

THE EXHIBITIONIST
NO. 4 / JOURNAL ON EXHIBITION MAKING / JUNE 2011

**REFLECTION
RESPONSE
CRITIQUE**

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LA CRITIQUE

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Cover of *Cahiers du Cinéma* 126
(December 1961)

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REFLECTION



Jens Hoffmann and Tara McDowell

The Exhibitionist no. 1 was published in January 2010 as the first issue of the first-ever journal devoted to contemporary curatorial practice and exhibition making.¹ Our aim was to create a specialized publication for a professional field that has grown vastly over the past two decades and was in need of a recurring, critical platform to discuss its ways and means. Over the past 18 months we have published four issues containing kinds of writing that, for the most part, did not exist before. With this fourth issue we would like to take the opportunity to look back at some of the discussions that have arisen and respond to some of the reactions that the journal has provoked.

The Exhibitionist does not aim to supplant artistic practice with curatorial practice, nor is it meant to consolidate the power of the curator. This is not an either/or proposition. Close readings of exhibitions by those who make exhibitions only makes us more accountable for the work we show and our motivations for showing it. Our proposal also does not represent any consensus of curating. The widely divergent voices within these pages make clear how we conceive of curating: as a discourse with many viewpoints, styles, and commitments. While we do claim a particular editorial position, we are not aiming to establish a single school of exhibition making. Rather, we want to participate in and foster the diversification of exhibition models. There are writers in this issue who explicitly disagree with the journal's editorial opinion, and who come to conclusions at variance with one another. Looking back over the past issues, the range of writing styles, arguments, and chosen subjects is striking, especially considering the journal's strict editorial structure. We have purposefully resisted a homogenous, or hegemonic, approach to curating.

This may seem at odds with the journal's professed belief in exhibition making as a form of authorship—the editorial claim that has, understandably, generated the most debate and disagreement. But the emphasis is mistakenly on a seemingly anachronistic appropriation of authorship, and elides what for us is the central point: that exhibition making is a kind of *making*.

This issue of *The Exhibitionist* diverges a bit from previous issues. Gone is the distinctive, bright yellow cover (an appropriation of, and homage to, *Cahiers du cinéma*). On the cover, rather than a single image (those in past issues were selected for the especially emphatic ways they staged various positions of looking and being looked at) appears a phrase deployed with tongue just slightly in cheek: “La Critique.” This and every subsequent fourth issue of *The Exhibitionist* offers a forum for response and critique.

In the critique section, we welcome critical commentary about the journal itself: both its editorial commitments and the specific content of earlier articles. We envision this section as permitting the brief, but passionately argued, response that is the “letter to the editor”—a response that segues what was once a closed, final statement into an open dialogue. The opinions offered by Jarrett Gregory, Mia Jankowicz, Tina Kukielski, Miguel A. López, Rodrigo Moura, and Lawrence Rinder do not coalesce into a neat mapping of key themes of the journal, nor any illusory status quo of curating. Rather, they are idiosyncratic and deeply personal.

A topic that has been discussed at length, in both the pages of this journal and the larger art world, is the relationship between the artist and the curator. Some may feel that this issue has been discussed to exhaustion, but we have noticed a strong

desire on the part of many curators to look into it anew and push the conversation further. In these pages, Massimiliano Gioni, Dieter Roelstraete, and Dorothea von Hantelmann offer points of view that recognize the complexity of this relationship and its historical development. Von Hantelmann notes that the increased significance of curating in the past few decades directly correlates with the new cultural and social value placed on acts of selection: “Only with an understanding of this new culture of choosing, I argue, can we recognize the embeddedness of curatorial practice in the present socioeconomic order of Western societies.” For Gioni, the role of the curator is more akin to that of the interpreter. He cautions against a tide of resistance to interpreting artworks in ways other than the artist intended. “There is quite a bit of room inside an artwork, a vast space that accommodates multiple and varied readings,” he writes. Roelstraete prefers to frame the debate not around good artists or good curators, but on “whether this is a good work of art or that a good exhibition.”

The second topic discussed here is the necessary and relevant subject of the history of exhibitions. Teresa Gleadowe, Julian Myers, and Christian Rattemeyer demonstrate that despite the spate of recent and forthcoming texts on the subject, this is a nascent history, still very much in formation with much interesting work to be done. Gleadowe calls for an exhibition history that we actively inhabit and interrogate through the lens of our own commitments and methodologies, as a preventative measure against the “false familiarity” of a “sterile canon of ‘landmark’ exhibitions.” Rattemeyer argues that, in fact, precisely what this emergent discourse needs is a canon of exhibitions comprised of in-depth case studies as well as a “terminology and methodology of scholarly description.”

Myers for his part warns us that “a phobia of artworks seems to be the cost of a fetishization of exhibitions” and stresses the need for a history of exhibitions to turn to artworks—not perfunctorily but with deep, sustained attention. Certainly this point is well taken, but it also makes the task at hand somewhat Herculean. In addition to attending to the organization, installation, and reception of the exhibition, the historical specificity of the moment in which it appeared, its relevance for contemporary practice, and its material relations with market and site, there are, of course (and most importantly) the works that are in it. Moreover, close examination of an exhibition necessarily reveals in all its squirminess

what a history of art and artists would—and does—leave out: the forgotten artists, the failed artworks, the minor or transitional efforts. Writing or teaching a history of exhibitions, then, can quickly become not just Herculean, but unruly, as the photographic and historical record demands writing back in the figures so often left out.

Curatorial education, our third topic, has been the subject of much discussion lately, and rightly so given that we are dealing with a new academic discipline that is most likely here to stay. Johanna Burton, recently appointed director of the graduate program at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies, names the elephant in the room: “the possibility that considerations of curating . . . are in the process of becoming fully loosened from considerations of art in any previously coherent or stable sense.” For Burton, however, though it may be fashionable for students to eschew art and its institutions in favor of theory engaged with culture, or image circulation more broadly, we would do well not to abandon art's institutions so quickly.

Andrew Renton, director of curating at Goldsmiths College for the past eight years, arrives at a somewhat similar conclusion. In recent years, he says, something was lost in the curator's dogged pursuit of independence from collections and museums. “If today's generation of curators inherits a legacy of dematerialized, process- and discourse-driven curating,” he writes, “the physical absence that is produced in the wake of such strategies becomes a site of mourning and loss. Something was left behind.” And finally Kate Fowle, who cofounded and led the graduate program in curatorial practice at California College of the Arts from 2002–8, asks us to push beyond stale debates about whether or not such programs should exist. In dialogue with Maria Lind's polemical assessment of such programs in the third issue of *The Exhibitionist*, Fowle reframes the debate to consider “how to provide opportunities for growth over, say, a 40-year career” rather than via a two-year graduate program.

As with exhibition histories, there is little consensus about how curatorial education should be positioned in relation to art history. Is it a subfield of art history, or distinct from it? How far into the reaches of the academy should it wander? How much should it replicate art history's structures and narratives? It is worth noting that such uncertainty about the ways, means, and boundaries of a discipline is part of what keeps it vital. Art history, to this end, would do well to

consider how these unwieldy upstarts might productively trouble its own procedures.

Here is another question we have asked ourselves: How much can “the curatorial” annex and still remain nimble without becoming megalomaniacal—or, worse, a “half-abstracted meta-discourse” (in the words of Julian Myers) without a subject? This last question is in response to curating’s growing popularity and prestige (while, for example, as others have noted here and elsewhere, the importance of the art critic has declined), and the tendency for an ascendant body to almost magnetically attract and annex whatever lies nearby. We are calling this phenomenon “the paracuratorial.” This practice defines curating not as bound to exhibition making, but rather as encompassing, and making primary, a range of activities that have traditionally been parenthetical or supplementary to the exhibition proper. We especially like Livia Páldi’s concise, yet performatively accumulative, definition put forth in her essay here: “The term, which encompasses lectures, interviews, educational events, residencies, publications, screenings, readings, and performances, implies an intertwining net of activities as well as diverse modes of operation and conversation based on more occasional, temporary alliances of artists, curators, and the public.” Páldi notes that the paracuratorial is linked to, and takes advantage of, temporary and mobile models of coming-together that are themselves the result of emphasis placed on the distribution of knowledge rather than its production. And yet, “in an age that is literally drowning in events,” the paracuratorial runs the risk of simply adding to that problem.

Vanessa Joan Müller limns the historical trajectory of the paracuratorial and finds its roots in the New Institutionalism that emerged in the 1990s, and also in the institutional critique of the preceding decades. She asks that we retain the exhibition as our central form and collaborate with other arenas, rather than appropriate their activities into our own (art institutions’) theater of operations as a kind of second-wave institutional critique. “We ought not to forget,” she writes, “that other places exist where much of what we increasingly find ourselves doing is also done—places like universities, repertory cinemas, community centers, and so on, and which merely await our willingness to cooperate.” For Emily Pethick, it is precisely the boundaries and “unnecessary dualism” posited by the term “paracuratorial” that require rethinking. The moment a

project runs up against boundaries or obstacles may bring about its most productive turn.

We wonder, as all editors and writers do, who our readers are, and where their commitments lie. Even though this is a highly specialized publication directed at a sliver of an already-circumscribed art world, it seems that, paradoxically, discussions around curating are becoming more and more splintered and isolated. This atomization, we feel, results from the total success of the contemporary and the demands of that model that our energies be directed at parsing certain curatorial trends: social practice, the educational turn, New Institutionalism, and so on. We do not claim to be immune to such temptations, but we do feel, and wish to stress, that the often isolated and unconnected discussions around curating are in fact parts of a larger evaluation, of clear relevance to all, concerned with reformulating the relationships among art, critical thinking, the public, cultural institutions, and the politics inherent to all of these.

Notes

1. With the recent launch of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, *The Exhibitionist* is no longer alone in this pursuit. Other periodicals on the subject of curating are apparently in the making.

RESPONSE I



THE ARTIST AND THE CURATOR

Dorothea von Hantelmann
Dieter Roelstraete
Massimiliano Gioni

THE CURATORIAL PARADIGM

Dorothea von Hantelmann

1. Daniel Buren, "Ausstellung einer Ausstellung" (1972), in Daniel Buren, *Achtung! Texte 1967–1991* (Dresden and Basel: Verlag der Kunst, 1995): 181.

2. Consequently, Buren proposed a work that places the focus on precisely this situation. Instead of simply adding another piece to the exhibition, he chose an already curated room with paintings by artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert Ryman, and Brice Marden and covered the walls beneath the paintings with striped wallpaper. *Exhibition of an Exhibition* was a work that dissolved the hierarchy between the artwork and its environmental support, thereby producing a certain bafflement in the viewer as to the actual location of the work of art—the paintings, the wall, or the entire situation—and also pointed out the extent to which this "entire situation" determines or co-determines the experience and the meaning of any artwork.

3. Harald Szeemann, *Museum der Obsessionen* (Berlin: Merve, 1981): 119ff.

4. Interestingly, this development took place parallel to the emergence of director's theater. It should therefore be mentioned that Szeemann also came from theater before turning to art. This aspect cannot be gone into more deeply here, but it would certainly be worth exploring.

In 1972, on the occasion of his participation in Harald Szeemann's *Documenta 5*, the artist Daniel Buren wrote a much-quoted statement for the exhibition catalogue in which he claimed that "More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of art works, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art."¹ Buren was reacting against what he saw as a tendency among curators to overemphasize the curatorial concept and assume an authorial role in the presentation of artworks—a tendency arguably spearheaded by Szeemann himself—warning that the logical conclusion of this would eventually be the reversal of the relationship between the artwork and the exhibition, as the latter would have to be acknowledged as the actual work.²

In some respects Buren was right. With his innovative exhibition concepts, Szeemann transformed the idea of curating from a rather scholarly practice, aimed at the "objective" presentation of art historical knowledge, into a creative and individually authored activity, and in doing so shifted the idea of the curator from a conservator of art to a *metteur-en-scène* of exhibitions. Szeemann was not the first to break with the tradition in this manner, but he did so in a particularly deliberate way. "I am simply no longer willing," he said, "to merely fill up an available space, but tend more and more to projecting my own ideas into it."³ Stepping out of his previous anonymity, he claimed an authorial role in his own right.

This not only marked the birth of the independent curator, who, no longer backed by an institution, institutionalizes his or her own style of making exhibitions. It also transformed the character of the exhibition. What used to be a rather scholarly medium for encountering artworks now became a medium that included elements of personal expression in which the vision of an individual—the curator—manifested itself.⁴ Consequently, the presentation of the individual work gave way to a no longer conventionalized, but rather increasingly individualized, curatorial narrative. Similar to the evolution of the artist, who since antiquity and far into the 18th century was a craftsman, then slowly evolved into a creative genius, the curator—equally driven

by thrusts of increasing individualization taking place in society—ascended from being a service provider to becoming a meaning producer, who "signs" an exhibition with a personal style and vision and therefore makes it possible to identify the exhibition as the work of a specific individual.⁵

Today curators enjoy an extraordinary presence and prominent position in contemporary culture, while their practice, curating, is not only taught in numerous curatorial study programs but tends to be regarded as comparable to art. "Is the Curator an Artist? Is the Contemporary Exhibition an Artwork?" was the title of a recent symposium in Ljubljana, picking up Buren's statement from 1972 yet giving it a much more positive spin.⁶ However, the questions of how to explain these phenomena remain: What are the reasons for this change in the status of curating from a secondary, administrative, scholarly task to a creative, quasi-artistic practice? How could the curator become such a prominent figure in contemporary culture? What do these developments say about today's culture and society?

Clearly, the ubiquitous presence of curators today has to do with the explosive increase in the number of exhibitions in recent decades. Given the sheer quantity of new museum buildings, exhibition spaces, and biennials, the medium of the exhibition has evidently gained an enormous popularity and significance in contemporary culture. This significance is not a new phenomenon, but rather continues a success story that began about 200 years ago with the historical emergence of exhibitions and museums. In 1867 Edouard Manet said that exhibitions are a vital format for artists because they generate not only income, but also encouragement and incitement to create more new work.⁷ With the rise of exhibitions, the artist's status changed along with that of the public, as the latter became a new addressee and power factor in the art world. But, even more, it was museums and exhibitions that created the modern notion of "art"; in previous cultures of the court and aristocracy, paintings and sculptures had existed as parts of princely collections or were integrated into religious functional contexts. It was the fact of their public presentation, their being exhibited in museums that were accessible to a public, that set a development in motion that led to the modern concept of autonomous art.

But the exhibition's most important cultural accomplishment was the constitution of a site in which basic categories of modern societies are enacted and exercised. Museums and exhibitions introduced a ritual that fulfills precise functions in modern Western societies: it addresses the individual citizen (where theater, as an older cultural format, addressed a collective); it places the individual in relation to a material object (in an increasingly industrialized society that derives its wealth and identity from a manufactured object-world); and it immerses both the individual and the object into a narration of linear time, progress, and development.⁸ The format of the exhibition connects the individual to these pillars of modern Western society and

5. I'm not saying that all curators have become "creative" exhibition makers today. My focus is on the creatives, but of course the traditional museum or collection curator also continues to exist.

6. Held at the Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, October 1–2, 2010.

7. Edouard Manet, "Catalogue des Tableaux de M. Edouard Manet exposés Avenue de l'Alma en 1867, Paris 1867," quoted from Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem* (Cologne: DuMont, 1997): 10.

8. See also *Die Ausstellung: Politik eines Rituals*, eds. Dorothea von Hantelmann and Carolin Meister (Berlin, Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010).

9. Boris Groys refers to museums as “preschools of consumption” because they train people in experiencing aesthetic differences; they refine their ability to compare and to differentiate between aestheticized objects. See Boris Groys, *Topologie der Kunst* (Munich, Vienna: Hanser 2003): 47ff.

10. Sheena Iyengar, *The Art of Choosing* (New York: Twelve, 2010).

helps to consolidate them in individual and collective consciousness.

I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that it is not art but the exhibition that is the definitive invention of modern times. The emergence of exhibition paintings (meaning, paintings explicitly made to be shown in exhibitions) in the 18th century, of exhibitions organized by artists in the 19th century (for instance Gustave Courbet’s 1855 *Pavillon du Réalisme*), and of exhibition art (art that can only be shown in exhibitions) in the 20th century validates this. Yet, and this brings us back to our initial question about the changed status of the curator: If the actual moment of the production of meaning lies in the exhibition (and not, or at least not primarily, in the artwork), doesn’t this imply that the actual *producer* of meaning is the curator?

If this is the case, one might object, then why is it only in the last few decades that curatorial practice has come to be respected as a creative and significant activity? Firstly, because as long as curating was committed to an art historical canon that was charged with a certain authority and objectivity, the exhibition did not play itself into the foreground. As long as the exhibition was based on a conventionalized narration, it did not become present as a medium in its own right. It needed a certain thrust of subjectivation of the curator’s practice, and this thrust was induced by figures such as Szeemann in the 1960s.

The second reason is that the specific techniques on which both the exhibition and the curator’s practices are based have recently gained new significance in contemporary Western societies. What is it that lies at the core of the curator’s practice? It is the act of selection. Of course, curating implies a broad range of activities and demands various skills. Curators produce, communicate, and organize knowledge. But all this takes its starting point in decisions for specific artistic practices or positions. The exhibition is a narrative written by curatorial choices—choices that the visitor responds to in his or her own selections of artworks to focus on and linger over. Exhibitions can be seen as sites in which practices of comparing, distinguishing, and selecting are trained, cultivated, and refined—practices that, as will be shown, have gained an enormous importance in today’s consumer culture.⁹ Yet if, in today’s societies, the skill—or, if you will, the “art”—of choosing¹⁰ has become a cultural practice in its own right, the emergence of the contemporary independent curator has brought about an actual profession with choosing as its center: the selection of artistic works, and aesthetic and discursive positions, which the curator places into new contexts of meaning. Only with an understanding of this new culture of choosing, I argue, can we recognize the embeddedness of curatorial practice in the present socioeconomic order of Western societies. And only in recognizing this embeddedness can we understand the curator’s relatively visible position in contemporary culture.

The new importance of selection is essentially connected to profound

transformations of Western societies in the second half of the 20th century. I am referring to the transition from societies of scarcity to those of affluence, a process that became apparent in North America in the 1950s and in Western Europe in the 1960s and that had already been predicted in the 1930s by the economist John Maynard Keynes before it was first discussed in depth by John Kenneth Galbraith in his influential book *The Affluent Society*, published in 1958. For the first time in the history of Western civilizations, the aggregate sum of production was greater than what the population could consume, and societies predicated on scarcity became societies predicated on affluence. The phenomenon of affluence signified a transition from supply-driven to demand-driven markets and the shift from modern industrial to postindustrial consumer societies.

The ecological and economic consequences of this have now reached general public consciousness. The *cultural* impact of this transition, however, at least as an impact, seems much less present. According to the German sociologist Gerhard Schulze and his seminal 1992 study *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (The Experience Society), the transformation from a society of scarcity to one of affluence has produced a change in the way individuals relate to themselves.¹¹ With increased income and leisure time, more and more people can (and need to) shape their lives according to their own needs and preferences. “Our living situation continually forces us to make distinctions,” says Schulze.¹² And more than ever before, people perceive their existence as something that can and must be created and shaped. In every aspect of how we plan and live our lives we experience increased possibilities, of which the increase in consumption is only one of many aspects.

In the field of consumption, however, this change is especially palpable. Under conditions of scarcity, relating to things means adjusting to their characteristics; you have to deal with what is there. A multitude of options changes one’s relation to things. Now you have to select, which means adjusting the criteria to suit oneself. People can and need to learn how to relate to their living contexts in a mode of selection. The selector, as Schulze says, becomes the paradigmatic personality type in the new consumer society, but one whose selection criteria are no longer primarily purpose-oriented—that is, driven by necessity—but instead increasingly driven by aesthetic preferences and subjective taste. If I have to choose, I can do so according to necessity or according to taste. I can, to use a banal example, decide on clothing that satisfies practical requirements or looks good. And what we have experienced in Western societies since the 1950s and 1960s is the fact that this area of the not-necessary, of the aesthetic, has gained considerable importance.

The fact that people no longer primarily relate to their everyday lives in a purpose-oriented mode, but aesthetically, and that they stylize their day-to-day living in a wide range of forms and also recognize one another in

11. Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1992).

12. Gerhard Schulze, “From Situations to Subjects: Moral Discourse in Transition” in *Constructing the New Consumer Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997): 42.

13. Georg Simmel, "Das Problem des Stils," *Dekorative Kunst: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Angewandte Kunst* (April 1908): 307–16.

14. Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Barry Schwarz, *The Paradox of Choice* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

such stylistic characteristics, was observed by Georg Simmel in his sociocultural studies in Berlin at the turn of the 20th century. He exemplified the importance of (what we would today call) a well-curated personal style in the changed habits of interior decoration.¹³ Until the late 19th century, people mainly decorated their living rooms in one coherent style. But with an increased emphasis on individuality, this became more and more problematic, because the coherence of a generic style does not leave enough space for the individual to shine through. So the living room became a space in which different kinds of objects were presented, which had nothing in common except the fact that they were all selected by one individual. The heterogeneity of the objects and the way they were assembled allowed the personal style and taste of the individual who brought them together to become apparent.

It is this significance of things for the constitution of subjectivity, and the corresponding significance that lies in the act of their selection, that Simmel—and following him Schulze as well—emphasized as a central aspect of modern subjectivity. Decisive here is that aesthetically founded selection processes place the spotlight on the selecting subject. When the locus of power shifts to the choosing individual, the question of who that individual is—what his or her goals and motivations are—gains importance. The act of purchasing is transformed from a purely practical one to a self-expressive one. When I buy a mobile phone, I not only meet my need for connectivity, but I also make a statement about who I am and what is important to me. And my choice of ringtone says as much about my character, my style, and my personality as the restaurant I choose to go to for dinner.

When material needs are satisfied—when, as John Maynard Keynes said, the satisfaction of wants becomes a larger focus of economic activity than the satisfaction of needs—a new connection between the production of subjectivity and the act, or rather the skill, of choosing emerges. We no longer constitute, distinguish, and refine ourselves through our jobs or occupations only, but increasingly also through specific choices. To be oneself is to make the choices that best reflect the self. Choices are seen as realizations of the attributes of the choosing person—expressions of personality—and reflect back on the person who has made them. Every choice I make rebounds on me. This of course also produces a great deal of uncertainty among consumers today. The freedom to choose is also the burden to choose. The existence of choice can also become the tyranny of choice.¹⁴ To master the act of choosing, to be able to spot the differences and read their meaning, is a skill that needs to be learned, practiced, and constantly refined.

In this context the curator emerges as a figure who exemplarily constitutes him- or herself through aesthetic choices. Curators are professionals in the field of choosing, and also experts in making these choices meaningful. Each curated exhibition is based on a number of choices that are supposed

to form something coherent—to produce, as an exhibition, more than the sum of its parts. This is the difference between choosing and curating, and it points to a skill that is demanded from individuals in advanced consumer societies: not only to be able to select, but also to know how to unite their acts of selection in a way that produces meaning, be this a coherent lifestyle or a coherent personality.

There is a hierarchy between artist and curator—in which the artist counts as the authentic producer but the curator as the intermediary, secondary agency—that has established itself as part of the bourgeois value system in which, according to Enlightenment economics, the producing subject and productive labor have considerably more status. But both figures are at base constructed categories that have emerged along historical thrusts of subjectivation. Just as in modern industrialized societies the visual artist, as a producer of the most sophisticated material objects, impersonates the producing individual in a kind of “higher” modality, so does the curator embody a particularly advanced version of the selecting individual in advanced consumer societies. While the former, the artist/productive individual, generates subjectivity through production, the latter, the curator/selecting individual, generates subjectivity through consumption. If we understand the field of art in this sense as one in which basic characteristics of a socioeconomic order are reflected and manifested, the sharper focus on the curator that has been noticeable for a while now doesn’t at all appear to be a coincidental phenomenon. Instead it mirrors fundamental transitions in the socioeconomic order of contemporary Western societies, to which art has always been intrinsically linked. A society in which the focus is shifting from production to consumption needs new actors and protagonists. In this context the curator emerges as a figure who to a certain extent selects exemplarily, who is constituted in choosing (particular works of art, discursive positions, aesthetic acts, et cetera), and above all in whom consumption is manifested not only as a receptive capacity, but as a productive and generative force.

