its history. This was the aspiration, one that sought sources of a trans-national, inter-pavilion interlocution and not a national or nationalist affirmation. Identity and representation thus were not prominent in my agenda. I wanted to pursue an eccentric or idiosyncratic modernity that cast the Philippines as at once stalwart and delicate, conversant and untranslatable, baroque in both its micropolyphony and ornament.

The catalogue essay, therefore, addresses these desires and the intention to create an afterlife for the pavilion (Flores 2015). I didn't like the idea of the exhibition burning brightly in Venice and expiring thereafter. I wanted to protract its duration, prolong its tenure, extend its reach. Since the pavilion moved across different temporalities, this delay and dilation was possible. The essay was meant to annotate these turns. Moreover, the catalogue was another moment of curation. The interdisciplinary essays I chose further fleshed out the argument of the exhibition and could serve as an anthology of texts on the "West Philippine Sea." As a university teacher, this is significant, with the pavilion becoming part of a seminar, so to speak. The text was in the end hybrid: part curatorial essay, part art history, part political and aesthetic theory. Part of the aspiration, too, was to engage in close readings of the practices and forms in the exhibition. Many times, critique is focused on the political economy of a national pavilion and the byzantine stories sowed by dispossessed, graceless intriguants. The essay was an effort to be more granular and attentive in the appreciation of the integrity and intelligence of the material. This materiality is often lost in the polemics against the platform of the biennale and the national pavilion, as if these two overdetermined the sensible life inhabiting their premises. Again, the aspiration pertains to both cosmology and afterlife, mediating the "present" through sensible material, the curatorial, and the writing – which aimed to reveal the multiple sympathies of the curator and the materiality of curatorial practice.

Notes

- 1 In addition to Martínez (2014), see Godfrey-Smith (2017) and Haraway (2016).
- 2 Vitale Shreve, Mehrkam, and Udell (2017)'s article was then reported on 28 March 2017 in such major news outlets as *Time* magazine, the *Independent*, and *The Huffington Post*: <http://time.com/4714823/cats-very-social-study/>; <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/cats-pretend-indifferent-humans-pet-study-oregon-state-university-a7653941.html>; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/do-cats-like-people_us_58da7ebbe4b0928a6b780d12, all accessed 13 March 2019.
- 3 Diane Meriwether. 2015. Why Are Cats Attracted to People Who Don't Like Them? *Slate* (7 August). http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2015/08/07/why_are_cats_attracted_to_people_who_don_t_like_them.html; <https://www.quora.com/Cats-domestic/Cats-pets-How-should-a-stranger-behave-to-a-cat-to-become-his-friend>; <https://www.litter-robot.com/blog/2016/06/22/the-slow-blink-and-why-you-should-use-it/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 4 In "Attention Shoppers!" Goldhaber (1997) writes: "We've turned a corner toward an economy where an increasing number of workers are no longer involved directly in the production, transportation, and distribution of material goods, but instead earn their living managing or dealing with information in some form. Most call this an 'information economy.' Yet, ours is not truly an information economy. By definition, economics is the study of how a society uses its scarce resources. And information is not scarce – especially on the Net, where it is not only abundant, but overflowing. We are drowning in information, yet constantly increasing our generation of it. So, a key question arises: Is there something else that flows through cyberspace, something that is scarce and desirable? There is. No one would put anything on the Internet without the hope of obtaining some. It's called attention. And the economy of attention – not information – is the natural economy of cyberspace." For an artworld perspective, see Oetker and Schafhausen's (2013) collection of interviews with artists.
- 5 See Osborne (2013) and also Wee (2017). Wee offers a different engagement with Osborne in relation to contemporary art and Southeast Asia.
- 6 For a succinct definition of neoliberalism, let me turn to Noam Chomsky, who contrasts it with the period that came before, "the golden age of modern capitalism" that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and was "the great growth period, egalitarian growth, a lot of advances in social justice and so on." That "changed in the '70s with the onset of the neoliberal era that we've been living in since. And if you ask yourself what this era is, it's crucial principle is undermining mechanisms of social solidarity and mutual support and popular engagement in determining policy. ... [where] 'freedom' means a subordination to the decisions of concentrated, unaccountable, private power" Lydon (2017).
- 7 What Soon (2016) actually says is "a kind of anthropology of sustained inquiry" (225); later at the conclusion of the essay he emphasizes the act of listening (227).
- 8 Osborne (2006) asserts that "it is increasingly the exhibition that is the unit of artistic significance" (128). One imagines that the other units of significance would include artworks, texts, networks, institutions, independent spaces, the various practices of arts professionals and so on.
- 9 Gardner and Green's (2015) "South as Method" draws from their earlier essay (2013) "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global." See also Gardner and Green (2016).

- 10 The art writing workshop was part of ZeroStation’s two-year project, “Asian In/VISIBLE Station,” funded by the Asian Center, Japan Foundation. The workshop was co-facilitated by Hiroyuki Hattori, and participants included: Đỗ Tường Linh, Dương Mạnh Hùng, Khương Lê, Nguyễn Bích Trà, Nguyễn Hoàng Thiên Ngân, Nguyễn Quốc Thành, Nguyễn Thị Minh, Trâm Đỗ, Trần Duy Hưng, and Trương Quế Chi. There was a series of public talks with speakers from Vietnam and theregion.<http://zerostationvn.org/ga0/blog/project/southeast-asias-art-writing-workshop-at-zerostation-in-april-2017-workshop-viet-nghe-thuat-dong-nam-a-tai-ga-0-thang-tu-2017/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 11 See Taylor (2011) and Flores (2016), where the latter wonders “if postcolonial knowledge is always ethnographic in nature” (32).
- 12 An alternative sampling of friends might include: Storer’s colleague at the Gallery, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa; Viviana Mejía, now independent curator, formerly of Future Perfect art gallery; June Yap, recently appointed curatorial director of the Singapore Art Museum; or, besides Flores, any of these art historians with curatorial practices: Thomas Berghuis, a contributor to this publication; TK Sabapathy, National University Singapore/Nanyang Technological University; or David Teh, Future Perfect/National University Singapore. I’m name-dropping, of course, but my point is to inadequately gesture at how important conversations with persons like these, and many more, have been to my own education. (Note: Qinyi Lim has since joined National Gallery Singapore.)
- 13 “On Attachments + Unknowns,” organized/instigated by May Adadol Ingawanij and Erin Gleeson, hosted by Sa Sa Bassac, January 15–20, 2017, Phnom Penh.
- 14 I am currently working on a collection of essays, “The Address of Art and the Scale of Other Places,” where I aim to explore such questions as: what is art’s address? How does art speak to us? What can it tell us? and how? How does art locate us in the world – not just a world which we apprehend rather readily, but a world that is always also somehow beyond our reach of understanding, a world that is made not just of our own place, but of other places? https://www.academia.edu/25653838/The_Address_of_Art_and_the_Scale_of_Other_Places_Preface_, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 15 As part of the Symposium for the 2016 Singapore Biennale, which took place in January 2017, Wong spoke about her participation in Gwangju. Her short presentation, “Train to Biennale,” has since been developed into a full essay, although, as of April 2019, it has not yet been published. The quotations in this section are from her manuscript.
- 16 <http://san-art.org/about-2/> and <http://san-art.org/conscious-realities/>, accessed 13 March 2019.

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Part IV



Beyond the Museum

Curating at the Frontier

Parallel Processing

Public Art and New Media Art

Sara Diamond

Introduction

In the last four decades, the definitions, applications, and practice of public art have expanded dramatically in cities and sites around the world. Public art spans social engagement to spectacle. Public artworks last for several decades, or are temporary ephemeral experiences presented in festivals or online. Transformations in the purpose and analysis of public art have occurred in parallel with the emergence of “new media art,” itself a diverse series of practices that take myriad forms of expression and serve a range of intentions. Both public art and new media public art can provide a means of city and identity building, community activation, or intervention (Diamond et al. 2017). Publics for physical artworks and new media art are both local and global. This chapter defines public art as accessible, albeit within a constantly changing public realm (Diamond et al. 2017).

New media public art encompasses telematic and networked performance works; net and web art; mobile art, locative art, and games; augmented and mixed reality works; data gathering and surveillance art; interactive sculptures; projections and interactive public screens; responsive light works; and art made with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence/machine learning, and biotechnology (CRISPR). Rather than provide a catalogue of new media public artworks, this chapter assimilates examples into curatorial contexts.

Methodology

New media public art curation occurs through the work of artists, art consultants and commissioners, and curators, through festivals, platforms, agencies, and collaborations with institutions such as universities, galleries, museums, and new media art centers. Processes include creating and understanding the context for the artwork, establishing the slate of artists or choosing artists, defining and understanding audiences, and planning audience outreach and education. Curators and consultants manage the highly regulated nature of public space, establishing access to private spaces for the public. Similarly, they establish public space within the Internet and other digital platforms, which requires access to telecom, data plans, mobile networks, and servers. Curators organize collaboration with stakeholders, understand the demands of specific technologies and/or materials, and plan and organize maintenance and conservation. Curators and commissioners establish and manage budgets, and work closely with artists in producing the work to spec. Historical notions that the curator is the arbiter of value have shifted, especially with the widespread dissemination of social media, where there is constant contention.

This chapter uses a mixed-methods approach to excavate the curatorial practice of new media public art. There is ample documentation of new media art considered in the public realm or public art (Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss (CRUMB) 2019; CRUMB Discussion List – New Media Curating Archives 2017; Rhizome 2018; MediaArtNet 2019; Paul 2016a; Cook and Graham 2010; Cook and Graham 2010; Ladly and Beesley 2008; Abrams and Hall 2006)). Paul (2016a) and Balsamo (2016) provide detailed taxonomies of new media public art. However, with some exceptions (Cook and Graham 2010; Balsamo 2016; Paul 2016a), reflection on the relationship of new media artworks to curatorial practice is limited. New media public art documentation was analyzed to find trends in presentation practices. Historical interviews with new media curators conducted by Cook and Graham (2010) and texts on new media curatorial practice (Cook and Graham 2010) also provide clues. Analysis of a significant sample of public art policy documents indicate whether and where new media art appears, or fails to appear, in commissioning policy (Diamond et al. 2017). Interviews were conducted with new media artists and curators who have engaged with and shaped new media public art practices. Citations from interviews undertaken for Diamond et al. (2017) were also used. Finally, in order to elicit opinions on the challenges and opportunities for curating new media public art, a discussion list was established on CRUMB in November 2017 until January 2018 (CRUMB Discussion List – New Media Curating Archives 2017).

Defining the Role of Public Art

Redefining Public Art in Toronto (Diamond et al. 2017) suggests that, given the complex, cosmopolitan nature of cities, public art is asked to embrace contradictory missions. Public art can be a means of engaging varied audiences in exploring their social and cultural context in new ways, including built spaces, the natural environment, waterways, and city infrastructure. Concepts of “place-making” – that is shaping public space and strengthening a sense of identity – have led theorists to see

public art as inflected by local and national history, culture, and identity (Zebracki 2011). Public art is expected to facilitate coexistence of difference, allowing parallel imaginaries of the same cities and locales (Cartiere and Zebracki 2016). Its success is in part measured by how it benchmarks at the international scale, positions a city, and adds cultural cachet (Saukkonen and Ruusuvirta 2013). Public art can be a catalyst for enhancing economic and cultural value, escalating real estate prices, and attracting cultural tourism. It is also a platform for supporting artists: local, national, and international.

Current public art policies such as Chicago's new *Public Art Plan* (City of Chicago 2019a; City of Chicago 2017) and its 50×50 Neighbourhoods Project (City of Chicago 2019b) emphasize the need to expand public art outside of the downtown core, not as an instrument of gentrification but as a tool for neighborhood engagement, improvement, and beautification. Socially engaged public art, with different durations and processes than traditional fixed interventions, has expanded dynamically for over four decades, through artists' initiation or through curatorial processes that locate artists within communities. For example, the annual Festigraff Festival for graffiti art in Dakar, with its seventh edition in 2017, serves an urban population in which over half are under 20 years of age, with the premise of "urban, accessible, open culture" (UNESCO 2016: 186). Many of these different functions play out in new media public art.

The Contested Nature of Public Space

New media curators Sarah Cook (2017), Christiane Paul (2016a), and Marcus Neustetter (2017) join public art curators and critics (Doherty 2015; Diamond et al. 2017) and earlier writers (Besser 2001) in pointing out that public space is highly regulated, and is not accessible to many because of socio-economic constraints of access. Steve Dietz (2017) comments that individuals must travel to see works of art, and transit or parking are seldom affordable. As well, public artworks are at times located in private spaces that are made only temporarily available to the public. Curator Candice Hopkins frames the complexity of publicness through Indigenous values:

For me, publicness is also deeply tied to understandings of protocol of the land, to understanding what is truly public. You could conflate it with the commons, but require some kind of consensus; you still have to know whose land it is because all land in Canada was and is someone's territory. (Hopkins 2017)

Not only has public realm been privatized, but the land does not belong in the colonizer's public realm in the first place. Indigenous societies did and do not believe that places could and can be owned, but still respect the people who live on that territory. She states, "The first step is not only to respect the people but the place itself" (Hopkins 2017). This poses requirements for public art, whatever its medium, to acknowledge and respect local context and communities.

Claire Doherty insists that socially engaged practices should be the focus of public art given that the public realm is increasingly diminished:

Through strategies of occupation and perpetuation, the potential of public art to expose and respond to the encroachment of corporate interests on public space,

to the diminishing opportunities for social cohesion and freedom of speech, and to the invisibility of the displaced and dispossessed in public life is considerable. (Doherty 2015: 15)

Almost two decades earlier, Howard Besser paralleled Doherty's concerns, but in relation to the Internet, stating:

Just as large-scale economic forces are causing gentrification of our cities and the elimination of public spaces that allow culture and politics to flourish, powerful economic interests have also launched a full-scale attack on our public information spaces, many of which exist on the Internet. (Besser 2001)

The Internet is not a "free space" and is mediated by the requirement to pay for access, as well as control by platforms – whether Facebook or Instagram, and the trade-off for users of access for their data. Data rates can prohibit mobile phone owners from participating in online or mobile public art.

Paul (2016a) proposes that both the concept of a public audience and the regulatory power of the state changed with the advent of the Internet, "Net art introduces a shift from the site specific to the global, collapses boundaries between the private and public, and exists in a distributed non-local space" (209). She emphasizes the increasing dependency of new media public art on corporate platforms, and hence the focus of some artists on the structural, economic, and controlling nature, as well as potential, of the Internet and the Web. She notes: "As in physical public space, these environments allow for different kinds of interventions, ranging from activist ones (public protests and civil disobedience) to more aesthetically oriented approaches" (Paul 2016b). Some artists "slip under the Lidar" (Thiel 2017; Wikipedia 2018) or surveillance cameras, and create experiences that critique the lack of access to the public realm, underscoring corporate hold on tools, environment, or surveillance. The Surveillance Camera Players encouraged the public to mount and perform plays with a focus on surveillance and civic rights in front of surveillance cameras with audiences (Surveillance Camera Players 2019), building an uncanny bond between invisible members of the urban panopticon (police, security guards), performers, and the public. Urban data analytics artists Gabriel Zea, Andres Burbano, Camilo Martinez, and Alejandro Duqueuse use performance techniques to encourage the public to pay attention to the environmental quality of their city by "walk[ing] the streets of Medellin, Colombia, with a mobile apparatus which includes CO2 sensors" (Paul 2015: 2796–2799).

The advent of largescale network capabilities at the global level and the explosive growth of mobile devices is a tipping point, offering new platforms and a contiguous private/public space that also conjoins the local and global. New media public artworks that combine physical and networked experience provide opportunities to create a temporary public realm and critically question the emerging digital city. Artist, curator, and theoretician Diana Domingues underscores the transformation that mobile technologies bring to concepts of public space, "We are co-located and can act in the space by living in ubiquitous and distributed spaces" (Domingues 2017). Mobile devices function as interactive tools, and media can be geolocated and retrieved. "Locative media" is a term that arose in the early twenty-first century to describe the combination of sensor, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, mobile, and GPS (GIS)

technologies, QR codes, and the affordances that these offer to remap, re-experience, and comment within the urban context. Murmur, an early mobile documentary project, was sited in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, San Jose, and Edinburgh, and was emulated by many other projects to follow. Stories were recorded at specific places with signs installed (which appear to this day), and anyone with a mobile phone could call and listen. The artists hoped to invoke a “psychogeographic experience, that is the emotional human layer of memory about a space” (Micallef 2008: 111). Augmented reality (AR) is an extension of these practices in the public realm, and provides the means to “create different levels of context awareness, be it in relation to the self, community, place, or societal structures” (Paul 2015: 213). AR appeals to Thiel, a member of the Manifest.AR group (John Craig Freeman, Will Pappenheimer, Mark Skwarek, and Tamiko Thiel), because it allows her “to ignore the laws of physics” at a site (Thiel 2017), and instead to layer associations, hidden histories, and relationships.

If all Internet and mobile art is considered public art practice, there is a danger in losing definition, and an ability to create conditions for the curation of networked public art practice. Hence, this chapter narrows the consideration of networked and mobile works to those that meet a set of criteria, served by the examples above. These are: accessibility, control, and intentionality – on the part of artists and curators and/or institutions – to constitute a project as public art (Dietz 2017). According to Cook (2017), the distinguishing factor is whether the artwork is structured as a collective experience, even if online, “where the agency sits and what the protocols are ... facilitating experience not so much a one to one but many to many experience, so with other viewers alongside you” (Cook 2017).

Curating New Media Public Art in the Policy Context

In the highly regulated context of public art, policy sets the stage for the inclusion or exclusion of new media public artworks as a formally recognized and supported practice, enabling the commissioning, curating, funding, and conservation process. New media public art practice bears close resemblance to its description within the policies described below. A comprehensive keyword analysis of public art policy documents from approximately 30 cities with a population of over one million provided an overview of new media within public art policy.¹ Terms were chosen from repositories and databases such as Media Art Net, and from sources that informed this chapter. Most public art discussed in these policies are funded through a required contribution by cities or other public agencies, developers, or public/private funds, in which a percentage of the cost of infrastructure or a building is set aside for public art.

In most cities surveyed, digital, electronic, and new media arts began to appear at the turn of this century, with many references emerging in the 2010s. Generic terms such as “electronic art” stood in for many years, while others updated the terminology describing this fast-changing field. In 2008, San Antonio pronounced that “public art can be defined many ways. For the purposes of this plan, the term refers to any art – visual or otherwise – that is accessible to the public.” The plan included “media-based artwork (i.e. electronic, video, internet reliant)” (City of San Antonio 2008). Seven years later, the City of San Antonio updated this definition, stating that public art “also embraces new media technologies such as digital art, video, sound and

light-based work, as well as other emerging art practices and genres” (City of San Antonio 2015: 16). Vancouver includes digital art in its public art policy, with a focus on “video and LED artworks for designated screens,” but more broadly states that “public art may be in any medium, including electronic or environmental elements or socially engaged practices” (City of Vancouver 2016). New media public artworks were used as examples of public art successes within their public art portfolio by Calgary, Edmonton, Hackney, Montreal, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Jose, San Diego, and Sydney.

Montreal links its public art policy to its competitiveness, proposing that as:

the international cultural metropolis, [Montreal] should build its niche on creativity and innovation ... [and] must continue to bank on contemporary practices in visual art, as well as on digital arts and the new technologies that are increasingly enhancing Montreal’s reputation. (Montréal Métropole Culturelle 2009: 13)

Birmingham, England also identifies new media creativity with the qualities of a desired urban life and identity, “To have ... provoking, innovating and challenging art, we need bold, inspiring, innovative artists, planners, developers and urban designers at the cutting edge of technology” (Birmingham City Council 2015: 22). Birmingham emphasizes the citizen engagement potential of new media public art. San Jose poses new media public art as a means of marrying art and technology to generate new products that represent a city that is in the midst of Silicon Valley, as exemplified by the O1SJ Biennial (Markusen and Gadwa 2010).

In Brisbane, Australia, new media public art is proposed as a means to link physical and virtual urban spaces:

Public art can function, at both macro and micro levels, as this permeable structure – an in-between layer linking: public and private; work, home and play; past, present and future; day and night; winter and summer; virtual and real environments. (Brisbane City Council 2013: 6)

Brisbane treats new media public art as a means to gather and archive stories and documentation about the city through its “Building Bridges” program, which embraces digital programmable elements (Brisbane City Council 2013: 11–12). Sydney, Australia acknowledges the critical engagement that new media artists bring, proposing new media works not as a promotion for a high-tech city but rather as a way of understanding societal and cultural change, “Artists working with new media extend available technologies to comment on and understand the implications of a globalised, networked and rapidly changing society” (City of Sydney 2016: 3). Sydney holds 250 public artworks, and has also incorporated new media public art within infrastructure planning, including light rail construction, promoting widespread presentation of new media works (City of Sydney 2013: 20; 2014: 45).

The Internet and social media appear as a means to propagate interest in public art of all media in policies of Dublin, Los Angeles, Ottawa, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Diego, and Sydney. Sydney also sees social media as a mechanism for citizens to contribute their opinions, and contribute artworks or content to public art projects: “The democratization of content creation, enabled by digital technologies, provides

the framework for citizens to contribute to the city's cultural expression" (City of Sydney 2014: 33). Digital tools, often using CAD and GIS software, are offered as a means to plan and imagine the positioning and design of public artworks. The *Phoenix 2015–20 Public Art Project Plan* (2015) offers that,

a comprehensive computerized mapping system (GIS mapping) will be developed to enable staff to determine the best sites and opportunities Citywide for future public art projects using water and wastewater percent-for-art funds. (City of Phoenix 2015: 24)

Policies frame the process of choosing artworks, which vary according to funding mechanisms (Diamond et al. 2017).² Lynn Basa (2008) explains a variety of mechanisms to choose artists. Public art offices convene the process of choosing public artworks for either privately built public spaces or for public infrastructure. Artists are qualified by submitting slides to San Francisco and Montreal registries. Art consultants use these databases to find artists who have a history of public artworks. All artists in the Montreal bank are from Quebec, and have significant histories in visual and public art. If accepted, they can submit proposals to projects. The inclusion of new media public artists as part of a registry is clearly a requirement if they are to be considered for commissions. Other methods are: open calls that any artist can apply to, or direct purchase – an RFQ process in which artists submit evidence of qualification based on past work (Basa 2008: 13–14).

Many cities employ a jury process, often organized by art consultants, working with city officials or developers. Art consultants select a slate of artists who the jury then considers. Juries include artists, art consultants, architects, and representatives of the developer or infrastructure and community. Despite their endorsement of public art, however, there were no cities that required new media art expertise on the part of jurors or art commissioners. Depending on the city and context, artists can be chosen early on in the life of a project to work closely with the architect and developer (public or private), or in other situations, find themselves making a work for a project which is already highly determined. Cameron Cartiere underscores the layers of processes embedded in policies:

In addition to the jury process, a public work often requires municipal approval procedures and engineering reviews. Some projects might be contingent on community engagement and the artist may need to undertake extensive consultation with specific stakeholder groups. (Cartiere 2016: 459)

Audience

The activity of imagining audiences for public art projects begins before or while the work is created. Anne Balsamo coined the term “phantasms of the public,” inferring that such a concept of audience is

determined by mode of address and the idealized figuration of the user as citizen, consumer, tourist, audience, member of the public or as anonymous, individuated, or member of a mass, crowd, or collective. (Balsamo 2016: 338)

All policies propose that public art processes require public engagement and consultation, inflected by the goals of the project. “Artists must see the citizens of the city as experts on their own space, and rely upon their judgement” (Finkelpearl 2000: 45). Diamond et al. (2017) argue that often for place-based work: “The primary role of public consultation is to deepen artists’ connection with the community – its history, aesthetics, and context – not for communities to be placed on juries as non-professionals” (105). At the same time, there are instances where there is value in neighborhoods and organizations working closely with curators to choose and implement public art.

Public art offers a different relationship to audience than art in a gallery does. Artist David Rokeby suggests that, “You would come upon it without expecting it ... You are dealing with people who have not transformed themselves into a culture-viewing person” (Rokeby 2017a). Yet, to be successful, many new media interactive works demand response or recognition by their audiences at a level that passive screen-based or sculptural works may not. Paul underscores this shift: “Rather than being the sole ‘creator’ of a work of art, the artist often plays the role of a mediator or facilitator for audiences’ interaction with and contribution to the artwork” (Paul 2015: 219–221). New media public artworks offer a different temporality than a linear narrative, a single image, or an object, acting “as a modal, experiential state that is active and manifest in time, and presents as a ‘constant’ transformation of the experience of being in a certain place” (Rokeby 2017a). Audience members activate or complete works through embodied interaction, the provision of content, or remixing original works into new forms demanding thoughtful curatorial positioning:

New media is extremely diverse, and what might work as a form of engagement for an online interactive form may not work for a screen-based work. Each work has to be thought through in terms of what it is doing, how it presents itself, what it is saying, and how it addresses or invokes its public. The variously inflected ideas of openness, publicness, performativity, and the different temporal footprints of different kinds of works each require their own rhetorics of presentation. (Raqs 2018)

Hence, mechanisms to encourage audience members to engage with the work are of critical importance.

Temporal depth is increasingly accompanied by perceptual depth, engaging the entire bodily apparatus as mobile devices bring data gathering capabilities of geometric and biometric sensors.³ Domingues describes “body/environment affection [as] intensity of heat, cardiac output, respiratory flow, muscles activity, tactile vibrations, and other measured sensations” (Domingues et al. 2011), which produce the cognitive quality of audience performance, “They are not a spectator, an actor or actors ... They are ‘in-action’, ‘enacted’, a state beyond interaction that integrates ‘biocybrid systems’,⁴ topological perception and cognition” (Domingues 2017). These affordances pose creative opportunities and ethical challenges for artists and curators in relation to data collection, management, and privacy.

Social media yields new opportunities for public art projects within privately owned platforms in which “people produce and circulate memes, as naturally as they send texts and emails to each other” (Raqs 2018). This gives artists opportunities for playful interventions through “imaginatively created Facebook profiles or Twitter handles

... An ‘artist’ could be a profile, accessed and deployed by many people who simply share a password” (Raqs 2018). Artist Constant Dullaart bought 2.5 million Instagram followers (who could be imagined as fictitious audience members) for \$5,500, exploring the Dark Web and revealing the ways that popularity is manipulated online. His bots equalize the numbers of Instagram followers of famed artists, compromising their market value where it is determined by follower numbers. He has been described as both a participatory ethnographer and artist.

Audience members, especially younger ones in the developed world, or those with access to technology in the emerging world, bring digital literacy, mobile devices, and social media engagement to the experience of the artwork, allowing a breadth of audience reach. Graham and Cook observe:

If new media art is continually making reference to popular culture, that might make it more understandable than a work, in whatever medium, which is understood only in relation to the history of art. (Graham and Cook 2010: 31)

This is a different context from that of earlier new media artworks, where audiences were unfamiliar with the technology. Admittedly, practices with emerging technologies continue to require the socialization and education of audiences by curators, art consultants, and artists.

The Curatorial Role in New Media Public Art

Artists’ Self-Curation

There are many new media public artworks that are self-curated by artists or artist teams. “Artists as curators have adopted a number of modes to produce and promote their own and others’ new media art, ranging from activist interventions to more hybrid temporary event structures” (Cook and Graham 2010: 259). Artists have produced telematic online collaborations such as *Avatar Body Collision*, “a globally dispersed cyber performance troupe” consisting of four members who are located in New Zealand (Vicki Smith and Helen Varley Jamieson), Finland (Leena Saarinen), and the UK (Karla Ptacek). They have offered publicly accessible online experiences that explore machine mediation of human performance and issues such as proximity and distance. They also build tools side by side with their creative practice, including “UpStage,” a platform for multiplayer online performance (Studio XX 2019).

Organizers of the We AR in MoMA initiative called on artists from around the world to place their AR works within the MoMA, without the MoMA’s permission, providing access to a Layar app via the Apple store and GPS coordinates.⁵ In response, Thiel undertook AR annotations of exhibitions, borrowing the MoMA’s authority:

As long as curators are gatekeepers for locations of high art, location still confers value – and placing AR works in such a location, even or especially if put there by the artists themselves in subversion of this control, endows the works with the aura of objects canonized by that location. (Thiel 2014: 30)

AR artists have posed their medium as one of rereading and reinterpreting the curatorial and architectural canon while recognizing that their medium has constraints of access. According to Jacob Garbe:

the ability to customize those boundaries, to draw one's own curatorial borders and parameters ... is in itself a freedom drawing from AR's strengths, inviting a model of the world as not one in which art happens, but one which is conditionally defined and experienced as an integrative work of art. (Garbe 2014: 138)

The collaborative creation of a platform for intervention can be seen as a curatorial practice by a group of artists not unlike artist-run efforts of earlier decades.⁶

Curatorial Practice as Context Creation

There is wide consensus among the curators interviewed, and in the literature reviewed, that new media public artworks require “context creation.” This aligns with best practices in public art. Tom Finkelpearl (2000) documents the ways that audiences balk at works that feel inappropriate for their local context. Hence, Cook proposes the work of new media curators as a kind of ethnographic practice similar to digital system development. As McCullough describes: “Contextual inquiries into the specifics of technology use expose social, organizational, and physical factors that influence both the functional features and the successful adoption of new technologies. A physical location provides both protocols and constraints when it comes to establishing context” (McCullough 2004: 157–159). Requirements are an understanding of local conditions, including context-aware technologies (sensors arrays, for example), technological affordances, networks, and other conditions of access and audiences.

Public new media works allow for better context integration and response because audience members bring their own context to interaction, through their data, recorded interactions, and mobile devices, etc. Recontextualizing a familiar technology by reframing it can be successful. For example, Luis Villareal's *Bay Bridge* arranges LED lights in simple, arresting ways that leverage people's visceral attraction to light (Daily Mail Reporter 2013). However, in the fast-paced context of technology adoption, reinterpretation is needed: “There is a need for topology, referencing, and placement of new works and existing works within carefully chosen contexts ... to reinterpret works quickly as technology matures and distribution platforms draw new audiences” (Diamond 2003: 156). The curator's ethnographic role is even more pronounced because audiences are able to affect the work itself. Ideally, context creation must be ongoing, with curators as “commissioners or producers, and arguably contributors ... [who] shape the art work during its production process, rather than creating context for completed works” (Cook 2005).

Raqs (2018) argues that artworks never fail, but that the context fails the artist:

What is often misread as ‘failure’ is simply a shifting of the goal post of attention and feasibility. These are not intrinsic to the work, but are features of the environment around the work. (Raqs 2018)

In support of this, Cook believes that the most successful new media public artworks are ones in which the artist has chosen the site, instead of having been curated

or commissioned into an existing site. She provides the example of Constant Dullaart's (2016) six-month Wi-Fi work at the Utrecht Central Station (Public Works Utrecht 2016; Figure 18.1). Tapping into normative behaviors as travelers connect to Wi-Fi in the station, the work disrupts these behaviors by offering Wi-Fi options with fictional and whimsical names, potentially allowing travelers to realize that others are sharing the disruption (Cook 2017). Cook looks for the appropriateness of the work to the place and how the public can access it, noting, "As a curator, I look for seamlessness" (Cook 2017). She underscores the importance of "the conversations that you have around the intention of the work with the artist and troubleshooting and the compromises you decide in advance" (Cook 2017). Cook is one of many interviewed who stressed that best practices in curating public art hold for work in all media – the same planning needs to occur.



FIGURE 18.1 Constant Dullaart, *High Retention Slow Delivery!!*, 2014. Still from video essay. Courtesy the artist and Upstream Gallery.

However, some new media public artworks can be successfully recontextualized when migrated to a new context or location. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Body Movies* (2001) provides urban portraiture that can be transposed from city to city. It "transforms public space with [thousands of large-scale] interactive ... photographic portraits, previously taken on the streets of the host city ... [and] shown using robotically controlled projectors" (Lozano-Hemmer 2001). A more recent work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, creates over 22 billion versions of 1984, showing house address numbers extracted from Google Street View images (Lozano-Hemmer 2014). Marjolijn Dijkman's *LUNĀ* table project exemplifies a reproducible context. Re-enacting the Lunar Tables of the Lunar Society of Birmingham, a group of "amateur experimenters, tradesmen and artisans [in the eighteenth century] ... who gathered for dinner conversations" and prototyped major inventions that "changed the face of England" (Dijkman 2018), the *LUNĀ* table moves between sites, and hosts different, yet cumulative, dialogue regarding "exponential technologies such as quantum physics, protest movements, environmental issues, neuroscience, science fiction, experimental education" (Dijkman 2018).

Cook and Graham pose the relationship between curators and artists as necessarily collaborative:

With so much riding on the rungs of participation, both socially engaged art curators and new media art curators need to be aware of the gaps between intent, reality, and documentation, as well as the potential gap between different experiences of the same process. (Cooke and Graham 2010: 147)

Collaboration makes all roles in the creative and presentation process more discursive and conscious, demanding openness and acceptance of less predictable results (Diamond 2005). Raqs describes the need for "intelligent curation" that sets the stage for artists, which integrates technical enablement, infrastructure, funding, institutional support, exhibition and public platforms, context creation, and audience building to "breach new thresholds in the development of relationships between humans, between humans and software, [and] between software and machines" (Raqs 2018). Public artworks can be subject to more critical discourse and debate than works in the protected space of a museum (Diamond et al. 2017). Raqs (2018) points out that "there is a special precariousness involved in new media art forms, also because they can be vulnerable to hacks, and trolling campaigns." As such, curators have an important role to play in defending artists.

Having had the unique experience of being an independent artist, Thiel acknowledges that collaborating with an enabling curator knowledgeable in site and context has given her and her work legitimacy. Thiel describes two distinct categories of public art curators: "soft curators" and "strong curators." Soft curators support the artist's projects, while strong curators act as commissioners that approach an artist to be part of their project. For her AR installation, the *Gardens of the Anthropocene* (2016) (at the Seattle Art Museum – Olympic Sculpture Park), curatorial support meant that there was large visible signage directing viewers to discover the AR overlay (Figure 18.2). As a result, "Seattle's tech-savvy visitors immediately whipped out their phones and started looking at the augments, showing them to random passers-by" (Thiel 2017). Thiel's *Transformation: Lebel* (2012) was a response to a commission by strong curators Serafine Lindemann (artcircolo) and Christian Schoen (kunst I konzepte), who were exploring the sustainability of neighborhoods – specifically



FIGURE 18.2 Tamiko Thiel, *Gardens of the Anthropocene*, 2016. Commission for the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park, Courtesy of the artist.

Lehel, a part of Munich that was undergoing gentrification – in the project, *Overtures ZeitRäume* (Thiel 2012). They approached and commissioned Thiel to develop a work with the St. Lukas Church community. The *Mi Querido Barrio Project* (2012–2016) is another such example (Thiel 2019). Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, the founder and director of the Caribbean Cultural Center and African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI) of New York City, commissioned Thiel to undertake a new media public art project. Moreno Vega learned about AR from Thiel, and was excited about the ways that it could empower and engage the CCCADI’s audience of East Harlem, a community that is undergoing gentrification and gun violence. The community’s residents did not visit traditional galleries, but the youth were immersed in mobile phone culture (Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute 2017). With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Thiel and collaborators trained East Harlem artists to create their own AR works of art. Thiel believes that Moreno Vega was “a true visionary” because she saw the power of mobile technologies and AR well before the art world, where Thiel was instead criticized for working within an elitist platform.

Art Consultants

As noted earlier, policy has opened up opportunities for new media public art commissions. Art consultants, rather than curators, facilitate the creation of permanent or semi-permanent new media public artworks. Rokeby notes that he has worked only once with a curator in the creation of a new media public artwork.⁷ Toronto-based Brad Golden, who has commissioned major projects with the Toronto Transit Corporation, developers, and the City of Toronto, poses the challenge:

It’s a public discourse that is delivering content to a broad public audience in public space. ... It’s important to me that the work has sustainability and breadth. By sustainability, I mean that there’s access to the work initially on a fairly simple level to a

very broad public audience and then that the work continues to deliver content and value on an ongoing very long-term basis to either the same audience or one that encounters it only that day. (Golden 2017)

It can be a stretch for public art consultants and juries to choose new media works, because of lack of familiarity or confidence. Consultants' recommendations rely in part on their sense that a technology is stable enough to use. Curator Candice Hopkins, who has commissioned new media projects, describes technical anxiety regarding new media commissions:

Coming from the curatorial end, [it] is having a low degree of failure ... because you need things to work and you need things to turn on, and there is always an extra degree of complication with new media, so you need really good technicians. (Hopkins 2017)

A Toronto success story is Daniel Corporation's High Park condominium public artwork *We Are All Animals* (Public Studio 2015). The developers encouraged the inclusion of Public Studio as one of the competing teams (Public Studio 2015). Created by Public Studio in collaboration with OCAD University students, it is "a randomly generated environment built with digital gaming software [that] presents a landscape changing over the course of days, months, years" (Public Studio 2015).

Once a work is chosen, some art consultants will support the artist through the process and ensure the best fit of the commissioned work and the site. Others play a less engaged role and expect the artist to manage the project directly with a level of sophisticated infrastructure, retreating to the role of contract enforcers of budget and by-laws, rather than active participants in the creative process. Expectations of artists are high. Rokeby and Lozano-Hemmer have built project teams that support their practice because the public artist is treated as a specialist who, once funded, must produce all components of the work:

You have to keep things under control, every aspect, from material sourcing, hiring my own engineers, getting my own certification. I develop relationships with fabricators. They come to trust that I know what I am talking about when a not standard practice is needed. (Rokeby 2017a)

However, Reena Greer, one of Canada's leading public art consultants, argues for an ongoing role for the art consultant. City public art professionals approve the process, site, and jury, but do not often see the work through its realization. Hence, the curatorial role of advocacy, interpretation, and project management is of critical importance in public art (Greer 2017).

A critical part of the artist–consultant collaboration is the effort to convince site owners and/or builders/developers that the artwork will increase the value of the built space. Rokeby (2017a) sees this as the turning point of being viewed simply as a vendor, to being treated as an artist. Permanent public art commissions that are funded through Percent for Art funds and developer contributions can either find great success or be relegated to marginal or difficult spaces, requiring assertiveness on the part of the public art consultant and the artist. Rokeby describes the worst-case



FIGURE 18.3 David Rokeby, *Calgary Scroll*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

scenario for artists who are brought in late to the project, “You are almost always offered the space that’s the problem – the corner that [the architects] couldn’t resolve, or the place where they can’t put windows, or they can’t put prime tenants” (Rokeby 2017a). Projects succeed best when artists are part of the planning process from inception (Diamond et al. 2017). Rokeby recently undertook a major commission with the City of Calgary, the redevelopment of a street and railway underpass (Figure 18.3). Rokeby was brought in from the beginning through that city’s integrated design process with architects, designers, civil engineers, and consultations with historians and Indigenous community members. He treated the street as

a wound across the body of Calgary and this wound as a repository of historical memory ... with a swoop that pulls the eyes across and then LED text drawn from the first 25 years of Calgary’s history ... scrolling in a rain like way, and the viewer can text to it and it jogs their memory. (Rokeby 2017a)

The public artwork was wrapped into the tender process; hence, Rokeby became a consultant rather than the producer of the art, relying on the engineering teams to build from exact drawings and specs. Rokeby is happy with it as “a really appropriate civic public art work” (Rokeby 2017a). Media and city staff describe the work as effectively undertaking city building and urban intervention/transformation (Guilbert 2017).

Perhaps in search of stable, but monumental, media forms, the 2010s have seen commissioners gravitate to digital lightworks for infrastructure and buildings, as LED

and LED control systems have expanded, making light installations more affordable and flexible. Peruvian American artist Grimenesa Amorós is an inventor of interactive and fluid works of light art, including a commission for the Soleri Bridge in Scottsdale, Arizona:

The piece will seemingly rise from the canal waters. ... The vertical and horizontal lines on the structure aim to express and metaphor that the dynamic balance between the urban and natural forces can be experienced simultaneously. (Amorós 2015)⁸

Other notable public commissions include Bill FitzGibbons's *Light Channels* in San Antonio, a series of "stainless steel chevrons and digitally programmed LED projections in tinted light that illuminate the pillars and caverns of two underpasses," with the intention of strengthening the connective tissue of the city (Silva 2016). Lozano-Hemmer's *Pulse Corniche* (2014) provided a canopy of interactive light beams projected by robotic searchlights that were controlled by the heart rates of visitors to the Abu Dhabi Corniche (Lozano-Hemmer 2015). Canadian public art veteran, Michael Snow's *Lightline* (2012) showcases lights sliding up and down the 65 stories of the Toronto Trump Tower (now the Adelaide Hotel).⁹ Light works require careful planning between artists, consultants, city planners, and sites to be meaningful throughout the twenty-four hour cycle of the city, while avoiding light pollution for nearby residents.

Platforms

Platforms are an extension of context creation by curators. The Sarai New Media Initiative in Delhi proposed the concept of a digital commons in the early twenty-first century with the intention of staking claim for discourse and creative practice in the face of the growing monopolization of the Internet (Paul 2016a). Dietz describes platform creation as an aggregating role that allows a wide range of new media works to be drawn together, continually updated, and made available to the public. He states, "It's more akin to open source and some related ideas of community and sharing and non-ownership and openness, as opposed to curating" (Cook et al. 2010: 2581–2587). Chairman and CEO of the ZKM Center for Art and Media, Peter Weibel reinforces the notion that the aggregating role of platform creation is relevant in presenting Net Art or Internet art, in essence making the work public rather than requiring that audiences somehow discover the work (Cook and Graham 2010: 372–382). The concept of intentional aggregation to facilitate public discovery is very different from the idea that public art is something that the public unexpectedly discover.

New media commons build upon efforts by earlier generations of artists to establish collaborative platforms (Diamond 2015). The Mobile Digital Commons Network (MDCN), an international (Canada/UK/Finland) research/creation platform led by Michael Longford and Sara Diamond (Diamond and Ladly 2008) adapted this concept. It linked the Banff New Media Institute, Concordia University, and OCAD University with local and international artists' groups and industry laboratories (Nokia and HP Labs Bristol). It acted as both a virtual and physical platform (Ladly and Beesley 2008; Cook and Diamond 2011) for locative mobile experience creation and "user generated content" in parks in Banff, Bristol, Montreal, and Toronto. Participant

Geograffiti, a collaborative team comprising Marc Tutters and Karlis Kalnins, created tools for participants to annotate location-based virtual spaces, allowing the creation of “homunculus maps,” which Dietz proposes (2006: 200) are deeply rooted in the personal and human physical memory systems. The novelty of these projects would diminish in a twenty-first century of ubiquitous smartphones and social media platforms, but platforms that support experimentation with new media public art continue as a curatorial practice.

Transitory New Media: Biennials and Festivals

The Cyber Art Biennial of Mercosul (Artmap Foundation 2000; Biennial Foundation 2019) was a significant maker in the early history of new media public art. Dr. Fábio Magalhães, the curator of the Second Biennial of Mercosul, invited Diana Domingues to create a new media show that would be free to the public. The biennial also showcased a retrospective of Julio Le Parc, curated by Sheila Leirner. Le Parc is a celebrated Argentinean leader in kinetic art who had “explored participation but not interaction” (Domingues 2017). He had been exiled during the dictatorship in Argentina, and his return to Latin America to present this show was significant. The exhibitions were complementary:

The other floor had all these things that were mechanical and used physics to explore light, speed, projections, movement, wind, etc., but when visitors came here, to the Cyber Art floor, they were invited to act, and they began to interact with software, to have and incorporate behaviors and responses. (Domingues 2017)

As preparations continued towards the exhibition, the biennial leadership became skeptical about the Cyber Art show as it required tremendous effort.¹⁰ However, the response to the free exhibition was overwhelmingly positive:

[It] was the ugly duck of the event before the opening.... But taking the responses after the opening, the exhibition became the prince. It was the best visited exhibition with lines and lines of people. (Domingues 2017)

Popularity was evidenced by the need to change the living plants in Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau’s *Interactive Plants Growing* (Sommerer and Mignonneau 1992), which countenanced the touch of over 5000 people a day. At the event’s seminars, Angel Kalenberg, a respected Uruguayan critic, declared that the biennial had demonstrated a turning point toward the advent of art and technology. Unfortunately, the biennial never again offered new media public art as part of its regular fare.

Dietz built San Jose’s first OISJ Biennial in San Jose in collaboration with the 2006 ISEA Symposium (Dietz and Austin 2010). In line with San Jose’s public art policy, the intention of the project was to position San Jose as a culturally relevant city, given its placement in Silicon Valley. Director, Joel Slayton, states:

The mission of ZERO1 is to inspire creativity at the intersection of art, technology, and a digital culture ... and that art at the frontier of contemporary technology can provoke our critical understanding of the world. (Slayton 2010: 5)

The biennial included a significant component of new media public art. The Banff New Media Institute, ZERO1, and Sundance Film Festival collaborated on commissioning *A Machine To See With* (2010), a new work by Blast Theory that mixed “documentary material, stolen thriller clichés, and the films of Jean-Luc Godard” and invited audience members to “take risks, play games, and connect the fantasy of thriller movies with the political questions that each of us must face” (Dietz 2010: 91). In Luke Jerram’s whimsical artwork, *Play Me, I’m Yours*, street pianos appeared in parks, plazas, and passes, and encouraged the public to play them, indicating the connectedness of networks and building community,

Each piano is labeled with a URL to which the public can upload and share their photos, videos, and stories, creating a web-based archive and each piano has a human friend who looks after it. (Austin 2010: 103)

The San Jose biennial has become a successful repeating event.

One of the drivers of Toronto’s Nuit Blanche is the opportunity for artists to create new work. Over a 12-hour span, it reaches an audience of 1 200 000–1 400 000 from the Greater Toronto Area, upstate New York, Montréal, and Europe. Facilitated by the City of Toronto, an advisory committee comprising curators, artists who have participated previously in Nuit Blanche, leaders of arts-focused institutions, and business supporters choose a group of curators who are funded to create concepts for zones. Curators choose artists on the basis of the concept, which more recently responds to a unifying theme. The city production team and the committee collaborate with the curators as the program emerges, but overall, curatorial leadership is respected. Over the course of its existence, Nuit Blanche has included many new media public artworks, including D.A. Therrien’s *Beautiful Light: 4 Letter Word Machine* (2009) (CCCA Canadian Art Database 2009a), Gordon Monahan’s *Space Becomes an Instrument* (2009) (CCCA Canadian Art Database 2009b), Usman Haque and Natalie Jeremijenko’s *Flightpath* (2011) (CCCA Canadian Art Database 2011), Yvette Mattern’s *Global Rainbow* (2014) (CCCA Canadian Art Database 2014), Philip Beesley’s *Oceans* (2016) (Beesley 2016), David Rokeby’s *Hand-Held* (2016) (Grief 2016), and Jean-Pierre Aubé’s *Electrosmog Toronto* (2016) (Grief 2016). When surveyed, its audience expresses a preference toward immersive and interactive artworks.

Since 2010, Steven Dietz, inspired by Nuit Blanche, has led Minneapolis’s Northern Spark, using “a top-line animating approach.” With a large thematic focus (most recently climate change), it supports 100 artists who undertake projects related to the theme, enabling the public to learn experientially and emotionally about complex issues. The festival mixes new media with other forms of expression. In 2018, Dietz wanted to animate a “no-place” close to the airport that was also a wildlife preserve. He curated Marina Zurkow and Paul Paradiso to present *Flight*, a building scale, real-time, data-driven, generative animation, projected on the Hyatt Regency hotel in Bloomington where the fans and families of the super bowl team stay (Northern Lights 2018). *Flight* “lets people think ... this is the satellite that’s going over head, this is the plane that’s going off, these are the birds in the refuge yesterday, these were the people that were born” (Dietz 2017). The combination of medium and context brought site-specificity to an otherwise transient space. Enabled by a shorter duration, major events attract resources to present new media public art.

*New Media Curatorial Platforms as Social Praxis, City Building,
and Urban Intervention*

The conviction that public art can shake up assumptions about physical and virtual cities is common to contemporary public art practice. This work is sometimes described as “social practice,” or “socially engaged art” (Creative Time 2011).¹¹ Such activities can be enabled by platforms, curators, organizations, or institutions (Kurtz 2017). Dietz sees all of his curatorial platforms as focused on empowerment, “to invoke a sense of seeing the world in a new way, and through that, encouraging and perhaps enabling, a sense of agency, especially in relationship to super large systems” (Dietz 2017), such as cities. He suggests that interactive new media works, especially aggregated into festivals and other platforms provide, “a different way to think about, and ultimately to act in the place where you live and work” (Dietz 2017).

Events such as *Nuit Blanche* and *Northern Spark* are shifting their modus operandi to serve and engage a wider demographic by occurring both in the urban core and surrounding neighborhoods. *Northern Spark* built a program council of nine racialized artists who were provided with 90% of the festival budget. They positioned the festival along the “green line,” a light rail that travels between Minneapolis and St. Paul, to include communities along the rail that identified as African, African American, Somali, and Vietnamese. Specific calls for artists from those neighborhoods brought forward spoken word, performance, and 2D work. *Northern Spark* enabled the migration of these artists toward new media through training workshops, yet also shifted its definition of interactivity away from technology toward behaviors (Dietz 2017).

Lucas Bambozzi was the initiator and curator of the popular *arte.mov*, *International Festival of Art in Mobile Media (2006–2012)* (*arte.mov* 2019), a multi-city festival in Brazil that used mobile platforms within marginalized urban spaces. His most recent project, a collaboration with Gisela Domschke, is *Labmovel*, a modified van that brings digital media activities and street workshops to economically challenged areas where there is a shortage of institutional artistic offerings. It gathers community members, guest artists, educators, and researchers. In 2016,

Labmovel produced a cultural mapping of the north and east regions of São Paulo, through a one-week immersion in each of the regions, where we conduct[ed] listening labs with different groups of residents. A practice where people inform and produce their own representation of space. (*Labmovel* 2016)

The late Mervin Jarman’s *iStreet Media Labs* (*iStreet Lab* 2009; *The Edge* 2011) provided creative digital resources for spontaneous music-making and mixing at street corners to underserved groups, including Australian Indigenous communities and neighborhoods in Toronto, the UK, and Caribbean cities. At times “guerilla” activities by artists are enabled by curators and artist-run centers through partnerships focused on providing training in tools and access to new media technology for communities (Cook and Diamond 2011; Hopkins 2017). In the new media context, all of these initiatives require leverage of privately owned systems, software, and data plans.

South African curator Marcus Neustetter leads the *Trinity Sessions* (Neustetter 2017), an organization focused on socially impactful practices, which “means engaging site and context specifically with a particular audience that you are trying to address,”

while simultaneously looking toward a “wider, more reaching audience” (Neustetter 2017). The experience of “publicness” emerges through specific interventions (Neustetter 2017). Neustetter describes an inverse continuum of scale and technological complexity, with simpler technologies such as mobile phones allowing broader reach and more experimentation. He feels that if art is to receive funding it must be transformative for communities grappling with “hunger and rape and homelessness” (Neustetter 2017).

Using this model, the Johannesburg #*ArtMyJozi* project builds on that city’s concept of development corridors to, “draw out individual and collective narratives ... through multi-disciplinary workshops, public space activations, and exhibitions” (Johannesburg Development Agency 2017: 1). For four months, artists traversed venues and documented local practice, holding pop-up art events in communities across all forms of media, acting as cultural ethnographers and spontaneous performers. Using new media tools like the #*ArtMyJozi* social media campaign, the project transformed from a mapping exercise to a movement, and the city is now looking at ways that their public art policy and practice can move away from monumental works to integrate the #*ArtMyJozi* performance methodology. #*ArtMyJozi* demonstrates that roles change as the curator builds partnerships and acts as an advocate for communities, “a pushing of ideals, virtues, concepts, relevance, arguments etc. that actually move away from the classic notion of what a curator is” (Neustetter 2017). Success is measured by communities adopting and owning projects, with control moving from the initiators, including artists, to the community. Neustetter self-reflexively underscores the learning that he undertakes as a curator in this context, “Because of apartheid, because of our differences, because of issues of race and gender and colour and languages etc., we constantly have to question our presence on their continent” (Neustetter 2017).

Indigenous art interventions into the public realm continue to expand, whether through commissions or artists’ interventions. Some artists will not work with state funding and agencies, prioritizing autonomous works and underscoring their right to the land. Building on the oral traditions of Indigenous cultures, Hopkins places emphasis on sound and radio works in the projects that she has curated on reserves in Canada and in urban contexts. As a Nuit Blanche Toronto curator, she produced Post Commodity’s project, in which they created a radio booth that resembled a confessional where audience members shared songs and memories from residential schools. The recordings were transformed into vibrations that moved weavings inside the church, “You can hear the voices but they were distorted and [you] did not know exactly what they were saying but then all of sudden they were formed into another kind of energy” (Hopkins 2017). Hopkins argues that public art best practices have established community consultations as a core component, which in her view is even more important for Indigenous projects, whatever the medium.¹²

Arts Agencies

Arts agencies are specialized organizations that commission and support new media public artworks. Cook and Graham (2010) describe arts agencies as nimble, office-based organizations that “have extensive experience in the process of making art happen in venues outside of conventional art spaces, using any media necessary” (224). Creative Time, now with several decades of experience, have played an occasional role

as a commissioner of new media art. For example, they presented Anne-Marie Schleiner's *Operation Urban Terrain (OUT004)*, a one-night, live-action intervention of online military games, which was played out and projected in public spaces through a projector and laptop connected to an international team of game players that intervened via performance actions ranging from simulated grenade suicides to absurd dances (Creative Time 2004). The artist's goal was to critique the blurring of boundaries between entertainment and reality. In 2008, Creative Time commissioned *Playing the Building* by musician David Byrne, who

transformed the interior of the landmark Battery Maritime Building in Lower Manhattan into a massive sound sculpture, at which he invited visitors "to sit and play" as machines vibrated, struck, and blew across the building's elements, triggering unique harmonics and producing finely tuned sounds. (Creative Time 2008; Beesley and Khan 2009)

British agencies have a particularly successful track record. Shinkansen (1989–2004), a commissioning agent led by Gillian Boddington, initiated public-facing dialogues, prototypes, and commissions, aligned with four concerns: biotechnology, ecotechnology, wearable computing, and responsive environments, in part through the ambitious Future Physical (Shinkansen Collection Portal 2003). Arts Catalyst, the Centre for Art, Science and Technology, has over two decades of experience in commissioning global projects that span arts, science, and new media, usually in the public realm, working as initiator, producer, and intellectual center with major arts, science, and academic organizations. Arts Catalyst curated *Wrecked on the Intertidal Zone* (2015), a multi-year arts and citizen science project and public monument created with artists YoHa,¹³ the Critical Art Ensemble, locally engaged artists Andy Freeman and Fran Gallardo, ecologists, fishermen, engineers, and the public, to explore the changing Thames estuary. The project included *The Graveyard of Lost Species* (2016–2018) (Critical Art Ensemble 2016), which created recordings and a data base of "species" such as "wildlife, marine creatures, livelihoods, fishing methods, landmarks and local dialect, that once comprised of the Estuary and which are now disappearing" (Harwood 2015). The lost species were etched into *The Souvenir*, a retrieved boat that was dug out of the Thames estuary. Arts Catalyst have worked with artists as diverse as Tomas Saraceno, Aleksandra Mir, the Critical Art Ensemble, Jan Fabre, Yuri Leiderman, Stefan Gec, Otolith Group, Beatriz da Costa, Kira O'Reilly, and Marko Peljhan. They act as producers, raising funds for new works, and punctuating large-scale artists' projects within thematic interests.

Institutional Curators and Support

Temporary and semi-permanent new media artworks have been made possible through well-resourced institutional commissions. The Banff New Media Institute has also enabled many new media public art projects as a co-producer. For example, Skawennati Tricia Fragnito led the development of *CyberPowWow*, which adapted the online world, *The Palace*, with many collaborators over a series of residencies. It sought to colonize cyber space for Indigenous people, with Indigenous participants inviting those who wished to engage with them into worlds and performances that the Indigenous collaborators defined (Cook and Diamond 2011).

Connectivity between different time zones and places through telepresence is an ongoing theme in new media public artworks. One of the most celebrated and analyzed works in this genre is *Hole in Space* (1980) by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz of the Electronic Café International (ECI). The work was a three-day “Public Communication Sculpture,” enabled by the Lincoln Centre in New York, with satellite infrastructure support from NASA:

Suddenly head-to-toe, life-sized, television images of the people on the opposite coast appeared. They could now see, hear, and speak with each other as if encountering each other on the same sidewalk. ... There was the evening of discovery, followed by the evening of intentional word-of-mouth rendezvous, followed by a mass migration of families and trans-continental loved ones, some of which had not seen each other for over twenty years. (Galloway and Rabinowitz 2019; MediaArtNet 2019)

Decades later, Zhang Gas’s *Peoples’ Portrait* (2004) “simultaneously displayed portraits of people captured in New York, Singapore, Rotterdam, Linz, and Brisbane on the Reuter’s electronic billboard in Times Square and other sites in the connected cities, transforming the public plazas into trans-local sites” (Dietz 2019).

An early interactive screen project enabled by institutional support is Dara Birnbaum’s *Rio Videowall* (1989), commissioned for the Rio shopping mall in Atlanta. When there was little activity, passive images filled the 25-monitor data bank. Silhouette images of passing mallgoers were captured and projected onto the wall and their silhouettes filled with satellite images from CNN. Critic Dot Tuer describes the impact:

In the process, a riot confusion of feedback and transmission, appearances and copies, ensues, pointing to the interface of the video screen as a mechanism of representation that leads, in Paul Virilio’s words, “from the aesthetics of the appearance of a stable image to the aesthetics of the disappearance of an unstable image.” (Tuer 1997: 10)

These projects require intensive curatorial efforts and open access to the site.

There is a significant difference in curating new media public art for electronic billboards or a shopping mall, to addressing spaces specifically built to support new media interactive works. Anne Balsamo describes how new media art center, Ars Electronica, has created a stable, if constrained, environment for curators and artists:

The building that houses the Ars Electronica Center in Linz, Austria, is wrapped in a glass facade that consists of several hundred windows that can be illuminated with colored LED lights. Each LED panel can be individually controlled such that the facade of the building can be programmed to provide a dynamic light show. A docking station installed on the outside of the building enables a visitor to use a music player or smartphone to program a light show to accompany a musical playlist. (Balsamo 2016: 339)

Montreal’s le Société des Arts Technologiques (le SAT) is an artist-run center that has grown to be both a research and presentation centre. Alex Morgenthaler’s *PIXINESS* (2011), made of motorized LED lights, was commissioned by Le SAT for the façade of its building, and acts as architecture, artwork, interactive environment, and illumination: “The horizontal rotation of these prisms creates reflections of the external

environment or produces layers of low-resolution, light-based images that lie at the limits of our figurative perceptions” (Société des Arts Technologiques 2011). The work is part of Montreal’s Quartier des Spectacle’s Luminous Pathway, which integrates works commissioned as semi-permanent public works.

Academic Projects and New Media Public Art

The last two decades have seen new media public art and related technological, ethnographic, curatorial, and critical practices become areas of research investment in universities worldwide. Partnerships with universities have allowed artists’ companies such as Blast Theory to develop specific technology platforms with which to create public art (Cook and Diamond 2011). Blast Theory’s over 20-year relationship with the Mixed Reality Lab of University of Nottingham (Steve Benford, Martin Flintham, and Chris Greenhalgh) has included virtual reality (VR), mobile, and mixed reality gaming research (Blast Theory 2018). These collaborations allow cutting-edge projects to see the light of day (or night). However, the challenge for curators and commissioners is that they must ensure deadlines are met, and that research-quality technologies and creative prototypes can scale up for large audiences.

Mouna Andraos and Melisa Mongiat of Daily Tous Les Jours are a digital public art team from Montreal who undertake new media public art commissions that are technologically seamless and playful. *21 Balançoires* is an interactive musical work located at La Promenade des Artistes (Quartier des Spectacles Montréal 2018). Bringing together scientific research in evolutionary behaviors, music, and new media, they developed the interaction scenario with a biology professor and expert on cooperation amongst animals, Dr. Luc-Alain Giraldeau from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) faculty (Giraldeau 2016), and a local musician, Radwan Ghazi-Moumneh. When in motion, each swing triggers different notes, and when used together, the swings create a musical composition in which certain melodies emerge only through cooperation. As Andraos notes, “It’s a game where, from the start, you need to adjust to the actions of others” (Daily Tous Les Jours 2019).

Many new media public artists and curators are university-based researchers. David McIntosh is an OCAD University faculty member and recipient of a Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research grant, which supported the tri-lingual transmedia, trans-local digital game, *QUIPUCAMAYOC* (2016) (Quipucamayoc 2019). It was created with OCAD University, production and presentation partners Centro Hipermediático Experimental Latinoamericano (CheLa), and Quinoa Villa Boutique in Argentina and Peru. The game concept began with the historical, Andean notion of quipu, a form of record-keeping based on knots in strings used in Inca society until the Spanish Conquest in 1532; *QUIPUCAMAYOC* refers to the keeper of these string memories. Played simultaneously within two Andean communities, in Cusco, Peru and Buenos Aires, Argentina, the game allows traditional storytellers to embed their narratives in virtual space.

As a faculty member and senior researcher at the University of Brasilia, Domingues pursues her technologically challenging projects through her association with university labs. In 2010, Domingues was invited by curator Graciela Taquini to undertake a new reading of Jorge Luis Borges’s stories in and around the Centro Cultural San Martín in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the museum dedicated to



FIGURE 18.4 Diana Domingues, *Biocybrid Fables: Borges' Fantastic Creatures*, 2010, Urban intervention in Mobile Augmented Reality (MAR) and Installation in AR, Buenos Aires. Courtesy of the artist.

Borges's oeuvre is located. Domingues produced *Biocybrid Fables: Borges' Fantastic Creatures* as both an AR and physical installation (Figure 18.4), where the audience encountered imaginary creatures extracted from Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings* (Domingues, da Rocha, and Miosso 2011). She notes, "Fables were modeled, tagged and ... the synthetic creatures scattered by geodesic coordinates" (Domingues 2017). The work required geospatial, AR, and artificial intelligence research support.

Cook commissioned a temporary cardboard monument by artist Olivier Grossetête for Dundee's waterfront, on the site where a new Victoria and Albert Museum and public park will open (Creative Dundee 2016). It displayed images captured in AR through a Lidar scan and photogrammetry. The commission expanded when the University of Dundee's archeological and heritage researchers chose to create a series of more realistic monuments in AR, representing a former monument through four stages of its life before it was torn down in the 1950s, in order to extrapolate what the 3D data could have been (Cook 2017). The project has ongoing iterations, and its viability continues to depend on the university. As new media, public art enters a new set of practices using AI, machine learning, CRISPR, and other bio-art media, collaboration between artists, curators, and research labs will continue to gain importance.

Conservation and Maintenance of New Media Public Art

Artists, curators, and leaders in archival practices agree that new media public artworks face specific challenges in regard to conservation and maintenance. Rokeby believes that "very few of the stakeholders have any way of grasping the problem,"

and that there is either “optimistic blindness to the real challenges, or under informed kneejerk fear of the challenges” (Rokeby 2017b). Anxiety can prohibit the curation and commission of new media public art. The CRUMB discussion on new media public art underscored the need for a “bespoke conservation strategy” and archiving practices, resources, and consistent funding (CRUMB Discussion List – New Media Curating Archives 2017). Contributions recognized that many works were vulnerable to technological and contextual change, such as Internet service provisions, decommissioned technologies (such as the Microsoft Kinect), and institutions’ new media and digital capabilities. Cook added an additional dimension, that of planning for the evolution of the work, not simply its updating and ultimate conservation. In the Dundee commission she led, “We imagined a future audience, which is when the Victoria and Albert opens and when this landscape is finished and when this public park really becomes a shared public space and people’s behaviors in that space change, then suddenly this work might encounter an audience it doesn’t have yet” (Cook 2017).

Case studies reinforce these concerns. Simon Biggs created a costly public new media work in 2004 that was integrated into the infrastructure of a building, with “miles of Cat 6 cabling encased in the concrete superstructure,” and that worked with live video feeds and sensors (Biggs 2017). He had a virtual private network (VPN) connection to all of the systems in the building, so that he could reboot machines as needed and direct engineers on cherry pickers to adjust camera angles and to perform maintenance. In 2011, after the financial crisis, the client vacated the building, abandoning the work. Paul Brown, who has created public artworks since the 1960s, underscores how relatively easy it is to get well-funded commissions but how difficult it is in turn to get, “recurrent funding to maintain them” (Brown 2017). He notes that he has made work that no longer is maintained by those who commissioned it (Brown 2012), as has his partner Wendy Mills (Mills 1999), and his son Daniel (Brown 2017). There are some exceptions, such as the Changi Airport with its strict maintenance policy (Changi Airport Singapore 2019). Hence, maintenance budgets need to be thought of as part of the overall building or environmental maintenance, as with all public art.

Technological platforms and code face obsolescence at a rate far faster than other media, requiring strategies to transfer platforms, rework a piece in other media, and sustain excellent documentation of code. There are different ways to provide durability and maintenance of new media public works, whether “maintained or resuscitated or emulated in a way that accurately reflects that ideas and intuitions that lead to their creation” (Rokeby 2017b). Johannes Beringer sees the need to plan for “continuous “translation ... [to] abstractly describe the work in a systemic way ... allowing for re-interpretation or re-creation” (Beringer 2018). Commissioner Mike Stubbs sees the need for a shared language and sets out a framework, suggesting that: to avoid trauma, artists must co-design with builders; establish better contracting and comprehension of contracts; end the concept of perpetuity; hone a specific plan for limited duration or legacy; and budget to maintain (Stubbs 2017). Data storage needs to be stable and the contents constantly checked to ensure that the bits of media remain. This requires devices to read the bits and boot devices, and for programs that drive the artwork to continue to operate (Goebel 2017). Rokeby has changed the ways that he approaches technological viability as he has matured as an artist, remounted works, and prepared them for collections or for public display over many years, “delivering code in an operating system agnostic with functional description and a documented API, and a functional, operating system/computer era specific

generic ‘wrapper’” (Rokeby 2017b). He has challenged himself to plan beyond the expected 20 years of technology obsolescence, looking 50 to 100 years out.

While Rokeby is looking far into the future, for others, requirements for maintenance vary depending on the artists’ intentions of longevity for the works. Johannes Goebel insists that artists must define and declare the lifespan for all artworks with electronic components, and states,

This work is good for 2 months, 3 or 5 years – we can maintain it under such and such conditions – and we will document it with texts, images, recordings, drawings etc. – and then this will be “the end of the piece.” Curtain! (Goebel 2017)

Laura Sillers (2017) collaborated with artist Ben Tew, in South Korea, to create a work with the potential of a 20-year lifespan, owing to “warrantees on all of the parts, careful planning on the method of fabrication, construction and power,” but have only negotiated paid support to the artists for five years after the work’s installation, shifting responsibility to the site in Korea after the five-year span, without requiring the artists to return annually.

Artist Melinda Rackham argues that new media public artworks are ephemeral and should not be captured:

a lot of that work was made specifically to have instant access to an audience and route around the artful institutions of curation and collectability. ... It wanted to utilize windows of opportunity, software glitches or exploit hardware, stretch new programming languages, it was “of the moment” unconcerned with longevity. (Rackham 2017)

Rackham questions whether earlier works are of value to a younger generation who have grown up with ubiquitous connection, “Conservation is a broadly cultural lament. Digital loss and ephemerality feel a bit like the scattered photos of teenage years – of bad perms and forgotten love interests” (2017). Meanwhile, Paul acknowledges

There also are works that need to be ephemeral, and perhaps live on in oral history. I know (art) history is a construct but we would be writing a very obscure and culturally irresponsible history if digital art – in all its manifestations, from physical to highly conceptual and ephemeral – would be omitted from it. (Paul 2017)

This returns to the role of the curator in preserving historical memory. Amanda McDonald Crowley insists that new media curators bear responsibility for the lack of maintenance, rather than artists, “As New Media Curators, many of us think of ourselves as curating platforms that are experiential, rather than collections of objects or works” (McDonald Crowley 2017). She continues that documentation of and writing about these works existed on the “interwebs,”¹⁴ not in publications, and has also disappeared. There are also new media archives that have been taken down, including the Banff New Media Institute, and the Daniel Langlois Foundation (now with Cinémathèque Québécoise). Biggs argues that “[Rackham’s] perspective devalues the role of the curator as creating meaning out of history” (Biggs 2017).

Much like the need for a legacy for early performance art, hindsight has strengthened the argument for intentional conservation strategies and maintenance plans.