In the field of art it was Marcel Duchamp who anticipated, paradigmatically performed, and articulated this transition. For in this context the readymade occupies the position of a junction. On the one hand the exhibition of the readymade object encapsulates the production paradigm of modernity, and thus of the 19th century: In the presentation of the sheer thing it parades the mode of industrial production. Particularly from today’s perspective the readymades confront us as objects from another time, witnesses to an epoch, icons of the modern paradigm of industrial production. Yet Duchamp also shifted the focus from production to the act of selection, as he points out in his famous description of the readymade: “Whether Mr. Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not has no importance. He chose it.”¹⁵ In an interview in 1961 he even declared the act of choosing to be the actual artistic

15. Marcel Duchamp, “The Richard Mutt Case” in *Art in Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996): 248.

16. Marcel Duchamp in a 1961 interview with Georges Charbonnier, quoted in Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998): 162.

gesture. “Choice is the main thing,” he says, “even in a normal painting. . . . In order to choose, you can use tubes of paint, you can use brushes, but you can also use a readymade thing, made either mechanically or by the hand of another man, even, if you want, appropriate it, since it’s you who chose it.”¹⁶ The readymade marks the transition of a production-oriented society to a selection-oriented society, and thus anticipates a historical moment that essentially characterized the 20th century: from a classical industrial model to an advanced consumer society. Duchamp turned the act of choosing into a new paradigm of creativity. Or, rather, he sharpened a practice that had always existed into something like a paradigm. He recognized and anticipated the slightly shifting accentuation from the former to the latter, a shift that would gain significance in the decades to follow in culture and society, and, consequently, as an artistic strategy.

WE, THE SUBJECTS OF ART

Dieter Roelstraete

“There is in any case no realm of study that is more social than that of art.”
—F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*

In 1950, the Viennese-born British art historian Ernst Gombrich published his magnum opus *The Story of Art*, still one of the best-selling and most widely read art books of all time. It begins with the following oft-quoted words: “There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.” This was the early 1950s, of course, the years of Existentialism’s imperious ascendancy in the philosophical arena, and Abstract Expressionism’s unchallenged assertion of an arch-individualist ideology of genius in the field of artistic production: a time when artists, critics, philosophers, and writers—individuals—were kings. (But not queens. Existentialism and Abstract Expressionism, the most emblematic expressions of the egomania that engulfed the general cultural landscape in the immediate postwar era, were, unsurprisingly, decidedly macho affairs.) According to Gombrich there could not be such a thing as “Art—there could only be individuals named ‘artists,’ whose works could perhaps be viewed as constituting one source of this partly delusional thing called ‘Art.’”

For reasons that need not detain us here, this euphoric celebration of an authoritative, insular subjectivity would prove to be rather short-lived, at least in philosophical and critical discourse. First came the challenges of structuralism, followed by the deaths of both the author and the humanist subject as such (proclaimed by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, respectively), then the systems-and-structures-obsessed social art history that dominated a fair chunk of the 1970s. This last was the academic equivalent of much work being done in the art of the time that likewise sought to dismantle or erase the tangle of modernist myths that continued to surround avant-garde notions of authorship and identity, agency and autonomy, genius and individuation. Indeed, had Gombrich published *The Story of Art* in 1970, chances are that the story would have begun with the following words instead: “There really is no such thing as an artist. There is only Art.” Of course, in the 1970s “Art” would probably have been read just as reductively as the system of art, or art

1. This is not as idiotic as it may seem. For many curators, the path to exhibition making has involved crossing the desolate, windswept plains of art making. This is certainly true of yours truly, who at age 25 even wound up indulging in the odd Land art piece or two: valuable autobiographical information deleted, at the last instance, from my book on Richard Long's seminal *A Line Made by Walking*. And who wouldn't want to see an exhibition of Jens Hoffmann's late early drawings?

2. Read the entire article at <http://www.afterall.org/online/artists-at-work-willem-de-rooij>.

world: the meshwork of power relationships called art, the wholly arbitrary structure that produces art. Whereas the point of our hypothetical exercise—dreaming of a book that could have begun by saying “There really is no such thing as an artist. There is only Art”—is that this latter sentence really means only this, or really should only be read as: “There is only the idea of art.”

What does it mean for a curator to dream of a book that declares the nonexistence of artists? Not much, because this particular curator would be just as enthusiastic (even more so!) about a book that begins by saying, “There really is no such thing as curating. There is only Art.” And/or, “There really is no such thing as art criticism. There is only Art.” Et cetera, ad nauseam. As long as we agree that there is only art, only the idea of art—the idea from which the idea of the artist springs, along with the idea of the curator, the idea of the critic, et cetera, ad nauseam, all of them ideas about which we can agree or disagree.

Why on earth would anyone working in contemporary art want to re-read the opening sentence of a book as outdated and irrelevant, it seems, as Gombrich's *The Story of Art*—so outdated and irrelevant that I don't even have a copy (never had one—but then again I'm not an art historian), and hardly know anyone who does anymore? Because two or three events that took place in quick succession in the fall of last year in my hometown of Berlin managed to convince me that Gombrich's epochal, provocative statement is perhaps not as outdated as it may seem. These two or three events appeared to confirm that there really are only artists after all, and no art to speak of.

The first was the appointment of the Polish artist Artur Zmijewski as the next curator of the Berlin Biennale, followed by a hotly debated open call for project submissions, which tempted me to briefly consider the possibility of submitting my own project-specific portfolio consisting of drawings, poems, and documentary records of performances (an art exhibition exclusively made up of the artful juvenilia of curators—now *there's* an idea), but which also led to a considerable measure of consternation among the curatoriat that was difficult to dismiss—however tempting this option may have been—as mere territorial anxiety.¹ The second event was the opening, just a couple of weeks later, of Willem de Rooij's impressive *Intolerance* exhibition at one of Berlin's most prestigious art venues, the Neue Nationalgalerie—an installation made up of other artists' works, primarily 17th-century Dutch bird paintings by Melchior d'Hondecoeter and 18th- and 19th-century feathered objects from Hawaii. It was easily (and this is not without significance) one of the best and most memorable shows of 2010.

In a published conversation I had the pleasure of undertaking with de Rooij shortly after the show's opening, we touched upon a prodigious wealth of subjects, ranging from Dutch colonial history and the South Pacific uncanny to the politics and rhetoric of display.² But, rather curiously, one thing that was never mentioned was the project's relationship to curatorial

practice. Didn't de Rooij's installation resemble an *exhibition*, after all? In a subsequent email exchange with the artist, he referred to the unruly complex of the curatorial/curatorship/curating as “the C-word,” and as it sounded exactly like the unspeakable, it was thereafter left unspoken throughout.

Needless to add here that I did not for a minute doubt the soundness of the artist's reasons for resisting, or at the very least discouraging, a discussion of his project—the result of long years of passionate artistic research—in the overly professionalized, managerial terms of contemporary curatorial discourse (which, to be sure, I often end up resenting just as much, if not much more). But I could not help wondering what was so profoundly wrong with curating that it required being referred to as “the C-word.” Is this how artists speak among themselves about the curatoriat—“those c*****”? What's wrong with—or rather, what's the problem with—curating? Fear of curating, hatred of curating, some disdain, some distrust, some resentment? Some of it is easily explained. Following the logic of Anton Vidokle's polemical article “Art Without Artists” (published in *e-flux journal* no. 16 in spring 2010) to its grim conclusion, the global curatoriat could easily be perceived as an intricate conspiracy whose ultimate aim is to produce “art without artists”—a world with art in it still, but produced by curators, not artists.

Whether I agree or disagree with Vidokle's claims (some, such as the last one, mildly preposterous indeed, but then again so many more preposterous things have been claimed in the name of the curatoriat) is hardly to the point, and I fear that my introduction to the present essay, in which I admit to dreaming of a book that begins by saying “There really is no such thing as an artist. There is only Art,” will only serve to fuel the fire of Vidokle's central suspicion anyway: that we, the curators, are really only in it to take over from you, the artists. And to a certain extent he is right. I do dream of art without artists. But I also dream (do I ever!) of art without curators. In short, I dream—not all the time, but very often, or often enough—of *art* instead of the *art world*. For that, I think, is the problem of a debate that seems to revolve around questions of power only, or power first and foremost: empowerment, disempowerment, who's more powerful than who, who's less powerful than who. These questions only help to accelerate the gradual disappearance of art behind something called the art world.³

And what is the art world anyway? At a conference on curatorial practice organized in the Canadian Rocky Mountain resort town of Banff last fall, I wrote down the following wise words as they issued from the mouth of Paul Chaat Smith, a curator at the National Museum of the American Indian: “The art world doesn't exist. It's just a bunch of people hanging out doing stuff.” This “stuff” they do is, of course, Art. Some make it, and of course this is how and where it all begins, how and where it always begins. Others comment on it, yet others sell it or collect it, and many organize exhibitions of it. This all happens in ways that may indeed resemble artistic activity properly

3. I have treated this issue in greater depth in an essay published online, in the same issue of *e-flux journal* that featured Anton Vidokle's “Art Without Artists.” See my “(Jena Revisited) Tentative Tenets” at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/137>. In that essay I single out one particularly problematic manifestation of this increasing conflation of contemporary art with the contemporary art world: the vast quantities of art made “about” the art world—an inflationary category that also includes most art-about-art. Needless to say, the boundless profusion, in recent times, of meta-curatorial discourse is as much part of this problem as the hypertrophy of referentiality in art, and this present essay is no exception. In writing about the art world, I am only too aware that I should really be writing about art instead. All I can do is call for the former to cease and desist, and the latter to be revalued.

speaking, just like certain artistic activities may indeed resemble other types of practices that belong to art's general, ever-expanding orbit, which includes organizing exhibitions, buying and selling art, writing about art, everything that may give rise to the lazy, profoundly misguided impression that there are also artists without art out there.

This may be due to my naïveté perhaps, or to a blindness I can afford to indulge in because of the relative comforts of my position as a museum curator, a position that blinds me to the possibility that, yes, perhaps I do wield some power over certain "others" within this orbit, if only because of the institutional security from which I'm able to operate. But I have real difficulty in conceiving of this positively confused state of affairs as a source of anxiety. In fact it's one of the few forms of confusion that I've come to wholeheartedly embrace over the years. This is not so much because I am convinced that status (or territorial) anxiety is something that afflicts only those who believe in status (or territory), for I am prone to suffer from it as much as the next person. It is because, in this confused gathering around the great subject of Art, I have decided to be anxious about other things instead. Not about whether this is a good artist or that a good curator (because in this respect I am inclined to stick to the historical diagnosis of the "death of the subject," whether artist or curator; rather than believe in stable identities, I'd like to believe in unstable activities). But about whether this is a good work of art or that a good exhibition. In some cases, the work of art may indeed resemble an exhibition, or the exhibition may indeed resemble a work of art, in which case the only question that really matters remains: Is it a good work of art and/or a good exhibition, and has the progressive erosion of categorical difference between the two been a force for this admittedly elusive good? Will the cause of art be furthered by it?

I admit, in conclusion, that concluding with such grandiose statements and casual talk of "good art" (good artworks, good exhibitions, the good) is like opening a can of worms at the tail end of a dinner party thrown by the International Society for Scoleciphobes. What is the cause of art, anyway, and why must it be furthered? However, I do believe (and not just in the religious sense!) that the question of quality is integral to the discussion of art, and quality is something that can only be located in discrete objects such as works of art and exhibitions and art projects. It cannot be located in the fleeting half-identities that are people or practices. Quality is that which persists, and it is disingenuous for an artist, critic, or curator to state that such persistence—which should under no circumstances be confused with a notion of permanence, let alone immortality—is of no interest to us. It is the very discussion of quality, of what is good and what is not (rather than who made and/or appropriated what), ever evolving and always renegotiated, that constitutes the subject of, or such a thing as, art.

THE LIMITS OF INTERPRETATION

Massimiliano Gioni

In this essay I would like to introduce a series of reflections aimed at understanding what we can do to a work of art—that is, how we can understand and define the legitimacy of a certain interpretation and presentation of an artwork. What I would like to figure out—to paraphrase the title of a recent book by Dorothea von Hantelmann—is not how to do things with art, but how to do things *to* art. The underlying question here is whether the artwork itself is what sets the boundaries, authorizing a series of interpretations and uses as justifiable, while excluding others.

The question is a crucial one for a curator. I do not want to outline a deontological system for our profession, or draw up a list of rules about what should and shouldn't be done to artworks. But I do want to try to get a better idea of where artworks stand within our value system, what our role is in relation to them, and to what degree we should respect the autonomy of various players in the art game.

The title of this essay is borrowed from a seminal work by the philosopher Umberto Eco. Eco has devoted many books to defining the limits of interpretation, waging a crusade against deconstructive criticism. Although he got his start as the leading theorist of the "open work," Eco has spent the more mature stage of his career defending the rights of the artwork, attempting to trace its borders, as if to caution that a work's openness doesn't mean it is infinite and receptive to any interpretation. Maintaining that the rights of the reader have been overstressed in recent years, Eco has delineated a hermeneutic model in which the intention of the artwork is the main focus. Above all, he has tried to distinguish between interpretation and over-interpretation, between interpretation and use—"use" implying the distortion or misappropriation of an artwork's meaning.

I feel I should state explicitly that in many ways I consider myself a fairly conservative curator, although I have done some rather odd things to artworks over the course of my career, for instance presenting them in unorthodox contexts, like the miniature Wrong Gallery, or in settings overcharged

with the scars and traces of history, as at the 2006 Berlin Biennale or in the Trussardi Foundation's many exhibitions in public spaces and abandoned *palazzi*. On one occasion, the details of which I don't plan to disclose, I completely invented an artist and an artwork (with the complicity of an artist and another curator). At other times, I have reconstructed entire artworks that were lost, such as Gino De Dominicis's *The Second Solution of Immortality* (1972, presented at the 2006 Frieze Art Fair in the Wrong Gallery booth), or entire exhibitions, as with Mike Kelley's *The Uncanny* (1993, presented at the 2010 Gwangju Biennale). Recently I incorporated objects that were not artworks—as readymades—into an exhibition that was structured as a sort of giant ethnographic museum.

Each time that I've made choices such as these, I have asked myself whether they were justifiable, and whether the artworks presented in those contexts really suggested and allowed for that type of presentation. If I decided to follow through on the ideas, it's because I believed the artwork itself would come out the richer, with new possible interpretations—interpretations that were, so to speak, contained in the work and not imposed on it. In other words, even when I've done something particularly bizarre, it was because I believed that that artwork authorized that reading and that manner of presentation. Or, rather, because I believed the seed of that interpretation was already lying dormant within the artwork.

One needn't go as far as the extreme cases described above to see that any presentation of an artwork is an act of interpretation. Deciding to arrange work chronologically rather than thematically is a clear interpretive choice, just as the decision to place one artist's work next to another's is a choice that expresses various explicit or implicit interpretations of the artists, the works, and art history.

The question of limits on the interpretation of artworks is also closely linked to the role and position of the curator. In the first issues of *The Exhibitionist*, the idea of the curator as an author seemed to be gaining ground. As I said to Jens Hoffmann after reading his first editorial, I don't identify with this notion at all. I think that things are both simpler and more complicated: I like to think of the curator as being an interpreter, a model reader, at most an editor, but not an author.

Or, rather, a curator is an author in the same way that someone who says "That's a gorgeous dog" is the author of that sentence. But if by "author" we mean something closer to "artist," then I think that "author" is a pretty misleading way to describe the role of a curator.

By this I don't mean to devalue my profession or put a leash on my ego. Acknowledging that curators are interpreters does not detract from their skill or creativity, it just means acknowledging that unlike authors, who have total freedom, curators must reckon with the artwork; their freedom must

be defined and limited by the work or works they are dealing with in their practice.

Please note that I am talking about the artwork, not the artist. At the risk of alienating all the artists I've worked with in the past and will work with in the future, I'd like to go on record as saying that I don't think an artist has greater rights or qualifications than me when it comes to interpreting—and thus presenting—his or her work. In a system like the current one, where the market is a driving force in the life and career of many artists, the artist's voice is unfortunately seen as the absolute, ultimate truth, not only with regard to the "meaning" of the work, but even in relation to the "right" way of presenting it, distributing it, and preserving it.

It is interesting to observe how contemporary art, in the end, is a very conservative field; even though we've all read—or pretend to have read—Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, we live and work in a system where the author is anything but dead. The author is the lord and master. How many times, after requesting the loan of a work, have you received instructions on its presentation that are worthy of a military handbook, stipulating where, when, and in what sequence it must be installed? And how many times has an artist, or the artist's dealer, tried to correct your press release or essay, as if their interpretation was the only possible one? Many contemporary artists believe they are the only people who can determine what their work means and how it should be presented, and quite simply, I think they're wrong.¹

I would like to remind all subscribers to the idea of univocal, indivisible truth—and there are plenty of them, especially in Chelsea—that we are in the interpretation business, and that many of us came to art because we thought of it as a realm where interpretation would be not only welcomed, but encouraged and supported as a quintessential freedom. Not in the sense that one could do or say anything with a work of art, but in the sense that an artwork does not come with only one single possible interpretation.

At the cost of reasserting the obvious, I think that my task as a curator lies in providing situations that allow a given artwork to emerge in a new light, with a new interpretation, because it has been put into a new system of relationships with other objects. These relationships can be created between artworks by the same artist, or between works by different artists, or even between a work and a given exhibition setting. Not to thrust the artwork into such new situations means the artwork will be reduced to a mere tautology (a risk that seems pervasive at many of our museums and exhibitions, where the work is simply presented as itself, at most as a masterpiece, encapsulated in a presumed neutral setting).

As a curator and interpreter, I believe I have the right and the duty to postulate new interpretations and placements of works, even when these distinctly clash with the artist's desires. How to convince the artist to agree to

1. I would like to clarify that I've learned a lot by working closely with artists, because artists often know their own work inside out. But they know it inside out the way a critic who has spent a lifetime studying it would know it. That is, they know it because they've spent days, years, installing it and presenting it, not simply because they've created it. I feel it is important to specify this point, as I am not advocating for an "art without artists," to use the title of a recent article by Anton Vidokle (*e-flux journal* no. 16, May 2010). In that article, with his typical overtly simplistic Manichaeism, Vidokle tries to warn readers about a bureaucratic drift in curatorial practice that has led to the removal of the artists from the production and distribution of art, in favor of a more streamlined and sterilized art world in which artists are reduced to simple providers of objects and content. Obviously, defending the right of interpretation does not mean that I want to supplant the role of the artist as creator. But I do want to preserve the right of the interpreter to introduce new ideas and new interpretations, even when they do not encounter the favor of the artist. In fact, I am advocating for a less bureaucratic and much freer exchange.

2. Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990): 7.

such things is a pragmatic and political question, and in fact has nothing to do with the limits of interpretation, my own rights, the rights of the artist, or the rights of the work.

A curator's relationship with an artist, after all, is based on affection, curiosity, engagement, politics, diplomacy, and two-bit psychology. Probably, as long as art exists, artists and curators will have to heatedly or submissively argue about how artworks should be presented, one party always asking for the permission and authorization of the other. But these relationships fall between the legal and the personal, and should have nothing to do with the science (or perhaps I should say the art) of interpretation. Instead I believe that the work of art can impose its own interpretation, or a spectrum of possible interpretations. If this is the case, then artists can also rest easy in the knowledge that their works are protected by their integrity. Or, to quote Umberto Eco, "The limits of interpretation coincide with the rights of the text (which does not mean with the rights of its author)."²

Now that we have rapidly done away with the question of the "author's intention," I would like to discuss a series of particular cases in which artists have taken on the role of curator.

For reasons that are not yet clear to me, but which I instinctively accept, we are accustomed to allowing certain curatorial solutions from artists that would instantly cost many professional curators their jobs, or at least their credibility. Marcel Duchamp suggesting, with his enviable aplomb, that Peggy Guggenheim simply slice a few inches off a Jackson Pollock painting to make it fit into her apartment is perhaps the most obvious demonstration that artists are permitted to violate not only the limits of interpretation of an object, but even its physical boundaries.

And one could cite a few dozen other particularly adventurous curatorial choices of Duchamp's, such as the threads strung all around the paintings in the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York in 1942. The history of Surrealism and Dada is full of exhibitions in which the installation concept muscled in on the artworks, even impeding their visibility and altering their physical appearance. Other particularly innovative exhibitions by artists in the last half-century include those by Richard Hamilton and the Independent Group, such as *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953), in which works of art, reproductions, and found objects were intertwined in immersive environments. In the 1960s there was the now-legendary *Raid the Ice Box I* (1969), curated by Andy Warhol, who selected umbrellas, dresses, utensils, shoes, clothes, and artworks from the collection of the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design and arranged them in cabinets as commodities in a shop.

Group Material's archive exhibitions in the 1980s presented a new definition of authorship by combining everyday objects and artworks by several artists. The resulting presentations often blurred the distinction between art-

work and document, effectively turning artifacts into art, and artworks into relics. More recently, Mike Kelley combined medical instruments, hyper-realist sculptures, and reproductions of artworks in the 1993 exhibition *The Uncanny*. And, last but not least, one could mention the way that Urs Fischer overlapped copies and original artworks in his curated exhibition *Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?* (2008), which turned the entire show into a hall of mirrors.

Speaking of overlaps, I was particularly struck by a picture I saw recently of an installation by the Dutch artist Lily van der Stokker at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, in 2008. In one of the rooms, the artist—who had been invited to install works from the permanent collection as part of the exhibition series *Plug In*—hung a Donald Judd piece in the middle of one of her own wallpaper pieces. This is actually an approach that she had experimented with in the past (though not using Judd) and which has influenced the work of other curators, particularly Eric Troncy and his fabulous show *Dramatically Different*, held at Le Magasin in Grenoble, France, in 1997. At the Van Abbemuseum, perhaps because she chose a work by a particularly orthodox artist such as Judd, or perhaps because the installation was in a museum setting, with the blessing of the institution and curators, I found this display truly remarkable for its audacity.

When I look at installation choices such as Lily van der Stokker's, I usually find myself wondering, "Could I do that too?" The "could I" is not a question of ethics. Nor fear, nor caution. Rather, it is a question about my role as a curator, the limits of interpretation, and the boundaries of the artwork. The question is not whether it's right or not to hang a Judd on someone else's wallpaper. I firmly believe that it is, and if the Judd Foundation were to sue Lily van der Stokker or the Van Abbemuseum, I'd be the first to sign a petition in their defense.

What's important to me here is not celebrating the irreverent power of artists and the shows they curate, although I am naturally a huge fan of all the exhibitions I've cited, Lily van der Stokker's included. What I would like to figure out, and I don't think I have a definitive answer yet, is whether that piece by Donald Judd in the Lily van der Stokker exhibition can still be considered a work by Judd. Is it a work that has gained a significant new interpretation? Has it simply been reduced to—transformed into, rather—a work by Lily van der Stokker or a prop in an installation of hers? Or is it some strange hybrid? In short, are we looking at a new interpretation of a work, or as Eco would say an obvious case of over-interpretation or use? Eco tells us that anyone can "use" a text to serve purposes that are not foreseen by the text itself, but that this is a violation of its boundaries—a violation that may lead to new, creative solutions, but which in the end tells us nothing new or important about the text. To offer an overly simplistic example: I can pick up a Bible and heave it at someone I'm annoyed with, if I like, but that action—that use—isn't going

to help me understand the Bible.