Curator and writer Richard Reinhart sees preservation as core to publicness in many dimensions. He notes the need for protocols that allow access to specific, and wider, communities raising the concern that access can be politicized and denied. He suggests that there are different publics that need to be addressed, “We must be open/accessible to the public and, in a more indirect way, we preserve our collections not just for their current legal owners, but for posterity, for the broader public” (Reinhart 2017). Maintenance is a critical part of the curatorial agenda. Short-term public new media works and new media not made for public art can become long-term public artworks and resources for recontextualization.

Expanding New Media Public Art

In an era of ubiquitous digital technologies, artists versed in other media have begun to develop new media public art projects. Curators who are not familiar with new media presentation contexts are commissioning or integrating these works into public art exhibitions (Quaranta 2013). At times, they are iterating work that has been done by prior new media artists without reference to that history; at other times the work addresses new concerns outside of new media art dialogues (Diamond 2003; Quaranta 2013; Obrist 2016). New media curators such as Cook or Dietz have expanded their curatorial practices to focus on highly interactive behaviors with or without technology, digital expressions, or computation. These trends move new media public art into a more prominent spotlight (Quaranta 2013). Meanwhile, curators seek new dimensions for commissions, for example emerging collaborations between artists and scientists with CRISPR to create and exhibit new genetic formations in the public realm.

Britta Peters, Kasper König, and Marianne Wagner are the 2017 curators for *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, a public art exhibition of sculptures in public places within the town of Münster, Germany that began in 1977, and occurs every ten years. In 2017, the team included significant new media works, seeking to foreground issues of transparency and the need for a critical public in the context of digital mediation, “In some sculptural projects the questions of digitalization are very much in the foreground – for example Hito Steyerl, Aram Bartholl, or Andreas Bunte – in others it is a more implicit subject” (Estorick 2017). Artsy hailed Pierre Huyghe’s *After Life Ahead* as “the single most ambitious work of contemporary art created in 2017” (McDermott 2017). Sections of the ceiling open and close as an Artificial Life Algorithm responds to changes in the environment, which includes peacocks, bees, an aquarium with shells, and cancer cells that grow when more CO₂ is released into the atmosphere. A musical score plays from the data. (McDermott 2017)

Conclusion

For curators, the opportunities and definitions of new media are shifting, requiring knowledge and context creation beyond the purely digital as artist’s experiment with intelligent textiles, surfaces, and the Internet of Things, and moves “from screens to surfaces; from images to sensations” (Raqs 2018). Curation of new media public art continues to require a deep collaboration between artists, sites – whether virtual or

physical – and the public. New media public art faces both unique challenges of production and conservation, and shared conditions with public art of audience engagement and access.

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Notes

- 1 The search included the same cities that were studied for Diamond et al. (2017).
- 2 *Redefining Public Art in Toronto* argues for flexible yet clearly articulated processes, including arms-length juries that include arts professionals with knowledge of Indigenous, digital, and diverse public art practices.
- 3 These include GIS, Bluetooth, including the attachment of biometric sensors such as EOG, EMG, EEG, and GSR.
- 4 Dr. Diana Domingues has created the term biocybrid systems “for enactive affective perception,” which she creates at LART – the Laboratory of Art and TechnoScience at the University of Brasília at Gama (UnB/FGA).
- 5 In the case of the MoMA, Thiel integrated into the project curated by augmented reality experimentalist Sander Veenhof from the Netherlands, and Mark Skwarek, new media artist from New York as part of the Conflux Festival, a New York festival dedicated to psychogeography (Veenhof 2010).
- 6 See Diamond (2015), in which I chronicle the history of artist-driven media activism in Vancouver.
- 7 Nato Thompson when he was artistic director at Creative Time (Rokeby 2019).
- 8 However, in a screen-intensive world these also add to light pollution, and engender complaints from building inhabitants, or can be both beautiful and diverting to drivers.
- 9 Snow is renowned for his flying geese at the Toronto Eaton Centre and the golden crowd of fans at Rogers Centre.
- 10 Domingues had borrowed Silicon Graphics machines from the national university to run the algorithmic work of Yoichiro *Kawaguchi*, organized Web connectivity, and there had been significant set up.
- 11 Twenty years of social practice is documented by Creative Time in their Living as Form database (Creative Time 2011).
- 12 Hopkins has worked on the Edmonton Indigenous Arts Park, a collaboration between the City of Edmonton, Edmonton Arts Council, the Confederacy of Treaty Six first nations, Metis Nation of Alberta. A steering committee was created from these organizations, the city and community-based artists and knowledge keepers. “All of the short-listed artists were brought to Edmonton for a two-day workshop where they learned from poets, from knowledge keepers in the area, we did site visits, we did walks with an Indigenous anthropologist as well, and all those became tools for them with which to develop their proposal after” (Hopkins 2017).

The workshop helped candidates develop their proposal with support because a number of artists had not worked at public scale before. Final proposals were then chosen by the steering committee. The process of this project has become a model for commissioning indigenous artists for projects across territories.

- 13 YoHa is a collaboration between Dr. Graham Harwood (formerly of Mongrel) and Mastuko Yokokuji.
- 14 “Interweb” is a disdainful term referencing poor or naive Internet content. According to <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/interweb>, “The Internet: used jocularly when pretending to be or referring to an inexperienced Internet user, or when expressing a disdain for certain Internet content: *vague recollections presented as fact on the Interweb.*”

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Approach to the Curatorship of Virtual Reality Exhibitions

Arnau Gifreu-Castells

Introduction

The new media is the result of technological developments of the late twentieth century, a period in which a set of inputs from engineers and mathematicians invented and developed tools and languages that enabled a new means of expression called “digital” or “interactive.” These systems, which are able to store, manage, integrate, and process large volumes of data, laid the foundations of the current environment of digital communication.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a set of characters who made key contributions in different technological areas emerged: first, the pioneers of digital media, which introduced the basics of the new medium during the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries include: Charles Babbage, Herman Hollerith, Alan Turing, Norbert Wiener, Claude Shannon, Konrad Zuse, Jack Kilby, and J.C.R. Licklider. On the other hand, the inventors of the audiovisual simulation and the creation of the first interactive programs during the first half of the twentieth century include: Morton Heilig, Fred Waller, Joseph Weizenbaum, and Raymond Kurzweil. In turn, developers of new concepts and theories such as hypermedia, multimedia, and virtual reality (VR) include: Douglas Engelbart, Ted Nelson, Jaron Lanier, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak. And finally, characters in charge of designing the language of the Internet from development hypertext include: Vannevar Bush, Ivan Sutherland, and Tim Berners-Lee.

The digitization of content, convergence of media, and cultural consumption habits of digital natives have been decisive factors that have contributed to the positioning and expansion of new media. This expansion of new forms of expression has been

linked to the loss of presence and audience of traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television). This has altered the dynamics of audiovisual production and consumption, boosting expectations and capacity for audience intervention.

Since its appearance to its consolidation, interactive digital media has been a testing ground for new forms of storytelling. The potential of interactivity along with its characteristics of nonlinearity have been established as the basics of a different language from the audiovisual, characterized and enriched by the contributions of authors like Marshall McLuhan (1964 and 1972), Espen Arrest (1997), Lev Manovich (2001), Marie-Laure Ryan (2001 and 2004), George Landow (2005), Henry Jenkins (2008), and Janet Murray (1999 and 2012), among others.

Alvin Toffler (1981) divides history into three waves: the first one came up with the Agricultural Revolution (during the seventeenth century in Europe, the second emerged with the Industrial Revolution (1760–1850), and the third is the current one, which began during the second half of the twentieth century and where technology has played a decisive role. In this third wave, in connection with communication theories, the author notes the appearance and power of the new media, highlighting concepts such as decentralization, demassification, and customization. According to Octavio Islas (2009: 29), the new digital media has shaped a new cultural ecology in which some conventional media has failed to adapt to the new media environment.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marshall McLuhan proposed several theories that are still valid today. While the author was referring to traditional or electronic media, one of his hypotheses stated that technology tends to create a new environment or “galaxy” that does not work as a mere passive receptacle, but rather operates as a process asset that reshapes both the man and other technologies (McLuhan 1972: 7).

Lev Manovich (2001) notes that the twenty-first century is the period of the interface, a time of unprecedented technological advances in which we are immersed in a revolution of new media that exceeds that of the printing of the fourteenth century and photograph of the nineteenth century (Manovich 2001: 19). In this sense, Paul Levinson (2013) suggests that since the emergence of Web 2.0 society has come to coexist with new media processes so novel that the term “new media” should be extended to “new new media.” These new forms of storytelling promote and facilitate reticular communication and hypermediation, a complex process of symbolic exchange that is achieved by means of digital interfaces, which constitute its “public face” (Scolari 2008: 277).

Approaching the Concept of Extended Reality (XR) and Virtual Reality (VR)

Virtual reality and other three-dimensional (3D) technologies are transforming the process of communication toward an expanded reality. During the last 25 years, technologies such as tangible interfaces, augmented reality and augmented virtuality (mixed reality), virtual reality, telepresence, etc., have been built and developed. The “continuous reality-virtuality” was a theory enunciated by Paul Milgram and Fumio Kishino in 1994, a continuum that extends linearly from left to right, from physical reality to complete virtuality (Milgram and Kishino 1994).

The so-called extended reality, or XR, is a concept that describes the entire spectrum of reality, from the virtual to the physical, from augmented reality to augmented virtuality (mixed reality), virtual reality, and everything in between. Eventually, this new spectrum of technologies will produce the overlap of the digital world and the real world, where the virtual amplifies and influences reality, and where the physical persists in the virtual space. Outlining the end of the virtuality-reality classic division.

Returning to the continuous reality-virtuality, at the beginning of it we have the reality, that physical reality that we perceive through our senses and our brain without an apparent mediation of technology. At that point the tangible interfaces would enter, to interact with virtual elements. From there and moving to the right we enter into realities enriched, expanded, or built completely synthetically thanks to technology (Sacristán 2018).

At the other end of the spectrum is virtual reality: an immersive synthetic world generated by computer as a faithful reproduction of the outside world, 3D, navigable, and interactive in real time, with a subjective perspective centered on the user (Sacristán 2018).

Janet Murray (1999) considers interactivity and immersion as two key aspects of new media. Murray defines “immersion” as the part that lets the user add dramatic aspects in relation to the computer and breaks them down into two main qualities: spatiality, the ability to show spaces through which we can “move” (“surfing” as a spatial sense), and the encyclopedic one, the access to an infinite amount of data, resulting in the possibility of an almost unlimited wealth of representation. Here Murray uses the holodeck from the *Star Trek* television series (1966–2005) as a metaphor for this unmediated experience.

Transparency and invisibility of mediation and hyperrealism are not distinctive attributes of the digital environment because a photograph or a painting also meet these criteria. According to Manovich, “the real break is the introduction of a synthetic moving image, with interactive 3D images and computer animation. With these technologies, the viewer has the experience of traveling through a simulated three-dimensional world. Something we cannot do with an illusionistic painting” (Manovich 2001: 246).

Experimentation with spatial immersion through virtual reality requires a complex technical needs and specific knowledge and skills, so the early projects were developed only in research centers. The School of Journalism at Columbia University in 1994 created the Center for New Media, and more recently the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, research centers studying how new technologies can transform journalism. In 1996, the Integrated Media Systems Center at the University of Southern California promoted the User-Directed News Project. Currently, this university has promoted the Annenberg Innovation Lab, a laboratory that is part of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Over the years, the progressive lowering of technologies has enabled more and more actors to experience hybridization between journalistic form and virtual reality.

Immersion is a psychological quality and an act of imagination that depends both on the author to promote it and on the cooperation of the reader experiencing it. What differentiates the immersion of a reader of a book or a movie viewer from the one of virtual reality is that cooperation goes beyond the mind and becomes a physical action it should perform on digital material. According to Eva Domínguez (2013), spatial and sound immersion can be considered two key resources of digital immersive narrative journalism. To these resources must be added the influence of the specific

strategies of videogames and applied simulations, going beyond fiction for their ability to recreate the feeling of being transported to a different physical location of the real (Outing 2002; Lester 2004). Authors like John Pavlik (2001) and Nonny de la Peña (2010) believe that immersive journalism began to really leverage the use of technology and equipment this century, a situation that has allowed the situation sensory testing of 3D environments created by computers.

One of the pioneers of immersive technology was Charles Wheatstone, who in 1844 introduced a device that created the illusion of seeing 3D images: the stereoscope. A few years earlier, in 1838, he published an essay in the journal *Philosophical Transaction* of the Royal Society of London in which he describes the phenomenon of stereoscopic vision. Wheatstone had discovered that two images mounted on a display located at the same spacing produce an embossed effect as with 3D bodies.

Another pioneer inventor, Fred Waller, created a panoramic image on a huge screen with some curvature. Following an initial experiment called Vitarama, Waller created a machine called Cinerama, which consisted of three cameras filming and projecting through three 35 mm projectors working in sync.

Morton Heilig, fascinated with the possibilities of Waller's invention, patented in 1958 the Sensorama, a machine that offered synesthetic response, i.e. activating images, sounds, smells, etc., and which consisted of a cabin with a seat and a steering mobile wheel, stereoscopic glasses with headrest, two stereo speakers on each side, a device that emitted odors, and fans to remove them. Heilig described it as a "theater of experience" and as an "art of consciousness." The first model simulated the experience of driving a motorbike in Brooklyn and included smells of gasoline and pizza. Heilig, fascinated by the concept of immersion, was also interested in multisensory game machines and new concepts of film and interactive theater, and was a pioneer in the construction of the virtual helmet. Initial experiments in the twentieth century around the visual simulation, as seen with Waller and Heilig, offered viewers the first immersive experiences.

Ivan Sutherland is another key figure in the field of immersion and virtual reality. He contributed decisively in computer graphics and computer interaction, proposing new concepts such as the 3D model, visual simulations, and automated design. In 1968, he became obsessed with being able to receive pictures by computer through virtual glasses, designing the first model, known as the Head-Mounted Display device.

Current virtual reality is a result of improved visual simulation techniques developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by inventors like Wheatstone, Waller, Heilig, and Sutherland. During the first half of the twentieth century, the invention of television reduced the number of moviegoers. To restore audience decline, film studios focused on providing services that television could not offer: 3D cinema, stereo sound, wide screens, and all that contributed decisively in experimenting with new immersive storytelling techniques. By the late fifties and early sixties, the company Philco Corporation developed the first virtual reality system.

The term "virtual reality" was coined by Jaron Lanier in 1989 to describe an environment that is simulated by computer. The definition of virtual reality is still in an evolving state, owing to the constantly changing use and applications of the technology. Carol Manetta and Richard Blade defined the concept as "a computer system used to create an artificial world in which the user has the impression of being and the ability to navigate and manipulate objects in him" (1995). Steve Aukstakalnis,

David Blatner and Stephen F. Roth (1993: 7) note that “virtual reality is a humane way to visualize, manipulate and interact with computers and complex data.”

Virtual reality can be “immersive,” “semi-immersive,” and “immersive.” Immersive virtual reality methods relate to a 3D environment created by a computer which is handled through helmets, gloves, and other devices that capture the position and rotation coordinates and different parts of the human body. In the semi-immersive model, the user interacts with the virtual world, but without being immersed in himself. Non-immersive virtual reality offers the opportunity to interact in real time with different people in spaces and environments that really do not exist without the need for additional devices to the computer. In this approach we focus on immersive methods. The immersive VR or presence is what is commonly known as “virtual reality to dry,” which makes it necessary to isolate yourself audiovisually from the outside world and immerse yourself in a completely digital 3D world, thanks to virtual immersion glasses or virtual reality glasses (Sacristán 2018).

Approach to VR Exhibitions in Contemporary Art and Storytelling

Regarding some key events in this field today, in North America, we highlight CES (Consumer Technology Association, Las Vegas), SXSW Mobile Growth Summit (Austin), ODSC (Open Data Science Conference – Boston), VRLA (Los Angeles), Magnify World AR/VR Summit (New York), Silicon Valley Open Doors (Mountain View, CA), Miami VR Expo, VRTO (Toronto), La French Tech Conference (NYC), RX (Boston), Games for Change (NYC), SigGraph (Vancouver), VRARA Global Summit (Vancouver), The Future of Storytelling (New York), TC Sessions – AR/VR (Los Angeles), and VR for Good Summit (Tempe AZ). Regarding Europe, we have detected important venues such as the Mobile World Congress (Barcelona), VRX (Amsterdam), VR World (London), Next Web (Amsterdam), World VR Forum – Crans-Montana (Switzerland), 5th International Conference on AR, VR and Graphics (Otranto, Italy), VR Expo (Stuttgart), EuroVR (London), VR Days Europe Amsterdam (FutureLand), and Virtual Reality Day (Milan, Italy). In Asia, there are a few events, such as VR/AR/MR World (Tokyo) and CES Asia (Shanghai). And finally, in the online category, there is the Reality and Games and Entertainment Extravaganza’18, the Virtual Reality Games and Entertainment Extravaganza, and the Virtual Reality and Higher Education Symposium (VR Voice 2018).

Regarding our specific field, film festivals and art galleries seemed to be the natural exhibitions for VR projects. In this regard, we outline in VR exhibitions today: La Biennale di Venezia (Venice Film Festival), which showcased a program of 40 projects at the 2018 Film Festival on the island of Lazzaretto Vecchio (Lido di Venezia) and a Competition section. In addition, thanks to the multimedia platform VRrOOm, the public all around the world was able to watch the VR projects presented at Venice Virtual Reality 2018, allowing the audience to watch content curated by the world’s finest festivals and cultural events (Venice Film Festival 2018). Besides Venice, there is also the Cannes Film Festival, Berlinale, Tribeca Film Festival, South by Southwest, Sundance Film Festival, Festival of nouveau cinema, Hot Docs and IDFA Doclab, with showcases and exhibitions focused on fiction, nonfiction, and art.

Art galleries and cultural centers are other institutions that display VR exhibitions, such as Phi Center in Montreal or other art centers and galleries in the US. In order to complement venues, festivals, and shows, we highlight portals, web platforms, and blogs, such as Immerse, VR Voice, and VR and AR storytelling Facebook groups.

Useful Guidelines and Tips to Curate and Exhibit VR

It is important to mention at this point that this is an essay-like text that does not pretend to establish definitive guidelines, because this is a relatively novel field and constantly changing and evolving. Our intention in this work is to point out a series of ideas and proposals that can be considered by curators, artists, and professionals in charge of twenty-first-century exhibitions.

Part of the methodology used in this work focuses, first of all, on an analysis of the existing literature and different key events around the subject matter proposed during recent years. Personal experience is another of the contributions that add to the second part of this chapter, because the author has had the privilege of being a curator in different interactive and immersive exhibitions since 2013. I would like to highlight the coordination of the Vic Digital Week (2011 and 2012), together with Marc Vaillou and Pep Campàs (Gifreu, Vaillou, and Campàs 2012–2013); the coordination of two exhibitions in the framework of *interDocsBarcelona* (interactive exhibition 2013 and immersive exhibition *Médicos Sin Fronteras* 2016); the co-curator of *Interactive Digital Stories Track* – Madeira Film Festival (2017 and 2018), along with Valentina Nisi, Deborah Castro, and Sabrina Scuri (Nisi et al. 2018/2018); and the *Mostra BUG* (2018), together with André Paz and Julia Salles.

The exhibition in Vic Digital Week was very simple: over two years, ten of the best final degree projects by students at the University of Vic (Vic, Spain) were exhibited in an especially conditioned room in the VIT (Vic Integració Tecnològica – Technology Center of Vic). However, the 2013 *interdocsBarcelona* exhibition (part of DocsBarcelona International Documentary Film Festival) had 20 interactive stations with computers, tablets, and video projections. The immersive exhibition organized in 2016 by Doctors Without Borders as part of the *interdocsBarcelona* program had eight VR stations, videos, and physical stations (Gifreu 2016) (Barcelona, Spain). The *Interactive Digital Stories Track* is an exhibition that consists each year of ten projects that compete for the Best Storytelling Project prize as part of the Madeira Film Festival (Portugal). It has computers, tablets, projects with headsets, and interactive installations. Finally, the *Mostra BUG* exhibits about 50 projects, including immersive and interactive works, two interactive projections, and an immersive installation (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). The selection is a reference of the main international creative poles and the promising production from the Brazilian scenario, covering interactive and immersive narratives like web and interactive documentaries, 360 videos, virtual reality animation, augmented reality narrative, sound maps, transmedia installations, and websites.

Finally, two interviews with Julia Salles and André Paz complement the carried out. Julia Salles is a lecturer at the University of Montréal and has worked as a curator and committee member for several international film festivals. Salles is also the co-author of Bug404, a platform for the development of interactive narratives in Brazil, and an affiliate of Milieux Institute for Arts, Culture and Technology. André Paz is a researcher

TABLE 19.1 Proposed analysis model for the curatorship of a VR exhibition.

A. Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General/Specific • Main/Secondary 	Objectives established according to the activity that will be carried out
B. Theme/Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Specific 	Decide whether there is a thematic axis, specific field, or editorial freedom in relation to the selection of works
C. Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiovisual • Interactive • Immersive 	The specific technology that is needed to carry out the exhibition
D. Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General • Grounds/levels/rooms 	Specific space and its distribution according to the needs of the works to be exhibited
E. Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age groups • Specific 	Establish target audience
F. Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed • Temporary 	Time interval in which the exhibition will be held
G. Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Experience 	Human resources needed to carry out the exhibition
H. Diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyers • Media (TV, radio, etc.) • Social media • Other activities 	Diffusion necessary so that people know about the exhibition

and creative director. He has undertaken postdoctoral studies about interactive narratives, makes interactive documentaries, and organizes workshops and courses. He is also a professor at the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) and directs Bug404.

In order to structure and order several categories or areas that we consider key for the curatorship of a VR exhibition, we propose this analysis model made up of eight categories: Objectives (A), Theme/Area (B), Technology (C), Space (D), Public (E), Time (F), Team (G), and Diffusion (H) (Table 19.1).

We will now define in more depth the key aspects and dimensions for planning and preparing a VR exhibition presented in the table above and propose some guidelines, insights, and suggestions for implementation.

A. Objectives (Why?)

Preliminary question: what do we want to achieve by organizing this exhibition?

First of all, the future success or failure of the exhibition will depend on establishing the appropriate objectives and intentions. The objectives, in any enterprise, provide a kind of roadmap that is the key to the project or event when it is evaluated in the end.

The objectives, in addition to establishing the priorities for the production team, are also essential for determining the viability and specificities of the project, whatever it is. From the outset, this information is vital for financing entities, whether public (government, grants, calls from public centers) or private (companies, art festivals, markets, producers), who are taking a risk when they invest financially in the project.

The objectives of an exhibition are based on specific curatorship and can vary. A primary and/or priority objective is usually to present a specific field to a public,

with a selection of specific works that use a particular technology. In the field that we are dealing with, strongly influenced by technological innovation at the crossroads of different areas of knowledge, there is often a set of secondary goals:

- First, to attract new audiences, in which young people and digital natives are an important target audience.
- Second, this approach with young – and especially not so young – audiences aims to reduce the distance between people and technology, the so-called digital gap.
- Third, to look for strategies for integrating the audience into the experience in a medium that has not yet exploited its entire expressive capacity.
- Fourth, to place emphasis on producers, organizers, and curators, experimenting, exploring, and mixing different curatorial possibilities.

B. Theme/Area (What?)

Preliminary question: is the exhibition limited within a particular theme/area?

As it is an exhibition, the nature of the projects included in it must be considered. The theme/area itself may entail a type of space layout and a specific type of technology. This theme/area can involve a type of consumption of the works depending on whether the visitor follows a suggested order (guided) or they are encouraged to discover the exhibition freely.

In the case that concerns this text, in the absence of sufficient content and a relatively new type of production, the majority of VR exhibits and curatorships analyzed so far do not include a specific thematic axis, but rather an amalgam of different themes and approaches. What we detect today are exhibitions by areas or specific fields, including mainly health, education, military, art, communication, and leisure. At the level of the area and type of project (characteristics to be chosen as representative), we recommend following these indications to choose the projects:

- That they are representative of a thematic axis/area if this is an essential part of the exhibition (not yet applicable to immersive exhibitions).
- That they are easy to navigate.
- Projects which have won prizes and recognition.

C. Technology (How?)

Preliminary question: what technologies are part of the exhibition?

In this case, having set the objectives and type of works that we want to include in the exhibition (free selection or by subject/area of interest), we reach the second key aspect for the viability of the exhibition (the first key aspect is the financing): the technology and the different necessary equipment. It is important to use the easiest and most adaptable technology for the exhibition. It should be understood that the simpler the technology, the fewer technical problems there will generally be; and when they do occur, they should be simpler to solve.

First of all, we recommend developing an inventory based on the type of projects with all the technological requirements. In exhibiting forms of narrative expression, the technical specificities and requirements of the different projects need to be

understood: linear audiovisual projects, interactive projects, transmedia projects composed by different platforms, and immersive projects.

- Audiovisual projects usually require a screen and headphones (or control).
- Interactive projects require electronic devices (computer, mobile, or tablet) and other peripherals, such as a keyboard, mouse, and headphones. If it is an installation, it will also need electronic circuits and sensors.
- Transmedia projects include a mixture of audiovisual, interactive, and immersive projects; therefore, all aspects mentioned above must be considered.
- Immersive projects, especially those with VR, may require:
 - 360 video/photo: a keyboard or device to activate navigation.
 - Augmented reality/mixed reality: a mobile or a tablet.
 - Augmented virtuality: computer and other peripherals.
 - Virtual reality: glasses, headsets, computer, and other devices.

It is important to mention this previous aspect because the exhibitions that include VR generally also exhibit other types of works, which are always a mixture of audiovisual, interactive, and immersive projects.

The biggest challenge in relation to technology is the technical problems when the exhibition is set up (before), and especially during the performing days (during). During the preparation and adaptation of the space (before the exhibition), make sure to hire a technical team with experience in virtual reality. Another problem is usually to find the equipment that is available in stores or universities. During the event, and in order to control the different technical problems that may arise, it will be necessary to plan a human resource structure that includes a set of “moderators,” that is people trained to accompany visitors during their experience. This vital specific task includes explaining the context of the work before the users navigate in it, helping the visitors with the devices, and also when they have some sort of problem. In certain set-ups, and especially when the user has to move around the physical space, the headset cables can annoy and make the connection between the virtual world and the user’s real world difficult. This aspect must also be taken care of at the technological level and the moderator can play a key role in this (Salles, personal communication, 2018).

D. Space (where?)

Preliminary question: is the space suitable for setting up the exhibition?

Space is another key category when we plan a virtual reality exhibition. In this case, it is necessary to think about the availability of the projects according to the available space, taking into account that large spaces are required to place computers, tablets, glasses, installations, and Cave automatic virtual environment (CAVE). The type of connectivity, light, and space are other key factors that need to be addressed.

The geographical location of the exhibition is the first thing to consider: assessing whether the space is accessible to visitors, its transport connections, and whether it is well known. The second aspect to consider is the physical space itself, and a layout plan is necessary to locate the different floors, levels, rooms, etc. From here, the next step would be to determine which criteria should be followed to divide the space and what specific human resources are needed to manage each of the spaces (Paz, personal communication, 2018).

If the virtual reality projects are not interactive, there is no problem, as they only need a small space with a chair, glasses, headphones, and a moderator who helps situate the visitor and with any technical problem that may arise during the experience. If the immersive project also includes interactivity, then the equation becomes complicated as this type of project requires a more extensive space and a more complex technological setting. Prior to installing interactive installations or immersive spaces, it is also necessary to consider the economic investment, because it may be necessary to transport the technology from other countries, which involves traveling distances with technical specialists (Salles, personal communication, 2018). An example of this is *The Enemy* (Karim 2015), a transmedia immersive project that puts the user face-to-face with combatants from three conflict zones: with the Maras in Salvador, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in Israel and Palestine. Their testimonies and confessions about their lives, experiences, and perspectives on war allow the users to better understand their motivations and their humanity. In the case of the VR installation, five users at a time equipped with a VR headset and PC backpack can experience this work. Visitors are able to move freely in a room designed with three virtual spaces, each containing two combatants from opposing camps of a conflict. Images and Karim Ben Khelifa's voice guide the visitors before they meet the combatants, who look at and talk to them (Phi Center 2018).

E. Public (Who?)

Preliminary question: who do we wish to reach?

This prompts a further question that should be part of the objectives as well: who is our audience? The second important question to ask is how to attract this audience to the exhibition. We need to determine what other audiences might be interested in and for what reason. One can guarantee a certain audience coming from the sector that the projects represent, and so, to broaden the audience, one should look at attracting those interest in technology generally and young people per se. In this category, we propose different strategies to attract the public:

- As this is a specific type of technology and a relatively new form of narrative expression, this generates mystery and curiosity and makes people interested in coming to visit the projects. In countries like Canada or France, this language is already part of the ecosystem and its use is being normalized, which is why it does not cause such curiosity; however, in other countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, or Colombia, it is something very new and does generate curiosity (Salles, personal communication, 2018).
- The equipment (goggles, sensors, etc.) is not yet standardized, unlike other technologies (computers, mobile devices, televisions, etc.), and this means that people make the effort to go to the exhibition. In previous exhibitions we have coordinated, such as *interDocsBarcelona 2013* interactive exhibition, part of the programming of the interactive section of the DocsBarcelona International Documentary Film Festival (Gifreu-Castells 2013), most of the projects could be consulted on the Internet, and therefore, because it was possible to experience the projects at home, very few people actually went to the exhibition (100 people in one week).

- Another effective strategy is to have some projects (at least one or two) that involve someone important or famous, such as renowned film directors or well-known artists. For example, Wes Anderson's film *Isle of Dogs* (2018) has a virtual reality version as making of. *Isle of Dogs* is a stop-motion animated science fiction comedy drama film written, produced, and directed by Wes Anderson. The story follows a young boy in Japan searching for his dog after the species is banished to an island following the outbreak of a canine flu. Another example could be a project produced by Alejandro González Iñárritu, *Carne y Arena* (*Flesh and Sand*; Iñárritu and Lubezki, 2017). Iñárritu and the director of photography Emmanuel Lubezki worked for four years on this installation in which the viewer puts himself in the shoes of undocumented immigrants who cross into the US from Mexico. Seven minutes in, based on the real testimonies of several immigrants, they are detained in the middle of the desert trying to enter the US illegally.
- Another effective strategy would be to look for synergies with other parallel activities that could attract other types of audiences. This can come from the actual exhibition, that is sometimes the exhibition is part of a larger event (festival, market, congress, etc.), or other similar events happening at the same time as our activity. Often an exhibition is accompanied by conferences, workshops, case studies, presentations, papers, and symposia. And this is where the professional and academic world can find and exchange experiences.
- The fifth strategy, combined with the previous four, is to carry out a large viralization, marketing, and communication campaign to generate curiosity and mystery.

F. Time (When?)

Preliminary questions: the category of “time” refers, first, to the time interval during which the event will take place. It is necessary to consider from the beginning the time of year and time slots: what is the best time to put on the exhibition, when should the event be accessed and does it coincide with other important events (both in relation to the event itself and with other activities)?

In relation to how long it takes to experience the works, there are two aspects to contemplate:

- Waiting time: one of the big problems of these exhibitions is waiting time, because they are usually individual experiences (in most cases). If a work lasts for 20 or 30 minutes, only 2–3 people can access it every hour, which means about 15–25 people a day. In many events, there is no planning and the visitor has to go to the exhibition very early in the morning because all the spots are busy during the day (Salles, personal communication, 2018). An option that a center of reference, the Phi Center of Montréal, has applied is to limit access to 20 visitors per day. Visitors buy an entrance ticket for three hours and rotate, thus avoiding queues and long waiting hours (Salles, personal communication, 2018). The solution that we applied in the *Mostra Bug 2018* exhibition was to use a free application in which people could arrange an agenda where each visitor had to leave their name, telephone number, and commit to being physically on the site five minutes before accessing the work.
- Duration of the work: we recommend selecting works that last for between five and ten minutes, but this will depend on the exhibition's specific objectives and area.

G. Team (Who?)

When we set up the team, we must begin by clarifying some important preliminary questions: who will decide who is the curator? Will the curatorship be carried out by a single person or a group and what is the training and experience of curators in the subject matter?

In the exhibition team, the figure of the “director” (which is also called “producer,” although sometimes there are differences between these roles in certain countries’ cultures) has the most responsibility. This main figure can choose to hire or not a production company that is in charge of the “artistic curation,” or perform this task themselves or with a specialist curator. These specialists are usually creators, artists, or people who work in the social field. Depending on the size of the exhibition there can also be a “coordinator” (Salles, personal communication, 2018).

Another key figure is that of the “moderator.” This figure acts as a “mediator” between the real world and the virtual world. Moderators, whether they are contributors with financial compensation or not, are people who bring visitors from the physical world to the virtual one, and when the users return from the experience, they connect them to the real world again. Moderators undergo training adapted to the specific exhibition. In the case of *Mostra BUG*, there was a moderator (alternation between two shifts of 3–4 hours) and their salary was part of the budget (Paz, personal communication, 2018).

At the technical level, we strongly recommend having a technical team that has experience in VR, and finally someone who manages the whole issue of copyright and intellectual property of the works (here it is necessary to determine whether the event is for profit).

H. Diffusion

Preliminary question: which is the most suitable strategy for the dissemination and diffusion of the exhibition?

Diffusion and dissemination are key aspects that must be planned some time before the exhibition. We have placed them as the last point in our model since they are a synthesis of the previous points. We have divided them into previous and subsequent diffusion.

- Previous dissemination: we recommend conducting a dissemination and viralization campaign of the event in different media and platforms to ensure reaching all audiences: this could include television, radio, newspapers, social media (especially Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and specific video content for WhatsApp).
- Subsequent dissemination: Once the event has finished, it is time to record and show what happened (to have a record or to justify the expense made to those who provided funding). We recommend using existing videos and websites, conducting interviews, and editing them, producing short capsules where people are enjoying the exhibition, and especially surveys to obtain quantitative data, which are used to:
 - Identify what worked and what did not.
 - Justify the expense.
 - In the best case, to obtain funds for another sample.