Perhaps for the very reason that I see my role as a curator as one of interpretation and not authorship, I believe the limits of interpretation lie within the work. My responsibility is to make the work say what the work wanted to say: in a new language or with a new strength, perhaps, by placing it in a chorus of unexpected voices; or with a louder voice, by putting it into a new environment that bears up some nuances more than others or that even threatens to render the work unrecognizable. There is quite a bit of room inside an artwork, a vast space that accommodates multiple and varied readings, even unexpected ones, and allows for even the most offbeat interpretations. But my work as a curator should stop short of the point where the voice of the artwork begins to be drowned out by my own.

RESPONSE II

★

TOWARD A HISTORY OF EXHIBITIONS

Julian Myers
Teresa Gleadowe
Christian Rattemeyer

ON THE VALUE OF A HISTORY OF EXHIBITIONS

Julian Myers

1. Florence Derieux, "Introduction" in *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2007): 8.

2. See this affirmed, for example, by the curator Christophe Cherix in his introduction to Hans Ulrich Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* (Zürich and Dijon: JRP Ringier and Les presses du réel, 2008), for example, or in more qualified prose by Teresa Gleadowe in her introduction in *Exhibiting the New Art: Op Losse Schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form, 1969* (London: Afterall, 2010): 8–11.

3. See Jenelle Porter's essay "Pictures at an Exhibition" in *The Exhibitionist* no. 2. Other examples include a 2008 reinstallation at Zwirner & Wirth of Dan Flavin's 1964 exhibition at the Green Gallery; artist Mario Garcia Torres's 2008 "reproduction" of the 1969 exhibition *9 at Castelli* at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, a reprinting by Edward Robinson in 2009 of the 1975 exhibition at George Eastman House in Rochester; and *Sol Lewitt: A Mercer Union Legacy Project*, organized by Sarah Robayo Sheridan at Mercer Union in Toronto in 2010.

4. I should admit to my complicity in this, having produced for Afterall an essay on Szeemann's 1983 exhibition *The Tendency Towards the Total Artwork* (see "Totality: A Guided Tour," *Afterall* 20, 2009: 100–107) as well as an edited volume on same: *HSz: As is/As if* (San Francisco: California College of the Arts, 2010).

In her introduction to *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, the curator and art historian Florence Derieux asserts, "It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the twentieth century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions."¹ Articulated in the pages of one of the most visible publications in a wave of recent scholarship around Szeemann, such wide acceptance has become increasingly hard to dispute.² One need only take in the frequent restaging in institutions of historical exhibitions (Artists Space's 2001 "fragmentary re-creation" of Douglas Crimp's 1977 exhibition *Pictures* is a signal example);³ the establishment and proliferation of courses devoted to this history in curatorial training programs and universities; a new pitch in academic study of the history of art away from monographic studies and toward essays on exhibitions; and a raft of new publications, from the modest to the monumental.

Scanning my bookshelf, alongside *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* sits the 2007 catalogue raisonné of Szeemann's exhibitions titled *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957–2005*; Bruce Altshuler's *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1863–1959*, of which the first volume emerged in 2008; Hans Ulrich Obrist's 2008 collection of interviews with individual curators, *A Brief History of Curating*; and Afterall's inaugural volume (published in 2010) of a series of exhibition histories, beginning with Christian Rattemeyer's *Exhibiting the New Art: Op Losse Schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form, 1969*. Their bibliographies reveal that this new preoccupation emerges largely from European publishing houses; Harald Szeemann's name, threaded through their pages, makes it hard to distinguish this new area of historical study from the hagiography of one man. Leave aside that this consolidation of reputation has occurred around *When Attitudes Become Form* (1968), an exhibition that, unlike his later trio *Bachelor Machines* (1975), *Monte Verità* (1978), and *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (1983), might not actually guarantee such claims for historical importance.⁴ Pile on compilations dealing with curating more generally, which sometimes embark

on historical studies of this kind, and whose value varies from one author to the next: *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* (2007), *Curating Subjects* (2007), *The Biennial Reader* (2010), et cetera. Five years ago this shelf would have been sparsely populated indeed; now its joints creak under the weight.

Yet wide acceptance of an assertion does not demonstrate its veracity, or explain the reasons such a momentous shift may have occurred, or explore its implications for the myriad objects, institutions, relationships, and exchanges that make up the field of contemporary art and exhibitions. Which is simply to say that the work of critical thinking on this momentous "turn" in the study of art remains before us. So, what gives? One might see this development as part and parcel of a culture newly attentive to "extras" and supplements of all kinds, for example the current fad in music for bonus tracks, or in movies for making-of documentaries and commentaries. Following this line of thinking, the history of exhibitions might be merely a secondary effect of an academic, institutional, and para-institutional discourse about art, in desperate pursuit of "added values" of its own (followed in quick succession with "education" or some such, ad infinitum).⁵

As my introductory quote suggests, though, this ambiguous surplus is now dreaming of hegemony. A sustained analysis of institutions of art (museums and galleries)—which post-Althusserian inquiry still largely saw itself as a supplement to the history of art—has given way something more triumphant, autonomous, and central, but as yet more difficult to pin down: a history of exhibitions.⁶ One might object that such a history would be a contradiction in terms, for of course exhibitions have been one primary infrastructure or apparatus in modernity for producing and mediating historical knowledge. That such infrastructures have themselves become common objects of historical attention in the academy (say, the history of history) will not completely dispel a suspicion that this is in some fatal way a meta-conversation, academic in the worst way.

It will already be evident from my title that I don't fully agree with this assessment. One of the strengths of historical inquiry is to make such mediating frameworks contingent and visible as one possibility among others—not just to explain but to *denature* the present. And indeed it turns out that exhibitions are not some ineffable infrastructure at all, but that they are something historical. They appeared at a particular moment, designed to answer a certain set of specific historical conditions. Forms of display go very deep into human social behavior, from the display of medieval relics to cave paintings and beyond, but the "exhibition" as such was invented in the Enlightenment in Western Europe, as a new form of publicness for a new sort of audience. Listen, for example, to the French painter Jacques-Louis David, who argued for this new public format in a pamphlet published on the occasion of his

5. See Diedrich Diederichsen on Marx's theory of *Mehrwert* in *On (Surplus) Value in Art: Reflections 01* (Rotterdam and Berlin: Witte de With and Sternberg Press, 2008): 21–31; also my "Art History as Added Value," *SFMOMA Open Space*, July 20, 2009 (<http://blog.sfmoma.org/2009/07/art-history-as-added-value/>).

6. Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (first published in *Artforum* in 1976, then later collected by UC Press in 2000) is a good example of this.

7. Jacques-Louis David, “The Painting of the Sabines” in *From the Classicists to the Impressionists: Art and Architecture in the 19th Century*, ed. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 5.

8. Thomas Carlyle, quoted by Richard Wagner at the beginning of his essay “Art and Revolution” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, Volume 1: The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Künner & Co., Ltd., 1895): 23.

9. Holt, *From the Classicists*, 2.

10. Described as such on February 26, 1760, by Francis Hayman, chairman of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. Originally compiled by Edward Edwards, and cited at length in Algernon Graves, *The Society of Artists of Great Britain 1760–1791; The Free Society of Artists 1761–1783* (London: G. Bell and Sons), 303.

1799 exhibition at the National Palace of the Sciences and the Arts (I hope the reader will forgive me for quoting at length):

For a painter the custom of exhibiting his works before the eyes of his fellow citizens, in return for which they make individual payment, is not new.... In our own time this custom of showing the arts to the public is practiced in England and is called *Exhibition*. The pictures of the death of General Wolf and of Lord Chatham, painted by our contemporary [Benjamin] West, and shown by him, won him immense sums. The custom of exhibition existed long before this, and was introduced in the last century by [Anthony] Van Dyck; the public came in crowds to admire his work; he gained by this means a considerable fortune. Is this not an idea as just as it is wise, which brings to art the means of existing for itself, of supporting itself by its own resources, thus to enjoy the noble independence suited to genius, without which the fire that inspires it is soon extinguished? On the other hand, could there be a more dignified and honorable means of gaining a share of the fruit of his labors than for an artist to submit his works to the judgment of the public and to await the recompense that they will wish to make him. If his work is mediocre, public opinion will soon mete out justice to it. The author, acquiring neither glory nor material reward, would learn by hard experience ways of mending his faults and capturing the attention of the spectators by more happy conceptions.⁷

This is soon after the “celestial-infernal events” of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror.⁸ David, called by some the “Robespierre of the brush,” had been imprisoned for his enthusiastic involvement as a propagandist and pageant master in the radical Jacobin government.⁹ The artwork he planned to show, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, was his first major work after his release. In the new Republican France, he could no longer count on the patronage of the church (he’d repudiated it), the Royal Academy (as a member of the Directorate, he’d liquidated it; the exhibition was in its former hall), or the aristocracy (whose executions he’d witnessed and supported). “Exhibition” was called up to answer his predicament as a new citizen of the Republic: For whom was his art now intended? And a connected question: How can an artist support himself in these unfamiliar circumstances?

For the Classicist painter, all things led inexorably to the example of Greece. David quotes Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy’s *Voyage du jeune Anarcharis* (1787), which referred to a “habit of public exhibition of paintings” among the Greeks. More proximate examples are the bourgeois exhibiting societies founded by artists in England in the 18th century: the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, out of which developed the Society of Artists of Great Britain, and then the dissident Free Society of Artists. (Their fractious dealings later led to the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in London.) These societies imagined their “new practice” of temporary public exhibitions as both educational and entrepreneurial—an enterprise that early on came to include charging a shilling at the door.¹⁰ This new model, David implores, “brings to art the means of existing for itself, of supporting itself

by its own resources, thus to enjoy the noble independence suited to genius.” And indeed the painter’s ambitions were realized. This exhibition earned him acclaim and his own “considerable fortune.”

Let me sum up. First, I would argue that “the exhibition” as such has a history, and this is when it began—not, as Derieux maintains, in the second half of the 20th century, though her periodization suggests that radical shifts in the practice of art in this moment emphasized the importance of mapping this history.¹¹ And second, that the history of art is unintelligible without such a consideration of the artwork’s public life, as hereafter *mediated* by the dreams and practicalities of exhibition making. Already, then, we see the peculiar combination of public virtue and marketplace ambitions native to exhibition making. So too does there appear, even in this early moment, the exhibition’s task of calling its public into being (far too often it’s imagined the other way around). David placed his faith in constituencies among the emergent bourgeoisie who might, or might not, support and legitimate his work: “If his work is mediocre, public opinion will soon mete out justice to it.” Far from being taken for granted, this new constituency had to be seduced, or persuaded (this was the evident aim of David’s pamphlet), which predicts the sorts of anxiety and consternation about the dangers of public judgment that haunt contemporary practices of exhibition making and art making—for Catherine David no less than Jacques-Louis.¹² Not for nothing did some among the 20th century avant-gardes flee into obscurity, privacy, or bohemia.¹³

The crucial task of a history of exhibitions, then, would be to attend to this particular constellation—a desired autonomy, the social situation of the artist, institutions, the market, and the public—as they assumed new relationships over time, in and through practice.

Of course, no one would care if the work at the center of this array had not itself been worth looking at—if David’s sense of his audience, and the situation of his painting’s public life, had not transformed the *form* of the work itself, from its scale and pictorial organization to its fervid hyperrealism to the costumes of its women. As Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has amply demonstrated, the work makes no sense without knowing the conditions of its exhibition.¹⁴ But the reverse is true as well. Severed from an account of the painting, David’s attenuated situating and inventing would not count for much, and would fade into mere maneuvering and publicity.

What, then, is to be the value of an ascendant history of exhibitions, as somehow distinct from a history of artworks? Speaking as an art historian, I find Derieux’s distinction overstated: The history of art is the history of exhibitions, and vice versa. But in my experience, too much of the writing in the emerging subfield—and I am not excluding *The Exhibitionist* and my own efforts—stops short at precisely the moment of turning to the works at hand; a phobia of artworks seems to be the cost of a fetishization of exhibitions.

11. Erica Levin and Danny Marcus, for example, confirm Derieux’s intuition: “In recent decades, however, the production of exhibitions on-site has become at least as important as studio practice, if not more so; and though galleries continue to serve as vendors of art objects, curators have come to occupy a pivotal role in the economy of art’s production, exhibition and exchange. Artists who base their practice on exhibition-making are bound more than ever to organize their working lives around exhibition spaces.” See Levin and Marcus, “Elegant Obstinacy, Meaningless Work” in *We Have as Much Time as It Takes*, eds. Julian Myers and Joanna Szupinska (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2010): 23. Terry Smith’s *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University Press, 2009) also corroborates Derieux’s periodization.

12. I have in mind the recurring unease about audience and populism articulated by Benjamin Buchloh, Catherine David, and Jean-François Chevrier in “1960–1997: The Political Potential of Art, Part 1 & 2” in *Politics, Poetics: Documenta X: The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Documenta and Cantz Verlag, 1997): 374–403, 624–43.

13. On this see Boris Groys, “Critical Reflections” in *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008): 111–18.

14. See “The Revolution Glacée” in Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999).

15. T. J. Clark, "On the Social History of Art" in *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973): 13.

16. Ibid.

Which is to say that this writing, whatever its value, too often demurs from the work of building (to quote the art historian T. J. Clark) "the connecting links between artistic form, the available systems of visual representation, the current theories of art, other ideologies, social classes, and more general historical structures and processes."¹⁵ It politely refrains from attending to the historical mediations between these different spheres, or providing an "account of their change and ambiguity."¹⁶ If our contemporary fixation on exhibitions hopes to be something more than anecdote, confession, half-encrypted publicity, or half-abstracted meta-discourse—that is, if it aspires to become a history—then these will be the tasks before us.

INHABITING EXHIBITION HISTORY

Teresa Gleadowe

The current interest in exhibition histories has its roots in artists' practice. The conceptual shifts that took place in the late 1960s eventually resulted in an understanding of the exhibition itself as a creative entity—a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, *dispositif*, or medium—as well as an interpretative frame or lens. For the last four decades artists have been working in response to site, or, later, institutional context, audience, or community. They have appropriated objects and activities from beyond the traditional field of art and absorbed the mechanisms of exhibition display into their own creative vocabulary. Indeed the artist's "work" now often comprises decisions and processes that would once have been described as entirely "curatorial." The roles of artist and curator have sometimes converged and the artist-curator has become a familiar figure in the exhibition landscape. One high-profile example of this is the series of exhibitions commissioned by Roger Malbert for the Hayward Touring program in England since 1995, which have been curated by artists such as Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth, Susan Hiller, Tacita Dean, and, most recently, Mark Wallinger.

These developments have their beginnings in the first half of the 20th century, in the work of Marcel Duchamp and his Surrealist contemporaries, the environments constructed by El Lissitzky, the designs of Mies van der Rohe, Lilly Reich, and Frederick Kiesler. They have outstanding exponents in the second half of the 20th century in the work of such diverse protagonists as Richard Hamilton, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Joseph Beuys, Donald Judd, and General Idea. And the active legacies of all these persist in the present, in the work of artists such as Liam Gillick, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Goshka Macuga, Martin Beck, and Walid Raad. In the past four decades these and many other artists have made the exhibition their medium, transforming it and vastly expanding its limits. In doing so they have made it clear that the history of contemporary art is inseparable from the history of its exhibitions.

On a more institutional level, the growing interest in the history of exhibitions has been fanned by the development of curatorial programs such as

those at the Royal College of Art (where the curating department of which I was director was inaugurated in 1992) and at Bard College (where the graduate program in curatorial studies was initiated in 1994). Building on the pioneering work of the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York and L'École in Grenoble, France, these academic programs took on the job of defining a body of knowledge and delineating a professional field. They did so by reference to recent and current art practice as much as to art history. The growth of curatorial programs is thus linked to an interest in innovation in the form of the exhibition, in contrast to the traditional art historical emphasis on individual works of art. A knowledge of past exhibitions, and of the practices and trajectories of exemplary exhibition makers, has come to be recognized as a crucial way of describing the work of the curator and thus as an essential aspect of the curriculum in curatorial courses.

Conversely, a fascination with the history of exhibitions could be seen as a response to the fragmented and deregulated proliferation of curatorial activity. As the number of independent or self-described curators has multiplied, as curatorial mechanisms have become more fluid, as working patterns have become less institutional, exhibition histories have gained recognition as a way of delineating ethical and professional boundaries.

Perhaps as a result of these moves, exhibition history has also increasingly come to be seen as an integral part of art history, employed to mark successive “turns” in the production and reception of contemporary art. For instance in the Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh magnum opus *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, published in 2004, each chapter from mid-century onward is introduced by reference to an exhibition—from the first Gutai exhibition in Japan in 1955 to *Utopia Station* and *Zone of Emergency* at the Venice Biennale in 2003.

It is worth recalling that at the beginning of the 1990s there was little published research about 20th-century exhibition history, and what there was had been done mostly in continental Europe, not in the English-speaking world. In France the sociologist Nathalie Heinich had been conducting innovative sociological analyses of the field of art and exhibitions since the 1980s. The art historian Walter Grasskamp first began to research the history of Documenta when he was working for the German art magazine *Kunstforum International* between 1978 and 1983; he published his short essay “Mythos Documenta” in *Kunstforum* in 1982. In 1988 the groundbreaking exhibition *Stationen der Moderne*, presented at the Berlinische Galerie in Berlin, traced the history of 20th-century exhibitions from *Die Brücke* at Galerie Arnold in Dresden in 1910 to Gerry Schum’s *Land Art* exhibition for his Fernsehgalerie in 1969. In the Netherlands the anthology *Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties*, published in 1989, questioned a range of contemporary

curators on their attitudes to exhibition making in the last decade, providing a barometer of curatorial thinking at that time, while the journal *Kunst en Museumjournaal* included articles on exhibition making, collection building, and collection displays, pioneering a reflection on curatorial mores. In France the *Cahiers du Musée nationale d’art moderne* also began to publish occasional articles on curatorial subjects at the end of the 1980s.

But none of this work was widely known, and it was not until the mid-1990s that a cluster of publications on recent exhibition history began to appear on the international stage. Bruce Altshuler’s influential *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* was published in 1994. *Die Kunst der Ausstellung* (an anthology of essays on 30 exemplary 20th-century artists’ exhibitions, edited by Bernd Klüser and Katharina Hegewisch) appeared in 1995. *Thinking About Exhibitions*, the seminal anthology edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, was published in 1996, and Mary Anne Staniszewski’s *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* appeared in 1998. By the end of the decade Hans Ulrich Obrist was beginning to speak about the need to correct “the prevalent amnesia about museum and exhibition history,” referring to Staniszewski’s book.

In 1992, when the Royal College of Art curating course was launched, none of this material was available. In the first few years of the course it became clear that, in the absence of a published history of exhibitions, there would be a heavy reliance on visiting lecturers to contribute oral histories and, in the words of the course prospectus, “to develop awareness of the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that frame the production and reception of works of art.” When the curator Michael Compton (formerly head of exhibitions at the Tate Gallery in London) devised a series of seminars in the first years of the program’s existence, he chose to build his teaching around specific case histories, taking these as exemplary of certain key curatorial questions. For instance he asked of the concurrent 1969 exhibitions *Op Losse Schroeven* and *When Attitudes Become Form*, “Do the catalogue essays written by the curators adequately define the work that is in each show? Do the texts present the shows in ways that make them understandable? Have the selections made for these exhibitions in 1969 been ratified by the art world in terms of selection for subsequent exhibitions? Is the political context of the time reflected in the exhibitions, and if so, how? How did these exhibitions relate to private gallery shows and to the activities of the market at that time?”¹

Through such questions Compton introduced an opinionated insider’s engagement with the achievements of his contemporaries. He expected students to have knowledge of the field, to have some familiarity with the references that would be needed to make the comparisons he was seeking. He led them to an appreciation of the way in which both exhibitions grew out of

1. I led the curating course at the Royal College of Art from 1992 to 2006. These observations are drawn from notes I made during Michael Compton’s seminars.

2. Martha Ward, "What's Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?" in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996).

conversations with artists—and artists' personal recommendations of other artists—and thus located the curators at the heart of their artistic generation, rather than at an academic distance from it. From here it was but a single step for Compton to discuss exhibitions of new art as a curatorial genre that makes particular demands on the relationship between curators and artists, and to engage students in debating those professional and ethical demands and dilemmas. Another seminar, devoted to his own curatorial management of Robert Morris's participatory installation at the Tate Gallery in 1971, highlighted the curator's distinct role and uneasy institutional responsibilities. Compton's account of the public's enthusiastic physical engagement with Morris's installation—followed by his decision to recommend its premature closure as a result of accidental injuries to visitors—demonstrated that a curator with a duty of care to the public cannot necessarily follow the path of the artist in an institutional setting.

In her essay "What's Important About the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?" the art historian Martha Ward suggests that "One way to characterize the period from 1750 to 1914 in relation to our own is that it occurs prior to the articulation of any science or discourse of display." She argues, "Despite the appearance during this period of the institutions that are now commonly taken to be synonymous with the creation of an autonomous space for art (museums, art societies, salons, galleries) it's nevertheless the case that art installation was not yet a subject for professional discussion. Nor did the dealers, administrators, entrepreneurs, or artists who mounted exhibitions often aim to create startlingly innovative displays of art and so to engineer new modes of visibility."² In Ward's account, this discourse of display did not emerge until the 1920s, with the beginnings of historicized museum installations, the impact of the new American science of advertising, and the radical interventions of artists, such as El Lissitzky's at the Landesmuseum in Hannover, Germany. But of more immediate relevance here is the way in which Ward emphasizes the importance of the questions we ask when addressing exhibition history. She interrogates the ways in which exhibitions manage relationships with the public sphere, the ways in which they function to represent some totality or entity larger than themselves, and the manner in which they prepare or frame the experience of the viewer.

Ward's observations are drawn from her knowledge of exhibition making in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the questions she asks relate particularly to this period. Rather different questions are required when dealing with the history of exhibition making in the 20th century, especially in the period since the late 1960s, when the work of art began to merge with the exhibition. At this point, the form of interrogation needs to be animated by a viewpoint that is closer to the approach of artists and curatorial practice than to traditional art history. Michael Compton's teaching was valuable not only because of his

deep knowledge of art history and museological issues, but also because of his partisan engagement with the subjects at hand, his recognition that the problems posed by certain exhibitions are still of acute interest to contemporary artists and exhibition makers, and that asking questions of past events can extract new insights with respect to the future. The urgency of the questions asked by curators or artists in relation to their own working methodologies can reanimate exhibition histories, moving them into an active relationship with contemporary art and exhibition making.

Speaking recently at a conference at the Banff Centre in Canada (at which I was a participant), Ute Meta Bauer, associate professor and director of the visual arts program at MIT, described the way the first generation of independent curators and artist-exhibition makers had initiated her own generation of artists and curators into "a community of shared agency." In presenting her own act of "transmission," an improvised performance using the old technologies of slide and overhead projection, she exemplified the meaning of this history in terms of her own practice. By anecdote and example she elaborated the ways in which artists' use of the medium of exhibition making—for instance the Independent Group's *This Is Tomorrow* in 1956, Yves Klein's *Le Vide* in 1958, Jean Tinguely's *Dylaby* in 1962, Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter's *Leben mit Pop* in 1963, Gilbert and George's *Living Sculpture* in 1969, and Jannis Kounellis's 12 horses in Galleria l'Attico in Rome in 1969—gave sustenance to her work as an artist and curator. She demonstrated that we learn from exhibition histories by the use we make of them.