Conclusion

To conclude, the most important aspects of curating virtual reality exhibitions is to first take enough time to think about the appropriate objectives and intentions of the exhibition: plan your roadmap carefully, because it will determine the future success or failure of the exhibition (A). Second, think about the specific fields you are dealing with and the corpus of works which could best fit/represent these fields (B). Third, think about the kind of technology you need and the different necessary equipment to run the exhibition properly (C). Fourth, this technology needs a space where it can be set up; as well as the physical location of the exhibition itself, think carefully about the distribution of the space (D). It is also important to think about when would be the best time to show your exhibition (E). Time and space will have much to do with the success or failure of the exhibition, but it will be nothing without a public: think about your target audience and look for other complementary targets that could enrich and make your exhibition larger (F). The team is also important to make the best selection of the works and give technical support during the exhibition (G). Finally, in order to attract an audience, you should advertise and “spread the word” through different platforms and channels, so use everything you can to let people know about the exhibition (H).

Finally here is a list with the eight key points that, according to the research, should be taken into account when planning an exhibition:

- A – Have very clear curatorship objectives.
- B – Propose two visiting modes: free and guided +include projects that keep a certain linearity and are not very complex to use.
- C – Keep in mind that part of the success of the exhibition depends on the viability of the technology used.
- D – Have a large, bright space (unless darkness is needed to navigate the projects) and have enough human resources to help visitors, offer information, provide the context of the works, and solve technical problems that arise.
- E –Put on the exhibition during a tourist peak or other similar events in the city/ place.
- F – Have curators specialized in topics and who have technical knowledge.
- G – Establish agreements with brands and manufacturers (equipment in exchange for publicity and dissemination).
- H – Make an effective broadcasting campaign.

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Tracing the Ephemeral and Contestational Aesthetics and Politics of The Living Archive

Eric Kluitenberg

Introduction

Political and activist interventions and event-based arts share a similar problem in relation to the capturing mechanisms of documentation and archiving practices. This problem relates primarily to their respective temporal dimensions. The constitutive element of both political and activist interventions, as well as event-based arts, is “the event,” which unfolds as a living moment. The vitality of the living moment is contained in the intensity of its immediacy. The archive (documentation), in its function of capturing living moments and turning them into historical events, on the contrary constitutes a form of atemporality. Immediacy and atemporality seem essentially at odds here.

In the urgency and vitality of the living moment, both in the arts and in politics and activism, the functions of documentation and memorizing are most often overlooked or even considered redundant or irrelevant. However, it is hard to imagine sensible political interventions without some reference to past events. And the same may hold true for artistic interventions. It would seem that some way of mitigating the apparent contradiction between the vitality of the event and the atemporality of the archive is required to resolve this problem.

This text deals with the question of how this apparent contradiction between the vitality and immediacy of the living moment and the atemporality of the archive can be understood conceptually, and how it can be approached practically.

To address this double question, I will introduce my understanding of the concept of The Living Archive, which I have worked with in different contexts, both theoretically and practically since the early 2000s. The collision of living moments and frozen statements that is implicit within this problem gives rise to a range of theoretical questions, to which the concept of The Living Archive can only provide partial

answers, but at least it is possible to identify the most pressing concerns and questions that are raised through this problem.

On a more practical level the question above addresses three areas that I want to highlight in particular. These are:

- First, the broader question of capturing ephemera, which has been the subject of archiving studies for a longer time, has become increasingly prominent with the growing circulation of digital objects that require some form of documentation in view of their cultural, political, and societal importance.
- More specifically in relation to activist practices and politically engaged forms of ephemeral arts practices (performance, urban interventions, online art works, campaigns) the second important problem relates to the sensitivities and practicalities involved in documenting the contestational.
- The third problem relates more broadly to the relationship of ephemeral art forms and the archive. Here the range is from purely temporary interventions that quite often resist or refuse documentation to ephemeral digital, and online art works that exist only temporarily are often tied to specific generations of digital and media machines, and tend to disappear rather quickly, which imparts this question its urgency. The difference with the second category is that these works need not involve any explicitly “political content” or be conceived with a specific political purpose, yet they bring up highly similar questions toward the sensitivities and practicalities of documenting ephemeral processes.

To develop my argument, I will first discuss the conceptual model of The Living Archive as originally developed in a practice-oriented research project by the same title at De Balie, center of culture and politics in Amsterdam, between 2004 and 2008. This is followed by an examination of four exemplary projects that each embody certain aspects of the characteristics of The Living Archive outlined in the conceptual model, which leads to some preliminary conclusions.

The Living Archive: A Conceptual Model

The practice-oriented research conducted in the collaborative research project “The Living Archive,” was a joint project of De Balie, center for culture and politics in Amsterdam, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, and University of Portsmouth. The research trajectory was founded on a set of assumptions and theoretical starting points that have informed this trajectory from the start. These assumptions and starting points for the research were encapsulated for us in the notion of The Living Archive and are contained here in the brief description of the conceptual model.

The most important idea that underpinned this research project involved a shift toward a discursive understanding of the archive, which is then no longer considered primarily as a collection of (physical) documents and objects. Rather than seeing the act of archiving as the creation of a “mute” repository, we considered it an active process informed by and informing living practices. This idea led us to explore a range of questions implicit within our understanding of the concept of The Living Archive.

Working Definition

The Living Archive refers to a methodology and a software system that draws upon two distinguishing features of the evolving structure of the World Wide Web. First, the process-oriented character of the Web that dynamically links people and organizations in processes of information exchange and communication and, second, the function of the Web as a repository and accessible storage facility for various types of documents and information resources. These two functions cannot self-evidently be unified in a single concept.

The Living Archive aims to create a model in which documentation of living cultural processes, archived materials, ephemera, and discursive practices are interwoven as seamlessly as possible, utilizing advanced online database and content management systems, and digital audio and video technologies. Archiving here is understood as a dynamic open-ended process that acts upon present and future events and is simultaneously acted upon and rewritten by these events and their outcomes. The Living Archive is thus understood not as an immutable repository creating a stable foundation for the “production of meaning” but instead as an active discursive principle emphasizing the contingency of historical development.

Primary Theoretical References

The Archive as an Active Discursive Principle

The reconstitution of the idea of an archive as an active discursive principle is primarily informed by the critical work of Michel Foucault on discourse formation, particularly the delineation of his methodology of “archaeological description” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 2003).¹ In this work, Foucault sets out to specify his method rather than to give a specific description of a particular field of application for it. It is this “methodological” level that we are primarily interested in here.

Foucault awards a central place to the notion of the archive in his method of archeological description, but transforms the concept of the archive significantly in the process of doing so, wherein the traditional idea of the archive the principal orientation is on the document, and the object (in the museum). In Foucault’s understanding of the term “archive” the principal focus is on what he calls the statement and the system of (discursive) rules that bring these statements into being in the first place. These systems include not only the explicit discourse in a particular period and knowledge domain but also the institutional arrangements, the implicit rules that operate in a given period and domain (of which the actors involved may themselves not be fully conscious), and even the physical architectures in which these collections are brought together. It is this system of rules in a given period and domain that the archeological method tries to excavate and understand. The documents and objects in the real-world collections for Foucault merely embody the statements these systems of rules bring about.

The archive in Foucault’s own words is “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 2003: 146), “the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events,” and simultaneously it is that which “determines that all (these) things said do not accumulate in an amorphous mass” (Foucault 2003: 145). The archive is the system that groups “all these things said”

together in distinct figures, “composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained in accordance with specific regularities,” which at the outset and at the “very root of the statement-event” defines what can be expressed in clear and definite terms (“enunciated”).

Thus, the traditional idea of the archive as a repository of documents and objects is rewritten as a system of rules governing the appearance of definite and clear statements that these documents and objects embody. Discourse formation is for Foucault an active process in which existing rules, ideas, and concepts are continuously transformed. And it is exactly in this transformation our own discourses become distinct from the archive, and create the specific difference of our own time and history. This idea emphasizes the discontinuity of history rather than its continuity through time. Revealing the governing rules of the archive and the ways in which active discourse formation constitutes difference to these rules does not result in an escape from the archive. Rather, the archive is rewritten by these acts. The archive can never be fully uncovered according to Foucault, if only because we are ourselves part of it; our own discourses are (in part) governed by its rules. The archive can, however, be engaged by actively uncovering the rules that govern “the appearance of statements as unique events” in the archive and modifying them.

The Living Archive is a conscious and active engagement with these systems of rules.

Cultural Memory as an Active Political Principle

The Living Archive is less concerned with physical memory objects as it is with an active engagement of living cultural processes. Here we find the concept a “cultural memory,” as it has been developed by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, extremely useful (Assmann 1997). Assmann speaks of cultural memory as a connective structure founding group identity through ritual and textual coherence. He explains that the past is never remembered for its own sake. Its main functions are to create a sense of continuity and to act as a motor for development. The present is situated at the end of a collective path as meaningful, necessary, and unalterable. Assmann defines such cultural narratives as “mytho-motorics.” They motivate development and change by presenting the present as a deficient reflection of a heroic mythological past – a past that should be restored for the future.

Assmann’s view implies that cultural memory acts beyond the founding of group identity and the continuity of the present with the past, into the future. It presents a particular view of the future as necessary, and provides direction for collective action in the present to move toward it. The goal is to recapture and restore the ideals lost in the deficient imperfections of present-day life, ideals that can be retained through collective action, whether in the form of ritual or rather through revolutionary change.

Archives, museums, monuments, religious and artistic artifacts, architecture, and literature are some of the typical memory objects that are narrated and used as foundations for cultural memory. It is their instrumental presence that denies the discontinuity of history and experience and can act as a catalyst for social and political mobilization of various kinds. A critical engagement and possible deconstruction or

intervention into the narration of cultural memory is an important tactical imperative for the construction of living archives. Living archives actively engage the construction of mythological cultural narratives to emphasize the contingency and open-ended character of historical development, and the possibilities for active involvement of a variety of actors in their determination.

The Database as Cultural Form

In his book *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich expands his previously published analysis of the database as a symbolic and cultural form (Manovich 2001). In the section “Forms and the Database,” Manovich argues that the database form has become a key category of contemporary culture. This transition was prepared on the one hand by a series of philosophical, cultural, and social changes that increasingly lead us to experience the world as “an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records,” for which it is most appropriate to model them as a database (Manovich 2001: 214). On the other hand, through the increasing presence of computer databases in daily life, this computer-based form has migrated back into culture at large, both literally and conceptually, according to Manovich: “A Library, a museum – in fact, any large collection of cultural data – is replaced by a computer database. At the same time, a computer database becomes a new metaphor that we use to conceptualize individual and collective cultural memory, a collection of documents or objects, and other phenomena and experiences” (Manovich 2001: 214).

Manovich argues that, in an age where all design has become information design, the database form, the interface to the database, and information access have become key categories of culture. He insists that, accordingly, this demands that we deal with these new key categories of culture theoretically, aesthetically, and symbolically (Manovich 2001: 217). In *The Living Archive* (following Manovich analysis) we study the database form not simply as a purely functional principle but as a cultural and symbolic form that provides cultural meaning and simultaneously is shaped by the contemporary cultural context.

Manovich introduces an important distinction between the database and the narrative as a cultural form, which becomes important in the light of our discussion of cultural memory and its inherent construction of mythological narratives mentioned above. He writes: “As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, the database and the narrative are natural enemies” (Manovich 2001: 225).

“Tactical media” can be regarded as an intervention into the construction of dominant narratives of cultural memory that create cause-and-effect trajectories, which suggest necessary outcomes and future destinations. The tactical intervention of tactical media denies the necessity of these outcomes and aims to provide alternative trajectories. Similarly, we have conceived of *The Living Archive* as a tactical intervention into the creation of the archive and its implicit construction of cultural narratives. *The Living Archive* can seize upon this quality of the database refusing to “order the list of items” and create cause-and-effect trajectories to allow for the construction of multiple and alternative narratives within the archive.

Characteristics of The Living Archive

The Living Archive was a practice-oriented research trajectory. The research therefore involved the translation of our theoretical starting points and assumptions into practical methodologies that specify its principal characteristics. The theoretical starting points and assumptions stated before, taken together with the practical methodologies stated below, can be regarded as the description of the constitutive elements of the theoretical model of the living archive.

Building on our theoretical starting points, the principal methodologies of the Living Archive can be grouped into three main categories:

- **Archiving as a dynamic open-ended process**
 - The Living Archive builds upon a dynamic interplay of archiving methodologies with living cultural processes. The archive and the processes of living cultures draw upon and inform each other. This dynamic relation is supported by real-time (synchronous) and stored (asynchronous) digital capturing technologies and methods, designed to support and capture events and information exchange processes.
 - While The Living Archive in no way contradicts the inclusion of physical objects and documents in the archive, its main emphasis lies on “intangible cultural heritage” (as defined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage),² and “ephemera,”³ as primary “materials” for the archive.
 - The Living Archive is an active engagement with the formative processes of cultural memory as a “connective” process-oriented structure, based on active and continuous reinterpretation of memory objects (material and intangibles).
 - Through its emphasis on living cultural processes, intangibles, and ephemera, the event assumes a central position in the archive.
 - The Living Archive is not simply a repository of memory objects: it involves the construction of a set of documentation tools for capturing current and future events as they unfold.
- **Archiving as a discursive principle**
 - The Living Archive aims to extend the “temporal dispersion” of events. It intervenes in the preparation of the event and involves the system of “discursive formation” antecedent to the event, as well as its continued reinterpretation a posteriori.
 - The Living Archive therefore involves the full integration of (online) discussion and live coverage tools with archiving functions that capture not only the event itself but also the interpretative contributions made by the various actors actively involved in its creation and execution, before, during, and after the actual event.
 - The Living Archive further requires a set of tools that support and enable the continuous reinterpretation and annotation of archived materials, including rich media sources such as audio and video recordings.
- **Open editorial policies**
 - The archive determines the authority of statements (following Foucault). The democratizing aspiration of The Living Archive can therefore only be attained by distributing editorial control over the inclusion of particular statements in the archive. Open, distributed, shared, and collaborative editorial policies are therefore necessarily a constitutive element of The Living Archive.

- Traceability of the editorial history of the archive: The Living Archive considers the archive as an intrinsic part of the process of discursive formation and the establishment of authoritative statements. Therefore, the editorial history of the “statements” included in the archive is an indispensable element of the process of discursive formation that The Living Archive needs to make visible.
- The Living Archive draws upon established social and editorial practices that characterize the development of the internet. Self-organizing editorial processes that the Internet itself inherited from its predecessor Usenet⁴ and the proliferation of self-organized newsgroups, currently continued in technical discussion groups on protocol standardization and other core software technologies of the Internet. These established practices are a primary reference for the shaping of the distributed editorial policies of The Living Archive. More recent experiences gained from massive user-generated content support services are another crucial reference.

“Operational” Living Archives

It would be justified to assert that The Living Archive as outlined in the conceptual model does not exist as yet. However, its elements and necessary prerequisites can be specified. Perhaps the closest approximation of this model in operation today is Wikipedia, primarily because of the open-ended character of its editorial process and its participatory structure. However, Wikipedia is not conceived of as an archive per se but much rather as a dynamic knowledge resource, extending from the grand tradition of the physical encyclopedia. The politics and policies of Wikipedia are the subject of a broad range of studies and active critical discussions, both within the wider editorial community of Wikipedia itself and its various regional chapters, as well as in a variety of critical external analyses. This wide-ranging discussion is entirely beyond the scope of the current text.

I do wish to point out one important aspect of the unique position of Wikipedia, however, which is the result of what can be called the “network effect.” The uniqueness of Wikipedia is not simply determined by the fact that there is no other comparable online knowledge resource available today – neither in its comprehensiveness nor in its participatory character. Much rather it is important to recognize the winner-takes-all effect that gives Wikipedia this unique position. This winner-takes-all effect is a general characteristic of digital systems, particularly of networked digital systems and, by extension, the network economy.

Similar “unique,” or rather exclusive, positions can be found in a range of digital (software) products and (online) services. This effect can be elucidated by asking a number of very simple questions about this peculiar characteristic of digital systems and the networked economy, such as: why is everybody using MS Word? Why is everybody using Google Search? Why is Facebook the dominant social networking platform? In all cases the answer to this question is the same: because everybody is using MS Word, Google Search, Facebook, and comparable dominant networked-market players. The value of these digital products and services grows exponentially, both for the companies offering them as well as for the users who actually use them, with an increase of scale and tighter interconnectivity. This dynamic is facilitated through the logic of perfect digital copies combined with the growing capacities for interconnectivity of digital networking technologies, in particular the “public” Internet as we know it today.

Similarly, Wikipedia has become the dominant online knowledge resource, which can sustain itself exactly because of this exclusive position that enables it to attract the volume of traffic, donations, and active user contributions that no other collective knowledge platform is able to garner for itself. This is primarily the result of a lack of comparable economies of scale. The important implication of the winner-takes-all effect, which pertains to Wikipedia as much as to the commercial digital services and platforms, which we all know and make use of (directly or indirectly) on a daily basis, is that their model is essentially not repeatable. Only when a new platform would be created that replaces Wikipedia entirely as the prime online public knowledge resource, and thereby takes over its exclusive position at the center of the network, will its current position be challenged (disrupted). However, given the exponential rise in value of these central network positions once established, such positions become all but unassailable because of the concentration of resources. The relative strengths and weaknesses of these products and services (commercial and noncommercial) seem to matter much less for their success than their scale and exclusive position at the center of the network.

Living archives that nonetheless attempt to establish themselves to address a particular need or specific audience therefore tend to adopt a different approach than the one indicated by the Wikipedia model. Their approach is more often determined by the local circumstances they operate in, and the aims set by their initiators. I want to examine four initiatives (platforms) here that can be viewed as imperfect approaches to the essentially unattainable “ideal” of The Living Archive, but that nonetheless offer tremendous value in the attempt to approximate that ideal.

These four initiatives are the Tactical Media Files online documentation resource, bak.ma, the digital media archive of social movements in Turkey, and Vox Populi, a project by artist Lara Baladi that assembles media documents of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath. Finally, the Syrian Archive, a resource which aims to support human rights investigators, advocates, media reporters, and journalists in their efforts to document human rights violations during the armed conflicts in Syria since 2012. Each of these projects embodies different and overlapping aspects of The Living Archive model. Thereby they highlight tensions and sensitivities implicit within the concept and the practices it informs.

Tactical Media Files

The Tactical Media Files⁵ is an online documentation resource of Tactical Media’s practices, including their legacies and context. The platform was created in the frame of The Living Archive research trajectory at De Balie in Amsterdam, and launched publicly in November 2008.

The project was initiated by artist and researcher David Garcia and me to address the apparent condition of selective amnesia that seemed to afflict the diverse coalition of experimental media artists, political activists, dissident lifestylers, radical theorist, and community media makers that met up in the Next 5 Minutes festival series (Amsterdam and Rotterdam, 1993–2003), which gave Tactical Media its name.

The idea was to make materials and ideas brought together in these energetic and influential events available to new generations of artists, activists, researchers, students, and other interested parties. The resource was created on the basis of the

archive holdings of the festival series located at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. The materials digitized from these holdings have subsequently been complemented by new materials that refer directly or indirectly to the practices of Tactical Media and their legacies.

The resource is deliberately not organized as a traditional archive, but rather around categories that result from the cultural practices Tactical Media has traditionally been immersed in, i.e. festivals, art projects, media and public space interventions, community media, campaigns, and different forms of political contestation. These action categories are in turn intersected by a series of thematic topics that connect materials from different contexts across time and geography. The resource includes a large body of texts, visuals, publications and books, and an extensive video collection, all freely accessible.

“Tactical media” as a concept refers to the way in which different groups and individuals take media into their own hands to address their concerns over misrepresentation and marginalization in the wider public domain and public culture. This public culture has become increasingly defined in terms of mediation by electronic and digital media with evolving generations of media technologies. Particularly as they became more accessible to nonprofessional media makers, leading to a situation today where virtually anybody who wants to can have access to these media tools and infrastructures (through mobile phones, Internet-based media platforms and social media in particular). The main questions associated with these evolving practices have consequently shifted from fights over access to media tools and infrastructures to addressing issues of context, disinformation, and public attention.

As initiators of the resource we recognized that it was impossible to comprehensively document and capture this rapidly evolving field of practice, in which people might indeed be doing “tactical media” without ever thinking or knowing about tactical media (Stalder 2008). Nor would we be able to occupy a field where such (editorial) discussions could be hosted with a Wikipedia-style approach to collective editing, for a range of practical, organizational, and material reasons. Furthermore, it might not even be deemed desirable to attempt to occupy such a position, and we considered it more prudent to accept the limitations of the undertaking from the start.

Instead, what we have proposed from the initiation of the project is that the online resource is only one aspect of the overall endeavor. The website and resource act as a means of collecting materials and ideas associated to them over time, in an open-ended editorial process. On the basis of this collection and process physical events are organized at irregular intervals that open up the process and ideas to critical scrutiny by both the initiatives and makers documented in the resource as well as the general audience. Examples are the Media Squares symposium and workshops at De Balie in Amsterdam (2011),⁶ and the Tactical Media Connections public research trajectory (2014–2017),⁷ which resulted in public debates and exhibitions in Amsterdam, Liverpool, and Basel in 2017.

The idea is to see the documentation process as an activity that is continuously informed by living practices and feeds into a permanent critical public debate about these practices, while actively shaping these practices themselves. One of the key ideas behind the concept of tactical media was that tactical media never represent an event, but that they always participate in it (Lovink and Garcia). Thus the participatory logic

is always at the heart of tactical media practices, and similarly at the heart of this documentation resource. With that, no statement documented here is ever considered final and is always open to scrutiny and debate. These physical events are a vital and indispensable part of the living practice of documenting and through their documentation become themselves part of the documentation resource.

bak.ma

One of the digital media archive of social movements in Turkey is bak.ma⁸. From Gezi to Tekel workers' resistance, 19 January to Hewsel, it aims to reveal the recent political history of Turkey with audio-visual recordings, documentations, and testimonies. Bak.ma positions itself as an anonymous, autonomous open-access digital media archive.

The bak.ma project was initiated in 2013 by media artists and activists in different Turkish cities in the frame of the #occupygezi protests that started in Istanbul and spread to many other cities in the country. Video collectives assembled their materials and the materials of ordinary citizens during the protests, and the violent reactions of authorities to these protests. However, the initiators stress that an important objective of the collections is to show the nonviolent discussions and public manifestations that were staged during the time of the protests and its connections to other, earlier, social movements in Turkey.

The resource includes visual and textual documents as well as media documents (sound and video recordings) and interviews with protestors, organizers, and theorists linked to the various actions and movements documented in the resource, using mostly open-source digital media tools to make these materials accessible online to enable transparency of the resource, but also to make it easier to duplicate preserve the archive. The archival system used by bak.ma is based on the pad.ma project, short for Public Access Digital Media Archive, created between Berlin and Bangalore since 2010.⁹

Bak.ma is a clear example of an archiving initiative initiated from the ground up, by the people actually affected by and involved in the events and actions captured in the resource. As such it cannot and does not lay claim to the production of historical statements – the function ascribed by Foucault to “The Archive” in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* as discussed in the section on the conceptual model of The Living Archive. Instead, bak.ma documents a series of positions and practices that are highly localized, specific, and largely temporary. Such practices are very much determined by the urgency of the moment and the specific local context in which they unfold, and because of that “documentation” is often not a prime concern of the actors involved in these actions, with the exception of prosecuting authorities that might use such documentation practices for prosecution or other repressive purposes.

The initiators, however, insist on the memorizing function of these documentation practices to be able to create a living memory of these ephemeral events, and to be able to build connections between different social movements, operating in different times and different local contexts. Documentation is organized here according to criteria determined by the participants in the events themselves, not by an outside authority. Again, the participatory character of the archival practice that results from this is a prime concern for the initiators, which connects the archival closely to the social praxes captured by the resource.

Vox Populi

Vox Populi is an ongoing initiative by the Egyptian Lebanese artist Lara Baladi. The project includes a series of media initiatives, artworks, publications, and an open-source timeline and portal giving access to web-based archives of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath, as well as other related global social movements.

On the project website Baladi comments on the background of her project:

On January 28 2011, I joined the people in Tahrir as a regular citizen. Just as the YouTube video “Tiananmen–Cairo Courage in Cairo” went viral, a friend posted on Facebook a speech Jean-Paul Sartre had delivered to an audience of striking French autoworkers 40 years earlier. As the political tension grew, more and more images and videos of a packed Tahrir Square were uploaded. They echoed footage from other uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as a vast array of past social movements. It was as though Sartre was protesting with us in Tahrir.

In an attempt to keep track of the events unfolding on the ground, I set about documenting and archiving, videos, photographs, articles and further data related to the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath, while also collecting material on major events taking place around the world at that time. In parallel I researched and amassed footage that resonated with Tahrir Square and everything that followed, from historical footage (of which the Sartre speech is an example) to philosophical discourses, to banned cartoons, to political satire ... I called this ongoing archive Vox Populi...¹⁰

In 2011, Baladi was part of the impressive Tahrir Cinema project, a public screen on Tahrir Square in the midst of occupation during the summer, where in the evenings curated selections of video documentations of the 2011 anti-Mubarak uprising and related events were shown to an audience of thousands, often the very people who had been part of these events themselves or even produced the documents being screened.¹¹ The project can best be described as a form of collective self-representation in a particularly tumultuous and intense period of recent Egyptian history.

Crucial to the curated selections was the extensive collection of video documents that had been collected from the earliest moments of the first occupation of Tahrir Square in January 2011. A group of artists, writers, actors, and filmmakers decided to set up a media tent at the heart of the square where media documents made by the protestors were collected, and basic instructions of how to shoot more useful videos were given to essentially anyone partaking in the events. This initiative laid the foundation for the creation of the Mosireen independent media center¹² in Cairo and the extensive archive of people’s documents created in the middle of the uprising.

In these initiatives, the archived footage takes on an active role in determining the self-awareness of individual participants as being part of a larger protest “movement” (though never formally declared as a coherent entity) and a tool for activating a larger constituency. As with Tactical Media these initiatives are less concerned with “documenting” the events in any conventional archival understanding but rather participate in the events to amplify and extend them. There is an immediate relation and exchange between the archival materials and the embodied actions on the streets and squares and the wider public domain. The “authority” of the collected (archived) materials derives less from rigorous archival policies, clear taxonomies, and

transparent categorization, as it does from their ability to activate a larger constituency. The “living archive” in this case becomes a decidedly political tool, making the implicit politics of the archive unequivocally clear.

The Syrian Archive

The Syrian Archive is a largely independent initiative that aims to support human rights investigators, advocates, media reporters, and journalists in their efforts to document human rights violations committed during the armed conflicts in Syria since 2012. The initiators pursue this goal through developing new open-source tools as well as providing a transparent and replicable methodology for collecting, preserving, verifying, and investigating visual documentation in conflict areas.¹³

The initiators state that they believe “visual documentation of human rights violations that is transparent, detailed, and reliable are critical towards providing accountability and can positively contribute to postconflict reconstruction and stability. Such documentation can humanize victims, reduce the space for dispute over numbers killed, help societies understand the true human costs of war, and support truth and reconciliation efforts.”¹⁴

The initiators further state that verified user-generated visual documentation can also be valuable in relation to humanitarian response planning, in supporting mechanisms that increase legal compliance by conflict parties, and strengthen advocacy campaigns and legal accountability, documenting human rights violations in the Syrian conflict.¹⁵

The Syrian Archive also addresses the discursive dimension of The Living Archive, as the initiators state that “visual documentation allows the Syrian Archive to tell untold stories through amplifying the voices of witnesses, victims and others who risked their lives to capture and document human rights violations in Syria.”¹⁶ Here the Syrian Archive shows strong similarity to the principles of tactical media, especially the central idea that Tactical Media never report events, but always participate in them, and in that sense are never impartial.¹⁷

Through collecting, verifying, preserving, and investigating visual documentation of human rights violations in Syria, the initiators of the Syrian Archive aim to “preserve data as a digital memory, to establish a verified database of human rights violations, and to act as an evidence tool for legally implementing justice and accountability as concept and practice in Syria.”¹⁸ This legal dimension adds a notably different function to the Syrian Archive as compared with Tactical Media Files and Vox Populi. The possibility of an involvement in legal procedures related to the prosecution of human rights offences committed in the Syrian conflict introduces a strategic dimension to the resource that builds upon the stated functions of documentation and memorization.

This strategic function is enacted through three core principles of the research methodology that underpins the Syrian Archive project: (1) content identification, acquisition and standardization; (2) secure long-term preservation; and (3) verification, cataloging and metadata enrichment.¹⁹ The debate that will ensue from this strategic legal dimension of the resource will undoubtedly focus on the question of how far these materials can be admitted to legal proceedings as reliable sources of information of events that happened “on the ground” during the conflict. And this

question will in turn center on the robustness of the research methodology that the initiators have proposed.

Some Conclusions

There is an inherent tension that results from the conflicting temporalities of the vitalist energies of the activist moment and the event-based arts, and the capturing mechanisms of the archive and documentation practices. The theoretical and practical work on *The Living Archive* was an attempt to address this tension without enforcing a homogenizing ordering on its constitutive elements. The *Living Archive* model does not accept the fixation of objects and events into “clear and definite statements” (Foucault 2003), or their static categorization and classification that in some form would manifest history. The model rejects a mytho-motoric narration of past, present, and future in the service of any particular strategic political program, or the construction of mythological cultural narratives (Assmann 1997). The *Living Archive* instead emphasizes the contingency and open-ended character of historical development.

Because of this specific aim, the discursive dimension of *The Living Archive* is the most important characteristic of the model and its associated practices. This discursive dimension can manifest itself in editorial tools applied in online applications, of which the open editorial structure of Wikipedia is perhaps the best example to date. But importantly it can also manifest itself in an extended engagement with the socio-political and cultural context in which such documentation resources and practices operate. In the case of the *Tactical Media Files* resource this is realized less through the online application, which is open access but read/view-only but rather through public debates and gatherings around the resource and the evolving practices of *Tactical Media*.

The discursive dimension can unfold therefore both in online debates as well as extended face to face public meetings, debates, workshops, conferences, and live streaming events with audience feedback channels. The aim of these processes is not to reach a commonly achieved meta-categorization or classification of objects and events. Instead, the aim of such activities is to facilitate a continuous reinterpretation of these objects and events so that no final categorization or classification is ever established. The *Living Archive* concept firmly rejects any attempt at the construction of such final categorizations or classifications.

Public research is the principal research methodology to develop *Living Archive* resources – a form of research that is conducted from the beginning in full public view and that involves both the wider audience as well as any constituent group, individual, or entity involved with the objects and events the research is about. Here again both online discussion and dissemination tools as well as face-to-face gatherings contribute to opening the research process from inception to realization for the public. In the ideal form of *The Living Archive* this involves not only feedback on established research questions and objects but crucially also the definition stage of these questions and the selection of research objects themselves. What *The Living Archive* aims at with this methodology is the discursive dispersal of the archive, rather than its stabilization.

From these principles, it should already be clear that *The Living Archive* cannot be conceived of as a politically neutral position. The *Living Archive* shares with *Tactical*

Media the operational principle that it never simply documents or reports events but always participates and engages actively in them. However, this engagement necessarily has to remain open ended; otherwise, The Living Archive risks quickly becoming a political tool.

In the cases discussed above, which rely heavily on user-generated content (the bak.ma archive, the Vox Populi project, and the Syrian Archive), these questions become extremely urgent. In part because of the origin of the objects brought together in these projects but also because of the active engagement of these projects in an unfolding and in all three cases highly charged political context. The question that is pertinent to such complicated projects is how to involve a radically dispersed constituency (the “users” generating the materials) in the construction of the resource. This question for the moment remains largely unresolved.

Given the refusal of the fixation of objects and events into a stable categorization and classification within the Living Archive model, the aim of the Syrian Archive to involve itself in possible future legal proceedings against perpetrators of human rights violations in the Syrian conflict becomes particularly problematic. The issue of the verification of source materials is contentious and should, following the logic of the Living Archive concept, be open to continued critical scrutiny, which puts the concept at odds with the proposed evidential function of these verified materials and the stated aims of the verification process.

The emphasis of The Living Archive on living cultural processes, intangibles, and ephemera, and the central position of the event in the model, makes its functional principles also highly relevant for the documentation of event-based arts. While these art forms may not always share the political urgency and contentiousness of the four projects discussed here, they do share the inherent tension between the vitality of the living moment, so central to the event-based arts, and the static character of capturing mechanisms of the archive and documentation practices. The capture, for instance, of performance art works in video documents is almost always felt as deeply unsatisfactory. Instead, the discursive dispersal of the experiences gained by those present at the actual event, published commentaries and reviews, discussions of the work over time, reinterpretations, controversies, media reports, all contribute to a much deeper understanding of the work and its context. Such an interpretative process is ideally never closed, but evolves with growing distance to the event’s living moment that facilitate its further dispersal.

Video documents (registrations), research notes (by the artist and others involved in the creation of the event), sketches, prepared materials used during the event, audience recordings, and any other materials relating to the event then take on the role of support documents for the evolving discussion of the work’s meaning and significance.

This documentation model can also be helpful in addressing technology-based works of art, such as Internet artworks, often relying on specific generations of hardware and software that quickly become defunct with new lineages of digital machines. The question discussed most often concerns what to “archive”. The original digital work together with its technical support structure? A task often beyond the scope of traditional memory organizations – or is it better to focus on documenting the context of the work, from its inception to audience reception? The Living Archive model can include potentially both dimensions, but it integrates them into an ongoing cultural and artistic debate that evolves as an a priori open-ended discursive process.