There is no direct correlation between the desire to uncover exhibition histories and the ability to learn from them. As in archaeology, the excitement of excavation can easily give way to cold processes of classification. The opportunity to access primary materials, through archive and publication, is immediately attractive, but the productiveness of our readings of past exhibitions depends on the questions we ask of them, the knowledge we bring to them, and the ways we work with them. The archive display about past exhibitions, now becoming a staple of contemporary art institutions, tends too often toward headlines and highlights, tokenistic samplings that leave the viewer with the impression of familiarity but without the means or desire to interrogate further. Such uses of the archive run the danger of producing a sterile canon of "landmark" exhibitions that can be named and listed, but are never actively interrogated or inhabited. Even exhibitions as widely referenced as *Magiciens de la terre* and *When Attitudes Become Form* suffer this false familiarity, their frequent citation standing in for a deeper knowledge.

An exhibition is always more than the relics that survive it—more than the catalogue, installation photographs, exhibition plans, posters, and other marketing ephemera, the interviews, press reviews, and news reports, the floor plans, exhibition files, and administrative records, the media responses, diary

notes, video and audio recordings. All of these sources make vital contributions to an exhibition history, as demonstrated eloquently in *Exhibiting the New Art: Op Losse Schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form, 1969*, the first book in Afterall's new series devoted to exhibition histories. But, like a performance, an exhibition is also a series of phenomenological experiences—elusive and essentially irrecoverable. Perhaps it is the recognition of this quality above all that makes it necessary to think about exhibition history not only as a product of meticulous historical research, but also as a subject that needs to be illuminated by artists and curators who wish to inhabit these histories and set them to work.

WHAT HISTORY OF EXHIBITIONS?

Christian Rattemeyer

In 1998, when I finished my master's thesis at the Freie Universität Berlin with a study of the exhibitions *Op Losse Schroeven* and *When Attitudes Become Form*, I was told that my professor was not available for a PhD on the history of exhibitions, as the topic was both too recent for historical analysis and too far removed from the work of artists to be relevant. It was made clear to me that I would have to go elsewhere, maybe to an English-speaking academic environment. Three years later, in spring 2001, after completing my oral exams at Columbia University, a proposal to write a PhD thesis on formations of group exhibitions after 1945 was greeted with the answer that writing the history of curating would be akin to writing a history of exploitation, since artists create, and curators exploit. Needless to say, I am still ABD.

Last year, I published an expanded, rewritten, and certainly more polished version of my thesis in English, with the London-based publisher Afterall.¹ The book, which also brings together substantial documents about both exhibitions, including floor plans, installation photographs, original essays, and interviews with some of the participating artists, bears little resemblance to my first attempt at writing a case study of two landmark exhibitions from the late 1960s, although the basic lines of argument remain the same and the basic idea of what these exhibitions might mean remains as valid today as it was 12 years ago. More importantly, and more startlingly, maybe, is that no other publication has appeared that addresses either of these exhibitions, with the exception of a large archival tome that brings together all of Harald Szeemann's exhibitions.² Over 12 years, in the context of a rapidly developing field of academic research, publication, and discourse on the history of curatorial practice, my thesis is still the most detailed account of these seminal exhibitions.

Of course, these two shows might simply not have been the most pressing subjects for further academic exploration over the last decade, when—rightly so—a broadening of the canon of important exhibitions, not a solidification of the primacy of late-1960s Western European curatorial practice, has been

1. Christian Rattemeyer et al., *Exhibiting the New Art: Op Losse Schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form, 1969* (London: Afterall, 2010).

2. Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds., *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite* (New York/Vienna: Springer, 2007).

the order of the day. But at the same time, the complete absence of further critical discussion of what often are referred to as the canonical exhibitions of the late 1960s—not to mention the origin myth of the independent curator (in the figure of Szeemann)—is remarkable. All of this is simply to say that the discrepancy between the perception and the reality of the coverage of the history of exhibitions suggests the need for further inquiry.

This is not to say that no research has been done. Since the first broad push to move exhibition history into the forefront of art historical study in the early to mid-1990s with anthologies such as Bernd Klüser and Katharina Hegewisch's *Die Kunst der Ausstellung* (1991) and Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne's *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996) as well as academic studies such as Bruce Altshuler's *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* (1994), several books have touched upon and expanded our knowledge of particular exhibitions, for example Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another* (2002), which in the context of a discussion of site-specificity includes a lengthy chapter on the 1993 exhibition *Culture in Action* in Chicago.

But to claim that the history of exhibitions as an academic subject has provided a particular fascination in recent years might be an overstatement. Rather, I think, what has been described as a fascination with the history of exhibitions really might be considered more accurately as a fascination with the curatorial. It is at this point a well-worn cliché to state that curatorial studies have flourished in the past two decades. Graduate programs and symposia, websites and anthologies have been developing for quite some time to look at questions of the curatorial, and publications such as Paul O'Neill's *Curating Subjects* (2007) and Hans Ulrich Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* (2008) suggest that the fascination with the curatorial is in no small part a fascination with the curator. To some extent, this has been understood and rectified. In the case of *Curating Subjects*, O'Neill claims as a *raison d'être* for the anthology the need to move forward from a focus on the curator to a focus on his or her activity, from "an understanding of who certain curators *are*" to "what they actually *do*" and to develop new vocabularies for these practices.³ But O'Neill is chiefly concerned with a model of the curatorial that develops exactly at the moment when the traditional object of the exhibition is complicated, expanded, and potentially abandoned at the end of the 1960s, with a mobilization of the traditional museum curator into roles such as that of the *Ausstellungsmacher* (Szeemann, again).

So, while anthologies such as this actively complicate the debate around the roles and functions of the curator, the question of the exhibition is only occasionally raised, and then usually in relation to strategies of display, institutional politics, and what might be called a taxonomy of genres of exhibitions. Rarely are exhibition histories, or historical exhibitions more specifically, approached with the same degree of attention, descriptive and analytical

precision, or discursive innovation. Maybe it is useful to distinguish between "histories of exhibitions" and "exhibition theory" on the one hand and similar fields of inquiry for curatorial studies. Curatorial practice and exhibitions obviously share a relation, much like artistic practice and artworks do, but they aren't synonymous.

In fact, two central elements necessary to speak of a "history of exhibitions"—however preliminary, incomplete, and ideologically fraught such a history may be—are largely missing from today's discourse. The first element in question concerns an accepted canon of important exhibitions, even in the most general form. The second concerns a developed terminology and methodology of scholarly description. Besides the previously mentioned handful of anthologies published over the past few years, which provide brief entries on important exhibitions of the past century, usually without a more developed framework of how and why these exhibitions were selected, and a bevy of internal lists kept by the various centers and departments of curatorial studies (having taught a class at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies on the subject of the history of exhibitions, I witnessed how these lists changed over the semesters and years), there is no easily accessible and generally agreed upon trajectory of exhibitions to which we can refer.

More importantly, we are only at the very beginning of developing a terminology and taxonomy of exhibition types—the solo show, the group show, the thematic exhibition, the retrospective, the exhibition-as-publication, and more recently the biennial, the exhibition-as-proposal, the social project, the exhibition-as-performance/opera/seminar/film series, to name just a few. Similarly, categories and terminologies for descriptive purposes generally have not yet fully developed to account for the slippery borders where the individual works of art end and their installation and display begins, to discuss placement of the single object and its function within a sequence, the relationships and juxtapositions between objects, and what these arrangements mean for the art and for the exhibition. And of course more generally, as we track the evolution of the exhibition as a genre and independent field of study, what are the categories we apply to define innovation, experimentation, success, or failure? How do we compare different modalities of display, curatorial selections, the changing interactions between curators and artists, expectations for and from the viewers? How do we account for the relation between the installation and the publication? These and many other questions that touch on methodology and terminology on the one hand, as well as a general sense of historical classification and canonization on the other, are still unanswered, and thus suggest that even speaking of a "current fascination with the history of exhibitions" needs to be considered in a new light.

Why should such a canon matter? Isn't it, rather, that the discursive field of curatorial practice and exhibition studies has offered the perfect subject for

an approach to cultural production that recognizes radical dispersal and discontinuity, the necessity for local context and preliminary truths, and the possibility of formal and methodological repetition and appropriation that are not perceived as epigonic? Current curatorial analysis allows the discussion of individual exhibitions and curatorial projects simply on their own terms, without the need to situate them within a larger trajectory of historical development, and thus could ascribe meaning, value, and intellectual power to them without recourse to comparison. In other words, would a return to the narrative of inclusion and exclusion and originality and imitation—that the establishment of a historical canon threatens to reintroduce—limit our ability to assess the richness, diversity, and radical discontinuity of current production through a reductive comparison with past achievements? Or wouldn't it, rather, afford us a toolkit and set of references that enable us to see the current work of curators and artists in different, more complex terms? And wouldn't such a project in turn allow the present work to inform and expand the past? In the last 15 or 20 years, curatorial practice has tested a range of radical experiments, often without the intellectual support that a knowledge of its historical predecessors might have provided. To create such a history shouldn't just be a fascination; it should be a necessity.

Back in 2001, my proposal for a dissertation about typologies of group exhibitions after 1945, then still mainly confined to Western Europe and North America, was guided by the idea that during the first decade after World War II, a paradigmatic shift in exhibition practice occurred. This shift distinguished these exhibitions in crucial ways from exhibitions organized, most often by artists, in the prewar period of the avant-gardes of “classical modernism” (a subject Bruce Altshuler has covered extensively in his book *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*). While prewar exhibitions might be considered “manifesto exhibitions” conceived by artists and artists' groups to announce a new style, to declare their arrival on the avant-garde stage, and to discredit what came before them, exhibitions after 1945, and especially after 1955, often emerged from a point of observation that was more editorial than enunciatory.

Exhibitions that should and could be read as a book, drawing from forms such as the essay to make their point, have developed since Documenta in 1955 and *This Is Tomorrow* in 1956 declared (both in unique ways) the arrival of an organizing intermediary, who, on behalf of and in collaboration with the artists, presented, arranged, commented upon, and shaped the material on view. Several important paradigm shifts occurred in rapid succession through the following decades, which can be traced through analyses of iconic exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Op Losse Schroeven*, Seth Siegelaub's publication-exhibitions in the late 1960s, and more recently the turn toward community- and activism-driven exhibitions such as the aforementioned

Culture in Action in Chicago; the 1993 Whitney Biennial in New York; *Projet Unite* in Firminy, France; and *Sonsbeek 93* in Arnhem, the Netherlands; all happening in 1993.

In 2001, this still sat uneasily with the academic art history establishment that (at least at Freie Universität Berlin) had trepidations about the possibilities of writing the art history of the last 40 years, and that (at Columbia University) had no clear use for the study of exhibitions. I am not certain that the academic climate has shifted much, but I feel the need for such a project just as urgently today as a decade ago. No attempt at an overview of the development of exhibitions—individual, group, thematic, or otherwise—has been undertaken, no canon has been defined. Needless to say, the moment such a list of important, even fundamental, exhibitions has been established, it will be modified, added to, and disputed. But that is exactly what needs to happen. And, I believe, in order for it to happen we need to define why and how a certain exhibition matters, how it contributed to the formulation of new paradigms, how it developed this or that topic further and proposed a more resolved form, and how it challenged a model that had become outdated and required correction.

Maybe such a project is no longer compatible with our times and with discursive standards that recoil at the prospect of overarching narratives, general statements, and even the idea of a canon. But the recourse to individual exhibitions, to the case study and the monograph, and the insistence on the singularity of a chosen example, isn't forthcoming either. I believe that it is exactly in the insistence on the concrete example, in the understanding of the case study as a valid, even necessary, form of inquiry, that larger contours of historical developments will reveal themselves. The Afterall book series *Exhibition Histories* may be a first place where this need is acknowledged, but I hope that more and other voices will join in the discussion to properly create a fascination for, and more fascinating accounts of, histories of exhibitions.

RESPONSE III



CURATORIAL EDUCATION

**Johanna Burton
Andrew Renton
Kate Fowle**

ON KNOT CURATING

Johanna Burton

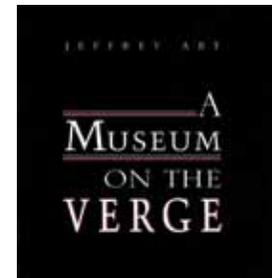
1. By this I mean that some figures are seen as more solidly within the academic field of art history even while attending as well to current practices, whereas others might arguably be seen to take the contemporary as their primary object, even while making recourse to various histories. A sampling of the respondents attests to this kind of span and includes Julia Bryan-Wilson, Miwon Kwon, Anton Vidokle, Terry Smith, Tim Griffin, and Isabelle Graw. See "A Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary': 32 Responses," *October* no. 130 (fall 2009).

2. *Ibid.*, 3.

Issue no. 130 (fall 2009) of *October* magazine was devoted to the "the contemporary," a subject undertaken by some 32 writers with various perspectives and vocations as responses to a questionnaire issued by the editors. The respondents were for the most part a slew of self-identified art historians and critics—though they were both emerging and established, and quite disparate in terms of proximity to what might be considered *recent* art or cultural production.¹ While the resulting tapestry of (sometimes competing or conflicting, but just as often compatible) views yields an interesting case study in and of itself, I call attention to the document here not to parse what it offered with regard to the topic of the contemporary as a potential historical paradigm but to focus on something quite particular that was missing. As Hal Foster pointed out in a footnote accompanying the introduction to the package, "This questionnaire was sent to approximately seventy critics and curators, based in the United States and Europe, who are identified with this field. Two notes: the questions, as formulated, were felt to be specific to those regions; and very few curators responded."²

Flipping through the entries, the latter observation becomes starkly evident: Out-and-out curators are nameable on (half of) one hand: Okwui Enwezor, Kelly Baum, and Helen Molesworth. Here are the only figures whose primary occupations—however differently performed or understood even among these three—can be seen as more or less clearly aligned with the day-to-day pursuit of certain aspects of the curatorial function. (There are a number of others, including Richard Meyer, Mark Godfrey, and myself, who weigh in—via pedagogy or practice—with inquiries related to and invested in curating, but who can be argued to remain aligned for the most part with art history and/or criticism.) Why were so few clear curatorial voices raised, and why did so many seemingly opt out of (or not feel truly implicated within) the conversation?

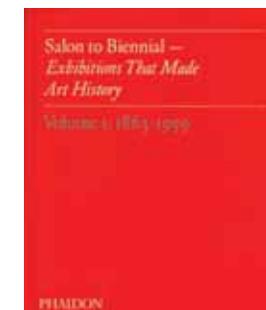
There are easy answers: Perhaps *October* isn't the venue of choice for figures contemplating the unwieldy, even maverick terrain of a still-emerging discipline. Indeed, some would find the context hostile for such discussions,



Jeffrey Abt, *A Museum on the Verge: A Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of the Arts 1882–2000* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001)



Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* (New York: Abrams, 1994)



Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008)



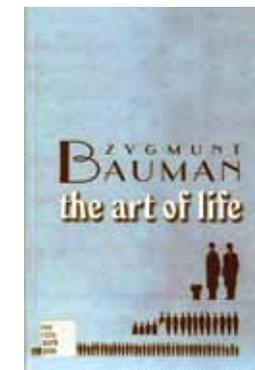
Jacquelyn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2004)



Jacquelyn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, *Learning Mind: Experience Into Art* (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009)



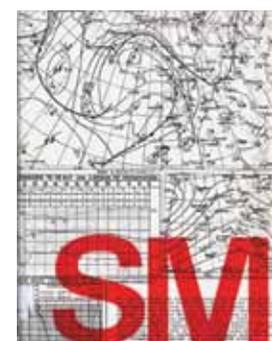
Alain Badiou, *Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of State Truth* (Maastricht, the Netherlands, and Zagreb, Croatia: Jan van Eyck Academic and Arkzin d.o.o., 2009)



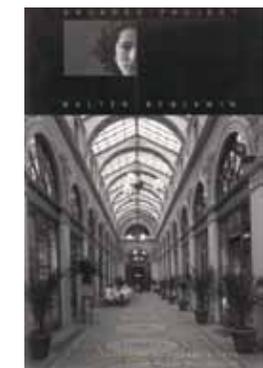
Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008)



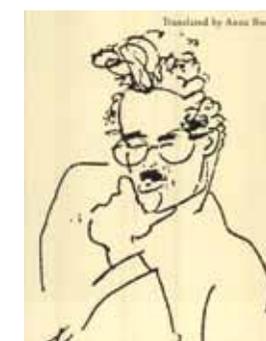
Evelyn Beer and Riet de Leeuw, eds., *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties* (s-Gravenhage: SDU uitgeverij, 's-Gravenhage: Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1989)



Wim A. L. Beeren, Piero Gilardi, and Harald Szeemann, *Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostructuren* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1969)



Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999)



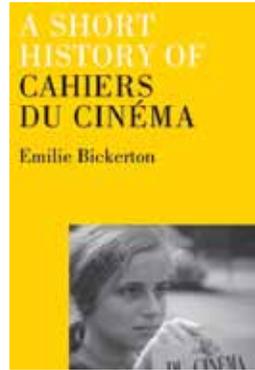
Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998)



Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds., *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957–2005* (Zürich, Vienna, and New York: Edition Volzmeier and Springer, 2007)



Henry Bial and Carol Martin, eds., *Brecht Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2000)



Emilie Bickerton, *A Short History of Cahiers du cinéma* (London and New York: Verso, 2009)



Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster, and Rosalind Krauss, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004)



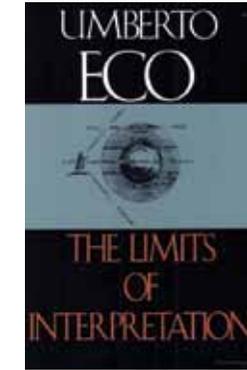
Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa, eds., *Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer: 50th International Art Exhibition* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003)



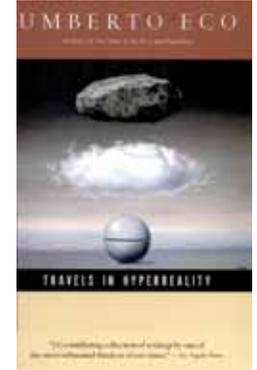
Florence Derieux, ed., *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2007)



Diedrich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art: Reflections 01* (Rotterdam and Berlin: Witte de With and Sternberg Press, 2008)



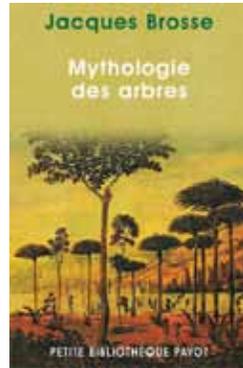
Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990)



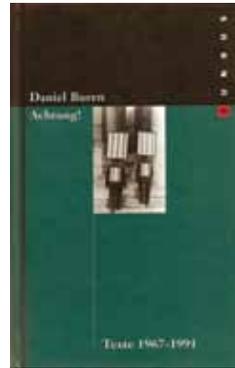
Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986)



Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992)



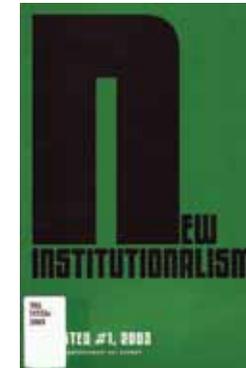
Jacques Brosse, *Mythologie des arbres* (Paris: Payot-Rivages, 1993)



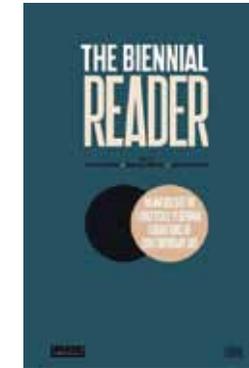
Daniel Buren, *Achtung! Texte 1967-1991* (Dresden, Germany, and Basel, Switzerland: Verlag der Kunst, 1995)



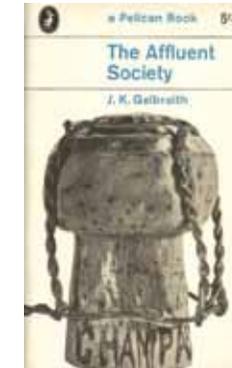
T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973)



Jonas Ekeberg, ed., *New Institutionalism* (Oslo: OCA/verksted, 2003)



Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo, eds., *The Biennial Reader* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2010)



John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: Pelican, 1963)



Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)



Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995)



Catherine David and Jean-Francois Chevrier, eds., *Politics Poetics: Documenta X—The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Documenta and Cantz, 1997)



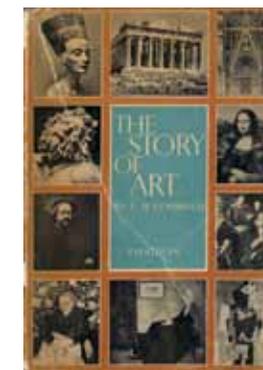
Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998)



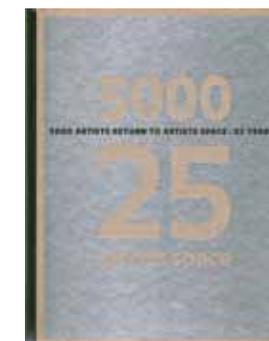
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004)



Massimiliano Gioni, *10000 Lives: Gwangju Biennale 2010* (Gwangju, South Korea: Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 2010)



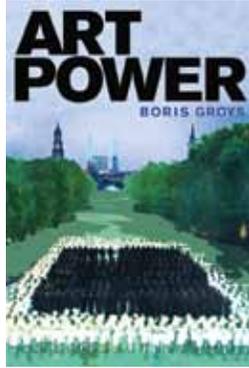
E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1951)



Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith, eds., *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years* (New York: Artists Space, 1998)



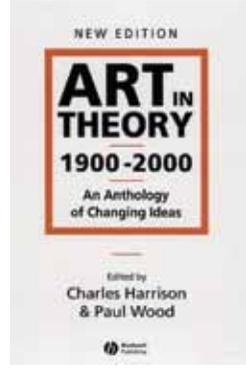
Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996)



Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008)



Josué V. Harari, *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979)



Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992)



Jim Hillier, ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s - New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985)



Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (San Francisco: Bay Press, 1995)



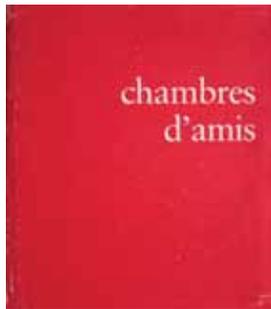
Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)



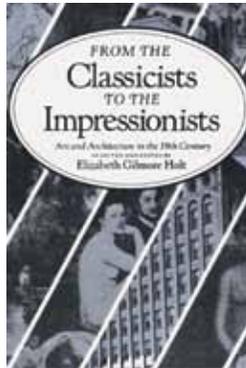
Maria Lind, *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2010)



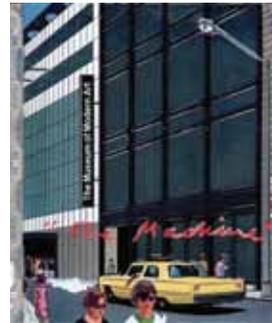
Lucy Lippard, ed. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* . . . (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997)



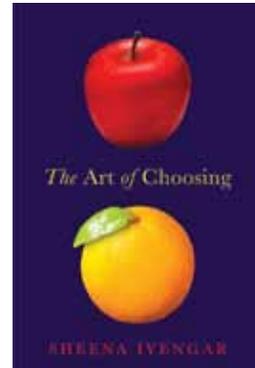
Jan Hoet, *Chambres d'Amis* (Ghent, Belgium: Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst, 1986)



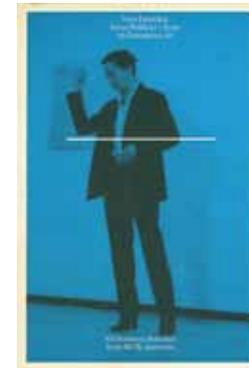
Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *From the Classicists to the Impressionists: Art and Architecture in the 19th Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986)



Pontus Hultén, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968)



Sheena Iyengar, *The Art of Choosing* (New York: Twelve, 2010)



Sven Lütticken, *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam and Amsterdam: Nai Publishers and Fonds BKVB, 2005)