Notes

- 1 In particular Part II – section 5, *The Historical a priori and the Archive*, 142–148.
- 2 Definition: “1. The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.” Source: UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, article 2. www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00022&art=art2#art2.
- 3 We follow here the working definition of ephemera, taken from Maurice Rickards *Encyclopedia of Ephemera*, as adopted by CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals): “*The minor transient documents of everyday life*”. See also:
 - “Ephemera: the stuff of history” – Report of the Working Party on Ephemera set up by CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), Cilip/re: source, January 2003. www.cilip.org.uk/policyadvocacy/informationociety/preservation/ephemera.htm
 - Rickards, Maurice and Twyman, Michael (ed.). (2000; reprinted 2002) *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator and Historian*. New York: Routledge.
- 4 Further information about the genealogy of Usenet and the Internet can be found here: <https://www.livinginternet.com/u/u.htm>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 5 www.tacticalmediafiles.net, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 6 www.tacticalmediafiles.net/events/4780, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 7 <http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/articles/3646>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 8 <http://bak.ma>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 9 <https://pad.ma/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 10 See: <http://tahrirarchives.com>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 11 A vivid description of the project can be found here: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/tahrir-cinema-displays-revolutionary-power-archives/>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 12 <http://mosireen.org>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 13 See: <https://syrianarchive.org/en/about>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 See the Introduction of Lovink and Garcia (1997). <http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/articles/3160>, accessed 13 March 2019.
- 18 <https://syrianarchive.org/en/about> – section: “Vision,” accessed 13 March 2019.
- 19 *ibid.*

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Curating with the Internet

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For more than half the world's population,¹ the Internet is a definitive shaping condition of everyday life. Yet despite its ubiquitous and still growing influence across virtually every sphere of activity in developed societies, its magnitude is still being processed by artists and curators. To be sure, in at least a basic sense, everyone who uses a smartphone or personal computer is now a curator and archivist of sorts.² Today, a significant portion of everyday work and social and domestic activity is invested in the selection, organization, and presentation of vast quantities of images, documents, data, links, and audio and moving image media. Increasingly, these activities take place in networked relationships with remote servers popularly metaphorically abstracted as “the Cloud.”³ Significantly, much of this networked screen-based activity is centered around strategies of selection and display that seek to attract and direct attention as a form of currency. Bordering on an obsession for some, and accelerated by almost continuous access to the Internet and digital imaging technologies, this phenomenon is particularly evident in the way that social media services such as Facebook (or WeChat in China), Twitter, and Instagram are used as vehicles for presenting carefully curated yet paradoxically generic representations of individuated expression, taste, and opinion. At the extreme end, these forms of presentational filtering become bankable brands. But before we go any further down this track, we should probably ask ourselves: in what contexts, and in what kinds of ways, do these kinds of activities meaningfully constitute a form of curatorial selection? Undeniably, using technology to engage with communities of interest is as much the domain of everyday life as it is art. Indeed, certain activities clearly seek to qualify in both realms. Yet, as is the case with any ontological doubling presented through art, certain mutually insufficient characteristics – such as concept and aesthetic (Osborne 2013) – are invariably required.

This chapter explores Internet-based and Internet-activated approaches to curating art through both established and nontraditional exhibition circuits. In some cases, as

we will see, curating with the Internet need not be categorically differentiated from curatorial practices more generally. Yet, as this chapter also reveals, there are many significant ways in which the Internet – or, to be more precise in most instances, the World Wide Web⁴ – has given rise to significant shifts in curatorial thinking and practice. Today, new curatorial approaches are emerging in tandem with digitally activated modes of presentation and dissemination distinguished by perpetual reproducibility, multiple intersecting temporalities, and materializations, and the subsidence of physical space. Accordingly, this chapter discusses networked, distributed, and modular approaches that variously disrupt, democratize, antagonize, institutionalize – and in some cases altogether bypass – the figure of the curator. Significantly, many of these approaches are no longer necessarily connected to singular events or spaces and are perhaps better understood as omnidirectional movements between modes of conception, production, and dissemination connected through the screen as a communal space. This communal space might offer either access to new works, illuminate the existence of works understood to be elsewhere in time and space, or offer multiple or alternative materializations, versions, attributions, interpretations, and representations of existing works.

Novelty, Banality or Transformation?

As already indicated, anybody who actively uses the Internet is now a *de facto* curator of sorts – especially whenever a link or content is shared with a view to recontextualizing, reconfiguring, or translating meaning. For the serious observer, however, the question soon turns to whether or not this sharing of links has brokered a deeper critical or experiential engagement. Are such activities – like so many taking place across a present that is now as obese as history is deep – meaningfully differentiated through specialization or expertise?⁵ Or to put it another way: if everyone is now a curator, do professional curators matter? Or do we need other kinds of evaluative tools and strategies? (We return to this second question later in this chapter.)

The last two decades have seen a digitally driven transformation in cultural production and distribution commensurate with the emergence of mechanical and photomechanical reproduction. Across countless fields of activity, websites that enable content sharing have led to the formation of both popular and highly specialized user-populated and user-generated taxonomies. Just as established institutions have opened up the searchability of their collections, so too have lay enthusiasts created and maintained sharable worlds of content. So, to rephrase our earlier question, if anyone can potentially curate connections between materials found or placed online, what are the hallmarks of professional curatorial activity on the Internet? Do we simply retool the curatorial axiology of ethics, aesthetics, and politics for the digital age?

Today, the Internet is increasingly seen as more a banality than a novelty. Artists and general web users alike (united in the form of a contemporary subject that at once produces and consumes) both routinely recycle online material and repurpose the context of transmission to generate new meanings or reveal hitherto invisible contradictions. As US-based British art historian Claire Bishop notes, for many contemporary artists, the twentieth-century strategy of appropriation has mutated to become a default form of repurposing engaged with the perpetual “reformatting and

transcoding ... of preexisting files” (Bishop 2012: 438). Faced with an informational world of ever-expanding “infobesity,” art can often struggle to assert cultural significance. For many observers, this condition has been glaringly apparent for some time. As US critic James Westcott put it in 2008, how do “artists working with palettes like YouTube, Google Images or porn do more than just churn the overflowing archive of easily, almost boringly, available cultural knowledge?” (Westcott 2008).

Although the task of distinguishing art and non-art in an online context is not necessarily distinguishable from the broader philosophical problem of art and non-art, it is clearly difficult to exceed arbitrariness without resorting to empty spectacle in a realm in which it is possible to scroll through dozens of images in seconds by simply swiping a finger. How do artists and curators compete with this cacophony of competing distractions? For British philosopher Peter Osborne, this situation is inherently paradoxical, for “art distracts, as well as resisting distraction [yet] is received in distraction” (Osborne 2013: 186.) Consequently, for Osborne, the artistic implications of the Internet remain unclear:

Today, with the digitally based convergence of audio-visual communication technologies, the training ground of distracted reception has moved again, from television to the multiplying sites and social functions of the interactive, liquid crystal-display screen: smartphones and tablet computers, in particular. We are experiencing a new, much more spatially diffuse “cult of distraction” of the internet, the social and economic – but not yet the artistic – significance of which is clear. (Osborne 2013: 185)

It is unsurprising, given the nature of the Internet itself, that much Internet-based art both employs and reflects upon practices of copying, hyperlinking, sharing, tagging, and filtering. Accordingly, the way in which the Internet now forms the subject, theme, and method of much contemporary art has led to a proliferation of curatorial activities that variously reflect upon, take place within, or are organized online. Moreover, peer-to-peer technologies, through which users routinely modify and re-post media objects, have further problematized residual assumptions that artists create, whilst curators select and interpret. At any rate, the currency of the professional curator is potentially augmented in an online realm. Given that professional curators no longer simply organize and arrange exhibitions but also *create* events, texts, conferences, and archives – all the while attending to respective online representations thereof – the relative prestige, visibility, and influence of the curator in relation to that of the artist (notwithstanding the blurring of these roles) can be disproportionate. In his reading of German critic Boris Groys, Osborne notes that the already established mediating role of the curator as “the performer of the image” (Groys 2008: 85) has, through processes of digitalization, enabled the “curator to usurp the role of the artist” (Osborne 2013: 130).

This ascension of the curator is, however, far from settled. Low-cost access to tools of production, selection, and aggregation means that most in the “connected world” are – theoretically, at least – now both content producers and selectors. With content filtering, once the preserve of curators and editors, now a ubiquitous activity, curators need to further differentiate their professional roles. For curatorial theorists Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook (2010), three metaphors usefully applicable to the curating of digitally centered works are “curator as filter,” “curator as editor,” and “curator as context provider” (11). Although much curating of “net.art” emphasizes the role of curator as a filter, online curating can also be differentiated in relation to technology

driven variations of participatory, collaborative, and discursive activities such as naming, categorizing, highlighting, list making, moderating, and editing (Graham and Cook 2010: 11). Many of these activities simply constitute inviting audiences to experience data streams in new configurations or contexts. Others are more transformative. In any case, clear distinctions between editor, author, publicist, designer, producer, project manager, and stylist are easily blurred in online realms in which curatorial activities might range from generative to managerial roles. Moreover, this blurring further problematizes already shaky distinctions between curators, artists, archivists, and audiences.

A key characteristic of much Internet-based art is that it effectively employs the same technical means in circulation, storage, display, conservation, and reproduction. In this sense, the broader problem of an inseparability of form and content in contemporary art is applicable. The Internet is not simply a tool or medium but rather a *world* within which to research, conceptualize, produce, and distribute works. For Canadian theorist Caitlin Jones, the laptop “serves simultaneously as the tool, the space, the product and the frame” (Jones 2010). Digital technologies also facilitate the easy remediation and simulation of existing works. A website, for example, might simultaneously present elements otherwise presented in books, films, radio programming, television, and physical exhibition spaces. In this sense, the Internet effectively flattens a replication of all other reproducible media. Meanwhile, a vast array of other human activities, from communication to relaxation to conflict, are also seamlessly flattened in a generic activity of looking at a screen and inputting information. Online, invisible technologies can *appear* to dissolve boundaries and unify distributive systems into singularly identifiable yet multitudinous networked spaces. This convergence of activities is particularly interesting for some artists and curators. Slovenian artist Aleksandra Domanović’s curatorial work, for example, addresses ways in which we consume and research culture through the screen. Flattening was the subject of Domanović’s 2009 Biennale (Dictum Ac Factum) – which comprised a website featuring embedded images, files, and clips foregrounding a circular mayhem of dynamic cannibalistic becoming. Also, noteworthy here is the online curatorial collaboration VVork.com (with Oliver Laric, Christoph Priglinger, and Georg Schnitzer).

Today, although still at the beginning of a presumably long incoming tide, Internet-based curatorial activities are becoming relatively more common. One example of a more recent innovative online curatorial strategy is *#exstrange*. This live web-based project was initiated by Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini between 15 January 2017 and 15 April 2017 and used the online marketplace eBay as an exhibition vehicle for a curatorial strategy explicitly exploring relationships between artistic production, commerce, and cultural exchange (Ghidini and Modrak 2018). Comprising a series of “artworks-as-auctions” specifically created by artists and designers for eBay, the work effectively foregrounded the eBay listing – i.e. descriptive texts, images, pricing, and categories – as both artistic and curatorial medium. Presented in discrete categories (such as Business and Industry, Collectibles, Consumer Electronics, Health and Beauty, Real Estate, and Warranty Services), this was an exhibition strategy clearly designed to reach a diverse global audience. Significantly, 102 individual “artworks-as-auctions” were created and presented during the *#exstrange* exhibition, and the project received critical attention in North America, Europe, and India (Figures 21.1 and 21.2). Of particular interest here is the way in which the exhibition was effectively curatorially positioned, produced, and disseminated within the same online platform.

Health & Beauty



A VERY RECIPE
 Artist: Wu Jiaru
 Category: Health & Beauty
 Price: HK\$1.00
 Location: Hong Kong, China
 Curator: TSAO Yidi



ANONYMOUS GRANDMA SOUVENIRS
 Artist: Xi Jie Ng
 Category: Health & Beauty
 Price: \$1.00
 Location: Singapore
 Curator: Harrell Fletcher



GENIUS
 Artist: Nicolás Lamas
 Category: Health & Beauty
 Price: €750.00
 Location: Ghent, Belgium
 Curator: João Laia



NAIL VARNISH WITH FIBERS AND MICRO-ORGANISM'S FROM MY NEIGHBOUR'S CLOTHES
 Artist: Laura Yulke
 Category: Health & Beauty
 Price: £2.00
 Location: London, UK
 Curator: Nora O Murchú



ONE UNIT OF A SLAP (SLAP IN THE FACE, MEDIUM TO STRONG, COLORFUL)
 Artist: Lanfranco Aceti
 Category: Health & Beauty
 Price: \$500.00
 Location: Boston, Massachusetts, USA
 Curator: Joiner – Artist

Home & Garden



0.2M³ OF SPACE, KIT
 Artist: Aliadi
 Category: Home & Garden
 Price: HK\$1000.00
 Location: Hong Kong
 Curator: TSAO Yidi



A FLIMSY ALIBI
 Artist: Sreshta Rit Premnath
 Category: Home & Garden
 Price: \$0.00
 Location: Brooklyn, New York, USA
 Curator: Ghidini & Modrak



AN APOLOGY FOR SALE
 Artist: Ajit Bhadoriya - Chinar Shah - Surabhi Vaya
 Category: Home & Garden
 Price: ₹1769.47
 Location: Bangalore, India
 Curator: Joiner – Artist

FIGURE 21.1 *#exstrange Live Now on Ebay (Featuring Anke Schüttler)*, 2017. Internet-based work. Image courtesy of Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini.

Like contemporary art more broadly, discussion surrounding Internet-based and Internet-activated art often emphasizes the languages of process, participation, and audience. Some participation is synchronous. Most is, however, asynchronous. Although an extension of more generalized artworld languages, the idiosyncrasies of digitally networked activity has bred focused variants, both dystopian and utopian in tone.

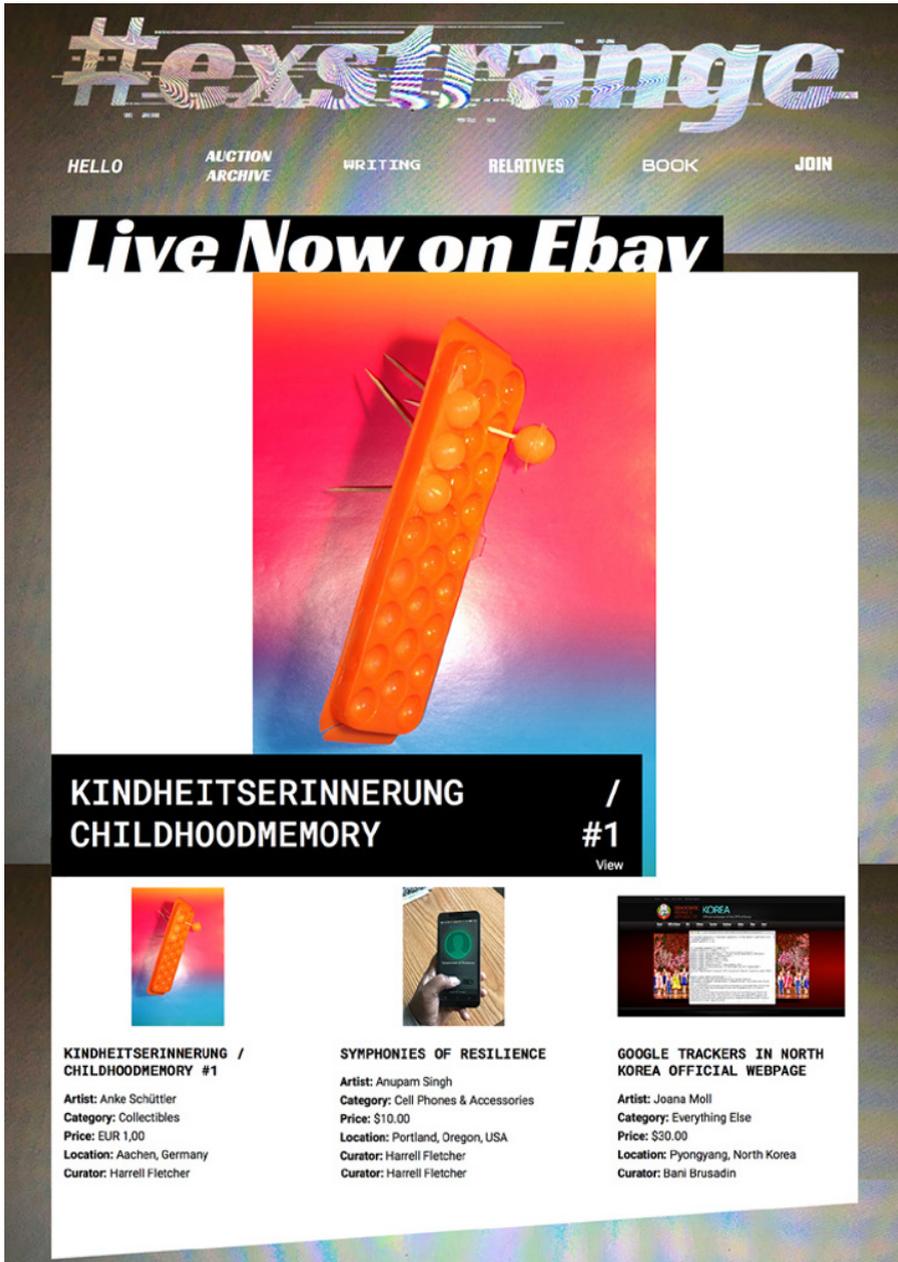


FIGURE 21.2 *#exstrange Archive*, 2017 - present. Internet-based work. Image courtesy of Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini.

For US critic Rachel Green, Internet art is critically and problematically “intertwined with issues of access to technology and decentralization, production and consumption” (Green 2004: 8), whereas for Paul, it offers a “parallel, distributed, living information space that is open to interferences by artists, audiences, and curators – a space for exchange, collaborative creation, and presentation that is transparent and flexible”

(Paul 2006: 81). Despite a frequently cursory lauding, institutional acceptance of Internet art has ebbed and flowed together with corresponding levels of excitement accompanying technologically centered social habits more generally. Sometimes snubbed, and sometimes unsustainably overexposed (Graham and Cook 2010: 39), it is nevertheless often lacking in reflective scholarship.

In emphasizing two-way communication, the socially ubiquitous use of the Internet has naturally inspired artists and curators alike to consider communication as subject and information as artistic material. Unlike the culture of passive reception that characterizes broadcast media culture, Internet culture promotes connectivity and invites active engagement.⁶ Internet art is not simply a subset of contemporary art more broadly but a radical spatialization and convergence of issues common to art and broader culture. Consequently, it is responsive to curatorial practices that stress connectivity and invite engagement.

Some Histories

Once art escaped traditional medial categories, it became more conspicuously dependent upon host contexts. Internet-based and Internet-activated art have simply extended this tendency. For Green, the horizon of Internet art is historicized to the rise of graphical web browsing in 1993 (Green 2004). From the early 1990s onwards, rapidly changing technologies have correspondingly problematized the consistency of categorical delineations and terminologies. By the late 1990s, critics such as US curator Steve Dietz declared “net.art” to be a suitable generic term for describing works for which the network is a necessary condition. Today, the terms “internet art,” “net-based art,” “net art,” “net.art,” and “web art” are used interchangeably. Meanwhile, terms such as “cyberspace” and “web surfing,” once quintessential language on the early incoming tide of Internet culture have fallen into quaint irrelevance. One unfortunate consequence of this may be an associated disappearance of still-relevant metaphors for spatial and temporal exploration, which these older terms perhaps more emphatically implied.

Despite the way in which the World Wide Web gives rise to highly specialized networks, disciplinary configurations, and atomic micro-genres, some broader historical generalizations are still potentially applicable. Like other art histories, the evolution of Internet art is punctuated with false beginnings and lost and recuperated forms. Here, loosely determined historical trajectories are further problematized by technology-driven hype cycles (Graham and Cook 2010). Given that Internet art is highly susceptible to perceptions of dating, hype can dissipate before fuller critical understandings are formed (Graham and Cook 2010). These conditions place new emphasis on the value of timely and considered curatorial frameworks. As Italian critic and curator Domenico Quaranta notes, many early attempts to introduce Internet art to an exhibition environment were curatorial rather than artist-driven. As an example, Quaranta points to Simon Lamunière’s curatorial selection in *documenta X* in 1997, for which Lamunière was also the curator of a parallel website (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta 2013: 26).

A consistent feature in the development of Internet art are questions pertaining to distribution and access. It is unsurprising, given the legacies of strategies developed by artists before the Internet, that many net artists seek to enter, disrupt, or take control of privately controlled distribution systems. These strategies are often

quasi-curatorial in nature. One historical example that exemplifies this tendency is German artist Cornelia Sollfrank's response to a 1997 Hamburger Kunsthalle call for submissions for a "net.art" competition. In forming her submission, Sollfrank used a program that collected random HTML materials from the Web and automatically combined them to enter 289 fictional women artists in the competition. Sollfrank's *Female Extension* (1997) was effectively activated in the moment in which the unsuspecting museum announced how many women had entered, before somewhat predictably declaring an all-male list of winners. She later adapted her net.art generator to commission four artists to build programs to search the Web for material to reassemble distinct HTML artworks, with each net.art generator producing surprisingly different results.

Adequate evaluation of Internet-based and Internet-activated art demands at least some awareness of concurrent technological histories, many of which are poorly understood. Compounding this situation, much art education still glosses over technological histories. Consequently, digital historical literacy functions in tiered communities, with interpretation routinely inflected with technological bedazzlement and Luddite suspicion. As Christiane Paul has put it, "understanding of its 'backend' will always remain a fringe culture (closed system) that won't be integrated into the mainstream of (perception-oriented) art criticism" (Paul 2006). Given that this lack of engagement can "lead to work that ages poorly because it is so deeply invested in a technological novelty," it is vital to "question the logics of progress, innovation, and novelty that undergird the way technology works in our culture" (Balsom and Kholeif 2015: 287).

One challenge for curators seeking to present Internet-based or Internet-activated art in traditional exhibition environments is the problem of how to appropriately present a dynamic and interactive experience within the temporal and spatial limitations of a physical gallery. Compounding this situation, traditional art institutions and audiences often expect online work to resemble video installation. Accordingly, curators must consider what makes accessing the Internet in a gallery context distinguishable from being at home, work, or on public transport – without resorting to anomalous spectacle. This challenge is only in part a larger one: how does art made with digital media technologies distinguish itself from popular mass media? Digital media are everywhere, from social media to the digital shopfronts of corporations. Given that more people are familiar with how to use the Internet than fine art production techniques, audiences are already relatively familiar with certain aspects of the medium. What, therefore, differentiates digital media as art? The short answer is of course philosophical. Digital media presented as art (like contemporary art more generally) is fictionalized in a distinct ontological realm to that of digital media more generally. This kind of literally indiscernible difference, once articulated in US philosopher and art historian Arthur C. Danto's description of an "artworld," is problematized in Osborne's more recent articulation of the structural liberty of postconceptual art's fictionalized participation in the transnational network of art institutions (Osborne 2013), and US theorist Pamela Lee's inverse articulation of "the *work* of art's world" (Lee 2012: 2 and 8).

Funding for curatorial projects is often dependent on a capacity to convincingly demonstrate wide-ranging community impact or relevance to prevailing sociocultural agendas. Consequently, curators are routinely expected to negotiate complex relationships between established artistic classifications and ideas that reach out to wider cultural

fields. As Osborne has noted, the development of new curatorial strategies since the 1960s, had by the 1990s, “developed in ways largely unrelated to the critical artistic meanings of individual works – ‘themed’ shows of varying kinds producing loosely linked aggregates of works, without specifically artistic unity” (Osborne 2013: 104). This shift has only been accelerated with the Internet as a subject, theme, and method of artistic production. Here, specialized understandings of ways in which specific elements function within a network, together with a sensitivity to the complexities of remediating and presenting an array of often disparate ideas, and technologies and materials into a singularly identifiable format, is an imperative for critically engaged online curating. Clearly, any consideration of the physical properties of digitally centered artworks that does not critically reflect upon their conventions and how they behave in relation to their host culture is potentially limiting – especially given the fact that the physical properties of digitally centered artworks are inherently mutable, emerging, and superseded (sometimes even within the course of exhibition planning and execution).

Will some art of the digital era last even a single lifetime? If the “Cloud” fails, where will documentation be stored? One issue that exacerbates the aforementioned inconsistencies in relationships between technologically driven fashions and lagging or lacking degrees of critical attention is the problem of good archival practice. Here, curators wishing to return to even relatively recent works face the problem of technological obsolescence. As US journalist Melena Ryzik put it in 2013, “the 1s and 0s of digital art degrade far more rapidly than traditional visual art does, and the demands of upkeep are much higher” (Ryzik 2013). In one recent exhibition, this problem was integrated into the curatorial premise. In British curator Jim Boulton’s 2017 exhibition *64 bits*, the tone of dial-up modems became a historical texture. Boulton, who is committed to conserving moments in the history of Internet culture that have not yet been archived or translated to later formats, even invited visitors to bring in obsolete media for experts to transfer to current formats.

There are now several initiatives devoted to promoting, archiving, and historically contextualizing Internet-based works and collections. Only a handful, however, have been established since the early days of net.art. Rhizome is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting digitally based art forms. Founded by US artist and curator Mark Tribe in 1996 “as a kind of bottom-up alternative to the top-down hierarchies of the art world” (Laurel 2016) and dedicated to “the creation, presentation, preservation, and critique of emerging artistic practices that engage technology” (Rhizome 2007), it had established a relatively comprehensive online archive of net related artforms called ArtBase by 1999. In addition to hosting archived works, Rhizome’s work includes digital art conservation and the updating of obsolete code. Rhizome’s programming has included a diverse array of online events and physical exhibitions, including physical exhibitions at the New Museum in New York and elsewhere. Significantly, *net.ephemera*, which was curated by Mark Tribe in 2002 at the Moving Image Gallery in New York, was the first major attempt to stage an exhibition about Internet art without using computers. In 2005 at the New Museum, Rhizome presented an exhibition of selections from its online archive co-curated by Lauren Cornell and Rachel Green that included significant net artists such as John F. Simon Jr., M. River, and T. Whid Art Associates, 0100101110101101.org, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, and Cory Arcangel. Marisa Olson’s appointment as Curator at Rhizome in 2005 saw a shift from supporting “not only internet-based art, but all art that engages with the internet” (Olson 2011: 59). In

2010, Cornell staged *Free* at the New Museum – an exhibition based on law professor Lawrence Lessig’s argument that digital information should be freely available to avoid corporate feudalism (Lessig 2004). For Cornell, *Free* featured artists that “borrow, and reframe digital images – not as a rebellious act of stealing or deconstructive act of critique – but as a way to participate thoughtfully and actively in a culture that is highly circulated, hybridized, internationalized – if unevenly” (Cornell 2010). Given the spirit of the exhibition, the New Museum relaxed its usual ban on photography, and the catalogue was offered as a freely downloadable document. In 2015, Rhizome archived its influential blog *VVORK* (marking the first time an entire website had been archived) and launched Oldweb.today (which enabled users to view archived webpages in emulated historical web browsers (Dellinger 2015)). By 2016, Rhizome’s Webrecorder tool represents a first attempt to record a user browsing sites to capture interactive features.

Post-Internet Curating

We grew up with the internet and on the internet. ... The internet to us is not something external to reality but a part of it: an invisible yet constantly present layer intertwined with the physical environment. We do not use the internet, we live on the internet and along it (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta 2013: 212)

Despite living through social and political changes which are radically paradigmatic, it is nevertheless challenging to gain sufficient historical distance to evaluate the impact of these changes on artistic and curatorial practices. Despite this lack of reflective distance, we are nevertheless well over a decade into the professional emergence of a generation of artists and curators who have grown up knowing only life *with* the Internet, and consequently tend to regard it as a given or banality. So-called post-Internet art is popularly periodized as art produced *after* the social and cultural changes introduced by the Internet. Accordingly, post-Internet artists are said to work critically as entrenched “prosumers” within the mutualized functions of production and consumption. Today, much lived experience unfolds in concert online and offline. In this sense, the Internet is simply an extension of the real. Thus, any attempt to maintain a meaningful distinction online and offline is simply motivated by a romantic yearning for their former separation. Although some artists exclusively exhibit in an online context, it is more common for artists to develop on and offline versions or representations of a single work or project. A key characteristic of post-Internet culture is that distinctions between the virtual and the physical are unnecessary. Many post-Internet works do not necessarily exist online but function in response with the social impact of the digitally proliferating image. Even nostalgia-driven bespoke artisanal production paradoxically evokes its rejection of digital culture in digitally connected communities. In any event, many artists and curators seek to represent and access realities that exist somewhere in-between online and offline realms:

What changed ... is our understanding of this space ... turned out to be not a virtual, abstract “cyberspace,” but an augmented version of the old, real world. So, you can now make paintings for the White Cube and be, nevertheless, a net artist. (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta 2013: 25)

The already unfashionable term “post-internet art” was, at least popularly, coined by German artist and theorist Marisa Olson in 2008 (Debatty 2008), and further defined by New York-based art critic Gene McHugh in 2009 (McHugh 2009/10). Perhaps most succinctly, as New York-based artist Artie Vierkant has put it, post-Internet art is “informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials” (Vierkant 2010). The fact that the term itself is a cliché is further evidence of the ubiquity of the conditions it seeks to encapsulate. Given that the World Wide Web is a common means of accessing the Internet, some have suggested that it should be more called post-web art (Balsom and Kholeif 2015). In any event, the ever-increasing speed and accessibility of the technologies involved, and the sheer girth of the worlds in which art is now produced and discussed, will ensure that much the content of this text will be dated by the time it goes to print.

It is only possible to assemble a snapshot of post-Internet curatorial activities in this text. London-based artist collective LuckyPDF, for example, have been collaborating with artists to produce events, videos, and viral projects since 2008. Interestingly, they present e-flyers at the center – as opposed to paratextual periphery – of their exhibitions. *Connecting Cities* and the *Streaming Museum* are also good examples of Internet-centered curatorial models – in this case designed to operate through large, networked digital displays. Meanwhile, Dutch-Brazilian artist Rafael Rozendaal’s produces and collects animations on a dedicated website, and once translated into a traditional exhibition space, uses broken mirrors to project works in multiple spatial configurations. In 2010, Rozendaal facilitated the first *Bring Your Own Beamer* (BYOB) as a one-night exhibition in Berlin, in which many artists were invited to project works upon any available space in a physical architecture. Also, in 2010, US-based curator Ruba Katrib staged the first retrospective of Cory Arcangel, and Brad Troemel and Lauren Christiansen of Brooklyn-based collective The Jogging. In 2010, The Jogging invited international artists to send images to be placed onto images of empty walls at Sullivan Galleries in Chicago – the result, *An Immaterial Survey of Our Peers* (2010), was a virtual installation of an exhibition that did not occur physically. Significantly, these exhibitions relied upon audience awareness of the existence of physical and online spaces. In this sense, something of the work is understood to exist elsewhere in space and time.

In a so-called post-Internet climate, an exhibition can be understood to exist concurrently across both traditional objects and in versions or alternative materializations online. This is tricky curatorial terrain, for as British theorist Nick Lambert puts it “a work that has no final version and multiple iterations can make the curator’s role problematic” (Lambert, McNeil, and Domenico 2013:15). In an era already described by US art historian Rosalind Krauss as beset by a “post- medium condition,”⁷⁷ artists and curators operate under the premise that “anything can now effectively be anything else” and that something formed in one medium can be readily translated into another (Vierkant 2013). This situation is in many ways simply a technologically augmented extension of postconceptual art’s established “complex distribution of artistic materials, across a multiplicity of material forms and practices” nevertheless capable of being expressed through “singular, though internally multitudinous work[s]” (Osborne 2013: 110). As Vierkant puts it, artists can now “create projects which move seamlessly from physical representation to Internet representation, either changing for each context, built with an intention of

universality, or created with a deliberate irreverence for either venue of transmission” (Vierkant 2010). Given that artists and curators now routinely customize works and exhibitions to suit different contexts of production and reception, it is less important what the specifics of a medium might be and more important what a work *does*. With the arrival of mass digital audiences, the process of digital transmission itself naturally becomes an extension of the work. Or, as Osborne puts it, the mode and space of transmission determines the mode of mediation and, by extension, the spatialization of the work (Osborne 2007). Consequently, it is a network of relations between various discrete materializations that creates the space of a work or exhibition, irrespective of whether the primary point of entry is understood to be offline or online.

Staging Online Exhibitions and Maintaining Archives

The Internet has transformed how culture is created, documented, and archived. How have artists, curators, galleries, museums, and archivists met this transformation? It is uncontroversial to assert that all art involves at least some form of mediation, translation, or transmission. Digital art exemplifies “remediation” insofar as it assumes the form of a revision whilst foregrounding a new medium (Bolter and Grusin 2000). In simply extending modern, and then contemporary, art’s and popular culture’s tendencies toward self-referencing (i.e. paintings about paint or television about television. etc.), Internet artists and curators naturally gravitate toward the production of websites about websites or mailing lists about mailing lists. Jonah Brucker-Cohen and Mike Bennett’s *Bumplist* (2003), for example, was designed to only accommodate a finite number of subscribers – each new subscriber bumped off whoever had been on the list the longest. In a basic sense, works, exhibitions, and curated collections presented as lists or series of links simply double the way in which the Internet itself is a collection of linked computers. Surprisingly, the idea that a website can constitute the primary or only site for an exhibition is rare. Despite a wholesale increase in online curatorial activity, online art is still more likely to operate in an interpretative context rather than as a primary medium for exhibition. Here, a question that applies to contemporary art more generally is again pertinent: should collections be considered as “an archive of artistic materials or a work of art” (Osborne 2013: 91)? There are several challenges facing those seeking to stage online exhibitions and create and maintain online archives. A key point worth stressing here is that the spatial and operational constraints of server dependency are often inadequately addressed. Although fears of digital erasure are underscored by the ease with which digital gestures are deleted from view,⁸ it is at the same time apparent that virtually all online activity leaves traceable footprints. Either way, optimum presentation and adequate contextualization requires ongoing attention. The ethos of the globally connected Franklin Collective exemplifies a growing awareness of such considerations:

direct and indirect access to digital records now allow for past work, even those perhaps seen by an artist as “failures,” to become a matter of public record. Illusions of 21st century privacy aside, this does present us with a new kind of transparency for the art-viewing public. (Franklin Collective 2016)

There are certainly moves at the upper end of the artworld's⁹ food chain to create more comprehensive digital archives and public access. In 2016, for example, the Museum of Modern Art in New York released a comprehensive digital archive of exhibitions dating from its founding in 1929 up to the present. The Google Art Project – featuring a “walk-through” variation of Google’s Street View technology – was launched in 2011 with a view to facilitating interactive access to works in cooperation with 17 international museums (including the Tate Gallery, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; and the Uffizi, Florence).

Although museums and galleries digitize representations of their physical collections, these activities are clearly far from specifically conceiving exhibitions for the Web. Of more interest within the context of this chapter are examples of initiatives that move beyond using the Internet to simply promote and document existing works. The Wrong, for example, is an online digital art biennial that showcases selected works in virtual curated spaces. Another smaller-scale initiative, the Museum of Virtual Art, presents itself as a multiplayer initiative featuring the work of international artists. Meanwhile, Catalog@catalogproject is a selection of moving image works curated on Vimeo by @stemiraglia, NewHive is a platform that commissions curated and solo exhibitions by net artists, and MutualArt.com is a model established in 2008 for connecting databases of artists and members with curated information about art fairs, exhibitions, and events.