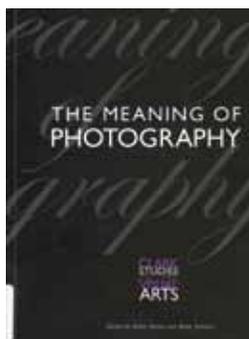
Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)



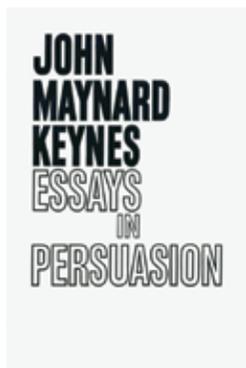
Paula Marincola, ed., *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, Philadelphia Center for Arts and Heritage, 2006)



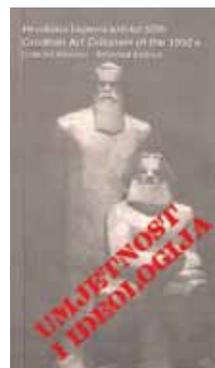
Davor Matičević, *Innovations in Croatian Art in the 1970s* (Zagreb, Croatia: GSU, 1982)



Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson, eds., *The Meaning of Photography* (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008)



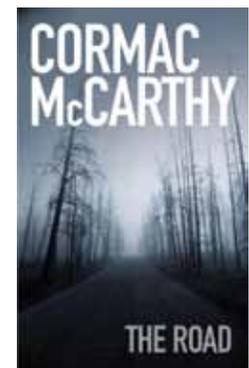
John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963)



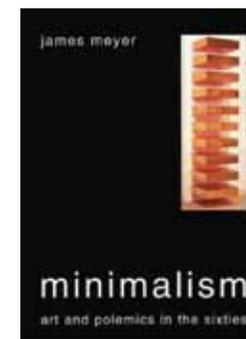
Ljiljana Kolešnik, ed., *Croatian Art Criticism of the 1950s: Selected Essays* (Zagreb, Croatia: Croatian Art Historians' Association, 2000)



Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002)



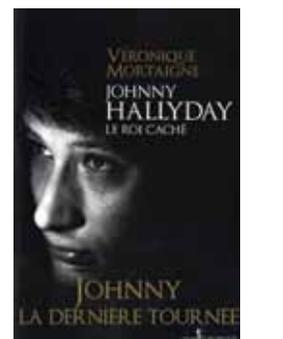
Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Random House Digital Inc., 2006)



James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001)



William J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997)



Véronique Mortaigne, *Johnny Hallyday: Le Roi Cache* (Paris: Don Quichotte, 2009)



Gerardo Mosquera, *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996)



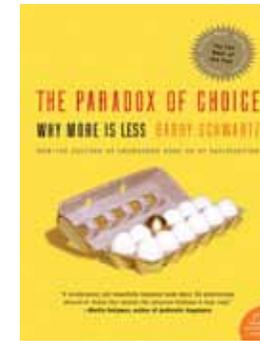
Julian Myers and Joanna Szupinska, eds., *We Have as Much Time as It Takes* (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2010)



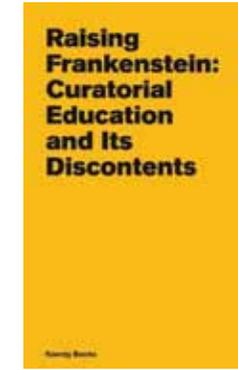
Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2008)



Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (London: Lapis Press, 1986)



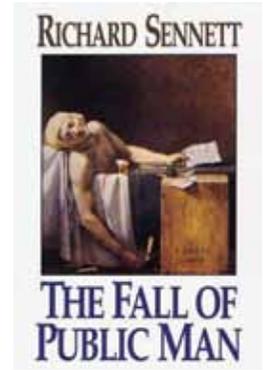
Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004)



Kitty Scott, ed., *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents* (Cologne: Koenig Books, 2011)



W. G. Sebald, *After Nature* (New York: Random House Digital Inc., 2003)



Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992)



Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions / Occasional Table, 2007)



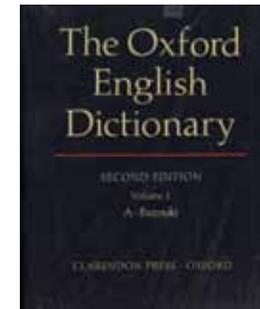
Peter Pakesch, ed., *John Baldessari: Life's Balance, Works 1984-2004* (Cologne: Walther Konig, 2005)



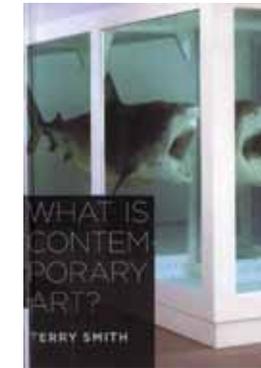
Christian Rattemeyer et al., *Exhibiting the New Art: Op Lasse Schroezen and When Attitudes Become Form, 1969* (London: Afterall Books in association with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2010)



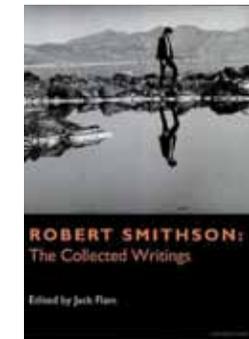
Brenda Richardson and Susan Rannels, eds., *Free* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum, 1970)



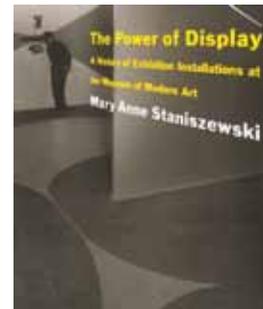
John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)



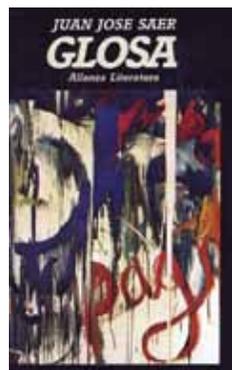
Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)



Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1996)



Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001)



Juan José Saer, *Glosa* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2003)



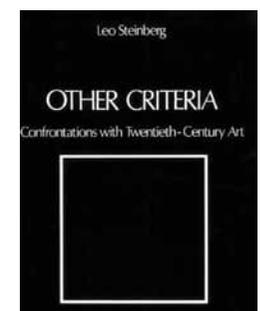
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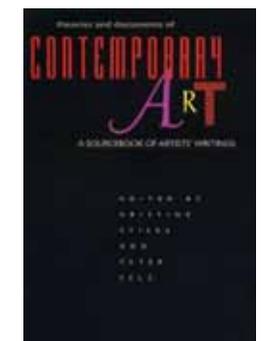
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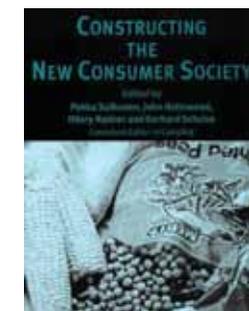
Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1992)



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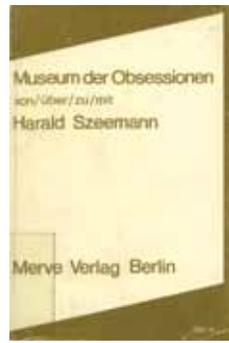
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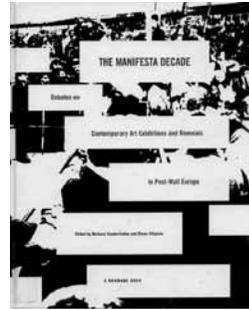
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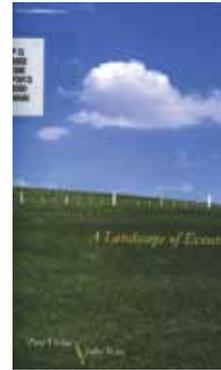
Harald Szeemann, *Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969)



Harald Szeemann, *Museum der Obsessionen* (Berlin: Merve, 1981)



Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, eds., *The Manifesta Decade: Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005)



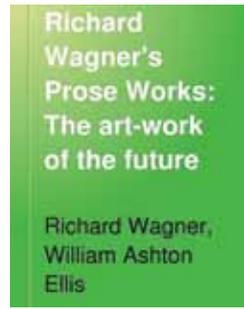
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Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2010)



Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Volume 1: The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Kübner & Co. Ltd., 1895)



Samuel J. Wagstaff, ed., *Other Ideas* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1969)



Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston: David R. Godine, 1984)



Brian Wallis, ed., *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism: A Project by Marika Rosler* (Seattle: The New Press, 1998).



What, How, and for Whom / WHW, *What Keeps Mankind Alive? 11th International Istanbul Biennial* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kültür Sanat, 2009)



Stephen Wright, *Going Native* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1994)

a point that became clear in the defensive crouch of some of the respondents weighing in, as they labored to shield contemporary practices against perceived ahistoricism, spectacle, or viral cultural spread. To boot, the pool canvassed, though somewhat diverse, was ultimately a fairly tried-and-true bunch, and so didn't represent much in the way of figures engaged in overtly experimental discursive strategies. Thus, the resulting texts were coded more by way of competency than true insecurity, and even if the idea of the contemporary did seem, for some, to mark a kind of "turn," this for the most part enumerated little more than a 360-degree pivot. One could argue the obvious (and, to my mind, reactionary) point that *October* is simply too overtly positioned, and too overtly partisan, to be identified with by a new breed of curators who have found or created (or are finding and creating) other venues for their discussions. Indeed, the publication in which you read this essay stands as one instance of a context recently honed in order to fill just the kind of gaps that are thought to exist with regard to conversations around curating (with its theoretical and practical concerns per se) as a foremost topic, rather than as an offshoot, effect, addendum, or parasite, on art history or anything else. Finally, and compellingly, one might say that the very notion of plumbing ideas (and histories) of the contemporary would be antithetical (and even inconceivable) for a certain stripe of curator today, who would regard the exercise as hyperbolic, and truly and utterly redundant.

As true as any of the above explanations might be, more forceful as an answer to why *October* no. 130 was nearly void of curatorial reflection is the possibility that considerations of curating—its practices, histories, procedures, and politics—are in the process of becoming fully loosened from considerations of art in any previously coherent or stable sense. I say this advisedly, and polemically, fully aware that the argument will seem wholly problematic and even patently untrue. How can curating be considered at all outside the very sphere in which it organizes itself and participates (even when proposing alternative structures)? What would it, or could it, mean to claim that curating is, perhaps, rapidly finding itself unmoored from the very objects and contexts that it would ostensibly attend to? In other words, did curators choose not to respond to the *October* questionnaire, with its prompts to consider how we think about current conditions for art, its organization, and its audiences, because they are involved in pursuing *other* questions?

I put forward this speculative claim—that some advanced conversations around curating are migrating *away* from the more functionally integrated (or at least recognizably demarcated) field we might call art—due to a shift I am experiencing within my own context. I currently direct the graduate program at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. Now approaching its 20-year anniversary, it was first formed in response to a growing sense that curating needed to be regarded as embodying more than the caretaking operation implied by its etymology. Indeed, given that institutional critique has revealed

the structural imperatives and ideologies of culture, and artistic practice has demanded reevaluation of both production and reception, it makes sense that the early 1990s saw curatorial practice taken up as an object in its own right.

The conversations that have evolved in that arena over the last two decades have been both exhilarating and frustrating. Tangles over just what is to be taught in a two-year master's degree course in curating have not abated. Some argue that curatorial programs, like master's programs in art practice, offer more in the way of strategic networking than foundation, and emphasize the meet-and-greet aspect of curating as a social occupation. Others feel a patently academic approach is in order, to ensure that young curators in the field will have some sense of history and develop stakes within the field, emphasizing the role exhibitions and curators have played in, among other things, art history and its evolutions. Adversaries on this count would argue for a curatorial version of technical schools, whereby the various pragmatic tools of conservation, installation, and inter-institutional communication are handed down unfettered to ensure that students entering the workforce do so with a clear and unadulterated skill set. Finally, curating seen in an expanded field—as an activity that not only operates within and by way of institutions of art but extends these as well—has allowed for theoretical and politically driven conversations that take into account globalization, neoliberalism, and cosmopolitanism. CCS cannot be reduced to having followed any one of these strands singularly, as its reins have been held by various directors and its courses led by a panoply of instructors with different aims. Yet it has veered strongly away from both the technical school model and, as much as possible, the finishing school approach, where placement is the ultimate goal. If the place has had stronger leanings, these have undebatably been art historical and broadly theoretical—often warring impulses despite what would seem to be compatible directions and, in fact, necessary foils.

What I mean by this is simply that, in my time at CCS (some five years total, though I am now completing both my first as director and first in a full-time capacity), the divide between what has come to be seen as curating that finds its footing in art history versus that which anchors to the vicissitudes of larger culture has increasingly yawned. To my mind it's a false divide, particularly since the version of art history I advocate is in and of itself indivisible from the analysis and contemplation of society, particularly in terms of its organization by way of class, gender, sexuality, and race. Yet, art history (and curating's place in it) is also regarded as a kind of institution, one whose parameters need to be acknowledged but outpaced, and many of my own students—without discounting the importance of what's come before—feel at an articulable distance from that discipline. They are much more urgently engaged in placing their own practices more visibly within discussions that move in seemingly other directions, these more directly tethered to considerations of images, say, as they are collected, distributed, and rerouted more

generally. The theoretical strain, then, that sometimes gets cast as competing with art history as such tends itself to produce both pleasures and perils for students and teachers alike. While hungry for texts that will shed light on questions of labor, ethics, and transparency, students often come as well to articulate their own dissatisfaction with the activity of mapping Jacques Rancière, Bruno Latour, or Jean-Luc Nancy too neatly onto their own practices, which attempt to balance the conceptual and the material in various ways.

That there is tension around curatorial training, and that it in some way proceeds by asking questions about its very position in relation to art history, to culture, and to material practice, is all for the good. Indeed, the very messiness of the enterprise is what points to the field being poised to articulate its own aims in productively contradictory ways. But there is, too, a kind of strained antagonism that threatens sometimes to stall the whole. When I said above that curating is itself being untethered from art as we have known it, I mean this quite literally. In recent, important, texts—most notably by Maria Lind (my predecessor at Bard), Beatrice von Bismarck, and Irit Rogoff—one can see how, with various degrees of success, the very notion of curating, well after the inception of institutional critique, is in the process of undergoing reevaluation and, at present, some repositioning. The noun and verb forms eschewed in lieu of the more compelling, and strategic, adjectival form, Lind in particular makes an argument that it is not curating per se that demands our attention, but rather “the curatorial.”³

Lind's decisive reorientation is one that defines the curatorial both functionally and discursively. (One thinks here of Michel Foucault's insistence that there is no author but only its deeply coded operations, within a nexus of power relations.) Her argument, in part, is that the curatorial, in order to operate self-reflexively and, thus, with open enmity toward oppressive or conservative modes, must be seen as actively involved in making available and holding open spaces for conflict and debate. This means that the curatorial evolves at every level of practice, and is not relegated to the curator in any way. For Lind, the curatorial can be operational within fundraising, writing, editing, education, and so on. Borrowing her model from Chantal Mouffe (who distinguishes between “politics” and “the political”), Lind's insistence is that the curatorial allows for sparks in debate and, more importantly, the articulation and eruption of contradictory ideas in lieu of consensus.

If for Lind and others, the curatorial cannot be locatable solely within curating, it nonetheless resides within its sphere. Calling attention to the discursive, self-reflexive potential of curating is invaluable for creating new avenues pertaining to its reach and aims, but this also, perhaps, reinscribes inadvertently the division between, say, art history and theory and, more importantly, between ideas and objects. While Lind and others would never advocate for a move away from material practices, I think it is fair to say that there is inherently less value placed on exhibitions or practices that look or feel “tra-

3. See, among other texts: Maria Lind, “The Curatorial” in *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010): 63–66; Irit Rogoff, “Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality” August 2006, eipcp.net; and Beatrice von Bismarck, “Curatorial Criticality: On the Role of Freelance Curators in the Field of Contemporary Art” in *Curating Critique* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2007): 62–69.

4. As Andrea Fraser recently wrote "The institution is us," in her essay "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (September 2005): 278–83.

ditional" or give themselves over to contributing to narratives (even if radical retellings) of history. To this end, it becomes somewhat clear why so many voices were absent in the questionnaire with which I began. If the curatorial takes as part of its mission the circumnavigating or disruption of institutions mired in ideology, contributing to these institutions would be counterintuitive. Yet, as Helen Molesworth points out in her contribution to the *October* issue, institutions themselves need to be rethought, and their potential for introducing alternative or opposition models reinvested in. That, as she says, it's hard to think of a single New York museum today that has either a position or an effect on culture (beyond that of magnifying via reflection) does not mean this has always been the case. Indeed, not so many decades ago, some institutions were formed in order to act precisely as *antiestablishment* firmaments, and we need not let go of that potential now.

I am not arguing for institutions as the new seat of radicalism or, even, as sites appropriate for a number of ventures we might deem curatorial. Yet to imagine institutions as monolithic—or to position them as fossils to be referred to rather than engaged—is also an oversight, and mere parodies or *gestures* of critique are a real risk in this construction. (Here one wishes to pause briefly and also underscore the ways in which the institution of art can be extended from architecture and organizations to the discourses and dialogues that make art legible as such, ever expanding or altering its definition; one is necessarily entwined in the other.)⁴ I would go so far as to say we are already experiencing a new formalism of critique whereby certain artistic and curatorial practices are valued precisely for their polite enumerations of awareness, their performances of consciousness. Indeed, as we have seen in the past, almost all practices that garner any traction, no matter how far they position themselves outside of the grasp of various structures, end up contributing to those very structures, for better or for worse. It seems to me that the promise of curatorial education at the moment is to consider the internal tensions it generates and to resist overgeneralizing where the border between "inside" and "outside" might be. It's possible, I think, to both recognize the limitations of something and invest in new forms that pirate from its seeming exhaustion. Starting in the mid-1980s, the artist Sherrie Levine, told that painting had finally met its match (again), began making her *Knot Paintings*, which, by protesting too much, got to have things both ways. (Spoken aloud, the series title seems to disavow the medium, even while the works are precisely what is described—painted knots in wooden panels—bringing about a conundrum forcing us to look at artistic conventions anew.) I propose, then, that we sometimes aim to "knot curate," acknowledging the impossible tangles of the curatorial with regard to the institutions of the past and those of the future (including the curatorial itself) while proposing new models, even if they sometimes look anything but.

FORMS OF PRACTICE: CURATING IN THE ACADEMY

Andrew Renton

I've been worrying that we talk about curating too much. We never used to talk about curating like this. We just got on with it. Actually, we hardly even had a name for it. But as it takes shape as an academic subject, the level of self-consciousness that this produces provokes a form of rhetorical, even ironic, curating. It's our fault. At best we are at a moment that coins the new languages of curating. At worst the academy becomes home to curating about curating. Curating as subject, but with no subject to curate. Surely the practice of curating offers more possibilities than that. Curating as research. Curating in the lab.

But it's still early days for curating. And even more so for curating as an academic subject. The growth of curating programs around the world seems to reflect demand from potential students, if not necessarily from the institutions that might later employ them. According to this trajectory, one nightmare scenario is that there might soon be as many curators as artists—a sort of concierge service for art, every artist having their own curator in tow. And then there are the specializations, where curating is invoked to serve every type of micro-medium.

What accounts for this interest? There's a cynical suggestion that it's a desire to participate in the art world. It does sound glamorous, but there are easier ways to crash the parties. I want to argue for something else: that there is an emerging discipline of curating that relocates its legacies, as it gradually frees itself from the constraints of the institution and comes to occupy a unique place in the academy. It needs to be sited there if only to define very often what it is not. The discourse of curating is not about methodologies of display or histories of the museum, but about an expanded field of practice. I want to argue against the trend for curatorial specializations in favor of curating as a more inclusive mediating practice.

There is a paradox to this, given that curating, I would argue, must be understood in terms of practice rather than as a supplementary activity

tacked onto the end of art history. It is not art history, nor is it museology. Rather, it functions in a variety of ways to produce a language of its own that goes beyond another styling of critical theory. It is responsive, of course, in its relationship to art and to artists, but it may also be proactive in the ways in which it seeks to establish spaces and contexts of operation for works and people.

The adherence to practice is an ideological position. Immediately this flags up the difficulties of teaching curating *as a subject*. It's not a subject at all, but rather a framework or critical mechanism to enable self-criticality, and to expand a field of vision. It's tempting even to propose curating as a *genre*. Curating not so much as critique or commentary, but as a formal manifestation of practice. Genre, here, is a definable space or language within or against which one might work continuously. To propose curating as a genre would suggest that it is a practice that is not exclusively responsive or secondary to the styles of art with which it collaborates.

Curating as a taught subject is not even 20 years old. The program I inherited eight years ago at Goldsmiths, for example, had been run along a social science model, for no apparent reason, as far as I could determine, other than to apply some formal rigor to this relatively new discipline. All the more strange, as it was positioned in the fine art department rather than under the umbrella of art history. The art school has been comfortably embedded in the British University since the 1950s, with all the implications that come with the notion of supporting artistic practice as an academic, assessable subject.

Analyzing the specifications of the curatorial program we inherited at Goldsmiths, my colleagues and I understood that it had been framed within the university institution to invoke systems of knowledge that were subject-specific. It's hard to excavate what exactly the motivations for this were, but they were perhaps related to an inherent institutional nervousness at the prospect of this new discipline.

Curating programs framed themselves in the early days through a tripartite model of artist-curator-audience. But much of what was taught relied heavily upon museological technicalities, social engagement, and a small measure of connoisseurship thrown in. A training in a portfolio of predetermined skills, rather than in a more complex development of an individuated practice. No negotiation of *position*, of where the curator might be in spaces in which art circulates and comes to be seen.

It seems to me that the moment for curating programs has really occurred in the last decade, exactly when permission for curating as a practice has become fully part of the discourse of the broader art world. And the moment when curating came into its own, no longer obliged to defend

itself as a role, is the same moment that we understood that curating cannot be taught.

This is not as radical as it sounds. And it is certainly not bad news. It means that the moment you recognize curating as a practice, another type of contextualization comes to take the place of the canon, opening it up beyond one singular history or methodology. And because of the openness of the practice it is not a question of curriculum.

There's a blank space to be filled, and indeed a space to be forced open, where the curator is accountable to a multitude of influences. In this way curating cannot be taught, because it should anticipate being out of its depth. Curating doesn't tick boxes, but flows over the margins. Practice is an unsteady condition that thrives on the spaces its experimentation opens up. Certainly there is an articulacy that can be developed around practice. Context, if you will. But it is not prescriptive. If context is almost the sum of what one might be able to teach, by the same token, curating as a taught subject should recognize that it cannot hope to cover all the ground. It must be subject to constant change and displacement. (And never rely upon the same reading list from one year to the next.)

There's a function for the curator that needs to be defined beyond footnoting what has gone before. The model that emerges must be one of subjectivity, where the curator produces an alternative set of histories that work backward to locate themselves.

By the same token, with hindsight, as we attempted to rethink how curating might be taught, we might well have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. In our revisions, we chose not to prioritize technical skill sets in favor of learning those practicalities on the job. We do not teach a history of display from the *Wunderkammer* to *When Attitudes . . .* for fear of an overindebtedness to art history. Instead we conduct seminars according to the practices of the students. We shouldn't do more than structure the space in which their projects are tested among their peers. No thematics, except perhaps the understated anticipation of barely visible memes, or an unstable zeitgeist. No theory as a starting point, except in the service of a project under discussion.

And yet, almost reluctantly, we found ourselves reintroducing histories into the discourse. But this time the perspective was different. For example, at Goldsmiths we have developed a curatorial histories course inside the program that is entirely driven by the students. They select the exhibitions that are to be brought to the seminar for discussion. They rewrite the history of these precedents. What we continue to learn from this is just how curating is used for dramatically different agendas, and continues to be read differently, depending on one's perspective. This sound like a banal truism, given the uncontested internationalism of contemporary art, when there is no continent

or region without its own biennial or art fair. Because we are all subscribed to e-flux, the new curating reveals not so much a distinction of content, but a dramatic difference of purpose. We never anticipated that our students would wish to use curating as a language that changes so dramatically depending on the context.

If the ethics of curating are to be based on the obligations that emerge with practice, then how is it possible to negotiate the curated object if, by definition, it is absent from the site of the discourse? Art schools have long taught around a produced object, in the studio, where, for the most part, the object is fabricated. The critique takes place with a materialized work, or at least the work in progress. There's something to see, to walk around. But that's not always a possibility within the practice of curating. The acts of curating are so often deferred. The processes of production may be drawn out, and might occur much later in the day, or, of course, elsewhere.

But there must be a way to carry forward the encounter of the studio critique into the obligations of curating. It's an intense encounter, and always an ethical one. Facing up to the work of art and finding a language for it. I would wish to argue that there is a possibility of a curatorial critique that retains this ethical obligation, even with the physical absence of the works of art under discussion. Practice, or research, occurs elsewhere. In this way the academy is not necessarily the site of that research, but a location that gathers these findings into an open discourse.

In the name of curating, even the objects sometimes get in the way. We became commitment-phobic in this flight from the museum, adeptly avoiding any obligation at all to the materiality of the collection. Indeed, the triumph for the independent curator was the ability to be detached from an obligation to a collection as such.

The curator was no longer at home. Uprooted, the curator could operate in a variety of registers and locations in a practice of curatorial temporality, rather than any consolidation of history. And this was a battle worth fighting. It signals the moment when curating begins. But we lost the *touch*; we hardly handled anything. And sometimes you do need a home to go home to.

Returning to the collection, we've renegotiated it through a couple of surprising, unanticipated routes. If today's generation of curators inherits a legacy of dematerialized, process- and discourse-driven curating, the physical absence that is produced in the wake of such strategies becomes a site of mourning and loss. Something was left behind.

At the same time, the past decade has seen the growth of independent collections, far beyond the control and rigor of any museum. Independent, willful, without constraint, these collections reflect an increased interest in and hunger for contemporary art as economic and intellectual capital.

Highly visualized outputs, generating speed through consumption. And no one has begun to think their way through them in any critical way, except as symptoms of a market. But their curatorial legacy will prove much more interesting.

The object returns, however subversive the form. Indeed, the more subversive the better. The contemporary collection has become infinitely accommodating; there is nothing it could not bring under its auspices. It moves quickly, rashly, and does not fret with buyer's remorse. But it can only do this without overindebtedness to a past. What is collected is a manifestation of existential desire. It does not have to tell the whole story. It simply tells its own, here, now. Outside of history.

In such a climate the contemporary curator has to negotiate this surplus and is obliged to reengage with the idea of collection building. These collections become the sites where new conjunctions might be formed, temporarily, that collapse museums' histories in favor of an ethics of subjectivity. The collection must be irresponsible, must refuse to retread the territory of the museum, and the curator now faces a unique opportunity to engage with this.

Another side of this practice of curating would be to propose the notion of the non-curator, perhaps in a way similar to how Brian Eno used to speak of himself as a non-musician. But if curating resists becoming a subject, then why try to test its limits in academia? My sense is that we have learned a great deal through the curating programs about where curating might operate. Curating beyond the exhibition, a new generation of curators want to curate wherever gaps occur in their world experience. A sort of daily practice of curating. If the academic context runs the risk of producing a potentially unhealthy degree of self-consciousness in curatorial practice, so too it needs a degree of self-awareness to seek out corners of interpretation that critical discourse alone cannot reach.

A non-curating, or minor curating, then, that resists the monumental in favor of a temporary critique. Curating as problem solving, sketching out the territory.

Often invisible, its effect is incremental and highly localized. It is not restricted to proposing specialist expertise, but rather offers a tailored response to where you find yourself, here, now. While fully conversant with the language of the biennial or the museum or the catalogue raisonné, this is a curating of temporality, always in motion, barely observable, but embedded within the practices of art making. Again, an ethics of curating.

A longtime collaborator of Harald Szeemann once told me that Szeemann never included a work in an exhibition that he had not traveled to see in the flesh. The curator today might express disappointment if something did not yield immediate results in a Google image search. There's some

legitimacy to the young curators' strategy, as much as we very much frown upon it in class. After all, Aby Warburg's dislocation of art history brilliantly anticipated the equivalence and simultaneity of the Google search. But I suspect that Szeemann, if he was alive today, would still prefer to conduct his research the long way round.

AN EDUCATION

Kate Fowle

In early 2011 the Banff Centre in Canada published a book called *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, which includes essays on curating programs and their outcomes—ranging from the provocative to the testimonial—by a diversity of practitioners at different stages of their careers who participated in a conference on the same subject at the Banff International Curatorial Institute in November 2008. Ever since curating programs were first established, they have caused consternation and divided opinions as to their effectiveness and purpose. Regardless, the programs have proliferated, largely as a result of their popularity among the ever-increasing numbers of people who see further education as a fast track to a curatorial footing. For better or worse, it is evident that the formalized practice of teaching curating is here to stay, and the debates of “to be or not to be” are now rhetorical. This was made clear in the panel discussion published in *Raising Frankenstein*, which apparently dissolved into a stalemate of personal opinion.

While exploring various curating programs' pitfalls in her text for *The Exhibitionist* no. 3, Maria Lind called such programs “one of the most significant additions in the past 20 years to the system of art.” This is certainly true if one is to take into account their increasing centrality in conversations around curating and developing institutions. Whether we agree with these programs or not, the fact of their existence has helped to trigger reflexive questioning by directors, curators, artists, and a few other seasoned exhibition-goers on what “Curating” is. It has also contributed heavily to the impetus for some long-overdue publishing on exhibition histories, as well as—for want of a better phrase—curator's monographs. The latter address the oeuvres of specific practitioners, such as *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite* that was published in 2007, or the recent book of Lind's writing and exhibitions published by Sternberg Press.

Up to now very little of this published scholarship has been produced as a direct result of curatorial programs, which is surprising, as one would imagine it to be a chicken-and-egg scenario, wherein for example the research generated via the classes would form the core of material for print. While all the

programs have paved the way for curators and directors to talk more about their exhibitions, concepts, and research, and many of these presentations have been recorded, the speed with which the courses move through various visiting professionals and topics has led to a tendency toward archiving primary material rather than spending time developing it further.

Toward the end of her article, Lind observes two paths for programmatic reform that could inject more causality into the system: To study the “history and practices of curating as a subcategory of (for example) art history, visual culture studies, or ethnography,” which she suggests would impact the depth of publishing; or alternatively to focus on “the curatorial” as a methodology, wherein “most functions within an institution or other organization would be the object of curatorial scrutiny and practical work,” which would shift the emphasis from teaching curating as a series of temporary gestures or exhibitions to thinking through longer-term infrastructures. Both approaches indicate ways to hone the specificity of studies, which could collectively create a more in-depth body of research that could be useful to others in the field, as well as productively enhance the various institutional frameworks—from universities and art schools to museums—that currently support them. Strategies such as these are increasingly the direction in which progress for curatorial programs is discussed, for the most part because the practical aspects of the training are criticized as being dubiously productive. But it is Lind’s parting proposition, which advocates for a hands-on approach to developing curatorial practices, that I think is key to advancing the actual profession (as opposed to pedagogical strategies) today.

To paraphrase, she calls for encouraging young people to self-organize curated projects and that this could be supplemented by short courses, so that discussions around art and context could produce discourse and networks between working peers. In short, Lind is calling for the growth of practical solutions that respond to the needs of those who are learning through doing, and which may not always be best served by the current academic systems of master’s degrees or postgraduate programs.

In 2002 I cofounded the Graduate Program in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts in San Francisco. It was the second such master’s degree program to be launched in the United States and the first in the country to be established in an art school context. Using the word “practice” to define the program rather than “studies” could be seen as semantics, but the latter implies a distance to the subject that is counterintuitive to the process of curating, which has to involve parallel “doing” and “thinking” just as an artist’s practice does. In the six years that I directed the program, it became very clear to me that students with prior work experience in the field could contribute more to, and get more out of, the courses, but they got frustrated with the endurance of a two-year seminar-bound regime; testing out ideas can only go so far when more emphasis is put on discussion than action.

But at the same time, the museum and gallery professionals who taught the classes often commented on how much they valued the opportunity to reflect on their work in the midst of busy schedules. What became evident is that it is productive for curators at every stage of their careers to take a step back and go deeper into the whys and wherefores of practice. But the question is: for how long and in what context?

In places where there is less formal infrastructure, emergent systems have evolved that give local arts professionals the opportunity for precisely this kind of reflection and examination. For example: Arts Initiative Tokyo (a-i-t) is an organization started in 2001 that has successfully produced nonaccredited courses (curatorial and otherwise) for 10 years. And in Mexico City a successful nonaccredited curatorial program was formed by Teratoma—a group of curators, artists, anthropologists, and art historians—that lasted for three years, from 2003 to 2006. Both projects had inbuilt flexibility so as to accommodate the changing interests of the participants as well as the opportunities afforded by visiting professionals to each city. Through this, experimental forums were created to explore art-world and curatorial issues, develop new discourses from a local perspective, and enable collaborations. Though they were informal, both programs have had a proven impact via the creation of small-scale institutions, exhibitions, and writing by people who have gone through the courses, as well as new national and international platforms, which continue to expand.

In 2009 I became the director of Independent Curators International (ICI), a small nonprofit organization based in New York that develops touring exhibitions, publications, and public programs with international curators. Once there, I saw an opportunity to address curatorial training outside of the formal education system, inspired by the success of the pragmatic approaches to education mentioned above, but with an international perspective. The result is the Curatorial Intensive, which is a low-cost, 10-day curatorial short course. Held twice a year in New York, and in other locations worldwide (such as Mumbai, Johannesburg, and Philadelphia) in conjunction with local institutional partners, the program is for practitioners who are already working. It consists of seminars based on case studies led by curators, directors, art historians, critics, and artists; group-led discussions; site visits to museums, galleries, private collections, and artists’ studios; and one-on-one sessions around projects that the participants are developing themselves. The Intensive culminates in a daylong symposium wherein the participants present project proposals to a public audience, and then the finalized proposals (which are worked on with ICI for several months after the course) are posted on ICI’s website. The aim is to give people working in diverse circumstances around the world—often outside of established art centers, or in newly emerging ones as far afield as South Africa, Singapore, Egypt, Belgium, Colombia, Serbia, Ireland, Bulgaria, Israel, Tasmania, and Nigeria—the chance to develop their ideas and

make connections internationally.

The basic structure of the Curatorial Intensive remains the same with each iteration, but the content, as well as the selection of participants, depends on the specific issues that are recognized as pressing, or lacking in opportunities for professional development, for instance curating in the public realm, or curating performance. The premise is the critique of practice rather than the teaching of theories and concepts, so that through the courses people at different stages of their careers, with varying institutional experience and geographical knowledge, can temporarily create a critical mass through which to interact and bounce ideas off one another. As a result, some unlikely intergenerational and interregional networks and collaborations are starting to develop. Time will tell their ultimate value to discourse and practice around the world.

There is no doubt that curating programs need to diversify and become more specialized to stay relevant to the ever-expanding art system. There is a clear need for the development of more research-based courses oriented toward institutional analysis, as well as the production of scholarship around exhibition histories, but we must also think of ways that curators can get access to shared self-reflection throughout their careers, not just at the beginning. The issue is how to make time for this productively in an already-demanding work schedule.

Lind writes of her concern that master's degree programs function as "part-incubators, part-greenhouses" that "not only pamper the students, but also put tremendous efforts into sustaining those who otherwise wouldn't make it." Furthermore, she posits that the greenhouse effect is one that, through producing growth at speed, creates a false faith in education and its eventual outcomes. I think this is true in the context of academic environments that encourage growing for the sake of growing, but it's also the very premise on which "graduating" is based, and so is somewhat inevitable within academia.

When imagining how to provide opportunities for growth over, say, a 40-year career, it is necessary to vary our received notions of ideal duration and speed for education. In a constantly evolving professional context driven by engagement with artists, shorter, more intensive learning environments can create a much-needed rupture of the day-to-day. But this also needs to happen more than once. Perhaps it is better to consider the model of retreats, which are perceived to be a forum that is returned to with a kind of "slow" regularity. These work on the premise of taking the current experience and attitude of the participants as the common ground, rather than using a prescribed starting point or generic level of knowledge and understanding from which to generate development. Creating a dynamic and intelligent art world across countries and generations will require everyone involved to pay more attention to fostering opportunities for taking stock, converging, and learning over time.

RESPONSE IV



**THE
PARACURATORIAL**

**Vanessa Joan Müller
Livia Páldi
Emily Pethick**

RELAYS

Vanessa Joan Müller

1. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997).

When I was asked to write a text about the “paracuratorial,” a seminar devoted to filmic paratexts that I attended as part of my film studies coursework immediately sprang to mind. Based on Gérard Genette’s definition of the paratext as the sum of those elements that accompany a text or a book—from the dust jacket to the advertising campaign—the filmic paratext serves as a framing adjunct with the power to guide our reading of a film.¹ The directors of the Nouvelle Vague were characterized above all by their affording this framework almost as much attention as they gave to the films themselves. The opening and closing credits, the poster, and also writing on the subject of film constitute the levels of commentary that coalesce to form the overall space inhabited by a film and render its external and internal references visible and subject to analysis.

Along with its core duty of exhibition making, curating also encompasses a whole series of other activities that are now taken for granted: writing accompanying texts, programming film series, organizing lectures and talks, et cetera. As a (somewhat academic) term, the “paracuratorial” has arisen out of a plane of commentary similar to other paratexts in order to channel the reception of the exhibition in a particular direction and illuminate its inherent systems of reference. In recent years, however, this whole area has developed its own impetus. We are no longer dealing only with fields that go hand-in-hand with curatorial work and ultimately therefore the exhibition itself, but also with arenas that have taken the place of the exhibition: the thematic reader, the academic conference, the philosophical seminar. Curators stage salons and interdisciplinary symposia, and even publish periodicals. They adopt artistic methodologies of research-based activity and present their own institutional history as an interactive archive. They adapt the notion of a collective production of knowledge in the form of temporary academies. We are dealing with an enormous degree of openness nowadays with regard to what is offered by, and what can be discussed within, the context of an institution. As a result, new conflicts, correspondences, and commentaries have emerged

within the traditional coordinates of art that place the format of the exhibition in an altered, broader focus.

Many of these activities are the result of a series of considerations that relate to how the art institution sees itself, and ultimately also relate to the academic processing of such considerations. To a certain extent, they represent the legacy of New Institutionalism, which has itself become a kind of common property. In its wake, museums, galleries, and art centers have transformed themselves into more open formats. They have tried to foster a more democratic attitude toward their audiences, and to open themselves up to new forms of artistic practice. The institution as “part-community center, part-laboratory, and part-academy” may well belong to the past, but its diverse components are part and parcel of everyday curatorial practice.² In the field of education in particular, diverse models have been developed to reach out to new audiences and (to a certain extent) to make art more accessible across the board. Moreover, there has been a recognition of the institution’s potential to create a public for art and to act as a substitute for those spaces that have become increasingly subservient to commercial interests and are no longer inclusive, but exclusive.

This also implies that different institutional formats do indeed represent “sealed, protected areas” (that would constitute the white cube’s productive legacy) where things can happen that don’t happen elsewhere. The repoliticization of art, the focus upon—often already historic—activist formats, and the close collaboration with local communities make it apparent that diverse forums that once existed have now ceased to exist in this particular way. A broadened form of curatorial practice occasionally compensates for this, to an extent.

Classic institutional critique targeted the framework of art’s production as well as the socioeconomic and political conditions of the institutions engaged in its exhibition. It analyzed and questioned the very locus in which art was publicly displayed. Precisely because institutional critique was ultimately a form of criticism that affirmed its own institutional basis—as an “internal” critique referring to the institutional status of art and the system of art institutions (ranging from museums to galleries to art periodicals or indeed the art market)—it was also possible for art institutions to utilize it for their own purposes of self-legitimation. (As indeed it often was, through to the ubiquitous rhetoric plied by curators today that art is permanently “crossing borders” of one kind or another, questioning relationships of power, and unveiling institutional mechanisms.) A follow-up trend emerged later in the form of the so-called *Kontext-Kunst* (Context art), which on the one hand saw itself as part of the tradition of institutional critique, but on the other was attempting to open up art institutions to non-art practices to which it was previously unconnected.

2. Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt, “Harnessing the Means of Production” in *New Institutionalism*, ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo: OCA/verksted, 2003): 78.

3. Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Curriculum of Institutional Critique" in *New Institutionalism*, 89–109.

Whereas orthodox institutional critique is predicated upon the supposition (and I am simplifying to an extent) that there is an inherent conflict between the artist and the institution, the second phase of institutional critique is a more collaborative affair and utilizes the exhibition as a space to draw attention to its operations. After institutional critique's renaissance during the 1990s made renewed reference from the artists' point of view to the symbolic rules that differentiate art from the broad field of non-art, the institutional context functions nowadays predominantly as a privileged place in which the focus can be directed toward that sociopolitical "outside the white cube" which is itself filtered out of the internal system. By means of targeted interventions, reality outside art has found its way, legitimated as art, into the interior space. The relationship between art and non-art defines itself here just as strategically as it does situationally: There is an outside to which reference is duly made, but this is not contextualized completely as art by virtue of the reference alone. Instead of fundamentally questioning the symbolic borders of the art space per se, its rules and ways of functioning are temporarily transferred to areas that gain a new interest and also a politicization through this very framework.

Art institutions are no longer viewed as sites of cultural and political exclusion deserving of critique and indeed attack. Instead, contemporary critical institutional discourse is propagated—and here we arrive at the subject in question—chiefly by curators and museum directors. The transformation of the institution and the extension of its scope of action have become a shared goal. However, over time the broadened version of institutional critique has also progressed from a critical form of art practice to a more general attitude toward the "operating system," which can in turn be adopted by artists, curators, and critics alike. A command of "the curriculum of institutional critique" has become a matter of course.³

This shift—which is owed in equal measure to both the success of institutional critique and its historicization, so that it has now become part of an art-historical canon as well as curatorial training—engenders a variety of paracuratorial activities. The majority of these activities take place in a field which itself examines the possibilities of curatorial practice beyond (now rare) rigid institutional formats. Whereas there are experts for the classical activities of communication (press officer, art educator), the curator, as auteur, adopts the role of the critic channelling the debate, productively extending the curatorial remit. He or she knows that things are possible within the institutional framing of art that are (no longer) possible elsewhere. This framing is perhaps the most important aspect for the various conferences and publications initiated independently of exhibitions, for the political engagement of individual institutions, and for their contribution to sociopolitical initiatives for change. On the other hand, the academic world hardly has the financial resources

to publish its research in book form. Institutions publish not only exhibition catalogues but also anthologies, collections of essays, conference minutes, and other kinds of documentation. The likelihood of listening to a lecture by a renowned philosopher held in a museum, a municipal art gallery, an art center, or a conference organized by one of these institutions is significantly greater than doing so in a university.

This development becomes problematic when academic training becomes increasingly market-oriented, generously leaving the fields adapted from the art industry itself to the art industry; when art institutions become places that organize not only exhibitions but also university-level conferences and establish their own albeit temporary academies, and universities are forced to withdraw from these arenas out of political considerations; when cultural policy is only prepared to sanction the funding of the institution's disseminative role and duly cuts structural funding; when conditions are laid down as to which paracuratorial activities need to be performed and which do not. In times when universities are being restructured and the humanities actively curtailed, when art academies are being forced to obey the call for efficiency, one shouldn't redistribute their duties unquestioningly.

With all due sympathy for the extended forms of curatorial activity, the exhibition and dissemination of art should move to center stage once more, and the accompanying apparatuses that frame it and the discourse it produces should be supported by a commonality of interest in these two core elements. That would constitute a plea for broad-based forms of dissemination to a heterogeneous audience as well as for the integration of adjacent fields into a curatorial discourse which itself reflects the political, social, and economic "outside." The art system is in a powerful position at the moment to be able to appropriate many discourses and fields of activity and engagement. We ought not to forget that other places exist where much of what we increasingly find ourselves doing is also done—places like universities, repertory cinemas, community centers, and so on, and which merely await our willingness to cooperate.

The classical paratext is "a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition, but also of *transaction*."⁴ As a transitional zone it is part of neither one field nor the other. From the point of view of a text, it belongs to the context, but from that of the context, it is part of the text. At best, it is a switching point and interface, with the capacity to initiate communicative processes. Ultimately it is a profoundly heteronomic, auxiliary discourse operating in the service of a different enterprise, which provides its very justification for existence: "Irrespective of the degree of aesthetic or ideological content, coquettishness, and paradoxical reversals the author may choose to introduce into a paratextual element, it is always subordinate to 'his' text and this functionality significantly determines its composition and its existence."⁵

4. Genette, *Paratexts*, 15.

5. *Ibid.*

Even if the shifts of position within the curatorial per se and its interplay with other spheres of activity and social contexts are indeed irreversible—and are not meant to be reconsidered here at all—the exhibition itself still ought to move center stage more emphatically as a unique format for the production of meaning. Collaborations with experts from other fields are explicitly recommended in this endeavor. The endless extension of curatorial practice itself will lead to a one-sided upgrading of the figure of the curator in the field of the production and dissemination of knowledge. Reflection on, and commentary upon, existing social, political, and economic conditions in the sphere of art must be a joint enterprise—for artists, curators, and their public. In this sense, the paracuratorial would also ideally be a switching point and interface for the initiation of communicative processes.

Translated from the German by Timothy Cornell

NOTES ON THE PARACURATORIAL

Livia Páldi

Made by curators for curators, *The Exhibitionist* has set out to create, as Jens Hoffmann states in the first issue, a “consistent platform for more frequent and interconnected conversations” about curatorial practice. The aim is not so much to provide historical data as to enhance a dialogue about the still somehow privileged domain of exhibition making. Declaring the renowned French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* as its main source of inspiration, *The Exhibitionist* invites critical revisiting of significant exhibitions and insight into their making. Basing its approach on comparativity, the journal also zooms in on specific issues (curatorial responsibility, mediation, learning, education, interactivity, collaboration, the public, authorship, et cetera) and in relation to them suggests some rethinking of the curatorial vocabulary as well.

The essays connect a number of approaches, types, and strategies of curatorial engagement, and they bring into the conversation the highly polemical issue of curatorial subjectivity and creative authorship. Rethinking exhibitions that either represented or presaged radical shifts in art practice and exhibition making—for instance *Innovations in Croatian Art in the 1970s* by Davor Matičević and Marijan Susovski in Zagreb in 1982, the much-cited *Chambres d’Amis* by Jan Hoet in Ghent in 1986, or *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* by Okwui Enwezor in New York in 2002—is also saturated with the need to look at how the exhibition as a dominant format has been (and can be) challenged with respect to constantly evolving needs and concerns.

The aim of every fourth issue (of which this is the first iteration) is to offer responses to and reflections on the preceding three, as well as to hint at possible future subjects and directions. I was asked to contribute a text about the “paracuratorial,” defined by Jens Hoffmann in his emailed invitation as activities that “sit outside the idea of curating as bound to exhibition making.” The term, which encompasses lectures, interviews, educational events, residencies, publications, screenings, readings, and performances, implies an intertwining net of activities as well as diverse modes of operation and conversation based on more occasional, temporary alliances of artists, curators,

1. Joans Ekeberg, ed., *New Institutionalism* (Oslo: OCA/verkstad, 2003). See also Nina Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future" published by the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (August 2007), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en>.

and the public. I would like to examine the term's embeddedness in contemporary curatorial and institutional practices and how, partly due to increased access to information and diversified forms of its dissemination, the exhibition has also been transformed into a multitasking environment that hosts and accumulates a growing number of incidental, diffuse, or even hijacking moments.