Exacerbating a blurring of roles already manifest in contemporary art, it can be particularly difficult to meaningfully distinguish artistic and curatorial initiatives in an online context. Artist-curated projects have long problematized this precarious relationship by “sitting uncomfortably close to artistic work, and yet still evidently not quite qualifying as artworks” (Filipovic 2013). This is notoriously fuzzy terrain, for just as “the other of the artist as curator is the curator ... the other of the curator as artist is, the artist” (Noack 2012). There are certainly numerous examples that complicate distinctions between generative curatorial and artistic sensibilities in the history of net.art. US artist Douglas Davis’s *The World’s First Collaborative Sentence* is an early piece of interactive net.art in the form of a blog enabling users to add words to an initial sentence. It received over 200 000 contributions between 1994 and 2000. Today, owing to technological obsolescence, projects such as these cannot be exhibited in their original form. At around the same time, artists such as Alexei Shulgin and Olia Lialina developed conceptual approaches to creating interactive stories and artist-run Internet groups. Shulgin, for example, founded *Moscow-WWW-Art-Lab* in 1994, whilst Lialina’s *My Boyfriend Came Back From The War*, was a browser-based narrative that chronologically marked a relationship in recovery after war. Several years later, Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied’s *Midnight* (2006) used the then new Google map interface to access animated icons from the early Web. With numerous examples of novel artist-driven curatorial initiatives, a comprehensive account is well beyond the scope of this chapter. One recent example is *NARGIFSUS* (2015), which was an exhibition of animated GIF self-portraits featuring over 50 artists curated by Carla Gannis and Tina Sauerländer. Other initiatives are more utopian in ambition. Seeking to address the social limitations of physical movement governing the physical exhibition circuit, Nicholas Zhu and Michael Bordlee’s recent initiative MOVA (Museum of Virtual Art), for example, seeks to open audiences to a stake in curated collections without having to pay or travel to physical galleries. There are also many examples of established curators moving the focus of their activities to an online context. After closing her East London

gallery La Scatola in 2013, for example, British curator Valentina Fois used the gallery's website as a platform for digital residencies. Meanwhile, Brazilian curator Beatriz Lemos moved to specifically foreground relationships between art and digital networks. Many established institutions are also looking to establishing exclusively online exhibition content. At the time of writing, for example, Remai Modern was commissioning artists to realize projects exclusively for online viewing.

Many curators and institutions see the Net as a platform for creating rich immersive experiences. To develop an online exhibition, particularly if there is financial accountability at stake, curators must consider the distributional nature of the Web and technical characteristics such as variability and virality. They also need to be prepared to continue promoting and updating the project. Looking beyond the exhibition, the task of documentation invariably involves issues of ephemerality and conservation. Also, at all stages in the lifespan of an online exhibition, curators navigate a fine line between providing sensitively appropriate information and providing all available paratextual material. With this challenge in mind, one richly immersive online exhibition still stands as an exemplar. *The Gallery of Lost Art* (2012–2013) was an exclusively online exhibition curated by Tate's head of collection research Jennifer Mundy and developed together with Tate's creative media director Jane Burton and Glasgow-based digital design agency ISO – led by Damien Smith and Mark Breslin. “[C]onceived and developed as a curatorial rather than a learning project” to create “an immersive experience (as opposed to a flat, image-plus-text presentation),” the team employed “curatorial values and practices” to present “surrogates” for lost artworks (Mundy and Burton 2013). The exhibition was launched in July 2012, with half of the 40 case studies initially available. The remaining case studies were released slowly up to and through 2013. Repurposing richly spatial and televisual tropes from crime and forensic science programs, *The Gallery of Lost Art* cast exhibition visitors in the role of forensic investigators. A rich, zoomable, high-resolution array of paratextual material presented on tables viewed from above illuminated the experience of “lost” works. Conspicuously absent was any direct photographic representation of the actual works:

Controversially, we included examples of works that were never intended to survive for any length of time. The loss involved in no longer being able to see Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin 1971–1995* (1971–1995) or Keith Haring's *Berlin Wall Mural* (1986) was ultimately no different, we felt, from the loss involved in not being able to see, for example, sculptures discarded by their creators or canvases consumed in a fire. (Mundy and Burton 2013)

Significantly, *The Gallery of Lost Art* was available online for only one year, and then pulled down permanently (Figures 21.3 and 21.4). Provocatively, especially given the total cost of £300 000, the decision to end the project after one year sought to emphasize the exhibition's “insights into loss” (Mundy and Burton 2013). From July 2013, *The Gallery of Lost Art* was “no longer ... accessible from the web, a virtual space which is traditionally attributed the role of a perceptual archive” (Trochianesi et al. 2013). Information about the exhibition and supplementary essays are, however, still available.

The Gallery of Lost Art exemplifies a growing field of major online museum exhibitions, such as the National Museum of American Jewish History's *George Washington Letters*, the National Archives' *Digital Vaults*, and Museum of Modern Art's online companion to *Century of the Child*. Significantly, the curatorial premise for *The Gallery*

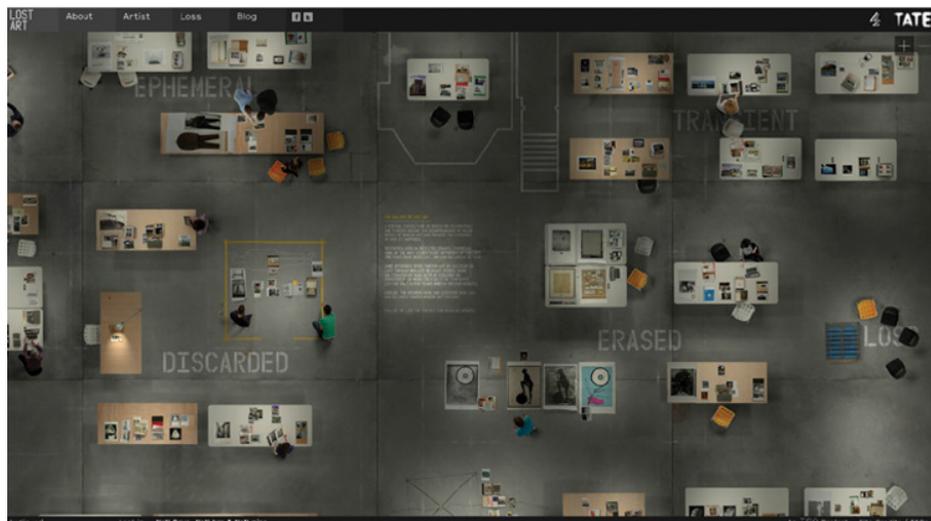


FIGURE 21.3 *The Gallery of Lost Art*, 2013. Online gallery view. Image courtesy of Damien Smith and ISO Design, 2012.



FIGURE 21.4 *The Gallery of Lost Art*, 2013. Page devoted to John Baldessari, *The Cremation Project* (1970). Image courtesy of Damien Smith and ISO Design, 2012.

of Lost Art emphasized that artworks should to be understood in relation to “a broad ecology of ideas, influences, and connections, in which the material existence of the artworks was only one” (Mundy and Burton 2013). Of course, no artwork is ever completely “lost” if we maintain some cultural knowledge and evidence, no matter how meagre, of its existence.¹⁰ This of course brings us to the problem of *where* and *when* any work or exhibition actually exists.

Distribution and Circulation

Describing the once imagined and now increasingly threatened utopian potential for open distribution on the Internet, Quaranta reminisces:

you could be everywhere and everybody at the same time, surfing on a space without physical boundaries playing out different identities, writing and subverting your own rules. ... You didn't need institutions because you could be the institution or the gallery, the curator, the art critic, all together. And, if you got bored of the traditional personas of the artworld, you could be everything else: a boy band; a terrorist cell; a corporation; a publisher; a spammer; a bot. (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta 2013: 25)

So *where* exactly is Internet art? This question demands consideration of both the distributed nature of the Internet itself and the distributed nature of multiple (hypothetically infinite) materializations characteristic of postconceptual art more generally (Osborne 2013). Historically, some forms of conceptual art (such as mail art) demonstrated that specific locations were not necessary to present art. An artistic or curatorial gesture could point toward an artefact, event, or gesture understood to be elsewhere in time and space. Today, the shape and nature of distribution remains an inherent concern in the production and curatorial dissemination of web-based art. Although artists are embedded in specific cultures and societies, the digital moves across and through spaces and borders, and like the forces of globalization more generally, both disperses and solidifies cultural specificities. Although art is often presented as a speculative form of exchange and engagement, its critical capacity is limited by its complicity with the global cosmopolitan territories it inhabits. In this sense, the everywhere-ness of an online artistic representation can be seen as much as a testament to democratic availability as it is to the exchange value of information as commodity. German artist, filmmaker, and theorist Hito Steyerl understands the paradoxical nature of distributed media well:

The history of conceptual art describes this dematerialization of the art object first as a resistant move against the fetish value of visibility. Then, however, the dematerialized art object turns out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism. In a way, the poor image is subject to a similar tension. On the one hand, it operates against the fetish value of high resolution. On the other hand, this is precisely why it also ends up being perfectly integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screening. (Steyerl 2009)

Despite the fact that computability and connectivity are invisible, it is a fallacy to call Internet art “immaterial” – for Internet art still exists in accord with the laws of physics. Although the rise of the Internet led to a revival of interest in ideas related to dematerialization, the same problem facing conceptual artists in the late 1960s and 1970s prevails: dematerialization does not negate the need for a “vehicular medium” (Davies 2004: 59) to transmit an idea to an audience. Like art more generally, digital works of art exist somewhere in an indeterminate relationship between the necessary

yet insufficient role of the materiality of media and the necessary yet insufficient role of a host context (Osborne 2010, 10–11). And, like art more generally, digital content can exist at once as a singular entity *and* as multitudinous materializations across a complex distribution of relationships and materializations (Osborne 2013: 110).

Although much artistic production remains directly or indirectly concerned with specific materialities, it is at the same time open to a “vast variety of methods of presentation and dissemination” (Vierkant 2010). Consequently, post-Internet conditions have radically extended historical philosophical perplexities surrounding the “where,” “what,” and “when” of a work or exhibition. At a basic level, this question is encapsulated in the reproducibility of the photographic image. For Osborne, although “the whole question of *where* ‘the photograph’ is” was already “difficult to answer under the conditions of chemical-based analogue images” (Osborne 2013: 124), the digitally produced image “is a *visible* copy of an *invisible* original” (129). Notwithstanding the aforementioned requisite presence of a vehicular form to articulate an idea, the objects/events that might avail audience access to a creative work are in some cases (at least hypothetically) endlessly interchangeable. As Vierkant puts it, a work might be accessed:

in the version of the object one would encounter at a gallery or museum, the images and other representations disseminated through the Internet and print publications, bootleg images of the object or its representations, and variations on any of these as edited and recontextualized by any other author. (Vierkant 2010)

Broadly speaking, twenty-first-century artists and curators are less concerned with authorship – at least in the sense that twentieth-century avant-gardes used it as a vehicle for problematizing the “myth” of originality – and instead, focus upon questions of content attribution, ownership, and the control of informational flows of user-generated content. Herein lies an important distinction between appropriation and formal collectivism (such as open-source programming and deejaying). Here, for Steyerl, “circulationism” is an appropriate descriptor:

What the Soviet avant-garde of the twentieth century called productivism – the claim that art should enter production and the factory – could now be replaced by circulationism. Circulationism is not about the art of making an image, but of post-producing, launching, and accelerating it. (Steyerl 2013)

Steyerl’s conception of circulationism offers a partial answer to the provocative stance taken by Bishop in the pages of *Artforum* in 2012, in which she argues that there are almost no artists or curators critically responding to the paradigmatic social and political changes wrought by “the digitization of our existence” (Bishop 2012: 435). One work that clearly explored the circulation of images in a quasi-curatorial manner was Austrian artist Oliver Laric’s *Versions* (2009–2012). *Versions* manifested as a series of sculptures, images, a talk, text, a song, a dance, a film, and merchandise – and most notably as a series of moving image variations exploring the historical circulation of images. Similarly, US-based Israeli artist Seth Price’s *Dispersion* is an open-ended essay presented as an artist’s book, a physical sculpture, and a downloadable PDF. *Dispersion* takes net collectivity as a point of departure for a historical reconsideration of boundaries between art and non-art (Price 2008).

For Price, the increasingly dispersed accessibility and reproducibility of media has enormous implications for how art is disseminated and valued. The essay later inspired an exhibition curated by Polly Staple in 2009 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London featuring Price, together with Henrik Olesen, Hito Steyerl, Anne Collier, Hilary Lloyd, Maria Eichhorn, and Mark Leckey. In Staple's curatorial spiel, these artists variously explore "the circulation of images in contemporary society, examining the role of money, desire and power in our accelerated image economy" (Staple 2009).

Whilst commercial broadcasters and publishers seek convergence in distribution, artists and curators often seek less controlled approaches. The many-to-many connectivity of the Internet both challenges traditional broadcasting and publishing models and radically augments social relations within which producer and consumer become the same peer network. Like cultural activity more generally on the Internet, many artworks use peer-to-peer networks or open systems in which the user becomes the content provider. These distributed approaches problematize dominant artworld networks that value discrete works authored by "branded" artists. At any rate, and at all levels of professional stratification, artists can no longer avoid distributing materials and documentation online. Massive changes affecting the distribution of images have underscored conditions of permanent transformation, open circulation, and in some cases, the "unerability" of regrettable forms of expression. Given that images are easily reformatted without concern for their materiality, origin or attributive information, some images become interchangeable and placeless. These conditions have also inspired a range of critical responses. In his *Free Art* manifesto, US artist Brad Troemel argued that the artworld is contaminated by private interests and gatekeeping and instead advocates self-distribution and the substitution of individual success for collectivity. Meanwhile, and by contrast, US-born, Australian-based theorist Douglas Kahn took issue with US conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith's position that online media should be free of branding or authoritative paratexts in order to travel to unimagined places. For Kahn, unattributed systems lead to "historical amnesia, social or ecological decontextualization, lack of attribution, cultural theft and imperialism" (Kahn 2005).

Several other observers have explored the nature of distribution in contemporary culture. US art historian David Joselit sees "a shift from the manipulation of material to the management of populations of persons and/or pictures" (Joselit 2011: 81). For Joselit, "formatting," which can be characterized as a "capacity to configure data in multiple possible ways," has all but replaced the concept of "medium" (Joselit 2011: 81). In practice, this shift involves a "re-enactment and relocation of the 'same' image in different places and times" (Joselit 2011: 81). Against this backdrop, many cultural producers attempt to "disrupt" production, distribution, and consumption in an era in which a once imagined democratized horizontality has effectively become a one-thing-after-another scrollable experience of algorithmically targeted messaging and advertising. Meanwhile, although new cultural objects can be easily produced from pre-existing fragments of image, object, symbol, narrative, text, and melody, the limitations of private property still govern creative expression. Contesting this situation, open-source culture and crowdsourcing movements constitute a "new commons" Open-source cultures challenge commercial imperatives by substituting systems based on ownership, authorship, and monetary value for open systems based on collective value. Unauthorized platforms for sharing artistic content such as UbuWeb and Karagarga

exemplify this tendency. Spanish social activist Mayo Fuster Morell calls for knowledge that is “collectively created and owned or shared between or among a community” and “oriented to favor use and reuse, rather than to exchange as a commodity” (Fuster Morell 2016: 5). At a basic level, open-source participants contribute to edited collections. At the other end of the spectrum, participants build specialized software and system design.

Against a backdrop of surveillance and state or private control of the Internet, we are also (at best) witnessing a transition to more horizontal forms of social, political, and economic organization. For Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, horizontal participation within social networks is beginning to translate into other forms of political and social life. Consequently, we are seeing more horizontally organized “leaderless” political movements (such as Occupy, los Indignados, Black Lives Matter, and #metoo), together with “flatter” economic initiatives (such as car sharing and labor exchange). This contest is far from settled.

Un-curating, Anti-curating, and Artist as Curator

In many ways, using digital networks as the basis for new curatorial models is simply a technologically augmented adaptation of the way in which artists have long included peers in processes of artistic production. These networks range from centralized or hierarchical to decentralized networks with multiple centers and distributed networks with no center but many links. In any network, information is effective via relational positioning. The accelerated and open-ended nature of digital networks emphasizes cultural forms that are incomplete, unresolved, and open to constant transformation. Artists and curators have of course long reached beyond the constraints of established institutional structures and traditional exhibition spaces. These tendencies were first clearly articulated (with some notable historical avant-garde precedents) in the language that framed conceptual and systems-based art in the 1960s and 1970s. The focus then, as it is today with much net-based art, was upon locating or creating alternative circuits.

For many contemporary artists, the often asymmetrically invested power wielded by institutional and globally mobile “super” curators is problematic. Consequently, there are now several initiatives seeking to create alternative vehicles for selecting, evaluating, and disseminating art. *Project Anywhere*, for example, which was founded by the author in 2012 in conjunction with an international committee of artist academics, is promoted online through artistic and institutional networks as a “global blind peer reviewed exhibition program dedicated to art and artistic research at the outermost limits of location-specificity” (Project Anywhere 2018) (Figure 21.5). Although primarily communicated via a dedicated website and related online networks, *Project Anywhere* is not an online exhibition model. It is instead presented through the Internet as “an exhibition comprising the entire globe in which the role of curator is replaced with a peer evaluation system” (Project Anywhere 2018). With no curatorial imperative to develop specific thematic orientations, this curator-less approach is specifically designed to suit highly speculative and often radically transcategorical artistic projects that are potentially located “*anywhere* and *elsewhere* in space and time” (Project Anywhere 2018).

Another non-profit initiative that uses a dedicated website to point toward artistic projects located elsewhere in space and time is the Random Institute. Based in Zurich,

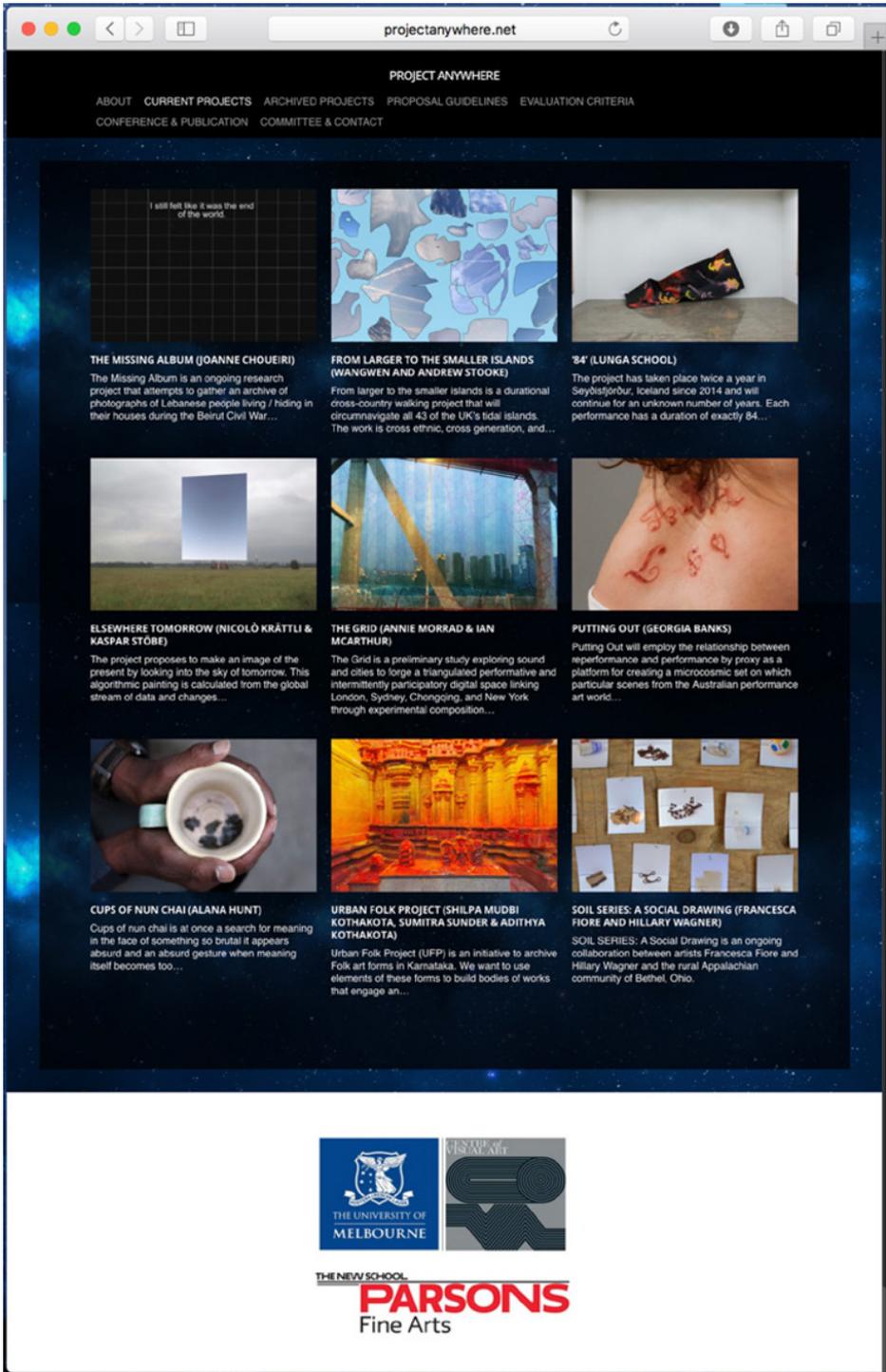


FIGURE 21.5 Project Anywhere, Screenshot of 2018 Global Exhibition Program. Courtesy of the author and Project Anywhere.

Switzerland, the Random Institute has produced numerous intriguingly ambiguous exhibitions, events, and research initiatives around the world featuring work by artists such as Richard Long, James Lee Byars, Cory Arcangel, Žilvinas Kempinas, Guido van der Werve, Bethan Huws, Carey Young, Julian Charrière, Federico Herrero, Allora & Calzadilla, Luis Camnitzer, Alfredo Jaar, Regina José Galindo, Aníbal López, Teresa Margolles, Rivane Neuenschwander, and Liliana Porter. Founded by Sandino Scheidegger and Luca Müller in 2007, its focus is new exhibition formats and exhibition-making as practice. To date, perhaps its most ambitious yet enigmatically subtle initiative was the ostensibly secretive organization of an exhibition in Pyongyang in North Korea titled *All The Lights We Cannot See* (2016). For this exhibition, although nine artists were invited to exhibit, all other details surrounding the entire project were committed to secrecy. Beyond a very limited set of installation views, the only other trace of the exhibition is a one-line mention on each of the participating artists' CVs. Intriguingly, if asked about the exhibition, all participating artists have agreed to respond with: "I'm not supposed to talk about it" (Random Institute 2016).

The often-invisible power structures that shape contemporary life in the age of the Internet have also inspired new generations of leaderless artist collectives. The novel organizational and operational structure of the Franklin Collective, for example, constitutes an approach to collective artistic and curatorial organization that evades locational specificity and attribution in a manner darkly reminiscent of a global corporation. Offering an experience which is at once unsettlingly critical and complicit with the generically technocratic and bureaucratic nature of global capitalism in the age of the Internet, Franklin Collective manifests as "an immersive, multi-faceted institutional critique dwelling in both offline and online realms" (Franklin Collective 2016). In an interview conducted by the author in late 2016 with two of the Collective's founding members – New York-based artists Mark John Smith and Matt Whitman – some of the curious ambiguities surrounding the collective's operations were discussed:

you're not quite sure where it starts and where it stops and where the borders exist. And that it could be here, it could be Northern Ireland, it could be in South America, and not being able to see precisely how it gets from one point to the other. (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016)

One of many portals into the collective's world is made manifest through a strangely and antagonistically corporate styled call center operated by representatives that answer calls and perform scripts outlined by the collective. Here, callers become implicitly aware of now ubiquitous social architectures and, in particular, ways in which "the language of the home, the language of the familiar, the language of friendship and kindredness [are] inserted into the corporate model" (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016). They are also interested in the way in which words such as "proxy" can dislocate culpability. Rather than emphasizing relationships between artist and curator, the collective is interested in "activating different entities within the collective" (Whitman 2016). Although "there are artists [and] curators in the collective" (Whitman 2016), the collective is "not an artist [or curator]" (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016). When pressed, Smith and Whitman concede that "there are times when we go back to the idea of curation" (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016) – for there are still decisions regarding which "images to put on Instagram and which images to leave off" (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016). This

process is at once secretive and transparent, for the collective’s website also features a Dropbox option enabling audience and collective alike “to go into a portion of the Franklin Collective cloud [to see what] the collective is working on” (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016). Although mindful that they have a responsibility to omit “identities of people that are involved and who for whatever reason do not wish to have that identity made public” (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016), their quasi-anonymity is nevertheless adjusted for “instances in which a public face is necessary.

it’s all about ... how the information is flowing and which direction ... and what side of the fence are you on. Are you in it, or are you looking at it? (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016)

In each example discussed above, we see evidence of an emphasis upon meanings generated through selective relationships made manifest through particular constellations of materializations. This tendency is of course not particular to art chiefly made or disseminated with the Internet, for as Groys puts it, “after conceptualism, we can no longer see art primarily as the production and exhibition of individual things” but rather as “a holistic exhibition space in which the relations between objects are the basis of the artwork” (Groys 2011: 1). Consequently, it is often unclear whether meanings are generated within relationships between specific materializations or in supplementary or paratextual materials. Artists and curators, it would seem, often deliberately problematize these relationships. In some cases, distinctions between a work/exhibition and its surrounding paratextual universe can be radically and profoundly uncertain. Australian artistic/curatorial initiative the Ghosts of Nothing, for example, are publicly presented through the vehicle of a fictional touring rock band (Figure 21.6). This artist as curator collaboration between the author and Ilmar

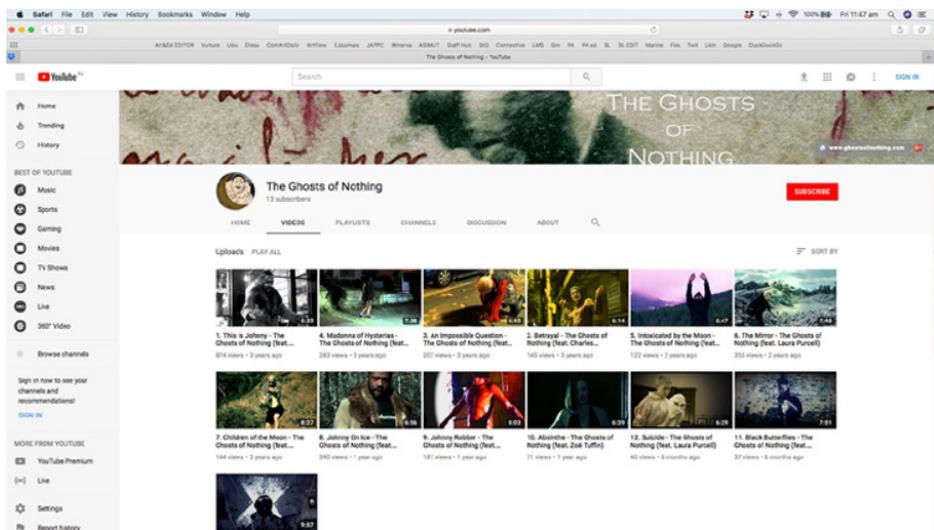


FIGURE 21.6 The Ghosts of Nothing, Screenshot of YouTube channel for The Ghosts of Nothing—*In Memory of Johnny B. Goode—World Tour—2014–2018*. Courtesy of the author and The Ghosts of Nothing.

Taimre epitomizes the continuous and continually evolving nature of a radically distributed yet singularly identifiable work/exhibition of postconceptual art. Their radically “open work” *In Memory of Johnny B. Goode – 2014–2018*, for example, was presented as a digital recording of a rock opera, a script, a radio play broadcast, a series of published writings, a “world tour” of live collaborative performances remediated through YouTube, and as a series of subsequent exhibitions of related images and performance artefacts – all curated by the artists.

Algorithmic Popularity

curators now rival artists for influence the way DJs rival musicians. Both are a kind of portfolio manager of the qualitative. The next step after the dematerialization of the artwork may be the dematerialization of the art worker, whose place could be taken by new kinds of algorithmic functions. (Wark 2016)

Notwithstanding a potential to reach new audiences, much contemporary artistic activity plays directly to an audience of specialized peers.¹¹ Moreover, given that much of this activity is documented and disseminated as it happens through its surrounding peer network, the robustness of documentation and critical discussion can become distorted as a consequence of its inherent correlation to social acceptance and favorability. These networks can also exclude contributions outside a core group. Also, given that much art shares media with other databases and websites, algorithmically driven perceptions of popularity can influence ways in which art is evaluated, interpreted and valued. This can present challenges to curators seeking to establish new audiences or disseminate ideas without a #tag precedent. Some observers argue that algorithmically driven content and “filter bubbles” (Pariser 2011) generate echo chambers of opinion, perspective, and, at worst, conspiracy.¹² It is now well established that algorithms and sponsored search results on platforms such as Google and Facebook direct and manage online experience by privileging particular information. Some online realms enable users to decide or influence the most important content to feature. Meanwhile, audience data and online traffic analysis see art institutions and events at risk of comparison with popular entertainment. These comparisons can have real implications for viability and funding.

It is not difficult to find examples of what can happen when algorithmically driven technologies are unchecked. When Microsoft released its “millennial chatbot” Tay in 2016, for example, it quickly began using racist language and promoting neo-Nazi views on Twitter. And, after Facebook eliminated human editors to curate “trending” stories in 2016, the algorithm began promoting fake and vulgar stories (Thielman 2016). Meanwhile, Beauty.AI, the first international beauty contest judged by machines in 2016 saw over 6000 entries from over 100 countries submit images for an algorithm to judge attractiveness. It was soon clear that the algorithm disliked participants with dark skin (Levin 2016).

Algorithms are clearly increasingly influencing the way in which we consume culture. The key problem with the algorithmic selection of cultural objects is that they only really function in response to what has already been consumed. They are arguably less equipped to introduce content that might expand horizons. Consequently, the digital objects that surround us are attempting to steer us in increasingly invisible

ways. As Franklin Collective co-founder Mark J. Smith quips, “our technology [even] knows that we’re not using it. The network knows that we’re sleeping” (Lowry, Smith, and Whitman 2016). Given that online personalization distorts what we see, it is imperative that curators present content that actively ruptures filter bubbles and echo chambers. Although many people were surprised when Donald Trump was elected president in late 2016, this surprise was potentially a consequence of “years [of] coaching Facebook, Instagram and Twitter” (Wortham 2016). Yet, as US writer David Weinberger argues, casting the Internet as a series of echo chambers is also potentially limiting, for even everyday use of the Internet can bring us into contact with at least some ideas that don’t confirm our established views. Although Weinberger concedes that filter bubbles are diminishing diversity, he is quick to remind us that our informational diet before the Internet was also limited:

Three channels of nightly news; a small handful of newspapers in major cities; a nice spread of national magazines, each one its own echo chamber; a *Great Books* series launched in 1952 that consisted of works by 130 authors, not one of whom was a woman or black, and almost all of whom were within the European tradition. (Weinberger 2016)

Rather than bluntly rejecting or accepting social media at face value, we might, as US critic Howard Rheingold puts it, seek the benefits of practicing “real-time curation” in our use of social media (Rheingold 2012). Rheingold also warns that an “emerging digital divide is between those who know how to use social media for individual advantage and collective action, and those who don’t” (Rheingold 2012). Given that the act of selection is effectively equalized with making in post-Duchampian art, curatorial thinking is already embedded in artistic processes – including the moments in which artists select filters on Instagram to reflect how they imagine their work *should* look. Curatorial strategies of self-promotion also extend to mimetically distributing an artistic identity and personal likeness as “brand.” From outright complicity with “insta-like” and “selfie” culture through to more subversive forms of critique, variations of self-portraiture are in abundance on the Internet. Not long ago, the curated mediated self was the domain of public figures. Today, it is a pervasive condition within which an individual performs identity as brand to increase their symbolic capital. Less cynically, US critic and curator Brian Droitcour sees the rise of social media as a rebalancing of image-making power (Droitcour 2012). Of course, these shifts only form part of broader patterns of disintermediation.

Today, touring rock bands such as Metallica use local listening data from streaming services such as Spotify to “curate” their concert setlists (Jenke 2018). Meanwhile, political opinions and decisions are increasingly swayed by the impact of data generated through social media. Like other professions, artists are now implicitly valued through “likes.” Social media platforms might avail everything from carefully curated perspectives of an artist’s personal life to the presentation of fictionalized identities presented as art. Here, art that explores the nature of digital life is arguably more capable of performing a critically reflective function when experienced on the same devices encountered in everyday life. In 2014, for example, US-based Argentinian Spanish artist, Amalia Ulman ran an extreme, semi-fictionalized makeover through her Instagram account titled *Excellences and Perfections*. In this project, Ulman pretended to undergo a breast augmentation, followed the Zao Dha Diet, attended

pole-dancing lessons, and paraded lingerie and stylized interiors. Even Ulman's friends were unable to distinguish between her "real" and fictional personas. This work has already entered the canon as the first "serious" Instagram work. In stark contrast with Ulman's semi-fictionalized Instagram makeover, Australian artist Georgia Banks took to Tinder in 2017 to produce *Looking for Dick (in all the wrong places)*. Although this work was presented through real-time Tinder exchanges, it took place in a physical gallery. Re-presenting Chris Kraus's iconic *I Love Dick* (1997), Banks spent 12 hours a day for three days live on Tinder, swiping right only for men named "Richard." Accordingly, an otherwise private experience became public. Where Ulman inhabited the phenomenon of the "Hot Babe," Banks claimed the "Hot Mess of Tinder – embracing with open arms and unflinching honesty all the behavioural tropes women are taught to avoid during the 'getting to know you' stages of dating" (Banks, personal communication).

To be sure, a diverse range of cultural activities and institutional events in the art-world are now heavily reliant upon social media. A good example of the effective use of social media in an institutional context is US art curator and social media manager Kimberly Drew (aka @museummammy), who presents herself online as "#careful-blackgirl selling the shadow and supporting the substance." Significantly, Drew's currency is both supported by and extends her professional responsibility for running the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York's social media channels. Another prevalent use of social media used to promote art institutions and events is the "takeover," where an institution delegates its social media account to artists or a broader user community to vary voice or raise interest. To cite an early example, in August 2010, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art gave control of its Twitter account to actor Rainn Wilson. The results were confusing for many visitors, with Wilson deliberately sending out "alt right" styled provocations. A more recent variation of this approach was #AskACurator day, a cross-institutional initiative coordinated by @MarDixon. In its first iteration on 13 September 2017, audiences were invited to ask questions of staff at a number of participating museums.