Throughout the postwar history of exhibitions, the growing need to engage the white cube in more spontaneous events and more critical discussions has taken varied forms and modes of operation. Many institutions from the 1990s urged the redefinition of the contemporary art institution, resulting in "a redistribution of its resources, expressed both spatially and temporally in terms of how institutions' hardware (their buildings) and software (their schedules) are apportioned."¹ Art spaces (among them Rooseum, Malmö, Sweden; the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania; and Kunstverein Munich) moved toward becoming institutions of critique, where the exhibition lost its primacy and became coequal with (or even subordinated to) the other types of activities described here as paracuratorial. Spaces with hybrid functions emerged, incorporating for instance screening lounges, archive/research stations, and reading rooms, not only to provide interested visitors with information on the contextual backgrounds and relational networks of the projects but to enable new aspects of education, learning, participation, and engagement.

Connected to colloquy, theoretization, education, or simply the exercising of the imagination—from salons, interview marathons, and migrating archives to performative talks, interview-style radio and TV shows, and temporary schools—a growing number of unscripted and semispontaneous situations have also pervaded curatorial practice. They are meant to inform, inspire, and even test curatorial agendas; interrogate and subvert roles and protocols; and give space to more flexible encounters with critical and independent players beyond the art world. The curatorial reactivation of the fragmentary, temporal, and transitive has also been greatly supported by the reappropriation and recontextualization of artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s.

Often positioned as temporary, mobile, or nomadic, paracuratorial activities and attitudes can take on different tasks and roles. They can either slow down a process, reverse it by zooming in on some ignored detail, or alter the perception of artistic and curatorial work by making its procedures detectable in a more critical framework of theory. There are a wide array of practices building up in mixed (even chameleonic) formats with the potential to reveal more precisely the blind spots and paradoxes, and even sometimes counterproductivity, of curatorial work.

One of the early protagonists of the "curatorial turn," Harald Szeec-

mann, following his controversial 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head*, envisioned and realized an "event-oriented" Documenta that worked halfway between "abandoning the institution to street, and arbitrariness" and "the seminar-type approach that would have turned its back to the original(ity of the) event."² In its complex handling, Documenta 5 merged diverse sources, practices, authorial commitments, and ways of viewing. It not only reconsidered the concepts of publicness and the exhibition as a public space, but also helped to develop a more articulated interplay with the public. Documenta has historically been an exhibition that lasts for 100 days, but lately the temporal scope of the exhibition has been extended so that activities begin long before the opening date. The events leading to the "final" stage take various forms (Documenta 11 was organized as a series of five platforms, Documenta 12 engaged in a magazine project, et cetera) and occupy different statuses within the projects.

The last decade generated a new wave of discussions about the present and future roles of museums as public institutions and the capacities and potentials to synchronize their historical functions with the economic, cultural, and political changes that are pressuring and reshaping artistic and curatorial work. On the other hand there have also been varied debates on the place and possibilities of criticality independent from institutions and the market. We are living in an age that is literally drowning in events, with the hyping of event culture and an almost fetishistic, marketing-driven, festivalizing approach to discursivity. In this context, paracuratorial activities can both support this overabundance and facilitate a counterflow to overwrite existing scenarios.

The following examples indicate some ways in which different institutions have utilized the "halfway between"—the migratory, transient character of paracuratorial agendas—not only to facilitate more discussion about agency but also to support the reinvention/redefinition of their scopes of operation and enhance their capacities in a debate-based institutional framework. The experiences these institutional projects gather extend from flexible roundtables (such as the protoacademy initiated at Edinburgh College of Art by Charles Esche) to integrations into the biennial mode. They contribute to the questioning of institutional and academic hierarchies, and to the potentials within institutions to connect with artistic and curatorial strategies reflective of contemporary social and political urgencies, as well as to local histories.

Developed both inside and outside the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, the two-year project (begun in January 2007) *Be(com)ing Dutch*, led by Charles Esche and Annie Fletcher, debated Dutch national identity in the globalized world while putting forward a challenge for the museum to become politically proactive in its provincial hometown. Realized through

2. Alex Farquharson, "Bureaux de change," *Frieze* no. 101 (September 2006), http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/bureaux_de_change.

3. Annie Fletcher, *Be(com)ing Dutch* abstract, published by the European Cultural Foundation, 2007, <http://www.eurocult.org/uploads/docs/794.pdf>.

4. Charles Esche, "What's the Point of Art Centres Anyway? Possibility, Art, and Democratic Deviance," *republicart* (April 2004), http://www.republicart.net/disc/institution/esche01_en.htm.

5. Paul O'Neill, "Be(com)ing Dutch," *Art Monthly* (October 2008): 23.

a series of talks, panels, workshops, major public discussions such as the Eindhoven Caucus, and an exhibition, *Be(com)ing Dutch* asked "whether art might offer alternative examples of thinking about how we might live together today" and how we deal with the critical challenges associated with that, among them escalating processes of inclusion and exclusion.³

Be(com)ing Dutch put to use different forms and media to communicate the distinct roles of art and culture (and the institution) in imagining the future. In many ways it continued what Esche proposed with the Rooseum in Malmö (he was the director there in 2000–4) by attributing transformative public potential to an art institution. His text "What's the Point of Art Centres Anyway? Possibility, Art, and Democratic Deviance" translates like a statement about the necessity to rethink art institutions as public spaces that are reflective of their immediate surroundings and historical moment. It envisions "something close to that mix of community centre, club, academy, and showroom" and a freedom that "encourages disagreement, incoherence, uncertainty, and unpredictable results."⁴ The writer and curator Paul O'Neill closed his exhibition review of *Be(com)ing Dutch* by describing a performance/demonstration on Dutch colonial history that had to be canceled due to public pressure and threats. He indicated this as a new point of departure toward the envisaged position and possibilities of the institution having a say within the "real" public arena.⁵

"Dialogue is a precondition of moving things along" served as a dialectical principle, motto, and leitmotif of the 5th Berlin Biennale in 2008, titled *When Things Cast No Shadows*. Curated by Adam Szymczyk and Elena Filipovic, it announced itself as taking the form of an "open structure in five movements without a plot" and offered the most extensive event series in the history of the Berlin Biennale. The night program, *Mes nuits sont plus belles que vos jours*, involving more than 100 practitioners (artists, producers, writers, et cetera), served as the activated intersection both inside and outside of the dominant exhibition venues (Kunst-Werke, Neue Nationalgalerie, Schinkel Pavilion, and Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum as well as those being involved on occasion, such as Kino Arsenal and Volksbühne). Among other events, it included lectures on Modernism in the 1950s in Yugoslavia, "Dustination," automobiles, and hypnagogia as well as film screenings and city tours (including a visit to the city's 1980s-era civil defense complexes, remnants of the Cold War).

When Things Cast No Shadows proposed a tactical balance between the exhibition (daytime) and paracuratorial activities that took hold during post-exhibition hours and the nighttime. While undoubtedly playing with the conscious/subconscious analogy, it gave countenance to the curatorial focus on processes and irregularity. Like its reader/catalogue, it became an edition of heterogeneous acts and productions, activating different moods and lines of thought.

While the 5th Berlin Biennale balanced curatorial with paracuratorial modes, the planning and afterlife of the failed critical and educational endeavour that was Manifesta 6 gave primacy to the event-driven mode of working. Inspired by the legendary Black Mountain College, the curators proposed to bring about an art school in collaboration with a collection of people in Nicosia in Cyprus, as they believed that "a truly progressive art school needs to respond to what is lacking within institutional spaces of culture and seek to transform everyday life."⁶ Though the process was delayed for diverse (political and other) reasons and eventually canceled, one of the curators, Anton Vidokle, in collaboration with Boris Groys, Jalal Toufic, Liam Gillick, Martha Rosler, Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Nikolaus Hirsch, Tirdad Zolghadr, Walid Raad, and a great number of other artists, writers, philosophers, and the public, transformed the research that had already been undertaken into an independent project. During its 12-month operation in Berlin, *Unitednationsplaza* hosted a great number of seminars, screenings, book presentations, and other projects, and it led to other variations on the theme, including *Night School* at the New Museum in New York.

Largely defined by the cultural environment in which they take place, paracuratorial activities can gain a very special momentum. Questioning the definition of publicness, including what and where can be public, was the main impetus for the curatorial duo Aleya Hamza and Edit Molnár in Cairo—who were running the Contemporary Image Collective (CiC) between 2007 and 2009—to initiate and organize *Tales Around the Pavement* in 2008. They helped to produce events that explored "the complex relationships and shifting dynamics between people and public space in the context of a megacity like Cairo, in which the notion of public space and its various functions, official and informal, is constantly negotiated and redefined."⁷ Some lasting more than a week and others only a few hours, these "ephemeral disruptions of the urban landscape" necessarily involved being both confrontational and politically provocative.

In a context where institutional spaces of culture are scarce and discussions about contemporary art are practiced via only a few protagonists, *Tales Around the Pavement* activated the "halfway between" as a series of hybrid actions to acquire knowledge about how publicness and public places exist in downtown Cairo. The organizers appropriated everyday street routines and guerilla tactics that people develop in the megacity, and merged these with previous artistic research. The project thus represented a slightly twisted situation, very different from those canonized forms of public art that define themselves in relation to white cube practices. For instance, to set up *Transmission: A TV-Based Urban Situation* in Mounira (close to the villa where CiC worked)—a fake urban middle-class living room situated on the pavement with TV monitor displays—the artist Mahmoud Hamdy had difficulties requesting permits and operating his project. Though watching football in shop

6. See <http://manifesta.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/NotesForAnArtSchool.pdf>.

7. See http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2008/tales_around_the_pavement.

8. See <http://hamzamolnar.wordpress.com/2010/06/29/tales-around-the-pavement/>.

window displays of stores selling audiovisual equipment is a common practice in downtown Cairo, the artist's negotiations with shop owners pointed at the ill-defined borders between public and private as well as the indistinctness concerning the Emergency Law and its restrictions on freedom of assembly in public spaces.⁸

In conditions where institutions and academies are almost nonexistent, or do not allow for progressive testing of curatorial operation, the paracuratorial format can provide a model to link and mobilize diverse energies and practices in the form of temporary events and ephemeral structures. This also applies in places where politics pervades culture and its institutions, and either annuls their activities or degenerates them into propaganda and marketing. Here paracuratorial practices and strategies may counteract over-ideologized institutions and their stiffened protocols, and maintain space for discourse and independent curatorial work. In countries such as Hungary, where semi-underground existence has always been a well-known mode of critical operation, soon again this existence will be the only relevant way to continue debate and conversation.

THE DOG THAT BARKED AT THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Emily Pethick

As a curator primarily involved in producing artists' works that are often constituted through live events and other discursive processes that take place both inside and outside the gallery, I have to confess that I have struggled with the term "paracuratorial." At face value it posits a frame that is centered on the exhibition, making separations between what takes place inside and outside of it, thus suggesting a center and periphery and reinforcing borders that are now disregarded by many artists and curators. The question of boundaries does, however, prompt some further thinking about where the borders of institutions and artistic and curatorial practices now lie, what they can accommodate and not, and what other kinds of parameters they encounter (social, political, economic) and how these are negotiated and shifted.

While the paracuratorial positions a frame inside and outside of which curatorial activity takes place, one could say that the curatorial as a practice has gone beyond the binaries of inside and outside, as Irit Rogoff has written:

In a sense "the curatorial" is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict. . . . Moving to "the curatorial" then, is an opportunity to "unbound" the work from all of those categories and practices that limit its ability to explore that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world.¹

Here the conventional idea of curating as bound to exhibitions in a physical space has shifted to a conceptual space, a productive space of encounter where different forms of knowledge and practices may intersect, a methodology that is in process, through which problems may be inhabited and grappled with without the need for objective distance. Thus one could ask whether the curatorial in this sense still has, or needs, borders? And in relation to this, could the curatorial become a vehicle to access what lies beyond them—the unknown, unintended, uninvited, unacknowledged, suppressed, uncomfortable—often the things that arrive through the event in the moment when something is put

1. Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality," eipcp.net/dlfiles/rogoff-smuggling.

2. In the words of Robert Smithson, “Cultural Confinement” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1996).

3. In *Democracy and If You Lived Here...*, artists became curators, but worked in a way that was closely aligned to the role of organizer (in the activist sense). The exhibitions took place at a time when institutional critique was in full swing as a practice that consistently questioned who or what was not included in the institutional “frame” and the conditions within which works were situated, although institutional critique itself has been criticized for internalizing questions within the field of art. I believe that these examples demonstrate a shift to a radically externalizing approach.

4. Yvonne Rainer, “Preface: The Work of Art in the (Imagined) Age of the Unalienated Exhibition” in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism: A Project by Martha Rosler*, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: The New Press, 1991): 12.

out into the public realm and ushers a response. Could it be these factors that linger beyond the horizon of the curatorial that the paracuratorial may now encompass? One could start this investigation by looking at what’s not there, and what is there but unacknowledged, and what happens when these enter into the frame, or the frame expands to include them.

“In general, we see ourselves as the outspoken distant relative at the annual reunion who can be counted on to bring up the one subject no one wants to talk about.”

—Group Material, “On Democracy,” 1990

While the shifts from objective exhibitions toward more discursive models are extensive to track, two artist-led curatorial projects at the Dia Art Foundation in New York in 1988 and 1989 specifically did much to break down the “cultural confinement”² of the gallery. The first was *Democracy*, organized by Group Material, which involved four exhibitions as well as private meetings, public assemblies, and town meetings. The approach, as described by Group Material member Doug Ashford, was to “directly engage an audience that would actually move objects in and out of the gallery in response to the political reality of the day, the week, or month: an exhibition that would change with the people who came to see it.” The second was Martha Rosler’s *If You Lived Here...*, which involved film and video producers, photographers, architects, planners, homeless people, squatters, activist groups, and schoolchildren in addressing contested living situations, architecture, planning, and utopian visions, primarily in the local context of New York. Each exhibited artwork was presented alongside a host of other artifacts, demonstrating broad, inclusive ways of opening up the exhibition to those who might in the past have been excluded, and debating problems and conditions that at that time were marginalized and hard to speak about.³ In her essay “Preface: The Work of Art in the (Imagined) Age of the Unalienated Exhibition,” the artist Yvonne Rainer (who was responsible for bringing the projects to the Dia Foundation) described how they resonated: “What surfaced again and again as one spent time in these seemingly chaotic installations was the conflict between official utterance and nonofficial representations of everyday life, between the exalted bromides of Western democracy and their thinly disguised ‘freedoms.’”⁴

The event-based nature of the work showed ways of approaching knowledge and experience that were still in the process of being thought through—that resisted easy resolution, and that could not be contained but needed to be lived through, shared, and kept open. Furthermore, they demonstrated the potential of the event to incorporate more than one voice, coming from different positions with sometimes contradictory viewpoints—including the “voice” of the institution—and how the intersection of these produces not only new knowledge, but a more complex picture.

This method of opening up a problem to participation through the staging of an event is a central methodology in Wendelien van Oldenborgh’s

Maurits Script, a film that looks at “unofficial” Dutch colonial history in northeast Brazil. It was first presented in 2006 at Casco in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Van Oldenborgh’s script edited together narratives sourced from both “official” and more informal accounts of what took place at the time, offering often-contradictory points of view on the celebrated governorship of Johan Maurits and the lesser-recognized aspects of his governance, such as his treatment of slaves and “natives.”

Van Oldenborgh shot the entire film in a one-day open shoot in the Golden Room of Maurits’s former residence, now the renowned museum Mauritshuis. He cast a group of nonprofessional actors, each of whom had a different personal relationship to the issues raised in the script. They independently played out their roles before a single camera on one side of the room, and on the other side engaged in an open conversation with the other actors about legacies of colonial histories, revealing at times conflicting viewpoints. The unraveling of these multiple accounts at the heart the museum created a counternarrative that addressed the unspoken conditions under which much of the museum’s collection, and the building itself, had been produced. At the same time, the museum’s everyday routines continued, including a guided tour, which kept to its usual route and went straight through the film shoot. Captured on camera, the guide entering the official narrative into this site of dissent further complicates the layering of insider and outsider positions and creates an ambiguity as to whether the “real” has entered the “unreal” (of the film set), or vice versa. While culminating in a film that was exhibited elsewhere, it was the event of the production of the work that created a discursive site where many intersecting knowledges wrestled one another to create a densely layered narrative that resisted resolution.

While van Oldenborgh’s project pushed against the official narrative of the museum from within, Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss’s project *Read the Masks: Tradition Is Not Given* had a more radically externalizing effect. It was produced as part of *Be(com)ing Dutch*, a two-year research project and exhibition (the exhibition component took place in 2008) at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, on issues concerning Dutch national identity. *Read the Masks* aimed to open up a debate about Zwarte Piet, a popular traditional Dutch pre-Christmas character whose distinguishing features include a black face, red lips, and dark curly hair. Through a series of public events, Bauer and Krauss worked toward the production of a film, which was to begin with a protest march planned in collaboration with two Dutch activist groups. The march aimed to publicly give voice to the long marginalized and suppressed critique of Zwarte Piet.

A few days before the march, extensive media coverage triggered hundreds, if not thousands, of negative reactions, many of them very extreme, including threats of violence against the participants. The museum canceled the march, and thereby drew a line in the sand that ultimately influenced

the shape of the work. The media attention—which was even mentioned in parliament—revealed a widespread, deep-seated refusal to acknowledge the problematics around this tradition and triggered complex discussions on national identity, racism, freedom of speech, and whether the art institution was a place for reflection or action, thus bringing the museum once again into the frame, this time to have its funding threatened. A frequent accusation against the artists was that they were not Dutch, thus “outsiders” who were not entitled speak about this, even though Krauss had been living in the Netherlands for some years. The project opened up a space in which issues could be discussed, yet the explosiveness of the debate was almost too much for the museum to handle.

This was the only part of *Be(com)ing Dutch* that touched such a nerve and tackled some of the painful questions that it set out to address. Excerpts from a semi-public roundtable discussion held at the museum are threaded through the subsequent film *Read the Masks: Tradition Is Not Given* and tease out some of the intricacies of this story. At one point in the film, the museum curator Annie Fletcher is asked whether the museum has seen “a change in its politics as a result of the project.” She responds: “We have learned a lot from the whole process. But also when it comes to decision making, thinking more about what we produce as a ‘cultural temple.’ What we collect, how we collect, the politics of collecting. And how we understand the museum as a public space. And who has access to this public space.” The acknowledgment of the struggle that the institution went through and the changes that resulted shows that the museum as frame is not fixed; Fletcher’s statement of this is also now part of the final work itself.

To publicly address uncomfortable questions that usually linger outside the frame of representation was a central concern of the 2011 exhibition *Cinenova: Reproductive Labour* at the Showroom in London. Cinenova is a film distribution company that was founded in 1991 as the outcome of a merger of two self-organized feminist film and video distributors, Circles and Cinema of Women. Each was formed in the early 1980s in response to the lack of recognition of women in the history of the moving image. Cinema of Women had come to exist partly in response to the exhibition *Film as Film* organized by the English Arts Council in 1979, which marginalized women filmmakers to such an extent that the women on the exhibition committee (Lis Rhodes, Annabel Nicholson, and Felicity Sparrow) decided to withhold their work from the exhibition and issued the essay “Women and the Formal Film” in explanation of their stance. They described their idea of showing historical experimental film alongside “an active space within the exhibition where contemporary women could show personal statements and histories, find their own continuity, and share ideas for future shows,” conditions that were difficult to realize within the hostile and hierarchical structures then predominant within the

organizing institution. “In general,” they continued, “we object to the idea of a closed art exhibition which presents its subject anonymously, defining its truth in Letraset and four foot display panels, denying the space within it to answer back, to add or disagree, denying the ideological implications inherent in the pursuit of an academic dream, the uncomplicated pattern where everything fits.”⁵

Twenty-two years later, a more active space for the exhibition of women’s film was created at the Showroom, taking the form of *Reproductive Labour*. It was organized by a Working Group made up of Cinenova volunteers, who are involved in the practical running of Cinenova. The Working Group was constituted through the project, but also out of an urgency to save the organization from economic instability and material deterioration, and it developed the project through a dialogue that took place over two years and fluidly traversed practical, economic, conceptual, and political factors. To represent the organization and its work, they brought to the venue the 500 film titles that Cinenova distributes, their equipment, and an archive of paper materials. Members of the Working Group were present in the exhibition to meet visitors as well as to carry out the daily work of Cinenova. During this time they also began the task of digitizing the films in its holdings in order to preserve them and make them more accessible—a project requiring space, time, and facilities. In exposing this work and the conditions surrounding it, the exhibition explicitly aimed to make public and urgent Cinenova’s precarious situation, particularly in terms of the voluntary labor that sustains it, and to socialize these struggles, creating a site that could give rise to reflections on the desires and problematics of collective cultural work and the difficulty of sustaining critical culture. As an exhibition it resisted a closed form. Its films and other displayed materials changed each day, and a number of events were planned spontaneously in response to particular interests and ideas of those who visited.

Projects such as the ones described here shake institutional structures and dance between binaries of inside and outside, but one must remember that these are essentially artificial boundaries that are sustained by certain kinds of institutional practices. The “paracuratorial” is a useful tool to think through practices that have shifted away from conventional exhibition formats and refuse to be contained, but it still posits a boundary and sustains an unnecessary dualism. “The curatorial” in contrast is recognized as an unbounded framework that is speculative and responsive, which allows for the possibility that one might not yet know at the outset of a project what one is grappling with, and that it may change in the process of being realized. At the same time, artistic and curatorial practices involve negotiations with a whole range of factors, and thus cannot be entirely borderless—there must be a horizon—and it is often at the points at which obstacles and boundaries are

5. Annabel Nicholson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Ilijon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, and Susan Stein, “Women and the Formal Film” in *Film as Film, Formal Experiment in Film 1910–75*, ed. Phil Drummond (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979): 118.

encountered that challenging practices and ideas emerge and create change. While acknowledging the presence of a horizon, when taking into consideration the multitude of factors (both intended and unintended) that enter into the “event” and the undeniable presence of the conditions that produce these, it is almost impossible to close the frame. And if one tries, the suppressed often makes its way back in, if only in the guise of a badly behaved visitor. To allow these outside influences to enter into the picture creates the possibility of addressing complexity and working with it.

★

LA CRITIQUE

Miguel A. López
Lawrence Rinder
Tina Kukielski
Mia Jankowicz
Jarrett Gregory
Rodrigo Moura

BEYOND PARTICIPATION

Miguel A. López

Joshua Decker offers three provocative ideas in his text “Everywhereness,” published in *The Exhibitionist* no. 2: that all space has been converted into a potential art space, that the difference between public and private is beginning to dissolve, and that the tricky rhetoric about “participatory work” is beginning to serve as a fixed stereotype of the so-called “emancipatory” potential of art.

Decker signals the necessity of skepticism in the face of an oversimplified narrative in which “collectivity” is the “progressive” ideal to which all art must aspire. Nonetheless, despite the importance of suspicion when confronted with said affirmation, we run the risk of avoiding the antagonisms and frictions within the heterogeneous debates in recent years about “participation” and “collectivity.” An attentive analysis cannot ignore the waves of protests that have been stimulating the radical imagination of the West since at least the late 1990s (such as the movements against corporate globalization since 1999 in Seattle, or the indigenous uprisings in Mexico since the Zapatistas), which have had as much resonance in the realm of art as in social practice. We must distrust not only the false equivalence of “collectivity” and “democracy” as Decker implies, but also the view of the art world as a place that inevitably neutralizes the critical potential of the experience of art. Some time ago the writer and scholar Stephen Wright encouraged “escaping” the art world frame as one of the “most exciting developments in art,” which required sacrificing “one’s coefficient of artistic visibility, but potentially in exchange for great corrosiveness toward the domi-

nant semiotic order.”¹ But is it possible to avoid this “frame”? And does that flight assure the desired liberty and effectiveness? In her performance *Tattlin’s Whisper #6* at the 10th Havana Biennial in 2009, Tania Bruguera used exactly this art world frame to install a temporary public platform (a stage with a podium, two microphones, and big golden curtains) so that anybody could freely say for a minute anything they wanted to, something that the repressive Cuban regime rarely permitted.