The Stubborn Primacy of the Image

The architecture of the Internet, an arrangement of language, sound and images in which imagery is the most dominant, immediate factor helps facilitate an environment where artists are able to rely more and more on purely visual representations to convey their ideas and support an explanation of their art independent of language. (Vierkant 2010)

With or without the consent of author producers, any work placed online is potentially open to mutation. Historically, fixed forms of media levied value driven by scarcity and one-to-many systems of distribution and commodification. By contrast, digitally networked modes of production, dissemination, and reception problematize notions of a "primary experience" or "definitive version" – instead promoting conceptions of works or exhibitions as always provisional, always in progress, and available to be repurposed. Despite the multiplicity of possible medial materializations in an online context, the photographic image remains the primary point of entry.

As discussed earlier, photo sharing and social networking sites have radically extended the reach of everyday acts of curatorial selection. There is now no escaping the reality that artists and curators, irrespective of the content of their work, are deeply implicated in ways of behaving formed in response to the ubiquity of the digital image. As images dance across innumerable screens, “our eyes just scan the surface” as part of a process of “rapid-fire skimming” (Bishop 2012: 435). Given that more people will invariably encounter any given work through the backlit glow of a screen than via any other means, some artists and curators are increasingly alive to the urgency of promoting other ways of engaging with art. As Bishop puts it, “the art object needs to be reasserted in the face of its infinite, uncontrollable dissemination via Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, etc.” (Bishop 2012: 436) And, as Steyerl points out, issues that were apparent long before the Internet would be hyperrealized in its image, for “[t]he map ... has not only become equal to the world, but exceeds it by far [for a] vast quantity of images [now] covers the surface of the world” (Steyerl 2013). In any case, it is reasonable to assert that cultural expression both has and hasn’t been fundamentally transformed by the Internet. The irrepressible capacity of art to mock, subvert, and implicitly resist power structures both predates the era of the Internet, and – even allowing for the most dystopian visions of the future – will surely never be completely usurped or sublimated to the will of the few.

Conclusion

the role of the curator must evolve, and is evolving, in an age where informational systems underpin even the most traditional gallery system. Internet art not only incorporates such technologies, it also reveals them and reflects on their operation, and this in itself changes the curator’s relation to the work. (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta, 2013: 16)

Internet-based and Internet-activated art is simply part of broader contemporary art-worlds and not something significantly ontologically distinct from contemporary art more generally. At the same time, however, it is also clear that it sometimes demands its own languages and evaluative criteria. Ideally, Internet-based and Internet-activated art also requires a degree of digital historical literacy in order to avoid technological bedazzlement or Luddite suspicion. The Internet is also at once radically disrupting and entrenching the role of curators as cultural gatekeepers. We are not, however, at a point in which curating with the Internet is an integrated tradition with well-established curatorial roles. The future of curating with the Internet is therefore marked with many unknowns and possibilities. Just as the respective roles of artist, curator and audience are difficult to categorize in the era of disintermediation, many artists seek to actively bypass the figure of the professional curator altogether. Significantly, this potential “freedom from traditional curatorial structures ... makes internet-based art attractive to a range of artists operating outside the gallery system” (Lambert, McNeil, and Quaranta 2013: 16). For some, the future is marked by an urgent need to better democratize strategies of selection and display to reflect a world in which informational transmission is as important as its creation. In any event, we are well beyond believing in the naive utopian image of a democratic Internet capable

of liberating culture for all. But all hope is certainly not lost. As Rebecca Morse, Associate Curator in Photography at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, puts it, we are “making up the rules as we all go along” (Miranda 2016: 4). And, as they grapple with new challenges, artists and curators alike will no doubt continue to implicitly critique the spectatorial conditions of the digital devices that define contemporary existence by artistically presenting a philosophical doubling of their hold on nearly every aspect of life in developed countries. The creative use and adaptation of technology is inseparable from a broader human capacity to create alternative worlds. This is where, at best, Internet-based and Internet-activated art can signal the emancipatory potential within human existence.

Today, through the World Wide Web, an artist, curator, or collective can be virtually indistinguishable from a corporation or brand. Meanwhile, curatorial selection and documentation by artists and audiences is always already happening online, for, as Bishop puts it, “the derive is the logic of our dominant social field, the Internet” (Bishop 2012: 435). Unlike the assertions of aesthetic autonomy that prevailed in key twentieth-century art, much art in the twenty-first century is more concerned with negotiating relationships and testing spatial and temporal boundaries. In short, the key twentieth-century question “What is art?” has mutated to become “*Where* is art?” and “*When* is art?” In particular, works and exhibitions of art presented in explicit relationship with the Internet are less likely to be regarded as fixed in space and time, and correspondingly, more likely to be regarded as porous and open to continual transformation. Given that we can now effectively scroll in and out of some objects almost infinitely, questions of scale are increasingly unhinged from bodily registers. At best, net.art offers an augmented form of reality that performs a critically reflective intermediary role between that which we experience as embodied beings and abstracted echoes stored in code on massive servers elsewhere in time and space. Although many of the same questions that have long defined art’s relationship with the world still hold, the dimensional scope of some art historical problems is distorted across an obese present of global multi-temporal transcultural interactivity. As Peter Osborne argues, contemporary postconceptual art – of which Internet-based and Internet-activated approaches to art are simply subsets – is materially unlimited, ambiguously fictionalized, defined by a mutual insufficiency of material and contextual elements, and features a limit function provided only by the institutional networks of art. And this is only the beginning of the so-called digital century. It is also clear that we possess only a profoundly inchoate sense of what art and curating can and will be with the Internet.

Notes

- 1 Ubiquitous Internet connectivity forms a significant part of the fabric of twenty-first-century life in developed countries. This is not the case for the world’s most marginalized and excluded. As more people go online, the relative disadvantage of being offline grows. Although the “divide is narrowing” it is also “getting deeper” (Ewing 2016). A United Nations report published in 2015 found that billions of people in the developing world are still without Internet access, including up to “90 per cent of those living in the poorest nations” (United Nations 2015).

- 2 The detritus of any life has always accumulated with the passing of time. Digital technologies have simply accelerated the efficiency of preservation and accumulation – in turn demanding correspondingly greater attention to processes of selection, classification, archiving, retrieval, and re-presentation.
- 3 Although the Internet has effectively transformed the world into a giant library built in the metaphor of the Cloud, it is still limited by the editorial choices of contributing individuals and agendas of nations and corporations. As Lawrence Liang puts it, “the utopian ideal of the library ... is destined to be incomplete [and] haunted by what it necessarily leaves out and misses” (Liang 2012). The seductive allure of this metaphor was addressed in the curatorial premise underpinning a 2015 exhibition at the Serralves Museum titled *Under the Cloud*. The metaphor of the cloud also veils a broader shift from a culture of ownership to what American economic and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin describes as an age of access, in which, through licenses and leases, we are all essentially becoming perpetual renters of cultural products.
- 4 The World Wide Web (abbreviated WWW or the Web) – invented by British scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 – is a globally connected information space in which documents and other web resources identified by uniform resource locators (URLs) and interlinked by hypertext links can be accessed via the Internet.
- 5 It is now relatively well established that social media gives rise to cultural conditions in which non-expert comments and opinions carry commensurate weight with that of “expert” opinions.
- 6 Despite the relatively small percentage of users that actually leave comments on YouTube, etc. (Some videos with over a million views have zero comments.)
- 7 Although Rosalind Krauss’s influential description of a postmedium aesthetic in the late 1990s can be adapted to encapsulate something of the way in which reproducible and distributable media forms are flattened in an online environment, established postmedial understandings don’t necessarily account for ways in which behaviours in an online environment constitute a central distinguishing feature (Krauss 2000).
- 8 In a gesture that echoed John Baldessari’s ritual destruction of his paintings in 1970, net artist Igor Štromajer systematically deleted all his net.art works created between 1996 and 2007.
- 9 The artworld is not a homogeneous body but an aggregate of worlds which interact and overlap in a complex manner. It is a network of dependencies between sets of stakeholders, whose influence changes over time.
- 10 For a discussion of the minimum cultural traces required to establish the existence, somewhere in time and space, of an artwork, see Taimre (2018, 58–59, 509–512). As Taimre explains, the seminal work of Jeffrey Strayer (2007) is highly pertinent here.
- 11 Legitimation begins as peer support. With symbolic capital dependent upon the value of peer recognition, the ability to maintain meaningful communities is critical for the success of any new idea. The term “networking” is widely used to refer to the exchange of information or services between individuals, groups, or institutions, and the cultivation of productive relationships.
- 12 Molly Sauter usefully describes the susceptibility of Internet users to conspiratorial thinking: “Humans are storytellers, pattern-spotters, metaphor-makers. When these instincts run away with us, when we impose patterns or relationships on otherwise unrelated things, we call it apophenia” (Sauter 2017).

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Arts and Science

The Intersection (Re)engineered

Melentie Pandilovski

Re-visiting the “Two Cultures”

Curating projects at the intersection of science, philosophy, technology, and the arts is as curious a discipline as the relationship between science and the arts itself. Historically, parallelisms between arts and sciences go a long way back, and can be traced in our modern times in the well-known cases of Picasso and Braque coming up with the concept of Cubism, and Einstein with the concept of Relativity, during the same period. The influence of the French mathematician and philosopher of science Jules Henri Poincaré’s *Science and Hypothesis* (1902) on the artists of the age, and especially the chapters on the origins of geometry, seem to tell us that the origins of Cubism are not completely rooted in the arts. This has been thoroughly researched by Arthur I. Miller in *Insights of Genius: Imagery and Creativity in Science and Art* (Miller 2000) and *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc* (Miller 2001), where he rightly notes that the joint question of both the arts and sciences has been how to interpret the unseen world and go beyond conventional constraints of visual imagery and language to dramatically transform the concepts of visual imagery.

Still lurking in the depths are some of the most difficult and unresolved questions arising from the breakdown of communications in society, such as the issue of the relationship between the arts and the sciences, which has plagued humanity throughout the greater part of the twentieth century and was described by the author C.P. Snow as the rift between “the two cultures,” in his celebrated 1959 lecture series of that title, with the exception that Snow saw in this breakdown a chance for humanity:

The clashing space of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures, – of two galaxies, so far as that goes – ought to produce creative chances. In the history of mental activity that has been where some of the breakthroughs came. The chances are there

now. But they are there, as it were, in a vacuum, because those in the two cultures can't talk to each other. It is bizarre how very little of twentieth century science has been assimilated in twentieth century art. (Snow 1959)

Snow was correct in his observation, as generally speaking the artists and scientists have been educated in either the sciences or humanities. This task is therefore made very difficult, as in the analysis one has to deal with the essence, spectacle, and background of scientific processes, the artwork and its aesthetic qualities, the complex relationship of science and culture, as well as the social and political context surrounding art and science.

Still, great strides have been made since in bridging this gap, and new artforms have appeared, such as Robotic Art (just think of the beginnings with Nam Jun Paik and Shuya Abe's *Robot K-456*, Tom Shannon's *Squat*, Edward Ihnatowics's *Senster*, Ken Goldberg's *TeleGarden*, Simon Penny's *Petit Mal*, Stelarc's *Third Hand*, up to Chico MacMurtrie's *Totemobile* and his various inflatable sculptures), Nano-Art, Quantum Art (art and the physical sciences), experimental interface art, art in the domain of information visualization, and BioArt that seems to have developed the furthest in attaining a prominent place in regard to bridging this quite obvious gap from the two cultures of modern society – the sciences and the humanities. C.P. Snow (1959) in *The Two Cultures* defines the breakdown of communication between the two cultures of modern society, one being the culture of the sciences and the other one the culture of humanities. Snow sees this breakdown as a major hindrance to solving the world's problems of art and science – along the interface of the biological (which is both “ultimate objectivity” in the hands of science, “biological facts,” and “ultimate subjectivity” as the most intimate seat of personal feeling and emotion, the irreducible humanist bastion of “feelings”).

The US artist Joe Davis believes that Snow's “perspective is outdated”

The two can no longer be absolutely separated. Like science, art is a quest for knowledge. Few recall that for thousands of years, art was a principal instrument used by *Homo sapiens* to undertake the Apollonian search for secrets of God and nature. Only in recent centuries have special injunctions been adopted which proscribe artistic activities that might be confused with research and scientific inquiry. Students of art in our own era will generally have no idea that artists contributed to the invention of mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics and biology. This constructed separation of art and science has left little room for individuals who work outside contemporary frameworks of thought and language. Scholars of the humanities now acknowledge that this separation of arts and sciences was an artificial one perpetuated by centuries of history that turned metaphysics into the foundation of all things artistic. Yet, the machinery of this historical artificiality and its categories has assumed a kind of *de facto* reality. Until we can learn to think without the modern classifications of art and science, it will be difficult to encounter borderlines, interspaces and hybrids. (Pandilovski 2011: 226–239)

Joe Davis, who is also considered one of the pioneers of BioArt, goes on to say that he believes that the arts have been slowly moving away from this division for at least several decades:

I am simply too impatient to wait for art to fully recover its former scope. I would rather explore a role that still remains unknown to us: neither as an artist nor as a

scientist (designations I consider exchangeable in my personal practice). An artist-scientist is both free enough to tackle absurd questions and disciplined enough to be scientifically rigorous about the way the work is carried out. There is a chance, where it is possible to both dream and act, that opposition between Romantic and Constructivist notions can finally be resolved.

In the first century BCE, Marcus Vitruvius, the great Roman artist and architect and namesake of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man wrote that a student of art "... should be a good writer, a skilful draftsman, versed in geometry and optics, expert at figures, acquainted with history, informed on the principles of natural and moral philosophy, somewhat of a musician, not ignorant of the sciences both of law and physic, nor of the motions, laws, and relations to each other of the heavenly bodies.

Since therefore, this art is founded upon and adorned with so many different sciences, I am of the opinion that those who have not, from their early youth, gradually climbed up to the summit, cannot, without presumption, call themselves masters of it. (Vitruvius 2009)

Another view has been suggested by the British artist Gina Czarnecki, who has suggested there never was a gap. According to Czarnecki there never really was a gap, but just the perception of one. She believes that there is increasing awareness of the need for both specialists and generalists in any field. Czarnecki comments:

Science, technology, culture, innovation and their associated socio-political drivers are inter-related and there is an increased acknowledgement of the mutual evolution and the spaces between. However, one of my concerns in the UK is education and whilst it appears we are heading to a place where the space between art and science is being increasingly professionally acknowledged – therefore will grow – the education system is sprouting specialist secondary schools which gear themselves to be specialists in maths and computing, sciences, or humanities. My children at 10 will have to make a decision on what path they take and it becomes vital that alternative models of what people can do are there for these children rather than the division and classification of thinking. (Pandilovski 2011: 264–275)

Gary Cass, Australian biologist turned artist, is absolutely convinced that most of the world's universities, the bastion of all knowledge, have recognized the value of cross-disciplinary research, and that includes the arts and sciences crossovers.

My new workshops focus on not only artistic creativity but the scientific creativity. The science world is recognising the need for their world to become more creative. To deal with an unknown future and the possible problems we as a society may face will need the sciences to become more creative. And of course, this may be involving the meeting of two diverse cultures like the arts and sciences. As I have been invited to do the workshop that started in Adelaide at the Experimental Art Foundation, now around the world shows how popular these arts/sciences collaborations are becoming. I believe we have bridged the gaps, albeit slightly, but it is a great start in the right direction. Further acceptance of the arts by the sciences and especially the science funding bodies, in particular the need for philosophical viewpoints and creativity, are definitely required. But it will also require the arts to accept scientific beliefs and position. (Pandilovski 2011)

We are of course a long way from bridging the gap. In my opinion, we would first have to answer the question of whether the assimilation of science and technology has already become part of the mental experiences of the general public. An answer to this question could be given by determining whether the artworks themselves can be understood without the assistance of explanatory notes. In other words, the test will be passed if a singular sci-art object in itself – such as Paul Thomas/Kevin Raxworthy *Quantum Consciousness* and *Nano-Essence*, Eduardo Kac's *Genesis* and *Alba*, Joe Davis's *Microvenus*, Norman White's *The Helpless Robot*, and *Snowflake* by Boryana Rossa, Guy Ben-Ary, and Oleg Mavromatti – could be understood (and therefore self-sufficient) without the photo/textual documentation accompanying it.

Phenomenological Views of Technology/Science/Arts

The view taken by phenomenology is that the society and technology co-constitute each other, and are in a permanent condition of being what they are. Fundamentally, instead of concentrating on producing empirical observations, phenomenology delves into accounts of experienced space, time, space, body, and relations. The intersection of science and art finds good use of all of the above-mentioned accounts, but also of one of the basic characteristics of phenomenology, making a distinction between appearance and essence. Merleau-Ponty's idea that phenomenology is the study of essences resounds very well with sci-tech artworks, such as Eduardo Kac's *Genesis* (Osthoff 2001). Namely, phenomenology demands the reinterpretation of the world as we interact with it through an immediate experience.¹ Phenomenology also insists on “the same demand for awareness and the same will to seize the meaning of the world as that meaning comes into being.” This means that phenomenology always asks the question of what the nature or meaning of something is.

Martin Heidegger, on the other hand, identifies Plato's articulation of “*techne*” as the foundation upon which contemporary technology builds. In his 1955 lecture “The Question Concerning Technology” (given as part of a series of lectures organized by the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts on the theme of “the arts in the age of technology”), he insists on a certain isolation of a particular understanding of being which allows for the existence of any technology (Heidegger 1977). This is the sense in which one can understand his claim that “just as an essence of a tree is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all other trees, so the essence of technology is not itself something technological.” For Heidegger technology has a dual significance, as extreme danger threatening man to enter into a more original revealing, as well as a saving power which is there for man to recapture the original Greek essence of science, making “*techne*” the originating and final point of human existence. The disclosure of the world through technology is also a disguise of these relations, relations that can, however, be revealed.

Heidegger's ideas of “the second beginning of thinking,” and the meeting of the world in the historical time-space, and that this space can only be built by art when it connects to his idea of authentic language and points out the great link between the Origin (authenticity) and the conveying (language, art, BioArt in this case). Heidegger's concepts of origin and conveying could be seen today in relation to the encoding, recoding, and decoding practices – pointed out by Eugene Thacker (2006) – as representing the primary activities of biotechnology today. This relation

is additionally burdened by the simultaneous notions of the biological stock being property and information, having the traits of materiality and immateriality, existing as deployments of life which are being shifted from body to body, body to code, and code to body. One of the problems with the conveying is that the technologically enabled artwork puts the artist in a brand-new position of relating to, and depending upon, technology. Some of the artists who are known for their art/tech works have not yet mastered the technology. They rely heavily on institutions in general and technicians in particular. Very often this dependence is so deep that this represents a case of collaborative art, even though the technicians are seldom given the credit for co-authorship in the creation of the works of art. Conflicts occur often over this, and sometimes even the “artwork” becomes inaccessible for the general public, even the artist himself or herself (e.g. Eduardo Kac’s *Alba* project as the scientific lab that technically created the GFP bunny rabbit decided not to release it to the artist who conceptualized it). The audience is also mostly unsure about the possibilities of the technology, and therefore their experience of the understanding of the artwork suffers.

In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1977) notes that the essential unfolding of technology harbors within itself a danger of technology’s essence, but also the saving power inherent in it. Where does this saving power of technology reside? Will salvation be found in art and activism, that is strategies of resistance? Perhaps the Scientific Age will allow us to witness what Heidegger calls “the second beginning of thinking,” the meeting of the world in historical time–space, and perhaps this space can be built only by art.

Artistic and cultural research into scientific and technological developments has questioned established philosophical systems, ethical beliefs, and cultural practices by proposing new ways of looking at life and society, as artists, critics, and theorists navigate the maze of art–science–tech connections. The interdependencies certainly change the cultural, sociopolitical, and ecological landscape as science and technology creep into everyday lives.

As artists have delved deep into science and technology, it has become very difficult for art critics to define this newly produced work, let alone find a consensus or common ground regarding these new art works that utilize the merging of art and information technologies, augmented and accented through their interaction. Essentially, it is hard to imagine the full impact of what is to come, but the development of biotechnology and genetics certainly seems to have the potential to cause a tectonic shift in our culture. Generally speaking, cultural change is accompanied by, even caused by, changes in consciousness. In this case, we are witnessing a process of changing the critical viewpoint – away from the traditional understanding of civilization and in the direction of the intersection between the engineered and the biological.

However, we are still largely venturing into unknown regions; therefore, the domains of the metaphor of the phenomenon of the science artwork, as well as the lived experience with the science-tech artwork, might be better suited to guide us through the various discourses surrounding BioArt.

The concept of spatiality, or the “lived space” (also referred to as “felt space”), represents an integral part of the experience of creating, displaying, and seeing, or witnessing science-tech arts in the gallery space, science lab, workshop area, hospital, or city square. It differs on each occasion, and the experiential differences are the ones we need to discover.

In this sense of the “lived space” we can look into Kac’s transgenic installation *Genesis*, which explores the new fetish of the scientific world: the gene and the protein, posing interesting theoretical and metaphysical questions about media, meaning, and representation. The key element of the installation is an “artist’s gene,” which is a synthetic gene containing a DNA sequence of the first chapter in the Old Testament (the Biblical book of Genesis), is translated into DNA bases, and the subsequent reversing of the process by translating from the mutant gene sequence, to Morse code, and finally back to altered English. Participants in the project (both in the gallery space and on the Web) can turn on the ultraviolet light in the gallery, causing real, biological mutations in the bacteria which is to be found in a Petri dish in a luxurious glass case. The viewer is thus able to change the biblical sentence in the bacteria. This relates to the US philosopher Eugene Thacker’s triumvirate of encoding, recoding, and decoding as representing the primary activities of biotechnology today, as well as to the simultaneous notions of the biological stock being property and information, having the traits of materiality and immateriality, and existing as deployments of life that are being shifted from body to body, body to code, and code to body.

Returning to the work of Joe Davis, he sees his artwork *Microvenus*² as already part of the “lived mind.” It is carried around in the same space with all other experiences. For Davis, the search for reality of the secrets of life is a search for invisibility within invisibility.

Details about cellular signaling, membrane transport, vectors, introns, exons and RNAi, promoters and origins of replication are all nested within what there is to know about bacteria. This knowledge includes understandings of transcription of nucleic acids and translation and synthesis of peptides and protein and of the enzymes and biochemical operators that underlie these processes. The study of bacteria is also a study of many useful proteins that assemble into such things as nanoscale molecular motors and fluorescent markers. Bacteria can be assembled into macroscopic devices too, to clean wastewater or produce electrical current. Perhaps most importantly, the study of bacteria is the study of the incredibly compact master plan for life itself that is coded into substances found within each invisible bacterium. The study of bacteria then becomes a desire to acquire the tools and skills needed to resolve this master plan and the wisdom needed to comprehend it. The choice is to learn all of this or to remain forever ignorant. To peer through microscopes is not enough. The facts at hand are much too deeply invisible. The fabric of reality is much finer and far more intricate than the contexts of even the tiniest objects seen in the compass of a microscope objective (Pandilovski 2011).

“The lived body” refers to the embodied (corporeal) experience. We experience artworks through our bodies, as we experience the world through our bodies. The experience is always different. For example, the viewer of *Kuh*, Michalis Pichler’s project, is able to witness a semi-real corpse/artifact in a public space. Namely, *Kuh* consists of the tanned skin, claws, and horns of a cow (which was slaughtered for meat consumption) that has been sewn over a sculpted corpse carved out of Styrofoam. *Kuh* is then placed in a public space (the work was positioned in different locations in Berlin, such as Breitscheidplatz and in the town of Brühl). The “lived body” consists of a signifier (skin of dead cow over Styrofoam) and referent (dead cow) making it a hybrid of an image and a real dead cow. The people that touch the artifact are dealing with mortal remains as well as with the representation of death.

Joe Davis’s *Microvenus* DNA, like all other DNA, is a physical substance. In sufficient quantity, it is visible and tactile. Still, the simple act of seeing something does not

automatically make it true. Davis used Sanger sequencing, gel electrophoresis, and autoradiography to verify that *Microvenus* consisted of the intended nucleotides and these techniques produced unique, *Microvenus*-identifying artefacts that have been exhibited internationally. For Davis, the “embodied experience” is not a reasonable basis to argue that art cannot be created and observed at microcosmic scales. Davis believes that he has changed the way in which we are asked to behold a work of art.

Microvenus was an image written as language. It is a word and a picture and I created it from scratch. It has since been reiterated in diverse forms. Critics and curators are disoriented because *Microvenus* itself cannot be found perfectly nested in a picture frame or otherwise comfortably disposed in the halls of a typical exhibition. You might ask, “Where are the paints and canvas? Where is the gouache or charcoal? Where is the ink and paper?” But, these questions are only asking after the materials I use. How can anything be art if I have not decided to choose from this hallowed inventory of art supplies? I say art is not defined by what substance it is made of any more than it is by the commercial and institutional architectures of galleries and museums. I say this word created for you is more robust and durable than all the pages of all of the history books and the combined collections of world museums. When all of these have finally turned to dust and all of the cities and monuments raised by enormous acts of labour and sacrifice have long since passed from the face of the Earth, this word – and others like it – will be left to shoulder the legacy of human dreams and aspirations. (Pandilovski 2011)

Temporal issues, such as subjective time, as opposed to objective time are covered by the concept of “lived time.” This notion can be researched with the artwork, its concept, but also with the audience. Questions which are of interest are issues of temporality that we face when encountering a work of science–tech–arts. In this respect, I would like to point to the work of New York-based Chico MacMurtrie, who is internationally renowned for his robotic installations. In the middle of the last decade he altered the materials that he was famous for working with (metallic cumbersome robots) with inflatable sculptures. I curated three installations, performances, and workshops of Chico MacMurtrie and Amorphic Robot Works. *Interactive Birds* was the first interactive inflatable version of *Sixteen Birds*, the first multi-sculpture installation using Amorphic Robot Works’ Inflatable Bodies technology, which I curated at the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in 2006 in Adelaide, Australia. A spectacular project, it provides for a meditative experience for the public, the birds begin with movement as soon as the public enters the gallery, as the birds begin to accumulate air they fill their bodies as if human presence gives them life. The open, physically accessible nature of the installation gives the impression that visitors are free to roam within the birds’ space, but if the viewers encroach upon their space excessively, a death cycle is triggered. Once one bird is infected, it begins to corrupt the others’ behaviors, and soon all the birds have prematurely ended their lifecycles.

Following *Interactive Birds*, I curated *Inner Space*, a performance, installation, and workshop, in 2010, at the National Gallery of Macedonia – an Ottoman hammam converted to a gallery space in Skopje, Macedonia. *Inner Space* comprises an inflatable robotic structure that forms a capsule-like space made of interconnected tubes. The installation represents a part of Amorphic Robot Works’ ongoing exploration of living systems, machines, and architecture, its movement analogous to that of organic muscle and bone, animated by the slow rhythm of breathing. The installation allows

for the visitors to experience the kinetic transformation from inside or outside the capsule, the public allowed into the actual installation, as the tubes fill with air to form a suspended enclosure.

Inflatable Robotic Arts in Canada and the performance *Inflatable Architecture Intervention* was the third project I curated of Chico MacMurtrie and Amorphic Robot Works, at the University of Manitoba's Gallery, in Winnipeg in 2012. The project represented an innovative development project implementing evolving technologies for the new generation of robotic sculpture and media arts. MacMurtrie used cellular hexagons "offering visceral experience of the kinds of minuet geometric constructions that underlie all of life, revealing that organic and inorganic forms are not mutually exclusive categories, but different moments of a shared continuum of form" (*Inflatable Robotic Arts in Canada* 2012).

The concept of relationality involves numerous sorts of interrelationship. The Canadian philosopher Max van Manen, in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action* (2016), speaks of the lived relationship we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them. Forms of relationality include seeking to establish a shared presence in a single space involving the lived other. Others who were present when the transmission took place, such as the other artists, the general public, scientists, mechanical and electrical engineers, biologists, astronomers, professional dancers, architects, linguists, and philosophers. This lived relation is very evident in Ted Hiebert's work, during his project *Between Magnets*, which I curated for the group exhibition *Toxicity*, where I performed "magnetic baptism." Namely, in an agreement with the artist, I placed strong magnets on both sides of Hiebert's head while he patiently allowed for the strong magnetic fields to affect his body and consciousness. Oblivious of the consequences, both artist and curator hoped that everything would go well, and it did. The audience loved the project, and the artist was unharmed. We are, however, unsure of the long-term consequences of this project, as we simply do not know enough about magnetism. I like to point out that Albert Einstein spent decades attempting to develop the unified field theory which would relate to electromagnetism and gravity, but he was only partially successful. The posthuman condition is bound to take into account advances in our understanding of electromagnetism, in the same way it embraces other sciences.

Joe Davis's *Poetica Vaginal* contains aspects of relationality, as it is in fact a transmitted message to the "other" (real or fictional), and involves discourses of interrelation, or lived relation, we maintain with this "other" in the intergalactic and interpersonal space that we share with them. Joe Davis believes that *Poetica Vaginal* and other projects surrounding the search for extraterrestrial intelligence brought him to the study of molecular biology. Davis has made this observation:

I have recently circled back to undertake further projects in interstellar communications (e.g., *Rubisco Stars* and *Swan Songs*, an effort in progress). These fields are multidisciplinary or "relational" if you will. Astronomy and biology have become astrobiology. Whole fields of computer science and radio engineering have grown up around the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence while bioinformatics, proteomics, and genomics have grown up around molecular biology. These overlaps may seem impressive, but in my mind, everything is intrinsically connected with everything else. I build connectors and the connection I built with *Poetica Vaginal* was to interplay the intense rationalism of astronomy and astrobiology and the irrational shame and

vanity with which *Homo sapiens* regards its own physiology. Nothing of this was any sort of mystery to start with. Everyone knew. It simply had never been acknowledged. It was as if we had decided to go walking around without our eyes and ears. We still do, of course. *Poetica Vaginal* speaks to all utterly obvious things that lurk around us “co-presently” and completely unseen. (Pandilovski 2011)

Eduardo Kac’s work shows that genetic art deals mostly with questions of a phenomenological nature. The questions of “relationality” are important in his work, as are generally the questions of lived experience (as “lived space,” “lived body,” “lived time,” and “lived other”). It is perhaps also of importance to note that relationality is perhaps best followed in *Genesis*, as they reconfigure the relationship between biology and technology. Kac makes this salient point:

We can make art in which the relationship between audience and work is the relationship of two subjects, not a subject and an object. What are the boundaries of a work of living art? Is all of it art, or only certain features, such as flowers or fluorescence? What kinds of interactions are possible with live art works? Under what circumstances, if any, can death or suffering become aspects of art? What responsibilities do artists, curators, audiences, and collectors have to live works of art? What are our responsibilities to nonhuman life? (Gessert 2004)

Arts Science Metaphors

Motifs, metaphors, and models are shared between the arts and sciences. The primary role of the metaphor lies in the concretization of the abstraction or in the clarifying of the subject matter, which is otherwise bound to stay mystified. Metaphors represent a large part of the public representation of science in particular and play a crucial role in the wider gamut of science and technology issues in general. Eugene Thacker says that “molecular biology is one field that consistently shows that metaphors matters” (Pandilovski 2011: 246–249).

He primarily refers to the metaphor of information as applied to the living, and the resultant ways in which we increasingly come to regard life as defined by and through information.

The level of interaction between the arts, sciences, and technology in the past half a century has been steadily increasing, indicating the tendency of artists to assume the roles of the Renaissance period, or the first decade of the twentieth century, when communication between the arts and the sciences became increasingly intensive. Artists have become highly aware of the necessity to collaborate with scientists and technologists. This awareness is perhaps even more important than the actual mastery of scientific and technologic processes. We can say that the understanding of today’s world and the shifts in arts coincide with augmented concepts in the sciences (research in quantum physics and exploration of nano levels, as well as in biological and genetic theories and practices). Additionally, life sciences are transforming into information sciences. In fact, for the medium of DNA it has become irrelevant whether the code is written as an information code onto the hard disc, is found in the Cloud, or is stored into an *E. coli* culture in a Petri dish. The fact that the code is transferrable makes the issues of storing less important.

The public image of science is reflected through numerous metaphors such as “scientific journey” and “progress of science,” which have been in wide use to depict

the development of biotechnology. One must also note the point that French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour (1987) makes that science and nature are constantly renegotiated, thus emphasizing the importance of studying science in action. Some of the universally used metaphors in regard to environmental issues are the “greenhouse effect” and the “ozone hole.”

As far as the phenomenological view is concerned we can assert that the used metaphors in BioArts have the potency to become crucial in interpreting what BioArts stands for. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003: 157) in *Metaphors We Live By* suggest, “New metaphors, like conventional metaphors, can have the power to define reality.” They claim that we not only use metaphors in our language but that these same metaphors shape our language. The “alphabet of life” has often been used as a metaphor when referring to the Human Genome Project (Kevles and Leroy Hood 1992; Rosner and Johnson 1995). Other metaphors about this project include “revealing the secrets of the book of life” and the “secret textures of life.” Responses from the humanities have included metaphors of “creating new monsters” (Keller 1996) and “creating chimeras” (Nelkin and Lindee 1995). In as far as metaphors about chimeras are concerned, the South Australian artist Niki Sperou sees that BioArt proposes manipulation of things, things which express some kind of intervention. In her work, she uses various metaphors and visual puns such as fleshy and layered forms and colors with biological substances: rice, eggs, flowers, blood, leather, and pig parts (Figures 22.1 and 22.2). The work is usually alive, wet, and messy. These things are often hybrid and (as seen through the concept of the “chimera” – the transgenic organism of biotechnology) suggest strong metaphors in her work. As Sperou reminds us: “When perceived as monstrous they represent things which are extra, deficient or out of kilter. They allude to the transversal of boundaries. They might represent fluid ideas and processes or misunderstandings. They are things which are under development, experimental, that require reflection and understanding. They represent new possibilities and new realities” (Pandilovski 2011: 257–264) (Figures 22.3 and 22.4).