Beyond any rhetoric of participation, in circumstances of control of free speech, it is precisely the mobilization of voices, images, and bodies that allows the toppling of governments, and (as recently seen in Tunisia and Egypt) not just through academic chatter or international diplomacy. Latin America and its terrible decades of dictatorships have been extreme ground for these initiatives of resistance, but to try to measure their so-called effectiveness is always slippery territory, as Decker correctly warns. Recently the Peruvian writer José Luis Falconi declared the failure of *Siluetazo* (1983), the improvised collective making of silhouettes in Argentina in which demonstrators lay down, offering their bodies for others to trace and outline in an allusion to those who were missing. This collective visual protest was led by the Argentinean group Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Disappeared) at a time when the military regime (1976–83) was still in power. Falconi cited the apparent impossibility of reforming their vast protests into realpolitik—“their failure to really amount to something decisive in the political realm (to make justice, purely and simply).”² But can we really judge the political achievements of an aesthetic exercise by its eventual translation into pragmatic judicial or legal action?

Old divisions between public and private appear to be dissolving in the age of information, as Decker suggests, but it would be naive to optimistically

believe that this digital domain is about autonomous spaces already won. “Is there really any space that is more public than the Internet as a cosmos . . .? What isn’t accessible, and therefore somehow public?” he claims, noticing at once the seeming widening of the “public” itself and the furthest desire of artistic practice to infiltrate everywhere. But beyond art expectations, is this new “digital social reality” capable of replacing traditional conceptions of “public,” or even prepared to announce the end of the old “public sphere” as a physical space of political deliberation and participation, which is fundamental to democracy? Is the construction of virtual communities the ultimate future of this everywhere? I don’t think so. To put it in other words: Even with the linking capabilities of digital technologies, would the recent Egyptian revolution have been possible without (millions of protesters physically gathered in) a place like Tahrir Square?

Translated from the Spanish by Megan Hanley

Notes

1. Stephen Wright, “Users and Usership of Art: Challenging Expert Culture,” lecture presented in the seminar “Musée d’Art Ancien, Département d’Art Moderne: Rethinking Cultural Organizations in the New Cultural Economy” at MACBA, Barcelona, June 12–13, 2008.

2. José Luis Falconi, “Two Double Negatives” in *The Meaning of Photography*, eds. Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008): 136.

CURATORIAL CONTROL

Lawrence Rinder

I concur that curators have subjectivities, and that an exhibition expresses the curator’s perspective and aesthetic sensibility. I can even accept that at times the boundary between curator and

artist is blurred, not only when a recognized artist curates an exhibition, but also when a professional curator comes up with an exceptionally brilliant and beautiful show. Up to this point I am in agreement with Jens Hoffmann’s application of auteur theory to curatorial practice in the “Overture” of *The Exhibitionist* no. 1, which he further clarified in the “Endnote” of *The Exhibitionist* no. 2. But I have some reservations.

In “Endnote,” Hoffmann writes: “To reduce the relationship between artist and curator to a simple antagonistic binary, an enduring conflict and power struggle, is at best outdated and at worst outright reactionary.” But this kind of binary is precisely what is implied by invoking auteur theory, which solidly places the film director at the apex of power in the grand collaboration that is filmmaking. And the debate over authorial control that was played out in the world of cinema in the 1960s (that is, directors versus screenwriters, cinematographers, et cetera) seems archaic today. We all know that there is no such thing as a neutral setting and that organizing works of art into any kind of context is dependent on the organizer’s intention, ideology, and aesthetic conception. Why not leave things in a state of negotiated balance, accepting that everyone has some stake in the reception and meaning of art? Why insist that the curator comes out on top?

Second, I have a lingering feeling that artistic integrity matters and that, if it comes to a decisive choice, an artist’s vision should trump a curator’s. I understand that it is a matter of degree and I’m fully aware of how simply placing one work next to another is in some sense an imposition on “pure” experience. But should curators really do anything they want with someone else’s art? There are many shadings of this curatorial responsibility. For *In a Different Light*, an exhibition I curated in 1995 with Nayland Blake, we contacted every living artist we hoped to include,

described the theme of the show and overall methodology, and asked their permission to have their work displayed (even if we were not borrowing a work directly from them). In one instance, in which an artist voiced objections, we removed their work from the checklist. We did not, however, tell the artists precisely how their work would be deployed and, indeed, the show was extremely rich in implicit associations based on syntactic juxtapositions. Were we overly cautious in the first instance and unethical in the latter? Did it matter that my co-curator was an artist and brought an artist’s sensibility to the project? In the same exhibition we also hoped to include a work by Frida Kahlo from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. For some reason I can’t recall, we were unable to obtain the painting and so simply exhibited a printed reproduction of it (though the work was not included in the catalogue’s checklist). This begs the question of different treatments for living and dead artists. Without Kahlo around to object, this curatorial choice was much easier to make.

The framing of an exhibition, and the art it includes, is crucial. For *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, an exhibition that opened in 2010 at the National Portrait Gallery, co-curators Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward edited unidentified film footage found in the studio of the deceased artist David Wojnarowicz, added audio, and presented the resulting video as *A Fire in My Belly*, which is actually the title of a quite different, considerably longer and unfinished silent film by Wojnarowicz. The fact that the new video does not appear in the exhibition catalogue suggests that the curators themselves were initially reserved about its artistic and/or authorial status. But after the piece was censored by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, all ambiguity vanished in face of the need to circle the wagons around “artistic freedom.” The censored video—presented

as Wojnarowicz’s art—was screened by galleries and museums across the country and, today, this video, which David Wojnarowicz did not make, has become his best-known work.

Wojnarowicz spent several precious months of his final years fighting in court to protect his work from being edited, manipulated, and misrepresented by others. The specific “other” in the 1990 lawsuit was the odious American Family Association, whereas some have said that Katz and Ward’s video is in keeping with the artist’s intention. Yet we can never know for sure. I believe that what was being asked of the curator in *Hide/Seek*—and indeed of all the galleries and museums that screened this work under Wojnarowicz’s name—is more authorship and control than the practice can responsibly bear.

Jens Hoffmann believes that the role of the curator is to bring a measure of control (and, I am sure, inspiration) to the presentation of art. In his “Overture” he writes, “The curatorial process is indeed a selection process, an act of choosing from a number of possibilities, an imposition of order within a field of multiple (and multiplying) artistic concerns. A curator’s role is precisely to limit, exclude, and create meaning using existing signs, codes, and materials.” This could be an innocuous description of traditional curatorial work, or it could be interpreted as a polemical call for increased curatorial control, of the kind that characterized *In a Different Light* as well as Hoffmann’s own exhibitions. The notion that curators impose order and exert control is not troubling in itself, but we need to be alert to specific instances where curatorial control overly violates artistic integrity.

Am I worrying needlessly? Is the application of auteur theory just a clever way of describing what we curators have been doing all along? Perhaps, but there is one essay in *The Exhibitionist*, Carol Yinghua Lu’s “The Curator as Artist” (which appeared in the third

issue), that does give me pause. After describing curator Massimiliano Gioni's unauthorized re-creation of Mike Kelley's 1993 exhibition *The Uncanny* in the 8th Gwangju Biennale, she writes:

Gioni's curatorial style can seem imposing, almost dictatorial. Its emergence and visibility in the art world echoes a certain wider political temperament arising following the world's disillusion with neo-liberalism in the wake of the current economic crisis. People have realized that absolute economic and political freedom is perhaps not the ultimate answer to the world's problems, and that elements of intervention, control, and mediation administered from a higher level are necessary to maintain order and prosperity on this planet. These ideas can be applied to the arts and to reality at large, and Gioni acts on just such a principle.

I find the language and implications of Lu's analysis to be quite chilling. I didn't see Gioni's exhibition and have no opinion about the success or ethical appropriateness of his curatorial decisions. However, Lu's rationalization that increased curatorial control is part and parcel of a global imperative (and desire!) for more limited political freedom is painfully out of alignment with the spirit of our times.

PROLONGED EXPOSURE

Tina Kukielski

I have never curated a retrospective exhibition. And I probably won't have the chance for some time.¹ In the capacity of curatorial assistant at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York from 2003 through 2010, however, I shared in the organization and conception of a few: Tim Hawkinson in 2004,

Gordon Matta-Clark in 2007, William Eggleston in 2008, and recently Paul Thek in 2010. The retrospective offers a rich platform for curating, as focused exposure to a single artist affords an in-depth, sometimes never-before-realized, interpretation of their work. Yet I also observed that the retrospective could induce a problematic relationship, especially in projects with living artists who might be described as less established and lacking the mature distance required to aid in the presentation of a selection of their work. Rather than argue this as a black-and-white issue—as in, young versus old—I offer instead that we consider the retrospective as a goal, a dream, something to be realized by the artist before death. The prospect of it on the horizon weighs on the minds of artists, regardless of their age.

The most consistent dilemma I recognized, as a collaborator but not a co-curator, was always the question of what gets in and what gets edited out of a retrospective. I was especially attuned to this while working in the Gordon Matta-Clark archive, which is split between the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal and the home of the artist's widow in Connecticut. In her essay for *The Exhibitionist* no. 3, Elisabeth Sussman discusses the experience of “prolonged exposure” to artists' bodies of work.² In the stacks of vintage photographic prints, the binders full of now-discolored Kodachrome slides, the shelves of half-used sketchbooks bearing Matta-Clark's characteristic handwriting, the artist persists despite the fact of his absence.

An unanticipated body of work emerged from this research: what his widow has loosely named the impossible projects. They are like thought bubbles, barely present as scribbles of handwritten text on a notecard, or a few sketches buried in a random notebook.³ Some examples: shopping cart housing, the air behind you as you move, the kind of living you can carry along with you.

I clung to each “project” like a dream that should not be abandoned. In some cases, the inclusion of an impossible project in the retrospective exhibition would have necessitated exhaustive accompanying text. The ideas that recurred most frequently eventually found their place in the artist's chronology that I was authoring at the time.

Over the course of that research, I found myself wanting to know exactly the things that had escaped me in the archive: What books did Matta-Clark read? What were his favorite movies? At about the same time, I was beginning to work with artists on commissioned projects for the Whitney's lobby gallery. I organized five of these shows within a few years. The artists I worked with were all mostly my age, in their 30s, about the same age as Matta-Clark when he died. They all revealed to me what books they read, the movies and music that had made a difference. I realize now that what I was looking for were more, perhaps better, criteria to judge Matta-Clark's work by, hopeful that I could make the case for why or how to recuperate the impossible and make it possible again.

In another article in *The Exhibitionist* no. 3, Jessica Morgan concludes that there is less of a difference between curating dead and living artists than there is between their individual approaches and work. I never did find out what movies Matta-Clark loved; no one could remember. He had died young, and it had been 30 years since then. After prolonged exposure to his work, I had an ever-present feeling of its profound incompleteness. The idea of death weighed heavily on Matta-Clark in the last years of his life, as his twin brother died just two years before he did. The artist had acquired a collection of small, useless micro-parcels of land in Queens and Staten Island with the idea of turning them into a project related to the idea of unexpected sites for daily intervention, but he never

got the chance to develop the work as fully as others that he executed during his lifetime. He ultimately defaulted on the taxes, and the properties reverted to the city upon his death. The associated photographs, maps, and papers, as well as a video by his friend, the artist Jaime Davidovich, remained. They were assembled posthumously around 1992 by his widow as the *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* project—and even reenvisioned in 2005 as a video project, an exhibition, and a book by *Cabinet* magazine⁴—but the unrealized potential of the *Fake Estates* remains part of its story, inextricably linked to its significance and interpretation today.

In the hyper speed at which we today demand that artists produce crisp, finished works worthy of the retrospective, incompleteness seems less and less of a possibility. Yet it is to the impossible, the incomplete, that curators should look in the hopes of unearthing some small but meaningful shard, a new perspective from which to look back.

Notes

1. I will be co-curating the next Carnegie International, scheduled to take place in 2013. I share this responsibility with Daniel Baumann and Dan Byers.
2. Disclaimer: From 2005 through 2010, I worked for Elisabeth Sussman, the curator or co-curator of the three earlier-mentioned exhibitions.
3. Furthermore, these works bridged into collaborative projects coming out of Anarchitecture, a loose network of artists and thinkers who gathered intermittently and eventually installed a show together at 112 Greene Street in New York in 1974.
4. This was in collaboration with the Queens Museum of Art and White Columns, New York.

CURATOR WITH A CAPITAL C OR DILETTANTE WITH A SMALL D

Mia Jankowicz

A convenient generation divide in curating is easily observed, or at least fre-

quently invoked, between those who began curating before the emergence of curatorial programs and those who did so after. Curators advanced in their careers are often heard pronouncing in panel discussions that they never undertook a curatorial program, with the implication that they are proof positive of the superfluity of curatorial education. What is rarely asked in these situations is, had curatorial programs been available at the sprouting of these careers, whether at least some of them might have given it a go?

Maria Lind's text in *The Exhibitionist* no. 3, aside from giving me the novel experience of thinking of myself as a tomato, recalls various hallmarks of my experience in the de Appel Curatorial Programme in Amsterdam. The urge to be a Curator with a capital “C,” the feeling that one must perform curatorial “pirouettes,” and the force of political correctness (which often plumps for what Lind calls “overcollaboration”) were all somehow present. The hothouse metaphor is especially important to consider, as one of the most resounding elements of curatorial education is intensive access to high-placed contacts, research material, and, through a form of institutional endorsement, artistic trust. This privilege is an essential career ingredient, but it does not entirely make for a high-toned defense of curatorial education.

What does this hothouse constitute? At least with de Appel, it involves intensive periods of travel; personal space replaced by the constant presence of five ambitious strangers; a blistering who's-who schedule of meetings and tutorials; and a body of resources and obligations (contacts, local officials, assignments, base budget) from which to develop a project. The project is to be collectively curated, responsive to an alien geographical context, and done in a very short time. While any of these conditions can individually crop up in a curatorial career, to have them all hap-

pen at once is a perfect storm of curatorial artificiality.

The hothouse, then, is not entirely a shelter, but also a place of unnatural exposure. This crucially leads to a point that Lind omits: that the kind of curator you are during your curatorial program (quite possibly a “narcissistic apparatchik”) is, thank God, most certainly not the kind you are in more sensible contexts. This means that many of the conditions she describes—and particularly the dreaded final project itself—are not necessarily indicative of the value of curatorial education.

The question, then, is what is? The same question is frequently aimed at art education, where it is also particularly difficult to answer. As one potential response, I want to offer a tentative defense of a description often leveled at (implicitly, graduate) curators: in Lind's words, that they have “intellectual and artistic varnish rather than profound capabilities.” To recast this description, perhaps the curatorial program in its stone-skimming approach doesn't produce well-rounded intellectuals or artistic experts, but is at least a multiplier of the best aspects of the dilettante. That is, someone whose unusual, enthusiasm-driven capacities in artistic and intellectual fields has a role besides virtuosity; in the case of the curator often the priority is in working out diverse aesthetic and conceptual connections between leading practices, before attempting to lead those practices themselves.

Ironically, the *dilettante* is closely allied with the position of the *amateur*, so it is paradoxical to defend a professional education program on this principle. However, an accepted, almost definitive aspect of the curator is the ability to mine and reference the theorists of certain fields, typically in but not always limited to the social sciences. Curators are (rightly) not expected to be experts in these fields, which correspondingly relieves them of the territorial certainty of the proper boundaries and

languages of a field of study. Rather, and quite crucially, it enables them to develop witty, mercurial, occasionally fascinating projects with artists and others. While this can be enormously problematic, it strikes me as far more essentially proper to the figure of the curator than the themed exhibition curated by the academic expert, which often is so watertight that one imagines the distinguished curator defending her thesis all over again through artworks. Exhibit A.

The spectacularly earnest, intellectually poseur-ish, messy propositions of end-of-curator-school projects are the product of a set of experiences that probably leave you far less expert than you thought you were before, but possibly more open. As for more profound experience—given the immense oddity of the role itself, we can only hope that our glittering post-curatorial-education careers will offer us that.

BESTIAL ACTS

Jarrett Gregory

Bertolt Brecht's theories on the space of the theater are wholly relevant to the practice of exhibition making, which is overdue for an infusion of Brechtian consciousness. Specifically, I mean a more calculated consideration of production and aesthetics, and a revived valuing of showmanship. Brecht's ideal was to create the draw and immediacy of the sports stadium within the theater—to turn the audience into experts, as sports fans feel they are.¹

The 11th International Istanbul Biennial, titled *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* from the lyrics of a song in Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, seemed prepared to engage with Brecht's questions and answers. Jill Winder, writing about the biennial for the first issue of *The Exhibitionist*, explored the Brechtian principles that influenced the curators, the

collective What, How, and for Whom (WHW). Winder cites Brecht's notion of transparency, a method he developed to prevent the audience from suspending disbelief. Transparency is what kept Brecht's productions political. His carefully orchestrated moments of alienation—leading to astonishment—facilitated a distance that allowed his audience to see their own conditions with greater clarity.

Winder relates this transparency to WHW's revealing of all of the exhibition costs in the biennial catalogue. WHW's budget was more engaging as an idea than in practice, however. A more nuanced Brechtian gesture, I think, was the crumpled red paper strewn throughout all the floors of the exhibition. The project was by the Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, who compiled and printed on the red paper reports on the status of women by Turkish NGOs. The paper was an eyesore and a pervasive reminder of the artist's feminist program. In its crudeness, it resonated with Brecht's esteem of "third-rate provincial theater."² Brecht wrote in great depth on the space of the theater, on opera for a new time—"Opera—with Innovations!"—and on epic theater.³ At the Istanbul Biennial, where was the grand scale, the prostitutes, criminals, and lowlifes? The excitement and tragedy, operatic highs and lows? "Theater remains theater, even when it is didactic; and if it is good theater it will entertain."⁴

Although the biennial was more moralizing than entertaining, there were some works that got to the grimy heart of Brecht's subject matter: the gratuitous violence in Igor Grubic's *East Side Story* (2006–8), or the sexual manipulation and uneasy exploitation in Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir's video trilogy *Beyond Guilt* (2003–5).

Winder acknowledges the crisis surrounding the end of Communism, and WHW's hope to revive Brechtian methods of engagement. But she gets to the heart of the biennial when she points

out that the exhibition was an argument for Communism. I would add that the incantation of Brechtian aesthetics was just an inroad to a different end. *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* had a political agenda that outweighed its artistic program; it was propagandistic.

Much like a curator, Brecht straddled the roles of producer and author. In Walter Benjamin's journal entry from July 6, 1934, he recounts second-hand how Brecht frequently imagined being interrogated by a tribunal: "Now tell us, Mr. Brecht, are you really in earnest?" "I would have to admit that no, I'm not completely in earnest. I think too much about artistic problems, you know, about what is good for the theater, to be completely in earnest."⁵ WHW was too earnest about their political program to do justice to the artistic problems at hand. And though they used his question to spur a saga of human discontent, WHW might have hit the Brechtian sweet spot—that delicate balance between political agenda and entertainment—had they heeded what Brecht wrote in the last line of the song: "Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts."

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin quoting Brecht, "What Is Epic Theater—1st Version" in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973): 4.
2. Walter Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht" in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973): 115.
3. Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theater Is the Epic Theater" reprinted in *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992): 33.
4. Bertolt Brecht, "Theater for Learning," reprinted in *Brecht Sourcebook*, trans. Edith Anderson (New York: Routledge, 2000): 27.
5. Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht," 106–7.

YELLOW YEARS

Rodrigo Moura

The Exhibitionist has appeared in the editorial landscape with a proposal as new as it is unequivocal: to be a pub-

lication by experts speaking to experts, commenting on exhibitions for those who make exhibitions. According to the opening note of its editor, it responds to a growing debate around the role of the curator. It is thus the first journal devoted exclusively not only to the curatorial trade, which also encompasses the formation of collections of art and the everyday functions of art institutions, but also and more importantly to one of the trade's most visible aspects: exhibition making.

The journal strives above all to claim auteur status for the curator in the same manner that the Young Turks of *Cahiers du cinéma* did for filmmakers, particularly during the so-called "yellow years" from 1951 to 1959. But what seems to be more productive and challenging in this analogy is the discovery of the not-always-clear limits within which curators can claim the authorial role. If *Cahiers* attributed to films the status of artworks, this magazine is making the first steps toward attempting to give the same status to exhibitions. The frequently tense relationship between artists and curators is one of the aspects covered in the self-critique of the editor in the magazine's second issue, making clear just how sensitive this relationship is and how it has transformed in recent years.

It is true: One cannot think any more of exhibition making as a neutral activity. At the root of this practice, there are choices with aesthetic and political values and implications. An exhibition is not just an inventory of things, but rather a gesture that combines context, things, and ideas. Whether artists like it or not, the role of the curator has transcended that of the mere intermediate figure or the academic expert. It would be interesting to add more and more to this framework, for example exploring in greater depth how artists themselves have experimented with exhibition making. Their crossing of this boundary is happening with increasing

frequency, and is less reproached than when the reverse happens. This is a reflection to be elaborated upon.

Another context that is typical of our times is the decay of critical activity. If criticism was once a school for curators, as it was for the critics of *Cahiers*, many of whom went on to become filmmakers, today most curators are trained in academic programs. And it remains to be seen whether the graduates of these programs are trained to be curator-authors. The programs are well known for offering a uniform set of skills, and most of all they provide a fast track into the scene, socially and institutionally.

Although it is difficult to argue that the decline of criticism is a result of the rise of the curator's role (and its academic professionalization), we cannot help wondering whether there is some causal relationship between the two phenomena. Unlike curatorial activity, critical activity is lonely and does not necessarily involve other actors in the industry. It also does not move capital, as making exhibitions and building collections do. It is very hard to make a living from just writing. The pay is terrible if you take into account the time and effort required to produce a critical text of quality. Boris Groys compares critical work with industrial manual labor in the 19th-century sense, and the system of contemporary art with the entrepreneurial model.¹

Historically, the role of the critic was to educate the viewer, illuminating the thoughts and processes behind a work's production and the larger system of which it is a part. The position of the critic was once invested with a certain power, but it now pales in comparison to the status of the professional curator, reaching the paroxysm with the phenomenon of the celebrity curator. Although to compare these two activities—the critical and the curatorial—is not entirely fair, since they frequently overlap and sometimes conflict grandly.

Jacques Rivette once said: "The only true criticism of a film is another film." A task of this journal should be a frank discussion of all this.

It is too early to predict the future of *The Exhibitionist*, but it should keep one goal always on its horizon. If *Cahiers* was first and foremost a stage for debate (sometimes a battlefield) marked by cinephilia, this magazine should be the same in the field of exhibitions. Did someone say "expophilia"? Or is it just exhibitionism?

Notes:

1. "Who Do You Think You're Talking To?" Boris Groys in conversation with Brian Dillon, *Frieze* no. 121 (March 2009): http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/who_do_you_think_youre_talking_to/.

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Publisher:

Archive Books, Berlin/Turin

Circulation:

Ellie de Verdier

Printer:

Me.Ca., Genoa

ISSN: 2038-0984 / ISBN: 978-88-95702-09-5

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www.the-exhibitionist-journal.com

ARCHIVE BOOKS

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The Exhibitionist no. 4, June 2011. © 2011
The Exhibitionist and Archive Books, Berlin/Turin