Thierry Bardini and Marie-Pier Boucher (2010) look into the “metaphormatted human,” referring to three different things: that today’s human beings are being metaphormatted by a set of philosophical postulates, moral values, and inscription practices that frame the human evolution (both biological and cultural) with respect to technology; that today’s human beings are potentially metamorphosed by a set of technological concepts, and incorporating interventions amounting to the concrete bootstrapping of the production of man by man – and that both of these philosophical axioms are heavily dependent on an engrained set of metaphors, catachreses, and metonymies that actually enable and constrain the passages between both realms, thus artistic practices.

Metaphors certainly assist us with the perpetual covering of scientific and environmental issues. The discoveries in the fields of genetics and genomics are almost always being branded with the metaphor of scientific breakthroughs. However, the risks involved are mostly looked upon as scientific progress in an unexplored field. According to Dvora Yanov (1996), technology is often perceived as being out of control, whereas science is perceived as a means of gaining control.

On the other hand, Peter Sloterdijk looked with suspicion into the prevailing discourses being built around the genetic technologies. As he suggests:

The most spectacular hold of the mechanistic over the subjective looks promising in genetic technology. Genetic technology draws on a wide range of preconceptions, vulnerable to artificial manipulation. To this is attached the more or less fantastic idea



FIGURE 22.1 *Trust* (series), Niki Sperou, Medium: glass Petri dish, gel medium seeded with *E.coli*, antibiotic, paper, light box. Created for the *Toxicity* exhibition, Plug-In ICA, Winnipeg, Canada, 2013. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.

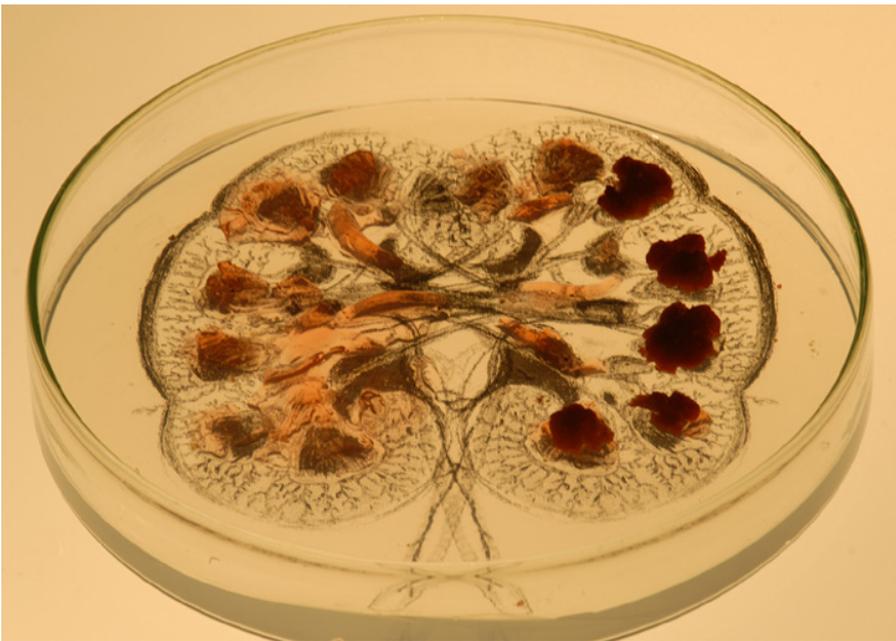


FIGURE 22.2 *Man A Plant* (series detail), Niki Sperou, Medium: glass Petri dish, plant tissue culture, agar medium, drawing, on lightbox plinth. Produced via aseptic technique. Produced in 2006 for the *Man-A-Plant* exhibition, at the Flinders Medical Centre, Adelaide. Exhibited at Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide for Biotech Art – Revisited in 2009, and *The Apparatus of Life & Death* – SEAFair, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Macedonia in 2010. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.



FIGURE 22.3 *The Colonised Body* (detail), Niki Sperou. Mixed media installation 2016. Exhibited at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in 2016, and *The Rise of Bio-Society*, Riddoch Art Gallery, Mount Gambier in 2017. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.



FIGURE 22.4 *Preserves*, Niki Sperou. Mixed media installation. Created for the *Domestic Science Exhibition*, Royal Institution Australia in 2012. Courtesy of Niki Sperou.

that we could, in the short term, “make whole men.” In such fantasies, the primitive biologisms compete with humanisms and with helpless theologisms, and not an ounce of understanding of the conditions of the anthropogenesis in evolution is discernible among those who hold such opinions. (Bardini and Boucher 2010)

According to the German French curator Jens Hauser:

Biology’s ascent to the status of the leading natural science has led to a massive use of biological metaphors in the Humanities and a wide range of Bio-tech procedures that provide artists with themes for their work and, even more, with new expressive media. (Hauser 2006)

Suzanne Anker and Dorothy Nelkin (2004) write about how the gene becomes a cultural icon of our times, providing a huge supply of imagery and ideas for artists. In the book, they look into the moral and bioethical questions such as the meaning to be human, ethics, and identity in a society of genetically manipulated individuals in the genetic age.

UK-based artist Gina Czarnecki uses signifiers and metaphors to enable wider reading through different individuals’ associations and what they bring to the works. She uses metaphors in her work as a simplification of very complex associations that can be read on multiple levels with multiple entry points. She is currently using kids’ teeth as metaphors for states of transition, rites of passage, connections between the biological and the mythical world, bones as a metaphor for medical possibilities, consent, preservation, histories of imperialism and slavery, choice, fat as a metaphor for abundance and dependency, and recycling and taboo.

Peter Weingart (1998) points to the historical evolution in society of both mass media, and the sciences, both of which have their own logic, yet in contemporary society they are becoming interwoven. Both, however, vie for their structural possibilities, and the deciphering of their ontological reasons for being, which results in different actions being taken, and evolving metaphors being used for the scientific and public discourses.

Iina Hellsten (2002) discusses the “politics of metaphors,” focusing on metaphors as flexible tools of making sense of the world and communicating these views to others.

“The politics of the metaphor is analysed in relation to public representations of science and technology both as advances and risks, particularly in relation to public representations of modern biotechnology and biodiversity in the 1990s” (Hellsten 2002: 4). According to Iina Hellsten, the scientific issues of and public debates on biotechnology and biodiversity have several points in common. Both are global phenomena that originate in the realm of biosciences – biotechnology in molecular biology and genetic engineering, biodiversity conservation in systems ecology and conservation biology. In public debate, the issues are co-defined by a complex network of different scientific and social scientific as well as political, legal, and economic discourses. Discourse refers here to the system’s conventionalized ways of speech. Furthermore, all these discourses are represented in public, i.e. mass-mediated, debates. Both the biotechnology and the biodiversity debates also evoke images of the end of nature (Giddens 1998), the postnatural era (Franklin et al. 2000), or social aspects of nature (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 4–15). In other words, in both debates the discourses of societal institutions are interestingly intertwined; and

second, the boundaries between culture, nature and science are blurred into a number of ways. Both debates also point to expectations concerning the future. Public representations of biotechnology often point to the hope of medical breakthroughs in the treatment of cancer. Public representations of biodiversity, in turn, point to the fear of losing biological diversity. These images of hope and fear have to be stabilized in the present. In the stabilization of expectations, metaphors seem to play a crucial role (Wyatt et al. 2000).

The Western Australian artist biologist Gary Cass points out that perhaps it is up to the viewer who needs to distinguish the metaphors.

We build a Cyborg, a dress, a half man, half machine, and they are what they are! I think in this respect, and if the audience perceives the metaphor, then the piece is more powerful. We generate thought provoking objects for the public to scrutinise and distinguish for their own ideology and reflection. I don't believe that our pieces should be used by us for some sort of political gain. Whether for instance, *Bioalloy* and the *Body* performance done in Singapore represents a metaphor of the Singaporean state and it's pain through the bleeding of the machine, the bleeding and pain felt by the Singaporean people; must be perceived by the viewers of the performance? (Pandilovski 2011: 275–285)

Curating in the Science Era

It has been evident that the displaying of science-based artwork changes the custodial role of the art institution. Art institutions have been expanding their exhibition policies in order to present BioArts over the past two decades. Institutions such as *Ars Electronica*, the *EMARE NETWORK*, *SymbioticA*, *Australian Experimental Art Foundation (AEAF)*, and *SEAFair (Skopje Electronic Art Fair)* take part in this development by supporting artistic research in the sciences. This role is especially important in commissioning and supporting the work of artists, and in opening up the “white box” to “live” artworks, created in collaborations with scientists. The changing role of art institutions, in supporting artistic research in certain gray areas (as a reflection of current theoretical developments in biophilosophy and biopolitics), can be seen as directly connected to the thinking of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Roberto Esposito. The anesthetization of science in general, and biology in particular, can be seen in projects of artists such as Eduardo Kac, *TC&A (the Tissue Culture & Art Project)*, Andre Brodie, George Gessert, and Natalie Jeremijenko.

In practical terms, it has to be said that at this point of development of art science, we have witnessed some support by the media arts institutions, and mostly by *Prix Ars Electronica*, universities such as University of Western Australia have been instrumental by setting up science and art laboratories such as *SymbioticA*, and media-visual art organizations such as the *International Symposium for Electronic Art (ISEA)*, *Transmediale* in Berlin, *VIDA* in Spain, *Bio-Art Lab* at the School of Visual Arts in New York, the *Art and Genomics Center* in Leiden, *BAD: Bio Art & Design Awards*, the *SEAFair (Skopje Electronic Art Fair)*, *Arts at CERN* (particle physics laboratory, home of the Large Hadron Collider). Also, *Ectopia* in Portugal, *ZKM* in Karlsruhe, *FACT* in Liverpool, *Waag Society's Open Wet Lab* in Amsterdam, *ACMI* in Melbourne, and the *Experimental Art Foundation* (now closed) in Adelaide have

given plentiful support to this growing area. However, it has to be pointed out that the major art venues (museums, state galleries, and major biennials) have had a very sparse involvement with BioArts.

It is to be expected that arts and science will be acknowledged by the major contemporary art venues during this decade, a process that video art went through some two to three decades ago.

Through my practical first-hand experiences with the area of Sci-Tech Arts, including the roles of curator, artist, director, and writer since the eighties, I curated projects such as *Interactive Birds*, *Toxicity*, *Age of Catastrophe*, *The Rise of Bio-Society*, *Society and Genomic Culture*, and the *Art of the Bio-tech Era*. I have had the privilege to witness the development of Sci-Tech Arts, and the various phenomena accompanying it, first-hand,³ such as “Bio-tech Art – Revisited,”⁴ which provided a critical examination of these phenomena in society, politics, networks, and media by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The exhibition *Bio-tech Arts-Revisited* had stressed that we are at a point where we are able to understand our world to be at an intersection where the biological and the engineered meet. Advancements have occurred in the field of biotechnology, and we have generally become more aware of the need to address issues as diverse as the politics of the discipline of biotechnology, the ethical implications of genetic engineering and the relationship between ethics and bio-technology. The exhibition had also shown that the artform of BioArt has somewhat matured, the audiences have gotten accustomed to treating biotech arts as a valid artform, rather than a spectacle of the new. The project dealt with the essence, spectacle, and background of scientific processes, the complex relationship of science and culture, the social and political context surrounding art and biotechnology, and finally the artistic and cultural codes used in art and biotechnology. The exhibition assisted me in conducting an objective analysis about the structure and ways of how moist-media was influencing the way we experience life.

The key questions which I deemed important in order to understand the wider domain of Sci-Tech Arts:

- The artwork, although using science (nanotechnology, quantum research) cannot be seen as merely a descriptor of scientific practices.
- The artwork, even though it uses biomaterial, cannot be treated as based on live or dead cells, because it has a conceptual content beyond its corporeality.
- The artwork, even though coding is used (in program languages or in the genetic information of organisms), cannot be treated solely as software action, because the aspects of life in the production of moist art give a much greater rigor to the processes of creation of the new work.
- The analysis showed that this sort of artwork is not image based, even though artists use the image as such: they have engaged in the process by which the artworks outgrow the concept of images, though in fact the phenomenological experience of the image is increased.
- The artwork, although utilizing text, cannot be considered text based. Similarly, the Web itself is not text based, though it is textually overloaded.

This analysis also shows that, at a technical level, such work represents a vibrant interpretation of scientific principles, as in the case of *nanoessence* and *quantum consciousness* by Paul Thomas and Kevin Raxworthy; interaction between biodata stacks moving from the representation of the manipulation of biomatter, as in the

work of Patricia Piccinini or Mez Breeze through to the actual manipulation of biomatter, as in the work of Andre Brodyk, Eduardo Kac, Adam Zaretsky, or the TC&A. We would not be wrong in saying that the above-mentioned artists utilize integrated media communications where the “space” becomes the space to be augmented, accented through a process of wide-ranging visualization, across text, imagery, biomatter, and coding.

In order for artists to develop science-tech projects, they have to take into account the context, data compiling (biological, genetic, electronic, or other), thus establishing a relation between artists, scientists, and the producers. Once this relation is established, they have to adapt to technical requests, consider as many effects and side effects of the projects as possible, generate scientific content, and create a set of connections within simple or complex systems, and be immersed in the processes of scientific and technologic exploration. In this process, the artists are engaged in finding out the constraints of science and technology while bringing the viewer to an increased awareness of the artwork, represented by samples which may be experienced or interfaced by the viewers, as they are absorbed in intrinsic or hidden possibilities of interaction with the BioArt. Further on, artists are engaged in the process of altering the concept of personal and community biospace, are attempting to organize it along the lines of a relationship between science, technology, genetics, real space, and a personal (or collective) viewpoint. Underlying this is increased access to the spheres of “visual thinking” and “intuitive awareness.” Equally important become “embodiment issues,” “the enhancement of the human species,” “hybridity,” but also the classical issues which artists have always confronted: colors, forms, fragrances, accidents, and textures.

The terms of “communication,” “uncertainty,” “presence” (the sense that there are things quite separate from us out in the world), and navigation have become key common experiences we have on seeing new work (Pandilovski 2011).

In regard to the concept of presence, George Gessert continues: “I am less interested in metaphors and meanings than in what Hans Gumbrecht calls ‘presence’: the sense that there are things quite separate from us out in the world. We give these things names – ‘plum tree,’ ‘granite,’ ‘Alpha Centauri,’ ‘heat’ – and impose meanings, but can never completely know or understand what it is we are seeing. That is the magic of the world” (Pandilovski 2011: 239–245).

In regard to the principle of uncertainty George Gessert makes this comment:

I consider communication important, but that does not necessarily involve verifiability. Uncertainty is one of the most common experiences we have on seeing new work. We don’t know what is going on. I wish that everyone interested in contemporary art accepted this, but they don’t. When INRA refused to release *Alba*, some artists – people who should know better – attacked Eduardo for making unverifiable claims about the rabbit. I wrote the essay in Eduardo’s defence, and in defence of the kind of art that is most important to me: art as visual or conceptual experience, not as a construct of verifiable facts. (Pandilovski 2011: 239–245)

In terms of the uncertainty principle (Heisenberg’s “indeterminacy principle” and Einstein’s “spooky action at distance”), being one of the most famous ideas in physics which tells us about the fuzziness in nature and behavior of quantum particles, I have curated *Quantum Consciousness*, a collaborative work by artist and professor at the University of New South Wales Paul Thomas and scientist Kevin Raxworthy for *The Age of Catastrophe* at the Actual Gallery, in Winnipeg, Canada,

in 2015, as well as for *The Rise of Bio-Society* exhibition, which examined recent developments in the areas of BioArt and culture at the Riddoch Art Gallery, in Mount Gambier, in 2017. *Quantum Consciousness* is a sonic and visual installation immersing the viewer in the quantum phenomenon. Atomic data index the quantum movement of an electron. The interactive quantum spin of the electron is mapped, serving as the conduit for the form of the sensory stimuli of the work. The project delves into the paradox of the quantum superposition, best articulated in the Erwin Schrödinger's cat thought experiment, existing as an actual and empirical condition in which an electron occupies multiple positions in space simultaneously, but none specifically. *Quantum Consciousness* therefore brings an aesthetic and immersive experience establishing a metaphor and indexical map of human thought. Artist and academic, Paul Thomas and scientist Kevin Raxworthy (see a broader significance of quantum consciousness concerning the possibility of nonhuman, computational intelligence commingling with human consciousness). This possibility stems from the fact that the "material" of the electron and its quantum behavior is the basis of the possibility of quantum computation.

In addition, I have also curated *Nanoessence* by Thomas and Raxworthy for *Biotech Art-Revisited* at the (Australian) Experimental Art Foundation in 2009, as well as in Mount Gambier's Riddoch Art Gallery for *Rise of Bio-Society*. *Nanoessence* begins with living skin cells that are scanned by the atomic force microscope (AFM) in various modes, recording topographies by gathering deflection data that are translated to produce a visual representation. Thomas and Raxworthy use the data from the AFM to look at biological phenomena of difference revealed at nanolevels in topographical visualizations and sonic structures between life and death. The breath and moisture interface allows users to breathe on the model of the HaCaT cell. As the user maintains their breath, cellular automatons start to grow and spin. This growth lasts as long as the user continues to breathe on the work.

The Politics of Science–Tech–Arts

The twenty-first century symbolically starts with two proclamations: the first one is simultaneously an art project and a living being. Her name is *Alba*, and her creator is Chicago-based, Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac. As an art project *Alba* has a power of a Futurist manifesto, and so much more, acting as what Marshall McLuhan would term a "Distant Early Warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it" (McLuhan 1964: xi). *Alba* is also known as "The GFP Transgenic Bunny." She is an albino rabbit whose entire body glows green under fluorescent light. She was conceptualized, conceived, and born in 2000, at the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), through the collaborative efforts of Eduardo Kac, Louis Bec, Louis-Marie Houdebine, and Patrick Prunet. In order to convey the critic's comprehension of *Alba*, it is worth noting that Steve Tomasula shares a characteristic attitude to understanding Kac's work in "Genetic Art and the Aesthetics of Biology" (Tomasula 2002). He sees *Alba*, the first mammal genetically altered to be a work of art, as being part of a performed social event entitled GFP Bunny. Tomasula comments:

In it, Kac and the rabbit were to live together first in a faux living room within the Grenier à Sel in Avignon, France, then with Kac's real family in his real home in

Chicago. What happened instead was that *Alba* was confiscated by the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, the research lab in which Kac's biologist collaborators worked; the lead biologist himself was reprimanded. The public debate Kac hoped to generate did ensue, however, with some members of the French and German press equating *Alba's* confiscation with artistic censorship and others characterising *Alba* as a work of decadent art, citing the fact that the rabbit was given the ability to glow by infusing its cells with the protein that allows jelly fish to glow under the sea. He concludes with the idea that the lab now has a new director, so *Alba* may yet come to Chicago. But in any case, the discussion is sure to widen, as Kac is at the leading edge of a growing number of artists who work in genes, cells and other biological materials as a sculptor might work in bronze. (Tomasula 2002)

This sort of discourse is repeated in Carol Becker's (2002) "GFP Bunny," Carrie Dierks' (2000) "Glowing Bunny Sparks International controversy," Gareth Cook's (2000) "Cross hare: hop and glow," and Libby Copeland's (2000) "It's Not Easy Being Green."

The second proclamation is purely political. In 2000, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair proclaimed victory with their simultaneous declaration that a draft version of the human genome had been completed. The so-called deciphering of the human genome seemed to say that a great victory had been achieved by completing this undoubtedly highly conceptual and scientific task, and it was time for technical follow-up. As time has shown, this has indeed been a prematurely celebrated victory as the human genome is, however, proving to be more resistant to deciphering than previously thought, presenting a number of practical surprises to the scientific world, which now has to reconsider the genes previously discarded as "trash" or "evolutionary junk."

The activity of artists who deal with science has also been seen through the political lens. The US artist and writer George Gessert points out that "all art has political dimensions, but purely political art rarely tells us anything that we don't already know. Agitprop has social uses, but is rarely interesting as art. What genetic art can do best is what art has always done best: engage our minds and hearts through our senses, break down stereotypes, define hopes and fears, baffle and astonish, relieve our isolation" (Pandilovski 2011: 239–245).

However, Gessert continues:

All works of genetic art, whatever their political slant, validate public discussion about Bio-technology and genetics. This has important political implications. Business, science, agriculture, and government control not only Bio-technology, but most discourse about it. Almost everyone else, including artists, have stayed out – or been held out – of public discourse about genetics. Until very recently the few who spoke up in even small ways were often ridiculed, marginalized or attacked. This was, in part, presumably because eugenics was lurking in the wings, ready to pounce if people as allegedly emotional and irresponsible as artists got involved. (Pandilovski 2011)

Gessert points out that in the 1980s, when he first exhibited hybrid irises in galleries, he was questioned about eugenics, and heard nervous comments about Hitler and racism, during the course of every exhibition; to many people, even the mildest reference to genetics in the context of "culture" implied eugenics. Once in the gallery, hybrid irises were not irises: they were stand-ins for people.

I tend to agree with Gessert when he states that:

Genetic art has fostered discussion, not only about Bio-technology, but about bringing consciousness to evolution – our own evolution, that of other species, and of the biosphere. Understanding of the issues that surround these things is much greater today than it was just a few years ago, at least in the art world. However, what we must also recognize is that the work of artists who deal with science involves various political implications, and it is not rare that the activity of artists is under scrutiny for being in the service of Bio-technology by acting in a normalising and regularising fashion. (Pandilovski 2011)

Gessert is opposed to this and says that:

When an artist uses Bio-technology, he or she is only validating its use for that particular work. Use of a tool is not an endorsement of everything else that it can do, in art or elsewhere. What is a valid use? The answer will vary from artist to artist. (Pandilovski 2011)

George Gessert also suggests:

In terms of attack against bio-tech arts we can point out that the nastiest attack ever delivered against Bio-tech art was by Paul Virilio [Virilio 2003]. He is a cultural theorist, not an artist. From the evidence of *Art and Fear*, which contains a long essay on Bio-tech art, he hasn't actually seen much of it. He mentions no Bio-tech artist by name and discusses no specific works. *Art and Fear* is a grandiose rant with a French flavour, but in spirit is weirdly akin to right wing American talk shows. One hardly recognizes the object of Virilio's vitriol. (Pandilovski 2011)

Gessert also mentions that the ugliest attacks he ever received were in the 1990s, when he was often accused of being a fascist or somehow having affinities with Nazism.

Those were the days when genetics was still taboo in art, and Clement Greenberg was the object of oedipal rage. At a show in Iowa two professors compared me at length with Leni Riefenstahl because of my emphasis on aesthetics. The attack came as a surprise because the people who made it I considered my natural allies. It was my rather late introduction to the stupidity of political correctness. (Pandilovski 2011)

In terms of the role that aesthetics plays in BioArts, Eugene Thacker comments:

Aesthetics is as important to me as politics. Neither is the "whole picture," but I think they go hand-in-hand, especially when thinking about bio-art, or about science fiction and horror. Thacker also claims that part of the reason as to why artists use living organisms in order to create art is that "it has to do with the "reality" factor, the idea being that in using life itself one move beyond representation. But this is obviously a complex move, since much of the works are still exhibited and documented as traditional art works. Other artists move towards performance, hoping to avoid this trap. But then why isn't gardening or your own living body a work of art? (Pandilovski 2011)

Importantly, the key artists, including Eduardo Kac himself as one of the main protagonists in Sci-Tech Art, seem to be looking at these developments through positivist lenses, which contribute to the noncritical acceptance of developments in science and technology. Both *Alba* and *Genesis* (Eduardo Kac's most known works) have served well as breakthrough projects in the field of art, and culture more generally. They have been contributing to the "cementing" of this approach in art and culture, as one more sphere of human activity, alongside biomedicine, nanotech, agriculture, bio-patenting, quantum research, human rights, bioethics, science, and technology (in theory, practice and regulations). Perhaps this was the only way, as phenomenologists tell us that society and technology always go hand in hand. On the other hand, Kac himself, perhaps attempting to diffuse any potential criticism, says that "technological criticism is one of the most important responsibilities of contemporary artists." And, although he continues to say he believes that technology cannot be left behind in art and that it's the artist's duty to raise questions about contemporary life through the use of new media, he is not explicitly critical of biotechnologies, instead, he proposes "transgenic art" (based on artistic appropriation of genetic engineering technology to transfer natural or synthetic genes to an organism in order to create new and unique living beings), as a personal contribution to contemporary art. Kac adds to the discussion that "artists can offer important alternatives to the polarised debate" about genetic engineering, putting "ambiguity and subtlety" in place of polarity (Schueller 2001). The language he uses is basically modernist. The tactic he uses is sometimes overhyped sensationalism, a tactic he used with *Alba*. There was an obvious division of labor, where Kac did the conceptual thinking for the creation of *Alba*, whereas the science team carried out the technical side of the project. The social side of the project was also important, as Kac intended for the rabbit to live with his family in Chicago, and therefore he got involved in campaigning to get the INRA Laboratory to release *Alba* so that she could join the family. When that was impossible, it created a clash between Kac and the INRA Lab – to the delight of the press.

Consciousness, Embodiment, and the Arts

In returning to the problem of consciousness in phenomenological inquiries, Edmond Husserl is of use as he has observed that it is of a great value as consciousness either isn't, or in any event cannot be said to be, rooted in anything at all. This is because, for Edmund Husserl (2014), "consciousness is a zero-point of phenomenological inquiry, thus unreal." Husserl named the study of the substance of the mind as "phenomenological reduction," which does not assume that something exists, a state that allows directing the mind on its way to the real, but also imaginary objects. For us, this creates the possibility of linking the structures of consciousness through our personal experiences in a wide range of human activities, including those of arts and technology.

What Husserl discovered when he contemplated the content of his mind were such acts as remembering, desiring, and perceiving and the abstract content of these acts, which he called "meanings." These meanings, he claimed, enabled an act to be directed toward an object under a certain aspect; and such directedness, called "intentionality," he held to be the essence of consciousness. However, Husserl's position is not completely accepted by all phenomenologists. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1965),

the French philosopher, is in this case opposed to Husserl's "idealism" and tries to find another way out by saying that consciousness is rooted in the "body-subject" or "flesh." This embodiment in turn provokes a tide of criticism toward Merleau-Ponty position, predominantly by postcolonial and postfeminist thinkers.

The role of the body and the reception of art seem to be equally important as the sociocultural context, in which these works of art are created. Merleau-Ponty points out the close analogies between phenomenology and art when he states: "The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being" (Merleau-Ponty 1965: xxii).

With this Merleau-Ponty places the artistic vision into the broader realm of pre-reflective, bodily sense experience where psychological and physiological aspects of perception may overlap and influence each other, especially in the domain of the spatiality of the human body.

Perception is a system of meanings, according to Merleau-Ponty used for the recognition of phenomenal objects. Intent plays an important role for Merleau-Ponty as the intentions of a person perceiving an object are reflected in the field to which the phenomenal object belongs.

In regard to the human body, Merleau-Ponty regards it as an expressive space, as the origin of expressive movement, as well as a medium for perception of the world. He says: "The body is our general medium for having a world." (Merleau-Ponty 1965: 169). Merleau-Ponty argues that phenomenologically the bodily experience gives perception a meaning beyond that established by thought. He continues: "The thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity. To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things." (Merleau-Ponty 1965: 373). In phenomenology one cannot separate the idea of the body from the experience of the body, resulting with the idea that mind and body cannot be separated as subject and object, but that they have each other's own being, and the perceptions of the body influence what is perceived by the mind. "True reflection presents me to myself not as idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and though them, all the rest" (Merleau-Ponty 1965: 525).

The Australian artist Trish Adams, through her ongoing interest in physicality and materiality, chose as a title of one of her works *machina carnis*, as it emphasized evocative parallels between mechanical characteristics of some aspects of the human body, particularly its central "engine," the heart. Adams's artwork *machina carnis*, the last work in a series of works called the *Vital Force* series, is situated in the field of enquiry about corporeality and potential changes to the body as we know it today. Intrigued by the way that scientists of that era appeared to feel that this "new" technology would at last provide them with the key tools to quantify and explore the body and thus finally to be able to measure the essence of "humanness," Adams made a series of artworks that referenced and parodied in a quasi-scientific way the development of

galvanics at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This experimental research series also incorporates the artist's curiosity about the ways in which the discovery of electricity led to a spate of new mechanical devices for measuring the physical responses of the human body. Of course, we are able to see parallels here with our own "latest" technology for measuring the body: sequencing the human genome.

On the other hand, *1/4 Scale Ear*,⁵ a project by the TC&A in collaboration with the Australian Cyprus-born performance artist Stelarc, raises questions about the possibilities of altering the human body. Assisted by the TC&A project, Stelarc reaches a more advanced stage, by taking his cartilage and bone marrow and nurturing them in the form of an ear. The idea of the "ear" was for it to be surgically placed under a flap of skin on his arm where it would develop its own blood supply, becoming a permanent part of Stelarc's body.

Stelarc has through his career used his own body, as well as robotics, virtual reality systems, medical instruments, prosthetics, and the Internet, to explore various interfaces with the body. Stelarc is world famous for his performances with a third hand, the third ear, a virtual arm, a virtual body, and a stomach sculpture. The way he uses his body is both unique and surprising, as he presents us with a plethora of possibilities for humanity. His career was in fact supposed to take off in Adelaide, where the Experimental Art Foundation was established in 1974.⁶ However, the Experimental Art Foundation cancelled Stelarc's flesh-hook suspension project at the last minute, as the medical advice was that they could not guarantee the safety of the artist. Although this first attempt was unsuccessful, it led to Stelarc's 25-body suspensions with hooks into the skin over a period of 13 years in Asia, Europe, America, and Australia. His body was suspended in different positions, in varying locations and diverse situations, as it swung and propelled. It also led to Stelarc sending a postcard from each successful performance to the Chair of the Experimental Art Foundation. After this rather protruded grudge of 33 years, I asked Stelarc to exhibit at the Experimental Art Foundation in 2007. We chose to present a selection of current and past work including *Prosthetic Head* (representing an all-knowing being, in fact a 3D avatar head, a combination between a hominoid and Stelarc himself, having excellent facial features, real time lip-synching, and speech synthesis) and *Walking Head* (a six-legged autonomous walking robot). Vertically mounted on its chassis is an LCD screen imaging a computer-generated human-like with LCD screen, and a scanning ultra-sound sensor), *Blender*, and *Extra Ear*, as well as an edited compilation documenting other projects contextualizing the exhibition. The gallery was of course packed, as one would expect, and Donald Brook (chair of the Experimental Art Foundation at the time of the cancelling of the exhibition), whom I invited to open the exhibition, began his talk in the spirit of forgiveness, but not of the EAF forgiving Stelarc, but the other way around!

Setting aside the issue of the artists' breaking of barriers and exploration of new frontiers, the underlining subject of these projects seems to be the question of the evolution of the human body. The most important question that *1/4 Scale Ear* raises is perhaps whether the human body has reached its "ultimate" form, or whether its evolution has not yet been completed. Is the evolution of the human form at all possible? If possible, is the evolution of the human body necessary?

The issue of the artists' breaking of barriers and reaching new frontiers set aside, the underlining subject seems to be the question of the evolution of the human body. In order to understand the driving current between the center of consciousness and the world of forms that represent the human reality we need to explore the field of

identification. For example, we identify ourselves as human with the human form of the body. In a way, this signifies that the identification with the forms is an obstacle to the emancipation of consciousness, for our experience with the phenomenal world is conditioned by our own limitations. Through it we experience the conflict between the need for the emancipation of consciousness and the limitations of consciousness, as such.

Some of the art projects, which I have already outlined, such as, *Extra Ear 1/4 Scale*, a project by the TC&A project in collaboration with Stelarc, raise questions of possibilities of changing the human body. Art in general and arts and science in particular have seen in the last decade many experiments tending to show the potential for a further extension (evolution?) of the human body (Orlan's plastic surgeries, Kac's chip implant, Stelarc's robotic arm). The technologies used in these projects are plastic surgery, robotics, and prosthetics.

As we move into the twenty-first century, the numerous alterations it is providing to us, above all, signify a need for a change of the consciousness, and provide us with a new cultural and communication matrix. Various interpretation systems have a hard task in describing the changes, which leads to the conclusion that what is necessary is a new phenomenological understanding, which enables a more valid account of the processes we are witnessing.

The development of science and technology, including the development of possibilities in the area of the engineering of the human body, is moving at a record pace, with ethics lagging in the process. Artists seek to question this through an investigation of arts practice based on an unconventional use of science. The artworks are very much involved with the overall and specific social and ethical implications stemming from the implementation of science, technology, and genetic engineering in areas such as biodiversity, patenting, cosmetic modification, contamination, medicine, as well as comment on issues in relation to the body. The very ability to deconstruct the building blocks of the body sends the message that we are already in a position to extend its lifespan and capacities, and therefore redefine what constitutes a human being. Artists are also concerned with ethical and biopolitical questions about the role that science plays in defining normalcy and acceptability in society. They are also concerned with questions of the very re-composition of the human body and questions about who controls the body today (about who has the right to engineer it, and therefore alter it).

Notes

- 1 Merleau-Ponty in the Preface to the "Phenomenology of Perception" points out that the work of phenomenology is as painstaking as the work of artists such as Balzac, Proust, Valery, and Cezanne.
- 2 Joe Davis, who has introduced the term "art and genotype," created one of the early biotech artworks *Microvenus*, which he developed in collaboration with molecular scientist Dana Boyd from the Harvard Medical School in 1988. Joe Davis's creative insight about the potency of biotechnology serves as a foundation for various future biotech artworks. This seminal artwork in biotech arts involves a biotechnological recombination intervention at a genetic level DNA, altering of an *E. coli* bacteria genome by directly inserting compatible DNA coded material. The work consisted of synthesized sequence of 28 DNA nucleotides forming an encrypted image. The artwork is in fact an encoded binary graphic icon of "Y" superimposed over "I," which represents the Germanic rune for "life," but also "earth."

- 3 The results of the project were published in the *Art of the Bio-tech Era* catalogue (published by the Experimental Art Foundation in 2004), and more comprehensively in the book *Art in the Bio-tech Era* (published by the Experimental Art Foundation in 2008).
- 4 This platform includes a series of continuous standpoints questioning the concepts of biotechnology and genetic engineering through the symposium, exhibition, workshops, and direct interaction between the public and participants (a project organized by the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide in April 2009).
- 5 <http://web.stelarc.org/projects/quarterear/index.html>.
- 6 In 2016, the Australian Experimental Art Foundation merged with the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA) to create a new entity: ACE Open.

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